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Constructing imaginative geographies in Genesis

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Author:
José-Alberto Garijo-Serrano[1,2]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Old Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology, Pontifical University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain

[2]Department of New Testament Studies and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:
José-Alberto Garijo-Serrano,
jagarijose@upsa.es

This article considers Edward W. Said's proposals on 'imaginative geographies' as suggested in his leading work *Orientalism* as a tool to analyse the ideological circumstances that shape geographical spaces in the Bible. My purpose is to discuss how these imaginative geographies are present in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis and how they have left their mark on the history of the interpretation of these texts and on the not always easy relations between members of the religious traditions inherited from the Bible (Hebrews, Muslims and Christians). I propose four types of 'imaginative geographies': (1) 'Equalness' is the way to represent what is considered as sharing the own identity. The geography of 'Equalness' defines the spaces of Isaac, Jacob and their families. (2) 'Otherness' is the way to represent the 'Other' as opposite or juxtaposed to one's own identity. A common border is shared, thus kinship relationships can be established. It defines the spaces of Ishmael, Esau/Edom, Lot (Ammon and Moab) and Laban. (3) 'Foreignness' is the way to define what is strange, odd or exotic considered as external to the own identity, in a space set beyond even the space of the 'Other'. Egypt is in Genesis a land of 'Foreignness'. (4) 'Delendness' encompasses whatever claims our same space and therefore threatens our survival and must be destroyed (*delendum*). As such, processes of annihilation and dominion of Israel on Canaanites and Sichemites are justified.

Contribution: The article applies Said's 'imaginative geographies' as an identity mechanism for the creation of biblical literary spaces. A quadripartite classification ('Equal'/'Other'/'Foreigner'/'Delendum') instead of the usual bipartite one ('Equal' vs. 'Other') is proposed and the consequences for the current coexistence between religious identities inherited from Abraham are shown.

Keywords: orientalism in the Bible; imaginative geographies; otherness in the Bible; Jacob and Esau; Arabs and Ishmaelites; Israelites and Canaanites.

Introduction

Many current questions and conflicts over cultural identities and borders have their roots in the founding texts of the great religions. The not always easy relationships between Christians, Muslims and Jews in the Mediterranean world and the Middle East are strongly conditioned by how national identities were constructed in the Hebrew Bible. In the last two decades, some studies have addressed the question of how one's own group identity is constructed in the Hebrew Bible in contrast to the 'Others' from a methodological plurality spanning sociology, anthropology, social psychology, postcolonial or ethnicist approaches and literary and historical research (eds. Achenbach, Albertz & Wöhrle 2011; eds. Albertz & Wöhrle 2013; eds. Ben Zvi & Edelman 2014; Brett 2000; ed. Cataldo 2016; Geyser-Fouche & Fourie 2017; eds. Harlow et al. 2011; eds. Hensel, Nocquet & Adamczewski 2020; eds. Ro & Edelman 2021; eds. Sergi, Oeming & De Hulster 2016a, 2016b). This study will focus on the relationship between group identity and imaginative geography in the patriarchal narratives in the book of Genesis (Gn 11:27–50:26).

Firstly, my point of departure is a literary study of the text that analyses the peculiar relationship between the characters and their own space, following Wellek and Warren's intuition that 'setting is environment and environments, especially domestic interiors, may be viewed as metonymic or metaphoric, expressions of character' (Wellek & Warren 1949:210) and other literary theorists (Bobes Naves 1985:203; Chatman 1978:138–145; Garrido Domínguez 1996:216–218). Thus, kinship relations, marriages, alliances and ruptures between the heads of family clans are configuring different geographical spaces.

Secondly, I consider that literary studies of narrative space should also analyse the ideological circumstances that give rise to the conformation of geographical spaces. In this sense, Edward W.

