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Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity

Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin

In the field of rational analysis, a feeling of recognized kinship is more desirable than nationalism.

—GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK¹

Group identity has been constructed traditionally in two ways. It has been figured on the one hand as the product of a common genealogical origin and, on the other, as produced by a common geographical origin. The first has a strongly pejorative value in current writing—having become tainted with the name *race* and thus racism—while the second has a generally positive ring. One of the reasons for this split in values is undoubtedly the unfortunate usages to which the term and concept of

Some of the material in this paper is taken from the final chapter of Daniel Boyarin's forthcoming book, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*. Other material is from Jonathan Boyarin's "Der Yiddisher Tsenter; or What Is a Minyan?" and Jonathan Boyarin and Greg Sarris, "Jews and Native Americans as Living Voice and Absent Other," presented at the MLA convention, December 1991. We wish to thank Harry Berger, Jr., Stephen Greenblatt, and Steven Knapp, none of whom necessarily agrees (and one of whom necessarily disagrees) with the claims being made but all of whom made vitally significant interventions.

All biblical translations are our own.

1. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer 1992): 773. Paradoxically, Spivak means "recognized kinship" and even "family resemblance" that have nothing to do with genealogy, thus inscribing herself inevitably in a Pauline descent according to the spirit. Perhaps "in the field of rational analysis" is meant exactly as an ironic—or even satiric—distancing from that field.

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race in the sense of genotype has been put in Europe since early modern times.² Another source, however, of our cultural disdain for genealogy as a value is undoubtedly the sustained attack on it that lies at the fountain-head of Christendom, the Letters of Paul. In this paper, we would like to interrogate the Pauline sources of Western discourse about generation, space, and identity, along with the rabbinic Jewish counterdiscourse around these terms. We will trace this fault line into the present as well, confronting claims of “pure theory” with our own discourses of critically grounded identity, speaking about paradoxes of individual and collective identity with reference to Jean-François Lyotard, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Walter Benn Michaels.

1

פְּאֹלוֹס אִיז גְּעוּעֵן רֵדֶר עֲרִשְׁטֶער בּאַלְשֶׁעוויק
[Paul was the first Bolshevik.]

—HILLEL KEMPINSKY³

In early patristic writings and again in many quarters since the mid-nineteenth century, Paul’s project has been understood as one of universalizing the Torah, breaking through the “particularism” of the Jewish religion. Galatians 3:26–29 is taken as the moral center of Paul’s work: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ [saying]: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free-

2. It was not, of course, always used that way. Symptomatic perhaps of this shift is the following statement from Dio Cassius: “I do not know the origin of this name [Jews], but it is applied to all men, even foreigners, who follow their customs. This race is found among Romans” (quoted in John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* [New York, 1983], p. 91). We see from this quotation that race once had much suppler and more complex connections with genealogy, cultural praxis, and identity than it has in our parlance.

3. Oral communication to Jonathan Boyarin. Hillel Kempinsky ל”ז was the archivist at the YIVO Center in New York.

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man; there is no male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.' If, however, you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

Paul cites the baptismal formula that the Galatians themselves recited or heard recited at the time of their baptism: "There is neither Jew nor Greek."⁴ He interprets the text, and thus baptism itself, in the following fashion. The rite consists of a new birth that is understood as substituting an allegorical genealogy for a literal one. In Christ, that is, in baptism, all the differences that mark off one body from another as Jew or Greek (circumcision is considered a "natural" mark of the Jew [Rom. 2:27]), male or female, slave or free are effaced, for in the Spirit such marks do not exist.

Accordingly, if one belongs to Christ, then one participates in the allegorical meaning of the promise to the "seed of Abraham," an allegorical meaning of genealogy that is already hinted at in the biblical text itself, when it said that in "Abraham all nations would be blessed" (Gen. 12:3) and even more when it interpreted his name as "Father to many nations" (Gen. 17:5). The individual body itself is replaced by its allegorical referent, the body of Christ of which all the baptized are part.⁵ This is what the "putting-on" of Christ means, which is certainly a reference to the topos of the body as a garment.⁶ Paul is the vehicle of a certain distrust of corporeality that is characteristic of Christian culture as well as of the Western critique of ethnicity since his text is the material base of much of the discourse on ethnicity in Christian culture. Things of the body are less important than things of the spirit. The physical connection of common descent from Abraham and the embodied practices with which that genealogy is marked off as difference are rejected in favor of a connection between people based on individual re-creation and entry *de novo* into a community of common belief. Charles Mopsik has recently glossed the cultural effect of Paul's works as "the persistence of a split opened two millennia ago by the ideological victory over one part of the inhabited world of the Christian conception of carnal relation—and of carnal filiation—as separate from spiritual life and devalued in relation to it."⁷

In his authentic passion to find a place for the Gentiles in the Torah's

4. See Dennis Ronald Macdonald, *There Is No Male and Female: The Fate of a Dominical Saying in Paul and Gnosticism* (Philadelphia, 1987) and the classic paper by Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13 (Feb. 1974): 165–208.

5. The parallel citation of the formula in 1 Corinthians 12:13 makes this even more explicit: For in one spirit we were all baptized into one body.

6. As in the dominical saying identified plausibly by Macdonald as the source of the baptismal formula itself: "when ye trample on the garment of shame, when the Two become One, and Male with Female neither male nor female." See also Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," *History of Religions* 5 (Winter 1966): 217–38.

7. Charles Mopsik, "The Body of Engenderment in the Hebrew Bible, the Rabbinic Tradition and the Kabbalah," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher (New York, 1989), p. 49.

scheme of things and the brilliance of the radically dualist and allegorical hermeneutic that he developed to accomplish this purpose, Paul had (almost against his will) sown the seeds for a Christian discourse that would completely deprive Jewish ethnic, cultural specificity of any positive value and indeed turn it into a “curse” in the eyes of Gentile Christians.⁸ Elizabeth Castelli has focussed most sharply on the extent to which the drive for sameness was constitutive of Pauline discourse by analyzing the function of imitation and its political effects in his letters:

the language of imitation, with its concomitant tension between the drive toward sameness and the inherent hierarchy of the mimetic relationship, masks the will to power which one finds in Pauline discourse. Paul’s appropriation of the discourse of mimesis is a powerful rhetorical move, because this language identifies the fundamental values of wholeness and unity with Paul’s own privileged position vis-à-vis the gospel, the early Christian communities he founded and supervises, and Christ himself. *Here is precisely where he makes his coercive move. To stand for anything other than what the apostle stands for is to articulate for oneself a place of difference, which has already implicitly been associated with discord and disorder.* To stand in a position of difference is to stand in opposition, therefore, to the gospel, the community, and Christ.⁹

8. This is not to deny the radically progressive intent nor even the radically progressive effect of Paul’s utterance. Indeed, one of the larger points of Daniel Boyarin’s forthcoming book *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* is to show precisely that ideals of universal human equality that have given rise to the French Revolution, the emancipation of slaves, and the feminist movement also flow from the fountainhead of Galatians 3:28–39. For the nonce, see Daniel Boyarin, “Paul and the Genealogy of Gender,” *Representations*, no. 41 (Winter 1993), in which this argument is expressly made. As Boyarin writes there:

In any case, if on the one hand, Wire points to the devastating history of male oppression of women in the name of Paul, one can also cite at least a nascent discourse and real history of chastity as female autonomy also carried out in his name in what is, after all, the Acts of Paul and Thekla for notable example. Similarly with regard to the parallel issue of slavery. Philemon has been used (maybe misused) as a text in the service of slavery. It is just as true, however, that Galatians 3:28 has been mobilized in anti-slavery discourses. The failure of consistency here does not involve Paul’s aspirations but his achievements. Others who come after may indeed be able to put into practice that which in Paul is fraught with contradiction. I think that the ultimate elimination of slavery in all of the Christian world is an eloquent case in point, although it took nearly two thousand years for Paul’s vision to be realized here. [Pp. 32–33 n. 91]

Indeed, if anything, the ultimate point of the present paper is that the progressive elements of that Western universalism that we are locating in Paul are inescapably bound up in their very problematic coerciveness. If, as Etienne Balibar argues (see n. 23 below), the very discourse of “the Rights of Man” provides the form for a particularly French racism, this does not mean that the world would be better off not having had those principles articulated.

9. Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville, Ky., 1991), p. 87; emphasis added.

Castelli describes the personal will to power implicit in the Pauline rhetorical drive toward sameness. The same analysis can be applied, however, to the politics of group relations even after the apostle's death. We suggest that as Paul gradually became not an embattled apostle for one kind of Christianity contending with others but the source of Christianity *tout court*, and as so-called pagans faded from the scene, the function of those who "stand in a position of difference" came to be filled almost exclusively in the discourse by the Jews, and the "coercive move" toward sameness came to be directed at the Jews.¹⁰ The place of difference increasingly becomes the Jewish place, and thus the Jew becomes the very sign of discord and disorder in the Christian polity. That this is so can be shown from the fact that as other "differences" appear on the medieval European scene (the Lollards, for example), they are figured in literature as "Jews."

It is, however, important to emphasize that Paul is not "anti-Semitic" or even anti-Jewish. From his perspective, the drive toward sameness was precisely to be understood as the fulfillment of Judaism, for "true" Jewishness was not an affair of descent "according to the flesh" (Gal. 4:21–31); nor was it an affair of practice according to the flesh, like circumcision (Rom. 2:28–29).¹¹ True Jewishness lay, according to Paul, precisely in renunciation of difference and entry into the one body of Christ. Anyone at all can be Jewish, and those who "call themselves Jews" are not necessarily Jewish at all.

