

○ THE CRIPPLED *UMMAH*

TOWARD REDEFINING *GOLAH* IN EZRA-NEHEMIAH

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The main objective of this investigation is an articulated definition of the term and concept *golah* that is tenable within social-scientific method. Through a cross-cultural comparison of the nature and organisation of the *ummah* under Muhammad in Yathrib/Medina with the nature and organisation the *golah* community in Yehud, this investigation will argue that the *golah* community (as portrayed in Ezra-Nehemiah) compares in many ways with the *ummah*, a 'religious tribe.' As a result, the *ummah* can be used as a cross-cultural model against which to refine a definition of *golah*, comparing the idealised portrait of the community in Ezra-Nehemiah with the 'portrait' arrived at through cross-cultural analysis. By analysing key structural components of the *ummah* and comparing those components with those of the *golah* community, this study will highlight some of the structural and characteristic traits of the *golah* community. It should be noted that my discussion of the term *ummah* focuses on its structure and purpose in Yathrib rather than on the more evolved and evolving theological usage of the term in the Quran.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

There are specific questions about the social-political makeup of the *golah* community that delicately brace the framework of this study. In what sense was the *golah* community autonomous, authoritative, or exclusive? Also, in what sense, if at all, did the religious ideologies of the *golah* community dictate social, economic, and political actions in Yehud or even more specifically in Jerusalem? Does Ezra-Nehemiah reflect an ideal situation, one in which the leaders of the *golah* community were able to dictate the ebb and flow of the social, economic, and political systems in Yehud? An ideal situation, if it does, that was not quite utopian; conflict continues to exist even in Ezra-Nehemiah. But what, if anything, does that conflict say about the nature of the *golah* community?

As a working premise, I view Ezra-Nehemiah as originally produced by representatives of a particular social group that, while portraying an idealised vision of a society, affirm or react to certain social realities in Yehud – specifics that will be addressed in due course. In order to more fully accommodate a cross-cultural comparison, this study begins with a case study discussing the structural components of the *ummah* community in Yathrib – chosen because the *ummah*, a 'religious tribe', shares a number of similarities with the *golah* community. In the sections following, I will compare those structural components to those of the *golah* community in order to arrive at a more social-scientifically refined definition of the term and concept *golah* found in Ezra-Nehemiah.

CASE STUDY: THE *UMMAH* IN YATHRIB/MEDINA

In the Arabian Peninsula during the seventh century C. E., social-political organisation remained largely tribal based, though in a state of transition from tribal-based leaderships into those reflecting the development of a state (Khaldun 1958, 428; Lapidus 2002, 51–60). Muhammad's constitution of an *ummah*, a political confederation at root (Serjeant 1978, 4),¹ in Yathrib occurred

during a time that the area was fertile for social-political change. It was part of a response prompted by his concern over the decaying social, economic, and moral-religious climate in Mecca, and his subsequent 'migration' from Mecca after speaking out against the economic and political elite (Ibrahim 1982, 343–358).² These, i.e., the elite, were exploiting the lower classes for economic gain (Lapidus 2002, 21). Individual pursuit of power and its consolidation caused the struggle for a control over the city which, given its location on trade routes through the Arabian Peninsula, as well as its being the location of the Ka'ba (a shrine that was the central component of the *hajj*, or holy pilgrimage), had become economically prosperous.³

When Muhammad spoke out against the social and economic injustices perpetrated by the economic and political elite in Mecca, the city leaders drove him out – a (e)migration later referred to as the *hijra* (Abu-Sahlieh 1996, 38; Donner 1999, 8–9).⁴ Representatives of Yathrib who agreed with his teachings, took him in and made him the de facto ruler and arbiter of disputes in the town (Donner 1999, 8–9).⁵ By virtue of this position and through his social-religious teachings, Muhammad gained control over the economic, judicial, and political spheres of Yathrib, though not always without some protest. On several occasions, Muhammad and his followers found themselves in skirmishes with leading Jewish clans, from Yathrib and surrounding territories, which before Muhammad's arrival had enjoyed economic control (Donner 1999, 9).⁶

In what may have been a response to the social diversity in Yathrib, and to the gradual obsolescence of the kinship form of society (Lapidus 2002, 22–23), Muhammad used religious ideas to give new meaning to traditional virtues and social institutions (Armstrong 2000, 4–6; Lapidus 2002, 29). He redefined the criteria for membership within a tribe, better 'social unit,' from bloodline to common faith, integrating social and religious concerns. His teachings easily attracted followers because they were clearly related to the then dominant form of Arabic religion, since his focus was on religious reform in addition to social and economic reform (Armstrong 2000, 4–5; Lapidus 2002, 28–39). There was, to be sure, an 'avant-garde' element in his view of social (re)organisation. In Muhammad's idea of *ummah*, kinship was not the dominant or defining factor; instead, it was faith in the authority of God as well as a shared territoriality that defined this concept – the latter was especially important given Muhammad's struggle against the Quraysh in Mecca (Denny 1977, 44; Dabashi 1989, 48–49, 54). This made possible the integration of disparate peoples into a new community (Lapidus 2002, 29). As a popular author notes:

What made the Ummah a unique experiment in social organization was that in Yathrib, far away from the social and religious hegemony of the Quraysh, Muhammad finally had the opportunity to implement the reforms he had been preaching to no avail in Mecca. By enacting a series of radical religious, social, and economic reforms, he was able to establish a new kind of society... (Aslan 2005, 58).

