

The Indiscriminate Use of *Ethno-Cognates* in Biblical Studies and Its Repercussions to the Filipino Migrants Abroad

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Abstract: The term ethnic group, along with related *ethno-cognates*, has been ubiquitous in recent scientific research since the advent of the formal discipline called Ethnic Studies in the 1960s. The biblical field is no exception to this phenomenon because many social, religious, territorial, and political groups in the Bible are indiscriminately referred to as ethnic groups by commentators. However, using this appellation loosely may cause some problems in the representation of contemporary communities, especially those who use the Bible as a normative guide in daily living. This concern is even magnified in contexts where ethnic conflicts and persecutions prevail, leading to the further marginalization of the weaker sector as evidenced, for example, in the experience of some Filipino workers living outside the Philippines. In this light, this paper aims to explain the evolution of Ethnic Studies and the introduction of *ethno-cognates* into the biblical field, with special attention to the use of the term *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel as an illustration. Given that the use of social approaches in reading pericopes has been largely employed already in many recent biblical investigations, it is also advantageous to explore the social principles in the use of *ethno-cognates*, lest sensibilities to ethnic identification are transgressed. In the end, this paper proposes practical measures in conveying biblical episodes that respect ethnic differences and recover the rightful ethnic identification of Filipino migrants abroad.

Keywords: Ethnic Groups • Ethnic Determination • *Ethno-Cognates* • Fourth Gospel • Filipino Migrants • Filipino Biblical Scholars

Introduction

Which are the ethnic groups in the Bible? Are the *Ioudaioi* (Jews¹) ethnic groups, or are they regional or

¹ I use the translation “Jews” for the Greek term *Ioudaioi* instead of “Judeans”. See Rex Fortes, “‘The Judeans’ for οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι?:

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territorial groups? Given that the *Ioudaioi* are historically constituted based on their monotheistic faith in Yhwh, is it more proper to call them religious groups instead? When juxtaposed with other established ancient civilizations like the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, can the *Ioudaioi* be considered a nation like them? Consider the presumed Jewish ancestors; are the Hebrews/Israelites a distinct people, or are they mere tribal groups of the encompassing Semitic “race”? Things get more complicated when we examine the contemporaneous groups of the *Ioudaioi* in the first century CE. How do we categorize the Galileans, the Samaritans, the Greeks, and the Romans; are they geopolitical groups or unique assemblages with separate ethnicities? The same applies to other sectoral groups in the Bible: do the Zealots, Pharisees, Sadducees, Baptist Group, Hellenists, Herodians, and Messianic groups possess significant attributes that qualify them to be referred to as “ethnic”?

The intricacies of the meaning of *ethno*-terminologies are rarely discussed today. For many, calling some of them “ethnic groups” does not raise an academic issue at all. We even interchange related labels with a biblical collectivity. For example, the *Samaritai* (Samaritans) are differently classified by scholars, viz., religious sect,²

Contested Ethnicity in the Fourth Gospel,” *Neotestamentica* 55, no. 2 (2021): 365-387.

² See James Alan Montgomery, *The Samaritans: The Earliest Jewish Sect, Their History, Theology and Literature*, new ed. (New York: Ktav, 1968); James D. Purvis, *The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Origin of the Samaritan Sect*, HSM 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

territorial group,³ or ethnic group.⁴ We also alternately ascribe ethnic, territorial, religious, cultural, or political labels to the *Ioudaioi*, depending on a particular narrative context. However, I think that not problematizing our use of ethnic categories is actually problematic. If we ignore the subtleness of their appellations, we may use them inappropriately and contribute to their harmful effects on society.

This concern becomes real among communities that use the Bible as an accompanying lens in day-to-day living and decisions. By ignoring or, at least, not substantially factoring in ethnic differences, we may unknowingly side with the *status quo* that patronizes the dominance of an influential social group. R.S. Sugirtharajah commented, “the world of biblical interpretation is detached from the problems of the contemporary world and has become ineffectual because it has failed to challenge the status quo or work for any sort of social change.”⁵ If ethnic categories are trivial to us, how can we promote the present plight of the indigenous people who are largely undermined by the general population? If we do not ethnically delineate ancient colonizers from their subjects, how can we speak against the neo-colonial oppressions that are happening even as we speak today? If we treat the representations of biblical collectivities lightly, how can we advocate for the self-determination of minorities and marginalized

³ See József Zsengellér, ed., *Samaria, Samaritans, Samaritans: Studies on Bible, History and Linguistics*, SJ 66 and StSam 6 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

⁴ See the claims of Samaritanism in select Samaritan documents, viz., Stefan Schorch, ed., *The Samaritan Pentateuch: A Critical Editio Maior*, 5 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); John Macdonald, ed. and trans., *Memar Marqah: The Teaching of Marqah: The Text*, vol. 1 (BZAW 84. Berlin: Töpelmann, 1963).

⁵ R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

sectors, such as migrant Filipino workers abroad?

