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Your Name Shall No Longer be Jacob, but Refugee: Involuntary Migration and the Development of the Jacob Narrative

I. INTRODUCTION

Consider this atypical summary of the ancestral narrative in Gen 12–36.

The narrative begins with Abraham,[1] who migrates to Canaan. On arrival in Canaan, famine forces Abraham to flee to Egypt (Gen 12:10). Abraham eventually returns to Canaan, where his son Isaac also faces a famine that forces him to migrate (Gen 26:1). Rather than leave Canaan, Isaac drifts within its boundaries, residing in various places to survive. Isaac's son Jacob grows up in Canaan, but spends his early adulthood as an asylum seeker avoiding the aggression of his brother Esau by taking refuge with his family in Mesopotamia. After 20 years, Jacob returns to Canaan to find a transformed, unrecognizable society. The conciliatory attitude of Esau—who seeks to reconcile with Jacob instead of killing him—exemplifies Jacob's reverse culture shock. Throughout a *Leitwort* is *gēr*, "sojourner," a term that connotes transitory residence, difference from the host population, and limited legal protection.

One might summarize the narrative with terms used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Abraham is an environmentally induced externally displaced person; Isaac is an environmentally induced internally displaced person; and, Jacob is an asylum seeker who subsequently repatriates by choice. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all self-settled involuntary migrants.[2]

[1] For ease, I shall use Abraham throughout, though the first patriarch's name is Abram from his introduction until it is changed by YHWH in Gen 17:5.

[2] The matriarchs in Gen 12–36 are also involuntary migrants. When they seek respite from the famine in Canaan, Abraham coaches his wife Sarah to identify as his sister, thus protecting him from any Egyptian who might consider murdering him to take this beautiful woman as their wife. Abraham and Sarah do the same again when fleeing famine in Gerar. Like father, like son: when Isaac and Rebekah encounter a famine in Canaan and migrate to Gerar in order to survive it, they employ the same scheme for the same reasons. In UNHCR's terms, Sarah and Rebekah are environmentally induced involuntary migrants; circumstances beyond their control compels them to engage in a form of sex work in order to provide for their families. For further details, see C. A. Strine, "Sister Save Us: The Matriarchs as Breadwinners and Their Threat to Patriarchy in the Ancestral Narrative," in *Women and Exilic Identity in the Hebrew Bible*, eds. M. Halvorson-Taylor and K. Southwood (Bloomsbury T&T Clark: London, forthcoming 2017).

When framed this way, there is little doubt that Gen 12–36 invites the commentator to employ social scientific research on involuntary migration. Though social scientific approaches to Genesis are not new,[3] very little work on the ancestral narrative foregrounds the issue of migration. Perhaps the first to recognize the prominence of this theme in Genesis was John Van Seters, though it informs his approach tangentially.[4] Recent volumes by David Frankel and Elizabeth Robertson Kennedy and an article by Guy Darshan, give a larger role to migration in Genesis,[5] but none draws on the sub-discipline of the social sciences often known as refugee studies in order to deal with this theme.

To some extent, this lacuna arises from the youth of forced migration studies. Some trace its origin to the 1951 UN convention relating to the status of refugees,[6] but a vast number place its foundation in the early 1980's.[7] Still in its infancy, the field of involuntary migration studies continues to grow and define its methods, only recently being capable of delivering findings that can be used in other disciplines. Bearing these limitations in mind, the preceding summary of the ancestral narrative indicates that Biblical Studies—especially

[3] *Inter alia*, E. Theodore Mullen, *Ethnic Myths and Pentateuch Foundations: A New Approach to the Formation of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997), John Van Seters, *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), Mark G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), and Anselm C. Hagedorn, "Huasmann und Jäger (Gen 25,27-28). Aus den jugendtagen Jakobs und Esaus," in *Die Erzväter in der biblischen Tradition: Festschrift für Matthias Köckert*, ed. A. C. Hagedorn and Henrik Pfieffer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009). Beyond Genesis, the best examples are John Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migrations: A Sociological, Literary, and Theological Approach on the Displacement and Resettlement of the Southern Kingdom of Judah* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), Jill Middlemas and John J. Ahn, *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of the Exile* (New York: T & T Clark, 2012), and Katherine E. Southwood, *Ethnicity and the Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9–10* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a broader justification for employing social scientific research as an interpretative heuristic, see the argument of Philip Esler, "Social-Scientific Models in Biblical Interpretation," in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context*, ed. Philip Esler (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 2006), 3-14.

[4] For John Van Seters most extended discussion of the issue, see *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1992), 209-14.

[5] David Frankel, *The Land of Canaan and the Destiny of Israel: Theologies of Territory in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), Elisabeth Robertson Kennedy, *Seeking a Homeland: Sojourn and Ethnic Identity in the Ancestral Narratives of Genesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), and Guy Darshan, "The Origins of the Foundation Stories Genre in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Eastern Mediterranean," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133:4 (2014). Frankel does not draw on the social sciences in a substantial way. Kennedy relies upon the work of Anthony D. Smith; this is helpful and her book offers important new ideas, but she sees migration as merely a precursor to a landed, national, static form of identity that fails to really engage with the lived experience of forced migration of the research on that phenomenon. Darshan does not employ the social sciences, though his comparative method further underscores the potential for this approach to enhance our understanding of not only the biblical but also classical material.