This double reading of the sign *Jew* by Paul as both signifier of unruly difference and symbol of universalism has had fateful consequences for the Jews in the Christian West. Once Paul succeeded, "real Jews" ended up being only a trope. They have remained such for European discourse down to the present and even in the writings of leftists whose work is *explicitly* opposed to anti-Semitism—and even in the writings of Jews. Although well intentioned, any such allegorization of *Jew* is problematic in the extreme for the way that it deprives those who have historically grounded identities in those material signifiers of the power to speak for themselves and remain different. In this sense the "progressive" idealization of *Jew* and *woman*, or more usually, *jew* and *Woman*, ultimately deprives difference of the right to be different.

2

Sometimes the reference to the allegorized Jew is implicit or made in passing; in other recent works it is an explicit and central trope. An exam-

10. At least until new "pagans" were discovered in the early modern period.

11. For a full discussion, see Daniel Boyarin, "'This We Know to Be the Carnal Israel': Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Spring 1992): 474–506.

ple of the former is contained in Jean-Luc Nancy's recent *The Inoperative Community*. Nancy's central problem in that work is to formulate a notion of community that will not violate the standard of noncoercion. That standard holds that community is "the compearance [*comparution*] of singular beings." For Nancy, such singularity and the simultaneity that is a condition of it appear to imply an evacuation of history and memory. So many brutalities, so many violations of any notion of humanly responsible community have been carried out in the name of solidary collectives supposed to have obtained in the past, that Nancy seems to have renounced any possible recourse to memory in his attempt to think through the possibility of there ever being community without coercion. Of there ever *being*: the only community that does not betray the hope invested in that word, Nancy argues, is one that resists any kind of stable existence.¹²

The problem is that Nancy has in fact attempted a generalized model of community as *nonbeing*. Hence any already existing "community" is out of consideration by its very existence, relegated through philosophical necessity to a world we have lost or that never existed. Following Nancy's rhetoric, the only possible residues of that lost world are false community appearing as a serial, undifferentiated collective in the same analytic category as the fascist mass or, alternatively, an assemblage of unrelated individuals. The individual in turn "is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community," and furthermore, "the true consciousness of the loss of community is Christian" (*IC*, pp. 3, 10).

Although Nancy is silent on the relations among history, memory, and community, he considers at some length the apparently tortured relation between "myth" and community. For Nancy, myth—that necessary fiction that grounds the insistent specialness of the existent communal group—is an irreducible component of community and at the same time is necessarily pernicious in its effects. Therefore Nancy asserts a search not for the eradication of myth but rather for its "interruption": "The interruption of myth is therefore also, necessarily, the interruption of community" (*IC*, p. 57). In a footnote, Nancy elaborates on a comment made in 1984 by Maurice Blanchot:

"The Jews incarnate . . . the refusal of myths, the abandonment of idols, the recognition of an ethical order that manifests itself in respect for the law. What Hitler wants to annihilate in the Jew, in the 'myth of the Jew,' is precisely man freed from myth." This is another way of showing where and when myth was definitively interrupted. I would add this: "man freed from myth" belongs henceforth to a community that it is incumbent upon us to let come, to let write itself. [*IC*, p. 162 n. 40]

12. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor et al., ed. Connor (Minneapolis, 1991), p. 58; hereafter abbreviated *IC*.

We want to press, in a sense by literalizing, the opening offered here. The quote from Blanchot seems ambiguous if not contradictory: do the Jews literally “incarnate the refusal of myths,” or is that one of Hitler’s myths? Let us first pursue the first reading, which is both the more flattering and the more dangerous. This reading would tell us that community without myth was once the special possession of the Jews. Nancy’s “addition” would then explore the consequences of the release of that secret to “us” as a result of the genocide. What else, after all, can *henceforth* mean? We deeply respect the fact that this and other work of Nancy’s is explicitly motivated by the desire to understand and “unwork” the complicity between philosophy and twentieth-century violence.¹³ Nancy would doubtless be horrified and/or furious at the suggestion that his rhetoric is complicit in perpetuating the cultural annihilation of the Jew, yet it seems clear that this is one potential accomplishment of his further allegorization of Blanchot. *That which the Jew represented before “he” was annihilated is that which “we” must let come, must let write itself.* The word *henceforth* indeed implies that the secret of freedom from myth has passed from the Jews to a community that does not exist, that is only imaginable in and by theory. The secret becomes potentially available to all who await a second coming of this sacrificed Jew. We insist that this plausible yet “uncharitable” reading cannot be stretched to an accusation of anti-Judaism. On the contrary, it is clear that Nancy and thinkers like him are committed to a sympathetic philosophical comprehension of the existence and annihilation of the Jews. Our claim is rather that within the thought of philosophers such as Nancy lies a blindness to the particularity of Jewish difference that is itself part of a relentless penchant for allegorizing all “difference” into a univocal discourse.

Now let us pursue the alternate reading of Blanchot, and of Nancy’s gloss. Its implications are both more modest and more conducive to our project. According to this second reading of Blanchot, the Jews’ freedom from myth was primarily, if not exclusively, significant as a myth that murderously irritated Hitler. Nancy would then be saying not that “we” have inherited the secret of the Jews but rather that it is incumbent upon us—the pronoun this time not excluding in any way Jews living after the Nazi genocide—to assume the challenge of the myth of freedom from myth, to let come a community that is free from myth. We will suggest below that living Jews may have a particular contribution to make to that general effort, especially in the experience of Diaspora that has constrained Jews to create forms of community that do not rely on one of the most potent and dangerous myths—the myth of autochthony.

The critical text that has gone furthest in employing “the jew” as an

13. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, “The Nazi Myth,” trans. Brian Holmes, *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Winter 1990): 291–312.

allegorical trope for otherness is Jean-François Lyotard's recent *Heidegger and "the jews."* The title tells the story: *Heidegger* gets a capital *H*, but *the jews* are in lowercase. This is done, as the back cover blurb explains, "to represent the outsiders, the nonconformists: the artists, anarchists, blacks, homeless, Arabs, etc.—and the Jews."¹⁴ The Jews are doubtless chosen as exemplary both because the voices of some Jews are so prominent in European modernism and because of the enormous challenge of Nazi genocide to Enlightenment thought. But the name as used here is *essentially* a generic term standing for the other. And indeed Lyotard's book is all about the danger of forgetting that one ("one" in a position of relative power, that is) has always already forgotten the Other.

But why does Lyotard feel free to appropriate the name *the jews*? What does it mean for David Carroll, the author of the introduction to the English translation of Lyotard's book, to write in reference to Lyotard's citation of "Freud, Benjamin, Adorno, Arendt, Celan" that "these are ultimately 'the jews' we all have to read and even in some sense to become, 'the jews' we always already are but have forgotten we are, 'the jews' that Heidegger forgets at great cost for his thinking and writing" (*H*, p. xxiv)?

What Lyotard refuses to forget, remembering the negative example of Heidegger, is not so much upper- or lowercase Jews as Christian European crimes against humanity. In other words, Lyotard takes history seriously as an implication of philosophy, doubtless a vital exercise. This sketch of a critique, therefore, is not intended as an exposé of Lyotard but as a further implication of the universalizing, allegorizing traditions of Hellenistic philosophy as absorbed in Christian culture.

Lyotard basically repeats Sartre's thesis about the production of the Jew by the anti-Semite: "What is most real about real Jews is that Europe, in any case, does not know what to do with them: Christians demand their conversion; monarchs expel them; republics assimilate them; Nazis exterminate them. 'The jews' are the object of a dismissal with which Jews, in particular, are afflicted in reality" (*H*, p. 3). Let us pause at the first words here and test a paraphrase. How would it work if a man or a woman said, "What is most real about real women is that men continually try to dominate them"? The condescension of Lyotard's statement immediately becomes evident.

It would have been quite different if Lyotard had written rather, "What matters most to me here about those usually called 'Jews' is that Europe does not know what to do with them." There is no gain-saying the power of his insight. Europe indeed does not know what to do with "real Jews." But what of European philosophy? Is Lyotard not Europe here? Might we not fairly say, "Europe does not know what

14. Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews,"* trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis, 1990); hereafter abbreviated *H*.

to do with them," "philosophers allegorize them," and so on? To which one might comment that in doing so, they continue another particularly Christian practice with regard to uppercase Jews, one that begins with Paul.

Here we can see more analytically what is wrong with Carroll's rhetoric about us all becoming once again "the jews we always already are but have forgotten we are." We must resist the seduction of these sentiments, for like Paul's writing they deny, they *spiritualize* history. For some contemporary critics—indeed, those most profoundly concerned with the lessons of the encounter between Jewish identity and European self-adequation—it seems that the real Jew is the non-Jewish Jew. What does this say about the "reality" of those Jews—most of those who call themselves Jews, of course, are the untheorized, unphilosophical, unspiritualized Jews—who would think the phrase "non-Jewish Jew" to be nonsense? Is it politically correct, that is, ethical, to "forget" them and to fashion an imaginary dialogue with the other who is, in fact, the already sanctioned, official model of the "non-Jewish Jew," the Franz Kafkas and Walter Benjamins? For as we know, the vast majority of the Nazis' Jewish victims were unredeemed, "real" Jews.¹⁵

Against this incipient critique stands precisely the force implicit in Lyotard's act of allegorizing the name *jew*. Radiating out from the sun of philosophy, remembering the other by writing the "jew," Lyotard challenges all those who would fetishize their particular difference, insisting that we learn how to imagine ourselves as blacks, as Arabs, as homeless, as Indians. This is a political challenge, but Lyotard does not suggest how those who are themselves "real Jews" could respond to it. Indeed, he explains that one reason for his avoidance of the proper noun, of the uppercase "Jews," is to make clear that he is not discussing a particularly Jewish political subject, which he identifies as Zionism (*IC*, p. 3). We want to insist in response to Lyotard that there is a loss and a danger either in allegorizing away real, uppercase Jews or in regarding them primarily as a problem for Europe. Our claim entails in turn a responsibility to help articulate a Jewish political subject "other" than that of Zionism, which in fundamental ways merely reproduces the exclusivist syndromes of European nationalism. Zionism itself is predicated on a myth of autochthony. We will suggest that a Jewish subject-position founded on generational connection and its attendant anamnestic responsibilities and pleasures affords the possibility of a flexible and nonhermetic critical Jewish identity.

