



# JEW S

The Making of a Diaspora People

IRVING M. ZEITLIN



## Jews: The Making of a Diaspora People

For Esther, my beautiful wife and best friend for over sixty years

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Irving M. Zeitlin

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First published in 2012 by Polity Press

Polity Press  
65 Bridge Street  
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press  
350 Main Street  
Malden, MA 02148, USA

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ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-6016-5

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-6017-2(pb)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 10.5 on 12pt Times  
by Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Group Limited, Bodmin, Cornwall

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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	x
<b>Preface</b>	xi
<b>1 “Diaspora”: On the Genealogy of a Concept</b>	1
The Relation of Theory to History and the Role of the Ideal Type	2
<i>Global Diasporas</i> by Robin Cohen	4
<i>Diasporas</i> by Stéphane Dufoix	9
<i>Powers of Diaspora</i> by Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin	13
<i>The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness</i> by Paul Gilroy	18
<i>Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century</i> by James Clifford	26
<b>2 Varieties of Jewish Religious Experience (Resting, however, on Unifying Jewish Religious Principles)</b>	29
Moshe Rosman’s <i>Rethinking European Jewish History</i>	32
Cultures of the Jews	33
Syncretism in Jewish History	35
Polytheism and Monotheism	35
The Nature of Polytheism	36
<b>3 Max Weber’s Ancient Judaism</b>	39
The Hebrew Prophets: The Setting	40
The Prophetic Ethic	45
<b>4 The Babylonian Empire</b>	50
The Revolt and the Destruction of the First Temple	53
The Emigration to Egypt	55

<b>5</b>	<b>The Babylonian Exile and the Persian Supremacy (586–332 BCE)</b>	57
	The Diaspora in Babylon and Persia	61
<b>6</b>	<b>Alexander the Great and the New Hegemony of the West</b>	64
<b>7</b>	<b>The World Diaspora</b>	67
	The Beginnings of the European Diaspora: Greece and Rome	70
<b>8</b>	<b>The Diaspora in the First Century CE</b>	72
	Judaism’s Proselytism	74
<b>9</b>	<b>The Jews in the Roman Near East</b>	78
<b>10</b>	<b>The Jews Move to Poland</b>	83
	The Chmelnitzky Uprising of 1648–1649	86
<b>11</b>	<b>Sabbatai Zevi</b>	90
<b>12</b>	<b>Gershom Scholem’s Error</b>	97
	Dubnow on the Sabbatian Movement	100
<b>13</b>	<b>The Rise of Hasidism and the Baal-Shem-Tob</b>	104
	Enter the Man, Israel, Who Became the Baal-Shem-Tob	105
	The Fundamental Principles of the Besht’s Teachings	107
	The Growth of Tzaddikism	109
	Hasidism, Rabbinism, and the Forerunners of the Enlightenment	112
<b>14</b>	<b>The Jews of Spain</b>	114
	The Inquisition	117
	The Jews, the Spanish, and the “ <i>Conversos</i> Problem”	122
	The Aftermath of the Pogroms	126
	Jewish Mysticism: The Kabbalah in Spanish-Jewish Life	128
<b>15</b>	<b>The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain</b>	131
	The Conquest of Granada	132



<b>16</b>	<b>The Enlightenment and the Jews</b>	136
	The English Deists	138
	Varieties of Enlightenment Views on Religion	141
	Voltaire	143
	Rousseau	146
	Rousseau on Judaism and the Jews	148
<b>17</b>	<b>The Germanies</b>	152
	The Emerging German National Mind	154
	Luther	154
	Luther's Attitude toward the Jews	158
	Hegel	160
	Hegel on Jews and Judaism	162
<b>18</b>	<b>The Left Hegelians and the so-called "Jewish Question"</b>	166
	Bruno Bauer on the "Jewish Question"	168
	Marx	172
	Marx's Use of the Terms "Jew" and "Judaism"	174
	Weber vs Sombart on the Spirit of Capitalism	176
<b>19</b>	<b>From Religion to Race</b>	179
	Afro-American and Jewish Parallels	179
	Arthur de Gobineau	181
<b>20</b>	<b>From Gobineau and H. Stewart Chamberlain to Wagner</b>	185
	Nietzsche, the Jews, and Judaism	188
	Nietzsche's Legacy	193
<b>21</b>	<b>The Rise of Nazism</b>	195
	The Versailles Treaty	197
	The Origins of the Nazi Party	199
	After the Putsch	202
<b>22</b>	<b>The Early Nazi Regime and the Jews as Perceived by     Non-Jewish Contemporaries</b>	206

<b>23</b>	<b>World War I, the Collapse of the Old Regimes, and the Rise of Totalitarianism</b>	212
	More on Nazi Ideology, Internal Factions, and Foreign Policy Aims	214
	The Turning Point: The Attack on Poland	216
<b>24</b>	<b>Max Weber on Bureaucracy and its Relevance for an Analysis of the <i>Shoah</i> (Holocaust)</b>	219
	Bureaucracy	219
	German Ideology and Bureaucracy	221
	Weber's Serious Error	223
<b>25</b>	<b>Charisma, Bureaucracy, and the "Final Solution"</b>	226
	Raul Hilberg's, <i>The Destruction of the European Jews</i>	226
	The Administration of the Destructive Process	228
	The Reich-Protectorat Area	230
	The Creation of a Centralized Authority in Ghettoized Jewish Communities	230
	The Polish Jews under the Nazis	232
	The Jewish Councils (Judenräte)	234
	Nazi Food Controls	237
	Mobile Killing Operations	238
	The Role of the Other Ethnic Groups	240
	Definition of "Jew" Again, and Himmler	241
	Ian Kershaw's Recent Re-examination of the Issues	243
<b>26</b>	<b>Leon Poliakov's Complementary Analysis of the <i>Shoah</i></b>	246
	Hitler's Euthanasia Program	247
	Auschwitz	249
	The "Death's Head" Formations (SS <i>Totenkopf</i> )	251
	Back to the Question of a Distinctive German National Character	252
	Significant Political Differences Between Eastern and Western Europe	254
	The Role of the Christian Churches	255
	Postscript	256
<b>27</b>	<b>The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto</b>	258
	A Reflection on Jewish Resistance	261