The *ummah* was the community of God. Muhammad was the intermediary between the people and God.⁷

Muhammad's charismatic authority was manifested in a variety of ways: He was a military commander, a general for the Muslim soldier; he was the polit-

ical leader of the administrative apparatus of Muslim society; he was the religious leader who intervened between the *ummah* and Allah; and he was the spiritual leader who inspired the minds and hearts of all the Muslim saints in the generations to come (Dabashi 1989, 56).

The Constitution of Medina (hereafter, CoM) was a military-political document intended to safeguard Medina and the *ummah* attached to it (Denny 1977, 44; Rubin 1985, 9). The CoM chartered the end of the official transition from Yathrib⁸ to Medina (*madinat al-nabi*, ‘city of the prophet’ or ‘the prophet’s city’) – a transition that also confirmed Yathrib/Medina’s status as a sacred territory, as declared by Muhammad (cf. Article 39, and see below), rivaling that of Mecca. In Article 1 of the CoM, *ummah* is defined as all Muslims, Jews, and *ansar* (those who supported the immigrants coming into Yathrib) (Abu-Sahlieh 1996, 38) who strove together with Muhammad and his followers to bring about the social, economic, and religious reforms he advocated, while protecting Yathrib as a sacred territory (Denny 1977, 43; Rubin 1985, 10–13; Armstrong 2000, 14).⁹ ‘That the main basis of the new unity was to be a territorial one is indicated in article 39: “the inner part (*jawf*) of Yathrib is sacred (*kharam*) for the people of this document.[”] In making the territory of Medina a protected *kharam*, Muhammad put it on a level with the *kharam* of Mecca’ (Rubin 1985, 10). This was more than just choosing a permanent territory for the *ummah*. During Muhammad’s lifetime, Mecca had become a central religious site, a dominant mercantile, and a cultural center (Donner 1977, 249). Declaring Yathrib a *kharam*, a sacred territory,¹⁰ created a new religious-cultural center that was in direct competition with Mecca.¹¹ Moreover, Muhammad undermined Mecca as an economic center by raiding caravans bound for the city – a task made easier given Yathrib’s location, near which all inbound caravans must pass (Donner 1977, 256). He also established alliances with tribes in the zone between Yathrib/Medina and the coast, creating an additional ‘hostile territory’ through which the caravans had to pass (256). The *ummah* centered in Yathrib/Medina became under Muhammad a military and economic force that the Quraysh could not afford to ignore.¹²

To confirm the *ummah* as a social-political unit, Muhammad focused on a unity based on territoriality with the creation of Medina’s constitution (Rubin 1985, 10 ff 27);¹³ this idea of *ummah* as ‘oneness’ is one that is preserved in the Quran (43:33; 23:52; 21:92) (Denny 1975, 45).¹⁴ Nevertheless, the *ummah* did not lose all hints of tribal loyalty. Articles 37 and 38 of the CoM state that all members of the *ummah* must finance war expenses by paying *nafaqah* (levy).¹⁵ Additionally, all members must come to the aid of any other members of the *ummah* who are being fought against (Rubin 1985, 12). One also sees here hints of the type of inter-tribal loyalty that one finds in a confederation (Serjeant 1964, 13; Denny 1977, 44). This suggests that there continued to be recognition of differences (e.g., Jew, Muslim, etc.) (Denny 1977, 43; Rubin 1985, 12–13; Armstrong 2000, 14)¹⁶ within the framework of the *ummah*. Those differences, however, were not divisive but were part of the complexity of the *ummah* as a new social-political unit.¹⁷ It was a unit, or confederation, as R. B. Serjeant notes, that was basically secular in pattern while theocratic in its ultimate nature of arbitration (Serjeant 1978, 2).

UMMAH, STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

The *ummah* was a social-political unit defined not primarily by bloodline or kinship but by a ‘common faith’, therefore capable of including Jews, Muslims, and others. In function, it operated as a type of tribe, or ‘supertribe’ as Frederick Denny refers to it (Denny 1977, 46–47). Serjeant describes it as ‘basically a political unit’ (Serjeant 1978, 4). As a collective, it imposed certain rules of interaction within its social-economic-political space upon its individual members. One of its main purposes, in addition to that of living as a faithful community, was to safeguard the sacred territory of Yathrib. Membership within the *ummah*, which was said to guarantee protection, entailed economic obligations, among others, such as levies and general taxes. Historically, the *ummah* was part of a reaction to the current social-economic inequalities perpetrated by the Quraysh leaders. It was associated with and loyal to Muhammad’s religious teachings. It was territorial in nature, centered in Yathrib, which in turn became a sacred territory. Its leader(s) regulated control over the social, economic, and political institutions of Yathrib, as well as other territories later included in Muhammad’s domain.

COMPARISON: UMMAH AND GOLAH

In the name of God! The Merciful, the Compassionate! This is a writing of Muhammad the prophet between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib (sc. Medina) and those who follow them and who crusade along with them. They are a single community distinct from other people [CoM] (translated by Watt 1961, 94; cited in Dabashi 1989, 54).

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. Then those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors. They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth part of the day, and for another fourth they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God (Neh. 9:1-3).