15. Lest there be confusion, we of course endorse Isaac Deutscher's actual point that modern Jewish radicals who do not practice the Jewish religion nevertheless can represent an appropriate way of enacting Jewishness in the contemporary world. See Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (New York, 1968).

In a recent essay, Walter Benn Michaels criticizes the notion of a cultural retentionism that is not “race”-based. His text is of extraordinary theoretical importance for the analysis of both the ancient dialectic between Paul and the Rabbis on the status of Jewish ethnicity, as well as for the current debate over ethnicity and multiculturalism in the United States. Michaels argues that all conceptions of cultural ethnicity are dependent on prior and often unacknowledged notions of race. In a series of examples, including the work on African-American culture of anthropologist Melville Herskovits and a novel of Oliver La Farge, Michaels argues that although they insist they are only talking about culture and not something that is biologically innate, they nevertheless assume that someone who does not “have” the culture of his or her “People” is in some sense lacking something and that the lack can be repaired.¹⁶ Michaels questions this assumption: if they do not already observe the practices of that culture, in what sense other than “racial” can it be said to be theirs? His conclusion is, “This is not to say, of course, that all accounts of cultural identity require a racial component; it is only to say that the accounts of cultural identity that do any cultural work require a racial component” (“RC,” p. 682). By this Michaels means that one is already either doing “Navajo things” or not. If one is doing them, then there is no cultural work to be done; they are one’s culture already. If one is not already doing them, then it can only make sense to call them one’s culture that one ought to be doing on the basis of an assumed or imputed biological identity as Navajo. He concludes that “the modern concept of culture is not, in other words, a critique of racism; it is a form of racism” (p. 683).

Michaels’s argument that any identification of culture with ethnicity is logically dependent on a genealogical connection for it to work at all seems correct. Yet by glossing as “racist” all claims for group identity based on genealogy (whatever the posture of that genealogy, rhetorical or biological, might be), he inscribes a particular ideology as natural. The residue of Michaels’s critique of genealogically based identity as “racist” is a radically individualist, voluntaristic, and attenuated notion of something that can only with difficulty be called “identity.” This valorization of any kind of elective and affective connection between people over against the claims of physical kinship is deeply embedded in the Platonic value system Europe has largely inherited from Paul. In opposition to a traditional Jewish culture, which, in virtually all of its varieties, considered literal descent from Abraham and thus physical kinship as of supreme value in establishing identity, Paul preached kinship in the spirit as the mark of identity. Secondly, where other Jewish groups insisted on the value of doing tradi-

16. Walter Benn Michaels, “Race into Culture: A Critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer 1992): 679–80; hereafter abbreviated “RC.”

tional Jewish things—the Law—as the practice of Jewish identity, Paul asserted the doing of new things, “better” things, baptism for instance, as the marker of Christian identity. Both of these moves are, moreover, crucially founded on the hierarchical dualism of spirit and flesh, with anything having to do with flesh implicitly and explicitly devalued.

The attenuation of memory in Michaels’s residual account of identity is shown by his remarks on Herskovits. Herskovits had argued that African practices were retained by house slaves who had been acculturated into the white culture through a process of “reabsorption” of “Africanisms.” To this Michaels reacts, “if you were trained as a house slave, why would absorbing Africanisms count as reabsorbing them?” (“RC,” p. 679). The function of this claim for Herskovits, as Michaels correctly argues, is precisely to avoid the necessity for assuming any “innate endowment” of cultural traits in order to bolster his argument for the African component of African-American culture. At this point, however, Michaels jumps from here to the following:

To make what *they* did part of *your* past, there must be some prior assumption of identity between you and them, and this assumption is as racial to Herskovits as it is in Cullen or La Farge. The things the African Negro used to do count as the American Negro’s past only because both the African and the American are “the Negro.” Herskovits’s anti-racist culturalism can only be articulated through a commitment to racial identity. [“RC,” p. 680]

Indeed. But this demonstration, repeated over and over in Michaels’s essay, does not in any way imply that cultural practices are “innately endowed,” as racialist (and racist) theories of cultural differentiation had been wont to do before the intervention of culturalists like Franz Boas and his followers, whose work, as we have said, had been largely accomplished by the 1920s.¹⁷

Let us think for a moment how Herskovits’s “house slaves” might have come to feel a sense of identity with the field slaves who had not been acculturated to the white norm. First of all, they might indeed have managed to *remember*—simply not forget—that their immediate ancestors had been Africans in Africa. Secondly, their bodies were marked as being different from the other people doing “white” things. Third, they shared a slave status with the field hands. Fourth, the notion of complete separation followed by reestablished contact is a pure fiction. Much more plausible would be a model of acculturation whereby these house slaves had been exposed to the culture of the other slaves that they had partially forgotten during the process of (presumably) early childhood “acculturation” to the house culture and that indeed they might reabsorb as adults.

17. For W. E. B. DuBois on this, see Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Illusion of Race,” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 30–32.

Identity is not only reinvented, as Michaels would have it; it is at least partially given for different people in different ways and intensities. Bodies are marked as different and often as negatively different to the dominant cultural system, thus producing a dissonance or gap between one's practices and affects. Partly assimilated, partly repressed, early childhood acculturation reasserts itself as a sense of dissonance, or guilt, as well. Contact with other people who share the name of a given identity and seem to feel organically connected to a community can produce a sense of nostalgia even in one who has never been near the things that that community does. Michaels obscures all of this by eliding racism—the idea of an innate capacity or tendency for certain practices—and generation understood as a kinship with other people who happen to do certain things. Versions of this same argument can be constructed for all of Michaels's deconstructions of culturalism.¹⁸

Michaels's text thus implicitly inscribes as natural another characteristically Protestant theme, a radical individualism, in which a person sufficiently makes her- or himself. For Michaels, apparently belonging to a culture cannot determine a life trajectory. There can be no "mark of identity that transcends one's actual practices and experiences. . . . The fact . . . that something belongs to our culture, cannot count as a motive for our doing it since, if it *does* belong to our culture we *already* do it and if we don't do it (if we've stopped or haven't yet started doing it) it doesn't belong to our culture" ("RC," pp. 681 n. 36, 682–83). Does this apply to children? Is there no model of *learning* or *transmission* here? What happens if we substitute *language* for *culture*? Should we say that it is racist to speak of teaching children "their language" because "their language" is what they know already, so there is no reason for parents to speak a different language than that of the majority to small children in order that they will know "their" native language as well as the dominant one? What about a thirteen-year-old child whom we have allowed until now to concentrate on learning the language/culture of the dominant group? Is it racist to send him or her to a school to learn "our" language? What about a thirty-year-old long-lost cousin who wants to reconnect with his or her "roots"? Michaels's individualism allows him to slip in the problematic pronoun *our*, which he employs in fact to mean not only each and every one of us, separately, but—as this quote shows—each and every one of us separately from any possible identity with ourselves yesterday or tomorrow because that would be to prescribe in a racist way what "our" identity is, separately from anything that happened before we, as particular organisms, were born.

18. We do mean deconstruction precisely in the technical sense in which one of the terms of a binary distinction, in this case between race and culture, is shown to be dependent on that which it seeks to exclude. Once again, Michaels has indeed shown the weakness of notions of "culture" dependent on their assumption of binary opposition to a pernicious and discredited account of race.

Male Jewish circumcision provides a particularly sharp disruption of Michaels's statement that no "mark of identity . . . transcends one's actual practices and experiences," for it certainly can be a mark that transcends one's actual practices and (at least remembered) experiences, yet it is a mark that can reassert itself, and often enough does, as a demand (almost a compulsion) to reconnect, relearn, reabsorb, and reinvent the doing of Jewish things.¹⁹ Indeed, one could understand circumcision precisely as the cultural construction of a genealogical differentiation, as a diacritic that symbolizes the biological status of Jewishness—not in the sense of a biological difference between Jews and others but in the sense of the biological connection that filiation provides. Further evidence that this connection has nothing to do with racism per se is the fact that one not Jewish can indeed adopt Jewish identity by taking on Jewish practices and through symbolic rebirth (and for men, physical marking) as a member of the Jewish People. It is thus not quite as obvious as Michaels claims it to be that a New York Jew cannot become a Mashpee Indian ("RC," p. 680 n. 36). Certainly a Mashpee Indian can become a Jew. Those Jewish subcultures that do promulgate racist or quasi-racist notions of Jewishness have great theological difficulty with conversion and ultimately retreat to the same kind of dualism of bodies and souls that characterizes Paul.

More revealingly, however, the convert's name is changed to "ben Avraham" or "bas Avraham," son or daughter of Abraham. The convert is adopted into the family and assigned a new "genealogical" identity, but because Abraham is the first convert in Jewish tradition, converts are his descendants in that sense as well. There is thus a sense in which the convert becomes the ideal type of the Jew. We not only do these things because we are this thing, but we are this thing because we do these things.

