Prophet in the Camp:
Ezekiel and Refugee Studies

"...it is so obvious as to be a certainty that Ezekiel was first and foremost a prophet
for the exiles..."

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In my work on Old Testament themes and texts, I have found that when I take time to do wide-ranging reading in anthropological and sociological literature dealing with generally similar events, contexts, or circumstances, this reading has often involved time well spent. For example, when working on the mixed marriage crisis of Ezra-Nehemiah, I read some 40-50 articles dealing with mixed marriage analysis more generally. For my work on the Babylonian Exile, I have maintained a serious reading interest in subjects such as ethnicity, minority identities, and studies of recently mobile minority groups. In this paper, I propose to suggest how a reading of Ezekiel in the context of refugee and trauma studies may impact the way we approach these texts. These are somewhat tentative thoughts, some of them more carefully thought through than others, but I consider my role in this forum to be one of suggesting possibilities – particularly noting that I am a relative newcomer to Ezekiel studies. I appreciate the opportunity to share some of these thoughts with the Ezekiel group as I move toward more serious studies in Ezekiel myself after some years spent on the exile more generally, and Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah more specifically.

What is Disaster?

Among the more infamous epithets bestowed upon the 20th Century, it has also been christened “the century of the refugee” or “the century of Genocide”². Exile is the reality, whether chosen or forced, that demands our attention from an unprecedented percentage of the world’s people in movement in the 20th century. First and foremost, before any theological statement is made about
exile, we acknowledge that exile is the daily reality for millions of human beings at the opening of
the 21st Century.

Peter Stalker, writing for the Survey of International Labour Migration conducted by the United
Nations, rehearses the grim statistics – 80 million people now live in “foreign” lands. One million
people emigrate permanently each year, and another million seek political asylum. At the time he
wrote, 1994, there were 18 million refugees from natural disaster or war, but the recent report The
State of the World’s Refugees 1997-1998 reports that: “…50 million people around the world
might legitimately be described as victims of forced displacement”3. When it is added that 20% of
the world’s population control a percentage of the global GNP of between 70-83%, and that 1.2
billion people live in poverty, we begin to see the results of 20th Century civilization. Huge
population transfers amount to rich nations "penetrating" less powerful nations for labor pools:
Arabs in France, Turks in Germany, Mexicans in the USA. Stalker writes:

Widening economic gaps between industrialized and developing countries, rapidly
increasing populations, the penetration of poor countries by rich ones, the disruption caused
by economic development and the web of transport and communications systems all create
the structural conditions' that might encourage an individual to consider life elsewhere4

Exile can be part of a disaster. But do we know what a disaster really is? Contemporary
scholars of disaster tell us that there are certain conditions that must be met before a disaster can be,
well, disastrous. Events must exceed the ability of an individual or group to “cope” with the
events in normal mental structures about how the world works. Furthermore, political and social
decisions can impinge on the meaning and impact of disasters. Even the concept of a “natural
disaster” must be questioned if they are thought to be occasions devoid of power relations and
political decisions. Anthony Oliver-Smith, whose important monograph, The Martyred City: Death
and Rebirth in the Andes5, represents a school of “disaster studies” that refuses to separate
supposedly “natural disasters” from human intervention. In his analysis of the aftermath of a
massive earthquake that devastated the Andean village of Yungay on May 31, 1970, Oliver-Smith
provocatively refers to the “500-year earthquake”, suggesting that a large part of the devastation of
this “natural disaster” is the legacy of five centuries of Spanish colonialist presence with the
accompanying development of social castes and especially the colonizer’s rejection of light,
indigenous architectural traditions that were suited to the unstable Andean environment. These
were replaced by the “superior” heavy, European-style construction of imported Spanish traditions
– an monumental architectural tradition which had the unfortunate corollary of transforming homes into death traps:

    Colonial governments and their successors, responding to non-indigenous pressures and forces, imposed systems of production, urban and rural settlement, and limits on population mobility that severely undermined indigenous hazard management.\(^6\)

The point is, simply, that disaster scholars have come to see that human interaction with the environment – for example, decisions that are made against older wisdom – are inherently a factor in the assessment of “disaster”. There is, in short, a politics of disaster that brings it closer to the study of the sociology of human crises of violence, war, and forced population movements. Such a wider lens is required for a deeper appreciation of the events of the Babylonian Exile of the Jews. Any attempt to clarify the theological significance of Hebrew writings associated with these Imperial realities, and for subsequent decades and centuries that followed, needs to consider the massive disruption in the lives of the Hebrews who lived in Palestine, among others also affected, and the continued realities of living under Imperial control and administration.

The Palestinian-American writer Edward Said writes:

    …exile is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have enemies, or states, though they are often in search of these institutions. This search can lead exiles to reconstitute their broken lives in narrative form, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people. Such a story is designed to reassemble an exile’s broken history into a new whole.\(^7\)

Finally, in terms of general introductory remarks, lest we become too romantically attached to the notion of “creativity in exile”\(^8\), Said adds:

    To think of exile as beneficial, as a spur to humanism or to creativity, is to belittle its mutilations. Modern exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical. It is produced by human beings for other human beings; it has torn millions of people for the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography…It is necessary to set aside Joyce and Nabakov and even Conrad, who wrote of exile with such pathos, but of exile without cause or rationale.
Think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created, of refugees without urbanity, with only ration cards and agency numbers…

My attempt to respond to the warnings of writers like Said has resulted in these (somewhat unprocessed) thoughts about reading Ezekiel in sociological contexts.

