

Testi/2

*Diaspora**

Liliana Ruth Feierstein

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Meanwhile, the concept of *diaspora* – the Greek term applied in the Septuaginta to the Jewish experience – has been losing its textual meaning in recent decades, metamorphosing into its opposite: the idea of a *geographical* centre with a periphery of people who are not physically *there*. Yet *diaspora* is originally the radical Jewish conception of a culture that lives in a *common text*, a geography of letters without a centre and an origin, because *all* is commentary. And in *time*. The new, imprecise usage of the term incorporates a geopolitical notion of a geographical centre and national borders – a dichotomised here/there and inside/outside – a ‘normalisation’ of thinking in western categories. The Jewish Tradition established a conceptual alternative to the sanctification of territory, which is related to the prohibition of images: the connection should not be with the land, but with the Law.

1. Introduction

If there is *one* word which evokes Jewish history and experience, then it is *Diaspora*. It is astounding that it is precisely a Greek word which has fulfilled this meaning in Jewish culture. Several central traits of Jewish history are crystallized in the term *diaspora*: a complex and original dialectic of exile and domicile¹, the contact with other cultures as well as the absorption and adaptation of some elements from them, so that in the relationship something new can develop without the cultural difference being negated or abandoned.

The term *Diaspora* denotes both the territory outside of a ‘centre’ as well as the people who constitute the communities which belong to it, and includes the *condition* of diasporic life. The term’s scope thus covers – like many other polysemic terms in Judaism – several meanings and behaves similarly to the name *Israel*, which according to the Torah was given to the Patriarch Jakob after he wrestled with a ‘man’ (*Genesis* 32.23-32.33), and later, accordingly as

* English Translation by Ian Leveson. The original article “Diaspora” was published in *Handbuch Jüdische Studien*, M. Brumlik and C. von Braun (eds.), Berlin 2018, pp. 99-109.

¹ Y. H. Yerushalmi, *Exil und Vertreibung in der jüdischen Geschichte*, in Id., *Ein Feld in Anatot. Versuche über jüdische Geschichte*, Berlin 1993, pp. 21 – 38.

the name of the People who were Jakob's descendants (the twelve tribes who counted as the *bnei israel*, the Children of Israel), and also to a land (*eretz Israel*).

Emmanuel Lévinas noted a difference between the Greek and the Jewish narrative: While Odysseus undertook a journey in order to come back to Ithaca (and to himself), Abraham, following G-d's imperatives broke consecutively with two connected principles: idol worship and a concrete Father-land. The Hebrew did not return home, instead followed the Word, the promises of the Law so far as to reach the point of abstraction. The Jewish narrative gained its strength from *lech-lecha*, G-d's command to Abram (*Genesis* 12.1.) to leave the land of his ancestors (and idol-worshippers), in order to go to the 'promised land' – in the future². The land Israel is thus not to be understood as *eretz moledet* – Land of (his) Birth – but rather as an expectation. The Promised Land is not the same as a Fatherland.

The supposed 'centre', to which Diaspora functions as a pendant, is in itself not a political base, since, from the time of the destruction of the second temple in the Year AD 70 onwards, no religious or political centre has been connected with a country or city and so able to act as such. With the near total defeat of the uprising under the leadership of Simon bar Kochba in AD 135, the hope to return to the promised land was postponed to the messianic age, and thus moved from the political to the religious level³. Parallel to that a series of practices and rituals developed, which were intended to replace the sacrifices in the Temple: essentially the study of and the stricter practice of the *mitzvot* (commands). The daily prayers also were from that time onwards due to be held as the sacrifices had been – replacing the act (of some of the sacrifices) with words⁴. The writings (the *Tanach*, somewhat later the *Talmud*) was given meaning as the new 'focal point' – a special feature replacing the centre provided by the geographical location of the temple which allows Judaism as a result of the wisdom of the learned to be based on a textual geography written around it.

