

New Perspectives on Jewish Studies

A Series of the Philip and Muriel Berman Center for Jewish Studies
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

General Editor: Laurence J. Silberstein

*The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish
Culture and Identity*

Edited by Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn

*Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective: Religion,
Ideology, and the Crisis of Modernity*

Edited by Laurence J. Silberstein

New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State

Edited by Laurence J. Silberstein

The Other in Jewish Thought and History Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity

Edited by
Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York & London

93. *Zohar* 1:162a.
94. *Shegel ha-Qodesh*, ed. A. W. Greenup (London, 1911), 67. Cf. Wolfson, *Book of the Pomegranate*, 227-29 (Hebrew section).
95. Jochanan Wijnhoven, ed., *Sefer ha-Mishgal* (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1964), 133.
96. Cf. Eliade, *The Two and the One*, 111-14.
97. Cf. Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London and New York, 1990), 117.
98. See reference to my study and that of Boyarin cited above, n. 15.
99. Cf. *Zohar* 1:87a, 151a, 206b; 2:67b, 100b; 3:236b; *Zohar Hadash*, 45c, 62a.
100. *Zohar* 1:163a.
101. *Zohar* 2:4a.
102. Cf. *Zohar* 1:47b, 122a, 235b; 2:4a, 67b.
103. *Zohar* 1:232a. This passage was cited by Gershon Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts of the Kabbalah* (New York, 1991), 186, who duly noted the attribution of active, masculine aspects to the feminine *Shekhinah*.
104. For references, see above, n. 7.
105. Cf. Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, 191-92; Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 376-79, 469.
106. Cf. *Zohar* 3:48b, and the discussion in Elliot R. Wolfson, "Light through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the *Zohar*," *Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988): 81 n. 29, 86 n. 46.
107. *Zohar* 3:77a and 119a.
108. *Zohar* 3:259b.
109. Cf. *Zohar* 1:94a.
110. For discussion of some of the relevant sources, see above, n. 66.
111. Cf. Charles Mopsik, "The Body of Engenderment in the Hebrew Bible, the Rabbinic Tradition, and the Kabbalah," in *Zone: Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi (New York, 1989), 48-73.
112. See Peter Brown's characterization of Valentinian Gnosticism in *The Body and Society*, 113.

Chapter 9

From Pharaoh to Saddam Hussein: The Reproduction of the Other in the Passover Haggadah

Adi Ophir

I. The Context of Reading

Every culture has its own privileged texts. A privileged text is not simply a text that belongs to a sacred canon, a text that has been canonized in a particular cultural field, such as literature, science, or religion. Rather, a privileged text is part of the very process of acculturation that serves to unify a culture over and above its different, particular spheres or fields. A privileged text resides at the intersection of several cultural mechanisms; for example, the mechanism that authorizes one to speak in the name of a culture, to interpret it for its members; the mechanism that reproduces cultural identity and solidarity among the members of a culture; and the mechanism that demarcates the outer boundaries of a culture and excludes nonmembers.

Usually, a privileged text resides at a privileged cultural place—the theater or the High Court, for example, or the synagogue or the church—and is visited frequently by some or all of that culture's members. Access to such texts is restricted, denied to some but permitted to others, the privileged, who thus possess precious symbolic capital.¹ In addition, this differentiated access is sometimes institutionalized so that the privileged text becomes the authorized property of a privileged community of discourse. And finally, a privileged text has its own limited and authorized modes of material reproduction and dissemination, which are often authorized and

limited differently for members of different classes within the community, and for community members and nonmembers.²

In traditional Jewish culture, the existence of privileged texts is clearly evident. The Talmud and the prayer book have played this role for centuries. Also, in a more restricted and concrete way, the Passover Haggadah, perhaps the most popular text in Jewish religious literature, has served as such a privileged text.³

In modern Jewish culture, outside the ultra-Orthodox community (which has been vigorously striving to maintain its traditional character despite and against overwhelming processes of modernization), among both secular and religious alike, the Talmud has clearly lost some, if not all, of its privileged position. However, in contemporary Israeli Jewish society, some portions of the prayer books (especially those used at the High Holidays) and, more conspicuously, the Passover Haggadah still remain privileged texts in the sense defined above. Even among secular Jews, the Haggadah occupies a privileged traditional site and time, the Seder table on Passover, wherein at least the first section is usually read—sometimes parodied, but nevertheless read—before the Passover meal is served.

The Haggadah is a multilayered text whose origin is quite ancient. In essence, the text is a collection of the midrashic interpretations of a few verses from Deuteronomy to which various passages were added through the years. Scholars—philologists and historians of Jewish culture—are capable today of reconstructing more or less precisely the different layers of the text, returning them to their places of origin and putting them in a proper chronological order. This order ranges from the late days of the Second Temple to the early modern era, when the final versions of the text were consolidated with the advent of printing in different Jewish communities. In this essay, however, I am not concerned with the text's historical development or with the history of its interpretations.⁴ My concern is rather with the text that appears at a contemporary Seder table, where it functions as a privileged text par excellence, playing a key role in contemporary Israeli culture. The Haggadah, I will argue below, has been adopted into secular Jewish culture in Israel as a kind of metanarrative that frames and constrains the account of the relation between Israel and the Nations, i.e., of the history and logic of separation (*havdalah*, *hibadlut*) of the Jewish people from all its Others.

Secularization in general and the Zionist revolution in particular have not affected the Haggadah's popularity; it is by far the most

popular traditional Jewish text among secular Jews in Israel. New editions of the text appear every year, some printed with a high-quality design, some especially designed for special audiences (children, immigrants, soldiers). Fancy facsimile editions using images from old prints have become very popular and are among the favorite Passover gifts. Every year, the main daily newspapers distribute cheap reprints as supplements to their Passover-evening editions. Inexpensive reprints are also distributed by the Ministries of Absorption and Tourism, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), and a few other governmental and public agencies.

The kibbutzim, once considered the crown and symbol of modern secular Judaism, have adopted the Haggadah with well-known amendments and have established their own tradition of the Passover ritual. During Passover in 1992 I saw a private edition published by a candidate in a local election in the northern Galilee area. The candidate inserted campaign propaganda in the margin of the page, alongside the verses, without altering the main body of the text or its traditional design.

