

# THE GREEK OTHER: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE SOCIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY OF THE *HELLĒNES* IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO THE PRESENT MIGRATION CRISIS

REX FULLENTE FORTES

The term *Hellēnes* appears in the Gospel of John on two occasions, twice in 7:35 as a reference to those in the dispersion and once in 12:20 as descriptive of those who went up to Jerusalem for the feast. Common among scholarly interpretations is the understanding that its ethnic identity is marked either by genealogical origin/upbringing (either Jewish or non-Jewish) or geographical location (either inhabitants of Palestine or any Greek/Gentile territory). However, analyzing solely the lexeme *Hellēnes* and its history statically has not satisfactorily explained the use of this term in the Fourth Gospel. What is lacking in order to comprehend better the formation of their group identity as conceived by the evangelist is an investigation of the social dynamics of ethnicity. Accordingly, the Social Identity Approaches (SIA; Henri Tajfel, 1970, and John Turner, 1974) take into consideration the psychology of group formation and the dynamics of an ingroup's relationship to outgroups, which have already been adopted into biblical analysis beginning with the work of Philip Esler (1994). Along these lines, this paper will adopt the SIA in its inquiry of the socio-ethnic identity of the *Hellēnes* in the Fourth Gospel. It will first situate them within the context of the first-century Christianity before proposing to identify them as a Jewish outgroup in 7:35 that gradually deviates from their own group toward a possible inclusion to the Johannine ingroup in 12:20. Meanwhile, this biblical interpretation can also be adopted in recovering a normative framework in the present migration crisis where many migrant-refugees are marginalized and dying on a regular basis. Particularly, this paper will propose to address the migration problem within the inclusivist outlook of the Johannine Jesus and ingroup, and will strongly oppose the politicized polarization of the society between the insider-citizens

and the outsider-refugees, recognizing that it is one of the serious causes of the worsening of this global crisis.

## INTRODUCTION: THE MECHANICS OF GROUP FORMATION AND REPRESENTATION

The lexeme *Hellēnes* occurs 25 times in the NT. But apart from the Acts of the Apostles (9 times)<sup>1</sup> and the Epistles of Paul (13 times),<sup>2</sup> its other occurrences are found only in the Fourth Gospel, twice in Jn 7:35 and once in 12:20. In Jn 7:35, the lexeme was used in reference to the so-called dispersion (*diaspora*). However, the text is quite ambiguous whether the *Hellēnes* are to be regarded as native Greeks,<sup>3</sup> Greek citizens, Greek-cultured nationalities, or inhabitants of a Greek territory. Meanwhile, in Jn 12:20, the socio-ethnic identity of the *Hellēnes* becomes even more complicated as they were presented as attending the Passover festival in Jerusalem. Their description as going there “to worship” (*hina proskynēsōsin*) alerts the readers that they were Jews in some way, or at least aspirants or sympathizers to the Jewish faith, since it is quite odd that Greek foreigners would make a long journey to the Jewish temple.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding, their desire to see Jesus

---

<sup>1</sup> See Acts 14:1; 16:1, 3; 17:4; 18:4, 17; 19:10; 20:21; 21:8.

<sup>2</sup> See Rom 1:14, 16; 2:9, 10; 3:9; 10:12; 1 Cor 1:22, 24; 10:32; 12:13; Gal 2:3; 3:28; Col 3:11.

<sup>3</sup> For heuristic purposes, we will use the convenient translation “Greeks” to the word *Hellēnes* without prejudice to its other translations, which will, nonetheless, be explored also in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Even if such a phenomenon is unpopular, we can never say that it is unprecedented. Flavius Josephus, for example, cites several occurrences of a similar event (see *Ant.* 1.21.1; 2.4.3 in Flavius Josephus, *Judean Antiquities* 1–4, eds. Steve Mason, trans. Louis H. Feldman [Leiden, Boston and Köln: Brill, 2000]). Furthermore, the reconstructed Herodian temple in the late first century BCE featured four main divisions. One of these is the Court of Gentiles which attests that non-Jews were allowed to participate in the public worship during that time, albeit restricted in their movements and activities (see *Against Apion* 2.8 in Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, ed. Steve Mason, trans. John M. G. Barclay [Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007]).

(*thelomen ton Iēsoun idein*) in the next verse dims their perceived resolve to be fully fledged Jews. We are confronted with a dilemma whether to regard them as traveling to Jerusalem primarily for the feast or were simply grabbing the opportunity of meeting Jesus who by this time had become very popular.<sup>5</sup>

These two Johannine passages, hence, give us an unclear picture of the socio-ethnic identity of the *Hellēnes* and there is no clear consensus among Johannine scholars as to their true identity—others would even posit that the term *Hellēnes* should be read separately and distinctly in these two verses.<sup>6</sup> What is unison among their positions, though, is that most of them, if not all, perceive the *Hellēnes* as identifiable based on one of the Herodotian markers of ethnicity, i.e., blood, language, religion, and customs.<sup>7</sup> This outlook is popularly known in Ethnic Studies as the backbone of primordialism, which argues that socio-ethnic identity is something inherent among individuals, obligating them to conglomerate into one ethnic group with respect to their innate commonalities.<sup>8</sup> This thought is, however, challenged by instrumentalism, which posits that ethnic identity is conditioned and constructed at a certain moment in history in accordance to the contextualized need of a social group.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> At this point in Jn 12:20, Jesus is presented in the Johannine narrative as well-known to the Jewish public. Fresh from raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11:38–44), Jesus was anticipated by the public to be present at the festival in Jerusalem (Jn 11:56; 12:9, 12).

<sup>6</sup> One elaboration of this stance is offered by Joachim Wanke, *Hellēnes*, *EDNT*, 1 (1990): 436, who proposes to understand the *Hellēnes* as “Greek-speaking Gentiles” in Jn 7:35 while treating them as “God-fearers” in Jn 12:20.

<sup>7</sup> See *Histories* 8.144 in Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, 8.144.2., trans. George Rawlinson, with an introduction by Francis Godolphin (New York: The Modern Library, 1942), 656, which reads: “Again, there is our *common brotherhood* with the Greeks: *our common language, the altars and sacrifices of which we all partake, the common character which we bear*—did the Athenians betray all these, of a truth it would not be well” (my italics for emphasis).

<sup>8</sup> See John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, eds., *Ethnicity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 8.

<sup>9</sup> See *Ibid.*, 8–9.

Our present difficulty in determining the socio-ethnic identity of the *Hellēnes* may have been hindered by our traditional primordialist approach to ethnicity. In relation to our pericope, an adoption of an instrumentalism-based-concept of ethnicity opens a perspective that is scarcely explored in Biblical Studies, that is, that the social category of the *Hellēnes* may have just been created by the Johannine evangelist to advance his/her theological goals and his/her rhetorical and literary purposes.<sup>10</sup> Having recognized that a primordialist biblical interpretation on *Hellēnes* leads us nowhere further, this paper proposes to widen our horizons in interpreting the socio-ethnic identity of the *Hellēnes* by adhering to instrumentalism.

However, instrumentalism is merely a perspective and not a systematic approach in reading texts and events. Fortunately, there are the Social Identity Approaches (to be referred hereafter as SIA) that offer one an accompanying lens in understanding social groups with a philosophy that is attuned to the social construct notion of instrumentalism.<sup>11</sup> It is along these lines that this paper

---

<sup>10</sup> The study of the intent of the Johannine author is explored by R. Alan Culpepper in his book *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983) and is widely promoted by practitioners of Narrative Criticism, viz., Mark W.S. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), among many. This paper will not delve into this approach but simply recognizes that it is essential to, at least, unfold the philosophy behind the narrative creation of the different ethnic groups by the Johannine author.