Daniel Boyarin shows how both Talmudim (*Jerusalem Talmud* and *Babylonian Talmud*) acted as a Diaspora for the other⁵. The dynamic between the centre and the periphery changed continuously: While the teachers in Babylon claimed that, because of the collected wisdom in Babylon, Zion was located with them, other voices emphasized the traditional centrality of Jerusalem.

² Only at his circumcision (the covenant of *brit milah*) is the letter 'he' inserted into Abram's name, through which he became Abraham.

³ This was to a certain extent toned down with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Many orthodox Jews spoke out against Zionism on these grounds. On the difficulties to fit a Diaspora culture into the hegemonial conception of a nation-state, see D. and J. Boyarin, *Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity*, «Critical Inquiry» 19 (2002) pp. 693 – 725.

⁴ The timing of each of the daily prayers has been also associated in the tradition with the patriarch who had introduced the respective one – Abraham – shacharit (morning), Isaac – mincha (afternoon), Jakob – maariv (evening).

⁵ See D. Boyarin, *A Travelling Homeland: The Babylonian Talmud as Diaspora*, Philadelphia 2015.

Diaspora is often translated back into Hebrew as *galut*, *golah*, or *tzfutzot israel* (the scattering of the people of Israel). The complexity of the languages and the narrative require a nuanced understanding and respect for various connotations, historical viewpoints and counter-narratives, which on account of the dialectic of the Diaspora are indivisibly connected with each other.

2. The 'emptying' of a Term⁶

Since the 1960's an increasingly inflationary use of the term *Diaspora* is notable in the fields of Social- and Cultural Studies. New extensions to its definition⁷ lead to misrepresentation of the «diasporic condition»⁸ and are connected to an insufficient understanding of the theoretical, historical, and cultural backgrounds of the term Diaspora. This leads not only to a banalization, but also removes its potential to challenge cultural definitions – such as the currently dominant territorial concept of the national state. Through its scope being extended to cover all possible populations which find themselves outside an 'original' imagined territory (or 'centre'), the originality of the idea (which exists in the possibility of an extra-territorial culture, based on the writings or language-as-home) is neutralized. Instead the extended scope means the return to a form of geographical thinking which constrains the idea of a cultural community to being bound to the logic of a firmly delineated physical area. In contradiction to the intention of cultural studies, use of the term instead strengthens the territorial dimension rather than putting it in question, and so contributes to reinforcing a dichotomous form of thought which frames the opposites of centre and periphery as a fixed ontology.

The Jewish history of the concept of Diaspora would in contrast enable one to think from other starting points. Even before the term became a fashion, a few groups had used it to describe their situation, among others, Afro-Americans, Armenians (after the genocide) as well as Sinti and Roma. Their common experience is of a non-territorially connected culture and the survival of a traumatic history. Nonetheless, perhaps the key to a better understanding of the term Diaspora lies not only in geography, but also and especially in language: At the beginning stood a translation.

⁶ Stéphane Dufoix did excellent work showing how this fashion, and the concomitant changes in the connotations of the term, took place. See his work *Les diasporas. Une histoire de usages du mot diaspora*, Paris 2011. He provides a concordance of the word Diaspora in the Bible, including in the New Testament, see p. 78 ff.

⁷ Cfr. R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, New York 2008. See also A. Lipphardt, *Diaspora. Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Annäherungen an das Forschungskonzept*, in *Fremd im eigenen Land: Diasporic Cultures – Diasporic Mentalities?*, M. Rürup (Hg.), Göttingen 2009, pp. 43-61.

⁸ R. Mayer, *Diaspora. Eine kritische Begriffsbestimmung*, Bielefeld 2005, p. 21.

3. The Septuaginta

The word Diaspora appears first in the Septuaginta, the oldest Greek translation of the Torah which was completed in Alexandria. According to the legends, which is recorded in Aristeas's letters and in Meg 9a, Sof 1.8, the 72 rabbis who were appointed from Jerusalem (six each from the 12 tribes of Israel) finished the translation of it in 72 days (some versions refer to 70 rabbis, therefore Septuaginta, according to others only 5 – for each of the Books of Moses). It is related that the wise men each arrived at identical translations, which further as a rhetorical figure of speech can be presented as legitimation for the transmission of the holy texts.