6 Richard Black, "Fifty Years of Refugee Studies: From Theory to Policy," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (2001): 57-78; for the UN document see http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html (accessed 23 Feb 2017).

[7] Dawn Chatty, "Anthropology and Forced Migration," in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 74-80.

work on the Hebrew Bible—offers a prime area for such interdisciplinary work.

Two potential contributions of this approach lie at the core of my work on Genesis. First, the insights that the study of forced migration provides on the migratory experience suggest new interpretations of difficult texts in the ancestral narrative. Second, built upon that exegetical work, one can reconsider questions of textual fractures indicating separate sources and by examining the attitudes exhibited towards the experience of involuntary migration exhibited in these textual sources comprising Genesis, then work towards a fresh model for the diachronic growth of the book.

This article shall focus on the Jacob narrative (Gen 25:19–33:20), using it as a case study to demonstrate both contributions. The Jacob narrative lends itself to this effort particularly well because it presents a full "lifecycle" of involuntary migration. In stage one, Jacob lives as an asylum seeker from Esau's threat of violence, receiving refuge in Haran/Padan-aram. In stage two, though Jacob is welcomed and protected by Laban, he remains an indentured laborer with limited rights. Typical of subordinated persons, Jacob does not acquiesce to this situation, but eventually finds a way to subvert his domineering host, even to benefit financially from the situation. In stage three, Jacob returns "home" to Canaan. Anxiety consumes Jacob when he considers the hostility he will face from Esau when he returns; yet, when he arrives in Canaan he is astonished to find that Esau wants to reconcile with him. "Home" is totally different than Jacob remembers or imagines. Nonetheless, the patriarch proceeds with caution and a lack of trust for Esau, the same strategies that proved successful during his time as a refugee. In all three stages, Jacob resembles involuntary migrants from other cultures, whose experiences can, therefore, enhance our understanding of this narrative.

II. JACOB THE INVOLUNTARY MIGRANT (GEN 25:19–29:14A)

The Jacob narrative begins in Gen 25:19 with the *Toledot* formula and a description of the struggle between Esau and Jacob during their birth. The continual nature of their conflict with one another is highlighted by the stew-birthright negotiation story in 25:27-34. The story of Isaac facing a famine, like Abraham before him, interrupts the developing rivalry; though it underscores the centrality of involuntary migration in the ancestral narrative, its role must

remain a topic for another time.

After the story of Isaac's and Rebekah's time in Gerar, the narrative returns to Esau and Jacob. The details of Rebekah and Jacob's ruse to gain the patriarchal blessing for Jacob instead of Esau are familiar, but it is worthwhile to look at the end of Gen 27 where the circumstances of Jacob's departure from Canaan are enumerated. Esau's bitterness towards Jacob produces homicidal intentions, which Rebekah discovers. She counsels Jacob to flee Canaan and seek safety with Laban in Haran for "a while"—this amounts to recommending that Jacob seek asylum and become a refugee. "A refugee," as defined now, "is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence,"[8] and it is likely she or he "cannot return home or are afraid to do so."[9]

Staying with the final form of the text for now, Gen 27:46–28:5 explains how Rebekah facilitates Jacob's departure by expressing her disgust at the idea that he would marry a Canaanite woman. From the perspective of involuntary migration studies, it is entirely logical that Jacob's mother would use her influence and knowledge to gain safe passage for her son. Caution is necessary to avoid anachronism, but research in various areas shows that asylum seekers and refugees—like all manner of marginalized people—see their claims succeed far more often when a qualified person takes forward their claim.[10] Today, this generally involves legal counsel; in antiquity, influential people played similar roles, though they did not have a professional qualification *per se*. Often, these people had a social status that allowed influence with a powerful person (e.g., Nathan's influence with David; Rehoboam's counsellors in 1 Kgs 12:1-17). It is not at all extraordinary that Jacob relies upon his mother for this support: ethnographic research indicates that "the *only* person a man can *really* trust is the one person who will not stand to gain by his death. This person is neither

[8] http://www.unrefugees.org/site/c.lfIQKSOwFqG/b.4950731/k.A894/What_is_a_refugee.htm (accessed on 23 Feb 2017); cf. Article 1, 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which says "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

[9] http://www.unrefugees.org/site/c.lfIQKSOwFqG/b.4950731/k.A894/What_is_a_refugee.htm (accessed on 23 Feb 2017).

[10] See Eleanor Acer, "Making a Difference: A Legacy of Pro Bono Representation," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 17, no. 3 (2004): 347-66, and Katia Bianchini, "Legal Aid for Asylum Seekers: Progress and Challenges in Italy," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 2 (2011): 390-410, for discussion and further references.

his wife nor his children; it is his mother."[11]

Rebekah is a powerful figure by any estimation. Mark Brett notes that this story "serves to emphasize her agency,"[12] and John Anderson remarks that "the narrative presents Rebekah as much more than a simple housewife."[13] Indeed, no one knows better than Rebekah that Isaac's life was shaped by the requirement of endogamous marriage and, more recently, by distrust for the local population (e.g., the men of Gerar in Gen 26). She acts in a way that is likely to persuade Isaac to allow Jacob's departure. Rebekah operates like a political figure or legal advocate, using her knowledge, access, and influence to aid her "client."