<sup>11</sup> Admittedly, the Social Identity Approaches are technically outside the realm of Biblical Studies as they are designed to be used primarily in Social Sciences and Anthropological Studies. Despite not being essentially a standard tool in biblical exegesis, the SIA will be very useful as a complementary mechanism in providing a systematic understanding of the dynamics of group-formation and interrelationship which this paper is fundamentally concerned with. Indeed, the SIA differ from any other established biblical critical disciplines since they do not intend to present what factually had happened in group-formation as historical-critical approaches do. Moreover, they do not explore how the biblical narrative had been formed, transmitted, and written in history as Form, Rhetorical, and Literary Criticisms provide. But having recognized that relying merely on these traditional critical approaches do not solve the interpretational impasse of the

proposes to read the *Hellēnes* in the Fourth Gospel. In concrete, this paper will embark by surveying the prevalent understanding of the *Hellēnes* in the Fourth Gospel by exploring the varied scholarly positions. Having unveiled the limitations of these viewpoints, this paper will exegetically analyze select Johannine verses with an SIA perspective. Subsequently, this paper will propose to identify the *Hellēnes* as a Jewish outgroup in 7:35 that was gradually deviating from its own group toward a possible inclusion to the Johannine ingroup in 12:20.

Meanwhile, two millennia after the composition of the Fourth Gospel, our present global community continues to experience the radical polarization of social groups into ingroups and outgroups. This setup has a manifest pejorative effect in ethnic groupings and relationships since an excessively ethnocentric dynamic displayed by a perceived superior ingroup is proved to alienate dramatically designated inferior ethnic groups, specifically on account of their migratory status. Ongoing discourses on autochthony, xenophobia, white supremacy, neo-colonialism and even Islamophobia continue, not only to divide the world into radical binaries, but further to inhibit migrating groups from gaining equal socio-economic opportunities with the so-called First-World local communities, or at least receiving from them a decent respect of their human dignity. In fact, even migrants who have successfully attained naturalized citizenships continue to feel the estranging prejudice given to allochthonous immigrants on account of the color of their skin. This marginalization exponentially worsens with the ongoing migration of refugees, some of whom have risked their very lives by crossing the Mediterranean Sea in pursuit of securing a safe haven away from poverty and/or local violence. Yet, host nations do not shy away from expressing their callous unwelcoming attitude to them.

---

*Hellēnes*, this paper will conduct an interdisciplinary reading of Jn 7:35 and 12:20, particularly by utilizing the discipline of SIA in biblical analysis—we will see later that this methodology has already been done as early as 1994 by Philip Esler (see footnote 35).

Since the context of the *Hellēnes* in the Fourth Gospel is migratory also in nature, it is, hence, worthwhile to adapt our reading of Jn 7:35 and 12:20 with the contemporary problems of international migration.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, this paper will attempt to juxtapose the predicament of the visiting *Hellēnes* with that of present-day migrants, while using the Johannine Jesus Event as a potential framework in advocating the recovery of their rights for equal social opportunities, fair mobility, and ethnic self-determination.

### MOBILITY OF THE *HELLĒNES* IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

As mentioned, there is an obvious divide among Johannine scholars with regard to their understanding of the identity of the *Hellēnes*. Firstly, a good number of them—e.g.,

---

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, we normally equate migration with economic migration. However, our present global realities inform us that the factors for (international) migration are multi-faceted. While the greater number of migrants admits that economic gains remain to be the prevalent reason for migration, other causes have sprung up in recent years, viz., political and territorial security, ecological and domestic convenience, greater opportunity for societal equality, democratic ethno-cultural and religious expression, etc. (see below footnotes 81–84 for some relevant statistics). Appropriately, although we may observe at first glance that the *Hellēnes* were on the move to Jerusalem for religious and cultural reasons, we do not undermine the polarizing attitude the Jewish natives may have allegedly displayed toward them particularly on account of their outgroup status. In a similar vein, the same marginalizing attitude may be perceivable in today's global migration crisis that underlines empathically the ingroup and outgroup divide. This paper will intently focus on the similar social attitudes of stakeholders between the two generations—that of the Christian community of the 1<sup>st</sup> century and the international migrants of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—more than establishing the similarities of their separate contexts.

Barrett,<sup>13</sup> Brown,<sup>14</sup> Bultmann,<sup>15</sup> Morris,<sup>16</sup> Carson,<sup>17</sup> Brodie,<sup>18</sup> Michaels<sup>19</sup> and Bruner<sup>20</sup> understands the *Hellēnes*, at least partially, as Greek Gentiles,<sup>21</sup> i.e., they were born to native pagan parents in a distant Greek land. This definition is quite vague but what is important to note here is that they are non-Jews in every sense: no

---

<sup>13</sup> See C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 325, 351, 420–21, but with a special caution that the *Hellēnes* should not be understood “strictly of the Greek race but one of non-Jewish birth” (ibid., 421).

<sup>14</sup> See Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John (ixii): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AnCB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 314, 466, 470. Though he reads the *Hellēnes* in 7:35 as Greek Gentiles, he regards differently its usage in 12:20, arguing that it is more of a reference to Christian converts (ibid., 314).

<sup>15</sup> See Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoe & Ruprecht, 1968), 323–324. Bultmann’s position actually vacillates between understanding the *Hellēnes* as a “representative of the Greek world” (ibid., 324) or proselytes (“als *prosēlytoi* oder *sebomenoi*”; ibid., 323); nonetheless, he leans more toward the former reading.

<sup>16</sup> See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 591, who particularly takes note of its synonymous reference with the “God-fearers” of the Acts of the Apostles, albeit not of the *Hellenistēs* of Acts 6:1, ibid., 591 n. 61.

<sup>17</sup> See D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 320, 436–7. Despite claiming that the *Hellēnes* were clearly Greek Gentiles, he is not discounting the possibility that they can also be proselytes especially in 12:20, ibid., 320.

<sup>18</sup> See Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 412–413, with a special focus on the over-all literary structure of Jn 12:20–22 that emphasizes the coming of the Gentile world to Jesus, ibid., 413.

<sup>19</sup> See J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010) 458, 686, who gives special emphasis on its unequivocal resemblance with *ta ethnē* (= Gentiles) of the Synoptics and the Acts of the Apostles, ibid., 458.

<sup>20</sup> See Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2012), 712–3. However, like Bultmann, he further extends the meaning of the *Hellēnes* to include the “whole world” in juxtaposition with *ho kosmos* in 12:19, ibid., 713.

<sup>21</sup> This nuanced meaning of being pagan, heathen or gentile is reflected also in a good number of early English biblical translations, namely, Wycliffe Bible (1382), Tyndale’s NT (1526), and King James Version (1987 [1611]).

Jewish lineage, did not practice the Jewish religion and customs, and did not dwell in Jewish Palestinian territories. This classification, hence, infers that the alleged going of Jesus to the *Hellēnes* in 7:35 is to be construed as a potential proselytization of the Gentiles with the Diaspora Jewish community as his home base. Also, this view advances that the *Hellēnes* who went to the festival in 12:20 are basically foreigners and non-Jews. They may probably be there either as interested tourists or sympathizers of Jewish religion and mores.