There are certain aspects of the *ummah* that make it an attractive possibility for comparison with the *golah* community in Yehud.¹⁸ Both are developed as part of a sense of territoriality, being centered on a city. Both appear to be social units that develop in response to an ‘other’ controlling social, economic, and/or political power (this was the Quraysh for the *ummah* and, we must theorise here, the social-economic elite, for lack of a better term, of ‘the people of the land’ for the *golah* community).¹⁹ Both are social units with identities stemming from a religious orientation and definition, and both seem to present that religious definition as a social-political one; whether this ultimately proves true of the *golah* community will hopefully be determined by the end of this investigation. The *ummah* required a common belief in God and God’s prophet, Muhammad. Limited inclusiveness seems to have existed here, allowing individuals of different religious practices (e.g., Jew, Muslim) to be members of the *ummah* so long as their first loyalty was to the *ummah* and its arbiters, God and Muhammad. The so-called Golah Lists of Ezra 2 and Neh. 7, however, suggest that the *golah* community defined itself with a stronger sense of exclusivity. While Muhammad seems to have redefined the unity once determined by bloodline

as a type of group feeling (Khalidun 1958, vol. 1, 264–265, 374; vol. 2, 120, 267, 302–305), the *golah* community appears to base membership on a collection of certain bloodlines, and possibly more importantly on a shared experience of exile (cf. Ezra 6:19–22). As the passage from Ezra (note esp. 6:21) suggests, it appears possible that some people who may not have immigrated from Babylon were granted honorary membership in the community after they professed loyalty to it and its god. The difference between the *golah* community and the *ummah* on this point is that those who joined the *golah* community also became ‘converts’ to the community’s religion. The *ummah* in Yathrib could accommodate different, though related, religions as long as they expressed loyalty to the ‘local god’ and to Muhammad. These are initial observations, however, and will require more comment in due course.

GOLAH AS RELIGIOUS AND REACTIONARY

The rhetoric of Ezra-Nehemiah presents its readers with an ideal image of a social space that is divided into two categories based on religion, those who are members of a sacred community and those who are not members (cf. Ezra 10:2, 10–11, 14; Neh. 13:3, 26–27). The CoM, by way of comparison, suggests something very similar: ‘They are a single community (*ummah*) distinct from (other) people.’²⁰ Taking the meaning behind such rhetoric in Ezra-Nehemiah as an adequate representation of Yehud has suggested to some that a theocracy existed in the province (De Vaux 1961, 98–99, 141; Plöger 1968, 108–116; Hanson 1979, 211–220; Weinberg 1992, 112–126; Wellhausen 1994, 411–422; Dyck 1998, 1–4). Though a theocracy is ultimately an inaccurate description,²¹ and we may question the adequacy in representation by such meaning, one still cannot escape the deep-rooted presence of religious agenda and ideology within Ezra-Nehemiah. Ezra-Nehemiah is, above all, a religious text. This meaningful presence defines and confines the focus of the text to the people of Yahweh, the city of Yahweh, and the restoration of the nation chosen by Yahweh, each as ideally defined by the text itself and limited to the *golah* community. Unlike the CoM, it is not a political document, though it may make certain unverifiable, political statements (cf. Ezra 7:1–28).²² Still, in the near absence of alternate evidence it is an unavoidable lens through which we must look to glimpse the social, economic, and political worlds of Yehud, however fleeting and obscured by religious ideology they may be. This state of the literary text requires a certain deconstruction of ideology and agenda as expressed by the text. Note, for example, the theologically weighted response in Neh. 2:20:

The God of heaven is the one who will give us success, and we his servants are going to start building [i.e., the walls of Jerusalem]; but you have no share or claim or historic right in Jerusalem.

The presence of what seems to be an obvious religious agenda in Ezra-Nehemiah helps explain the text’s dramatic focus on rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. For the author/redactor, these walls not only divided geographic space, they symbolically divided the social space into categories that the author/redactor argued was divine intent – an intent perhaps for the province, though almost exclusive attention is given to the city of Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 13:1–3). Jerusalem, like the *ummah* considered of Yathrib (in CoM, Article 39), was considered by the *golah* community to be a sacred space. Only those whose allegiance was to the local god were the true ‘citizens’ of this space.

Because the *golah* community was, as considered by the author/redactor of Ezra-Nehemiah, the ‘true’ people of Yahweh, it was commanded to separate itself from the ‘profanity’ of all those who were not members of the community (cf. Ezra 10:10-12; Neh. 13:1-3, 30). From the perspective of the biblical text, one might see in that the, for lack of a better phrase, fundamentals of a group consciousness,²³ given that the group perceives itself as a group in the social realm of Yehud.

This perception in Ezra-Nehemiah is a projection of a group in its current place, not one out of place or even displaced (though ideological tradition may preserve in identity the effect of a previous group displacement). In other words, the group perceives itself as a group in the social space that it occupies.²⁴ Like the *ummah* was recognised by its members and by those external to but perceiving of the *ummah* as a unit whose identity was predicated on its location in Yathrib, the *golah* community was a unit whose identity was predicated on its location in Yehud, and increasingly more specifically in Jerusalem.

According to Ezra-Nehemiah, religious, group separation ultimately required Jerusalem’s walls. While the physical walls that would cut through Yehud’s social space were (re)built in conjunction with a larger imperial policy – and we can say this based on an aware historical-archaeological understanding (Meyers 1987, 516; Høglund 1992, 165–169, 208–212; Berquist 1995, 112–114; Carter 1999, 282, 320; Fried 2002, 61–73; Edelman 2005, 75, 146) – the author/redactor interpreted and claimed Jerusalem’s walls as religious and social symbols attesting to the restoration of the *golah* community and of the nation of Israel through this community. The author/redactor largely ignores imperial policies as explanatory reasons, choosing instead the more stirring hope of restoration and its requirement that the sacred be kept distinct from the profane (cf. Neh. 9:32-38).

The Neo-Babylonian- and Persian-period biblical texts generally reject those who remained in the land after the exiles. They appear to be for the biblical authors what the Quraysh represented for Muhammad: a force of antagonism and also at many times, a force of antithesis. Ezekiel 11:1-25, for related example, does no less than reduce these, rather unfairly, to an offensive group of syncretistic self-deceivers who wrongly believed they had a right to the land.²⁵ One sees similar rejection of ‘foreigners’ in Ezra-Nehemiah (cf. Ezra 10:1-44; Neh. 13:1-3), with ‘foreign’ being synonymous with ‘profane’.