Although the writing of the Septuaginta historically until now has not been exactly reconstructed, it was with great probability in reality a *collective* translation: the presence of recognizably different levels of Hebrew and Greek knowledge in the stylistic components within the text as well as in the individual passages lead one to this conclusion.

The Septuaginta counts as one of the great cultural achievements of Hellenistic Judaism. In the context of this notable translation Jewish teachers transmit the whole of the Tanach in the world language of that time. It is simultaneously to be understood as a transgression, a breaking of the contemporary boundaries of Jewish horizons of that time, as a re-thinking and re-formulation in another world-view. With this translation the Hellenistic Judaism found its home in the Hellenistic Diaspora. The Septuaginta contributed enormously to the spread of monotheism, Judaism, and the Bible (*biblia* – again a Greek term), as these were threatened to disappear along with Jerusalem. That in Greek the noun *biblia* was chosen, with which 'the book' rather than 'the teachings' (as in the Torah) is meant, reminds one of Aristeas-Letter, which records the royal librarian as being responsible for encouraging the translation of the Septuaginta⁹.

The monumental work is itself a diaspora phenomenon – completed by Diaspora Jews in Alexandria. The holy text is not only translated into another language, but is transferred into another time and culture. It remains the same and is simultaneously different. So, for example, Torah becomes *nomos* (the Law) – the Hebrew meaning or interpretation as teaching, was lost in the translation, from which among other things followed consequences for Christian theology and its understanding of Judaism as a static legalistic religion. Attempting to think of *tohu-wa-bohu* (chaos) in Greek was expressed as *ahótatos kai akataskeuástos*, which means something like 'unworked' (that is not yet included in the creation process of the world) or 'unstructured' – and thus not visible or capable of being visually experienced, since only that which is structured, which displays contours, is visually accessible.

⁹There are several historical doubts about the accurate of this "legend" - it is anyway significant as a narrative that puts the translation of the Tanach in the tradition of the Library and of the interest in other cultures. See T. Rajak, *Translation and survival: the Greek bible and the Jewish diaspora*, Oxford 2009.

The Jewish teachers, who worked on the Septuaginta, used the Greek language creatively and sovereignly, finding several neologisms – new words and influencing the meaning of existing words, which had not existed in ancient Greek culture before. They universalized the Jewish Bible. The Greek intellectuals were fascinated by the strict monotheism which lacked an anthropomorphic idol figure, since this touched on ideas developing in Greek philosophy, for example in Xenophanes works, which emphasized the spiritual and un-seeable elements of divinity.

It was only as the Christians in the Greek-Roman cultural sphere declared the Septuaginta to be their bible did it lose influence in the Jewish world. Without having been taken over by Christianity perhaps it would have advanced to have become the primary Jewish bible, together with its Hellenistic-liberal interpretation of Judaism.

4. *Galut, gerush, tfutzot*

As already mentioned, the word Diaspora didn't exist in ancient Greek before the Septuaginta and was a (perhaps the most interesting) new influence exerted by the translators: making a noun out of what had been a verb until that point *diaspeiro* (to disperse respectively to sow). There are still discussions as to whether this neologism was positively or negatively connoted and whether the dispersal was associated with new life, for some of the philologists identified that it had a connection with the word «seeds»¹⁰.

Contemporaneous usages differentiated Diaspora from the Hebrew word *galut* (mostly translated as collective exile) with the argument that in the Septuaginta there were hardly any points where the term diaspora was adopted, where *galut* had stood in the original text. Various different Hebrew terms were translated with the neologism Diaspora by the learned authorities – nonetheless neither *galut* nor other words derived from the Hebrew root *glb*¹¹. Some authors favored Diaspora as the translation for *tfutzot* (in the sense of dispersal, both as process as condition, as well as with respect to the scattered Jewish communities) and claim that these were founded as positive, voluntary decision (at least to stay after all) and yet as a term contrary to *galut* as negatively connotated exile (and biblical punishment) – whereby *tfutzot* in the Torah is also named as punishment for not following G-d's commands¹².

