BRILL

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION 30 (2022)
437–459

Biblical Interpretation

brill.com/bi

The "Foreigner" and the Eunuch: The Politics of Belonging in Isaiah 56:1–8

Katherine E. Southwood
Associate Professor in Old Testament, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford, England, UK
Fellow and Tutor in Theology and Religion, St John's College, Oxford, England, UK
katherine.southwood@sjc.ox.ac.uk

Abstract

One important theme that has emerged recently in research concerning exile, migration, and return-migration is the concept of "belonging", a concept that is quickly destabilising the emphasis on identity. This article will demonstrate the heuristic significance of research concerning belonging for Biblical scholars, focusing on the negative stereotypical identity labels, "the foreigner" and "the eunuch" in Isaiah 56:1–8. It will emphasise the crucial importance of using clear and differentiated analytical language and will illustrate how doing so enables us to perceive new nuances and shades of meaning in the Biblical text. We will emphasise the importance of elective attachment in Isaiah 56:1–8 and will emphasise the significance of recognising that identity labels such as "foreigner" are constructed and unstable. The article surveys material concerning belonging and demonstrates its significance for rethinking and reframing the polemic against ethnic entitlement and exclusionary language.

Keywords

Isaiah 56 – belonging – foreigner – eunuch – temple – post-exilic Yehud

Isaiah 56 begins what has been long understood as "Trito-Isaiah" with Isa. 56:1–8 and 65–66 functioning almost like bookends as a late redactional framework.[1] It

1 This view goes back to Duhm who first argued that Isaiah 56–66 should be understood as the work of a separate prophet (Duhm 1922). However, Duhm's thesis did not receive unanimous

is not clear how the work was communicated originally to audiences or how it emerged.[2] Perhaps it is a work of persuasion that was read out before an audience? There is little scholarly agreement and it should be acknowledged that without further evidence there is little that we can know for certain. We can be slightly more confident about a setting in post-exilic Yehud. However, we should note the complexity of the shadow cast by the exile in this setting. This is a shadow that continues to divide communities and leads to references in texts betraying the idea that some groups of people were constructed as "foreign".[3] Although the exile is clearly over by the time Trito-Isaiah emerges, its reverberations in the form of changing group allegiances and identities can clearly be seen.[4] Indeed, many scholars distinguish between a returnee population בני הגולה (the children of the exile) and a group labelled עם הארץ (the people of the land), a distinction clearly evident in Ezra-Nehemiah (עם הארץ Ezr. 4:4; 10:2, 11, Neh. 9:24; 10:30–31; בני הגולה Ezr. 4:1; 6:16, 19, 20; 10:7, 16; Neh. 7:6). However, this distinction is less readily observable in Trito-Isaiah despite reference to the anonymous category בן הנכר "foreigner" (Isa. 56:3, 6; 62:8). Nevertheless, the evidence presented in much of the biblical material of the post-exilic period suggests that the returnee community quickly became the more powerful group in Yehud (Kessler 2006; Fried 2006; Lipschits 2006; Japhet 2006).

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support, even at an early stage. Torrey, for example, viewed 55:1–56:8 as one unit (Torrey 1928:255–257). It is important to recognise (with Duhm) the continuity of themes, motifs, and concerns that Trito-Isaiah has with the other Isaianic material, continuity achieved largely through allusion. Such continuity has prompted a degree of scepticism with regard to the idea of Trito-Isiah ever circulating independently. Some scholars have, for example, emphasised the remarkable persistence of key terms such as משפט and צדקה that occur throughout Isaiah, noting how the latter term's extended meanings in Trito-Isaiah (Rendtorff 1993; Blenkinsopp 2007:33; Williamson 1994; cf. Paul 2012; Sommer 1998). While acknowledging that it is a highly interpretative version of Isaiah, we should recognise that the great Isaiah scroll from the first Qumran cave adds an initial כי, ('therefore') in Isa 56:1 'which has the effect of attaching it to 55.12–13 immediately preceding and aligning it with 55.6–13' (Blenkinsopp 2019:665).

2 Stromberg notes that some scholars suggest 'that 56:1–8 develops 60–62 along lines that are significantly more inclusive with respect to the non-Israelite' an argument that holds some weight given the fact that 'the expression בני נכר occurs several times in 60–2, but apart from 56:1–8 it is found nowhere else in the book' and the same is true of the verb שרת (Stromberg 2011:28; cf. 56:7; 60:7).

3 Throughout this article the terms "foreign" and "foreigner" will appear in inverted commas. This is a conscious decision and one that is designed to highlight the constructed, rather than primordial, notion of ethnicity (Rainey 2018:19–53). Since the term is a construction and a label, it is quite difficult to make concrete determinations about the "real" ethnicity of the so-called "foreigner" such as, for example, supposing that the בן הנכר is a foreign born Yehudite, as Croattò suggests (Croattò 2005).

4 For example, Southwood demonstrates the importance of return migration and ethnicity as part of the repercussions of survival in exile (Southwood 2012:191–213).

It is difficult to ascertain exactly what level of demographic change occurred in Yehud. Biblical accounts are inconsistent, suggesting that fewer than 10,000 people were deported (Jer. 52:27–30; cf. 2 Kings 24:14–16) but then, in contradiction, also suggesting that 'all but the poorest of the land' (2 Kings 24:14; 25:12) were deported.[5] The most persuasive interpretation of the demographic evidence seems to suggest, however, that the population rapidly decreased at the end of the Iron Age II (refer to Lipschits 2003 *pace* Carter 1999). Perhaps, as Faust suggests, this was a result not only of the exile but also of the ongoing consequences that post-collapse societies suffer after being overthrown, such as difficulty growing crops, famine, and disease (Faust 2012:167–208).