It is along these lines that this paper attempts to problematize the use of *ethno*-cognates in our references to biblical collectivities, hoping that it can lead present-day commentators to speak more effectively on ethnic issues in our contemporary times. In the next subsection, this paper discusses the rise of the theme of ethnicity, investigating how it has entered biblical studies with special attention to the understanding of the term *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel (abbreviated hereafter as FG). This discussion asserts that ethnic categories in antiquity are more complex and fluid than imagined. Next, this paper proceeds with an inquiry into the repercussions of our use of *ethno*-cognates on the determination of Filipino migrants abroad, especially since many Filipinos utilize the Bible as a basis of their decision-making. Finally, this paper raises concrete proposals on how to employ *ethno*-cognates that can help avoid the infringement of ethnic sensibilities, but respect differences in our multi-ethnic society.

The Rise of the Theme of Ethnicity

The term “ethnic groups” was introduced at the beginning of the 20th century.⁶ At first, it was one of those words that are interchangeably used to refer to a group of people with noticeable physical and cultural similarities among its members.⁷ The other more popular

⁶ See Karim Murji and John Solomos, eds., *Theories of Race and Ethnicity: Contemporary Debates and Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3; Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (New York: Pluto, 2010), 11-12.

⁷ Ellis Cashmore, “Ethnicity,” *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* (1996): 121, defines ethnic groups as “a group possessing some degree of coherence and solidarity composed of people who are, at least latently, aware of having common origins and interests.”

term then was “race”, which focuses on the genetic makeup of a collectivity or the union of members of the same bloodline.⁸ However, the Greek word on which the expression is based, i.e., *ethnos*, does not necessarily suggest “common blood”. Rather, it originally refers to any group—be it of human beings or animals—whose members significantly act in concert with each other.⁹

Later, this notion that the *ethnos* is constituted of those who are socially gathered in a congregation changed over time, focusing instead on the common genetic makeup of each member of an assembly. This shift of emphasis occurred at the time of Herodotus, who is dubbed the father of History and Ethnic Studies.¹⁰ According to him, in the face of an impending Persian occupation of Panhellenic lands at the threshold of the 5th century BCE, the Greeks decided to be unified as one people, holding on to four common bases among them, viz., blood, language, customs, and sanctuaries, as narrated in *Histories* 8.144.¹¹ Over time, these Herodotian markers became the traditional parameters for judging the ethnic components of a collectivity. This outlook is associable with the primordialist view that promotes the inherency of ethnic attributes among the

⁸ The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed September 21, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/race>, defines the expression “race” as “any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry.”

⁹ See *LSJ*, s.v. ἔθνος. *GELNT*, s.v. ἔθνος, defines this term as “a number of people or animals forming a group.”

¹⁰ Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus on 484 BCE but spent the large part of his life in Athens. See introduction of A.D. Godley, trans., *Herodotus*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).

¹¹ See Herodotus, *The Histories: A New Translation* by Robin Waterfield, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

members of a given social group.¹² It goes on to say that one's ethnicity is something one is born into.

This way of thinking influenced advocates of perceived “superior” bloodlines, who argue that the world would be a better place when the assumed “inferior” ones were forced to extinction.¹³ True enough, our world has witnessed many “racial”, genocidal, and purging activities in history. Foremost among them is the annihilation of at least six million Jews by the Nazis during World War II.¹⁴ As a deterrent that such an inhumane act is repeated, a good number of institutions, including the United Nations,¹⁵ proposed the abolition of “racial” ideologies that prove to be detrimental to global peace and security. For example, in the Bad Soden Conference, Germany voted for the deletion of the German word *Rasse* (“race”).¹⁶ Likewise, France ratified the removal of the term *Race* from the preamble of its national constitution last June 27, 2018.¹⁷ By and large,

¹² Scholars who advocate primordialist thought include, among many, Edward Shils (1957), Clifford Geertz (1973), Harold Isaac (1974), and Pierre van den Berghe (1978).

¹³ Michael Banton and Robert Miles, “Racism,” *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* (1996): 308, describes “racism” as “a doctrine, dogma, ideology, or set of beliefs ... that ‘race’ determined culture, and from this were derived claims to racial superiority.”

¹⁴ See Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 59-62.

¹⁵ See the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948).

¹⁶ See Kathy Ehrensperger, “What’s in a Name?: Ideologies of Volk, Rasse, and Reich in German New Testament Interpretation Past and Present,” in *Ethnicity, Race, Religion: Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts, and in Modern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Katherine M. Hockey and David G. Horrell (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 92-112.

¹⁷ France replaced the French word *race* with *le sexe* (i.e., sex or gender) in Article 1 of their Constitution, i.e., the Preamble. Now, it reads in English: “shall ensure equality before the law for all citizens without distinction regardless of sex, origin or religions.” See Aamna Mohdin, “France Replaced the Word ‘Race’ with ‘Sex’ in Its

the greater European society eschews this term and embraces, instead, the more neutral expression “ethnic groups”.¹⁸

The consequence of this shunning of “race”-based words is the proliferation of *ethno*-cognates. In effect, the discipline of Ethnic Studies dawned in the 1960s¹⁹ along with the rise of the sociological approach to studying human group behavior. Many collectivities from hereon have been referred to as “ethnic groups” and their identities have been described as “ethnicities”.²⁰ Also, various theories emerged that reinterpret the parameters of ethnicity. One of them is the instrumentalist approach²¹ that adheres to the circumstantial genesis of social groups. It means that group members normally decide to gather themselves at one point to form an ethnic group based on a perceived common need or goal (mostly, economic and/or political agenda). In the 21st century, ethnicity is largely understood to be more accidental than predetermined and to be fluid rather than fixed, debunking the longstanding notion that ethnicity is inherent among

Constitution,” *Quartz*, June 28, 2018, <https://qz.com/1316951/french-mps-removed-the-word-race-from-the-countrys-constitution>.