The content of Rebekah's plea to Isaac represents a change in theme and style from Gen 27:1-45, one of several reasons scholars allocate Gen 27:1-45 to a non-Priestly source (non-P) and 27:46–28:9 to a Priestly source (P). Further attention to those issues will come later. For now, this fracture should neither obscure that the study of involuntary migration provides a sensible logic for the topical shift between the two sections nor overshadow the similarities between Rebekah's approach here and Isaac's pragmatic tactics with the men of Gerar in Gen 26. Both Isaac and Rebekah exhibit a willingness to bend the truth and to use deception. It is relevant to note, then, that Barbara Harrell-Bond and Eftihia Voutira quote an involuntary migrant source remarking that: "[t]o be a refugee means to learn to lie."[14] Whatever the process by which these texts arrive in their canonical form, the characters and actions depicted here correspond closely to behaviors observed among involuntary migrants facing similar challenges in other times and places.

As Jacob sets out for Canaan (28:10), he spends a night in the place that he will name Bethel. His vision into the divine realm provides an etiology for the sanctuary at Bethel, to be sure. However, approached from the perspective of involuntary migration, Jacob's vow forms

[11] Eftihia Voutira and Barbara E. Harrell-Bond, "In Search of the Locus of Trust: The Social World of the Refugee Camp," in *Mistrusting Refugees*, ed. E.V. Daniel and J. C. Knudsen (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995), 208.

[12] Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, 88-89.

[13] John E. Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and Yhwh's Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in Jacob Cycle* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 70.

[14] Voutira and Harrell-Bond, "In Search," 216. It should be stressed that necessity, not deficient morality, typically drives such dishonesty. Deceptive actions often constitute one of very few survival mechanisms available to people with a legitimate fear for their life.

the critical aspect of the experience:

> [20b] If God remains with me, if he protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, [21] *and if I return safe to my father's house*—YHWH shall be my God. [22]And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be the house of God; and of all that you give me, I will make a tithe to you.

This scene, coherent and unified despite much argument to the contrary,[15] does far more than offer a *hieros logos*; rather, it conveys the hopes and fears of an involuntary migrant fleeing mortal danger by traveling into an unknown place, without assurance things will be better there.

III. JACOB THE REFUGEE (GEN 29:14B–32:1)[16]

Upon arrival in Haran, Jacob meets Rachel, who then introduces him to her father, Laban. Laban welcomes Jacob into his house, where Jacob explains what has prompted his departure from Canaan to Laban (29:13b), who declares his willingness to protect Jacob by calling the newcomer "my bone and my flesh" (29:14a). Recognized as family, Jacob falls under Laban's protection. He is, in an ancient form, granted asylum from his bloodthirsty brother, Esau.[17]

The relationship between Laban and Jacob is not one of full equality. After a month of service "Laban said to Jacob, 'Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing?'" (Gen 29:15a) Despite inviting Jacob to set the wage, the text leaves Laban's motivation ambiguous. Wenham remarks that Laban keeps "his options open" and concludes that the extraordinarily large commitment Jacob is willing to make for Rachel suggests that he will pay handsomely for her.[18] Without disregarding that interpretation, one may add to it from the perspective of involuntary migration: Jacob's extended commitment assures him of

[15] Erhard Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig Evans, A., Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 197-203.

[16] This division of the sections follows the BHS arrangement, where 29:14a concludes the preceding material and 29:14b opens a new movement in the narrative.

[17] cf. cities of refuge, e.g., Num 35; Deut 23:16; Josh 20:2, 21:13, 21, 27, 32, 26.

[18] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 235.

protection for the foreseeable future. From one perspective, seven years constitutes an extraordinarily long term of service for a bride; from another, it affords Jacob security, assuring he retains protection against the violent retribution he seeks to avoid.

Moreover, bearing in mind Jacob's "refugee status" illuminates the power dynamics at play. Asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, as just one example, do not choose where they live, cannot work legally, and must survive on about £6 a day in vouchers. Life is complicated by the constant threat of deportation. Even after receiving refugee status, forced migrants remain at the mercy of the government: they do not live as citizens, but on time limited and revocable visas. Without uncritically applying modern circumstances to the ancient context, one may still highlight the fundamental dynamic that does cross cultures: the one granting protection to the asylum seeker possesses tremendous power over them. So long as the threat of expulsion exists, so does an asymmetric power relationship.

This model explains Laban's duplicitous behavior. When Laban takes advantage of Jacob's status as a refugee, Jacob has little recourse. "Benevolent" Laban, remarks von Rad, is "a master of deceit:"[19] even though Laban agrees that seven years of service from Jacob will warrant a daughter in marriage (29:19), without warning or regret he gives Jacob the older, unwanted daughter Leah. "Laban said, 'It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, *provided you serve me another seven years*'" (Gen 29:26-27). Westermann remarks that "Jacob agrees; he has no option."[20]

Westermann is correct, but he neither elaborates on the reasons why nor considers the implications of the situation. Because Laban assures Jacob's livelihood and safety, Jacob lives in an asymmetric power relationship with him. He is, like all refugees, in a subordinate position to the one who grants this status. The refugee is marginalized, disempowered, and circumscribed in their ability to pursue their rights for fear of expulsion. All of this is compressed into the short, dismissive comment with which Laban begins his explanation: "It is not done thus in *our* place" (לא יעשה כן במקומנו; Gen 29:26a). Even though Laban has welcomed Jacob like family and granted him asylum, he remains an outsider, not a part of the host community.