Such a differentiation between *galut* and *tfutzot* does justice neither to the diversity and polyvalence of the terms nor to their varying genealogies. Interestingly in Eben Shoshan's monumental etymological work of the Hebrew Language the following meanings are listed:

¹⁰ S. Dufoix, *Les diasporas*, cit. Critical comments from M. Baumann, *Diaspora: Genealogies of Semantics and Transcultural Comparison*, «Numen» Vol 47, No 3 (2000), pp. 313–337.

¹¹ S. Dufoix, *Les diasporas*, cit., p. 60 ff.

¹² See *Deuteronomy*, 28, 25.

Emigration/leaving the land of birth (*eretz ha'moledet*). Moving to a foreign land. *Tfutzot* Israel in various countries as well as its lands, to which the People (*ha'am*) were driven out.

The children of *Golah* (*bnei ha'golah*)¹³.

In the entry for *tfutzot* is on the other hand to be read: «in metaphorical sense: *golah*, *galut*, *makom* (place) or *eretz* (country) to which the people were driven out to: *tfutzat teyman* (Jemen), *tfutzat polyn* (Poland)»¹⁴. Through this it becomes clear that both meanings cannot be clearly separated from each other and each are even mentioned in the respective conceptual descriptions of the others.

Not only are the mixing of *galut* and *tfutzot* confusing, also the description and definition from land of birth (*eretz moledet*) are deliberately ambiguous. As already mentioned, G-d's command to Abram: «*lech lecha me'arzecha vemoladetecha umi'beit avicha, el ha'aretz asher arecha* – Go forth from your land, your place of birth, and your father's house into the land which I will show you» (*Genesis* 12.1). Here it says unmistakably «go forth from your *moladetecha*, your place of birth», yet the Promised Land will not become *arzecha* (your land), since generations later, on the arrival in Israel, G-d revealed to his people, that it is only there as a guest, since «the Land is mine. You are only strangers and guests on my ground» (*Leviticus* 25.23). It is this paradox of (de-)territorialisation and the complex interplay of the past (land of the forefathers and idol-worshippers, land of birth) and the future (the promised land, monotheism), which makes up the richness of these terminologies. The paradox is connected with the messianic concept of time, which in ancient Hebrew grammatically was represented in one alphabetic letter: the *waw conversivum* (the 'reversed waw', *waw ha-hipukh*) – which can change the future into the past.

In view of this complex Jewish conceptualization of space and time Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi had suggested an original interpretation of *galut*: the dialectic of *exile* and *domicile*¹⁵. Although the repeated collective exiles of Jewish history are connected with many catastrophes (such as with the most emblematic of all the exiles, the Babylonian) nonetheless many of the communities developed into seats of intellectual flowering and material prosperity, which diluted the violence with positive experiences. The expulsions and the inherently connected feelings of defeat and grief anchored since then in collective memory – in a reality which nonetheless displayed quite different contours. This is since, as Yerushalmi emphasized, «exile and domicile» are only superficially contradictory. In reality they've often coexisted in dialectic tension. One felt religiously in exile yet existentially at home¹⁶.

¹³ E. Shoshan, *Ha'milon ha'chadash*, Jerusalem 1961, p. 175 [Translation LRF].

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1723.

¹⁵ Y. H. Yerushalmi, *Exil und Vertreibung in der jüdischen Geschichte*, cit.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

The great Jewish historian Simon Dubnow had characterized the Jewish Diaspora as the «cultural ferment and progressive force» in a society (this metaphor for a cultural minority which would develop astounding strength and influence within the majority society was a repeated feature of Jewish literature and intellectual interventions in public life). Dubnow reminds one that, although the sources often describe the Diaspora as an unhappy punishment, some medieval commentators such as Rashi saw it as an opportunity to spread the seeds of monotheism in the whole world, but also as a chance to survive: a scattered people cannot be eliminated with one blow¹⁷.