Michaels also marginalizes the political dimensions of cultural retention and loss: "Without race, losing our culture can mean no more than doing things differently from the way we now do them and preserving our culture can mean no more than doing things the same—the melodrama of assimilation disappears" ("RC," p. 685). He allows only that "the situation is entirely different with respect to compulsory assimilation; what puts the pathos back is precisely the element of compulsion" ("RC," p. 685 n. 41). However, as Michaels surely knows, power operates in many ways other than the exercise of actual compulsion. Ideological state apparatuses and discourses all press mightily on different identities to assimilate to the dominant culture. The pathos of notions such as assimilation, cultural demise, and cultural survival grows precisely out of the ways in which they are embedded in political processes of domination and exploitation. The insistence on the value of bodily connection and embodied practice that

19. See the analysis of the function of Daniel Deronda's circumcision in Sander Gilman, "'I'm Down on Whores': Race and Gender in Victorian London," in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis, 1990), pp. 162–63.

is emblematic of Judaism since Paul thus has significant critical power vis-à-vis the isolating and disembodied direction of Western idealist philosophies.

4

This feeling of identity between self and body, which, naturally, has nothing in common with popular materialism, will therefore never allow those who wish to begin with it to rediscover, in the depths of this unity, the duality of a free spirit that struggles against the body to which it is chained. On the contrary, for such people, the whole of the spirit's essence lies in the fact that it is chained to the body. To separate the spirit from the concrete forms with which it is already involved is to betray the originality of the very feeling from which it is appropriate to begin.²⁰

Levinas's statement here is extremely significant. If, as he claims, writing in 1934, the philosophy of Hitlerism is a reaction to German idealism with its disembodied notions of universal spirit, then we have a startling and troubling analogy with the reaction of rabbinic Judaism to similar philosophical developments in the Rabbis' world, a reaction that also rejected the notion of "the duality of a free spirit that struggles against the body to which it is chained." Levinas argues that the philosophy of Hitlerism consists precisely of a struggle against this flight from the body so characteristic of Western culture, a protest against the disgust with corporeality that makes one ashamed of having parents, genealogical connections, or a native country. Like white cells gone wild and destroying healthy tissue, this reaction turned into the most destructive horror that human beings have ever invented. With a terrifying irony, then, the rabbinic reaction against dualism in late antiquity bears strong analogies to this modern one. If Lyotard continues Paul, does Heidegger continue the Rabbis?

The reaction against such idealism and disembodiment in "the philosophy of Hitlerism" produced the worst violence that human beings have ever perpetrated against each other, but Judaism, in a similar reaction, did not. The most violent practice that rabbinic Judaism ever developed vis-à-vis its Others was spitting on the floor in the synagogue or walking around the block to avoid passing a pagan or Christian place of worship. Something else was needed for the potential negative implications of the culture to become actualized. That necessity is power over others. Particularism plus power yields tribal warfare or fascism.

20. Emmanuel Levinas, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" (1934), trans. Seán Hand, *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Autumn 1990): 68–69.

Christianity plus power has also yielded horror. If particularism plus power tends toward fascism, then universalism plus power produces imperialism and cultural annihilation as well as, all too often, actual genocide of those who refuse to conform. Our thesis is that Judaism and Christianity, as two different hermeneutic systems for reading the Bible, generate two diametrically opposed and mirror-image forms of racism—and also two dialectical possibilities of antiracism.²¹ The genius of Christianity is its concern for all the peoples of the world; the genius of Judaism is its ability to leave other people alone.²² And the evils of the two systems are the precise obverse of these genii. The genies all too easily become demons. Christian universalism, even at its most liberal and benevolent, has been a powerful force for coercive discourses of sameness, denying, as we have seen, the rights of Jews, women, and others to retain their difference. As Etienne Balibar has brilliantly realized, this universalism is indeed a racism:

This leads us to direct our attention towards a historical fact that is even more difficult to admit and yet crucial, taking into consideration the French national form of racist traditions. There is, no doubt, a specifically French brand of the doctrines of Aryanism, anthropometry and biological geneticism, but the true “French ideology” is not to be found in these: it lies rather in the idea that the culture of the “land of the Rights of Man” has been entrusted with a universal mission to educate the human race. There corresponds to this mission a practice of assimilating dominated populations and a consequent need to differentiate and rank individuals or groups in terms of their greater or lesser aptitude for—or resistance to—assimilation. It was this simultaneously subtle and crushing form of exclusion/inclusion which was deployed in the process of colonization and the strictly French (or “democratic”) variant of the “White man’s burden.”²³

21. Etienne Balibar, in a quite different historical context, writes: “In fact racism figures *both* on the side of the universal and the particular” (Etienne Balibar, “Racism and Nationalism,” trans. Chris Turner, in Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* [London, 1991], p. 54).

22. Paula Fredriksen cites abundant evidence to the effect that in antiquity Jews permitted Gentiles to attend the synagogue without conversion and even if they continued to worship idols! See her *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (New Haven, Conn., 1988), pp. 149–51.

23. Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” in *Race, Nation, Class*, p. 24; hereafter abbreviated “I.” To be sure, there are those who would locate the origins of this “universal mission to educate the human race” in the “imperialist” monotheism of the Hebrew Bible, and ultimately, of course, the Hebraic and Hellenic sources of Christianity cannot be neatly separated out. There are aspects of both the Israelite history and of the prophetic discourse that could give rise to such a reading. Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity—in their relation to peoplehood and universalism—are interpreted by us, in a sense, as mutual thesis and antithesis within the biblical system. See further discussion below, as well as our reach for a synthesis.

Thus paradoxically and tragically, at the very heart of those most truly progressive discourses of Europe, including Marxism, the inability to accommodate difference provides a fatal flaw. This inability was characteristic of German liberalism, as Marc Shell points out,²⁴ and still persists in the United States of today in such “liberal” expressions as “too Jewish.”²⁵ Shell documents such notions in the discourse of the contemporary Russian ideologue Igor Sharevich, who argues that Jews must abandon their difference if they wish to be full citizens of Russia.²⁶ The paradox in such discourse is that nearly always, as Shell emphasizes, the justification for coercing Jews to become Christian Russian citizens of the world is the alleged intolerance of the Jews. The parallels between this modern liberal discourse and that of Paul seem obvious.

The Rabbis’ insistence on the centrality of peoplehood can thus be read as a necessary critique of Paul, for if the Pauline move had within it the possibility of breaking out of the tribal allegiances and commitments to one’s own family, as it were, it also contains the seeds of an imperialist and colonizing missionary practice. The very emphasis on a universalism expressed as the concern for all of the families of the world turns very rapidly (if not necessarily) into a doctrine that they must all become part of our family of the spirit with all of the horrifying practices against Jews and other Others that Christian Europe produced. The doctrine of the Apostle of the Free Spirit can be diverted, even perverted, to a doctrine of enslaving and torturing bodies. Paul had indeed written, with notorious ambiguity, “For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and if present I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has [lived with his father’s wife]. When you are assembled and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:3–5). It is surely Paul’s own sense of self, divided into body and spirit so that this spirit can be where his body is not—and he means this literally—that permits him to suggest (if that is what is meant) and his followers to practice torturing and killing bodies to save the souls. As Henri Baudet has remarked concerning

24. “Moses Mendelssohn in his *Jerusalem* tried to steer the ideology of a universalist Enlightenment . . . away from what he took to be its probably inevitable course towards barbarism. . . . In the Germany of his day Jews were pressured to renounce their faith in return for civil equality and union with the Christian majority. The pressure was kindly, but it was also a form of intolerance towards non-kin” (Marc Shell, “Marranos [Pigs], or From Coexistence to Toleration,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 [Winter 1991]: 331).

25. On this point see Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York, 1991), pp. 25–27. At Oxford University, the Centre for Advanced Hebrew Studies holds its dinners on Friday night (even though many of its participants cannot, therefore, attend) because “we are not a Jewish institution; we are an Oxford institution.” This is, we submit, an example of the internalization of the racist demand for universalism.

26. See Shell, “Marranos (Pigs),” p. 332 n. 84.

late fifteenth-century Portugal, "although the bodies of Negroes might be held captive, this very fact made it possible for their souls to achieve true freedom through conversion to Christianity. And so the enslavement of Negroes took on a kind of missionary aspect. It was in keeping that christened Negro slaves should enjoy certain small privileges above their fellows."²⁷ Disdain for the bodies of others combined with concern for the souls can thus be even more devastating than neglect. From the retrospective position of a world that has, at the end of the second Christian millennium, become thoroughly interdependent, each one of these options is intolerable.

Critics of Zionism, both Arab and others, along with both Jewish and non-Jewish anti-Semites, have often sought to portray Jewish culture as essentially racist. This foundational racism is traced to the Hebrew Bible and is described as the transparent meaning of that document. Critics who are otherwise fully committed to constructionist and historicist accounts of meaning and practice abandon this commitment when it comes to the Hebrew Bible—assuming that the Bible is, in fact and in essence, that which it has been read to be and authorizes univocally that which it has been taken to authorize. Frederick Turner writes, "But the distinctions raised in the covenant between religion and idolatry are like some visitation of the khamsin to wilderness peoples as yet unsuspected, dark clouds over Africa, the Americas, the Far East, until finally even the remotest islands and jungle enclaves are struck by fire and sword and by the subtler weapon of conversion-by-ridicule (Deuteronomy 2:34; 7:2; 20:16–18, Joshua 6:17–21)."²⁸ The historically and materially defined local practices of a culture far away and long ago are made here "naturally" responsible (like the khamsin, the Middle Eastern Santa Ana) for the colonial practices of cultures entirely other to it simply because those later cultures used those practices as their authorization.²⁹ One effect of this sudden dehistoricization of hermeneutics has been an exoneration of European

27. Henri Baudet, *Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man*, trans. Elizabeth Wentholt (New Haven, Conn., 1965), p. 30. In California, certain missionaries had thousands of Indian babies killed so that their souls would be saved before their bodies could sin.

28. Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit against the Wilderness* (New York, 1980), p. 45. In his book, *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis, 1992), p. 134 n. 13, Jonathan Boyarin has provided a summary critique of Turner's book. See also on this theme Regina Schwartz, "Monotheism, Violence, and Identity," in *Religion and Literature*, ed. Mark Krupnick (forthcoming).

29. A particularly extreme and explicit version of this naturalizing and dehistoricizing move vis-à-vis biblical hermeneutics is found in Donald Harman Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992), who writes, "For certain societies, in certain eras of their development, the scriptures have acted culturally and socially in the same way the human genetic code operates physiologically. That is, this great code has, in some degree, directly determined what people would believe and what they would think and what they would do" (p. 9).

Christian society that has been, after all, the religious hegemonic system for virtually all of the imperialist, racist, and even genocidal societies of the West, but not, of course, Judaism. There were no Jewish missionaries in the remote islands and jungle enclaves. It is not the Hebrew Bible that impels the “Societies for the Propagation” but rather Pauline rhetoric like “For as in Adam all men died, so in Christ all men shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). Jews and Jewish culture will have to answer for the evil that we do (especially to the Palestinians), but it is absurd for “the Jews” to be implicated in practices in which they had no part and indeed have had no part even until now: forced conversion, deculturation, genocide.³⁰ Even the primitive command to wipe out the peoples of Canaan was limited by the Bible itself to those particular people in that particular place, and thus declared no longer applicable by the Rabbis of the Talmud.³¹ It is precisely the very literalism of rabbinic/midrashic hermeneutics that prevented a typological “application” of this command to other groups. It should be clearly recognized, then, that the attempt of the integrationist Zionist Gush Emunim movement to refigure the Palestinians as Amalek and to reactivate the genocidal commandment is a radical act of religious revisionism and not in any way a continuation of historical rabbinic Judaism.

Does this mean that rabbinic Judaism qua ideology is innocent of either ethnocentric or supremacist tenets? Certainly not. What it argues is rather that Jewish racism, like the racism of other peoples, is a facultative and dispensable aspect of the cultural system, not one that is necessary for its preservation or essential to its nature. Perhaps the primary function for a critical construction of cultural (or racial or gender or sexual) identity is to construct it in ways that purge it of its elements of domination and oppression. Some, however, would argue that this is an impossible project not because of the nature of Jewishness but because any group identity is oppressive, unless it is oppressed.

In a recent Marxian analysis of both race and racism, Balibar has argued that “racism” has two dissymmetrical aspects. On the one hand, it constitutes a dominating community with practices, discursive and otherwise, that are “articulated around stigmata of otherness (name, skin colour, religious practices).” It also constitutes, however, “the way in which, as a mirror image, individuals and collectives that are prey to racism (its ‘objects’) find themselves constrained to see themselves as a community.” Balibar further argues that destruction of racism implies the

30. See Shell, “Marranos (Pigs),” for the argument that Jewish reluctance to convert others is built into the system and not merely a result of later material and historical conditions. We think, however, that Shell underestimates the potential for grounding racist thought in other aspects of biblical discourse.

31. See Jonathan Boyarin, “Reading Exodus into History,” *New Literary History* 23 (Summer 1992): 523–54.

“internal decomposition of the community created by racism,” by which he means the dominating community, as is clear from his analogy to the overcoming of sexism that will involve “the break-up of the community of ‘males’” (“I,” p. 18). This is, however, for us the crucial point, for the question is, obviously, if overcoming sexism involves the breaking up of the community of males, does it necessarily imply the breaking up of the community of females? And does this, then, not entail a breaking up of community, *tout court*? Putting it another way, are we not simply imposing a more coercive universal? On the other hand, if indeed the very existence of the dominant group is dependent on domination, if identity is always formed in a master-slave relationship, is the price not too high? What we wish to struggle for, theoretically, is a notion of identity in which there are only slaves but no masters, that is, an alternative to the model of self-determination, which is, after all, in itself a Western, imperialist imposition on the rest of the world. We propose Diaspora as a theoretical and historical model to replace national self-determination.³² To be sure, this would be an idealized Diaspora generalized from those situations in Jewish history when Jews were both relatively free from persecution and yet constituted by strong identity—those situations, moreover, within which Promethean Jewish creativity was not antithetical, indeed was synergistic with a general cultural activity. Another way of making the same point would be to insist that there are material and social conditions in which cultural identity, difference, will not produce even what Balibar, after P. A. Taguieff, has called “differentialist racism,” that is,

a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but “only” the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions; in short, it is what P. A. Taguieff has rightly called a *differentialist racism*. [“I,” p. 21]

To our understanding, it would be an appropriate goal to articulate a theory and practice of identity that would simultaneously respect the irreducibility and the positive value of cultural differences, address the harmfulness, not of abolishing frontiers but of dissolution of uniqueness, and encourage the mutual fructification of different life-styles and traditions. We do not think, moreover, that such possibilities are merely utopian. We would certainly claim that there have been historical situations in which they obtained without perfect success in this radically imperfect

32. To the extent that this diasporic existence is an actual historical entity, we ourselves are not prey to the charge of “allegorizing” the Jew. It may be fairly suggested, however, that the model is so idealized as to be in itself an allegory.

world. The solution of Zionism—that is, Jewish state hegemony, except insofar as it represented an emergency and temporary rescue operation—seems to us the subversion of Jewish culture and not its culmination. It represents the substitution of a European, Western cultural-political formation for a traditional Jewish one that has been based on a sharing, at best, of political power with others and that takes on entirely other meanings when combined with political hegemony.

Let us begin with two concrete examples. Jewish resistance to assimilation and annihilation within conditions of Diaspora, to which we will return below, generated such practices as communal charity in the areas of education, feeding, providing for the sick, and the caring for Jewish prisoners, to the virtual exclusion of others. While this meant at least that those others were not subjected to attempts to Judaize them—that is, they were tolerated, and not only by default of lack of Jewish power—it also meant that Jewish resources were not devoted to the welfare of humanity at large but only to one family. Within Israel, where power is concentrated almost exclusively in Jewish hands, this discursive practice has become a monstrosity whereby an egregiously disproportionate measure of the resources of the state is devoted to the welfare of only one segment of the population. A further and somewhat more subtle and symbolic example is the following. That very practice mentioned above, the symbolic expression of contempt for places of worship of others, becomes darkly ominous when it is combined with temporal power and domination—that is, when Jews have power over places of worship belonging to others. It is this factor that has allowed the Israelis to turn the central Mosque of Beersheba into a museum of the Negev and to let the Muslim cemetery of that city to fall into ruins.³³ Insistence on ethnic speciality, when it is extended over a particular piece of land, will inevitably produce a discourse not unlike the Inquisition in many of its effects. The archives of the Israeli General Security Services will one day prove this claim eminently, although already we “know” the truth.

We are not comparing Israeli practice to Nazism, for that would occlude more than it reveals and would obscure the real, imminent danger of its becoming the case in the future; the use of *Lebensraum* rhetoric on the part of mainstream Israeli politicians and the ascent to respectability and a certain degree of power of fascist parties in Israel certainly provide portents of this happening. Our argument is rather for an as yet un-

33. A highly ingenuous, or more likely egregiously disingenuous, claim by Abba Eban is given the lie in every page of Israeli history, particularly the last ones. Beersheba may have been “virtually empty,” but that is little consolation to the Bedouin who were and continue to be dispossessed there and in its environs. And the refugees in camps in Gaza, as well as the still-visible ruins of their villages, would certainly dispute the claim that Arab populations had avoided “the land of the Philistines in the coastal plain . . . because of insalubrious conditions” (Abba Eban, letter to W. D. Davies, in Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* [1982; Minneapolis, 1992], p. 76; hereafter abbreviated *T*).

realized but necessary theoretical compatibility between Zionist ideology and the fascism of state ethnicity. Capturing Judaism in a state transforms entirely the meanings of its social practices. Practices that in Diaspora have one meaning—for example, caring for the feeding and housing of Jews and not “others”—have entirely different meanings under political hegemony. E. P. Sanders has gotten this just right:

More important is the evidence that points to Jewish pride in separatism. Christian scholars habitually discuss the question under the implied heading “What was wrong with Judaism that Christianity corrected?” Exclusivism is considered to be bad, and the finding that Jews were to some degree separatist fills many with righteous pride. We shall all agree that exclusivism is bad when practiced by the dominant group. Things look different if one thinks of minority groups that are trying to maintain their own identity. I have never felt that the strict Amish are iniquitous, and I do not think that, in assessing Jewish separatism in the Diaspora, we are dealing with a moral issue. (The moral issue would be the treatment of Gentiles in Palestine during periods of Jewish ascendancy. How well were the biblical laws to love the resident alien [Lev. 19:33–34] observed?)³⁴

The inequities—and worse—in Israeli political, economic, and social practice are not aberrations but inevitable consequences of the inappropriate application of a form of discourse from one historical situation to another.

For those of us who are equally committed to social justice and collective Jewish existence, some other formation must be constituted. We suggest that an Israel that reimports diasporic consciousness—a consciousness of a Jewish collective as one sharing space with others, devoid of exclusivist and dominating power—is the only Israel that could answer Paul’s, Lyotard’s, and Nancy’s call for a species-wide care without eradicating cultural difference.³⁵ Reversing A. B. Yehoshua’s famous pronouncement that only in a condition of political hegemony is moral responsibility mobilized, we would argue that the only moral path would be the renunciation of Jewish hegemony qua Jewish hegemony.³⁶ This would involve first of all complete separation of religion from state, but even more than that the revocation of the Law of Return and such cul-

34. E. P. Sanders, “Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11–14,” in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa (Nashville, Tenn., 1990), p. 181.