[19] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary,* trans. John H. Marks (London: SCM Press, 1961), 292.
[20] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary,* trans. John K. Scullion S.J. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 467.

Jacob has severely limited options in this situation. His stated desire to marry Rachel is not irrelevant, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Jacob accepts Laban's one-sided offer to serve another seven years for Rachel without resistance or negotiation because of the asymmetric power relationship between them.

Jacob serves the additional seven years of service, sees the birth of twelve sons, and then requests permission to leave (Gen 30:25). Even after almost twenty years (cf. 31:38), Laban politely declines, suggesting instead that Jacob specify another "wage." This is not generosity, writes Westermann, but "a rejection of Jacob's request."[21] Laban imitates a loving father, but leverages his power to compel Jacob into yet another term of service that will benefit him far more than Jacob.

Whereas commentators interpret the confusing set of statements between Laban and Jacob in Gen 30:25-34 through their kinship,[22] it is far more helpful to examine it through migration studies. Jacob expresses the desire to live on his own, to manage his own affairs, and to be treated as a fully capable agent (30:25-26, 30b). This desire is common to involuntary migrants, who prefer to self-settle and to survive by their own agency.[23] When Laban refuses Jacob's request (30:31a), the patriarch resorts to a tactic common among subordinated groups across cultures: he employs Laban's paternalistic language against him, utilizing it to construct the ruse whereby he will acquire the majority of Laban's livestock.

American sociologist and political scientist James C. Scott has demonstrated that subaltern groups resist and deceive dominant groups in their daily practices.[24] In *Weapons of the Weak* and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, he establishes that dominated groups assert their rights through disguised behaviors that push the established boundaries of obedience for their benefit without breaking them so blatantly as to provoke punitive

[21] Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 481.

[22] As an example, consider Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 271-72.

[23] See, for instance, Barbara E. Harrell-Bond, *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), and the synthesis in Elizabeth Colson, "Forced Migration and the Anthropological Response," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 16 (2003), 7-10; for an anecdotal overview, cf. the recent lecture by Jeff Crisp at the Refugee Studies Centre in Oxford: http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/news/in-search-of-solutions-refugees-are-doing-it-for-themselves-refugee-voices-opening-plenary-jeff-crisp (accessed on 23 Feb 2017).

[24] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985); idem., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), 110-25.

measures from the authorities. Particularly relevant to the Laban-Jacob relationship, Scott observes that when dominant powers portray themselves with "paternalist flourishes about care, feeding, [and] housing,"[25] subaltern groups happily employ this rhetoric in requests that suit their needs. Jacob's scheme against Laban depicted in Gen 30:25-43 fits this profile.

Daniel Smith-Christopher previously suggested the relevance of Scott's work for interpreting the Jacob narrative, though he did not note the particular connection to Jacob's use of Laban's language. Smith-Christopher concludes that trickster narratives contribute to a "subcultural ethics" that emerges from the social circumstances of exilic subordination, extol the subaltern's ability to successfully navigate problematic circumstances,[26] and exhibit a willingness to use truth and falsehood to survive. Laban's disingenuous rhetoric furnishes Jacob an opportunity to resist his authority in this way. Jacob shrewdly capitalizes upon it in order to serve his ultimate aim to gain autonomy.

The importance of the asymmetric power structure between Laban and Jacob is highlighted by what happens when it is undone. Compare the final conversation between Jacob and Laban in Gen 31:25-54. Although Laban feigns his desire to celebrate Jacob, still Jacob confesses that "I was afraid because I thought you would take your daughters from me by force" (31:31). Furthermore, when Laban cannot prove his accusation that Jacob has his household gods, Jacob feels free to respond with anger (31:36). Now outside of Laban's home and his protection, Jacob is forceful, unafraid to assert his rights, and even accusatory. This is not the same man who accepted a seven-year term of service for Rachel without negotiation because this is no longer a refugee dependent upon a protective power. Laban recognizes as much: though he wants to claim all Jacob possesses as his own (31:43), even he knows this is not possible, so he settles for a treaty that includes curses on Jacob should he mistreat Leah or Rachel (31:50).

[25] Scott, *Domination*, 18.

[26] Daniel Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 167; cf. Susan Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

IV. JACOB'S THE RETURN MIGRANT (GEN 32:2–33:20)[27]

The narrative immediately pivots towards Canaan, and Jacob's demeanor changes as he contemplates returning "home." Jacob understandably dreads what he will find when he meets Esau; he lives with a nightmare of return, not the more common utopian dream of home called the myth of return.[28] On the night prior to crossing the Jordan, Jacob struggles with a divine being (Gen 32). The fight dislocates his hip, providing the etiology for the name Israel, but also affording him the courage to face Esau. Thus, Jacob's assessment that "I have seen God face to face yet my life has continued" (Gen 32:31) evokes the traumatized involuntary migrant remarking that "if I can deal with this, I can deal with anything." Jacob's encounter at the Jabbok does not change his character, but underscores his ability to endure even the most fearful circumstances.[29]

The positive impact on Jacob's courage comes to the fore when he encounters Esau again (33:1-11). Jacob remarks that "to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably"[30] (33:10), creating an explicit echo of 32:31. No less surprising than seeing the divine countenance and surviving, Jacob's confession to Esau reveals equal astonishment at confronting his aggrieved brother without open hostility. Lest the point escape notice, this suggests that the experience of involuntary migration remains absolutely central to the narrative even in the the two divine visions (Gen 28:10-20 and 32:23-33) that provide the *hieros logoi* for Bethel, Mahanaim, and Penuel. At the same time as providing etiologies, these texts offer assurance and hope to those facing the frightful trial of living among potentially hostile others.