Regardless of the precise numbers, significant tensions apparently occurred in post-exilic Yehud. Such tensions might have numerous causes, many of which can be attributed to the rifts caused by migration and exile. For example, if we were to suppose there was a degree of religious change amongst exiles in terms of a greater tendency towards monotheistic Yahwism and increased emphasis on ethnic and religious purity then this may have caused perceived differences when returning groups encountered those who never left (Southwood 2012:163–210; Rom Shiloni 2013:99–138; Japhet 2006:114). In terms of the latter group, there does seem to be compelling evidence of a more polytheistic Yahwism emerging during the exilic and the "templeless" (or post-exilic) periods (Middlemas 2005). This may be detected through the polemics in many texts against what was deemed to be worship of "foreign" gods (Jeremiah 7; 44; Isaiah 57: 3–13, and 65: 1–7; Ackerman 1992). As we shall explore, the evidence in Trito-Isaiah seems to be particularly scathing about what it perceives as illicit religious practices. One interesting aspect of the way the tension is communicated is the way that language about what is deemed illegitimate or unorthodox is used to create a rift between those who "belong" and those who are forced out. This is particularly noticeable in many post-exilic texts through the way that the term "foreign woman" is used, often indicating a mythic archetype of the "Other" that acts as an impure and alluring but threatening force (Tan 2008; Camp 2000; Prov. 1–9; Ezr. 9–10; Neh. 13:23–27). The term "foreign" is very loaded, often causing scholars to revert to sociological material concerning

5 Interestingly, the Elephantine Papyri and the Murašû archive both attest a degree of economic independence and assimilation of Yahwists during the post-exilic period (Porten and Yardeni 1986; Clay 1912; cf. Jer.29:5). Likewise, the *Documents of the Judean Exiles* demonstrates a relatively high level of ethnic assimilation alongside the fact that Yahwists were in direct contact with Babylonian officials, scribes, and businessmen (Pearce and Wunsch 2014). There are potentially helpful lessons to be learned in terms of how we think about the onomastic data in terms of comparing this evidence of people with Yahwistic theophoric names and the importance of names in the Neirab texts (Tollini 2017).

ethnic identity in order to try and form interpretative apparatus around which to extrapolate the term's significance. As noted, however, the label "foreign" is constructed.[6] Therefore, in many ways the label "foreigner" is a void concept: a figment, a figure of fantasy, or frozen image that readily lends itself to be projected on to the screen of living people rather than something that describes the ethnic identities of different groups. Such is plasticity of this concept "foreign", that it becomes quite a dangerous concept, a powerful type of ideological rhetoric which can be used to exclude people, religious practices, and even gods that are deemed inauthentic.

How, then, should we interpret the role of exile in Trito-Isaiah and how does it relate to the role of exile in Isaiah more broadly? This is quite a difficult question to answer given that Isaiah does not supply readers with plentiful information on the exile (Poulsen 2019). Instead, the idea homecoming and the notion of Zion act more like symbols of genuine adherence to Yahweh where the "way" idiom in Trito-Isaiah may act as a metaphor for the community's redemption, new direction, and escape from their current confusion (Blenkinsopp 2007:31; cf. Hägglund 2008; Steck 1989).[7] Furthermore, the somewhat florid way that Trito-Isaiah talks about various groups in post-exilic Yehud makes it difficult to ascertain who, specifically, is being referred to. As Middlemas argues, Trito-Isaiah refers to disadvantaged groups using anonymity, calling them 'the oppressed (Isa. 61:1) … the broken hearted (Isa. 61:1) … all who mourn (Isa. 61:2) … mourners in Zion (61:3) … captives (Isa. 61:1) and prisoners (Isa. 61:1)' (Middlemas 2011:108). Without clear evidence identifying who the various groups were and why tensions arose after the exile, many scholars suggest a split between two communities; one who had returned from the exile and another group who had remained in the land. As noted, however, this division is quite clear in Ezra-Nehemiah but is less distinct in Trito-Isaiah. A key question that arises, then, in light of Isa. 56:1–8 is: how should we understand the reference to the "foreigner" and eunuch?

The evidence in Trito-Isaiah is a significant part of the debate about divisions between groups more broadly (Rom-Shiloni 2013:99–138; Smith-Christopher 1996). The addressees of the beginning of Trito-Isaiah are given the prophetic messenger formula followed by imperatives that come in synonymous parallelism: 'guard (שמר) judgement and do (עשה) righteousness' (Isa. 56:1a). The reasons given occur in parallelism 'because my salvation is near to coming and

6 Refer to note 3.

7 Landy helpfully suggests that if 'one looks for exile in Isaiah, it is hard to find' and that we should instead view exile as an 'unspoken signifier' and an 'unacknowledged reality' that 'is the condition of the survivors' (Landy 2010:242).

my righteousness [is near to][8] being revealed' (Isa. 56:1b; cf. Isa. 46:13a). The macarism that follows, along with the repeated participles of the verb 'guard' (שמר) is particularly important for contrasting with the entreaty to addressees concerning references to "foreigners" and eunuchs in verses 3 and 6.

> Happy is a man (אנוש) who does this / and a son of man (בן אדם) who holds fast to it:
> Who guards (שמר) the Sabbath rather than profaning it[9] / and [who] guards (שמר) his hand instead of doing any wrongdoing.
> Don't let the "foreigner" (בֶּן־הַנֵּכָר) / the one who has joined himself closely (לוה)[10] to Yahweh, say:
> "Yahweh has utterly separated (בדל)[11] me from his people" /
> And don't let the eunuch (סריס) say: "Behold, I am a dried up tree"[12] (Isa 56:2–3).

It is worth noting the contrasting categories. Having opened with imperatives of the verb "to guard" (שמר) in relation to "judgement" and "righteousness" now what is being guarded is the Sabbath and the idea of refraining from wrongdoing. Effectively, what constitutes the qualities "judgement" and "righteousness" is spelt out explicitly in terms of behaviours required. However, the way that groups of people are referred to here is also significant. The macarism gives the examples, in parallelism, of the "man" (אנוש) and of the "son of man" (בן אדם), in this case, broad categories relating to any human being regardless of identity. In contrast, those explicitly excluded from the group, are designated as the "foreigner" (בן הנכר) and the "eunuch"

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8 The translation assumes that the force of קרוב carries over from the first part of the stitch to the second part of the parallelism.