**Ezekiel and The Violent Context of Exile**

It was economics and control and power that dragged Ezekiel and his compatriots to Babylon. It was economics and control that reduced Jerusalem to devastation. What has all this to do with Ezekiel? When these texts are read with an eye to the study of crisis and refugee culture, these social and political observations can mean a great deal. How, then, do we re-read Ezekiel in the light of the Babylonian Exile? First and foremost, is the realization that the book of Ezekiel is, among others, certainly the product of “state-sponsored terrorism”.

Caroline Gorst-Unsworth, who works on treatment of terror and torture victims, defines this phrase as follows:

...essentially the act of a state against an individual or group, with the aim of achieving specific psychological changes (directly) in their victims and often (indirectly) in their communities...the survivor of torture has not merely been the accidental victim of physical injury or threat of death such as might occur, for example in a natural disaster or accident...He or she has received the focussed attention of an adversary determined to case the maximal psychological change...Neither is it the individual who suffers. For every person tortured there are mothers and fathers, wives, husbands and children, friends and relatives who wait in uncertainty and fear...Torture has effects on communities and on whole societies...

When we read Ezekiel 5:12:

One third of you shall die of pestilence or be consumed by famine among you; one third shall fall by the sword around you; and one third I will scatter to every wind and will unsheathe the sword after them.
Do we have any substantive reason to excuse Mesopotamian regimes from the accusation of state-sponsored terrorism merely because it is ancient history we speak of rather than 20th Century? There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the terror expressed in the text of Ezekiel was fully intended by Mesopotamian regimes.

For example, in reference to the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Prof. Kuhrt writes of reliefs depicting its kings reclining near the severed heads of enemies, as well as Assyrian inscriptions boasting of the dead rebels draped on their city walls, or rebellious rulers entrapped in cages with wild animals that are then suspended at the entrance to cities. The King, she writes:

...was awe-inspiring; the fear that filled his enemies was the terror of those knowing that they will be ruthlessly, but justly, punished. The royal power to inspire fear was visualizes as a shining radiance...a kind of halo, that flashed forth from the royal face...it made him fearsome to behold and it could strike his enemies down, so that they fell to their knees before him, dazzled by the fearful glow...\(^{12}\)

It is interesting to note that in his recent work, Vanderhooft wants to carefully distance Neo-Babylonian inscriptions from the sheer cruelty of Neo-Assyrian rhetoric. But even at that, Vanderhooft, too, refers to the "brute facts of subjugation", and writes that the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar II was: "...at base, focused on domination and exploitation of non-Babylonian populations for the benefit of a ruling elite."\(^{13}\) Biblical materials do not present a different picture. Wilkie, already in 1951,\(^{14}\) anticipated recent observations by Blenkinsopp that the suffering of the so-called “Servant Songs” of Second-Isaiah may reflect some of the exilic realities of the pre-Persian period. And even in the context of legends, the suddenness of executions demanded by the `mad King' is an essential element in the drama of the tales in Daniel 1-6, Esther, and Joseph, even if we are dealing with late Persian period collective memories of the Neo-Babylonian experience. We run a serious risk of misreading exilic and post-exilic texts, I would argue, when many of these themes are reduced (and dismissed?) as merely literary motifs.
Ezekiel and Refugee Studies

Problems of using Refugee Studies for a reading of Ezekiel begin already with the very term “refugee” in modern sociological literature. In her recent summary of Refugee studies in the Annual Review of Anthropology for 1995, Liisa Malkki notes that there are considerable difficulties simply defining the term “refugee”, especially given the context of the rise of refugee studies in the immediate post-war years of the first half of the twentieth century. Interestingly enough, I note that when I was a doctoral student at Oxford, reading heavily in immigrant studies and minority studies, I was not even aware that a small program was taking root there in “Refugee Studies”. The program has since gone on to become an important world center of refugee research, and the publisher a major journal for the field.

But in Malkki’s analysis, recent refugee studies have been separated from a wider study of social and political contexts:

If nothing else, the development of the discourse on refugees has sometimes facilitated the continued depoliticization of refugee movements; for instead of foregrounding the political, historical processes that generated a given group of refugees, and that reach far beyond the country of asylum and the refugee camp, development projects tend to see a whole world in a refugee camp. Malkki, notably, refers in her work to a “sedentarist bias” that now defines the refugee as a “problem” precisely because the refugee is stateless. Thus, this bias suggests the necessity of territory and sealed borders, and thus invites xenophobic reactions to the presence of such refugee groups. In reply to this tendency Malkki calls for an approach to the study of the phenomenon of refugees that also incorporates a study of what “being home” is! But what is particularly suggestive is her questioning of the territorial, nationalist bias of present refugee research:

“…a denaturalizing, questioning stance toward the national order of things, presents itself as a promising site from which to identify new research directions in the study of refugees, exile, displacement, and diaspora – as well as for imagining new forms of political engagement.”

