



Editorial

Dan Diner

Diaspora is a Greek word for a Jewish condition. It is Greek, because in late Hellenic classical antiquity, Jews who were largely living dispersed had adopted that language and embraced the associated culture. Sprung from the constellation of dispersion at that time, the Jewish condition of Diaspora thickened into a kind of paradigm. It has come to signify similar circumstances in analogous life worlds, the existence of population groups living scattered beyond their previous original locations. Today, in an age of mounting social acceleration, of mobility and migration, the concept of Diaspora has become a commonplace of discourse. Now it serves essentially to help describe or qualify a demographic or sociological fact. The associated discursive inflation leads to a situation where its configurations distinctive to and anchored in Jewish historical experience increasingly recede into the background and are lost. The original former religious, if not to say political-theological latent aspects inscribed in those configurations undergo neutralization.

The very description of the existential condition of the Jews living scattered in dispersal as ‘Diaspora’ itself has a neutralizing effect. By contrast, the equivalent Hebrew terms present a whole spectrum of signification – ranging from a topographical-geographical descriptor of their situation (*tfutza*, *psura*) to terms loaded with a sacral semantics and imbued with eschatological meaning. The terms *galut* or *golah* are of central interest in this connection. On the whole, their signification is identical with the meaning of *exile*. And exile has itself here several significations: proceeding from the assumption of an exile of the Jews by force from their native land, there is an associated claim to eventual return. This is represented in prototypical form in the Babylonian Exile of the Jews, associated with the loss of their ‘sovereignty,’ and symbolized by the First Destruction of the Temple. Memorialization of this type of exile is principally effected in and through liturgy. That is also true to a certain degree for the Second Destruction of the Temple, and the subsequent emergence of a narrative of repeated dispersion.

Not until the age of nationalism and the conception of history associated with it, oriented to territorial statehood, did such a view undergo secularization, where a seemingly causal nexus was conceived between the loss of the land by forcible expulsion and its later repossession. Nonetheless, even in the modern, secularly framed meaning of a nationally conceived immigration or arrival in the land, we find the continued presence of sacral elements. Thus, the immigration of Jews to the land regarded as ‘promised’ or to the State of Israel is termed in Hebrew *aliyah*, ‘ascent’ in both a factual and metaphysical sense, an ascent up to Jerusalem. Thus the term of ‘ascending’ is infused in turn with a liturgical significance of a pilgrimage in Jewish tradition.

The term exile insists on designating a condition that presses for its termination. It is after all inscribed with a dimension of the temporary. And here far more central is probably the aspect of a temporary temporality, a space in time, not a temporary location. Exile in this sense is conceived as a condition whose final termination is projected onto a tran-

scendental plane as it were. The lexeme exile bears within itself the meaning of its opposite: the advent of Messianic time. Exile and Messianic fulfillment thus form a binary constellation, containing in its folds the tension of futurity.

The present volume seeks, from diverse perspectives and sites of interrogation, to relate the Jewish conception of Diaspora to differing readings of political-theological understanding of the world. Of less interest is the demographic-topographic signification of the term, of greater interest its infusions with sacrality. This anthology of studies attempts to explore their validity and impact in a kaleidoscopic fashion. The essays gathered together here are best viewed as fragments of a larger project for the future, aimed at generating interactive dialogue within a comparative frame between fundamental concepts in political theory of differing, principally monotheistic worlds of faith. Ultimately, the question of the universal validity of the worlds of political conceptuality that constitute our order is probably among the most pressing fundamental questions in a rapidly globalizing world.

The question about the origins of political semantics, their meaning and scope are what is increasingly emerging as a fundamental problem for the future. It touches not only on problems of law, the state and various institutions, themselves with diverse foundational rationales, but also and primarily on the conception of a good and proper ordering of human affairs as challenged by an array of intercultural correlation. Here and for this purpose, it is specifically the question of the Jewish Diaspora, or more precisely: Jewish exile, its concepts, forms of thought and law that are investigated. That is due in large part to that often overlooked significance of Judaism in its *diasporic configuration*, sited between Christianity and Islam. Judaism, like Islam a religion of the Law, takes on the significance of an intermediary role by dint of its diasporic condition; by contrast, the secularizing concepts of what is political, and the forms of law springing from them, emerging from both Christianity and Islam in differing density, are evidently more powerfully infused with a praxis of the exercise of power likewise in the more modern era, and more particularly precisely there.

It is *exilic* to live the Jewish diasporic experience spatially *external* to its political-theological canon, while at the same time being regulated by the 'civil' spheres of its largely sacred law. Such an exilic experience still lies in the offing for other sacrally impregnated cultures.

The first contribution in this volume deals with a critique of Carl Schmitt's understanding of the figure and meaning of biblical Leviathan. By juxtaposing it with the image of Ahasver, the Wandering Jew, *Galit Hasan-Rokem* (Jerusalem) shows to what extent Schmitt was informed in his theological-political iconography by an anti-Jewish reading. While Leviathan embodies rational political order – Ahasver, although a concealed figure in Schmitt's writing, represents its very disruption. Through a textual and contextual reading of Martin Buber's "Königtum Gottes" (1932), *Paul Mendes-Flohr* (Chicago/Jerusalem) discerns it as a critique addressed to his friends who participated in the Bavarian Revolution of 1918/19, as well as political-theological trends of his time, including Jewish Messianism and currents within Zionism. *Sylvie Anne Goldberg* (Paris) elaborates on the notions and concepts of Jewish diasporic existence, considering the purely theological and particularly Jewish meaning of the concept. She gives special attention to the legal configuration of the Aramaic term *dina de-malkhuta dina*, a mode of privileging the law of the land to a certain extent in Jewish legal thought. In her contribution, *Régine Azria* (Paris) universalizes the Jewish condition of Diaspora by exposing its nature as a dynamic concept. She shows how the diasporic conditions among Jews differ according to the diasporic topographies, their lexicon and their geographical semantics.

Yotam Hotam (Jerusalem) scrutinizes into the Zionist discourse of the first half of the 20th century by juxtaposing the works of Jakob Klatzkin and Hans Jonas. He illuminates how Gnosticism was for both a common denominator, however a reason for intellectual separation as well. *Martin Yaffe* (Denton) considers the recent attempt of Eugene Shepard's "historicist" interpretation to understand the meaning of "exile" in Leo Strauss's Jewish thought less in terms of the philosopher's biographical experience of exile, and more in the deeper layers of a politico-theological understanding of the Jewish diasporic venture.

The introduction to this volume of *Behemoth* cannot be concluded without expressing my deep gratitude to Otfried Fraisse of the *Simon-Dubnow-Institute* (Leipzig). Without his skills, his precise editing and dedicated commitment to the project, this collection would not have been possible. Last but not least deserves William Templer our compliments for his devoted editing of the english-language.

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