Said's proposals on imaginative geographies suggested in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) may be of interest. Said's goal is to unmask the cultural ideas at the basis of literature that justify imperialisms. Orientalism is the cultural creation of 'the East' by 'the West' as an inferior, savage, ungovernable, irrational and fanatical reality. Orientalism creates an idea of what 'they' are as opposed to what 'we' are, an essential 'Otherness' that, in reality, serves to reconstruct one's own identity. According to Said, one of the aspects of Orientalism are 'imaginative geographies', that is, the literary creation of spaces linked to the image of the Orient that distinguish 'our civilised land' from the barbarian 'other lands', those inhabited by 'them' (Said 1978:49–73). A group that inhabits a space will delimit mental rather than physical 'geographical boundaries' that serve to protect its own identity against identities considered barbaric and to separate the known space from the unknown space (Said 1978:54). The imaginative depiction of the Orient privileges certain places representative of its recreated and inferior identity, as the governor's house, the school or the prison (Said 1978:40–41). Based on Said's proposal, Anderson (1983), Bhabha (ed. 1990), Gregory (1994, 1995), Waldenfels (1997), Fludernik (2007) and others have explored the literary construction of national identity through the use of myths and stories and the construction of geographies and spaces. For Mohnike (2007:22–24), the construction of one's own identity involves a tripartite spatial representation: the 'Same' (*das Gleich*), the 'Other' (*das Andere*, 'what is not me') and the 'Foreigner' (*das Fremde*, 'what I do not know and is outside of what I know and can imagine').

Thirdly, every literary text aims to condition the reader's image of the Other, which is displayed in the history of the interpretation of the text according to Gadamer's (1989: 334–341) '*Wirkungsgeschichte*' or history of the effects.

I propose a classification of those imaginative geographies in four categories:

1. 'Equalness' is the way of representing what is considered to be encompassed within one's own identity and one's imaginative geography.
2. 'Otherness' is the way of representing the Other as opposed to one's own identity. The 'Other' is located in a space juxtaposed or neighbouring our own. Thus, it is necessary to define the boundaries of Otherness to prevent crossing the limits and bursting into other people's spaces.
3. 'Foreignness' is the way of defining what is foreign, strange, weird or exotic and is considered as something external to one's own identity and 'beyond the Other'. There is no need to establish borders as it is not juxtaposed and there is no danger of overcoming limits.
4. 'Delendness' encompasses everything that claims to occupy the same geographical space as ourselves and therefore threatens our very existence and must be destroyed. Narrative identity justifies the conquest of territory and the destruction of the occupier. I have taken

the term *delendum* from the expression 'Carthago delenda est' attributed to Cato the Elder (Clavadetscher-Thürlemann 1974).

The imaginative geography of 'Otherness'

Ishmael

The imaginative geography of Ishmael is linked to the imaginative geography of the Otherness of the Arab populations considered Ishmael's descendants in biblical literature. Ishmael enjoys a special status as he has received a special blessing from YHWH in return for the covenant established with Isaac (Gn 16:10–12; 17:18–21; 21:18).

The names of the twelve sons of Ishmael mentioned in his genealogy – 'Nebaioth … Kedar, Abdeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah' (Gn 25:13–15) – are present in texts from the first millennium BCE referring to populations set down in desert regions between the Levant, the Euphrates river and the Arabian Peninsula. They are called *[lu]Aribi/[lu]Arbaja* in Assyrian sources (Eph'al 1982; Knauf 1989, 1992; Weippert 1974) and Arabs (*ʿărābîm*) in the Bible (Is 13:20; Jr 3:2; Neh 2:19; 4:1; 6:1; 2 Chr 17:11; 21:16; 22:1; 26:7). The mention of Havilah, Assyria and Egypt in Ishmael's genealogy (Gn 25:18) takes us to a vast scenario from Mesopotamia to Africa where Arab nomadic tribes move freely (1 Sm 15:7; Jericke 2013:28–29; Na'aman 1980). It is precisely in the surroundings of that region where YHWH's angel met Hagar in her first escape 'on the way to Shur' (Gn 16:7).

