Social identity in Nahum: A theological-ethical enquiry

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any university for a degree.

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Summary

In this study the very relevant theological-ethical question of social identity and intergroup conflict is looked at. This is done by reading the Book of Nahum multidimensionally as an "Oracles Concerning the Nations" text, and as part of the Book of the Twelve. The multidimensional methodology includes a combination of synchronic and diachronic reading strategies, the implementation of social identity theory and self-categorization theory, the focus on ideological-critical aspects and theological-ethical questioning. In the process of research the underlying dynamic of social identity construction of ancient Israel is uncovered and theological-ethically appropriated.

In the first two chapters the problem of the global rise of extreme nationalism, racism and zenophobia is noted. The very diverse post-apartheid society of South Africa, as well as the post-nazi and post-unification German society is mentioned. The Book of Nahum, an Oracle "Concerning the Nations" text, is chosen as avenue for studying the dynamic underlying the construction of social identity in ancient Israel. It is suggested that while a one-dimensional reading strategy may lead to an exclusivist intepretation of Nahum that fosters a theological ethic of intolerance and hate, a multidimensional reading strategy leads to a theological ethic of liberation, responsibility and peace.

Chapters 3 and 4 give a research overview of the study of ancient Israel's identity as well as how the Book of Nahum is to be understood with regards to its dating, unity, stucture and historical situation. The research overview shows how incorporating social identity theory and self-categorization theory provides a better and more integrated perspective on social identity than what has been done up to now. The social psychology theories are summarized into five working premises. The background study of Nahum comes to the conclusion that Nahum should be read synchronically in its diachronical development from the pre-exilic Assyrian crisis with its polarized political inter-group conflicts to the exilic/post-exilic situation with its unique search for a new beginning, identity and hope.

Chapters 5 and 6 contain the exegetical explication of the Book of Nahum. Nahum 1:9-14;2:2-3:19 is interpreted as a pre-exilic construction of social identity. Nahum 1:2-8;2:1 is read as an exilic/post-exilic text. The inter-group dynamic between the Yahweh-Alone movement and the pro-Assyria party (pre-exilic) as well as the Deutero-Isaiah group with its

theological opponents (exilic/post-exilic) are interpreted in terms of the five social identity premises. Although social identity construction in Nahum does follow the main premises of discrimination and prototypical ingroup favouring a surprising ambiguous undercurrent of self-criticism as apposed to ethnocentrism is discovered in both historical situations. Apart from the social identity, a strong movement towards liberation from oppression is present in the Book of Nahum.

This underlying ambiguous dynamic of social identity construction and the liberatory rhetoric of Nahum is appropriated theolgical-ethically in Chapter 7. A theological-ethical model, which combines the role of identity in ethics, the concept of "natural law", the responsibility ethics of Levinas and a focus on liberation, is suggested as a useful instrument for interpreting the theological-ethically uncomfortable Oracles Concerning the Nations texts. Chapter 8 summarizes the study and points out the research's contribution towards Old Testament methodology (exegetical and ethical), Nahum studies as well as providing a possible theological-ethical solution to intergroup conflicts (religious, cultural, political etc.) from an Old Testament perspective.

Opsomming

In hierdie studie word die baie relevant teologies-etiese vraag na sosiale identiteit en intergroep konflik ondersoek. Die studie word aangepak deur die Boek van Nahum multidimensioneel te lees as 'n Profesieë aangaande die Nasies teks, en as deel van die Boek van die Twaalf. Die multidimensionele metodologie sluit in: 'n kombinasie van sinchroniese en diachroniese leesstrategieë, die implementering van sosiale identiteitsteorie en self-kategoriseringsteorie, die fokus op ideologies-kritiese aspekte sowel as teologies-etiese vraagstelling. In die proses van navorsing word die onderliggende dinamika van sosiale identiteitskonstruksie in antieke Israel onthul en teologies-eties beoordeel.

In die eerste twee hoofstukke word die globale probleem van ekstreme nasionalisme, rassisme en zenofobie genoem. Die baie diverse post-apartheid Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing, sowel as die post-nazi en post-eenwording Duitse samelewing word bespreek. Die Boek van Nahum, 'n Profesieë aangaande die Nasies teks, word gekies as 'n kanaal vir die bestudering van die onderliggende konstruksie van sosiale identiteit in antieke Israel. Daar word voorgestel dat indien 'n een-dimensionele leestrategie kan lei tot 'n eksklusiwistiese interpretasie van Nahum en 'n teologiese etiek van intoleransie en haat, 'n multidimensionele leestrategie kan lei tot 'n teologiese etiek van bevryding, verantwoordelikheid en vrede.

Hoofstukke 3 en 4 bevat 'n navorsingsoorsig oor die identiteit van antieke Israel, asook hoe die Boek van Nahum vertsaan behoort te word in terme van datering, eenheid, struktuur en historiese konteks. Die navorsingsoorsig kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat die inkorporering van sosiale identiteitsteorie en self-kategoriseringsteorie 'n beter en meer geïntegreerde perspektief op sosiale identiteit verskaf as wat tot dusver die geval was. Vanuit die sosiale sielkunde teorieë word vyf werkspremisse geformuleer. In die agtergrondstudie van Nahum word die gevolgtrekking gemaak dat Nahum sinchronies sowel as diachronies gelees moet word in die boek se ontwikkeling vanaf die pre-eksiliese Assiriese krisis met sy gepolariseerde politiese intergroep konflikte, tot in die eksilies/post-eksiliese situasie met die unieke soeke vir 'n nuwe begin, identiteit en hoop.

Hoofstukke 5 en 6 bevat die eksegese van die Boek van Nahum. Nahum 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19 word geïnterpreteer as pre-eksiliese konstruksie van sosiale identiteit. Nahum 1:2-8; 2:1 word gelees as eksilies/post-eksiliese konstruksie. Die intergroep dinamika tussen die Jahwe-Alleen

Beweging en die pro-Assiriese party (pre-eksilies) sowel as die Deutero-Jesaja groep met sy teologiese opponente (eksilies/post-eksilies) word geïnterpreteer in terme van die vyf sosiale identiteit premisse. Alhoewel die sosiale identiteitskonstruksie in Nahum die hoof premisse van diskriminasie en prototipiese binne-groep bevoordeling volg is daar tog 'n verassende onderstroom van self-kritiek teenoor die verwagte etnosentrisme. Dit word gesien in beide die historiese kontekste.. Behalwe vir die sosiale identiteit is daar 'n sterk beweging in die rigting van bevryding van onderdrukking in die Boek van Nahum.

Hierdie onderliggende dubbelsinnige dinamika van sosiale identiteitskonstruksie en die bevrydende retoriek van Nahum word teologies-eties in Hoofstuk 7 beoordeel. 'n Teologies-etiese model wat die rol van identiteit in etiek, die konsep van "natuurlike wetmatigheid", die verantwoordelikheidsetiek van Levinas en 'n fokus op bevryding kombineer, word voorgestel as 'n bruikbare instrument om die teologies-eties ongemaklike Profesieë aangaande die Nasies te interpreteer. Hoofstuk 8 gee 'n opsomming van die studie en wys die navorsing se bydrae uit ten opsigte van Ou Testament metodologie (eksegeties en eties), Nahum studies sowel as 'n moontlike teologies-etiese oplossing vir intergroep konflik (godsdienstig, kultureel, polities ens.) vanuit 'n Ou Testament perspektief.

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Table of contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Relevance of the study

When we look at and read about the world around us, it is not difficult to see where the relevance of this study lies. It is about the search for understanding how different religious, ethnic and political groups come to the point where their humanness is replaced by hatred and revenge that results in an inability to see the group opposing them as human too. A lack of knowledge regarding the different culture, religion or group, together with mistrust and stereotyping, leads to hatred. This usually results in violence, be it in a physical, emotional or verbal form. A vicious spiral is created and nobody knows where it will end.

The ethical and specifically theological-ethical questions surrounding this age-old problem of inter-human conflict (specifically inter-cultural and inter-religious conflict) is still with us today. The twentieth century has seen an unexpected revitalization of ethnic ties and nationalism. This is true even though social scientists thought that in the light of the horrors of two world wars and the emergence of regionalism and global interdependence, humanity would be led towards a "genuine cosmopolitanism" (Smith 1994:721-722). The urgency to answer (and re-answer) such questions of social identity becomes more critical with every new incidence of xenophobia, genocide, apartheid or just "normal" right-wing politics or "fundamentalist" religious calls for purity or outright annihilation in the name of God.

Apart from many international examples where nationalism, ethnocentrism or racism has reared its ugly head, one could also point to the recent history of apartheid in South Africa and National Socialism in Germany. In a post-colonial, post-apartheid and multi-cultural country like South Africa, the question of identity remains a very contentious matter, if not one of life and death. The questions regarding social identity in particular and its ethical side is "still a pressing feature of contemporary politics the world over" (Brett 1996:3). The different "options for co-existence" or the "quest for a national identity" (Villa-Vicencio 1994:26-27) are still being debated (and fought over) in South Africa, while in Germany the issues of nationalism and nationhood are recurring themes.

Three articles written in 1998 serve as examples to articulate the German situation. These articles focus on humanity and being a nation ("Volk"), Israel's self-definition, the so-called Janus face of the concept of "nation" as well as how the concept of Israel as the People of God has come to be used in the contemporary German debate about "nationale Identität" (cf. Crüsemann 1998; Ebach 1998 and Perels 1998). Also in "France, Britain [and] North America – the politics of immigration and indigeneity have generated ethnic revivals of various kinds" (Brett 1996:3). Ethnocentrism and xenophobic nationalism, to name just two, are alive and well, and always seem to be lurking on the borders of the vulnerable South African ethos of nation building, tolerance and reconciliation.

Although it will take more than an ethical understanding of the problem to alleviate the suffering of so many, an understanding of what causes the problem can be part of the solution. Coming from a tradition[1] in which the Word of God forms the central axis around which life before God turns, more words on the subject of inter-cultural or inter-racial or inter-religious strife do not necessarily produce inaction, but can energise and give vision to an active confrontation with the ugly reality of inter-human conflict. Writing about *the medium as the message* in his well-known book *Understanding media*, Marshall McLuhan[2] uses Nietzsche's idea that "understanding stops action" to state that if one understands how media (as extensions of human beings) function, this can "moderate the fierceness" of the conflict that the media produce in society. In the same way understanding the way texts (as media) function in contributing to inter-human conflict can be a step in the direction of stopping or moderating the violence. Exploring the theoretical side of inter-group tensions is indeed not "just" a theoretical exercise, but can even become "potential blueprints for action" (Thompson 1989:5[3]). The "blueprints" of this study are given in Chapter 6, where the theological-ethical implications of social identity construction are explicated.

As a lot of the problems stem from the application or misapplication of words (written or spoken), one has to search for the "solution" in the understanding of how words and especially texts (written or spoken, holy or revolutionary) function in a religious or cultural group to bring people to the point of hating and killing even their neighbours, friends or family members. In other words, one needs to understand the way that texts form and

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[1] I am a member of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.
[2] McLuhan, M 1964. *Understanding media. The extensions of man.* London: Routledge, p.16
[3] Thompson (1989) gives a critical appraisal of theories of ethnicity and shows how cultural theoretical worldviews are blueprints for social understanding, but also for social practice and action.

legitimise an ethos whereby eliminating the "other" (for example, through avoidance, apartheid laws or destruction) is not seen as wrong, bad or evil, but fits into a coherent scheme of how the world of right and wrong is structured. One needs to comprehend how the deeds (even retribution and murder) of the "self" naturally fall into the "right" side of moral living, and those of the "other" into the "wrong" side of this ethical worldview. The theories of social identity will provide help in this regard.

2. Outline of the argument

Forming the basis of the argument is the premise that a group's social identity (be it cultural, economic or religious identity) comprises the essence of what it means for the group to live ethically in relation to other groups. Understanding the social identity would then logically be the first step in finding out what living ethically means to the group. The next step is to find out how this identity is constructed and kept alive. Of specific importance to this study is how texts and textual traditions build social identity and therefore construct ethics and ethos[4]. This again brings us into the field of textual representation – in other words, studying how texts represent social identity and the influence of ideology on the production and transmission of texts.

As this is a theological-ethical enquiry in the field of the Old Testament, one has to look at ancient Israel, its social identity, its formative texts and how its processes of representation functioned. In other words, when an ancient society like biblical Israel is studied through the text of the Old Testament (and other extra-biblical texts) we have to ask what the texts of the Old Testament tell us about the social identity of ancient Israel. This process raises many questions: for example, is it possible to construct ancient Israel's identity while having only the witness of the biblical texts, or, can we project our modern concept of "identity" onto an ancient society? In the course of the study these and other questions will systematically be dealt with and the basic methodological assumptions will be discussed.

So far two separate aspects have been introduced, namely, texts, identity and ethics in the *modern world,* and texts, identity and ethics in *ancient Israel*. How do the two aspects

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[4]*Ethics* refers to the "rules of human behaviour [or] ... The scholarly study of moral principles and moral behaviour with reference to concrete situations" and *Ethos* refers to *"*The characteristic spirit or code of values of a people" (Deist 1984:87).

function together? Is there any correspondence at all between the modern problems of inter-human relations and the cultural, religious and social identity of ancient Israel? In a sense this question answers itself as people *then* and people *now* remain "people," and the problems then and now have bearing on each other. Therefore, although we deal with two radically different societies separated by two and a half millennia of history, worldviews that are worlds apart and social identities that would be mutually experienced as radically foreign, there is still enough "common ground" in the lived experience of every day to enable a comparison. If it were impossible to build a bridge between then and now, the whole discipline of biblical studies, and for that matter, whole modern belief systems and religions that build upon an understanding of the Bible and other sacred texts, would also have to be abandoned.

Barton (1998:28-29) takes up this issue and uses Martha Nussbaum's ideas to show how "the characters in the biblical stories … belong in some sense to our world as well as [their] own." They share "the same needs, emotions, and frailties as ourselves" and we can therefore treat "past writings as genuine dialogue partners for us, repositories of wisdom and insight, when they are read within their original context" (Barton 1998:29).

This said, with the advent of hermeneutics with Gadamer and Ricoeur, post-structuralism or deconstruction with Derrida, and interpretative strategies or methodologies such as liberation and feminist theology, the study and understanding of biblical texts and a society such as ancient Israel has become a complex task. It is of great importance to explain the methodology of an enquiry, so that the hypothesis stated and conclusions reached can be understood and criticised within the same methodological paradigm in which the questions have been posed and the texts interpreted. These issues are addressed in Chapter 2.

For the moment it is sufficient to state that the texts are read from the standpoint that understanding takes places in the "blending of the horizons" of the text and of the interpreter. In this process the socio-historical contexts of both the text and interpreter play a cardinal role and have to be stated clearly and taken into account in the research. In short, it can be said that the research is undertaken from the methodological perspective that meaning is created in the interplay between a text's literary, socio-historical and ideological dimensions, and the social and ideological dimensions of the interpreter. The polysemic nature of language and the ambiguity of texts (especially the biblical texts) are taken seriously and used as an avenue of

interpretation. The broad methodology could be described as multidimensional, incorporating synchronic, diachronic as well as social science and ideological-critical approaches in the study of Israel's identity.

What I suggest as an avenue of study towards finding an ethic of "character and community", as Richardson (1994:89) puts it, is to revisit one of the usual sources of "inter-communal" or "inter-cultural" ethics, namely the Oracles Against the Nations. Actually we should rather refer to the Oracles Concerning the Nations, because the point is that not all the prophetic voices hold an exclusivist or annihilating perspective on Israel's neighbours. Apart from other more "universal" and "inclusive" traditions in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. the creation narratives, canonical books such as Job, Ruth etc.), one is surprised to discover a very pertinent positive evaluation of the foreign nations in some of the prophetic texts – so much so that Brueggemann (1997:492) speaks about "The nations as Yahweh's partner."

The point of the research is not just to explicate these "alternative" witnesses, but also to take another look at the exclusivist oracles and how they function in the prophetic literature. The main focus of the exegetical discussion will be on Nahum as an example *par excellence* of how the so-called "nationalistic" Oracles Concerning the Nations function. Nahum will be studied synchronically, diachronically and in its embeddedness in the Book of the Twelve as well as the Old Testament as a whole. The focus is on *how social identity is constructed* in and through this specific prophetic text. By looking at Nahum as part of the Book of the Twelve, we will see how the underlying processes or dynamics of the construction of social identity functions. In condensed form one could therefore say:

> *A multidimensional study of the prophetic Oracles Concerning the Nations, and specifically Nahum, provides an avenue for discovering ancient Israel's social identity. This reading strategy, which uncovers the ideological, religious, economic and political dimensions of ancient Israel's social identity in historical perspective, leads to the possible construction of a theological ethic of tolerance, community and in the long run to an ethos of responsible co-existence.*

3. The social dimension of the study

Part of this journey is also informed by the social location of the interpreter. The meanings of texts are not just conditioned by their production (events, culture, etc.) but also by the reader or "receiver" of these remote texts. The interpreter or scholar is not a solitary individual who searches for truth with private means, but a member of a society (political, economic and academic) which influences the way in which the world and texts are read (Schökel 1998:148). One could call this the *social dimension* of the research. As an interpreter I come to the Bible as a Christian, and the Bible forms the determining factor of who I am as a Christian. This should be taken seriously. As Schökel (1998:139) puts it:

> So I, the reader, am part of the Bible, the result of the biblical text, and as such I read it. Familiarity, congeniality and reception exist between both. I am not a neutral reader. I do not read the Bible as an archaeological curiosity or as a simple object of study. If I read it and want to understand it in depth, I must allow it to shape and mould me. It is a living text, and its communication of meaning exercises an influence on life. It not only communicates knowledge but is a live and vivifying force.

Stating who I am as researcher is therefore not a "subjective" endeavour, but an integral part of the process of interpretation. As a male, white, Dutch Reformed and Afrikaner Christian interpreting the Old Testament in a South African, post-apartheid context, it is indeed critical that I state "where I come from." I belong to a culture and a church that invented, accepted and theologically undergirded the sinful, evil and oppressive system of apartheid. This theological-ethical study wants to contribute to theology in South Africa in order that something like apartheid will never happen again.

From my experiences in the new South Africa, as well as my observations of the re-united German society[5] I realised that a tolerant and inclusivist ethos does not flow automatically from positive changes in political identity. After ten years of South Africa's being a democratic country, many of the old divisions in our society still exist. This of course has many causes (especially the economic reality of poverty), but one stands out. Although on a political level the identity of people in South Africa has changed (a democratic government and a liberal constitution), there are still too few examples of true reconciliation between

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[5] I was fortunate to be able to spend 15 months in Germany (Marburg, 2000-2001) to do research for this study.

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groups, religions and individuals. This is because the social identity of people in South Africa has not yet changed.

Although a totally different situation, the same dynamic can also be seen in Germany after the fall of the Wall. Politically there is no longer an East and a West Germany, but socially there are huge challenges. To some extent there is still an invisible line dividing the country between the "Wessies" and the "Ossies"[6]. Economics definitely also plays a big role in this situation but, as in South Africa, the fact that social identities have not changed very much throws some light on the problem. I think that focusing on social identity and how the underlying dynamics of social identity construction impact on theological-ethical decisions and an ethos of tolerance and just peace is a very necessary focus of research. My own personal biography has made me sensitive to this issue and influenced my choice of topic.

Being a student of the Old Testament and writing in the field of the Biblical Sciences also requires an explication of my epistemological and methodological paradigms, as it is these "behind the scenes" processes that have influenced the way the Bible was, and still is, read in South Africa and in the Dutch Reformed Church. In Deist's very important and extremely valuable 1994 publication *Ervaring, rede en metode in Skrifuitleg* (English: *Experience, reason and method in Scriptural interpretation*), which investigates Scriptural exegesis in the Dutch Reformed Church from 1840-1990, this fact is made very clear. He indicates how (a) epistemological, science-theoretical, and methodological decisions; (b) their broader ideological frameworks of justification; and (c) the social matrix within which these ideas were developed and functioned all played a role in the history of the DRC's theological journey towards, and nowadays away from, the ideology of apartheid (Deist 1994:v).

He shows that there has been a shift from a positivistic, naïvely realistic, Calvinistic paradigm towards a more critical realistic one in which, for example, historical-sociological, anthropological and literary-critical methods are incorporated (Deist 1994:362-363). One of the main points he wants to make is that one's exegetical choices are made from, or influenced by, one's model of rationality. These models are deeply influenced by the social and political environment of the interpreter. Therefore, an interpreter needs to be aware that

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[6] In Germany these terms are used colloquially to denote the difference between the previous East German and West German people.

her/his exegetical and theological choices have social implications and that he/she can be held socially responsible for them (Deist 1994:364 and ii).

This view is held not only in South Africa, but is also being recognized in, for example, Germany, with a publication like that of Weber (2000). Weber writes about the way in which the question of "nation" (German: "Volk") in Germany in the time of the Third Reich was appropriated in Old Testament studies. She takes Johannes Hempel (1891-1964) as an important case study and indicates how he managed to incorporate the Old Testament into the nationalistic debate about nation, the role of the Old Testament and the questions about being German (i.e. of the Nordic-Germanic race) *vis-à-vis* especially the Jews.

Old Testament science in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century had to defend its position against the idea of nation that later formed the central tenet of the Third Reich's nationalistic fervour, which built upon romantic 19th-century ideologies (Weber 2000:1). With central works such as *Das Alte Testament und die völkische Idee*[7] (1935), Hempel argued for the idea that the Old Testament gave the idea of "nation" a divine sanction, and that the Old Testament mirrored the salvific connection between God and Nation (Weber 2000:2). He opted for an understanding of the importance of the link between God and Nation that lies especially in the obedience of the nation and the wrath of God that falls upon disobedience (Weber 2000:3). He saw the role or destiny ("Schicksal") of Israel a warning to the German nation to live according to the will of God (Weber 2000:3). Weber (2000:5) chose Hempel as an example to show how research on the idea of "nation" was influenced by the biography of the researcher and the historical aspects of the time of National Socialism.

Doing research on the construction of identity in ancient Israel is therefore not a random or haphazard choice of topic, but is born out of my own search for identity as a white, male, Afrikaner living in post-apartheid South Africa. I grew up as a privileged person within a society where my group was responsible for the oppression of millions of fellow citizens. This calls for a historical sensitivity. The questions of dealing with the past and finding a new identity need to be faced openly and integrated honestly, also in writing a scholarly study. By bringing these questions into the research, I am in fact only stating processes that are already part of the research anyway. Apart from a personal quest for, and interest in, identity and the

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[7] English: "The Old Testament and the idea of Nation."

way that groups define themselves, there is also the influence of a more national (and international) interest in this field.

In the above-mentioned book Deist (1994:349-351) shows how Afrikaner nationalism played an important part in the intuitive preference of the DRC for the system of enforced separate development (apartheid). He mentions the Voortrekkers' struggle for freedom from the English and how they understood their situation as a religious one, identifying the Afrikaner nation and its history of "exodus" more and more with Israel and her history of exodus (Deist 1994:349). He cites, for example, Kritzinger, who preached at a Dingaan's Day festival in 1936. In his sermon he drew the following parallels between Israel and the Afrikaner (Deist 1994:403):

Israel	*Afrikaners*
• Moves out of Palestine to Egypt	• Move out of Europe to Africa
• Suffers under foreign rulers	• Suffer under the English
• Moves out of Egypt to Canaan	• Move out of the Cape to the North
• Thinks the surrounding? nations are too strong	• Blacks prevail in superior numbers against the Boers
• Receives its own new land	• Receive their own new land
• Makes a vow to God	• Make a vow to God
• Builds a memorial stone	• Build the Cilliers memorial church
• Fathers tell the children	• Fathers tell the children

More recent examples of the Afrikaner's search for identity in a new democratic dispensation can, for example, be seen in the books of Krog (1998), Durand (2002) and Giliomee (2003), while two recent dissertations by Marais (1999) and Meyer (2004) also highlight this plight.

Antjie Krog (1998), a well-known Afrikaans poet, in her book *Country of my skull* describes the journey that she underwent as a journalist covering the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The book is more than journalism, it is an account of her own struggle with "Afrikanerhood," and how Afrikaners should make meaning out of their history of being oppressors – of being culprits. Giliomee's *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people* (2003) gives an overview of the history of the Afrikaners and describes the process of oppression under the

English, and the rise of apartheid as political segregationist system. It becomes clear that the Afrikaners are not only seen as culprits, but in a certain sense also as victims.

When Meyer (2004:43-47) discusses the Jubilee in Leviticus 25 theological-ethically from a South African perspective, he takes up this double-barrel identity construct "of being a 'culprit' and a 'victim'." He sees in the Afrikaner's *culprit identity* as entailing a sort of "ostrich tactics of not knowing" (Meyer 2004:45). On the other hand, he describes the Afrikaner's "*victim identity* … of being terribly wronged by the English" (Meyer 2004:45 – italics JPB). This led to the Afrikaners' blindness to the injustices that they themselves inflicted on others and diverted attention away from the fact that "the ultimate victims in colonial South Africa were … the original Khoisan and black peoples who lived on this land in the first place" (Meyer 2004:46).

Meyer (2004:43) sees the South African legacy of apartheid as:

> … one of the most important 'ideological holdings' that any critical scholar trying to read the Bible in the twenty-first century in South Africa should take stock of. Our experience with Apartheid and the role that the Bible played in this project of social engineering will taint any interpretation of the Bible for a long time in South Africa.

The Dutch Reformed Church is also struggling with her identity in a new South Africa. Being known as the "apartheid church" has placed a lot of pressure on the church's leaders, theologians and members to come to grips with their sinful legacy of theologically undergirding apartheid, and of South Africa being the place *par excellence* where the segregation of white, brown, black and Indian citizens took on a very concrete form. Brown, black and Indian worshippers were not allowed to attend services in white Dutch Reformed congregations and sermons were the vehicles of communicating the Afrikaner "Volk's" separateness from the "heathen peoples" of the country. With our new democracy (since 1994) the church had to start answering difficult theological and social questions, not least of these being why for many decades the "Bible said" apartheid was right and now all of a sudden the same preachers say the "Bible says" it is wrong!

In his 1995 essay Marais calls this situation in white congregations in South Africa a struggle "for a new identity" in which the old apartheid myths have to be exposed and challenged. The

injustices have to be faced in a way which leads to the formation of new myths, where the formerly marginalized and the outsiders are listened to (Marais 1995:141-148). He explores these ideas further in his 1999 dissertation "Identiteit en transformasie"[8] in which he examines Richard Niebuhr's theology and ideas on a hermeneutic of identity and the connection between identity and transformative processes. He indicates the fact that mainline churches have shrunk and are experiencing a loss of power and marginalization (Marais 1999:3). This inevitably leads to the importance of investigating the identity of Christian communities/congregations. In a more popularized way, Durand (2002)[9] addresses the same problem of the transformation of the Afrikaner and the Afrikaner churches in a changed South Africa.

Coming from this cultural and theological background can either paralyze one with guilt and silence, or worse, it can lead to a continued blindness to past and present injustices; or it can sensitize one to renewed struggle and action for a better and more just future. If the option of lethargy or avoidance is taken, it can indeed also influence the way one reads the Bible, and specifically the OCN. It would inevitably lead to missing so many of the social identity and ideological issues contained within these texts. If one cannot listen to the oppressed and marginalized voices of present-day fellow citizens, how is one going to manage listening to, not to say understanding, the voices of oppression coming to us from ancient times?[10]

The second option helps one to be sensitive to guilt and the past, of what it means to experience and to mete out oppression, of how the Afrikaner "people of God" managed to construct a system of separate and exclusivist identity with the best of intentions and in the name (and even at the command) of God. Being an Afrikaner in a newly liberated South Africa opens one's exegetical eyes to the place of minority groups, to the question of (ethnic) identity, to the reality and dynamics of a culturally and religiously pluralistic society. All of a sudden one realises that it is not so self-evident that one is reading with the grain of the Old Testament as if one (Afrikaner, Christian) is reading "through" the eyes of an Israelite. Perhaps one should start by feeling the strain of reading against the grain "through" the eyes

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[8] English: "Identity and transformation."

[9] "Ontluisterde wêreld: Die Afrikaner en sy kerk in 'n veranderende Suid-Afrika" (English: "Disenchanted world: The Afrikaner and his church in a changing South Africa").

[10] Following Meyer (2004:i), who sees his apartheid-influenced ideological baggage as predisposing him to read in a certain manner, i.e. "to give some voice to people that were voiceless in the biblical text." His Afrikaner identity also opened up for him "avenues of engagement with ethical issues" as it "reminds us of how our presentations are influenced from where we look, from whose side we evaluate" (Meyer 2004:246).

of the "Nations".[11] It urges one to seek for inclusiveness, tolerance and reconciliation in texts that seem to opt for exclusiveness, hatred and division.

4. Aims and objectives of the study

In short the aims and objectives of this study could be summarized as follows:

- My ultimate goal or aim is to make a contribution to human-relations ethics by bringing new biblical insights to bear on the complex and contested sources for ethical reflection (namely the Oracles Concerning the Nations), and to play a part in the formation of an ethos of respect and responsibility in South Africa;

- I intend to approach the study by deliberately incorporating my own South African contextual identity as a white, male, Christian, African Afrikaner, engaged in theological-ethical interpretation, and hopefully contributing to an ethos of responsible tolerance, respect and community;

- I want to show that there is a correlation between the ideological, religious, economic and political dimensions of ancient Israel's identity and that "social identity" is a meaningful term to describe this correlation;

- To do this I will look at how the Book of Nahum, as example of an OCN text, functions in the prophetic corpus of the Hebrew Bible known as the Minor Prophets or The Book of the Twelve;

- Nahum will be studied in a multidimensional way. That means studying it synchronically and diachronically, while using the insights of social identity theories, ideological criticism and keeping the theological-ethical aim in mind;

- To complete the study I want to show (a) *that* and *how* the Hebrew Bible can be used in ethical reflection and (b) how the above-mentioned understanding of Nahum, as OCN text, can be used to construct a life-giving ethic which can lead to peaceful and responsible co-existence between different communities (faith communities and others).

To date there has been a plethora of ideas, methodologies, reading strategies, concepts and views. All of these will be worked through systematically in the following chapters, trying to show how this complex network of approaches can provide some kind of meaningful whole

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[11] Crüsemann (1996) sensitized me to this issue in his study of Israel, the nations and the poor in Zephaniah.

or contribution to the study of the prophetic Oracles Concerning the Nations, the construction of Israel's social identity, and the ethics of the Old Testament.

5. Overview of chapters

In *Chapter 2: Dimensions of the research* the main problem, hypothesis, epistemology as well as methodology and method of the study will be expounded. A critical-realistic epistemology, a multidimensional methodology using social identity theories and an ideological-critical liberatory perspective are discussed.

In *Chapter 3: Identity in ancient Israel* a research overview of studies focusing on ancient Israel's identity (religious, national/political and ethnic) is given. This is followed by a proposal for using social identity as a more meaningful theoretical instrument for unlocking the dynamics or processes underlying the construction of identity in the texts of ancient Israel. The chapter concludes with a short overview and introduction to the OCN and how they combine with social identity.

Chapter 4: Nahum: Background contains a discussion of the Book of Nahum in terms of the background questions. This includes Nahum as Oracle Concerning the Nations text, the dating, unity and structure of the book and the historical situation(s) in which the book should be read.

Chapter 5: Nahum and social identity in the Assyrian crisis gives a multidimensional exegetical interpretation of the social identity in the texts in the Book of Nahum (Na 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19) that can be traced to the pre-exilic Assyrian crisis in Judah. Basic premises about how social identity in ancient Israel functions in times of oppression and crisis are investigated. This is done from an ideological-critical perspective and with the aim of drawing theological-ethical conclusions.

In *Chapter 6: Nahum and social identity in the exile/post-exile* the same is done as in Chapter 5, but with an eye on the texts that are clearly exilic/post-exilic (Na 1:2-8; 2:1). The interpretation is then widened to investigate social identity in Nahum in terms of Nahum's function in the Book of the Twelve as a whole. The final section of the chapter deals with the

reception of Nahum and what it conveys to us about the theological-ethical construction of social identity.

Chapter 7: Nahum, social identity and theological ethics integrates the different theoretical strands of the study by commenting on the theological-ethical implications that can be drawn from the exegesis of Chapters 5 and 6. Old Testament ethical models and the responsibility ethics of Levinas are combined in a theological ethic of identity, liberation and responsibility. The ethics in Nahum and the ethics of the "use" of Nahum are brought to the fore.

Chapter 8: Conclusions binds together all the loose ends of the research, states the conclusions reached in the study with regards to the problem statement and hypothesis, and mentions implications and possibilities for future research.

Chapter 2: Dimensions of the research

1. Introduction

In the introductory chapter the relevance of the study, the outline of the argument, the social dimension, and an overview of the chapters were presented. It was argued that the very relevant question of identity (e.g. in South Africa and Germany) and how it is "lived out" between groups (ethics) are intricately entwined. Modern-day social problems of extreme nationalism, ethnocentrism, religious militarism and exclusiveness can be traced to the way that a group (cultural, political, religious, etc.) views itself, that is, how it constructs its social identity.

To study this problem it was suggested that the prophetical Oracles Concerning the Nations of ancient Israel provide a window onto the theological-ethical dynamics of identity construction in ancient societies and through ancient texts. Understanding these biblical texts in terms of identity and ethics can provide hermeneutical clues to pressing modern-day global inter-human conflicts. It was also stated that in this research process my own identity (male, white, Dutch Reformed Afrikaner) and social context (post-apartheid South Africa with a legacy of intolerance and with burning questions of identity) play an integral role in the way that I approach the Bible, and in particular these seemingly exclusivist and terrible "texts of terror"[12] in the prophetical corpus of the Christian and Jewish scriptural tradition.

In this chapter the more formal dimensions of the research are put forward. The problem and hypothesis are stated, after which the model of rationality (epistemological dimension) and the multidimensional reading strategy (methodological dimension) are explicated. The chapter ends with a description of the method that will be followed through the remaining chapters of the study.

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[12] This phrase was coined by Trible (1984) in her book *Texts of terror: Literary-feminist readings of biblical narratives.*

2. Problem and hypothesis

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the focus of this dissertation is on how the social identity of ancient Israel is constructed *in* and *through* the Oracles Concerning the Nations (OCN). These processes of identity construction have a hermeneutical influence on the way readers (old and new) of these oracles interpret their own lives and construct their own identity. The problem lies in the fact that the OCN and the Book of Nahum are usually interpreted as being extremely nationalistic and ethnocentric in their outlook and, therefore, hypothetically lead to similar exclusivist ways of identity construction, be they political, economic or religious. Such ways of identity construction can lead to a theological ethic of intolerance or retribution and can be seen in the extremes of, for example, xenophobic ethnic cleansing.

These nationalistic/ethnocentric interpretative tendencies hypothetically coincide with interpreting groups' "preferred intuitions." This idea comes from Laudan (1977), who holds the view that in certain eras preference is given to particular definitions of rationality. Deist (1994:354) adds to this that it seems as if these (unspoken) definitions of rationality are *inter alia* formulated by the social-historical surroundings of the scientists[13]. This leads to theologies and ethical stances that see the biblical text as only *confirming*, and excludes the possibility of the Bible also *criticising,* a particular group's/culture's/religion's agenda[14]. One could formulate the **problems** that are being investigated as follows:

> *Does a one-dimensional and uncritical reading of the Book of Nahum, an Oracles Concerning the Nations text, lead to a destructive theological-ethical dynamic of social identity construction? Is the social identity constructed in Nahum ethnocentric and exclusivist? Does the underlying theological-ethical dynamic of social identity foster, among other things, extreme nationalism and xenophobia?*

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[13] It should be noted, however, that at the end of his study Laudan comes to the conclusion (*contra* Mannheim and Durkheim – Laudan 1977:210-213) that cognitive sociologists "have yet to produce a single general law which they are willing to evoke to explain the cognitive fortunes of any scientific theory" (Laudan 1977:217-218). One could say, however, that the Afrikaners' worldview (founded on Afrikaner nationalism and insecurity) during the time of the emergence of the policy and theology of apartheid had a stronger influence on research traditions than the other way around. It influenced the politicians and theologians to accept a naïvely rationalistic model of rationality as it served the ends of their political and cultural programme (Laudan 1977:101-103).

[14] Deist (1994:349-352) shows how the social context of the Afrikaner (in the wake of the Great Trek, the two Wars of Freedom and oppression under the English) led them to construct their models of rationality on the preferred intuitions of Afrikaner nationalism and security, both leading to the dominant theological model of Kuyperism, relying on positivism and naïve rationalism. These and other factors influenced the identification of the Afrikaner "Volk" with Israel, and led eventually to the theological and exegetical undergirding of the exclusivist, racialist and nationalistic policy of apartheid.

A **hypothesis** can be formulated as follows:

> *A multidimensional ideological-critical reading of the Book of Nahum[15], an Oracles Concerning the Nations text, is a better approach. This approach includes a description of the underlying processes of social identity construction. A nuanced description of social identity in Nahum points away from ethnocentrism and exclusiveness. A theological-ethically sound appropriation of the described processes fosters a dynamic of social identity construction that is responsible and liberatory.*

As I will argue later on, this study is not concerned with theories or methodology but with making sense of the texts in front of "us" (ancient and modern). This, however, does not negate the importance of explicating the model of rationality and the choice of methodology. Laudan (1977:59) says in this regard that the "work of several historians in the last twenty years has provided overwhelming evidence that the methodological beliefs of scientists often do profoundly affect their research." Apart from this more formal reason, I also want to argue that putting my methodological "cards on the table" is part of the inter-subjective process of disseminating this piece of research in the scholarly community.

To be criticized constructively on the grounds of the stated scientific boundaries and paradigms is a process that leads to progress in the field of the study of theology, ethics and the identity of ancient Israel. In the remaining part of the Chapter I will explain on *which* theory of knowledge I base my research (epistemology), *which* mapping of theoretical factors in the process of interpretation I will use (methodology), and *how* I intend to implement these theoretical perspectives (method). In the *summary* important conclusions are drawn.

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[15] In Chapter 4, Section 3.2 I will propose more specific hypotheses regarding the interpretation of the Book of Nahum with regards to dating, historical context, etc.

3. Epistemological dimension

Rationality is represented in different models of which naïve realism, positivism, instrumentalism and critical realism are probably the most important for the process of biblical interpretation[16]. For this study critical realism will provide the best rational instrument as it acknowledges that our knowledge of the world is mediated by the mind, on which our senses are dependent. In this sense it integrates the sound insights of idealism and New Realism, the last of which "foundered on the phenomena of error, illusion, and perceptual variation" (Delaney 1999:194). Critical realism is better able to accommodate error, illusion and perceptual variation, as "the primary object of knowledge is the independent physical world, and that what is immediately present to consciousness is not the physical object as such, but some corresponding mental state broadly construed" (i.e. mental mediation)" (Delaney 1999:194).

In the South African (Dutch) reformed theological world, Van Huyssteen played an important role in applying critical realism to theology and the interpretation of the Bible[17]. He reminds theologians that the biblical texts do have to be studied as literature, but also makes a strong case that "these same literary texts are also religious texts responding to explicitly religious questions" (Van Huyssteen 1987:11). For Van Huyssteen (1987:13-14) the value of critical realism lies:

> … in the quest for the proper relationship between models in theology and the resulting hermeneutical and exegetical methodology, I find the reality of text, the reality of the reader, and the reality of the dynamic reception of the text by the reader of the utmost importance. … On this basis I personally opt for the model of critical realism.

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[16] There are other grids of organizing models of rationality, e.g. Johnson, Dandeker and Ashworth (1984). They draw up a conceptual map according to scientists' answers to two questions: (1) What is the nature of social reality? and (2) How do we get knowledge about this social reality? (Johnson, Dandeker & Ashworth 1984:14). The answers to (1) can either be *Materialism* or *Idealism* and the options for (2) are *Nominalism* and *Realism* (Johnson, Dandeker & Ashworth 1984:13-16).
[17] Deist notes that in the history of the rationality of the Dutch Reformed Church, it was Van Huyssteen who in 1973, 1983 and then with his 1986 book *Teologie as kritiese geloofsverantwoording* (English: *Theology as critical faith accountability*), really got the discussion going about scientific theories in the Dutch Reformed theological world (Deist 1994:303-305).

The **critical realist** stance includes the following aspects (Van Huyssteen 1987:19-22):

- Theories are representations of the world as a reality;
- Human imagination is important in the formation of theories;
- Creative thought as well as existing reality structures are recognized;
- The critical realist discovers, creates and believes that her/his theories refer;
- There is no uninterpreted access to reality;
- The role of metaphor is central;
- In theology the provisional, inadequate and partial nature of this stance is necessary as the only way to refer to God and his relation to humanity, thereby acknowledging "a ultimate faith commitment, while at the same time honouring the plurality, provisionality and validity of relevant forms of linguistic and literary criticism" (Van Huyssteen 1987:21)[18].

Critical realism seems to be a fruitful way forward in the study of social identity in ancient Israel's texts. To mediate the construction of social identity in Nahum and the OCN, these texts must be situated and interpreted in *their* political, economic, cultural and religious (although metaphorically mediated) reality. At the same time I realize that to get to that reality one needs supporting theories or methodologies, which can serve as interpretative keys for unlocking the social dynamics of social identity construction. This is especially true for the strong metaphors we come across in Nahum, as the reality of ancient Israel is mediated to us not directly or literally, but through metaphorical language.

The critical realist stance, which opens up the possibility of referring (always indirectly, partially and inadequately – Van Huyssteen 1987:20) to the reality of God, is also important to this study as the identity of Yahweh and what that means for ancient Israel's way of social identity construction will be of paramount importance. Lastly, because this is also a theological-ethical study, the fact that critical realism "not only provides us with valid criteria for theological credibility for our present complex situation, but also with basic provisional criteria of appropriateness to the Bible" (Van Huyssteen 1987:22), helps us to responsibly incorporate pressing present-day issues into our theological-ethical reflection on the OCN.

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[18] Van Huyssteen (1987:21-22) goes on to explain critical realism in terms of the way this theory refers to and depicts the religious reality of the biblical text, how theology therefore is a special sort of explanation, and how the religious experience of a faith community and interpretative tradition provides the grounding of this reference.

This model is of course still very modernistic, and I would like to add a post-modern extension to my epistemological choice because paradox, ambiguity and "filling-in the gaps" when reading texts are central to the understanding of the OCN.

Toulmin (1990) helps us in this regard. The type of criticism he raises in his book *Cosmopolis: The hidden agenda of modernity* is becoming commonplace as the certainties of the modernistic project are questioned. Also in the biblical sciences many of the old certainties and universal theories continue to lose their power. For example, continuing new archaeological discoveries in what used to be the ancient Near East raise questions about the dominant paradigm.

Toulmin (1990:xi) pleads for a humanizing of scientific enquiry in the cold rational world into which science has developed. He deconstructs the certainties by questioning the "standard narrative" of the "beginning" of the modernistic era (Toulmin 1990:12). According to him, the narrative of the emergence of modernism is nothing but a rational construct and thus not historically correct (Toulmin 1990:13, 81). Modernism should not be sought in the early 17th-century solipsism of Descartes, but in the 16th-century Renaissance writers like Montaigne, who were not so interested in formulating generally valid theories, but rather "concentrate(d) on accumulating a rich perspective" (Toulmin 1990:27).

The 16th-century modernism was conscious of the diversity of human life and theoretical investigation was balanced by taking the situatedness and concrete effect of such theories on humans and nature seriously. After the murder of Henri IV and the chaos of the ensuing 30 years war, Descartes' rationalism brought renewed certainty (Toulmin 1990:70). In the process there was a "flight from the particular, concrete, transitory, and practical aspects" (Toulmin 1990:76) to (i) written formal logic, (ii) an emphasis on universal principles, (iii) the drawing up of abstract axioms, and (iv) that an emphasis on that which is permanent (Toulmin 1990:31-33).

The central point he wants to stress is that "we need to balance the hope for certainty and clarity in theory with the impossibility of avoiding uncertainty and ambiguity in practice" (Toulmin 1990:175) and in the process "provide the elbowroom we need in order to protect diversity and adaptability" (Toulmin 1990:183).

Summary: The need for a relevant epistemology was noted, as one's model of rationality influences the methodologies that are used, which to a large extent influence the way research is conducted, and indeed to which conclusions one comes. Critical realism was described and positively incorporated as it focuses on the importance of interpreting the metaphorically mediated reality of ancient Israel and Yahweh, and on providing theological credibility for biblical interpretation, as well as for theological-ethical incorporation into addressing our present-day problems. Toulmin's critique loosens up the modernistic "straightjacket" and provides ample room for taking ambiguity, paradox and uncertainty seriously and incorporating it into our view of the biblical text and ancient (and modern) society.

In the next section the methodology of the study will be looked at. It should be noted that what appears at first glance to be methodological eclecticism is indeed part of the Kuhnian "shifting of paradigms",[19] as I understand it. The multidimensionality of the research does not imply relativism, and is born from a critical-realistic, post-modern and ideological-critical intuition about Nahum and the OCN. It is also part of my identity as researcher, as I read, research and write from a place/country in which plurality, ambiguity and the sensitivity to power-relations are celebrated. The combination of critical realism and post-modern paradox provides the fertile soil in which a multidimensional approach to Nahum and the OCN can flourish.

4. A multidimensional methodology

> The Bible was not written for biblical scholars, nor Don Quixote for Cervantists, nor the Divine Comedy for Danteans … Biblical scholarship is no longer knowledge about the Bible but rather about biblical scholars (Schökel 1998:170).

This quotation by Luis Alonso Schökel may sound a bit hyperbolic, but contains more than a grain of truth. Engaging in Old Testament theology has become a methodological minefield that stretches across continents, borders and languages. By going about one's "scholarly business" in a certain way, one is at once befriending one paradigm, but estranging oneself from others. This feeling is not limited to one scholar. In his essay "The synchronic, the diachronic and the historical: A triangular relationship?" Barr ends his contribution to the

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[19] Cf. Deist (1995) and Laudan (1977:73-76).

debate about method in Old Testament exegesis with an apology "for reading a paper which has in it little or no detailed reference to the Old Testament" (Barr 1995:14). He goes on to say that this is not an accident as:

> The methodological discussions in which biblical studies are now engaged seem to me to have rather little to do with the Bible itself … These discussions seem to me to be discussions of our own modern experience, and it is our own modern experience in its many varied aspects that is the authority to which we are appealing. Since these aspects are indeed varied, we can confidently expect that the answers to be produced will continue to be varied also (Barr 1995:14).

Jonker (2001) "makes the same case" by (consciously) listing the various (unconscious) factors that play a role in biblical interpretation and by mapping them so as to "assist us in the navigation process" (Jonker 2001:423). The fact that he lists 19 different factors and then groups them into 11 different "maps" indicates the complexity of modern-day biblical research and indeed that "Biblical interpretation … is a multidimensional and dynamic process" (Jonker 2001:418).

The fact is that, even though critical reflection upon the process of interpretation (hermeneutics) and elaborating upon a chosen reading strategy or methodology often leads one into a chaotic variety, it is indeed a crucial exercise. Consciously reflecting upon a certain way of reading the Bible provides one's readers with the categories and parameters within which inter-subjective communication and meaningful dialogue become possible.

Another important aspect of methodology is the fact that there is not one correct method. Jonker (1996:299-300) puts it succinctly:

> an exegetical method should not be conceived as objective pre-formulated rules for analyzing texts. Exegetical methods should rather be described as *formalized intuition about and experience with texts.* The interaction between exegete and text *creates* a method[20]

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[20] He also quotes Barton to confirm this view: "Biblical 'methods' are *theories* rather than methods: theories which result from the formalizing of intelligent intuitions about the meaning of biblical texts … But the theory – which, when codified, will become source analysis or redaction criticism… is logically subsequent to the intuition about meaning" (Jonker 1996:300).

Keeping in mind, therefore, that reflecting on methodology is crucial to responsible interpretation, and that methodology is intuitively created in the process of reading the biblical text, the methodology of this study can be explored.

4.1 Introduction to a multidimensional approach

This dissertation uses a multidimensional methodology or approach to interpretation. According to Jonker (2001:426), a multidimensional "map" *incorporates* aspects of more than one of the other maps[21] and shows how the different aspects of the maps are *related* to each other. This is not a study *about* methodology, but one that wants to *use* methodology to read and interpret the text of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible[22] in an academically and ethically responsible way.

In his published dissertation *Exclusivity and variety: Perspectives on multidimensional exegesis*, Jonker (1996) gives a superb overview of the methodological problems in current biblical scholarship and provides a valuable perspective on a multidimensional or integrational methodology[23]. As the title indicates, Jonker sees a problem in the exclusive way in which Old Testament scholars go about their scholarly business. He notes the plethora and variation of approaches on the "methodological market" (one could differentiate roughly between historical-critical methods and hermeneutical views) (Jonker 1996:22-26).

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[21] The other maps include: (i) The world behind, inside, in front of (and underneath) the text; (ii) Historical context – text – tradition – suspicion – spiral of interpretation – contemporary context; (iii) Text – context; (iv) Sender – Medium – Receiver; (v) Textual production – Textual reception; (vi) Centrifugal (deductive) – Centripetal (inductive); (vii) Diachronical – Synchronical; *(viii) Multidimensional*; (ix) Source orientated and discourse orientated; (x) Syntagmatic and paradigmatic; (xi) Tropes and topics (Jonker 2001: 423-427 – emphasis JPB).

[22] Zenger *et al.* (1998:16) see in the use of the "Hebrew Bible" a "neutral" way of reading and research of a document of the religion of biblical Israel, without taking into account the implications for contemporary Jewish and Christian identity. The name "Old Testament" will be used in this study as it is written from a Christian perspective. This does not, however, indicate insensitivity to the scriptures that are for Jewish believers the "Hebrew Bible." In a certain sense the "Hebrew Bible" is incorporated in the use of "Old Testament" as the historical and cultural embeddedness of the texts refers to an ancient people who could indeed be referred to as Hebrews or ancient Israelites.

[23] Laudan (1977:103-105) gives examples of how differing research traditions can be integrated, e.g. by the two being grafted on to each other: "While undermining the presuppositions of neither of its predecessors, the amalgamation suggested important new lines of research, and put scientists in a position to deal with empirical and conceptual problems which neither of the ancestor traditions alone could resolve satisfactorily" (Laudan 1977:104).

His conclusions about variety and exclusion could be narrowed down to the following two points:

- The variety in exegetical studies is not a negative factor if it is used in a controlled way (Jonker 1996:30).
- Although exclusivism is not necessarily inherent in any methodology "[e]xclusivism … develops when the exegete claims (consciously or unconsciously) that his/her specialization area is the *only* key to the correct exegesis of a text" (Jonker 196:33 – emphasis JPB). This exclusivism is found in both historical-critical as well as in more reader-orientated or literary approaches (Jonker 1996:33-34).

For Jonker (1996:36) the answer lies in a "multidimensional … exegetical theory". "Multidimensional" refers to:

> … the interrelation among exegetical methodologies in a systematic and ordered way. Every methodology is allowed to operate according to its own approach, and by means of its own method(s). However, instead of operating exclusively and on its own, the exegetical process and results are being coordinated and related to those of other approaches and methods … A 'multidimensional' exegetical process does not deprive the exegete of making exegetical decisions. Rather he/she then has the opportunity of making exegetical decisions in a more responsible way. Not only one view on the biblical text … will be taken into consideration, but various views will benefit his/her 'position' as exegete (Jonker 1996:71).

The question remains: how one goes about choosing the appropriate methodology as a conversation partner? Jonker (1996:327) quotes Lategan, who points out that "within a multidimensional approach towards Biblical interpretation the question no longer is 'What methods do we choose?' but: 'What methods does the text choose – or rather, require?'" To this Jonker (1996:327) adds that just as important is the question: "What methods does the context choose - or rather, require?" as biblical interpretation does not take place in a vacuum. Thus text and context indicate what questions one should ask (Jonker 196:327). The biblical text, by its definition of being an ancient text, is multidimensional. The context within which one interprets also requires a multidimensional point of view.

This focus on the multidimensionality of interpretation is found not only in the English-orientated scientific world, but is also starting to come to the fore in the German biblical

sciences. Theißen had already in 1995 pleaded for the importance of a plurality of exegesis (making room for scientific exegesis[24] and reader-response/liberationist approaches[25]). He sees this as necessary because:

> … das Verhältnis des exegetischen Pluralismus zum sozialen und kulturellen Pluralismus in der Gesellschaft, d.h. zur Notwendigkeit, ein Zusammenleben von Gruppen mit verschiedener Identität in der heutigen Welt zu ermöglichen (Theißen 1995:130).

In this polyvalent exegesis (Theißen 1995:137-138) which requires that all the possible meanings of a text must be brought to the surface, the scientific models provide rules to the game of interpretation (Theißen 1995:130) and the reader-response or liberation methodologies make new interpretations and the application of interpretations possible (Theißen 1995:137). He combines his approach in the faith-hope-love metaphor (1 Cor 13) with the "love principle" acting to accept the plurality, to be humble about one's own method, and to respect other people as well as their interpretations (Theißen 1995:139).

This brings us to the questions that the present study asks about the *texts* (4.2) that are considered: how OT prophecy should be studied (4.3); how OT prophets should be viewed (4.4); how the processes of social identity construction (4.5) in these ancient texts can be described by using social sciences; and how an ideological-critical sensitivity to the context (4.6) of both the text and interpreter plays a critical role in reading texts.

4.2 Reading texts multidimensionally

In this section the aspect of reading a biblical text (general) and a prophetic text (specific) as part of a multidimensional approach is described.

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[24] Here he includes the classical text and literary criticism, form and redaction criticism, textual-scientific approaches using linguistics and literary theory, as well as social-historical and textual-psychological methods (Theißen 1995:127-128).
[25] Theißen (1995:129) includes in this category those approaches that find their orientation in the present, with application as the main goal, which want to define and make possible human identity. He lists exegesis from the Judeo-Christian tradition, liberation theology and social preaching, as well as feminist theology. The main themes are freedom or liberation from anti-Semitism, imperialism and patriarchalism (Theißen 1995:129).

4.2.1 Reading a biblical text

> Talking about a book of the Bible … requires many skills. Translating an ancient and sacred text uses knowledge of history, archaeology, social anthropology, and linguistics. We have to bring back to life the culture and values of an ancient society … We have to relive the experience of a man … We have to understand what he was doing, what he was feeling, when he wrote it. We have to understand the literary forms available to him, which were familiar to his readers, but possibly strange to us. We need some knowledge of history in order to appreciate the situation … We have to let [him] be who he was and the people of Israel be who they were. We are here to listen, not to judge (Andersen 2001:xiii).

What Andersen says about reading Habakkuk in the Old Testament could also be said of the prophet Nahum, or any other biblical book for that matter. The different dimensions to Bible reading which he mentions – for example, historical, archaeological, social anthropological, linguistic, etc., fit in with a multidimensional approach. In this section as well as the following sections the different aspects of the research and the methodological perspectives that accompany them are stated. In this section the focus is on the polyphonic, richly interwoven and often ambiguous nature of biblical texts.

When Zenger (Zenger *et al.* 1998:19) talks about Christian-Jewish biblical hermeneutics, he is quick to point out that the Bible, and especially the "First Testament", should not be seen as a systematic unit, but a dramatic correlation ("Zusammenhang"). What is more, this polyphonic Symphony of the Old Testament was, to a great extent "willed":

> … wie die Töne, Motive, Melodien, ja sogar die einzelnen Sätze … miteinander streiten und sich gegenseitig ins Wort fallen, sich ergänzen und bestätigen, sich wiedersprechen, sich wiederholen und sich variieren – das ist kein Makel und kein Unvollkommenheit dieses Opus … Im Gegenteil: Es ist eben das Proprium der Bibel, daß eine solche Komplexität gezielt geschaffen und aus theologischem (!) Interesse beibehalten wurde (Zenger 1998:19).

According to Schökel (1998:146-147), this polysemy or ambiguity is true of texts, even though "we usually consider the text as an enclosure or precinct … The author thus marks out boundaries, raises separating walls, so that the sense of the work may be a closed garden: univocal and unambiguous, forever." Polysemy can be intended or involuntary and unexpected. It can be caused by the text's inner relationship, for its elements are assembled in

an "organic system … [bearing] … a sense which may exceed the calculation or intension of the author" (Schökel 1998:147).

> Even if we raise the walls, the text remains open upwards and downwards and over the wall. In the barred garden of the Song of Songs (4.12) the south wind slips in 'to air the plants and wrest perfume from them' (Schökel 1998:147).

This insight (or is it foresight?) will be critical for reading Nahum in a multidimensional way as an example of identity construction in an oracle concerning a foreign nation. Closely reading the text of Nahum requires that the cracks "where the light shines through"[26] be described. It asks for an "ear" for the intertextual shimmerings of rich and complex traditions. It focuses on the "gaps" and the ambiguities. It zooms in on the paradoxes and uncertainties in the hope that even from the dark sides of a text that has been called both nationalistic and a text of terror, there will be noted a glimpse of liberation and an ethic of reconciliation.

Sternberg describes this stance to reading the biblical text masterfully. In his well-known 1985 work, *The poetics of biblical narrative: Ideological literature and the drama of reading*, he describes the way a literary work's ideology, aesthetics and history join forces and cast "reading as a drama, interpretation as an ordeal that enacts and distinguishes the human predicament" (Sternberg 1985:46). The language of a text "consists of bits and fragments to be linked and pieced together in the process of reading: it establishes a system of gaps that must be filled in" (Sternberg 1985:186).

This basic idea of reading is elaborated on and refined in his 1998 book *Hebrews between cultures. Group portraits and national literature* (Sternberg 1998). He makes a distinction between what he calls the "Proteus Principle" and the so-called "Package deal fallacy" when it comes to interpretation (Sternberg 1998:155). Package dealing is that error ("lust") of interpreters when, for the sake of "pure scholarship", they try to unify and correlate texts that are not ordered and easy (Sternberg 1998:160). This "lust for (meta) stereotype in (meta) discourse … answers to a certain ideal order – easy and reassuring where the Bible's is difficult and unquiet" (Sternberg 1998:158). He opts for the boundless dynamism of the Proteus Principle which takes the many-to-many correspondences between form and function of all semiotic systems seriously (Sternberg 1998:158).

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[26] In acknowledgement to Leonard Cohen.

What makes this approach useful is the fact that the theme of his book integrates with this study's focus on identity. Below (Chapter 3, Section 2.4) we will see how this Proteus Principle impacts on his reading of ethnic identity, ethnocentrism and other themes related to identity, such as "foreignness." He calls the violent levels of the Bible's discourse universe unsettling and demanding, and argues that the focus on nuances "weans us … of the shortcuts to making sense of the world" (Sternberg 1998:157). His ideas are indeed unsettling, but that is exactly what is needed to tackle violent and disturbing literature like that found in the OCN and specifically in Nahum. He comes to the epistemological conclusion:

> True belief is belief in a difficult order: one fluid with limits, created and controlled but ever-contingent on choice, absolutely yet irreducible to formula, hence always partly mysterious. Any easier order would offer false comfort, especially the appearance of stability, at prohibitive cost (Sternberg 1998:157).

4.2.2 Reading a prophetic text

In this study the focus of interpretation falls on Nahum and the Minor Prophets. The so-called Oracles Against the Nations,[27] which are found in the prophetic books of the OT, need to be read in their prophetical context. To understand this context better we will first look at how the phenomenon of OT prophecy should be understood (Section 4.3), and after that how an OT prophet should be seen (Section 4.4). These aspects, as well as the focus on social identity (Section 4.5), all form part of the multidimensional reading of a prophetic text.

4.3 Studying Old Testament prophecy

In this section we will consider how a multidimensional approach is called for by the multiplicity of prophecy in the OT. After looking at a general picture of OT prophecy and how prophecy has been studied in the OT discipline, the investigation will focus on the specifics of OT prophecy as part and parcel of the ancient Near Eastern world.

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[27] In Chapter 3 the argument is made that one should rather use the designation "Oracles Concerning the Nations" as the oracles found in the prophets are not all negative towards the (to Israel) foreign nations.

4.3.1 The Old Testament and the multiplicity of prophecy

The OT *itself points to the multiplicity of prophecy*, and introduces us to a variety of men and women, groups and individuals. One could distinguish between the so-called "writing prophets", who were critical of the state, and the "other prophets" or the "salvation prophets", who served the religious stability of the state by only proclaiming Yahweh's support (Zenger *et al.* 1998:371-372).

One could point to the multiplicity of words that are used to describe these figures or groups and how fluid the terminology is. Therefore the usual Hebrew word for a biblical prophet is נָבִיא, but that description is, for example, not accepted by the prophet Amos as applicable to him. The terms "Prophet" נָבִיא (the so-called mediator of God's word), "Prophet's son" נָבִיא-בֶּן (member of a prophetic "society"), "Man of God" אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים (miracle workers healer of the early history), and "Seer"/"Visionary" רֹאֶה and חֹזֶה (ecstatic auditions and visions) are all found in the OT and have different meanings at different times.

One could also look at the different functions that prophets had. Their primary role as "Messenger or mediator of Yahweh" with the main contents of their message being "Yahweh brings destruction and (perhaps) salvation" (Lang 1980:18,20; Brueggemann 1997:622ff), was not the only function of the prophets. Prophecy was also a factor of politics and thus had a societal function (Lang 1980:14-18). To this could be added the different categories into which prophets are normally divided. Zenger (Zenger *et al.* 1998:372-375) has: (1) prophetical groups/societies (*Genossenschafts-propheten)*, (2) temple or cult prophets, (3) royal court prophets, (4) the free, oppositional individual prophets, and (5) the literary or writing prophets.

Finally, the different ways in which the prophecy or message was brought across (oracle, song, writing and theatre – Lang 1980:28-29) are apparent from the OT texts. It becomes clear that one has to first clear the conceptual and terminological "thicket" when it comes to studying prophecy meaningfully.

For our study of Nahum it will become clear that we probably have a type of "visionary" as Nahum 1:1 talks of the "vision" (חָזוֹן) of the Book of Nahum. Nahum definitely had the role of a messenger of Yahweh with his message of destruction of Nineveh, but we also find traces

of Nahum being a cultic prophet (cf. Jeremias 1970). We also see elements of a literary or written prophetic book. The final form of the Book of Nahum was probably composed in the late exilic/post-exilic time when it became known as the "book" of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite (Na 1:1b).

4.3.2 The methodology of prophet studies

The *methodology of studying the prophets of ancient Israel* is such a divergent field that it is difficult to get one's bearings in the chaotic welter of approaches[28]. Since the start of the 19th century, the study of OT prophecy has experienced far-reaching changes in the methods and strategies of biblical scholarship (Clements 1996:1). The old traditional historical-critical approaches with their idealistic focus on the prophets as charismatic individuals, whose original words have to be revealed, has slowly developed into more nuanced theories and methodologies of interpretation. Clements (1996:1-6) indicates that since the 1960s, with the *form-critical* approaches of Gunkel and then Westermann, the idea that the writings contained the prophet's original spoken pronouncements of God's future actions which were based on God's promises to Israel, was re-examined. The connections between the prophets and psalmody/cult (Clements, Begrich and Muilenberg) and questions on how they obtained their highly skilful rhetoric led to the realization that:

> He [the prophet] was himself the product of a long tradition, not simply of prophets like himself, but of a whole history of piety, worship, and political expectation with which he necessarily engaged in a kind of dialogue (Clements 1996:3).

Then came Von Rad's *Old Testament Theology* (Volume 2, 1968), which further changed the way prophets were studied. With his *Traditionsgeschichte* it was shown that prophets were not only individual human beings with personal insights, feelings and creativity, but that they also reflected "the varied locations from which the prophets emerged and the local political and religious training that each one of them received" (Clements 1996:3). Research in the field of the life and writings of the prophets received much attention and things such as, for example, studying the prophet's context, the wider ancient Near Eastern background and the

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[28] Cf. Clements (1996:1-19) for an overview of the history of the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, 1965-1995.

strong political content of the messages, were becoming part of the field of the dominant (European, Western) models of prophetical research (Clements 1996:4-5). Since then, there have been further changes and developments in this field.

In his thought-provoking article "The prophets: Are we heading for a paradigm switch?" Deist (1995:583) already suggested in 1989[29] that "we are at present ... in the midst of … a paradigm switch with regard to the scholarly appreciation of the Old Testament prophets in general and the so-called 'writing prophets' in particular." He describes the way in which the dominant paradigm[30] in OT scholarship is being undermined. Deist's criticism of the dominant paradigm (classical historical-criticism) boils down to a feeling of uneasiness with three of this paradigm's main assumptions:

(1) Israelite and Christian religion should be seen as *unique* and this unique revelation should be searched for in the OT (Deist 1995:585);

(2) Historical-critical hermeneutics are undergirded by an *idealistic philosophy* in which the idea of, for example, *a priori* thought categories which lead to text production are still being maintained (Deist 1995:586);

(3) The historical-critical methodology proceeds from an *essentialist view of texts* according to which "texts are *reflections* of reality, thought processes and/or deposits of meaning" (Deist 1995:586).

The dominant paradigm is, according to Deist, undermined by four factors.

(1) *New evidence* from archaeology and continued historical-critical research pointed out that (a) prophecy was a phenomenon spread throughout the ancient Near East and therefore questions the uniqueness of the OT prophets and asks for a better sociological foundation for the study of prophecy; (b) the idea of oral tradition, the stereotypical speech forms employed by the prophets and the affinity to Deuteronomistic (non-prophetic and post-exilic) forms implied that the prophetic texts

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[29] The 1995 article is a reprint of Deist's 1989 article, which appeared in Fritz, V, Pohlmann, K-F and Schmitt, H-C (eds) 1989. *Prophet und Prophetenbuch: Festschrift für Otto Kaizer zum 65. Geburtstag*, 1-18. Berlin: De Gruyter.
[30] The "dominant paradigm" includes the search for the *ipsissima verba* of the prophets emphasizing the *original sources* and their *uniqueness* (literary and source criticism); using the histories of ancient Israel to provide the background for understanding the words of the prophets as "utterances of specific individuals in specific circumstances; finding the *Sitz im Leben* of their "speeches" (form criticism); seeing the prophets as the main contributors to the formation of Israel's ethical monotheism, etc. (Deist 1995:583-585).

"provide us neither with a mirror of genuine prophetic thought nor with a picture of their times" (Deist 1995:589-590).

(2) *Changing assumptions* about rationality (nominalism/idealism/freedom *vs.* realism/ materialism/determinism; the rise of the social sciences, the phenomenology of *Gestalt,* etc.) led to historical-criticism as an exegetical procedure that came under fire since the 1960s and that was criticized for "asking the wrong questions" (Deist 1995:590-591). This, coupled with (a) the challenges from the so-called Third World after the process of decolonization in the form of liberation theology, (b) the democratization of educational institutions after the European student movements, c) the rejection of neo-colonial liberal Western values in the Third world as well as (d) the disillusionment with the perceived detrimental environmental impact of capitalist "civilization" that has "contributed to the serious questioning of the dominant model of rationality" (Deist 1995:592).

(3) *New uneasy questions* about the results of the historical-critical paradigm couldn't find answers within that model, as the traditional model does not "'look at a phenomenon (such as prophecy) or at a text from the side of social realities … [and tend to] … side-step the (socio-anthropological) problem by focussing more and more on the finished product, the 'final/canonical text'" (Deist 1995:593).

(4) *The disappearance of proponents of the dominant model* (German scholarship and the old masters such as Alt, Noth, Von Rad, Eissfeldt, etc.) led to OT scholarship becoming a more international affair. American scholars entered the debate and scholars from the English scholarly world "stimulated interest in the application of anthropological and sociological insights to Old Testament studies, including prophecy" (Deist 1995:594-595).

Although the dominant model has not disappeared and has not lost all credibility, these developments show, however, that:

> … because of its philosophical basis and its consequent ideological bias, the dominant model is (at least in certain parts of the world) experienced as incapable of asking meaningful questions and of suggesting credible solutions to pressing existential problems (Deist 1995:595).

These new developments in methodology have brought about a scientific or methodological crisis. The plurality of approaches and perspectives is daunting. This should not, however, inhibit us from continuing to research. On the contrary, I believe it opens up new avenues and approaches where the plurality of the Old Testament witness, coupled with the multiplicity of methodologies, can lead to rich descriptions. These descriptions are comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity and in this way can indeed provide credible solutions to our pressing existential problems such as ethnocentrism, nationalism, xenophobia, etc.

Periods of liminality are usually full of promise and very energizing. This study's use of a multidimensional methodology should be seen in the light of the above. The developments in approaches have made us sensitive to so many new aspects of ancient Israel and her prophets/prophetesses. In this way it has made a study of this kind not only possible, but indeed essential.

Studying the OCN requires that some choices regarding Israel's prophets need to be made. One has to sharpen the focus. Since it is impossible to discuss every aspect of prophecy in detail, I have chosen four aspects that I deem to be crucial for my reading of Nahum and the OCN in the following chapters. The aspects are:

- Israelite prophecy as part of the ancient Near East (4.3.2);
- The prophets as poets (4.3.3);
- The prophets as socio-political commentators (4.3.4);
- The prophets and social sciences (4.3.5).

4.3.3 Israelite prophecy as part of the ancient Near East

Von Rad (1965) made OT theologians sensitive to two aspects of prophet research. The *first* is to show that, unlike the time from Luther to the 19th century where (especially) Protestants saw the prophets as mainly commenting on Mosaic laws (Von Rad 1965:13), we now realise that the prophets were also dependent on old traditions which they actualized and interpreted (Von Rad 1965:14). The *second* is that the prophets were part of the world of the ancient Near East:

> Die Forschung hat inzwishen gezeigt, daß der substantielle Anteil der Propheten an den antik-orientalischen Vorstellungen, an Kultus und Mythus, ja auch an primitive- 'magischen' Vorstellungen … doch viel größer war (Von Rad 1965:14).

In his very influential article Jeremias (1994:484) agrees with this shift when he mentions that until shortly after the Second World War even Martin Noth, an expert on the ancient Orient, could state that, with regards to the classical eighth-century prophecy of the Old Testament, no real equivalents in the history of humanity could be found. Jeremias (1994:484-485) then shows how, with the discovery of similar prophetism in the Mari Texts,[31] the situation changed. With this idea the idealistic framework of the dominant model, which centred on the *uniqueness* of the OT and the prophets, was starting to change. The *uniqueness* of Israelite prophecy is a perspective that many scholars still hold to a greater or lesser degree, but usually in a more nuanced way.