9 The 3rd masculine singular suffix on מהללו does not agree with the feminine noun שאת. It is not surprising that IQ Isa[a] has instead מחללה as noted by the editors of BHS.

10 This translation understands the *niphal* as reflexive, rather than passive.

11 *Hiphil* infinitive absolute בדל. The verb בדל ("separate") is popular in post-exilic material that calls for stringent separation between the group called the children of the exile and so-called "foreigners" (Ezr. 9:1; 10:8, 11, 16; Neh. 9:2; 10:28; 13:3). Ironically the verb's re-use in Trito-Isaiah emphasises that it is actions, rather than supposed ethnicity, ancestry, or any other such identifiers, which allow for belonging with Yahweh's worshippers. As explicitly stated in a scathing critique of the priestly leadership's neglect of their duties: 'your iniquities have separated (בדל) you from your god' (Isa. 59:2; cf. Tiemeyer 2015:62).

12 The image of the tree is widely used in the ancient Near Eastern literature 'as an image of procreativity and survival' the idea of this being dried up may suggest that 'survival or procreativity are under threat' (Wright and Chan 2012:101, n. 9). This image is a striking contrast with the rejoicing of the trees in Isa. 55.12–13.

(סריס).[13] Paradoxically, however, these very groups are the ones whose actions, reflect the "judgement" and "righteousness", as clearly spelt out in the macarism. Indeed, the language concerning their behaviours is authoritatively repeated, on the lips of Yahweh as if to demonstrate, unequivocally, their entitlement to belonging in the group regardless of constructed notions of identity difference.

> To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths / who choose what delights me / and who hold fast[14] my covenant ….
> And the foreigners who join themselves closely (לוה)[15] to Yahweh
> to serve him and to love the name of the LORD / and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath, and do not profane it[16] / and who hold fast my covenant (Isa. 56:4, 6).

The text here is clearly a critique of the way that those constructed as "foreigners" and other groups are treated. It has a hortatory quality beseeching listeners to change their attitudes through greater recognition of the way that groups such as the "foreigner" and eunuch align themselves to the dominant group, perhaps with similarities to Isaiah 1:10–20; 58:9–14. It is not clear why so-called "foreigners" and eunuchs are coupled as groups that are somehow conceived of as "outsiders". It is entirely possible that these "out" groups were stereotyped negatively in post-exilic Yehud.[17] Paradoxically, however, "out" groups such

13 The term סריס is usually translated "eunuch" in such a way as to suggest a castrated man (possibly with the idea of a member of the royal court, unable to impregnate the King's women). It is worth noting that the term may potentially suggest an "officer" (Gen. 39:1). However, given the reference to the "dry tree" and the use of the term in Isa. 39:7, it seems fairly unlikely that we should translate "officer" in this case.

14 Note the contrasting uses of the verb חזק ("grasp" "hold") in verses 4 and 2, explicitly connecting the actions of the eunuch with those set out in the macarism.

15 The verb לוה is used several times referring to "foreigners" joining Israel (Isa 14:1; Zech. 2:15; Est. 9:27). McDonald also notes the etymological significance, observing that it is used 'as a folk etymology for the name Levi (לוי)' (McDonald 2015:27; cf. Gen 29:34). McDonald notes the view that this term in Isa. 56 has sometimes been understood as reminiscent of Numbers 18 where the Levites are 'joined to' (לוה) Aaron, sharing the responsibility in the Tabernacle, and therefore by implication, "foreigners" are portrayed in Isa 56 as doing priestly service (McDonald 2015:27).

16 The confusion in verse 2 is directly repeated here (refer to note 9).

17 The negative language used about foreigners, especially through the motif of the "foreign woman" is particularly obvious in a lot of the biblical evidence, as discussed. With regard to eunuchs, Wright and Chan pull together a significant range of primary material from Biblical and Greek sources in the Persian Period (including from Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah as well as Xenophon, Herodotus, Ctesias, Quintus Curtius, Plutarch, and Diodorus) to argue

as the "foreigners" and eunuchs are precisely the ones whose actions align with the type of Sabbath observance that is required in Exodus 31 (Goldingay 2014:77). However, regardless of their actions, foreigners and eunuchs are cut off from the community and this is the major cause for the critique here.

Nevertheless, towards the end of the unit, we are reassured that eunuchs will be given a 'monument' (יד) and a 'name' (שם)[18] and that 'foreigners' will be brought to Yahweh's 'holy mountain' and will rejoice in 'the house of my [Yahweh's] prayer'[19] (Isa. 56:5, 7). Finally, the two groups are expanded to refer to a broader group of people at the end of the section. It is impossible to miss the emphatic nature of the language in this verse. Here Yahweh, designated the title 'the one who gathers the outcasts (דחה)[20] of Israel,' declares[21] that: 'yet, I will gather more upon it [my house] than those who have already been gathered' (Isa. 56:8). The term 'gather' (קבץ) is repeated three times here polemically accentuating the open nature of the community and thereby disparaging addressees who might seek to 'separate completely from' groups who are deemed to be outsiders.

What reasons might motivate the exclusion of certain groups from the community? Perhaps there is legal precedent for excluding eunuchs and foreigners? One possibility is the idea that the law in Deuteronomy 23 concerning those who are to be excluded from the assembly is being reinterpreted and reapplied in Yehud. As Schaper argues, this may be a 'clash of interpretations

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that during the period, eunuchs were 'often stigmatized and represented as being morally and sexually distorted' (Wright and Chan 2012:117). Therefore, they suggest that Isa. 56:3–5 'may have been intended to combat negative stereotypes against eunuchs' (Wright and Chan 2012:116).