Refugee Culture: Creative and/or Destructive

Given these cautions, however, it is possible to note that studies of refugee events and groups reveal an interesting tension between those who emphasize the creative ability to reconstruct, or even maintain, pre-crisis identities, and those who emphasize the debilitating conditions of not
having sufficient stability to maintain identity, culture, and rationality. In their own introduction to
an important series of essays considering identity, gender, and change in refugee settings, Krulfeld
and Camino observe that:

Despite experiences of being violently or forcibly uprooted and plunged into discord
and disorder, refugees demonstrate the strengths of innovation for survival, as well
as the vitality to create and negotiate new roles and behaviour to achieve both
necessary and desired ends. By doing so, they reveal the multi-layered, richly
contextualized meanings of their lives and traditions as they act to re-affirm self and
community.¹⁹

Here the generalized studies of “Disaster” may assist us, especially when we can cite
disaster theorists such as Gilbert, for example, who has revived older views about how
“disasters” only become “disastrous” for people when the events exceed the ability of the
group to cope, re-define, and reconstruct:

…we may speak of disaster when actors in modern societies increasingly lose their
capacity to define a situation that they see as serious or even worrying through
traditional understandings and symbolic parameters.²⁰

Studies of Palestinian experiences in prisons, for example, suggest that coping strategies help to put
negative experiences into meaningful frames – such as suffering for the “political cause”, for the
love of one’s friends and families, for heroic fulfillment, and through a deepening sense of religious
devotion.²¹ Indeed, it has often been noted that reconstructing some of the structural and social
elements of previous existence can assist in this process. Palestinians in refugee camps continue to
use village designations, and recreate Neighborhoods. Peteet observes:

“If one wished to locate the home of a person who is from Safed, one could ask,
‘Where do the people of Safed live?’ In short, the camps were structurally arranged
to mirror rural Palestine in a desire to re-form a physical and social geography of
trust”²²

This was our fault…

Another way that this reconstruction process has been observed in refugee study literature is in
the forging of new histories in the process of reconstructing identity. Daniel and Knudsen observe
that:
Several anthropologists working with refugees have found that one of the important components in the recovery of meaning, the making of culture, and the reestablishment of trust is the need and the freedom to construct a normative picture of one’s past within which ‘who one was’ can be securely established to the satisfaction of the refugee. The refugee’s self-identity is anchored more to who she or he was than what she or he has become…”Individualities” constructed in oral autobiographies are deemed irrelevant by many caseworkers whereas for the refugee this is the foundation on which a meaningful world may be rebuilt.23

Included among the options of this reconstruction of history, however, is the possibility that cultures can be reconstructed on negative terms – such as being considered cursed, sinful, or doomed. In her study of Cambodian refugee narratives, for example, Muecke observed that:

In an attempt to comprehend the heinousness of the mass persecution of Cambodians in the late 1970s, many Cambodians have raised the possibility that Cambodian culture itself had a bad karma. Belief in karmic explanation of their misery could enable Cambodians to sustain the legitimacy of Buddhism and to rebuild their confidence in their future by virtue of having now expiated their karmic demerit through their massive sufferings. But believe in a karmic explanation could also justify a belief in the imminence of Armageddon. Fear of extinction is not new among the Khmer.24

Future writing on the theological viewpoint of the Deuteronomic Historian, and the influence of similar perspectives from the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for example, ought to consider this widely observed phenomenon, especially given the widely recognized negative evaluation of the previous monarchical history typical of all three of these Biblical sources. For example, I have myself heard many Cree Indian Christians in Canada lament that their shamans have no powers any more because they were abused in the past by the shamans themselves for self-gain before the whites arrived. The noted scholar of Armenian history, Ronald Suny, notes a similar controversial view among some Armenian clergy who explained some of the suffering at the hands of the Turks as a result of “our sins”.25 Surely the frequency of the motif that “…it’s all because of our sins’ in cross-cultural settings would lead one to re-think the possibility that it is among the effective coping strategies of a
people in crisis. After all, if one’s suffering is because of one’s own oversights, and not because of the power of the emperor and his armies, then this holds out considerably more hope about a future restoration, given appropriate spiritual recovery.

**Destructive Behaviour Patterns**

Other refugee theorists, however, emphasize the destructive behavioral patterns that are frequently observed. Matlou, for example, emphasizes the destruction of flight, and the ensuing divisions and internal factions that can result:

> During the processes of forced migration that so often result, ongoing social structures and institutions undergo significant changes. As the state disintegrates, its monopoly over the instruments of power and the allocation of resources disappears. Warlords, praetorian guards, religious zealots, and crime bosses take over the shattered shells of now weakened states and societies. Development recedes, what progress had been made is lost, and violence becomes the order of the day as the wak are further subjugated.²⁶

When one considers the divisions between those Judeans who seemed to gravitate toward Egypt, versus those (like Josiah) that seemed to have a preference for dealing with Babylon, such internal divisions sound vaguely familiar. Furthermore, in a series of observations that seem deeply suggestive for the shrill oracles of judgement by Ezekiel aimed, at least partially, at fellow exiles, Matlou adds:

> …the deprivation and uncertainty that refugees often suffer sometimes lead them into conflict with each other over scarce rewards. In this regard, exile often serves as an arena for the continuation of conflicts begun at home and leads to the intensification of discriminatory practices that were already in place.²⁷

Many scholars of Daniel, for example, have noted the strange ambiguity of diaspora narratives like the Daniel stories of Chs. 1-6 with regard to the view of the foreign rulers. There appear to be alternating views of near positive feelings about the Emperor (e.g. Darius in Ch. 6), but at the same time the fear of spectacular death by burning, maiming, mauling, and impaling (virtually all 6 stories refer to such horrific forms of capital punishment at the whim of the emperor!). Such uncertainty, interestingly enough, turns out to be a conscious strategy in the imperial repertoire of modern terrorist regimes. In his study of Latin American persecution of peasant societies, Turner notes that:
“…brutal actions were carried out on a few individuals in such a way that the wider population was literally terrorized. For this to be successful, the state had to make sure that the population was well informed about the violence taking place and was maintained in a state of fear by a sequence of unpredictable actions involving acts of intimidation alternative with conditional protection.”