<b>28</b>	<b>Zionism, Israel, and the Palestinians</b>	263
	Theodor Herzl	264
	The Historical Jewish Presence in the Arab World	265
	The Peace Conference of 1919	266
	“The Unseen Question”	268
	Arab Rebellion	273
	<b>Works Cited</b>	276
	<b>Index</b>	281

# Acknowledgments

I owe many thanks to my wonderful daughter Ruth for enabling me to communicate frequently with my distinguished editor, John Thompson, by email. Without her assistance I would have had to employ the pre-industrial, handwritten-letter method on which I have relied since childhood.

I need, in addition, to thank the intellectually exciting scholar, Ato Quayson, for his gracious and generous response to my request for bibliographic suggestions concerning the concept of “diaspora.” I have always found my conversations with him stimulating and illuminating.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the essential role my typist, Gloria Rowe, has played in transcribing, impeccably, my hardly legible hand-script. She has typed all my booklength manuscripts for the past 35 years.

# Preface

In Exodus 19:5 of the Hebrew Bible, we read: “Now therefore, if ye will hearken unto my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be mine own treasure from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.” The Hebrew word *segula* does, in fact, imply “treasure.”

The same Hebrew word appears in Deuteronomy 7:6: “For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God who hath chosen thee to be His own treasure, out of all peoples that are upon the face of the earth.” In Deuteronomy 7:7-8, Moses explains why the Israelites were chosen:

The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people – for ye were the fewest of all peoples – but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh King of Egypt.

In the *King James Version*, Ex. 19:5 also reads: “if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all peoples.” In Deuteronomy 7:6, the parallel passage replaces “treasure” with “special.” In the *Revised Standard Version*, the relevant passage in Ex. 19:5 reads: “if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples.” Similarly, in Deut. 7:6 we read: “The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.”

Moses’ explanation of God’s choice is essential for an adequate understanding of the passage, for it illuminates the nature of the Deity. Why did he set his love upon the Israelites? As Moses stated, not because they were especially numerous. Nor because they were especially virtuous. Moses attributed no such quality to them. The reason for God’s choice,

then, is the conception of Him as an *ethical* deity who heard the cries of an oppressed people and decided to come to their aid. It was an act of grace, but a conditional one: If they will obey God's voice and keep his Covenant, then they will become a "peculiar treasure" to Him. The meaning of "peculiar" in this context is clear: all the nations of the world are God's, but Israelites or Jews are His in a *special manner*. All nations of the world are God's by reason of His power, *but the Jews are his by reason of their own consent and Covenant*.

The italicized passage is the animating principle and theological framework of the entire Hebrew Bible. The passage is also the key to the self-understanding of the Jewish people as they came under the influence of the Hebrew prophets of social justice. In tracing the process that led to exile, the central and most interesting question will be: How did this people survive despite the serious and recurrent challenges it faced? I was inspired to address this question by the work of Max Weber who has justifiably been described as the greatest social scientist of the twentieth century. Among his other contributions, it is his comparative studies of the world religions, East and West, which have earned him his reputation as a great scholar; and it is his *Ancient Judaism* in particular, which is, for our purposes, his most important work. For it is there that Weber fully grasps the characteristic uniqueness of the Jewish faith and the source of that uniqueness in the teachings of the Hebrew prophets of social justice. Indeed, the profound influence of the prophets will serve as the theoretical framework of the present study because I regard the prophetic legacy as the *sine qua non* of Jewish survival in the diaspora. However, before turning to Weber's profound analysis of the prophetic legacy, a full clarification of the concept of "diaspora" is advisable in light of the current application of the term to a wide range of ethnic groups.

## “Diaspora”: On the Genealogy of a Concept

With this book my primary aim is to provide a historical-sociological analysis of the process by which the Jews became a “diaspora people.” I employ the concept of “diaspora” because I believe it effectively captures the characteristic uniqueness of the Jewish historical experience.

“Diaspora,” as defined in the Oxford and other dictionaries, was originally applied *exclusively* to the early history of the Jews who, after the Babylonian exile, settled in scattered colonies outside Israel-Judea. By the fourth century BCE the diaspora population had increased to the point at which more Jews lived outside their ancestral homeland than inside.

It seems that one striking difference between Jews and most other ethnic groups is that, in the case of the latter, the *majority* remained in their lands of origin. The Jews appear to be exceptional not only in that regard but also because they constituted the most conspicuous ethnic-religious minority in the numerous societies in which they settled. This, as we shall see, was already true in antiquity; but it grew all the more striking and troublesome when the Jews became the most visible non-Christian hated and/or despised minority in Christendom. Hence, it appears to be a highly cogent proposition that the Jews may be regarded as the archetypal or prototypical diaspora people.