Jeremias (1994:485-488) shows that, although there are indeed many similarities between Mari prophetism and the OT prophets,[32] there are two important differences. Firstly, the *content* of the divine messages of salvation and destruction from Mari is of a more general nature and not so deeply intertwined as in the OT, where Yahweh's love for his people and the seriousness of the obedience or disobedience of the king and his people towards the declared will of Yahweh was declared through the mouth of his prophet.

Secondly, the *way* in which we learn about prophecy in Mari and in the OT differs. Mari's prophecies were orally transmitted and were, so to speak, "prophecy for one day," whereas the OT prophecies come to us in the form of written documents. According to Jeremias, this is the most important difference. The way the biblical prophetic words and texts were chosen, systematically collected and eventually canonized has no analogy in the ancient Near East (Jeremias 1994:488). The mystery of OT prophecy therefore lies in the fact that it was not just "everyday prophecy" but that:

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[31] The Old Babylonian texts/letters from the 18th century BCE that were discovered in the 1930s at Mari, or *Tell Hariri* (Cf. Weippert 1985:55).
[32] Some similarities include: the importance of distinguishing between true and false prophecy; the use of the same kind of diplomatic speech and speech forms; the rich diversity of figures from different sectors of society that were prophets; reception of the divine message through dreams, visions and ecstasy (Jeremias 1994:485-486).

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> … dieße Worte stets beides zugleich sind: Wörter einer ganz bestimmten einmaligen geschichtlichen Stunde … und zugleich Worte, die keineswegs in dieser Stunde aufgingen, sondern … Bedeutung weit über dese geschichtliche Stunde hinaus besaßen für spätere Generationen (Jeremias 1994:490).

Weinfeld (1995:32) agrees that "the religious moral pathos … as well as the prophetic ideas about the end of idolatry, universal peace and world salvation" and "an ideology which shaped the life of the nation [Israel]" (Weinfeld 1995:49) are unique to Israel's classical prophecy. He asks, however, whether the literary conventions from which classical prophecy grew were unique (Weinfeld 1995:32). By studying texts other than just those of Mari, and investigating them in terms of different literary or thematic categories,[33] he comes to the conclusion that something like the notion of social justice for determining the fate of a nation is also found in Mesopotamian literature (Weinfeld 1995:49). That also applies to "the basic procedures of prophetic activity as well as basic patterns of the prophetic message" (Weinfeld 1995:49). This is also the conclusion of Miller (1995:100), who sees no difference in the prophetic "office" and "vocation" of Israel and, for example, Mari. The only Israelite peculiarity in prophecy lies in the content of the messages to pre- and post-exilic Israelite and Judean communities (Miller 1995:100).

Grabbe (1995:85-94) takes a broader range of cross-cultural parallels to OT prophecy into consideration: *Syro-Phoenician*[34] literature does contain prophetic elements, although we do not have a lot of evidence (Grabbe 1995:85). In *Egyptian*[35] literature there seems to have been an absence of prophecy, although there are similarities to the OT *written prophecies* and especially to the *content* showing that "the oracles of Ipuwer and Neferty seems to have been created" (Grabbe 1995:87). *Old Babylonian* prophetic texts[36] have shown that the hypothesis of a Western origin for prophecy, which was then adopted in Mesopotamia, needs to be reconsidered (Grabbe 1995:87-88).

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[33] The categories chosen include: signs and portents; purification of the mouth; ecstasy; salvation oracles; false prophets; dreams and visions; the *rib* (lawsuit) pattern; morality versus cult; and violation of morality as cause for destruction (Weinfeld 1995:34-49).
[34] I.e. the Moabite stone, the tale of Wenamun and the inscription of the north Syrian king Zakkur (Grabbe 1995:85).
[35] E.g. the "Admonitions of Ipuwer" and the "Prophecies of Neferty (Grabbe 1995:86-87).
[36] Especially the 29 Mari texts (which contains close to 40 individual prophecies), as well as the two broken-off prophetic texts from Ishchali (Grabbe 1995:87-91).

Grabbe (1995:89) admits to differences in emphasis, but he questions the long-standing idea that Mari prophecies only functioned as assurances for the king without any admonition. He cites examples of the king being chided. *Neo-Assyrian prophecies*, mainly addressed to Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal, also show similarities with OT prophecy. Three examples are: (1) the "Fear not!" formula, (2) the messages of deliverance from enemies, and (3) the use of treaty and covenant language (Grabbe 1995:91-92). There is even evidence of prophecies that, although not kept in the royal archives, were directed *against* Esarhaddon (Grabbe 1995:92). *Akkadian* texts[37] point towards *literary prophecy* (a kind of *vaticinia ex eventu*) which do indeed remind us of OT prophetic literature, as well as the fact that prophecies can be scribal creations (Grabbe 1995:94). Closer to the aim of this study are Grabbe's remarks about Nahum, as well as the OCN:

> *Nahum* … Except for the length of his oracles … he does not seem to differ from the prophets of Mari, who prophesied that Zimri-Lim's enemies would be destroyed … *Prophecies against various nations* around Israel are a regular part of the preserved prophetic literature and very much parallel to prophecies known from Mari and the Neo-Assyrian period (Grabbe 1995:102-103 – emphasis JPB).

It is clear from the scholars cited thus far that Israelite prophecy has to be seen as part and parcel of the ancient Near Eastern context. Although there are sometimes different emphases in content and the strength of pathos, Israel had no *sui generis* category of prophecy. The terminology for this oracular phenomenon overlaps, the literary forms used are related, there is criticism against the king and even the literary character of the prophecies (e.g. Egyptian and Akkadian) does remind one of the fact that OT prophecy is not only about oral messages, but can also be related to *written prophecy* and even to scribal creation.

The fact that we find examples of ancient Near Eastern written prophecy that is kept in the annals of kings starts to challenge the reservations of Jeremias with regards to the literary and later canonical functioning of prophecy as a message for a specific time, as well as for future times. This is hard to prove, however, and therefore I accept that Israelite prophecy, being passed-on and canonized prophecy, does indeed provide a special focus to the way we view OT prophecy. It is a very important part of studying Nahum and the OCN, for the literary

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[37] E.g. the Sulgi and Marduk prophecies, the Dynasty Prophecy, and the Uruk Prophecy (Grabbe 1995:93).

nature of the OCN, as well as their embeddedness in a broader literary and canonical context, will be of crucial importance to the question of social identity.

In a sense it is not so important to be able to point to direct prophetic influence from, or towards, other ancient Near Eastern peoples and literature. That would be the topic for another study[38]. What is important, though, is to show that the OT prophets were part of a broader context. A context that had an impact on the way they said what they said (or wrote what they or later editors wrote). It will be shown, for example, how Nahum contains many allusions to Assyrian themes and interests. Other aspects that will be attended to are: (1) the way in which Akkadian words and concepts were incorporated into Nahum's oracles; and (2) how the experience of oppression under the great and terrible Assyrian (and later Babylonian) empire played a huge role in the way that these types of texts were used in the construction of social identity in times of extreme crisis and oppression. All these aspects will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

So far we have looked very generally at how texts can be read as part of a multidimensional methodology. We have also seen how prophetic texts need an explication of the phenomenon of OT prophecy. The next step is to focus even more closely on how OT prophets are viewed in this study.

4.4 Studying Old Testament prophets

To be able to read Nahum multidimensionally it is crucial that we come to some conclusions about what OT prophets were and how they functioned in society. The question "What is a prophet?", the poetical side of prophecy, and the social-critical function of prophets are subsequently discussed.

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[38] The essay by Hanson (1992) gives a very good overview on the question "War das Alte Israel einmalig?" ("Was ancient Israel unique?"). He answers this difficult question by showing how Israel's exodus past forms part of an epic (German "Epos") of identity construction. The question cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" but needs a more subtle approach (Hanson 1992:19). As his conclusion he indicates that the Old Testament points toward a multi-layered image of the early Israelite community that naturally used the genres, images and narrative structures of their neighbours to construct an epic symbolization of their origins, legal and value systems, social structure and institutions as a revolutionary alternative to that of the surrounding societies (Hanson 1992:20).

4.4.1 What is a prophet?

It is remarkable how, even after centuries of investigation and research, the OT prophets are still mainly seen as foretellers of future events. Especially in the Christian (Western) theological traditions, prophets are mainly seen as people inspired by God to prophesy the coming of the Messiah (Zenger *et al.* 1998:371). This remains the case to this day, even though the biblical texts themselves contain very few messianic texts and rather witness *en masse* to God (Zenger *et al.* 1998:371). One should add to this view the very important social function that the prophets performed in ancient Israelite society, especially their social critique and their call for righteousness and justice. The fact is that the "prophets"[39] and "prophecy" is a multifaceted field of study, and one that is not without pitfalls and questions.[40]

Deist (1995:593) summarizes the typical historical problematic questions that scholars are faced with:

> … what then was a *prophet*? Did the "prophets" occupy any office in society? How are the "prophetic words" regarding social, economic and political issues to be evaluated? What was the real role of those figures in the shaping of Israelite religion? In what sense are they to be regarded as "unique"? And can we really speak of "prophetic circles" and of a prophet's "disciples" as the *locus classicus* …?

The description of the prophets of Israel is made difficult by two factors. The one is the evidence we find in the OT, the other is the way (methodology) in which the prophets are studied.

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[39] The word comes from the Greek *prophetes,* which originally meant "the one who speaks for God before the people", but which quickly became linked to the type of foretelling of the future that, e.g. the oracle at Delphi did. The Hebrew word for prophet, *nabi,* meant nothing more than a "called caller" (Zenger *et al.* 1998:371).
[40] Cf. Grabbe (1995:98-105) for a good overview of the problem of definition with regards to what a "prophet" is.

4.4.2 The prophets (or redactors) as poets

Davies (1996:55) argues that the writers of the prophetic scrolls need not have been intermediaries themselves, but could have been "observant and literate members of a society in which intermediation was well known." He ends his essay (tongue in the cheek?) by suggesting:

> … we could start without assuming either intermediaries or audiences and think instead of the compulsive neurosis that is called 'writing.' My guess is that the scribal class wrote for their own interest, not for consumption by the illiterate masses, not for oral proclamation, liturgical use or any such motive (Davies 1996:62).

This is probably the furthest (left) pole of the debate about the literary nature of biblical texts in general and prophetic texts in particular. This debate forms part of the rise in interest in social sciences and literary theory in the twentieth century after the "two World Wars, the Cold War, the rise of social movements, and the emerging importance of many previously ignored cultures and nations throughout the world" (Sweeney 1995:114). This also had a tremendous impact on the study of the literary character and social dimensions of prophetic literature (Sweeney 1995:115).

In the 1980s prophet studies revolved around the debate between Auld and Carroll,[41] on the one hand, and scholars like Vawter (1985) and Overholt (1990), on the other. Their focus was on the question: "Were the prophets (really) prophets, or (just) poets?" In the light of the research on classical prophecy since the 19th century, whose goal it was "to hear the words of the prophet as they would have sounded to his original hearers" (Clements 1996:12), this kind of question was very radical. The mainstream refutation of these perspectives proves this.

Vawter (1985:207) concludes that even thought the term *nabi* was not necessarily assumed, and sometimes even rejected, and even though it is difficult to determine exactly what they were, "these charismatic individuals would not have sought their common identity under the vague rubric of 'poet'." Overholt (1990:3-9) gives a good overview of Auld and Carroll's four arguments in favour of their basic agreement that "figures like Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah

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[41] For the main arguments cf. Auld, AG 1983. Prophets through the looking glass: Between writings and Moses. *JSOT* 27:3-23, and Carroll's response in Carroll, R 1983. Poets not prophets: A response to "Prophets through the looking glass." *JSOT* 27: 25-31.

were poets and were not thought of as prophets until exilic times" (Overholt 1990:3-4). He develops what he calls the genre of *anthology*[42] and couples the meaning-expectations associated with this genre type with cross-cultural research on the social reality of prophecy to demonstrate that "the named individuals of the Hebrew Bible actually *were* prophets" (Overholt 1990:25).

In a sense this debate has lost its immediacy, for the literary analysis of, *and* the importance of the material, or social contexts of the prophets or later redactors are both deemed to be equally important. Why can the "prophets" not be (real intermediary) prophets and at the same time poets? This is of course an oversimplification, as I accept that prophetic "books" have undergone numerous redactions, which can be seen in the many inconsistencies of style, subject matter and theological assumptions (Clements 1996:12). Even if some of the prophecies were purely *literary prophecies*, and even if later redactors were responsible for "putting words in the prophet's mouth" - does that change the essence of the prophetic literature of being a divine message (with a socio-political impact) for a specific historical moment (be it the times of the prophet or of the later redactors) which also has a (prophetical) theological-ethical bearing on our present-day society?

Large sections of prophetic literature are poetic (in the case of Nahum most of the 53 verses) and therefore we could say that in the prophetic literature poetry functions prophetically. The important aspect of "poetic justice" through the OCN immediately comes to mind – a thought that will be specifically dealt with in Chapters 5 and 6. The power of irony and satire in the text of Nahum will also be shown to be part of the poetic nature of this prophetic book.

I have come to a crucial decision about my multidimensional stance regarding the biblical text. If I take the literary forms (which include different genres but especially poetry) and their very purposeful (final) arrangement which I encounter in the text seriously, but at the same time acknowledge that the specific arrangement and perhaps origin of those forms come from different redactors (anthologists?) and from different times in the history of Israel - what

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[42] According to Overholt (1990:23-24), the *anthology* genre has an opening colophon which announces that the work contains the words of a certain individual in a certain historic period, after which follows "a body of material consisting of separate and discrete units which are homogeneous in neither form nor date." Therefore he also calls the editor who put the material together an "Anthologist."

am I to do? Here my methodology is tested to the full, as it is in a sense impossible to answer this question logically.

At this point most scholars choose to work either diachronically (historical criticism), or to go on the more synchronic (literary, text-immanent) path of interpretation. I still want to hold on to an integration of the two positions, working synchronically and with the "final text", but also not forgetting the historical questions and the history of redaction (diachronic). But one needs a starting point and I cannot escape the fact that I have to take the "final form" of the text as my basis of analysis, not forgetting the very crucial role that redactors play in the finalization of the text. In this regard I want to quote Sweeney (1995:115), who draws on Clements:

> … redactors are not just literary technicians or archival collectors lacking in literary or ideological agendas. Rather, redactors act as authors who compose prophetic books according to their own purposes or theological agendas. … Because the final forms of the biblical books come to us from the hands of their respective redactors, they reflect the perspectives, ideologies, interpretations, and concerns of the redactors in relation to their own later historical settings … to fit their understanding of the prophet and the prophet's message.

This is by definition a paradoxical position, but one that I believe has a complementary function that enriches and enlivens our experience of the biblical text. Jeremias summarizes this "and – and" situation when he remarks about the text of Amos:

> The final form of the text has priority in every interpretation of a biblical book … The text, not the hypotheses, must be decisive for exegesis as well as for preaching. I would certainly add … that because the text must be interpreted as precisely as possible for the sake of the church that uses it, the attempt at a historical interpretation is indispensable (Jeremias 1988:227).

To conclude, I think the prophets, or the redactors who wrote in their name (or in their vein), could have been poets. One should not from the outset regard poetry in the prophets as later insertions, for the specific poetic forms they employed were part and parcel of the message they wanted to convey, regardless of the historical context (prophet or redactor(s)). Israelite prophecy has a literary side to it which cannot be disregarded. In that sense the OT does contain literary prophecy (as is the case in Egyptian and Akkadian prophecies – see above).

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Because we have to begin with the largest literary unit available, we start with the prophetic book as a whole, taking into account the literary setting of the smaller texts that make up the book (Cf. Sweeney 1995:115). In the process we see prophetic poetry not just as a window back on ancient Israel's history, but as a painting "whose every stroke was purposefully placed" (Darr 1995:142), combining literary and historical method.

Literary perspectives on the poetry we encounter in the OCN, and historical-redactional enquiries about the times of prophets and redactors, are not the only important perspectives on reading the prophets. As part of the history, we have to explore the socio-political context, and the role of the prophets in their society. It is to these issues that we now turn.

4.4.3 The prophets as socio-political commentators

Studying Nahum and the OCN immediately brings us into the realm of ancient Israel's international relations and has everything to do with the internal and foreign politics of the day. Throughout the OCN the prophets wanted to act within the social, economic and political realm. Society, economy and politics are closely linked to the notion of power structures and hence to the very important role of ideology. One should be careful, though, not to see the prophets as "social critics"[43] with modern theological concerns in mind.

Miller (1995:97) describes the role of the prophets as follows:

> They addressed injustice and social oppression, crises of military invasions and the barbarities of war, creation of political alliances, religious apostasy, monarchical pretensions and tyranny, people lamenting their exile or directionless in trying to start a new life. All these - and other situations – as the focus of prophetic words mean that the prophets and their message are only intelligible in the context of a understanding of the social, political, and religious conditions and circumstances of their prophecy.

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[43] Cf. the criticism of Grabbe (1995:204), who sees the use of "social critic" for the prophets as an "inadequate description" and a "major distortion" of who the prophets were.

According to him the prophets worked in three spheres.

1. *The political*: Oracles to kings about battles; appointed and disposed kings; called kings to account because of failure to carry out righteousness and justice; how kings should participate in military alliances – all these political matters were ultimately theological, "reflecting in the prophet's judgment the degree of faithfulness and trust in Yahweh on the part of the king and the court" (Miller 1995:104-105).

2. *The social*: Focus on justice and righteousness that were rooted in the Yahwistic covenant traditions and against growing economic depression (Miller 1995:105-106).

3. *The religious*: The proper worship of Yahweh was also a central feature of their proclamation and overlapped with the issues of justice. The point is that social practices were as consistent with covenant requirements as practices of worship. The prophets were therefore not against the cult *per se,* but basically "placed the social sphere as prominently to the fore as the sanctuary as the locus of right relation to Yahweh" (Miller 1995:106-107). Fenton (2001:137) sees in what he calls the "New" Hebrew prophecy the first "protest movement" for these prophets were the first to criticize the rulers and the apparatus of government (Fenton 2001:136).

It is important to note at this point that focusing on the socio-political side of prophecy does not imply a negation of the central religious or theological role that the prophets fulfilled. The whole notion of the OCN, with Nahum being a prime example, is that the judgment and the political commentary are borne from a certain theological understanding of who Yahweh, the Lord of Israel, is. They are therefore to be seen as political *and* religious critics (cf. Grabbe 1995:204), the one not excluding the other. In the process of social identity construction, this link between "us" and the identity of "our God" as theological basis for the judgment on "them" and their socio-political injustices will be demonstrated as we read Nahum.

One very intriguing question immediately comes to mind. All the above-mentioned spheres in which the prophets worked imply that they did so in the ancient Israelite context. The prophecies were made to the Israelite and Judean kings, the Israelite courtiers, and later to the population of Israel or Judah as a whole. The OCN, though, were not addressed to these Israelite ears and eyes, but to the enemies of Israel and Judah. It becomes problematic to simply say that the OCN are also socio-political commentaries. One has to describe exactly what one means by this notion.

The addressees of the OCN are indeed a crucial question in this study. Suffice it to say that a case could be made that the prophets delivered the OCN, not in the first place to a foreign nation, but indeed for Israel's attention. The socio-political and religious critique all of a sudden becomes very ambiguous and more complex. What is the socio-political function of such a message in the whole process of the construction of identity? The same can be said for the literary nature of the prophecies in the OT. If, as was shown above, prophetical books say more about the time of their finalization by redactors, what are the socio-political implications for the later readers and audiences who were confronted by this historically evolved message from the Lord? Possible answers will be given in the chapters that follow.

This last section on reading prophetical literature was very important as it leads us into the special focus of this study, namely how the social sciences can help us to unlock the dynamic processes of social identity construction in Nahum.

4.5 The prophets and social sciences

One of the dimensions of interpreting the OCN in terms of what they say about ancient Israel's construction of identity is using concepts, definitions and theories taken from the social sciences. These include anthropology, sociology and social psychology, of which social identity theory and self-categorization theory (social psychology) will form the most important part. The use of these kinds of theories gleaned from the social sciences and their application to ancient Israel are not necessarily accepted everywhere in OT studies. In the light of this, a few remarks about the necessity of this avenue of research are in order.

It is interesting to note that all the new questions that arose against the dominant paradigm (see above 4.3.1.2) have to do with societies and the societal structures of the OT times, and with the socio-economic life of those days. Deist rightly remarks that these questions can only be answered by using *strategies "supplied by sociological and anthropological models*" (Deist 1995:597 – emphasis JPB). Deist is, of course, not the first to make this claim. These kinds of strategies have been used for quite a while to study the prophets.

In his very important and groundbreaking study, Wilson (1980:ix) aimed at exploring the social dimensions of prophetic activity in Israel. He states that, even though the theology, the

literary history and the characteristic patterns of the prophets have been studied since the 19th century, "it is all the more surprising that we still do not have a clear picture of the role that prophecy played in Israelite society … In short, most of the social dimensions of Israelite prophecy remain unclear" (Wilson 1980:1-2). He admits that this is the case because the prophetic books themselves "furnish little data that can throw light on the social matrix of the prophets" (Wilson 1980:14). Wilson (1980:14) suggests that one should work in an inter-disciplinary way and use comparative anthropological evidence that indicates the complexity of this avenue of research and generates new questions regarding the biblical text.

Le Roux (1985) reiterates the importance of sociology in the study of the history of ancient Israel. He sees the use of micro- and macro-sociology as important partners in the quest for the study of the Old Testament (Le Roux 1985-13-14). The study of (specifically) Israel's history requires sociological theories or concepts to revive the past, a basic premise being that "theories and concepts that explain social phenomena in modern society can also be applied to previous societies" (Le Roux 1985:15).

Herion (1987:45) provides a very useful summary of the development of sociological interests in the OT field, seeing Wellhausen (1887) and Smith (1889) as the first to apply social science insights to Israelite history. Louis Wallis (1912), Max Weber (1921) and Antonin Causse (1937) also took up these insights. He regards the more recent (in his time) interest in social sciences as coming from Mendenhall's 1962 essay "The Hebrew conquest of Palestine". Weippert described this essay as "sociological" and it was amplified by Gottwald in 1979 (Herion 1987:45-46). He warns about the uncertainty of the historical value of the biblical texts for serving as anthropological and sociological "data", and points approvingly to ancient non-biblical documents, as well as archaeological remains (Herion 1987:50-51).

The dangers of reductionism, positivism, determinism and relativism in the "marriage" of the two fields are always lurking, not to mention the danger of the modernistic biases of the interpreters trying "to impose their own modern and Western experiences on to the world of ancient Israel" (Herion 1987:55-56). When using social sciences, the interpreter should carefully note where data (ancient Israel/Bible) and model (social science) diverge. Nevertheless, the discipline can help us to understand the history of ancient Israel by providing the social context in which the artefacts and written texts should be read (Herion 1987:8-59).

The article by Benjamin (1991), "An anthropology of prophecy," confirms the value of this inter-disciplinary approach. After discussing Israelite prophecy in terms of classical anthropological categories,[44] he comes to the conclusion that the assumptions of OT scholarship with regards to, for example, the prophets' integration into society; prophets as representing a social balance of power with the monarchy; and prophets as the monarchy's loyal opposition, are more and more influenced by insights from the social sciences (Benjamin 1991:142). Although these insights are not all radical "nor particularly novel … they can significantly enrich the way we read the biblical prophets today" (Benjamin 1991:142).

Of course not all scholars accept this approach. Davies (1996:49) points to what he regards as the "complacent confusion" between:

> … the historical/*anthropological* study of individuals and social types … relevant to an understanding of the figures whose names adorn various biblical books or whose activities are described by them … [and] … the *literary* analysis of the literary books that are called 'prophetic' (Davies 1996:48 – emphasis JPB).

He goes as far as to say that the more we learn from anthropology, the less we understand the prophetic literature and the "murkier becomes the profile of an individual intermediary" (Davies 1996:49). He does, however, not only offer criticism, but also mentions what for him would be the better approach of combining the literary and the anthropological. One should look at the "social function" that these writings exercised and then work back to the "social function of their producers" (Davies 1996:50).

Even though Grabbe (1995) agrees that it is difficult to move from literary text to sociological investigation, his approach is more positive than that of Davies. With what he calls "methodological care", he believes "we *can* move from text to society, and that the literary construct can be used as a basis for teasing out data about the society" (Grabbe 1995:8 – emphasis JPB). He says this, even though the OT/Hebrew Bible is a religious document that has a long history of growth and is not a "first-class source for history" (Grabbe 1995:7). His

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[44] Cf. Benjamin (1991:136-141): prophecy and ecstasy; prophecy and the future; prophecy and monarchy; prophets and villages; prophets and diplomacy; prophets and courts of law; prophets and messenger; and prophets and war.

brilliant socio-historical study of religious specialists in ancient Israel[45] does, however, convince me of the importance of, and the need for, studying ancient Israel in terms of her sociological realities.

To conclude this section, I want to draw attention to four contributions of anthropology and sociology to the study of the Old Testament (Grabbe 1995:15):

- We see new possibilities and approaches to familiar texts;
- We can now interrogate the texts and try to find answers to questions that were not necessarily viewed as important questions by the ancient authors/editors or audiences;
- We have models that we can test against the biblical data;
- By way of analogy we have cross-cultural comparisons that help to fill in gaps in the biblical data.

With the mentioning of these potentially helpful attributes of using social sciences in Old Testament research, we can now turn to the way this research incorporates social science methods in addressing the problem at hand. The idea of social identity comes from the field of social psychology. The two important social psychological theories, namely social identity theory and self-categorisation theory will be discussed in the following sections.

4.5.1 Social psychology and identity construction

The problem of identity construction needs methodological instruments that draw from anthropology, sociology and specifically social psychology. A few modern "catchwords" or concepts such as *ethnicity*, *nationalism*, *culture* and *race* are discussed, for they often lie at the centre of inter-group conflicts. In order to provide a better understanding of these terms, anthropological and sociological definitions and theories will be applied (e.g. Thompson 1989, Krüger 1993 and Smith 1994). This will form part of the discussion in Chapter 3. It is in a sense impossible to study identity construction without first being very clear about some of the concepts that are part and parcel of the identity of groups.

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[45] Cf. his discussion on the difficulties and sensitivities about the term "ancient Israel" as expressed by, e.g. Davies and Carroll (Grabbe 1995:3).

In studying these concepts one cannot rely on the biblical text alone, but (as critical realism confirms) one needs theories and definitions from the social sciences. There are, of course, inherent problems in marrying anthropology/sociology/social psychology and the Old Testament, but these will be addressed and shown to be mere obstacles that can be overcome and not barriers to understanding.

The main issue, though, is not to give working definitions of the central concepts that are used. What is more important is to find a way in which to describe the *process* or the *dynamic* of inter-human contact/conflict. Especially among groups, things do happen in a certain way. The social process or dynamic of the way that groups or cultures construct their own social identity against (or rather in terms of) the "other" forms the focus of this study. If we can describe what happens when a society/group like ancient Israel "writes out" their identity, then we have indeed found a way to bring new possibilities and approaches to familiar texts and have opened up the way to ask questions about the text that perhaps did not even come to the mind of the authors.

Social psychology opens up an avenue in this regard. In social psychology the person and work of Henri Tajfel[46] come to the fore as the developer of the very influential *social identity theory* (*SIT*) (Turner 1996:5). Turner (1996:5) goes so far as to say that:

> Current work on stereotyping, impression formation, attitude judgment, group formation and polarization, social influence and intergroup relations, which employs the categorization process as a central tool, can almost without exception be traced back to Tajfel's theorizing and direct research inspiration.

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[46] Henri Tajfel was a Polish Jew who fought for France in the Second World War. He was captured by the Germans and spent the whole of the war in prison camps. His whole family was killed in the war. He used a false identity as a Frenchman to hide his true identity as Polish Jew and said that "once his true identity had been discovered, it was that social category membership (of being Polish) which would have determined the reaction of the guards and his ultimate fate. His personal attributes and identity as a unique individual would have proved unimportant and irrelevant to their response" (Turner 1996:2-3). The experiences of the Nazi (WWII) and the English (Anglo-Boer War) concentration camps, as well as a divisive inter-group system such as apartheid are all extremely powerful influences on the social sciences, and especially on theology. Tajfel's "real life experience" of inter-group processes, as well as my experience of post-apartheid South Africa, form the contexts from which one studies National Socialism, horrific racial separatism and also the biblical Oracles Concerning the Nations.

4.5.2 Social identity theory and self-categorisation theory

Social identity theory (henceforth SIT) was developed in the second half of the 20th century, building on previous models of groups' social interaction, such as Sherif's "conflict of interest theory", by adding the variable of "social categorization" (Turner 1996:15). This theoretical framework of "intergroup relations between large-scale social categories" (Hogg 1996:66) became very important for understanding the way groups relate and how social change functions in society at large (Turner 1996:16). The main emphasis is on "*understanding processes* that occur within groups, and how groups may be internally structured and differentiated" (Hogg 1996:66 – emphasis JPB). The interest is on how social identity[47] mediates the coherence of group and inter-group behaviour (Abrams 2001:14306).

Self-categorization theory (henceforth SCT) grew out of SIT from the work of Turner (Hogg 1996:68). This theoretical development was important as it complemented SIT. Whereas SIT focuses on the *inter*-group relations and social change, SCT looks to *intra*-group processes and the "social-cognitive basis of group membership and group phenomena" (Hogg 1996:68). Bar-Tal (1998:93) describes SCT as follows:

> … individuals categorize themselves as members of social categories, and then define, describe and evaluate themselves in terms of these categories.

In studying the OCN we will need both these theories, as well as other social psychological insights and criticism on SIT and SCT. The fact is that the OCN indeed places us within the realm of *inter*-group processes, and therefore SIT is necessary to unlock the way ancient Israelite identity is constructed over and against the "other" or "foreign" nations. The OCN, however, contain more than just judgments on the nations. As these oracles were probably never delivered personally to the kings or nations addressed, but were meant for Israel and Judah's ears (or eyes as in the case of Habakkuk 2:2), they also contain a certain ambiguity. This ambiguity is part and parcel of the way the *intra*-group processes develop. To describe and understand these processes, SCT is called for. The two theories do not exclude each other, but rather complement and enrich one another.

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[47] Social identity and personal identity form the two poles of a continuum "on which identity and relationships can be depicted as purely personal and interpersonal at one extreme, and purely social, or intergroup at the other" (Abrams 2001:14306).

Chapter 3, Section 4 will deal with both these theories in detail and how they impact on the study of the construction of identity in ancient Israel. In the last section of the methodological dimension of the study, my stance, or rather intuition, regarding the ideology of texts and the power they contain and enforce will be discussed.

4.6 Context, liberation and ideological criticism

Our perspectives are formed by our contexts. When we come from a context where liberation is part of the fabric of society, it influences the way we interpret what we read. Ideology forms the basis of this contextual and liberational view of understanding reality and texts, for it has an indisputable role in the process of production (of texts). As Mosala (1995:195) reminds us: "The starting point of any serious textual hermeneutics must be the historical and social text of the hermeneutician." Because I read from the context of post-apartheid South Africa as a white, male Afrikaner, the text will inevitably turn my gaze towards the question of oppressor and oppressed, perpetrator and victim.

A cursory reading of Nahum or other examples of the OCN places one in the situation of having to decide whether what you read is ethical or not. You catch yourself reading from your own ideologically dominant vantage point and judging the "liberationist," "nationalistic" or "revolutionary" way in which Israel dealt textually with its oppressors and enemies. An analogy is the Afrikaner leaders who, in the time of apartheid, protested from their ideological "high ground" as oppressors and perpetrators against the *way* the leaders of the "struggle" protested and cried out for liberation.

The feeling of guilt caused by this hermeneutical recognition deconstructs one's first intuitions and requires a different sensitivity towards what is in front of one. Viewing Israel's OCN from the "bottom" up, from the side of the oppressed and victimized, brings different questions into play. For example, what is the role of poetic justice? Does a group or nation come to a point where "civilized" (modern Western) ethics provide no more answers to unbearable suffering and where righteous revenge is called for? And if the textual and social identity constructed in these nations' texts is liberating, but also needs liberation from injustices (for example, using violent metaphors against women), how should that be addressed without again becoming "patronizing?" How far can one take criticism against a

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"foreign culture" such as ancient biblical Israel without being labelled "ethnocentric," "racist," "colonialist" or even "anti-Semitic" yourself?

Ideology criticism helps us in this regard. As one reads the text of Nahum in an ideological-critical manner, one should also remain sensitive to one's own context. In order to address issues of liberation as well as theological-ethical interpretation, the sensitivity to ideology in text and context is crucial.

All readers and writers of the biblical texts are "interested parties", as Clines (1995:23) has indicated, for they have ideological investments. To uncover these "investments" one needs to describe what "ideology" means. This is no easy task (Clines 1995:9-10). The term has carried multivalent meanings since its coinage at the end of the 18th century (Gottwald 1996:136). This applies especially when it comes to the ideologies of ancient Israel that are "historically and culturally far removed from the ideologies of our own day" (Clines 1995:19). Clines (1995:10) proceeds by describing four denotations of the word "ideology":

1. A more or less connected group of ideas;
2. A relatively coherent set of ideas amounting to a worldview, or outlook on life;
3. A set of such ideas that specifically applies to a particular social class or group;
4. A set of ideas held by the dominant group in a society.

Although all four aspects do play a role in the Book of Nahum, it is especially numbers three and four that will draw our interest. The particular group ideas/ideology of the anti-Assyrian party in the time of the Assyrian crisis (pre-exilic) and the possible group beliefs of the Deutero-Isaiah group in the exilic/post-exilic time (No. 3) are in conflict with the dominant ideology of power of the Assyrian and Babylonian empire and to some extent the pro-Assyrian party in pre-exilic Judah (No. 4). With regards to a more nuanced description of ideologies within bigger groups, we will have to search for other ideas.

Gottwald (1996:137-138) also suggests four senses in which "ideology" is used in the humanities:

1. A fairly coherent system or pattern of ideas equivalent to philosophy or worldview;
2. A system of patterns or ideas or beliefs that corresponds to the social conditions and self-interests of particular groups of people;
3. A form of false consciousness that is self-serving and limiting and has to be uncovered by ideological criticism;
4. A set of strongly held but impractical ideas about social relations, for example, extremism, rigidity and unreasonableness in group thinking.

As with the set of possibilities above, numbers 2 and 3 address the situation in the Book of Nahum most aptly. We have a repetition of the group beliefs held by the oppressed in-group (No. 2) versus the false consciousness of the false leaders in Judah and the Assyrian leader who plots evil against Yahweh (Na 1:9-14).

Because our focus is on the way bigger groups interact with each other, I want to mention one last way of describing ideology, namely, as a "reinforcing and legitimising mechanism in social control" (Carlton 1977:23). There are ideologies which function to maintain interests, that is, as masks or weapons "to secure and justify … aims and policies" (Carlton 1977:24). Then there are ideologies which are symptoms of the strain that societies experience when there is dislocation in the social structure (Carlton 1977:25-26). The situation in Nahum contains both types of ideologies. Nahum writes from an ideological perspective under strain over against the self-interest ideologies of the oppressing Assyrians, Babylonians and any other oppressive power that wants to maintain its (tyrannical) power. One could also call this the difference between "revolutionary ideology" (Nahum) and "conservative ideology" (Nineveh). Carlton (1977:33) explains the difference in the following way:

> Whereas conservative ideologies are concerned with the preservation of the social status quo, revolutionary ideologies – by definition – are more interested in the possible disruption of the current social order. Conservative ideologies seek to maintain social stasis, revolutionary ideologies are directed towards social change.

The ideology in Nahum and the OCN can function in various ways. Carlton (1977:28—32) names four categories:

1. *Cathartic functions* – ideologies act as emotional release systems for societies (e.g. Nazi policies of anti-Semitism and systematic genocide);
2. *Morale-maintenance functions* – sustains social order against morale-threatening incursions (e.g. racist ideologies that can "clearly" classify ethnic groups and so treat them as inferior or as non-human);
3. *Solidarity-reinforcement functions* – promotes unity among adherents (e.g. myths that constitute a basis for a unifying ideology and transmits social truth or justifies current social practices);
4. *Advocatory functions* – reacts to strains in society and polarises responses to those issues (e.g. persuasive orators who have to sway the masses to support a war – USA and Iraq?)

It will be made clear which of these functions of ideology are present in the Book of Nahum. The important part of ideology-criticism, however, is to be sensitive to it and especially to evaluate it in terms of a liberating perspective. Liberation is a word that is often used by liberation theologians as well as feminist theologians. Although this is not a liberation theology or a feminist study, it is informed by these perspectives and, as will be seen, these perspectives are necessary to integrate some of the material in Nahum and the OCN.

5. Method

Method flows from methodology. The method followed in this study can be described briefly as one that is centred on the text of Nahum. It aims to read the text in a multidimensional way as an OCN. This process can be summarized as follows:

▪ In the next chapter SIT and SCT, both theories of social psychology, will be shown to be very meaningful when studying the construction of identity in ancient Israel. Especially because Nahum, as an OCN text, determines our perspective on the relationships between bigger groups in ancient Israel, the concept of social identity will be used. After a description of SIT and SCT, a working list of social identity "premises" is drawn up. These premises will guide us in uncovering the construction of social identity in Nahum within different historical contexts (pre-exilic and exilic/post-exilic).
▪ In Chapter 4 the background to the Book of Nahum with regards to it being an OCN text, its dating, unity, stucture and historical situation(s) is looked at.

- In Chapters 5 and 6 Nahum is read in a multidimensional way. That means that the diachrony of the book's development over more than a century is taken seriously, and that the texts that belong to the two main periods of Nahum's development are read synchronically in their historical context. The reading of Nahum is sensitive to the literary nature of the book, the role of Assyrian traditions and influence on the text, and how form is crucial for meaning and especially for paradox, ambiguity and the polysemic juxtaposition of ideas in the grammar and in the ideology. All of this is done with the three-fold aim of saying something about the construction of identity in Nahum. The three aspects are: (1) testing the working premises of SIT and SCT and uncovering the underlying group dynamic of social identity construction in Nahum; (2) looking for theological-ethical implications of the way that social identity is constructed; and (3) being sensitive to the ideologies of the writer(s) as well as the reader(s) of the Book of Nahum as an OCN with the focus on liberation, reconciliation and peace.
- In Chapter 7 all the implications of the multidimensional exegesis of Nahum are brought to bear on the theological-ethics of Nahum. Here social identity and ideology-criticism are combined with a theological ethic of identity, liberation and responsibility. This is done with a view to understanding the ethics *in* Nahum, as well as the ethics of the *use of* Nahum.
- Chapter 8 rounds off the study with conclusions and suggestions of future possibilities for the application of social identity to other OCN texts in the OT.

6. Summary

In this chapter we have seen how extremely important it is to explicitly lay one's methodological "cards on the table." For this study it was shown that:
- Critical realism, combined with the post-modern sensitivity to paradox and ambiguity and the polysemy of language, is a meaningful epistemology for studying the ancient text of Nahum, and for grasping how the text represents the social identity of ancient Israel. This builds a basis for a multidimensional methodology;
- A multidimensional methodology, as opposed to an exclusivist one, is better suited to the task of uncovering the underlying dynamic of social identity construction in Nahum as an OCN text. This implies that (1) the text will be read both synchronically and diachronically; (2) that social sciences theories such as SIT and SCT should be

incorporated; (3) that the biblical text is read in its richness as a multi-layered complex of meanings; (4) that prophetic material should be seen in its ancient Near Eastern context; (5) that prophets were not only messengers, but also poets with a strong ideological sense of socio-political justice (national and international); and (6) that ideology-criticism is crucial for evaluating and integrating the results of the exegesis;

- Theological ethics is a way to make a meaningful contribution to the very relevant problems of inter-group conflict. Only describing the construction of identity in Nahum and leaving the results to be "applied" by others is not responsible research. Although this was the case in OT research until recently, the importance of the context of the researcher and the readers cannot be overstated and should be consciously foregrounded. Especially in the OCN, which are dangerous sources for ethical reflection, one should try and explicate the ideological implications of the study. This includes validating liberatory moments, but also resisting implications that only cause further oppression and suffering.

Chapter 3: Identity in ancient Israel

I against my brother, I and my brother against our cousin,

I, my brother and our cousin against the rest of the world.

~ Arabian saying ~

1. Introduction

The Arabian saying above communicates something of the worldview of the ancient Near East, of which ancient Israel was part. The inter-human relationships in inter-group conflict, as expressed in literature such as the OCN, and the way it functions to create social identity is studied in this chapter. In Chapter 2 the methodological scene was set with regards to what undergirds this study of the construction of social identity in ancient Israel. Critical realism, a multidimensional approach to texts, the focus on social identity theory and self-categorization theory as instruments that unlock meaning as well as an ideological-critical hermeneutic of suspicion, which takes context seriously, was described and developed with regards to the way it has a theological-ethical impact on the present study.

The focus sharpens as we turn our modern (and post-modern) methodological "gaze" towards ancient times and ancient texts. The whole notion of identity in ancient civilizations in general, and ancient Israelite society in particular, has not received much scholarly attention. The reason for this is probably that the scholarly description of identity and how it is created was in a sense taken for granted until the recent surge in nationalism and ethnocentrism right across the globe, which demanded more thorough research.

Our world with her limited resources and overpopulation is getting uncomfortably small. Coupled with this are the effects of economic and political globalisation, and the after-shocks of colonialism. Ethnic groups, religions, cultures and sub-cultures are clamouring for their unique place in the sun. All of this brings one to the question: "Who are we?" What is our identity in this limitless, networked web of people, nations, kingdoms, other species and nature to which we are so intimately bound?

Not that these questions have not been asked before. Poetry from times ancient and modern has grappled with the question of identity. Religious followers through millennia have generated scriptures, visions and texts with which to express their identity as believing human beings. Propaganda and the use of rhetoric, narratives and myths to provide explanations to questions (e.g. "why are we who we are?" or "how did we (and not they) come to have this land?") are as old as the mountains.

The point is that the study of how all of these issues relate to and contribute towards the dynamic processes that underlie identity construction has only fairly recently been developed. Especially with regards to ancient Israel, this can be seen in the absence of studies that deal explicitly with the question of identity. It is in this regard that the present study wants to contribute towards the deepening of our understanding of the identity-forming processes in the texts of ancient Israel. The attempt to uncover this dynamic is in itself a way of understanding our own identity in a very different globalized world.

My identity as Afrikaner and how I perceive myself in the light of other cultures and groups in post-apartheid South Africa does indeed not only influence the way I look at ancient Israelite identity, but is also influenced by that search. I believe this is true not just for liminal groups such as the Afrikaners, but it is also applicable to any group that experiences times of crisis and which feels forced in some way to define "who they are." This strengthening of local and ethnic allegiances around the world goes hand in hand with the post-modern idea of the deconstruction of nationhood through internationalism, while there is "a reactive search for more immediate identities, notably ethnic identities" (Brett 1995:159-160).

In Chapter 6 these kinds of theological-ethical as well as ideological-critical questions will resurface to bind the whole argument together. It is the task in this chapter to first of all give a short literature overview of work done on identity in ancient Israel in the last few decades. This will form the springboard for asking whether the research on Israel and identity thus far is helping us to formulate constructive theological-ethical ideas on inter-group relationships. It will be shown that the focus on ancient Israel's "religious", "national/political", "ethnic identity" and the like leads one to a sound description of the concept of identity, but it does not in itself give us a fresh view on the dynamics of identity.

I will explain why using the social psychological theories of SIT and SCT is more fruitful for the study of identity dynamics in groups than the research done on identity thus far. I will further explicate how this study contributes to our thinking and study of ancient Israel's identity. It will be critical to ascertain whether we can indeed speak of Israel as a "nation" or an "ethnie"[48] and hence as participating in "nationalism," or "ethnocentrism", as well as clearing the conceptual thicket with regards to race, ethnicity, culture and the like. The issue of how SIT and SCT are combined with an ideology-critical hermeneutic function in this study will then be made clear. With this groundwork done, we will move to a discussion of the Oracles Concerning the Nations (OCN): what they are, where they came from and why they are such excellent avenues of research into questions of identity construction.

Before we continue, it is important to clarify what I understand by the terms "ancient Israel" and "identity."

2. The concepts of "identity" and "ancient Israel"

Up until now we have used the terms "identity" and "ancient Israel" many times and they are even included in the title of the study. Although there are also other terms that will be clarified by means of definitions and descriptions below, these two are the most important. The terms have something in common as they are both quite fluid in meaning.

Thus far we have specified "identity" as "social identity." The reason for this choice will become clearer below. The main term or concept though pertains to "identity" and that should be defined first. A quick reference to the *Reader's Digest Great Illustrated Dictionary* (Ilson *et al.* 1984:836) provides the basic meaning of the English word "identity:"

> **identity** … 1. The collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitively recognisable or known. 2. The set of behavioural or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognisable as a member of a group. 3. The name or nature of a person or thing ….

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[48] Smith (1989:709) defines *ethnie* as: "a human group whose members share common myths of origin and descent, historical memories, cultural patterns and values, association with a particular territory, and a sense of solidarity."

As in most other dictionary entries, the focus is on the characteristics of a person, an individual[49]. Although the definition above mentions that it also has something to do with group membership, identity is usually understood as a personal aspect. This is probably the influence of psychoanalytic psychology that, through the theorist Erik Erikson, brought the term identity into general use in 1959. For Erikson personal identity "was located deep in the unconscious as a durable and persistent sense of sameness of the self" (Byron 1996:292). Since then the social sciences have picked up on the term and have extended its meaning to refer not only to an individual meaning but also to a communal one.

The term "identity" is used differently in anthropology, sociology and social psychology. In anthropology it is a vexed term that usually refers to a person's "psychologically salient individuality" (Luhrmann 2001:7154). It has, however, developed in recent decades to also include the "commonalities associated with groups or categories" (Byron 1996:292). The sociological reference to identity is more communal, "emphasizing the individual's social and cultural surroundings, and the mechanisms of socialization and cultural acquisition" (Byron 1996:292). In both these disciplines the concept of identity has in recent decades become very complex due to the post-modern turn in the social sciences, the focus on power and agency and the emergence of what is called "identity politics" (Luhrmann 2001:7154).

Although the anthropological and sociological perspectives are also valuable, the idea of "social identity" as used and developed by social psychology is more central for the purposes of this study. The focus is on the identity of groups and how they interact among each other. Social psychology, in particular social identity theory and self-categorisation theory, investigates exactly that. Individual and collective identity are co-constituted poles on the same continuum (Hall 1999:35). Social identity is an umbrella term that covers sub-identity terms such as national/political identity, religious identity and ethnic identity. Below (Section 4) the concept of social identity will be discussed in more detail. A last word on the matter is a diagram that visually represents how the "taxonomy" of identity functions in this study:

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[49] E.g. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Fowler & Fowler 1964:601), which defines "identity" as: "Absolute sameness; individuality, personality" etc.
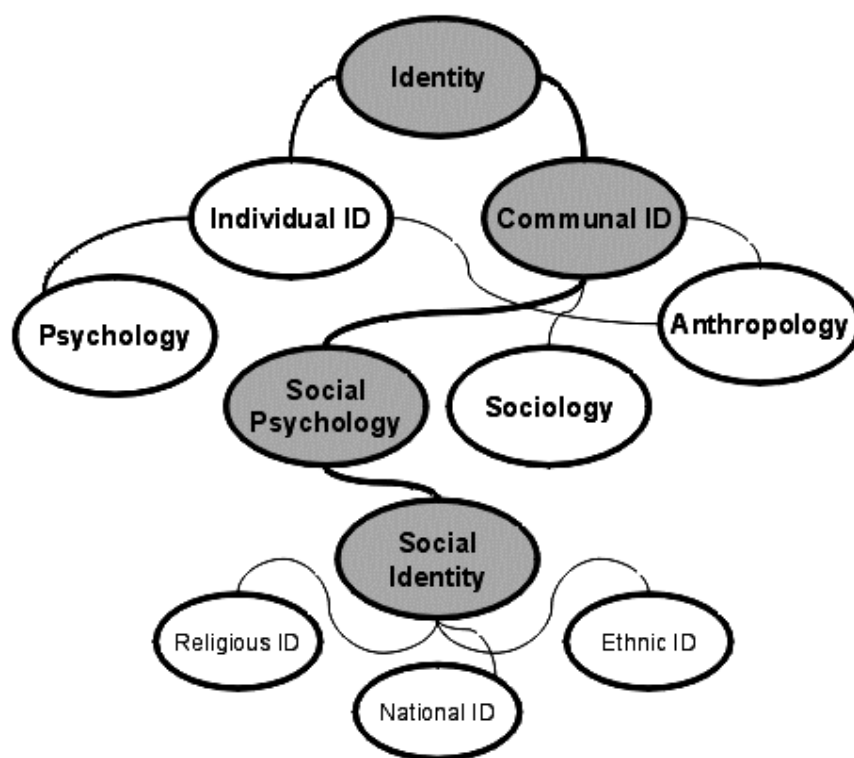
Figure 1: A "taxonomy" of the term "social identity"

As in the case of the term "identity", the term "Israel" is also ambiguous for it can be used as a territorial, a religious, a socio-political, as well as an ethnic designation[50]. Knauf (1994:188-189) discerns five "Israels" that can be described before Persian times:

(1) "First Israel" as seen on the *ca* 1208 BCE Pharaoh Merneptah inscription about a tribe in Central Palestine;[51]

(2) Israel as the tribe that inherited the name of the tribe whose God was to be Yahweh. This Israel is to be found among the Northern tribes and became a state in the first half of the 9th century, but was destroyed in 720 BCE;

(3) The "deuteronomistic Israel" is found in Deuteronomy, which described the "nation" waiting to cross the Jordan. After 720 Judah took over this name as the people of Yahweh;

(4) After the Exile we find the "Persian Israel", which tried to maintain its identity by means of exclusive definitions of who they were;

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[50] See Skjeggestad (1992:161-162) for an excellent overview of the recent research in which the term "Israel" has been used in the senses described above.

[51] Although it is debated whether this is referring to a group or a region.

(5) At the conclusion of the canonical formation we find "biblical Israel" as a utopian ideal. Two religions, with several confessions, have identified themselves with this Israel.

Although it may seem as if I'm sidestepping the problem, I want to keep the question open. The ambiguity of the term "ancient Israel" is important for the question of how the Israelites saw and defined themselves and therefore one should keep all of the possibilities in mind when studying Israel. A useful description of who Israel was is given by Mullens (1993) and for the time being I want to stick to his description:

> In the Hebrew scriptures, 'Israel' is applied to the patriarch Jacob, to a geographical territory, to a monarchic state, and to an idealized community. Thus it has the power of a highly flexible and transformative symbol that may be applied and reapplied in a variety of ways to a wide range of differing situations, thus making the survival of group identity a stronger possibility (Mullens 1993:57).

With these aspects more or less attended to we can return to the task at hand – that of giving a meaningful overview of the work done on Israelite identity in the Old Testament.

3. Research overview of identity in ancient Israel

Identity, and the way it is represented or constructed in the Bible, is complex and one should rather speak of an array of identities that are in constant interaction with one another. It is always a question of bringing nuanced and sophisticated interpreting instruments to the study of identity. The inherent confrontation and tension that Israel experienced in her self-awareness as a people, is not just the conflict "*with* the surrounding cultures," but also of the conflict "*within* Israel's own cultural identity" (Legrand 2000:18). This coincides with the use of SIT to describe the "*conflict with* relationship" (dynamic inter-group identity), and SCT to evaluate the "*conflict within* affiliation" (confrontational intra-group identity).

The terminology that can be used to describe the way Israel perceived or imagined herself as a group amongst other groups/nations is very fluid. For example, what is the difference between "culture" and "identity"? One could add other questions such as "What is the difference between 'ethnicity' and 'identity'"? In this field we are immediately pulled into a maelstrom of blurry concepts and fuzzy definitions. Add to this concepts such as "nation", "race",

"nationalism", "state" etc. and things become really complicated. Then try and define what was meant in biblical times by the Hebrew words/concepts for "people," "nation" and the like and one is certain to start mixing the categories.

This especially happens when the paradigm within which one reads the Bible urges one to find or refute modern concepts such as "universalism," "nationalism," "ethnocentrism" and "racism." These important terms/concepts will be expanded and differentiated in the next section of this chapter. The following research overview focuses only on books, articles and essays that explicitly talk about identity in relation to ancient Israel and the Old Testament.

The literature on identity in ancient Israel could be categorized according to the focus on different approaches to identity and the theological-ethical questions that usually lie behind the particular perspective from which the research was done. The categories are not clear-cut and more often than not flow into each other (e.g. religious identity is seen as an important part of national identity). They are separated to give a meaningful overview of the different general directions in which studies have been undertaken.

3.1 Focus on the religious identity of ancient Israel

One could possibly say that viewing Israel's identity from a religious perspective is the most traditional way of studying this ancient society. If we should substitute "religious" with "theological", we will be dealing with all the literature about Israel's faith and theology since time immemorial. Focusing only on religious identity in a social scientific manner – religion being one aspect of a nation's social identity – will narrow the study to manageable proportions.

One of the key reasons for studying ancient Israel's religious identity is to be able to say something about universalism versus particularism. A lot has been written about the tension between universalism and particularism in the Bible (cf. Brett 1995:151). Although particularism is sometimes linked to nationalism[52] – and thus more to a national or political

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[52] Christensen (1992:1037) sees the study of the nations in the canonical tradition of ancient Israel as primarily linked to the tension between the concepts of nationalism and universalism, the nations being the "matrix of Israel's life, the raison d'être of her very existence." As will be shown in Chapter 6

identity – this binary opposition is usually used with regards to ancient Israel's religious identity and the question of their faith in Yahweh includes or excludes the other nations (*goyim*).

Broadly speaking, the argument usually runs as follows: "Israelite religion during the period of the monarchy was predominantly a nationalistic and territorial [particularistic] faith while the destruction of the temple ensured the rise of a more universalistic faith" (Brett 1995:151). This is a too simplistic view of the very complex and nuanced picture we have in the Old Testament. It can be asked whether the categorization into universalism and particularism is appropriate when studying the Old Testament. To a certain degree it is helpful for it corresponds to our modern-day ecumenical debates on, for example, inter-religious dialogue, as well as the Christian nations' political stance with regards to non-Christian nations.

In his 1997 article Fenske (1997:190) comes to the conclusion that, although it seems that the binary opposites of universalism and particularism are illusionary ("Scheingegensatz"), there were currents of universalism and particularism in both Christianity and Judaism. He studies the relationship between God's people and the other nations and sees both openness and self-centredness ("Selbstbezogenheit"), depending on the concrete situations in which these two currents surface (Fenske 1997:196).

The one (particularism) is needed to show the uniqueness of the nation, without which the message of God's turning towards the nations would not be intelligible (Fenske 1997:196). The other (universalism) is needed to carry the message of God's rule over the nations further (Fenske 1997:196). The point is that a "normal" relationship with people of the other nations is not at all clear from the Bible, and it seems that particularism implies a massive negation of the other nations, while universalism should be understood in terms of God's rule over the other nations (Fenske 1997:196).

Inclusive or exclusive religious identity in the Old Testament is usually linked to the identity of Yahweh. When De Pury (1994) studies the possibility of a pre-exilic tribal Yahwism as seen in Hosea 12, he comes to the conclusion that for Hosea, the identity of Israel goes hand

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of this study, the prophetic literature in particular contains this dialectic between nationalism and universalism. Nahum and Jonah serve as showcase examples and "[t]he conflicting attitudes of nationalism and universalism could not be put in sharper contrast" (Christensen 1992:1046).

in hand with the fight for the identity of Yahweh (De Pury 1994:436). By the fight for Yahweh's identity, he means the way that the two main traditions of how Israel's religion started out, developed and changed in the late 8th and early 7th centuries. The older Jacob tradition (Yahweh is genealogically related to other gods), which can be called the tribal front, had to make way for the Moses tradition (developed by the deuteronomistic and priestly traditions that Yahweh has no genealogy – De Pury 1994:414). This promoted Yahweh as the only God and resulted in Yahwistic monotheism[53].

Post-exilic Orthodox Yahweh-monotheism shaped the whole of the Old Testament (De Pury 1994:413), but this was not always the case. With the discoveries at Kuntillet 'Agrud, Khirbet el-Qom and Elephantine, as well as some overseen biblical passages (Dt 32.8f; Ps 82; Gn 31.53 and Jg 11.24), De Pury shows how there are still traces of the older tribal Yahwism (De Pury 1994:414). He chooses the model of Smith and Lang, who proposed that the reason for the emphasis on the exclusivism of Yahweh has to be sought in an internal conflict situation, which went hand in hand with the start of a Yahweh-Alone Movement in the 9th-century prophetical movements (De Pury 1994:415-416).

He then zooms in on Hosea 12, where one finds the earliest example of pre-deuteronomistic Yahweh exclusivism, which is not so much anti-polytheistic as part of the creation of identity in Israel:

> Was ist für Hosea und für seine Tradition die wahre 'Identität' Jahwes, und was ist Verkennung von Jahwes Identität? … Was ist die wahre, von Jahwe gewollte Identität Israels, und was ist die falsche, verwerfliche Identität des Volkes? (De Pury 1994:419-420).

This idea of Israel constructing her identity by constructing the identity of her deity, Yahweh, is a very important dynamic in the formation of social identity and will receive more attention in Chapters 5 and 6 in the detailed analysis of Nahum. This juxtapositioning of Yahweh and his people creates identity in that it (1) shows who or what Yahweh is *not* (e.g. he cannot be

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[53] Even though Yahweh became the national God of the Israelites in the monarchic era, the religion was never a strict monotheism and could rather be termed "practical monolatry" as the Israelites (especially of the tribal era) continued to recognize the existence of other deities apart from Yahweh, and furthermore knew more than one Yahweh (e.g. "Yahweh from Samaria," "Yahweh of Teman," "Yahweh of Hebron," and "Yahweh of Zion") (Van der Toorn 1995:1728-1729). Van der Toorn (1995:1729) summarizes this as follows:: "The religious situation in early Israel, therefore, was not merely one of polytheism, but also of poly-Yahwism. The Deuteronomic emphasis on the unity of Yahweh … must be understood against this background."

reached through altar offerings and he is not human), and (2) remembers his deeds in history (De Pury 1994:420). For social identity this forms part of a group's "group beliefs" and plays a significant role in Nahum and the OCN.

In Hosea 12 the Jacob legend is revisited and it is shown how the ideal of autonomy of the *am ha 'aretz* is pitted against the monarchy by focusing on segmentary genealogy as the most important coordinating system of identity creation (De Pury 1994:431-432). Viewed from a religious perspective, this made the living together of groups (tribes) of different backgrounds possible - they were tolerant and inclusive and had no great difficulty in identifying with the gods of different groups and places and allowing them to co-exist (De Pury 1994:432). This leaves room for the idea that, although Yahweh became the national God in the 8th-century, the Jacob legend was still the formative myth of the Yahweh cult and had to be opposed by the prophets,[54] who erased the idea that Yahweh's identity had anything to do with a relationship (genealogical) to other deities (De Pury 1994:432).

Stolz (1994) looks in the same direction as De Pury when he asks the very interesting question: does Israel's portrayal of Yahweh also tell us something about the society of Israel? He sees Israel as a Type 1[55] society, whose structures of excluding identification are linked to the establishing of social and political solidarity and authority (Stolz 1994:41). This kind of solidarity was symbolized through God-images and especially the concept of monolatrism, where the national God (Yahweh of Israel, Judah or Jerusalem) provides an identificatory inner structure: Yahweh as one God (among others) provides the unifying force for the Israelite community (Stolz 1994:41-42).

Other structures of excluding identification are seen in the setting of *outer borders* (social and political borders; struggle and war against enemies and forces of nature), and the setting of *inward borders* (in Israel's case, e.g. the Yahweh-Alone Movement, which created an oppositional and sub-cultural border; the exclusivity of Yahweh identifying solely with their own religious and political struggle) (Stolz 1994:44). One could summarize Stolz's argument in his own words:

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[54] The opposition prophets could have been (1) Levites from the Northern Kingdom (Wolff), (2) the Yahweh-Alone movement (Smith) or (3) a peripheral opposition group (Wilson) (De Pury 1994:432).
[55] Type 2 societies tend to expand their cultural space, with gods being identified with one another and selectively taking over each others' characteristics (Stolz 1994:43). Type 3 societies look for the unity in the plurality – the plurality of too many gods comes to be identified with one God (Stolz 1994:43).

Gesteigert wird in diese Abgrenzung in der Zeit des Exils. Jetzt verbinden sich Subkultur und nationale Kultur, Jahwe als exclusive Identifikationsfigur wird zum Garanten einer eigenartig neuen, national-religiösen Identität – eine Konstellation, die Geschichte macht. Die Exklusion führt so weit, daß Gott und Welt in ein Verhältnis wechselseitiger Exklusion treten (Stolz 1994:45).

Israel's self-conception in terms of Yahweh's identity will play an important role when we look at identity construction in Nahum.

Albertz (1996) builds out this concept in terms of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as the people of God. He gives a not so detailed but important overview of the people of God and the nations according to the Old Testament and specifically on what he calls Israel's self-conception ("Das Selbstverständnis Israels"). Albertz (1996:279) sees the twofold conception of Israel as, on the one hand, a genealogical conception of a twelve-tribe nation, and on the other hand, a theological conception as the people of God, as two sides of the same coin. He sees the theological and the socio-political elements in both (Albertz 1996:279).

Ultimately the religious uniqueness of Israel's faith and identity is that Israel defined itself as a people that is constituted in the first place by its personal relation to its God Yahweh (Albertz 1996:282). This self-conception of Israel does not, however, follow a type of "natural" concept of nation, but opts for Yahweh's loving self-binding to his people, and Israel's thankful binding to their God as that which defines the people of God (Albertz 1996:285).

In most cases where scholars discuss Israel's identity, whether it be their religious identity or not, the question of theological ethics comes to the fore. Albertz, for example, writes his article against the background of what he sees as the reawakening of the nationalist spirit ("Nationalgefühls") in the now re-united Germany (Albertz 1996:278). As we will focus in detail on the theological ethics of ancient Israelite identity studies in Chapter 7, suffice it to say that Albertz (1996:278) believes the Old Testament has an important role to play in a theologically responsible way towards dealing with loaded concepts such as "people" ("Volk") and "nation." He pleads for a renewed and nuanced approach to the conceptual

categorization of different nations according to the Old Testament to which research always tended as:

> … es in der Vergangenheit haüfig gerade das Alte Testament war, aus dem die christliche Theologie – in liebedienerischer Verbeugung vor dem Zeitgeist – falsche und z.T. auch gefährliche Schlüsse für ihr Volk und Nationenverständnis gezogen hat (Albertz 1996:278).

Excursus: The Hebrew concepts for "nation"

Being clear on the Hebrew concepts for nation is critical for a theological-ethical enquiry. Albertz (1996:278) tries to show how an understanding of the concepts in a more nuanced way can contribute to modern-day discussions on the resurgence of nationalism. He does this by showing how the two Hebrew concepts for "nation" namely עַם and גּוֹי[56] have been misunderstood as the technical terms for "Israel" (עַם) and "the foreign nations" (גּוֹי). This must be understood in the light of the Septuagint's more pejorative distinction between "Israel" (λαος) and the "Heathen" (ἔθνοι). From there it was a small step to the Christian nations' identification with Israel and the "declassification" of the non-Christian nations (Albertz 1996:278). The fact is that a clear differentiation of the two terms is not possible and that they are often used synonymously in the Old Testament (Albertz 1996:278).

Albertz (1996:278-279) continues by identifying a tendentious difference between the two. עַם is a relational term, which describes a perspective "from the inside" and is more often used for Israel. גּוֹי is more of an objective perspective "from the outside" in terms of people being a political, territorial or linguistic unit, and it is more often used for the other nations. This not exclusively so though, for Israel is called a גּוֹי at key junctures in the Old Testament, for instance in Jeremiah 31:35 and Isaiah 26:2[57]. This view held by Albertz (1996) is a good summary of the latest research done on these terms and improves on the earlier work done by, for example, Cody (1964), who builds on the groundwork done in 1934 by Leonard Rost.

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[56] There are more Hebrew words for nation, but עַם and גּוֹי are the most prevalent. The other words are: (1) לְאֹם ("people, nation") an archaic poetic term close to גּוֹי in meaning in the sense of cold neutrality; (2) אִי ("island, coast, coastland") an etymologically obscure word that has "national" significance in some instances and in Isaiah is used as "islands" as a designation for foreign nations; (3) אֻמָּה ("clan, nation") used as "nation" only once in Ps 117:1 (Block 1997:966-967).
[57] Cf. Block (1997:970-971) who concurs with this idea and quotes the "extremely positive" Isa 26:2: "Open the gates that the righteous nation (gôy) may enter, the nation that keeps faith."

Cody (1964) still has the traditional classification in mind when he answers the question: "does *gôy* contain a connotation of heathenness, or is it a use positively called for?" (Cody 1964: 1). He comes to the conclusion that:

> … we can readily see that of the two words it was *'am* that expressed those things which belonged to the heart of Israel and to Israel's relations with Yahweh – those things which a theological perspective made the Chosen People something 'other' and apart. But Israel as a *gôy* was like the other *gôyim*, and … [carries] a note of theological disfavour (Cody 1964:6).

Cody (1964:1-2) does give a good overview, though, of the different meanings of גוי and he focuses on the fact that being a גוי means being connected to territory and government and being part of a political unity (Cody 1964:5). Clements (1975:427-428) reiterates the connection with politics and territory and adds race (seen e.g. in a common language[58]) as well as the worship of a national god as components of being a *gôy*. He also discusses the religious sense of being a *gôy*. In this regard he gives a more nuanced discussion than Cody. He argues that Israel was "a *goy* with a *special* religious character" and therefore "was fully conscious that it was distinct from other *goyim*, and that it possessed unique moral, political, and religious obligations" (Clements 1975:431 – emphasis JPB).

Because *gôy* functions as a self-description of Israel, it could not have a completely hostile religious meaning, but apparently did get an "increasingly adverse religious sense" (Clements 1975:431). In the deuteronomistic movement we begin to find hostility towards the other *gôyim,* for their religion did not please Yahweh and was a temptation to Israel (Clements 1975:432). This hostility towards *gôy* and *gôyim* grew and took on an adverse religious meaning in the later Talmud (Clements 1975:432).[59]

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[58] Although it seems that language did not play such a big part in nationality as one would expect (cf. Block 1984:337-338; 1997:969-970). E.g. the Hebrews, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, etc. all gave up their native speech in favour of the prevailing Canaanite, and the adoption of the new language did not represent a crisis for the group's self-consciousness (Block 1984:227). This in itself is a crucial element in the contemporary debate on nationhood and identity, as language usually plays a pertinent role in nationalist movements (Block 1984:321 mentions the Welsh in Britain and the Quebecois in Canada). In South Africa the use of Afrikaans as language was part of what it meant (and to most Afrikaners still means) to be an Afrikaner. After the demise of apartheid, Afrikaans became known as the language of the oppressor, and was shunned by many, although the language is spoken by a large group of people from across the whole spectrum of a culturally diverse nation.
[59] Note, however, the criticism of Brett, following the lead of Weisman (1995:146-148), on the supposedly anachronistic use of *gôy* before the time of the monarchy, as well as the deuteronomistic use, which refutes many of Clements's and Cody's claims.

Brett (1995:147-148) comes to the conclusion that the only thing one could say with any degree of certainty is "that *gôy* is a polysemous term [in the lexical semantic technical sense of the term] … which may, or may not, carry connotations of territory and sovereignty, depending on the linguistic context." This is also true for עַם, which, although it has a relational sense and is a theophoric element in West-Semitic names, cannot easily be categorized as the term for a religious community (and גוי as a political unit) (Hulst 1984:291-291).

It is only from the context and with some explanation that one can distinguish between the two terms (Hulst 1984:294). This ambiguity of the two terms complies, though in an indirect way, with the Old Testament's "Proteus principle" There is no all-inclusive definition of what it means to be a nation in ancient Israel. One has to look and read closely to be able to identify the contours of the use of each of the concepts. This brings us to research that focus on ancient Israel's political or national identity, with the resulting question about the problem of nationalism.

3.2 Focus on the national/political identity[60] of ancient Israel

To show how intertwined the different foci on identity are, one can turn to a scholar like Assmann (1992), who writes about *literature*, *remembering* and *political identity* in early advanced civilizations ("frühen Hochkulturen") as part of the cultural memory of a nation. Like most of the scholars who write about identity, he locates his topic within the context of the terrible crime and catastrophe of the 20th century and investigates the importance of

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[60] The differentiation between political/national and ethnic identity is not a clear-cut one and in anthropological and sociological studies these two are often connected. Smith (1994:706,717), for example, sees both ethnicity and nationalism as part of the "politics of culture" in which nationalism is the ideology of the symbolical and cultural ethnic community called a "nation." He shows how in modern examples of nationalism, nationalists have harnessed "the power of ethnic ties and their attendant myths and symbols … [creating] the social and political conditions for its own propagation" (Smith 1994:727). Krüger (1993:14) sees the proximity between ethnicity and nationalism as follows: "both are the offspring of the same root, the ethnic group, with nationalism becoming the advancement of ethnicity." One also finds distinctions between the two, e.g. a "political nation" (founded upon common and accepted political and institutional principles … respect for human rights that includes a respect for differences) and "ethnic nation" (founded on a common culture, especially a descent, language and religion) (Krüger 1993:10).

remembering as a new paradigm for interdisciplinary debate between different cultural fields – art and literature, politics and society, religion and law (Assmann 1992:11).

In his view political identity is political imagination which, together with remembrance of the past, and cultural continuation or tradition building, operates on the social and temporal dimensions to unite and bind together people (Assmann 1992:16). This happens by building a shared experience, expectation and action through a symbolical sense-world (Assmann 1992:16). He builds on the ideas of Maurice Halbwach, who points to the socially shaped nature of cultural memory (and history) as a collective creation, creating meaning from the past for the present (Assmann 1992:34-35, 48, 88).

Political identity is collective identity ("we" identity) that is symbolic and can be understood as a type of social imagination (Assmann 1992:132-133). Part of Israelite political identity is their religion, a part of their culture that enabled them to survive through cultural changes, foreign introductions and assimilations (Assmann 1992:196) – so much so that religion replaced politics in the Second Temple period:

> Religion wird zum Fundament und Medium eines Widerstands gegen eine Umwelt, deren kulturellen und politischen Strukturen sie als autonome Sinnsphäre gegenübersteht (Assmann 1992:196).

In a very compact and informed overview of the theme Liverani (1992) first takes us on a whirlwind tour of political identity in the ancient Near East before writing about Israel. He shows how the ancient Near East went through different stages of political identity.