18 The significance of being given 'a monument and a name' is interesting, as are the debates concerning what the terms יד and שם actually refer to here. The latter usually refers to 'name' in the sense of reputation. The former has a wide semantic range. Goldingay toys with the idea that יד 'can be a euphemism for penis (e.g. 57.8, 10)' therefore 'perhaps a monument had phallic significance' relating to offspring (Goldingay 2014:77; cf. 2 Sam. 18:18; van Winkle 1997). Robinson translates יד as 'portion' or 'possession' (Robinson 1976; cf. Num. 2:17; 2 Sam. 19:44). An alternative is suggested by Westermann who understands the terms as a hendiadys (Westermann 1969:314). This is a possibility given the connection that appears here with the preceding chapter, which mentions the term 'name' (שם) as 'an everlasting sign that will not be cut off' (Isa. 55:13; cf. Deut. 23:1).

19 The reference to a 'house of prayer' (בֵּית־תְּפִלָּה Isa. 56:7) may be a play on the idea of the 'beautiful house' (בית תפארתי Isa. 60:7 Ruszkowski 2000:222).

20 The *niphal* verb דחה refers to the idea of being forcefully thrust out of a situation (Ps. 35:5; 147:2). This picks up on Isaiah 11:12.

21 Here, the messenger formula is used in a way that emphasises Yahweh's authority, going beyond the standard 'Thus says Yahweh' of 56:1 to: נאם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה ('declares the Lord, Yahweh') a formula that 'commonly functions to add force to some strong statement that people need to be urged to take with absolute seriousness' (Goldingay 2014:87).

of one and the same reference text' in 'post-exilic Judean society' (Schaper 2004:137). This is an interesting idea given the fact that Deuteronomy 23 explicitly states that 'no one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off' can enter the assembly and 'No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted' (Deut. 23:1, 3). However, the same problem occurs: the סריס word is absent. Likewise, although Ammonites and Moabites are specifically mentioned, the term 'foreigner' (בן הנכר) is not. Nevertheless, the general connection is undeniable and the tension between the texts is therefore marked. Another possibility is a connection in terms of the stereotyped laments of the "foreigner" and the eunuch with reference to the exclusion of so-called "foreigners" in Ezra-Nehemiah.[22] For example, Schramm argued that Trito-Isaiah was a forerunner of Ezra and suggested that the problem was 'the traditional, syncretistic cult of YHWH, a battle in which the Priestly, Pentateuchal tradition and the prophetic tradition fought on the same side!' (Schramm 1995:168–169; cf. Rom Shiloni 2013:134). Similarly, Sweeney doesn't discern major differences between Isaiah and Ezra-Nehemiah on the matter (Sweeney 2016). This argument is possibly bolstered by the mention of those who 'tremble' (חרד) at God's word, a group who in Ezra are cast out (Isa. 66:2, 5; Ezr. 9:4; 10:3). Additionally, the connection between the excluded eunuch who keeps the Sabbath and the exhortation to keep the Sabbath in Nehemiah 13:15–19 may be significant (Jer. 17.19–27; Ezek. 20).

Despite the surface-level similarities, however, we must adopt caution when making connections between the situation concerning the casting out of foreign women and the mention of foreigners in Isaiah 56. This is because unlike Isaiah 56, Ezra-Nehemiah makes no reference to "foreigners" serving in the temple or to eunuchs (Isa. 56:7; cf. Isa. 60–62). Secondly, although Ezra 9–10 rigidly re-applies laws found in the Torah to suit his agenda of stringent separation from so-called "foreigners" through endogamy, intermarriage is not mentioned in Isaiah 56 (Ezr. 9:10–12; Exod. 34:11–16; Lev. 18:24–26; Deut. 7:1–6; 23:1–3). More broadly, the prophetic-eschatological concerns found in Trito Isaiah, such as the emphasis on Zion's significance for example, are absent in Ezra-Nehemiah. Also in Trito-Isaiah those who 'tremble' are associated with the poor and afflicted whereas in Ezra-Nehemiah they are associated with the leadership of the *golah* community. Perhaps a point of connection between Isaiah 56 and Ezra-Nehemiah that is slightly more secure is the temple? Blenkinsopp makes a case for this, arguing,

22 The term "foreigner" is a constructed, rather than a biological, identity (Southwood 2012:123–161).

> Attachment to the temple in theory and neglect of the temple in practice in Ezra-Nehemiah provides a clue to what is perhaps the only link between Ezra-Nehemiah and Trito-Isaiah. The privileges and wealth of the temple priesthood, or at least of its upper echelons, explain the frequent criticism which priests attracted .... Beginning under Persian rule, the temple became increasingly secularized and commercialized to the point where, under Seleucid rule, the high priesthood was, in effect, sold to the highest bidder (Blenkinsopp 2019:675).

Blenkinsopp's assessment here aligns well with the evidence in Nehemiah and in Zechariah (Neh. 13:4–9, 28; Zech. 14:21). Likewise, temple building and worship, and who is supposedly qualified (or not) to engage in it, becomes a contentious matter in both texts (Ezr. 3:12–4:6; Isa. 66:1–2).[23] Critique of the priestly leadership on account of their apparent lack of concern for social injustice, as in Isa 59, is certainly a possibility that connects the texts (Tiemeyer 2015:62). It is a concern that resumes in Trito-Isaiah and among other prophets (Isa. 66:1–4; cf. Isa. 1:27–31; Zech. 7:4–10). The critique of the priesthood is also evident throughout Malachi, a text which cautions against marriage to the 'daughter of a foreign god' (Mal. 3:5). Perhaps, therefore, Nihan is correct in urging for a less rigid approach to the texts by arguing that 'restricting the policy of ethnic purification endorsed by Ezra and Nehemiah to the case of mixed marriages ... seems problematic' (Nihan 2011:76). If this is the connection, then the issue at stake is not to do with identity: in many ways it matters little what the constructed terms "foreigner" and "eunuch" actually refer to, or which particular groups are implied. Instead the heart of the matter concerns a faceless, anonymous group given the label "foreigner" and eunuch who seem to be excluded from temple service and worship.

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23 Stromberg notices an important linguistic connection between Isa 66:1–2 and Isa. 56:1–8 arguing

> In Isaiah 56:1–8, outsiders who chose (בחר) that which the Lord desires (חפץ) are promised access to the temple as a house of prayer. But in Isaiah 66, insiders who chose (בחר) that which he does not desire (חפץ) have their efforts at building that temple rejected (Stromberg 2011:27).