35. See Jonathan Boyarin, “Palestine and Jewish History,” chap. 7 of *Storm from Paradise*.

36. Shell argues, following Spinoza, that temporal power is necessary for toleration (“Marranos [Pigs],” p. 328 n. 75). We are suggesting the opposite, that only conditions in which power is shared among religions and ethnicities will allow for difference with common caring.

tural, discursive practices that code the state as a Jewish state and not a multinational and multicultural one. The dream of a place that is ours founders on the rock of realization that there are Others there just as there are Others in Poland, Morocco, and Ethiopia. Any notion, then, of redemption through Land must either be infinitely deferred (as the Neturei Karta understands so well) or become a moral monster. Either Israel must entirely divest itself of the language of race and become truly a state that is equally for all of its citizens and collectives or the Jews must divest themselves of their claim to space. Race and space together form a deadly discourse.

Genealogy and *territorialism* have been the problematic and necessary (if not essential) terms around which Jewish identity has revolved. In Jewish history, however, these terms are more obviously at odds with each other than in synergy. This allows a formulation of Jewish identity not as a proud resting place (hence not as a form of integrism or nativism) but as a perpetual, creative, diasporic tension. In the final section of this paper, then, we would like to begin to articulate a notion of Jewish identity that recuperates its genealogical moment—family, history, memory, and practice—while it problematizes claims to autochthony and indigeness as the material base of Jewish identity.

5

The Tanak and other sources of Judaism reveal certain ideas concerning The Land that reflect, or are parallel to, primitive Semitic, other Near Eastern, and, indeed, widespread conceptions about the significance of their land to a particular people. Israel is represented as the center of the Earth. . . . The religious man desires to live as near to this sacred space as possible and comes to regard it, the place of his abode, his own land, as the centre of the world. [*T*, p. 1; see also p. 87]

There are two diametrically opposed moments in the Jewish discourse of the Land. On the one hand, it is crucial to recognize that the Jewish conception of the Land of Israel is similar to the discourse of the Land of many (if not nearly all) “indigenous” peoples of the world. Somehow the Jews have managed to retain a sense of being rooted somewhere in the world through twenty centuries of exile from that someplace (organic metaphors are not out of place in this discourse, for they are used within the tradition itself).

It is profoundly disturbing to hear Jewish attachment to the Land decried as regressive in the same discursive situations in which the attachment of native Americans or Australians to their particular rocks, trees, and deserts is celebrated as an organic connection to the Earth that

“we” have lost.³⁷ The uncritical valorization of indigenouness (and particularly the confusion between political indigenouness and mystified autochthony) must come under critique, without wishing, however, to deny the rights of native Americans, Australians, and Palestinians to their Lands precisely on the basis of real, unmysterious political claims. If, on the other hand, Jews are to give up hegemony over the Land, this does not mean that the profundity of our attachment to the Land can be denied. This also must have a political expression in the present, in the provision of the possibility for Jews to live a Jewish life in a Palestine not dominated by one ethnic group or another.

On the other hand, the biblical story is not one of autochthony but one of always already coming from somewhere else. As Davies has so very well understood, the concept of a divine promise to give this land that is the land of Others to His People Israel is the sign of a bad conscience for having deprived the Others of their Land (see *T*, pp. 11–12).³⁸ Thus at the same time that one vitally important strain of expression within biblical religion promotes a sense of organic, “natural” connectedness between this People and this Land—a settlement in the Land—in another sense or in a counterstrain, Israelite and Jewish religion is perpetually an unsettlement of the very notion of autochthony.

Traditional Jewish attachment to the Land, whether biblical or post-biblical, thus provides a self-critique as well as a critique of identities based on notions of autochthony. Some myths about “the tree over there from which the first man sprung,” along with European nationalist myths about Atlantis,³⁹ have been allowed to harden into a confusion of “indigenous” (the people who belong here, whose land this rightfully is—a political claim, founded on present and recently past political realities) and “autochthonous” (the people who were never anywhere else but here and

37. An aboriginal Australian recently began her lecture at a conference with greetings from her people to the indigenous people of the United States, of whom there were two representatives in the audience and whom she addressed by name. Much of her lecture consisted of a critique of the rootlessness of Europeans. Daniel Boyarin had a sense of being trapped in a double bind, for if the Jews are the indigenous people of the Land of Israel, as Zionism claims, then the Palestinians are indigenous nowhere, but if the Palestinians are the indigenous people of Palestine, then Jews are indigenous nowhere. He had painfully renounced the possibility of realizing his very strong feeling of connection to the Land (this connection having been co-opted by the state) in favor of what he and Jonathan Boyarin take to be the only possible end to violence and movement toward justice. Are we now to be condemned as people who have lost their roots?

38. Davies remarks that this sense of “bad conscience” can be found in texts as late as the first century B.C.E. We think he underestimates this. The classical midrash on Genesis, *Bereshith Rabba*, a product of the fourth and fifth centuries C.E., begins with the question, “Why does the Torah open with the creation of the world?” It answers, “So that when the Nations will call Israel robbers for their theft of the Land, they will be able to point to the Torah and say: God created the earth and can dispose of it at his will!” (our trans.).

39. See Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “Atlantis and the Nations,” trans. Janet Lloyd, *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Winter 1992): 300–326.

have a natural right to this land). The Jewish narrative of the Land has the power of insisting on the connection without myths of autochthony, while other narratives, including the Zionist one, have repressed memories of coming from somewhere else. The confusion between indigenoussness and autochthony is of the same kind as the confusion in Michaels's text between any kind of genealogically based racism belonging to a people and modern scientific racism.

These very conflations are complicitous with a set of mystifications within which nationalist ideologies subsist. Harry Berger argues that "the alienation of social constructions of divinity and cosmos by conquest groups resembles the alienation of socially constructed kinship and status terms from domestic kin groups to corporate descent groups—in anthropological jargon, from the ego-centered kinship system of families to the more patently fictional ancestor-centered system of lineages."⁴⁰ Distinguishing between forms of "weak transcendence" and "strong transcendence," Berger argues that "family membership illustrates weak kinship; tribal membership, strong kinship." Strong transcendence is more aggressive because it is more embattled and does more ideological work, that is, according to Berger, serves to justify land control. "Status that depends on land is generally more precarious and alienable than status inscribed on the body; mobile subsistence economies tend to conceptualize status in terms of the signifying indices of the body—indices of gender, age, and kinship—rather than of more conspicuously artificial constructions, and are closer to the weak end of the weak-to-strong scale" ("L," p. 121). The place of the first of these alienations can, however, be taken by the alienation of a socially constructed connection to a land by myths of autochthony and the unique belonging of this land to a people, an alienation that can serve the interest of conquerors, as easily as by the transcendental legitimation of kings. Thus if Berger, following Walter Brueggemann, contrasts two covenants, one the Mosaic, which rejects "the imperial gods of a totalitarian and hierarchic social order" ("L," p. 123), and one, the Davidic, which enthrones precisely those gods as the one God, we could just as well contrast two trajectories, the one toward autochthony and the one against it, in the same way. The first would support the rule of Israelite kings over territory; the second would serve to oppose it.⁴¹

40. Harry Berger, Jr., "The Lie of the Land: The Text beyond Canaan," *Representations*, no. 25 (Winter 1989): 121; hereafter abbreviated "L."

41. For an even more nuanced reading of tensions within the Davidic stories themselves, see Schwartz, "Nations and Nationalism: Adultery in the House of David," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Autumn 1992): 142. Schwartz's forthcoming book will deal with many of the themes of identity in the Bible that this essay is treating, albeit with quite different methods and often with quite different results.

The dialectical struggle between antiroyalism and royalism persists throughout the course and formative career of the Old Testament as its structuring force. It sets the tent against the house, nomadism against agriculture, the wilderness against Canaan, wandering and exile against settlement, diaspora against the political integrity of a settled state. ["L," p. 123]

Our argument, then, is that a vision of Jewish history and identity that valorizes the second half of each of these binary systems and sees the first as only a disease constitutes not a continuation of Jewish culture but its final betrayal.

Berger, however, has also implicated "ancestor-centered systems of lineages" as ideological mystifications in the service of the state power of conquest groups while we have held up such an organization as one feasible component of an alternative to statism. Empirically, tribal organization, with its concomitant myths of the eponymous ancestor, is nearly emblematic of nomadic peoples. Berger's own discourse, however, is inconsistent here, for only a page later he will refer to the premonarchic period of Israel ("roughly from 1250 to 1000 B.C.") as a sociological experiment in "the rejection of strong transcendence in favor of a less coercive and somewhat weaker alternative, the tribal system that cuts across both local allegiances and stratificational discontinuities" ("L," p. 123). Thus Berger first puts tribalism on the side of "strong transcendence" and then on the side of "weak." Against Berger's first claim on this point and in favor of his second, we would argue that talk of the eponymous ancestors, of the patriarchs, is conspicuously less prominent in the "Davidic" texts of the settlement than in the "Mosaic" texts of the wandering. As Berger himself writes, David "tried to displace the loyalties and solidarity of kinship ties from clans and tribes to the national dynasty" ("L," p. 124). We suggest that descent from a common ancestor is rather an extension of family kinship and not its antithesis and thus on the side of wilderness and not on the side of Canaan. Even the myth of descent from common ancestry belongs rather to the semantic field of status through the body and not to the semantic field of status through land. Diaspora, in historical Judaism, can be interpreted then as the later analogue to nomadism in the earlier set of material conditions and thus as a continuation of the sociological experiment that the Davidic monarchy symbolically overturns.⁴² With the

42. It is important to emphasize that this analysis is indifferent to the historical question of whether there were nomadic Israelite tribes to begin with or the thesis (made most famous by the work of Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* [Maryknoll, N.Y., 1979]) that ascribes them to a "retribalization" process taking place among "native" Canaanites. For a discussion of this thesis, see "L," pp. 131-32. For our purposes, the representations of the tribes as nomadic and the ideological investments in that representation are indifferent to the "actual" history.

rabbinic “invention” of Diaspora, the radical experiment of Moses was advanced. The forms of identification typical of nomads, those marks of status in the body, remained, then, crucial to this formation. Race is here on the side of the radicals; space, on the other hand, belongs to the despots.