Secondly, some scholars e.g., Robinson<sup>22</sup> and Smith<sup>23</sup> advocate that the *Hellēnes* can only be comprehended as Greek-Speaking Jews<sup>24</sup> so that the whole narrative of John can sustain a logical thematic unity. This opinion hinges on the basic belief that only fully pledged Jews can participate the Jewish festival “to worship” (12:20b). Thus, the *Hellēnes* in 7:35 are better assumed as Hellenized Jews particularly on account of the Greek language they used. This is corroborated by the mention of the term diaspora, which technically refers to the Jews who were born outside Palestine and whose culture was highly Hellenized but whose religion remained Jewish. Simply put, the Greek modifier is a reference not to their genealogy or religion, but to the language they used.<sup>25</sup> Thus,

---

<sup>22</sup> See John A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, ed. J.F. Coakley (London: SCM Press, 1985), 60, 653, who just reasserts his initial position in his article “The Destination and Purpose of St. John’s Gospel,” *Twelve New Testament Studies* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1962), 107–25. Significant in his reading is his association of the coming of the *Hellēnes* in 12:20 as an anticipation of the future ingathering of the Jewish Diaspora, which he argues as happening literally (see Robinson, *The Priority of John*, 653).

<sup>23</sup> See D. Moody Smith, *John* (ANTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999), 173–4, 238. Indeed, he finds the reading Greek-Speaking Jews to the *Hellēnes* true in 12:20 (Ibid., 238). However, in 7:35 he interprets it as a reference to the Gentile world in resonance to the universal mission of the Gospel (Ibid., 173–4).

<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, in some English biblical versions, the racial association of the *Hellēnes* as Jews is expressed altogether by the Complete Jewish Bible (1998), whereas the Living Bible (1971) and The Message (2002) read the same meaning only in 7:35 but not in 12:20.

<sup>25</sup> The Greek language became the *lingua franca* of the Hellenistic times and, practically, of the whole world. In effect, even the Jews adopted this language



in order to be differentiated from the Jews who are Semitic-speakers,<sup>26</sup> these Hellenized Jews are appropriately addressed as *Hellēnes*.

Thirdly, other scholars—e.g., Windisch,<sup>27</sup> Westcott<sup>28</sup> and Schnackenburg<sup>29</sup>—propose to read the *Hellēnes* as Semi-Proselytes, i.e., native non-Jews who were at the verge of being converted to Judaism. This view explains their presence in Jerusalem without genealogically identifying them as Jews. The phenomenon of conversion to Judaism is not something unprecedented.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, reading the *Hellēnes* in 7:35 as Semi-Proselytes validates Jesus' alleged instruction on them, which would be geared toward teaching them on what they would need to know as

---

especially in non-Palestinian Greek territories. Since most of the later Jewish generations had forgotten already or had not used the Aramaic language at all, the Greek language became their main, and possibly, only vernacular in these places.

<sup>26</sup> They are properly referred to in the NT as *Hebraioi* as found in Acts 6:1, 2 Cor 11:22, and Phil 3:5.

<sup>27</sup> See Hans Windisch, "*Hellēn, Hellas, Hellēnikos*, et al.," *TDNT*, vol. 2 (1971): 504–10. He further argues that the *Hellēnes* did not dwell only in distant lands, but they were actually attached to the Jewish synagogue in their communities (*Ibid.*, 509).

<sup>28</sup> See Brooke Foss Westcott, ed. *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* (Thornapple Commentaries; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 120, 276, especially with his intertextual reading of the coming of the *Hellēnes* in 12:20 with the prayer of King Solomon in 1 Kgs 8:41ff, *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>29</sup> See Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 381; vol. 2, 150. He actually favors two readings to the *Hellēnes*, viz., they were either proselytes already, or in the process toward it, more properly referred to as "God-fearers" (*ibid.*, vol. 1, 381), who would worship at the "Court of Gentiles" (*ibid.*, vol. 2, 150).

<sup>30</sup> The reality of Jewish conversions became prevalent beginning with the Maccabean times when mass proselytization, either by force or voluntarily, is recorded in contemporaneous literature. This claim is very much corroborated in the writings of Flavius Josephus who narrates that many conversions to Judaism happened, foremost among them is the mandatory circumcision policy of John Hyrcanus and the conversion of the Idumean Herod who would later become Herod the Great (see *Ant.* 13.9.1; 14.7.3; 14.15.2 in Flavius Josephus, *Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston, foreword by William Sanford [LaSor; Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1960]).

aspirants to the Jewish faith. Furthermore, their pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 12:20 is to be understood as their voluntary attempt to worship the God of the Jewish monotheistic religion in view of being converted to the faith in the remote future.

However, as explained above, all of these interpretations fail to explain satisfactorily the use of the term *Hellēnes* in the Fourth Gospel. It is because they are all restrained by the primordial view of ethnicity, which places ethnic identity along with its identifiable inherent parameters within a fixed box. Doing so undermines the fluidity of ethnic identity as well as the malleable nature of ethnic group categories. What is lacking, hence, in order to comprehend better the formation of their group identity as conceived by the evangelist, is an investigation of the social dynamics of ethnicity. Fittingly, both our Johannine texts display incidents of encounters between the *Ioudaioi*<sup>31</sup> and the *Hellēnes*; analyzing the dynamics of their interrelationship will unveil their ethnic self-determination as well as their regard on the so-called ethnic other.

## SOCIAL IDENTITY APPROACHES AND BIBLICAL STUDIES

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a breakthrough in group psychology and social analysis in the 1970s.<sup>32</sup> Embarking

---

<sup>31</sup> The Greek term *Ioudaioi* is translated differently by biblical scholars. As no consensus has been reached yet, this paper will simply employ its common rendition in English Bibles, i.e., “Jews” (and “Jewish” when taken as a modifier), without prejudice to the current debates.

<sup>32</sup> The significant works of Henri Tajfel include “Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination,” *Scientific American* 223 (1970): 96–102; “La Categorisation sociale,” in *Introduction à la Psychologie Sociale*, ed. S. Moscovici (Paris: Larousse, 1972); “Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour,” *Soc. Sci. Inform.* 13, no. 2 (1974): 65–93; “Social Stereotypes and Social Groups,” *Intergroup Behaviour* (1981): 144–67; editing *Differentiation between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1978); and co-authoring with John C. Turner “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. W.G. Austin and S. Worchel (Monterey, CA: 1979), 33–47, and “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour,” in *Psychology of*

from his study on why individuals decide to group themselves, Henri Tajfel proposes to understand them as disposed to belong/stay to an ingroup while conditioned to be prejudiced against outgroups. The SIT is further enhanced by Tajfel's protégé, John C. Turner, who conceptualizes a supplementing approach called Self-Categorization Theory (SCT).<sup>33</sup> This cognitive theory posits that social categorization amplifies group members' self-identity effecting to ascribe themselves to the recognized group norms which are essentially contradistinguished from outgroups. The two theories are collectively known as the Social Identity Approaches (SIA). What these approaches distinctly offer is a special consideration of the psychology behind group formation, maintenance, and ongoing negotiations with outgroups.

The potentials behind SIA in better explaining the social groupings in the Bible was initially recognized by Philip Esler in 1994. Pioneering is his analysis of the Matthean community with the Beatitudes as starting point.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, he recognizes that the identification on who are "blessed" was composed by the Matthean evangelist to demarcate sharply the Christ-followers from the Jews. The eight conditions of blessedness were constructed to countercheck if ingroup members were faithfully observing the ideals of a Matthean community. Meanwhile, the contrasting "woes" in Matthew 23 were created by the evangelist as a foil to enhance further the clear-cut identity of the Matthean ingroup.