Nehemiah’s division of the people from the foreigners in Neh. 5 centered obliquely on the *golah* community as the authority – using ‘authority’ theoretically – in the social-economic-political hierarchy of Yehud. When fully enforced, this division would prohibit access to positions of authority to anyone not a ‘card-carrying’ member of the *golah* community, shown in part by the actions taken during the crisis of intermarriage within Ezra-Nehemiah (e.g., the driving out of one of the sons of Jehoiada in Neh. 13:28).²⁶ Note also:

And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, ‘You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great

evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women'? (Neh. 13:25-27)

The dramatic reaction to intermarriage here and elsewhere in Ezra-Nehemiah may indeed reflect significant lines of stress within a social group, i.e., the *golah*.²⁷ Simultaneously, the expressed need for clear lines of division served a religious purpose. '[O]ne finds almost universally that unhappiness is brought into relation with the wrath or envy of either demons or gods' (Weber 1993, 107). But the adherent of a Yahweh-alone religious orientation had no such luxury of demons or multiple gods; the source of 'unhappiness' could only be explained by profanity, a state of being outside the favor of Yahweh. This was embodied most colorfully in the 'foreign', whether this was the Judean rejected from the *golah* community or another from the various peoples from the surrounding nations (e.g., Ammonites, Edomites, Moabites, etc.). At a most basic level, however, these actions clearly define an idealised group regulation. This was not to be a confederation in the truest sense of the term. While it may be likened to Denny's description of the *ummah* as a 'supertribe', it is only that in the sense that the *golah* community could include within its collective any number of bloodlines. Whether a particular bloodline could be part of this community, however, was strictly regulated. While there was unity in an expression of a common faith, as we see in the *ummah*, the lists in Ezra 2 and Neh. 7 prevent us from denying that bloodline factored into the group identity.

MORE ON GROUP REGULATION

Neh. 13:1-3 states that the law forbids Ammonites or Moabites from entering the 'assembly of God'. In response, the community (referred to as 'Israel') separated itself from all people of foreign descent. One might ask, were only the Ammonites and the Moabites foreign? Or does the author/redactor reductively categorise all foreigners (i.e., those not included in the 'assembly') as Ammonite or Moabite, the most religiously despised of Israel's enemies, and treat them accordingly?²⁸ According to Ezra-Nehemiah, the *golah* community was the rightful 'dominator' of land and economic production. Everyone else was a foreign profanity, like those who caused even the wise Solomon to sin (cf. Neh. 13:26-27) and the nation to later fall in exilic punishment. If the community did not separate itself from them, the author/redactor seems to suggest, it would suffer removal from the land and its position of authority, no longer the exploiters but the exploited.

If control, or the desire for it, over class identity and membership was a motivating factor in Ezra-Nehemiah, then one might read Tobiah's rejection (cf. Neh. 13:4-9) as an attempt by leaders of the *golah* community to assert control over the distribution of power and influence in Yehud (or only Jerusalem) – those things that a ruling class normally dominates, which might in turn intimate a *golah* attempt at defining the group as a ruling class. Removing Tobiah from the temple symbolises his rejection by Yahweh and, from a *golah* perspective, his subsequent rejection from the social-political hierarchy in Yehud. Yet that he was able to establish or be given a presence in the temple seems to suggest that the temple was not under strict *golah* control at the time. In fact, it appears that temples generally, while permitted the freedoms necessary to maintain local cults, were under the final authority of the imperial government – as shown in part by the imperial officials who were appointed to temples and the imperial government's ability to control funding associated with a temple (Schaper 1995, 528–539).²⁹ Furthermore in

this theoretical drama, we cannot avoid Eliashib, who may have been high priest,³⁰ and who does not seem to share the author/redactor's perception of class and class division in Yehud. Perhaps Eliashib should not be held in blame; Yehud was likely a much more complex entity than the author/redactor lets on. Ethnic identities ranged, for example, from Philistines, Judahites, Samaritans (ethnic Israelites and settlers brought in by Assyria), Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Arabs, and Phoenicians (Smith 1987, 63–66, 81; Ahlström 1993, 822–823; Leith 1998, 381). In fact, it appears that a number of aristocratic priests accepted intermarriage (Smith 1987, 65; VanderKam 2004, 53–54), a possible fact that continues to question the reality of a *golah*-controlled social context. Such a complex cultural variety would without question result in a more complicated social division than the pertinacious-imperialistic sounding situation (in other words, member/non-member) that Ezra-Nehemiah describes.

It is within the literary space of Ezra-Nehemiah that control over intermarriage was also control over the land and the distribution of power and authority in the social-political hierarchy in Yehud. In that (controllable) space, the author/redactor used *golah*-Yahwistic ideologies to separate the 'chosen people' from 'everyone else'. While Ezra-Nehemiah reveals tendencies toward defining the *golah* community, or members of it, as a social-political authority, without corroborating evidence from the social, economic, and political realms of the province, we cannot depend upon these tendencies revealed in literary text as historical facts.

GOLAH PRESENCE IN ECONOMIC SPACE

In Neh. 5:1-8, one can possibly see the beginnings of an exploiter-exploited matrix.³¹ Yet it is not clear whether the possible exploiters and exploited were both members of the *golah* community or whether the exploiters were a landed aristocracy and the exploited from the *golah* community (either would explain the author/redactor's concern for debt reconciliation; cf. Neh. 5:6-9).³² The text simply says that nobles (*kbrym*) and officials (*sgnym*)³³ were greedily tightening the (economic) noose around their Jewish kin (cf. Neh. 5:1, 5, 7). This seems to parallel what Muhammad saw in the Quraysh, leading him to speak out against their economic injustices.