Stromberg develops this argument, connecting the temple building and service with Solomon's prayer of the dedication of the temple in 1 King's 8:42–61. In particular, he notes Solomon's request that God listens to the "foreigner" (הנכרי) who comes on account of God's name (שם) and prays (התפלל) at the temple (בית) (1 Kgs 8:41:43). This language directly concurs with the promises to the "foreigner" who loves God's "name" and rejoices in his "house of prayer" in Isa. 56:6–7. Stromberg's argument that in 'Solomon's prayer one finds combined a rejection of the temple as an adequate divine dwelling, an affirmation of that temple's existence, and a radically inclusive vision of it with respect to the nations' is particularly helpful (Stromberg 2011:20).

If temple service is all-important to the question of belonging then the 'the inclusion of proselytes inside the community … in Jerusalem toward the end of the Persian period' is particularly significant (Nihan 2011:96). The connection between the temple, purity, identity, and belonging is particularly marked in several texts (Ezra 6:21; Neh. 10:29; Isa 56:3–8). However, as Tiemeyer demonstrates, although a lot of rhetoric is directed against "foreigners" in the post-exilic period, the view also exists in texts that the critical problem concerning the matter of defiling the temple with impurity lies *not* on account of so-called "foreigners", but instead is the result of insurmountable failings emerging within the priesthood (Tiemeyer 2006).[24] This is perhaps what leads Trito-Isaiah to call for a 'globalisation of the priesthood' (Tiemeyer 2006:286; Isa. 56:1–8; 66:18–24; cf. de Hoop 2008:690; Cook 2015:48). This scapegoating of those who are vulnerable by the priestly leadership through constructing and insisting on ethnic differences between people - and then making the so-called differences something that really mattered through conflating the idea of difference with impurity - seems to be a key part of the reason for their critique. Oswald argues that this is because,

> there were people who were proud of their birth-right as Israelites and who believed that ritual precision was what was called for. On the other hand there seems to have been a group of people who, although they were oppressed by those in power, nevertheless were determined to fulfil the spirit of the Covenant in their behaviour, while at the same time being very conscious of their failure to do that in the depth that they wished (Oswald 2014:86).

One appealing aspect about Oswald's argument here is the rather generalised terms that it is couched in. The evidence that we have addressed in Isaiah 56 is equally vague. A compelling case has emerged in scholarship, as we have demonstrated, for suggesting the critique in Trito-Isaiah is of a priestly group whose focus is on birth-right, ritual, purity, and exclusion. As Westermann observed, this 'priestly and legal tradition' sought 'to limit the community to those who are Jews by birth' (Westermann 1969:316). However, while we can be relatively certain about the dominant group's identity as Priestly, save for the

24 Difficulties that Tiemeyer identifies include: encouraging social injustice (Isa. 58:3–5; Zech. 5:1–4; Mal. 3:5; cf. Nehemiah 5); unorthodox sacrificial rites (Isa. 57:6–8; Isa.65:3–4; Isa. 66:3); intermarriage (Mal. 2:10–16); forming foreign political alliances (Isa. 57:9–10); neglecting Yahwistic cultic regulations (Mal. 1:6–14; Isa. 61:8); passing ritual impurity to the people (Hag. 2:10–14).

constructed terms of difference such as "foreigner" and eunuch, we know very little indeed about the oppressed group. This is where the literature concerning the matter of belonging may be more helpful for scholarship than the focus on identity. However, before perusing this line of inquiry, we should investigate further the connections between the Priesthood, foreigners, and temple service.

A remarkable level of congruence is obvious between Isa. 56:1–8 and Ezek. 44. This connection has been widely recognised and the level of lexical similarity is neatly summarised by McDonald.

> Both passages concern foreigners (בני נכר; Isa. 56:3; Ezek. 44:7, 9) and their access to the temple, which is also described as "my house" (ביתי; Isa. 56:7; 44:7). Whilst Isaiah 56 permits the foreigners into the temple, אל־הר קדשי והביאותים (v. 6), Ezekiel 44 sees it as a matter for condemnation and forbids it לא יבוא אל־מקדשי (vv. 7, 9). Where Isaiah 56 is concerned that the foreigner not profane (חלל) the Sabbath, but hold fast to the covenant (מחזיקים בבריתי) Ezekiel sees the admission of foreigners as a profanation (חלל) of the sanctuary and a breaking of the covenant (ויפרו את־בריתי). For Ezekiel 44 the numerous verbal resonances with Isaiah 56 are almost entirely limited to the reproach in v. 7 and its negation in v. 9. (McDonald 2015:30).

The view put forward in Ezekiel 44 concerning "foreigners" as defiling to the temple is another possible connection with the nexus of issues relating to temple worship that occur in Isaiah 56 and in Ezra-Nehemiah. The association between certain types of people who enter the temple and the resulting ritual impurity of the temple is particularly clear in the narrative concerning Nehemiah and Tobiah (Neh. 13:4–9). Nehemiah clearly interprets the presence of the "foreign" Ammonite, Tobiah, in the temple as defiling. As Olyan comments 'Nehemiah's order that the chamber be purified suggests that he viewed it as polluted "ritually," and the source of the pollution, the text implies, is the presence of Tobiah the Ammonite' and 'his belongings' (Olyan 2004:10).[25] Perhaps during this period there was what Hayes describes as a 'democratization of the requirement of genealogical purity' (Hayes 2002:10)? It is certainly a possibility. Whatever terminology we use to describe the purity required

25 Olyan references here the distinction made by Klawans between "moral" and "ritual" impurity (Klawans 2000). Prior to Klawans, Olyan had emphasised the need to distinguish between "natural" impurities and those which emerge because of some specific, usually forbidden, action. For example, some impurities are 'tolerated impurities' (Anderson and Olyan 1991). Likewise, Frymer-Kensky makes a distinction between 'ritual pollutions' and 'danger beliefs' (Frymer-Kensky 1983).