¹⁸ See David G. Horrell, Introduction to *Ethnicity, Race, Religion: Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts, and in Modern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Katherine M. Hockey and David G. Horrell (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 3 n. 10.

¹⁹ See Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (New York: Pluto, 2010), 5.

²⁰ Abner Cohen, *Urban Ethnicity*, ASA 12 (London: Tavistock, 1974), ix, describes ethnicity as “a collectivity of people who (a) share some patterns of normative behavior and (b) form a part of a larger population, interacting with people from other collectivities within the framework of a social system.”

²¹ Renowned advocates of the instrumentalist approach in ethnicity and/or nationalism include, among many, Max Weber, Frederik Barth, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Abner Cohen.

people. There are also attempts to harmonize the polarized primordialist and instrumentalist views by proposing a variety of synthetic approaches to ethnicity.²²

Despite the universal attempt to banish the word “race”, there are current movements, especially in North America that resuscitate its usage in describing and addressing the alarming phenomena of “race”-related hate crimes, abuses, violence, and persecutions that happen on a global scale.²³ Particularly, the Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in 1989 to examine the notion of “one blood” in the determination of groups of people.²⁴ For CRT advocates, it is salient to adopt this expression since, in praxis, the so-called societal color blindness has adversely produced many unaccounted and unresolved hate crimes based on one’s different “race”. To end this discrimination, CRT promotes the old lens of “race” to judge and monitor human behaviors and institutions, lest abusers are not made accountable for their behavior,

²² One example of a synthetic approach is ethno-symbolism which acknowledges both the fluidity of ethnic markers and the permeability of ethnic symbols over time. Its advocates include John Armstrong, John Hutchinson, Jonathan Hall, and Anthony D. Smith.

²³ See Michael Banton, “The Idiom of Race: A Critique of Presentism,” in *Theories of Race and Racism*, ed. John Solomos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 55-67, at 66; Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex, eds. *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 3.

²⁴ The CRT is essentially anti-“racist” since it is based on the premise that “race” is “not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed (culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of colour” (see *Britannica*, last modified May 11, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory>). However, it has to use “racial” categories to address better “race”-related realities since “racism” has been “inherent in the law and legal institutions of the United States insofar as they function to create and maintain social, economic, and political inequalities between whites and nonwhites, especially African Americans” (ibid.).

and their victims continue to lose their dignity and self-respect. There is truth to what CRT supporters are saying since the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that 61.8% of hate crimes in the US in 2020 (i.e., 5,227 out of 11,129 cases) are motivated by a personal hostility against another's "race", ethnicity, or ancestry.²⁵ Miserably, 55.1% of those who reportedly commit hate crimes are White Americans, while 21.2% are Black or African Americans.

At this point, we face a big dilemma. On the one hand, eliminating the term "race" may remove the stigma brought by many "racial" cleansings in the past, but such a step only sweeps under the proverbial rug ongoing "racial" abuses, especially in the Global North. On the other hand, salvaging the term "race" may better caution the general population to be mindful of its potential "racist" words and deeds. However, such may inadvertently divide groups of people, triggering them to be hostile to one another as what is currently happening between the Ukrainians and the Russians. The issue is indeed complicated, but it serves rightly that we become sensitive on matters about ethnicity since it helps us think twice about the negative consequences of any misrepresentation of an ethnic group.²⁶ This point echoes well what Mark Brett said: "Whether we like it or not, we are implicated in contemporary ethnic issues in a variety of ways [... hence,] biblical critics have an ethical

²⁵ See The United States Department of Justice, "2021 FBI Hate Crime Statistics," accessed September 21, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics>.

²⁶ Fernando F. Segovia, "Racial and Ethnic Minorities in Biblical Studies," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett, BInS 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 469-492, at 478-479; "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic," in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 33-44, at 42.

responsibility to address this complex web of issues.”²⁷

Incorporation of Ethnicity to Biblical Studies with the Term *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel as an Illustration

As the sociological approach to reading biblical passages was popularized along with the rise of related disciplines such as anthropology and archeology,²⁸ it is only forthcoming that the ethnic discourse is incorporated into biblical interpretation. The term “ethnic groups” has been employed by biblical scholars. According to David Miller,²⁹ one of its pioneers is W.A. Meeks who identified the *Ioudaioi* in the FG an ethnic group in his writings in 1975, a practice that was sustained by John Ashton in 1985. Over time, many biblical groups of people, both in the Old and New Testaments, are popularly referred to as ethnic groups. In fact, *ethno*-cognates are employed in many lists of biblical publications and themes.³⁰ For example, volumes 60-62 of the *Elenchus Bibliographicus Biblicus of*

²⁷ Mark G. Brett, “Interpreting Ethnicity: Method, Hermeneutics, Ethics,” in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett, BINS 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 14-22, at 5.