One modernist story of Israel, the Israeli Declaration of Independence, begins with an imaginary autochthony—“In the Land of Israel this people came into existence”—and ends with the triumphant return of the People to their natural Land, making them “re-autochthonized,” “like all of the nations.” Israeli state power, deprived of the option of self-legitimation through appeal to a divine king, discovered autochthony as a powerful replacement. An alternative story of Israel, closer, it would seem, to the readings of the Judaism lived for two thousand years, begins with a people forever unconnected with a particular land, a people that calls into question the idea that a people must have a land in order to be a people. “The Land of Israel was not the birthplace of the Jewish people, which did not emerge there (as most peoples have on their own soil). On the contrary it had to enter its own Land from without; there is a sense in which Israel was born in exile. Abraham had to leave his own land to go to the Promised Land: the father of Jewry was deterritorialized” (*T*, p. 63).⁴³ In this view, the stories of Israel’s conquest of the Land, whether under Abraham, Joshua, or even more prominently under David, are always stories that are compromised with a sense of failure of mission even more than they are stories of the accomplishment of mission, and the internal critique within the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) itself, the dissident voice that is nearly always present, does not let us forget this either. Davies also brings into absolutely clear focus a prophetic discourse of preference for “exile” over rootedness in the Land (together with a persistent hope of eschatological restoration), a prophetic discourse that has been totally occluded in modern Zionist ideological representations of the Bible and of Jewish history but was pivotal in the rabbinic ideology (see *T*, pp. 15–19).

The Rabbis produced their cultural formation within conditions of Diaspora, and we would argue that their particular discourse of ethnocentricity is ethically appropriate only when the cultural identity is an embattled (or, at any rate, nonhegemonic) minority. The point is not that the Land was devalued by the Rabbis but that they renounced it until the final redemption; in an unredeemed world, temporal dominion and ethnic particularity are impossibly compromised. Davies phrases the position just right when he says, “It was its ability to detach its loyalty from ‘place,’

43. Also: “The desert is, therefore, the place of revelation and of the constitution of ‘Israel’ as a people; there she was elected” (*T*, p. 39). Davies’s book is remarkable for many reasons, one of which is surely the way that while it intends to be a defense and explanation of Zionism as a deeply rooted Jewish movement, it consistently and honestly documents the factors in the tradition that are in tension with such a view.

while nonetheless retaining 'place' in its memory, that enabled Pharisaism to transcend the loss of its Land" (*T*, p. 69).⁴⁴ Our only addition would be to argue that this displacement of loyalty from place to memory of place was necessary not only to transcend the loss of the Land but to enable the loss of the Land. Political possession of the Land most threatened the possibility of continued Jewish cultural practice and difference. Given the choice between an ethnocentricity that would not seek domination over others and a seeking of political domination that would necessarily have led either to a dilution of distinctiveness, tribal warfare, or fascism, the Rabbis chose ethnocentricity. Zionism is thus a subversion of rabbinic Judaism, and it is no wonder that until World War II Zionism was a secular movement to which very few religious Jews adhered, seeing it as a human arrogation of a work that only God should or could perform.⁴⁵ This is,

44. We think that Davies occasionally seems to lose his grip on his own great insight by confusing ethnic identity with political possession (see *T*, pp. 90–91 n. 10). The same mixture appears also when he associates, it seems, deterritorialization and deculturation (p. 93). It is made clear when he writes, "At the same time the age-long engagement of Judaism with The Land in religious terms indicates that ethnicity and religion . . . are finally inseparable in Judaism" (p. 97). We certainly agree that ethnicity and religion are inseparable in Judaism, but we fail to see the necessary connection between ethnicity, religion, and territoriality. Moreover, a people can be on their land without this landedness being expressed in the form of a nation-state, and landedness can be shared in the same place with others who feel equally attached to the same land. This is the solution of the Neturei Karta, who live, after all, in Jerusalem but do not seek political hegemony over it.

45. Davies states that "for religious Jews, we must conclude, The Land is ultimately inseparable from the state of Israel, however much the actualities of history have demanded their distinction" (*T*, p. 51). Yet clearly many religious Jews have not felt that way at all. Although we do not deny entirely the theological bona fides of religious Zionism as one option for modern Jewish religious thought, the fact that they are the historical "winners" in an ideological struggle should not blind us to the fact that their option was, until only recently, just one option for religious Jews, and a very contested one at that. Even the theological "patron saint" of religious Zionists, the holy Rabbi Loewe (Mahara") of Prague, who, as Davies points out, "understood the nature and role of nations to be ordained by God, part of the natural order," and that "nations were intended to cohere rather than be scattered"; even he held that "reestablishment of a Jewish state should be left to God" (*T*, p. 33). Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav's desire to touch any part of the Land and then immediately return to Poland hardly bespeaks a proto-Zionism either (*ibid.*). Davies nuances his own statement when he remarks, "Zionism cannot be equated with a reaffirmation of the eternal relation of The Land, the people, and the Deity, except with the most cautious reservations, since it is more the expression of nationalism than of Judaism" (*T*, p. 64). Davies is right, however, in his claim that J. J. Petuchowski's statement—that there can be a "full-blooded Judaism which is in no need to hope and to pray for a messianic return to Palestine" (J. J. Petuchowski, "Diaspora Judaism—An Abnormality?" *Judaism* 9 [1960]: 27)—is missing something vital about historical Jewish tradition. The desire, the longing for unity, coherence, and groundedness in the utopian future of the messianic age is, as Davies eminently demonstrates, virtually inseparable from historical Judaism (*T*, p. 66). There is surely a "territorial theological tradition." At issue rather is its status in premessianic praxis.

moreover, the basis, even to this day, for the anti-Zionist ideology of such groups as Neturei Karta.

The dialectic between Paul and the Rabbis can be recuperated for cultural critique. When Christianity is the hegemonic power in Europe and the United States, the resistance of Jews to being universalized can be a critical force and model for the resistance of all peoples to being Europeanized out of particular bodily existence. When, however, an ethnocentric Judaism becomes a temporal, hegemonic political force, it becomes absolutely, vitally necessary to accept Paul's critical challenge—although not his universalizing, disembodied solution—and to develop an equally passionate concern for all human beings. We, including religious Jews—perhaps especially religious Jews—must take seriously the theological dimension of Paul's challenge. How could the God of all the world have such a disproportionate care and concern for only a small part of His world? And yet, obviously, we cannot even conceive of accepting Paul's solution of dissolving into a universal human essence, even one that would not be Christian but truly humanist and universal, even if such an entity could really exist.⁴⁶ Somewhere in this dialectic a synthesis must be found, one that will allow for stubborn hanging-on to ethnic, cultural specificity but in a context of deeply felt and enacted human solidarity. For that synthesis, Diaspora provides a model, and only in conditions of Diaspora can such a resolution be even attempted. Within the conditions of Diaspora, many Jews discovered that their well-being was absolutely dependent on principles of respect for difference, indeed that, as the radical slogan goes, "no one is free until all are free." Absolute devotion to the maintenance of Jewish culture and the historical memory was not inconsistent with devotion to radical causes of human liberation; there were Yiddish-speaking and Judeo-Arabic-speaking groups of Marxists and anarchists, and some even retained a commitment to historical Jewish religious practice.⁴⁷ The "chosenness" of the Jews becomes, when seen in this light, not a warrant for racism but precisely an antidote to racism. This is a Judaism that mobilizes the critical forces within the Bible and the Jewish tradition rather than mobilizing the repressive and racist forces that also subsist there and that we are not denying.

Within conditions of Diaspora, tendencies toward nativism were also materially discouraged. Diaspora culture and identity allows (and has historically allowed in the best circumstances, such as in Muslim Spain),

46. Judith Butler asks, "How is it that we might ground a theory or politics in a speech situation or subject position which is 'universal' when the very category of the universal has only begun to be exposed for its own highly ethnocentric biases?" (Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" *Praxis International* 11 [July 1991]: 153).