The most astonishing fact about the status of the Haggadah in Israeli culture, however, is not that the text is so widely distributed but that in the last three or four decades so few attempts have been made to revise it.⁵ Thus, secular Jews in Israel, accepting the authority of Orthodox Jews, reproduce only the Orthodox authoritative version. Although sometimes improvising on the graphic design, they leave the main body of the text untouched, acknowledging as it were its "authenticity." This sense of authenticity seems to compensate for a lost, longed-for aura of sacredness.

Moreover, "the text in itself" often serves as a bridge, or a common ground, linking Orthodox (rabbinic) Jews, Zionists as well as non-Zionists, with secular Zionists.⁶ From "the text itself" Zionist readers derive nationalist, chauvinist meanings often echoed in contemporary (Israeli) rabbinic interpretations of the Haggadah. It is perhaps because of this common ground of nationalistic hermeneutics that the Haggadah, more than any other product of rabbinic culture, has come to occupy such an important position in Israel's "civil religion"⁷ and in the formation of its Jewish identity.

In contemporary Israeli culture, the text of the Haggadah is privileged in all the senses defined above. It has its own privileged sites and time; it is visited frequently by almost all of the culture's members; and there are acknowledged legitimate modes of its

material reproduction (to which the use of the Haggadah in an election campaign is still an exception, almost a transgression).

The text currently resides at the intersection of several cultural mechanisms, in three related domains: the production, reproduction, and distribution of collective memory; the production of national identity and social solidarity; and the demarcation of the culture's outer boundaries, which set the limits of inclusion and exclusion, frame the metanarrative of the relation with the Other, and constrain the perception of the Other in both popular and political culture. Unlike the Talmudic text, however, the Haggadah has never become the authorized property of a privileged community of discourse. On the contrary, the symbolic capital acquired through the appropriation of the text is evenly distributed among all the members of the community who take part in the ritual. Thus, for one night, the text turns all members, even those incapable of reading it, into one united community of discourse.

This community of discourse commemorates and reproduces the moment at which Israel became a privileged people. It does that through a rite of separation that reaffirms and reinterprets both the identity of the nation as well as its difference from all other nations. While separation is clearly not the only theme in the Seder and the Haggadah, it is, I would argue, the theme most emphasized in both secular and religious communities in Israel. Moreover, it is certainly the aspect that, more than any other, forges a common ground between Orthodox and secular Jews.

Especially since the Six-Day War, two complementary cultural processes have played a decisive role in shaping the particularist, nationalist character of Jewish society in Israel: (1) the adoption by and incorporation into secular Israeli culture of nationalist motifs drawn from rabbinic culture⁸ and (2) the growing nationalistic character of the Orthodox community's response to the Zionist conception of modern Jewish identity.⁹ The Haggadah and its ritual, the Seder, both embody and exemplify a unique combination of discursive and ceremonial practices that in the last decades have played a growing role in structuring and reproducing Jewish collective memory and identity in Israel. Thus, the Haggadah and the Seder have had the effect, usually unnoticed, of linking secular Israeli Jews to their traditional, pre-Zionist, Orthodox forerunners, on the one hand, and to contemporary Orthodox Israelis, on the other hand.

These two nationalistic processes, and the combination of discourse and ceremony they have made possible, should be understood in light of what I consider to be the single most important factor in contemporary Jewish life in Israel: the reversal of power relations between Jews and Gentiles. In Israel, Jews are the ruling party and enjoy cultural hegemony; the Gentiles (i.e., the Palestinians) are the dominated, and their culture is the subordinate, minority culture.

The Haggadah was originally composed by a more or less oppressed minority culture to commemorate its (already lost) triumph over its enemies and its (by then gone) liberation and sovereignty. But today in Israel, the Haggadah is read as a text of the majority culture. Within this culture, it is the Palestinian Other who now occupies the place of the oppressed. This inversion of oppressor and oppressed forms the perspective that frames the following analysis and critique.

I have described the status of the Haggadah and its position as a cultural phenomenon in order to place my study of the Haggadah in its precise sociological and historical context, i.e., the context of contemporary Israeli culture. But I have also presented it as a pretext, a kind of apology. This is the apology of a secular Israeli who, like so many Israelis of his generation, cultural background, and political temper, has often experienced the Seder as a somewhat annoying ceremony and the Haggadah as a somewhat boring, even alien, text that, nonetheless, warrants a close reading. In what follows I am offering neither a playful, sacrilegious interpretation of a sacred text nor a fashionable strategy of tearing down a valued cultural object. In the critical interpretive analysis of the Haggadah below, I attempt to expose within the text itself a structure that, in contemporary Israeli culture, has come to dominate the uses and abuses of Passover's text and ritual. Once this structure is exposed and its presence in the midst of our secular culture is made manifest, it may be easier, I believe, to resist its hidden agenda.

II. Text and Ritual

Like the Mishnah and the Talmud, the Haggadah too is a text that betrays the variety and multiplicity of its sources, announcing from almost any of its pages that no single *author* stands at its origin. Like the Mishnah and the Talmud, the text erases all the traces of

the process and historicity of its composition. Yet, unlike the Mishnah or Talmud, and despite its explicit intertextual dimension, the relative unity of the text and its clear closure are strictly maintained. Many voices are heard at the table when the Haggadah is read, yet the text appears as an almost seamless, written substratum for a rite of speaking and eating. It is the Haggadah that organizes the rite from the preliminary ceremony, *Bi'ur Hametz* (the elimination of food forbidden on Passover), occurring on the evening preceding the first night of Passover, to the completion of the Seder. Thus, the Haggadah determines how the table is to be set and the food served. In addition, it designates that which is to be said, prayed, and sung in the form of blessings, games of questions and answers, short stories, and midrashic interpretations.

The ritualized reading of the Haggadah is a rite of recollection that erases most of the traces of the text's composition. Nonetheless, the unity of the text is actualized through the act of the telling itself, during which open-ended passages or loose threads of composition are woven together, overcome. Thus, neither the history of the text nor the continuity of its transmission guarantees its unity for a contemporary reader/user; rather, this unity results from the way the text is interwoven with the Passover ritual. In this sense, the text has always remained unified, at least since its establishment as the written medium of the ceremony providing the directions for the rite.