---

*Intergroup Relation*, ed. W. G. Austin and S. Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brookes/Cole, 1986), 33-47.

<sup>33</sup> See John C. Turner, "Social Comparison and Social Identity: Some Prospects for Intergroup Behaviour," *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.* 5, no. 1 (1974): 5-34; "Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group," in *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, ed. H. Tajfel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 15-40.

<sup>34</sup> His SIT-based biblical analysis in 1994 was only published two decades after; see Philip Esler, "Group Norms and Prototypes in Matthew 5.3-12: A Social Identity Interpretation of the Matthean Beatitudes," in *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, eds. J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016, paperback ed.), 147-71.

Subsequently, several other biblical scholars<sup>35</sup> begin to utilize the same methodology, namely, among many: Hakola,<sup>36</sup> Bosman,<sup>37</sup> Marohl,<sup>38</sup> Shkul,<sup>39</sup> Tucker,<sup>40</sup> Finitis,<sup>41</sup> Kuecker,<sup>42</sup> Lau,<sup>43</sup> Rosell Nebreda,<sup>44</sup> Roitto,<sup>45</sup> and Baker<sup>46</sup>. In Johannine Studies, a key figure here is Raimo Hakola, who uses this approach in analyzing select passages (e.g., Jn 11:47–53) and relevant themes in John (viz., Social Identity of the Johannine Community and nature of Jewish Identity).<sup>47</sup> Despite the growing interest in using SIA in biblical

---

<sup>35</sup> See the summary of the incorporation of the Social Identity Theory into biblical analysis in Coleman A. Baker, “Social Identity Theory and Biblical Interpretation,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 423 (2012): 132–6.

<sup>36</sup> See Raimo Hakola, *Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> See Jan Petrus Bosman, *Social Identity in Nahum: A Theological-Ethical Enquiry* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> See Matthew J. Marohl, *Faithfulness and the Purpose of Hebrews: A Social Identity Approach* (Princeton Theological Monograph; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> See Minna Shkul, *Reading Ephesians: Exploring Social Entrepreneurship in the Text* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> See J. Brian Tucker, *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1–4* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> See Antonios Finitis, “The Other in Haggai and Zechariah 1–8,” in *The “Other” in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, ed. D.C. Harlow et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 116–131.

<sup>42</sup> See Aaron Kuecker, *The Spirit and the “Other”: Social Identity, Ethnicity, and Intergroup Reconciliation in Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> See Peter H.W. Lau, *Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth: A Social Identity Approach* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> See Sergio Rosell Nebreda, *Christ Identity: A Social-Scientific Reading of Philippians 2.5–11* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> See Rikard Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer: A Cognitive Perspective on Identity and Behavior Norms in Ephesians* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> See Baker, “Social Identity Theory,” 129–38.

<sup>47</sup> See Raimo Hakola, “The Counsel of Caiaphas and the Social Identity of the Johannine Community (John 11:47–53),” in *Lux Humana, Lux Aeterna: Essays on Biblical and Related Themes in Honour of Lars Aejmelaeus*, ed. Antti Mustakallio, Heikki Leppä and Heikki Räisänen (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 89; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2005), 140–63; “Social Identity and a Stereotype in the Making: Pharisees as Hypocrites in Matt 23,” in *Identity Formation in the New Testament*, ed. Bengt

interpretation, this methodology has barely been used in analyzing ethnic groups.

After recognizing that the traditional lexical and historical-critical biblical analyses were unable to explain satisfactorily the socio-ethnic identity of the *Hellēnes*, this paper follows Esler and his followers' lead. It will be then interesting to employ SIA in reading our Johannine pericopes and discern if such a reading stands true to the overall Johannine narrative and theology.

### THE *HELLĒNES* IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SOCIAL IDENTITY APPROACHES

Those who employ the SIA in biblical analysis embark with the guiding philosophy that it is primarily the biblical author who made group distinctions and categorizations in his/her opus. Though in recent decades the role of the author has been bracketed and relegated as unimportant, an SIA-based biblical reading resurrects the authorial intent. Though it is realistically impossible to uncover a writer's true motive, this paper, nonetheless, explores this avenue since this will facilitate the unveiling of the reasons behind the ingroup-outgroup polarization which the SIA presuppose. Accordingly, this paper proposes that one of the explanations in the authorial use of the *Hellēnes* in the Fourth Gospel is to communicate to its readers that they are a Jewish Outgroup and a Potential Johannine Ingroup.

### A JEWISH OUTGROUP

In 7:35, the interlocutors of Jesus wrongly comprehended his statement that where he was going they could not follow. Out of nowhere, they conjectured that what it meant most probably was

---

Holmberg and Mikael Winninge (WUNT 227; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 123–39; “The Pharisees as Others in the New Testament,” in *Others and the Construction of Early Christian Identities*, ed. Raimo Hakola, Nina Nikki and Ulla Tervahauta (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 106; Helsinki, 2013), 33–73.

that he would go to the Dispersion of/among the Greeks. The genitive case *Hellēnōn* adds more complication to the meaning of this phrase with “of the Greeks” and “among the Greeks” as the two most beheld translations.<sup>48</sup> However, the lexeme’s second occurrence as *Hellēnas*, put in the accusative case bearing a direct object function, gives some clarity to its first occurrence. What the narrator communicates then is that the *Hellēnes* are to be taken as a social group of people that is contradistinguished from the ingroup of the speakers of the phrase, i.e., the *Ioudaioi*.

The tone of the speech of the speakers projects also a sarcastic remark or a rhetorical demeaning of the initial statement of Jesus. This is not the only time that Jesus was being associated to a *non-Ioudaioi* ethnic group. We recall here vividly the rejoinder of the *Ioudaioi* to Jesus in 8:48, saying: “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”<sup>49</sup> Their identification of Jesus as belonging to the Samaritan ethnic group is already a clear sign of their disowning of Jesus. Remember that the evangelist earlier remarked in 4:9 that the “Jews do not share in common with Samaritans.” Adding insult to injury, they even attached demonic possession in their disavowal, not only of Jesus, but indirectly of the Samaritan ethnic group. Even if the discourse on the *Hellēnes* in Jn 7:35 was not as harsh and derisive as appearing in Jn 8:48, their condescension on the Greek ethnic group is perceivable. Associating Jesus as teaching them belittled the knowledge of the *Hellēnes* on matters of religion. Furthermore, the fact that Jesus was categorized as a potential sympathizer of the *Hellēnes* would mean that they were both perceived as outsiders to the Jewish society.

This condescending attitude against Jesus in 7:35 is part of a recurring theme in the whole of chapter 7 of the Gospel of John. In fact, there is an explicit indication that the Jews—more properly, the religious Jewish leaders—were trying to arrest Jesus (7:30, 32) in

---

<sup>48</sup> Between the two, the English translation “among the Greeks” is the more popular one appearing in major English Bibles, e.g., American Standard Version, English Standard Version, New American Bible, and New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>49</sup> The English biblical texts are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), unless otherwise indicated.

view of killing him (7:1, 19), which Jesus hinted as catapulted by his healing of a man on a sabbath (7:23, cf. 5:1–18). Jesus was correct with his conjecture because after performing such a deed, coupled with his reference to God as his Father (cf. 5:7), “the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him” (5:18). It is, thus, under this context of persecution that the crowd, despite others who believed in Jesus (7:12b), would not speak openly about him “for fear of the Jews” (7:13b). Jesus might have secretly traveled to Judea because of this existing public fright (7:10).