These considerations by Simon Dubnow were published in the form of an entry in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* 1931. It is no accident, that precisely Dubnow as the initiator of the idea of *Diaspora-Nationalism*, which aimed to establish autonomous Jewish communities within other political entities, was asked to write this entry. On the first reading, the material seems rather confused, since he first discusses the Greek and Armenian Diasporas, before he approaches Jewish history: «Diaspora has its equivalents in the Hebrew words *galut* (exile) and *golah* (the exiled)»¹⁸. The theoretical discussions of the last years claim exactly the opposite – that Diaspora and *galut* (exile) are *not* equivalent, since Diaspora designates a voluntary dispersal.

The second article in the *Encyclopaedia* on this theme appeared under the Lemma 'Exile' and was written by the Italian Philosopher of History Guido De Ruggiero. De Ruggiero referenced the Greek-Roman tradition of *exilium*, the banning to foreign lands – initially as a possibility to avoid a death sentence. On comparing the two entries the differences are clearly evident, since De Ruggiero is focusing on the individual perspective in his considerations: exile as a (milder) penalty for an individual breach of the law (or on political grounds). Interestingly the oldest cited precedent came from the Torah -- whereby the term for exile in this context had nothing in common with *galut* but instead pointed to «cities of flight» (*arei miklat*) in which individuals who had killed someone accidentally could seek refuge to avoid the revenge of the dead person's family. Only at the end of the article does De Ruggiero consider collective exile on political grounds – at the time of writing a real consideration in view of Benito Mussolini's fascist regime which was already in power in Italy¹⁹.

Galut, differently than in the case of exile, is always to be understood as collective. Not an act, or a political thought, is to be punished, rather a collective (independently of how its individual members think or act) would not be banned by a central power, or kingdom, or similar, but rather would be deported by an external (foreign) power. As a result of this experience Jews, according to their own idiom themselves *den goles shlepn*. So they early on get to know lines of text as places of asylum, such as in the well-known children's song *Oyfn Pripetshik* by

¹⁷ S. Dubnow, *Diaspora*, in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, E. R. A. Seligman and A. Johnson (eds.) Bd. 5, New York 1931, pp. 129–130.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.127.

¹⁹ G. De Ruggiero, *Exile*, in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Bd. 5, cit.

Mark Warshawsky, in which a Rabbi teaches small children the Hebrew alphabet (*alef-beys*), thus:

Zet-sche Kinderlech | Ir wet, kinder, elter wern | Wet ir alien farschteyn | wifln in di oyses lign trern, en wifl geveyn! || Zet-sche kinderlech | As ir wet, kinder, dem goles schlepn | oysgemutschet zayn | Zolt ir fun di oyses koyech schepn, kukt in zey arayn!

(Children you will become older | and yourselves come to understand | how many tears there are in the letters | and so much crying! || Children, when you carry the burden of exile | and struggle with it, | you should take strength from the letters; | Look into them!)

As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi accurately described it, the feeling of *galut* (originally) goes back to the year 70 AD, and it arises not so much from the loss of the land as from the loss of the temple²⁰. Yet this dialectic is found not just in the history, but also in the words themselves.

The texts were taken into the Diaspora, and they grew and flourished there. There was still a *lashon hakodesh*, a holy tongue – whose holiness is far stronger than is that of the Holy Land. The Promised Land would become a metaphor in the Diaspora – in Boyarin’s words *palimpsested* through which various ‘Jerusalem(s)’ such as Toledo, Thessaloniki, Frankfurt or Prague came into being. In *Los gauchos judíos*, the founding text of Jewish Latin-American literature, this shift in the meaning of the Promised Land would be connected with the concrete conditions of diasporic life: «Just therefore I forgot, as Rabbi Zadock Kahn announced our emigration, my happiness at the return to Jerusalem and remembered the verse of Yehuda HaLevi: Zion is, where joy and peace reigns»²¹. Almost two thousand years beforehand the Rabbis in Babylon claimed that Zion was dwelling with them, since it was not the geography which was decisive, but rather the knowledge – which is why the ‘centre’ of Jewish learning always moved around: to Italy, Sepharad, Vilnius – following the centers of Jewish wisdom²².