Actually, the unified text displays hardly any traces of its own history and serves, in fact, as a mechanism for dehistoricizing the Passover rite. Directly linking the participants to the event described and reenacted in the Seder, the exodus from Egypt, the Haggadah dehistoricizes both the actual text and the ceremony. Thus, the contemporary reader is placed on one temporal plane together with the children of Israel who came out from Egypt. He or she experiences the Egyptian redemption as his or her own, for the redemption from Egypt is ongoing, from the time of Pharaoh to ours, stretching over thousands of years in an instant. We were once the slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and we were rescued by the Lord our God. Had He not brought our ancestors out of Egypt then we and our children and our children's children might still be enslaved to a Pharaoh in Egypt.¹⁰ Thus, the event transcends the entire history of the community and is realized in a rite made possible by the text.¹¹

At the same time, the text is unified by the rite that it organizes and directs. The text and the rite are inseparable, together comprising one rite of passage through a liminal stage of existence, which is also a rite of (textual) passages, a textual event, a ritualized text, a rite/text. It is this rite/text that I would like to subject to a careful deconstruction.

III. Separation

Passover is a holiday of "separation." This fact is already inscribed in the holiday's Hebrew name: *Pesach*, from *pasach*, meaning "passed over." As God passed over the doors of Israel's houses, He separated the marked houses of the Israelites from the unmarked houses of the Egyptians, and the Israelite first-born sons, marked for life, from the Egyptian first-born, marked for death. Although this particular divine act of separation is mentioned only briefly at a late stage of the rite/text, practices of marking throughout the Seder serve as traces of that primordial separation.

Early on the evening before the Seder night, a ceremonial search for leavened food, *Bi'ur Hametz*, marks the separation of the seven subsequent days from the rest of the year. But even those who come to the Seder table unaware of these preliminary acts are immediately introduced into rites of separation. Through acts of marking, separation permeates the inner core of the Passover text and ritual. As with a Russian doll (*babushka*), these practices are arranged in several layers, forming a more or less symmetrical order, before and after the main body of the rite/text in which the story is unfolded and interpreted.

Those who gather at the Seder table are first separated from their mundane everyday existence through various acts of marking. This is enacted through two series of rites of separation/distinction during the first part of the Seder. Prior to the narrative recounting slavery and redemption, we have a blessing distinguishing Israel from the other nations and sacred time from profane time (*Kadesh*); rinsing of hands (*u-Revah*); a blessing over the fruit of the earth and the tasting of the vegetable (*karpas*); breaking the middle *matzah* and hiding the *afikoman* (*Yahatz*); *Ha Lachma Anya* (behold the *matzah*, bread of poverty), the first general symbolic interpretation in the Seder; and the Four Questions beginning *Mah Nishtana* (In what ways is this night different from all other

nights?) Following the narrative but prior to the meal, we find the recitation of Rabbah Gamaliel's statement regarding the three major symbols of Passover; a long blessing over the second cup of wine; a second hand washing (this time with its blessing); a blessing over bread in general and unleavened bread (*matzah*) in particular; the blessing over the bitter herbs (*maror*); and the eating of *matzah* and *maror* together (*korekh*).

All of these acts combine speech and tasting, except for the silent rinsing of hands at the beginning. While the first group serves to introduce and temporally bracket the ceremonial reading of the narrative, the latter group introduces and temporally brackets the festive meal. Between them comes the main body of the Passover narrative, separated twice, from the profane time and everyday practices that precede it, and the meal that follows.

However, prior to being inscribed in the participants' minds through changing and telling, separation is physically inscribed on the table. At this early stage, the rite/act has not yet introduced the *Kadesh's* metaphysical and transhistorical separations and announces them only by way of anticipation. The main separation at this point is that of the concrete time and place of the Seder in which the rite of separation itself is now beginning to occur. A mute gesture, rinsing hands without a blessing (reference without meaning); a "blind" blessing over a vegetable of the earth (*karpas*, a name without a reference; the real *karpas* is unknown);¹² followed by a deaf word, *afikoman*, a Greek word whose precise meaning had long been forgotten—all create an open space for the approaching story. Only in this space, a space emptied of colloquial expressions and everyday meanings, can the story of origin be properly enacted, a story that confers deep meanings on trivial objects, endows food articles with symbolic import, and, above all, elevates the concrete and historical to a transcendent, metaphysical plane.

After the recitation of the story, just before the meal is served, the movement of suspension is reversed. The symbolic meaning of the ceremonial food is explicitly stated. In fact, the three last speech and tasting acts that precede the meal (*matzah*, *maror*, *korekh*) are but a highly condensed version of the story embodied in a few articles of food. At the beginning of the Seder, the food, not yet imbued with symbolic meaning, simply marked the spatio-temporal separation of the rite of separation. Now, however, it symbolizes the merging of two kinds of separation, that of the world of ritual from the everyday world, and the separation, affirmed in the course of the

ritual, of Israel from its Others. **This Matzah which we eat . . . is because there was not enough time for our ancestors' dough to ferment before they were redeemed from Egypt. . . .**

At the same time, the food symbolizes the continuity of the concrete community gathered at the Seder table who, separated from the historical present, form part of the transhistorical community of the separated people. Thus, in every generation a person should see himself as though he, personally, came out of Egypt. As speech has been concretized in food, the food becomes an embodied memory, a tangible medium of recollection, which guarantees the transhistorical continuity and unity of the nation.

At this point, as people become aware of their hunger, a gradual transition occurs from the transcendent plane that confers meaning back to the concrete site of the gathering. This transition is completed right after the meal, with the materialistic, sometimes greedy negotiation that usually accompanies the retrieval of the *afikoman*.¹³ Between the first act of purification and the latter blessing over hand washing, between the lost *karpas* and the found *afikoman*, lies the rite/act of Israel's separation.