– ethnic, moral, ritual, genealogical – one thing is abundantly clear: purity functions as a highly symbolic, powerful metaphor which is used to exclude and demonise those deemed impure. Such impure "foreigners" would defile the temple, and even their belongings might render one vulnerable to infection and pollution. Given this consideration, the idea put forward by Trito-Isaiah that foreigners might 'minister' in the temple and offer 'burnt offerings and sacrifices' on the altar would probably have generated anxiety, fear, and resistance (Isa. 56:6–7). Indeed, McDonald's argument concerning the possibility that Ezekiel 44 is a *response* to the situation envisaged in Isaiah 56:1–8, rather than a prompt for the entreaty therein, seems persuasive (McDonald 2015). As is widely recognised 'the central issue is not just admission of foreigners to the sanctuary' but it is the existence of even the possibility 'for such foreigners to minister within that sanctuary' (Nihan 2011:77).[26] The evidence in Isaiah 56:1–8, in context, attests a clash between an anonymous group who yearn to belong but feel disenfranchised and an unremarkable and odious, but still powerful, priestly leadership. This is a clash of yearning to belong versus a sense of prerogative. Interestingly, however, it is also a conflict played out through the language of ethnic exclusion versus entitlement. Given this observation, we will now focus on research concerning belonging in order to address how this concept can help us understand conflicts over group membership.

There is an increasing trend in research concerning identity and migration towards greater analytical clarity when choosing language to describe social phenomena. One interesting consequence of this is the widespread and decisive shift away from the term "identity" itself. For example, Brubaker and Cooper argue that rather than 'stirring all self-understandings based on race, religion, ethnicity, and so on into the great conceptual melting pot of "identity," we would do better to use a more differentiated analytical language' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 20). Similarly, Jones and Krzyzanowski argue strongly against using the concept of identity in scholarship, because:

> 'identity' has become something of a catch-all concept, which is used uncritically to support an untenably disparate range of claims; in actual fact the explanatory potential of 'identity' has been much diminished by such loose and over-generalized application. We believe that a point has now been reached where the concept of identity, without serious de- (and re-) construction, provides little … theoretical or methodological precision (Jones and Krzyzanowski 2008:39).

26 This interpretation of Isaiah 56:1–8 is also well attested in the textual evidence. For example, 1QIsa[a] omits שרת and portrays the foreigners 'blessing' instead of 'loving' Yahweh.

Problematizing the concept of "identity" in this way is helpful, not only on account of the call to avoid intellectual laziness but also because of the extensive call for rethinking the ways in which we categorise and evaluate "identity" in academic writing. Although there is no problem with using the term identity itself, what is specifically being problematized here is the tendency to view identity as some kind of "unchanging essence". For example, in their influential article entitled 'Beyond Identity' Brubaker and Cooper make a sustained case for recognising the political implications of categorising people by dividing them into mutually exclusive groups that leave no room for ambiguity or mixed forms, as if identity can be reduced to some sort of hermetically sealed, neat, and static state. They argue that 'conceptualizing all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion, all self-understanding and self-identification in the idiom of "identity" saddles us with a blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:2). Reducing the complexity of various group participations to the notion of "identity" is dangerous because it allows scholars to make swift and abrupt decisions about people or texts using one label or other and then fail to question the ongoing validity of that analytical pronouncement. Furthermore, as Jones and Krzyzanowski elaborate, the upshot of 'the casual application of this highly elastic yet undifferentiated concept' to 'research on migration' is 'the potential of "identity" to operate as an overarching explanatory framework … often serving to hide more than it reveals' (Jones and Krzyzanowski 2008:38).[27] This is particularly important if we take into consideration the fact that anthropological research concerning ethnic "identity" attempts to distinguish between primordial and instrumental, or constructivist, approaches to the concept.[28] The idea, which has been endorsed by some anthropologists,[29] that ethnic identities might be "primordial" (that is *a priori*, "natural", and fundamental) is dichotomously opposed to the notion, argued here, that identities might be rather more complex and fluid. There is a danger that when we see the term "foreigner" in Isaiah 56:3 and 6, we assume the language must point towards some sort of unchanging "ethnic identity", and in

27 Jones and Krzyzanowski note the significance of migration to this discussion, arguing that 'many of the weaknesses' of the usages of identity 'are particularly evident in discussions of 'migrants', who are frequently referred to as a coherent, internally consistent group' (Jones and Krzyzanowski 2008:43).

28 Refer to note 3.

29 Van den Berghe 1987. Note also Geertz, who writes about the primordial sentiment (i.e. the belief of various groups, such as Telgu speakers, that they have a natural affinity that cuts across British administrative boundaries) in the context of post-independence India (Geertz 1963).

doing so simplistically repeat the divisions formed within and by the text. This would be rather unfortunate, given the critique of identity that exists. Identities are constructed, by individuals but also by others, as categories through which to understand and frame individual selves and groups of people. This is especially the case in the context of migration, which can trigger more of an awareness of difference between people. It is also problematic in terms of group politics and power in post-exilic Yehud, at a time shortly after significant migration. This is where the complex politics of belonging is all-important. Who decides, in that setting, how to construct ethnic differences among communities, what differences matter, and what differences are inescapable for example? Does the so-called "foreigner" mentioned in the text identify with that category? Or is the label "foreigner" constructed by the Priesthood as a pejorative means of excluding and other-ing those deemed unwanted in temple worship?

Rather than repeat the identity labels of the text, it might be wise to consider the dynamics created by the notion of "belonging". This concept was first introduced to scholarship by Probyn who argued that belonging 'inspires a mode of thinking about how people get along, how various forms of belonging are articulated, how individuals conjugate differences into manners of being, and how desires to become are played out in everyday circumstances' (Probyn 1996:5). Probyn's argument here is helpful because it captures the fluidity, complexity, and the often constructed nature of identity in way that instrumental approaches to ethnicity sometimes fail to emphasise.[30] Obviously, belonging is not a self-explanatory notion. Therefore a definition is required, specifically addressing the notion of voluntary belonging. The study of the notion of belonging aims to:

> … understand how, as an emotional feeling, it [belonging] comes to be attached by an individual to a particular place so as to generate … place-belongingness. In this context, place is felt as 'home' and, accordingly, to belong means to find a place where an individual can feel 'at home' (Antonsich 2010:646).[31]

30 Instrumental and constructivist approaches to ethnicity, in contrast to primordial approaches, highlight the socially constructed nature of ethnic identity as something which can be a political tool.