The metaphorical and metonymic relationship of Ishmael's character with his spatial environment is particularly evident in the stories of Hagar's two escapes (Gn 16; 21:9–21). Ishmael will be 'a wild donkey of a man' (Gn 16:12) accustomed to the harsh and lonely life of the wilderness (cf. Jr 2:24; 14:6; Hs 8:9; Ps 104:11; Job 11:12; 24:5), confronted with everything ('his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him'), out of the land of Canaan but 'in front' (*ʿal pᵉnê*) of his brothers, keeping a special relationship with them (Hamilton 1995:160; Seebass 1999:261; Westermann 1981:482); initially a place of death threat for Ishmael, the wilderness is the place where 'God was with the boy' and where 'he grew up' (Gn 21:20). Therefore, Ishmael's imaginative geography is characterised by the desert as a place where life is lived in complete freedom but continually threatened, in a struggle for survival and with scarce water sources.

However, the border between the imaginative geographies of Isaac and Ishmael is not so hard. They are constructed with the in-between realms and cross-bordering mechanisms pointed out by Ben Zvi (2014) and they reflect zones of encounter and exchange (Hamilton 1995:169; Römer 1999; Wénin 2016:368; Wöhrle 2011). For instance, after Abraham's death, Isaac settles down precisely at the well of Lachai Roi (Gn 24:62; 25:11), a place linked to Ishmael (Gn 16:13).

The Ishmaelites' imaginative geography in the Hebrew Bible reflects no negative judgements. Thus, while the book of *Jubilees* still maintains the positive image of Ishmael (Francis 2012), in Targumic and Rabbinic literature (especially in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Pirqei deRabbi Eliezer*), Ishmael's depiction is defiled by the controversy between Judaism and Islam in Medieval times (Bakhos 2006; Ohana 1975; Pérez Fernández 2000; Syrén 1994).

Esau and Edom

The imaginative geography of Esau/Edom is the complete antithesis of the imaginative geography of Jacob/Israel according to the curse his father casts on him – 'away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be and away from the dew of heaven on high' (Gn 27:39) – , and in contrast to Jacob's blessing (Gn 27:27–29). In both formulas, the same terms ('the fatness of the earth' and 'the dew of heaven') are used to describe both the dryness of Esau's land and the fertility of Jacob's land. Furthermore, the preposition *min* is used in both oracles but with different meanings. In Jacob's blessing, as a partitive: '[of] heaven's dew and [of] earth's richness' (Waltke & O'Connor 1990:213–214). In Esau's curse, *min* introduces an argument of origin, which implies resistance/separation ('away from the fatness of the earth… and away from the dew of heaven') marking 'what is missing or unavailable' (Waltke & O'Connor 1990:214). This element seems to create in Esau an initial false expectation about his blessing that is later tragically refuted, 'a cruel joke, this verse!', as Fokkelman (1991:111) pointed out. However, its authentic meaning remains ambiguous and some authors admit a partitive use of *min* also in the Esau oracle, such as Jacob (1974:184) and, in rabbinic exegesis, Rashi, who even identifies this rich land as 'the Italian Greece', following Targum Onkelos and echoing the traditional Jewish identification of Edom with Rome (Hamilton 1995:227).

Esau's imaginative geography is also set 'on high' (*mēʿāl*, Gn 27:39), in accordance with the highlands of Mount Seir (cf. Jr 49:16). This may, however, point out to an additional meaning suggested by the paronomasia between elements containing the sound sequence ʿ-l: *mēʿāl* ('on high', v. 39) y *ʿullô* ('his yoke', v. 40). This paronomasia continues in *weʿal ḥarbᵉkā* ('by your sword', v. 40) and *mēʿāl ṣawwārekā* ('from your neck', v. 40), whereas Jacob's blessing lacks this sound sequence. Genesis Rabbah (BerR 67:7) notices this paronomasia reading *weʿal ḥarbᵉkā* ('by your sword') as *ʿōl ḥarbᵉkā* ('the yoke of your sword'). In this way, the imaginative geography of Edom as a highland may include an allusion to his condition as a captive man, subdued to Jacob-Israel as announced in the curse (Gn 27:40).