Thus, the occasions of vaguely positive evaluation of emperors in regimes that we know from archaeological and textual evidence to be brutal certainly does not mean that the Biblical texts reveal positive feelings about living in the shadows of empires. It merely reveals the ambiguity of living under a regime that calculates public relations as an element of domination.

**Learning to Listen to Refugees**

Life under these regimes can have other internal consequences as well. In a fascinating analysis of “refugee cultures”, Harrell-Bond and Voutira speak of the realities of the notion expressed by many refugees that “to be a refugee means to learn to lie”. One of the most important “divides”, therefore, is between the officials, and the refugees. Knudsen observes, based on his work with Vietnamese refugees in Norway, that the refugees from Vietnam:

…often stress that the brutality of the wars has engendered suspicion, individuality, and distrust rather than forthrightness, cooperation, and trust. Hence even daily communications is described as more indirect than direct and often accomplished

This is not an inappropriate place to raise once again the closely related observations in the pioneering work of James Scott, whose sociological observations are already being energetically mined by Biblical scholars. Scott noted the difference between the “hidden transcript” – the opinion genuinely held by the subordinated groups, which is often encoded in the “public transcript”. Clearly, Biblical exegesis of the texts of the Diaspora must take into consideration the reality of “official correspondence” being an element of Biblical documents, and not conclude too quickly that the necessity of dealing with officials therefore establishes positive and working relations with the regime. Scott’s work, with Harrell-Bond’s observations about refugee culture noted above, forces us to read with considerable awareness of the subtleties of living under dominant regimes.
In the Ezekiel seminar of 1999, I read a preliminary paper based on my work on the analysis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder literature in relation to Ezekiel, which was written largely in response to Dr. David Halperin’s interesting 1993 work, Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology (Penn State University Press, 1993). As it relates closely to my suggestions in this paper about resources for studying Ezekiel, I will here summarize some of my work in that study.

Halperin's work is a fascinating contribution to the collection of efforts by scholars, whether versed more in Biblical or psychological disciplines, to analyze the behaviour and attitudes of the priest/prophet Ezekiel through a close examination of selected texts. Halperin himself states that his work is an attempt to revise, correct, but in general to renew the psychoanalytical suggestions originally made by Broome, in his 1946 article, "Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality". Although Halperin acknowledges that psychological interpretations of Ezekiel go back at least as far as Klostermann's 1877 essay, it is Broome's more Freudian approach that Halperin is particularly interested in revising and reviving.

Psychological interpretations of Ezekiel, it should be noted, are resisted by many scholars. But even in the context of rejecting specific psychological explanations, there are notable strains in the interpretations of Ezekiel when confronted with what Fohrer designated as the 12 "sign-actions" of the prophet - for example the famous enactments of silent tableau scenes of Jerusalem, the packing of an 'exiles' bag', symbolic cutting of his own hair, binding his own hands, etc. Zimmerli, for example, varies between seeing these actions as conscious efforts to: "...set forth in a visible action the event announced by Yahweh as something already begun", and those actions that may result from events "...which overtake him and which make him appear to be overpowered by these experiences...[such as]...the tragic loss of his wife...". In other words, such events make it difficult to avoid some kind of psychological or psycho-theoretical notions for fully appreciating Ezekiel.

Halperin stated that the "centerpiece" of his arguments about the psychological nature of Ezekiel is Ezek 8:7-12, the account of "digging through the wall" during the visionary return to Jerusalem that occupies one of the most important "visions" of the first half of the book, Ch. 8-11. Halperin's central assertion is that this digging in the wall "is a symbolic representation of sexual intercourse", and his entire psychoanalytical interpretation of Ezekiel and his sexuality follows from this initial
interpretation. Halperin wondered what other possibilities existed for holes in the walls of Jerusalem.\(^{36}\)

That the holes of battering rams did not occur to Halperin was, I suggested, indicative of the neglect of the social context of Ezekiel. Ezekiel, by most modern estimates, was among the first exiles taken from Jerusalem. This exile occurred after a siege of the city by Nebuchadnezzar. Throughout the Bible, we know that sieges involved siege-engines and battering rams from at least as early as the Assyrian Empire, if not earlier. Amos speaks of defeat by the Assyrians in 4:3 by stating, "Through breaches in the wall you shall leave" (See also Psalm 144:14 - compares breach with exile). Isaiah 30:13 goes into graphic detail:

> Therefore this iniquity shall become for you
> like a break in a high wall
> bulging out, and about to collapse
> whose crash comes suddenly, in an instant