Between *Magid* (the beginning of recitation of the narrative) and *Korech* (the eating of the *matzah* together with bitter herbs), the interplay between tasting and blessing is replaced with another, the interplay between storytelling (recollection) and midrashic commentary (interpretation). With this interplay the separation of the ceremonial event turns into the separation constituted by the rite/act. By telling the story of the exodus from Egypt, the rite/act makes present the first Egyptian separation; by presenting the midrashic commentary, alluding to the story of its formation and ongoing transmission, the rite/act creates the historical continuity that guarantees and reaffirms the separation of the entire nation, past and present, from the other nations. Thus, at the heart of the rite/act, recollection and separation are intrinsically linked.

Recalling the memory of the original separation, the participant reaffirms the ongoing, eternal separation. The present separation derives from the original one and is, in essence, bound up with it, but at the same time, the original separation is reasserted, made present, through present-day acts of recollection, which themselves presuppose an ongoing separation. The told story and the story of the telling are closely linked.

IV. Two Beginnings

In the beginning, when they were redeemed from Egyptian slavery, the people of Israel were separated from their Others, the Gentiles. **We were once the slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt. But the Lord our God brought us forth from there.** . . . Thus, the opening verse of the story presents the three protagonists as well as the fundamental structure of the narrative: we, that is, Israel; Pharaoh, the archetype of all Gentiles to come, the terrible Other; and the ultimate Other, the one who separates, rescues, redeems, the Almighty, **our God**. If He had not rescued us from *them*, we would still be there, slaves. Even before His redeeming intervention, there had been a state of separation resulting from the power relations between us, the people of Israel, the enslaved, and Pharaoh, the one who enslaves.

But the merciful God did not simply invert those power relations; He did not put us in Pharaoh's place. Instead, when He rescued us from Egypt, He also rescued us from the type of power relations the Egyptian domination entailed, thus making us different from both masters and slaves. Henceforth, we shall never resemble the slaves we once were even when we again suffer under the yoke of oppression. When better days come and others are placed under our domination, we shall not resemble those Egyptian masters. For we came out of Egypt, and it is our duty (*mitzva*) to recount this exodus from Egypt. **And whoever dwells on the story of the liberation from Egypt is praiseworthy.** The story, or rather the act of telling the story, guarantees that we too, not only our ancestors, have left Egypt.

The enacted narrative consolidates the first encounter among the three protagonists and transforms it into the eternal structure of Israel's separation. While the *content* of the story asserts the appearance of the transcendent in history and transforms historical reality to a metaphysical reality, the concrete *speech act* connects the historical present to an already sacred history. Thus, the act of telling the story strips away the local and temporal context, turning the events into ephemeral moments in the eternal return of the same: Israel/Gentile/God.

The Haggadah's second story recounting Israel's origins tells of an even earlier moment of separation that precedes the Egyptian exodus. **In the beginning our ancestors were idol worshippers.** Thus, the Egyptians' separation is placed in a wider historical

context. Slavery, we are told, has its roots in ancient times, **beyond the river Euphrates**, while the roots of redemption are found in God's promise to Abraham, who was himself led out of Egypt to the land of Canaan. Now this first exodus from one place to another is seen as the historical source of Israel's separation, of its otherness vis-à-vis the rest of nations. However, the children of Abraham went down to Egypt and became there the Other of others, **strangers in a foreign land.** Thus, long before the nation's collective identity, the identity of a nation mediated by God, the Holy One, who endows identities and makes differences, was established in Egypt, another separation had occurred and another identity established—the coercive separation between master and slaves, the oppressed identity of the slaves vis-à-vis their masters.

The double story of origins thus performs a crucial task. It removes separation from its historically contingent and ontologically meaningless political context and places it, once and for all, in its proper theological context, that of God's presence in history. By overcoming Pharaoh, God not only rescued Israel but also created the conditions for Israel to recognize Him as the sole and ultimate basis of their separation from all future pharaohs. The victory over Pharaoh, a radical, totally evil Other, is thus uncompromisable and the nation's separation from him complete.

Thus, recognition of God becomes the true basis for Israel's separation. While the nation as a whole came to recognize God through His miraculous intervention in Egyptian internal affairs, this was certainly not the beginning. Nor can the true beginning of Israel's separation be located in history, even if one goes as far back as Terah, Abraham's father. There, beyond the river, before our forefathers separated from the rest of nations, was a place and a time of *avodah zarah*, idol worship, which literally means foreign or "other" worship. Although God had not yet revealed Himself to Abraham, the distinction between true and false worship, *avodat zara* and *avodat hashem*, was already drawn. **I, Adonai . . . no other, the believers would later say, as they retrospectively fixed the time before the revelation as a time of ignorance and blindness, of illusion and false consciousness.**

The distinction between true and false religious consciousness precedes the revelation and, unlike it, needs no particular historical context. For this distinction follows from the concept of God itself. God may be an unintelligible unity over and above all separations, and distinctions, yet He is the One responsible for all separations,

from the separation between darkness and light to that between the holy and the profane. God generates separation and difference in the world through His presence in history: a concealed presence, the presence of an absence. For had He not been absent, had He not required revelation as the constitutive moment of human history, and had He not limited this revelation to His selected, separate people, there would have been no idol worship in this world and every nation and every person would have recognized Him as what He is, worshipping Him alone. The absence of God, which is the mode of God's presence in the world of humans, is the source of all separations.

This means that positive acts of creation, sanctification, revelation, or election, acts that either generate history or traverse it while imbuing it with meaning, acts whose origins are always transcendent, are not the ultimate foundation of divine separation. The primordial origin of separation is, rather, the essential concealment of God, the concealment to be unconcealed in those rare moments of revelation. The God of separation is the god who is absent, that god who is not. His negated presence, that painful hole that God left in the world to be healed temporarily once or twice in the past and once and for all in the future, is the true origin, the source of all sources. Only when this source is asserted as the true origin is it possible to unfold the nation's genealogy.

The opening verse—**In the beginning our ancestors were idol worshippers**—posits a straightforward genealogy within the context of separation and formulates its first principle. Without this opening verse, the story would have been but a simple genealogy, tracing the nation from its founding to the people who came out of Egypt. The distinction between the worship of God and idol worship forms the first distinction between the same and the Other. The first otherness is that of another, false, unreal god, an ephemeral appearance that takes the place of the one, true God. The first Other is nothing, and the recognition of this nothingness for what it is provides the basis for further separations. The first solidarity among human beings is among all those who have recognized the one and only God and learned to separate Him from His Others.