²⁸ See Keith W. Whitelam, “The Social World of the Bible,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 35-49, at 35.

²⁹ See David M. Miller, “The Meaning of *Ioudaios* and Its Relationship to Other Group Labels in Ancient ‘Judaism’.” *CurBR* 9, no. 1 (2010): 98-126, at 112. See also id., “Ethnicity Comes of Age: An Overview of Twentieth-Century Terms for *Ioudaios*,” *CurBR* 10, no. 2 (2012): 293-311; “Ethnicity, Religion and the Meaning of *Ioudaios* in Ancient ‘Judaism’,” *CurBR* 12, no. 2 (2014): 216-65.

³⁰ Coleman Baker and Amy Balogh, “Social-Scientific Criticism,” in *Social and Historical Approaches to the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mungum and Amy Balogh, Lexham Method Series 3 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 195-218, at 208.

*Biblica*³¹ feature publications and classifications using *ethno-cognates*, viz., ethnography, ethnoarchaeological, ethnology, and ethnicity, among others.

Meanwhile, missing in most of these studies is an operable set of criteria on why a group of people is labeled an ethnic group. There have been many efforts in the last two decades to address this gap. The earliest of them is Philip Esler (2003),³² who embraces the six ethnic components proposed by John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith in *ethno-symbolism* (1996),³³ viz., “collective name”, “myth of descent”, “shared history”, “shared culture”, “specific territory”, and “sense of solidarity”.³⁴ Another thinker is Dennis Duling (2005), who introduces three components of ethnicity, viz., “common ancestry”, “common homeland”, and “common distinctive culture”. Recently, some scholars adopt these two approaches in categorizing the ethnic groups in the FG, such as Stewart Penwell (2019),³⁵ who uses Hutchinson and Smith’s six ethnic components, and Andrew Benko (2019),³⁶ who employs Duling’s three ethnic categories.

Despite these efforts, biblical scholars remain considerably divided on the basic components of an ethnic group. We find it true to the understanding of the *Ioudaioi* in the FG. Aside from the fact that the classification of the *Ioudaioi* is contentious—as to

³¹ See Robert North, *Elencus* 60 (1979): 880-888.

³² See Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003).

³³ See John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity*, Oxford Readers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁴ See Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 22-31.

³⁵ See Stewart Penwell, *Jesus the Samaritan: Ethnic Labeling in the Gospel of John*, BInS 170 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

³⁶ See Andrew Benko, *Race in John’s Gospel: Toward an Ethno-Conscious Approach* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books; London: Fortress Academic, 2019).

whether it should be called an ethnic group or not—the compositional nature of its presumed referent remains ambiguous. Actually, Johannine scholars have contrasting opinions on this matter.

For Gerhard von Rad, Karl George Kuhn, and Walter Gutbrod in their collective article in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (1938),³⁷ the *Ioudaioi* in the FG are a conglomeration of blood relatives from the same Abrahamic lineage. This view presents that Jewishness (i.e., Jewish ethnicity) is based on genealogical ties. For Malcolm Lowe (1976),³⁸ the *Ioudaioi* are primarily inhabitants of the Judean region, suggesting that Jewishness is founded on geographical attachments to a fixed locale. It is for this reason that Steve Mason (2007)³⁹ recovers the translation “the Judeans” for *hoi Ioudaioi*, arguing that such had been the general understanding in the 1st century CE Palestine when Judea served as the center of religious and political activities. For Urban von Wahlde (1982),⁴⁰ the Johannine

³⁷ See Gerhard von Rad, “Ἰσραήλ, κτλ: Ἰσραήλ, Ἰουδαῖος, Ἑβραῖος in the Old Testament,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 356-359; originally published as *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1932–1979); Karl Georg Kuhn, “Ἰσραήλ, κτλ: Ἰσραήλ, Ἰουδαῖος, Ἑβραῖος in Jewish Literature after the OT,” *TDNT* 3:359-369; and Walter Gutbrod, “Ἰσραήλ, κτλ: Ἰσραήλ, Ἰουδαῖος, Ἑβραῖος in Greek Hellenistic Literature and in the New Testament,” *TDNT* 3:369-391.

³⁸ See Malcolm Lowe, “Who Were the IOYΔΑΙΟΙ?,” *NovT* 18, no. 2 (1976): 101-130. See also the early position of John Ashton, “The Identity and Function of the IOYΔΑΙΟΙ in the Fourth Gospel,” *NovT* 27, no. 1 (1985): 40-75. He later changed his view in favor of the “Jewish (Judean) authorities”-reading in *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁹ See Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457-512.