31 Concerning the emotive aspects of belonging, refer also to Wood and Waite 2011.

Here Antonsich refers to home both literally as a place and also metaphorically as a feeling.[32] Yuval-Davis's contribution to this discourse in the form of discussing the politics of belonging is also particularly helpful. Yuval-Davis makes a distinction between psychological and political belonging, arguing for the importance of boundaries and power in the process of belonging. As she suggests 'the politics of belonging involves not only constructions of boundaries but also the inclusion or exclusion of particular people, social categories and groupings within these boundaries by those who have the power to do this' (Yuval-Davis 2011:18). The key point in this observation is the fact that some people "have the power" to decide who is included or excluded and to either firm up or loosen boundaries. Thus, although belonging can be approached from the perspective of feeling rooted and secure, it is essential also to recognize the compound political dynamics that underpin it. In negotiations of belonging there is always a "them" and "us" and the labels that are assigned to Other groups, as well as those chosen as self-identifiers, are important. But in many ways the labels of identifiers, whether ethnic (e.g. the "foreigner") or concerning different bodies (e.g. perhaps the eunuch), are just the tip of the iceberg. A crucial consideration, when it comes to the politics of belonging is the matter of boundaries. Therefore, as Antonsich argues 'every politics of belonging involves two opposite sides: the side that claims belonging and the side that has the power of 'granting' belonging' (Antonsich 2010:650). A concrete example of the politics of belonging in motion can be found in Li's study of Malaysia's Indian Muslims, Chitties, Portuguese Eurasians, Peranakan Chinese, and Baweanese communities (Li 2018). As Li observes, one 'key problem facing these acculturated ethnic minorities is not their size or their hybrid cultures, but their perceived lack of State-favoured identity and opportunity' (Li 2018:206). In this example, there is a clear yearning to belong. However, this is met with a blunt refusal to recognise people in a particular identity category. Similarly, in the example, the one who has the power to grant belonging is the state. This is an interesting illustration of the politics of belonging at play, demonstrating the notion that identity is fluid. Rather than being fixed, 'individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become,

32 Though it should be noted that "home" can become a somewhat contested place in some situations. For example, using the literal example of home in the context of return migration, the homeland may have changed beyond recognition and the people who return may have matured and changed too. As James concisely summarises 'when Mr. Johnson went home in Tobago in 1982, he was a different man in a "foreign" land' (James 1993:248). Likewise, the metaphorical example of feeling at home with people may change. If, for example, trust is betrayed, then the symbolic space of familiarity and security disappears.

a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than positing of identity as a stable state' (Probyn 1996:19). It also demonstrates the importance of elective attachment as individuals and groups situate themselves in relation to larger or more powerful groups.

Given the importance of elective attachment and power we should recognise that when we talk about "identity" what we are really describing is not a fixed notion of a person as a "foreigner", for example, but a static snapshot of group relations and power at any given point. As Antonsich illustrates,

> identity is underpinned by a range of processes that are reproduced and/or sustained through a range of social practices, we can see that as individuals we have huge ranges of affinities and attachments that shape the way we perceive ourselves, and crucially, ourselves in relation to others (collective or otherwise). All those perceptions must be seen as inherently rooted in discourses of belonging/non-belonging which both create our social location and milieu, and are subsequently reproduced by discourses we produce ourselves as members or citizens, viz. as those belonging or nonbelonging (Antonsich 2010:52).

This perspective is interesting because it highlights the importance of performativity and process when it comes to belonging. Belonging is not just about identity labels, given that identity is adaptable, it is about acting according to a set of given identity principles or "doing belonging" according to collective practices. Therefore, when people feel a sense of association with a group they may perform acts of belonging, attachment, and alignment. It is then up to the dominant group whether to loosen the boundaries through inclusion or apathy, of whether to actively engage in the rhetoric of difference and exclusion, thus maintaining boundaries that even performative acts of belonging cannot transgress. If belonging is achieved, then it is important to recognise that it is a spectrum and an ongoing process rather than an "in/out" group state so that there are 'strong and weak relationships of belonging' at any given time (Girard 2016:2). A final observation that is worth noticing is Girard's argument that belonging always involves some form of exclusion, but 'the more desirable the relationship of belonging is or appears to be, the more bitterly the violence of exclusion is experienced,' likewise 'the harder such a relationship is to acquire, the more desirable it appears to be' (Girard 2016:4). This suggests that scarcity and exclusivism can create a sense of what is fashionable and elite.

How does the research concerning belonging help us when interpreting Isaiah 56:1–8? The first obvious point for reflection concerns the identity

markers named: the "foreigner" and the eunuch. Although we have noted throughout this paper that the term "foreigner" can only ever be understood as a constructed identity, rather than an *a priori* or primordial quality,[33] the research concerning the changeable nature of identity encourages us to think even more emphatically about these identity categories as merely labels. This is especially the case for the "foreigner": an identity label constructed that emphasises ethnic difference rather than resemblance. We are not told the ethnic identity of this so-called "foreigner" only that they are constructed as "foreign" by the group that Isa. 56:1–8 addresses. Likewise, with the term eunuch: while acknowledging that we cannot be totally certain about the term's exact meaning,[34] we can ascertain that this is an identity label (which may or may not be the way the group referred to self-identify) that is used to emphasise difference and heighten boundaries amongst the addressees of Isaiah 56:1–8. Secondly, the group who are addressed in Isa. 56:1–8 are clearly those within whose power lies the gift of granting or refusing belonging amongst those who are labelled "foreigner" and eunuch. The addressees are the epicentre of a group whose membership is appealing, for some reason, to those beyond the existing boundaries of the group. Given the evidence we have surveyed concerning Trito-Isaiah, it is possible that those who are being addressed in our text are the foreigner and the eunuch who feel exploited by a corrupt priestly group (cf. Isa. 56:9–12). It is also possible that the text is simultaneously indirectly addressing the very people who are excluding the foreigner and the eunuch by overriding their authority and power with Yahweh's views on such exclusion.