Esau's genealogy (Gn 36) points out that Esau will dwell in Edom, which is Seir (Gn 36:6–8). Some authors discuss when Esau was linked with Edom/Seir in Genesis narratives (Bartlett 1989:41–44; 175–180; Blum 1984:138; Dicou 1994:137–139; Finkelstein & Römer 2014:331–332; Nash 2018). In any case, Genesis 36 juxtaposes two lists of population: the 'sons of Esau' (Gn 36:1–19) and the 'sons of Seir' (Gn 36:20–30), which may show up two different and complementary faces of Esau:

> Esau in Edom: The story of Esau plays on the paronomasia between the terms Edom (*ʾĕdôm*) and red (*ʾadmônî*; 'reddish', Gn 25:25; *min-hāʾādōm hāʾādōm hazzeh*, 'of that red, that red stuff', Gn 25:30), perhaps referring to the colour of the Nubian sandstone of the region (Bartlett 1992:287). Now, Esau's genealogy wearily reminds us that 'Esau is Edom' (v. 1.8.9.19.43) so that the reader may not forget what Esau actually is: He is Edom, that guy who lost his birthrights because of 'that red stuff' (Gn 25:30).

> On the other hand, Mount Seir was the territory of the Horrites (Gn 14:6; 29:30; 36:20, 21; Dt 2:12, 22) whom Edom had wiped out. Thus, Seir seems to allude to the warlike and conquering mood of Esau-Seir. The names of some of the chiefs of Esau (Eliphaz, Kenaz, Reuel, Oholibamah, Timna and Amalek) are pointing to a geographical region located in southern Judah and the Negev where there seems to be evidence of Edomite settlement in the 7th–6th centuries BCE (Bartlett 1992:288; Knauf 2001; Tebes 2006). This points out to a more positive imaginative geography than what Esau's curse portrayed: an organised territory with a political structure established even 'before any king reigned over the Israelites' (Gn 36:31; Nm 20:14–21; Dt 2; 1 Sm 8; 12) and may reflect the frequent and deep relations between Judea and Idumea from the Persian period until the Hellenistic and Nabatean-Roman periods (Knauf 2001:594).

In biblical literature, Edom is portrayed as the brother of Israel (Gn 32:3; Dt 23:8), but on the other hand, Edom appears as a declared enemy in Numbers 20:14–21; Jeremiah 49:7–22 and in the so-called antiedomite prophetic oracles (Is 34; 63:1–6; Jr 49:7–22; Ezk 25:12–14; Hab; Ps 137:7), probably drawn up in the Persian period as an answer to Edomite intervention in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE (Assis 2006; Bartlett 1982; Dicou 1994; Tebes 2011). Esau/Edom is always present in the Jewish tradition in his ambivalence as both a brother and an enemy. Thus, Edom is identified with Rome in the Talmud and Midrashim and even with the Christians (Hadas-Lebel 1984).

Lot: Ammon and Moab

Lot's narrative ends with the scene of a tiny group of five people shut down in a narrow cave beyond Zoar (Gn 16:36–38): Lot, his two daughters, and his two sons incestuously born, namely Moab (*môʾāb*) and Ben-Ammi (*ben-ʿammî*). The character of Lot has a peculiar relationship with his own living space becoming smaller and smaller as the narrative unfolds: from the irrigated wide plain (Gn 13:10–12), the prosperous city of Sodom (Gn 13:12; 19:1), the little town of Zoar (Gn 19:20–23), the far hill (Gn 19:30a) and the narrow cave (Gn 19:30b).

Lot has neither a genealogy nor a list of kings, tribes or cities and not even an assigned territory with defined borders. Actually, the Genesis narrative does not provide an imaginative geography of Moab and the Ammonites. The biblical reader will have to read on to Numbers 21:11–13, 24, Deuteronomy 2:8–11, 18–21, 29, 37 and Judges 11:13–18 to

know the extent of their territories in Transjordan: the land of Moab confining with the territory of Esau-Seir around the city of Ar (Dt 2, 8–9) and the land of the Ammonites on the hills surrounding the Jabbok river (Dt 2:18–19, 37).