2 Kings 25:4, of course, directly attests to battering rams in the Babylonian arsenal during the siege of 587. In two separate texts, Ezekiel also refers to battering rams: In his tableau where he sets up the model of the siege of Jerusalem in 4:2,3; and in pronouncing the disaster in 21:22 (27H). They are implied in Ezek 26:9, where the walls of Jerusalem are being "struck", and towers broken down. Thus, an image of Ezekiel digging through walls ought to suggest damage done to Jerusalem walls in a siege, and all Ezekiel must do is dig a bit further, and "behold", an opening! Blenkinsopp, for example, pointed out that the northern, as well as eastern, section of Jerusalem would have born the brunt of attacks by Mesopotamian regimes, and thus Nehemiah (some 150 years later!) found this section in the greatest state of destruction, and more workers are employed in this section than at the other sections.\(^{37}\)

As Zimmerli and others note, the Hebrew text's additional discussion of digging in the walls does, in fact, relate to 12:1-16, where allusions are made to Zedekiah's attempted escape from Jerusalem. Most scholars see 12:13 as a post-587 insertion regarding Zedekiah's blindness and capture, and our reading of this would make this a natural association. The point is, however, that reading Ezekiel in the context of the socio-political events of the time suggests that his behaviour
and observations can, and probably should, be read in the light of these actual traumatic circumstances as a prerequisite to any assessments of the behaviour, much less the textual reconstruction of a problematic passage, in Ezekiel. Yet Halperin mentions the exile, and then only in passing, two times in his entire book. I argued that such tendencies to read the psychological state of Ezekiel totally apart from the social and political experiences he suffered, are symptoms of the same avoidance in other Biblical scholarly analyses of the exile as a real event where human beings deeply suffered. Any psychological assumptions about Ezekiel derived apart from serious attention to the exile are thus tantamount to blaming the victim.

**Trauma Studies, and "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder": Ezekiel the Refugee**

Attention to the social, economic, and traumatic factors at work in circumstances and contexts of subordination, disaster, warfare, or political oppression (either individually or a group) has led in recent years to increased attention to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (hereinafter PTSD). It was only in 1980 that the widely cited Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders ("DSM") of the American Psychiatric Association listed a symptomology of "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder". Among the indications of PTSD appearing in the latest edition of DSM, we find: recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the even, including images, thoughts, or perceptions...recurrent distressing dreams of the event...acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and...flashbacks...intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event...efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings...associated with the trauma...feeling of detachment or estrangement from others...(Compare Murray38).

In the 16 years since this symptomology has entered DSM, however, interest in trauma studies and related psychological and sociological studies have increased dramatically39. This interest has not come without a serious backlash. To suggest that (for example) warfare, both shooting and being shot at, can have serious and debilitating psychological consequences (!) has obvious implications for governments and industries who are determined in their attempts to spend as much money as possible on the causes of destruction, and as little as possible on its' results, both human and environmental. In a recent review of the history of PTSD, Wilson points out:
Viewed from a historical perspective, the emergence of widespread interest in PTSD by the medical and behavioral sciences as well as in legal arenas a litigation is quite understandable and, perhaps, expectable when examined by a retrospective look at some major events of the 20th Century: two World Wars; the atomic bombing of Hiroshima; scores of nationalistic and colonial wars; widespread civil violence; mass genocide...When it is considered that hundreds of millions of human lives have been adversely effected by such traumatic events, it only stands to reason that sooner or later scientific inquiry would accumulate enough momentum to began examining the multifaceted aspects of what traumatization means, and the potential long-term impact to human lives of such events.\textsuperscript{40}

Moreover, PTSD has by now been thoroughly documented as resulting from a variety of traumatic experiences both natural and man-made, and the central symptoms of which - particularly intrusive memory and debilitating depression, have been documented across an impressive variety of cultures around the world, from studies among Armenians surviving the massive earthquake of 1988 (6.9, 25,000 dead), Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees in the USA and Norway, Sri Lankan survivors of disastor, Israelis, Russians, Indians, and the work continues, particularly on nuancing cultural variations in symptoms and expression of symptoms.

A sampling from recent literature on PTSD is suggestive. As Gersons and Carlier point out in this review article of the British Journal of Psychiatry (1992), PTSD has its origins as a new diagnosis in response to the unique psychic consequences of war in the 20th Century, and particularly in Viet Nam.\textsuperscript{41} War continues to provide significant sources of research, even up to the Gulf War: specifically the impact of missiles fired at Tel Aviv neighborhoods, for example,\textsuperscript{42} and a very high instance of PTSD symptoms (over .50%) among military personnel who worked with the identifying the dead (one worker reported crying out the name of the first identified body in their sleep).\textsuperscript{43} One thinks of Ezekiel's vision of the valley of bones in Ch. 37, particularly noting that many modern scholars suggest that the vision is intended to depict a battle field strewn with dead. Murray further notes that the literature suggests that: "Combat exposure, its duration, witnessing the death of comrades, and participating in atrocities were the most frequent factors associated with PTSD"}\textsuperscript{44}
Participation in Viet Nam atrocities and the associated guilt appears to be a prominent feature among those generations who experienced that conflict. Davidson and Foa, writing in 1991 Journal of Abnormal Psychology concur, stating that:

"Of the event characteristics...physical injury, bereavement, participation in atrocities, exposure to grotesque death, and witnessing or hearing about death were more often associated with the development of PTSD..."  