The cogency of this proposition carries with it no value or moral judgment. There is no intention here of attributing to the diasporic status of the Jews any special virtue that might be construed invidiously when compared with the status of other ethnic minorities. A group can be unique without implying invidiousness. Indeed, I believe that every ethnic group is unique. The role of concepts like “diaspora” impels me to return to Max Weber and to a key element of his historical-interpretive method.

## The Relation of Theory to History and the Role of the Ideal Type

The “ideal type” or “pure type” is a concept that Weber regards as indispensable in any kind of analysis. He calls it a “Utopia,” an intellectual construct arrived at by accentuating certain aspects of reality for heuristic purposes. Such constructs are analytical tools with which Weber himself approached the materials of world history in comparative analysis. Ideal types aid us to grasp the characteristic features of social and cultural phenomena, and their significant differences. How do we know that we have, in fact, constructed a good ideal-type conception of whatever it is we are interested in? The answer, for Weber, is that we never can know in advance of employing it and judging whether it actually enhances our understanding of a phenomenon. Weber’s criterion for the assessment of the fruitfulness of a particular ideal type is pragmatic:

there is only one criterion, namely, that of success in revealing concrete cultural phenomena in their interdependence, their causal conditions and their *significance*. The construction of ideal types recommends itself not as an end, but as a means.<sup>1</sup>

It is Weber’s position that if we use such concepts, they ought to be well thought out and unambiguous. The greater the need for a clear and unambiguous delineation of a cultural phenomenon, the more imperative it is to construct the ideal type carefully. Weber did not, of course, invent the concept of an ideal-type construct. He is merely calling attention to the heuristic device historians, scholars, and social scientists have always employed, either deliberately or unconsciously. Ideal types are purely logical constructs, and have nothing to do with value judgments. As Weber remarked, “There are ideal types of brothels as well as of religions” (99). The goal of an effective ideal-type construct is to make clear and explicit *the unique individual character of a social phenomenon*.

In the pragmatic aspect of Weber’s method, he converges intellectually with the great founders of the American pragmatic philosophical movement: Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead. This school looked upon concepts as *analytic tools* and recognized that gaining knowledge requires an ongoing revision and reconstruction of our conceptual tools. The Pragmatists proposed that

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. and ed. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1949, 92. Hereafter, all page references to this work will be cited in parentheses immediately following the quoted passage.



if a concept enables us to understand something better than we would have understood it without that concept – or better than we would have with an alternative concept – it is heuristically valuable because it yields definitely favorable results.

Weber converges methodologically with the Pragmatists in that regard as well. He, too, recognized the need for a

perpetual reconstruction of those concepts through which we seek to comprehend reality. The history of the social sciences is and remains a continuous . . . attempt to order reality analytically through the construction of concepts – the dissolution of the analytical constructs so constructed, through the expansion and shift of the scientific horizon – and the reformulation anew of concepts on the foundations thus transformed. (105)

Although Weber regarded his epistemological approach as neo-Kantian, his grasp of the function of concepts is fully compatible with that of the Pragmatists. He writes:

If one perceives the implications of the fundamental ideas of modern epistemology which ultimately derives from Kant, namely, that concepts are primarily *analytical instruments* for the intellectual mastery of empirical data and can only be that, the fact that precise genetic [i.e., historical] concepts are necessarily ideal types will not cause him to desist from constructing them. (106)

With this understanding of the role of concepts, perhaps it makes sense for our purposes to regard the Jews, owing to their distinctive historical experiences, as the ideal-typical diaspora people.

Are there other diasporas? Is there a need to distinguish diasporas from other forms of ethnic community? It is a historical fact that virtually all of the ethnic groups of Europe, Asia, and Africa have produced communities in countries other than those of their origin. This has prompted some scholars to raise the question whether those communities might also be characterized as “diasporas.” Some of those scholars have proposed that a significant distinction may be made between “diasporas,” on the one hand, and “transnational communities,” on the other. The question, then, is by which criteria one would distinguish between the two categories.

My book is a historically specific analysis of the experiences of *one* people; it is not a comparative study, at least not explicitly. In light, however, of the immense and growing comparative literature concerned with the two categories, I feel an intellectual obligation to engage with it.

***Global Diasporas*<sup>2</sup> by Robin Cohen**

Cohen opens by observing that until recently most characterizations of diasporas emphasized their catastrophic origins, as was the case in the original, forcible dispersion of the Jews. However, he correctly calls attention to the fact that although the word “Babylon” implies captivity and oppression, a careful reading of the narratives concerning the Babylonian period of exile can be shown to demonstrate the emergence of a new creative energy “in a challenging pluralistic context outside the natal homeland” (5–6). Beyond Babylon, moreover, Jewish communities flourished all over the Hellenistic world. In Alexandria, for example, under Ptolemy Philadelphus, the *Septuagint* was composed, and Jews served as administrators and army officers. Despite occasional expressions of anti-Jewishness, respect was the normal experience of the many Jewish communities scattered around the Greco-Roman world. So Cohen asks how we should account for the so-called “doleful” view of the Jewish diasporas.

To answer that question, Cohen proposes that we have to turn to the period of Roman domination. The Jewish war against Rome ended in the destruction of the Second Temple by the Roman general Vespasian and his son Titus in 70 CE. From the Christian ideological standpoint, this was interpreted as God’s punishment. For what? For the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as the Christ and for their alleged complicity in the execution of Jesus. There thus emerged the image of the “wandering Jew,” condemned to eternal restlessness as a suitable punishment for these sins.