The tiny kingdoms of Moab and of the Ammonites burst into the history of that region during the 9th–6th centuries BCE until they disappeared as independent political entities in the aftermath of the Babylonian invasion in 582–581 BCE (ed. Bienkowski 1992, 2009; De Tarragon 1992; Hübner 1992; Lipiński 2006; Miller 1992). The lack of a detailed imaginative geography of Moab and the Ammonites in Genesis may reflect how Persian-period Judaism envisioned these desolate Transjordanian territories and their inhabitants: only a small memory of their names remained, with no mention of boundaries or special features.

On the other hand, I should point out that whilst the Transjordan kingdoms of Sihon and Og are 'Delenda' and so must be destroyed and their territories occupied (Nm 21:21–35; 32:33–38; Dt 3:1–13; Jos 12:1–6), Moab and the Ammonites are considered as 'Others'.

Laban

Laban is also the 'Other', 'the Aramean' (*hā-ʾǎrammî*, Gn 25:20; 28:5; 31:20, 24), with whom the patriarchs have strong kinship ties (eds. Sergi et al. 2016a, 2016b). The account of Jacob's flight (Gn 31:44–32:1) underscores the location of the boundary separating Jacob's and Laban's imaginative geographies: Gilead and Mizpah. Jacob erects a heap (*gāl*) as a witness (*ʿēd*, from which Gilead-*gilʿād* derives) and a *maṣṣēbāh* (in paronomasia with *miṣpāh*, Mizpah, 'Watchtower') as landmarks of the non-aggression pact between him and Laban, sealed with a meal. It is possible that 'this separation happens not for ethnic reasons (Rachel and Leah are Arameans) but for religious reasons' (Nocquet 2020:104), Laban's God being 'the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor' (worshipped before Abraham's call as Jos 24:2 remarks), whilst Jacob's God is 'the fear of his father Isaac' (Gn 31:53).

However, Laban has no genealogy, no list of tribes. Laban's sons do not even have a name (Gn 31:1). The imaginative geography of Laban contains just the name of Aram Naharaim (Gn 24:10), the city of Nahor (Gn 24:10), Padan Aram (Gn 25:20; 28:2, 5–7; 31:18; 33:18; 35:9; 35:26; 46:15) and Haran (Gn 27:43; 28:10; 29:4), which are associated with the homeland of the common ancestors (Gn 11:31–32; 12:4–5). Israel defines itself in contrast to this 'Other', Laban and to its imaginative geography, the land of its origins but a definitely left-behind territory.

The imaginative geography of 'Delendness'

God has given to Abraham and his offspring the land of Canaan (Gn 13:14–17; 17:8). The problem is that, astonishingly, the land is already inhabited by another people, the Canaanites (Gn 12, 6; 13, 7). The land's boundaries of the Canaanites are set in the table of nations:

> The territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon, in the direction of Gerar, as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lash. (Gn 10:19)

The debate on the ethnic identity of the Canaanites and their relationship with the Israelites has taken up an intense discussion amongst archaeologists and historians (Lemche 1991; Naʾaman 1994; Rainey 1996). It seems that the Canaanites as an ethnically different group was a literary creation of postexilic Judaism for the sake of his historiographical project of 'narrating the nation' (Bhabha 1990:1–7): the Canaanites occupy the land of Canaan (Gn 12:6; 13:7), the same geographic space that God has given as an inheritance to Israel (Gn 13:14–17; 17:8), and therefore they must be exterminated, which justifies the practice of *herem* in the conquest narratives (Nm 21:1–3; Dt 20:10–18; Jos 6:17–21; 8:20–29; 1 Sm 15:1–23). In the Deuteronomic narrative, the Canaanites are a 'Delendum'.

