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Porter, Christopher A. *Johannine Social Identity Formation After the Fall of the Jerusalem Temple: Negotiating Identity in Crisis*. BIS 194. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022. Xvi + 284 p. ISBN 9789004469822

REVIEWED BY Laurent Pinchard, Université Catholique de l'Ouest (Angers), France for RBL (AUTHOR'S COPY)

Porter draws on the works of Stephen Reicher and Fabio Sani (p. xvi) in defining the Structured Analysis of Group Arguments (a.k.a. SAGA), a framework that examines how social identity and group dynamics shape argumentation and decision-making. He applies this framework in his study of Johannine Social Identity Formation after the Fall of the Jerusalem Temple, specifically analysing how the Fourth Gospel responds to the displacement and crisis caused by the Temple's destruction. Through this lens, P. uses Social Identity Theory (SIT) to argue that the Gospel, as an intra-Jewish text, reshapes the identity of Jesus' followers while maintaining continuity with Jewish traditions. This ultimately contributes to the development of the Johannine Community's unique identity.

P.'s application of SIT highlights how individuals within a group tend to align their arguments with the in-group's norms and often dismiss or reject the perspectives of the out-group, regardless of their validity. This aligns with Reicher and Sani's research, which explores phenomena such as group polarization, where discussions within groups tend to push participants towards more extreme positions. P. draws on insights from social influence theory to highlight how leaders or dominant figures within a group can steer the focus and intensity of discussions, amplifying thereby divisions and further polarising positions among group members.

While Reicher and Sani do not specifically engage in structural analysis, their contributions to understanding group behaviour and social identity provide valuable context for P.'s analysis. These insights enrich the study of how arguments within the Johannine community were formed, received, and used to negotiate social identity in the wake of the Temple's destruction. This helps P. articulate how the Gospel of John serves as a tool for reinforcing in-group cohesion and distinguishing the Johannine community from other Jewish groups.

P. helpfully provides a glossary (pp. xv–xvi) with clear definitions of key concepts for lay readers, which are extensively referenced throughout the text, such as 'categorization,' 'comparative fit,' 'depersonalization,' 'fit,' 'identity construct,' 'in-group,' 'key,' 'meta-contrast,' 'normative fit,' 'out-group,' 'prototype,' 'prototypicality,' 'SAGA Type A,' 'SAGA Type B,' 'self-categorization,' 'shared schematic narrative,' 'social identity approach,' 'social identity salience,' 'social category,' and 'stereotype.' This glossary proves to be an invaluable tool for readers, aiding in their understanding of the theoretical framework that informs the broader discussion in the book.

While these terms are outlined in the glossary, it is useful to clarify SAGA Type A and Type B here. Both types represent two approaches to how groups manage their identities in relation to broader social structures. In SAGA Type A, the superordinate group, encompassing both in-group and out-group members, is viewed positively. The in-group aligns itself with the positive identity of the broader group while portraying the out-group negatively. This suggests that while the in-group views itself as superior to the out-group, it still values the overarching group identity. In contrast, SAGA Type B involves a negative portrayal of the superordinate group. The in-group maintains a positive view of itself but perceives both the larger group and the out-group negatively. Here, the in-group distances itself from the flawed superordinate identity while continuing to regard the out-group as inferior. These two models illustrate how groups either align with or reject broader social categories depending on their view of the larger structure and their place within it.

The author applies his concept of 'in-group prototypicality,' encompassing the ideal traits, beliefs, and behaviours that define a group's core identity, to the Gospel of John. This approach reveals how the Gospel shapes a distinct identity for Jesus' followers, particularly after the Temple's destruction, when traditional Jewish identity markers were destabilised. Certain individuals and actions serve as models, reinforcing the group's internal coherence. P. also highlights the role of the superordinate group, a larger collective that includes multiple subgroups. He argues that the Johannine community exists within this broader Jewish identity while maintaining its distinctiveness as a subgroup of Jesus-followers. The Gospel positions Jesus' life, especially his death and resurrection, as the fulfilment of the broader Jewish narrative, thus integrating Jesus' followers into the superordinate group while preserving their unique identity.