The author/redactor's literary treatment of foreigners throughout Ezra-Nehemiah (cf. Ezra 10:10-12; Neh. 13:3, 30), and the described actions of Nehemiah toward those who took an inclusive posture toward foreigners (cf. Neh. 13:25), suggests that no real concern would have been expressed in the text had the exploited not been members of or attached in some important way to the *golah* community. In the literary space of Ezra-Nehemiah, the author/redactor organises recognisable social categories³⁴ and offers a theological justification for Nehemiah's appeasing of the economic crisis (Neh. 5:9-13). A threat of future destruction if the community/society does not follow the decision (Neh. 5:13), the author/redactor provides for good measure. It is noteworthy that this justification appeals primarily to the religious traditions claimed by the *golah* community and not to Nehemiah's imperially legitimated authority. Religion becomes in the text the proposed basis for legitimation.

By way of comparison, while religious ideas played an important role in Muhammad's reformation, they were supplementary to the more invested concern over the social, economic, and political institutions in Yathrib and in Mecca. Thus, because the *ummah* was established to protect these concerns, it was, in appearance, a social-political unit first and a religious confederation second. The reverse seems to be true of the *golah* community in Yehud. The *golah* com-

munity seems foremost to have been a religious unit; all social, economic, or political concerns of the group were addressed under the semblance of that identity. In point of fact, readers of Ezra-Nehemiah hear very little about anything other than religious concerns.

It is unfortunate that our overall understanding of Yehud's economy is in many ways restricted to what the author/redactor believed to be the true purpose of social (and economic) development in Yehud,³⁵ being the restoration of Yahweh's chosen people. The author/redactor refers to the economic space in Yehud when he has Nehemiah forbid economic exchange (of capital)³⁶ on the Sabbath day (Neh. 13:15-22). Nehemiah's outburst regarding the Sabbath is followed immediately by a bitter remonstrance of intermarriage and the children of an 'Israelite' male and a foreign female (Neh. 13:23-27).³⁷ Unless this was religious racism, or an intense counter-religious reaction, these actions demonstrate what seems to be a sought-after control of economic production and exchange, and control over access to goods and services. They set up, consciously or unconsciously, preliminary distinctions between the perceived dominant and dominated parties. In this light, the lists in Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 2; Neh. 7),³⁸ validated by religious affiliation, represent an idealised manner of control over the social-political hierarchy and land or property rights (those things situated in economic space) in Yehud.³⁹ Read in this manner, and taken for the moment as a theoretical possibility, one can see a possible comparison with Muhammad's manner of control in Yathrib/Medina as discussed above.

FROM YATHRIB TO JERUSALEM, SACRED TERRITORY

One is not required to spend much time explaining why Jerusalem was considered a sacred territory; the answer is the same for the *golah* community as it was for much of Yahwism throughout Syria-Palestine. To be sure, Jerusalem's identity as a sacred site was well established before the existence of a *golah* community. The *golah* community, however, sought to lay claim to that tradition – shown in the repeated statements emphasizing the community's self-argued divine right to the land.⁴⁰ Ezra (cf. 1:2-4; 6:3) frames this claim as a decree from Cyrus, providing the criteria that those who have jurisdiction in Jerusalem are the Judeans from Babylonia, not those already in Yehud, and who are willing to invest themselves in rebuilding the temple. Even the 'antagonists' of the *golah* community are presented as acknowledging in the so-called letter to Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:12 that those who are responsible for Jerusalem came from a territory nearer than they to the imperial king (*dy yhdy' dy s'lqw' mn-lwtk 'lyn' ttw lyrwshlm*). A noticeable difference here between the *ummah* and the *golah* community is that while the *ummah* depended upon its control (via Muhammad) over the social, economic, and political institutions of Yathrib, the *golah* community appears only able to depend upon the Persian imperial government and the officials it appointed. Thus, it was possible for Rehum, Shimshai, and their associates to successfully petition the imperial government to stop the building activities of the community in Jerusalem (Ezra 5:1-24).

We might note again the passage in Neh. 2:20 wherein Nehemiah is said to have rejected the help of others in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, which appear in the religious text as divisions between sacred and profane, or member and non-member.⁴¹ The author/redactor of Ezra-Nehemiah clearly believed that Jerusalem was a sacred territory of the *golah* community. Yet it was not a sacred territory because the *golah* community resided there. Members of the *golah* community inhabited the city in religious tithe (Neh. 11:1) because the city was already considered

sacred by Yahwists. Yathrib, on the other hand, was made sacred because it was the territory of Muhammad and the *ummah*. The *golab* community was not wholly territorial in the sense that it could define a place as sacred by virtue of its presence. The community linked itself with the sacred territory from Judean past, which in turn defined the sacrality of the group.

COMPARING CONSTITUTIONS, SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

It is generally accepted that the *golab* community either created or adopted the tradition of the exodus as a symbolic narrative for their immigration into Yehud (see also Neh. 10:29). It is likely that some form of the Pentateuch functioned as a religious law code for the *golab* community.⁴² As Serjeant notes, the CoM is comprised of several documents (Serjeant 1978, 8). Therefore, a comparison with Ezra-Nehemiah when that text is accepted as a narrative based upon legal foundations from the Pentateuch, a document that is itself composed of several ‘documents,’ is valid from a social-literary standpoint.