This aversion against Jesus, though orchestrated by those in authority, had also gradually influenced most of the Jewish crowd. Some of them even uttered repugnant speech against him like: “He has never been taught” (7:15), “No, he is deceiving the crowd” (7:12b), and “You have a demon” (v. 20). Jesus recognized this general hatred against him evident in his words “The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil” (7:7). It is then in the context of disassociation, hatred, and conflict that the Jews were able to say: “Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks (7:35)?”

Now, we wonder why the Jewish crowd is presented by the evangelist as very prejudiced against Jesus. Explaining this via the traditional historical-critical or even literary approaches needs much unpacking and validating. But a Social Identity Theory perspective tells us that biases and prejudices against outgroups are part and parcel of group categorization. Tajfel in his experiments proves that the mere fact that one is categorized into a specific group already makes that person display a distinct favoritism toward the ingroup while manifesting a pronounced bias against outgroups.<sup>50</sup> This phenomenon is regardless of prior knowledge of or contact with ingroup members.<sup>51</sup> Once classified, an individual will instinctively become loyal and protective of the ingroup he/she now belongs to.

---

<sup>50</sup> See Tajfel, “Social Identity,” 66; Turner, “Social Comparison,” 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

Turner further expounds this observation by looking at the cognitive dimension of social identity.<sup>52</sup> He explains that an individual begins to adhere to a group when he/she finds saliency on the group norms and values, which, surprisingly are the things that solidify his/her self-identity.<sup>53</sup> In other words, belonging to a group gives added value to one's personal self-evaluation.<sup>54</sup> Henceforth, he/she will adhere to the group norms as much as possible, and at most times, his/her behaviors are influenced by group attitudes.<sup>55</sup> Group norms are essentially resulting from the consensual opinion of group members, becoming the group's prototype.<sup>56</sup> These are usually crafted based on the principle of social comparison that contradistinguishes them from the perceived norms of outgroups.<sup>57</sup> But, more often, they are highly affected by prototypical leaders whom the ingroup members regard as the carrier of their distinct group values,<sup>58</sup> and henceforth, whose voice to the ingroup is widely respected.<sup>59</sup> Michael Hogg and Scott Reid (leading SIT advocates) further describe that these leaders receive a high regard from the ingroup as their "credentials are not called into question," "they are trusted by the group," "they can

---

<sup>52</sup> See Turner, "Social Comparison," 5. He defines this term specifically as "individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (ibid.).

<sup>53</sup> See Tajfel, "Social Identity," 69, 75. Norms are described properly by Michael A. Hogg and Scott A. Reid, "Social Identity, Self-Categorization, and the Communication of Group Norms," *Communication Theory* 16 (2006): 8, as "shared patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior, and in groups, what people do and say communicates information *about norms* and is itself configured *by norms* and by normative concerns."

<sup>54</sup> See Turner, "Social Comparison," 15.

<sup>55</sup> See Hogg and Reid, "Social Identity," 13.

<sup>56</sup> According to Hogg and Reid, Ibid., 10, prototypes are "fuzzy sets, not checklists, of attributes (e.g., attitudes and behaviors) that define one group and distinguish it from other groups". Since prototypes are shared attitudes of ingroup members, they can be synonymous in a way with group norms (see Ibid., 11, 18).

<sup>57</sup> See Turner, "Social Comparison," 8, 10. A related concept here is the notion of intergroup competition that describes the mechanism of interrelationship of two groups and their distinctions; see Ibid., 12.

<sup>58</sup> See Hogg and Reid, "Social Identity," 19-20.

<sup>59</sup> See Ibid., 18.



therefore be innovative,” and “they are permitted to behave, ironically, in non-prototypical ways.”<sup>60</sup>

In contrast, low-prototypical leaders, i.e., those who deviate from group norms or challenge established group values, are treated differently. Their “credentials are not established and may be called into question,” “they therefore need to be more careful to behave overtly,” and “their criticism of the group’s norms is not tolerated, is viewed as destructive, and is very unlikely to lead to normative change.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, for having disturbed the harmony of the ingroup and having “threatened the integrity of group norms,”<sup>62</sup> they are discredited,<sup>63</sup> treated as “black sheep,”<sup>64</sup> and are marginalized, or even persecuted, until either one of the following is achieved: they recant their views or they are disavowed from the ingroup.<sup>65</sup> However, if a low-prototypical leader is able to muster a good number of dissident members, “[a] split, or schism, is more likely to occur [especially] if members feel the group is intolerant of dissent, unable to embrace diverse views, and inclined toward marginalization of dissenting individuals.”<sup>66</sup>

We observe the same behavioral social dynamics in John 7. The Pharisees (7:32) were presented by the evangelist as the prototypical leaders of the Jewish faith, to whom the Jewish crowd subscribed their allegiance since these leaders carry and protect the traditions of Moses and the patriarchs. For the Jews, their association to their ancestors was quintessential for it defines who they are (7:19–24). Their social identity as Jews defines their individual self-identities. Hence, just the knowledge of the religious leaders’ hostility against Jesus stirred them to be suspicious also of Jesus. Meanwhile, Jesus is portrayed in the Gospel as a Jewish renegade/deviant for being low-prototypical and non-conformist in his beliefs and ways. His complicity merited him to be treated as a

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>63</sup> See Ibid., 19.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 22.

social “black sheep” from whom Jewish ingroup members would necessarily dissociate.

If Jesus in 7:35 was grouped together with the *Hellēnes*, or was at least associated with them, then it follows that both were referred to as part of an outgroup of the Jewish ingroup. All the subsequent hostilities against them began with this social categorization and were magnified by the fact that Jesus manifested a deviating behavior from his current Jewish ingroup.

### A POTENTIAL JOHANNINE INGROUP

In 12:20 the *Hellēnes* were described as going up to worship at the festival. The evangelist presumed here an initial portrayal that they were Jewish outsiders. This assertion was accentuated with the backdrop of v. 19 wherein the religious authorities told each other that the world was coming to him [Jesus]. The word *Hellēnes* in the following verse appears to be a reference to this perceived coming of the outside world, especially manifested in their request to see Jesus. This expressed desire may be interpreted as an innocent wish to meet a popular miracle worker in Jesus, whose name by this time must have been very renowned after raising Lazarus from the dead.

However, the description of the *Hellēnes* in v. 20 as present in Jerusalem “to worship” infers that they were not only having an adventure, rather, they were embarking to some kind of soul-searching.<sup>67</sup> Their intent to meet Jesus aligns them with other anonymous people who, beginning from his coming for the festival, had become his believers and followers (Jn 11:45; 12:11). The theme of believing in Jesus had been present in the Johannine narrative since 1:7. Now, it has continued with the coming of the

---

<sup>67</sup> The verb *proskynein* (“to worship”) in the Gospel of John is not just a word for rendering respect to somebody but more for paying homage or deep respect to a deity or somebody representing God. This is not only true in 12:20 where a resonance of glorifying (12:23) and giving service (12:26) to God are implied. It is also quite true in its Johannine usage in two other episodes. Firstly, in Jn 4:20–24 a reference to the performance of cult and religion to the God of Israel is obviously inferred by the frequent use of *proskynein*. Secondly, in 9:38 *proskynein* is used as the resulting action of the man who confessed on his faith on Jesus as the Son of Man (9:35–36).

Hellēnes. Apparently, this Jewish outgroup is moving toward being included among the Jesus-followers, more appropriately referred to here in our gospel as members of the Johannine ingroup.