For Simon Dubnow it is not dispersal which makes Jewish history unique, but rather the continued maintenance of Jewish culture in such different cultural environments – despite hundreds of years of wandering, without the certainty of protection or support from a “home country” or any other such allies²³. In the Diaspora and especially following the shifting and re-interpretation of the religious centre of the temple in the text, Hebrew was retained as the holy language in the texts, while the Jewish communities developed their profane languages further in conjunction with the majority societies (Judeospanish, Yiddish, Judeoarabic). These creole languages contain many elements from Hebrew, and are often written in *otiot*, Hebrew characters – through which they remain materially connected with the Hebrew language.

²⁰ Y. H. Yerushalmi, *Exil und Vertreibung in der jüdischen Geschichte*, cit.

²¹ A. Gerchunoff, *Los gauchos judíos*, La Plata 1910.

²² D. Boyarin, *A Travelling Homeland*, cit.

²³ S. Dubnow, *Diaspora*, cit., p. 127.

5. Letters and Sand

The destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem is still an open wound in the memory of the Jewish people. According to the duty of *Zakhor!* (Remember!) there is a mourning day in the Jewish year to remember this Destruction and other catastrophes, such as the expulsion from Spain in 1492. *Tisha b'Av*, the 9th of the month *Av*, is in the most varied of ways therefore connected with the painful experiences of exile²⁴. After the destruction of the Second Temple a new concept of Judaism emerges. Rabi Yohanan ben Zakkai, according to accounts which have been passed down, asked the Roman emperor for permission to open in Yavne a school for the study of the Torah, which should never be closed; «not even for the reconstruction of the Temple». Sigmund Freud discerned the significance of this gesture: since then – he once wrote – the *invisible building* of Judaism could be constructed. From that moment onwards the Jewish people began to live among the letters²⁵.

Heinrich Heine intuited as nobody else did the function of homeland that this shared place constitutes for a people dispersed in exile:

A book is their Fatherland, their possession, their authority, their fortune and their misfortune. They live in the signs of this Book, here they exercise their citizenship rights, here one cannot scare them away, nor scorn them, here they are strong and worthy of admiration [...]²⁶.

For the wandering Jews, for the people of the Book, the Book was their «portable homeland' (*portatives Vaterland*)»²⁷. Even God lives since that time in the writings, that «precarious home», as Emmanuel Lévinas called them, as we read in the Talmud: «since the days when the Holiness was destroyed, the Holy one in his world has no more as the four ellen of the *halacha*»²⁸.

So, the Scripture developed a multiple and complex significance in Jewish culture and history, a kind of metaphoric territory where *am basefer*, «the people of the Book», were at home. This territory, marked off and protected as its own space, offered a place in which one felt that one belonged. As Heine described in a letter to Eduard Gans, where he told him about the dedication of his last book:

I nailed this name (sc. Rahel Varnhagen), which is so lovely for me, on the doorpost of my book and through that it became more habitable and safer. Our books also should have their *messusse*²⁹.

²⁴ See Y. H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Seattle 1982.

²⁵ See G. Haddad, *L'enfant illégitime. Sources talmudiques de la psychoanalyse*, Paris 1990. The extract from Freud's letter, cited here, was taken from the quotation in this book.

²⁶ H. Heine, *Sämtliche Schriften*, Bd. 4, München 1995, p. 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 483.

²⁸ E. Lévinas, *Eigennamen*, München-Wien 1988, p 106.