Now that the groundwork is laid, we can move to the rest of the book. The introduction (Chapter 1) covers 40 pages and addresses the profound impact of the Temple's destruction on Jewish and early Christian communities. P. engages with an extensive bibliography on the subject, offering summaries of key contributions from scholars such as Louis J. Martyn, Wayne A. Meeks, Alan R. Culpepper, Raymond E. Brown, Martin Hengel, Adele Reinhartz, Richard Bauckham, Edward W. Klink III, Mary L. Coloe, Stephen Motyer, Philip F. Esler, Brian J. Tucker, William R. Baker, Timothy Terbilcox, Raimo Hakola. He then turns to methodology, particularly highlighting works in biblical studies that employ social disciplines, with a special focus on narrative identity, like in Paul Ricoeur's works.

P.'s unique contribution lies in his detailed analysis of how narratives are used to create and consolidate identity (p. 24). Following this, he presents scholarship on the theory of social identity, specifically 'Social Identity Theory,' a psychological framework developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner. SIT explores how individuals derive part of their identity from the social groups they belong to, and how these group affiliations influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. P. then incorporates concepts developed by

Matthew J. Hornsey and Michael A. Hogg on 'subgroup relationships' and explores how groups interact and relate within a broader social structure. He illustrates these points with several helpful graphs for the reader (pp. 31-35), making the complex theoretical material more accessible.

P. explains that his approach is a psychological one, aimed at understanding group identity formation. He demonstrates how SIT connects to other themes in biblical studies, such as linguistic textual analysis techniques (including discourse analysis and sociolinguistic analysis), as well as a third area he refers to as the 'circumambient tradition' of written texts, culture, and oral tradition (p. 39). He emphasises the breadth of the issue, arguing for the necessity of a fresh examination of identity formation. P. critiques earlier sociological models and introduces his own research question, which focuses on how the community behind the Fourth Gospel redefined itself in response to the Temple's destruction. He also outlines his methodology, which centres on narrative identity formation and SIT. By situating his approach within a broader socio-scientific framework, P. aims to illuminate how collective identity is constructed, challenged, and reconfigured within the context of early Christian and Jewish communities.

The second chapter, comprising 31 pages, explores Jewish models of identity formation in the post-Temple period, focusing on texts such as the Damascus Document and the Community Rule. P. uses these as case studies to illustrate how subgroups within Judaism negotiated their identities following the destruction of the central Temple cult. Specifically, he examines these two texts as models of temple-removed Jewish social construction, viewing them as 'functional documents that depict groups separating themselves from the broader society' (pp. 42-73). He also compares the two communities, showing how they differentiated from each other, providing evidence of the group dynamics within sectarian Judaism (p. 73). He analyses how these texts establish in-group and out-group boundaries, employing shared historical narratives and internal laws to distinguish the faithful from others. This chapter lays the groundwork for understanding how the Johannine community may have similarly navigated its identity crisis after the fall of the Temple.

In Chapter 3, a concise 7-page section, P. introduces the Fourth Gospel, focusing on how it might have served both as a performance and a codification of identity for its original audience. This brief chapter sets the stage for the more detailed analysis that follows, highlighting how the Gospel narratives functioned as identity-shaping stories for the Johannine community.

The book then transitions into a more detailed analysis of the Gospel of John, beginning with Chapter 4, where P. introduces SAGA framework and applies it to key passages in John 1-19 (excluding Chapters 11, 13-17, and 20-21). The reason for dividing these chapters in this specific way, rather than following a sequential order, is that the two sections of John—commonly referred to as the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory—

employ different aspects of SIT. P. highlights how each section of the Gospel focuses on different mechanisms of identity formation: the Book of Signs explores the establishment of group boundaries through normative fit, while the Book of Glory shifts its emphasis to internal identity confirmation and in-group cohesion, drawing on distinct elements of SIT to reflect the evolving group dynamics within the Johannine community.

In the first half of the Gospel, the extended discourses (e.g. John 8:12-58 and 9:1-41) focus on normative fit, which identifies the traits and behaviours that define the in-group, distinguishing them from the out-group. These discourses serve to delineate the boundaries and identity of Jesus' followers by outlining the expected norms and behaviours within the community. This section of the Gospel plays a key role in shaping the identity of the in-group by defining what it means to belong to Jesus' followers, reinforcing social cohesion and group identity.