And yet, despite the strong anti-Jewish sentiment, the level of discrimination against the Jews was quite modest in the Roman world. However, things changed dramatically for the worse in the eleventh century with the Crusaders who, beginning in the summer of 1096, slaughtered or forcibly converted the Jews of the Rhine Valley. When the Crusaders finally arrived in Jerusalem in 1099, they gathered in a synagogue all the Jews they could find, and burned them alive.

Summarizing other well-known examples of Christian intolerance, persecution, and worse, Cohen cites several events, later discussed in my book. He also touches upon Jewish diasporas under Islam, where the experience was mostly positive until the Almohades had put an end to the fruitful interplay between Islam and Judaism. The center of Jewish

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<sup>2</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997). Page references to this work will be cited in parentheses immediately following the quoted passage.

spiritual life then moved to the Ottoman Empire where Jewish experience varied hardly at all from that in earlier Muslim regimes.

Cohen next addresses the origin of the Ashkenazic Jews. Relying on the outstanding Jewish histories, he speaks of the conventional threefold classification: Jews of the Iberian Peninsula (*Sephardim*); Jews of the Muslim Middle East; and Jews of Northern Europe who came to be called (in the plural) *Ashkenazim*. *Ashkenaz* is the medieval rabbinical name for Germany. As the Jews migrated toward the Rhineland, and then further east, they became the large division of Jews comprising the Eastern European Yiddish-speaking Jews. Having originated in the Rhineland, Yiddish became a Germanic language in its syntax, grammar, and vocabulary, mixed, however, with Hebrew words and with words and phrases borrowed from the languages of the other peoples among whom the Jews lived.

In contrast to this sound historical explanation of the origin of the *Ashkenazim*, Arthur Koestler introduced the highly controversial theory that most of the Ashkenazim arose from the Khazars who, purportedly, had converted en masse to Judaism. When the Russians in 985 crushed the Khazarian domain, the Khazars migrated north, retaining their Jewish faith. Cohen recognizes that Koestler's once fashionable theory is no longer taken too seriously by scholars.

In the balance of Cohen's impressive work, he addresses the main sociological issue: what kind of inferences can be drawn from the Jewish diasporic tradition for the application of the concept to other ethnic groups? He notes that the term “diaspora” has come to be applied to a wide range of different categories of peoples. Relying on William Safran, Cohen mentions expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and “racial” minorities. The term has also been applied to a vast array of different peoples: “Cubans and Mexicans in the USA, Pakistanis in Britain, Maghrebis (North Africans) in France, Turks in Germany, Chinese in Southeast Asia, Greeks, Poles, Palestinians, blacks in North America and the Caribbeans, Indians and Armenians in various countries, Corsicans in Marseilles and even French-speaking Belgians living in communal enclaves in Wallonia” (21–2). Cohen recognizes that generalizing the concept in this way tends to turn it into a vague and imprecise term that sheds little or no light. Cohen therefore implicitly follows Weber's admonition, demanding intellectual rigor and precision in the construction of our concepts.

If the Jews are taken as the prototype, Cohen argues, then, in order to qualify as a diaspora, a given group should have been dispersed to more than one land. Still relying on Safran, with some reservations, Cohen proposes that the concept of diaspora can be applied when members of an expatriate minority community share several of the following features:

- they or their ancestors have been dispersed from an original “center” to two or more regions;
- they have a collective memory or myth about their original homeland, its history and achievements;
- they doubt that they can be fully accepted in their “host” societies and, therefore, remain partly separate;
- their ancestral home is idealized to the extent that when conditions are favorable either they or their descendants should return;
- they believe that all or most members of the diaspora should commit themselves to the preservation or restoration of the original homeland, and to its security and well-being;
- they continue to relate to their homeland; and their ethnic consciousness and solidarity are, in a significant way, defined by such a relationship.

Cohen qualifies some of these features, amending, for example, the first one by adding that “dispersal from an original center is often accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event that provides the folk memory of the great injustice that binds the group together” (23).

Cohen also adds three features:

1. Groups that scatter for aggressive or voluntary reasons. He calls this the most controversial departure from the Jewish diasporic tradition; but he thinks it “can be justified by reference to the ancient Greeks (who, after all, coined the word) and to the duality, voluntary *and* compelled, of the Jews’ own migration patterns” (24).
2. Time has to pass before we can know whether any community that has migrated really is a diaspora.
3. There must be a pronounced recognition of the positive virtues prompting the retention of a diasporic ethnic identity.

In subsequent chapters of Cohen’s thoughtful study, he discusses:

- victim diasporas: Africans and Armenians;
- labor and imperial diasporas: Indians and British;
- trade diasporas: Chinese and Lebanese;
- cultural diasporas: the Caribbean case.

Cohen acknowledges that in practice “migration scholars find it difficult to separate voluntary from involuntary migration. Nonetheless, there are, clearly, mass displacements that are occasioned by events wholly

outside the individual's control – wars, ‘ethnic cleansing,’ natural disasters, pogroms and the like” (180).

So the question is whether a formal-technical definition of “diaspora,” or checklists of criteria by which to distinguish diasporic from non-diasporic peoples, can be effective without implying invidiousness. Let us, then, employ Cohen's criteria to determine whether the distinction can be made in an objective, non-evaluative manner.