⁴⁰ See Urban C. von Wahlde, “The Johannine ‘Jews’: A Critical Survey,” *NTS* 28 (1982): 33-60.

narrative suggests that the *Ioudaioi* are mainly comprised of the religious leaders of Jerusalem, who were presented as constantly in opposition with Jesus. In this sense, Jewishness is constituted by religious believers of a common deity, i.e., Yhwh. For Raymond Brown (1966),⁴¹ the term *Ioudaioi* is referential of the overall Jewish life that includes genealogy, geography, religion, and culture, inferring that Jewishness is the totality of all of the observable Jewish attributes.

An even more critical question is whether the term the *Ioudaioi* in the FG really refers to real persons who existed in the time of Jesus. For Rudolf Bultmann (1941),⁴² the *Ioudaioi* are presented by John as representations of unbelief in Jesus in stark contrast to his followers. In other words, the *Ioudaioi* are symbolic (or allegorical) illustrations and are not to be equated with any group in Roman times. For R. Alan Culpepper (1983),⁴³ the *Ioudaioi* are mere narrative characters in the storytelling of John. They are employed in the FG to advance its theology and to enjoin John's audience toward radical discipleship of Jesus. This argumentation produces a school of thought⁴⁴ that the FG is a rhetorical

⁴¹ See Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 2 vols., AB 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966–1970). See also Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum, 2001); and Raimo Hakola, *Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness*, NovTSup 118 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

⁴² See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. R.W.N. Hoare and J.K. Riches, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971); translated from *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941).

⁴³ See R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, foreword by Frank Kermode (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983).

⁴⁴ This school of thought influenced recent scholars to view the *Ioudaioi* as mere narrative characters in the FG. See Tobias Nicklas, *Ablösung und Verstrickung: 'Juden' und Jüngergestalten als*

and literary work that is concentrated on the faith-formation of John's readers, rather than relaying facts concerning the Jesus story.

Amidst these contradictory views on the referent and sense of the *Ioudaioi* in the FG, I see a bigger issue concerning the ethnogenesis of this group: How do the *Ioudaioi* relate with other social collectivities and how does John depict each social group's ethnicity? Apparently, the *Ioudaioi* were presented as disassociated from the *Samaritai*, evident in the parenthetical comment in Jn 4:9 that both groups have no healthy social relationships with each other. In 8:48, Jesus was even labeled by some *Ioudaioi* as possessed by a demon and a Samaritan. Meanwhile, the Samaritan woman in 4:20 held on to the Samaritan belief of worship, which promotes a Yhwh-worship on their own mountain. From these passages, both groups disaffiliated themselves from one another, suggesting each one's ethnic uniqueness from John's perspective. However, how do we reconcile the behavior of Jesus, who had accepted the invitation of the *Samaritai* to stay in their village in 4:40-42? Has Jesus already extended salvation to them and recanted his earlier claim in 4:22 that "salvation is from the Jews"?⁴⁵

A certain animosity is also noticeable in John's portrait of the *Galilaeoi* and the *Hellēnes*. To the former,

Charaktere der erzählten Welt des Johannesevangeliums und ihre Wirkung auf den impliziten Leser, RStTh 60 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2001); Ruben Zimmermann, "Imagery in John: Opening up Paths into the Tangled Thicket of John's Figurative World," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, ed. Jörg Frey, Jan G. van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmermann, WUNT 200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 1-43; and Hartwig Thyen, *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum*, WUNT 214 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

⁴⁵ Biblical quotations in this paper are based on the *New Revised Standard Version* (1989).

some *Ioudaioi* looked down on them by their demeaning statements in 7:41 and 7:52 concerning the non-Galilean origin of any prophet and the expected messiah. It suggests the ethnic primacy of the *Ioudaioi* over the *Galilaioi*. To the latter, some *Ioudaioi* in 7:35 believed that the *Hellēnes* were still in need of instructions since they were dwellers of a foreign and distant land. It hints at their identity as outsiders, excluded from the greater Jewish society. Likewise, both the *Galilaioi* and the *Hellēnes* dissociated themselves from the *Ioudaioi* in their respective actions in the FG (cf. Jn 4:45; 12:20-21). In a similar vein, John depicts the *Rōmaioi* as enemies of the *Ioudaioi*, evinced in the anxiety of the Sanhedrin about a possible Roman takeover of Jerusalem (11:47-50) and the cruel Roman executions of criminals in John 19. The crux is that the *Rōmaioi* are clearly Jewish outsiders from John's perspective. However, the mechanism of colonization complicates the relationship of the *Ioudaioi* and the *Rōmaioi* in the FG since some Jewish leaders collaborated with the latter and Jesus seemingly legitimized Pilate's authority over his people in his speech (cf. Jn 19:11a).

In the final analysis, ethnicity has a complex dynamic in its embedding in biblical collectivities. One possible explanation of this intricacy lies in the argument of anachronism, which asserts that the concept of ethnicity is only a mental construct of modernity that may not be true in Roman times. Another viable reason is the fact that several editorial works on biblical composition occurred over time that resulted in contradictory renditions. A third probable justification is that biblical authors were confused or, at least, not keen on social categories so they tended to mix the representations of tribal groups with religious, cultural, territorial, and political entities in their writings.