Note here the suggestions about Ezekiel's hearing of the fall of Jerusalem, with the accompanying news of his wife's death. What has been particularly important in PTSD research is the fact that symptoms can persist, or even turn up, literally years after the events that triggered the symptoms. Disastor workers reported symptoms 3 years following the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise ferry in the English Channel in 1987. Unique research turns up specific factors when dealing with children, such as prolonged exposure to violence in poor, urban neighborhoods, but also specifically with women, particularly in cases of rape. Notably for our study of Ezekiel, Murray reports that: "The interval between rape and presenting for treatment was about 8 years for a woman who had lost her ability to speak in the meantime."  

Note that Ezekiel is struck mute for the duration of most of his symbolic actions, and can only speak with the news of the fall of Jerusalem and the death of his wife. Furthermore, research indicates that PTSD symptoms are also found in those reacting to natural disasters as well.  

Research on specific symptoms is also intriguing. For example, Classen, Koopman, and Spiegal report in the Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic (1993) of the symptoms of feeling detached, as if one is an observer of one's own mental or bodily processes:

Rape victims often speak of feeling as though they are floating above their own body, feeling sorry for the woman suffering the sexual assault. A car accident survivor said her experience, "was as though I was separate from myself and watching, like in a dream when you are watching yourself"...a Vietnam combat veteran said, "I felt myself separating from myself and looking down at the person who was in combat, and feeling sorry for him"...
Such specifics give us pause when thinking of Ezekiel's famous vision of being miraculously and bodily transported back to Jerusalem to witness the horrifying heresies of the Temple in Chs. 8-11.

Application of PTSD symptomology and literature to historical cases is also not new. Parry-Jones and Parry-Jones, writing in a 1994 issue of *Psychological Medicine*, apply PTSD terminology to an 18th Century avalanche disaster, and draw conclusions from the witnesses and surviving participants about the occurrence of PTSD symptoms.

Of particular interest to us, of course, is the amount of PTSD research conducted with refugees. Psychologists and Medical scholars have been interested in cross-cultural differences in exhibiting PTSD symptoms, and the length of time that symptoms are reported or persist among, for example, Cambodian refugees and Vietnamese Refugees in the United States and Norway. Indeed, scholars are moving toward a profound recognition that PTSD is allowing for a much greater depth in our understanding of the psychological and even spiritual impact of warfare and refugee life. The loss of one's way of life, one's entire world, may itself trigger such symptoms. As Lukoff, Lu, and Turner argue: "...cultural bereavement may exemplify a psychospiritual problem occurring within a non-Western ethnic group." When this loss is connected to violent loss, as in refugee status from warfare or state sponsored terrorism, then we begin to hear new tones in the voice of Ezekiel.

Finally, attention to the social, economic, and traumatic context at work in circumstances of subordination, disaster, warfare, or political oppression (either individually or a group) has led in recent years to increased attention to PTSD as a means of understanding *cultural groups* who suffer as entire peoples. Eduardo and Bonnie Duran's brilliant work, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*, 1995, is an excellent move in this direction, and has obvious relevance to a fuller reading of Ezekiel (as well as the Book of Lamentations, among others). In their work, they note the specific social impact of the First Contact period, the Invasive War Period, and Subjugation and Reservation Period, the Boarding School Period, and finally the Forced Relocation and Termination Period. They refer to the research pointing out the cross-generational passing of PTSD symptomology, as noted in children of Holocaust survivors, and discuss the realm of dreaming as places of pain and groping for understanding in Native culture and practice. Such thoughts would point in an interesting new direction for assessing the social values of Ezekiel's "visions" of a more
Suggests on Reading Ezekiel Texts

It is beyond the scope of a preliminary study such as this to now turn to a detailed analysis of Ezekiel texts with these sociological contexts in mind. But what I want to suggest three issues that I would argue need to be approached with this sociological material as part of our background for analysis:

(1) The Sign-Actions of Ezekiel in the context of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,
(2) The Hyper-Critical Rhetoric of Ezekiel toward his own comrades in Exile as exemplary of Refugee “camp” behaviors, and especially rumors as signs of internal rivalry, and
(3) The increasingly unusual visionary reports of Ezekiel that differ from the older Prophetic Vision material illustrated in, for example, an earlier prophet like Amos (Chs. 7-8).

The "Sign-Actions" of Ezekiel: Reading Ezekiel with Lamentations

For the study of Ezekiel, the reading of Refugee studies and the literature of PTSD forces us to ask serious questions about the adequacy of any textual assessment of Ezekiel apart from a full appreciation of the historical and social implications of the siege of Jerusalem, the deportations, and executions by the Babylonian armies and the Exile. Furthermore, PTSD literature emphasizes that there is secondary trauma for which symptoms are widely documented. One need not be present at the death of a loved one - merely the news can be sufficiently traumatic. Furthermore, we noted that proximity to the time of the disasters or traumas is clearly an interesting aspect of PTSD studies, some of which document symptoms 20-40 years after the events themselves.