The analysis of John 1 examines how Jesus is introduced in relation to the Jewish community, while John 2 discusses the cleansing of the Temple and how this event redefines cultic worship. In John 3, Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus about rebirth and the new Passover is explored, followed by the Samaritan woman's debate over the proper location of worship in John 4. P. continues this analysis in John 5, where the Sabbath controversy highlights the tension between Jesus and Jewish law. The theme of reinterpreting Jewish traditions continues with John 6 (the bread of life discourse), John 7 (the living water), and John 10 (Jesus as the good shepherd and the idea of new consecration). John 12 brings in the theme of kingship and the Day of the Lord, while John 18 and 19 culminate in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, where the question of who truly reigns as king is examined. This chapter extends over 64 pages, making it the most detailed in the book, as it lays the foundation for understanding how social identity is constructed through Christological claims.

Chapter 5 spans 47 pages and focuses on the second part of the Fourth Gospel, known as the Book of Glory. P. examines the Christological confirmation of social identity in these extended discourses, focusing on how the differentiation between in-group and out-group identities occurs within the larger framework of the superordinate group. P.'s analysis emphasizes how Christological identity is further solidified in the Johannine discourses. He concentrates on key passages such as John 8, 9, 13, 14, 15-16, 17, 18, 19:17-42, 20, and 21, with particular attention to elements like the 'ἐγώ εἰμι' ('I am') statement, which reinforce 'in-group prototypicality' within John. According to P., the ἐγώ εἰμι-statements serve as a powerful mechanism for establishing the connection between prototypicality and identity. They culminate in John 8, where Jesus' declaration of 'I am' becomes a strong affirmation of his authority, and by extension, the identity of his followers. P. views these statements as essential for strengthening in-group coherence, presenting Jesus as the prototypical figure whose traits and authority should be mirrored by his followers. This concept reaches its height in John 8, where the ἐγώ εἰμι-statements function as a 'strong

stratagem of in-group prototypicality' (p. 195), reinforcing the community's collective identity and unity around Jesus as the ultimate model for their behaviour and beliefs.

In Chapter 6, the analysis shifts to the Johannine Epistles (1–3 John), where P. explores how the themes of social identity, introduced in the Gospel of John, are sustained within the ongoing life of the Johannine community. The discussion of 1 John (pp. 199–216) centres on the confrontation with the 'out-group' and the testing of 'in-group prototypicality,' particularly in relation to the presence of false teachers. The shorter letters, 2 John (pp. 217–222) and 3 John (pp. 223–228), focus on issues of leadership and the management of intra-group conflict. This 39-page chapter provides a thorough examination of how the Johannine community continued to navigate both internal and external challenges to its identity, utilising the framework of SIT to analyse these dynamics.

The eight-page Chapter 7 compares the identity formation of the Johannine community with contemporaneous Jewish texts, particularly those of Philo (e.g., *De Abrahamo* and *De Vita Mosis*) and Josephus (*Antiquities* and *Jewish War*). Through this comparative analysis, P. demonstrates that the Johannine community's concerns with identity were part of a wider Jewish negotiation of self-understanding in the context of the Roman Empire, particularly in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple. This chapter highlights the broader cultural and religious milieu within which the Johannine community sought to define its identity.

The final chapter offers a concise 9-page conclusion, where P. summarises his findings and reflects on the broader implications of the SAGA framework for interpreting social identity in the Johannine writings. He revisits key insights from the study and highlights how his analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of group dynamics in the Gospel of John. The book concludes on page 257, followed by an extensive bibliography and a helpful double index—one for ancient sources and one for subjects—which enhances the study's engagement with both primary and secondary literature, adding further depth to the research.

As a biblical scholar interested in the New Testament, one particularly striking passage is John 9, a text familiar to many readers. While the blind man pericope can be analysed using Freytag's Pyramid—examining the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement—or through a textual analysis of key verbs like βλέπω ('I see') and (οὐκ) οἶδα ('I know [not]'), P.'s approach offers a more nuanced sociological perspective. He demonstrates that the narrative of Jesus healing the blind man is not only a theological challenge but also a social one, aimed at the established 'out-group'—the Pharisees. The healed blind man's journey symbolises a profound shift in social identity, as he transitions from being excluded to becoming part of the 'in-group' of Jesus' followers. This shift is marked by his eventual confession of faith, aligning himself with Jesus, the 'in-group prototype.' P. highlights how this narrative illustrates the negotiation, reinforcement, and

contestation of group boundaries through religious acts such as healing, showing the deep dynamics of identity formation within the text. Although the Pharisees are a high-status group, they are portrayed as insecure about their position, leading them to reject the healed man in an effort to protect their social standing.