### *Ethnic immigration in the early eras of American history*

In the modern period from, say, the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, America was the chief “host” country for many millions of immigrants. In America, most ethnic minorities are the descendants of immigrants who freely left their lands of origin to settle in the United States. English, Scottish-Irish, Germans, Irish, Poles, Jews, Italians, Chinese, and Japanese are examples of such ethnic groups. There are, however, other minorities in the United States who, though they share a presumed common ethnic origin, must be placed in a different category. Afro-Americans are a case in point, for their ancestors, far from having been free immigrants, were brought to America in chains.

American Indians, on the other hand, are natives of America, a small remnant of a conquered and nearly annihilated people. Both blacks and Indians therefore have histories that distinguish them from all other American ethnic groups. Mexican Americans too, though descended from immigrants, are native to the American continent.

From 1820 to 1930 more than 37,000,000 immigrants, mostly Europeans, arrived in the United States. The major factor impelling that great mass of people to uproot themselves and to emigrate was poverty. The first of the impoverished Europeans to leave their homes in the nineteenth century were the Irish. The Poor Law, the enclosure of the land, and the potato famine of the late 1840s caused untold misery and starvation to millions. Alexis de Tocqueville, who visited Dublin in the 1830s, recorded the most appalling manifestations of poverty even before the Great Hunger caused by the potato blight. Between 1,800 and 2,000 paupers were received in the poorhouse each day. As he left the poorhouse, Tocqueville saw two paupers pushing a small closed wheelbarrow. They were on the way to the homes of the rich to collect their garbage and bring it to the poorhouse so that broth could be made of it.

To take only this dramatic example, one sees the difficulty in distinguishing voluntary from involuntary emigration. The emigration of the Irish was voluntary in the sense that they possessed enough consciousness and will to make significant choices and decisions. They were impelled

to act by an economic disaster. But *they were not forcibly expelled from their homeland by a militarily stronger imperial power and dispersed*. For Cohen and other scholars, this is the chief criterion by which to discern the difference between voluntary and involuntary.

If I may be excused for stating the obvious, the case of black Americans best illustrates not only involuntary emigration, but much else that is relevant to the question of how to define "diaspora." The impoverished Irish immigrants to the United States suffered from extreme discrimination, as in employment opportunities where the signs read "Irish need not apply." But black Americans left their homeland chained two by two, left leg to right leg, which is also how they arrived to the American continent. Again stating the obvious, the African skin color became by the eighteenth century a badge of slavery and degradation. Chattel slavery had become firmly a part of American custom and law. And after emancipation, "Jim Crow" became a synonym for Negro. A high social barrier was erected between whites and blacks. Its purpose was to prevent interracial mixing of any kind, especially intermarriage. Separate drinking fountains, separate privies, separate schools, and so on became the order of the day. White nurses were forbidden to treat black men; white teachers were not allowed to teach black students. In Florida, even "negro" and "white" textbooks were segregated in warehouses. In Oklahoma, there were separate telephone booths; and in Atlanta courtrooms, Jim Crow Bibles were provided for black witnesses and regular Bibles for white. There is, of course, much more that needs to be said about those dark chapters in American history, with which most of us are quite familiar. For our purposes, however, it must suffice where its relevance to Cohen's thesis is concerned.

In his concluding remarks, Cohen again lists what he regards as the key features of a diaspora, including a "return" ideology: the parallel in black history to Zionism, the back-to-Africa movement of Marcus Garvey. What Negroes needed, he said, was an organization and a country. There was no hope of justice for a black man in America. Negroes must return to their motherland.

The features characterizing diaspora experience, Cohen avers, are analogous to Wittgenstein's fibers of meaning. In those terms, Cohen seems to intend his checklist of features to be interpreted in Wittgenstein's terms as "family resemblance" between Jewish experiences and those of other ethnic groups. This suggests, perhaps, that Cohen himself may have nagging doubts that checklists of features are the best way to go about our task.

That it is the wrong way is the stout argument Stéphane Dufoix makes in his superb, critical discussion of the issues.

***Diasporas*<sup>3</sup> by Stéphane Dufoix**

Dufoix' slender, pithy, and superlative study is actually a history of the concept. Right at the outset he expresses his astonishment at how that ancient, simple word “underwent an amazing inflation that peaked in the 1990s, by which time it was being applied to most of the world's peoples.”

In his highly illuminating genealogy of the concept, he points out that the modern usage of “diaspora” stems from a neologism in the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. In the Septuagint Bible “diaspora” appears 12 times, but never referring either to the Babylonian exile or to any other historical event. Instead, “diaspora” always referred to the threat of dispersion if the Hebrews failed to obey God's will. The concept was applied almost exclusively to divine acts: it is God who will scatter the sinners and gather together the atoned in the future. To explain the growing popularity of the term “diaspora,” Dufoix examines two cases that are both linked and opposed: the “Jewish diaspora” and the “black diaspora.” As the substance of my book is devoted to the former, I will focus on what Dufoix has to say about the latter.

It is fully understandable why the descendants of Africans, living on other continents, would adopt the concept “diaspora” and apply it to themselves. For blacks, the biblical narrative of the Exodus, escaping slavery and reaching the Promised Land, resonated profoundly. Hence, the Zionist idea inspired the return-to-Africa cause. Earlier I mentioned Marcus Garvey, who advocated the founding of a black nation in Africa. His movement for black peoples' right to self-determination gained momentum for a while, but ran into serious financial difficulties which led to his downfall and the end of his “back-to-Africa” plans.