Has the psychological exegesis of Ezekiel tended toward blaming the victim? A synoptic reading of the exile through Ezekiel and the book of Lamentations, for example, forces us to take a fresh look at the actions and behavior of Ezekiel. Lamentations consists of poetic memories of the fall of Jerusalem. To read Ezekiel with an eye to Lamentations suggests that many of Ezekiel's "bizarre" actions can be seen as modeling the trauma of the fall of Jerusalem, whether Ezekiel is acting on personal knowledge, or knowledge brought to him by recent refugees, or whether the texts have been redacted to reflect these realities. Let us consider some of the famous "sign-actions" in this way:
I. Ezekiel 3:22-27 - Ezekiel sits confined in his home (Lamentations 3:7-9 - images of confinement), with his hands tied by cords. Compare the language of chains in Lam. 3:7: “He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has put heavy chains on me…”

II. Ezekiel 4:1-3 - The siege of Jerusalem that forces some people to eat impure foods, or foods prepared in an impure manner. Compare Lamentations 1:11; 2:12; 4:4, 9-10 about hunger leading to suggestions of cannibalism (compare Jer 37:2; 52:6, 24; 2 Kings 25:3?). Lamentations echoes the concern with the ability to feed oneself and family properly:

(Lamentations 1:11) All her people groan as they search for bread; they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength. Look, O LORD, and see how worthless I have become. Compare also Lamentations 4:4-10:

The tongue of the infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives them anything. Those who feasted on delicacies perish in the streets; those who were brought up in purple cling to ash heaps. For the chastisement of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, though no hand was laid on it. Her princes were purer than snow, whiter than milk; their bodies were more ruddy than coral, their hair like sapphire. 8 Now their visage is blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets. Their skin has shriveled on their bones; it has become as dry as wood. Happier were those pierced by the sword than those pierced by hunger, whose life drains away, deprived of the produce of the field. The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food in the destruction of my people.

III. Ezekiel 5:1-17 - Ezekiel acts out the tri-fold punishment of Jerusalem - a third burnt in the city, a third dying by the sword, and a third exiled (“scattered to the wind”) - Compare Lamentations 1:1, and 2:21:

The young and the old are lying on the ground in the streets; my young women and my young men have fallen by the sword; in the day of your anger you have killed them, slaughtering without mercy.
IV. Ezekiel 12 - Ezekiel prepares "an exile's bag" and is led through a hole in a wall to exemplify being taken as a prisoner of war. He is reliving the events, both his own, and his image of events to come. Compare Lamentations 1:3, 18, "Led into exile", and Lamentations 2:8:

The LORD determined to lay in ruins the wall of daughter Zion; he stretched the line; he did not withhold his hand from destroying; he caused rampart and wall to lament; they languish together.

V. Ezekiel 21 - Babylonian forces are modeled by a sword. Compare Lamentations 2:21, and notably 5:9, where the "sword" refers, again, to foreign rule:

We get our bread at the peril of our lives, because of the sword in the wilderness…

How do we read such synoptic accounts of exilic tragedies? On the one hand, they can be psychologized away – the mental illness of a raving lunatic that history preserves as the sayings of Ezekiel. Or, they are merely the stereotypical language of lament, and thus with questionable historical value. This is not the place to pursue a further discussion about how literary theory has tended to de-historicize lament literature, and thus remove it from a role in assessing historical circumstances, but to establish what I mean, I will cite only one reference, turning to related discussions of the descriptions of tragedy in the Book of Lamentations.

In his recent commentary, Provan provides important literary observations in his introduction, which includes a discussion of stereotypical language:

"[On the one hand…]…the events which the poems describe are cloaked in non-literal language…which renders the reality which lies behind them elusive. It is, on the other, demonstrably hyperbolic…" 

The result of Provan’s line of literary analysis, however, suggest that a necessary caution in dealing with descriptions of suffering has begun to give way to open skepticism:
“If it is true…that accounts of suffering in the Ancient Near East were to some extent, at least, written up in a stereotypical manner, without thought of the immediate ‘facts’, our first difficulty is to know when it is right to look for concrete historical reality behind the text at all…”

Now, it may well be the case here that we cannot make presumptions about the historicity of details that fit a clearly established pattern of images. And it seems beyond doubt that we are dealing with patterns in the descriptions of suffering, but it is also difficult to avoid the impression of a classic “slippery slope” in these arguments. In recent work, we seem to be approaching doubts about the very impact of the exile. In other words – where once the references in Lamentations (and other passages that describe the results of siege and military conquest) were formerly considered at least partially stereotypical in form, there is a tendency now to speak of these stereotypical references as historically fraudulent. Is a move from the conclusion that certain literary forms of narrative employ stereotypical language, to a conclusion that stereotypical suffering is therefore not suffering at all, a legitimate move? I think this question must be raised in the light of some recent studies of the exile, and as we have already noted, most significantly in the widely cited work of Barstad, who wrote:

We should keep in mind that we are dealing with a small, basically agricultural society, in a Mediterranean climate. With life going back to normal fairly soon, it would represent a fatal misunderstanding of how ancient agricultural societies functioned to perceive any fundamental changes in everyday life or culture.

The assumptions about the conditions of the exile here are very weighty indeed, and suggest that we must radically dismiss all the Biblical and archaeological evidence that we have with regard to the enormity of the disaster, the depth of the spiritual and social crises that resulted, and therefore call into question a great deal of the tone, content, and imagery of the literature that resulted – particularly, it seems obvious, descriptions of suffering such as the book of Lamentations, and the resulting behavior of a person like Ezekiel.
Refugees and Camp Life: Rumours and News

One of the most interesting features of Ezekiel (and Jeremiah, interestingly) is, of course, internal fractures in the community as revealed by the role of “tidings”, “reports”, and “rumors”. What is mentioned in Jeremiah becomes rather prominent in Ezekiel:

Jeremiah 51:46 Do not be fainthearted or fearful at the rumors heard in the land--one year one rumor comes, the next year another, rumors of violence in the land and of ruler against ruler.