P.'s application of Social Identity Theory (pp. 155-162) sheds new light on the interactions between the healed man, the Pharisees, his parents, and Jesus. The Pharisees, suspicious of the situation, probe for hidden motives, while the healed man, now able to see both physically and metaphorically, exposes the Pharisees' blindness to the truth. In terms of in-group identity construction, Jesus serves as the in-group prototype, while the Pharisees represent the out-group. The healing of the blind man becomes a central event for reinforcing the boundaries between these groups and solidifying the dynamics of social identity, as the blind man's newfound faith in Jesus positions him firmly within the in-group, while the Pharisees remain outside, resistant and hostile to the emerging community of believers.

The interaction between the healed blind man and the Pharisees is framed within the context of Mosaic law, particularly the prohibition of working on the Sabbath. The Pharisees invoke this law to challenge Jesus' actions. However, by recognizing Jesus as a prophet, the healed blind man aligns himself with Jesus' followers, indirectly challenging the Pharisees' authority. This sets up a clear in-group/out-group dynamic, with the Pharisees embodying the opposition to Jesus. The tensions between these groups reflect a broader social identity conflict. The once-outsider blind man, now a member of the in-group, challenges the legitimacy of the out-group.

The man's transition from out-group to in-group represents a significant act of social mobility, undermining the Pharisees' authority and status. This identity shift aligns with the broader concept of superordinate group membership within social identity theory. The Pharisees, insecure in their high-status position, are depicted as trying to protect their group identity by rejecting the now-healed man who has joined Jesus' followers. Their insecurity is further deepened by their inability to recognize Jesus' authority, which destabilizes their group's standing.

In this framework, Jesus is portrayed as the in-group prototype, with the healed man embodying the qualities and aspirations of those who join the group. The man's healing and subsequent confrontation with the Pharisees confirm his new social identity. His declaration of Jesus as a prophet destabilizes the Pharisees' authority, revealing the fragile boundary between the in-group and out-group.

Ultimately, the conflict is resolved when the blind man is fully integrated into the in-group. His recognition of Jesus as the 'Son of Man' and his act of worship signify his complete transition from a liminal state to full membership within the in-group, resolving the tension between social identities through spiritual and social inclusion.

As a result, John 9 is more than just a miracle story of physical healing; it is fundamentally about identity formation, group dynamics, and social competition. Jesus, as the central figure or prototype, becomes the foundation around which the in-group (his followers) is formed, while the out-group (the Pharisees) is defined by their opposition to him. The healing of the formerly blind man is thus both a physical restoration and a social and spiritual transformation, signifying his shift from the margins of society into the secure identity of Jesus' group.

P.'s book is a comprehensive study that offers a fresh socio-scientific perspective on the identity dynamics within the Johannine community. Drawing on social identity theory, P. examines the Fourth Gospel's response to the destruction of the Temple and provides an insightful analysis on how the early Christian community redefined itself in the face of crisis. His application of the SAGA framework sheds light on the negotiation of in-group and out-group boundaries, especially throughout the Gospel. The book offers a compelling and fresh perspective by showing how religious acts, like healing, contribute to shaping social identity. The book's clear methodology, extensive use of primary and secondary sources, and a detailed glossary make it an invaluable resource for scholars. In conclusion, P.'s work significantly advances the understanding of the intersection between social identity and biblical narrative, offering a critical contribution to both New Testament studies and social theory.

Prior to reading this book, I was unaware of how theories such as SIT and the SAGA framework relate to biblical stories. However, this book has not only deepened my understanding of 'social identity formation' within biblical texts but has also provided a framework for interpreting modern group behaviour. According to SIT and the SAGA framework, it becomes clear how group members tend to align their arguments with 'in-group norms,' while often dismissing 'out-group perspectives,' regardless of their validity. This dynamic strongly reminds me of contemporary 'social' and 'cultural conflicts,' where polarized groups engage in increasingly heated debates. These groups not only defend their own positions but actively seek to discredit opposing views, leading to such typical 'polarization.' Discussions, as a result, tend to become more extreme over time. What I found particularly interesting, based on these theories, is that such behaviour is not random but typical in group settings, which helps explain why polarization occurs. This insight, while not necessarily offering a solution to resolve such conflicts, provides a solid foundation for understanding the social mechanisms at play. This understanding was an unexpected benefit I gained from reading this book, as my primary interest was focused on examining how the Gospel of John reflects textual and narrative dynamics not solely as a purely Christian text, but as a writing deeply embedded within Judaism, particularly in the aftermath of the Temple's destruction.