The promise that accompanied the first revelation (of God to Abraham) and the first recognition (of God by Abraham) has stood **by our ancestors and us** and provided the basis for the generalization at the end of that short genealogy: **In every generation enemies rise up against us and seek to destroy us. But the**

Holy One, praised be He, delivers us from their hands. The slavery in Egypt was the first, but by no means the last. God saves us from *their* hands, the hands of those Others who recognize neither Him nor us as His chosen people. Thus, the relations among the chosen people, their Other, and their God formed during the first slavery and first redemption comprise a persistent pattern within which the genealogy forever unfolds.

But not during the Seder. With the exception of one passage, **If He had merely . . .**, whose subjunctive language clearly serves a different purpose, Israel's genealogy is not going to be retold again in this rite/xl. From this point in the Seder onward, the fundamental structure of relations among the three protagonists, God, Israel, and its Other, will be re-presented and elaborated in the context of that formative, originative event. The entire history of Israel is going to be a history of going down to, becoming slaves to, and going out from an Egypt. Henceforth, Israel will have no history, but stories whose beginning and ends are already known, for they are produced as analogies to the story of that first and last event of Jewish history, The Historical Event. Each particular story will be but a reflection of that first story and a realization, in different times and places, of the eternal return of the same: Israel/Gentile/God (UG/G).¹⁴

V. Revelation

After the general outline of the formative story and its lesson has been firmly established, the Haggadah again tells, through midrashic interpretations, the story of Egypt.¹⁵ At each stage of the plot, God and Gentile appear embraced back to back, holding each other's heel. When the one is concealed, the other reveals himself, and vice versa. When one occupies center stage, the other recedes into the background. In the middle are the people of Israel, surviving through the power of the One and being separated by the force of the Other; or, vice versa, surviving on account of the word of the Other and being separated by the word of the One.

As the Haggadah tells it, Jacob's original descent to Egypt is the wandering of a nomad who escapes from one Gentile seeking to persecute him, Laban (**A Syrian tried to destroy my father**), only to become a guest, and later a hostage, of another Gentile, Pharaoh. As the text implies, permission to remain in Egypt was granted in

response to an explicit request (The Sons of Jacob told Pharaoh: **We have come to the land to dwell here temporarily.**)

At the same time, Jacob's descent to Egypt is read as a response to a divine decree, as implied by the phrase **compelled by the word** (*anus al pi hadbur*), interpreted by traditional commentators as well as English translators to mean God's command. While the Gentile, Laban the Syrian, who planned to destroy Jacob, is depicted as powerful, cruel, and ill meaning, God's presence is only hinted at indirectly.

In Egypt, however, Israel becomes a **great and mighty people**, yet their suffering and future redemption are already implied: **I have caused you to multiply as the buds of the field . . . your breasts were formed and your hair grew long, yet you remained naked and bare . . .** At this point, the God previously referred to through allusion appears center stage as speaking on behalf of His people and giving expression to their suffering. The Gentile, who previously appeared on center stage, now recedes into the background, momentarily suppressed, referred to only as the unspoken cause for Israel's terrible situation.

But almost immediately, the Gentile returns to center stage, reemerging in a display of power and cruelty: **and the Egyptians treated us harshly, and oppressed us, and imposed hard labor upon us.** Now it is God who recedes into the background, temporarily absent. His absence, a condition for the cruel "revelation" of the Gentile, sets the stage for and provides the pretext for this cruel "revelation." Conversely, repressing or destroying the Gentile is the purpose and justification (and an implicit precondition as well) of God's miraculous revelation.

In Egypt the Gentile is revealed to Israel as the one who imposes hard labor. Between Pithom and Raamses, in a setting of torture and hard labor, the oppressing Gentile appears. Now the distinction between master and slave, oppressed and the oppressor, clearly emerges, together with the distinction between good and evil. The fundamental demarcation between the collective, national subject, Israel, and its Other, the enemy, is represented in the text through the opposition of the first- and third-person plural. (**Let us outwit them, lest they multiply; . . . they will join our enemies and fight against us. . .**)

They have started all the trouble, when they posited us as their significant Other who might conspire with their enemies. Our response was to reify the relation of otherness. Thus, we have

turned otherness into a fixed, persistent, unchanging quality, eternalizing the Other as totally wicked: **and the Egyptian treated us harshly** (*boya'ereu okanu*, ill-treated us) (this is the decree of the newborn boy), **and oppressed us** (this is the decree of taskmasters), **and impressed hard labor upon us** (this is the decree of *avodat parekh*, hard labor). Between idol worship (*avoda zarah*, foreign work), and the worship of God (*avodat hashem*, the work of God), lies the site of genuine hard work, the site of hard labor. This kind of work does not produce goods in order to fulfill needs, relieve material scarcity, or alleviate psychological burdens. This work, born out of the Other's display of wicked power, produces scarcity and intensifies hardship and suffering. At the site of hard work, the Other is marked as radically evil and his domination portrayed as the source of all evils. At this site, the absence of God is most depressingly evident.

From that place, *min ha-avodah*, from the place of hard labor, Israel's cry . . . **came up to God**, as they sought to replace one revelation with another. Because of their bondage, that is, from the perspective of the oppressed, God is an invisible observer and listener, an absent addressee to whom the cry of the oppressed is directed. But the perspective of the *rite/text* changes rather suddenly. In the next verse God becomes the subject of the story, portrayed as an active observer and listener, one who **hears the voice of the oppressed and sees their misery and toil.**

Suddenly the play of appearance and disappearance, revelation and concealment, between God and Gentile, comes to a stop. For a short moment, the two seem to appear together, facing one another, set at each other's throat by a text that celebrates Israel's revenge. The text places the two on a course that will lead to their terrible, unavoidable clash, the outcome of which is known in advance. God, not yet seen but already seeing and listening, watches the oppressive Gentile, while the Gentile watches only his slaves, deaf to their outcry.