47. Lenin's minister of justice, I. N. Steinberg, was an orthodox Jew.

for a complex continuation of Jewish cultural creativity and identity at the same time that the same people participate fully in the common cultural life of their surroundings. The same figure, a Nagid, an Ibn Gabirol, or a Maimonides, can be simultaneously the vehicle of the preservation of traditions and of the mixing of cultures. This was the case not only in Muslim Spain, nor even only outside of the Land. The Rabbis in Diaspora in their own Land also produced a phenomenon of renewal of Jewish traditional culture at the same time that they were very well acquainted with and an integral part of the circumambient late antique culture. Diasporic cultural identity teaches us that cultures are not preserved by being protected from "mixing" but probably can only continue to exist as a product of such mixing. Cultures, as well as identities, are constantly being remade. While this is true of all cultures, diasporic Jewish culture lays it bare because of the impossibility of a natural association between this people and a particular land—thus the impossibility of seeing Jewish culture as a self-enclosed, bounded phenomenon. The critical force of this dissociation among people, language, culture, and land has been an enormous threat to cultural nativisms and integrisms, a threat that is one of the sources of anti-Semitism and perhaps one of the reasons that Europe has been much more prey to this evil than the Middle East. In other words, diasporic identity is a disaggregated identity. Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these in dialectical tension with one another. When liberal Arabs and some Jews claim that the Jews of the Middle East are Arab Jews, we concur and think that Zionist ideology occludes something very significant when it seeks to obscure this point. The production of an ideology of a pure Jewish cultural essence that has been debased by Diaspora seems neither historically nor ethically correct. "Diasporized," that is, disaggregated, identity allows the early medieval scholar Rabbi Sa'adya to be an Egyptian Arab who happens to be Jewish and also a Jew who happens to be an Egyptian Arab. Both of these contradictory propositions must be held together. Similarly, we suggest that a diasporized gender identity is possible and positive. Being a woman is some kind of special being, and there are aspects of life and practice that insist on and celebrate that speciality. But this does not imply a fixing or freezing of all practice and performance of gender identity into one set of parameters. Human beings are divided into men and women for certain purposes, but that does not tell the whole story of their bodily identity. Rather than the dualism of gendered bodies and universal souls, or Jewish/Greek bodies and universal souls—the dualism that the Western tradition offers—we can substitute partially Jewish, partially Greek bodies, bodies that are sometimes gendered and sometimes not. It is this idea that we are calling diasporized identity.

Crucial to this construction of Jewish history and identity is the simple

fact, often consciously or unconsciously suppressed, that Diaspora is not the forced product of war and destruction—taking place after the downfall of Judea—but that already in the centuries before this downfall, the majority of Jews lived voluntarily outside of the Land.⁴⁸ Moreover, given a choice between domination by a “foreign” power who would allow them to keep the Torah undisturbed and domination by a “Jewish” authority who would interfere with religious life, the Pharisees and their successors the Rabbis generally chose the former (see *T*, p. 68).⁴⁹

The story we would tell of Jewish history has three stages. In the first stage, we find a people—call it a tribe—not very different in certain respects from peoples in similar material conditions all over the world, a people like most others that regards itself as special among humanity, indeed as the People, and its land as preeminently wonderful among lands, the Land. This is, of course, an oversimplification because this “tribe” never quite dwelled alone and never regarded itself as autochthonous in its Land. In the second stage, this form of life increasingly becomes untenable, morally and politically, because the “tribe” is in cultural, social, and political contact with other people. This is, roughly speaking, the Hellenistic period, culminating in the crises of the first century, of which we have read Paul as an integral part. Various solutions to this problem were eventually adopted. Pauline Christianity is one; so perhaps is the retreat to Qumran, while the Pharisaic Rabbis “invented” Diaspora, even in the Land, as the solution to this cultural dilemma.

The third stage is diasporic existence. The rabbinic answer to Paul’s challenge was to renounce any possibility of domination over Others by being perpetually out of power:

Just as with seeing the return in terms of the restoration of political rights, seeing it in terms of redemption has certain consequences. If the return were an act of divine intervention, it could not be engineered or forced by political or any other human means: to do so would be impious. That coming was best served by waiting in obedience for it: *men of violence would not avail to bring it in*. The rabbinic aloofness to messianic claimants sprang not only from the history of disillusionment with such, but from this underlying, deeply engrained attitude. It can be claimed that under the main rabbinic tradition Judaism condemned itself to powerlessness. But recognition of powerlessness (rather than a frustrating, futile, and tragic resistance) was effective in preserving Judaism in a very hostile Christendom, and therefore had its own brand of “power.” [*T*, p. 82]

48. Davies is one scholar who does not suppress this fact but forthrightly faces it. See *T*, p. 65.

49. Once again, the Neturei Karta, in their deference to Palestinian political claims on the Land of Israel, are, it seems, on solid historical ground.

As before, our impulse is only slightly to change the nuance of Davies's marvelously precise reading. The renunciation (not merely "recognition") of temporal power was to our minds precisely the most powerful mode of preservation of difference and, therefore, the most effective kind of resistance. The Neturei Karta, to this day, refuse to visit the Western Wall, the holiest place in Judaism, without PLO "visas" because it was taken by violence.

This response has much to teach us. We want to propose a privileging of Diaspora, a dissociation of ethnicities and political hegemonies as the only social structure that even begins to make possible a maintenance of cultural identity in a world grown thoroughly and inextricably interdependent. Indeed, we would suggest that Diaspora, and not monotheism, may be the most important contribution that Judaism has to make to the world, although we would not deny the positive role that monotheism has played in making Diaspora possible.⁵⁰ Assimilating the lesson of Diaspora, namely that peoples and lands are not naturally and organically connected, could help prevent bloodshed such as that occurring in Eastern Europe today.⁵¹ In Eastern Europe at the turn of the century, the Jewish Workers' Bund, a mass socialist organization, had developed a model for national-cultural autonomy not based on territorial ethnic states. That program was effectively marginalized by the Bolsheviks and the Zionists. Diaspora can teach us that it is possible for a people to maintain its distinctive culture, its difference, without controlling land, a fortiori without controlling other people or developing a need to dispossess them of their lands. Thus the response of rabbinic Judaism to the challenge of universalism that Paul, among others, raised against what was becoming, at the end of one millennium and the beginning of the next, increasingly an inappropriate doctrine of specialness in an already interdependent world may provide some of the pieces to the puzzle of how humanity can survive as another millennium draws to a close with no messiah on the horizon. The renunciation of difference seems both an impoverishment of human life and an inevitable harbinger of oppression. Yet the renunciation of sovereignty (justified by discourses of autochthony, indigenoussness, and territorial self-determination), combined with a fierce tenacity in holding onto cultural identity, might well have something to offer to a world in which these two forces, together, kill thousands daily.

50. Sidra Ezrahi has recently argued that monotheism and Diaspora are inextricably intertwined (oral communication with Daniel Boyarin).

51. Our point is not to reallegorize the Jew as wanderer but simply to point to certain aspects of the concrete realities of Jewish history as a possible, vital, positive contribution to human political culture in general. The implicitly normative call on other Jews to participate in our image of Jewishness is, we admit, ambivalent and potentially coercive, but how could it be otherwise? Even coercions can be ranked.

*Appendix: Statement of the Neturei Karta*⁵²

We the Neturei Karta (Guardians of the City—Jerusalem), presently numbering in the tens of thousands, are comprised of the descendants of the pioneer Jews who settled in the Holy Land over a hundred years before the establishment of the Zionist State. Their sole motive was to serve G-d, and they had neither political aspirations nor any desire to exploit the local population in order to attain statehood.

Our mission, in the capacity of Palestinian advisers in this round of the Middle East Peace Conference, is to concern ourselves with the safeguarding of the interests of the Palestinian Jews and the entire Jewish nation. The Jewish people are charged by divine oath not to seek independence and cast off the yoke of exile which G-d decreed, as a result of not abiding by the conditions under which G-d granted them the Holy Land. We repeat constantly in our prayers, “since we sinned, we were therefore exiled from our land.” G-d promised to gather in the exiled Jews through His messiah. This is one of the principles of the Jewish faith. The Zionist rebelled against this divine decree of exile by taking the land away from its indigenous inhabitants and established their state. Thus are the Jewish people being exposed to the divine retribution set down in the Talmud. “I will make your flesh prey as the deer and the antelope of the forest” (Song 2:7). Our advice to the negotiating contingent of the Palestinian delegation will remain within the framework of Jewish theology.

Zionist schoolings dictate a doctrine of labelling the indigenous Palestinian population “enemies” in order to sanction their expansionist policies. Judaism teaches that the Jew and non-Jew are to coexist in a cordial and good neighbor relationship. We Palestinian Jews have no desire to expand our places of residence and occupy our neighbors’ lands, but only to live alongside non-Jewish Palestinians, just as Jews live throughout the world, in peace and tranquility.

The enmity and animosity toward the non-Jewish population, taught to the Zionist faithful, is already boomeranging. King Solomon, in Parables 27:19, describes reality “as one’s image is reflected in water: so one’s heart toward his fellow man”—so an enemy’s heart is reflected in his adversary’s heart. The Intifada is “exhibit A” to this King Solomon gem of wisdom. We hope and pray that this face-

52. This statement was made by the Palestinian Jewish (Neturei Karta) members of the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East Peace Conference in Washington, D.C., 1992, and has been translated here from the New York Yiddish weekly *Di yidische vohknshrift*, 4 Sept. 1992. We are not including this statement with our essay in order to advance Neturei Karta as an organization, nor are we members of Neturei Karta, some of whose policies we are in sympathy with and others of which we find violently objectionable. We include it because we consider it to be eloquent evidence of the kind of radical political rhetoric available within a highly traditional diasporic Jewish framework and in particular for its insight into what could be called the construction of the demonized Other.

to-face meeting with imagined adversaries will undo the false image created and that both Jew and Arab in Palestine can once again live as good neighbors as was the life of yesteryear, under a rule chosen by the indigenous residents of the Holy Land—thus conforming with G-d's plan for the Holy Land.

*Inchallah!*⁵³



Three members of the Neturei Karta posing with Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi (left), head of the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East peace talks. Photo: *Di yidishe vohnschrift*, 4 Sept. 1992.

53. The word is the traditional Muslim prayer, "May it be God's [Allah's] will."