In the Genesis narrative, the geography of 'Delendness' mainly affects the city of Shechem, which seems to represent the whole land of Canaan. Not by chance, Shechem is in the centre of the land of Canaan and was the first place mentioned when Abram and Jacob get into it (Gn 12, 6; 33:18). The story of Dinah (Gn 34) points to the clear and incompatible differentiated identity between the inhabitants of Shechem and the family of Jacob-Israel. Initially, both groups move in their own spaces: Jacob-Israel in the countryside (Gn 33:18–19; 34:7) and Hamor-Shechem in the city (Gn 33:18; 34:20, 24, 25, 27–28). However, difficulties arise when Dinah (Gn 34:1) and Hamor (Gn 34:20) get out (*yṣʾ*) of their own space and cross to the opposite space. The people of Shechem propose to break out the border and to become a unique people: 'Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves' (Gn 34:9). Jacob's sons impose circumcision as the only painful condition: (Gn 34:16). This unification proposal includes a clause of the geography of the 'Equalness', in which both groups share the same space (Gn 34:10, 21).

Nevertheless, the rapture of Dinah is taken as an outrage to the national identity of Israel. The reason for defiling (*tmʾ* Piel) Dinah (Gn 34:5) and committing infamy (*nebālāh*) 'in Israel' (Gn 34:7) and a disgrace (*ḥerpāh*, Gn 34:14) is not a woman's rape (Reuben does so without punishment in Gn 35:22), but giving one of our women to an uncircumcised man, as circumcision is the clear sign of Israel's identity (Gn 17:9–16, 23–27; 21:4). They pretend to be one people when they are not (Bechtel 1994; Garrone 2015). Simeon and Levi intentionally invade the opposite space, burning the city of Shechem to the ground (Gn 34:25–29). The Shichemite will never be an 'Equal' but a 'Delendum'. Jacob suspects the terrible consequences of this action, as then the Canaanites and Jacob's sons will struggle against each other for their survival.

Dinah's episode shows how a proposal for 'Equalness' can end up with a sentence of 'Delendness'. But it can also happen the other way around. Groups initially categorised as 'Delendum' may in the end be recognised as 'Other' and even as 'Equal', all of which is expressed in a narrative of their own, as in the episodes of the clan of Rahab (Jos 2:1–21; 6:22–25; Nm 31:22) or the Gibeonites (Jos 9). Likewise, there may also be conflictive processes in which a group labelled as 'Equal' becomes a 'Delendum', such as the Benjaminites after the episode of Gibeah's crime (Jdg 20–21). This shows us that the narrative discourse by which groups recognise themselves as 'Equal', 'Other' or 'Delendum' can shift over the course of history.

The imaginative geography of 'Foreignness'

Egypt appears in the Genesis narratives as an ideal but strange land. The imaginative geography of Egypt depicts it as a fertile, watered country (Gn 13:10), a land of wheat where everyone can go down in times of famine (Gn 12:10; 42:1). However, Israel's sons and the Egyptians maintain a relationship between them different from that of the 'Other' (as Ishmael, Esau/Edom, Laban, Lot), that is, an entity for continuous reference to affirm their own identity. Egypt has got neither a genealogy nor a list of tribes. There is no need to set fixed boundaries with it. In return, Egypt is portrayed as the 'Foreigner', the exotic, the strange, the odd and the different.