(1) The **early stages of development of the state in the ancient Near East** used the archaic counter-positions of "Us" versus "The Others" with the Egyptians and the Sumerians as prime examples of superiority of the own against foreigners. This is not nationalism yet. The foreign nations formed part of the "chaotic periphery threatening the cosmic order established by the god (and maintained by the sovereigns) at the centre of the world" (Liverani 1992:1031-1032).

(2) The **political conflicts** between, for example, Sumerians and Akkadians in lower Mesopotamia lacked ethnic motivations. Although one would have expected this, it is not present in the written sources of that time (Liverani 1992:1032).

(3) In the **Bronze Age** there was a development towards territorial states, and individuals "belonged to one state just because they were residents in its territory – with no consideration

of their ethnic affiliation or origin … the inner structure of the state as socio-economic: linguistic and ethnic qualifications were irrelevant" (Liverani 1992:1032). There was also a move towards more tribal groupings based on kinship instead of territory. At the end of the Late Bronze era the tension between these two groups led to hostility with the tribal group becoming less and less important (Liverani 1992:1032).

(4) In the **Early Iron Age** this process was turned around as the territorial states underwent serious inner crises and the tribal element again came to the fore. The political "model" was based on tribal kinship again and not on territory (Liverani 1992:1033).[61]

(5) In the last stage we have the **evolution and decline of the national states** that first re-established territorial ties and administrative structures and then formed empires in which the nationalities in the subdued regions were destroyed "in order to produce a homogenous texture throughout the territory of the empire" (Liverani 1992:1033). This led to nationalistic resistance movements of local ethnic groups "against an all-embracing and superimposed ideology and government" (Liverani 1992:1033), a situation that can be fruitfully applied to the reading of Nahum as liberation literature against the evil Assyrian empire.

When Liverani (1992:1033-1034) turns to national identity in Israel, he traces the traditional view of the development of Israel from tribal group(s) to state/monarchy but suggests that the picture we find in the Old Testament tells us more about the history/context of the *writers* of the early history of Israel than about the *times* they are writing about. Therefore, after discussing the usual theories of the Canaanite city-states that were invaded by the "league of twelve tribes",[62] he comes to the conclusion that the "very existence of a political entity 'Israel' before the monarchic period must remain a matter of doubt" (Liverani 1992:1034).

The monarchic picture presents further uncertainties about Israel being a national state and it is probably only possible to talk about Israel as a "nation" in the time of Josiah[63] (Liverani 1992:1035). In the exilic and post-exilic era the Judeans were able to keep and improve their national consciousness when they returned to "the empty land" by adding a racial element to the religious and cultural elements conceived in the Exile (Liverani 1992:1035). Israelite national unity rested, paradoxically, not on political unification, but on the political disaster of

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[61] This idea is related to modern sociological models of nation formation. Cf. e.g. Smith (1994:718), who distinguishes between the "civic-territorial" model and the "ethnic-genealogical" model.
[62] I.e. the classical reconstruction of Alt and Noth, as well as the newer American social upheaval paradigm of Mendenhall and Gottwald, and the very critical European scholarship denying the historicity of the traditional paradigm.
[63] In Josiah's time there was a "national feeling … unification of cult, promulgation of divine law, reconstruction of past history as a process finalized to the national unity, role of the covenant with the national god, and counterposition to other nationalities" (Liverani 1992:1035).

the Exile, the Return and as a reaction to the mighty Assyrian and especially Babylonian empires (Liverani 1992:1035).

In his essay Liverani (1992) touches upon a few very important premises of nationality and ethnicity, the most important one being the fact that both ethnicity and nationalism are not givens but social and political constructions (cf. Brass in: Krüger 1993:11). We will return to this question in the next section on ethnic identity (2.3), but first a short excursion on nationalism and ancient Israel is in order.

Excursus: Can one speak of nationalism in ancient Israel?

What is nationalism? Smith (1994:725) defines nationalism as having a dual nature, namely an ideological doctrine as well as a wider symbolic universe and fund of sentiments:

> The ideology holds that the world consists of separate, identifiable nations, each with its peculiar character; that the nation is the sole legitimate source of political power; that every individual must belong and owe supreme loyalty to one and only one nation; and that nations must be autonomous, preferably in states of their own, for only then can global freedom and peace be assured … But there is also a wider 'culture of nationalism' which underpins the political doctrine and its variations. I have in mind, first, the recurrent central motifs or ideals of autonomy, unity and identity; and second, the panoply of symbols and rituals associated with the drama of the nation.

As early as 1882 Renan said that nationalism was not created in the nineteenth century but had already existed in the Hellenistic kingdoms (Mendels 1998:19). Can we still entertain such a notion? When Liverani (1992) writes about nationality and political identity in the ancient Near East as well as in ancient Israel, he starts off by saying one should be careful about using the terms "nation" or "nationality" or "nationalism" when it comes to Israel and the Bible:

> … the modern use of the term ["nation"] and its derivatives ("nationality," "nationalism") has special features, not necessarily to be found in the quite different situation of biblical times. The possibility of (unperceived) misunderstandings is a real one; in particular, the current idea

that Israel was a "nation" (in its modern sense) is doubtful and in any case the subject for specific research (Liverani 1992:1031).

He does find it permissible to apply the term "nation" to the political realities in the old periods of history, but then always within a specific definition to avoid anachronism (Liverani 1992:1031). Many scholars have debated this aspect. An anthropologist such as Garvin (1993:63, 66) argues that if one talks about nationalism in the sense of a political and universalist ideology, it can only be dated from the seventeenth century, an innovation of the post-agricultural age. He does, however, leave open the door for ancient Israel when he speaks of nationalism as a cultural phenomenon with political consequences, and even gives as example "Jewish nationalism" as found in the Old Testament (Garvin 1993:67).

On the other hand, we find a scholar such as Smith (1994:707-708) referring to the trend to "read features of modern nations into pre-modern ethnic communities" as "perennialism" and the worst form of that "retrospective nationalism" that "would treat ancient Greeks or Jews as fully-fledged nations with 'nationalist' movements and programmes." The danger of this approach is pointed out by the Old Testament scholar Knauf (1994:184-185), who describes how the German nation ("Volk") wanted to become a unified state[64] after 1813, an impulse that became the forerunner of National Socialism:

> … statt als antizipatorische Bürgerschaft in einem noch zu schaffenden demokratischen Deutschland …verstand sich das 'Volk' als eine Kultur-, Sprach- und Abstammungsgemeinschaft unter zunehmenden Einfluß rassistischen Gedankenguts … Der deutsche Begriff des 'Volkes' setzt Nationalität und Ethnizität gleich. Der biologische Volksbegriff hat zur Ideologie der Völker als Subjekte der Geschichte geführt … **Der 'Weg des Volkes' zum Einheitsstaat wurde zum Paradigma, nach dem dann auch die Geschichte Israels dekliniert wurde** (Knauf 1994:185 – emphasis JPB).

Liverani hints at the same phenomenon when he says that "the nationalistic trends in past-century Europe were effective in shaping the institutional history of Israel in terms of a search for national unification" (Liverani 1992:1031). What is clear is that the modern concept of nationalism came to the fore with the American and French revolutions (Garvin 1993:63;

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[64] In contrast to the American and French revolutions, where the state created the nation (Knauf 1994:185).

Knauf 1994:184).[65] The question arises as to how one should study "nationalism" before the 17th or 18th centuries CE.

Liverani (1992) leads the way by studying Israel as a "nation", but with reserve and caution. Knauf (1994:184) sees the history of the ancient Near East not in terms of nations but in terms of economics, tribes and states, because the concept "nation" was unknown in those times and only emerged not so long ago. Greenfeld (in Brett 1995:143) talks about "proto-nations in the ancient world, notably among the Jews and the Greeks." Mullen (1993:64 - see below 2.3) uses an anthropological definition of what nationalism is and comes to the conclusion that, although nationalism is clearly a modern phenomenon, there exist a number of continuities "between the formation and development of ethnic and national groups, and the application of the term [nation] to earlier historical periods is not inaccurate."

This said, I think one should take the dangers of perennialism and retrospective nationalism seriously and be very careful about the anachronistic imposing our modern notion of nations and nationalisms upon an ancient world, such as Israel's experience of being a "nation." There is enough continuity, though to bring the two worlds closer to one another, but by means of very careful analogical comparison. As Greenfeld (with respect to English Puritanism) and Knauf (on German National Socialism) have suggested, and as I have shown in the introduction (the Afrikaner people's identification with ancient Israel), the fact that modern-day nations and nationalistic movements drew, and still draw, on the Old Testament perspective of what it means to be a nation, or "the chosen people of God," is enough evidence to study the phenomenon.

The fact that people link their own modern-day experience with that of ancient Israel shows that there is a process of identification that is mediated through the text. Precisely how this identification functions and how the underlying processes and dynamic of identity construction influence reader communities ethically is what this study wants to explicate.

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[65] Note, however, Brett (1995:140-143), who discusses the view of Greenfeld on nationalism. She holds that "the birth of nationalism is to be found in sixteenth-century England in the interaction between religious and political movements which included a widespread appropriation of the idea of being an elect people, reflecting the influence – at least initially – of the theology of Israel" (Brett 1995:142).

Having said that, I think we should search for new avenues of research. Although useful and important work has been done on nationalism in the Old Testament, one has to place a number of question marks on the validity of such a venture. A new direction is called for. As I will argue below, a focus on social identity (rather than exclusively on religious, national or ethnic identity) through social identity theory and self-categorization theory provides a more integrated approach. This approach should yield more appropriate material for theological-ethical reflection on problems such as extreme xenophobia, oppressive ethnocentrism and discriminatory racism.

3.3 Focus on the ethnic identity of ancient Israel

What is ethnicity? Krüger (1993:16-17) provides a very good definition:

> Ethnic articulation always includes an element of past times, myths of foundation and survival, traditional habits, the sequence and achievements of past generations, and it emphasizes the value of its own ethnicity. Groups with an ethnic consciousness are determined to stress the long historical tradition of their ethnicity, nation or nationalism. They often go back to widely unknown and for that reason frequently mythical past ages. Myths, symbols, unchangeable narratives of nationally fundamental events represent a strong support to the nation's coherence, memories, and self-awareness (cf. also Stone 1996:260-262).

To that can be added the element of a common name and the elements of culture, as well as an association with a particular territory (Sokolovskii & Tishkov 1996:192).

Ethnicity is usually studied in terms of territory, warfare, organized religion and myths of ethnic reflection (Smith 1994:711-713). There are three main approaches/theories to the understanding of ethnicity: (1) *Primordialist* (ethnic identification is based on deep primordial attachments to a group or culture), (2) *Instrumentalist* (ethnicity is a political instrument that is exploited by leaders and others in pragmatic pursuit of their own interests), and (3) *Constructivist* (ethnic identity is fluid and is created in specific social and historical contexts) (Sokolovskii & Tishkov 1996:190; cf. also Smith 1994:706-707).[66] The introductory chapter

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[66] See also an older critical appraisal by Thompson (1989) of theories of how ethnic sentiments arise.

by Sparks (1998:1-22) gives an excellent overview of the theories of ethnicity as well as the issues and problems surrounding Israel's ethnic identity.

Ethnicity is a socio-cultural phenomenon and therefore one has to take into consideration relevant anthropological research when studying the ethnicity of ancient Israel (Skjeggestad 1992:163). Mullen (1993:1) does this by incorporating sociological and anthropological analyses into the more classical historical-critical and literary approaches when he looks at how the deuteronomistic historian "created" Israelite identity.

After discussing the traditional models (i.e. Noth, Cross, Smend and Dietrich) of what the deuteronomistic literature is, Mullen finds no material there for answering the crucial question of how deuteronomistic history functioned "with respect to the formation of the community whose identity as an ethnic group was threatened by the exile with complete assimilation and ethnic dissolution" (Mullen 1993:5). He describes the exile and states the need of Israel to develop a distinctive form of ethnic identity because of the loss of "previous identifying factors" (Mullen 1993:9).

According to him, this was done by "the conscious development of social ethnic boundary limitations that … helped to develop and maintain a new social construction of Judean reality that was both continuous with and different from the past from which it had developed" (Mullen 1993:10). He regards the book of Deuteronomy as a type of social manifesto of "Israelite" ethnic identity:

> Israel, then, is defined in Deuteronomy as a special people, distinct from the surrounding nations by virtue of its dual relationship with its patron deity … The ideal 'Israel' is created by the 'choice' of its deity, and its continuation is determined by Yahweh's mercy and covenantal ideals. Central to both of these defining characteristics stands Israel's distinctiveness among the nations of the earth … since ethnic groups may be defined on the basis of the opposition between self and others. By the process of categorization of such oppositions, a group is able to define itself in terms of both overt signs and basic standards of value and morality (Mullen 1993:63).

Ethnic identity and national identity becomes even more difficult to separate and nationalism and ethnocentrism are sometimes very difficult to distinguish, for the one flows forth from the

other. Crüsemann (1998) proves this by combining ethnic and religious identity with the question of nationalism. According to him, ethnic identity can be linked to genealogical systems and he searches for Israel's self-definition in terms of the genealogical systems of Genesis (Crüsemann 1998). In the genealogies of Genesis (especially Gen 10) he finds new light cast on the old question of universalism and particularism, and also of what the Old Testament has to say about modern nationalism.

With regards to universalism/particularism he sees Israel in the Genesis genealogies as so embedded in the whole of humanity that the question about inclusive or exclusive identity is answered in a very specific way (Crüsemann 1998:195). Nationalism also gets a new definition, which links to the discussion about nationalism in ancient Israel in the previous section (3.2). He argues that, although Israel is given a special role among all the nations of the earth, Israel's self-definition distinguishes itself from every trend of modern nationalism (Crüsemann 1998:195).

This is seen in the fact that: (1) humanity is portrayed as a unity in its plurality; (2) ethnic identity is only one of many levels of human identity that is important for a collective identity; and (3) there is always a tension between Israel as a people of God and Israel as a universalistic nation (Crüsemann 1998:195). On the basis of the Genesis genealogies, he claims that there is a balance between humanity and nation, ethics and ethnicity and universal human rights and group-specific identity:

> Weltweit zeigen Exzesse eines neuen Nationalismus, wie wenig es bisher gelungen ist, Menschheit und Volk, Ethik und Ethnizität, universale Menchenrechte und gruppenspezifische Identität in ein stabiles Gleichgewicht zu bringen (Crüsemann 1998:180).

His central point is that modern nationalism builds upon a very narrow understanding of what it means to be a nation, and that the biblical evidence does not support this view (Crüsemann 1998:191). As Knauf has suggested, the concept of "nation" holds so many problems that it must be used with great care. In between humanity and nation lie many different levels of identity, for example, the Fatherhouse (בֵּית אָב) and the Clan (מִשְׁפָּחָה), so that one must therefore speak of a multi-layered identity ("vielstufige kollektive Identität").

Concerning the concept of ethnicity, Crüsemann (1998:191-192) is adamant that from a biblical perspective one should not exaggerate the importance of the ethnos. In a sense modern-day society is also ordered like the biblical multi-layered society concept in that we do not only form part of a nation but also of a family, a town, a region, a country and an international community (Crüsemann 1998:191-192). Crüseman provides a fresh and more nuanced way of studying the identity of ancient Israel. The important idea of a multi-layered identity will be significant for my own examination of Nahum and the Oracles Concerning the Nations.

Last but not least, we have the view of Kenton Sparks, who comes closest to the topic under discussion with his book *Ethnicity and identity in ancient Israel* (1998). It is interesting to note the sub-title to the book, which reads: "Prolegomena to the study of ethnic sentiments and their expression in the Hebrew Bible" (Sparks 1998). This is because he does not regard his contribution as a complete analysis of ethnic sentiments throughout the history of Israel (Sparks 1998:15). Sparks brings the elusive concept of ethnicity to bear upon Israel.

After a sound discussion of the three classic models of Israel's ethnic genesis (Amphictyonic, Conquest and Peasant revolt, Sparks 1998:6-10), he finds that these models do not provide a "convincing historical context that could produce or foster ethnic distinctions between ancient Israelites and other groups" (Sparks 1998:11). He describes the important roles of new paradigms[67] and finds the search for Israel's ethnic identity a paradox that should be addressed by studying the literary sources of Israel (Sparks 1998:13).

One of his main premises is that identity is not just ethnic in character and that other modes of identity (e.g. religious and political) should also be looked for in the Hebrew scriptures (Sparks 1998:13). He uses a responsible eclectic theoretical base from ethnicity studies in which he combines primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist models.[68] He calls attention to the importance of integrating cultural context, history and political, social-structural and economic embeddedness when studying ethnicity (Sparks 1998:16-22). Although this kind of theoretical eclecticism can be criticized, he indeed states at the end of

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[67] E.g. Coogan and Smith, as well as recent archaeology that presupposes that Israelite religion was a subset of Canaanite religion or West-Semitic religion (Sparks 1998:12-13).
[68] Sparks (1998:21) himself states that the primordial character of ethnicity is primary and the instrumental character secondary when it comes to theories of ethnic origin.

the book that the search for a "single and fundamental theory of the ethnic process" should stop (Sparks 1998:329). I agree with this view.

Describing the multi-layered nature of ethnic identity is to my mind a step forward and an idea that the present study also entertains. That being said, the choice of looking at Israel's ethnic identity as focal point is too narrow. Ultimately the study tries to show how Israel's prime mode of identity construction was actually *not* always first and foremost ethnic identity:

> First, as it is presented in the biblical sources, throughout the period that we have examined, ethnicity seems to have played a *secondary role* to Israelite and Judean concerns about *religious identity*. And second even in the most rhetorically ethnic sources, such as Deuteronomy and Ezra-Nehemiah, the Israelites tended nevertheless to have a keen interest in the assimilation of foreigners to their religious community (Sparks 1998:325 – emphasis JPB).

In the book Sparks first gives a very thorough and informative overview of ethnicity and identity in Assyria, Egypt and ancient Greece. He finds that Assyria and Egypt have a similar focus on political and cultural (not ethnic) identity (Sparks 1998:91), *contra* Greece, which was "primarily concerned with ethnic varieties of social identity" and can be considered as having the greatest affinity with the Hebrew Bible (Sparks 1998:92-93). After that he discusses Israelite identity from the earliest to the exilic literary sources[69].

He finds that there is a gradual increase in the complexity and intensity of Israelite ethnic ideology from the late eighth to the early sixth centuries (Sparks 1998:284), which intensifies even more in the exilic community (Sparks 1998:85) and then recedes again in Deutero-Isaiah. Sparks (1998:316) in fact calls this "something of a revolution, in which religious identity had almost totally supplanted the role of ethnicity in defining group identity."

Sparks' book does indeed serve as an important prolegomena to the study of Israelite identity when approached and used critically. This present study builds upon the general focus on Israelite identity as a multi-layered concept, but departs from it in that a more integrative

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[69] He discusses Merneptah's Stele and Deborah's Song (Chapter 3), ethnicity and identity in the Assyrian period (Hosea, Amos, Isaiah of Jerusalem – Chapter 4), ethnicity and identity in the Judean monarchy (Deuteronomy and Jeremiah – Chapter 5) and ethnicity and identity in the Exilic period (Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah – Chapter 6) (Sparks 1998).

theoretical base for identity is sought - not first and foremost in ethnicity studies, but in social psychology and in the broader concept of social identity. My focus on Nahum, the Oracles Concerning the Nations and the Book of the Twelve serves to fill in the gaps. Sparks describes only the processes of ethnic identification in the Major Prophets, Hosea and Amos. Lastly, this study will aim to extend the theological-ethical conclusions that can be drawn from Israelite identity studies[70] as well as to bring in a more pointed ideological-critical stance.

3.4 Focus on the "Hebrewgram" identity of ancient Israel

Sternberg is at his poetic and rhetorical best in his (rather too) long *Hebrews between cultures: Group portraits and national literature* (1998). I have decided to include his research under a separate heading as it defies categorization in a sense. One could broadly describe his approach to identity as an "anti-stance," a radical Proteus approach to the plurality, ambiguity, paradox and unattainability of the Hebrew text that (like Adonai) defies final description and categorization. As he says about the Bible's unconventional universality:

> For confirmation of your assorted certitudes – philosophical, historical, artistic, socio-political, ethnographic, psychic, generic, genetic, canon-formative, textbound, theoretical – you must look elsewhere (Sternberg 1998:89).

This is part of his ideopoetic approach to the Bible, according to the Proteus Principle that was discussed in Chapter 2 (4.2). He approaches the question of the identity of the "Hebrews" in the Jewish Bible on two fronts, by saying something *about* interpretation of the Bible, and by giving his own *interpretation* of the sources. There are also some general premises about the Bible's view on ethnicity and identity. As we have already focussed on his methodology, his theses about the "Hebrews" as well as his views on group identity will be discussed briefly.

What is Old Testament "Hebrewgram" identity? One could summarize it by saying that "Hebrew" reflects the "otherness of non-Israelite … culture and discourse" which can be divided into four patterns of usage (Sternberg 1998:85-86):

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[70] Sparks (1998:330-331) spends just more than a page on this topic as a final word in his book.

(1) "Hebrew" used in the place of "Israelite" when a non-native Biblical Hebrew (foreign) speaker uses it as a misrepresentation. It implies the foreign name-caller's superiority and hostility towards those he "miscalls" Hebrews;

(2) "Hebrew" when used by an Israelite who talks with foreigners, using their perspective on the Israelites because they are in power or cannot understand whom he/she is referring to;

(3) "Hebrew" when used by a narrator to render foreign thoughts about the Israelites, as he describes an alien or alienated mind "at work in connection with Israelites";

(4) "Hebrew" used by an Israelite speaking to fellow Israelites to indicate a foreign perspective that is in confrontation with their own view.

Sternberg's remarks on *foreignness* and *ethnocentrism* deserve mention, as they will help to provide some kind of frame for my ideas on how to think about identity and ethnicity in the Bible. *Foreignness* in the Bible usually takes its reference from the in-group, keeping an alien entity in the picture with a view to self-definition (Sternberg 1998:187-188). He juxtaposes the totalising ethnographies of the Greeks and Egyptians (we-group vs. the rest) with that of the Bible (Sternberg 189-190). Although the biblical word for "alien" is used from the inside out, it is not a prejudging stereotype but a description, ascribing ethnic otherness. It orientates, does not judge and leaves the normative force "wide open to the play of context" (Sternberg 1998:191-192).

This view is built on Sternberg's (not so politically correct) ideas on *ethnocentrism* and *ethnocentricity*. In reaction to Sumner's definition of ethnocentrism, Sternberg (1998:196) distinguishes between ethnocentrism and ethnocentricity, because the focus on the self (ethnocentricity – the in-group's self-centralization whereby it becomes the reference point for all others) does not necessarily imply that it is individually self-elevative above all others (Sternberg 1998:197-198). This idea flows from what he sees as "facts of division," namely, that the world divides into nations, nationalisms, national identities and it is from there that one needs to talk in a more nuanced way about ethnocentric representation (Sternberg 1998:203-204). One should have three gradable subcategories:

At one pole, we have *ethnocentrism*, with aggressive (e.g. Hellecentrist, Nilocentrist, Arancentrist) xenophobia as limit-case: the former will tend to an affirmative stereotyping of the in-group, the latter also to a negation, often a mirror – or vict-imaging of the outgroup, possibly the entire outworld. At the other pole, we have *the isms* (internationalism,

cosmopolitanism, humanism, universalism, Marxism, anarchism) that would replace the focal group in question by some idealized inclusive counterstereotype, with ethnophobia as their limit-case. In between there range *the shades of ethnocriticism* – autocritique trained on the collective – all essentially stereotype-wrenching, if not downright anti-stereotypic across the group fence (Sternberg 1998:204 – emphasis JPB).

Sternberg (1998:204) summarizes the way the Bible dramatizes these possibilities. The Bible is:

(1) *Ethnocentric*, yet with creation-old universalist nexuses and movements;

(2) *Ethnocritical* to an unusual as well as unprecedented degree, … because [it is]

(3) *Theocentrist* in principle, always keeping in mind that the supreme values cannot bear any automatic one-to-one correspondence with the transactions and judgments enacted by a character so intricate as is God.

3.5 Summary and conclusions on the research overview

Although not exhaustive, the sample research on ancient Israelite identity gives a thorough overview of the approaches to the problem. Below is a summary of what has been dealt with so far.

- Researchers normally choose to approach the topic of ancient Israelite identity from a specific viewpoint of identity. Although one could discern more categories,[71] the categories of religious, national/political and ethnic identity seem to be the most common ones by which ancient Israel is described. In the same breath it should be said that, even though one category is chosen, the different aspects of identity intertwine and flow together so that religion and politics, national identity and ethnicity have to be brought into close proximity.

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[71] One can think of cultural, economic and material identity, although economic identity is usually placed together with political identity, and cultural identity seems to be too broad a category to be able to describe meaningfully. One could even say that what I describe as social identity is akin to cultural identity for culture is an umbrella term under which all the different aspects of culture (politics, religion, ethnicity, art and ritual, etc.) could be situated in an interwoven tapestry (Cf. Rosman & Rubel 1981). The material identity of ancient Israel goes hand in hand with the archaeological search for early Israel (Cf. Dever 2003). Archaeology is in a sense not a separate identity category and can be used in all of the different approaches as a source for study.

- This said, Crüsemann and especially Sternberg have showed us that taking the biblical text as source seriously also means coming to conclusions that defy categorization and which undermine modern and post-modern theories. The Bible has an ambiguous side to it that does not "fit" nicely into what we would expect. It is this revolutionary and often surprising character of the biblical text that will guide our reading of Nahum and the OCN.

- Religious identity seems to be one of the strongest aspects in the construction of ancient Israelite identity. This can be expected, for the primary source (Old Testament) is religious literature which describes the history and religion of a nation that came to be known as "Israel" in terms of their relationship to a deity, Yahweh, and who became known as "His people." But religious identity in the Old Testament is not only about piety and cult; it is intertwined with politics and economics, ethnicity and power, making it a very important aspect to study with regards to ideology.

- We saw the importance of Yahweh's identity mirroring Israel's identity (or vice versa). In the OCN this aspect will be dealt with continually, as the identity of Yahweh in whose name the oracles (of especially judgment) are made is crucial. The emergence of political groups such as the Yahweh-Alone Movement in the 8th century,[72] as well as the Deutero-Isaiah group in the exilic/post-exilic times, will have to be taken into account.

- The focus on national/political identity brings the influence of modern concepts and theories of nation formation most clearly to the fore. Especially the question of nationalism shows how recent the term "nation" is. It becomes clear that to study Israel as an ancient "nation" a lot of clarification first needs to be done. If we take Knauf and Crüsemann seriously, we should not study Israel in terms of the modern conception of nation (as it came to be understood since the French and American revolutions), but rather study Israel in terms of a multi-layered conception of being a community (fatherhouse, clan, tribe, etc.).

- It is clear that the ideological motivations in describing Israel's national (historical) identity can be very influential indeed. One just has to think of the German view on nationalism-socialism, the European ideas of progress and evolution, the Afrikaner's identification with Israel and in fact any stereotypical idolatry (to use Sternberg's

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[72] I argue later on in Chapter 4, Section 4.2 that this movement played an important role in the socio-political situation in the time of Manasseh, and therefore is crucial for understanding social identity construction in Nahum. This movement has its roots, however, in the 8th century already, as can be seen from the type of theology in the Book of Hosea.

criticism), and how it directly and indirectly influences what is "discovered" in the biblical text.

- It is also very important to understand the fact that nationalism(s) are not givens but have the quality of being invented, and that imagination is part and parcel of the process, as Ernest Gellner (quoted in Sollors 1996:57) memorably argued: "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it *invents* nations where they do not exist."

- The same tendency of "invention" can be seen in ethnicity: "Ethnic groups are typically imagined as if they were natural, real, eternal, stable, and static units … ethnicity is not so much an ancient deep-seated force surviving from the historical past, but rather the modern and modernizing feature of a contrasting strategy that may be shared far beyond the boundaries within which it is claimed" (Sollors 1996:58-59).

- We have seen that modern sociological and anthropological theories are needed to describe what is seen as ancient Israelite ethnicity. The underlying motivation of both the study of ethnicity and national identity is to be able to say something (ethically) about ethnocentrism and nationalism, two terms (with all their derivatives) that have not only become problematic in the last few centuries, but part of a burning current global question.

- A contribution like Sternberg's reminds us that it is not always so straightforward to find an argument for or against nationalism and ethnocentrism in the Bible, as the Bible contains an unconventional, revolutionary and ideopoetic way of (not) speaking about these (imagined) realities. He leaves us with the (uneasy) question: if the Bible has some sort of ethnocentric slant to it, what is so bad about it? His work opens up the debate and broadens our search for ancient Israelite identity in that it forces us back to the biblical text again and again as final categories and answers will always allude us.

- Sparks's work is probably the most specific and detailed (introductory) study about Israelite identity that has been published up to date. This is not strange for the question about identity (in its modern scientific conception) is part of a recent upsurge of interest in this human reality. His combination of religious, political and ethnic identity, his (well-founded) focus on the context of Israel, his (responsible) social scientific eclecticism and his close reading of a good sample of texts from early Israel to exilic Israel is important and serves as a basis for this research.

The reason that ancient Israel is studied from the above-mentioned perspectives is because they are important to us, looking from our present-day context. We want to see and describe biblical Israel in terms of ethnocentrism, nationalism, racism, exclusivism or universalism, as these are concepts that are crucial for interpreting our modern or post-modern globalized world. Even though I agree that thinking about ancient Israel in these categories is important, I want to suggest that they do not represent the most fruitful ways of studying the identity of ancient Israel. I propose that studying ancient Israel and the OCN in terms of *social identity construction* could make a valuable contribution in the field of Old Testament theological-ethical studies relating to inter-group relationships.

4. Social Identity and ancient Israel

One could ask why I want to introduce another social scientific theory into the equation? Why would social psychology be a better way of studying identity than anthropology or sociology? What makes social identity different from, say, ethnic identity? A few responses to these questions are stated below.

(1) The concept of "social identity" invites a more integrative approach to identity. Religious, political, economic, ethnic and material identity can be incorporated into the research without being overtly eclectic. In this way the complexity of multiple identities can be incorporated.

(2) Social identity theory and self-categorization theory provide us with instruments that are directly relevant to the aim of the study, namely to describe the construction of social identity in ancient Israel in terms of inter-group conflict and relationships. This makes what is said about Israel also applicable to other types of groups (not just nations). This is so because many groups, by using the Old Testament, construct their identities analogically to that of ancient Israel.

(3) Social identity theory was designed as a "universal" theory. This makes it (at least theoretically) possible to "apply" to an ancient society like Israel. If we take the criticism of it (see below) seriously and also incorporate the historical and contextual factors that make ancient Israel's social identity construction unique, it has even greater value.

(4) Other theories are good for describing the reality of identity in terms of ethnicity or religion as it is found in the sources, but lack the instruments to describe the *processes* and *dynamics* underlying the construction of identity. This is the interest of this study and it makes a theological-ethical focus and the combination of identity and ethics possible.

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Using a fresh approach to ancient Israel's identity as constructed in the OCN fills an important gap in biblical identity studies. The combination of social identity construction, theological-ethical aims and a multidimensional interpretative approach coupled with an ideological critical sensitivity, promises meaningful results for the Old Testament discipline as well as for the ethical reflection on inter-human conflict. But what is social identity all about? A general methodological overview was provided in Chapter 2. Now the background of the theories will be elaborated upon and working premises will be formulated.

4.1 What is social identity?

Social identity focuses on those aspects of the self-concept that are derived from belonging to social groups and categories, and it is used in the social psychology of inter-group relations and group processes (Abrams 2001:14306; Hogg 1995:555-556). It also focuses on stereotypical group behaviour[73] (Hogg 1995:556). Furthermore, it connects processes of categorization with the social structure of society and focuses on the cognitive processes that underlies stereotyping, prejudice and the oppression of groups (Abrams 2001:14306).

One of the basic paradigms of social identity is Tajfel's "minimal group paradigm", which shows that minimal group membership[74] is sufficient for group members to act in a preferential way towards their own group and in a discriminating way towards those in the other group (Abrams 2001:14306; Hogg 1995:557). A further important implication of this experiment is that the in-group bias "does not necessarily have its roots in objective or realistic intergroup conflict or in personality differences or interpersonal dependency" (Abrams 2001:14306). Some scholars call this process "mystification" (Hardin 2001:7167). Social identity works with the concept of categories and the most common categories of social identity are of a racial, gender, religious, national, communal and ethnic nature (Hardin 2001:7167).

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[73] Typical group behaviour in social identity is: "ethnocentrism, ingroup favouritism, intergroup differentiation, conformity to ingroup norms, ingroup attraction, and perception of self, out groupers and fellow in groupers in terms of relevant group stereotypes" (Hogg 1995:556).
[74] A typical example of such a minimal group would be to randomly allocate people to categories that have minimal meaning (e.g. Group A and Group B). The participants do not know the other group members or why they are in the same category. Just belonging to a group is already enough for group members to preferentially allocate points or money to members of their group (Abrams 2001:14306).

What makes social identity so appealing for "application" to an ancient society such as Israel is that social identity has a stronger influence in collectivistic and sociocentric cultures in comparison to individualistic cultures (Páez *et al.* 1998:228). Ancient Israel can indeed be described as a collectivistic culture and henceforth we can expect a stronger social identity construction and out-group discrimination (Worchel *et al.* 2000:25). As already mentioned in Chapter 2, the two social identity theories that interest us most are social identity theory and self-categorization theory.

4.2 Social identity theory

Social identity theory (SIT) "aims to explain the uniformity and coherence of group and intergroup behavior as mediated by social identity" (Abrams 2001:14306). It builds on the idea of social identity by homogenizing it, "assuming that all identities operate by the same basic principles" (Deaux 2000:2) and therefore has a universalizing tendency. This universalizing tendency has been rightly criticized and one should take into account the specific group's unique qualities, idiosyncratic meanings (Deaux 2000:3), their concreteness in terms of how they speak about themselves, as well as their historical context (Billig 1996:347, 349).

One of the underlying principles of SIT is the process of categorization (see below) and the other is that people join or belong to a group because of certain principles of belief, and act according to those principles. But what motivates people to act on group membership? Older theories state that people desire a satisfactory self-image and positive self-esteem. Newer research, however, indicates that people are "motivated to reduce uncertainty, and that clarification of group membership, adherence to group norms, and associating positive group features with the self are ways to achieve this" (Abrams 2001:14307-14308).

It is also important to know that social identities are not only descriptive and prescriptive, but also evaluative (Hogg 1996:67). This makes the study of identity and how it links to ethics of crucial importance. This aspect will be returned to in Chapter 7, when the convergence of identity and ethics is put on the table. But first a few words need to be said about one of the offspring theories of SIT, namely, self-categorization theory (SCT).

4.3 Self-categorization theory

The social influence process in groups is described in terms of the categorization process, of which the basic premise or norm is "that it balances a minimization of differences among in group members with a maximization of differences between in- and out group" (Hogg 1995:557, 559). SCT, developed by Turner, extends and develops SIT by describing the way social identity regulates behaviour. In inter-group contexts people extracts from memory or from the available fuzzy cognitive representations the defining features of the in- and out-group called "prototypes" (Hogg 1995:559; Cf. also Oakes, Haslam & Turner 1998:75). Prototypes are the features that *define* but also *describe* appropriate behaviour. Prototypes lead to the categorization of the "other" but also of the "self" (Hogg 1995:559). The following summary by Hogg (1995:559) is very useful:

> When we categorize others as ingroup or outgroup members we accentuate their similarity to the relevant prototype – thus perceiving them stereotypically and ethnocentrically. When we categorize ourselves, we define, perceive, and evaluate ourselves in terms of our ingroup prototype, and behave in accordance with that prototype. Self-categorization produces ingroup normative behavior and self-stereotyping, and is thus the process underlying group behavior.

4.4 The importance of textual identities

Social psychology has not gone without its critics and one criticism that can be very fruitfully incorporated into this study is the idea of "textual identities." In what they call "a turn to textuality" Rogers *et al.* (1995:55) state that their way of thinking is "informed by non-positivistic approaches – such as hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, and phenomenology and re-formed into critical social constructionism."

The phrase "textual identities" is then coined by building on the work of Harré (1986), who proposed a theory of identity which was influenced by Vygotsky and Wittgenstein. The self (who is in possession of a theory) crafts out his/her understanding of identity "from out of the socially available pool of textual resources that are available in a given culture in a given time" (Rogers *et al.* 1995:60). The idea of textual identity as part of our social identity helps

to define what happens when a group like ancient Israel, or the Yahweh-Alone Movement, write (texts) and so "talk" about themselves:

> The way in which we talk about ourselves and who we are … is crucial in constructing the relationship we make to our circumstances. Indeed our circumstances only become determinate as what they are through the construction of our relationship to them … In this sense, the construction of an identity … is simultaneously the construction of … one's world (Rogers *et al.* 1995:62).

On the grounds of the above, along with other incorporated research, we can formulate a few working premises which can be useful in comparing the construction of identity in modern times with the way social identity functioned in ancient Israel and can be seen through their literature.

4.5 Working premises on social identity

Premise 1: All people have a social identity and belong to groups with basic group principles and beliefs.
Group beliefs are of vital importance as "foundation for group formation, and later, as a bond for group existence" (Bar-Tal 1998:94). Thus group beliefs ("convictions that group members (a) are aware that they share, and (b) consider as defining their 'groupness'" – Bar-Tal 1998:94) are an important part of social identity (cf. also Hogg 1996:67). Collectivistic cultures have a stronger social identity than individualistic cultures.

Premise 2: People in a group are motivated to act stereotypically in accordance with their group principles.
This is because it boosts a satisfactory self-image and self-esteem, but more importantly because it reduces existential uncertainty in troubling times. This process is ethnocentric/in-group favouring, and it becomes stronger when conditions arise when groups have to differentiate themselves (e.g. in times of war or crisis) (Hogg 1995:557).

Premise 3: In a group people will always minimize the differences between in-group members and maximize differences with members of the out-group.
This is done by categorizing the "other" and the "self" in terms of prototypes, which define, describe and evaluate the self and the other. Alongside this is the premise that dominated groups categorize the out-group in terms of their typical attributes. In threatening situations the out-group is perceived as

more homogenous (Páez *et al.* 1998:228) and therefore more stereotypical. When the threat to ingroup identity is internal as well as external, a group is very likely to discriminate against the outgroup (Worchel *et al.* 2000:29). In the self-categorization process self-perception is depersonalised. This means that there is the "perception of increased identity between the self and ingroup members and decreased difference from outgroup members" (Oakes, Haslam & Turner 1998:77). When the outgroup is deeply hated and is stereotyped in a way that disrespects their human dignity, this process can produce dehumanisation (Hogg 1995:560).

Premise 4: The process of self-categorization is context dependent in what can be called the meta-contrast principle.

The way a group self-categorizes may differ depending on the situation and the frame of reference (Oakes, Haslam & Turner 1998:77-78). Therefore: "People who are categorized and perceived as different in one context … can be recategorized and perceived as similar in another context" (Oakes, Haslam & Turner 1998:79). Prototypes in groups are therefore relative, as the description of a prototype "will vary along with variation in the intergroup context in which judgments are made". This makes fixed prototypes (images which represent groups as constants across changing contexts) uncertain and leaves room only for "judgments of prototypicality" (Oakes, Haslam & Turner 1998:80). Groups also do not just react to one out-group but usually have to construct their identity in terms of multiple out-groups: responses to an out-group are "affected not only by the relationship between the ingroup and this outgroup, but also by the relationship between the ingroup and other outgroups, and by the relationship between the outgroups" (Worchel *et al.* 2000:30).

Premise 5: Groups create their social identity by constructing textual identities.

A group's social world is constructed by using texts from the socially available pool in the specific culture at a given time by describing the hermeneutic and symbolic relationship between the group and their circumstances.

After this quite theoretical overview of social identity and some of its most important premises, we can conclude the chapter and move on to the interpretation of Nahum as OCN.

6. Summary

Chapter 3 brought the issue of research into the identity of ancient Israel into focus. From the outset it was clear that identity is a multi-layered concept. It is especially important to acknowledge this for ancient Israel, for the only material we have through which to discover their identity is the ancient biblical texts.

- In the introduction we were reminded that the study is not about describing identity *per se*, but about uncovering the underlying dynamic of how social identity is constructed through texts. This was shown to be a very important question, for my own South African context and history, as well as the global rise of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, rely on some sort of identification with being the "chosen people of God."

- The terms "identity" and "ancient Israel" were explicated and shown to be both quite difficult and fluid terms that escape precise definition. Identity was described by moving from a general internal and individualistic idea of "sameness" to a more communal view of identity. The study's focus on social identity was shown to be different from other social science endeavours (Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology) in that it mainly investigates how groups interact with each other. This approach was found most suited for finding the underlying dynamic of identity construction. In the same way "ancient Israel" was shown to be a multi-layered concept with at least five different connotations. It was decided to keep a more open-ended definition of ancient Israel as symbol of the way social identity can also change in different historical contexts.

- The overview of the research history on identity and Israel proved to be quite interesting. The research overview was divided into four categories (religious, national/political, ethnic and Hebrewgram) and contained two important excursions, namely on the Hebrew concept for nation and on the question pertaining to whether there was nationalism in ancient Israel. Each category was shown to have its own merits, but in the light of the special enquiry of this study it was shown to be insubstantial. It seems that by focusing on one aspect of identity, the other intermeshed aspects of identity are easily forgotten. What is needed is an approach to identity that incorporates other aspects of identity, and that unlocks the processes that lead to the construction of identity.

- It was shown how social identity is a more suitable term to use. The concept stems from Social Psychology and specifically social identity theory and self-categorization theory. SIT and SCT were discussed in detail and the implications for studying social identity in Nahum were formulated in the form of five working premises. It was indicated that,

because ancient Israel was a collectivistic culture, social identity would be very strong. Intuitively it could also be said that the type of literature that we find in Nahum, an OCN text, will slot in well with the basic premises of social identity. The strong focus on the enemy as out-group and the implied salvation for the in-group in times of crisis opens up interesting possibilities for social identity. Coupled with that is the fascinating function of the identity of the in-group's Deity, Yahweh, as well as the role of the fierce language of judgment and punishment.

Chapter 4: Nahum: Background

1. Introduction

> The fall of Nineveh was a watershed in ancient history. It is depicted spectacularly by the prophet Nahum. This poetry, with its eyewitness immediacy, its rhythmic energy and alliterative excitement, the colour and savagery of its battle scenes, the great heave of sarcasm, relief and exultation at the end, is magnificently equal to the event – the fall of the most powerful and ruthless empire the world had yet known. … Nahum's hatred of Assyria, his lust for revenge, his gloating delight at Nineveh's fall, are undisguised (Aberbach 1993:55-56).

This quote from Aberbach (1993) captures something of the essence of how the short book of Nahum is understood. Nahum is usually lauded as brilliant poetry, but with a theology of hateful revenge that makes one uncomfortable. There is no clear reference to, let alone criticism of, the Judean kings or the cult as in most of the other prophets. It seems at first glance that Nahum was more of a patriot than a prophet (Rudolph 1975:189). Nahum has been described as a representative of the old, shallow prophetism or as a precursor of the false nationalistic prophets whom Jeremiah actively opposed (Van der Woude 1977:108).

The bulk of the short book (especially Na 2-3) contains mostly secular sounding[75] judgmental speech on Nineveh, Assyria and its king. Some have called it a theological disgrace (see Spronk 1997:14 for an overview), an idea that will be challenged. Spronk (1997:14-15), for example, notes the fact that Nahum has clear intertextual relations with other canonical prophets (especially the OCN in Isaiah and Jeremiah) and that "[m]any sayings can be regarded as reinterpretations of words of Isaiah" and because of the correctness of the prophecy "was accepted as a perfect example of true prophecy" (in the sense of Dt 18:21-22).

About the force of the words used to condemn Nineveh, one could reiterate with Mihelic (1948:197-198) that sometimes one should be allowed to criticize the evil of another individual or nation[76]. The same direction is taken by Wessels (1998), who calls Nahum an

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[75] Seybold (1989) called what he sees as the original poems of Nahum (e.g. Nah 3:8-19; 3:2f; 2:2,4-13 and 3:1,4) "Profane Prophetie" in the sense of soldier songs.

[76]Cf. Mihelic (1948:197-198): "Had we in our day waited with criticism of the Nazi crimes, until England and America and other members of the United Nations had purged themselves of their own sins, the

"uneasy expression of Yahweh's power" and looks towards concepts like poetic justice and theological overstatement, akin to the freedom literature of oppressed people, to account for the radical message of liberation in Nahum.

More recently Gordon (2002:21-22) noted how the horrific events of September 11, 2001, changed the view of modern readers that Nahum has "little food for the soul" and that "the world today bears an unfamiliar similarity to the ancient world of the Judeans who had been afflicted for decades by the wicked Assyrian war machine." In the same vein Wendland (1998:155-156) argues that Nahum is not just "all bane", but exhorts and encourages the people of God, especially those who are "living during a period of great external threat to their way of life and indeed their very existence."

Finally, the hymn with which the book starts (Nah 1:2-8), even though it might be a later addition (see Chapter 6), provides the message of Nahum with theological depth. Gowan (1998:85) goes so far as to say that Nahum's value for the study of the prophetic tradition "is to be found almost entirely in the materials of the first chapter. The message of judgment and destruction is set in the realm of the Creator God who is also a fair Judge, and who in theophany will come to the aid of those who trust in him, and per implication those who suffer the oppression or evil (רָעָה Na 1:11; 3:19) of another". It remains to be seen how this theophanic Yahweh-hymn functions in the construction of ancient Israelite's social identity, especially in the exilic/post-exilic time (Chapter 6).

With Nahum we are in the "international" realm of nations and religions and the inherent tension and struggle of being part of an empire is showcased dramatically. Nahum is firstly situated in the category of OCN, after which an overview on Nahum research will be provided, followed by a description of the unity, structure and dating of the Book. The chapter ends with a historical description of the Assyrian crisis in the second half of the seventh century BCE. In the next chapter we will start the process of describing how social identity is constructed in the lexical, syntactical and grammatical configuration that has come to be known as סֵפֶר חֲזוֹן נַחוּם "The book of the vision of Nahum" (Nah 1:1b).

Nazi brutality would still be rampant today. It is my opinion that if the critics of Nahum had lived in the last decade and witnessed the brutality that had been visited upon the helpless people in the European and Asiatic concentration camps, that they would rather have joined their voices with Nahum in his joy over the fall of the 'bloody city,' than have condemned his righteous indignation in the comfort and the security of their ivory towers."

2. Nahum as Oracle Concerning the Nations (OCN)

Nahum is not easy to categorize as prophetic book. It is usually seen as part of the OCN material in the Bible (see table below in Section 2.1). In this study Nahum is read as an OCN text, and as an exceptionally good example of this. Before describing Nahum as OCN, a short overview of OCN research will be given.

2.1 Overview of OCN research

There are no better texts to examine with a view of studying inter-group conflict than the so-called Oracles Against the Nations (OCN). As already indicated in Chapter 1, one should rather speak of the Oracles *Concerning* the Nations (OCN) as oracles of God to Israel's foreign neighbours or oppressors also contain positive (centrist universalist[77]) examples (e.g. Is 18:7; 19:19-25). One could say that the OCN are those texts that:

> are addressed from God, through a prophet, to specific concrete non-Israelite nations and which say something about their present or future fate.

They are usually found in collections, but also as individual texts in all the prophetic books except Hosea (see the table below). The conceptualisation of these oracles is very difficult and has been discussed at length in various dissertations (Höffken 1977:387-388, note 3; Fechter 1992:2-3; Huwyler 1997:1-2) with many definitions forthcoming. One could ask with Höffken (1977:388) whether "oracle" is indeed the right term for these texts as the term "oracle"[78] wrongly implies a specific genre and origin. He suggests "nation sayings/ prophecies" ("Völkersprüche" Höffken 1977:388; cf. Huwyler 1997:2, who accepts this definition).

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[77] In his doctoral dissertation Schmidt (1966) calls the more positive allusions to the nations in the Old Testament (especially in the psalms, e.g. Pss 7, 18, 47, 62, 96:7-9 etc) Israel's "anonymous universalism" (Schmidt 1966:5), which can be divided into three categories: (1) Congregation of the nations around Yahweh as central cosmic-universal Lord and warrior ("Völkerversammlung" Schmidt 1966:8ff.); (2) The nations honouring the King in Zion ("Völkerhuldigung" Schmidt 1966:22ff.); (3) The pilgrimage of the nations ("Völkerwahlfahrt" Schmidt 1966:27ff.).

[78] Fechter 1992:2 sees "oracle" as originally connected to the cultic prophets who got the oracles as answers to their enquiry about the Divine, a characteristic he does not find in all the nation prophecies (cf. also Jones 1996:56).

One should perhaps then speak about the "Prophecies Concerning the Nations", although I would like to retain the term "oracle" as the rhetoric of the texts wants us to read them as oracles from Yahweh. The fact is that this term identifies texts within *different* genres[79], but with a common content. Jones (1996:56-57) makes the point succinctly:

> In the OAN collections we find laments, taunt songs and other genres that do not purport to be transmitted words of the deity [i.e. they are not all oracles]. In short, the formal diversity of the OAN makes it difficult to speak of the OAN *genre* except in a general and inexact way. Though the OAN lack generic uniformity, they do deal with the same subject matter. The texts treat the topic of the foreign nations and, generally speaking, seek to show how the nations fit into Yahweh's plan.

It is interesting to note that the OCN are not so popular in Old Testament research, although they comprise a large part of the prophetical corpus. A diagnostic example for this is the fact that Westermann (1964:147-148) gives less than a page of discussion to the OCN in his standard work. Add to this the interesting point (made by both Fechter 1992:1 and Huwyler 1997:5) that the OCN are not to be found at all in the lectionaries of the German Lutheran Church - probably because of their nationalist stance, their focus on revenge, as well as the difficulty in understanding the references in the texts to unknown places and by-gone happenings. Jones (1996:54) adds:

> The lack of interest in the OAN results in part from the contextual isolation and obscure theological/thematic function of the collections in the prophetic books, in part from their vitriolic tone and nationalistic spirit and in part from the fact that much of the material in the OAN collections is considered to be 'inauthentic,' the work of later authors.

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[79] This is said against Christensen (1975a:1), who describes these texts as oracular poems which are to be understood as having been written outside of the regular prophetic tradition. The fact that he accepts their oral and poetic nature is problematic (cf. also the critique of Christensen by Fechter 1992:3).

One could summarize the occurrence of the OCN in the prophetic books in the following table:

Occurrence of the OCN in the prophetic books of the Old Testament	
Found in collections	Major Prophets Isaiah 13-23 (excluding 22) Jeremiah 46-51 Ezekiel 25-32 Minor Prophets Amos 1:3-2:3
A whole book	Obadiah Nahum (some exclude Nah 1:2-8)
Isolated texts	Major Prophets Isaiah 7:3-9; 10-16; 8:1-4; 10:5-34; 34; 37:22-29; 47 Jeremiah 25:15-38; 27:1-11 Ezekiel 35; 38-39 Minor Prophets Joel 4:1-17 Jonah 3:1-5[80] Micah 4:11-13; 5:5-6; 7:12-13, 14-17 Habakkuk 2 Zephaniah 2:4-15 Haggai 2:21-22 Zechariah 9:1-8 Malachi 1:2-5
As stated above, Hosea seems to be the only prophetic book that *does not* contain OCN material	

Research on the OCN in the past focused primarily on the origin and purpose/intention and possible *Sitz im Leben* of the oracles. Hayes (1968) gives an excellent overview of the usage of the oracles against foreign Nations. He mentions the connection of the OCN with: (a) war curses and speeches made against an enemy before a battle (Hayes 1968:81-82); (b) the importance of omen-producing symbolic or divinatory acts (Hayes 1968:83); (c) the possible situatedness in cultic services of lamentation and national psalms of lament as well as possibly Israelite ritual (Hayes 1968:87-89); and (d) royal court procedure, with the presence of curses that remind us of international treaties (Hayes 1968:91-92).

Christensen (1975a) gives a thorough discussion of the "evolution" or transformation of the OCN from war oracles to apocalyptic literature. He sees two transformations in the holy war traditions of ancient Israel as the root of the OCN:

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[80] Some would say that, although Jonah has a foreign nation (Assyria) as topic, the theological message is on a different niveau than the OCN, being a story *about* a prophet, and not so much a prophecy in the traditional sense of the term (Cf. Huwyler 1997:2). Still, I think Jonah plays an important role as intertext to the OCN in the Book of the Twelve, and indeed gives an (narrative/fictional?) example of how an OCN could have been addressed to a foreign nation.

In the 10th-8th centuries the war oracle as a tactical element in military strategy was transformed into the literary mode of a prophetic judgment speech against both military foes and the nation of Israel, together with her political allies. In the opening decades of the 6th century the war oracle was transformed from the world of international politics to the trans-historical realms of early apocalyptic (Christensen 1975a:283).

The form, structure and generic characteristics are not easy to describe, as they do not form patterns of general similarity, or conform to an essential form (Jones 1996:56). At most one can try and describe the language used in the OCN, as Schmerl (1939) has tried. He searches for the OCN in the category of manticism and the apotropaic arts (Schmerl 1939:5-10) and ties the form of these "soothsayings" to the so-called old-Arabic *Kahin* sayings in which we find, for example, *parallelismus membrorum*, rhyme of all sorts and alliteration (Schmerl 1939:15-17).

He describes the language that is used as short sayings that could be repeated over and over, an abrupt style that uses nominal sentences, interjections, imperatives and rhetorical questions (Schmerl 1939:25-34). Concrete names are avoided and mysterious, secret names are used. The attackers are usually not mentioned pertinently (Schmerl 1938:37). All these characteristics could be described as having a "rhetorical complexity" (Jones 1996:62). This would include a complex composition that displays numerous changes of speaker, addressee and perspective (Jones 1996:62).

Geyer (1986) tries to systematize the form of the OCN by dividing the bigger collections in the prophets into mythologically formed oracles (Is 13-23, Jer 46-51 and Ezk 26-32) and culturally formed oracles (Am 1-2 and Ezk 25). By using form-criticism he describes the five major elements that are usually present in the (majority of) mythologically inclined texts namely, (1) the *superscription*; (2) the *destruction* passage; (3) the *lamentation* passage; (4) the *flight* passage; and (5) the *Yahweh* passage (Geyer 1986:132-133, 143-144).

The aim or intention of the OCN cannot (like the genre and form) be shown to point towards any single intention. As Jones (1996:58) says:

Some texts seem to be intended as threats against other nations; some seem to have been intended as veiled assurances of salvation for Israel and/or Judah. Some texts seem to be

aimed at providing guidance for political policy; some seem to function as theodicy. Often a text can be construed to have multiple intentions – threat, assurance, and political advice intermingled.

The main point is that the OCN are not first and foremost salvation oracles for Israel and Judah, an idea that held sway for a long time and that was even incorporated by Westermann (1964:147-148) in his form-critical description of the OCN. Its themes point rather to God's sovereignty over human pride and arrogance, the unreliability of the nations as sources for help and hope, and the prophets' very pertinent political role (Jones 1996:59-60). Christensen (1975a:282) comments in this regard:

> The dominant intent of the OAN tradition in the hands of Isaiah, Nahum, Zephaniah and Jeremiah from *ca.* 720-609 appears to be political … the major thrust of the formal OAN tradition of the period is aimed at shaping foreign policy in Judah with respect to the nations concerned.

2.2 The Book of Nahum as OCN

Nahum is a difficult book to categorize and to place on the spectrum of prophetic phenomena. It contains different types of material (e.g. hymnic and psalm-like material, theophany, woe-oracle, etc.). Even so Blenkinsopp (1996:123-124 – emphasis JPB) sees Nahum as "in essence, an *oracle against a foreign nation*, which would imply that its author was a central intermediary and that he presents us with cultic and nationalistic prophecy[81] in a fairly pure state … [Nahum being] the spokesman for the temple cult and its personnel in the service of nationalistic revival after a century of subjugation to Assyria." Whether Nahum really was such a nationalistic prophet as most commentators tend to think and whether he could be closely connected with the (post-exilic) cult as scholars, like Schulz[82] (1973:131), concludes, remain possibilities that will be explored below. That the Book of Nahum can be described as an OCN needs a bit more justification, though.

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[81] Here Blenkinsopp builds on the older ideas that see the OCN as among the oldest kind of prophetical discourse, which originated and functioned "within the official cult and as a function of national policy" (1996:123).

[82] Though he does not necessarily think the theophanic hymn, the words of salvation, battle and taunt songs belong to a specific liturgical occasion (e.g. Nikanorday, as Haupt insisted in 1907; or the New Year's festival of 612 BCE – Humbert's thesis in 1926) (Schulz 1973:111-112).

Generally speaking, it seems quite clear that Nahum is an OCN for: (1) The book is called a מַשָּׂא ("oracle" or "burden" v.1a), a technical term which usually points to OCN material[83] or at least to the topic of the nations (see below); (2) Nahum has as its stated theme the fate of a foreign nation (Assyria as symbolized by Nineveh); and (3) Nahum contains directly judgmental discourse against a foreign nation (especially Na 2:3-3:19).

The fact that the book consists of different literary types does not exclude it from being an OCN, as we have seen in the discussion of the OCN "genre" above (Section 2.1). On a form-critical level one could also call Nahum an OCN. The five elements that Geyer (1983:132-133) proposed as constituents of a mythologically inclined OCN text[84] can all be identified in Nahum. In addition, the rhetorical complexity of Nahum makes it a likely candidate for OCN categorization, as Schmerl (1938:37) and Jones (1996:62) have already indicated (Section 2.1 above).

The combination of the above reasons is enough to place Nahum in this (quite ambiguous) category of OCN. If one views parts of Nahum (e.g. Na 1:2-8, the Yahweh-hymn) as being later redactional additions, then the argument becomes more difficult. I want to propose (and this applies to the question of historical context) that, even if later materials were added, the fact that they were added under the heading of a מַשָּׂא makes them part of the OCN. They were utilized in a transformative way and they contribute to the construction of social identity in ever-changing circumstances.

3. Nahum research: Overview and problems

This study's focus on the construction of social identity in Nahum requires only a very short overview of the critical scholarship on Nahum. Studies on Nahum have mostly focused on the problems of methodology (synchrony or diachrony). These questions usually refer to the unity of the book and the historical situation. This includes questions such as the textual sources and *Sitz im Leben*. With the recent interest in the unity of the Book of the Twelve, studies on Nahum have also started to include the important questions as to the book's canonical

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[83] Jones (1996:63) sees the relationship between מַשָּׂא texts and OCN as complex, for many are OCN texts but some (e.g. 2 Kgs 9:26a; Is 30:6b-7; Ezk 12:11a-16) are not.
[84] I.e. (1) the *superscription*; (2) the *destruction* passage; (3) the *lamentation* passage; (4) the *flight* passage; and (5) the *Yahweh* passage (Geyer 1986:132-133, 143-144).

placement and its theological importance when viewed together with a book like Jonah. This "canonical" interplay will form part of the discussion in Chapter 6.

In his recent *Currents in Research* article, Michael Weigl (2001) gives a very good review of exegetical literature on the book of Nahum that focuses on work produced in the past decade.[85] Seybold (1989:11-18) gives a good overview of the European (mostly German) research on Nahum, while Spronk (1995:159-168) gives a compact description of the main problems concerning the question of synchrony versus diachrony in the studies on Nahum, which also incorporates Anglo-Saxon research.

Before venturing into the interpretation of Nahum as seen through the lense of social identity theory, a few crucial decisions have to be made and substantiated. In the next two sections we will attend to the unity, structure and dating of Nahum. In the last section the historical situation in which the pre-exilic part of Nahum's prophecy was uttered (or written) is indicated.

3.1 The unity and structure of the book

With regards to the unity of Nahum, one could agree with Weigl (2001:89) that the difficulties surrounding the structure and composition of the book is linked to a conflict of methodologies and that "the scholarly community is divided into two parties, with the front lines following the divergence of a synchronic or diachronic reading of the text." Spronk (1995:159-160) traces this split in the scholarly community to the discovery of traces of an acrostic in Nahum 1 by the Rev G Frohnmeyer, reported in Delitzsch's 1867 commentary on the psalms. The question is raised whether the book is a unity in itself. Weigl (2001:89) adds to this the role of the difficult passage 1:9-2:3, which is (according to the historical-critical scholars) "supposed to create a link between the extant prophetic oracles and the (secondary) hymn."

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[85] Fundamental issues such as the historical setting, the importance of Na 1:2-8; 1:9-2:3, Nahum's style and textual tradition, synchrony or diachrony, the unity of the book, Nahum and the book of the Twelve, the theology of Nahum as well as the history of interpretation are discussed and recent studies on the book of Nahum are reviewed (Weigl 2001).

Since then the "field" has divided into the literary critics who support a complex redactional process and those who hold the opposite view. Among the diachrony/disunity "supporters" we find Seybold (1991), De Vries (1966), Jeremias (1987), Renaud (1987), Hieke (1993) and Nogalski (1993). Among the synchronic/unity scholars we could mention the names of Van der Woude (1977), Maier (1950), Keller (1972), Vuilleumier (1971), Longman (1985), Rudolph (1975), Becking (1978) and Armerding (1985). (See the full bibliographical details in Spronk 1995:160.)

It is generally accepted that these two "camps" seem to be mutually incompatible (Weigl 2001:89), although there are scholars such as Sweeney (1992), Becking (1993, 1995, 1996) and Spronk (1995, 1997) who attempt to bridge this gap. Weigl (2001:89) sees the end to the *impasse* in the reconciliation between the synchronic and diachronic methodologies (cf. also Spronk 1995:167-168, who comes to the same conclusion).

As already indicated in Chapter 2, this study aims to read biblical texts multidimensionally, trying to incorporate synchrony and diachrony in a meaningful way. In a sense one cannot "skip" the synchronic reading of the text, for that is what one is presented with in the MT. At the same time, to disregard the historical-critical research of the last century is also not wise. What I hope to achieve is to view the book of Nahum as a well-structured whole, which has been formed by several redactional phases.

This of course has huge implications for research. When one speaks of "identity" in Nahum, is one speaking of the identity of the prophet Nahum, or of the editor(s) of the Book of Nahum? If one agrees, as I do, that the historical (and therefore ideological) context of the literature plays an important role in interpretation, should we look at the influence of the society of pre-exilic or of exilic/post-exilic Israel?

As I will indicate below, the text of Nahum seems to have been written by an author (or by redactors) that had as object a seamless and beautifully structured whole. Even if the acrostic hymn at the beginning (Na 1:2-8) and a word of salvation to Judah (Na 2:1) were later additions to provide the book with a religious framework and theological depth, the fact is that now they are woven into the very fabric of the texture of the book. This is done with

repeating keywords like *Nineveh*, *mountain*, *earth*, *fire* and *eat* in all three chapters[86]. Apart from that, there are interlinking keywords between the chapters[87], chiastic structures, well-intentioned developments and deliberate metre and rhyme.

Spronk (1995 & 1997), in doing a structural analysis using the rules of the Kampen School[88] (Spronk 1995:168; 1997:3), comes to the conclusion that "the book of Nahum should be regarded as a well-structured unity with an intricate web of cross-references throughout the book, emphasizing the divine oracles" (Spronk 1997:5). He sees a remarkable structure of cantos, canticles, strophes and verses in the book, as well as an extensive chiastic structure between Chapters 2 and 3 (Spronk 1997:4-5).

It is worthwhile showing Spronk's (1997:4) remarkable attempt to demonstrate the unified structure of the book:

(sub)cantos		canticles	strophes	verses
I	1:1-11	3	3 + 3 + 3	17
IIA	1:12-2:3	2	3 + 3	12
IIB	2:4-8	2	2 + 2	8
IIC	2:9-14	2	3 + 3	12
IIIA	3:1-7	2	3 + 3	12
IIIB	3:8-11	2	2 + 2	7
IIIC	3:12-19	2	3 + 3	13

Spronk's contribution to the studies on Nahum is too important not to incorporate. This is at least true for his focus on the unity and the possible editorial layers[89]. He also integrates structure and content in a meaningful way, which makes it possible to incorporate the poetic (form) with the message (content) of the book.[90]

Although I do not structure the text exactly in the same way that Spronk does, I will be guided by his focus on the unity of the book, not changing difficult texts too easily, and not shifting verses to please diachronic tastes. The fact is that the book in its final canonical form is the one being interpreted today, and the one whose underlying theological-ethical processes of

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[86] Cf. נִינְוֵה *Nineveh* Na 1:1; 2:8; 3:7, הַר *mountain* Na 1:5; 2:1; 3:18, אֶרֶץ *earth* Na 1:5; 2:14; 3:13, אֵשׁ *fire* Na 1:6; 2:4; 3:13 and אכל *eat/* devour Nah 1:10; 2:14; 3:12 etc.

[87] E.g. בְּלִיַּעַל *Belial* Na 1:11; 2:1, אַדִּיר *mighty ones* Na 2:6; 3:18.

[88] According to Spronk (1997:3) the Kampen School takes "the colometry of the Masoretes as a starting point, [and] the text is divided into cantos, subcantos, canticles, strophes, and verses. A comprehensive survey of all possible literary devices used by the poet helps to mark and define these units and their relations to each other."

[89] He sees later glosses in Na 2:1; 3:16b, 17a, 19c.

[90] Cf. also Baumann's (2001:74) remarks in this regard.

identity construction guide modern-day believers and groups in their inter-human relationships. This does not mean, however, that the different levels of redaction – and therefore interpretation - will be negated. They will indeed form part of the process to indicate how the construction of social identity changed as new historical contexts and challenges had to be overcome.

My structuring of the final form of the book is partly based on Becking's (1995, 1996) views. Like Becking (1995:279) I also divide the book into 5 sections (A-E), but I depart from him by adding more subsections in the fifth part (E) and by moving verses 2:2-3 as part of section E.

Possible structure of Nahum:

A. 1:1   Superscription

B. 1:2-8   Theophanic Yahweh-hymn containing:

                 - Salvation for some [a]

                 - And doom for others [b]

C. 1:9-14   Ambiguous application and elaboration of B.

D. 2:1   Description of forthcoming salvation for Judah [a]

E. 2:2-3:19   Description of forthcoming doom for Assyria [b]

	2:2,2-11	First attack on the city
	2:12-14	Ironic judgement oracle
	3:1-7	*Hoi* oracle as ironic lament with second attack on the city
	3:8-12	Comparison with No-Amon and judgement announced
	3:13-19	Third attack on the city and final fall of Nineveh

This structure gives coherence to a book that has been torn apart by literary-critical scholars in the past. Although this literary-critical approach is in some cases plausible, I think that for the question of social identity, the unity and coherence of the book should take precedence over a disjointed structure. Even with this more unified and conceptually coherent organization of the text, the text still contains enough ambiguous rhetoric and ironical questions to puzzle the interpreter, and to problematize the message of this ancient voice of protest.

3.2 The dating of the Book of Nahum

The question of dating a biblical book remains a very difficult task because (as Becking 1995:294 points out) there are no generally accepted procedures for dating texts and there probably will never be definitive solutions. One should make some kind of decision though, and this has to be based on certain justifiable motivations.

There is some consensus among scholars for date of origin for the older parts (i.e. Na 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19) between 663 – 612 BCE (Weigl 2001:81) - 663 BCE[91] being the *terminus post quem* (the sacking of Thebes/No-Amon - Na 3:8) and 612 BCE the *terminus ante quem* (the destruction of Nineveh by the Babylonians). There is of course the usual plethora of different datings in-between 663-612 BCE.[92] Those that hold on to the redactional nature of the book place some "original" material in the pre-exilic times, but date the finalization of the book in the post-exilic times.[93] Then there are those who place Nahum liturgically round about 612 BCE or shortly after, seeing it as some kind of celebration of the fall of Assyria in a *vaticinium ex eventu*.[94]

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[91] Note Rudolph (1975:143), who dates the fall of Thebes at 667 following the timeline of Jepsens, but cf. Grayson (1992:746) for the more correct dating of ca. 663 BCE.

[92] **Keller** (1972:409) sees the time shortly after the destruction of Thebes (i.e. 664/3) when Ashurbanipal was still at the height of his power as the time when Nahum would have had the greatest impact. **Rudolph** (1975:143) proposes the first half of the 7th century and the reign of Manasseh, somewhere before the death of Asshurbanipal in 632. **Van der Woude** (1977:112) suggests the period round about 660 and 630 BCE. **Becking** (1995:294) opts for 640 BCE when Amon, Manasseh's son, was killed and Josiah was enthroned in his place by the *am haaretz*. **Blenkinsopp** (1996:122) dates the "original nucleus" to the early decades of Josiah's reign (i.e. ca. 639-622). **Spronk** (1997:1) sees Nahum as "written in Jerusalem, ca. 660 BCE, by a talented, faithful royal scribe."

[93] **Jeremias** (1970) holds the view that Nahum was constructed from words against Assyria (2:4-14; 3:12-19) and words against Israel (1:11,14; 2:2-3;3:1-5,8-11) – the words against Israel being reinterpreted to be words against Nineveh after the fall of Babylon in 538 and therefore actually written against the Babylonians (Jeremias 1970:18-19; cf. also Zenger *et al.* 1998:511). **Schulz** (1973:55) sees Nahum as literary post-exilic prophecy that uses pre-exilic oral traditions and combines, fixates and applies them as new speech possibilities in the post-exilic socio-political power relations. **Seybold** (1989:32) sees (1) the bulk of the original songs of Nahum (3:8-19a; 3:2-3; 2:2,4-13; 3:1,4a; 2:14;3:5-7) as delivered somewhere between 650-615 BCE; (2) 1:12-13; 2:1,3 in the exile (ca. 550 BCE) and (3) 1:11,14 & 1:2-10 post-exilic round about 400 BCE.

[94] **Schulz** (1973:11-112) mentions Haupt (1907), who saw Nahum as a liturgical collection of 4 poems for the Nikanorday; Sellins (1930), who saw Nahum as a festival poem of prophetical liturgy; Humbert (1926) and Horst (1964) regarded the book as a liturgy for the New Year's Festival of 612. Although Schulz (1973:131) sees Nahum as rooted in the cult, he does not opt for a liturgy, even though some parts of Nahum do have liturgical formulae (Schulz 1973:122). **Sweeney** (1992:375) sees no liturgy but a prophetic refutation speech in relation to the fall of Nineveh in 621 BCE: "The refutation pattern … presupposes the fall of Nineveh as an established fact. From the perspective of the book of Nahum, either the city has actually fallen or its fall is a foregone conclusion."