God's impending revelation would soon be a display of wonders to be interpreted, a last moment of truth for the Gentile, who is doomed to perdition and an educating process for the benefit of all other nations as well as all other Gentile nations witnessing the event from afar. **Has any god ever tried to remove one nation from the midst of another by trials, signs, wonders, war; with a mighty hand, outstretched arm, and with great awe? Redemption occurs through the unmediated appearance of God, the**

Divine Being revealing Himself. Israel is saved neither by an angel nor by a seraph, nor by a messenger, but by Him alone. And He did it with trials and signs, lest there be any doubt, He and none other.¹⁶

But in truth, He Himself, almighty, with outstretched arm and strong hand, was never seen. What actually appears to the human eye-witnessing the scene of revelation is a horrible show of destruction, the destruction of the Gentle who is now tortured, robbed, and murdered in that series of plagues brought upon him by the Almighty. Each scene of horror is a sign of and testimony to God's presence, and is immediately interpreted as one of His faces, or one of His more conspicuous traces. The dead Egyptian first-born signify the march of the Almighty through the land of Egypt; the heavy pestilence that strikes Egyptians' horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, and flocks is God's mighty hand; His outstretched arm is a drawn sword; His signs refer to the rod Moses used to terrify the Egyptians; and His wonders [motim, demonstrations] refer to the blood that ran in their rivers. The Egyptian catastrophe thus sets the stage for the appearance of God, who, even in the moment of His revelation, remains invisible. He, rather than His angels or messengers, inscribes His imprint on the world by means of awful plagues that He pours upon the poor Egyptians and through the screams that rise from their stricken land.

These screams, however, are not going to be heard by anybody. As the Egyptians drown in the sea, everyone watches but nobody hears. The famous, oft-cited midrashic critique, "How can you sing while my creatures are sinking in the sea?" is not found in the Haggadah, but forms a counterdiscourse that challenges the dominant discourse.

Thus, the Haggadah turns the presence of the Other into a mere function of divine revelation and reduces the presence of the Other to an effect of God's absence. Once God appears, the Gentle loses his position as a possible speaker and listener. The Gentle's suffering, justified as it may be, is but a testimony to the concealed presence of the Holy and Blessed One.

Every year that awful drowning of the creatures of God is solemnly reconstructed in the Passover rite, with its symbolic display of blood and fire and pillars of smoke. Through this drowning, the God who made Israel holy and separated them is revealed. From this rite, Israel emerges as a holy people and a

kingdom of priests (*kohanim*), chosen and separated from all other peoples.

From the point of view of the participant immersed in the ceremony and engaged in rite/text through both interpretation and action, the distinctive identity of the nation is reasserted and reaffirmed each year, mediated through the memory of God's revelation and Pharaoh's destruction. From the point of view of the critic engaged in the work of deconstruction, God seems ever more absent and the Gentle ever more present. The memory of the appearance of the One is the promise for the disappearance of the Other; the memory of the destruction of the Other is the promise for the revelation of the One. Together, the two make possible the coming into being, the formation and separation, of the chosen people.

If these two were separated, that is, if God were represented and understood independent of the mediation of the Gentle and vice versa, the entire structure would collapse. However, in order for that structure, the discursive formation that endows the nation of Israel with unity and identity, to survive, the image of God destroying the Gentle and being revealed through this destruction must be continually reproduced. Henceforth, all—or almost all—Gentiles will be seen as the terrible Pharaoh, the Other who is essentially evil, the source of evil. Since evil and otherness are essentially linked, Israel can do little except pray for a recurrence of that awful midnight, the night in which **Thou didst destroy Egypt's first-born**. Thus, the recollection of God's miraculous intervention in the history of the Jewish people determines and severely restricts the scope of the people's historical expectations.¹⁷

At this point the rite/text becomes more rhythmic, broken into shorter passages, and the pace of alternation between quotation and interpretation quickens. The allusion to the drowning through the spilling off of drops of wine adds emphatic force to the text. As the wine is spilled from the cup three times, the room is filled with shouts of **blood, fire, and pillars of smoke**. After each plague is mentioned, the participants spill more drops of wine and recite the initials of the plagues, their multiplications, and the interpretation of the calculus of evils. Perhaps all this additional noise and activity is but a way to draw one's attention away from the disaster that, in the rite/text, is pouring down upon the late Egyptians, whose plagues are multiplied by five and twenty and twenty-five, up to

two hundred and fifty plagues at the sea, besides the fifty they received in Egypt.

This continues until God's wrath and fury and the terror of His messengers of evil fill the room. The Gentile himself has not been removed, of course. There he waits, outside the door, still to be mentioned several times in the *ri/te/xt*, from **He punished the Egyptians to Pour out Thy wrath**. But something essential to the Gentile's mode of being and representation has been erased: he has lost his position as a speaker or listener, as an interlocutor in the discourse, while the children of Israel have lost the ability to identify with his suffering. At the risk of anachronistically employing modern language, one may say that what has been erased is the Gentile's humanity. For what is the plague calculus if not the final erasure of the humanity of the Gentile, the reduction of the Gentile to radical Other, capable of radical evil, beyond understanding, compassion, punishment, and forgiveness.

The peculiar midrash that calculates the number of plagues actually excludes the Gentile from the domain of legitimate interaction and exchange among individuals and nations. The midrash implies that the ten plagues brought upon the Egyptians were not adequate punishment for the evil done to Israel. So terrible was that evil that it is neither intelligible, punishable, nor forgivable.¹⁸

Thus, the plague-stricken Egyptians are objects of an unrestrained exercise of power that knows no limits. This exercise of power cannot be justified by the wickedness of the Gentile (or by Israel's suffering, for redemption was postponed until the tenth plague had stricken); this unrestrained exercise of power can only be explained as the mode of God's presence in history. God's presence seems somewhat dialectical to the presence of the Gentile, the latter appearing as radical Other precisely at the moment in which God exercises unrestrained power.