Why is Egypt so different? Egypt is the land of the Nile River. In Egypt's imaginative geography, the Nile is the ubiquitous source of its wealth (Gn 41:1–36) and the country's most representative symbol (Jr 46:7–8; Ezk 29:3–5), with its famous floods and ebbs (Am 8:8; 9:5). In Exodus, the Nile is an instrument of oppression, but its waters turned into blood or exhausted are the sign of YHWH's judgement against Egypt (Ex 1:22; 2:1–10; 3:8–9; 7:14–25; Is 19:5–10). Egypt is the land of the Pharaoh, who in biblical literature is almost a metonymy for the country ('… Pharaoh and … Egypt': Ex 11:1; 18:8, 10; Dt 7:18; 11:3; 1 Sm 6:6; Jr 25:19; Ezk 30; 32). The imaginative geography of Egypt in Genesis conveys the idea of a hierarchised land on whose apex stands the Pharaoh at the first level (Gn 12:10–20; 40:20–23; 41:1–36; 45:16–21; 47:1–12; 50:4–6). At the second level were Pharaoh's officials: Potiphar (Gn 37:36; 39:1), the prison official (Gn 39:21–23), 'the cupbearer and the baker' (Gn 40:1) and Joseph. At the third level were Pharaoh's officials' servants (Gn 39:11–14; 41:37; 43:19). A great part of Joseph's story is set in buildings referring – in some way or another – to Pharaoh as the supreme authority: Potiphar's house (Gn 39:1–19); the prison where Joseph is closed up (Gn 39:40–40:23); Joseph's house (Gn 42:6–25; 43:17–34; 44:14–45:15) and at last, Pharaoh's house (Gn 41:1–46; 45:2, 16–20; 47:1–10; 50:4–6).

The Egyptian and the Israelite look at each other as 'strangers', as the correlative use of the terms 'Hebrew' (ʿibrî) and 'abomination' (toʿēbāh) in Genesis seem to indicate. It is in Egypt where an Israelite may be called a 'Hebrew' (ʿibrî,

Loretz 1984), both in Joseph's story (from the mouth of Potiphar's wife; Gn 39:14, 17, the chief cupbearer, Gn 41:12; or the narrator, Gn 43:32) and in Exodus (Ex 2:7–19, 3:18, 5:3, 7:16; 9:1–3, 10:3). The difference between a Hebrew and an Egyptian is so stark that a simple contact between them is considered an 'abomination to Egypt' (tôʿēbat miṣraîm) under the form of a food taboo (Gn 43:32) or a refusal to live with shepherds (Gn 46:34) or a refusal of sacrifices to YHWH (Ex 8:22). The term toʿēbāh seems to be an Egyptian loan (bw.t, 'disgusting', Humbert 1960, 1961) and suggests that Israel was aware that other nations and religions also had exclusivist customs and demands (Preuss 2004).

Egypt is the 'Foreigner', the strange country, but it is not unknown or distant. Connections to Egypt are frequent. Egypt is a traditional land of refuge (Galvin 2011). Joseph acknowledges that God brought them there 'to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors' (Gn 45:7). It is to Egypt where Abram (Gn 12:10–20), Hagar (Gn 16:7; cf. Jericke 2013:145–148), Hadad (1 Ki 11:14–22), Jeroboam (1 Ki 11:40; 12:2; 12:24), Jeremiah (Jr 46) and Jesus (Mt 2:13–2) flee, in one way or another.

The 'Egyptian connection' is evident in the story of Ishmael (Gn 16:1, 3; 21:9, 21; 25:12, 18). In the Midrash, Hagar is an Egyptian princess, daughter of Pharaoh (Kadari 2009). Joseph is fully introduced into the Egyptian way of life and customs about clothing, dietary rules and burial practices (Gn 41:14, 42–46; 43:32; 50:2–3, 26). The experience that Hellenistic Judaism had of being able to develop its own identity in an Egyptian environment, despite the difficulties (Moore 2015), contributed to the widespread reception of the Joseph story, as witnessed, for example, in the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* and *Joseph and Aseneth* (Wöhrle 2013).

The imaginative geography of 'Equalness'

The analysis of the geography of the 'Equalness' should be analysed last because it responds better to the process of identity construction: the identity of the 'Equal' can be defined only after the 'Other', the 'Foreigner' and the 'Delendum' are established. When the Genesis account ends, each group that descended from Abraham has his genealogy, a list of names and an assigned geography in which they have been able to grow and become numerous people. In this way their identity is delimited for everyone… except for Jacob. The sons of Jacob have a list of the 12 people who were born in Padan Aram (Gn 35:22b–26) and of the 70 who went down to Egypt (Gn 46:8–27; cf. Ex 1:1–5), but they do not have a territory. Their geography is still open to the future, perhaps guided by the boundaries that God promises Abraham (Gn 13:14–18; 15:18–21), but it has yet to be realised. The borders of the geography of the 'Equal' have been progressively defined as the borders of the 'Others' have been defined: with Lot in the plain of the Jordan (Gn 13:8–13), with Ishmael in the desert from Havilah to Shur, opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria (Gn 20:20–21; 25:12–18),