The arguments in favour of all these viewpoints are strong or at least feasible. The fact is that what we encounter in the MT, called the "Book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh" (Nah 1:1b), which was added to the מַשָּׂא נִינְוֵה/"oracle against Nineveh" (Na 1:1a), is ambiguous and complex and forms part of the rhetorical power of the text.

Maybe this is the nature of all ancient texts, and especially prophetic texts that were applied and reapplied in different historical contexts - that they harbour this character of mysterious uncertainty. We should probably see the difficulty of dating the book as part of Sternberg's ideopoetic Proteus principle. The Old Testament – like Yahweh himself – always denies complete clarity and definition, and is never willing to serve any premise or thesis or ideology or idolatry. What we are left with are choices which will meaningfully guide our reading of Nahum as social identity construction.

Strong cases can be made for totally different views on the structure/dating of Nahum. Most of the uncertainty in dating the book relates to Nahum 1:9-2:3 (Sweeney 1992:364). These verses connect the theophanic hymn (Na 1:2-8) to the rest of the book, but they are problematic "by their constantly shifting pronouns and forms of address, which exacerbate the difficulties in identifying the addressees to whom they refer (Sweeney 1992:364). Due to this the book of Nahum is usually structured more as a loose collection of prophetic sayings that lack systematic order (Sweeney 1992:365). The difficulties are then resolved by seeing them as a product of post-exilic redaction (especially Jeremias (1970) and Schulz (1973); cf. also Zenger *et al.* (1998:511) for different dating options).

Scholars such as Keller (1972) and Sweeney (1992), who use more integrated reading strategies, see a unity in these verses (Na 1:9-2:3) and read them as part of the pre-exilic core of Nahum. Keller (1972:407) views them as a prophetic appearance ("Auftritt") in which the thematic unity is preserved and which show us a lively argument between the prophet and his Jewish listeners. Sweeney (1992:366) sees the book as a coherent whole "based on the refutation pattern of the disputation speech."

There are many arguments between these two extreme perspectives and they all seem to make sense. One example will suffice. Nogalski (1993:197) also notes the difficulties in Nahum 1:9-14 and argues that there are pre-exilic material (Na 1:11-12a,14) and exilic/post-exilic redactions (Na 1:9-10; 12b-13), which included the hymn (Na 1:2-8) and the words of

salvation to Judah (Na 2:1-3). He sees in the earlier material a very meaningful structure in which he includes a parallel core inside a redactional frame (Nogalski 1993:198). Nahum 1:11-12a, 14 forms a redactional frame *inclusio* with 3:16-17, 18-19 (numerical strength of Nineveh will not keep away the destruction, and the funeral rhetoric). Nahum 2:4-14 and 3:1-15 form the parallel core (description of Nineveh's destruction). The rest of the verses (Na 1:2-10; 12b-13; 2:1-3) are to be seen as later redactions that "blend allusions and quotes from Isaiah 52 as promises to Zion and Judah" (Nogalski 1993:198).

I propose to read the book of Nahum in the following way:

(1) The greatest part (i.e. Na 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19) was written or compiled some time after the fall of Thebes (No-Amon) in 664/3 BCE, when the Assyrian might was still a factor in Palestine, and probably in the reign of Manasseh;

(2) The Yahwistic hymn in Chapter 1 (Na 1:2-8) as well as the word of salvation to Judah (Na 2:1) was added at a later stage. These additions were done so brilliantly that the book reads as a (nearly) seamless whole;

(3) In the late post-exilic age the redactors of the Book of the Twelve added verses or phrases (e.g. Na 1:2b-3a) to integrate Nahum in the overall structure of the *Dodekapropheton*.

What prompts me to make these choices? It makes rhetorical sense to see Nahum as the originator of most of the "oracular" (מַשָּׂא) material (Na 1:1a). Nahum 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19 contains brilliant poetry and a unified structure. To read Nahum 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19 in the time of Manasseh and Ashurbanipal shortly after the fall of Thebes makes rhetorical sense as Assyria was then still a force to be reckoned with, and the ideological confrontational power of a book/letter like Nahum in such a dark time would be at its most potent level. Hence it is very important for describing identity construction in crisis times.

Things like the treaty curses in Nahum, the very realistic allusions to the lion hunt in Assyria, the use of Assyrian loanwords and the very ingenious use of repetition and other literary styles, make the case for a pre-exilic reading of most of Nahum plausible and worth pursuing. Describing the possible historical situatedness of Nahum 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19 and how social identity construction functions in these verses is the aim of Chapter 5.

The "vision" part (Na 1:1b) of Nahum describes the post-exilic additions to the book. I include Nahum 1:2-8; 2:1 in these later parts. Nahum 1:2-8 is a universalizing theophanic Yahweh-hymn. Nahum 2:1 is a word of Salvation to Judah, which was probably added by the same group of editors from the Deutero-Isaiah "school." Then there are also verses (Na 1:2b-3a) that were probably added when Nahum was integrated into the Book of the Twelve (Zenger *et al.* 1998:511). These texts will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 as part of the exilic/post-exilic development of identity construction in ancient Israel. In Chapter 6 the historical context of the exilic/post-exilic era will be the focus of the research.

This division between Nahum 1:2-8; 2:1 (exilic/post-exilic) and Nahum 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19 (pre-exilic/Assyrian time) should, however, be made with care. The unity of the book (as already indicated) is indeed very strong, and on a literary level it should always be kept in mind. The editing of the book was done in a brilliant way. In this sense Schulz's (1973) work on Nahum should be taken seriously. He views Nahum as prophecy, but literary, post-exilic prophecy (Schulz 1973:55) – that is, prophecy that took the pre-exilic social-critical impetus and set it free by using new speech possibilities. This kind of prophecy does have an oral tradition, but it was conceived and fixed as literary composition (Schulz 1973:55). It is to these issues, and in particular the implications that they have for the Book of Nahum as a whole, that we will turn our attention in Chapter 6.

A short description of the pre-exilic rhetorical historical situation of Nahum (1:9-14; 2:2-3:19) is called for. Some important aspects in this regard will be highlighted. The "Assyrian crisis" will be described from an *inter*-group (the Assyrian Empire) as well as an *intra*-group (Judah in the Assyrian crisis) perspective.

4. Historical situation I: The Assyrian crisis

To be able to apply social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorization theory (SCT) to the ancient text of Nahum, we have seen in Chapter 3 (section 3.2) that one should take the historical and cultural contexts seriously. This means that we will have to take the historical context of Nahum into account throughout the research in order to counter the universalizing and homogenizing tendency of the theories (Deaux 2000:2-3 and Billig 1996:347, 349).

One's reading of the historical context is dependent on how one views the unity of the book. If one thinks of a longer development (diachrony) through a few centuries or decades, then the historical context of each of the different literary stages (synchrony) will have to be discussed. As I indicated in the previous section, the different parts of Nahum can and should be interpreted in more than one historical context. The first oracles (i.e. Na 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19) against Nineveh seem to be pre-exilic in origin. This is also the time that the book (and the *Dodekapropheton*) places itself historically. Rhetorically it "wants" to be read in the time of the Assyrian oppression (750-612 BCE). This historical context will be the focus of the present chapter. What happens to the book in the later historical stages (exilic/post-exilic) and how that impacts on social identity construction will be the concern of Chapter 6. There the historical situation of the exilic/post-exilic situation will be looked at.

4.1 The Assyrian Empire

Aberbach (1993:2) gives a popularised summary of the might of the Assyrian empire. He describes it as the most powerful empire in the history of the world up to that date, with the strongest army ever to be assembled, a highly effective bureaucracy and a network of administration and trade to match this. He describes their barbarous tactics of war in particular quite graphically:

> … flaying their enemies alive, chaining them in cages, immuring them, cutting out their tongues and eyes, cutting off their genitals and feeding them to the dogs, burning, impaling, piling up their heads or corpses, as depicted in their inscriptions (Aberbach 1993:3).

This picture of Assyria is painted to match *inter alia* Nahum's brutal and violent poetry to the violence of the enemy, "the toughness, violence and emotiveness of prophetic poetry hav[ing] their visual counterpart in the magnificent wall reliefs of war scenes and lion hunts which hung in the palaces of the Assyrian kings" (Aberbach 1993:3). These atrocities, not unknown to survivors of the concentration and death camps of, for example, the Anglo-Boer war or the Second World War, were part of Assyria's power propaganda and military strategy. Assyria

fought wars by means of pitched battles or sieges[95], but what made them most feared was their psychological warfare.

Before engaging in battle some Assyrian officers would go to the people of the target area and speak to them in their own language, persuading them to surrender without resistance. A good biblical example of this is found in 2 Kings 18:16-37, where Sennacherib's Rabshakeh tried to persuade the inhabitants of Jerusalem to surrender the city to the Assyrians (Grayson 1992:748). When that failed to work, the tactics changed dramatically, winning the Assyrians their notorious reputation:

> One or more groups or cities were singled out for a major onslaught … and once they were defeated the people were horribly mutilated and slaughtered while their houses and towns were burnt to the ground. Victims were selected, their skins were flayed, and the mutilated corpses were hung on stakes surrounding the city. News of such horrible acts spread quickly throughout the region, and commonly the people submitted to the Assyrian army without further resistance (Grayson 1992:78).

It is especially the new-Assyrian kingdom that was characterized *par excellence* by aggression and expansionism. Her military might formed the basis of her identity and economic prosperity (Dietrich 1994:473). Dietrich (1994:47) cites Röllig, (1986), who mentions four motives for the terrible expansionist drive and the brutal warfare:

(1) They found their national identity in this;

(2) They saw it as a divine mission;

(3) They saw it as a striving towards glory and superiority; and

(4) The craving for booty or loot (because of their own lack of mineral resources and for the interregional trade, Nineveh being a world metropolis).

From this it becomes clear that the suffering or "evil" caused by Assyria was not just this military terror, but it extended to and included the political, economic and religious spheres.

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[95] Pitched battles required hand to hand combat involving the infantry, archers, chariotry and cavalry, using special tactics on occasion, such as midnight attacks, damming rivers to flood enemy camps and cutting off enemies' water supplies (Grayson 1992:748). Siege warfare was perfected by the Assyrians and later copied by among others the Romans (Grayson 1992:748).

Politically, the epoch[96] we are interested in started with Esarhaddon (680-669), who brought the empire to its highest peak[97] and, with his successor Ashurbanipal (668-627), enjoyed what is called a *pax Assyriaca*. Even though the Assyrian empire started to crumble with the death of Ashurbanipal in 627, he was a strong and mighty king who was successful in holding all his vassals in check. He also suppressed revolts in Egypt and Ethiopia (667) by sacking Thebes (664/643 – No-Amon, Na 3:8), as well as a rebellion in Hatti (665) and the watershed rebellion by his brother Shamash-shum-ukin in Babylon (652). This revolt took four years to suppress. In 640 Ashurbanipal further reasserted control in the west (Syro-Palestine), which included Judah.

After his death in 627 the western territories broke free as the Assyrian empire, which crumbled with his successors[98], did not have enough power. Nabopolassar (Babylon 626-605) created a coalition with the Medes and destroyed Assyria city by city, until the great Nineveh was destroyed in 612 after a siege of three months (Johnston 2001a:303-304). The Assyrian empire was divided into two major units: (1) The central and most important heartland of Asshur, and (2) Greater Assyria (Grayson 1992:750).

This political/administrative split in the empire caused great economic hardship as the "economic organization of the Assyrian empire had only one goal – the enrichment of the Assyrian heartland and in particular the Assyrian court. The Assyrian king had no interest in the economic development of the outlying regions … [and] the economies of the outlying regions … were gradually destroyed in order to prop up an artificial economy in central Assyria" (Grayson 1992:752). A vassal state such as Judah became the victim of this economic oppression. They had to work on Assyrian building projects, provide food to the Assyrian troops on their marches through towns, and come up with regular payments of tribute (Seybold 1989:59; Grayson 1992:752).

Assyria's religious influence in the 7th century remains a debatable question. On the one hand, we have the position (cf. 2 K 23) that Josiah broke down the cultic sites which the Assyrians forced onto the Judeans in the time of Manasseh so as to claim the loyalty of the vassal states.

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[96] For a detailed discussion of this period see Grayson (1992:746-747).
[97] He controlled Egypt and Syro-Palestine in the west, the Lydians and Cimmerians in the north-west, Elam in the east, and Babylon in the south (Johnston 2001a:303).
[98] I.e. Assur-etil-ilani (627-623), Sin-shar-ishkun (623-612) and Ashur-uballit (612-609) (Johnston 2001a:304).

111

On the other hand, scholars are not so sure whether Assyria did in fact put such pressure on vassal peoples, and whether the Judeans did not rather turn to Canaanite cults and gods (Niehr 1995:38). Niehr (1995:38-39) mentions that archaeology indicates only a marginal presence of Assyrian gods in Palestine and that there can hardly be talk of an Assyrian crisis in the Judean religion in the 7th century. This is echoed by Grayson (1992:754) in a more nuanced way, indicating that the Assyrians did in fact use religion as a tool of rule:

> The Assyrians were tolerant of other religions and religious practices. They did not attempt to impose the worship of Asshur or any other Assyrian deity upon peoples they conquered. They did, however, carry off divine symbols of conquered peoples which they held as hostages in order to insure the loyalty of these suppressed populations (Grayson 1992:754).

It will be shown below that the Assyrian empire did indeed have, albeit indirectly, an influence on religion in Judah. Being a vassal state of Assyria had terrible consequences for Judah.

4.2 Judah in the Assyrian crisis

Donner (1995:357-359) makes it clear that, after Sennacherib's savage rampage through Palestine in which he took more than 46 walled and other cities, and besieged and spared Jerusalem after Hiskia's heavy tribute, the Judean kingdom (as established by David and the Elders - 2 Sam 2:1-4) ceased to exist. In reality Hezekiah only had the city-state, i.e. Jerusalem, and Judah was demoted from being a first- to second-stage vassal, the subsequent Judean kings providing a political-military buffer zone against Egypt (Donner 1995:359). One of the consequences of the battle of 701 is that we find no uprisings in Southern Palestine until the end of the new-Assyrian empire in the second half of the 7th century (Donner 1995:359).

The fact is that during the time of Manasseh, Assyria controlled the economic, religious and political life in Judah with a strong hand, Manasseh probably being hand-picked by Assyria and throughout his reign he remained an Assyrian loyalist[99] (Miller & Hayes 1986:370-372). Miller and Hayes (1986:371) even entertain the notion that, since Manasseh came to the

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[99] Graham (1927:40) calls this "religious latitudinarianism."

throne at a very young stage, there were probably Assyrian officials in Judah who aided the young vassal king. Apart from the political situation, as well as the economic oppression as described above, the religious aspect of being an Assyrian vassal needs special mention, for the political, economic and religious dynamics in an ancient society such as Judah were inextricably intertwined.

We have seen that it is difficult to state with certainty whether Assyria had a religious propaganda policy with regard to their vassals. On the other hand, there are quite a number of scholars who talk about strong Assyrian religious influence on Judah during the time of the Assyrian oppression. Albertz (1995:203,205) is of the opinion that there is no doubt that the massive cultural-religious pressure of the Assyrian epoch opened up the more popular family religion to syncretism with foreign cults (Assyrian-Babylonian as well as Syrian). Donner (1995:361) is certain that the Assyrian crisis of the Israelite religion came to the fore with the influx of Assyrian cultic objects into Jerusalem and Judah. This started during the time of Manasseh.

Seybold (1989:60) gives an interesting description of the religious situation. He agrees that there was an Assyrian religious crisis, but that the crisis did not revolve so much around the influence of Mesopotamian foreign cults, but around the rising syncretistic clash with the Canaanite religions. This aspect can also be seen in Nahum. Especially in the Yahweh-hymn (Na 1:2-8) the mythological tension between Yahweh and the forces of nature, and by extension the Canaanite deities, can be seen[100]. This brought terrifying consequences: Yahwism was endangered in the 7th century and the crisis climaxed with the breakdown of the social fabric ("Sozialgefüges"), the turbulence of the busy roads, and the breaking up of towns because of the presence of garrisons (Seybold 1989:60). In his own words:

> Es war keine Zeit für theologische Entwürfe, für Festliturgien und für weisheitliche Schulbildung. Allem Anschein nach war es eine Zeit der Improvisation, des Kontinuitätsverlusts, der Identitätskrise. Im Blick auf die Glaubenstradition wird man von einer Säkularisierung sprechen müssen. Lebensform und Sprachstil waren vom Militarismus und Kolonialismus geprägt. Das Erbe des Jahweglaubens geriet unter die Räder der Kriegsmaschinerie (Seybold 1989:60-61).

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[100] This aspect will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 6, where Nahum 1 will be discussed.

113

Seybold (1989:61) continues by asking whether it is therefore strange that we scarcely have any OT witnesses from this period in the history of Judah. Several researchers support the following notion as a meaningful description of the situation of that time:

> Conflict between strict and syncretistic Yahwists and between those advocating anti-Assyrian and pro-Assyrian policies must have existed throughout the final years of Hezekiah's rule and all of Manasseh's reign … Revolutionary sentiments – both political and religious – must have boiled beneath the surface of Judean society awaiting the day when Assyrian officials no longer supervised Judean life (Miller & Hayes 1986:372).

This perspective is important, as the idea of the *pax Assyria* in the 7th century does not imply that everything was peaceful. The fact that almost half a century passed between the last Israelite prophetic literature and the writing of Nahum was not without reason. On the one hand, one could say that it went relatively well with Judah under the reign of Manasseh and therefore no revolutionary literature was "needed." On the other hand, one could argue that the oppressive and dangerous situation with Assyrian troops and officials who regulated all parts of society inhibited the production of revolutionary writings. With the start of the downfall of Assyria, the cracks in the machinery of empire provided new possibilities for entertaining ideas of revolt.

This situation led to intrigue in Jerusalem between two groups. One group followed a policy of expediency and the other favoured a strong "nationalistic" policy (Graham 1927:41). Is it too far-fetched to see Nahum as part of a type of oppositional movement in Judah during that time? Dietrich and Link (1995:135; also Becking 1995:295) do not think so and add that this meant that he not only confronted the Assyrian oppression, but also the Judean kings and other "sell-outs", who thought that bowing to Assyrian rule is in the best interest of Judah.

Van der Woude (1977) has another suggestion. He develops the idea put forward by Rudolph that Nahum was an underground pamphlet smuggled from one hand to another in Judah itself (Van der Woude 1977:112). His theory is that Nahum belonged to the exiles of the northern kingdom and "that he revealed the contents of the revelation granted to him by Yahweh by means of a letter which he sent to certain persons in Judah" (Van der Woude 1977:113). His reasons are:

(1) The frequent use of Assyrian loan words;

(2) He refers indirectly to the ten tribes of the northern kingdom;

(3) He does not allude to election, covenant, or Jerusalem or Zion;

(4) He mentions regions such as Basan, Carmel and Lebanon, which makes a northern Palestine origin of his family possible;

(5) He knows Nineveh personally; and

(6) The prophecy, by inference from the heading "*sefer*", should be seen not as a spoken prophecy but as a letter (Van der Woude 1977:113-124).

Keeping these ideas in mind we have to be careful to label Nahum too quickly as a chauvinistic Jewish prophet of revenge:

> Wohl, er bäumt sich mit aller Kraft auf gegen die Unterdrückung des jüdischen Volkes durch die Assyrer; doch das verstellt ihm nicht den Blick dafür, das auch Judäer sich an der Unterdrückung beteiligen und davon profitieren, daß also der Umsturz der internationalen Machtverhältnisse Rückwirkungen auch auf die Machtverhältnisse im eigenen Land haben wird (Dietrich & Link 1995:136).

This rebellious group has been described in many ways, but the description "Yahweh-Alone Movement" seems to be a favoured one.[101] The movement reacted to the syncretistic religious politics of Manasseh. It started out as a result of the pious evaluation of the fall of Samaria in 722/1 and was "a religious faction aiming at the aniconic worship of only one deity; YHWH" (Becking 1995:295). They thus functioned as a combination of a resistance movement against Assyria as well as against the inner-Judaic politics (Dietrich 1994:473,479). They protested against religious syncretism, Assyrian imperialism and inner Judean despotism, which were all intertwined (Dietrich 1994:486). With this broad socio-political historical background we can address a text that bristles with ideology and contextual theology, and which provides a crack through which we can catch a glimpse of the social identity of ancient Israel.

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[101] Others include the "pro-Yahwistic" party, or the "People of the land" (*'am ha`aretz*), or the anti-Assyrian party (Cf. Becking 1995:294-295). According to Assmann (1992:200), the term was coined by Morton Smith in 1971, and then taken up by scholars such as Lang, Crüsemann and Weippert.

5. Summary

The prophetic Book of Nahum is one that is characteristically described as containing beautiful but theologically terrible poetry. This notion is questioned and will in the course of the exegesis in Chapters 5 and 6 be commented on. An important first step in our multidimensional study of Nahum in terms of social identity construction is to categorize it and to describe the structure, dating and historical context of the book.

- Nahum was shown to be an OCN as it conforms to most of the essential elements of an OCN. The most important markers are that it is called an "oracle"/ מַשָּׂא (Na 1:1a), it contains judgment discourse from God against a foreign nation (Nineveh/ Assyria), it uses typical OCN poetic style and mysterious references to the enemy.

- In the overview of the literature on Nahum we saw that in the past there was a division between scholars who read Nahum synchronically (focusing on the unity) and those who focus on diachrony. More recent research views Nahum as a unity, but does so with a diachronical sensitivity. My own choice is to read Nahum multidimensionally, i.e. taking both synchrony and diachrony seriously, but with the realisation that the final form of the Book of Nahum is a well-structured whole.

- The biggest part of Nahum (Na 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19) can be dated as pre-exilic to the time of Manasseh's reign in the early second half of the 7th century BCE. Especially the textual allusions to Assyrian ideas and practices make this dating probable. There are also exilic/post-exilic parts (Na 1:2-8; 2:1) that were added during the exile and at the time of the end-redaction of the Book of the Twelve (Na 1:2b-3a).

- The historical situation in which the pre-exilic parts of Nahum should be read and interpreted, especially with the aim of social identity in mind, can be called "the Assyrian crisis." It was shown that politically, economically and religiously Judah suffered tremendously under the Assyrian yoke of oppression. Although this era is called a *pax Assyrica,* there is no doubt that there was rebellious plotting against the Assyrian overlords and the pro-Assyrian party in Judah. Nahum could have been part of the pro-Yahweh "party", which had anti-Assyrian sentiments and which has been called the Yahweh-Alone Movement in scholarship.

In the next chapter the implications of this historical context on social identity construction will be dealt with as the pre-exilic parts of Nahum are discussed in the light of the ideological-critical multidimensional methodology explicated in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 5: Nahum and social Identity in the Assyrian crisis

1. Introduction

With the background questions of Nahum dealt with, and with a description of the historical context in which the pre-exilic material of Nahum is to be understood, we can now apply the theory to the texts. After formulating a social identity "hypothesis" within the matrix of the working premises developed in Chapter 3, Section 4.5, Nahum 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19 is studied with the aim of uncovering the underlying dynamic of identity construction. This is done with a continuous ideological-critical sensitivity and with a view to their theological-ethical implications.

2. Social identity construction in the Assyrian crisis

Social identity theory, as well as self-categorization theory, works with the basic premise that people have a social identity that constitutes them into groups. These groups act stereotypically and usually ethnocentrically in accordance with certain basic beliefs or principles. From the previous historical section we can construct possible groups or characters that represent groups. We need a "cast" to be able to read this visual drama of textual identity construction[102]. Nahum writes his prophecy as part of the Yahweh-Alone Movement, the in-group, which is anti-Assyrian, and also against the inner Judaic syncretism and despotism of the pro-Assyrian group. As we have the book now, Assyria is constructed as the main out-group, with the Judean pro-Assyrians (probably Manasseh and his court and officials) as the subsidiary out-group.

Other out-groups would include the Egyptians (who played a huge part in Palestine and the near East during the 7th century) and the other nations surrounding Judah, which of course also suffered tremendously under the heavy oppression of the Assyrian war and administrative machinery. As we read Nahum the plot thickens with the different groups and their prototypes coming to the fore in the process of categorization of self and out-group.

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[102] The language of the film industry was recently used by Premstaller (2003) to describe Nahum's second chapter. He divides Na 2 into "scenes" and "shots" with a "plot", "actors," "scenery" and "motion" (Premstaller 2003:47-50).

What would be interesting at this stage is to see what SIT and SCT would "predict" if applied to the situation described above. If we follow the 5 premises as summarized in Chapter 3, Section 3.5, the following can be said:

Premise 1: All people have a social identity and belong to groups with basic group principles and beliefs.

This seems too simplistic even to mention, but is indeed of the utmost importance. The people of ancient Palestine, and especially Judah, had a social identity and felt drawn to be part of the groups that could define their existence in a particular culture and context. The strong group principles or beliefs of Judah would probably revolve around the question of pure Yahwism/monolatrism (anti-Assyria/Yahweh-Alone/Nahum) versus syncretism (pro-Assyria/Manasseh) or outright idolatry/unrighteousness (Assyria/Nineveh/Ashur-Ishtar), and what it means to experience oppression or "evil" as it will be called in Nahum. The fact that ancient Judah has a collectivistic culture *par excellence* will make the study of social identity worthwhile, as such cultures (more than modern individualistic ones) tend to place more emphasis and value on the social side of identity.

Premise 2: People in a group are motivated to act stereotypically in accordance with their group principles.

Nahum, as part of the ideologically revolutionary group of Judeans who want the (divine) overthrow of the evil Assyrian empire, will act on behalf of his group, basing his stereotypical actions on what he perceives and believes to be trust in Yahweh. We are in the midst of troubling times and so would expect Nahum to prophesy/write in order to bring comfort and to reduce the existential uncertainty experienced by his group. We would expect to see a massive favouring of his in-group, for the time in which he constructs his social identity speaks of the harshest of crises and the depths of oppression and degradation.

Premise 3: In a group people will always minimize the differences between in-group members and maximize differences in relation to the out-group.

This should not be too difficult to see, as even a cursory reading of Nahum leaves one with the idea that the world is simplified. "Our" group is in the right and "their" group, the Assyrians and the bad (pro-Assyrian) Judean kings, is the symbolical representation of all that is bad and against Yahweh. We will have to watch out for self- and other categorizations in terms of prototypes, and because we have a time of intense turmoil, the out-group will probably be depicted as very homogenous/stereotypical. That is, all of them are evil, from the Assyrian king to his servants. The fact that the in-group also experiences a threat to their identity from both an external (Assyria) as well as internal (inner Judaic factions) group will very likely lead to discrimination against the out-group.

Because the hate is so great against Assyria, we will more than likely see elements of dehumanisation surfacing in the text.

Premise 4: The process of self-categorization is context dependent.
This element of social identity in Nahum will probably come to the fore when the possible diachronical stages of the book are discussed in the next chapter. This includes how Nahum fits into the canonical Book of the Twelve (the topic of discussion in Chapter 6). It will be interesting to see how the view on Assyria and the inner-Judaic party at fault changes when the context also enters a different era with different questions and realities. The questions and problems of the exilic/post-exilic era require new theological formulations as well as constructions of reality. The concept of multiple out-groups also comes into play in the Nahum era. The out-groups in Nahum's time included not only Assyria, the pro-Assyrian Judean party and Egypt, but also the other smaller vassal states, which suffered just as much under the Assyrian yoke.

Premise 5: Groups create their social identity by constructing textual identities.
Nahum constructs his and therefore his group's reality by using texts from the available textual traditions and by writing down his own new text. Since this was a time of great tension, we could expect a revolutionary, liberatory message of radical hope in darkness. The social and ideological construction will probably contain a lot of symbolism and metaphor and work towards a kind of poetic justice – with the only difference being that we now know he was dealing with hard realities.

3. Nahum 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19 and social identity in the Assyrian crisis

It remains to be seen which of the hypotheses in the previous section are indeed represented or have crystallized in Nahum as we work out the nuances of social identity construction in ancient Israel. We will do this by looking at the meaningful units delineable in Nahum (according to the structure set out in Chapter 4). The rendering of the text follows the NRSV translation in general, but with specific changes where I do not agree with the translation. The changes, as well as other additions (like inserting Hebrew letters in the English text to point out the presence of acrostics) are explained with textual notes. After the text is presented a multidimensional interpretation of the text in terms of social identity, ideological criticism and theological-ethics follows. The chapter ends with a summary and preliminary conclusions.

3.1 Nahum 1:1 – Superscription

As already indicated above, I divide the book of Nahum into two parts, namely, (1) Nahum 1:2-8; 2:1, which relates more to the exilic/post-exilic history and; (2) Nahum 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19 which should be read as part of the time of the Assyrian oppression. Although it could never be proven beyond doubt, this division seems logical.

The superscription of the book incorporates both these "parts" in the development of the Book of Nahum. For clarity's sake both parts will be dealt with in this chapter and just referred to in the next chapter.

After the superscription we will do an in-depth study of Nahum 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19. The focus will be on how the text helps us to uncover the underlying dynamic of the construction of identity and on how we can ideology-critically formulate theological-ethical premises for addressing the urgent need for reconciliation and peace.

3.1.1 Nahum 1:1

מַשָּׂא נִינְוֵה [1]   1a Pronouncement[a] about Nineveh

סֵפֶר חֲזוֹן נַחוּם הָאֶלְקֹשִׁי: 1b Scroll[b] of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite (ʾ)[c]

Textual notes:

1. a) Following Spronk (1997:19). Other possibilities are: "Prophecy" (NJB), "Utterance" (Müller 1986:24), "Oracle" (NIV, RSV, NASB). מַשָּׂא can mean "burden" but not when used as an utterance - exception in Jr 23.33-38 where the two meanings are combined - Müller 1986:24. This *contra* KJV and Lutherbibel ("Last"). **b)** Also "letter" or "writing" (KBL 666) or "book" (most English translations). **c)** According to Spronk (1997:19ff.) this end-*yod* forms part of one of four "word-acrostics" in Nahum. See *note a* in the textual note of the acrostic in Na 1.2-8.

It has become traditional to interpret the heading, or superscription of Nahum (Na 1:1) as a double-heading that shows how the book was composed (Zenger *et al.* 1998:510). The first part מַשָּׂא נִינְוֵה , Nahum 1:1a, would then point to the (original) prophetic words of judgment against Nineveh, and the second part סֵפֶר חֲזוֹן נַחוּם הָאֶלְקֹשִׁי, Nahum 1:1b, indicates the words

of salvation to Judah (inserted later). This is because superscriptions have traditionally been read with the aim of finding traces of the historical sources of the book, as well as indicating what the claim of authorship means, in this case Nahum (who? where? what? how?).

Although these questions are not without merit, it is improbable that we will ever be able to satisfactorily resolve them. I follow the (to my mind) more fruitful way that Ben Zvi (1996) proposes. That is, I address the message of the superscription as the starting point, as it "provide[s] the historical community of readers with a built-in interpretative key for the text" (Ben Zvi 1996:129). Together with Ben Zvi (incorporating the research of Malina 1996:130-131) one should ask what scheme[103] does the superscription evoke. Furthermore, we should ask what the implications are of that scheme for the historical and communal reading for which the prophetic books were first written.

On a second level, Ben Zvi (1996:132-133) makes the very interesting point that prophetic books should be seen as written documents and not as oral proclamations, and that (as written documents) they were meant to be read more than once. What is more, he views the readers of prophetic books as educated readers who could appreciate ambiguities and multi-layered meanings and who could be expected to find them within the texts (Ben Zvi 1996:133).

Although I do not totally agree with Ben Zvi about the highly educated readers being the main target-audience of the book (as those who could read probably read it aloud to listeners anyway), his suggestions for taking the prophetic texts seriously as texts/books has important implications for our reading of Nahum in terms of social identity. More important, though, is the idea that the text of Nahum itself nudges us in the direction of viewing it as written prophecy.

Whereas the two terms מַשָּׂא/"oracle" and חֲזוֹן/"vision" both imply orally inspired or delivered prophecy, the fact that it is uniquely[104] called a סֵפֶר/"book" or maybe even a "letter" immediately raises some social identity issues. The first is that ancient Israel created its social identity through the power of written texts. This indicates the strong focus on the Israelites' textual identity as part of their way of structuring their world and overcoming the uncertainty

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[103] "Scheme" is part of the cognitive anthropology that Malina incorporates in his research, the argument being that texts set forth mental representations of scenes or schemes that in turn evoke corresponding scenes or schemes in the mind of the reader (Zvi 1996:130).
[104] Nahum is the only book that combines these three terms in a superscription.

of their existence in troubling times. The second is that the concept of poetic justice[105] or liberation/revolution literature[106] is not so far-fetched. I will return to both these aspects in the subsequent discussion. The details of the superscription invite more social identity structuring issues.

The superscription provides us with the stereotypical notion that what we will encounter in the words to come has something to do with an *out-group*, Nineveh, as well as an *in-group*, represented by Nahum. The heading introduces two important prototypes, which function as self-categorizing elements. Nineveh is the stereotypical or homogenizing prototype of the enemy/out-group who symbolize רָעָה/"evil". This includes being known as the political, economic and religious scourge of the nations[107]. Nahum is the prophetic voice of the in-group and as such puts forth the basic group beliefs, which define and govern appropriate group behaviour. Nahum can mean "comfort"[108] (from the pi'el root נחם), and as such provides the motivation for self-categorization and the subsequent reduction of uncertainty.

The message of the superscription, and the redactor's/canonical key for understanding the book is therefore clear: Nineveh is the stereotypical prototype of the out-group that gets categorized in a negative way. Nahum, on the other hand, symbolizes the idealized (and ideologically important) cohesive in-group and the comfort that this categorization brings. The importance of these two concepts is strengthened by the crucial repetition of Nineveh (Na 1:1; 2:8; 3:7, and if Spronk 1997:112 is correct with his word-acrostic, also in Na 3:18), and Nahum/ נחם (Na 1:1 and 3:7[109]) throughout the book.

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[105] Cf. Wessels's (1998) idea of comparing Nahum's uneasy expression of Yahweh's power with literature from people who are struggling against oppression, and which functions in the sense of seeking poetic justice.

[106] This idea is also not new. Van der Woude (1977) entertains the thought-provoking view that Nahum was a letter written in Assyrian exile, after the demise of the Northern Kingdom, which was sent back to Judah (Van der Woude 1977:113). He builds upon, but changes, the earlier suggestion by Rudolph (1975:188) that Nahum was a written letter containing words of judgment on Assyria, and words of comfort for Judah, which was smuggled by hand.

[107] As Röllig (1986) so aptly characterized Assyria: "Assur - Geißel der Völker."

[108] Other personal names inferred from this root include, e.g. Menahem (2 K 15), Naham (1 Ch 4) and Nehemiah (Ne 1). Simian-Yofre 1986:379-380 notes that use of נחם pi'el is most often used for the comforting or consoling of Yahweh's people as a whole, and it is usually connected to a deed of Yahweh that changes the unwanted or terrible situation.

[109] In Na 3:7 נחם is used in an ironic rhetorical question. Whereas those who trust in Yahweh will find comfort (Na 1:1), Nineveh will not find comforters (Na 3:7) – see the discussion below.

Keller (1972:410-418) already indicated this relationship between Nineveh and Yahweh as being types ("Typos"). Nineveh is the type, or prototype in our social identity language, that symbolizes the counter-order or chaotic powers of destruction (Keller 1972:410). Keller sees the description of Nineveh in Nahum, not as a realistic description of the historical capital of Assyria, but as symbol for any city that houses evil (Keller 1972:412). In his own words Nineveh is:

> *Typus der gottlosen, herrschsüchtigen Metropole,* als Inbegriff egoistischen Machstrebens, als Ort widergöttlicher Pläne, als 'Mutter des gottlosen Tyrannen' … was aber Nahum zu interressieren scheint, ist … das Algemeine, Typische, das was bloss Individuelle umschliesst und auf eien ganz andere Ebene hebt, nämlich die Tatsache, dass an diesem Orte und durch diesen Mann 'בליעל', d.h. 'Widergöttliches', gegen Jahwe und seine Ordnung radikal Verstossendes, ausgeheckt und ausgeführt wird (Keller 1972:412).

On the other hand, Yahweh serves as a power of order. This is done through a mythical structure in which the chaotic anti-power (Nineveh) is correlated and corrected through the chaos-neutralizing power of Yahweh (Keller 1972:416-416). In this way Nahum becomes for Keller, not the historicizing of a myth, but the relativization and mythologization of history – the victory of order over chaos (Keller 1972:418).

Wessels refers to this as the issue of power and counter-power by which it is shown who the real power in the universe is (Wessels 1998:619-620). This blends with the understanding of social identity that sees identity-creating and uncertainty-relieving prototypes being used in the construction of group identity in (especially) times of trouble. Order will always in the end be victorious over chaos/evil. This becomes a major and very important group belief.

The heading contains three more important identity-constructing words. According to the superscription, what follows is a מַשָּׂא, usually translated as "burden" or "oracle." Two essential aspects of a מַשָּׂא text are that its topic is the nations (being found mostly in the OCN collections of the prophets[110]) and that we cannot expect a fixed genre of some sort. The OCN מַשָּׂא texts exhibit "a remarkable freedom in the way that they mix genres to accomplish

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[110] Especially in Isaiah (13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1,11,13; 22:1; 23:1; 30:6), but also in other prophetic speeches: 2 K 9:26; Ezk 12:11; Na 1:1; Ha 1:1; Zc 9:1; 12:1; Ml 1:1. Jones (1996:63) notes that, with the single exception of Nahum, all the texts that are both מַשָּׂא and OCN are found in Isaiah.

various rhetorical goals" (Jones 1996:63,74). We have already seen how this aspect is also descriptive of the OCN. However, it is not just a מַשָּׂא but also a חָזוֹן and therefore implies that what follows is a threatening word against the nations, which a prophet "saw" (Jepsen 1977:826). This term interconnects Nahum with the preceding (Micah) and following (Habakkuk) books in the Book of the Twelve (MT order), a question that will be addressed in Chapter 6.

The last word of the heading, הָאֶלְקֹשִׁי "the Elkoshite" (Na 1:1b), also plays its role in the textual construction of social identity, as it (presumably) locates the city or region from which Nahum came – territory being ideologically crucial for identity. The exact location of Elkosh can only be guessed, although there have been quite a number of suggestions.

Van der Woude (1977:120-122) gives one of the best recent overviews of the possible location of Elkosh. There are four sites that claim to have been the hometown of Nahum, namely:

(1) Al-qûsh, 25 miles north of Mosul (there is even a tomb of Nahum);
(2) Ain Japhata, a township south of Babylon;
(3) Southern Palestine (according to pseudo-Epiphanius' *De vita prophetarym*); and
(4) A small village in northern Galilee (in Jerome's commentary on Nahum) (Van der Woude 1977:120-121).

Billerbeck and Jeremias (1898:90-94) can be consulted for some more results on research about the location of Elkosh. After discussing the possible Assyrian or Galilean origin of Elkosh, they come to some sort of conclusion. If Elkosh were to be found in Palestine, it was surely projected to be read as if Elkosh was in Assyria (Billerbeck & Jeremias 1898:94). They make the strange final observation of the possibility of Galilee: "Im ersteren Falle [Palestine/ Galilee] bliebe angesichts dieses Propheten die alte Regel unangetastet: Kan auch ein Prophet aus Galiläa kommen?" (Billerbeck & Jeremias 1898:94).

Like the name Nahum, however, Elkosh can also have a symbolical meaning. On the literary level it parallels the first characteristic of Yahweh in the acrostic hymn: אֶלְקֹשִׁי ("God is severe" – Na 1:1b) // אֵל קַנּוֹא ("God is jealous" – Na 1:2a) (Spronk 1995:178). As already noted in the textual notes above, it could even be that the end *yod* (י) of *Elkosh* (אֶלְקֹשִׁי) forms

part of the first of a number of word-acrostics/telestics, it being the first letter of four end-letters which spells JHWH ("Yahweh") – see the textual notes under Nahum 1:2-8.

This possibility, as well as the fact that (1) Nahum's name can have a symbolical meaning; (2) that Elkosh is an unknown place which also could function on a symbolical/literary level and; (3) that Nahum is not introduced to the reader or listener in the proper ancient Near Eastern manner, that is, without genealogical reference, indicate a possible mythological basis to this book (see Geyer 1986, in Chapter 3, Section 5).

This will not be the only time in the book that the myth/symbol aspect of the poetry comes to the fore. Identity construction in Nahum functions along the lines of textual identity and poetic justice. It is precisely in this regard that we can study the book theologically-ethically as the rhetoric of myth and symbol makes it easier to incorporate the underlying ideological and ethical dimensions of the book into the present. This is indeed what has happened since the earliest times with the interpretation of Nahum.

What must further be noted is that the symbolic or rhetorical writing is thoroughly embedded in a real world, with real danger and a real oppressive empire. It seems that Nahum wrote about things that he saw or experienced, so much so that scholars have built theories around Nahum's identity and whereabouts on the strength of his being an "eye witness" of Nineveh's destruction. We will see a prophet writing in the language of his day, incorporating Assyrian loan words, using Assyrian and ancient Near Eastern metaphors and images ironically against the powers that be, and incorporating history in showing Yahweh's immanent judgment as international Judge of the nations.

The fact that the two aspects of Nahum (prophecy-for-now and mythical-rhetorical-prophecy-for-the-future) are combined so brilliantly confirms (to my mind) the thesis of Jeremias (1994:490), which we discussed in Chapter 2, section 4.3.2. Biblical prophecy is not just prophecy for the hour, but as written texts it influences reading communities far beyond their present moment.

3.2 Nahum 1:9-14 – Ambiguous prophetic judgement and salvation discourses

3.2.1 Nahum 1.9-14

⁹ מַה־תְּחַשְּׁבוּן אֶל־יְהוָה

9a Whatever[a] **you** plot against Yahweh[b] -
   an utter end he will make.

כָּלָה הוּא עֹשֶׂה

לֹא־תָקוּם פַּעֲמַיִם צָרָה

9b Trouble will not rise up a second time[c],

¹⁰ כִּי עַד־סִירִים סְבֻכִים

10a even though[a], like[b] thorns entangled
   and like their drink soaked[c]

וּכְסָבְאָם סְבוּאִים

אֻכְּלוּ כְּקַשׁ יָבֵשׁ מָלֵא:

10b they will be devoured like fully[d] dry stubble.

> v.9-10:"You": 2nd person **masculine**

¹¹ מִמֵּךְ יָצָא חֹשֵׁב עַל־יְהוָה רָעָה

11a From **you**[a] has come forth one plotting evil against Yahweh,[b]

יֹעֵץ בְּלִיָּעַל: ס

11b A councillor of Belial/wickedness.[b]

> v11: "You": 2nd person **feminine**

¹² כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

12a Thus says Yahweh:

אִם־שְׁלֵמִים וְכֵן רַבִּים

(א[a]) Though[b] they are (שׁ[a]) complete (ו[a]) and so (ר[a]) many,

וְכֵן נָגֹזּוּ וְעָבָר

even so they[c] will be cut off and disappear[d]

וְעִנִּתִךְ

12b I have mistreated **you** -

לֹא אֲעַנֵּךְ עוֹד:

Not shall I mistreat **you** again.

> v12: "You": 2nd person **feminine**

¹³ וְעַתָּה אֶשְׁבֹּר מֹטֵהוּ מֵעָלָיִךְ

13a For, now I shall break his yoke[a] that is upon **you**,

וּמוֹסְרֹתַיִךְ אֲנַתֵּק:

13b and the chains on **you** I shall snap."

> v13: "You": 2nd person **feminine**

¹⁴ וְצִוָּה עָלֶיךָ יְהוָה

14a And (further), Yahweh decrees regarding **you**[a]:

לֹא־יִזָּרַע מִשִּׁמְךָ עוֹד

Not will be sown **your** name again.[b]

מִבֵּית אֱלֹהֶיךָ

14b From the houses of **your** gods

אַכְרִית פֶּסֶל וּמַסֵּכָה

I shall remove carved image and cast image.

אָשִׂים קִבְרֶךָ כִּי קַלּוֹתָ׃ פ

I shall prepare your grave, because you are worthless.[c]

> v14: "You": 2nd person **masculine**

Textual notes:

9. a) מה is read as a *pronomen relativum* and not as an *interrogativum* (Becking 1996:8; BHRG §43.3/2v; also Nb 23:3; Jg 9:48; 1S 20:4). It is used rhetorically to indicate a negative value judgment about somebody (BHRG §43.3:2iii). Rudolph (1972:151) translates "What do you doubt about Yahweh?" Targ. "what are you reckoned before the Lord?" pointing to the nothingness of the nations who is thought off here (Is 40.15; Cathcart & Gordon 1989:133). **b)** It is not necessary to follow BHS as the sense of the MT is clear enough (Hulst 1960:245) and void of versional support.

10. a) כי translated as a concessive (KB) "although/even though." This, together with the translation which follows, expresses the same idea as, e.g. in Na 1:2 where the enemy will be destroyed although they are unopposed and many. **b)** The כְּ is used to indicate congruence with respect to manner or norm meaning "in the

same way" (BHRG §39.10/1iii). **c)** This very difficult text (v.10aB) is sometimes left out as dittography of v.10aA (BHS; RSV). MT "and like their drunkard drunken" "perhaps mean 'drunken to their drunken nature'" (Hulst 1960:246). Rudolph (1972:152) suggests כְּסֹכִים סְבֻבִים "like thorns surrounding" (סד as orthographic variant of שׂ). HAL (697) has "like binding weed," (so Deissler 1984:208 "wirres Windenrank" and Seybold 1989:84). Spronk (1997:19,55) translates "and like the beer that they brew" following Akk. *sību* "beer" and linking it to Mesopotamian drinking habits. Edel (1972:32) has "may they be entangled like thorns and soaked like their drink" and sees here images of great resistance. Edelman (1991:32) provides one of the best translations: "although they are entangled like thorns and like their drink soaked." This provides the best chiastic structure for the verse, the thorns (10a) being like chaff (10b) and the soaked drink (10a) being dry (10b) when Yahweh destroys. Note also Spreafico's (1998:106) suggestion: "as drunkards inebriated by wine, they will be devoured, as completely dry chaff." **d)** Reading מָלֵא as adverb and not (e.g. like RSV) changing it to הֲלֹא and making it part of v.11 as a question (BHS).

11. a) Partitive מִן (BHRG §39.14/7). **b)** Rudolph (1972:157,159) sees v.11 as a question "Must he not go away from you, he who plots evil against Yahweh?", meaning Sanherib and making the link to v.12 more logical, and/but thereby taking the ambiguity out of the text. Targ. does the same "from you *Nineveh*, there has gone forth *a king*" (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:133). Becking (1996:8) has "from you will march of" following *HALAT* and Is 49.17. **b)** Another translation possibility is "counselling wickedness" (NJB). The personal sounding "Belial" should be kept in mind, as there probably is a play on the later identification of Belial with a figure of evil. Whether we can speak of a personal or symbolical name here remains debatable – see the discussion below.

12. a) The third word-acrostic that Spronk (1997:59ff.) finds in Nahum is here in Na 1:12aB. He sees here a code for א - שׂ - ו - ר - א "Assyria." **b)** אִם "though" introduces a concession (BHRG §40.5/2). Edel (1972:32) also translates as a concession "though they are ... in the same way they will be destroyed." **c)** Following BHS and redividing the consonants between 12aBc and 13aA to read ועברו ענתך (Spronk 1997:71; Targ.; Hulst 1960:246; BHS). **d)** Spronk (1997:69-71) translates v.12a keeping the original meaning for גזז nifal "shear" and עבר "dispersing/fly away, " as being connected to a bigger extended farming or agricultural metaphor (cf. Na 1:10 "chaff"; 1:14 "sowing"; 2:2 "scatterer"; 3:18 "sheperds"; also Jr 13:24; Is 29:5; Zp 2:2). Spronk's use of "sheared" and "fly away" seems like mixed metaphors. My translation also keeps to the agricultural metaphor, but in this case the cutting off of and burning, i.e. disappearing of the stubble in verse 10. Seybold (1999:132ff.) sees in v.12 pre-masoretic marginal notes on the one side, well-kept lines *jod-mem*, and on the other side, problematic or disappeared lines *kaph-nun* of the acrostic in Na 1.

13. a) BHS suggests מַטֵּה "rod" following LXX and Vulg. Rudolph (1972:159) thinks the ambiguous punctuation of MT (the -*o*- suggesting מוֹט "yoke" and the suff. -*ēhū* suggesting a ל"ה noun, i.e. "rod") wants to keep open both meanings.

14. a) Rudolph (1972:159) has "Yahweh decrees regarding **him**" to make the verse's object (i.e. the Assyrian king) clearer. **b)** NJB "you will have no heir to your name." Targ. "there will not be a remembrance (זכר) of your name any more" (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:134), but following *lectio defficillior rectior* Rudolph (1972:81) dismisses this emendation. Seybold (1989:71) accepts the emendation to "remember/think of." **c)** Seybold (1989:71) "you have become contemptuous."

This section is usually regarded as the most difficult part of Nahum as it contains a very difficult and possibly corrupt verse (v.10), and is inconsistent in the pronouns used to describe who receives judgment and who receives punishment. That it serves as a type of structural bridge or link between the hymn of chapter 1 verse 2-8, and the rest of the book seems very plausible (Cf. Sweeney 1992:370). It takes up themes/keywords from the hymn as well as from the rest of the book. "An utter end" (כָּלָה) in verse 9b prepares us for Belial being "rooted out" (כֻּלֹּה) in Nahum 2:1.

As already indicated we find the very important keyword "eat/devour" (אכל), verse 10, which is repeated in Nahum 2:14 as well as in Nahum 3:12. The adjective "fully" (מָלֵא) also has a unifying character within the book as it describes the chaff in verse 10, the filling of the lion's den with prey in Nahum 2:13, as well as the fullness of the plunder in the city of blood in Nahum 3:1. We encounter the theologically central word "evil" (רָעָה) in verse 11b for the first time, and it reminds us of the last verse of the book where the "evil" of Assyria is summarized. "Belial" (בְּלִיַּעַל verse 11b) is introduced (repeated in Na 2:1), "passing over" (עבר verse 12b) links chapter 1 verse 8 with Nahum 2:1 and Nahum 3:19, and the theme of "destruction" (כרת Na 1:14, 2:14 and 3:15) is emphasised.

The taking up of textual resources for constructing a textual identity, and in the process social identity, links this section to very important and strong theological traditions. The idea of "plotting" (חשב pi`el) against Yahweh (verse 9 and 11) is not only typical of the wicked (Ps 36:5), or specifically of Assyria plotting excessive violence against the nations (Is 10:7), but also, and perhaps mainly, a trait of Israel. This we see in Hosea 7:15, where it is Israel who plots evil against Yahweh, and it is in Judah (Mi 2:1,3) in the context of a *hoi*-oracle, where in *lex talionis* fashion Yahweh will punish those who plot/plan evil/disaster. In later sources we find the same idea taken up by, for example, Ezekiel (Ezk 11:2), who describes the wicked schemers in Jerusalem.

The notion of Yahweh making "an utter end" (כָּלָה verse 9b) of someone or some group is likewise not only just reserved for the nations (Jr 30:11; 46:28), and again specifically Assyria (Is 10:23), but also includes Judah (Jr 4:27), the false prophets and Jerusalem (Ezk 13:13), and for that matter every living thing on the earth (Zp 1:18).

When Nahum indicates Yahweh as saying in verse 12b "I have mistreated/humbled (ענה pi`el) you, not shall I mistreat you again" he is placing us directly in the desert tradition as witnessed by Deuteronomy 8:2, 16, where Yahweh says he has *humbled* his people to test them and to know their inmost heart. He could also be pointing us towards a more prominent text like 2 Kings 17:20. There a possible gloss in the text, which talks about the fall of the Northern Kingdom, for Yahweh rejected all the descendants of Israel and *humbled* them, throwing Israel away from him because of the sins of Jeroboam. Exodus and First-Exile traditions are in a sense combined and brought into play in Judah's identity as people of God. The fourth Servant song (Is 53:4,7) notes the Servant (be it Israel or the prophet) being struck with *affliction* by God, and Isaiah 64:11 laments the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple with the probing question of whether Yahweh will continue to afflict them above their endurance.

These intertexts show that even in extreme situations, we do not find reserved texts and traditions for the enemy. The plotting against Yahweh is a Hoseanic tradition which focuses on the misdeeds of God's own people, Israel, and it is part of the holy people's, as well as the nations', misdeeds throughout both their histories. It would seem at this point that we could suggest that a deeper theological-ethical dynamic is at work in this Oracle Concerning (a) Nation.

Although focused in the first place on the enemy Assyria, and on all enemies of Yahweh in the future, there is no nationalistic vocabulary for the "other" or the out-group. A type of justice-principle, with Yahweh as the righteous Judge of nations' deeds, is at work. This is always present as an undercurrent in ancient Israel's construction of their social identity through the OCN, and in this case specifically Nahum.

This subtle undercurrent also has a more visible grammatical presence in the form of ambiguous pronouns, the use of mysterious and even hidden names, powerful metaphors, as well as ancient Near Eastern treaty curses.

3.2.1.1 Who is who? Grammatical and mythological identities

The very well known, widely used, but also criticized[111] theory of Jeremias (1970) should be brought into play at this stage. Although not the only section of Nahum that is taken as evidence for his theory, verses 11 and 14 play a very important part in his thesis that Nahum was not a cultic prophet (Jeremias 1970:20). The words/traditions of judgment he used were first meant for Israel's/Judah's ears and were only later, in exilic times, understood as judgment oracles against Assyria. By that time they became a symbol of Babylon, the new oppressor of that age (Jeremias 1970:51).

Dietrich (1994:470) goes even further and pinpoints the "you" in verse 11 and 14 as King Manasseh himself. The words used in threat and judgment were indeed part of Israel's own past and as such one cannot but take seriously the fact that to the hearers and readers of this oracle – at least the educated ones who knew the scriptures – there would have been recognition to some degree of their own traditions. This is probably too weak an argument to prove beyond doubt that (the "original") Nahum was not a cult-prophet, but it is strong (or maybe rather subtle) enough to be part of the ambiguity and the Proteus-like or Hebrewgram character of Nahum.

The ambiguity is created not only by the play on intertexts, but first and foremost on the use of the second person personal pronouns. As can be seen next to the translation above, the section starts in verse 9 by using the second person *masculine* pronoun to refer to the party threatened. Then it abruptly changes to the second person *feminine* pronouns in verses 11-13 and again changes back to a second person *masculine* pronoun in verse 14. This could be explained by describing it as a chiastic construction, or as a grammatical function of introducing a new subject or a new paragraph (De Regt 2001:214,231). This may all be possible, but it cannot be denied that it also creates a degree of chaos in terms of the certainty of the identity of the ones threatened. After closer scrutiny it seems that second *feminine* refers to Judah (if seen in the context of the whole book, and especially in the light of Nahum 2:1) and that second *masculine* refers either to the King of Assyria, or to Manasseh, although even their identities are masked or hidden.

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[111] Cf. especially Keller (1972:405-407) who gives a detailed argument why Jeremias's thesis cannot be accepted. He also notes the positive contribution that Jeremias makes.

The hiddenness, or mysterious quality of the identities (be it in-group or out-group(s)) is noteworthy. The point is that Nahum could have made his words much clearer, but neither he nor the editors chose to do so. They rather opted for a process of hidden or at least mysterious identity construction. If Spronk is correct about the hidden word-acrostic א - שׁ - ו - ר "Assyria" in verse 12a (see textual note at verse 12a above), it makes the poetics more powerful and the revolutionary and almost apocalyptic nature of the text more prominent, but it also adds to the suspense and drama of reading this text.

We see something in the text that could be described as codenames. We are impressed with the fact that we are dealing with subversive, liberatory literature – revolutions are dangerous! This premise is substantiated by the use of בְּלִיַּעַל "Belial" in verse 11 (repeated in Na 2:1). This very loaded word, which eventually became a personal noun in the New Testament (Βελιαρ) and in the Syriac (*Beliyar*), and was also used as comparison with Satan (*The martyrdom of Isaiah*, *The Testament of the twelve Patriarchs*) and with partly abstract, partly personified characteristics in the Damascus Document (see KB). The precise etymology seems to be uncertain but something like "worthlessness" might be a good guess.

It is in this basic semantic field that the word is mainly used in the Old Testament. We read of scoundrels, sons of worthlessness, or sons of wickedness who entice to idolatry (Dt 13:14), who are associated with Gibeah in two stories (Jg 19:22; 20:13; 1S 10:27), and who are basically brutes like Nabal in the story of Abigail and David (1S 25:17, 25). Eli's sons (1S 2:12), Sheba the Benjamanite who instigated the revolt against David (2S 20:1) and even David himself (2S 16:7) are called men or sons of Belial/wickedness. What is interesting, though, is to see how, in his hymn of victory, David (2S 22:5=Ps 18:5) thanks Yahweh for his deliverance from *Death's breakers, Belial's torrents, Sheol's snares and Death's traps*. It seems that at least in this text Belial already personifies wickedness, just like *Mawet* and *Sheol*. Other noteworthy intertexts are the fact that *scoundrels* gave false witness against Naboth (2K 21:10,13), that David states in his final words that God rejects men of Belial (2S 23:6), and that Elihu can say in Job 34:18 that the Almighty says to kings that they are scoundrels/worthless.

Sperling (1995:322) states that in the Old Testament usages of Belial, it functions "as an emotive term to describe individuals or groups who commit the most heinous crimes against the Israelite religious or social order, as well as their acts." Here in Nahum (Na 1:11; 2:1)

Belial is used in this very negative or derogatory way to describe the worthlessness or wickedness of the enemy king and his counsellor who instigate all this evil "going over" Judah and the other nations. If we were to read Belial in the context of Assyria's oppression in the time of Manasseh, it is possible that Belial could symbolically refer to the Assyrian king and that his counsellor points to Manasseh.

At the same time, however, Belial becomes a personified symbol of the prototype of the out-group[112]. The stereotyping and discrimination includes this kind of "name-calling." In the name, which implies wickedness, there is also the implication that before God such leaders/kings are worthless. From there it is not far to equate Belial with a God-opposing figure or power that stands for everything that is evil and oppressive. It could refer to the Babylonian king, but more universally, to every king or group who does evil to his or her people or his or her neighbours.

3.2.1.2 The power of metaphor

Schökel reminds us that the power of literature lies in the use of true metaphors, which become mediators of sense (Schökel 1998:131-132). Metaphors (and images) have a cognitive function in that they aim at "revealing an aspect of an object that would otherwise remain hidden or be unreachable, or would not strike the reader" (Schökel 1998:132).

Apart from the cognitive aspect, metaphors can also release feelings (affective processes), have an argumentative-rhetoric function, and therefore have ethical functions (Zimmermann 2000:127). A metaphor changes and has an influence on our behaviour. Nahum abounds in metaphoric language and in this section we encounter similes and a metaphor from the agricultural sphere.

The enemy/"Trouble" will be devoured "like fully dry stubble" (v.10b), cut off and blown away (v.12a). This metaphor creates an image of fleetingness, lightness, uselessness and

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[112] Cf. for a contrary view Sweeney (1992:366-369), who gives an overview of the research done on Belial in Nahum. He comes to the conclusion that we should not look towards situating the Belial passages in the Persian period eschatological scenario. Therefore the term does not personify evil, or a personified Satan figure, but points to the worthlessness and error in Judah (Sweeney 1992:368). I believe it has enough personified aspects to read it fruitfully as part of the exilic/post-exilic time as well.

worthlessness. Chaff is usually devoured by fire, or blown away by wind. We find both these extended images in the Old Testament, when all Yahweh's enemies will be consumed by Yahweh's fury like chaff (Ex 15:7), and the world rulers (Is 40:24), the enemies and Assyria (Ps 83:14), as well as Jerusalem (Is 47:14) will be blown away like chaff before the wind.

The "yoke" (מוֹט) that will be broken and the "chains"/"fetters" (מוֹסֵרָה) that will be snapped are part of the extended agricultural metaphor and comes from the yoke that was tied with fetters/chains to plough-oxen's necks. "His yoke" becomes a metaphor for the (economic?) oppression of Judah and probably refers to the Assyrian king, and the extreme taxation and other hardships that were forced upon the people of Palestine.

In this sense it is part of Nahum's allusions to Neo-Assyrian conquest metaphors. The Assyrians used the symbol of a yoke to depict Assyrian suzerainty: "The subjugated vassal is pictured as an ox wearing the 'yoke' of its master, the Assyrian king" (Johnston 2002:27).

Yahweh breaks these yokes of slavery and brings freedom (Lv 26:13). He breaks the staff and sceptre of rulers (Is 14:5), both Assyrian (Is 14:25) and Babylon (Is 14:5). He breaks the yoke and chains from the necks of Israel and Judah (Jr 30:8-9).

For social identity creation it is interesting to note that the metaphors and images that are used come from the world of ancient Israel. The agriculturally based tropes indicate that groups construct their identity from what makes sense to them and use images from the world and context they are part of. In Nahum 1:2-8 we also find nature imagery, and here we have agricultural references in Nahum 1:9-14. Could this be another hint that Nahum's anti-Assyria and anti-Manasseh "party" could be located in the "people of the land", who were living outside the big cities, and who were landowners, but wanted to keep to the traditional Yahweh-alone faith?

Both metaphors are strong and create meaning and certainty in times of trouble. Even though there was trouble before, now there will not be trouble again (Na 1:9b). Even though the enemy/out-group seems to be overpoweringly many (Na 1:12), they will become like chaff blown way by Yahweh (Na 1:10). Even though Yahweh has mistreated (Na 1:12b) and allowed the Assyrian yoke of economic, political and religious bondage to rest on Israel's

neck, he himself will break the burden of tribute in the form of money, produce and labour, and will set his people free.

Apart from tapping into Israel's textual resources of Yahweh as yoke and chain snapper, Nahum used a very powerful medium in an extremely ironic way. He incorporates well-known vassal treaty-curses from the ancient Near East in an ironic and satirical way, creating a textual identity that is built upon the power of poetic justice.

3.2.1.3 Curses are part of the struggle for identity

In a recent article Broadhurst (2004:61) asks whether the curses uttered by the biblical prophets should still form part of life in this 21st century BCE. He gives an interesting perspective from Kenya, noting that the reality of curses in ancient Israel is for many societies today in Africa still relevant and not a "relic from a bygone era" (Broadhurst 2004:61)[113]. In the light of this, the next section becomes very relevant in our study of ancient Israel's social identity as we find crucial examples of the dynamic of cursing in the formation of identity in troubling times.

In verse 14 we come across the first of a few curses, which are based on well-known treaty-curses from the ancient Near East. Cathcart (1973:179) builds on the work of Hillers (1964) and indicates how Nahum is full of allusions to Aramaic Sefire treaties and ancient Near Eastern treaty-curses[114]. Hillers (1964:5) emphasizes that prophets used prototypical imagery and that they preferred "traditional, inherited forms and expressions to those which were private and individual." Johnston (2001b:415, 418) elaborates on this and indicates that the curses come mainly from the neo-Assyrian political realm of vassal management (especially from the neo-Assyrian suzerain-vassal treaties). He places Nahum's allusions to these curses very specifically in the time of Manasseh (Johnston 2001b:422), namely, the Vassal Treaty that Essarhaddon made with Manasseh and other Syro-Palestine vassals in 672 BC.

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[113] Broadhurst (2004:62) makes the following interesting observation: "While African Christians admit their imprecatory thoughts, Christians in the West dismiss the potency of curses, regarding them as nothing more than fancy."
[114] He mentions Na 1:13,14; 2:14; 3:5,10,11,13,15,18,19.

We read in this pericope: "Not will your name be sown again" with the implication of "you will have no heir to your name" (NJB). This curse can be connected to the neo-Assyrian curses regarding the destruction of seed and name, and especially those of Essarhaddon. He repeatedly commanded his vassals to "eradicate the 'name' and 'seed' of insurrectionists, that is, to destroy all rebels including their heirs" (Johnston 2001b:425).

What is more, it is Yahweh who decrees (צוה pi'el) this curse. As we will see in the theophanic Yahweh-hymn in Nahum 1:2-8 (Chapter 6), we have an ironic reversal of the role of the Assyrian high king. Whereas the Assyrian king (i.e. possibly Ashurbanipal in Nahum's case) made the treaties with Judah, his vassal, and incorporated the curses at the end to make sure Judah does not break them, now the tables are turned. Yahweh the King of kings has the ultimate power over the forces and powers of this world. He pronounces a curse on the curse-maker, thereby creating an ironic reversal, which serves as poetic justice in a situation of dire need, oppression and existential terror (Cf. Johnston 2001b:435).

This is not the last time that ironic curse-reversal will be used in Nahum. This indeed forms one of the primary means by way of which social identity in Nahum is constructed. Themes, words, concepts and curses of the (oppressive) out-group are turned against them[115]. It is sort of tit-for-tat thinking, or *lex talionis* (law of retaliation). Although Assyria has been the instrument of Yahweh's punishment of Israel in the past, this instrument has, in its pride, thought more of itself than was allowed by Yahweh. The excesses of its war-mongering and the oppressiveness of its economic and religious empire turned in on itself and the punisher became the punished. Yahweh is behind all of this as the righteous Judge who at first seems "slow to anger" (Na 1:3a) but who, when aroused, is "great in power" (Na 1:3a) and will not allow oppression or trouble to rise up again (Na 1:9b).

What makes this ironic reversal with Yahweh as the powerful anti-type of the Assyrian (or any other power-abusing) king so pertinent, is Nahum 1:6a: "His **curse**, who can stand before it?" In this first and very important rhetorical question in Nahum[116] the prophet/writer tries

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[115] An example from the South African Apartheid Struggle history provides a good modern grounding of how this process works: The very patriotic anthem of the Afrikaner nationalist oppressive regime which included the words "ons sal lewe, ons sal sterwe, ons vir jou Suid-Afrika" ("we will live, we will die, for you South Africa") was also sung at meetings and rallies of anti-Apartheid liberationist groups. The words are the same, but the political irony and poetic justice created by these songs were dramatic. Patriotic and white exclusivist songs became revolutionary and liberatory taunt-songs.

[116] See below for the other rhetorical questions: Na 2:12; 3:7; 3:8; 3:19.

first of all to persuade, but also to stimulate the emotional reaction of the hearers/readers (De Regt 1996:52). At the same time this rhetorical question serves as a structuring device for the broader text, making the hearer/reader pause and emphasizing an important point (De Regt 1996:73).

The ambiguity is of course still present, and these curses could just as well have been meant (also) for the Judean king, that is, Manasseh, or for any other power-abusing, godless leader. In social identity theory this is indeed possible as multiple out-groups are often part of the identity-construction dynamic between groups. The cursing or announcement of doom continues when we read that carved and cast image (two technical terms for idols, which refers theologically to the group beliefs of the pro-Assyrian group) will be removed "from the house of your gods" and that the guilty party's grave will be put up (Na 1:14b).

That carved or cast images were not part of the Yahweh-Alone Movement is clear from the denouncement of them in the Decalogue (Ex 20:4; Dt 5:8), the Holiness code (Le 19:4; 26:1), the Deuteronomic instruction (Dt 4:16,23, 25) and the Deuteronomic curses (Dt 27:15). Although idols play a big role in the description of the sin of Israel (e.g. the golden bull at Horeb – Ex 32:4,8; 34:17; Dt 9:12,16; Ps 106:19; Ne 9:18), it is the connection of idols with the kings of Israel and Judah that interests us the most.

Jerobeam, as well as Ahaz (2 Ch 33:7), was condemned for making a מַסֵּכָה "cast image". More interesting is the mentioning of Manasseh in regards to a פֶּסֶל of Ashera that he put in the temple of Yahweh (2 K 17:16) and the repeated incident in 2 Chronicles 33:7, where it was a פֶּסֶל and a סֶמֶל idol. Manasseh is said to have put the images in "the house of God" (בְּבֵית הָאֱלֹהִים). This brings it into close proximity with Nahum 1:14, which talks about the images in the "house of your (G)od(s)." This is another clue or hint that Manasseh could be the one spoken to by Yahweh in Nahum 1:14!

3.2.1.4 Identity and political satire

Thus far the subtle undertones of reversed cursing and the ambiguity of persons who were named have been referred to as ironic reversal, dramatic irony or poetical justice. These concepts describe part of the dynamics of social identity, but fail to do justice to the

136

politically relevant and very crucial side of the text, which can be called political satire. This coincides with this study's focus on and sensitivity to the functioning of ideology in the text.

Nahum wanted to say something and he said it in very strong language, but at the same time the language used was also sharp and full of scorn irony and wit – all elements of political satire. In his very helpful book *Political satire in the Bible* Weisman (1998:55-56) directs our attention to the presence of political satire in the Bible and especially in the prophets and the prophecies towards other nations. The elements of political satire are very informative and their relevance to Nahum is clear. According to Weisman (1998:7-8), political satire includes the following elements:

- Sordid criticism invoking a negative and hostile attitude;
- Aimed at historical and concrete personalities, institutions, political systems, and mainly tyrants and arrogant, villainous adversaries;
- Animosity exposed by means of a curse in some instances, as well as merriment and joy at the sudden downfall of the arrogant person;
- The tone in satire is animosity and insult (vs. irony and humour – associated with a tone of forgiveness);
- Exploits rhetoric for its political purpose (polemical);
- Uses camouflage and does not reveal the name or the identity of the object of criticism (uses nicknames, metaphors, allegory and parody);
- Uses the grotesque, the paradoxical and the absurd to sharpen the criticism and taunt (uses stylistic and phonetic devices such as puns, double entendres, play of sounds (paronomasia, alliteration and assonance)).

We have seen the criticism (the plotting against Yahweh Na 1:11a), the historical and concrete aim of the prophecy (the anti-Assyrian party), the use of curses (treaty-curses Na 1:6,14), an insulting tone ("Yahweh decrees against you" Na 1:14a), the use of camouflage ("Belial" Na 1:11; 2:1) and the use of the grotesque and paradox ("You are worthless" – Na 1:14b) in Nahum.

All this has the ideological and polemical function of countering the political, economic and religious power of Assyria or any future power. It also ridicules the oppressive and peace-robbing complacency of the vassal king (i.e. Manasseh) and the pro-Assyrian "party" in Judah in a very subversive manner.

3.3 Nahum 2:2-3:19 – Description of doom for Assyria

The remainder of the book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite contains some of the best poetry, but at the same time some of the most offensive imagery in the Old Testament. The description of the attacking army, the ironic reversal and political satire against Assyria, and the cloaked identity of the destroyer of Assyria is breathtaking. The excessive violence and the metaphorical abuse of women's bodies are appalling.