No normative value or moral principle limits the Gentile's exercise of coercive power, only his limited, finite nature. According to the inner logic of the situation formed by the relation of master and slave, the power of the Gentile is unlimited. The same goes for God, whose power seems to be limited only by the limited imagination of the interpreting rabbis who quite arbitrarily stopped at two hundred and fifty plagues. But by the same logic, the logic of unlimited power, God could have inflicted more plagues.¹⁹ Between God's omnipotence and the unlimited power of the Gentile, the people of Israel is powerless, totally impotent, entirely dependent

either on the contingent, ephemeral, unreliable mercy of a seemingly kind Gentile or upon the grace of a benevolent God who **Keeps His promise**.

A twofold binary structure henceforth shapes the Jewish reception of historical experience, the experience of exile, of being a separate nation dispersed among the nations. On one axis, the binary opposition is between passive and active positions in power relations. From Israel's perspective, power is always exercised upon Israel from without by an Other, either God or Gentile. Israel is but the passive victim or beneficiary of power exercised by an Other. On the second axis, the binary opposition is between slavery and redemption. Within this redemptive framework, power is exercised from without in order to enslave or to redeem, but never in pursuit of everyday interests.

From Israel's perspective, power belongs to the domain of the holy, or rather to the moment of the appearance or disappearance of the holy within the realm of the everyday. In any case, Israel remains outside the historical realm of power clashes. From Israel's point of view, only two historical situations are possible: either the Gentile is beating Israel to death or God is beating the Gentile to death; either God covers His face and the Gentile appears in a cruel display of power, or God appears on the ruins of a destroyed Gentile.

The two binary axes are clearly expressed as the plague calculus comes to its arbitrary end, in the song "Dayeynu" (it would have been enough for us): **If He had merely rescued us from Egypt but had not punished the Egyptians, it would have been enough for us. . . . If He had merely brought us to the land of Israel but had not built the Temple for us, it would have been enough for us. All the more then—doubled and redoubled—are the blessing the Eternal has done for us! For He rescued us from Egypt . . . and built the Temple for us.**

The slavery-redemption axis is expressed in the content of the song, which is a linear progression beginning with the exodus from the abyss of Egyptian domination and concluding with the worship of God at the temple, the pinnacle of freedom. The active-passive axis is twice expressed in the grammatical form of the passage. First, each sentence is divided into explicitly active and implicitly passive forms: He is the one who rescued us and split the sea for us, supplied us in the desert and gave us the Sabbath, etc., and we are the ones to whom all this was done, was given, happened. Moreover, that axis is expressed by the subjunctive form of the

whole song: **If He had . . . but had not . . . it would have been enough. . . .**

"Dayeynnu" actually closes the story of the exodus from Egypt, the story that begins in idol worship, concluding with the worship of God in His temple, **where we could atone for all our sins.** "Dayeynnu" also provides, with utmost precision, the final shape for the overall structure of the narrative: presence-absence, appearance-disappearance; slavery-redemption; passive-active; Israel/Gentile/God.

VI. Pour Out Thy Wrath

After the meal the text continues with the blessing after the meal (*Brakat Hamazon*) and the psalms of praise (*Hallel*), which are chanted on every holiday. After these two standard prayers, the unity of the text, which up to now has been strictly maintained, is abandoned. Now we encounter different songs and prayers from different Jewish communities. Now, when the rite of separation has been completed and the unity of the transhistorical nation that transcends each concrete historical community has been reaffirmed, a multiplicity of versions, no longer threatening, can be safely recited at the level of folk culture.²⁰

Only one passage from this section merits serious consideration and close reading, **Pour Out Thy Wrath** (*Shefokh Hamatshah*). This passage is exceptional in several respects. While apparently seamless, it is actually made up of three different verses: **Pour out Thy wrath. . . . Pursue them in anger. . . . Destroy them. . . .**²¹ Moreover, the passage seems to fall outside the narrative structure described above, for it contains neither a recollection of a past redemption nor the promise of a future one. Instead, it is a cry for help, or rather, adhering closely to the wording of the text, a curse and a call for revenge: take revenge, O Lord, on those Gentiles who **have devoured Jacob and laid waste his dwelling place.**

Linked to this exceptional outcry is an exceptional gesture: The door is opened and the curse is pronounced aloud while a glass of wine is poured for Elijah, the prophet and redeemer. Despite the playful, amusing quality of the act, the appeal to Elijah and the curse upon the Gentiles dampens the joyful tone engendered by the praises for the glory of the Almighty who saved His people and destroyed their enemies. The sweet taste of utopia has been

embittered, the upward movement from the mundane, historical present to the transhistorical separation of the chosen people abruptly interrupted, and the participants brought down to earth. Now, without warning, an explicit reference to actual power relations between concrete communities of Jews and Gentiles introduces real politics into the rite/text.

Now the separation is between those Gentiles, **heathen nations who do not know God and do not call upon His name**, and the children of Jacob who have known God throughout the ages. While the Gentiles still live in darkness, Israel has seen the light emanating from the reproduced memory of the miracle of revelation. And now there arises between the two typical power relations of oppression and persecution. And the time is, as always, a time of the hidden face. As the Gentile appears in a display of power and cruelty, God is absent, as always, leaving no historical trace. And there is no sign, no hint, of His possible coming revelation, except for that old promise of a second redemption that the Haggadah mentions.

Nevertheless, this passage does not transgress the fundamental structure of Israel's separation established in the first part of the Seder. Rather, it embodies that structure in a partial manner. The text does not invert the visible-invisible, present-absent oppositions, nor does God replace the Gentile as the active agent in the scheme of power relations. What we hear is a call for such an inversion, for such a displacement. In other words, in the period between the Egyptian redemption and the messianic redemption, Israel remains in this world without any concrete, tangible evidence of the utopia promised in the rite of separation. Instead, there is suffering, sorrow, lust for revenge, and the painful sense of God's absence from history.

This painful sense of absence can be relieved neither by the symbolic opening of the door, when Jews act *as if* they are not afraid of the Gentile, nor by the glass of wine poured for Elijah. In fact, only the fact that Passover night is considered to be a *Leil Shimurim*, a night in which Israel is protected from the Gentile's wrath by God's attentive presence, makes it possible for this courageous gesture be played out. Moreover, this playful act—whether or not it is taken seriously by the participants—reflects a common perception of the fundamental Jewish condition: even in times of temporary relief, Jews are continually confronted by the threat of danger and persecution.