Both the CoM (Articles 2-10; see also 25-34) and Nehemiah (10:1-28; see also the lists in Neh. 7, and Ezra 2) provide a list of community members and those associated with the community but who may not have been considered ‘full’ members. In both cases, these lists function as a framework for the community and the procedure in which membership is defined. The *ummah* is a community that separates itself from ‘other people’ (CoM, Article 1). Likewise, the covenantal regulation in Ezra-Nehemiah is the result of a community that has separated itself from the peoples of the lands in order to adhere to the law of God (cf. Ezra 10:10-11, 14, 17, 44; Neh. 10:28; 13:1-3). The CoM specifies the tax amounts that are required by members of the *ummah* (cf. Articles 2-10). Nehemiah also specifies the tax amount that is required of members (10:32-39). Concern for the economic well-being of members is found in both (cf. CoM, Article 11; see also Article 2; Neh. 5:1-13; 10:31). Both specify their respective sacred locations (Yathrib: CoM, Article 39; Jerusalem/temple: Neh. 7:2-3; 10:34-39; 11:1; 13:15-21). Above all, both the CoM and the ‘book of the law’ in Ezra-Nehemiah symbolically represent the relationship between deity and people (cf. CoM, Article 36; Ezra 10:3; Neh. 9:3; 13:1). The CoM’s prohibition of ‘neighbourly protection’ (*yujir* [Article 20]; *la tujar* [Article 43]) for anyone of the Quraysh parallels the prohibition of accepting the ‘foreign’ (*nkr*) into the community (cf. Ezra 10:10-11; Neh. 13:26-27, 30). As only members of the *ummah* can enjoy the protection of its powerful military, only members of the *golab* community, ideally, can enjoy the protection of Jerusalem’s walls.

One of the differences between what comprises the identities of the *ummah* and of the *golab* community is expedition. The *ummah* supplemented its economic mainstay by raiding caravans and other communities not under the protection of the *ummah*. Thus, the CoM stipulates the requirements of members in how they are to provide for the military activities, mainly in the form of a tax. Apart from two only possibly related, remote events – the reinstatement of tithes going to the Levites and Nehemiah’s appointment of Levites to ‘guard’ the gates of Jerusalem (Neh. 13:22) – there is no mention of a military-oriented tax in Ezra-Nehemiah (much less any real military!).

In the CoM, Muhammad and God are declared the *ummah*’s arbiters. Ezra-Nehemiah specifies Ezra, Nehemiah, and God; the former two the focus of their respective books. Ezra-Nehemiah makes an interesting choice in this matter; both Ezra and Nehemiah – if for the moment we accept them and their roles as the text describes them – are employed by the Persian imperial government, an admission of which the text tries to make little. The text tries to get around any focus on the

imperial government by focusing more on Ezra's and Nehemiah's connections and callings by God to (re)establish the sacred community and its city.

GOLAH, STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

We can now address some of the structural components of the term and concept 'golah.' If the *ummah* can be described accurately as a social-political unit, the *golah* community, by comparison, can be described only as a social unit. While the group or members of it may have vied for political power, there is no evidence that it or they controlled the economic or political institutions of Yehud. One can, however, see the group's orientation for power in the figures, namely Nehemiah (a governor) and Ezra (who is portrayed as the law-giver), that the community claims within its membership. The political component the like of which one finds in the *ummah* structure is there, latent and unable to authoritatively assert itself during the Persian period as a recognisable authority before the society. The same can be said of the economic component. Neh. 5, as discussed above, expresses a concern that economic exchange be accountable to the religious regulation of the Sabbath. From the narrative itself, however, it seems fairly obvious that the regulation was not one that was generally accepted by the society – hence the need for its dramatic imposition within the narrative. There have been attempts by modern scholars at linking the Babylonian returnees with economic authority, but none have been able to find much support outside the biblical text in the archaeological and textual records.⁴³

Like the *ummah*, the *golah* community was defined by religious orientation. The members of the community professed loyalty to the *golah* version of Yahwism and the teachings of its leaders (members of the priesthood). Both also shared a compositional unity that was not strictly one of bloodline. Yet while the *golah* community itself was larger than any single bloodline, the community emphasised the bloodlines of its members in order to facilitate its exclusivity.