According to the structure indicated above, we are now in the part where the "doom for others" is developed on the strength of the principles of the Yahweh-hymn in Nahum 1:2-8 and the ambiguous application thereof in Nahum 1:9-14. This is part of the book in which the מַשָּׂא נִינְוֵה, the oracle concerning Nineveh (Na 1:1a), is discussed.

3.3.1 Nahum 2:2-11 - First attack on the city

עָלָה מֵפִיץ עַל־פָּנַיִךְ [2]	2a A Scatterer[a] will come up against you:
נָצוֹר מְצֻרָה	Guard the fortifications!
צַפֵּה־דֶרֶךְ	2b Watch the road![b]
חַזֵּק מָתְנַיִם	Strengthen the hips![b]
אַמֵּץ כֹּחַ מְאֹד:	Muster great power![b]
כִּי שָׁב יְהוָה אֶת־גְּאוֹן יַעֲקֹב [3]	3a For, Yahweh will restore the greatness[a] of Jacob,
כִּגְאוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל	(that is/together with the greatness of Israel[b])
כִּי בְקָקוּם בֹּקְקִים	3b although[d] the destroyers have destroyed them
וּזְמֹרֵיהֶם שִׁחֵתוּ:	and have wiped out their branches

Another possibility[c]:

3a For Yahweh will break into pieces the pride of Jacob,

    (like the pride of Israel)

3b because[e] the destroyers will[f] destroy them

    and will[f] wipe out their branches

מָגֵן גִּבֹּרֵיהוּ מְאָדָּם [4]	4a The shields of his elite troops are red.
אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל מְתֻלָּעִים	The warriors are dressed in scarlet.
בְּאֵשׁ־פְּלָדוֹת הָרֶכֶב	Like fire[a] the steel of the chariots[b]
בְּיוֹם הֲכִינוֹ	on the day of his preparation.[c]
וְהַבְּרֹשִׁים הָרְעָלוּ:	4b The spear shafts[d] are made to quiver.[e]
בַּחוּצוֹת יִתְהוֹלְלוּ הָרֶכֶב [5]	5a In the streets the chariots run as mad,[a]

138

יְשְׁתַּקְשְׁקוּן בָּרְחֹבוֹת	they rush to and fro in the squares.
מַרְאֵיהֶן כַּלַּפִּידִם	5b They shine like torches,
כַּבְּרָקִים יְרוֹצֵצוּ:	like lightning they dash to and fro
⁶ יִזְכֹּר אַדִּירָיו	6a He calls out[a] his mighty ones with rank -
יִכָּשְׁלוּ בַּהֲלִיכָתָם	they stumble[b] in their fleeing.
יְמַהֲרוּ חוֹמָתָהּ	6b They hurry to her wall,[c]
וְהֻכַן הַסֹּכֵךְ:	but the mantelet has already been set up firmly.
⁷ שַׁעֲרֵי הַנְּהָרוֹת נִפְתָּחוּ	7a The gates of the rivers[a] are opened
וְהַהֵיכָל נָמוֹג:	and the palace collapses.
⁸ וְהֻצַּב גֻּלְּתָה הֹעֲלָתָה	8a He is put down, she is exposed, raped,[a]
וְאַמְהֹתֶיהָ מְנַהֲגוֹת כְּקוֹל יוֹנִים	8b and her handmaids are moaning like doves
מְתֹפְפֹת עַל־לִבְבֵהֶן:	beating on their breasts.[b]
⁹ וְנִינְוֵה כִבְרֵכַת־מַיִם	9a Nineveh was like a pool of water,
מִימֵי הִיא וְהֵמָּה נָסִים	but[a] her waters[b] are draining away.[c]
עִמְדוּ עֲמֹדוּ	9b Halt! Halt! -
וְאֵין מַפְנֶה:	but no one turns back.
¹⁰ בֹּזּוּ כֶסֶף בֹּזּוּ זָהָב	10a Plunder silver! Plunder gold!
וְאֵין קֵצֶה לַתְּכוּנָה	10b And there is no boundary to the treasure[a] -
כָּבֹד מִכֹּל כְּלִי חֶמְדָּה:	a mass of all the things[b] of desire.
¹¹ בּוּקָה וּמְבוּקָה וּמְבֻלָּקָה	11a Void and waste and devastation.[a]
וְלֵב נָמֵס	And the hearts melt.
וּפִק בִּרְכַּיִם	And shaking are the knees.
וְחַלְחָלָה בְּכָל־מָתְנַיִם	And there is trembling in all loins.
וּפְנֵי כֻלָּם קִבְּצוּ פָארוּר:	And the faces of all of them gather a glow.[b]

Textual notes:

2. a) BHS proposes מֵפִץ "destroyer" (part. of פצץ "destroy") but there is no support in the versions. **b)** The absolute infinitives are to be read as imperatives (Ehrlich 1968:294; Rudolph 1972:160; Edel 1972:34; Deissler 1984:210 Spronk 1997:85).

3. a) BHS suggests גֶּפֶן "vine" probably as a good parallel to "branches" in v.3b (Spronk 1997:87). The "vine of Israel/Jacob" is not attested in the OT, whereas "pride of Israel/Jacob/Judah" is well attested. **b)** Rudolph (1972:160) deletes v.3aB as a gloss from Hos 6:11,7aA. **c)** The other translations possibility comes from the ambiguity of (1) שוב which can mean either "restore" or destroy" as a Qal transitive (DBLSD 8740-1) and (2) גְּאוֹן - "pride, majesty, splendour, glory" (positively) or "pride, arrogance, conceit" (negatively) (DBLSD 1454). **d)** כִּי is translated as a concessive (KB) "although/even though." **e)** Affirmative כִּי. **f)** Although rare, it is possible

that we have here a prophetic perfect, which serves the rhetorical means of presenting future events as if they have already happened (BHRG §19.2/5ii).

4. a) Dutch New Version "in the fiery light of the steel stand the chariots" (פְּלָדוֹת = "steel"). NJB "The metal of the chariots sparkles." Spronk (1997:89) "Flaming red are the covering of the chariots" relating פְּלָדוֹת to Ugarit. *pld* "piece of cloth" and Assyrian reliefs where chariots were decorated with coverings. Targ. "the plates of their chariots are prepared" (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:135). **b)** Changing with some MSS and Σ באש to כָּאֵשׁ "like fire" and reading פְּלָדוֹת as stat. constr. (Rudolph 1972:167). **c)** BHS suggests deletion of "on the day of his preparation" as a gloss. **d)** MT "cypresses" implying the wood of which the spear shafts were made. **e)** From רעל Hof. "to be shaken" (Hulst 1960:247), contra the suggestion of connecting the word with רעלה "a veil" (cf. HAL 1181) and therefore translating (with Spronk 1997:89) "and the poles are upholstered."

5. a) הלל III hitpoel; cf. HAL (239).

6. a) So KB. LXX and Vulg. read יִזָּכְרוּ "they are remembered/called out" seeing "the nobles" as the subject. So NJB "His captains are called out, stumbling as they go." **b)** Contra BHS "they do not stumble" who still sees the attackers of vv.4-5 in v.6 whereas it is clearly the defenders (Assyrian army and king) who are spoken about in verse 6 (cf. Spronk 1997:92-93). **c)** BHS suggests חוֹמָתָה (without the *mappik* and with directional ה; see Rudolph 1972:168). Here it is better to retain (like in Na 1:8, cf. note d; also MSS, Syr. and Targ.) the 3 fem. sg. as referring to Nineveh without directly naming the city and so building tension (Spronk 1997:93-94).

7. a) According to Rudolph (1972:168), it can also be "the gates of the river" i.e. the Tigris. This depends on how the destruction of Nineveh is seen. Targ. has "bridges over" seeing it as more appropriate to rivers (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:136).

8. a) Following Spronk (1997:96-98), who builds on Yefer ben Ely's translation of הצב and sees in עלה Hoph. the association with Gn 31.10 (mating of cattle). Whether this is correct is difficult to prove. It is an extremely difficult verse that BHS sees as corrupt. Many different solutions have been offered (see Rudolph 1972:168-169 note 8a, and Spronk 1997:96-98 for a thorough discussion). Other possibilities are: (1) "the captive train goes into exile" (Driver 1964:298 reads Arab. *ṣubbun* = הצב "train, column" and changes גֻּלְּתָה "has been uncovered" to גָּלְתָה "has gone into exile"); (2) "put into the captive-wagon is the 'Hochedle' (i.e. Queen)" (Rudolph 1972:166); (3) "it's mistress is stripped, she is carried off" (RSV; Hulst 1960:247); (4) "Beauty is taken captive, carried away" (NJB); (5) "The queen is taken away captive" (Lutherbibel); "The Queen is put on show" (Deissler 1984:210); (6) "It is fixed: She is stripped, she is carried away" (NASB translating falsely - so also OAB "en dit is beslis"; NAB "Dit staan vas" and NIV "It is decreed"). Certain is that we should not see the name of queen Huzzab here as Driver (1964:296) has shown. **b)** Lit. "hearts" implying great emotion.

9. a) Although deleted by the textual emendation (see Na 2:9 note b) the sense of the adversive ו (וְהֵמָּה v.9bA) is retained. **b)** Not following LXX in changing the grammatically problematic מִימֵי הִיא (construct noun with personal pronoun; Hulst 1960:247) "since the days of her" to מֵימֶיהָ "her waters" (so NJB; NIV; RSV). Although it moves the problem to the next word (Spronk 1997:100) "waters" plur. (implying the inhabitants of the city) gives a better referent for the pronoun "they" in v.9bA. **c)** Lit. "fleeing/running away." Rudolph (1972:169) simplifies this metaphorical "switch" from "vehicle" (water in a pool) to "tenor" (inhabitants in a city) by constructing "you fugitives - halt! halt!"

10. a) So NJB. Lit. "store." **b)** Lit. "articles/utensils."

11. a) The whole verse is filled with alliteration and assonance and expresses the deep emotions of fear and anxiety of death. V.11a almost sounds like a type of curse or ritual incantation: *buqah umbuqah umbullaqah*! Edel (1972:36) sees in the compilation of nouns with similar stems that sound similar the expression of the totality and finality of a condition. Seybold (1989:49) sees wordplay with the empty sounds of the syllables of *buqa*. **b)** The Piel meaning of קבץ with intertext Jl 2:6 (so Holladay; Spronk 1997:103; Seybold 1989:49 - "Fieberglut"; Rudolph 1972:169). Most translations have "the faces grow pale" (NJB; NAB; RSV; NASB; NIV). Targ. "and all their faces are covered with a coating of black like a pot" suggesting a comparison with Hebr. פרור "pot" (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:137).

With regards to questions of social identity we have fewer problems than in Nahum 1:9-14, and things seem a bit more clear-cut, although we will see some of the characteristics of Nahum 1:9-14 again in Nahum 2-3. The hidden or mysterious identity of the "Scatterer" in verse 2a is worth exploring, and so is the function of the great poetry of this section. Finally, something has to be said about the violent imagery that is used in the text. What does it say about the theological-ethical construction of social identity?

3.3.1.1 Who is the "Scatterer" of verse 2?

By now we know that Nahum cloaks the characters in this drama of writing. This is in agreement with the general style of some of the OCN that use a mythological grounding for their oracles of judgment, and also a very important part of the political satire that we find in Nahum. The "Scatterer" in Nahum 2:2a also falls in this category of hidden identity. The hif'il participle of the root פוץ is used to describe the entity that is "going up" (עלה) "against you." The text-critical apparatus of the BHS suggests that we read מַפֵּיץ "war club/battle axe" making it intertextually closer to texts like Jeremiah 51:20 where Babylon is called Yahweh's mace or war-club that crushed nations. This of course fits nicely (in hindsight) with the idea that the "mace" going up against Assyria refers to Babylon who indeed in the end destroyed Nineveh/Assyria. There are, however, no textual witnesses for this reading and so we are left with this rather strange root, which is somehow connected (through the substantive use of the participle) with a "scatterer" and possibly *the* Scatterer.

When mapping the occurrence of the verb פוץ, two very interesting observations can be made. *Firstly*, in most of the texts it is Yahweh who does the scattering! For example, in Numbers 10:35 Moses makes the warlike proclamation in the flight from Egypt: "Rise Yahweh, may

your enemies be scattered." We see that when Yahweh stands up his enemies scatter (Is 33:3). We also read in Psalm 68:2 "Let God arise, let his enemies scatter." The most interesting example though is found in Genesis 11 where the verb occurs three times (Gn 11:4,8,9). This is the story of the so-called "Tower of Babel", where the whole world wanted to build a tower so that they will not be *scattered* all over the world (v.4). Yahweh did not like it and then he *scattered* them all over the world (vv.8-9). When we read the Tower story as a critique of the Assyrian one-world programme (as Oehlinger indicated in his well-known study), then we are not a long way from Nahum! Could there be a possible connection, however faint, to this important story?

Secondly, we see that it is usually Israel that is *scattered*. We see Israel scattered on the mountains (1K 22:17=2Ch 18:16), among the nations (Jr 9:15), and like chaff before the enemy (Jr 13:24). This, of course, brings back the idea of the double-sidedness of the words that are used. If Israel is usually the one being scattered by Yahweh, it is strange to find all of a sudden an army of a (presumably) foreign nation which will scatter the Assyrians, the punishing rod of Yahweh.

The point is that the identity of the Scatterer is purposefully hidden, for the writer wanted to keep the identity of this character mysterious. Moreover, he wanted to make it clear that Yahweh has something to do with this character. We see this, not just in the intertextual evidence, but also in the next part of the verse where the enemy is commanded to "watch the road (דֶּרֶךְ)" and to "muster great power (כֹּחַ)". Both "road/way" and "power" link on to the hymn in Nahum 1:3, where Yahweh is described as great in power (כֹּחַ) with whirlwind and storm as his way/road (דֶּרֶךְ).

Even if it is a foreign army that will eventually do the rooting out of Nineveh, the writer wants to show that Yahweh is behind the attack. It is as if Yahweh himself is coming with his armies to destroy Nineveh and to end the oppression of Assyria. Here we have a very powerful mythological allusion that combines the power of deity with the realities of earthly combat. Social identity is constructed by a subtle play on the focus of their main group belief – that Yahweh is powerful to save those that trust in him, and that he is a stronghold in days of trouble.

Yahweh as ultimate prototype of Israel's identity shows us the hebrewgram principle of identity at its best. Even an earthly army is an extension of the arm of Yahweh. The warrior God, Yahweh, fights on the side of his people. He was responsible for scattering Israel in the past, but now he will do the scattering of his and Judah's enemies. That is why another word for "scatter" (פּוּשׁ Nif'al) is used to describe the end of the Assyrian empire in Nahum 3:18b: "your people are *scattered* on the mountains."

3.3.1.3 Nahum 2:3 - Ambiguity reigns: Is Judah saved or destroyed?

As was indicated in the translation above (see the textual notes), verse 3 is not necessarily as straightforward as would seem at first glance. One could argue that it is in fact only a word-play or even a coincidence, but seeing that we have already discovered this type of subtle polysemy and double entendre in Nahum 1, we should at least investigate the implications of an alternative translation.

Following the main thread of the text would leave us with the first translation possibility:

> 3a For, Yahweh will <u>restore</u> the greatness of Jacob,
>
>   (that is/together with the greatness of Israel)
>
> 3b although the destroyers <u>have</u> destroyed them
>
>   and <u>have</u> wiped out their branches

The word גָּאוֹן "pride" can mean majesty/greatness (in a positive sense) or pride (in a negative sense).[117] When it is combined with Jacob, it is more often than not used in a negative sense. For example, in Hosea 5:5 and 7:10 we read that Israel's *pride* is her accuser and she will be punished. In Amos 6:8 we see that Yahweh detests the *pride* of Jacob and sees it as a ground for punishment. Later on in Jeremiah (Jr 13:9), in the symbolic action of the "useless waistcloth," Yahweh says that he will ruin the *pride* of Judah and Jerusalem.

If taken to mean "majesty" or "greatness" it would make sense on some level, but on another level not. This is specifically the case because of the next line of the verse: כִּגְאוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל "like

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[117] Jeremias (1970:25-28) has already pointed out this ambiguity of translation in Nahum 2:3. Cf. also Dietrich (1994:484) who follows Jeremias in seeing the reference to Jacob's and Israel's "glory" as pride and therefore as an oracle of judgment against Israel/Judah.

the greatness of Israel" which would only make sense if we took the כְּ to mean something like "together with" or "that is," a sense that is not normally attributed to כְּ (cf. BHRG §39:10). At that stage the "ten tribes" of Israel were totally dispersed by the Assyrians, and since we have no other traditions that talk of Israel being restored again, it seems hard to believe that that would be the case here. If the author meant that Jacob's greatness would be restored "like" Israel's, then we have a false comparison, as Israel was not restored.

We must also consider the verb שָׁב with which the verse starts and which can mean either "return/restore" or "cut down" which means "to destroy completely" (cf. KB). Whichever way one translates verse 3a, verse 3b has to be translated correspondingly (as was done above). That is why an alternative translation would read:

> 3a For Yahweh will <u>break into pieces</u> the pride of Jacob,
>   (like the pride of Israel)
> 3b because the destroyers <u>will</u> destroy them
>   and <u>will</u> wipe out their branches

How does one decide? Perhaps the answer is to leave the text in its complexity. Maybe the author(s) wanted the readers to feel uncomfortable and uncertain. Maybe this way of open-endedness and ambiguity is part and parcel of how Israel wanted to construct their own identity. Is it not possible that a sense of self-critique runs as an undercurrent, even in this most famous of "nationalistic" texts? Nahum contains words that, to the ear of the hearers/readers who knew their textual tradition, would sound very familiar to the texts of judgment and punishment against Israel/Judah. If there was ever a unique characteristic of national literature of liberation, this would certainly be it. But the fact remains that what we have uncovered are only "shimmerings" of other texts. The question is whether these alternative shimmerings were/are strong enough to break into the world of nationalistic stereotyping. We will have to read Nahum as part of the redaction of the Book of the Twelve to see whether this is indeed what happens in the theological-ethical development of ancient Israel.

3.3.1.2 Great poetry and the search for social identity

The four imperatives in verse 2 are used ironically in that these "commands" function somewhat like "helpful suggestions" to the enemy (the "you" verse 2a). They are imperatives of futility though because as the text moves along at breakneck speed, with the use of short sharp sentences, it becomes clear that the attack is inevitable. All the "guarding," "watching," "strengthening" and "mustering" will be useless against the Scatterer and his army. We find the same use of imperatives in Nahum 2:9 and Nahum 3:14, and all have the same function.

In verse 6 we have another example of ironic reversal. The Assyrian army will "stumble" (כשל) in their fleeing. This can be a clever reversal of Isaiah 5:25-30, where the Assyrians are called by Yahweh to punish Israel: "none is weary, none stumbles (כשל)" (Is 5:27). The same happens in Na 3:3c, where the Assyrians again "stumble" (כשל) over the heaps of dead bodies.

The imperatives come from a narrator who, not unlike a commentator, gives the reader/hearer a birds-eye view of the attack as it approaches and then hits the city. The narrator/poet knows not only the details of the attacking army, but also what happens in the city of the enemy (how the enemy captain/Assyrian king calls out his officers but it is already too late – verse 6). The narrator also informs the reader/hearer that the Assyrian king orders the inhabitants of the city: "Halt! Halt!" but then scornfully remarks that no one turns back (v.9b). Then he goes on to encourage the attackers to plunder the city, again using ironical imperatives ("Plunder silver! Plunder gold!").

Reimer (1993:161-169) studied imperative strings in the oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51. He sees in the Jeremiah imperatives a dual function, namely "announcements of doom" and the "announcement of hope" (Reimer 1993:166). This is also true for Nahum. Another interesting remark from Reimer (1993:168-169) is that this use of imperatives raises the "emotional temperature of the oracle, with their insistent tone and implied imminence."

The poetry of this section creates a multiple sense experience of sight and sound, as we see the warriors and their chariots with their flaming red dress and spears, and hear (through the

use of onomatopoeia[118], alliteration and assonance[119]) how the army advances over the battlefield like a storm ("like lightning" verse 5bB). In our mind's eye we can see how the army approaches (vv. 4-5), how they come to the wall of the city (v.6), how the city and palace are taken (vv. 7-8), how the inhabitants flee out of the city (v.9), how the army plunders the fallen city (v.10), and then a general description of the aftermath of the attack in verse 11. We have indeed here a script that could be used for making a dramatic film, as Premstaller (2003:50) puts it:

> Maybe, this prophet would have been a good scriptwriter or director in Hollywood or somewhere else in our film industry, but not only for some kind of fiction, Nahum could also be helpful for documentaries: Nineveh was really destroyed by the Babylonians and Medes 612 B.C.E.

We have a beautiful, although at the same time terrifying, metaphor in verse 9a. Nineveh is likened to a pool of water, but whose water is now draining away, to indicate how the inhabitants flee out of the gates of the city, like a stream of water.

The interchanging of addressees in this text also creates excitement and drama, and adds to the ironic reversal that we have come to expect of Nahum. In verse 2 we have direct speech to the enemy "you." In verses 4-5 we have a third person description of the Scatterer's fierceful army. In verse 6 the third person is still used, but now it refers not to the Scatterer but (probably) to the king of the Assyrian army. In verse 7-9a we again have a general description of the attack. In verse 9b we hear (first person) imperatives from the Assyrian king. In verse 10-11 we have the narrator (or is it the words of the Scatterer?) commanding the plunder (בֹּז) of the city and then describing the aftermath of the terrible destruction of Nineveh, which is only introduced in verse 9. This produces dramatic tension.

Verse 11b "and the faces of all of them gather a glow" contributes to this tension. Glück (1969:21) sees in פָּארוּר paronomasia, an elevated pun that produces ironic tragedy and a delicately cruel bathos. His translation of פָּארוּר as: "and the faces of them all gathered

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[118] E.g. Na 2:5a where the chariots "dash to and fro" יִשְׁתַּקְשְׁקוּן, *jishtakshikun* which sounds almost like the wheels of the chariots on the cobblestones of the streets.
[119] Although there are many examples, Na 2:11a serves as the best example: בּוּקָה וּמְבוּקָה וּמְבֻלָּקָה, *buqah umbuqah umbulaqah* which sound like some kind of incantation when said aloud. This must have formed a dramatic climax when the text was read aloud.

greyness (like pottery)" plays on the level of a cooking pot that turns grey with much use on the fire – the colour of a face when the blood drains from it – as well as sets the connection between pottery and death (Glück 1969:22). The grey pottery reminds of a death mask, or the anthropoid earthenware coffins and "Nahum might well have wished to compare the face of the terror-stricken people." This literary device (paronomasia) uses subtle play on words and is very effective in dramatic presentation and oratory (Glück 1969:24).

Furthermore, we have a continued ironic reversal that serves the poetic justice and points to political satire. In the very important OCN against Assyria in Isaiah 10:6 we see that Yahweh had commissioned Assyria to pillage and plunder (בזז). In Nahum it seems that this commission from Yahweh is now turned against Assyria in a talionist fashion when the attacking army is ordered to plunder (בזז).

Poetry opens up the imagination and stirs the power of poetic justice. One could ask whether these verses are an eyewitness account of the attack on Nineveh, or whether they, by picturing the attack as fiercely realistic as possible, bring on the demise of Assyria almost in a mantic fashion. Seeing the fall of the city in the mind's eye and describing it in full colour (with sound effects!) create hope, reduce anxiety, and liberate on a symbolical level. The question is how one should think about such a violent way of expressing one's identity on a textual level. The next section looks at the implications of images of violence and abuse on identity.

3.3.1.3 Imagery of violence in Nahum 2

Can a theological ethic contain the option for violence? Are we not, after the Sermon on the Mount, the example of Ghandi and concepts such as peaceful resistance, supposed to shun even the faintest notion of propagating violence as a way to liberation? What do we do with the "Uneasy expression of Yahweh's power" (Wessels 1998) that constitutes such a large part of Nahum? Can we just look past the very graphic description of war in ancient Israel when our own world is so full of war? Nahum 2:5 and 2:11 are good examples of the devastation of war.

> Na 2:5 In the streets the chariots run as mad, they rush to and fro in the squares.
> Na 2:11 Void and waste and devastation. And the hearts melt. And shaking are the knees. And there is trembling in all loins. And the faces of all of them gather a glow.

Nahum 2:5 would have painted a picture of horrible terror and death in the minds of ancient Israel. The "streets" (חוּצוֹת) and the "squares" (רְחֹבוֹת) were the places of punishment, slaughter and destruction. After an attack, corpses would lie like dung on the streets (Is 5:25), also children and old people (Lm 2:19), and that was where the screaming and lamenting took place (Am 5:16). The squares and streets are where death cut down the children and the young people of Judah (Jr 9:20).

Nahum 2:11 might be very poetic, but the image of voidness waste and devastation, as well as the human terror that is mediated by describing the reactions of the human body (melting hearts, shaking knees, trembling loins and faces ashen-white with fear), is one that burns into the mind.

Then we have not even looked at the possible rape[120] of the queen of Nineveh (Na 2:8a) and handmaids moaning and wailing and beating their breasts. Compare Magdalene (1995:333) who reads Nahum 2:7-8 and concludes: "Here, wet gates are opened and the captured, stripped woman is carried off for rape, while those who serve her suffer over her fate."

We are confronted with the human reality of war and violence, and the worst part is that it is intimately connected to the "great power" of Yahweh, the rock-shatterer and the scatterer of peoples and nations. The graphic portrayal of violence will become even harsher in Nahum 3, but a few remarks about identity construction and violence in ancient Israel will be in order here.

In 1970 Holladay wrote a very interesting article about the influence of Assyrian Statecraft on the prophets of Israel. He first indicated that the kingdom of Judah has to be understood as being a vassal kingdom with Yahweh as Suzerain King, modelled on the great empires like Egypt and Assyria (Holladay 1970:33-34). Therefore he comments on the prophets in the following way: "Exactly as the envoy of the Pharaoh or the king of Assyria brought the word of the Great King to his vassal rulers … so also the prophet was "sent" with the message of

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[120] I use the word "rape" here, and also translate it that way (see translation above) following Gravett (2004:298), who studies the language and translation aspects of rape in the Hebrew Bible and comes to the conclusion that the translation "rape" "captures horrifying moments with clarity for the English reader." She goes further: "It locates readers within an experience of personal, sexual, emotional, and societal violation by acknowledging the lived reality of a character/group or the anguish propelling a cry to God … [it] underscores the violence of the power dynamics at play in the cultures that produces the text" (Magdalene 1995:298).

the Lord of Israel" (Holladay 1970:34). Secondly, he focuses on the neo-Assyrian influence on prophecy in Israel by showing how the "spectacular rise to prominence of the royal herald as essential instrument of imperial government" changed the focus of the prophetic message from just the leaders/king to the population as a whole (Holladay 1970:42-44). By using the Rabshakeh of 2 Kings 18:17ff. as example, Holladay (1970:44-45) indicates how the prophets took their "cue" from this secular neo-Assyrian model. Could the same be said about the images that Nahum uses?

Aberbach (1993:55) points in this direction when he states that "In its own way, Nahum's poetry echoes the brutality of Assyria and artistically is a verbal equivalent of the great Assyrian wall reliefs in Nineveh." When one has been oppressed for so many years and has seen wars and horrors and terror from village to village, one writes with the images in mind and the existential experience at hand. To counter the great evil and oppressive Assyrian empire, one had to use poetry that reversed the power and atrocities in the only way known to someone living in such a crisis – by violence of the same kind.

This is a very interesting point for the discussion of social identity. We see that the textual identity is formed by the use of the language, metaphors and imagery of the Oppressor. The violence overpowers all speech and writing and the result looks like a reversed speech of Ashurbanipal. Israel surely also housed stories and myths of their warrior God, Yahweh in its tradition – this God who led his armies in the tribal and regional wars. I do, however, think that this graphic, poetical depiction of extreme violence should be sought in the Assyrian influence on the identity of ancient Israel. People and groups living unsafely under oppression, torture and terror react with what they have and what they know. In a sense violence therefore begets violence, like an abusive father, who, more often than not, "produces" an equally abusive son.

In the ideology of power or the lack thereof in human affairs, violence has always played a central role. War after war is fought, and revolution after revolution is started or quelled. Theologically-ethically this dynamic that underlies the prophetic OCN should be exposed and resisted. As above, we could relativise the violent imagery by situating it in the patriarchal and hierarchical context of oppression and crisis under an empire. The importance, however, of the need to engage in dialogue with this ancient text before our eyes cannot be overstated.

Our present global situation, filled with wars, famine and disease, in some way connects with this ancient witness on the human condition. It is crucial to note the reality of creating a peaceful space (*sjalôm*) in the midst of suffering by groups pushed to political, religious and economic extremes, and the dynamic underlying such an identity-constructing process. But this should be done critically, even when it is a text from the Bible, by a prophet who declares: כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה ("Thus says Yahweh").

In Nahum 3 the nauseating scenes of death will strike us again in full force, and will go a step further by metaphorically abusing a woman's body. There the ideological and liberatory feminist critique against such texts of terror will be taken up again. First we must look for the social identity in a text about the "lion-family."

3.3.2 Nahum 2:12-14 – Ironic judgment oracle

Hebrew		English
אַיֵּה מְעוֹן אֲרָיוֹת ¹²	12a	Where is the den of the lions
וּמִרְעֶה הוּא לַכְּפִרִים		and the feeding place[a] of the young lions now?
אֲשֶׁר הָלַךְ אַרְיֵה לָבִיא שָׁם	12b	Where the lion went, the lioness[b] was there,
גּוּר אַרְיֵה וְאֵין מַחֲרִיד:		and the lion's cub without being frightened.
אַרְיֵה טֹרֵף בְּדֵי גֹרוֹתָיו ¹³	13a	The lion tore up enough prey for his whelps,
וּמְחַנֵּק לְלִבְאֹתָיו		and strangled prey for his lioness,
וַיְמַלֵּא־טֶרֶף חֹרָיו	13b	and filled with prey his holes,
וּמְעֹנֹתָיו טְרֵפָה:		and his dens with torn flesh.
הִנְנִי אֵלַיִךְ נְאֻם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת ¹⁴	14a	"Behold I am against[a] you" declares Yahweh Sebaoth.
וְהִבְעַרְתִּי בֶעָשָׁן רִכְבָּה		"For I shall burn to ashes in smoke your chariots,[b]
וּכְפִירַיִךְ תֹּאכַל חָרֶב		and your cubs the sword will devour.
וְהִכְרַתִּי מֵאֶרֶץ טַרְפֵּךְ	14b	And I shall eliminate from the earth[c] your tearing,[d]
וְלֹא־יִשָּׁמַע עוֹד קוֹל מַלְאָכֵכֵה:		and not will be heard again the voices of your messengers."[e]

Textual notes:

12. a) So Rudolph (1972:169 "Futterplatz" and Seybold 1989:49) against BHS (following Wellhausen's famous emendation to מְעָרָה "cave"). Hulst (1960:248) also suggests the change to "cave" because "to graze" does not fit the context - though Spronk (1997:105) thinks the opposite. **b)** Deissler (1984:211) has "to hide himself" from *lābō'* (Qumran).

14. a) אֶל "against" indicating the goal of an emotional process (BHRG §39.3/1e). **b)** Changing "her chariots" to LXX 2 fem. sg. suff. "your chariots" (Hulst 1960:248; Deissler 1984:212); although see Spronk (1997:108) who pleads for a "feminized plural" (dropping the *mappik*) and Rudolph (1972:169) who changes to "your highness" ("Größe") because "chariots" does not fit the context as it is only mentioned regarding the attackers and not Assyria! Seybold (1989:66) has "hideout." **c)** Rudolph has "from the country" as "earth" does not fit the specific context of Na 2:10. **d)** Following Spronk (1997:109) changing טַרְפֵּךְ noun to טַרְפֵּךְ inf. Targ. interprets טַרְפֵּךְ as "your trade" (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:138). NJB "I shall cut short your depredations on earth." **e)** Reading מלאכיך (with most scholars) "your messengers" seeing dittography of the ה (Rudolph 1972:109). Other possibilities are מַאֲכָלֵךְ "your feeding" or לְבִיאָיִךְ "your lioness" (see Spronk 1997:109 for details). The unusual form of the MT may be to stylize the idea of <u>one</u> messenger, so linking it to the <u>one</u> news bringer to Israel in Na 2:1.

This section, which is demarcated by the interrogative אַיֵּה "where?" (v. 12) and ends with the Masoretic *setumah* at the end of verse 14, satirizes the relationship between Nineveh/Assyria, on the one hand, and Yahweh/Israel/the other oppressed nations, on the other. The *tertium comparationis* is situated in the realm of fauna, with the lion and his family as the metaphoric vehicle. As we have already seen, political satire runs deep in Nahum and these verses are no exception. The expression of political or ideological judgement takes place by using images and nicknames, and in this case playing on a symbol very dear to Assyria and the Assyrian kings.

3.3.2.1 The lion metaphor as political satire

In verse 12 the author literally exhausts all the words that can be used for animals belonging to the lion-family, namely, אֲרִי *lion,* אַרְיֵה *lion* (male), לָבִיא *lion/lioness,* כְּפִיר *young lion,* and גּוּר *cub/whelp*. The lion and lioness and sometimes also the whelps or other combinations of two or three of the words are found often in the Old Testament. The use of the lion motive can be categorized as:

(1) Literal animals/fauna (for example Egypt was named the land of lioness and roaring lion in Is 30.6, Samson's show of power by killing a lion, and Daniel in the lion's den);

(2) Images of lions in sculptures (Solomon's palace and throne had lion motives, 1K 7:29,36; 10:10; 2Ch 9:18-19. The temple seen by Ezekiel had lion motives Ezk 41:19);

(3) As metaphor for threatening enemies, pursuers and the wicked (Pss 7:3; 10:9; 17:2; 22:14, 22);

151

(4) For Yahweh himself;

(5) For Judah or other Israelite tribes; and

(6) For foreign nations.

Numbers 4-6 above interest us the most.

Especially in Hosea we find a lot of references to Yahweh as a lion. We read that Yahweh is a lion against Ehpraim and the House of Judah (Hos 5:14). Yahweh is portrayed as roaring as a lion with the return of the exiles from all over the world (Hos 11:10). Yahweh will further be like a lion, leopard, bear and lioness to Israel, and he will tear them apart (Hos 13:8). But Yahweh will also be a lion against the nations (Jr 25:38). He will be like a *young lion* against Assyria (Is 31:4), and here we are closer to the mark.

We also see Judah or Israel being likened to a lion. Dan is, for example, called a *lion's cub* (Dt 33:22). In the prophecies of Balaam (Nb 23:24; 24:9) Jacob and Israel are called a lion and lioness. Judah is also called a *lion's whelp* and a mighty lion in the blessing of Jacob (Gn 49:9). Judah features further in Zephaniah 3:3, where his rulers are called lions. Israel is called a *lioness among the lions* and her kings likened to the lioness's *cubs/whelps* (Ezk 19:2,6). Then finally in Micah 5:7 we read *What is left of Jacob will be like a lion among the foreign beasts and sheep ... mangling his prey*.

What interest us most are, of course, the references to other nations being called lions. In general, the nations who invaded Israel are said to have the teeth of lions (Jl 1:6). Furthermore, *a lion* (which refers to an invading marauding nation) can be part of the punishment for a nation like Moab (Is 15:9). Egypt is called the *young lion of the nations* (Ezk 32:2) and is also called a lion in Jeremiah 2:15 with the (possible) intervention of Egypt in Israel in 605-608 BCE. Edom is likened to a *lion climbing the thickets of the Jordan* (Jr 49:19). This same formula (*lion climbing...*) is also attributed to Babylon (Jr 50:44), who is likened to lions who are roaring and whelps who are growling (Jr 51:38).

Babylon and Assyria feature together in Jeremiah 50:17: *Israel was a straying sheep pursued by lions. First, the king of Assyria devoured him, and latterly Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon crunched his bones* (NJB). Assyria becomes the most often mentioned lion-nation when we regard the *lion ... the destroyer of nations* who comes from the North to Israel as being the Assyrians or possibly the Scythians - Jr 4:7, and when we consider Isaiah 5:29 were

152

the summoned invaders of Israel are the Assyrians - *growling they seize their prey and carry it off.*

It leaves little doubt that this extended metaphor of the royal Assyrian lion-family refers to the Assyrian king and his family, together with his sons or possibly his officials or satraps. It is also known that lions were the most-loved animals of the Assyrians (cf. Edel 1991:36).

It is this point that Johnston (2001a), in his very well researched and though-provoking article, brings to our attention: "Nahum's rhetorical allusions to the neo-Assyrian lion motif." After describing what literary allusion is and how it functions (Johnston 2001a: 287-288), he situates the Hebrew writers' references to lions as part of the stereotypical and rhetorical imagery of the ancient Near East. This is because most writers of that time knew something about their neighbouring cultures (Johnston 2001a: 290).

In Nahum 2:12-14, Johnston (2001a: 295-296) sees two oracles: (1) 2:14 – Yahweh as mighty lion hunter; and (2) 2:12-13 – the description of the effects of the royal lion hunt: "the once feared [Assyrian] hunters will become the hunted!" It forms an extended metaphor that depicts the "immanent demise of the empire and destruction of Nineveh" with the "lions" being the Assyrian warriors (seen in the parallelism in 2:14, where "your chariots" is paired with "your young lions," and "your prey" is paired with "your messengers") (Johnston 2001a: 296).

The "lair"/"den" refers to Nineveh that was filled with tribute from vassals and the "hunting ground" represent the territories of the empire that would be lost as Assyria fell. The point he then tries to make is that these lion images are not merely stereotypical, but are "specific rhetorical allusions to the use of the lion motif in neo-Assyrian literature and art … particularly … Ashurbanipal" (Johnston 2001a: 296). The Assyrians depicted the lion in their literature and art and they saw their warrior-king as a mighty lion and as a mighty lion hunter (Johnston 2001a:296-300) - and Nahum was aware of this. Even though it cannot be proven that he personally saw the lion reliefs through diplomatic channels or through contact with the Assyrians on their Syro-Palestine campaigns and especially Ashurbanipal's invasion of Judah in 640, he could have known:

153

… there would have been adequate opportunity for the people of Judah, or at least the political and religious elite, to have been exposed to stereotypical Assyrian political propaganda, literature, and palace art, over a fairly long period of time and in various venues (Johnston 2001a: 307).

In these intentional allusions Johnston (2001a: 303-306) sees: (1) an ironic depiction of the historical situation, with Assyria losing its vast hunting grounds at the end; (2) an ironic reversal of the neo-Assyrian lion motifs (the hunter becomes the hunted!), which created a "dramatic display of poetic justice"; and (3) an ironic reversal of Ashurbanipal's boasts when Nahum punned on Ashurbanipal's boasts of culling the many lions in Assyria. He projected it onto the situation in Judah where Yahweh, the Great Lion hunter, will cull the Assyrian lions.

So by drawing on their own depictions of themselves, and by reversing the point of reference, Nahum created an ironic portrait. He mocked the pretentious Assyrians and also created a powerful picture of poetic justice (Johnston 2001a: 306).

These rhetorical ironic reversals, which create poetic justice and also act as seething political satire, contribute once again to our understanding of the dynamic of social identity construction in Nahum.

Perhaps it should be said at this point that the research so far agrees more or less with the conclusions of Sparks (see Chapter 3, section 2.3 for the discussion) that identity is a multi-layered concept and that ancient Israel's prime mode of identity construction was not always first and foremost ethnic. In Nahum one could say that thus far we have actually had no direct ethnic identity coming to the fore – that is, if one understands the reference to Nineveh and Judah as political realities and not as ethnic indicators.

We have also seen that Sternberg's Hebrewgram identity (see Chapter 3, section 2.4) does find its way into the social identity of Nahum. The ironic allusions and reversals, the ambiguity and the polysemic nature of the words and sentences used all show a slightly ideopoetic and self-critical (he calls it ethnocritical) view of ancient Israel.

It seems at this stage that the social identity theory premises that provide the perspective from which I am researching identity in Nahum do not always provide such a perfect fit with the

way ancient Israel constructed their social identity through this OCN. Although the premises provide pointers and are indeed very helpful to uncover the underlying dynamics of identity, the ancient text also goes against the grain of the social psychological theory. That in fact confirms the critical voices from within the SIT field, which were incorporated into the methodological overview of the theory in Chapter 3, Section 3. The historical and unique situation of each group that is studied should be taken into account to counter the theory's somewhat universalizing tendency.

Nahum 3 continues and intensifies most of the themes already encountered so far. The violent and anti-female imagery becomes even more terrifying. The political satire becomes more overt and piercing. The irony runs deep and the rhetorical tropes operate to their full extent. The book rushes like the chariots to its (and Assyria's) end. One has to read carefully to discover the theological-ethical liberatory cracks, or "gaps", in the text where the light is faintly shining through.

3.3.3 Nahum 3:1-7 – Woe-oracle as ironic lament and second attack on the city

הוֹי עִיר דָּמִים ¹	1a *Hoi*![a] city of bloodshed.[b]
כֻּלָּהּ כַּחַשׁ	1b All of her a lie.
פֶּרֶק מְלֵאָה	With plunder stuffed.
לֹא יָמִישׁ טָרֶף:	No end to the prey.[c]
קוֹל שׁוֹט ²	2a Sound of whip[a]
וְקוֹל רַעַשׁ אוֹפָן	and sound of clattering wheel.
וְסוּס דֹּהֵר	2b And horse galloping,
וּמֶרְכָּבָה מְרַקֵּדָה:	and war-chariot jolting.
פָּרָשׁ מַעֲלֶה ³	3a Cavalry charging,[a]
וְלַהַב חֶרֶב	and flashing sword,
וּבְרַק חֲנִית	and lightning spear,
וְרֹב חָלָל	3b and many slain,
וְכֹבֶד פָּגֶר	and heaps of corpses.
וְאֵין קֵצֶה לַגְּוִיָּה	3c And there is no end to the bodies,
וְכָשְׁלוּ בִּגְוִיָּתָם:	and they stumble over the bodies.[b]
מֵרֹב זְנוּנֵי זוֹנָה ⁴	4a The reason[a]: The countless whorings of the whore[b]
טוֹבַת חֵן בַּעֲלַת כְּשָׁפִים	with pretty charms, a mistress of sorceries.

155

הַמֹּכֶרֶת גּוֹיִם בִּזְנוּנֶיהָ 4b Selling[c] nations through[d] her whorings,

וּמִשְׁפָּחוֹת בִּכְשָׁפֶיהָ: and clans through her sorceries.

⁵ הִנְנִי אֵלַיִךְ נְאֻם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת 5a "Behold, I am against you," declares Yahweh Sebaoth.

וְגִלֵּיתִי שׁוּלַיִךְ עַל־פָּנָיִךְ "For, I shall uncover your genitals against you.[a]

וְהַרְאֵיתִי גוֹיִם מַעְרֵךְ 5b I shall let nations look at your nakedness,

וּמַמְלָכוֹת קְלוֹנֵךְ: and kingdoms at your shame.

⁶ וְהִשְׁלַכְתִּי עָלַיִךְ שִׁקֻּצִים 6a And I shall throw filth on you,

וְנִבַּלְתִּיךְ and I shall treat you disdainfully,

וְשַׂמְתִּיךְ כְּרֹאִי: 6b and make you a spectacle.

⁷ וְהָיָה כָל־רֹאַיִךְ יִדּוֹד מִמֵּךְ 7a And then all looking at you will flee from you

וְאָמַר שָׁדְּדָה נִינְוֵה saying: 'Nineveh is destroyed!

מִי יָנוּד לָהּ Who will express sympathy with her?'

מֵאַיִן אֲבַקֵּשׁ מְנַחֲמִים לָךְ: 7b Where shall I find comforters for you[a]?"

Textual notes:

1. a) A cry of lament that has been taken over and changed by the prophets (see discussion below). Translation possibilities are "woe" (NASB; NIV; KJV; RSV; Lutherbibel - "Weh"), "Ah!" (Spronk 1997:117); "Disaster" (NJB). **b)** The plural refers to blood that was shed and therefore to bloodguilt (Edel 1972:37). **c)** Rudolph (1972:175) "she is full of loot ... and even then the plundering does not end" ("und doch das Rauben nicht läßt").

2. a) Note the use of the singulars to intensify the grammatical-visual description of fast action by the use of nominal sentences.

3. a) See Na 3:2 note a above. **b)** Accepting BHS and reading בְּגֵוִיּוֹת seeing the ם־ in MT as dittography (Rudolph 1972:175; Deissler 1984:212). "Their bodies" could also be right because it links Na 3:3 to Na 2:6 where "they stumble in their fleeing" (with ם־ suff.) but it makes for a bad English translation as it is not logical for "them" to "stumble" over "their" (own) bodies (cf. also Spronk 1997:121).

4. a) מִן used as indicator of a cause (BHRG §39.14/5). **b)** Using the most degrading English word (short of "slut") to mirror the offensive, degradatory language of vv.4-6. **c)** BHS "who ensnares" (הַכֹּמֶרֶת cf. Edel 1972:38 "verstrickt"). Other possibilities are "who surrounds"; "who makes drunken"; "who enslaves" (NJB; NIV); "who betrays" (RSV following Targ. cf. Cathcart & Gordon 1989:139). **d)** Translating בְּ as a *beth instrumenti* that realizes the action of "selling" (BHRG §39.6/3i).

5. a) Following Baumann (2000:56-65) in translating this difficult verse with (1) גלה meaning to "uncover" a part of the body (2000:61); (2) שׁוּל being a metaphor for the feminine genitals (2000:65); and (3) עַל־פָּנָיִךְ as expressing an action that is directed against someone - "an act of spite" (Baumann 2000:64 quoting Eslinger) (more or less in the same way as it is used in Na 2:2 for the "Scatterer" that is coming up "against you"). Another translation possibility is "I shall lift up your skirts to you face" (NJB "For, I shall lift your skirts as high

3.3.3.1 Nahum 3:1-7: An oracle of woe

Nahum 3:1-7 could be described as a "woe-oracle" or *Hôy-oracle*[121] because of the characteristic הוֹי that the pericope starts with. After the introductory *Woe!* or *Disaster!* (cf. NJB) there follows the description of sin (Na 3:1). This Hôy-oracle is a bit different from the ones in, for example, Habakkuk (2:6b-20) in that we do not find a participle just after the הוֹי, stating a sin that is generally applicable, and usually translated as *Woe to the one who + sin described.*

The role that the particle *hôy* plays in the prophets is important. The woe-oracle that is developed in the prophets is connected to God's judgement: "To the prophet, God's word is as good as the deed it announced. Promise of destruction *was* the destruction. Lament was called for" (Clifford 1966:464). Janzen (1972:70) argues that the *hôy* as used here in Nahum 3:1 stands in a context of death and revenge followed by further death imagery. He categorizes the use of *hôy* here as filled with expressions of mourning and lamentation, but that it has moved away from the funerary background and has an increased tone of bitterness (Janzen 1972:90-91). Hardmeier (1978:381) reiterates this stance towards the *hôy* in Nahum by describing it as an announcement of disaster in the form of a cry of lament.

In Nahum 3:1 we have an accusation directed to the *city of blood* (meaning murder or bloodshed) and her other wrongdoings, namely *throughout a lie; full of plunder; no end to the prey/booty*. Generally after that the *hôy*-oracle there follows a threat of punishment (usually in a retaliating sense - the punishment fits the crime/the punishment flows forth from the sin, cf. e.g. Hab 2:6-8). When we read Nahum 3:1-7 from this background it seems as if (the disputed) Nahum 3:2-3 should be part of the punishment. Then it would not describe the

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[121] הוֹי is found 51x in 47 verses in the OT. As introduction to a woe-oracle or similar announcement of disaster it is found exclusively in the prophetic literature: Is (18x); Dt-Is (2x); Jr (5x); Ezk (3x); Am (2x); Mi (1x); Na (1x); Hab (5x); Zp (2x); Zc (3x). The woe-oracles are mostly directed against foreign nations, but a considerable number are also directed against Israel or Judah (the cities or the leaders, etc.).

military might of the wrongdoer (Assyria), but the military might of the army sent by Yahweh to deal out the punishment. The punishment also fits the crime of *bloodshed* and being *stuffed with plunder* (Na 3:1). This reminds of the *lex talionis* (law of retaliation) of tit-for-tat that is operative in the OCN in general and in Nahum specifically.

After the first announcement of punishment there follows a description of more sins, and more reasons or grounds are given for the punishment. In this case we find Nahum 3:4, (with the מִן (מֵרֹב) being translated as *because*) ... *because of the many prostitutions of the prostitute, (with) pretty charm, mistress of sorceries. Seller of nations with her prostitutions and (of) clans with her sorceries.*

In Nahum 3:5 a divine pronouncement follows *I am against you - word of Yahweh Sebaoth* and more announcements of punishment that fits the crime. The prostitute will be uncovered and her nakedness and shame will be shown to the nations and the kingdoms to whom she prostituted herself.

Nahum 3:6 has further descriptions of the punishment that goes with the transgression: *I shall throw filth on you, and treat you disdainfully, and (what is more...) I shall make you a spectacle.*

Nahum 3:7 can be classified as a type of dirge or lament, although (if it is meant for Assyria) it falls more in the category of ironic lament or taunt-song. Could it be that we have here a form of the hôy-oracle that is described in Habakkuk as a *mashal/satire* and *melitzah hidôt/mocking riddle*? If the lament/dirge-character of the woe-oracle is accepted, then Nahum 3:7 does seem relevant and part of the extended woe-oracle. We can summarise so far:

> **3:1 Woe-oracle** (הוֹי) with description of **sins** (bloodshed, lies, excessive plunder and prey);
> **3:2-3** Description of the coming **punishment** (Mighty army - possibly Yahweh's heavenly army itself - attacking and leaving many dead);
> **3:4** More **reasons for punishment** (*because*) and further accusations (prostituting and sorcery);

3:5-6 Word of Yahweh and announcement of **threat or punishment** (shown naked and shameful to the nations and kingdoms, made filthy, treated disdainfully, and made a spectacle of contempt);

3:7 Ironic lament/dirge-song for the city of blood/prostituting mistress of sorceries who is already as good as destroyed/dead, and for whom no sympathy or comforters will be found.

The presence of a woe-oracle in Nahum has implications for our understanding of the dynamic of social identity construction in ancient Israel. The ironic and bitter use of a cry that is supposed to be one of true lament at the death of someone links to the theme of ironic reversals and political satire so often found in Nahum. Another factor is the unmistakable onomatopoeic character of this literary feature. It expresses "a sharp outburst of feeling, sometimes of anger, sometimes of grief, sometimes of alarm" (Clements 1992:945). The emotive force of the judgment through the mouth of the prophet becomes a catalyst for poetic justice. This is part of what we can term "poetic overstatement" as Wessels (1998:625) puts it:

> By means of these excessive overtones an atmosphere of emotional tension was created for the purpose of conveying a sense of the oppression and all that it embraced. This resistance poetry was an excellent means of airing their rage and frustration. In the strongest possible language the defeat of the enemy was depicted which served as an outlet for suppressed or cropped-up emotions. At the same time faith is expressed in the sovereign power of Yahweh, the real power.

3.3.3.2 Nahum 3:1-7 and Nahum 2:12-14

When considering the **preceding pericope** (Na 2:12-14) together with Nahum 3:1-7, we find a close-knit relationship with many repeated keywords:

Nahum 2:12-14

טֶרֶף (2:13,14) – *prey*

הִנְנִי אֵלַיִךְ נְאֻם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת (2:14a) - *Look I am against you- Word of Yahweh Sebaoth*

כְּפִירַיִךְ (2:14) *your chariots*

חָרֶב (2:14a) *sword*

קוֹל (2:14) *voice*

Nahum 3:1-7

טֶרֶף (3:1) *prey/plunder*

הִנְנִי אֵלַיִךְ נְאֻם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת (3:5a) - *Look I am against you- Word of Yahweh Sebaoth*

מֶרְכָּבָה (3:2b) *chariot*

חֶרֶב (3:3) *sword*

קוֹל (3:2) *sound*

The *prey* in Nahum 3:1 links the pericope with the *prey* in Nahum 2:13-14 and therefore indicates that the same "lion-family" (presumably the royal family of Assyria) is addressed in Nahum 3:1-7 also and the *city of blood* (Na 3:1) would then have to be Nineveh. This is an assumption that comes from the book as a whole being read as a prophecy against Nineveh. When we realise that the "lion family" could also be connected to Israel's or Judah's royal house, then the question about the identity of the accused party comes into question again. Israel's/Judah's kings are also said to be lions tearing their prey (cf. Ezk 19:3, 6; 22:25, 27).

That the same prophetic formula (*Look I am against you - word of Yahweh Sebaoth*) is used also links the pericopes and indicates that the YOU in both cases is the same object of Yahweh's anger. *Sebaoth* makes one think of the heavenly armies and indicates that Yahweh himself will deal out the punishment. It also makes Yahweh the focus of the military attack that is announced in both cases (Na 2:14a and Na 3:2-3).

The *chariot(s)* and *sword* used in both pericopes point to the military nature of the coming punishment, although the chariots in Nahum 2:14 will be burned by Yahweh, while the chariots in Nahum 3:2b is described as part of the attacking force. Both these words are crucial in the whole of Nahum.

The *sound* of *her messengers/envoys* (Na 2:14) will no longer be heard - now the *sound* of the whip, wheel, horse and chariot (Na 3:2), the sounds of immanent disaster and horror will be heard.

3.3.3.3 Nahum 3:2-3 and Nahum 2:4-10

To the rest of Nahum the relationship lies in the **military imagery and attack described**:

Nahum 2:4-10	Nahum 3:2-3
רֶכֶב (2:4,5) *chariots*	מֶרְכָּבָה (3:2b) *chariot*
כַּבְּרָקִים (2:5) *like lightning*	בָרָק (3:3) *lightning (spear)*
כֹּשֵׁל (2:6) *they stumble*	כֹּשֵׁל (3:3b) *they stumble*
נִינְוֵה (2:9) *Nineveh*	נִינְוֵה (3:7) *Nineveh*

וְאֵין קֵצֶה לְ (2:10) *there is no end to ...*

וְאֵין קֵצֶה לְ (3:3b) *there is no end to*

כָּבֹד (2:10) *splendour (heavy)*

כֹבֶד (3:3a) *heavy mass/heaps of (corpses)*

The two texts are very similar and therefore strengthen the argument that the army that is described is the army of the attacker and not of Assyria (describing their terrible might). The description of the attack finds direct parallels in Habakkuk 3:8, 11 where Yahweh's horses and chariots are described and where we find this same phrase *lighting of his spear* (Hab 3:11). In Judges 5:22 we find the same rare verb for galloping (דהר) as in Nahum 3:2bA. There it forms part of the victory song of Deborah and Barak, which is written in the context of having received military support from heaven. It seems as if Nahum 3:2-3 wants us to call to mind the heavenly armies, Yahweh's army. It does seem difficult to relate this description to the Assyrian army and therefore we can concur that the attacking army is referred to here in such a manner as to link it to the celestial army of Yahweh himself.

Other notable relationships include the use of טוֹב *pretty (charm)* and בַּעֲלַת *mistress (of sorceries)* to refer to the *prostitute* (Na 3:4). In the opening hymn of Nahum we find Yahweh being described as טוֹב *good* (Na 1:7) and as a בַּעַל *Lord (of anger)* (Na 1:2a). Yahweh and the prostitute-sorcerer are set as opposites and enemies - with Yahweh who will take out his anger on this evildoer. Also Nahum 1:1 and Nahum 3:7 are linked with both verses containing the words נִינְוֵה *Nineveh* and the root נחם, which means *comfort*. Again the contrast is established: the book of the prophecy against Nineveh is meant to bring *comfort* to Judah (Na 1:1), but at the same time no *comforters* will be found for Nineveh (Na 3:7).

3.3.3.4 Nahum 3:4-7 Offensive identities in the Bible

As in Nahum 2, we have a very graphic description of violence, together with the abuse of a woman's body. All the strongest poetical tropes are used to put forward an image of war so terrible that one can see and hear, and maybe even smell (?) the death and decay and havoc that is described in Nahum 3:2-3. Short nominal sentences create quick ecstatic movements. The crack of the whip, the charging of the chariots and the cavalry, the hacking sword and the piercing spear can be visualized. Repetition (in verse 3 four descriptions/concepts of slain/dead human beings) creates poetic hyperbole and forces the image of heaps of slain bodies into our minds. Alliteration and assonance creates the rhythm of the charging chariots

that deals out death (verse 2b - וּמֶרְכָּבָה מְרַקֵּדָה *umerkabah miraqedah*). And then we see the reason for al this punishment and destruction.

Nahum 3:4 introduces the reason, or cause, of all the death with a causal מִן (BHRG §39.14.5). The city that is judged is accused of prostitution and sorcery. This again creates ambiguity, because in the traditions of Hosea (Hos 1:2; 2:4, 6; 4:12, 14; 5:4) Israel is painted as the whore/prostitute who is unfaithful to Yahweh and who practises idolatry and commits other crimes like bloodshed, economic crimes and oppression. Isaiah 1:21 well as Jeremiah (Jr 2:20; 3:3; 5:7; 13:27) confirms Jerusalem's character as prostitute.

When we take this together with the hoi-oracle's first accusation "city … filled with blood" (Na 3:1) then Israel/Jerusalem also immediately comes to mind. Hosea 4:2 announces Israel's crimes: lying and bloodshed after bloodshed. Jeremiah 22:17 prophecies (also in a hoi-oracle) against Jehoiakim by announcing that he shed innocent blood and perpetrated violence and oppression. The Deuteronomistic writer captures the reigns of Manasseh (2 K 21:16) and Jehoiakim (2 K 24:4) as both having filled Jerusalem with blood. The case of deception (כַּחַשׁ Na 3:1) is also pinned on Israel (Hos 4:2; 7:3; 12:1).

This confirms the possibility that traditional judgment oracles against Israel/Judah were used here against Assyria. As in Nahum 1:9-14, the ambiguity of the textual traditions warns us not to be too certain about our idea of who is right and who is wrong. For the creation of social identity it remains a characteristic of ancient Israel's texts that there is a hidden dynamic which functions on a subtle level, but which informs our theological ethic, even if indirectly.

The punishment, which is announced in the name of Yahweh Sebaoth, is shocking and offensive beyond words. The text should have had an age restriction with the code 18NSV[122]. The public display of naked women as punishment is incorporated here. It goes even further with the terrible act of throwing filth (שִׁקֻּץ) on the exposed female body. Still it does not stop there, for Yahweh then announces that he will treat this woman dishonourably and with contempt (נבל pi'el), and make her a spectacle (Na 3:6). Feminists like Baumann (1999), Klopper (2003) and others have dealt with this text in the only way that should be admissible

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[122] A code used in the public cinemas to grade films and to warn viewers that they should expect violence, nudity and bad language. 18NSV would then indicate that the film is only suited to viewers older than 18 and contains scenes of nudity, sex and violence.

– to resist it, to expose its horrific implications and to explicate the full meaning of this metaphor.

Baumann (1999:350) notes that the metaphoric language used here in Nahum should be seen in the ancient Near Eastern patriarchal context. Rape was not regarded as a crime against a raped woman, but rather as a type of theft of sexual property (Baumann 1999:350). In Nahum 3:4-7 Yahweh is shown as the Victor. Showing Nineveh as being raped indicates that Assyria/the Assyrian king was not able to protect his capital city – "symbolized by Nineveh the prostitute woman" (Baumann 1999:351).

Klopper (2003:617) gives an excellent overview of the development of the concept "city-as-woman." She shows how cities symbolize the nation of Israel/Judah with Yahweh being the husband (e.g. "Jerusalem" in Hosea 2-3, Jeremiah, Ezekiel 6, 7). The wife's unfaithfulness is usually described "in vivid, violent female sexual imagery" (Klopper 2003:618). Isaiah (Babylon) and Nahum (Nineveh) address foreign cities. Klopper (2003:618) then indicates how the imagery probably came from an ancient Western Semitic way of speaking of cities when "major cities were considered the female consorts of the patron god of the city."

The city-goddesses often symbolized fertility and were therefore venerated for their erotic and sexual attributes, being depicted in seductive stances (Klopper 2003:618)[123]. The prophets of Israel, being monotheists, could not focus on this aspect of the imagery and therefore "could in no way integrate the attractive sexual appeal of the goddess-city." All that remained for them was to demonize the city and so "the prophetic personifications transform the 'ruling women' of the ancient Near East into immoral, vain, and ultimately defeated and humiliated women" (Klopper 203:619). In Nahum 3:4-7 Nineveh becomes the prostitute and the mistress of sorcery. She is a prostitute because she had once too often "seduced and then deceived political and military allies through her treaty violations" (Klopper 2003:621).

The question is how one should react to this reality of violence in this prophetic text? Should we soften the impact of the metaphor by saying like Becking (1996:15) that the Nineveh metaphors were about people "other" than Israel/Judah? Should we conclude that the *tertium*

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[123] Note also Magdalene (1995:341-346), who traces the source of this metaphor of sexual abuse to the ancient Near Eastern treaty-curses. E.g. (1) The city or nation will become a prostitute; (2) the city or nation will be stripped like a prostitute; (3) wives will be raped; and (4) warriors will become like women (Magdalene 1995:343-345).

comparationes of the metaphor is "the fascination of power and richness that was exploited by the Assyrians" and that the "metaphor is [therefore] adequate in the exposure of Assyrian politics of oppression from which both men and women suffered" (Becking 1996:16)?

Baumann (1999:352) suggests that one should resist this text by pointing to the metaphorical and contextual nature of these texts. But then one must go one step further to realize that there really were suffering women in ancient Israel who did experience the terrible reality of rape (Baumann 1999:352). In this sense this text of revenge becomes a lament over the sexual violence done to all women past and present (Baumann 1999:352).

Gordon and Washington (1995:324) ask for a continuous critical reading of rape as a military metaphor and conclude:

> … we accept neither the devastated woman as the appropriate representation of punishment, nor the conquered city as the licit object of military conquest, We reject the equation of bad women and bad cities, and we reject the idea that male violence (sexual and military) delivers just punishment.

Klopper (2003:623) reminds us that the risk of seeing a metaphor as contextual and "adequate" for its (ancient) time begins when we disregard the dissimilarities:

> The city becomes a woman, not just a representative of the enemy in the imagery. Then physical violence against women is permissible (Klopper 2003:623).

In a shocking way, ancient Israel portrays its own social identity in a way that is quite uncomfortable. It displays the deep abyss in their patriarchal and hierarchical society between men and women. It indicates that the in-group is not so homogeneous after all, as the abusive metaphor of a naked, tortured female body drives a stake between the females of the group and the men with their prototypical patron deity supporting their worldview.

At this it could be said, yes, but the image is pointed at Nineveh, the enemy, and not at Israel itself (cf. Becking's idea of the *other* above). The answer to this is: No! Even if it is the women of the enemy, the gross violation of body and existence cannot under any circumstances, old or new, be accepted or ignored. The theological-ethical dynamic of

164

identity construction should be criticized and withstood here very strongly. Women on this earth over the ages have gone through enough abuse through texts like these serving as legitimating instruments of torture, rape, mutilation and killing.

All this leads to the rhetorical question in Nahum 3:7 "Who will express sympathy for her?" And "Where shall I find comforters for you?" Apart from serving as important structural markers that indicate the end of this section in the text (De Regt 1996:73-74), both seethe with satire and hatred and overflow with sarcasm and irony. The rhetorical questions expect the answers "no-one" and "nowhere", but in the light of the previous ideological criticism a responsible, life-giving theological ethic should reply "I will" and "with me."

Liberationists and revolutionaries should take care that the way in which they fight and struggle, even if it is "just" with words, should also be liberating and just. Using God in this way to legitimise an oppressive group belief is unacceptable and should be criticized and resisted.

3.3.3.5 Social identity in Nahum 3:1-7

The implications of the previous section are serious. It indicates a very crucial part of the process of social identity construction, by linking on to Premise 3 (Chapter 3, Section 4.5). This premise states that when groups are in conflict with one another, the differences between members of the in-group will be minimized and differences with the out-group will be maximized. It goes further than that, however. In agreement with Hogg (1995:560), we see here in Nahum that when the out-group is deeply hated and is stereotyped in such a way that disrespects their human dignity, this process can create dehumanisation. We do in fact see something of a dehumanising process in these terrible images.

That being said, with the metaphor of Nineveh as a defiled prostitute and sorceress, we uncovered one of the important ways in antiquity of creating identity. In a fascinating article Levinson (2000) investigates how the literary use of women's bodies and the borders of ethnic communities are part of a fictionalization of identity in antiquity. He talks about the body of Sarah (equating it with Isis) and how that was used to create a cultural narrative for

border-transgressing God-fearers who broke away from the hegemony of the binary oppositions of the pure Jewish nation that create ethnic identity (Levison 2000:35-360).

This kind of breach in the social structure is justified by homologically mirroring Sarah's open and breachable body (Levinson 2000:363). In the process we see how a homology is created between gender and ethnic identities: there is an "imbronication between women and gentiles, between the woman as other and the other as woman" (Levinson 2000:362). The body of a woman becomes the semiotic space whereon social concerns are symbolically enacted (Levinson 2000:363).

The "filthy body" of Nineveh, as the prototype of the "other", is used symbolically to mirror the underlying threat to the social identity of ancient Israel/Judah in the oppressive system of the Assyrian empire. When she is semiotically and symbolically "punished" and ravished, the emotional dehumanization of the arch-enemy creates new borders for one's own identity. Poetic justice is served and group cohesion is maintained and strengthened.

The second thing of interest in this section is that the reality of multiple out-groups (Chapter 3, section 3.5) can for the first time be seen very directly. Groups do not just react to one out-group, but usually have to construct their identity in terms of multiple out-groups: responses to an out-group are "affected not only by the relationship between the ingroup and this outgroup, but also by the relationship between the ingroup and other outgroups, and by the relationship between the outgroups" (Worchel *et al.* 2000:30).

Nahum 3:4b mentions that "nations" (גּוֹיִם) and "clans" (מִשְׁפָּחוֹת) are also part of the deviant and oppressive tactics of the Assyrian Empire, not just Israel. Nahum 3:5b states that "nations" (גּוֹיִם) and "kingdoms" (מַמְלָכוֹת) will be part of this public shaming and maiming as punishment of Nineveh. Apart from the fact that there is no direct ethnic or nationalistic particularism in Nahum, we indeed do have a more universalistic perspective on how the suffering under Assyria should be understood.

It can be concluded that Nahum also takes the suffering of the other nations and kingdoms into consideration. Nahum states that Yahweh is also the judge for the other nations over which Assyria went continuously with their evil. In the context of regional oppression, such

166

as in the case of living under the tyranny of the Assyrians, some out-groups become more similar to the in-group, and the social identity process of differentiation can be seen.

3.3.4 Nahum 3:8-12 – Comparison with No-Amon and threat announced

Hebrew		English
הֲתֵיטְבִי מִנֹּא אָמוֹן [8]	8a	Will you do better[a] than No-Amon[b]
הַיֹּשְׁבָה בַּיְאֹרִים		situated among the rivers of the Nile[c]
מַיִם סָבִיב לָהּ		with waters surrounding her[d]?
אֲשֶׁר־חֵיל יָם	8b	Whose rampart is the sea[e]
מִיָּם חוֹמָתָהּ:		from the sea her wall[f]
כּוּשׁ עָצְמָה וּמִצְרַיִם [9]	9a	Cush was her strength[a] and Egypt
וְאֵין קֵצֶה		and there was no end to it[b]
פּוּט וְלוּבִים	9b	Put and the Libyans
הָיוּ בְּעֶזְרָתֵךְ		were her support[c]
גַּם־הִיא לַגֹּלָה הָלְכָה בַשֶּׁבִי [10]	10a	Nevertheless[a] did she go into exile in captivity
גַּם עֹלָלֶיהָ יְרֻטְּשׁוּ בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חוּצוֹת		also her children being smashed to pieces on every streetcorner[b]
וְעַל־נִכְבַּדֶּיהָ יַדּוּ גוֹרָל	10b	And for her nobles they cast the lot
וְכָל־גְּדוֹלֶיהָ רֻתְּקוּ בַזִּקִּים:		and all her great men were put into chains.
גַּם־אַתְּ תִּשְׁכְּרִי [11]	11a	Also you[a] will become drunk[b]
תְּהִי נַעֲלָמָה		will go into hiding[c]
גַּם־אַתְּ תְּבַקְשִׁי מָעוֹז מֵאוֹיֵב:	11b	what is more, you too will look for a hiding place from the enemy.
כָּל־מִבְצָרַיִךְ [12]	12a	All your fortifications
תְּאֵנִים עִם־בִּכּוּרִים		are fig trees with[a] early-ripe figs.
אִם־יִנּוֹעוּ	12b	If they are shaken
וְנָפְלוּ עַל־פִּי אוֹכֵל:		then they fall in the mouth of the eater

Textual notes:

8. a) So Spronk (1997:126) and Rudolph (1972:179); cf. also NJB "Are you better off?" and Deissler (1984:214) "Are you better?" (so Seybold 1989:37). **b)** I.e. Thebes or lit. "No of (the god) Amon" or "city of the god Amon." **c)** The Nile and it's canal system. **d)** BHS sees 8aC as an added gloss (so Rudolph 1972:182) because it destroys the metre and tries to link No-Amon (not surrounded by water) with Alexandria (surrounded by water). **e)** Meaning the Nile (Rudolph 1972:181). **f)** LXX, Vulg. and Syr. pr.cop. has מַיִם "waters". Rudolph (1972:181)

changes to מֵי יָם "water from the sea" (following Targ. according to Sperber) but this seems like unnecessary tautology. NASB paraphrases "whose wall consisted of the sea."

9. a) With BHS (LXX; Syr.; Targ. and Vulg.) עָצְמָה. **b)** Rudolph (1972:179) translates "Egyptians more than one can count." **c)** With BHS תָה-. The MT 2 sg. "your support" makes Put and the Libyans Assyria's allies (Spronk 1997:130 sees a misinformed scribe at work here). NJB paraphrases "served in her army."

10. a) "The repeated particle נם has in this context the force of 'nevertheless'" (Spronk 1997:131). So Seybold (1989:37) and Rudolph (1972:180) "trotzdem ..." **b)** Lit. "at the head of every street."