I think, though, that the most feasible explanation for

the abovementioned complexities is that ethnic categories in Jewish antiquity were in a state of flux. This fluidity indicates that ethnic features can be altered, revised, and negotiated even in antiquity. This presupposition agrees with the trajectory of recent studies in Ancient History. Many scholars⁴⁶ adhere to the view that ethnic parameters are unfixed and changing, evident in the varying manifestations of social groups in their dealings with one another. While several collectivities were banded together based on genealogical and geographical affiliations, many societies were formed based on ethnic categories like religious sentiments (e.g., pilgrimages to sanctuaries and forced conversions or circumcisions), cultural trends (e.g., Hellenization and Romanization of the known world), socio-economic convenience (e.g., the issuance of Greek or Roman citizenships), and political allegiance (e.g., colonization, slavery, and manumissions). In this setup, judging squarely the ethnicity of an individual becomes complicated. What remains doable in this ambiguity is an elaborate case-to-case examination of the geopolitical landscape of a given collectivity to arrive at a superior interpretation.

Unwanted Effects on the Ethnic Determination of Filipino Migrants Abroad

The fluid nature of ethnicity is not only descriptive and restricted to ethnic groups in antiquity. The same

⁴⁶ Established scholars who adhere to the fluidity of ethnicity in antiquity include, among many, Jonathan Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Denise Kimber Buell, "Ethnicity and Religion in Mediterranean Antiquity and Beyond," *RelSRev* 26 (2000): 243-249; and Irad Malkin, ed., *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

phenomenon proves to be prevalent even in later generations and in various situations around the globe. Among Filipinos, for example, their collective ethnic identity has not been adequately established and determined. This occurrence is especially true in the context of Filipino migrants abroad, who encounter negative ethnic stereotypes, face misrepresentations of their identity, and experience social marginalization from their host countries. To give light on this issue, it will be beneficial to investigate on the predicament of the Filipinos overseas.

As of September 2022, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas claims that there are 10.2 million Filipinos overseas in 200 countries and territories.⁴⁷ This figure is comprised of 4.8 million permanent migrants, 4.2 million temporary migrants, and 1.2 illegal migrants. Many factors trigger Filipinos to migrate, but the most explicit one is to find a so-called “greener pasture”. From 1981–2020, the commission reports that there were 2.5 million registered Filipino emigrants; 1.5 million of them (60.15%) migrated to the USA. The next most popular countries of destination are Canada (20.38%), Japan (6.21%), Australia (5.84%), Italy (1.67%), New Zealand (0.94%), United Kingdom (0.77%), Germany (0.74%), South Korea (0.68%), and Spain (0.65%). Moreover, a good number of these settlers were married to foreign natural spouses. From 1981–2020, the commission records 583,279 intermarriages; 256,802 of them occurred in the USA (44.03%). The next countries that witness largely this phenomenon are Japan (21.88%), Australia (7.46%), Canada (4.60%), South Korea (3.39%), Germany (3.25%), United Kingdom (2.89%), Taiwan

⁴⁷ See the website of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, accessed September 21, 2022, <https://cfo.gov.ph/statistics-2/>. All succeeding statistical data on Filipinos overseas are taken from the same site.

(1.95%), Norway (1.11%), and Sweden (1.04%). Surprisingly, most of those who entered into mixed marriages have good educational attainment in the Philippines; in fact, 192,023 of them (32.92%) are college graduates, while 109,735 (18.81%) have at least reached the college level.

Notably, all the countries enumerated above are internationally recognized as progressive nations. This apparent economic opportunism of the Filipinos should not diminish in any way their dignity as persons. In fact, the Philippine government has been calling them “Mga Bagong Bayani” (Filipino for “new heroes”) since the time of Pres. Corazon Aquino’s address to the Filipinas working in Hong Kong on April 17, 1988.⁴⁸ Their high number of dollar remittances translates to uplifting the Philippine economy. True enough, the Filipinos overseas remitted to the country combined total cash of 13.42 billion dollars in 2021.⁴⁹ This national benefit does not yet include the education of their dependents, the micro-businesses they have engaged in, and the properties that they have procured for their relatives in the country.

While their stay abroad is clearly beneficial to their families at home, it is good to inquire whether their permanent settlement abroad has also contributed also to their well-being and happiness as persons. Given that they currently inhabit a foreign land, do they feel they belong to their host communities and are humanely respected despite being beheld as outsiders? Consider

⁴⁸ See “Address of President Corazon Aquino to the Filipinas Working in Hong Kong,” *Official Gazette*, April 17, 1988, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1988/04/17/address-of-president-corazon-aquino-to-the-filipinas-working-in-hong-kong/>.

⁴⁹ See “Total Value of Cash Remittances Sent by Overseas Filipino Workers (OEW) to the Philippines from 2012 to 2022,” *Statista*, accessed September 21, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1242750/remittance-overseas-filipino-workers-to-philippines/>.

those who married a local partner; are they publicly regarded as married out of true love, or are they looked down upon as financial opportunists? Or children born to couples of mixed marriages; are they even allowed to choose the ethnicity with which they wish to be associated? Consider too the offspring of a Filipino couple who settle abroad; are they considered locals of the place, or foreigners like their parents despite speaking fluently the local vernacular and imbibing well the culture of the land? Do Filipinos, who have been in the host country for two decades or more, receive the same treatment as the locals in terms of social privileges, equal job opportunities, and the right to acquire properties and hold public offices?