Perhaps we may now describe *golah* as a designation for a social collective (read *golah* community) whose unity was defined by an exclusive religious loyalty and the shared experience of displacement (exile) into Babylonia. It controlled its membership by rejecting intermarriage and by rejecting other religious forms by 'imposing' the sole legitimacy of its own. It presumed social, economic, and political self-sufficiency, and expected recognition of its religious laws by those social bodies around which it lived. Yet its self-sufficiency was no more than a pretense; it suffered from internal contradiction in that it depended upon the very society and culture it rejected. Like the *ummah*, it was a social-religious unit, recognisable to itself and by those outside it. Unlike the *ummah*, however, it was not a recognisable military or political unit. Devoid of real political and military authority, and possibly but not certainly economic authority, the *golah* community is not a one-to-one parallel with the *ummah*. Nevertheless, the *golah* community did behave in many ways as the *ummah* in Yathrib did; it can therefore be described as a crippled *ummah* – an *ummah* sans any real, substantial military, political, and economic authority. Like the *ummah*, it expressed concern for the land, the community's right to it, and its preservation as a sacred territory (cf. Neh. 9:1-38, esp. 36-38).⁴⁴ Its constitution, the charter document of the *golah* community, was none other than a version of Pentateuchal law. I propose that the *golah* community would have been something more resembling a full-blown *ummah* in Jerusalem if the prohibiting forces of the *am ha'arets* conceivably but also the administrative apparatus of the Persian imperial government had been absent. In that scenario, the community would have been free to progress unhindered along the idealised trajectory described in Ezra-Nehemiah.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Note also Ibrahim (1982, 343–344), who states that Muhammad’s initial reorganisation of political structures in Yathrib was not entirely unique but finds a parallel with Qutayb’s introduction of governing institutions in Mecca (i.e., before it became a major trade center and before the control of it by the Quraysh).
- ² This ‘decay’ was the result of a significant period of development in which various individuals and clans fought for power over the city.
- ³ According to Ibrahim (1982, 343), Mecca was located on an important trade route connecting Yemen and Syria, with a branch in the north that proceeded to Gaza and also to Egypt. Another route branched near Mecca in a northeastern direction toward al-Ubulla, Khira, and eventually Sasanid Persia.
- ⁴ The continued antagonism between the Quraysh and Muhammad resulted in, among other things, statements such as the one in clause 1 of Document G that states that neither the Quraysh nor anyone who supports them will be accorded protection. Given that there were supporters of the Quraysh in Yathrib, statements such as these that are preserved in the Constitution of Medina demonstrate Muhammad’s growing control over the social-economic realm of the city. For a translation, see Serjeant (1978, 37). Based in part on Muhammad’s immigration to Yathrib, the concept of migration will take on significant theological overtones for later Muslims (such as, it is best to emigrate from a land of infidels [compare Muhammad’s emigration from Mecca] and immigrate to perhaps a sacred territory, or *kharam*. On the concept of migration, see Abu-Sahlieh (1996, 37–57). By declaring Yathrib a sacred territory, Muhammad set the city in competition with Mecca, a *kharam* by virtue of the Ka’ba (cf. Ibrahim 1982, 343).
- ⁵ Serjeant (1978, 23) notes that the final clause (no. 4) of ‘Document B,’ the second of two pacts (khilf) concluded by Muhammad at Yathrib in ‘year 1,’ and one of eight documents comprised in the Constitution of Medina, establishes Muhammad as the final arbiter between the various groups at Yathrib.
- ⁶ Serjeant (1978, 3–4) states that three of the thirteen mentioned Jewish tribes (Qaynuqa’; Nadir; and Qurayzah) had honor, wealth, and power (*sharaf*, *tharwah*, ‘izz) over the others, which prompted Muhammad’s actions against the three.
- ⁷ As noted by F. Denny (1975, 36), W. Robertson Smith (Smith et al. 1903, 32) argued that *ummah* could be derived from Hebrew *em*, which he stated means ‘mother’ but can in some cases mean ‘community, tribe, stock.’ Denny (1975, 37) states, however, there is nothing in the Quranic usage of *ummah* to support Robertson Smith’s view. According to G. Lisowsky, in *KHAT*, there are three occurrences of Hebrew ‘*mh*’ that one may translate as people, tribe, nation, or gens (see Gen. 25:16; Num. 25:15; Ps. 117:1). While this does not confirm Robertson Smith’s view, it suggests that Muhammad may have borrowed from a prototypical form of the concept.
- ⁸ As a point of reference, Abu-Sahlieh (1996, 38) reminds us that Yathrib was the city of Muhammad’s mother.
- ⁹ The Quran will later define a true *ummah* as a collective that regularly worships God day and night (as noted by Denny 1975, 65). In general, the concept of *ummah* ranges from a general human community to a more specific community, such as the Muslim *Ummah* (65–66).
- ¹⁰ Serjeant (1962, 41–58) suggests, through an analysis of *kharam* and *kbawtah* [*hawtah*] in more contemporary South Arabia, that the context of *ummah* in Articles 39, 44, and 47 of Medina’s constitution reflect a traditional Arabian pattern of establishing sanctuaries, or sacred enclaves, centered on the cult of a local god.
- ¹¹ One might liken this to Jeroboam’s establishing of Bethel and Dan as official temples so that the citizens of the Northern Kingdom of Israel did not have to travel to Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 12:25–33).

12 Muhammad's intent to debilitate the power of the Quraysh is also found Articles 23, and 43 of the
CoM.

13 Rubin cites 'Abd al-Razzaq, IX, 263; Bukhari, III, 26, IV, 122, 124-125, VIII, 192, IX, 119-120;
Muslim, IV, 115, 217; Abu Dawud, I, 469.

14 Denny notes further (45–49) that the term became increasingly specific with regard to its definition
as a religious community through the Second Meccan, Third Meccan, and Medinan periods. Denny
(1977, 47) also points out the differences between the concepts of *ummah* in the CoM and the Quran
are that the CoM spells out 'the political structure of the Medinan community and the agreed upon
military aspects of its life, such as "neighborly protection," blood-wit, alliances, clients, and so on,'
while the Quran spells out the religious nature of the *ummah*.

15 See also Serjeant's general discussion (Serjeant 1978, 11–12) of the term *nafaqah*.

16 Denny notes elsewhere (Denny 1975, 58) that *ummah*, when not referring specifically to Muslims,
Jews, or Christians, generally means 'community,' or 'nation.' Clause 2a (also 2b-2h) in Document
C (one of eight documents that comprise the Medina's constitution) explicitly states that Jews and
Muslims, though having their own religion/law (*din*), are part of the same confederation (*ummah*).
For a translation of the document, see Serjeant (1978, 27).

17 Rubin (1985, 13) notes that in all references in the Quran to the locution *ummah wakhbida* (cf. 2:213;
5:48; 10:19; 11:118; 16:93; 21:92; 23:52; 42:18; 43:33), the phrase denotes a people united by a
common religious orientation rather than people divided by different kinds of faith.

18 As J. Blenkinsopp (2003, 49) notes, our sources for any discussion of the *golah* community are seriously
limited; the division between the *golah* community and the rest of the people is found only in Ezra-
Nehemiah.