Perhaps the most important way that research concerning belonging helps us to think again about Isa. 56:1–8 concerns the matter of yearning to belong and the performative nature of belonging. A crucial point of performative belonging is pointed out, on the lips of Yahweh, to the addressees: the eunuch *already* behaves in alignment with several features that characterise the monotheistic Yahwism that ought to be practised by the main group.[35] These include Sabbath observance, and adherence to the covenant, as well as the more generalised behaviour of doing 'things that please' Yahweh (Isa. 56:4). Likewise, the "foreigner" keeps the Sabbath and the covenant, loves Yahweh's name, joins closely to Yahweh (לוה), is Yahweh's servant, and even ministers to

33 Refer to note 3.

34 Refer to note 13.

35 Note the implied critique of the addressees in the praise of the "foreigner" who keeps Yahweh's Sabbath 'and does not profane it', a critique also present in the macarism (Isa. 56:2, 6).

Yahweh (Isa. 56:6).[36] This aligns quite neatly with Berges's argument regarding Isaiah's re-imagination of Israel as governed by ethical rather than ethnic concerns (Berges 2017; cf. Berges 2019; 2012). Effectively, the eunuch's three-fold description of performative belonging and yearning to belong, expressed both by concrete actions and by emotions is matched by the "foreigner's" five-fold description of performative belonging, which is likewise expressed through actions and emotions. Although these verses are short, they are exceptionally rich in terms of communicating about "doing belonging". It is clear from the three-fold description of attachment followed by the five-fold description that a strong relationship of belonging is desired on the parts of those given the anonymous labels eunuch and the "foreigner". These 'routine practices' might productively be understood as generating 'performative spaces of embodied representations of be/longing' (Christou 2011:250). The clear implication of these descriptions is that these people should be identified as Yahwists, rather than given the polemical identity labels that the addressees seek to assign to them.

The evidence points towards an argument arising at the time of the text's composition about inclusion: those who identify as Yahwists and perform belonging are identified by the addressees of Isa. 56:1–8 as "Other" and designated stereotypical identity categories that concretise, in the eyes of the addressees, their difference. Yuval-Davis's argument concerning individual identity in relation to groups is helpful here:

> Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not) …. these stories will often relate, directly or indirectly, to self and/or others' perceptions of what being a member of such a grouping or collectivity … might mean (Yuval-Davis 2011:14).

Yuval-Davis's argument about how belonging and narrative shape identity enables us to think again about the words attributed to the "foreigner" and eunuch in Isa. 56. Despite enthusiastic performances of belonging, the "stories they tell themselves" concerning their membership – that 'I am a dried up tree' and that 'Yahweh has utterly separated me from his people' – betray non-belonging and exclusion. Yet, ironically, it is the actions of the eunuch and the foreigner that are the subject of the macarism (Isa. 56:2). However, rather than being the "happy man" of verse two whose actions exemplify what justice and righteousness

36 The editors of BHS suggest emending the text from על יהוה (to Yahweh) to עלי (to me), and make similar emendations throughout the verse changing on four separate occasions in the same verse from the third to the first person. This aligns with the address on the lips of Yahweh in verses 1–5. No textual evidence is cited to substantiate the changes proposed.

might mean, these people clearly feel that their belonging is dubious. The words placed on Yahweh's lips confirming, in the strongest possible terms, the entitlement to belonging that those given the undesirable identity categories "foreigner" and eunuch should feel make the matter abundantly clear. Not only are these so-called 'outcasts of Israel' to minister in the temple, they will also make 'whole burnt offerings and sacrifices' on the altar at the heart of the temple (Isa. 56:7). Not only will they belong, but they will have an everlasting 'monument and name' *in* my house and *within* my walls' (Isa. 56:5). The spatial emphasis here highlights the level of belonging that the "foreigner" and eunuch are given as does the fact that the message is placed, authoritatively, on the lips of Yahweh. In a mere eight verses the complex politics of belonging in post-exilic Yehud are dramatically demonstrated. In marked contrast to any sense of ethnic entitlement perhaps felt by those in positions of power and leadership, Isaiah 56:1–8 emphasizes that supposed ancestry is less important than action. Indeed, in the next chapter these supposed leaders, whose sense of entitlement rests on constructions of ancestry are instead the 'sons of a sorceress, the offspring of an adulteress and a harlot' and 'children of transgression, the offspring of deceit' (Isa. 57:3–4). It is possible that the matter of constructed ancestry is part of the reason why the negative stereotypes, of the "eunuch" (who can have no offspring going forwards) and the "foreigner" (whose origins, looking backwards, are not "pure"), are selected for the confrontational hortatory address.

In conclusion, this article has emphasized the need for fluidity when thinking about complex concepts such as identity in relation to the so-called "foreigner" and "eunuch" in Isa. 56:1–8. Therefore, rather than thinking about the "true" identity of people and groups we suggested monitoring the intricate politics of belonging at work in the text. Many post-exilic texts, we observed, tend to demonize certain groups through blanket homogenous labels that construct identities in a negative way. What was particularly interesting about Isa. 56:1–8 was the contrast in attitude, where the text singles out specific individuals with the definite article and makes their personal voices, narratives, and actions known. The relationship between Isa. 56:1–8 and other post-exilic texts was unclear, but one interesting point of connection emerged in light of service in the temple. One point that became increasingly clear through the argument was that the idea of the foreigner and eunuch serving in the temple was particularly repugnant to some groups at the time, perhaps the priestly leadership. Ultimately, we will never know precisely who the so-called "foreigner" and "eunuch" are. However, in many ways, the lack of identity does not matter. What the text does allow us to do, importantly, is to glimpse the ways in which belonging is negotiated as well as the level of outrage sparked by the exclusion of certain groups of people from the community and from the temple.

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