with the sons of Keturah in the East (Gn 25:1–6), with Laban beyond Mizpah and Gilead (Gn 31:43–55) and with Esau in Seir (Gn 34:16–17). In this way, self-identity is constructed as other identities are created, or rather other identities are created to create one's own identity.

Conclusions

In this study I have dealt the relationship between the creation of the identity of the 'Other' (understood in a broad sense) and the creation of imaginative spaces and geographies (Said 1978) associated with the 'Other' in the book of Genesis and in the history of its interpretation. I have defined four types of imaginative geographies:

1. The 'Otherness' (properly speaking) reflects the 'Other' as opposed or juxtaposed to the 'Equal' in an imaginative geography in which clear boundaries are defined that cannot be crossed and privileged characteristics and places associated with that geography are observed. The 'Others' are Ishmael (confined to the vast desert region inhabited by the Arabs and updated by Jewish tradition in the followers of Islam), Lot (a refugee in the reduced highlands of Moab and Ammon in Transjordan, to end up disappearing), Esau (who is Edom/Seir, the eternal brother/enemy reincarnated in Idumea, Rome and Christianity) and Laban (in Padan Aram, in Aramaic territory, beyond Mizpah and Gilead, to which there is no return).
2. 'Delendness' defines the group that claims to occupy the same territory as us and which must therefore be destroyed ('delendum') as incompatible with our survival. These are the Canaanites in the Deuteronomic tradition and Shechem in Genesis 31.
3. 'Foreignness' that defines the group whose imaginative geography is not properly opposed or juxtaposed, but exotic, strange and odd or different. In Genesis, Egypt, the land of the Nile and Pharaoh, marks its differences with the Israelites by considering them 'Hebrews' and affected by the 'abomination'.
4. Finally, the 'Equalness' takes up the imagined geography of Abraham's descendants, the land of Canaan, which is defined precisely in contrast to the rest, and in whose territory it is not yet settled when Genesis ends. Equality, moreover, opens up to contacts with 'Otherness' and 'Delendness' that allow for mutual influences and kinship relations.

The main focus of this article is the discussion of imaginative geographies in the book of Genesis. But imaginative geographies can also help to understand other current and past identity processes and conflicts, to which I can only hint because of lack of space. For example, during the Middle Ages, Jews, Muslims and Christians acknowledge themselves as heirs of Abraham to varying degrees, according to the Genesis narrative and recognise mainly each other as an imaginative geography of 'Otherness' with representative spaces (neighbourhoods, worship and gathering places), and defined borders, despite some situations of intolerance (Costa

López 2016; Elukin 2007). However, the recent Israeli-Palestinian conflict has given rise to some hermeneutics of Genesis and the Qur'an that replaces the imaginative geography of 'Otherness' with a geography of 'Delendness', preventing any negotiation and possibility of agreement. This is the case, for example, of Jewish ultra-nationalist sectors in Israel for whom Palestinian Arabs are identified not with Ishmael, but with Amalek and the Philistines (Jacobs 2017; Masahla 2013; Reiter 2010:235–236). Processes of civil wars and genocides – such as those in Bosnia (1992–1995), Rwanda (1994) or in Burma against the Rohinya (2012–2018) – are often associated with national narratives in which group identities (Greenberg 2010; Moshman 2007) and their imaginative geographies are reconstructed in such a way that a group previously considered as 'Equal' or as 'Other' becomes a 'Delendum'. Thus, Edward Said's imaginative geographies may help to understand not only the effects that biblical and non-biblical narratives can have on historical identity processes but also to the identification and dissolution of current conflicts.

Acknowledgements

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