Dufoix shows that the special resonance the biblical narratives had for black thinkers goes back quite far. The concept of “diaspora” was often employed explicitly to draw analogies between Jewish history and black history. In his book *American Civilization and the Negro*, published in 1916, the African-American thinker and doctor, Charles Victor Roman, raised the question of the future of blacks in Africa and the American South:

The Negro is not going to leave here for two reasons: in the first place *this is his home*, and in the second place *there is nowhere to go*. He is not going back to Africa any more than the white man is going back to Europe or the Jew is going back to Palestine. Palestine may be rehabilitated and Europe

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<sup>3</sup> Translated by William Rodamor, with a foreword by Roger Waldinger, Berkeley, CA, and London: University of California Press, 2008.

be Americanized, but the Jew will not lose his worldwide citizenship, nor America fail of her geographical destination as the garden-spot of the world . . . The slave trade was the diaspora of the African, and the children of this alienation have become a permanent part of the citizenry of the American republic. (12)

It is truly remarkable that a year later, in 1917, the analogy was drawn on the Jewish side. The Yiddish newspaper, *The Jewish Daily Forward*, saw a parallel between the race riots that broke out in east St Louis on the second day of July, and the Kishinev pogroms of 1903, during which the Jewish victims counted 45 dead, over 500 wounded, and 1,500 houses and shops destroyed or looted. The Jewish editor wrote:

Kishinev and St. Louis – the same soil the same people. It is a distance of four and a half thousand miles between the two cities and yet they are so close and so similar to each other . . . Actually twin sisters, which could easily be mistaken for each other. Four and a half thousand miles apart, but the same events in both . . . The situation of Negroes in America is very comparable to the situation of the Jews in Russia. The Negro diaspora, the special laws, the decrees, the pogroms and also the Negro complaints, the Negro hopes, are very similar to those which we Jews . . . lived through. (12)

Dufoix observes that, until the 1950s, “diaspora” had mainly a religious meaning. And yet, much earlier, in the 1931 edition of the *American Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, it was the great Jewish historian, Simon Dubnov, who had argued that the term “diaspora” should *not* be limited to Jewish religious history. In his article on the concept of “diaspora” he wrote:

Diaspora is a Greek term for a nation or part of a nation separated from its own state or territory and dispersed among other nations but preserving its national culture. In a sense Magna Graecia constituted a Greek diaspora in the ancient Roman Empire, and a typical case of diaspora is presented by the Armenians, many of whom have voluntarily lived outside their small national territory for centuries. Generally, however, the term is used with reference to those parts of the Jewish people residing outside Palestine. (17)

Dubnov’s text played a major role in diffusing the term “diaspora,” in secularizing the concept, and in separating it from the historical experience of the Jewish people. Dufoix cites examples of how the concept was generalized. In 1949, an American sociologist, Rose Hum Lee, relying on Dubnov, proposed that “Chinatowns” might be regarded as “diasporas.” And 10 years earlier, the distinguished sociologist Robert Park –



known for his theory of the “marginal man” and the phenomenon of the “stranger” brought to the fore by Georg Simmel – had reframed Dubnov to apply “diaspora” to Asians. Dufoix continues to document in this way the gradual shift of the concept from the specific historical situation of a people to a general term widely applied in the social sciences. In his research on the history of the concept “diaspora,” Dufoix found that, except for the article by Simon Dubnov, the concept was almost absent from the social sciences before the 1960s. However, when the term began to emerge, no real attempt was made to define it.

Dufoix’s primary aim in this critical and illuminating study is to address the question whether “diaspora,” as the term has come to be widely applied, is anything more than an ambiguous cliché. Indeed, the term is increasingly being used, Dufoix notes, “without any definition in a scope that is both wide and loose.” Dufoix attributes the broadening of the notion of diaspora to “postmodernism,” “globalization,” and “transnationalism.” The growth in the number of phenomena and populations covered by “diaspora” has therefore attracted critics who argue that the word lacks theoretical or analytical power.

In his effort to clarify matters, Dufoix explores what he calls the “spaces of dispersion.” Relying on the historian William McNeill, and on the research material of paleoanthropologists who were tracing the origins of the human species from the paleolithic period, Dufoix notes that, according to the “out of Africa” hypothesis, humans have a single origin in Africa, from which they progressively colonized the rest of the world. And Dufoix notes perceptively, “If this monogenetic (single origin) theory is correct, dispersion is written into humanity’s very soul” (35).

In his illuminating sketch of the historic direction of migrations, Dufoix reviews the successive stages, from the original gathering-hunting stage to the relatively recent sedentary-agricultural period when the invention of boats made access to off-shore lands possible. Dufoix quotes Emmanuel Kant’s amusing observation that a time eventually came when people covered the entire Earth’s surface: “Because it is a globe, they cannot scatter to an infinite distance” (36). The result is that some 155,000,000 people now live far from the place where they were born.

In his continuing effort at clarification, Dufoix correctly observes that “diaspora,” in its classic usage, applied to the peoples whose migrations over hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of years had not weakened significantly “a permanent collective conscience rooted in an enduring reference to history, a land or a religion” (38). Clearly, this describes the Jewish experience. The question for Dufoix, therefore, is: to what other peoples does the term apply? In his effort to answer that question

adequately, Dufoix reviews the history of four migratory peoples: the Greeks, the Indians, the Chinese, and the Armenians.