Jacob does not live his nightmare when he meets Esau, but that does not mean his return "home" fails to be disorienting. Nothing resembles either Jacob's memory or expectation of Canaan. Jacob remains confused that Esau seeks reconciliation and not revenge. Though one anticipates that Jacob will now behave differently toward Esau, the unexpected situation leaves Jacob facing yet another new place with yet another unfamiliar

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[27] The UN defines a returnee as a refugee who has returned to his or her home country. See http://www.unrefugees.org/site/c.lfIQKSOwFqG/b.4950731/k.A894/What_is_a_refugee.htm (accessed on 23 Feb 2017).

[28] Jesse Newman, "Narrating Displacement: Oral Histories of Sri Lankan Women," *Refugee Studies Centre Working Papers* 15 (2003), 18-59.

[29] cf. the discussion in Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster*, 160-69.

[30] Following the JPS translation; cf. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 522-23.

host. Laban appeared benevolent to Jacob initially before taking advantage of him; will Esau be any different?

Katherine Southwood examines Ezra-Nehemiah and not Genesis, but she establishes that the Hebrew Bible depicts return migrants re-applying the strategies they used to survive away from "home" to navigate the unfamiliar circumstances they find when returning there.[31] Likewise, Jacob responds to Esau with the same strategies he employed for handling Laban. First, Jacob offers a material payment that is exceedingly large (Gen 33:1-11; cf. 29:15-20), indeed apparently unnecessary (33:9), to his unfamiliar host. Second, Jacob treats Esau's generous offer to provide assistance for his journey to Seir with suspicion because he is wary of having Esau's representatives with him. When Jacob refuses their help, the logic of his refusal replicates his final dealing with Laban: Jacob recognizes the generosity offered (compare 30:31 and 33:15), but refuses to accept.[32] With Laban, this behavior provides Jacob the opportunity to deceptively acquire wealth; with Esau, it provides Jacob protection by creating separation between him and someone he does not trust. Jacob acts the same way in circumstances that appear quite different to some, but are alarmingly similar to an involuntary migrant.

Though a similar analysis of Gen 34–36 could show how the experience of involuntary migration colors the interaction between Jacob's family and the Shechemites, in order to demonstrate the second potential contribution of this approach it is necessary to explore how this interdisciplinary exegesis may be coordinated with further insights from the study of migration to examine the diachronic growth of the Jacob material.

V. Reassessing the Development of the Jacob Narrative

The relatively broad agreement on the sources that comprise the canonical form of the Jacob narrative makes it a good case study to expound how the study of migration may inform a fresh assessment of Genesis' diachronic development.

Perhaps the single point of consensus in Pentateuchal source criticism now is the

[31] Southwood, *Ezra 9–10*. For the social scientific research basis of her argument, see pp. 49-56.
[32] In 30:31 Jacob says "pay me nothing!" and in 33:15 "Oh no, my lord is too kind to me!"

division between P and non-P material. Owing to the relatively small amount of P material in Gen 25–36, consensus is even more prevalent here. Erhard Blum enumerates an "almost undisputed" list of 29 verses from P in the Jacob narrative: 25:19-20, 26b; 26:34-35; 27:46–28:9; 31:17-18; 33:aα$_1$.β; 35:(6?) 9-15, 22b-29.[33] Scholars also generally agree that P's material dates to the period after 586 B.C.E., most accepting that it binds the ancestral tradition and the exodus tradition into a single narrative for the first time.[34]

The question of what material may pre-date P remains highly debated, though scholars tend towards one of two groups. One group identifies major pieces of the non-P Jacob narrative as pre-priestly compositions that originate separately from the Abraham (and Isaac) traditions, emerging from the Northern Kingdom of Israel prior to the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E. This group includes Erhard Blum, Albert de Pury,[35] David Carr,[36] Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer,[37] along with many others. Blum, perhaps the most influential of this group, may serve as a representative of it here, though differences certainly exist between him and the others in this group.

Blum argues for three stages of development prior to the P edition (his Kp). The earliest edition (Blum's *Kompositionsschicht*) consists of a Jacob-Esau-Laban story, probably composed during the Omride era (ca. 880-850 BCE). This version comprises the *Vorstufe* for the second edition, Blum's so-called *Jakoberzählung*, which expands the text into a tri-partite narrative with Jacob's two encounters with Esau framing his time with Laban. Crucial to Blum's dating of the *Jakoberzählung*, it now includes the *hieros logos* for Bethel (28:10-22), along with etiologies for Mahanaim and Penuel (32:2-3, 23-33). Such material, Blum contends, must date from a time when the relevant sanctuary operated, making 722 B.C.E. the

[33] Blum, "Jacob," 190-91.