11. a) Meaning something like "in the same way." **b)** Targ. "You too are like the one that is drunk" converting MT's metaphor into a simile (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:141). **c)** Spronk (1997:132) translates "will become darkened" linking this meaning to Na 1:8 where Yahweh pursues his enemies into darkness. It is also possible to read "and you will faint" (Edel 1972:40).

12. a) So NJB; RSV; NASB; Spronk (1997:133). Rudolph (1972:182) questions this usage of עִם and inserts "your men" (are like early figs). Cf. Seybold (1989:37) "your men ('Mannschaft') are like early figs."

Another scoffing rhetorical question leads us into the new pericope. As a refrain the now familiar irony is heaped on the Assyrians[124]. Their own "prey" or victory, namely the destruction of No-Amon in 663 BCE is used against them in an imprecatory way. The security and greatness of Thebes are sketched in verses 8-9 and then follows the brilliant use of the two *gam* particles (גַּם) in verse 10: "Nevertheless" and "also her …" The reversal of power in the case of Thebes is showcased and satirized because in verse 11 we find two more (corresponding) *gam* particles which introduces an unexpected turn of events. This can be likened to the ironic reversal of Nahum 2:12-14 where the Lion of Assyria, the lion hunter, becomes the hunted by the all-powerful Lion of Judah and the nations. The powerful Assyrian army that destroyed multitudes will now unexpectedly be destroyed in the same way as they destroyed another mighty city like Thebes.

We see again the usage of an agricultural metaphor to depict the reality of the downfall of Assyria. Like early-ripening fig trees (Na 3:12) whose figs (i.e. the Assyrian warriors) fall from the tree into the mouth of the eater (the attacking army), in the same way will Assyria be overcome and devastated. A very interesting intertext using this same metaphor is found in Isaiah 28:4, where the judgment is against Samaria. An attacking army (strong man) will come against Ephraim and will be destroyed "like a fig ripe before summer comes: whoever spots it forthwith picks and swallows it."

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[124] Note, however, the view of a scholar like Jeremias (1970:39-41), who sees the comparison with No-Amon as directed at Jerusalem.

This alludes (probably) to Assyria. Again we have this ironic reversal. In the Northern Kingdom, Assyria did the fig eating, but now the roles will be turned around and the fig-eater will become the fig that is eaten! Identity is constructed in *talionis* fashion and with the aim of the ironic reversal of the images that were used to oppress and scare and destroy ancient Israel. A whole barrage of texts and words and concepts and ideas is lined up to reverse the oppression of Assyria in such a way that poetic justice is served.

3.3.5 Nahum 3:13-19 – Third attack on the city and final fall of Nineveh

Hebrew	Translation
¹³ הִנֵּה עַמֵּךְ נָשִׁים בְּקִרְבֵּךְ	13a Look! Your people[a] are women[b] in your midst.
לְאֹיְבַיִךְ פָּתוֹחַ נִפְתְּחוּ שַׁעֲרֵי אַרְצֵךְ	To your enemies the gates of your country are gaping wide open
אָכְלָה אֵשׁ בְּרִיחָיִךְ:	13b Fire will devour your bars[c]
¹⁴ מֵי מָצוֹר שַׁאֲבִי־לָךְ	14a Water for the siege - draw it for yourself!
חַזְּקִי מִבְצָרָיִךְ	Strengthen your strongholds!
בֹּאִי בַטִּיט וְרִמְסִי בַחֹמֶר	14b Go into the mud and tread the clay!
הַחֲזִיקִי מַלְבֵּן:	Strengthen the brick-mould!
¹⁵ שָׁם תֹּאכְלֵךְ אֵשׁ	15a There the fire will devour you
תַּכְרִיתֵךְ חֶרֶב	the sword will cut you down
תֹּאכְלֵךְ כַּיָּלֶק	it will devour you like the hopper[a]
הִתְכַּבֵּד כַּיֶּלֶק	15b Become numerous like the hoppers!
הִתְכַּבְּדִי כָּאַרְבֶּה:	Become numerous like the locusts!
¹⁶ הִרְבֵּית רֹכְלַיִךְ	16a You have made your merchants
מִכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם	more than the stars of the heaven
יֶלֶק פָּשַׁט וַיָּעֹף:	16b The hopper has shed its skin[a] and flies away[b]
¹⁷ מִנְּזָרַיִךְ כָּאַרְבֶּה	17a Your officials are like locusts
וְטַפְסְרַיִךְ כְּגוֹב גֹּבָי	and your marshalls[a] like swarms of hoppers
הַחוֹנִים בַּגְּדֵרוֹת בְּיוֹם קָרָה	17b that settle on the walls during the cold of the day.
שֶׁמֶשׁ זָרְחָה וְנוֹדַד	When the sun rises they fly away
וְלֹא־נוֹדַע מְקוֹמוֹ אַיָּם	and not is known the place. Where are they?[b]
¹⁸ נָמוּ רֹעֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר	18a (נ[a]) Your shepherds are asleep[b], king of Assyria
יִשְׁכְּנוּ אַדִּירֶיךָ	(י[a]) your nobles are laying down
נָפֹשׁוּ עַמְּךָ עַל־הֶהָרִים	18b (נ[a]) Your people are scattered[c] over the mountains
וְאֵין מְקַבֵּץ:	(ו[a]) and there is none to gather them
¹⁹ אֵין־כֵּהָה לְשִׁבְרֶךָ	19a There is no remedy for your crushing
נַחְלָה מַכָּתֶךָ	Incurable is your blow[a]

כֹּל שֹׁמְעֵי שִׁמְעֲךָ   19b All hearing the news of you

תָּקְעוּ כַף עָלֶיךָ   will clap hands over you

כִּי עַל־מִי לֹא־עָבְרָה רָעָתְךָ תָּמִיד: For, over whom have not passed your evil continually?

Textual notes:

13. a) Rudolph (18972:182) sees "your people ... in your midst" as referring only to a part of the people and translates "your men are women in your midst." So NIV "Look at your troops -they are all women!" NJB paraphrases "Look at your people: you are a nation of women!" **b)** LXX (Syr. and Targ.) reads כְּנָשִׁים "like women" changing the MT metaphor into a simile. Targ. adds "feeble like women" (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:141). **c)** BHS sees in 3b an incomplete half poetic line, but according to Spronk's analysis (1997:135) v.13 forms a normal tricolon.

15. a) BHS suggests that v.15aC be deleted.

16. a) From פשט "to undress" implying "taking the skin off," cf. HAL 921. **b)** NJB transposes v.16b to v.17bB "The sun appears, the locusts spread their wings, they fly away."

17. a) KBL refers to Akkad. *ṭupšarru* "tablet-writer" translating "official for recruiting." **b)** Cf. Rudolph (1972:181); Deissler (1984:216); Spronk (1997:112).

18. a) The fourth word-acrostic as seen by Spronk (1997:112ff.). Here we have נ - י - נ - ו "Nineveh" (although the last ה of the word is missing). **b)** BHS reads with Syr. רֹעֶיךָ 2 fem. sg. in light of their suggestion that "king of Assyria" was added. - Here "slumber" could be a euphemism for being "dead" (Jr 51:39,57; Ps 76:6; Deissler 1984:215). **c)** Targ. (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:142) has "will be scattered" translating as a prophetic perfect.

19. a) NJB "Your injury is past healing."

The final pericope contains the same tropes and processes of identity construction as we have seen in Nahum until now.

The opening verse (Na 3:13) reminds us of the misuse of the female body to wage war on the enemy. This known ancient Near Eastern curse of warriors who became as weak as women is used as poetic justice against the oppressor. It cannot be proven for certain, but the allusion in Nahum 3:13aB to the "gates" of the country which are open to the enemies could refer to the rapes of women which were part of the realities of war, then, and sadly also now. Magdalene (1995:333) shows how "opening" (פת typically translated "secret parts") in the Hebrew text forms a wordplay on the word for "gate" (פתח) or opening of the city: "Thus, the metaphor operates to equate both the city with the person of the female and the gate of the city with the vaginal opening of the female body." She identifies Nahum 3:13 as well as Nahum 2:7-8 as functioning in this same manner.

The commentator that speaks here uses four satirical imperatives to indicate the uselessness of the actions to which the commands refer. All the drawing of water, strengthening of strongholds, treading of clay and strengthening of the brick-mould is not going to help. The fire will devour them anyway and the sword will cut them down.

Another agricultural metaphor is introduced, namely the locust. The writer brilliantly (as in the lion metaphor) uses three different words for locusts. It is in this case probably symbolic of attacking armies that will destroy in the same way as locust swarms do when they descend on a field. Compare, for example, Jeremiah 46:23 where the Babylonians attacking Egypt are said to be more numerous than locusts, and Amos' first vision of locusts that fed on the land and thereby signifying the coming military dread.

The use of locusts can also be connected to a Neo-Assyrian vassal treaty-curse. We see, for example, that Ashurnirari warned: "If Mati'ilu violates this treaty … may locusts appear and devour his land" (Johnston 2001b:429). We also find Essarhaddon threatening his Syro-Palestine vassals: "May the locust who diminishes the land devour your harvest" (Johnston 2001b:429). When Nahum (Na 3:17-17) applies this curse he is again ironically reversing the Assyrians' own curses against themselves (Jonhston 2001b:429).

With the introduction of the "merchants" (Na 3:16a), "officials" (Na 3:17a), "marshals" (Na 3:17a), "shepherds" (Na 3:18), "Nobles" (Na 3:18a), and the "people" (of Assyria) (Na 3:18b), and all being linked to the "king of Assyria" (Na 3:18a) the *massah* is drawing to its expected conclusion. The evil Assyrian king, with his whole machinery of war and bureaucracy is now named directly for the first time. The nicknames and codes are no longer needed[125]. The judgment is certain. The punishment is certainly going to be meted out.

An astrological metaphor is used to indicate that the trade network of the empire was so huge that the merchants were as many as the stars of the heaven. It is then wrongfully combined with a repetition of the agricultural locust metaphor, applying it to the officials and the marshals. I think verse 16b-17bA should be seen as a later insertion, for it breaks the logical sense of the stars metaphor. When the sun comes up, the stars "fly away" or disappear (v. 17bB) and not the locusts! Spronk (1997:139) treats this interpretative problem in detail and

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[125] Although there is still this sense of secrecy, if Spronk (1997:112ff.) is correct in seeing a fourth word acrostic spelling "Nineve[h]" in verse 18.

sees verses 16b-17a as secondary additions that could early on have been interpretative marks written in the margin. This could have been the first reinterpretation of the prophecy relating it to Babylon (Spronk 1997:139).

The reference to the "sun" (שֶׁמֶשׁ) could, of course, also be a reference to Yahweh, who (as in Na 1:2a) apart from being an angry "Baal", also is polemically referred to as the astral deity "Shemesh". The fight for the exclusive identity of Yahweh, and at the same time the identity of his people, comes to the fore again. Although a scholar like Hartmann (1995:998) thinks (following Jeremias) that in theophanies the sun (in the sense of a deity) does not play such an important role, the fact that we do find references to Yahweh as a sun, for example, in Psalm 84:12 ("Yahweh Elohim is a sun and a shield") and Malachi 3:20 ("the sun with healing in its wings"), indicates that this notion is not totally improbable. Van der Toorn (1995:1725) indicates that, with caution, it is possible to trace an aspect of Yahweh as a solar deity to the traits of El.

We find here another possible mythological reference to the Canaanite gods problem. Apart from the Yahweh-Alone Movement's focus against the Assyrian gods, they also fought against the syncretism of the growing monolatrous Yahwism with the ancient Canaanite pantheon. This subtle mythological focus on the Canaanite religious context will return in the discussion on the universalizing theophanic Yahweh-hymn (Na 1:2-8) in Chapter 6.

We have seen how the internal repetition of "mountains" creates the contrast between Judah, who will see the messenger of *sjalôm* on the mountains (Na 2:1), and Assyria whose people will be scattered on the mountains, with none to gather them (Na 3:18b) (all of course because of the power of Yahweh before whom the mountains shake (Na 1:5a).

Finally, we see more vassal treaty-curses being satirically turned against the Assyrian king, with a curse for having no remedy for a defeat, and no cure for an illness/blow (Na 3:19). This was a common Semitic theme and was used most frequently in treaties of the 7th and 8th centuries. We find the same ironic reversal of the Assyrian vassal treaty-curses. Essarhaddon, for example, used this curse five times in a vassal treaty with his Syro-Palestinian vassals:

172

May Marduk, the oldest son, assign you a serious punishment (and) an incurable wound …
May Gula, the great physician, put sickness and weariness in your hearts and an unhealing
wound in your body … May Ishtar … put a severe wound in your heart, so that your blood
dribbles down to the ground like rain (Johnston 2001b:430).

The last verse (Na 3:19) reiterates what we have said about the phenomenon of multiple out-
groups, as the "all" who hear the news of the Assyrian giant's fall refers back to the peoples
and kingdoms that we investigated in Nahum 3:5b. The symbolical action of "clapping" is
again used in a satirical or taunting sense, as it is a derogatory sign.

The pericope and the book ends with another rhetorical question - the most important one in
the book: "over who did not pass your evil continually?" Here we are moving into the
international arena. We see commentary on "international" affairs and we find a surprising
universal perspective, for again the focus is not just on ancient Israel, but on all the groups
that suffered so tremendously during this time of Assyrian rule. Although fierce in its
judgements, Nahum presents Israel as fair and just. The strangest thing of all is to see in this
possibly "nationalistic" book a turn towards sensitivity to the other groups in the same
situation.

We have come to the end of the Book of Nahum. The end is not yet the end, though, because
to these pre-exilic parts of Nahum material was added as the oracle concerning Nineveh came
to pass and was accepted as true prophecy. This probably happened during and after the Exile
of 587 BCE, one of the most far-reaching crises in the history of ancient Israel. During the
Exile the Israel of the Torah would be born as the fragmented community of Yahweh. They
would become a nation who rallied around a deity and a religion, a first in the history of
humanity.

In the next chapter the later additions to Nahum as well as the finalization of the Book of
Nahum as part of the Book of the Twelve will be investigated with a view to addressing
issues of social identity, ideology and theological ethics. What I hope to prove is that what we
have seen in the subtle undercurrent of more universal and self-critical theological ethics in
these pre-exilic parts of Nahum will be taken up and developed further by a very interesting
theological group within ancient Israel's exilic/post-exilic community.

4. Summary and conclusions

This chapter has taken us deep into the social identity of pre-exilic ancient Israel. One should perhaps be more precise and speak of the social identity of the anti-Assyrian group/Yahweh-Alone Movement in the time of the Assyrian oppression and vassalage, when Manasseh reigned as king. As we saw in the first section of the chapter, a few "predictions" were made about social identity using the working premises for SIT and SCT. The summary of the chapter and the conclusions that are reached regarding social identity construction will be done according to the same five premises. After that a few remarks about ideology in this historical context will follow.

4.1 Social identity construction in the Assyrian crisis

According to **Premise 1:** *All people have a social identity and belong to groups with basic group principles and beliefs.*

- This was shown to be true of ancient Israel, although we also found some surprises in the text of Nahum. The parts of Nahum written in the time of the Assyrian crisis do give us a glimpse into the way in which the in-group (Nahum, Yahweh-Alone Movement, anti-Assyria) constructed their social identity over and against the main out-group (Nineveh, Assyria) and the sub-category out-group (possibly Manasseh and the pro-Assyrian faction). The existential crisis for the in-group that was brought about by the military, political, economic and religious oppression under the Assyrian yoke, strengthened their group and urged them to define who they were over and against the other groups.

- As predicted, the main way of creating group cohesion was by very strong group beliefs. The main group belief, namely that Yahweh alone is God, and the implications of this (he is a strong warrior God who will destroy the out-group), form the basis of the dynamic of identity construction. One could go so far as to say that the deity, Yahweh, also serves as the prototype of what it means to be part of this revolutionary community. Yahweh of hosts has humbled his people, but will do so no more. He is a symbol of what freedom from oppression (no yoke and chains) means, over and against the out-group's prototypes of evil, namely Nineveh, Belial and the Assyrian king.

- The immensely important role of the prophet-poet of these texts can also not be overstated. As writer and mediator of the social identity of the in-group, his every word

and phrase gives meaning to their existence and struggle. Through his use of chiasm, alliteration, onomatopoeia and many other skilful tropes, he makes the oracle of judgment come alive in the minds and hearts of the hearers and readers. The downfall of the enemy out-group as well as the inner Judaic out-group is pictured so vividly and dramatically that poetic justice is served. Liberation is brought so close that one can see, hear and even feel the victory over the out-group. This creates the revolutionary hope of liberation. More importantly it gives comfort, which is the symbolic meaning of the name of the prophet to whom this oracle is eventually ascribed.

Premise 2 states that: *People in a group are motivated to act stereotypically on their group principles*.

- This was proven to be true to a certain extent. Through the prophecy of Nahum we see how a representative of the in-group writes in a way that is favouring the in-group and stereotypically constructing the out-group. SIT claims that one can also expect ethnocentric behaviour that becomes stronger in times of threat to the identity of a group. My reading of Nahum did not show this to be the case. Criticism and judgment of the out-group are offered on behalf of the deity, and we rather find a focus on the religious identity of the in-group than on their ethnic identity. Also the fact that in Nahum we see criticism against the own ethnic group's king (i.e. Manasseh) and others of the Judean people who are pro-Assyrian, refutes this notion of ethnic focus almost completely. As we will see in Chapter 7 the whole question of natural law and justice lay behind this unique stance.

Premise 3: *In a group people will always minimize the differences between in-group members and maximize differences in relation to the out-group.*

- Although we will only see it explained in a theological manner in the Yahweh-hymn in Chapter 6, it is clear from the first reading of the text that a "simplified" world of right and wrong is constructed. "Our" identity and group beliefs as symbolised by our prototypes (Nahum and Yahweh) is right(eous) and "their" construction identity (and in effect their world) is wrong (evil) and will be punished. There is no diplomatic or political middle ground where "we give some and get some." The out-goup(s) have plotted evil against the Lord of hosts, are guilty of many terrible sins (lying, bloodshed, sorceries, etc.) and will be destroyed because of that. This cursory reading of Nahum has led to the book being labelled as nationalistic and ethnocentric and therefore does present a danger that modern-day readers or groups could identify with the in-group and claim the vengeance of God

against their enemies for themselves. In the process their own violence often becomes legitimized on the strength of such misinterpretations.

- I speak of misinterpretations for a multidimensional reading of the text uncovered surprising results that in a sense defy or deconstruct the theoretical base of SIT and SCT. We have seen how even in the harshest of judgement there are shimmerings of a self-critical process of identity construction. We have seen how the grammar, the use of ambiguous words, the playful interchange between different persons and the use of literary traditions from their own past judgments against the in-group all contribute towards the creation of an in-group that sees itself almost bi-focally as closer to the out-group than one would think expect. This is the biggest discovery made thus far and one that will be proven also to exist in subsequent eras in Israel's history. In the next chapter we will see how this paradoxical juxtaposition of self-criticism and stereotypical criticism of the other is also found in other texts. The most important example that comes to mind is Jonah. Jonah is also about Israel and Nineveh, but there the roles are changed as the symbol-prophet gets the bad press, while the archenemy and ultimate out-group, Assyria, is positively constructed in this short-short story.

- This does not mean that the power and passion of this revolutionary letter should be understated. Their own social identity is very strongly put forward and the unjust out-groups' social identity severely questioned by the extensive use of ironic reversal and political satire. This is seen especially in the use of the woe-oracle in Nahum 3:1-7, which functions ironically as a lament at a death which now symbolises a cry of judgment. The brilliant use of reversed vassal treaty-curses and Assyrian king boasts to serve as poetic justice as well as very strong agricultural metaphors do serve the purpose of in-group favouring in this context of suffering and oppression.

- The use of certain metaphors, however, was shown to be ethically and ideologically dangerous. SIT and SCT hold that in situations of extreme trouble it is possible for groups to start depersonalising and then dehumanising the out-group. We have seen the depersonalising of the out-group with the mysterious and secret names, such as Belial, or a plain "you" as in "I am against you" says Yahweh. When it comes to the extremely violent imagery and especially the metaphoric abuse of women's bodies as spaces where the fight for liberation and the own social identity takes place, we do have an instance of dehumanisation. As indicated, this should be resisted openly and honestly and the negative appropriation of such metaphors should be ethically reflected on before identifying with that part of the identity construction process.

176

Premise 4: *The process of self-categorization is context dependent in what can be called the meta-contrast principle.*

- The re-categorisation that SIT and SCT predict when situations and frames of reference change could not be directly observed in the pre-exilic material of Nahum. This is because the texts under investigation all stem from one historical situation. It will be interesting to see in the next chapter whether something of this process of perceiving an out-group as more similar in another context is reflected in exilic/ post-exilic Nahum and especially in the Book of the Twelve.

- The same can be said for descriptions of prototypes that may vary as the intergroup context in which the judgments are made changes. For this one must surely look to the character and identity of Yahweh who represents (in these OCN texts) the prototypicality of the group.

- The meta-contrast principle can – by inference from other OT texts – be seen in Nahum. SIT and SCT hold that groups do not just react to one out-group but have to construct their identity in terms of multiple out-groups. We have seen this reality in Nahum. First of all it was shown that the inner Judean out-group of the pro-Assyrians is also dealt with, but on a slightly different level than the main out-group (Assyrians). The biggest discovery in this regard, though, is the way in which the in-group identifies other (out)groups (other nations, kingdoms, families, etc.) who are, in this OCN context, perceived to be more similar to the in-group. All the surrounding Syro-Palestinian nations, who in the OT are all judged and punished in OCN fashion, are in this context seen to be closer to the in-group. All who suffer under the crushing machinery of the Assyrian empire are perceived as being more similar to the in-group. Here we have one of the most important points of evidence against an ethnocentric reading of Nahum. The comfort that the poetic justice brings is indirectly also meant for the other out-groups who suffer in the same way. At the end "all" will clap hands over the downfall of Nineveh and the Assyrian king (Na 3:19).

Premise 5: *Groups create their social identity by constructing textual identities.*

- The exegetical part of the study has made this point clear. Prophets, and Nahum especially, wrote "with" their textual traditions. Nahum has close affinities to Hosea and Isaiah, but also to the Psalms and of course to other OCN texts in the prophets. To state the obvious: Nahum responds to his in-group's state of existential and ideological threat by writing an oracle against the enemy (Judean and Assyrian out-groups). He uses the OCN tradition to place the critique in the international realm of Yahweh's might and to indicate

177

that the pride and excessive violence and might of the Assyrians is not acceptable in terms of the "international law" in the ancient Near East. The nations are Yahweh's partners or even instruments of punishment, but if they overstep their mandate from Yahweh, they too will be punished.

▪ Through this choice of literature that contains such rich metaphors, ironic laments, political satire and the more traditional judgment discourse from Yahweh, Nahum places his in-group in a hermeneutical and symbolical relationship with their circumstances. The time for revolutionary and liberatory writing has come and Nahum does not hold anything back.

Part of the methodological approach described in Chapter 2, Section 4.5 was a sensitivity to context, liberation and ideological criticism. Although ideology was not investigated directly in the previous chapter, a few remarks with regards to ideology and social identity can be made to round off this section. Referring back to Carlton's description of the types of ideologies and the function of ideology (Chapter 2, Section 4.5), the following points can be made.

From our investigation of the pre-exilic material of the Book of Nahum it is clear that we are presented with a *strain* type of ideology. It wants to change the *status quo* of oppression and reacts against the *interest* type of ideology that threatens their existence as a Yahweh-Alone group in Judah in the time of Assyrian hegemony. Manasseh, the pro-Assyrian party, and of course Assyria want to maintain their power (ironically called *pax Assyria*) and uses *conservative* ideology to do that. Nahum challenges the Powers in the name of their deity, Yahweh, and puts forth a *revolutionary* ideology that wants to disrupt the current social order and work for social change.

The ideology that we are presented with in Nahum first of all has a *cathartic* function in that it provides an emotional release system for the oppressed in-group in Judean society. The prophet's symbolical name, Comfort, especially points in this direction. But apart from the catharsis there is a definite *advocatory* function in that there is a response to the strains in society which have a polarising effect. Yahweh is against the out-groups and their evil and there will be destruction and therefore salvation. Closely connected to these functions is the *solidarity reinforcement* function of Nahum's ideology. This will be seen even more vividly in the next chapter, but is already present here. Nahum's ideology wants to create unity

among the adherents to their group, but also a sort of "ecumenical" unity between all the nations and groups that suffer under the oppressive ideologies of the Assyrian empire. Their war-mongering propaganda that reinforces their ideologies of tyranny is familiar enough for us to realise the impact it had on all the small vassal states in Syro-Palestine during the neo-Assyrian subjugation.

A detailed discussion of ideology and social identity falls outside the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that it seems plausible to say that ideology does inform our perceptions on ancient Israel's social identity. In Chapter 7 the importance of an ideological-critical sensitivity will be noted as a crucial part of a theological-ethical reading of Nahum. At the end of the next chapter this limited focus on ideological-critical issues in exilic/post-exilic Nahum will again form part of the implications of the exegesis.

It is to the social identity of ancient Israel in exilic/post-exilic times that we turn our attention in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Nahum and social identity in the exile/post-exile

1. Introduction

As we have already seen, social identity and the historical context in which it is constructed are inextricably linked to one another. The same can be said for discovering the ideological trends and in effect the theological-ethical insights. In the previous chapter the Assyrian crisis formed the critical backdrop against which the oracle against Nineveh, the prototype of evil and "otherness" was interpreted. The pre-exilic political, religious and economic issues and how they influenced the social identity in Nahum were investigated in terms of some basic premises of social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorization theory (SCT).

It was found that the underlying group dynamic, as mediated through the ancient text of Nahum (or at least the early parts of the oracular material against Nineveh) to a certain extent converged with the basic premises of intergroup social identify dynamics. The important discovery, though, was the presence of a subtle undercurrent of self-criticizing identity and theological ethics. This unexpected presence in the textual identity was seen especially in the ambiguity of the texts of judgement (and of salvation). This recognition brought important insights into our reading of Nahum in terms of identity, and especially in terms of the uncritical categorization of Nahum as an extremely nationalistic and ethnocentric prophet.

In this chapter we encounter the further development of the text of the Book of Nahum. The exilic/post-exilic additions (i.e. Na 1:2-8; 2:1) are looked at in terms of social identity construction, with the focus on ideology and theological ethics. The historical context that forms the matrix against which social identity should be investigated is now exilic/post-exilic (and even late post-exilic). A totally new era in the life of ancient Israel's religious, political and economic history began with the total collapse of the state of Judah, the Babylonian exile and the subsequent return to the land and life under Persian rule.

A short description of this new historical context will be followed by a discussion of the remaining texts of Nahum. That will be followed by the crucial discussion of Nahum's role in the Book of the Twelve in terms of social identity, after which the importance of the reception

of Nahum in terms of identity will be studied. The chapter ends with a summary and conclusions.

2. Historical context II: The exilic/post-exilic age

The choice to read the pre-exilic parts of Nahum in the time of King Manasseh and under the Assyrian yoke was not arbitrary. This I have argued (following recent Nahum research) in the previous chapter. The bulk of Nahum (i.e. Na 1:9-14; 2:2-3:19) forms a more or less unified structure, and especially the ironic reversals of texts about Assyria (e.g. Is 5 and 10), as well as texts from the neo-Assyrian vassal treaties and royal annals (e.g. lion hunts) made a "fit" to the mentioned period very probable. Moreover, the focus on Yahweh as the King of kings (greater than Assyria) and the disputations with the Judean audience made rhetorical sense in the time of Manasseh.

Exactly when the Nineveh oracle was written, and precisely what the historical situation was, will probably never be pinpointed. Perhaps we could also read the words against Nineveh in the time of Josiah when Assyria was declining (Blenkinsopp 1983:147), that is, after the death of Ashurbanipal in 627, when a power-vacuum was left in Syro-Palestine (Donner 1995:370-374), or perhaps just before (Haldar 1947) or just after (Humbert 1926, Gottwald 1964:231) the fall of Nineveh in 612 as a rhetorical demonstration of Yahweh's might (Sweeney 1992). The applicability of the Nineveh oracles also to these later times is part of the prophetic text's flexibility to be reapplied to new contexts. How this reapplication was done in the exilic/post-exilic age and what implications this has for our understanding of social identity construction in ancient Israel will now be looked at.

As was already mentioned in Chapter 4, the acrostic theophanic Yahweh-hymn (Na 1:2-8, which also contains later additions) and the word of salvation word for Judah (Na 2:1) can fruitfully be seen as representing the social identity of the exilic/post-exilic community. The question should now be asked: what were the issues and problems of the Yahweh-community after the loss of state, land, religion and identity during and after the Babylonian exile of 587 BCE?

2.1 The "idea" of Exile and "Restoration"

What is the exilic/post-exilic period? In itself this terminology is not sufficient. "Exile" is usually used synonymously with "captivity" to refer to the period (587-539 BCE), when a part of the Judean population was exiled to Babylon. This too easily suggests that all the Judeans were deported and so is historically unsatisfactory (Ackroyd 1985:287). "Post-exilic" again refers to the time after the Babylonian exile, when the Persians conquered Babylon, which led to the so-called "Restoration"[126] of the Jewish community in Palestine. The term is also too general as it could imply the period until the "end" of the OT (Richards 1985:809). It is better to limit "post-exilic" through to the fifth century BCE and to discuss the Exile and "Restoration" together as this leads to a richer understanding (Richards 1985:809).

The exilic/post-exilic age can best be described as an "idea" rather than as a precise historical period. Ackroyd (1968:237-238) can be quoted at length to substantiate this point:

> Important and desirable as historical dating is … it may nevertheless be useful to draw together material which, even if not all of one period, reflects outlooks arising from the consideration of a particular situation. The exile was a historic fact, though its precise description in detail is a matter of great difficulty. But as a fact of Israel's historic experience, it inevitably exerted a great influence upon the development of theological thinking. The handling of the exile is not therefore solely a problem of historical reconstruction; it is a matter of attempting to understand an attitude, or more properly a variety of attitudes, taken up towards that historic fact.

Albertz (1998:22) agrees with this summary of the exile by describing its historical representation in the Bible as a dark hole ("ein finsteres Loch"). Grabbe (1998:80) also reiterates that the exile is a powerful symbol but is not easy to come to grips with from a historical perspective. Still, there are a few things that can be said of this period with relative certainty.

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[126] "Restoration" is put in quotation marks as it has recently come under fire as an "amazing inaccuracy of … scholarly terminology" and that "[t]his usage completely ignored that a restoration of the pre-exilic conditions, which means the re-establishment of a state and the reinstatement of a Davidic king, did not take place" (Albertz 2003:1).

The Exile created a big rift in the history of Israelite religion. The pre-exilic forms of their religion were severely challenged (Albertz 1994:368). It, however, also laid the foundation stone for the "most far-reaching renewal of this religion" (Albertz 1994:369). To quote Gerstenberger (2002:207): "only from the sixth century BCE in Israel was the exclusive faith in the one God Yahweh established firmly for all parts of the population and all social groupings."

2.2 Life in exilic/post-exilic times

After Jerusalem was captured, the Babylonian troops, under the direction of Nebuzaradan, the captain of the royal bodyguard, ravaged Jerusalem for a few weeks (Miller & Hayes 1986:416). The result of the Babylonian conquest was destruction. This brought about a disruption in the industry and economy of the country (Miller & Hayes 1986:417). The downfall of the state of Judah, the end of the monarchy, the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the deportation of thousands of members from the upper social class to Babylon in several stages left a disrupted and fragmented Israel (Gerstenberger 2002:207).

Carroll (1997:64) remarks wrily that "[w]hile the term exile may have a nice sound to it, the much harsher word deportation better embodies the experience of diaspora and reflects the utter miseries of existence as declared in the Bible about life outside the 'homeland' for the first diaspora generations." Smith-Christopher (1997:36) points to the "enormity of the physical, social, and psychological trauma of this experience in the life of Ancient Israel" and that we should see ancient Israel's eventual recovery process as a "frankly heroic survival of domination in the ancient Near East."

Albertz (1994:374-375) notes three sociological developments during this time:

(1) Israel of the exilic period consisted of three major groups in separate territories (Judah, Babylon and Egypt) with conflicting histories and interests and only loosely joined by a bond of common ethnic origin;

(2) Political organization became decentralized along kinship lines and the family became the main social entity. This gave the elders new power alongside the priests and prophets;

(3) The fact that Israel now lived among different foreign nationalities made it necessary for individuals to choose their commitment to their group. Religious confession became

significant in one's personal identity and thus "the Israel from the exilic period for the first time took on features of a community with a religious constitution."

For the biblical writings one should focus more on the experiences of the exiles in the Babylonian Golah (although the "others" in Egypt and especially those who stayed behind in Judah are also important). Gerstenberger (2002:208) makes the strong point that, although they had every reason to be dispersed and lose themselves "in the giant empire of the Babylonians", that did not happen. They preserved their identity, at least in part (Gerstenberger 2002:208).

According to some scholars, the exilic community was materially speaking not in great need and their distress was on a psychological and religious level (Albertz 1994:412; Gerstenberger 2002:208-209). Psychologically they suffered homesickness for Jerusalem and feelings of extreme guilt (Albertz 1994:413). Religiously the expected imminent return after an intervention of Yahweh had faded and with it the political nationalist hopes of again being a people of God (Albertz 1994:413).

The idea that there really was no real suppression or religious persecution (which can be found in the work of e.g. Noth and Oded) is challenged by more recent studies, such as that of Smith-Christopher (1997:23):

> It is precisely these tendencies to presume a tame, even if not entirely comfortable, existence that needs to be challenged in the light of an analysis informed by the experience of exiles throughout history, and the evidence of trauma in the Hebrew literature after the experience.

Smith-Christopher (1997:23-25) notes, for example, that on the strength of inscriptions by Nebuchadnezzar II, the exiles were probably slaves. Important for our study is the remark that Deutero-Isaiah's concept of the suffering of the "suffering servant" should perhaps be taken more literally and regarded as an accurate description of a situation of forced labour and other suffering (Smith-Christopher 1997:25). Taking this into account, it is to the group that was responsible for the writing of Deutero-Isaiah that we now turn.

2.3 The Deutero-Isaiah group

As already mentioned, a new beginning and a hopeful future were not envisaged by most of the exiles. It took the so-called "Deutero-Isaiah" group to recognize that the rise of Cyrus represents a decisive new beginning (Albertz 1994:413-414). This group started its literary legacy (Is 40-55) in the last decade before the fall of Babylon in 539 BCE. Albertz (1994:415) describes them as "a group of theologians gathered round a master which came from circles of descendents of the temple singers and cult prophets of the Jerusalem temple with their nationalistic attitude, and was intensively concerned with the prophecy of Isaiah."

Their main message was that the time of judgement has passed and that Yahweh would usher in a new period of salvation (Albertz 1994:415). To this can be added (Albertz 1994:416-419):

(1) Hymns of praise to the creator God, Yahweh, who was also Lord of history, were being incorporated in their theology. Yahweh's omnipotence as sovereign ruler over all nations was in effect being established;[127]

(2) From the pre-exilic prophets they developed the idea that Yahweh's judgment is purposeful. "The national catastrophe had not hit Israel like a blind stroke of fate, but had been a consequence of its sin" (Is 42:24; 43:26-28);

(3) The most important consequence for the official Yahweh religion of that time was the formulation of a consistent monotheism;

(4) Lastly, they broke through the centuries of being a national religion and theologically demonstrated that "the radius of Yahweh's action had extended to the world of nations". This created a universalized perspective on the future.

All of these aspects are important for our study of social identity study in Nahum in the exilic/post-exilic era. Especially the probability of linking the redaction of Nahum to a certain group is interesting. The aims of the Deutero-Isaiah group have connections to the Yahweh-Alone Movement that was the focus group in our study of pre-exilic Nahum material in the time of the Assyrian crisis (Chapter 4, Section 4.2). As Albertz (1994:419) puts it, the group "arrived at the conclusion that the knowledge that Yahweh alone was God … would also take

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[127] Ackroyd (1968:128-129) agrees with this very central element of the theology of future hope: "the setting out of the hope for the future is in terms of the hymnic praise of psalms which proclaim both the kingly rule of Yahweh and the creative act by which that rule is declared."

185

effect in history." Ackroyd (1968:234) states this point as follows: "if we were to pick any one phrase which is characteristic of the whole period, it would surely be 'to know that I am Yahweh' – the very expression of the name and nature of God."

The gradual development of the Yahweh religion from its monolatrous pre-exilic beginnings to its monotheistic post-exilic character is important. Day (2000:228) substantiates this: "it is clear that there was indeed a monolatrous party in the pre-exilic period … and absolute monotheism was first given explicit expression by the prophet Deutero-Isaiah in the exile and became fully operative in the post-exilic period." In the Scroll of Nahum we have a rare example of how the seeds of a theological idea that was planted in the text of a pre-exilic group (Yahweh Alone movement) was brought to fruition and prophetical re-enactment by an exilic/post-exilic group (Deutero-Isaiah group).

This realisation is very important for the study of the way that a monotheistic Yahwism was formed against the other "Yahwisms" of the time. Continuing prophecy and the way that later redactors took up the earlier texts and reinterpreted or reinserted them into the crisis of the present moment are beautifully seen here.

The Deutero-Isaiah group was, of course, not the only group in the exilic/post-exilic times that had an important message. Albertz (1994:440) talks about at least three "rival schemes" which functioned at the level of official Yahweh religion and which "fought for influence in the reshaping of the Jewish community":

- Deuteronomistic theology in its different genres (DtrG, JerD);
- The priestly reform theology (the Ezekiel school);
- The exilic prophecy of salvation (the Deutero-Isaiah school).

The scope of this study is not wide enough to study each of these theological "parties" in detail (Albertz 1994: 437ff. gives a very good and detailed discussion of Israelite religion in the post-exilic period). It is important, though, to know that the exilic/post-exilic community was splintered and that it was a time of great theological rethinking. From this rethinking and reinterpretation of the old traditions emerged most of what we know today as the Tanach.

186

2.4 Ancient Israel's scriptural traditions

It was in this most unexpected time that most of the traditions of the OT were collected, set down in writing and "worked on as the fundamental documents of faith" (Gerstenberger 2002:207; cf. also Sanders 1997:57). Gerstenberger (2002:211-215) names the development of the Torah as the first and foremost scriptural work. To that can be added the Deuteronomistic history, the so-called "priestly work," the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah and writings such as Lamentations and many of the psalms. It is the prophetic literature that interests us most.

The redactors of this time kept on reading the earlier prophets after 587 BCE as they thought the words of the voices of the past were applicable to their own day. In general, a pre-exilic nucleus was taken up, expanded and given a new meaning and a new lease on life by the writers of the exilic/post-exilic times (Collins 1993:16). A consequence of this perspective is that the historical value of the prophetical books often lies "in the insight which they give us into exilic and post-exilic thought, rather than as a guide to the history of prophecy in Israel" (Collins 1993:31). This also holds true for the book of Nahum.

Regarding the "scripturalization" of the book of Nahum, the work of Schulz (1973) on this book is quite enlightening. With his redactional-critical methodology he comes to the conclusion that, although Nahum is not a classical prophetical text (Schulz 1973:53), it should be seen as literary post-exilic prophecy (Schulz 1973:55). This kind of prophecy takes the pre-exilic social-critical impetus and sets it free by using new speech possibilities. According to him, these prophecies do have an oral tradition, but were conceived and fixed as literary compositions (Schulz 1973:55). Very important is his insight that these new prophetic genres must be connected to historical political reflection. The socio-political relationships of the pre-exilic prophecies were retained in so far as they were now (in post-exilic times) applied to the power-relations of their time. He calls this reactualising history by creating epical poetry that reflects on history (Schulz 1973:55).

Schulz (1973:105) therefore sees Nahum as the work of an author that took a battle song about the sacking of Nineveh and a taunt-qina about Nineveh and joined it with a theophanic hymn and a word of salvation for Judah and made it into a prophetic book. The finalized book has a prophetic literary design that can be seen in the heading that, in its turn, shows the

intention of the book (Schulz 1973:106). The book was "canonically acceptable" as a prophetic book because the heading, verse 1b, conformed to all the criteria: (1) The collection was closed (סֵפֶר "book" v.1b); (2) contained a prophetic vision (חָזוֹן "vision" v.1b); and (3) was ascribed to a known prophet (נַחוּם "Nahum"). Therefore the full heading shows that a מַשָּׂא נִינְוֶה "oracle against Nineveh" was changed into a "Book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite" (Schulz 1973:108).

To this can be added that, at the stage of the finalizing of the Book of the Twelve, other redactional changes were possible (e.g. Na 1:2b-3a; the disruption of the half-acrostic in Na 1:2-8). These issues will be dealt with below, when Nahum is interpreted as part of the Book of the Twelve.

2.5 Social identity construction in the exilic/post-exilic time

In Chapter 4 we made some "predictions" regarding possible group interaction in the Assyrian crisis by using the working premises of social identity theory and self-categorization theory (Chapter 4, Section 3.4). The same can now be done for the exilic/post-exilic times with their unique questions and specific groups.

The main groups who form the "cast" in this new drama of identity construction can roughly be identified as indicated below.

- As we have seen above, the main group is the monotheistic Deutero-Isaiah group. This group can be seen as carrying forward the theological ideals of the pre-exilic Yahweh-Alone Movement. The edited book of Nahum is their theological-symbolical representation. They form the main in-group. In Nahum they are called "Judah". Yahweh as only God is the expression of their basic group belief. This belief is stated in a time of immense trauma and expressed against other group ideologies regarding the significance of the experience of exile and against other types of Yahwism.

- The Babylonian empire, which functions both on a "real" political level as oppressor and at the same time on a symbolical level as prototype of the enemy. In this sense it takes over the role of Assyria in the pre-exilic era. "Assyria" is now probably understood as also referring to Babylon. From this time on "Assyria", with Nineveh

188

as prototype, becomes a symbolically constructed out-group. It is a "placeholder" for future enemies or oppressors, be it Babylon, Rome or Pretoria.

- The various other exilic groups who also had a theological view on the Exile and who functioned as (implied) subsections of the in-group, or even as subsidiaries of the out-group. The Deuteronomistic group as well as the priestly reform group (see above for details) can be mentioned. In Nahum they are implied, but it is almost impossible to see specific references to these groups as mediated through the text.
- Of course, also the other foreign nations and people who were in exile in Babylon. In Nahum (exilic/post-exilic) they do not feature centrally and are theoretical postulates that could have influenced the dynamics of social identity construction.

The predictions, formulated according to the premises as stated in Chapter 3, Section 4.5, can be summarized as follows:

Premise 1: All people have a social identity and belong to groups with basic group principles.
Social identity in the exilic/post-exilic time becomes more fragmented. In Exile the experience of loss of state, land, city, religion and especially temple created an severe loss of social identity. The huge existential uncertainty should lead either to the dissolution of group/social identity as Israel is "absorbed" into the greater Babylonian empire (as happened with the Northern Kingdom in the Assyrian empire) or to an even stronger search or expression of the ethnic, nationalistic, or religious identity of the in-group. The basic group belief of the Deutero-Isaiah group will probably centre on the group's deity, Yahweh. Yahweh will function as the prototypical expression of the basic group beliefs of the in-group. The content of the group beliefs can either focus on the end of being a unique socio-religious group or on the possibility of a new beginning as a community.

Premise 2: People in a group are motivated to act stereotypically on their group principles.
The Deutero-Isaiah group that probably had a hand in the way Nahum was revised and edited in the exilic/post-exilic era probably would act on their theological principles (Yahweh as Lord of history, salvation for Judah and a more universal view of God and the world). To measure "action" in ancient texts is extremely difficult, but we would expect such a group to write down their thoughts and in this way influence their community and its social identity.

Premise 3: In a group people will always minimize the differences between in-group members and maximize differences in relation to the out-group.

In a fragmented situation such as the exilic/post-exilic time, we would expect the in-group to construct identity by providing a hopeful and integrating message. This would be done by creating a very strong prototype of the in-group and by maintaining exclusiveness in relation to the other out-groups (Babylonians and Medes, as well as other nationalities).

Premise 4: The process of self-categorization is context dependent.

The diachronic development of the Book of Nahum from pre-exilic times through exilic and post-exilic times will be seen clearly. The traditions that are chosen as basic group beliefs, the construction of the prototype of "in-groupness" (i.e. especially Yahweh and Judah), and the way the out-group is stereotyped and the prototypes constructed will probably differ from Nahum: pre-exilic to Nahum: exilic/post-exilic. This is the exciting part of the research - to see whether there are similarities, but also to clearly note the differences.

Premise 5: Groups create their social identity by constructing textual identities.

As we have already seen in the historical overview, the great emphasis on creating new scriptural traditions to come to terms theologically with this greatest of catastrophes will definitely be represented in the textual traditions that are used to construct a new identity and thereby offer a new beginning for the Yahweh community. The choice of textual traditions could focus on the integration of texts (positive social identity construction) or the disintegration of texts (negative social identity construction). The big theological questions concerning guilt, the presence or absence of Yahweh with his people, their future as a people without a king and (at the early stage) without a temple will influence the choice of textual traditions that are used to come to grips with the situation. It remains to be seen how this will function in Nahum.

3. Nahum 1:2-8; 2:1 and social identity in the post-exilic era

In Chapter 5 we presented a detailed discussion of the superscription of the Book of Nahum. We saw how the earlier oracle against Nineveh (Na 1:1a) and the later Book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite (Na 1:1b) can be distinguished in the superscription. According to Schulz (see above Section 2.4), the full superscription of Nahum points to its exilic/post-exilic origin and it especially shows that the final redactional form was ready for inclusion in the canon. We also saw the importance of Nineveh, which is constructed as prototype of the evil out-group and the counter-ideological construction of the name Nahum that means comfort.

This aspect of comfort becomes even more crucial when read in the light of the exilic/post-exilic situation.

Isaiah 40:1, which introduces the writings of Deutero-Isaiah and puts forward the main theme of what the following chapters are about, begins with the following words:

נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי יֹאמַר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: ¹

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God (NRSV)

The stem נחם is repeated twice in the pi'el imperative form. The connection with the name of Nahum, which can be traced to the same stem נחם, is fascinating. With our knowledge of the Deutero-Isaiah group in the exilic times and the suspicion that they were responsible for the later redaction of Nahum, is it too far-fetched to see their hand in the choice of the name Nahum for the book that represents their new theological message? This "overlap" between Deutero-Isaiah in the superscription, but also in the addition of the word of salvation to Judah in Nahum 2:1, prompts one to seriously consider this influence. The literary character of the Book of Nahum is in a sense strengthened by this possibility.

3.1 Nahum 1:2-8 – Theophanic broken acrostic Yahweh-hymn

In this section of the text the mysterious and theological universalism of Nahum's message for social identity comes to the fore beautifully, as we look at a broken, half-acrostic theophanic Yahweh-hymn.

As we will shortly see, this hymnic addition to Nahum was done so brilliantly that it appears to be a seamless part of the whole book (cf. Spronk's integrated and unified canticle structure, Chapter 4, Section 3.1). The hymn takes up most of the important keywords that are repeated throughout the Book of Nahum and serves as an introduction to the main themes and message of the book. The probable connection with the Deutero-Isaiah group can also be entertained here, for this universalistic hymn with its focus on creation and the identity of Yahweh as Lord of history and nature "fits" into the type of literature that represents the theological hope of the Deutero-Isaiah group in the uncertain exilic/post-exilic times.

2a (א) A jealous[a] God (*El*)[b] and vengeful is Yahweh | אֵל קַנּוֹא וְנֹקֵם יְהוָה ²

Vengeful is Yahweh[c] and an angry Lord (*Baal*).[b] (ה) | נֹקֵם יְהוָה וּבַעַל חֵמָה

2b (נ) Vengeful is Yahweh against his adversaries | נֹקֵם יְהוָה לְצָרָיו

and grudging[d] is he against his enemies. (ו) | וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לְאֹיְבָיו:

3a (י) יהוה (א) is slow to anger but great in strength[a] | יְהוָה אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וּגְדָל־כֹּחַ ³

and he will definitely not leave unpunished.[b] (ה) | וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה

3b יהוה - (ב) In whirlwind and in storm is his way[c] | יְהוָה בְּסוּפָה וּבִשְׂעָרָה דַּרְכּוֹ

and clouds are the dust of his feet. | וְעָנָן אֲבַק רַגְלָיו:

4a (ג) Rebuking the sea he dries it up | גּוֹעֵר בַּיָּם וַיַּבְּשֵׁהוּ ⁴

and all the rivers he causes to run dry. | וְכָל־הַנְּהָרוֹת הֶחֱרִיב

4b (ד) Bashan withers away[a] and also Carmel, | אֻמְלַל בָּשָׁן וְכַרְמֶל

and the bloom of the Lebanon withers. | וּפֶרַח לְבָנוֹן אֻמְלָל

5a (ה) The mountains shake before him | הָרִים רָעֲשׁוּ מִמֶּנּוּ ⁵

and the hills are set moving, | וְהַגְּבָעוֹת הִתְמֹגָגוּ

5b (ו) and the earth is laid waste[b] before him, | וַתִּשָּׂא הָאָרֶץ מִפָּנָיו

and the world[c] and all living in it. | וְתֵבֵל וְכָל־יֹשְׁבֵי בָהּ:

6a (ז) His curse[a], who can stand before it? | לִפְנֵי זַעְמוֹ מִי יַעֲמוֹד ⁶

Who can withstand his glowing wrath? | וּמִי יָקוּם בַּחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ

6b (ח) His anger gushes forth like the fire | חֲמָתוֹ נִתְּכָה כָאֵשׁ

and the rocks are scattered because of him.[b] | וְהַצֻּרִים נִתְּצוּ מִמֶּנּוּ:

7a (ט) Good[a] is Yahweh- | טוֹב יְהוָה ⁷

indeed a stronghold[b] in days of trouble. | לְמָעוֹז בְּיוֹם צָרָה

7b (י) Knowing[c] those that trust in him[d] | וְיֹדֵעַ חֹסֵי בוֹ:

8a but[a], with[b] an overwhelming flood passing over[c], | וּבְשֶׁטֶף עֹבֵר ⁸

(כ) an utter end he will make of her place,[d] (<u>or</u>: those who defy him[e]) | כָּלָה יַעֲשֶׂה מְקוֹמָהּ

8b and his enemies he will pursue into darkness.[f] | וְאֹיְבָיו יְרַדֶּף־חֹשֶׁךְ

Textual notes:

Acrostics: a) According to Spronk (1997:19ff.) we find half a line-acrostic and four word-, or, name-acrostics in Nahum. They can be summarized as follows: (1) The Hebrew letters in brackets at the <u>end</u> of the lines of vv. 1b (י); 2aB (ה); 2bB (ו); 3aB (ה) spells יהוה "Yahweh;" (2) The Hebrew letters at the <u>beginning</u> of the lines of vv. 2aA (א); 2bA (נ); 3aA (י) spells אני "I (am);" (3) The half-acrostic begins in v.3aA (א) and v.3bA (ב) and then continues until v.7a (ט). Spronk (1997:19ff.) sees יהוה repeated before the א- and ב-strophe (v. 3aA and v.3bA)

192

as indication of the start of the line-acrostic. Taken together then we find "spelled out" "I am Yahweh" (combining 1 and 2), and two times "Yahweh" (taking 3 seriously) as the indicator of the "double" start of the line-acrostic, as well as indicating the subject of the acrostic - it is about Yahweh. For the discussion of the other two word-acrostics that Spronk (1997) sees in Nahum, see below the notes on Na 1:12 and Na 3:18.

2. a) Targ. "God is judge" translating קנא by its Aramaic cognate (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:131). **b)** Note the play on the names of the Canaanite gods El and Baal (Cathcart 1973:28-31; Christensen 1975:21). **c)** BHS: LXX^MSS does not have the second "vengeful is Yahweh." MT is accepted because of the balance and chiasm in the verse (see below). **d)** נטר "keeping his wrath; lastingly angry" cf. HAL 656.

3. a) BHS suggest חֶסֶד "mercy" to harmonize the text with Ex 34:15. Cf. also Ehrlich (1968:292) who suggests "Geduld" (Eng = "patience"). **b)** Most translations insert the "logical" missing sense with a word like "the guilty" (NIV; RSV; NASB), "the wicked" (KJV) or "evil" (NJB). Luther translates "theologically" "vor dem niemand unschuldig ist" (Lutherbibel). **c)** Christensen (1975:21) "he makes his way." Targ. "The Lord goes forth" (דבר) (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:132).

4.a) To "reconstruct" the half-acrostic (ד-strophe) one needs to read דְּלְלוּ "they are little/low/of little value," implying that Bashan and Carmel are personified places. אָמְלַל is seen as dittography and according to BHS the possible parallelism in the verse should be taken into account. The repetition of a word is not unusual in Nahum (e.g. in Na 1:2 we have three times נֹקֵם "vengeful"). It depends whether one sees Na 1:2-8 as acrostic or not.

5. a) Following MUR as well as LXX and Targ. reading "the mountains." **b)** So BHS, following Syr., Vulg., also Targ. - changing נשׂא to שׁאה "to be laid waste" (e.g. Is 6:11; 17:12-13; cf. Jeremias 1965:32 seeing a false masoretic punctuation and reading שׁאה nif.). Spronk (1997:42) follows the MT "the earth rises before him." Can also be translated as "Earth crashes into ruins before him" (Christensen 1975:22). Deissler (1984:207) has "the earth cries out" because this meaning of the ambiguous תִּשָּׂא fits the context of the inhabitants better. **c)** Not accepting BHS, which suggests "and they mourned" because of the importance of the ו (*waw*) for the acrostic and because ארץ and תבל is a common parallel word-pair in the OT (1 S 2:8; Is 18:3; Jr 10:12; Ps 19:5 etc.; cf. Spronk 1997:43).

6. a) Changing לִפְנֵי to לְפָנָיו "before it" and placing it after יַעֲמוֹד to reconstruct the ז-strophe. **b)** מִן used as indicator for the cause of something else (Rudolph 1975:152 note 6c). The masc. suff. is used for Yahweh and not for אֵשׁ "fire" which is fem.

7. a) טוֹב יְהוָה is only found here and in Lm 3:25. Lm 3:25 also stands in a three-verse alphabetic acrostic collective lament and verses 25-27 each starts with טוֹב "good." טוֹב is also found as representative of the ninth Hebrew consonant in other acrostics, for example, Pss 37:16; 112:5; 119:65,68,71,72. Although it could be coincidence, this could be another way of confirming the presence of the (half-) alphabetic acrostic in Na 1:2-8. **b)** Following Spronk (1997:19-20) and also Christensen (1975:22) who reads the *lamed* as assertive "yea, as a stronghold ..." NJB translates "Yahweh is better than a fortress in time of distress." Some follow LXX by inserting לְמִנָיו and translating "Good is Yahweh to them that wait upon him" (e.g. Rudolph 1975:151f.). **c)** Deleting the ו and/or inserting יהוה to obtain the י-strophe. When inserting יהוה, the metre is better (Rudolph 1975:152). **d)** Floyd (1994:428) "and he knows those who seek his protection."

8. a) *waw*-adversive creating contrast between two clauses (BHRG §40.8/1iv). **b)** *beth-instrumenti* (BHRG §39.6/3i). **c)** עבר could be changed to יַעֲבִירֵם "he passes over them" (BHS). Rudolph (1972:152) sees v.8a as

incomplete and the וֹ (8aAa) as dittography of the last letter of v.7b and translates "when the flood passes over" as complement for v.7b and following the structure of v.7a (also NJB). **d)** "her place" could be kept (BHS and LXX see note 8e) as the word forms an important keyword-link to Na 3.17 where מְקוֹם is also used. One could also see the 3 fem. sg. suff. as a reference to fem. "earth" or "world" in v.5b (so DNV; cf. Hulst 1960:245) or to "trouble" (v.7aB 3 fem. sg.; Floyd 1994:428). Deissler (1984:207) accepts the LXX to "his enemies." **e)** One could also say that the 3 fem. sg. suff. in מְקוֹמָהּ has no reference in the verse itself and that by just removing the *mappik* (so Driver and Haldar - cf. Rudolph 1972:152) to read "his adversaries" (Ger. = "Widerstand"). Is also makes sense for a better chiastic structure with v.8b "his enemies." **f)** The many suggestions on changing v.8b is unnecessary (*contra* Ehrlich 1968:293; Rudolph 1972:152; BHS). It is also not necessary to see חֹשֶׁךְ "darkness" as the subject ("darkness pursues his foes") for Yahweh is the subject of v.7 and v.8.

That this alphabetical Yahweh-hymn has a later character than the texts we have encountered in Chapter 5 is asserted by many scholars (Schoors 1998:155)[128]. As indicated above and in the previous chapter, this text should be read as part of the exilic/post-exilic context. In this section the focus on social identity in exilic/post-exilic times brings two important aspects to the fore; firstly (3.1.1) the identity of Yahweh, and secondly (3.1.2) how the form in which the text is presented affects the way ancient Israel (or at least the Deutero-Isaiah group as theological continuation of the Yahweh-Alone Movement) incorporates the specific identity of their national deity into their textual identity.

3.1.1 The identity of Yahweh

In a previous chapter (Chapter 3, 3.1) we saw how important religious identity was in ancient Israel. The identity of Israel was linked to the identity of Yahweh (De Pury 1994) and Israel's portrayal of Yahweh served as a type of structuring or bordering device for the society (Stolz 1994). Social identity functions on basic group beliefs and what the group believes about their deity reflects how they view and structure their world. In this opening hymn to Yahweh we have a wonderful opportunity to see how Israel's in-group identity can be extrapolated from Yahweh's character and the way he is portrayed.

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[128] Schoors (1998:155) mentions, e.g. Smith, Nowack, Elliger, Deissler and Renaud. Cf. Also Baumann (1999:347): "In der Forschung wird Nah 1,2-8 vor allem wegen seines Stils als exilisch-nachexilischer Zusatz zum Buch Nahum angesehen."

The basic fact that the judgment of Assyria/Nineveh (now as symbolical types for enemies) starts by first giving a theological and universalizing introduction or prelude is worth mentioning. The hymn is divided into three parts: Yahweh as just Judge (Na 1:2-3a); Yahweh coming in theophanic judgment (Na 1:3b-6); and Yahweh as Saviour and Destroyer (Na 1:7-8).

3.1.1.1 Nahum 1:2b-3a: Yahweh as just Judge

With Spronk's (1997:19ff.) new suggestion that Nahum 1:2b-3a forms part of a line acrostic that spells "I am Yahweh" (see textual notes above), one should not remove these verses too quickly. In previous research verses 2b-3a were usually ascribed to a later addition as it breaks the acrostic which starts in verse 2a, and alludes or quotes Exodus 34:6-7, a text that is associated with the final redaction of the Book of the Twelve (Zenger *et al.* 1998:511; Nogalski 1993; Van Leeuwen 1993). Nahum 1:2b-3a is forthwith discussed in terms of its place in the hymn, but with the realization that these verses are at the same time part of the Book of the Twelve's final redaction. In Section 4.2.2 below this aspect of the interpretation of Nahum will be considered again.

Jealousy, vengeance, anger and being grudging are all concepts that do not fall comfortably on the modern ear. When these concepts are attached to God, one is left with an uncomfortable feeling. Taken at face value, they indeed sound like nationalistic hate-speech. On closer investigation, however, we find a different level of meaning.

Becking (1995:289) notes that in the seven divine attributes mentioned in Nahum 1:2-3a, "most have their literary background and theological *Sitz im Leben* in the terminology of law, justice and covenant."

Yahweh as a קַנּוֹא אֵל ("jealous God") should be seen in the context of Yahweh's covenantal relationship with his people as seen in the Decalogue (Ex 20:5), where the term is used. In Joshua 24:19, the only other verse where the expression קַנּוֹא אֵל is used, we see Yahweh's jealousy being connected to his holiness. Here in Nahum it is used as a synonym for נֹקֵם (repeated 3x in Na 1:2 – the Qal participle is used: "vengeful") and is further explained by חֵמָה "angry" and נוֹטֵר "grudging" (Reuter 1986:60).

The participle נֹקֵם from the root נקם is used in connection with God as avenger (Lipinski 1986:604). This comes from the original legal meaning of נקם, where a misdeed was punished and so redeemed (Sauer 1976:107). In some cases it has the meaning of personal or blood-vengeance but in most of the cases where it is used with God, the idea implies that he is a punisher because of his jealousy for his people (Sauer 1976:108). It is used in connection with Yahweh taking vengeance on his foes (Jr 46:10; Is 1:24) and on the foreign nations (Is 47:3; Jr 50:15) but also with regards to Israel/Jerusalem (Jr 5:9).

חֵמָה "angry" expresses Yahweh's divine wrath against his own people for their misdeeds (2 K22:13; Ps 89:47), but also against the foreign nations (Ezk 25:14,17; Is 34:2; Mi 5:14) (Schunk 1977:1035). Yahweh is here curiously portrayed as a בַּעַל חֵמָה "angry Ba`al/ Lord",[129] which serves as a contrast with Nineveh, the בַּעֲלַת כְּשָׁפִים "*ba`alat*/mistress of sorceries" in Nahum 3:4. Speaking about God's wrath, we should not call to mind our 21st-century connotations of "wrath." God's wrath must be understood within the framework of the covenant. The divine wrath then "does not rest on furious arbitrariness, but as being provoked by the people who did not observe its covenantal obligations" (Becking 1995:288). Childs (1979:443) reiterates that in the reworking of the psalm the destruction of the enemy is now explicitly derived from the nature of God as a "jealous God" and "does not, therefore, stem from the personal hatred of its Jewish author against Assyria" (Childs 1979:443). Compare also Zenger *et al* (1998:512), who agree that the words "anger" and "vengeance" are not brutal categories but juristic categories.

The last important characteristic of Yahweh that is used in Nahum 1:2 as a synonym for נֹקֵם ("vengeful") is נוֹטֵר "grudging" ("is he against his enemies"). Madl (1986:436) makes the interesting comment that נטר is used here in Nahum 1:2 not so much in the sense of the enemies of Israel, but of the enemies that come out of Israel itself. The justice/judgment that is called for by Nahum on behalf of Israel is based on a God who acts justly and will not let injustice and misdeeds go unpunished. This is the case with the foreign nations, but also with Israel itself.

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[129] Edel (1972:30) translates this expression as "very angry." I think the use of Baal is not without meaning and that one should take seriously the possibilities of Yahweh being linked to or taking over the functions of Baal as the only God.

The judgment against the enemies of Yahweh is based upon justice as symbolized by Yahweh, the righteous Judge of Israel and the nations. This idea is confirmed in Nahum 1:3a, where a very important tradition about the character of Yahweh is used, namely that "He is slow to anger" but that "he will not leave unpunished." The whole verse 3a reads:

יְהוָֹה אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וּגְדָל־כֹּחַ וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה

Yahweh is slow to anger but <u>great in strength</u>, and he will definitely not leave unpunished.

This verse is an allusion to the great desert tradition of which we read in Exodus 34:6-7. After the Israelites broke the covenant with Yahweh through the Golden Calf incident (Ex 32), we find a series of dialogues between Yahweh and Moses as the representative of Israel (Ex 32:31-34; 33:1-5,12-23). The question whether Yahweh will forgive and remain with Israel after their sinful actions remains unresolved (Ex 33:5). Moses pleads for Yahweh's forgiveness and asks that Yahweh appears to him (Moses) in all his might as a sign of his presence with, and goodwill towards, his people (Ex 33:16). Yahweh complies with Moses' request and orders him back to Sinai to receive the words of the Law on two new flat stones (Ex 34:1-4). Yahweh appears to Moses in a cloud (Ex 34:5) and his decision on "what he is going to do with the people" (Ex 33:5) is revealed in a powerful self-declaration - Exodus 34:6-7:

> And Yahweh passed in front of Moses, proclaiming: 'Yahweh, Yahweh, a God compassionate and gracious, **slow to anger (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם)**, and **abounding in love (וְרַב־חֶסֶד)** and faithfulness. Maintaining love to thousands – forgiving guilt, rebellion and sin. Yet **definitively not leaving unpunished (וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה)** (the guilty). Calling to account the guilt of fathers on their sons and on the sons of their sons, to the third and fourth (generation).

In this dramatic theophany, which is more of an auditory than an optical revelation of God, we see that the bipolar and ambiguous character of Yahweh is revealed. This self-proclamation of God on his character and identity is one of the central confessions of Israel's faith. One could perhaps even call it a credo.

This statement, which some call the "mercy formula",[130] is prevalent throughout the whole Old Testament[131]. It is also found in the Book of the Twelve. It is seen by a scholar like Raymond van Leeuwen[132] (1993) as a unity-creating tradition. Building on the work of Gerald Sheppard (1980), he argues that "the end-redaction of the Book of the Twelve is sapiential in character … [employing] … the bipolar attribute formula on YHWH's name from Exodus 34:6-7 as a base text in developing an overarching theodicy vis-à-vis the divine judgments of 722 and 587 BCE" (Van Leeuwen 1993:49). Exodus 34:6-7 therefore forms part of the final redaction of the Twelve by Wisdom traditions.

> By using the full bipolar contrast of mercy and justice from Exodus 34:6-7, the redactor affirms on the one hand, that Yahweh is free to exercise his forgiveness and mercy toward *any* who repent, and on the other, that he will not be held hostage to the evil of the wicked." … [Van Leeuwen thinks it is] … "this fearsome divine mystery, that governs the wisdom redaction of the Twelve as a whole, that creates its logic of theodicy (Van Leeuwen 1993:49).

In Nahum 1:3a we have a recitation of Exodus 34:6-7, which contains replication and omission of words so that the verse has the force of an authoritative judgment. As in Exodus 34:6-7 the context is a theophany, but unlike Exodus it is not Yahweh making a self-declaration, but a third-person prophetic hymn about Yahweh. This creates more distance. In this case it is a powerful and judging distance, as the topic is the punishment of a foreign enemy of Israel. The credo starts off as in Exodus 34 "slow to anger," but where we would expect "great in love" (חֶסֶד), it is changed to "great in power" (גְדָל־כֹּחַ). The *BHS* proposes to read it as *love* (חֶסֶד), but here we see the poet putting "his own stamp on the traditional formula" and that the "original positive message was 'vengefully reapplied' … to underline the announcement of YHWH's anger coming upon his enemies" (Spronk 1997:36-37). The punishment side of Yahweh's character follows by exact replication of Exodus 34:7b "he will

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[130] "Gnadenformel" (Spieckermann 1990:3). Cf. also *Epiphanic formula* (Weiser) and *Prayer formula* or *Confession of faith* (Scharbert and Dentan) (cited in Spieckermann 1990:3).

[131] Spieckermann (1990:1) sees the full formula used seven times (Ex 34:6, Joel 2:13, Jon 4:2, Pss 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Neh 9:17) and partial allusions more than 20 times (e.g. Dt 5:9-10, Num 14:18, Is 54:7-8, Dan 9:4, 2 Chr 30:9, etc.).

[132] Spieckermann (1990) can be fruitfully studied for an overview of the diachronical development of the mercy formula from its origins in Deuteronomy 7:9-10 as originary text. The reception of Dt 7:9-10 through Exodus 34, the Psalms and importantly Jonah, Joel and Psalm 145 shows how this central tenet of Yahweh's character developed from a judging, punishing God, to one who shows mercy and relenting, firstly to his own people, but in the end also universally to all the nations. This "mercy formula" is prayer literature and he thinks it forms part of the centre of the Old Testament's theology. Cf. also Thomas Raitt (1991:45) who elaborates on the role Exodus 34:6-7 plays in being the "most important statement of forgiveness in the Old Testament."

definitely not leave the guilty unpunished." Here the focus is not on Israel, but on a foreign nation, and the message is clear.

In Jonah[133] we also find this crucial allusion to Exodus 34:6-7, but unlike Jonah, Nahum's experience of God as the one who is also ambiguously present in mercy to repenting nations is not applicable. His slowness to anger serves as an explanation of why his punishment and judging is revoked, but in the end punishment and disaster will strike Assyria. The use of such a strong text such as Exodus 34:6-7 to create a textual and ultimately a social identity is extremely important.

The fact that the balanced theology of the tradition (Ex 34:6-7) is changed in Nahum to a more one-sided perspective on Yahweh's character could perhaps be explained with the help of the meta-contrast principle of self-categorization theory. This principle holds that the way a group self-categorizes itself may differ depending on the situation and the frame of reference (Oakes, Haslam & Turner 1998:77-78). In times of crisis or loss of identity (as we find here in Nahum) we can in fact expect more discriminatory attitudes towards the out-group. Yahweh's "great strength" is showcased in the next section of the hymn, namely, Nahum 1:3b-6.

3.1.1.2 Nahum 1:3b-6: Yahweh coming in theophanic judgement

Theophany describes the coming of Yahweh in power to judge and how nature reacts to his violent magnificence (Jeremias 1965:1). In Nahum 1 we find a two-membered two-fold theophany with Yahweh, who comes in storm (v. 3b) and fire (v. 6) and the turmoil of nature is illustrated in the quaking of the mountains (v. 5a), the flowing chaos of waters (v.4a) and the withering of the cultivated land (vv. 4b, 5b) (Jeremias 1965:33). Theophanies show the irresistible might of Yahweh and his aliveness, dynamism and passion (Jeremias 1965:161). Theophany also confirms the hymn's mythological background and continues the Exodus theme of the presence or absence of Yahweh that was initiated in verse 3a.

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[133] The five texts in the Book of the Twelve that contains a quite clear allusion to Ex 34:6-7 are: Hos 1:6 (the keywords used in the negative); Jl 2:13; Jon 4:2; Mi 7:18-20 and Na 1:3a.

When theophanies are used in prophetic discourse,[134] the thunderstorm usually lies behind the images chosen (Hierbert 1992:509). We find very powerful imagery of Yahweh who comes in whirlwind and in storm, which is connected to later theophanic material found in Job (Jb 9:17; 21:18) as well as in the psalms, for example, Psalm 83:16 where the prayer is that God should treat his enemies like chaff (Na 1:10b!) and then devour them as a fire devours a forest and fill them with terror with his storm wind/whirlwind.

Yahweh and his סוּפָה "whirlwind/storm" is connected to the punishment of the nations, for example, as part of a *hoi*-oracle (Is 17:13) where the vast hordes have to flee like chaff before the wind or like dust before the gale, and in a judgement on Ammon (Am 1:13-15). With the image of the dust of his feet being like clouds (Na 1:3bB) we return to the theme of the presence of Yahweh in the desert (Ex 14:24; 16:10; 34:5; Lv 16:2,13; Nb 9:18-20; Dt 5:22) symbolized by a cloud, and his presence in the temple (1K 8:10-11; Ezk 10:4). We also find an allusion to Yahweh as the rider of the heavens (Ps 68:34), which may be an ancient Canaanite image of Baal or El that is identified with the sun. This forms part of the process in which Yahweh takes on Baal's traits as "storm god" or "rider of the clouds," a well-known epithet for Baal/Hadad (Van der Toorn 1995:1723-1724).