²⁹ Heinrich Heine to Eduard Gans, 26. Mai 1826. *Messuse* (yiddish, *mezuzah*, hebrew): piece of parchment contained in a small case inscribed with verses from the Torah, affixed to the

Besides the metaphorical territory of the writings there is an additional geographical space which is constitutive for the Jewish narrative: the desert. In the Jewish tradition, the desert is not empty. Instead it is full of words: it is the room in which the Law was transmitted. «In this desert nothing can grow, except words» remarked Edmond Jabès, pointing out thereby the connection of sand and words, and described the search for this territory of exile: «I have abandoned a land, which was not mine, for another, that was not mine either. I escaped to a vocabulary of ink—and had the book as space»³⁰.

The Book as a supportive Homeland, which demands neither a visa nor a passport, a safe place to live. In the words of George Steiner: «Like a snail, the antennae towards menace, the Jew have carried the house of text on his back. What other domicile have been allowed him? ³¹ [...] The Text is home, each commentary a return»³².

6. *Shabbat*: Living in Time

Extra-Territorial Thinking and a life in diaspora influenced the Jewish tradition from the beginning³³: the exile from the Garden of Eden. Fundamentally the whole *Tanach* is a travelogue. This is written into the law and is even present in the first command: «I (am) your G-d, who brought you out of the land of *mizrahim* [Egypt] and freed you from Slavery» (*Exodus*, 20.2)

Since then Jewish History has been made up of wanderings³⁴, such as the one to Babylon or into the Roman Empire. A fixed (geographical) center doesn't exist anymore. Jews find themselves to be constantly on the move, and the way is the *halacha*, the Jewish Law (the word *halacha* is derived from the verb *lalechet*, 'going').

This Tradition established a conceptual alternative to the sanctification of territory, which is related to the prohibition of images: the connection should not be with the land, but with the Law. The sacralization of the land – of Geographies, of the Mother country – follows a similar logic to idol worship, from the Jewish perspective. Lévinas writes about this: «Each word is uprooted. [...] Idolatry is rootedness [...] The development of writing is not the subjugation of the spirit to the letters, but rather the replacement of the ground by the letters. The spirit is free in letters and bound to the root»³⁵.

doorpost of Jewish homes to fulfill the *mitzvah* to «write the words of God on the gates and doorposts of your house» (*Deut.* 6:9).

³⁰ E. Jabès, *Ein Fremder mit einem kleinen Buch unterm Arm*, München-Wien 1993, p. 105.

³¹ G. Steiner, *Our Homeland, the Text*, in Id., *No passion spent. Essays 1978-1996*, London 1996, 304-326. here p. 309.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 306.

³³ See D. Diner, *Ubiquitär in Zeit und Raum—Annotationen zum jüdischen Geschichtsbewusstsein*, in Id. (ed.), *Synchrone Welten. Zeiträume jüdischer Geschichte*, Göttingen 2005, pp. 13-34.

³⁴ See M. Konner, *Unsettled: An Anthropology of the Jews*, New York 2003.

³⁵ E. Lévinas, *Difficile liberté: Essays sur le judaïsme*, Paris 1983, p. 183.

In the last verses of the Tora Moses' death is related. The Rabbis have often discussed who formulated these lines, since according to Tradition, Moses had written down the Tora. Several interpret it this way: Moses himself had written it down – with his tears³⁶.

And G-d spoke to him: that is the land which I have promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I spoke of giving it to your descendants. I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it. And Moses, G-d's servant, died there in the land of Moab on G-d's word. And he buried him in the valley, in the land of Moab, opposite Bet-Peor; and nobody to this day knows his grave (*Deuteronomy* 34, 4-6).

That the location of the grave is not stated, is – just like the prohibition of images in Judaism – not random. Roberto Blatt suspects that Judaism removed all traces of the locations of events at which the covenant was sealed with G-d in order to prevent those places from being sacralized, from both the concrete location in Sinai where the Torah was given to Moses' grave³⁷. And even if after some Jewish religious movements return to ideas of there being holy places (like the grave of Rachel or the pilgrimages by Chasidim to the grave of Rashbi (Rabbi Shimon bar Jochai) – whilst in those cases there is veneration for the relationship to the one who is buried there, in which proximity enhances prayer to the divine, the one who is buried is not the object of prayer; moreover – the places of the covenant are still hidden.