[34] I bracket the Neo-Documentarian approach here. Insofar as these scholars offer a date for any source, there are indications they prefer a pre-586 date for P. This matter deserves further attention, but that is not possible here.

[35] Albert de Pury, *Promesse divine et légende culturelle dans le cycle de Jacob: Genèse 28 et les traditions patriarcales* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1975); Albert de Pury, "Le cycle de Jacob comme légende autonome des origines d'Israël," in *Congress Volume: Leuven, 1989*, ed. J. A. Emerton (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

[36] David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

[37] Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer, "Comments on the Historical Background of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 126 (2014): 317-338; cf. Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer, "Comments on the Historical Background of the Abraham Narrative: Between 'Realia' and 'Exegetica'," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 3 (2014): 3-23.

terminus ante quem for this form of the narrative in his schema.[38] Blum speculates the likely provenance for the *Jakoberzählung* is "under the second Jeroboam, probably in the realm of the sanctuary at Bethel."[39]

This *Jakoberzählung* comes to the Southern Kingdom of Judah after the destruction of Samaria, where, in due course at some point after 586 B.C.E., Judahite tradents combine it with the existing Abraham traditions in order to form the ancestral history (*Vätergeschichte II* in Blum's earlier work on this material).[40] Though Blum's scheme details further development from this stage, both because that does not impact the current discussion and for brevity's sake that shall not be traced here.

Another group of scholars maintains that the Jacob narrative originates after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. Recently and notably, Nadav Na'aman has argued that the pre-P Jacob material comes from "about the mid-6th century B.C.E." in Judah.[41] Despite problems in Na'aman's argument, he demonstrates a number of obstacles to a Northern, 8th-century setting for the composition of the Jacob material as outlined by Blum. Six of Na'aman's arguments shall be reviewed here in order both to specify the problems he identifies with Blum's view and also to provide a foundation for a fresh proposal regarding the composition of the pre-P Jacob material.

Three points can be catalogued quickly. One, Na'aman observes that the well-integrated beginning (26:23, 33) and ending (35:19) of the Jacob story occur in Judah, not the Northern Kingdom.[42] Two, he notes that "[t]he prominence of Haran in the story fits the reality of the late 8th-6th centuries, not that of the time of the Israelite monarchy."[43] Three, Na'aman follows Jacob Hoftijzer, concluding that the promise texts, which form an important part of the story (12:1-3; 26:2-3ba; 31:3; 31:13; 46:3-4), "first arose at a time in which the Israelite's existence was seriously threatened, probably in the exilic period."[44] While

[38] Blum, "Jacob," 208.
[39] Blum, "Jacob," 210.
[40] Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984); see Erhard Blum, *Studien dur Komposition des Pentateuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 214, n. 35, and the discussion of the Blum's revision of his position in Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.,* trans. David Green (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 251-52.
[41] Nadav Na'aman, "The Jacob Story and the Formation of Biblical Israel," *Tel Aviv: Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 41 (2014): 95.
[42] Na'aman, "Jacob Story," 99.
[43] Na'aman, "Jacob Story," 99.
[44] Na'aman, "Jacob Story," 99.

Na'aman correctly stresses a connection to a time when the community felt its control over its land was at risk, he fails to recognize this mood may have prevailed in Israel, and indeed Judah, anytime from about 730 B.C.E. onwards.

Na'aman's fourth point constitutes his strongest objection to Blum's position: instead of postulating that the Bethel *hieros logos* (Gen 28:10-22) must originate in a period when Bethel contained an active temple, Na'aman demonstrates the equal likelihood that the material seeks to engender hope for a future restoration of the Bethel sanctuary. According to him, Gen 28 presents a "foundation legend of the temple, which justifies its restoration and expansion," substantiating a "hope that when Jacob/Israel returns home, 'this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God's house.'"[45] Na'aman's case hardly decides the issue; nevertheless, it shows the impossibility of dating this etiology according to the operational status of the Bethel sanctuary.

Fifth, Na'aman argues that a positive description of a familial network connecting the Northern Kingdom to Haran sits uneasily with the proposed dating of the "Story of Jacob" during the Israelite monarchy, a period of great hostility between the Israelites and the Arameans.[46] To this extent, Na'aman remains convincing, though he carries on into speculative claims he cannot substantiate.[47] Na'aman also observes that the Jacob narrative contains precious little material seeking to justify the role of the Israelite monarchy, which only strengthens his point. Whereas the material in Judges and Samuel, for which similar claims exist, obviously deals with political and military leadership, and even the Abraham material intimates similar themes (i.e., Gen 14), Jacob never adopts such a role. Jacob lives subordinated to others. Whatever success Jacob does experience comes by trickery of the

[45] Na'aman, "Jacob Story," 101; cf. Harald Wahl, *Die Jakobserzählungen. Studien zu ihrer mündlichen Überlieferung, Vorschriftung und Historizität* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), who suggests the story is written once Bethel is already destroyed.

[46] Na'aman, "Jacob Story," 105.