It is amazing to see how tightly knit the poetry is and how repetition functions to tie the hymn to the rest of the book. Yahweh's דֶּרֶךְ "way" in storm (Na 1:3ba) echoes Nahum 2:2 when the command comes to watch the דֶּרֶךְ "road/way" on which the attacker/" Scatterer" will come. We see the idea of Yahweh's רֶגֶל "feet" (Na 1:3bB) becoming the רֶגֶל "feet" of the messenger who pronounces שָׁלוֹם "peace" to Judah (Na 2:1). His rebuking of the (mythical) יָם "sea/Yam" (Na 1:4a) is used again in Chapter 3 verse 8 to describe the fall of No-Amon/Thebes. And the image of the נְהָרוֹת "rivers" (Na 1:4a) that he causes to run dry returns in Nahum 2:7, when the fall of the palace in Nineveh is described.

The הָרִים "mountains" which shake before Yahweh (Na 1:5a) become the mountains over which the salvation messenger comes (Na 2:1) and on which the people of Assyria is scattered after Yahweh has destroyed them (Na 3:18b). The אֶרֶץ "earth" which is laid waste in his coming (Na 1:5b) is the earth from which Assyria's "tearing" and plunder will be removed (Na 2:14b) and which gates will be thrown wide open to the enemy (Na 3:13).

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[134] E.g. Is 28:2; 29:6; 30; 27:33; Na 1:2-4.

Finally the אֵשׁ "fire" which describes the way his anger gushes forth (Na 1:6b) is the fire of the scatterer's oncoming chariots (Na 2:4a) and the fire that will devour the bars of Nineveh as it is destroyed (Na 3:13, 15).

The mythical images of Yahweh's power over nature are made "real" when they are used to describe the way Assyria/Nineveh will be attacked and her existence ended. With the mentioning of the withering of Bashan, Carmel and Lebanon (Na 1:4b) we learn something of the way in which the texts that were available to the poet were used. Throughout Nahum we see a lot of Isaianic material being incorporated. This is a clear example, because the only other place where Bashan, Carmel and Lebanon are mentioned together in the Old Testament is in Isaiah 33:9, where it is used in an oracle or lament for Jerusalem.[135]. The idea that the storm from the North (Jr 4:13), which usually indicates an attacking army that is coming to punish Israel, is now a Yahweh-storm advancing from the North (Bashan, Carmel and Lebanon are all in the Northern Kingdom), which will clear away the enemies of Israel.

This use of Bashan, Carmel and Lebanon, not only confirms a possible post-exilic setting for this part of Nahum, but draws our attention to the mythological deep structure of the hymn. We have already seen how the name of Yahweh is used as substitute for Baal and El in the fight for Yahwism in the time of the monarchy, but also, and especially, now in the exilic/post-exilic time. The issue of the Canaanite gods who are subservient to Yahweh is part and parcel of the theological agenda of the return from exile (cf. Ackroyd 1968:40). The mythological slant is strengthened when we realize that, for example, Bashan is a mytho-theological denomination in the biblical tradition (Del Olmo Lete 1995:308).

This means that Bashan was seen as a holy mountain and the dwelling place of the Canaanite gods Baal and El, which Yahweh-El then took over as his abode (Del Olmo Lete 1995:309). In the same way Carmel is a holy mountain connected to deities and in the Bible known especially (1 K 18) as the scene of a trial of strength between Baal (as fertility and vegetation god) and Yahweh (Mulder 1995:351-352). That Bashan and Carmel will both wither with the coming of Yahweh is indicative on a mythological scale of the power of Yahweh over these holy mountains and the deities they symbolize.

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[135] In Mi 7:14 and Jr 50:19 Carmel and Bashan are also paired. In Jr 50:19 this is also used in the context of Assyrian oppression. In Mi 7:14 we see a possible catchword link to Na 1:2-8, which points to possible influence from the final redactors of the Book of the Twelve (Cf. Nogalksi 1993:200).

The rhetorical strength of this section is to portray Yahweh as storm-rider, sea and river rebuker, witherer and shaker of mountains, hills and the earth, and rock-shatterer who is more powerful than the mightiest of enemies. In Nahum the first logical reference to how such a great king looks, is Assyria. Johnston (2002:44) notes Nahum's allusion to Neo-Assyrian conquest metaphors and summarizes his study of the introductory self-predicating form that the Assyrian great kings used as follows:

> Just as the Assyrian kings piled up one royal epithet on another to portray themselves as the mighty warriors par excellence, so Nahum piled up one epithet after another to portray Yahweh as the ultimate divine Warrior. The form and its function are identical, and many of the same motifs and metaphors used in the Assyrian self-predications appear in Nahum 1:2-8. The effect is clear: Nahum portrayed Yahweh in the way that Assyrian warrior-kings portrayed themselves. However, these verses make it clear that Yahweh would trump the Assyrian warrior-kings at their own game. He and He alone is the mighty warrior par excellence, who would defeat them in the same manner in which they had destroyed others (Johnston 2002:44-45).

In the exilic/post-exilic period this was, of course, transferred to the criticism of every new power and great king, be it Babylon, Persia or Greece. The idea of an ironic reversal and a *taliones* principle can be seen here and throughout the book. As Dietrich and Link (1995:134) put it: Nahum is the written-down outcry against injustice in its international dimensions – against the oppression of whole nations by the military, political and economic superpowers of the time. Krieg (1988:522) makes the interesting remark that the theophany in this hymn can be connected to images of death. These images would have been part of the experience of the exilic situation (being punished deadly by Yahweh), but at the same time also provided hope in his violent coming to judge His enemies (Krieg 1988:522).

The mountains that shake (רעשׁ) before Yahweh serve as another good example. In the rest of the Old Testament we find it in some of the oldest poetry. In Judges 5:4-5 (in the Song of Deborah and Barak) we see the following imagery: Yahweh is described as coming out of Seir and Edom, and the earth shook and the mountains melted before Yahweh of Sinai – here used in the sense of the wars of Yahweh against the Canaanites. We also see it used in Isaiah 13:13 in the prophecy against Babylon: Yahweh will shake the heavens and the earth will

quake under the wrath of Yahweh Sebaoth, the Day of Yahweh (Is 13:9). We have to understand this prophecy against Isaiah 14:6, where we read that the King of Babylon also made the earth tremble, but that the way he tried to be like Yahweh has led to his downfall.

We see the same with Yahweh who causes the rivers to dry up (חרב Na 1:4aB). In 2 Kings 19:24 we find a judgment against Sennacherib, King of Assyria, and we hear that he insulted the Lord by saying, among other things, that he dried up the rivers of Egypt. This is also seen in Ezekiel 29:10, where it is said that Yahweh will make Egypt a wasteland. The reason given is that the Pharaoh of Egypt thought in his pride that the Nile belonged to him, while in fact all the rivers belong to Yahweh the Creator. All in all the general theme seems to be taken from Yahweh, who led his people out of Egypt (drying up the Sea of Reeds!), and making his covenant with them at Sinai in theophany (the earth trembling and the mountains quaking!).

Verse 6 brings us to a climax where we find very strong rhetorical questions: "His curse – who can stand before it? Who can withstand his glowing wrath?" The זַעַם "curse" of God is connected to his punishment of the nations (Babylon, Is 13:5; Ammon, Ezk 21:36; the nations, Zp 3:8; his enemies, Ps 69:25), but also of Israel (Ezk 22:24,31). Isaianic traditions are used again, and irony is brought into play. We see the ironical twist when we read in Isaiah 10:5 that Assyria is the club in Yahweh's hand and his curse (זַעַם). Because of the haughtiness and the pride of Assyria the Lord's curse will turn against them and lead to their destruction.

The idea of curses plays a very central role in Nahum. We have seen in Chapter 5 how well-known ancient Near Eastern treaty curses were, and here specific neo-Assyrian curses are also hinted at and used in *taliones* fashion to evoke a sense of poetic justice. All the curses of the Assyrians which they included in their treaties with their vassals (like Judah) will now be turned against them. They have broken their treaty with Yahweh and as vassal of Yahweh his curses will now come down upon their head. This is now universalized to be applicable to any of Yahweh's enemies (Na 1:2, 8). It is succinctly put in Obadiah 15:

> As you have done, it shall be done to you;
> your deeds shall return on your own head.

3.1.1.3 Nahum 1:7-8: Yahweh as Saviour and Destroyer

Verses 7 and 8 summarize what the poet wanted to say with the hymn. Lamentations 3:25 provides the only direct intertext where it is also said that Yahweh is good. This is interesting as Lamentations bewails the fall of Jerusalem and the ensuing trauma and chaos of deportation and war crimes. In times of extreme pressure and crisis, the Israelite in-group constructs its social identity by stating the positive group belief that their deity is good. This continues by the use of the first metaphor for Yahweh, namely, that he is a stronghold in days of trouble (Na 1:7a). We see a third positive prototypical remark being made that he knows those who trust in him. The in-group is drawing its boundaries by formulating three basic group beliefs.

Those who can say that Yahweh is good, that he is a stronghold, and those that trust in him, will be saved. This is aimed not just at the enemies (the nations) but also at Israel's/Judah's own ears. Those who are part of the oppressing out-group/enemy, are not trusting in Yahweh, and so he will not know them, that is, protect them. No, he will pass over them like an overwhelming flood, making an utter end to all who defy him, and pursuing his enemies into darkness (verse 8). The image of a flood (שֶׁטֶף) is also used ironically and in *taliones* fashion, as we see in Isaiah 28:2 that an army in Yahweh's service will overflow Samaria – the Assyrians! In the same manner, the Assyrians are described in Isaiah 8:8 as the river that will flood Judah. Now the Assyrians (and therefore any other godless Oppressor) who have been a flood as punishment of Samaria and also Jerusalem (Is 28:15, 18) will be overthrown by a flood passing over them.

The verb that is used with "flood," namely עבר "pass over," is noteworthy. This is another structuring word that binds the book as a whole. The idea of Yahweh passing over his enemies with a flood is reiterated in Nahum 2:1 where the "wicked" (Belial) will not pass over Judah again, and then as a final rhetorical question put to the Assyrian king in Nahum 3:19: "Over whom has not passed (עבר) your evil continually?" Answer: the Assyrian king who passed over nations with his evil.

The scene is set, the boundaries are drawn, and there are just black and white alternatives. The world is divided into two groups, the in-group who trusts and who is protected, and the out-group(s) who will be destroyed. Social identity functions in this way when extreme pressure

is present: the in-group is defined as more homogenous than it is, and the out-group is defined in more stereotypical terms and discriminated against more vigorously. The available pool of textual resources (Isaiah, Exodus, theophany) is used to define a stance, to talk about themselves, to construct their world. Poetic justice will reign. Although until now it had seemed that the earthly kings were strong, this will ironically be overturned as Yahweh is the Great King of the universe who wields power over nature and casts curses over his enemies. He will destroy and pursue until darkness is all that is left.

This "God-is-on-our-side" nationalistic sounding speech seems impregnable and quite ethnocentric, yet there is something about the hymn that we have not explored yet. Something that places a few question marks across this very clear-cut world where Yahweh reigns ultimately. It is the form of the hymn.

3.1.2 The form: Broken half-acrostic Yahweh-hymn

Whether there really are two line acrostics in verse 2-3a which spells יהוה אני "I am Yahweh" (see the textual notes – Acrostics note a) above) is ultimately impossible to prove, but meaningful to entertain. The hymn is about Yahweh, which makes perfect sense for a document from the exilic/post-exilic period. In fact the Tetragrammaton is repeated five times in verses 2-7. That such telestics and line-acrostics were part of the world of the writer in the ancient Near East is very plausible. These suggestions, taken together with the fact that OCN material often contains secret names and mysterious elements, and its being brilliant poetry, make the presence of these acrostics plausible.

They express the basic group belief in Yahweh as their God (among other gods) in such a pointed fashion that they becomes etched into the memory and challenge one to the extreme. The boundaries created by this kind of writing are seemingly impermeable and fundamentalist, but that is where the interesting and theologically-ethically important paradox creeps in. It lies in the obscure presence of an alphabetical acrostic[136], which starts at verse 3a (if we follow Spronk's suggestions – see textual notes above) with א and ends with כ in verse

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[136] An acrostic is "a device employed in poetry whereby the initial letters or signs of each line, read downward, constitute a name, a sentence, or an alphabetic pattern" (Soll 1992:58). Examples of acrostics in the Hebrew Bible include: Na 1:2-8; Pss 9-10; 37; 119; 111+112; 25+34; 145; La 1,2,3,4; Pr 31:10-31.

8, covering half of the Hebrew alphabet. Furthermore, three of the lines seem to be broken and so the ר-strophe (v.4a), the ז-strophe (v.6a), and the י-strophe (v.7b) have to be reconstructed to obtain the correct letter (see the textual notes above for the details). On a possible solution to the final redaction of the Book of the Twelve as suggested by Nogalski (1993) see below in Section 4.2.1.

But can it be said that there is an alphabetic acrostic hidden in these few verses, as Rev Frohnmeyer had suggested more than a century ago? Some scholars confirm the presence of half an alphabetical acrostic, some try to find the full alphabet and some refute the presence of an acrostic[137].

Floyd (1994) makes a strong case that there is not an acrostic. He poses critical philological questions on the research done about the possibility of having only half the alphabet, and the relationship of the hypothetical acrostic to its context (Floyd 1994:422-423). His conclusion is that we have a "prophetical interrogation" in Nahum 1:2-10 and that the idea of an acrostic and of finding a hymn in verses 2-10 "should therefore be abandoned, so that the interpretation of Nahum can begin to take a potentially more fruitful turn" (Floyd 1994:437).

Van Selms (1969:34), on the other hand, calls it an alphabetic hymn of praise with elements of prayer. He notes the mnemotechnical aim of acrostics, and that the expression of a song by using all the letters of the alphabet creates a magic force (Van Selms 1969:34). However, Nahum 1 rather expresses the universality of the ideas presented in the psalm (Van Selms 1969:35). Van Selms (1969:42) sees Nahum the prophet as breaking the pattern of the old Northern Kingdom composition that he re-used. He did this in order to prevent magical associations.

Seybold (1999:125-128) tries to show how one could go further than only half of the alphabet. He indicates how Nahum 1:10 and 12 could be seen as early-masoretic marginal notes that became part of the text. In these notes the early editors already saw a possible acrostic and tried to make sense of it (Seybold 1999:134). Sweeney (1992:369) notes that most scholars

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[137] For a good overview of the research on the acrostic in Nahum, see Christensen (1975b:17-21). Among the scholars who accept the acrostic hypothesis are included, e.g. Horst (1954:156-158), Elliger (1956:3-6), De Vries (1966:476-481), Watts (1975:101-106), Rudolph (1975:150-157), Seybold (1989:74-83) and Roberts (1991:42-55). The scholars who are reluctant to adopt the acrostic hypothesis include Haldar (1947:15-33), Maier (1958:149-195) and Smith (1984:71-76).

currently agree that there is an acrostic in verses 2-8, but that it does not extend to a full alphabetic acrostic poem, as was believed in early readings. Most who entertain the idea agree that what we have here is broken and not complete, one of the reasons being that Nahum used an old acrostic hymn but did not recognize it as such.

This is of course a paradoxical situation, for the essence of an acrostic, especially an alphabetical one, is that it expresses some kind of unity, order, completeness and structure. Especially the alphabetic acrostic becomes a metaphor for totality and completeness "and thus serves as an excellent frame for praising the qualities of God (Soll 1992:59). The form of these acrostics creates meaning along with the content. This can best be seen in the acrostics used in the book of Lamentations. These acrostics contain the deepest of laments and talk about terrible and traumatic times, but clothe them in an ordered and structured form. The message is clear: even if everything seems chaotic and senseless: there is hope; there is order. Although our words are disjointed and meaningless, there still is the full alphabet and we will someday again be able to give meaning to our world through speech.

How then should we understand Nahum 1, the most awesome of Yahweh-hymns? Nahum 1:2-8, which contains the choice of metaphors taken from the strongest traditions available to Israel's world and which is focused on creating a bordered ideology of exclusion and discrimination, is moulded into a broken half-alphabetical acrostic form! Perhaps one should not make too much of this fact, but as we have seen in Chapter 5 it is clear that in Nahum there is a restless undercurrent of irony and self-critique. This reminds one of Sternberg's (1998:204 – Chapter 3, section 2.4) Hebrewgram identity, which is ethnocentric but also ethnocritical to an unprecedented degree, always incorporating the creation-old universalist nexuses and movements. This is also part of the exilic/post-exilic search for a new identity and beginning. As was mentioned above, the Yahweh community had to assert itself in an empire with many different nationalities. Part of this was the more universal outlook and the confession that Yahweh was Lord over all nations. At the same time, however, there was the recognition of guilt and the lamentations over the destruction of Jerusalem.

What I want to suggest is that the broken form of this half-acrostic is part of the process of identity structuring. The dynamic (if I am correct) indicates that underlying the super-prototypical, group-belief homogenizing hymn to Yahweh is a feeling of, on the one hand, incompleteness, and on the other hand a type of realistic humble fear. The form says that,

even though Yahweh is strong and will bring salvation, we are not seeing this yet. The salvation is still incomplete and we are still living in a broken world, where enemies like Assyria and Babylon are still mauling their prey politically, economically and religiously. The form reminds us that the fear and judgment of Yahweh is also applicable to his own person, which asks for a different stance.

We have seen something of this in the textual traditions that the hymn was constructed from. The metaphors and images were not only taken from texts that talk about the enemies of Yahweh, or the nations for that matter. They also come from texts that in the past have been used to warn Israel/Judah of their own misdeeds and the punishment and judgment of Yahweh that awaits them. Reading Nahum like this introduces a very subtle dimension that will seem implausible to some, but to my mind it provides a necessary self-critical theological ethic. This idea will be very important in the incorporation of Nahum into the dynamic of identity construction in the OCN.

This double or "hidden" stance is also found in the next section of the text, and the grammar again unlocks this very subtle presence in a seemingly nationalistic book such as Nahum.

3.2 Nahum 2:1 Salvation for Judah

Thus far in Nahum the universal theophanic Yahweh-hymn showed us the character of the just Judge of nations (Israel/Judah and foreign nations), who punishes/destroys those that do not heed his principles of justice (by effecting his (covenant) curses), but who will save those who trust in him. In Nahum 1:9-14 we have seen the ambiguous application of the hymn. Now (Na 2:1) we have the first real example of what this salvation will be like. In the rest of the book (Na 2:2,2-3:19) we have already seen what doom entails.

It is important that we keep in mind that the text of Nahum constructs social identity through a certain dynamic, which up to this point seems to follow the working premises of social identity construction (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5), but also has a subtle undertone which defies or at least is surprising in terms of the principles of social identity construction. It is this Hebrewgram-type of character of the text that will help us to design a more constructive and liberatory theological ethic in Chapter 7.

3.2.1 Nahum 2:1

הִנֵּה עַל־הֶהָרִים רַגְלֵי מְבַשֵּׂר מַשְׁמִיעַ שָׁלוֹם ¹

1a See on the mountains the feet of the messenger proclaiming peace/Sjalom.

חָגִּי יְהוּדָה חַגַּיִךְ שַׁלְּמִי נְדָרָיִךְ

Celebrate your feasts Judah! Complete your vows!

כִּי לֹא יוֹסִיף עוֹד לַעֲבָר־בָּךְ בְּלִיַּעַל

1b Because never again shall Belial/the wicked pass through you.

כֻּלֹּה נִכְרָת:

He will be completely[a] rooted out.

Textual notes:

1. a) Contra LXX who translates כָּלָה as a verb (cf. Spronk 1997:81; Rudolph 1972:160). **b)** Translating as a prophetic perfect.

As with the inserted Yahweh-hymn (Na 1:2-8), Nahum 2:1 was beautifully inserted into the book. It contains important keywords ("mountains," "messenger" and Belial) and should be read as part of the unified end-structure of the Book of Nahum.

Apart from the superscription of the book, where the reader was guided to read the enemy of the book as Nineveh, the negative prototype of the oppressing out-group, we only here in Nahum 2:1 again find a specific name for a party/group in this historical and existential drama of power. It is interesting how the New Afrikaans Translation of 1983 inserts the name "Nineveh" 13 times in Nahum (Na 1:1, 8, 11, 14; 2:2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14; 3:4, 7), whereas in the MT it only appears 3x (Na 1:1; 2:9; 3:7)! This is part of the problem of reading Nahum in a translation. The ambiguity of the Hebrew text is clarified by making decisions regarding the theological message and then providing more reading helps/guidelines than the text originally intended. In the process it is not strange that Nahum becomes the prime example of nationalistic hate-speech that smacks of extreme ethnocentrism and which can be used to undergird all kinds of extremist intergroup behaviour or ideology.

Whereas Nineveh should be kept in mind as the enemy that must expect doom, Judah is now introduced as the receiver of salvation. It is at this point that scholars in the past have branded

Nahum as a cultic or false prophet (in the Deuteronomic sense), as we find a clear description of Israel's/Judah's salvation but not a word about their sins.

Even though Nahum 2:1 was inserted at a later time (i.e. the exilic/post-exilic period), this was done brilliantly and in a manner that contributed towards the unifying of the book. This is because the themes/keywords, as well as the ambiguous undercurrent of the text, fuse well with the rest of the book. The main identity questions are connected to Nahum 2:1's obvious connection with Isaiah 52:7.

3.2.2 Nahum 2:1 and Isaiah 52:7

That Nahum 2:1a and Isaiah 52:7a are intertextually connected can probably be stated beyond doubt. Compare the two texts:

Nahum 2:1a	Isaiah 52:7a
הִנֵּה עַל־הֶהָרִים רַגְלֵי מְבַשֵּׂר מַשְׁמִיעַ שָׁלוֹם	מַה־נָּאווּ עַל־הֶהָרִים רַגְלֵי מְבַשֵּׂר מַשְׁמִיעַ שָׁלוֹם
See, on the mountains, the feet of the messenger proclaiming sjalôm.	**How beautiful** on the mountains, the feet of the messenger proclaiming sjalôm.

Diachronically one could ask which of the two texts was first? It is not an easy task to determine this. Normally Nahum 2:1 is taken as a later insertion (e.g. Jeremias 1970:13-19) but then it is also very plausible that Isaiah 52:7 could be the earlier text. This being said, it must be stated that it is not so important to get the order right, but to make the deduction that Nahum 2:1 and Deutero-Isaiah point to the same theological and contextual post-exilic realities.

These verses look like a clear *Premise 3* case of the perception of increased identity between the self and in-group members (Chapter 3, section 3.5), as well as the definition of "self" in terms of a prototype. "Judah" becomes the name of the prototype of the in-group, integrating all the Yahweh-Alone/Deutero-Isaiah sympathisers in a self-categorization prototype of similarity. This, of course, implies (in line also with Premise 3) that the "other" is at the same time also stereotypically described, defined and evaluated. The in-group (Nahum and the Yahweh-Alone/Deutero-Isaiah supporters) builds its self-esteem and decreases its existential

210

uncertainty in these fragmented times by tapping into the name Judah, which is such a powerful name in the pool of texts available to them. With the name Judah comes all the promises of salvation from Yahweh to David and his descendants. Sociologically this is called reducing uncertainty. Theologically this can be called hope.

Judah is then (in Na 2:1b) urged to "celebrate your feasts!" and to "complete your vows," which remains in line with the idea of Yahweh's promise of deliverance and peace. These commands to liturgical exercises are also indicative of the exilic/post-exilic context of these words.

The feasts are reminiscent of the feasts that Israel had to celebrate as described in the Pentateuch[138]. The idea of "fulfilling a vow" is interesting as it connects Nahum with the liturgical tradition of the psalms, where fulfilling vows to Yahweh were connected to the asking and receiving of help in times of trouble (e.g. Pss 22:26; 50:14; 56:13; 61:9; 65:2; 66:13; 76:12). It also links Nahum (paradoxically) to Jonah, who (in Jon 2:10) prays from inside the fish and who promises to sacrifice and perform his vows because Yahweh has saved him from the Pit, as well as to the late prose of Isaiah 19:21, where the three world forces of Israel, Egypt and Assyria are being saved by Yahweh. They will acknowledge Yahweh, offer sacrifices to him, make vows and perform them!

The reason for this urge to celebrate in thanksgiving is given in verse 1b and is introduced by a כִּי, which indicates the cause of a condition or process (BHRG §40.9.I.3). Belial/the wicked shall never pass over/through them again, as he will be completely rooted out. The demise of the out-group is stated as if it has already taken place. The "passing over" (עבר) of Assyria's, or Babylon's, or any future oppressor's continual evil (Na 3:19) will stop.

And so we come to the preliminary conclusion of the text of the Book of Nahum. It is a conclusion in the sense that we have discussed all of the sections of the book (pre-exilic and exilic/post-exilic). But the conclusion is preliminary, however, as there are more levels of interpretation to the Book of Nahum. These levels will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter. First of all attention will be given to the reading of Nahum as part of the Book of the Twelve and how the construction of social identity in Nahum is affected by reading it as part

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[138] E.g. in the Book of the Covenant (Ex 23:14), the Holiness Code (Lv 23:39,41) and the Deuteronomic Code (Dt 16:15).

of a bigger whole. The next section will deal with the questions surrounding Nahum as part of the Book of the Twelve; it will focus briefly on the reception of Nahum and draw some conclusions with regards to social identity construction.

4. Nahum and the Book of the Twelve

In this section the unity of the Book of the Twelve and Nahum's position in this unity will be discussed (4.1, 4,2). Although it does not strictly belong to the discussion on the Book of the Twelve, the reception of Nahum in the time after the finalization of the Twelve is so interesting that it is included in this section (4.3).

Seeing the Twelve Minor Prophets as some sort of unity is not new. In the Jewish tradition already Jesus Ben Sira (second century BCE) talked about the "bones of the Twelve prophets" which suggests that the Twelve had already taken shape as one book (Redditt 2001:49). Qumran to a great extent confirms the MT order of Twelve, Esdras 14:44 implies a 24-book canon (i.e. the Twelve as one), as does Josephus (22 books). The Talmud reckons the Twelve as one among the latter prophets, and although different from the three Major Prophets, they (the so-called "Men of the Great Assembly") saw it as "a collection of a number of prophets, whose identities are preserved" (i.e. not a collection gathered around the name of one prophet) (Redditt 2001:49). The question modern-day scholars ask, though, pertains to what kind of unity is being implied? Should we read the Twelve as a unified literary book, or only as an anthological type of collection? The more important question for this study is how the unity of the Book of the Twelve influences our reading of social identity construction in Nahum.

4.1 The unity of the Book of the Twelve

Jones (1995:14ff.) refers to K. Budde (1922) as the first scholar of the modern period to describe the Book of the Twelve as primarily a redactional creation (but Schart 1998a:6 thinks it is Wolfe).[139] Since Budde and Wolfe (1935) there were several decades during which a redactional-critical interest in the Book of the Twelve waned and therefore did not receive

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[139] Although Ewald (1867) (Jones 1995:23f. & Redditt 2001:50) and Steuernagel (1912) (cf. Redditt 2001:50f.) had already suggested stages of literary development in the canonical form of the Twelve.

much scholarly attention. However, since the late 1970s (beginning with Schneiders, 1979) a new wave of studies on this question emerged. Names like Weimar, Barth & Steck, Lee, Bosshard, Kratz appear in the 1980s (cf. Jones 1995:19-23; Schart 1998a:8-10).

From there onwards we have a string of excellent research: House (1990) – a synchronic reading of the unity; Steck (1991) – last redactional levels in Isaiah and the Twelve; Collins (1993) – the Twelve grew in four stages; Van Leeuwen (1993) – Ex 34:6-7 as redactional "cement" in the first six books; Nogalski (1993) – two volumes - catchword chain phenomenon between books; Coggins (1994) – synchronic and a pattern of judgment against Israel, judgment against the nations, salvation for Israe); Jeremias (1995) – Hosea and Amos were redactionally connected; Jones (1995) – order the Twelve in three canons, i.e. MT, LXX and 4QXII[a]; Schart (1998a) – a six-stage development; and Curtis (2000) – three three-volume corpora to which books were added (Jones 1995:23-42; Schart 1998a:6-21; Redditt 2001:52-57)[140].

These scholars have searched for the unity in the intertextuality that was found between the books (e.g. the use of catchwords at the beginning and end of books, the superscriptions and incipits, and framing devices). Various scholars have done redactional studies on the collections among the Twelve. Some look for the implications of the original order of the Twelve, and others search for the coherence in the Book of the Twelve (Redditt 2001:52-70). At the end of his very helpful overview on recent research in the Book of the Twelve, Redditt (2001:73) notes a few unsettled issues and states that the complexity of the redaction of the Twelve is very high and that there is still a lot that remains unclear.

It is not the aim of this study to contribute to the research on the unity of the Book of the Twelve. What interest me are the implications of such a notion for our reading of Nahum. It does seem that reading Nahum as part of a broader unity of books has merit. I am still not completely convinced that the Twelve forms such a tightly knitted whole as many would like to believe, but I realize that there are a few basic premises that can very fruitfully be applied to this study on Nahum.

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[140] The details of the history of research can be seen in the excellent summaries by Jones 1995:23-42, Schart 1998a:6-21, and Redditt 2001:52-57.

4.2 Nahum and the end-redaction of the Book of the Twelve

When exactly we should place the incorporation of Nahum in the Book of the Twelve is debatable. Collins (1993:62) sees Nahum as part of an exilic "first edition" which contained Hosea, Amos 1-9, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah and Obadiah (ca. the middle of 587-538 BCE). Schart (1998a:234-251) sees Nahum as part of a Nahum-Habakkuk corpus that served as an expansion of the earlier Deuteronomistic corpus (Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah)[141].

The Book of the Twelve redaction has special implications for the theophanic Yahweh-hymn (Na 1:2-8), Nahum 1:2b-3a, and for the theological questions in the book in general.

4.2.1 Nahum 1:2-8: The theophanic Yahweh-hymn

Most of the interesting research on the Book of the Twelve has implications for the Yahweh-hymn. What was said about the exegesis of the hymn above can be supplemented by the new perspectives that are opened when looking at Nahum in the context of the redactional process of the finalization of the Book of the Twelve. This will be done by looking at: (1) Nahum 1:2-8 as part of a hymnic level in the Book of the Twelve (4.2.1.1); (2) how a probable catchword phenomenon influences our interpretation of the hymn (4.2.1.2); and (3) the crucial role that the quotation of Exodus 34:6-7 plays in a Book of the Twelve reading of Nahum (4.2.1.3)

4.2.1.1 Schart and the Amos hymnic level (Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk)

Schart (1995/ 1998a), in his published habilitation, looked among others at how Nahum and Habakkuk were incorporated into the Book of the Twelve. He used the idea of a hymnic level ("Hymnenschicht") that is connected to Amos. The hymnic level in Amos (Am 4:12-13; 5:8-9; 8:8; 9:5-6[142]) is secondary to the Book of Amos (Schart 1995:195) and has definite affinities, especially through intertextuality, with Micah 1:3-4 which is also an isolated

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[141] Schart's (1998a) stages can be summarized as follows: *Stage 1*: Two-volume corpus (Hos, Am); *Stage 2*: Deuteronomic corpus (Hos, Am, Mi, Zp); *Stage 3*: Nahum-Habakkuk corpus added (Hos, Am, Mi, Zp, Na, Hab); *Stage 4*: Haggai-Zechariah corpus added (Hos, Am, Mi, Zp, Na, Hab, Hg, Zc); *Stage 5*: Joel-Obadiah corpus added; *Stage 6*: Jonah; *Stage 7*: Malachi.

[142] It is uncertain whether Amos 1:2 should also be seen as part of this hymn level (Schart 1995:195).

secondary addition to the book (Schart 1995:200). The hymns both have as focus judgment prophecy that is grounded in creation theology (Schart 1995:200). The creation-theology serves as a deepening of the message with the freedom of the Creator against his creation serving as basis for hope (Schart 1995:200).

He further indicates how this hymnic level can also be seen in Hosea 4:3 and Zephaniah 1:2-3 (Schart 1995:201-202). Finally, he shows that Nahum 1:2-8 and also Habakkuk 3:3-15 share in the characteristics of this hymnic level and should be seen as incorporated as a Nahum-Habakkuk corpus into the four-volume Deuteronomic corpus (Schart 1995:202-205)[143]. He sees through the Nahum-Habakkuk corpus the important introduction in the Deuteronomic corpus of a theophany tradition (Schart 1995:207):

> Jahwe wird nun nicht mehr nur als Gott Israels begriffen, der über seinen Bund mit seinem Volk wacht, sondern als der universale Weltenherrscher, der die Feinde der von ihm garantierten Ordnung vernichtet … [er wird betrachtet] als universalem Weltenherrscher…

Two implications of this research are:

(1) That the exilic/post-exilic dating of the hymn is probably correct – not just theoretically (intertextually) but also theologically as the universalizing and creation–theological notion of the hymnic level in the Book of the Twelve corresponds with what has been said about the role of the Yahweh-hymn in the Book of Nahum. As in Amos, the hymn deepens the message and gives it a theological basis, rooted in the universal justice of Yahweh, the powerful Creator who comes in storm and whose judgment against his enemies is swift and final;

(2) That a new "solution" to the half-acrostic form of the hymn can be put forward. Because Nahum begins (Na 1:2-8) and Habakkuk concludes (Hab 3:3-15) with a theophanic hymn, one should read the two books as very closely related. Add to that the fact that both books are called a מַשָּׂא "oracle" and that both have as their theme the oppression by great powers (Nahum has Assyria; Habakkuk has Babylon). It has in fact been postulated by Christensen (1992:1046) that the two books could be outlined

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[143] He indicates the amazing similarities between the different hymns. For example: (1) The expression "day of trouble" is found in Na 1:7, Hab 3:16 and Zp 1:15; (2) The reference to a great drought is found in Hos 4:3; Am 1:2; Mi 1:3-4; Na 1:4; Hab 3:17 and Zp 1:3 (Schart 1995:203,205).

in the form of a chiasm[144]. Schart (1995:204) says that from a reader's perspective Nahum 1:2-8 would be experienced as incomplete (with the breaking of the alphabet in the middle) and that they would see in Habakkuk 3 the completion of the hymn that was started in Nahum 1. The logic is that Nahum saw the downfall of the Assyrians, and now Habakkuk is waiting for the same to happen to the Babylonians (Schart 1995:204).

4.2.1.2 Nogalski and the catchword phenomenon (Micah, Nahum)

Another interesting option for understanding the theophanic hymn is found in Nogalski's (1993) catchword hypothesis:

> A phenomenon in the Book of the Twelve exists that has not yet been given the attention it deserves, namely the presence of words at the end of one book that reappear at the beginning of the next … The extent of these catchwords is considerable … [and] [T]he consistency of this phenomenon is even more intriguing (Nogalsi 1993:195).

He uses his theory to explain the brokenness of the alphabetical acrostic. He indicates that each of the four broken places contain significant words which also appear in Micah 7 (Nogalski 1993:198). These broken lines are therefore deliberate alterations to a pre-existing poem (Nogalski 1993:199-201). The implications for the function of Nahum in the Book of the Twelve become clearer, as this links Nahum and Habakkuk to Micah:

> Micah, in its latest structural development, begins with a theophanic portrayal (1.2-5), and ends with a lament (7.1-7[8-20]). Nahum also commences with a theophanic portrayal and concludes with a woe oracle and mocking lament. Habakkuk starts with a compositional lament and finishes with a theophanic portrayal which shares vocabulary and outlook, to a certain extent, to Nahum 1 (Nogalski 1993:202).

Nahum was therefore skilfully and deliberately integrated in its place in the Twelve as a witness to the historical reality of the Assyrian oppression and how Yahweh had intervened.

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[144]

A Hymn of theophany	Na 1
B Taunt song against Nineveh	Na 2-3
X The problem of Theodicy	Hab 1
B' Taint song against the "wicked one"	Hab 2
A Hymn of theophany	Hab 3

4.2.2 Nahum 1:2b-3a and Exodus 34:6-7

A last perspective on how a Book of the Twelve focus can inform the interpretation of the theophanic Yahweh-hymn is found in the presence of an allusion to one of the most powerful statements of faith in the OT, namely, Exodus 34:6-7.

Raymond van Leeuwen (1993) did research on the way in which Exodus 34:6-7 was used in the Book of the Twelve to create a unity.[145] We have already touched upon the implications of his research for Nahum above (Section 3.1.1.1). Here I want to elaborate further on how the other texts in the Book of the Twelve that contain this "credo" can be used in the interpretation of especially the theological trajectories of the Twelve and in particular of Nahum.

The five Book of the Twelve texts that allude in some way to Exodus 34:6-7 are: Hosea 1:6, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Micah 7:18-20, and Nahum 1:3a. The figure below (Figure 1) gives a short graphic overview of the way in which Exodus 34:6-7 is alluded to in the five texts in the Book of the Twelve. Note that all the texts allude to Exodus 34:6-7, but that Hosea 1:6 does so in the negative, Joel 2:13 and Jonah 4:2 adds an allusion to Exodus 32:14, and Nahum 1:3a changes an important part of the "formula" (see the discussion of the texts below). A short exploration of these strongest allusions to Exodus 34:6-7 in the Twelve will help us to draw some conclusions in the form of possible theological trajectories.

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[145] See also my work on the paradoxical presence of Exodus 34:6-7 in the Book of the Twelve (Bosman 2004).

	Name for God	Words for mercy/ forgiveness	Words for punishment	Words for sin	Person speaking	Addressed to: Israel-Judah or Nations?
Exodus 34:6-7	Yahweh + El	רַחוּם compassionate חַנּוּן merciful אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם slow to anger רַב־חֶסֶד great in love. אֱמֶת faithfulness נֹשֵׂא forgive (sin)	נַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה Definitely not leaving unpunished … פָּקַד Calling to account, avenging …	עָוֹן- guilt פֶּשַׁע - wrongdoing חַטָּאָה- sin	**1ˢᵗ person/** (Yahweh himself is speaking in a self-declaration)	"Israel" (at Sinai)
Hosea 1:6	(*Yahweh*)	נֹשֵׂא [Verb used in a negative sense (indicating definite anti-forgiveness)] רחם ["Take pity": Again used in a negative sense]	לֹא רֲחָמָה "Without compassion" (a negation of the positive) לֹא רחם "I will not show pity"		**1ˢᵗ person**	Israel
Joel 2:13	Yahweh your God	חַנּוּן merciful רַחוּם compassionate רַב־חֶסֶד great in love אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם slow to anger נחם relenting, regretting (over the disaster/ calamity (Ex 32:14)			**3ʳᵈ person** (Prophet to people)	Judah
Jonah 4:2	Yahweh + El	חַנּוּן merciful רַחוּם compassionate רַב־חֶסֶד great in love אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם slow to anger נחם relenting, regretting (Ex 32:14)			**2ⁿᵈ person** (Jonah to God)	Assyrians
Micah 7:18-20	El	נֹשֵׂא forgive (sin) לֹא־הֶחֱזִיק לָעַד אַפּוֹ "(he) does not hold on to his anger" חֶסֶד (delights in) love רחם "Take pity" אֱמֶת faithfulness		עָוֹן- guilt פֶּשַׁע – wrongdoing חַטָּאָה- sin	**2ⁿᵈ person & 3ʳᵈ person**	Judah
Nahum 1:3a	Yahweh	אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם slow to anger גְדָל־כֹּחַ great in strength	נַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה Definitely not leaving unpunished		**3ʳᵈ person**	Assyria/ Nineve

Figure 2: Comparison of 5 texts from the Book of the Twelve with Exodus 34:6-7.

4.2.2.1 Hosea 1:6

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⁶ וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בַּת וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ קְרָא שְׁמָהּ לֹא רֻחָמָה

כִּי לֹא אוֹסִיף עוֹד אֲרַחֵם אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־נָשֹׂא אֶשָּׂא לָהֶם:

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⁶ (Gomer) conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the LORD said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have **pity** on the house of Israel or **forgive** them.

As in Exodus 34:6-7 Yahweh himself speaks in the first person, and as in Exodus 34:6-7 he addresses Israel through the prophet. The name of the daughter plays on two of the central concepts of Exodus 34:6-7, namely Yahweh's compassion (רחם / רחום) and his forgiveness (נשא). It is a cultural intertextual *allusion* in the sense that the precise text that lies behind this verse cannot be pinpointed. It is in fact an ironic recontextualisation of the positive statements in Exodus 34:6-7 and serves to heighten the theological crisis in which Israel finds itself. The names of Hosea's children function symbolically to indicate the end of Yahweh's friendly disposition, his protection and his providence (Jeremias 1983:32).

The tension between Yahweh's love and his justice is problematic. In Hosea this tension is one of the central themes. Therefore we see in Hosea 5:8-6:6 how the Lord is a disease and a lion towards Israel, because they ran to foreign nations for help, but that at the end His love overcomes and he becomes their healer again. The same is seen in the well-known Hosea 11 were God's love and his mercy goes against all human logic and triumphs over his plans for punishment (Jeremias 1983:140). The fact that the Book of the Twelve starts with this ironic negation of Yahweh's character points towards its centrality in understanding the rest of the Book.

4.2.2.2 Joel 2:13

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¹³ וְקִרְעוּ לְבַבְכֶם וְאַל־בִּגְדֵיכֶם וְשׁוּבוּ אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

כִּי־חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם הוּא אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנִחָם עַל־הָרָעָה:

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"rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD your God, for he is **gracious and merciful, slow to anger,** and **abounding in steadfast love,** and *relents* from *punishing*."

Here we have direct first person speech from Yahweh in verse 13aα, but the prophet then takes up the speech in verse 13aβ speaking to Judah about Yahweh in the third person. This move away from the fiery self-declaration in Exodus 34:6-7 creates more distance and as such

holds more threat. We have *recitation* of Exodus 34:6-7, with the replication of the exact words with one or more differences. רַחוּם ,חַנּוּן ,רַב־חֶסֶד and אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם is used.

רַחוּם and חַנּוּן is inverted and the reference to the Lord's faithfulness (אֱמֶת) is left out. We actually have a *combined recitation* as the last part of the verse alludes to Exodus 32:14 where Yahweh relents about bringing disaster on Israel after the Golden Calf incident. The question pertaining to Yahweh's mercy and his forgiveness for his own people is stated in the context of the looming and terrible day of the Lord (Zenger *et al.* 1998:483), while "at the same time stress[ing] that there is still hope that the people will repent" (Prinsloo 1985:51). Verse 14 points to the uncertainty and ambiguity of Yahweh's presence: "Who knows (מִי יוֹדֵעַ) if he will not turn and relent." Zenger *et al.* (1998:483) calls this a dialectical image of God. In the context of the eschatological dialectic of disaster and salvation this image points to God's goodness and love, which is worked out in divine freedom. Prinsloo (1985:58) points to the freedom of God as this expression ("Who knows") "indicates that there is no direct, causal connection between the people's penitence and Yahweh's response … [h]e retains his sovereignty."

This seems to be pointing in the same direction as Exodus 34:6-7, with the uncertainty of the crisis of covenant-breaking calling forth ambiguous speech about Yahweh's mysterious and free presence and forgiveness.

4.2.2.3 Jonah 4:2

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמַר אָנָּה יְהוָה הֲלוֹא־זֶה דְבָרִי ²

עַד־הֱיוֹתִי עַל־אַדְמָתִי עַל־כֵּן קִדַּמְתִּי לִבְרֹחַ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה

כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה אֵל חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד

וְנִחָם עַל־הָרָעָה:

² He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a **gracious God** and **merciful, slow to anger,** and **abounding in steadfast love**, and ready to *relent* from *punishing*.

This verse forms the central theological tenet of Jonah and the recitation is used exactly as in Joel 2:13, except that the prophet is not speaking to Israel or Judah (or is he?) but addresses Yahweh in the second person. The whole allusion becomes a radical recontextualization, for the issue is not about the ambiguous presence of Yahweh with his own people, but rather the fact that this central confession about what or who Yahweh is for his own people seems to be true for other nations as well.

The ambiguity about Yahweh's mercy or his relenting is also echoed ironically in Jonah, when the king of Nineveh states: "Who knows?" (מִי יוֹדֵעַ) - God may relent and change his mind." Whereas Joel took Exodus 34:6-7 to be an ambiguous but powerful confession about Yahweh's particular and exclusive forgiving presence for his own people, the book of Jonah uses Exodus 34:6-7 as an ironic universalising extension of Yahweh's bipolar character not just to Israel but to all nations who repent (Zenger *et al.* 1998:502)[146].

4.2.2.4 Micah 7:18-20

¹⁸ מִי־אֵל כָּמוֹךָ נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וְעֹבֵר עַל־פֶּשַׁע לִשְׁאֵרִית נַחֲלָתוֹ
לֹא־הֶחֱזִיק לָעַד אַפּוֹ כִּי־חָפֵץ חֶסֶד הוּא:
¹⁹ יָשׁוּב יְרַחֲמֵנוּ יִכְבֹּשׁ עֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ וְתַשְׁלִיךְ בִּמְצֻלוֹת יָם כָּל־חַטֹּאותָם:
²⁰ תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לַאֲבֹתֵינוּ
מִימֵי קֶדֶם:

¹⁸ Who is a God like you, **pardoning iniquity** and passing over the **transgression** of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his **anger** forever, because he delights in showing **clemency.**

¹⁹ He will again have **compassion** upon us; he will tread our **iniquities** under foot. You will cast all our **sins** into the depths of the sea.

²⁰ You will show **faithfulness** to Jacob and **unswerving loyalty** to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

These last verses of Micah form not only the conclusion of this prophetic book, but also the conclusion of the first half of the Book of the Twelve. Micah 7:18-20 contains most of the

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[146] Van der Woude (1985:53-54) questions this nationalistic-particularistic versus universalistic interpretation of the text, and explains Jonah's anger as directed against God himself for being inconsequent and therefore placing his own (and his messenger's!) honour on the line.

keywords of Exodus 34:6-7, dispersing them across 3 verses and changing their original order. One could in fact ask whether we have any reference or allusion here at all? The fact is that forgiveness (נשׂא), compassion or mercy (רחום), faithfulness (אֱמֶת) and the important love (חֶסֶד) are used. The three concepts for sin in Exodus 34:6-7 (עָוֹן, פֶּשַׁע, and חַטָּאָה) are also used. Here Yahweh is not the one speaking, but the prophet who speaks in a peculiar mixture of second and third person to, or about, Yahweh.

These verses form the conclusion of the book, which, after explaining Yahweh's punishment of Israel in the past, now has to point towards an idealized future (Ben Zvi 2000:11).[147] They want to offer hope for the future and point towards the forgiveness of all sin after all the preceding "hard words" in Micah 1:2-7:6 (Wolff 1982:210). In this sense it picks up the central theme of Exodus: will Yahweh be present and guide Israel into their uncertain future in the wilderness? The difficult theological statement with which the Book of the Twelve opened – Yahweh will not have compassion (Hos 1:6 רחום) - is now taken up again at the end of the first half. Yahweh indeed will show compassion again and it seems that his love and forgiveness still triumphs over his punishment.

Thus far all the allusions in the Book of the Twelve referred only to Yahweh's positive side, as this created hope for Israel's future, or created a theological crisis with his merciful side also being available to repenting foreign nations. In Nahum this changes.

4.2.2.5 Nahum 1:3a

<div dir="rtl">

³ יְהֹוָה אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וּגְדָל־כֹּחַ וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה יְהֹוָה

</div>

³ The LORD is **slow to anger** but *great in power*, and the LORD **will by no means clear the guilty**.

We have already seen how Nahum 1:3a alludes to but also changes Exodus 34:6-7 (see above Section 3.1.1.1). To summarize: His slowness to anger serves as an explanation why his punishment and judging is put on hold, but in the end punishment and disaster will strike Assyria. In this sense, the use of the formula indirectly links to Yahweh's continuing presence

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[147] Zenger *et al.* (1998:504-506) see Micah 7:18-20 (salvation for Israel) as forming a theocentric frame with Micah 1:3-7 (judgment on Israel).

with Israel, and gives an explanation for the theodicy of exile and oppression. The answer is indeed a bit ambiguous, as the use of the confession as a weapon or maxim of judgment occurs in a possible partial, broken acrostic. Even such a statement of judgment is embedded into the paradoxical experience of reality, which is more often than not chaotic, broken and uncertain.

To recapitulate, we could say that in the Book of the Twelve the echoes of Exodus 34:6-7 indeed play an important role. It is also clear that the formula is not always used in the same way. The original text is changed and recontextualized. Its theological consequences are used in different ways to answer different questions in different contexts. It seems that all the uses of Exodus 34:6-7 do somehow point towards Yahweh's mercy towards Israel – but that the ambiguity and paradox of that mercy are also very clear. What was meant *for* Israel's ears as a self-declaration *from* Yahweh has become echoes *about* or *to* Yahweh, *about* Israel or *about* foreign nations. The complex and ambiguous question of Yahweh's presence is worked out in different strands and degrees to fit different crises.

The question about *Yahweh's forgiveness and his continuing presence* in post-exilic Judah after the destruction of the temple is central. The use of Exodus 34:6-7 is a way of dealing with the crisis of the exile and the question of theodicy. Will Yahweh still be present, although his temple, the symbol of his tabernacling presence, has been destroyed? The answer is a hopeful yes, although the realisation of Yahweh's total freedom is held in tension. *Who knows* whether God will relent? In that way Exodus 34:6-7 can indeed be seen as a "cement" used to bring about some kind of unity in the Book of the Twelve. On the other hand, the "formula" is echoed only in five of the twelve books and when it is used it seems to be in a theologically paradoxical manner. It is used in the most contrasting books of the Twelve - Joel, Jonah and Nahum Its use implies contrasting theological affinities.

The *ambiguity of Yahweh's presence* seems to be central to all the texts in question. Perhaps Exodus 34:6-7 was used by redactors to bring a unity to the Book of the Twelve, but this unity also has a paradoxical and ambiguous side to it. Perhaps we should rather say that it points, not to the redactors' creation of unity, but rather towards their respect for the Book's disunity. In this way the paradoxical presence within Exodus 34:6-7 points towards the paradoxical and mysterious presence of the Presence itself.

This reflects the social identity of the exilic/post-exilic period. As we have seen throughout the study, the character of Yahweh serves as a prototype for the identity of the community. By creating a textual identity that focuses on ambiguous presence but also on great strength and the possibility of a new beginning, the in-group represents their social identity in a realistic but also a hopeful way. This paradoxical theological reality can also be seen in other aspects of Nahum's embeddedness in the Book of the Twelve, especially in its theological-ethical matrix.

4.2.3 Theological questions (the characterisation of Yahweh)

The order of the books in the different "canonical" traditions (MT, LXX and 4QXII[a]) provides interesting theological parallels. Jones (1995:223) provides the following summary (Figure 3) of the arrangements of the Twelve in ancient manuscripts:

	MT Sequence	LXX Sequence	4QXII[a] Sequence
1	Hosea	Hosea	-
2	**Joel**	Amos	-
3	Amos	Micah	-
4	**Obadiah**	**Joel**	-
5	**Jonah**	**Obadiah**	-
6	Micah	**Jonah**	-
7	Nahum	Nahum	-
8	Habakkuk	Habakkuk	-
9	Zephaniah	Zephaniah	-
10	Haggai	Haggai	Zechariah
11	Zechariah	Zechariah	Malachi
12	Malachi	Malachi	**Jonah**

Figure 3: The arrangement of the Twelve in ancient manuscripts.

Jones (1995:222-234) discusses the implications of the different arrangements in detail. What interests us most is the fluidity of the position of Jonah in the different orders. Jones (1995:223) beliefs that the Qumran order, which places Jonah last, "represents the earliest position of the book within the Minor Prophets collection." In the MT order Jonah is inserted between Obadiah and Micah, a position that does not really make literary sense, but which

follows the MT redactors' idea of creating a more or less historically linear sequence (Jonah seen as a 8th century prophet – 2 K 14:25). The LXX placement of Jonah right next to Nahum has important theological implications.

That Nahum and Jonah have affinities with each other has already been shown many times. Both have Nineveh as their theme, both conclude with a rhetorical question, both feature Exodus 34:6-7 as central theological statement (see above), and both deal with Yahweh's judgment on Assyria. Jones's (1995:213-214) conclusion about this juxtaposition puts it very well:

> The juxtaposition of these two prophetic books reflects two different attitudes about the justice of God toward the nations as they are represented by the city Nineveh. Jonah teaches that the sovereignty of divine mercy may permit a reprieve to be extended even unto a people as wicked as the legendary city of Nineveh. Nahum on the other hand, reflects the belief that God's universal justice will not be stayed, but rather will be fully executed against the enemies of God and God's elect.

From this flows the fact that the redactors of the Book of the Twelve meant for the two books to be read reciprocally. Divine freedom (Jonah) is pitted against Divine justice (Nahum). Below we will see how this kind of tension has been harmonized in the reception of Nahum.

Further connections to other books in the Twelve include Joel and Obadiah with the unique expression יַדּוּ גוֹרָל "and they cast lots" being found in Nahum 3:10, Joel 4:3 and Obadiah 11, as well as the metaphor of stubble that will be consumed by fire to describe the destruction of an advancing army in Na 1:10, Joel 2:5 and Obadiah 18 (Jones 1995:200). These connections unite the books in their featuring of the Divine Warrior motif, as well as their emphasis upon the theme of Yahweh's judgment against the nations (Jones 1995:200-201).

One can also mention Watts's (1997) idea that Hosea 1-3 and Malachi create a form around the Book of the Twelve with the focus of God's love for his people creating a "softer context of meaning" by insisting that the love and compassion of God for his people have not changed. This frame of love answers the question: how can a remnant of Israel have survived through the oppression of the 8th and 6th centuries, and a new beginning have been made in

the 6th and 5th centuries? The answer: "The wonderful and improbable love of Yahweh for his people" (Watts 1997).

In terms of Nahum's message of divine punishment this other important canonical voice needs to be heard as well. Nahum's God is not just jealous and vengeful. He is also and ultimately a God of love and compassion. For the social identity of the end-redactors it implies that this softer aspect of their basic group beliefs as a people should always be remembered. It is the beginning (Hosea) and end (Malachi) of their identity of a people so strongly linked to the identity of their ambiguous deity, Yahweh. This focus should also inform the way one reads and uses the Book of the Twelve, and specifically Nahum, in theological ethics.

Lastly I want to refer to Shart's and Redditt's summaries of the theological unity of the Book of the Twelve. Both remark on the complexity of the unity of the Book of the Twelve. Reddit (2001:73) refers to House, who in his 2000 study offers a reading of the theology in the Twelve:

> He [House] takes as his starting point that no matter how differently the voices within the Twelve may portray God, they are all speaking deliberately and consciously of the same God. Hence, the Twelve portray a complex God who both warns and loves, saves and destroys, acting in ways that are different but not necessarily contradictory.

Schart (1998c:907-908) refers to the fact that the redactors of the Book of the Twelve "did not produce a flat coherence without deviations, tensions, and even contradictions." He notes how post-modern thought is intrigued by this kind of complexity:

> The Book of the Twelve postulates that messages from different times, from persons with special insights, speaking from different backgrounds, when read together, form a complex unity. The reader is forced to proceed from one prophecy to the next, each time imagining the hidden theme of the whole, the judging and restoring presence of God in history, from a different perspective (Schart 1998c:907-908).

What are the implications for the underlying dynamic of social identity construction in this kind of theological and textual environment, and how does this reflect the identity of the final redactors of the Book of the Twelve?

4.3. The reception of Nahum

Although I recognize that no detailed research on the reception of Nahum has been done so far (cf. Seybold 1989:96), I want to refer to some of the most important early receptions of Nahum. I do this because the reception of the text of Nahum tells us something about the dynamic of the text's rhetoric as well as the underlying processes of identity construction. What we see, even in a very cursory overview of some of the main early receptions of Nahum, is extraordinary and (as will be argued in the conclusion) can very fruitfully be investigated in further research.

The focus is again on how the text was taken up and reinterpreted in new contexts, and what this implies about the social identity of the translators or commentators. We will briefly look at the LXX, Tobit, Qumran, the Targums, Josephus and conclude with a few remarks on the history of interpretation in the Christian tradition.

It seems that the translator of the *Septuagint (LXX)* did not have great problems with the translation of Nahum. He correctly identified No-Amon as Thebes (Na 3:8) as well as the names for Ethiopia, Egypt and Libya (but not Put) (Seybold 1989:92). Ball (1997:66) stirs up a bit of excitement with her study of the Septuagint translation of Nahum 2:2a as: "He has gone up, breathing on your face, delivering from tribulation", which she then connects with the activity of God himself (on the strength of Gn 2:7). Nahum 2:2b is also interpreted as addressed to Judah and not to the enemy of Yahweh (Ball 1997:66). She entertains the possibility that Nahum 2:2 could refer to events in the Maccabbean period (Ball 1997:68). Judas, the 'saviour of Israel', made it possible for Judah to "celebrate their feasts" again at the liberation of Jerusalem. An "actualization" of Nahum 1 to the Jewish victories in the 160's BCE or the eschatological prophetic overthrow of the Seleucid power (the Nineveh of Na 2-3) is possible (Ball 1997:69).

The Deutero-canonical book of *Tobit* is usually not mentioned in the history of interpretation of Nahum. Even though it does not give a translation of the text, it does refer to Nahum and therefore is worth mentioning as a possible reactualization of Nahum in the period between 250-175 BCE (De Silva 2002:69). Tobit writes as if he is part of the exiles of the Northern Kingdom who was taken to Nineveh (Tobit 1:10ff.).

The interesting reference is found in Tobit 14:4, where Tobit speaks to his son and tells him to take his children to Media "for I believe the word of God that Nahum spoke about Nineveh, that all these things will take place and overtake Assyria and Nineveh." Then he provides an interesting window into the way in which the author read the words of the prophets when he says: "Indeed, everything that was spoken by the prophets of Israel, whom God sent, will occur. None of their words will fail, but all will come true at their appointed times." At the end of the book we read that before he died "he heard of the destruction of Nineveh, and he saw its prisoners being led into Media, those whom King Cyaxares of Media had taken captive. Tobias praised God for all he had done to the people of Nineveh and Assyria; before he died he rejoiced over Nineveh" (Tobit 14:15).

In the *Qumran pesher* commentary on Nahum (4Q169) both the translation as well as the commentary actualize Nahum in terms of the historical context of the first century BCE. The commentary contains an identifiable historical reference to Demetrius III Eukairos, the king of Seleucid Syria, who invaded the Holy Land in 88 BCE (Wise, Abegg & Cook 1996:215). There is also a reference to Alexander Jannaeus, who ruled over Israel as king and high priest from 103-76 BCE (Wise, Abegg & Cook 1996:215).

The writer belonged to a group (probably the Essenes) that opposed the ruling Jewish party, the Pharisees (who were called the "flattery-seekers" in the text) and who therefore supported Jannaeus, who is called the "Lion of Wrath" (Wise, Abegg & Cook 1996:216). In the known vein of the symbolic-typological interpretative strategies of the Qumran community (Seybold 1989:95), the Roman overlords also feature in the text in the form of a codename. They are called the "Kittim" (Wise, Abegg & Cook 1996:217). We also find a reference to "Ephraim," the name for the Pharisees, "Manasseh" is probably a reference to the Sadducees, whereas "Judah" refers to the Essenes (Seybold 1989:94). Seybold makes a very interesting comment on the way Nahum was taken up and reactualized as an inner-Judaic disputation:

Wie im Spiegel erkennt der Ausleger im Nahum-Text seine eigene Situation. Das Szenario und die Rollen der Akteure sind prophetisch vorgezeichnet. Ohne Rücksicht auf den weltpolitischen Großrahmen der Nahum-Gedichte werden ihre Handlungsmuster auf die internen Rivalitäten der Parteien oder 'Schulen' oder 'Sekten' der Pharisäer, Sadduzäer und Essener bezogen und natürlich ganz aus der Perspektive 'Judas', d.i. der essenischen Qumrangemeinde. Innerjüdische Auseinandersetzungen erhalten so durch Nahums Prophetie den Charakter der Prädestination (Seybold 1989:95).

The *Targum* of the Minor Prophets (Cathcart & Gordon 1989) on Nahum also shows interesting identity contextual adaptations of the MT of Nahum. Nahum 2-3 does not have any important differences, except that Nahum 2:1 has the detailed description that the mountains over which the messenger comes are "of the land of Israel" and that the extended metaphor of the lion's den (Na 2:12-14) is de-metaphorized. We read: "Where are the dwelling-places of the kings and the princes' residence" (Tg. Na 2:12). Chapter 1 of Nahum has more pertinent changes.

The targum's translations of Nahum 1:1 is worth quoting in full (Cathcart & Gordon 1989:131):

> The oracle of the cup of malediction to be given to Nineveh to drink. Previously Jonah the son of Amittai the prophet from Gath-hepher, prophesied against her and she repented of her sins, and when she sinned again there prophesied once more against her Nahum of Beth Koshi, as is recorded in this book.

The tension created by the juxtaposition of Jonah and Nahum (see discussion above) in the unified Book of the Twelve is "solved" here by providing this crypto-theological interpretation/ addition to the text.

Other crucial verses are Nahum 1:8-9, which talk about "the nations which rose up and utterly destroyed the Sanctuary," who will be delivered to Gehinnam"," and then again: "Nations who have plundered Israel" (cf. Gordon 1994:41-45 for a detailed discussion). To the Targumist the nations who have plundered Judah ("Israel") and its temple are more important than the obvious references to Nineveh. This is in line with one of the functions of the Targum "to apply the words of Scripture to contemporary situations" (Gordon 1994:40).

Josephus also uses the prophecies of Jonah and Nahum in very "creative" ways. When talking about Jonah, he omits the details of "40 days" till destruction as well as the repentance of the Ninevites (Schart 1998a:28). He then combines Nahum with Jonah with the implication that both prophets were ultimately right in their judgment oracles, in this way harmonizing the problem that the Book of the Twelve presents its readers with (Schart 1998a:28). Christofer Begg (1995) looks at this same phenomenon in Josephus, and how he omits verses of Nahum and only quotes about an eight of the book's extent verses (Begg 1995:14).

Begg (1995:18f.) sees in Josephus' incorporation of an "Assyrian" prophecy his desire to "please" his Roman patrons "who would have been gratified to discover that a Jewish prophet had announced the overthrow of the 'ancestor' of their great contemporary foe" (i.e. the Parthian empire). For his Jewish readers though his inclusion of Jonah and Nahum would have had a different message. Because they know the full story of both books they would have known that "Assyria" could, of course, also refer to Rome itself (Begg 1995:19)! Josephus is playing a "double-game". Begg (1995:20) is of the opinion that "Josephus intended his Jewish audience to take the above-mentioned statement as a kind of 'editorial wink' along the lines of: yes, of course, the old story of Jonah did tell more: it has Assyria repenting and spared."

Begg (1995:17) remarks that in Jewish and *Christian tradition* generally Nahum attracted minimal attention. Seybold (1998:96) reiterates that there is no echo or interpretation of Nahum in the New Testament community. Maybe this "silence" is why the Book of Nahum did not play an important part in the interpretative texts of the Christian tradition. Spronk (1997:17) mentions that in the Early Church (e.g. Jerome, Theodor, Theodoret and Cyrill) the Book of Nahum was "often interpreted as comfort to the persecuted Christians, expressing the hope that one day the church would have reason to celebrate like Judah. Nineveh was often regarded as a symbol of the devil (Spronk 1997:17). Finally, Luther also links the days of Nahum to his own situation, implying that as the Assyrians perished because they were unable to use their prosperity moderately, therefore "also today the pope is being destroyed by the word of God" (Spronk 1997:17).

It seems that there is something about Nahum and the kind of dynamic that underlies the reception of the book that encourages people to categorize themselves in the role of "Judah", who is in the right and is saved, over and against "Nineveh" and "Assyria", who always

represent the "other" groups who are in the wrong and will ultimately be destroyed. This dynamic seems to confirm the "predictions" of SIT and SCT about the way groups construct their social identity. According to these predictions the outcome of difficult situations entails strong homogenizing of the in-group and discriminatory stereotyping and even demonizing of the out-group in order to achieve existential certainty in the face of grave danger and a threat to the own identity.

What is "positive" to see, though, is the way the Essenes "use" Nahum in their inner-Judaic setting of borders for their own identity. It was mentioned from the start that Nahum is usually interpreted as a nationalistic prophet *par excellence* and as quite ethnocentric. Apart from the implications of the study of Nahum to the contrary already mentioned above, it is interesting that the Essenes do not use this book either nationalistically or ethnocentrically. Their enemies could in fact be described as subgroups of their own in-group, namely the Jewish nation. Whether they would have seen it in this way is, of course, open for discussion.

In the next chapter there will be references to how Nahum is theologically-ethically "used" or interpreted in more recent research. What seems to be the normal case when reading Nahum is to find substitutes for "Nineveh." It will be argued that this is not the most liberating way of interpreting Nahum ethically. The other underlying currents or dynamic present in the polyvalent and ambiguous text of Nahum will provide a possibly more hopeful and responsible ethic that could contribute to an ethos of peace and reconciliation.

5. Summary and conclusions: Social identity construction in exilic/post-exilic times

The implications and conclusions that can be reached regarding social identity construction in the exilic/post-exilic times as well as in later receptions of the Book of Nahum can now be put forward.

Premise 1: *All people have a social identity and belong to groups with basic group principles and beliefs.*
- As in Chapter 5, this will always remain a theoretical exercise, as it is impossible to say exactly which specific group(s) are represented in an ancient text. Reading the exilic/post-

exilic material of Nahum has strengthened the possible link to the so-called Deutero-Isaiah group who created a new theology of hope and suffering. This group introduced the return of Israel to the land coinciding with Cyrus' rise to power.

▪ The group beliefs of this exilic/post-exilic group were shown to coincide with those of Deutero-Isaiah. The theological construction of the deity, Yahweh, as universal Lord of history and especially of creation, was shown to be present in the Yahweh-hymn in Nahum. We also see the exilic/post-exilic focus on liturgy and the use of hymns (akin to the psalms). The group beliefs are centred on the return of Israel from Exile, and the comfort that they will receive from Yahweh. The salvation of Judah is clearly reflected in Nahum 2:1. By introducing the Yahweh-hymn at the beginning of the prophecy, the raw emotions and violent imagery of the pre-exilic material are theologically deepened and based on Yahweh's character as the righteous Judge of all nations (including Israel) and his power over Creation.

Premise 2*: People in a group are motivated to act stereotypically on their group principles.*

▪ It is impossible to investigate how the different groups acted on their different group beliefs except by noting that they wrote down their ideas. In the process they often took pre-exilic prophecy and transformed it into literary prophetical works as reflection on the current historical situation. This is probably what happened with Nahum. The Deutero-Isaiah group took the pre-exilic oracles against Nineveh, provided them with their specific theological additions and caused the Book of Nahum to be taken up in the Book of the Twelve.

▪ In the exilic/post-exilic Nahum texts we could also see how the important theme of comfort was introduced as part of alleviating the uncertainty and especially the fragmentary social identity of the exiles. A very interesting development is that the stereotyping of the out-group grew more general and symbolic. In the pre-exilic texts the out-groups were Assyria and the Judean pro-Assyrians. In the exilic/post-exilic texts the references to out-groups are universalized as "enemies" and "trouble." The names Nineveh and Assyria become symbols for Babylon, but also for any future oppressing king or nation. We have seen how this symbolical-typology functioned in the reception of Nahum (especially in Qumran).

▪ One of the main aims of the Deutero-Isaiah group was to get their theological perspective on the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile accepted as mainstream theology. Their focus on hope and the return of Judah to the land of Israel in the light of Cyrus' rise to power was

232

one of several perspectives in that time. If one understands ideology in the sense of "a system of patterns or ideas or beliefs that corresponds to the social conditions and self-interests of particular groups of people" (Gottwald 1996:137) then this theological project of the in-group could be seen as ideological. Against the Deuteronomistic or Priestly ideologies they wanted their ideology to change the minds and opinions of the exilic community.

▪ This theological focus on a universal Creator deity and Lord of all the earth could be classified as a *cosmic ideology* that has a supernaturalistic orientation (Carlton 1977:37). Cosmic ideologies such as the one employed in Nahum are "universalising in their attitudes to the world, and try to absorb or if necessary destroy other competing belief systems" (Carlton 1977:37). It has *solidarity reinforcement* as well as *advocatory* functions. It wants to comfort and bring hope to the disillusioned exilic/post-exilic community, but at the same time wants to put forward their view on the past, present and future of the Yahweh community as the one that should prevail.

Premise 3: *In a group people will always minimize the differences between in-group members and maximize differences in relation to the out-group.*

▪ This was easier to see in pre-exilic Nahum, but is also present in exilic/post-exilic Nahum. The categorisation of the self and the others in terms of prototypes is simplified. The world is categorized into those who trust in Yahweh (Na 1:7) and those who do not (Na 1:8). Because the out-group is now more mythological in nature a type of eschatological homogenizing of all future out-groups can be postulated. This focus on mythologizing the enemies of Yahweh, and therefore the enemies of the in-group, can clearly be seen in the way mythological places like holy mountains (Bashan, Carmel) are made subservient to Yahweh's storm-power and earth-shattering coming.

▪ Because the exilic/post-exilic Nahum texts do not make use of specific metaphors or other descriptions of judgment or punishment, the dehumanizing character of much of the earlier material is not present in the additions. Because the book as a whole, however, was also seen as part of the exilic/post-exilic reaction to new situations of oppression, it could be concluded that the dehumanizing language and violent metaphors were also incorporated in the way exilic/post-exilic Israel constructed their social identity.

Premise 4: *The process of self-categorization is context dependent in what can be called the meta-contrast principle.*

- This aspect of social identity construction can now clearly be shown. The exilic/post-exilic texts make it clear that change in context from pre-exilic Assyrian oppression to exilic/post-exilic experiences of loss and fragmentedness does have an influence on the way the in-group categorizes themselves as well as the out-group. There is a move towards a more universal and theologically deeper basis for self-categorization as well as the categorization of the other.