De jure, most international communities hold that they give all migrants the same privileges and opportunities enjoyed by the native dwellers. The power of working permits, visas, and citizenships officially stamps this declaration of equal treatment. However, *de facto*, the locals behave differently, especially in public spaces and adverse situations. For example, there has been an exponential rise of “Asian hate” in every society, aggravated by the spread of COVID-19 that allegedly originated in Wuhan, China. Sadly, some Filipinos were also victims of hate crimes and prejudices since they were not distinguished from Chinese, given that some of them have a so-called yellow complexion. In the US, next to Chinese and Koreans, Filipinos are the third largest group that fell victim to hate crimes.⁵⁰

Even in situations where Filipinos are differentiated from Chinese, a common stereotype exists in the public’s eye, i.e., all Filipinos are domestic helpers. On the one

⁵⁰ See Roy Mabasa, “Filipinos Rank Third among Asian Victims of Hate Crimes in the US-Report,” *Manila Bulletin*, August 16, 2021, <https://mb.com.ph/2021/08/16/filipinos-rank-third-among-asian-victims-of-hate-crimes-in-the-us-report/>.

hand, this generalization helps them secure jobs abroad. On the other hand, it badly affects their international image which reduces them to blue-collar laborers. Certainly, there are many Filipinos in respectable professions who are successful abroad, but this reality is overshadowed by the greater majority with clerical jobs. Additionally, there are many other derogatory labels attached to Filipinos abroad, such as party-lovers (e.g., in reunions, celebrations, and *fiestas*), hoarders (e.g., in sending of *Balibayan* boxes), photo-conscious (e.g., in the use of social media), and gossipers (e.g., in long-lasting gatherings). But the question now is: How do the Filipino migrants abroad reclaim their ethnic determination and true self-representation?

Amidst the negative stereotypes and impressions given them, the average Filipinos easily shun them away; they just cheerfully shrug their shoulders and hold tight to their resolve of staying in their host countries. This conduct is Filipino resiliency in full display. However, should we just allow them to keep quiet in the face of societal prejudices and marginalization? I believe that biblical commentators and theologians can help them by speaking about their concern for fair ethnic determination. The Bible is rich with many illustrative narratives that can be creatively utilized to advance this objective (e.g., the positive portrait of the Samaritan in Lk 10:29-37; 17:11-19). In fact, the Bible is very much revered by many Filipinos everywhere, who even consider it as the deposit of God's answers to their daily problems. However, if Filipino interpreters are not careful with the ethnic qualification of biblical groups, the reverse effect is achieved and they may inadvertently contribute to the further marginalization of Filipino migrants.

For instance, if a Filipino scholar exposes that the *Ioudaioi* has an ethnic rift with the *Samaritai* in the FG,

s/he presupposes that both collectivities are ethnic groups on equal footing. However, if their non-mixture is presented by the Filipino commentator as a sectarian separation of the *Samaritai* from the *Ioudaioi*, his/her rendition assumes that the former is a renegade of the latter. In any of the two given positions, the Filipino audience is led to make personal connections by allegorizing the narrative details into his/her present context. On the one hand, hearing that both the *Ioudaioi* and the *Samaritai* are ethnic groups, a Filipino reader may assume that Filipinos are ethnic groups themselves by analogy to the *Samaritai* who are minorities in a predominantly Jewish environment. On the other hand, gathering that the *Samaritai* are part of a breakup group from the Jewish society, a Filipino reader may conclude that any migrant should just learn how to incorporate with the dominant community in pursuit of greater harmony. Even if there is nothing wrong with any of these steps, the self-view of the Filipino migrants is compromised: Will they continue to assert their unique ethnicity even at the expense of slowing down their societal incorporation? Or will they instantly adjust to the culture of the host country in view of receiving a visa, resident/working permit, or citizenship?

Another illustration of this problem is the relationship between the *Hellēnes* and the *Ioudaioi* in the FG. If the Filipino scholar categorizes the former who visited Jerusalem in John 12 as an ethnic group, is it possible to state by analogy that the Filipino migrant who visits another locale abroad should be viewed as a member of the Filipino ethnic group as well? Yet, since the *Hellēnes* in the FG did not mix with the dominant Jewish community but approached Jesus's company that has been slowly disaffiliated by the *Ioudaioi* on several occasions in the FG (cf. Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), does it mean that the *Hellēnes* felt the condescending Jewish attitude

that was earlier expressed in Jn 7:35? If Jesus allowed himself to be approached by this outsider group, does it translate to mean that a Filipino migrant can act similarly in the face of an unwelcoming demeanor?

Of course, none of these given correlations between the biblical ethnic groups and the Filipino migrants can be convincingly established at this point since it requires further study. However, it is good to note that the ethnic categories and qualifications a Filipino scholar may use can by analogy affect the reading of biblical narratives by the average Filipino. Unqualified correlations and unfounded use of ethnic terminologies can indirectly sway the Filipino audience away from a healthy integration with their host communities. A non-informed Filipino commentator on ethnicity may inadvertently employ narrative images that perpetuate ethnic hate and division, instead of being instruments of propagating peace and harmony.