[47] Na'aman speculates that the "Arameans" that live beyond the river (31:21-23) represent the 'descendants of the Israelites that the Assyrians deported to north Mesopotamia who, over the course of time, lost their former ethnic identity and became "Arameans."' Na'aman attempts to support his speculation with an inscription from Sargon II, the account of 2 Kgs 17:6, and (admittedly) sparse evidence for Yahwistic names in this area during the 7th century, but the evidence will not support the claim (Na'aman, "Jacob Story," 105). He presents this case as an extension of Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel,* trans. Chiara Peri and Philip Davies (London: Equinox, 2005), 264, though there is little to nothing in Liverani's discussion to suggest this conclusion.

dominant power, never from obtaining that power himself. If the Jacob narrative intends to justify Israelite royal prerogative, it is an especially obtuse attempt to do so.

Finally, Na'aman discusses the varying locales of Rachel's tomb: placed alternately in the north (1 Sam 10:2; Jer 31:14) and in Ephrath/Bethlehem (35:16-20), he contends that the link to Bethlehem "strongly supports my suggestion that Jacob's story was written in Judah rather than in Israel. Otherwise," he continues, "the tomb would have been identified in north Benjamin, near Bethel, where the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom claimed its location to be."[48] Na'aman correctly stresses the connection to Benjamin, but he moves too quickly to conclude this indicates a Judahite composition. Indeed, his assertion relies upon his own idiosyncratic view that Benjamin comprised part of Judah throughout both the Bronze and Iron ages.[49] That view disregards strong evidence that Benjamin constituted part of Israel and Judah at various times during the Iron Age, with Judahite control of the region demonstrable from the late 8th-century until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.[50] So, while Na'aman accurately emphasizes the Benjamite connection, he incorrectly correlates this to the 6th-century rather than sometime after roughly 730 BCE.

To summarize, Na'aman persuasively demonstrates the author of the Jacob narrative "was familiar with places in south Judah and the neighboring southern regions and with Judahite oral traditions, and... was familiar with the North Israelite urban centers and cultural memories."[51] One may appropriate this contribution without accepting his specious conclusion that the Jacob material is, then, "a Judahite exilic composition" which "might be read as a paradigm of a forced migration from the land, the hard life in the Diaspora and the return home."[52] In sum, Na'aman effectively unmoors the Jacob narrative from a reigning Israelite monarchy and a functioning Bethel sanctuary while cogently connecting it to a

[48] Na'aman, "Jacob Story," 108.

[49] Nadav Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of ›biblical Israel‹," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 121(2009): 211-24, 335-49.

[50] Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 44-47, who argues in direct rebuttal to Na'aman's position as detailed in Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin".

[51] Na'aman, "Jacob Story," 118.

[52] Na'aman, "Jacob Story," 109; cf. Bert Dicou, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994). Indeed, Na'aman seems to undermine his own view in this last quote, which posits a community that has experienced diasporic living and, minimally, a desire to return home. Without objecting at all to the classifying those who remained in Judah after 586 B.C.E. as involuntary migrants, because they remain in Judah they are by definition not part of a diaspora that yearns for a return home.

community with knowledge of both Israel and Judah, living during a period of prominence for Haran (the late 8th-6th centuries), and familiar with the experience of involuntary migration.

The preceding exegesis—showing the centrality that involuntary migration plays in the Jacob narrative—magnifies the importance of this final feature. Indeed, when one places the efforts at royal authorization and religious etiology in proper perspective alongside the dominant theme of involuntary migration, the vital contribution the social scientific study of involuntary migration can make to identifying the provenance of Gen 25–36 comes to the fore. The key question emerges in this form: did a community of involuntary migrants, familiar with prominent locations in Israel and Judah, positively disposed to the traditions about the patriarch Jacob, exist during the period of Haran's prominence between the late 8th and 6th century BCE?

Much remains unknown about the aftermath of the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria around 720 B.C.E. Scholars largely agree, nevertheless, that the extant material and the textual evidence indicates a substantial number of Israelites (involuntarily) migrated into Judah as a result of these events. "Resettlement of Israelite groups from the area of southern Samaria, including Bethel, in Jerusalem and Judah," comments Israel Finkelstein about this period, transformed Judah into "a mixed Judahite-Israelite kingdom under Assyrian domination."[53] Scholars primarily concern themselves with the process by which this generates a so-called "pan-Israelite" identity secured by combining Northern and Southern textual traditions, but this analysis overlooks the possibility for compositional activity during this period prior to such amalgamation.[54]

Blum originally located the initial combination of the Abraham and Jacob traditions into a patriarchal history (his *Vätergeschichte I*) during this period,[55] though he subsequently revised his view, opting to argue this occurred after 586 BCE.[56] Blum's move created something of a "dark period" between roughly 720 and 586 BCE for him, and it would seem, for many others working on the Pentateuch as well. Recently, Finkelstein and Thomas Römer

[53] Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 155.
[54] Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 155.
[55] Blum, *Die Komposition*, 273-97, especially pp. 296-97.
[56] Blum, *Studien zur Komposition*, 214, n. 35; cf. Matthias Köckert, *Vätergott und Väterverheißungen: eine auseinandersetzung mit Albrecht Alt und seinem Erben* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 252-54.

have revived the role of this period in the development of the Jacob narrative, though they consider it only as a time that might allow for the combination of the Abraham and Jacob traditions, not as an opportunity for independent development of the Jacob material occurring prior to any integration with the Abraham traditions.