As Derrida wrote: «The 'dispersed', the exiled, the deported, the uprooted, the nomads have two things to sigh about, to be nostalgic about: their dead and their languages». Both dimensions are continually present for Jews in the book: from the holy language used in the Torah to the *yizkor-bikher* (memory books) script takes on the function of territory, remembrance and gravestone³⁸.

The Italian architect Bruno Zevi identified extra-territorial thinking and the distance to the material in the various conceptions of space. While for the Greek, respectively some Western thought, the essence of a room exists in its being (independently of how static and rigid the boundaries of the room are), according to Jewish rabbinical imagination such an entity embodied a "non-entity", since a being without movement or activity cannot exist. If a temple building counted in antiquity as sacred, later the prayer-house of Jews serves as a meeting place in which something *happens*³⁹: The Synagogue ('gathering', 'community', also here a Greek word!) in Hebrew is called *beit kneset* 'house

³⁶ See E. Weber, *Schwarze Tränen, Tintenspur*, in *Ethik der Gabe. Denken nach Jacques Derrida*, M. Wetzel, J.-M. Rabaté, G. Agamben (Hg.), Berlin 1993, pp. 39–56.

³⁷ Robert Blatt quoted in D. Sperling, *Genealogía del odio*, Buenos Aires 1995, p. 119.

³⁸ J. Derrida, *La Hospitalidad*, Buenos Aires 2000, p. 91.

³⁹ B. Zevi, *El judaísmo y la concepción espacio-temporal en el arte*, «Raíces», 3:2, Buenos Aires 1982. Of course, the Temple in Jerusalem was holy on its own: *kodesh kodashim* was above all a holy space, into which no one could enter other than the High Priest once a year. But with rabbinical diasporic Judaism the spatial and temporal dimension changed radically – even if there are surely differences between various Jewish cultures and for example also between the conception in Yerushalmi and Babylonian Talmudim.

of meeting', in Yiddish *shil* or *shul* – which means school. In the diasporic experience, a room doesn't become Jewish through its immanent characteristics, but instead through attaching a *mezuzah* to its doorposts, which signifies or acts as a reminder that Jewish Law is adhered to there. In Lévinas' words:

For Judaism the world is intelligible through the human countenance and not, for a great philosopher of the time, who summarized an important aspect of the Western world through houses, temples and bridges. Deeds instead of Being, Text instead of the Room⁴⁰.

Among the ten commandments there is one regarding making time holy (the 4th commandment: «you should keep Shabbat holy»), yet none is dedicated to a country. It follows that in the Talmud an important tractate is concerned with how to keep *Shabbat*. Judaism always lives in and values time. Abraham Joshua Heschel once formulated it beautifully: «the Shabbat days are our great cathedrals»⁴¹.

Other than in the European languages, the days of the week in Hebrew don't have names of their own – with the exception of Shabbat. Following the narratives in the Torah (1st *Book of Moses*, called *bereshit* respectively *Genesis*, which begins with the creation of the world) the days are simply numbered: 1st day, 2nd day, 3rd day – until following the 6th day is Shabbat. The Tradition foresees in that an always reoccurring 'travel' in time. Each week the numbering starts again. Whoever exercises power in a territorial sense, however dispersed the Jewish people are, in the Text and on Shabbat all Jews are unified. At Home. For a moment.

Shabbat. Arriving, each time afresh.

Liliana Ruth Feierstein
Humboldt Universität zu Berlin
✉ lfeierstein@culture.hu-berlin.de

⁴⁰ E. Lévinas, *Difficile liberté*, cit., p. 36.

⁴¹ A. J. Heschel, *Der Schabbat. Seine Bedeutung für den heutigen Menschen*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1990.