It is the Armenian case, Dufoix convincingly argues, that bears some resemblance to that of the Jews. The historic homeland of the Armenians was located between the Black and Caspian Seas. They had been long-time traders between Asia and Europe since at least the fifth century BCE. The politically and economically powerful Armenian Empire dominated the entire Near East in the first century CE, until they were defeated by the Roman armies. Though the Armenians converted to Christianity in the fourth century, they maintained a form of Christianity distinct from the Roman and Orthodox Churches, and did so within the Roman Empire as more or less sovereign kingdoms. In 1045, after the Byzantine conquest of Armenia, many Armenians left the country, heading west to the Black Sea and Bulgaria, or northwest to Poland and the Ukraine. Many nobles and priests fled to Cilicia on modern Turkey's southeast coast, where they founded an independent state. It survived until 1375 and was the last Armenian state until the proclamation, in 1991, of the Republic of Armenia.

Parallel with the Jewish experience, the Armenians, even in the absence of a state, preserved a sense of ethnic community. The Armenian business ventures led to the establishment of commercial colonies in Europe, Persia, India, and the Far East. The Armenian Apostolic Church held the dispersed Armenians together until the idea of Armenian nationalism began to take hold in the eighteenth century.

Dufoix then reminds us of the fate of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The fear, apparently, that Armenian nationalism was being supported by the Czarist Empire, led to the Ottoman pogroms of 1894–6 and 1909, in which hundreds of thousands of Armenians were killed, forcing survivors to emigrate mainly to the United States. In 1915–16, during World War I, the Ottoman regime forced the Armenians into the Syrian desert and “eliminated the Armenian elites in a genocide that killed three-quarters of the region's two million Armenians” (52).

### *Static thinking about dispersion*

Continuing his effort to clarify the concept of “diaspora,” Dufoix calls the word “slippery” and criticizes the use of it as a vehicle for static thinking that hides several illusions. In his complex and subtle argument, Dufoix calls the chief of the illusions the illusion of “essence,” according to which naming something implies the real existence of a substance. Dufoix cites Ludwig Wittgenstein who had made the same point by saying “A substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it” (55). For Dufoix, as for Wittgenstein, it is an illusory, scholastic enterprise to posit

the ontological existence of a *real* diaspora that one can encounter in the form of archetypes, the best known of which is the Jewish diaspora. The illusory task then becomes a search for migratory phenomena that match the predefined criteria. The illusion and error lie in the reification of a concept, so that “only phenomena that are identical *in reality* can deserve the title of ‘diaspora.’” Note the word “deserve,” as if “diaspora” is an honorific term. The checklists of “features” that some scholars have constructed are examples of such scholastic and/or mechanistic enterprises in which, with checklists in hand, one goes in search of ethnic groups who embody the diasporic “essence.”

How does one avoid what Dufoix calls “this epistemological impasse”? The answer lies, he says, in reversing our priorities. What he means is that instead of classifying migrant populations in accordance with pre-existing terms, we should first study the historically specific phenomena linked to the collective existence of groups outside a land, place of origin, or point of departure. Only in a second stage of analysis would we give the phenomena and processes a “name.” Dufoix quotes Émile Durkheim’s commonsensical methodological rule: “What matters is not to distinguish words; it is to succeed in distinguishing the things that are covered by the words” (58). First study the things, and then, if necessary, find the “new words” to designate the phenomena that resemble each other in Wittgenstein’s sense. Dufoix goes farther, noting, as I had earlier, Max Weber’s epistemologically pragmatic formulation of “ideal types” as instruments of analysis, not mere names or words.

In following Weber in this regard, we also avoid the danger of introducing into our analyses invidious distinctions and value judgments.

### ***Powers of Diaspora*<sup>4</sup> by Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin**

In the first of two essays in this volume, Jonathan Boyarin – whom I shall hereafter refer to merely as Jonathan – explores what he calls the “diasporic genius of Jewishness,” by which he means the *cultural* power of the Jewish, diasporic experience.

Jonathan opens his Introduction by citing the rabbinic literature praising the “greatness” of Israel’s humility – thus humorously calling attention to Israel’s pious claims to humility by “loudly proclaiming how humble we are” (2). It is true, of course, that in contrast to most ancient peoples who boasted of their nobility, power, might, and the domination of other peoples, the Jews have always reminded themselves

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<sup>4</sup> Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

of their original bondage: “We were slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt!” In every generation the Jews are urged to look upon themselves as if they personally had escaped from Egyptian bondage. Moreover, according to the biblical tradition, the historic individual who led the Israelites and the “mixed multitude” out of Egypt, also exhibited the very opposite of hubris: “now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). The Hebrew word *anav* connotes “meekness,” “humility,” and “much enduring.”

Jonathan states that his co-authored book is “an argument *for* diaspora, and at the same time an attempt to identify and avoid at least some of the risks inherent in promoting ‘diaspora’ as a new catchword in the global theorization of diversity.” He proposes that broadening the concept of diaspora “offers rich material for a reinvigoration of Jewish thought” (7).