In the SIA, group integrity is generally sacrosanct to group members. It is because one's self-identity is interconnected with his/her social identity which is defined by his/her participation within an ingroup. However, when an ingroup's defined social identity begins to crumble or misalign from one's self identity, it is not impossible that a member may seek out of his/her ingroup toward an incorporation to an outgroup. This is appropriately the principle of "social mobility".<sup>68</sup> This deviating activity on the part of an individual may be unpopular and very risky since it will disturb the harmony of an ingroup, but it may be rewarding in the long run—take, for instance, the path tracked by reformers and revolutionaries who would turn out to be celebrated heroes in history.

Tajfel describes this situation as the "insecure intergroup comparisons" which he illustrates accordingly on the table below:<sup>69</sup>

	Conditions conductive to leaving one's group	Conditions conductive to staying in one's group
Consensually Superior Groups	A	B
Consensually Inferior Groups	C	D

Above are four boxes that explain intergroup dynamics under which a group can either be perceived (either from within or without) as superior or inferior. Normally, the superior group members stay in their ingroup (Box B), protecting the status quo as

<sup>68</sup> Tajfel, "Social Identity," 78; Turner, "Social Comparison," 7.

<sup>69</sup> The chart is taken from Tajfel, "Social Identity," 79.

much as possible.<sup>70</sup> However, these same members can become insecure (Box A) particularly when its “group’s status is threatened” or “is related to a conflict of values.”<sup>71</sup> Correspondingly, Tajfel explains that when these conditions are escalated members will more likely begin to leave. In our Johannine narrative, we notice that this dynamic was being portrayed by the evangelist in his/her Christian community which was gradually distancing itself from its Jewish ingroup due to conflicts in beliefs and norms of conduct.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile, an inferior group faces the same reality of social mobility among its members (Box C) especially when it is in view of progress or in search of a higher goal. Tajfel perceives that “there is enough social flexibility to enable an individual to move, or hope to move, from one group to another, [since] there are no serious social sanctions from either of the groups for moving, and no serious conflicts of values involved in moving.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, unlike the mobility situation of a superior group (Box A) where dissenters are socially sanctioned or persecuted, a member of an inferior group will find it easier to transfer to a superior group since both the superior and inferior groups will be more tolerable of it. Members who decide not to move out (Box D) are generally individuals who aspire that their ingroup’s social identity is either

---

<sup>70</sup> See Ibid., 77. Tajfel further expounds that this status “can be preserved only if social conditions of distinctiveness are carefully perpetuated, together with the signs and symbols of distinctive status without which the attitudes of complete consensus about superior distinctiveness are in danger of disintegrating” (ibid.).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 79. Conflict of values would mean here that the group “is conceived by some as based on unfair advantages, various other forms of injustice, exploitation, illegitimate use of force, etc.” (ibid.)

<sup>72</sup> In contrast to the traditional belief that the Johannine community is expelled by the Jewish authorities from the synagogue—as popularized by J. Louis Martyn, *History & Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. and enl. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), in his interpretation of *aposynagōgos* in Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2—this paper argues against Martyn asserting that the Johannine community gradually separated themselves voluntarily from the Jewish community because of its restrictive faith system. For a summary of debates on this theme, see Jonathan Bernier, *Aposynagōgos and the Historical Jesus in John: Rethinking the Historicity of the Johannine Expulsion Passages* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Tajfel, “Social Identity,” 81.

reinterpreted to be in a possession of other superior qualities or to be exhibiting new distinct ideologies.<sup>74</sup>

In the same vein as mobile inferior group-members (Box C), the *Hellēnes* were presented by the evangelist as somewhat moving out of their inferior pagan ingroup toward an incorporation to a superior group, i.e., the Christian community in the Gospel of John.<sup>75</sup> As observed in the Gospel, their mobility is somewhat smooth-sailing as they could easily go to Jerusalem to worship or to seek Jesus' audience without receiving much oppositions from concurrent social groups. In search for a higher value in life, they may have probably been looking for an opportunity to listen directly to Jesus, whom they have heard as offering a new vision and meaning of human existence.

### **SITUATING THE *HELLĒNES* WITHIN THE PRESENT MIGRATION CRISIS**

Migration has been recognized as a global crisis from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The International Organization for Migration (IOM)—a UN Migration Agency that has published regularly since 2000 a so-called World Migration Report—estimates that: “there were around 244 million international migrants in the world in 2015, which equates to 3.3 per cent of the global

---

<sup>74</sup> See Ibid., 82–5. We can properly call members of this group as seeking not social mobility but social change, which Tajfel, Ibid., 78, defines as “changes in relationships between the groups as a whole, to expectations, fears or desires of such changes, to actions aiming at inducing or preventing them, or to intentions and plans to engage in these actions.”

<sup>75</sup> Although *Hellēnes* may be portrayed hegemonically as a superior group for having a closer link with the Roman power, and the Johannine community realistically as an inferior group before the Roman hegemony, the Johannine author, in writing his/her gospel, presented his/her community as a superior group in terms of its promised spiritual salvation. Yet, despite this implied superior status, this alleged Christian community displays a more inclusivist attitude toward would-be members, openly embracing anyone into its fold even if they may be non-*Ioudaioi* as in the case of the *Hellēnes*.

population.”<sup>76</sup> This figure is alarming because it has already surpassed the projected 230 million for 2050,<sup>77</sup> yet we are still more than three decades earlier! IOM also concludes “that out of a global population of 7.3 billion: 1 in every 30 people”<sup>78</sup> is an international migrant.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the reality of extreme movement of people is a cause of global concern.

As more and more people of various provenances are moving, transiting or emigrating, the border policies and controls of nation-states have become more and more restricting and discriminating. Since most of the host countries are considered economically rich, IOM adjudges that the primary reason, albeit not the only one, of the movement of people is economic in nature.<sup>80</sup> In most cases, those from poor countries would opt to escape from the poverty they are experiencing in their native countries especially during the heights of the so-called “global financial crisis in 2008.”<sup>81</sup> Yet, nowadays, a new reason for international migration is intensifying: violence or political persecution, especially with “[t]he ongoing conflict in the Syrian

---

<sup>76</sup> Marie McAuliffe and Martin Ruhs, eds., *World Migration Report 2018: Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2017), 13, accessed 8 September 2019, <https://www.iom.int/wmr/world-migration-report-2018>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>79</sup> The topic of migration is so encompassing that it can delve into any movement of people, both domestically and internationally. But we limit our study here to international migration. Accordingly, IOM, Ibid., 15, defines an international migrant as “any person who has changed his or her country of usual residence, distinguishing between ‘short-term migrants’ (those who have changed their country of usual residence for at least three months, but less than a year) and ‘long-term migrants’ (those who have done so far at least one year).” For a knowledge of the various sociological theories on (international) migration, see Caroline B. Brettell, and James F. Hollifield, eds., *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*, 3rd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>80</sup> *World Migration Report*, 20, informs us that “about two thirds of international migrants resided in high-income economies in 2015—around 157 million. This compares with 77 million foreign-born who resided in middle-income countries (about one third of the total migrant stock).”

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 2.