19 G. Ahlström (1993, 846) is confident that the struggle between the *golah* community and the *am
ba'aretz* was, being more than religious, economically motivated.

20 Article 1, translated by Denny (1977, 40).

21 Yathrib/Medina, however, ultimately proves to be a theocracy. I more fully demonstrate this and
additionally the reason for Yehud's inability to be labeled a theocracy in a forthcoming work.

22 Some, such as J. Berquist (1995, 139, 143), have suggested that Ezra brought as the 'law of the land'
a version of Pentateuchal law. While that is possible, it is not certain since it implies that the Persian
imperial government imposed a relatively new social-political law upon the province (a discussion I
take up elsewhere in a forthcoming work). For our purpose here a helpful but impossible survey
would be a comparison between the roles of this version of Pentateuchal law and of the CoM.

23 One could not yet discuss this as class consciousness, even if treating the *golah* as a theoretical class
distinction. As M. Weber (1958, 184–185) has noted, a class in itself does not constitute a community;
to treat a class conceptually as a community leads to an unfortunate distortion.

24 As is the general case in all societies where power is distributed among classes and groups (cf. Bourdieu
1990, 14, 129; Bourdieu 1998, 6, 10–11; Summers 2003, 23).

25 See also the discussion of Ezek. 11 in Leith (1998, 397).

26 See also the discussion of intermarriage in Ezra-Nehemiah by G. Knoppers (2001, 15–30), who argues
that the list of prohibited nations is expanded from those given in Exod. 34:11-15 and Deut. 7:1-4
to include Ammonites, Edomites, Egyptians, and Moabites. The list was expanded so that it would
apply to a new situation. That is an interesting suggestion and would not find contradiction in this
discussion.

27 As pointed out by Smith-Christopher (1994, 243). Note also D. Clines (1984, 247), who writes of
Neh. 13:25, "The Syriac version makes Nehemiah even more violent by identifying 'mrtm, 'I plucked',

with the Syriac verb *tmr* ‘to bury’, and expanding the sentence to ‘I killed some of them and buried them!’”

28 Compare Deut. 23:3; 1 Sam. 11:1-15 (Jabesh the Ammonite sought to curse Israel); 1 Kgs. 14:21-31 (Rehoboam’s mother was an Ammonite, ‘he did what was evil’; compare 2 Chr. 12:13-16); Neh. 2:10, 19; 4:3 (note the role played by Tobiah the Ammonite); see also Gen. 19:30-38 (Lot and his daughters are the ancestors to the Ammonites and the Moabites).

29 I discuss this with more detail in a forthcoming work.

30 But see J. VanderKam (2004, 51–52) who offers a compelling argument that Eliashib was not the high priest.

31 For more on the exploiter-exploited dichotomy, see Gottwald (1993, 3–22) esp. 4. Independently, J. Milios (2000, 295) makes a similar observation regarding the exploiter-exploited/dominator-dominated matrix in Marxist thought.

32 Fried (2004, 210) suggests that Nehemiah intended on reducing the power of the large landholders by abrogating debts of the peasants and returning their land to them.

33 Or ‘prefects’ or ‘subordinate rulers.’ Compare Ezek. 23:6; Jer. 51:23.

34 The so-called *Golah* Lists in Ezra 2 and Neh. 7 demonstrate how controlled the author/redactor thought that membership into the *golah* community/group was.

35 However, one may note, as does Carter (1999, 249–259), that grain, oil, trade, and wine were some of the basic ingredients of Yehud’s economy.

36 Here referring to economic capital, not symbolic or cultural (the latter two as defined by Bourdieu 1998, 6–7, 19–30, 102–104).

37 Regarding the *golah* community as ‘Israel’, C. Torrey notes, ‘According to the accounts in 2 Kings (exaggerated and self-contradictory, to be sure), the number of those who escaped the sword and capture was always much greater than the number of those who were taken. The number of those who were actually deported was very small indeed (Jer. 52:28-30). To treat this little handful henceforth as the only true Israel (and “all Israel”) is both false and truly ridiculous. It was mainly in order to formulate and establish this theory of the Return that the Chronicler’s history was written; all of its principal features are ancillary to the one purpose’ (Torrey 1973, xxv).

38 See also P. Davies’ discussion (Davies 1998, 128–138) of ethnicity as a literary device in Ezra-Nehemiah. Though compare T. Eskenazi’s argument (Eskenazi 1988, 641–656) that the repetition of the lists reflects wholeness. For further reference, see Høglund (1992, 233); Kessler (2006, 110–111).

39 See also Ahlström (1993, 846), who states that a major source of strife in the social-political order of Yehud was due to the both the people of the land and the returnees claiming the land.

40 See also the discussion in Smith (1991, 93–96).

41 This dichotomy between member and non-member is also played out in Neh. 3-4.

42 Cf. Berquist (1995, 143) who states that Ezra enforced a Persian-canonised Pentateuchal law.

43 For instance, J. Weinberg (1973, 400–414; 1992, 92–93, 111–113) argued that the priests, as leaders of the *bet ’abot*, achieved economic control through a virtual hegemony over ownership of private property.

44 Note also Ezek. 11, about which Leith writes, ‘According to Ezekiel, God has no patience with “inhabitants of Jerusalem” – in other words, nonexiled Jews who make the counterclaim that the land is theirs because God was punishing the exiles’ (Leith 1998, 397). R. Carroll (1991, 112–113) posits that Jeremiah’s land transaction (in Jer. 32:6-15, but note the larger context in vv. 6-44) prefigures the status of land ownership after the return of those who were exiled.

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