Nevertheless, the social setting for the Israelite involuntary migrants in Judah between 720 B.C.E. and approximately 630 B.C.E. provides precisely the atmosphere in which one may account for the strengths in both Blum's and Na'aman's views. The Israelites who involuntarily migrated to Judah not only knew Samaria and Bethel, as Finkelstein observes, but Shechem and perhaps Penuel, the main locations in the Jacob narrative. The oscillating affiliation of Benjamin with Israel and Judah makes it likely some of these Israelite involuntary migrants settled there, offering a possible logic for locating Rachel's burial there too. The small size of Judah and relative proximity of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Beersheba (about 40 miles/65 km from the former two), even by ancient standards, accounts for knowledge about the key Southern sites in the Jacob narrative.

It is conjecture to speak about the social status and education of the Israelite involuntary migrants, but the fact that any Northern traditions survive at all strongly implies the presence of some literate elites, such as priests and scribes. It is no struggle to imagine some elites being sent ahead "to safety," as it were, from Samaria, Bethel, and other key locations in Israel as the Assyrian invasion commenced and defeat became more and more likely, even if this situation lies beyond what is demonstrable. Whatever the case, members of the Israelite involuntary migrant community would have known key components of the pre-existing Jacob traditions—for instance, some etiological material along with some stories about migration—that enabled them to perpetuate the stories after arriving in Judah, perhaps orally, perhaps in writing.[57] This community of Israelite involuntary migrants, even in such broad outline, provides a fitting social setting for all the features Na'aman highlights about the Jacob narrative's likely author.

What aim would an Israelite involuntary migrant seek to achieve by including existing traditions about Jacob the patriarch and key religious sites in the North into a new edition of the story after 720 B.C.E.? Recall the major moves in the plot of the Jacob narrative

[57] On the evidence for an "oral-written literary matrix" lying behind the development of the texts in the Hebrew Bible, see David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

from Gen 25–33: conflict between Esau and Jacob produces hostility between them, so that Esau pronounces his homicidal intentions; Rebekah uses her access and influence with Isaac to arrange, with something between misdirection and dishonesty, Jacob's departure; Jacob travels to Laban, who he does not know but to whom he is related, and obtains refuge; though providing safety for Jacob, Laban accrues great power over Jacob, forcing Jacob to accept unfair treatment in order to retain his protection; after twenty years, Jacob cleverly escapes Laban's control, departs from this "safe-haven," and returns to face his enemy; although the enemy's hostility appears to have dissipated, uncertainty prompts Jacob to employ trickery to protect himself and his family once again. In sum, the Jacob narrative describes how to successfully navigate the frightful challenges arising from life as an involuntary migrant caught between a hostile enemy (e.g., Assyria) and a host community to which one is related, but does not have your well-being at the top of their priorities (e.g., Judah).

Characterized thus, the Jacob story offers encouragement to and sustains hope for the Israelite involuntary migrants in Judah after 720 B.C.E. To illustrate this function, compare this objective with the aims of stories told by contemporary involuntary migrants. In her influential work with Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Liisa Malkki notes the unabashedly didactic nature of their historical narratives. Lasting from hours to several days, the stories "were crafted with considerable oratorical eloquence" and "clearly had a beginning, a development, a climax, and a closure."[58] The stories facilitated discussions on the lessons contained in the material. The "heavily moral stories" constructed an understanding of the world "and the pragmatics of everyday life" as an involuntary migrant.[59]

By depicting Israel's eponymous ancestor Jacob as an asylum seeker, refugee, and return migrant who successfully navigates the gauntlet between hostile enemy Esau and coercive host-protector Laban, the Jacob narrative accomplishes the didactic, pragmatic function of endorsing a mode of life suited to the situation of the Israelite involuntary migrants who find themselves in Judah after 720 B.C.E.

[58] Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 53.
[59] Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 53-55.

VI. Conclusion

The Jacob narrative, as demonstrated, foregrounds the experience of involuntary migration. It follows sensibly, then, that the social scientific study of that same phenomenon must illumine the meaning of the text. Furthermore, the same social scientific research offers important inputs into the effort to reconstruct the diachronic development of the text by substantially clarifying the social setting(s) from which it likely arose.

This essay has employed findings from the study of involuntary migration to offer a fresh exegesis of the Jacob narrative, thereby justifying the need for scholars to recognize its central theme is involuntary migration. Additionally, this piece outlines a new argument for placing important diachronic developments in the Jacob narrative's history among Israelite involuntary migrants living in Judah during the period between 720 and 630 B.C.E.

The first stage of the argument—a synchronic exegesis—remains valid regardless of whether one accepts the second stage, namely, the diachronic reconstruction. This point deserves explicit statement, lest any disagreement on the more contentious issues of source criticism and provenance obscure the important contribution that occurs at this interpretative level.

That said, even scholars who disagree with the compositional history advocated on the basis of this exegesis will need to account for it—especially the finding that involuntary migration comprises a dominant theme of the Jacob narrative. The case for its role here should make it a common feature in future reconstructions of the diachronic development of the ancestral narrative. Indeed, one might define the central contribution of this article as its indication that the social scientific study of migration, especially involuntary migration, can and should assume an important role in analysis of the ancestral narrative.