Conclusion

At this juncture, I admit that I do not have the solutions to the issues I raised above. Aside from the fact that this paper cannot delve into a multiplicity of issues, the theme of ethnicity is so broad and complex, making it impossible to exhaust all possible avenues. Nonetheless, I take this opportunity to suggest pertinent lines of action that, hopefully, can profit all of us, particularly in our attempt to present suitably biblical collectivities in the Philippine context. Allow me, then, to underscore the following five recommendations:

1. *Avoid the use of terminologies that directly suggest “race” and lineage by blood, genes, and entitlements.* It should be noted that the term “race” has been eschewed by many international communities during the past half-decade. However, in the Philippine context, it appears that we

are not even near this level of sensitivity. Referring to the *Ioudaioi* as a “race” may suggest by analogy that being a Filipino is determined by “racial” bloodlines, too. Such does not suit well the second and third generations of Filipino migrants abroad, where the purity of their lineage is called into question. Furthermore, this framework may deter their smooth integration into the communities of their host countries since it can subconsciously prevent them from confidently proclaiming their perceived inferior genetic origin.

2. *Investigate properly the history of representation of biblical social groups to refer correctly or, at least, not pass adverse judgments on these collectivities in our academic discourses.* In our enthusiasm to speak about many topics, we neglect to evaluate critically the labels we give to a biblical collectivity. We tend to think that being meticulous about ethnic appellations is unimportant. Conversely, classifying a group of people as an ethnic group indicates its very composition as to whether it is constituted genealogically, geographically, religiously, socio-culturally, or politically. Knowing this detail conveys the aspect preferred by a social group in biblical narratives. Along these lines, it is important to learn how Filipino ethnicity is portrayed over many generations: what aspects are emphasized and what are not? If this question is not taken seriously, the tendency is that Filipino migrants can be easily misrepresented, and they may even be boxed to an ethnicity that is imposed on them from the outside.
3. *Present ethnicity as something determined both ad intra and ad extra, inclusive of their various intersections with each other.* This suggestion is equivalent to saying that ethnicity is fluid and malleable. In fact, it can be said that ethnicity is negotiable in the sense that it is a fusion of the self-determination of the group concerned (*ad intra*) and the other-representation it receives from outsiders (*ad extra*). In this dynamic, ethnicity cannot be comprehended as primordial nor pre-determined.

Rather, ethnicity involves the ongoing border maintenance of ethnic markers among stakeholders. For Filipino migrants abroad, this outlook may indirectly hint at how they must behave in their host countries: it is an ongoing negotiation and dialogue of ethnic heritage, markers, and values. An over-emphasis on the cultural aspect of Filipinos may be counter-productive in a mono-cultural setting, but may not be in a multi-ethnic society. A focus on the economic and geopolitical components, however, may lure many Filipinos abroad to change instantly their citizenship along with its attached social and health benefits.

4. *Render a preferential option of speaking from the perspective of ethnic minorities and marginalized sectors of society.* While we try to be fair to all ethnic groups, some of them have been ignored along with their overdue rightful representation. Even biblical narratives and interpretations have been noticeably constructed in a way that favors the positive identification of the people who wrote them. In the postcolonial framework, the so-called subaltern must be allowed to voice out its collective determination. For example, while the Israelites are presented positively in a large part of the Bible, some groups are depicted negatively, such as those of the Egyptians, the Canaanites, and the Philistines, among others. In the same sense, the usual criteria on ethnicity have been dictated by the Global North at the expense of the undermining of oriental categories, inclusive of those highly valued by Filipinos. Filipino migrants abroad are generally considered economic opportunists, whose main criterion for ethnicity is centered around genealogical and territorial family ties. Rarely are they treated as persons who are on-the-move to contribute to the betterment of the host society. For the most part, they are regarded as mere wage-earners, resulting in a low regard for their collective worth.
5. *Honestly admit our personal limitations in terms of our familiarity with ancient language and vocabulary as well*

as our meager knowledge of the nature of biblical collectivities. We should bear in mind that the issues above belong to the disciplines of linguistics/hermeneutics and ethnography/archaeology/history, disciplines that are way beyond our biblical and theological expertise. Furthermore, only a few of us are confident in our interdisciplinary knowledge of Ethnic Studies along with important debates on ethnicity, “race”, and culture. Judging ethnic composition requires vast investigation, particularly in the areas of culture, demography, anthropology, history, and sociology. Declaring their ethnic representation entails an even harder job since it involves quantitative research on their collective sentiments, honor system, and values. Similarly, we should be careful in making claims about the Filipino people in general, and the Filipino migrants in particular, without solid studies that support our views. The simple way out of this predicament is by humbly admitting our limitations on ethnic issues. What we can offer are only conjectures and assumptions, and not factual definitions or feasible solutions. Nonetheless, we should do our best to give our assessment and reading of biblical episodes that can contribute to the advancement of biblical ethnic studies as well as migration studies, especially in the Philippine context.

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