Arab Republic [which] saw the number of refugees from that country reach approximately 5.5 million.”<sup>82</sup> Accordingly, IOM indicates “that in 2016 there were 40.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide and 22.5 million refugees.”<sup>83</sup>

Along these lines, the most prominent problem nowadays is the chronic crossings of the Mediterranean Sea by refugees from Africa and the Middle East via improvised rubber boats. The sad reality is that these desperate people willfully choose to face the perils of the sea which can even lead to their ill-fated deaths.<sup>84</sup> With the hope of being alleviated from their dire situation of helplessness,<sup>85</sup> most of them would even race to get this rare opportunity of bettering their lives even if they would need to pay a handsome price.<sup>86</sup> Woefully, there are opportunist merchants

---

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 33. There are other countries outside Syria that continue to experience internal political conflicts forcing many refugees to seek asylum elsewhere; among them are “Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Myanmar, Eritrea and Burundi” (ibid., 33). Additionally, quite recently, the political and economic turmoil in Venezuela forced an overwhelming 4 million of its population to leave the country; see *UN News: Migrants and Refugees*, “Four Million Have Now Fled Venezuela, UN Ramps up Aids to Children who Remain,” 7 June 2019, accessed 9 September 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1040001>.

<sup>83</sup> *World Migration Report*, 2.

<sup>84</sup> For an updated report regarding the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean by refugees, see UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency, *Desperate Journeys: Refugees and Migrants Arriving in Europe and at Europe’s Borders, January – August 2018* (UNHCR, September 2018), accessed 9 September 2019, <https://www.searchnewworld.com/search/search2.html?p=united%20nations%20mediterranean%20action%20plan>.

<sup>85</sup> The importance of hope is recognized as a significant driving force enabling a suffering individual to risk everything. Such is the assertion of a recent study on African migration “that hope constitutes a fruitful analytical framework in which to link questions of political economy and mobility regimes with analyses of the collective social imaginaries and aspirations which imbue migration projects” (Nauja Kleist, “Introduction: Studying Hope and Uncertainty in African Migration,” in *Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration*, eds. Nauja Kleist and Dorte Thorsen [Routledge Studies in Anthropology; New York and London: Routledge, 2017], 1).

<sup>86</sup> Take, for example, the experience of a certain Somali who paid 1,000 dollars to smugglers in Libya (see UNHCR, *Desperate Journeys*, 21–2).

who would continue to ship them for the gain of money.<sup>87</sup> But the more dreadful thing is that potential host nations, on whose harbors these boats would eventually dock, have been drastically waning in their resolve to welcome them, or at least rescue them from the dangers of the sea despite their advanced naval technologies.<sup>88</sup>

Annual statistics continue to present us with the appalling increase of the number of fatalities in the Mediterranean: in 2015 alone there were 3,771 deaths (or missing), while in 2016 there were 5,096<sup>89</sup>—the single most tragic catastrophe happened earlier in October 2013 “in which an estimated 368 migrants died in the sinking of two boats near the Italian island of Lampedusa.”<sup>90</sup> There

---

<sup>87</sup> This activity is elevated into a criminal offense called “human trafficking” which consists of the illegal facilitation of the movements of “workers, refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs” (*World Migration Report*, 25; see also *ibid.*, Appendix D, 308–9). What happens usually is there are several persons involved in the smuggling. Primarily, trip organizers profit much from this operation. In various interviews with smugglers, Papa Sow, Elina Marmer and Jürgen Scheffran, “En Route to Hell: Dreams of Adventure and Traumatic Experiences among West African ‘Boat People’ to Europe,” in *Migration by Boat: Discourses of Trauma, Exclusion, and Survival*, ed. Lynda Mannik [Forced Migration 35; New York and Oxford: Beghahn, 2016], 244, narrate that “[b]etween 2008 and 2011, Saliu [a trip organizer in Senegal] said he organized six trips successfully and has earned a lump sum of 30 million francs CFA net profit from the *beuk-mi* (around 45,600 euros).” Yet, aside from the journey organizer who finances the boat to be used, there is a so-called conveyor who will make sure that the authorities will not intervene with their operation. To illustrate, a certain Senegalese named Musa in an interview confessed: “My role was also to bribe the police for not intervening during the boarding... For each canoe departure, the police commissioner and his men received 500,000 FCFA [ca. 760 euros] to close the eyes [look the other way]” (Sow et al., “En Route to Hell,” 244–5).

<sup>88</sup> For instance, the Italian government categorically closed its ports to any incoming refugee boats, and even imposed a fine of up to 1,000,000 euros to any vessel that would rescue them; see *UN News: Migrants and Refugees*, “‘€1 million’ Fine for Rescue Boats Prompts UN Concern for Future Sea Operations,” August 6, 2019, accessed 9 September 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/08/1043751>.

<sup>89</sup> See UNHCR, *Desperate Journeys*, 5. *World Migration Report*, 26, has a slightly higher figure of deaths in 2015 and 2016, with 3,785 and 5,143, respectively.

<sup>90</sup> *World Migration Report*, 25.



was a dramatic decrease in the previous two years: 3,139 in 2017 and 2,275 in 2018,<sup>91</sup> but UNHCR factors in the intervention enacted by the Libyan Coast Guard as “85% of those rescued or intercepted in the newly established Libyan Search and Rescue Region (SRR) were disembarked in Libya, [but] where they faced detention in appalling conditions (including limited access to food and outbreaks of disease at some facilities, along with several deaths).”<sup>92</sup> Still, these poor people continue to suffer even if they survived the sea. In reality, their tragedy was already looming with their decision to flee home coupled by Europe’s general apathy in receiving them.

The question now is: Why is there such a severe abhor of the refugees? The SIA have shown us that ingroups normally have strong prejudices against outgroups; just the fact that one is categorized as an outsider merits already a preconditioned negative response from ingroup members. However, these biases translate into concrete lines of action/inaction through the incitement of prototypical leaders, whom we see above are the protectors as well as the manipulators of ingroup values. Take, for example, the aforementioned series of tragedies in the Mediterranean. Most of them could have been realistically avoided if host nations—represented by their leaders—were compassionate and cooperative enough in the search-and-rescue of small vessels traversing the open seas.<sup>93</sup> Their inactivity, however, has gained public legitimacy with

---

<sup>91</sup> See UNHCR, *Desperate Journeys*, 5. It also reports that “[m]ost deaths took place after departure from Libya (more than 1,100), with several boats capsizing – there were at least 10 incidents in which 50 or more people drowned. These deaths came at a time when NGOs faced further restrictions on their activities, with some forced to remain in port or to spend longer periods transiting to ports for disembarkation or resupply” (ibid., 15).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 2. The UNHCR strongly opposes the proliferation of this practice commonly referred to as “push-backs” as it further jeopardizes the security of the refugees and the protection of their human rights; see ibid., 3, 6, 19 and footnotes 13, 30 and 50 therein.

<sup>93</sup> See analysis of Vittorio Longhi, “The Lampedusa Boat Sinking Was No Accident,” *The Guardian, International Edition*, October 4, 2013, accessed 8 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/04/lampedusa-boat-sinking-no-accident-eu-migrants>.

their portrait of the outsider-refugees as a societal menace that could destroy the harmonious community of the insiders and even take away the insider-citizens' domestic goods, peaceful sovereignty and racial privileges.<sup>94</sup>

Indeed, the migration crisis we experience nowadays is instigated by the propaganda of political power players who pit the insiders versus the outsiders. This polarization actually magnifies innate biases to escalate into intergroup conflicts.<sup>95</sup> Homi K. Bhabha is correct when he claims that cultural/communal conflicts were:

“mainly represented in spatial terms and binary geopolitical polarities – Islamic fundamentalists vs. Western literary modernists, the quarrel of the ancient (ascriptive) migrants and modern (ironic) metropolitans. This obscures the anxiety of the irresolvable, borderline culture of hybridity that articulates its problems of identification and its diasporic aesthetic in an uncanny, disjunctive temporality that is, at once, the time of cultural displacement, and the space of the ‘untranslatable’.”<sup>96</sup>

With a pronounced societal polarity, the middle ground of compromise, syncretism, and synergy is taken out of the picture. Thus, one is either pro-citizens or pro-migrants. A sustained discourse along these lines creates an internal conflict that reclaims the superiority of the autochthons (natural-born) over the

---

<sup>94</sup> A concrete example of this reality is the Hungarian government's programmatic negative portrayal of migrants and refugees, blaming them as the cause of their national security crisis; see *UN News: Migrants and Refugees*, “Politicization of Migrant ‘Crisis’ in Hungary Making Them Scapegoats, Independent Human Rights Expert Warns,” 17 July 2019, accessed 10 September 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/07/1042661>. Sadly, its general population agrees with this anti-migration discourse.