Ezekiel 7:26 Disaster comes upon disaster, rumor follows rumor; they shall keep seeking a vision from the prophet; instruction shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders.

Ezekiel 12:22 Mortal, what is this proverb of yours about the land of Israel

Ezekiel 16:44 See, everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb…

Ezekiel 18:2 What do you mean by repeating this proverb…

Ezekiel 21:7 "Because of the news that has come…”

I would argue that this is also related to alternative prophetic messages (Ch. 13, “Prophecy against the Prophets of Israel who are prophesying out of their own imagination…” which is also a feature of Jeremiah – another book arguably impacted by the exilic events. From the literature on refugee camps we see the role of rumor, constant changing of alliances, mistrust between groups, all as common features of refugee life.

Furthermore, Ezekiel studies often comment on the shrill tone of the attacks directed even at fellow exiles. Blenkinsopp, for example, speaks of the “extremely emotional language, sometimes verging on the pathological…”, and Koch referred to the “passion” and “cruelty” of the language of Ezekiel that is often directed to his fellow exiles. Many
scholars seem to read such attacks with a certain incredulity, noting that they are fellow sufferers of the exile, and surely such diatribes ought to be directed against those not in exile with him – yet refugee studies point to the refugee circumstance as often forcing the emergence of precisely these kinds of internal tensions.

**Visions and Encampment**

Finally, studies of dream analysis in populations of stress or refugee populations also provide an interesting source of insights for reading Ezekiel, who apparently dealt with many disturbing visions in his career as a Priest-Prophet of the Exile. I have myself, for example, been gathering a file of materials based on the work of Raija-Leena Punamaki, a Psychologist from the University of Helsinki who has done a number of significant studies on the dream culture of Palestinians in both occupied territories, and in Refugee Camp settings. Her work tends to focus on dreams as “compensation” for daily realities faced in violent circumstances, and dreams of “mastery” as a response. It would seem that Ezekiel’s “visions”, such as the transport to Jerusalem, and the valley of Dry Bones particularly, would be interesting subjects of a study comparing the content of these visions with dream analysis in violent circumstances.

Another direction for this analysis, however, would be in citing supernaturalist phenomena in the context of oppressive conditions. Aihwa Ong, investigating the occurrences of “spirit possession” among Asian sewing sweat-shops throughout Asia, has noted that factory women “untutored in ideologies” are capable of making alternative interpretations based on their own visceral experiences and cultural traditions. What is particularly noteworthy is the accounts of spirit possession breaking out in sweat shops. Ong suggests that, “Their vivid imagery defined the factory premises as a spiritually polluted place…” Her terminology is particularly interesting here when compared with the Priestly language of Ezekiel! To read the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones as the renewal of Israel from the strewn bodies of post-destruction Jerusalem is a powerful connection between contemporary analysis of visionary and dream content with studies of the book of Ezekiel.
Conclusions?

In drawing this wide-ranging series of observations to a close, I would suggest that what is important here is simply that a reading of refugee studies, disaster studies, and the assumption of trauma, transforms our image of Ezekiel from merely a neurotic psychopath (Halperin) or a merely creative writer (Zimmerli) to one whose imagery and prose can be taken as indications of the experience of exile. I do not claim that this would have a radical impact on Ezekiel studies (even at this early stage in my familiarity with the literature of Ezekiel studies) but it can, and I think should, be suggestive for new directions of the analysis of some old problems. There is a sociology, as well as an ideology, to the understanding of disaster and I would suggest that further analysis of Ezekiel along these lines may be a fruitful line of investigation.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of these very preliminary thoughts.
10 These comments were written before the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and only take on a more serious importance after that time.
11 Turner and Gorst-Unsworth,475-476.
12 517, Kuhrt.
16 Malkki, 507.
17 Malkki, 511
18 Malkki, 517.

27 Matlou, 136.


31 In preparing this paper, I have already noted the number of sessions in the 2001 SBL meetings where Scott’s work is being addressed.


34 Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, Fortress Press:Minneapolis.

35 Zimmerli, Introduction.

36 Halperin, 22.


38 Murray, 316


682, Wilson

Gersons and Carlier, 1992

Borkan, Shvartzman, Reis, and Morris, 1993.

Sutker, Uddo, Brailey, Allain, and Errera, 1994

p. 316, Murray.

P. 317, Murray.

P. 347, Davidson and Foa. See also Ursano, Fullerton, Kao, and Bhartiya (1995), p. 41

P. 324, Murray

Dixon, Rehling, and Shiwach, 1993

Fitzpatrick and BoldiZar, 1993

See Bownes, Gorman, and Sayers, 1991

P. 327, Murray

P. 326, Murray

181, Classen, Koopman, and Spiegel

Carlson and Rosser-Hogan, 1994; Vaglum, 1993; Mattson, 1993
55 P. 676, Lukoff, Lu, and Turner
56 I intend to do this analysis in the manuscript that I am now developing.
58 Provan, 12.