When Jonathan employs the word “power,” this word, it would seem, requires a good definition. For our purposes and for Jonathan’s aim, it is Thomas Hobbes, I believe, who has provided the best and most fruitful definition. “Power,” for Hobbes, refers to a “present means for the attainment of some future apparent good.” As we are speaking of the diasporic experiences of the Jews, a historically stateless ethnic group, Hobbes’s definition appears to be more appropriate than, say, Max Weber’s, for whom “power refers to the ability to realize one’s will against the resistance of others.” In his discussion of the “state,” Weber cites Trotsky’s words at Brest-Litovsk: “Every state is founded on force.” Weber goes on to say that a “state is a community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”<sup>5</sup> For the Jews, prior to the twentieth century, at least 2,000 years had elapsed from the time and place in which they could claim such a monopoly. Statelessness for the Jews meant that whatever power they had was certainly not founded on force. “Power” in Jewish diasporas was therefore exercised in the cultural sphere, in Jonathan’s sense, and in accordance with Hobbes’s definition. The aim of diasporic power for the Jews was the attainment, preservation, and further development of their apparent cultural goods, the nature of those goods having nothing to do with physical force. Indeed, those cultural goods were, in effect, a negation and repudiation of physical force and might.

Jonathan cites Nietzsche’s famous characterization of the Jews as the people primarily responsible for the inversion of the noble-warrior values

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<sup>5</sup> H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1970, 78.

based on force and might. Nietzsche calls the Jews a priestly people par excellence, and describes in the most dramatic terms the historic role of the Jews in inverting the noble values:

All that has been done on earth against “the noble,” “the powerful,” “the masters,” “the rulers,” is not even worth talking about when compared with what the *Jews* have done against them . . . With regard to the tremendous and immeasurably fateful initiative which the Jews have taken, through this most far-reaching of all declarations of war, I recall the proposition I arrived at on an earlier occasion (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 195) – that *the slave revolt in morality* begins with the Jews, a revolt which has a two-thousand-year history behind it and which is no longer so obvious because it has been victorious. (*On the Genealogy of Morals*, I, 7)

Historically, the political weakness and vulnerability of the diasporic Jews have meant that they could only engage in a spiritual revolt, what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment* or “spiritual revenge.” Jewish resentment of oppression and persecution resulted in the inversion of the values of the high-and-mighty and a triumph over them. Nietzsche was therefore correct to recognize that “power” in the Jewish diasporic sense meant that the Jews possessed enough *spiritual* power to repudiate the “master morality” and to create a “slave morality” in the positive and creative meaning of that term. Indeed, one can go beyond Nietzsche to argue that this “slave revolt in morality” was rooted in ancient Israel’s resentment of her Egyptian oppressors and in the subsequent ethical teachings of the Hebrew prophets of social justice. The “powers,” then, that Jonathan Boyarin has in mind, where the Jewish diasporic experience is concerned, are those that have enabled the Jews to continue their cultural and spiritual creativity.

Basing himself on rabbinic texts, Jonathan discerns in them a tension on the issue of “accommodation versus resistance or tricksterism versus martyrdom” (67). Jonathan is proposing that in the history of Jewish diasporas, where they could not act in accordance with the noble-warrior values, they adopted the strategy rooted in the “slave morality.” He cites the example of the Torah Jews of Eastern Europe who, by maintaining themselves as weak and passive, “were engaged in a more successful act of cultural resistance to the hegemony of Christian culture” (69). In effect, the rabbis gave positive sanction to a “slave-morality” strategy:

Continue to live, continue to maintain Jewish practice, but do not behave in ways that draw attention or provoke the hostile intervention of the ruling powers. (70)

Jonathan, however, goes beyond Nietzsche in a direction that is, perhaps, problematic. He employs Freudian and Lacanian postmodern psychoanalytic concepts to set forth his thesis on the so-called “feminization” of Jewish diasporic tactics. Still on the basis of rabbinic texts, he proposes that the approved practice for diasporic Jews has been gendered feminine, while the oppressor’s behavior has been gendered masculine. As a psychoanalytic corollary to the diasporic, “slave-morality” strategy, Jonathan explores the ways in which Jewish maleness was a form of resistance to Roman phallic masculinity. He cites approvingly the account by Kaja Silverman of the “dominant fiction,” the myth of the equation of the penis to the phallus – the narrative defining maleness through ascribing to the male an “unimpaired bodily ‘envelope’ . . . fiercely protective of its coherence.” And Jonathan comments: “the penis becomes phallus becomes then the very symbol of power and privilege as well as of completeness, coherence, univocity” (40). Silverman, in a later essay, argued that recent theory has benefited enormously from Lacan’s distinction between the penis and the phallus. To this, Jonathan responds that

the very myth of the phallus, is *never* politically productive. The issue is not whether we differentiate sharply or fuzzily [between the penis and the phallus] but whether we posit a phallus at all. It is the very transcendent immateriality of the phallus, and thus its separation from the penis, that constitutes its ability to project masculinity as the universal – as the Logos – and by doing so significantly enables both male and imperial projects of domination. A strong case can be made that this particular mode of idealization of the male body was instrumental, if not necessary, in the erection – pun intended – of empires, whether Roman or modern. (42–3)

Jonathan then adds: “such idealization of the phallic male role is typical of Zionist ideology” (45).

Jonathan’s apparent aim, then, is more than merely proposing that gender is, of course, historically and sociologically constructed. He wants to argue that for men in the bottom layers of society, their being there is/was interpreted as “feminization” – but feminization trans-valued and thus receiving at least some positive significance. He writes:

We claim that the absence of phallic power is not a lack. It need not be figured as a castration, as psychoanalysis figures the woman and the circumcised Jew, but as a gain, as a place from which a particular knowledge is generated . . .

Both early rabbinic Jews and early Christians performed resistance to the Roman imperial power structure through “gender-bending,” thereby making their own understanding that gender itself is implicated in the main-