<sup>95</sup> For a revisit of sociological theories on ethnic conflicts, see Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985), esp. 95–288, under the subtitle “The Theory of Ethnic Conflict.”

<sup>96</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge Classics; London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 322.

allochthons (foreign-born),<sup>97</sup> driving the native citizens to display an ethnocentric attitude that patronizes the welfare of their own people alone. What happens is that the allochthons are not only unwanted in the eyes of the host nation, but they are not allowed to ever reach the same status enjoyed by the autochthons even if they have been given full citizenships already by the host government.

The same mechanism of marginalization is true with the experience of the Johannine Jesus. Indeed, some of the crowds were prejudiced against him. But the resolve to persecute and even put him to death came from the incitement of the Jewish leaders with the crowd acting as an accomplice in the realization of their wishes. The willful participation of the crowd was ensured through the propaganda of the Jewish leaders in presenting Jesus as a deviant/renegade of the Jewish society. Subsequently, in the Johannine Passion narrative, the crowd would be instrumental in the enactment of the Jewish leaders' long-desired crucifixion of Jesus;<sup>98</sup> and it showed no remorse in doing so—in contrast to the crowd's emotional sorrow in Lk 23:48 as “they returned home, beating their breasts”—for it believed wholesale the dictates of the Jewish leaders (in the person of the high priest) that “it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (Jn 11:50).

Furthermore, some societal groups were categorized with Jesus; among them are the Hellēnes as we adjudged in our analysis of Jn 7:35. We can then expect that once fully incorporated into the Jesus Movement, they will equally receive the same harsh societal treatment. The Hellēnes are not necessarily refugees, though they can, strictly speaking, be categorized also as people-on-

---

<sup>97</sup> The concept of autochthony is even traceable from Greek Antiquity; see Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>98</sup> For the evangelist John, initially, it was the chief priests and police officers who had shouted the infamous “Crucify him” demanding Pilate to sentence Jesus to death on the cross (see Jn 19:6). However, later, the same cry would be uttered by the Jewish public assembly as if they were won over by the instigation of the Jewish leaders who continued to speak along with them (see Jn 19:15).

the-move, obviously because of their journey to Jerusalem in Jn 12:20. Still, we do not know how long they would stay in Jerusalem. But if we view them as joining the Johannine ingroup, then it is more likely that they would be international migrants, at least on a short-term basis.<sup>99</sup> Since in the Johannine narrative there was no description of their encounter with the Ioudaioi, we cannot tell what kind of reception they received from the Jewish insiders. But what is noteworthy is the welcoming attitude of the Jesus Movement on them: they were decently attended to by Philip (and possibly, Andrew) in Jn 12:21. Though not described as specifically entertained by Jesus, his foregoing words from verse 23 onwards are noticeably addressed to them and to any future follower of him. Certainly, one thing we know is that Jesus and his disciples did not instantaneously send them away. In fact, Jesus was opening the doors to the so-called “Greek Other” to be incorporated possibly into their own ingroup provided they subscribe to his gospel values. He indicated it clearly in verse 26 saying, “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.”

Going back to the current migration crisis, especially on the Mediterranean crossings, we cannot categorically recommend accepting all refugees en masse—the problem is quite complicated and must be carefully studied and critically assessed. Yet, one essential thing is to be done: the conscious bracketing of prejudices that demonize the outsider-refugee.<sup>100</sup> The Johannine Jesus gives us an example worth emulating. His deviant societal image must have put him into this position of radicality and capacity to oppose mainstream norms. But this is more of a creation of Jewish

---

<sup>99</sup> See footnote 79 on the definition of an international migrant.

<sup>100</sup> Robert A. LeVine and Donald T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1972), 90, situate the complexity of societal polarization: “Peoples may disagree about the ethnic names themselves (that is, whether they are applicable in the region), about the inclusiveness of the groupings they designate, and about the criteria by which inclusion and exclusion are determined; these disagreements can exist as continuous variations between small-scale groupings throughout the region or discontinuously, between clearly demarcated groupings of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’.”

prototypical leaders who programmatically painted him as an outsider-enemy of the Jewish ingroup. Similarly, it is the political power players of our present society who should spearhead the neutral representation of the outsider-refugee, especially in their policy-making.<sup>101</sup> Regarding them not anymore as threats or enemies, national leaders should highly consider offering them a humane treatment by receiving them, at least temporarily, into their shores.<sup>102</sup>

## CONCLUSION

At the onset of this paper, the basic question raised was who were the Johannine *Hellēnes* in terms of their socio-ethnic identity. Our survey of scholarly opinions provided us only with a rough sketch of their ethnicity that varies from being Greek Gentiles, Greek-Speaking Jews, and Semi-Proselytes. None of them proved to be convincing vis-à-vis a consideration of the interethnic landscape and dynamics. This paper unveiled the main reason for this impasse: scholars were confined to a primordial understanding of ethnicity that restricts related analysis within a static reading of their inherent qualities. In contrast, this paper attuned itself to the major trend in Ethnic Studies that moves away from primordialism toward instrumentalism.

Adjacent to this outlook is the mechanics advanced by the SIA that argue that an ingroup is basically created in direct contrast to its outgroup, conditioning the former to have a general bias against the latter. This paper has adopted SIA in reading the *Hellēnes* in the Gospel of John, asserting that they are better understood as a Jewish outgroup in 7:35 that were gradually

---

<sup>101</sup> For a relevant study discussing the politicization and manipulation of borders to divide people, see Anders Linde-Laursen, *Bordering: Identity Processes between the National and Personal* (Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>102</sup> This position is in line with two of the general recommendations of the UNHCR in 2018 to European states: “Urgently establish a coordinated and predictable regional mechanism to strengthen rescue at sea, especially with regard to disembarkations and subsequent processing” and “Enhance search and rescue capacity in the central Mediterranean, including by removing restrictions on NGOs” (UNHCR, *Desperate Journeys*, 6, also 14).

deviating from their own group toward a possible inclusion to the Johannine ingroup in 12:20.

This interpretation provides us with a paradigmatic pericope that can be normative in the current migration crisis. With a special attention to the increasing number of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, this paper asserts that the closed-door policy of potential host nations has a serious culpability in the escalation of deaths. However, this [in]action has found legitimacy and public support with the negative propaganda against outsider-refugees. Meanwhile, the Johannine Jesus, having experienced the same marginalization, managed to open the doors to people-on-the-move, regardless of their provenances and socio-ethnic backgrounds. This paper, hence, argues that though outgroup biases cannot be realistically removed, they can be practically bracketed especially by avoiding the radical polarization of society between ingroup-natives and outgroup-enemies.