- The focus on Yahweh as mighty Creator and Lord of the universe is very interesting. It seems strange that a group that has no political power and that has lost their land, temple and state should come up with such grandiose theological constructions. Gerstenberger (2002:224) addresses this very issue when he states that the exilic and post-exilic community of Israel shaped its theology in the light of the depressing political changes and Yahweh became "not only the personal God but the exclusive Lord of the whole world." Gerstenberger (2002:224) mentions how the contradiction with reality was sometimes "terrifyingly great", but that there are many statements "about the majesty of Yahweh." He sees in this the presence of real liberating experiences and theologically positive interpretations of contemporary events (Gerstenberger 2002:224).

- It could also be that the exilic/post-exilic Yahweh community was influenced by the language and religion of the great powers into whose hands they were given over. Especially the experience of being "set free" by Cyrus influenced texts like that of Deutero-Isaiah to a great extent. This is another indication of how the social identity of the powerless and conquered in-group is constructed by using the language and ideas of the supreme out-group. In pre-exilic Nahum this was the extremely violent propaganda of the Assyrian empire. In exilic/post-exilic Nahum it is the exalted and grandiose universal language of the world leader Cyrus.

Premise 5: *Groups create their social identity by constructing textual identities.*

- The use of textual traditions again is central in this chapter. The use of the Exodus 34:6-7 "credo" in Nahum 1:3a and in four other texts in the Book of the Twelve as an important theological theme, as well as the acrostic form of the Yahweh-hymn, provides us with very interesting social identity insights.

- The use of the "credo" in Nahum links the book with a broader theme in the Book of the Twelve, namely the ambiguous presence of Yahweh in the desert of the Exile. The underlying dynamic of self-criticism, or rather an honest focus on the reality of deportation and loss of identity and the theological uncertainty it produces is made present through this

234

verse. The function of the broken and unfinished form of the alphabetic acrostic hymn points to the same dynamic. The presence and power and help of Yahweh are not so certain. Through the broken form the underlying vulnerability and brokenness of the identity of the Yahweh community is represented. This ambiguous and paradoxical juxtaposition of form and content is one of the most fascinating discoveries of this research.

The importance of a pluralistic hermeneutic as part of a multidimensional methodology has become clear from what was said above. The implications for reading the OT and a text like Nahum are linked to a hermeneutic that takes paradox and ambiguity seriously. The type of text that is produced in times of exile and deportation is described in Eskenazi's (1995:82) quote of George Steiner about Judaism:

> In Judaism, unending commentary and commentary upon commentary are elemental. Talmudic exegesis exfoliates into uninterrupted study of the commentary on the Talmud … *Hermeneutic unendingness and survival in exile are, I believe, kindred.* The text of the Torah, of the biblical canon, and the concentric spheres of texts about these texts, replace the destroyed Temple. … In dispersion, the text is homeland (emphasis – JPB).

Is it far-fetched to see the later rabbinic exegetes' pluralistic interpretative stance, which includes a celebration of the polyvalence of the biblical text and its interpretations (Eskenazi 1995:84), as having its seed in the way the Book of the Twelve and the whole canon was ultimately integrated? The plurality that flows from the experience of loss and exile and fragmentation is already present in the textual traditions of ancient Israel in the late post-exilic phase.

The openness to paradox and the juxtaposition of theologically disparate texts such as Nahum and Jonah as part of a unified collection or book indicates a radical questioning of the models of social identity construction. Although there is a strengthening of basic group beliefs (Yahweh is the only God), and a certain amount of discriminatory stereotyping of the out-groups, especially the foreign nations, there is a very realistic mirroring of a shattered identity. The hope for full restoration and the judgment of Yahweh on the oppressive out-groups is there, but not without a deepening theological vision on the universality of the

Creator God as seen in the hymns of the post-exilic community that were built into the Book of the Twelve.

The undercurrent of self- and ethnocritical social identity construction that we have found in the pre-exilic textual traditions, and which were built on in the exilic/post-exilic material, is developed even further in the late post-exilic times with the final redaction of the Book of the Twelve.

Chapter 7: Nahum, social identity and theological ethics

1. Introduction: Why theological ethics?

After the exegetical study of Nahum from the perspective of social identity and a sensitivity to ideology in the previous two chapters, we continue the method as indicated in the first chapter by looking at the theological ethics in the Book of Nahum.. Reading Nahum and the OCN is not only a theoretical exercise in exegesis. The results of the study should impact on the very real problems of intergroup conflict all over the world, especially in contexts of oppression. Melugin (1996:250), for example, looks at the relationship between Israel and the Nations and argues that the theological enquiry is more than theoretical or antiquarian – it is existential:

> How should the Scriptures inform the difficult issues of the Middle East? How should the Scriptures be used to assess relationships between those of Christian faith and those who stand outside the Christian tradition? Biblical texts must be evaluated as precedents to be applied to problems concerning such relationships. What benefits should Israel enjoy? What obligations to Palestinians should they have? What stances should Christians take toward non-Christians? Are they persons primarily to be evangelised? Or are there other, perhaps more important, obligations? Biblical texts must surely be applied. But different texts have different theologies. Thus their theologies must be assessed and evaluated, as precedents to be evaluated and applied.

This is indeed the way that OT scholars have begun to treat the study of ethics in the Bible. Wright (1997:586), for example, states that the variety of ethical possibilities in the OT should help us with current ethical choices:

> This variety of approaches to OT ethics is illuminating in portraying Israel's actual response to ethical issues in her own context, in helping us relate that context to our own, and in showing us how literary texts of many different genres actually function in shaping or resourcing the ethics of the reader.

Gerstenberger (2002:295) agrees with this move towards "the interest of our world" against what he calls the "schemes of Christian ethics" that "have to grapple far more with the formal

problems of revelation, the dogmatized individualism of salvation, a one-sided imprisonment within the parameters of a wider society, with traditional notions of law and gospel, the two kingdoms and the coming world."

Without labouring the point too much, there are four grounds for including a chapter on the theological ethics of Nahum in this study.

Firstly, the reading and interpretation of the OCN in general and Nahum in particular rhetorically urges one to say something ethical. We have already seen how Mihelic (1948) brings Nineveh and the Nazi crimes of the Second World War into close proximity to one another. Mihelic (1948:200) argues that the condemnation of Nineveh grows out of "a moral and ethical concept of God." Nineveh and "all those, including Judah, who have ever imitated Assyria and her crimes over their subject peoples" are being punished for their immorality. Becking (1996:20) likewise connects Nahum to the crisis of history, "the *condition humaine* of ordinary people, males and females alike [who suffer] from marginalisation and oppression … these people are to be consoled." Wessels (1998:616) concurs that Nahum would be related to and understood by "people living in oppressive societies or who had previous experience of being oppressed." As a final example, Brueggemann (1997:527) ends his chapter on the OCN, "The nations as Yahweh's partner," by referring to the Holocaust's horrors and to the United States as "the last superpower":

> I intend that my analysis of Yahweh and the nations should finally settle in the presence of the United States, which has no viable competitor for power, and which is in an economic, military position to imagine, like Egypt, that it produces its own Nile.

Secondly, my South African context of interpretation urges me to say something ethical about Nahum. In a very important article, Smit (1992), two years before South Africa's first democratic elections, argued how important not just ethics, but also ethos is in a more just country[148]. He shows how many Afrikaans scholars in the time of apartheid were thinking ethically about "moral issues" such as "Is dancing a sin?" or, "Should one gamble?" while their own ethos radically and detrimentally influenced millions of people's lives through political and economic power, hundreds of apartheid laws, etc. (Smit 1992:306). He throws

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[148] Smit (1992:305) makes the important distinction between ethics and ethos by saying that ethics is the conscious thinking about ethos. He is of the opinion that for a group of believers their ethos is more important than ethics as ethos is what drives people in what they do every day.

down the gauntlet to biblical science scholars in particular to throw off the ban of modernism and to start reading not only the world *behind* or *of* the text, but to also take the text seriously as a religious document read by concrete believers (Smit 1992:323-324). Our multicultural and multireligious society with all its questions and problems needs reflection on intergroup ethics, especially reflection on the role of identity in ethics.

Thirdly, the importance of being ethically accountable to the people who are directly or indirectly influenced by critical exegesis should be noted. Because of Patte's focus on androcritical and multidimensional exegetical practices, the study of biblical ethics, as well as the study of the ethics of biblical interpretation has come to stay on the exegetical agenda (Patte 1995). He pleads that "we cannot continue promoting apartheid, racism, sexism, oppression, and injustice in all its forms through our critical studies of the Bible" (Patte 1995:113). One of the most important issues of ethically accountable exegetical practice is that the "interpreter acknowledge and affirm the context from which he or she reads" (Patte 1995:115). Although his stance has been criticized (see a good discussion on it in Meyer 2004:32-41), his point was well made.

Fourthly, the burning issue of violence in South Africa and across the globe calls for an ethical reflection on one of the most violent books in the Bible. In a recent article Snyman (2003) investigates the interplay between violence, fear, racism and the role of religion. After looking at the role of religion in violence (Snyman 2003:708-712), he comes to the conclusion that "Violence and the sacred go hand in hand" (2003:712) and that "divine approval of violence in the Bible offers encouragement to people bent on finding exemplary paradigms in the biblical text" (e.g. the ban and ethnic cleansing in Deuteronomy) (2003:713). Snyman (2003:714) suggests that "violence in the text should be confronted head-on" and not be glossed over.

Before exploring the theological ethics in Nahum and the ethics of the "use" of Nahum (Section 3), a theoretical discussion on a fitting theological-ethical model for interpreting Nahum and OCN material will follow.

239

2. A theological-ethical model: Responsible liberatory identity ethics

It is important first to obtain a general overview on Old Testament ethics before suggesting a fitting theological-ethical model for integrating the OCN and especially Nahum. Thereafter the discussion will be expanded to include a broader ethical field.

2.1 Old Testament theological-ethical models

OT ethics has undergone many extremes of interpretation in the previous century. On the one hand, we found theonomists who opt for an actual application of OT law in all spheres of life, and on the other hand, we have dispensationalists who argue that OT law was confined to the dispensation of Israel and therefore has no binding authority for Christians (Wright 1997:586). In between we find a variety of different positions[149]:

> Critical scholars in recent years have argued for a great variety of views as to how the OT can function ethically for Christians. It may reflect the natural morality and moral consensus of Israel within the context of wider ANE morality, and as such we can critically compare it with our own ethics (Rogerson). It provides a rich matrix of ethical insights and resources, but we must not reduce it to timeless principles and thereby ignore the historically conditioned nature of OT laws and conventions (Clements). Rather, it is the very concreteness and earthly specificity of the OT that serve as a healthy corrective to the tendency for Christian ethics to deal in vague generalities (Davidson, Goldingay). While the OT may no longer be prescriptively normative, it is still strongly influential in shaping the Christian's identity and moral character (Birch and Rasmussen). This is particularly the role of OT narratives, which have moral power in exposing reality, shattering and transforming worldviews, and demanding response (Birch, 'Moral Address'). The moral power of OT texts is applied to contemporary social, political, and economic issues through a kind of neo-typology in the many writings of Brueggemann (Wright 1997:586).

Hebrew Bible ethics, as it is often called in the research, is no simple endeavour. In fact, many researchers usually first list all the problems that can be found in this field of Old Testament studies. Davies (1994:43-44) is of the opinion that the main problem lies in the

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[149] See also Wright (1992:101ff.) and Wilson (1994:56ff.) for surveys of approaches to OT ethics from the early church until modern times.

nature of the raw material (i.e. the biblical texts) that serve as the object of study: ethical material is not easy to identify or classify and the Hebrew Bible never presents a coherent body of ethical principles. Wilson (1994:55f.) sees the problem in the methodology as well as the fact that biblical ethics often contain conflicting ethical views or beliefs (1994:61). Kaiser (1992:290ff.) confirms the above-mentioned key issues facing scholars of OT ethics. He (Kaiser 1992:293) notes how a paradigm shift has occurred in recent work, namely that scholars have started taking the linguistic turn seriously, made the social context part of ethical study and gave closer attention to the connection between OT ethics and Christian faith.

Barton (1994:20) makes the very important point that, although ancient Israel was a so-called "pre-philosophical" culture, we should submit their ethics and ethos to philosophical questioning. There are usually three types of moral/ethical systems identified, namely deontological, teleological and perfectionist[150].

In *deontological* models of OT ethics the law plays the biggest role. According to this model, the revelation of God at Sinai and in the history of Israel is of the utmost importance. Kaiser (1983) and Otto (1994) are good examples of this model. Otto (1994) gives a descriptive reconstruction of history in grounding ethical norms and also differentiates between the ethos of the people and what is given as theological-ethical ideals by the priests, prophets and teachers of wisdom. Kaiser (1983) looks at the holiness of God, his direct commands and the presence of creation orders, especially in the law literature of the OT: "The ground of the ethical in the Old Testament is the express commands of the absolutely, holy person, God, made known by historical acts of revelation" (Kaiser 1983:4-5).

Teleological models enquire into the *telos* or end result of ethical living. This is usually constructed as the "good." This theory has as basis the intentionality of human behaviour. The prophetic call of obedience to God, righteousness to the neighbour and keeping the covenant all fall into this category. As we will shortly see, this category is probably the most useful in the study of the ethics in the OCN and Nahum. Barton (1994 & 1998) is an important proponent of a nuanced version of this model.

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[150] These terms can vary. Barton (1994:13-19) gives more descriptive terms: (1) Obedience to God's will ("Deontological"); (2) Natural law ("Teleological"); and (3) Imitation of God ("Perfectionism"). In the same way Niebuhr calls the symbol of teleological ethics "Man-the-maker" and of deontological ethics "Man-the-citizen" (see Pauw 1999:12).

Perfectionist models follow the age-old Aristotelian maxim of the cultivation of values. It is about the human character as moral agent. Barton (1994:17) adds to this description that the "imitation of God" is part of the moral formation of the human: "God is not only the commander but also the paradigm of all moral conduct." In OT ethics Birch (1994) is a good example of this approach. In his 1991 *Let justice roll down*, Birch (1991) builds on the ideas of Stanley Hauerwas and seeks out how OT narratives influence the way in which believing communities live ethically. In his 1994 article (1994:23ff.) Birch shows how the Hebrew Bible affects moral agency and how text, community and the importance of canon should inform ethics. He comes to the important insight that the text is a product of a community (thus very specific and for a very specific time) but that the text at the same time influences the formation of a community (Birch 1994:26).

Janzen (1994) also follows a perfectionist type model that he calls a "paradigmatic approach." The *family paradigm* is worked out throughout the OT in (1) the priestly and wisdom paradigms (Janzen 1994 Chapter 5); and (2) the royal and prophetic paradigms (Janzen 1994 Chapter 6). The importance of narratives is emphasised in building a family paradigm ethos where life, land and hospitality play the leading roles (Janzen 1994:40-44).

However, most of the above-mentioned approaches do not help us in giving a theological-ethical interpretation of the OCN. This is probably because the bulk of the OT ethical material was meant for ancient Israel's ears and eyes. Gerstenberger (2002:262) notes how the ethic of the exilic/post-exilic Yahweh community was founded more on orthopraxis than on orthodoxy, and how it came to be more of an internal ethic (Gerstenberger 2002:270 referring to Max Weber). It could also be that, because Nahum was not a favourite book in the Jewish and Christian traditions from the earliest times, and because OCN material is usually absent from the common lectionaries of the Christian churches, the theological-ethical implications of the OCN are not readily investigated.

Wright (1983:103), for example, tackles the ethical implications of politics and the world of nations by referring to creation and the fall-from-redemption perspective. His investigation leads him to a universal vision in which all nations are included in God's redemptive purpose (Wright 1983:130). The OCN, though, are only treated in one short section (Wright 1983:123-

242

125) with the focus on the universal human validity of the moral criteria by which the nations were judged. With regards to the OCN, he summarizes:

> Not only do they show Israel's unshakeable conviction of the incomparable superiority and sovereignty of their God, even in the face of apparently contradictory evidence, and her indomitable hope in the moral purpose of God to destroy the wicked and vindicate the righteous. They also show an awareness of international affairs and insight into realities that lie behind them (Wright 1983:124).

This type of generalisation that does not build on thorough exegesis does not help us in a search for an ethical "grip" on the ethics *in*, and the ethics of the "*use of*" the OCN and Nahum. Barton (1980, 1994, 1995, 1998) helps us forward with his idea of "natural law" in prophetic ethics.

2.2 Barton and "natural law"

Barton (1994:15-16) follows a type of teleological ethics that he calls "natural law": "an accommodation of human action to principles seen as inherent in the way things are." The words are put in quotation marks to make readers sensitive to the difference between Barton's use of the term and what modern people understand by the term natural law.[151] In his book on Amos' OCN (Am 1:3-2:5) he calls the underlying ethical model "international customary law" (Barton 1980:43). That is:

> God steps in to punish the nations because they are guilty of various atrocities, infringements of supposedly universal norms … Israel's neighbours are not denounced for sins which they could not have been expected to recognise as such … but for offences against common humanity; not for disobedience to God, but for failing to follow the dictates of their own moral sense (Barton 1980:43-44).

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[151] Barton (1994:15) describes his use of the term "natural law" as follows: "The term as I use it is meant to point us in a certain general direction, to draw attention to places in the Bible where ethics is not obedience to revealed or 'positive' law … It is a 'vague phrase which is meant to be suggestive rather than defining' … It is *not* meant to imply, absurdly, that ancient Israelite culture knew about the later Western natural law tradition in all its refinements."

243

In his work on Isaiah, Barton (1995) continues this line of thought. Barton (1995:81-82) shows that the prophetic ethic could be studied as (1) "the actual moral conduct deprecated or enjoined by the prophets" (1995:81) and (2) "the *sources* of prophetic morality." One important source is "international moral conduct" as "agreed" upon between nations. He describes one category of sins as human pride, idolatry and anarchy that breaks down the ordered theological universe in which God is supreme. No one and no thing may be exalted above its proper place in God's universe. It is thus about "failing to observe order in the world" (Barton 1995:87-88). This applies to the Assyrian king as well: "he, too, is a fool, deluded by his own success into thinking he can vie with God, instead of recognizing that he is no more than a tool in God's hand" (Barton 1995:91). He concludes: "what we have in Isaiah is a theological form of *natural law*" (Barton 1995:92 – emphasis JPB).

In his popularly written *Ethics and the Old Testament* Barton (1998:58-76) reiterates his views on natural law in the OT, and especially the fact that it has its roots in wisdom traditions. He does, however, note that this natural law model sometimes underlies the present form of the text and that we have to "dig beneath the surface" to show "that in these ancient documents there are, even if in a rudimentary form, approaches to ethics which see it as resting on a foundation more like what Western tradition has called 'natural law'" (Barton 1998:76).

It is not difficult to see that this ethical reasoning is also present in Nahum. In Nahum it is summarized as "evil." But before we look at Nahum, we have to make an important detour into more general theories of ethics and then formulate an apt model for looking ethically at the OCN and Nahum.

2.3 Levinas and responsibility

In systematic theology ethicists also recognise a deontological and teleological model for ethical argument, but add a very important category, namely, *responsibility* arguments. Responsibility ethics does not work from norms (deontological) or goals (teleological). The situation, the specific circumstances, the claims of the moment weigh more heavily than norms or goals that are written in stone (Smit 1992:316). To be ethical is to be responsible in a given situation (Smit 1992:316).

Responsibility ethics was introduced in Max Weber's famous "Politik als Beruf" lecture in 1919 and serves as a transition from an ethics of conviction ("Gesinnungsethik") to an ethics of responsibility (Pauw 1999:8). Responsibility ethics served as a complement to "conviction ethics" in that it implemented a more reflexive use of convictions which focused on the consequences of actions, and which took into account the respect for the principles of others (Pauw 1999:9). Important ethicists/theologians in this category are Dietrich Bonhoeffer (responsible vicarious living for others in following Christ), Richard Niebuhr (responsible selves are *responsive* and therefore *responsible*) and especially Wolfgang Huber, who incorporates Bonhoeffer and Niebuhr but adds the important transition from one's *own* freedom of conscience to the principles of the *other* (Pauw 1999:9-17; "nicht mehr nur die eigene Gewissensfreiheit, sondern die Gewissensfreiheit des anderen ist der Ausgangspunkt der ethischen Reflexion" Huber 1990:150).

This extremely important movement from the self to the other as locus of ethical enquiry leads us to the phenomenological ethics of Emmanuel Levinas[152] who opts for a radical understanding of the self, the other and intersubjectivity. Although not fully categorisable in the responsibility ethics "camp", Levinas's ethics leads to a responsive ethics of responsibility (Pauw 1999:23-25).

In his own words:

> De verantwoordelijkheid [is] de wezenlijke, eerste, oorspronklike fundamentele struktuur van de subjektiviteit (Levinas 1987b:75).

In our search for models that can help us to integrate Nahum ethically, Levinas provides very rich and useful insights into ethical life between humans, and *inter alia* also between different human groups. Without giving an extensive treatment of Levinas's philosophy, we will discuss three of the most important concepts which impact directly on our study of Nahum. They are: the *other*, the *face* and *responsibility*.

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[152] Levinas was born in Lithuania in 1905, studied with Husserl and Heidegger in Freiburg (1928-1929) and earned his doctorate as phenomenologist. His most famous works include: *Time and the other* (1987a; orig. 1947) and *Totality and infinity* (1969; orig. 1961). In all his works he challenged the major assumptions and contributions of Western philosophy. "Levinas both appropriates the contributions of philosophers such as Hegel and Heidegger and radically alters them in the name of other, more humane categories" (Eskenazi 2003:2-3).

The *other* plays the formative part in Levinas's ethics (Eskenazi 2003:8) as he questions the way in which ethical guidance is rooted in the "I": "he regards the claims of the other on me as being really constitutive and primary, even in the formation of the 'I', but also in its responsible activities" (Gerstenberger 2002:294). In Levinas's words:

> The putting in question of the self is none other than the receiving of the absolute other. The epiphany of the absolute other is a countenance in which the other addresses me and shows me an ordering by his nakedness, by his need. His presence is an invitation to give an answer (Levinas 1987a:223).

The other is the "very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relation with God" (Eskenazi 2003:8) and is infinite in that it resists all totalizing powers. The other is any human that crosses my path, but especially the hungry, the destitute, the stranger, the widow and the orphan (Eskenazi 2003:8). I experience my own being and the desire to respond ethically through the *face* of the other. By the term *face* "Levinas indicates the otherness of the other person, that which resists the absorbing gaze of the I. That which cannot be thematized, that which is outside the totality of being is the face" (Hennessy 2003:57). To put it in plain language:

> … one is commanded to care for the other person. Confronted by the face of the other, one is literally solicited by God to care for this specific person. From the photos of starving children to the face of the homeless on our streets, we experience a sense of responsibility for them. I am responsible for this person. I am the one called to help them. I am the one chosen by God to reveal the glory of God in physically caring for this person (Hennessy 2003:56).

Through the *face* of the *other* one experiences the desire of being *responsible* to the infinite other that causes the self/the "I" to be and urges one to respond ethically. In Levinas's own words (see also Mortley 1991:15-16):

> Hence 'I-ness' means not being able to evade responsibility. This excrescence of being, this exaggeration that one calls 'I-ness', this outbreak of selfhood in the being, takes place as a growth in responsibility. The fact that my self is put into question by the other puts me in solidarity with the other in an incomparable and unique way … Here the solidarity is

responsibility, as though the whole edifice of creation rested on my shoulders (Levinas 1987a:295).

Eskenazi (2003:10) notes how important Levinas is for biblical studies as his formulations "articulate possibilities for interpreting the Bible in ways that are simultaneously religious, 'spiritual,' ethical, and nondogmatically philosophical." Gerstenberger (2002:293) sees the responsibility ethics of Jonas and Levinas as very necessary against modern ethics' individualisation, what is useful to me, what furthers my happiness. That, while the Hebrew Bible talks of "we" – "in the ancient texts references to social entities, the family, clan, people or community, stand in the foreground" (Gerstenberger 2002:293).

A last remark about Levinas should be sufficient. He wrote much of his philosophy against the chaos, what he calls the *il y a*, the Shoah and the "presentiment and memory of the Nazi horror" (Hennessy 2003:52). The *il y a*, or "there is" is the destruction of all beings and the rumble of silence that is left behind, "being itself filling in the void of nothingness … The *il y a* is not pure nothingness but rather the silent night of being in general. It is the felt presence of no thing, but of existence in general" (Hennessy 2003:53). The experience of *il y a* and being Jewish in 1933-1945 was the same. The fact that his ethics arise from the personal experience of war and Holocaust[153] makes his voice so much stronger when we consider inter-human ethics and how the OCN as violent, war-reciting texts should be treated ethically.

Levinas leaves us with an ethical vision with which we can discern, integrate and criticize the ethics in Nahum as well as the ethics of the way Nahum is interpreted. My reception of Levinas focuses on the implications that his ethical stance has on reading the OCN as texts of the "Other." Through these texts we are shown the *face* of the *other* and what we see is not pretty. What does one do when the face of the other that is constitutive of the own self contains the ashes of burnt victims or the blood of slaughtered enemies? How does one serve Belial as other? How does one respond ethically to another human being, or another group that is bent on killing, pillaging and raping?

These are not easy questions. It could be argued that the bigger the distance or abyss between groups ("selves") is, the more totalized the groups become to one another. It is only when one

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[153] Levinas himself escaped extermination as he was in a POW camp because of his French soldiers' uniform. His family died in the Nazi concentration camps.

realizes that the self is co-constituted by the face of the other that an attempt is made to begin bridging the divide. For intergroup relationships this is crucial. Perhaps part of responding ethically to the (horrific) face of the (ultimate) other is to face the other's face in total and raw honesty? The inhumanity of the other diminishes my humanity and should be exposed, judged and destroyed. Only then is it possible to respond even to an enemy and say, you are part of me. You make me suffer. By your inhumanity my self is diminished. You will be punished by the Other until the trace you leave of the Other is one that liberates, loves and creates peace.

2.4 Social identity and ethics

Thus far we have identified natural law and responsibility in ethics as boundary posts for a meaningful model of ethics for the OCN. In this section the crucial link between identity and ethics will be made.

Can we gain any ethical insight from the description of social identity so far? It seems that the answer is negative. Hardin (2001:7168) notes that social identity theory and the contemporary literature on identity are normative and not causal: they are "driven partly by the post-modern rejection of explanation and its focus on description and normative judgment that seems to flow merely from description." Most authors do not think about the moral claims of the groups that they describe. They take groups' identities for granted and see social identity and therefore communal life as normative and good (Hardin 2001:7168). This often leads to radical "communitarianism" which claims that when communities create values, those values are good for them, even to the point that members are almost always partial to their own group, and hostile and even murderous towards other groups (Hardin 2001:7169). Lastly, there is a trend among identity theorists to focus all of their claims to moral rights on minority groups, those with a secondary status and third world populations (Hardin 2001:7168).

Even if ethics in social identity is under-theorised, we should not underplay the importance of identity in ethics. It actually flows from Levinas's responsibility ethics, where the decentred being (i.e. identity) of the self in response to the face of the other behaves ethically. One could say that the way we perceive ourselves is the way in which we will live. Identity leads to ethics – of course, good and bad ethics.

The connection between identity and ethics has been made before. Stegemann (1992:113), for example, talks about the Western world's compulsion to create bipolar constellations, or antithetical conceptual pairs when thinking about identity. Examples like "Hellenists" and "Savages" or "Christians" and "Pagans" are not innocent, but function on the principle of asymmetry (Stegemann 1992:113). They also have a pejorative side as the "other" is not treated neutrally but in a derogatory way, and when these identity concepts are ethnocentrically absolutised, it usually goes hand in hand with political and economical oppression and power play (Stegemann 1992:113-114). Stegemann (1992:115) then makes the very important point that Israel's state of being "elected" by God should imply that they will absolutise their identity but that this has not happened:

> Vielmehr wurde es gezwungen, in einer langen Geschichte der Fremdlingschaft als politisch ohnmächtige Minderheit unter den Völkern, vertrieben aus dem eigenen Land und ohne staatliche Selbständigkeit, die eigene Identität zu behaupten (Stegemann 1992:115).

Stegemann (1992:115-124) shows in the rest of his study how a biblical xenology or an identity of being a stranger is true of Israel throughout their history.

In South Africa the question of what it means to live ethically in the new post-apartheid South Africa can also be connected to the question of identity. Du Toit (1994:482, 484, 486-487), for example, points to the connection between a Christian life style and a well-defined and positive notion of identity. The well-known neologism of the previous Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu that South-Africa is a "rainbow nation" can also be mentioned in this regard. Giving a positive identity "spin" on the multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious context has helped people to relate more ethically and morally to processes like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, as well as the big project of "nation-building."

From Germany we find examples such as the article by Honecker (1995), who investigates the tension-filled relationship between national (German) identity and theological responsibility. He is of the opinion that the question pertaining to nation and nationalism is still taboo in theological ethics in Germany (Honecker 1995:83-84). After an excellent tour through the history of concepts such as "Volk" and "Nation" in German history, and also in

the history of theology during the 20th century, he draws a few conclusions. One point brings out the connection between identity and ethics:

> Volk, Nation, Vaterland sind nicht exklusiv, im Sinn von Ausschließlichkeit, zu betrachten, sondern immer in Beziehung zum universalen Anspruch von Ethik zu sehen. Nationale Identität ist deshalb allein als 'offene' Identität legitim, in welcher die Selbstunterscheidung nationaler Zugehörigkeit nicht zur Abschließung gegen andere Völker und Nationen, zur Xenophobie mißbraucht werden darf (Honecker 1995:99).

Frey (1988) puts the function of identity in ethics in a theoretical frame. He traces the development of ethics and notes the influence of Gadamer and hermeneutics on Protestant ethics (Frey 1988:63-64). He also refers to the responsibility ethics of, for example, Bonhoeffer and then pleads for a focus on identity:

> The basic question of ethics is not only 'What should we do?' but 'Who are we? (the question of identity), 'What is our common world?' and 'From what perspective shall we arrive at a common future?' (Frey 1988:67).

In the following section I will summarise and integrate what we have uncovered thus far into a working model of ethics for reading Nahum and the OCN theologically-ethically.

2.5 A theological ethics of responsibility, identity and liberation

The time of searching for one fundamental theory of ethics is over. What is needed, especially when we come to such a question as judgement oracles against another group, is a responsible eclectic approach. In this we already have an example in the OT where the diversity of material and the complexity of the different ethical stances lead us to a type of "occasional ethics." Gottwald (1996:148) makes this same point when he refers to the occasional character of prophetic speech "addressed to specific situations and audiences." Biblical material and the historical and socio-political situation should be integrated, and a life-giving unlocking instrument found to interpret what we have before us. The "occasion" in the text and the modern question we are trying to address should also "fit" to some or other degree.

Maybe we could call it a type of neo-typology, as Walter Brueggemann's ethical work has been called.

We have seen how the deontological and perfectionist OT ethical models probably are not helpful in the case of the OCN and Nahum, and that we have to search more in the direction of a teleological model which is built on natural law, like that of Barton. As a foreign nation is being addressed, we cannot assume that they are judged on the grounds of any deontological Israelite internal laws of Yahweh. To judge a foreign nation there must be some "international" law which addresses what is ethically accepted across the ancient Near East. This includes the way warfare is to be conducted and the humane treatment of invaded populations[154].

In the case of the OT this natural law is still present in the background, but we encounter it in a redactional and theologised form in the OCN. It could serve as a very general reference to what we today call human rights (individuals and groups), documents like the Geneva Convention or even the UN as symbol of what is thought to be just and ethical in the international arena. Without pushing it too far, we could see Yahweh functioning in the same way as the UN. What Yahweh stands for is a symbol of what is right, just, life-giving, non-oppressive and humane. This point, of course, needs a nuanced discussion. This will follow below.

We have also seen how identity – and specifically social identity – is crucial for the ethics and ethos of a group. The way groups act on their perceived social identity as a group is a factor that must be taken into account when it comes to understanding the construction of social identity in the OCN. In ancient Israel this is closely aligned with the identity of Yahweh. This is especially true in the exilic/post-exilic time when Israel had to shape its situation-conditioned theology "in the light of the depressing political changes, the new social structures and an ambivalent experience of history" (Gerstenberger 2002:224).

In our post-Holocaust (and in South Africa post-apartheid) world Levinas's urge to take responsibility for the other should be considered very seriously. Since the care of the other (to be my brother's keeper), especially the care of the weak and oppressed, is such a strong theme

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[154] Barton (1980:51-61) has a whole appendix which discusses "International law in the ancient near East," including an additional note about the Hittite rules of war.

251

in the OT, this should also inform our ethical reading of Nahum. It generates many questions as we try and make responsible sense of words that are filled with violence, tit-for-tat thinking, political satire and deadly irony that constitute the book of Nahum. Still, we have to respond ethically also to the text of Nahum as "other" in whose "face" we feel the longing to care for – to comfort (Nahum!) the oppressed (and perhaps that includes the Ninevites who "drain" out of the city like water – Na 2:9a).

There is still one "post" that I want to erect and that is the focus on *liberation*. Throughout the study we have seen how ideology plays such an important role in the text. This includes not only political, economic and religious struggles for power or survival, but also the struggle for freedom of violence and gendered metaphors of horror. Wessels (1998:627) makes us sensitive to the possible misinterpretation of Nahum in that it could serve as "a means of justification for violence in the name of Yahweh." He notes the importance of ideological critical appropriation for one's own context, that is, "[c]ritical understanding of one's own ideological inclination, critical assessment of one's own context and the ideological-critical reading of the text" (Wessels 1998:627; cf. also Gottwald 1996:148-149).

This point is also made by Brett (1996:20), who notes that in interpreting ethnicity "[i]t is ethically important to take asymmetries of power in account" and that even "[d]ominated communities are not entirely free of ethical constraints." If it weren't for the liberation theologians like Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu, to name but two, who challenged the theological ethics and ethos of the theologically-ethically undergirded policy of apartheid, who knows where South Africa would have been today as a country! A text and the reading of a text should set free, reconcile and bring peace (Na 2:1a).

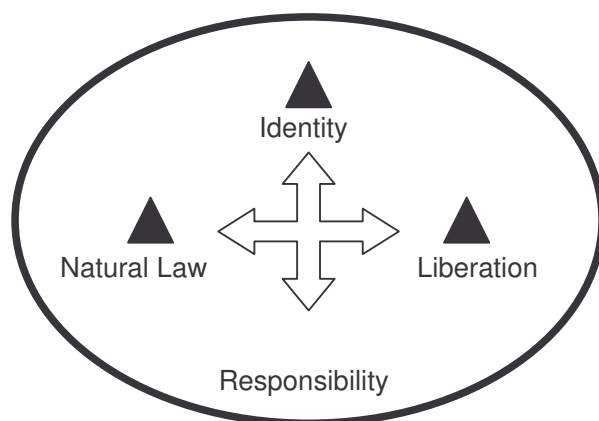The model described above can be graphically portrayed in the following diagram:

Figure 3: Theological-ethical model for interpreting Nahum and the OCN

Note that "Responsibility" does not form a separate node or "post", but is represented by the surrounding oval shape. This indicates the overarching and all-encompassing importance of responsibility that surrounds and informs all our ethical thinking.

3. The theological ethics of Nahum

How should we deal ethically with a text like Nahum? We could follow Davies (1995) or Clines (1995) in resisting the ethics of the Hebrew Bible where it leads to oppression and exclusiveness. Davies (1995:165) sees the OT as not "much of a resource for ethics" because of its commands character from an authority figure. This represents (especially in the prophets) a "totalitarian system in which individual will and freedom exist only to be sacrificed to the supreme authority of someone's deity" and this should be resisted by the critical biblical scholar (Davies 1995:172-173). Cline's (1995:244-268) ideological critical reading of Psalm 2 and the "Moabite Liberation Front") leads him to the same kind of ethical resistance to the text. According to him, "Israel is very happy to have been liberated itself," but "does not want anyone else to be liberated" in Psalm 2 (Clines 1995:269). The text is an "act of bad faith, an attempt to deceive itself about the nature of reality" (Clines 1995:269).

We could, however, also try and read Nahum as an OCN in its historical context, and with the "grid" or model "designed" above. This means first of all to read honestly and to face the

violence in the text head-on. It also means that we must search out the liberating and identity-enhancing elements of the text. We should take the text as a whole seriously. This should prompt us to take responsibility for the situations that we face as individuals and groups in our own world.

I will now firstly discuss the theological ethics in Nahum and thereafter the theological ethics of the "use" or interpretation of Nahum, although these two aspects are ultimately connected.

3.1 Theological ethics in Nahum

Bearing in mind that the preceding exegesis (Chapters 5 and 6) focused on the construction of social identity with a sensitivity to the ideology inherent in the text and the way the text is used, I want to highlight the most important theological-ethical points from the Book of Nahum in terms of natural law, identity, liberation and responsibility.

3.1.1 "Natural law"

Although the sins of Assyria/Nineveh are not spelled out as precisely as in Amos 1:3-2:5 (cf. Barton 1980), we can infer from the text that the nature of the transgression(s) are the same. It is rooted in the "natural law" or universal ancient Near Eastern laws of humanity. The theological-ethical stance in Nahum is against Assyria's pride and the fact that the Assyrians have broken out of the ordered world of Yahweh (to theologise the underlying source of ethics). This is summarized in Nahum with the word "evil" (Na 3:19).

The Assyrians are held responsible for political excesses. This can be seen in the idea that they are "plotting evil" against Yahweh (Na 1:9), and is vividly described in the image of the "whore and mistress of sorceries" (Na 3:4), who through treacherous diplomatic lying and oppression built one of the biggest and most oppressive empires of that time.

They are also judged on their economic excesses. We hear (through a commentator) of the gold and silver, the endless treasure and things of desire (Na 2:10) which were hoarded by the Assyrians. We are also metaphorically reminded that the elements of the bureaucratic

machine (merchants, officials, marshals – Na 3:16-17) are more than the stars of heaven - an image that shows the intense greed and wickedness of the Assyrians' dealings with the small vassal state of Judah.

Most important are the military transgressions. We hear of the mighty and brutal Assyrian army (1:12a), which is symbolised in the yoke with its chains that rest on the populations of all its submissive subjects (Na 1:13). We hear the Assyrian king (or any wicked and useless king in history), Belial, "passing through" (Na 2:1b) or "passing over" (Na 3:19) nations and kingdoms with his wickedness and evil, an expression that expresses the crushing movement of the Assyrian war machine over countries, districts and cities. This is metaphorically portrayed even more graphically by the extended metaphor of the Assyrian king as a lion who "tears and strangles prey" and who "fills his den with torn flesh" (Na 2:12-13), the flesh of his enemies. The natural law in terms of warfare was broken. This is described in the term "city of bloodshed" (Na 3:1). In all the imagery that is used to describe how an attacking army will eventually defeat Assyria (Na 2:2-11; 3:2-3,11-15), the effect of ironic reversal implies that what is described there is how Assyria went about attacking its enemies. The descriptions are violent and horrific to the extreme and point to the transgressions of Assyria: "void, waste and devastation" (Na 2:11), "heaps of corpses" (Na 3:3b), "the sword will cut you down" (Na 3:15a).

On a critical level it can be remarked that Nahum uses the same language as the oppressor, as well as the same images as in the royal propaganda in the Assyrian palace reliefs, to describe in *taliones* fashion the tit-for-tat punishment that will be meted out to the transgressor. This criticism will form part of most of the ethical remarks below. Can one use violence to stem violence? Although one could argue that most of the violence is described in (the best) poetic language to indicate that it served as poetic justice against the oppressor and as comfort (Nahum) to their own group, violence (always) begets violence. If misinterpreted, Nahum could be used to legitimize excessive violence in the name of God or religion.

3.1.2 Social identity

Four things pertaining to identity are very important and influence our reading of ethics in Nahum. The first is that the judgment oracle against Nineveh was not meant for Assyria; it

was written for Israel's ears and eyes! It is speaking to the in-group *about* the hostile out-group, and not *to* the hostile out-group. As indicated in the previous section, what we see is therefore literature drawn from the faith traditions that means to comfort and to give hope, and to serve as poetic justice. Although (as Brett remarked) even small oppressed groups do not have the ethical high ground *per se*, it could be argued that this type of response, this way of constructing their own social identity in times of crisis (Assyrian oppression) and fragmentation (Babylonian exile) is ethical.

The second is that, contrary to many cursory readings of Nahum, the Book of Nahum does not build on, or use ethnic identity, to gain the moral high ground. One could argue that there is some form of nationalistic sentiment, especially in the exilic/post-exilic verse in Nahum 2:1, where Judah is promised liberation. But even this is seen in another light when we take the historical situation that led to this manner of identity construction into account. Stegemann (1992:114-125) has pointed out how Israel, throughout its history, maintained a xenologic identity and should not be measured in the same way as other Western states according to their compulsion towards bipolar identity construction.

The third factor lies in the "self-critical ethnocentrism" (to use Sternberg's terms) of the text of Nahum. We have seen how even in the pre-exilic parts of Nahum that are supposedly vehement hate speech against Israel's archenemy, we find a strange undercurrent of self-criticism. This came to the fore in the ambiguous nature of much of the text. So much so that in the very "clear judgement" in Nahum 1:9-14 there shimmers a recognition of their own transgressions of the past. The same can be said of the ambiguous nature of the salvation report in Nahum 2:3, where the grammar implies a destructive and negative possibility together with the liberatory "first" sense of the text. I think this is probably the most important theological-ethical gem in Nahum. When you speak, and especially when you curse or judge, always beware that there are "three fingers pointing back at you." I believe this flows from the ideopoetic nature of the biblical texts and that this element is what makes them sacred scripture. Even the "worst" texts of punishment on the "worst" of enemies contain, hidden in the grammar and the flow of traditions, a self-critical or reprimanding undercurrent of meaning. We would not have been able to see this without the help of SIT and SCT and the focus on the underlying dynamic of the process of identity construction.

256

The fourth factor is the identification of the in-group Judah with their deity Yahweh, who serves as ultimate prototypical example of the in-group and as centre of the main group beliefs: Yahweh is one and a Warrior (pre-exilic)/Yahweh is Judge and Lord of creation and history (exilic/post-exilic). We have seen how powerfully the half-acrostic alphabetical Yahweh-hymn (Na 1:2-8) functions to give a universalised theological undergirding for the oracle against Nineveh. This exilic/post-exilic hymn underlines the non-ethnic dynamic of identity construction in that it focuses on the deity as symbol of the in-group's plight and call to liberation.

It should also be added that, as we have seen, the "jealous", "vengeful" and "grudging" (Na 1:2) characteristics which are ascribed to Yahweh, are not to be seen from our modern understanding of them as unethical. They are concepts expressing Yahweh's justice and righteousness, and that he will come to the aid of those who suffer, because he is slow to anger but great in power (Na 1:3). On top of that the ambiguous nature of the acrostic that is broken and only halfway completed also shows us the plight of the redactors of the Book of Nahum (or even the Book of the Twelve) in that they express their sense of fragmentation and their foreignness. That which is cried out liturgically in the form of a hymn is actually for the moment only hope.

The point is that as we look into the "face" of the "other" as mediated through this text, albeit a violent text, a longing grows in us to respond to the needs of the Yahweh community which are expressed so horrifically beautifully in this vision of liberation. We sense their fear, their horror, their loss of identity and their infinite experience of *il y a* and foreignness, and we have to respond with care. That care can include directions towards more just and ethical expression.

That is indeed what should be criticized in Nahum in terms of identity in a theological-ethical manner. Even though it can be understood in terms of the social context of ancient times, the use of dehumanising feminine metaphors cannot be ethically accepted and should be resisted. The image and symbolism of women who are raped (symbol of military victory – Na 2:8; 3:13) or a prostitute who is publicly exposed and humiliated (3:5-6) can never form part of an ethical reading of Nahum, except when it serves as a negative example. As argued in the discussion of these metaphors in Chapters 5 and 6, we should honestly face those who suffer

257

under these metaphors. We must resist these brutal images and reach out in care towards those who suffer. In this way we respond ethically to the "other."

3.1.3 Liberation

Nahum is filled with the positive ethic of liberation. The lifting of the yoke and the snapping of the chains (Na 1:13) are expressions of the liberation or salvation of Judah from the oppression of the Assyrians (and all other evil powers or empires after the Assyrians). A more liberating image than the one of the messenger who comes over the mountains to announce the good news of "peace" (Na 2:1), with all the liberating goodness and harmony that it implies, can hardly be found anywhere else. Although violent, the way the attacking army is identified with Yahweh himself constructs Yahweh's identity as a liberating warrior-God, who humbles his own people when necessary (Na 1:12), but who also responds to their cries by coming in power.

In this sense Nahum can indeed be read as resistance poetry or struggle literature, and would be understood and welcomed by people who are experiencing the same kind of tyranny or subjugation as Israel (cf. Wessels above).

The same criticism as in the section on natural law can be brought in here. By using the same ideology as their persecutors, and in a sense buying into the oppressive system of domination, the chances are that it will remain part of their ethical make-up as a group. As has been mentioned before, there is the danger that readers of Nahum could misinterpret the ideological language of power and might as "correct" language to build their own social identity. This kind of identification with the metaphors, concepts and language of the oppressor can be very dangerous. It can even be that majority groups and ruling groups construct their own identity along these lines and in this manner, and so "morally" claim that their group beliefs are ethical - even if they themselves are the oppressors. Examples of this unfortunate dynamic abide in recent history, for example the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, or the incomparably bloody rampage of the Hutu extremist *interahamwe* against the minority Tutsis in Rwanda (Hardin 2001:7169).

258

3.1.4 Responsibility

Responsibility, in the sense that Levinas means, is also present in Nahum, albeit in a very nuanced way.

The theophanic hymn that expresses Yahweh's coming against the powers of chaos reminds one of Levinas's own use of creation language and traditions to ethically counter the chaotic experience of *il y a* or the "there is"-ness of crises like the Holocaust. In an autobiographical description of his work, *Signature*, Levinas writes: "This disparate inventory is a biography. It is dominated by the presentiment and memory of the Nazi horror" and to that Hennessy (2003:52) adds: "It is this horror that rumbles through the night and fog of the *il y a*. Levinas speaks of creation in order to address this horror."

It is worthwhile mentioning the quotation in Nahum 2:1 from the Deutero-Isaianic text (Is 52:7) about the coming salvation of Judah. If it is true that the exilic/post-exilic redaction of Nahum that added these salvific words came from the so-called Deutero-Isaiah group in the Exile, can we not entertain the thought that they meant that more of their own tradition and theology should be integrated into the reading and understanding of Nahum? When Jesus quotes one verse of Psalm 22 on the cross, it shows us his embeddedness in the whole of Jewish tradition and piety. Could not, in the same manner, the quotation of Isaiah 52:7 show us something of the rest of the Deutero-Isaiah theology that should be understood as rumbling beneath the surface of the text?

What I am aiming at is the so-called "Suffering Servant" songs that we find in Deutero-Isaiah. The identity of the "Servant" aside, these songs point rather literally to the type of responsibility that Levinas was trying to communicate in his ethics. Compare the remarks of Hennessy (2003:51):

> Second-Isaiah situates the present time of suffering within the greater context of God's creation while acknowledging the silence of God during the time of devastation: 'Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour' (45:15). After declaring God's forgiveness to the people of Israel, Second Isaiah then speaks of Israel's redemptive ministry to the world: 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as the light to the nations, that my

259

salvation may reach to the ends of the earth' (49:6). Through this servant God will be glorified, as the servant suffers for us.

This "suffering for" that Levinas calls diacony is for him expressed in Isaiah 53, where the suffering servant of God symbolizes responsibility (Pauw 1999:28).

In line with this (hidden) presence of responsibility is the fact that Nahum does not only write on behalf of his own group, Israel/Judah. As we have seen in the exegesis, the cry for liberation and the hope for the downfall of the wicked city, Nineveh, are not expressed in isolation from the surrounding nations or states that were equally suffering under Assyrian tyranny. Nahum 2:14b indicates that Nahum knew that Assyria's "tearing" was experienced across the "earth." Nahum 3:4 includes other "nations" and "families/clans" when describing the prostituting and bewitching character of Assyria's political dealings. In the same way "nations" as well as "kingdoms" will be present when Nineveh gets her due punishment (Na 3:5) and in the end "all" (definitely not only Judah) who hear of Assyria's destruction will clap hands.

In this way Nahum serves all the oppressed nations of the earth in the time of Assyria, as well as in other times of war, tyranny, holocaust and the vicious striving for weapons of mass destruction. In the destitute face of the other groups and nations, Nahum fulfils the role of the suffering servant who raises his/her lament and cry of horror, so that Yahweh may hear and liberate, and the people may be comforted.

Ethical critique should however not be kept silent. We have seen the dehumanising dynamic of social identity construction at work in Nahum. The stereotyping of the enemy, the name-calling, the killing, the raping and the public humiliation of a woman-figure are all symptoms of the totalising objectification of the "other" that Levinas warns and writes against. We should realise that it is unethical to respond from a situation of *il y a* or chaos, and in the process create or poetically wish for *il y a* for the other. Here one must be radical and state that this should be true, even if the other is your archenemy and symbol number one of evil incarnate. This is, of course, easier said than done and it is at this point that Levinas's ethics of responsibility stumbles against the practical and harsh side of reality. How does one curse without turning away from the face of the other? How does one plead for justice without totalizing or objectifying the enemy as other?

This question can be observed at first hand in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where victims and perpetrators had to "face" each "other" in the unfolding of the dark truth that lay behind the lives and stories of our country. That it is possible to accuse and point out the perpetrations of the other without objectifying or dehumanising the other was shown time and again by the "servant-victims" of apartheid, who for the greater good of reconciliation and a future without oppression and struggle, "suffered" the unbelievably difficult process of telling their stories of human rights violations and were willing to forgive those that trespassed against them.

3.2 Theological ethics in the "use" of Nahum

The way Nahum is used is very enlightening and says something of the way groups identify with the contours of social identity in Nahum. In the reception of Nahum we have seen that most of the groups that "reinterpret" or "interpret" or "use" Nahum do so by reading with the grain of the text rather than against it. Therefore the in-group (be it Essenes, Jews in Maccabean revolutionary time or Protestant Reformers like Luther) identify with Nahum's in-group, Judah, and identify their political, religious or economic opponents with Nahum's out-group, Nineveh.

This presents a bit of a challenge, because it implies that the underlying dynamic of social identity construction that we have identified throughout Nahum does not "automatically" lead to the same kind of identity construction when read or interpreted. This could be for three reasons. (1) Groups read the text and are ethically formed in the process of identification with the underlying self-critical current of social identity, but choose not to acknowledge the fact and so resist the force of the rhetoric. (2) Readers or interpreters usually read the text using exclusive methods and so are not able to uncover the ambiguity and nuanced undercurrents of responsible and liberating meaning. (3) What this study suggests is that the way in which Nahum functions is not such a strong factor as the way the text functions when read by "real" people in the "real" world. If point 3 is true, then it would be a sad day for hermeneutics and the text's urge to be read and reread in the hope of uncovering a long lost treasure.

261

How to "use" Nahum ethically flows from the ethics in Nahum that we have already identified.

3.2.1 "Natural law"

What ancient Israel thought of as the ethos of Yahweh, their deity, could very carefully be translated into our world as a type of bill of human rights. This theologised neo-typology has many dangers, of course, but if one considers the possibilities for understanding Nahum, it is worth the risk.

Nahum could then be used very ethically to criticise and give voice to groups or nations who suffer under political, economic, military or religious oppression. The "natural law" types of transgressions that serve as the moral source from which Nahum prophesies punishment on wickedness and evil could be seen as our Geneva Convention or the Universal Bill of Human Rights or fair trade agreements or all types of agencies that search for interreligious dialogue and peace.

Groups who imitate not just the rhetoric of Nahum, but also the violence itself, show how it should not be used. These are groups who, by using the book to legitimise their own violence, are in fact doing exactly the same to the people they are opposing or trying to get rid of. Using Nahum as a form of resistance poetry or struggle literature, in the sense of advocating poetic justice, or even justified armed revolution, is one thing. Using Nahum to incite and condone violence in the name of God or the group (especially if the group is the one in power!) is ethically not acceptable and should be resisted.

3.2.2 Identity

The idea of identification has an important relevance for reading Nahum, as we have seen from the examples of the reception of Nahum in Chapter 6, Section 5. Can we use Nahum as a resource for identification? Two scholars from India, Thanzauva and Hnuni, argue that "the Bible does have resources for indigenous people, depending on how readers construct their identification with social groups in biblical stories. They tend to read 'with the grain' of the

262

biblical texts" (Brett 1996:21). The Bible could also be read against the grain, for example, from the view of the Philistines. This is not so easy though. Reading the biblical narratives which were written *against* the indigenous people of Canaan, for example, as a Palestinian or American Indian generates many questions. One can ask: "How is it possible for Palestinians and Indians, who have experienced the violent consequences of being read 'intratextually' as Canaanites, to turn around and read themselves in some kind of continuity with 'Israelites'?" (Brett 1996:21).

Although the violent entry into Canaan should be read from a slightly different perspective than Nahum, there are similarities that urge one to ask the same for Nahum. What if I were an Assyrian stumbling upon this text of death? What about the innocent sufferers in Nineveh, who were drained away by the terrible onslaught of the attacking army? What about the innocent women and children (and in Jonah even the animals) who are part of this great drama of crisis and conflict?

When confronted with these questions, it becomes apparent that a process of universalising is needed before applying the text ethically. Although it is difficult, it should be made clear that Israel/Judah/Yahweh are symbols of the oppressed and that Nineveh/Assyria are symbols of the oppressor. In this way it could be that Assyrians can take up this same text and lament their oppression by the Israelites and address it to Yahweh. Is this not what happens in Jonah, where the Assyrians are liberated from their own sin and saved, while Jonah is the one who goes against Yahweh's character of mercy? First he flees from his deity's identity and then he wants to see (ethnocentric) judgment being passed on the archenemy! The juxtaposition of Nahum in the Book of the Twelve, together with books like Jonah, does indeed point us in this direction. Even Nahum should be a book that can be a blessing to (all) the nations!

3.2.3 Liberation

Nahum is indeed first and foremost a liberatory book. As we have seen, it can serve as an excellent form of poetic resistance by "giving voice" to the struggles and fears and curses of so many people on this earth who suffer under some kind of oppression and tyranny. One should always read and interpret in an ideological-critical manner and remain aware of one's own ideology and vested interests in oppressive power-relations.

3.2.4 Responsibility

To use Nahum ethically and therefore responsibly is to first and foremost use this text as a response of the self to comfort the suffering others in their need. The faces of these others can be seen every night on the news and on the Internet. Nobody can escape the longing that those faces invoke. Nobody can side-step the message of Nahum in a world such as the one we live in. Sometimes it is ethically responsible to face a hostile other and to liberate him/her from the web of wickedness or from the chaos of the *il y a* by announcing an oracle of doom or a vision of punishment.

4. Summary and conclusions

It has been remarked that Nahum is often seen as a very nationalistic book and that its underlying ethic is ethnocentric and exclusive. Through the investigation of Nahum on terms of SIT and SCT, we have seen that a more nuanced picture emerges. Apart from the justness of the cry for liberation from oppression that the Book of Nahum mediates, it also contains an underlying dynamic that is not ethnocentric or nationalistic, but indeed self-critical and ambiguous. To find something like this in one of the most violent books of the Bible is very surprising. The multidimensional reading of Nahum has opened up avenues of interpretation that make a theological-ethical reading of Nahum possible and necessary. This "ugly duckling" of Jewish and Christian faith has more liberating possibilities than is usually recognized.

We have seen how a theological-ethical model that views Nahum and the OCN in terms of their ancient Near Eastern background of theologized "natural law" can help us to integrate the ethics in Nahum into our current dilemmas. The sins of Assyria can be linked analogically to a modern understanding of human rights. The importance of identification with the social identity in Nahum was also shown to be ethically viable, as long as the dehumanizing and violent aspects of this ancient society are seen against their ancient background and theologically-ethically resisted in our application of them. The paradoxical presence of a self-

and even ethnocritical dynamic of social identity construction is the most surprising and also most valuable part of the ethics in Nahum.

Nahum can fruitfully be "used" as resistance literature against the dark forces of oppression. The liberatory poetry functions to bring about a vision of justice, and creates a hopeful vision of comfort and peace for those over whom evil is continually flowing.

In all of this the responsibility of the self to respond to the face of the other should take precedence, and inform and infuse all the other aspects of ethics in Nahum. Being ethical means to use the text of Nahum responsibly and that implies using it very carefully. The importance to always ask ideological-critical questions of the text as well as of the self cannot be stressed enough.

There is a theological ethic in Nahum that can be discovered and should be heard as a voice in the pressing modern questions of escalating violence between groups, nations and religions. The process of discovery is also a struggle, but one that is worthwhile in the end and that will hopefully contribute towards more people hearing the feet of the messenger on the mountains who brings the good news of peace.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

1. Introduction

This study has embarked on a journey that has incorporated many different theoretical threads. Although the separate threads have to a certain extent been tied together in the different chapters, the overarching themes and how they can be integrated into the study as a whole still need to be summarized and the results of the research shown. To do this meaningfully, we will follow the movement of problem and hypothesis as indicated in Chapter 2. A description will be given of the research done and subsequently the results will be shown. The chapter ends with ideas and themes for possible future research.

2. What was the problem?

The theological-ethical reality of global intergroup conflict was shown to be a question that needs urgent theological attention. The choice of focusing on this problem was born from my South African context and social identity as being a white, male Afrikaner Christian. Our history of apartheid and our present need for an ethos of peace and reconciliation between the groups and cultures in our vulnerable democratic society prompted a theological-ethical response.

This being an Old Testament study, the prophetic Oracles Concerning the Nations were identified as appropriate avenues of research into the problem of intergroup conflict. The Book of Nahum was chosen as an excellent example of this type of literature. Because the OCN and Nahum have so often been interpreted as nationalistic, ethnocentric and xenophobic in the extreme, they provided a good test-case for a theological-ethical study of among others oppression and violence in the OT.

It was decided to investigate the problem of intergroup ethics in terms of how identity in ancient Israel was constructed in their literature (specifically the OCN). The most useful concept for this process was the notion of social identity, a very specific concept that focuses on the construction of identity by groups in their interaction with other groups.

The problem statement with regards to social identity in the OCN texts in general and Nahum in particular was formulated as follows:

> *Does a one-dimensional and uncritical reading of the Book of Nahum, an Oracles Concerning the Nations text, lead to a destructive theological-ethical dynamic of social identity construction? Is the social identity constructed in Nahum ethnocentric and exclusivist? Does the underlying theological-ethical dynamic of social identity foster, among other things, extreme nationalism and xenophobia?*

A hypothesis was then suggested:

> *A multidimensional ideological-critical reading of the Book of Nahum, an Oracles Concerning the Nations text, is a better approach. This approach includes a description of the underlying processes of social identity construction. A nuanced description of social identity in Nahum points away from ethnocentrism and exclusiveness. A theological-ethically sound appropriation of the described processes fosters a dynamic of social identity construction that is responsible and liberatory.*

3. What strategy has been used to study the problem anew?

As indicated in the hypothesis above, a less exclusive and more critical reading strategy was suggested. This reading strategy is built on three dimensions.

The first dimension has already been discussed. The social location and context of the interpreter must be pertinently taken into account in the investigation of these ancient texts. It was shown to be a scientific fallacy that a researcher stands objectively on the outside or to the side of the question that is being researched. It can be argued that the researcher's context and history generate sensitivities that can lead to new and enriching questions and insights with regards to the OT texts.

The second dimension is an epistemology that combines critical realism with a post-modern sensitivity to ambiguity and paradox. The need for a clear methodology and theoretical instruments for studying Nahum as OCN was noted. Critical realism's ability to incorporate the mediated reality of the text, the reality of the reader and the importance of the dynamic interplay between the two was incorporated. Toulmin's critique of the "false start" of modernism provides "elbow room" for a more humanized science and a balance between the hope for certainty in theory but uncertainty in practice. In this way diversity and adaptability are served and encouraged.

The third dimension is the most important. A multidimensional methodology was put forward that counters a one-dimensional and exclusivist reading of biblical texts. This methodology should not be seen as eclectic, but as an intuitive response to the biblical texts themselves. The multi-layered, polysemic and complex nature of OT texts in general and the OCN texts in particular asks for a responsible reading strategy that advances a rich and thick interpretation. The multidimensional reading strategy of this study had four main aspects:

(1) The texts were read both synchronically and diachronically. That means that the texts were not only interpreted synchronically on the level of the final form of the text, but synchronically on each of their diachronically developed redactional levels;

(2) Theories from the social science discipline of social psychology were incorporated into the exegesis. Social identity theory and social-categorization theory were described and five working premises for social identity and intergroup behaviour were formulated. The main attraction of this approach is that it provides a scientific instrument with which to describe the underlying dynamic of social identity construction. Because of the theories' universalizing tendency, they were used to investigate the social identity of ancient Israelite society, but care was taken to recognize the influence that different historical and socio-cultural contexts can have on the results;

(3) Ideology criticism formed a supplementary but crucial part of the methodology. Texts are full of ideologies of different kinds and, when misinterpreted, can lead to violent identification with and unethical application of the text. Therefore, one has to be critically aware of the ideologies in the text as well as one's own ideologies as reader of the text. In some cases the oppressive ideology of a text needs to be resisted in favour of a more liberating ethic;

(4) Throughout the study the initial theological-ethical nature of the study was kept in mind. The multidimensional reading of Nahum as OCN text, focusing on the construction of

social identity and with an ideological-critical interpretative "catch-net" was undertaken, with the aim to say something theological-ethical. A positive contribution to OT theological ethics was deemed a critical part of this study.

4. What are the main conclusions of the study?

Generally speaking the hypothesis was proven to be correct, although only partly. A multidimensional reading of the social identity in Nahum did lead to the formulation of a more inclusivist and tolerant theological ethic. This ethic has been described in Chapter 7 as one that incorporates "natural law", the importance of understanding how identity functions in ethics and one that is liberatory and responsible. It flows from an underlying self-critical dynamic that functions ambiguously and creates a paradoxical juxtaposition between the right to judge the other and the realisation that one could also be judged oneself. It is also seen in the lack of an ethnic identity construction in the text. Moreover the identity of Yahweh as righteous Judge and Creator forms a universal basis for the judgment of the other.

This hypothesis is only partly correct, though, for the study also uncovered unethical aspects of Nahum that should ideological-critically be resisted. This includes the use of Nahum to legitimize oppressive violence as well as the use of dehumanizing metaphors that degrade and totalize women. It should also be said that after a cursory overview of the reception of Nahum, it seems that this liberating and responsible theological-ethic that was discovered does not function "automatically." The appropriation of this positive and peace-producing ethic is dependent on a complex and ideological-critical process of integration. This, of course, acknowledges the freedom of the biblical text as witness of the elusive Presence. Any theory and hope for certainty is subverted and eludes finality when it comes to the text of the OT.

More *specific* conclusions or implications for a number of issues include: OT methodology, Nahum studies, the OCN and OT ethics.

- In the methodological turmoil of the discipline of OT studies, this research has hopefully contributed to calming the waters. The multidimensional perspective has shown that it is possible to bring new insights to old questions and texts. Sensitivity to context and ideology has proved to uncover issues that are crucial for the appropriation of the OT into modern-day questions. The incorporation of social science methods (SIT and SCT) has shown that, although there are pitfalls, their inclusion is needed for studying an issue in the OT that has a social basis. The concept of social identity and how it is constructed provided insights into the ancient texts that probably would not have emerged with traditional exegetical methodologies. The time for settling for only one exclusive methodology is over. The richness of the results when looking at a text from multiple angles speaks for itself. The challenge will always be how to incorporate new or interdisciplinary methodologies without losing the insights provided by centuries of historical-critical research. That this is possible has been shown in this study.
- Nahum research has gained an example of multidimensional exegesis in its widest sense. The issues of identity, ideology and ethics in Nahum have been investigated in the past, but here they are combined creatively and lead to interesting new results. *First* of all, a theological-ethical interpretation of Nahum has never been undertaken to this depth. Many researchers have already hinted at some ethical issues, but here this approach was developed for the first time to my knowledge. *Secondly*, a closer description of how Nahum could be read in the exilic/post-exilic time has, to my knowledge, not been attempted. The connection with the Yahweh-Alone movement (pre-exilic) and the Deutero-Isaiah group (exilic/post-exilic) brings new interpretation possibilities. *Thirdly*, using Nahum as explicit text to investigate the way in which social identity functions in ancient texts is also a new direction. To my knowledge, SIT and SCT have never been used in reading biblical texts. This study therefore forms a type of prolegomena which can serve as basis for other researchers who want to study broader social issues in biblical texts.
- Another contribution of the study lies in what has been uncovered regarding the development of monotheism. Although the Book of Nahum provides only a small crack, it does let in some light on this issue. The struggle for a monotheistic understanding of Yahwism started in the 8th century BCE and is reflected in the intergroup dynamics found in revolutionary texts like Nahum. Nahum shows us how specific historical circumstances,

270

especially the way groups like the Yahweh-Alone movement and Deutero-Isaiah group functioned, gave impetus to the strengthening of theological ideas. Reading Nahum as a book that developed across the divide of the Exile (587 BCE) gives us some indication of how the battle for faith in one exclusive Yahweh was won. This did not happen overnight, but hardened and matured through the chaos of many centuries of oppression, war and deportation. This knowledge makes us read and appreciate an (uncomfortable) book like Nahum with new humility and as an important part of the OT.

▪ All that was said to be gained in Nahum research could also be said for OCN studies. Although the theological-ethical implications of the OCN have been explicated by a number of scholars, the combination of strategies in approaching this strange corpus of texts is hopefully a worthwhile step in a new direction. It may be especially useful to investigate in other OCN texts the ambiguity and self-critical paradox that lie under the surface of the text in Nahum's case . The development of a theological-ethical model with which to meaningfully integrate texts such as these is a strong point. Reading an OCN text from an ethical angle brought these texts into a more "palatable" environment, where not only the technical aspects of these liturgically "forgotten" texts are put on the table, but also their very important role in discussions of especially intergroup relationships.

▪ Keeping the whole study together with the "cement" of theological-ethics could perhaps be perceived as trying to do too much in one study. However, it proved not to overburden the investigation and the reading of the text. The theological-ethical results are positive and life-giving and do, I think, help us to appropriate OT texts ethically in a modern/post-modern interpretative context. Especially the incorporation of the responsibility ethics of Emanuel Levinas has pointed towards a very important avenue for biblical studies in general and OT ethics in particular. The idea of the other (even the ultimate terrible other) co-constituting one's self has many applications not just for reading an ancient text, but also for our own situations of enmity and mistrust between groups[155]. Liberation ethics have also been served by confirming the need for an ethic against oppression and violence, but also by incorporating the ideologically-critical perspective that in the struggle for freedom one should not in the process become the oppressor (even if it is "just" with language).

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[155] This reminds us of what someone said about apartheid in South Africa. That the biggest problem was not that groups were each others' enemies, but that they were strangers. Enemies at least know one another intimately, while strangers have no contact with or cognisance of the other.

- The theological-ethical model provides us with an instrument to ethically unlock difficult texts, but also to help us think about our own modern/post-modern world. Around the world, and especially in South Africa, the need for an ethos of tolerance and reconciliation within multicultural and multi-religious societies is great. This study provides avenues of theological ethical reflection that do not just idealise diversity, but which take the ideological and material realities of possible power misbalances into consideration. It promotes peace that is also just. It calls for reconciliation that is also "real" in terms of living in a country that has so much to offer all her citizens, but at the moment only does so very selectively.

The study has hopefully shed some light on a topic and biblical book that is not a "favourite" among biblical scholars. Although dealing with a violent book is hard and raises more questions than answers, working through the process is a worthwhile experience. One feels "read by the text" and new dimensions of the human situation have opened up. Especially the plight of so many people and groups and nations that are suffering under terrible conflicts of ethnicity, politics or religion has moved into the centre of theological reflection. South Africa's own history of enforced separation and the damage that has been done (and which still has a destructive effect in our society) is also present in a study such as this.

It is my hope that the results of this study will not only find theoretical application, but that they will also contribute theological-ethical possibilities in "real-life" situations of conflict and oppression.

5. Themes for further research

- Methodologically, the application of SIT and SCT to biblical texts opens up a new world of possibilities. Using social identity to read other texts in which intergroup dynamics play a central role is a very worthwhile methodological direction that should be developed further.
- Looking for social identity construction in the other OCN texts in the OT is definitely the next step needed. One could begin by looking at all the OCN in the Book of the Twelve and investigate whether the same ethno- or self-critical dynamic is also hidden in the grammar, form and processes that led to the production of these texts in their specific

historical contexts. Amos's OCN (Am 1:3-2:5) and their climax in judgment against Jerusalem (the self/in-group!) spring to mind, as well as the identity construction function of all the hymns in the Book of the Twelve.

- Theological-ethical research that makes use of the model (identity, liberation, responsibility) explicated in this study could be undertaken and the model could be refined even further. Especially the role of liberation theological thinking and how theological ethics functions in it is a fascinating prospect for further investigation.

- The focus on ideology did not form the core of this research, but it could yield fascinating results when integrated even more with social identity theory. The question how ideological criticism can help to uncover even more aspects of social identity will be worthwhile investigating. This direction of research will probably also serve the development of social psychology and lead to refinements in both SIT and SCT.

- Finally the reception of the Book of Nahum should be studied in more detail. One could even go as far as to include in such a study empirical research on how modern/current readers or reading communities appropriate the "message" of Nahum. Reading Nahum together with minority groups or oppressed communities and investigating the process of identification with the underlying dynamics of the text could make a very valuable contribution to contextual theology.

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288

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Abbreviations used in the textual notes

BHRG   Van der Merwe, C, Naudé, J & Kroeze, J 1997. *A Biblical Hebrew ReferenceGrammar*, Volume 1. Workgroup for Biblical Hebrew. Logos Research Systems.

BHS   *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*

DBLSD   Swanson, J 1997. *Dictionary of biblical languages with semantic domains. Hebrew: Old Testament*. Logos Research Systems.

DNV   *Dutch New Version*

HAL   Baumgartner, W *et al.* 1967. *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament*. Leiden.

Holladay   Holladay, W L 1988. *A concise Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament.* Leiden: Brill.

KB   Koehler, L, & Baumgartner, W. 1953. *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*. Leiden.

KJV   *King James Version.*

Lutherbibel   *Die Bibel nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers (mit Apokryphen)*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

NAB   *New Afrikaans Bible.*

NASB   *New American Standard Bible.*

NIV   *New International Version.*

NJB   *New Jerusalem Bible.*

OAB   *Old Afrikaans Bible.*

RSV   *Revised Standard Version.*

ThWAT   Botterweck, G J and Ringgren, H (eds) *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament.*

ZAW   *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.*