It is interesting to note that among secular Jews in Israel, the original meaning of the open door has almost been forgotten. Today, opening the door is associated with Elijah, the always-expected invisible guest. A simplistic, benign messianic interpretation suppresses the original hostile attitude toward the Gentile. Nobody takes that appeal to Elijah seriously, however. To some, it serves to amuse the children who participate in the ceremony. In some Jewish communities, which have adopted certain Christmas customs, it may also serve as an occasion for the distribution of gifts.

The appeal to Elijah, the legendary savior, also serves to intensify a sense of absence. While the children are sent to open the door, someone may drink from the cup of Elijah, who, like a Jewish Santa Claus, hovers over Israel's houses, flying from one Seder to another, paying a short visit to each household. And in each house, small children may be excited but somewhat fearful. Nevertheless, as every adult sitting at the Seder table knows full well, Elijah's cup is a cup of absence, the concrete presence of an absence in the second part of the ceremony. Once it is painfully realized, everyone turns back to the regular proceedings and sings to the glory of the absentee, **for his kindness is everlasting**. His kindness is forever, only not for now, at this difficult moment, in these hard times.²²

While most scholars agree that this late addition is a response to persecutions, they are unable to relate that response to a particular event. Rather than traces of a concrete historical context, the verses of the curse provide a general relational pattern between Israel and its Other, a pattern of constant threat, coercion, and persecution. Instead of a particular Jewish response to a particular case of Gentile persecution, we encounter a general prescription for such a response, a topos of complaint and appeal to God.

This topos still follows the fundamental structure of collective memory that we have found to be manifest in the Haggadah. Israel faces the Gentile passively, waiting for salvation. God mediates Israel's reception of the Gentile presence in history, deferring any active Israelite intervention in that history, directing Israel's attention from the pressing present to the remote past and the promised future.

The Gentile, whose face is always drawn in the image of Pharaoh, separates Israel out with force by means of the harsh labor, the slavery, and humiliation. That separation is immediately projected onto a different separation, which precedes it in principle and justifies it a-posteriorly, the separation by means of the knowledge

of God. Those who recognize God, which now means those who belong to the community separated through recollection of the first moments of recognition, are distinguished from those who have been denied the opportunity to share in this collective memory. Separation by means of recognition becomes separation by means of recollection, collective memory, and the duty to remember. Facing the Gentile through the prism of this memory, the Jew wishes for nothing but reversal of the wheel of suffering. Once again, God is expected to become manifest through the destruction of the Gentile and Israel is expected to grow and become holy (*yitgadal veytikhadush*) and be separated as they were in ancient times as a result of the particular way God has chosen to exercise His power in history.

In the constitutive event of Jewish history, there was a series of violent clashes between the Gentile and Israel and their God, in the course of which God was revealed, the Israelite nation separated from all nations, and the Gentiles drowned in the sea. The memory of that event, shaped by the central ceremony of Jewish life, the Seder, constitutes the collective memory of the community of believers as an antihistorical memory.²³ It erases the traces of the actual present, subordinating ongoing events, their antecedents and consequences, to the paradigmatic moment of origin, and shapes them in the form of that moment, coercing each particular historical recollection into the structure dictated by the memory of origins. Moreover, this memory determines the dominant structure of historical consciousness as a result of which the historical present is perceived as an ephemeral moment between the Egyptian redemption and the coming messianic one. And this moment is always, that is, in the meantime, till God will pour out His wrath, placed somewhere between Pitom and Raamses.

The historical Gentile who thus appears on stage is always perceived in the image of Pharaoh. Being a poor imitation of the Egyptian arch Other or a monstrous refinement of him, he is always between Pitom and Raamses. God, who no longer appears with the Gentiles on the same stage, is perceived through the image of the ten plagues, which will again strike when the Holy and Blessed One reappears on stage. In the meantime, He is addressed by means of the harsh labor and the hard times, that being the permanent mode of existence for the Jew addressing God. In that meantime, the people of Israel remains on stage as the eternal witness to the Gentiles' revelation and God's absence. Witnessing their two

Others, waiting for salvation, they perceive themselves under the shadow of that old clash between the two—a clash that has long been but a myth of a golden age, indeed, but one that is doomed to return someday. This is the clash that constituted the origin of Israel's separation, the separation between material and spiritual slavery, that is, between being subjects of the One or of the Other.

VII. If There Is an IDF, Let It Appear at Once

This is not the end of the story. Later, as everyone knows, came the Zionists, who refused to wait any longer and generated another exodus, from Europe and from Arab lands. They resettled Canaan, gained control over the labor market, and revived the Hebrew language, which could now serve to curse God as well as praise Him, to announce His death as well as worship Him. The Zionists have, in principle, created the conditions for the development of new attitudes towards the Gentiles and a new type of interaction with Gentile nations. During that same period, there came Gentiles who allowed a new, most terrible pharaoh to emerge, the most horrible, systematic and sophisticated Pharaoh ever to have existed. Old Pharaoh, the Egyptian, now seems almost benign and obsolete, while the new, most sophisticated one belies comparison, he and no other. He turned the Nile into gas chambers and threw into them not only newborn Jews but all born Jews.

Nevertheless, the old forms of memory have been neither replaced nor enlarged; they have been simply filled with new blood, stamped in ashes. And when the German pharaoh sent the children of Israel to their death, God saw the **blood and fire and pillars of smoke** and remained silent. Perhaps He died long ago, perhaps He too suffocated together with His children, perhaps He revealed Himself to His people, as in ancient times, out of the smoking ashes.²⁴ However, just as in ancient times, now too, whether God is temporarily or totally absent, the Gentile still occupies the same position between God and His People.

Meanwhile, the Zionists have built Hebrew armed forces that have their own mighty hand and outstretched arm. Those forces have called upon the mercy of God and succeeded in inverting, in some crucial historical moments at least, the power relations between the Gentiles and the Jews. Their outstretched arm can now gain a hold over the nation's enemies and visit upon them **anger and wrath, indignation, trouble, and messengers of evil** at a

time and place that mighty Israel deems fit. And one need no longer wait forever for that power, which is now revealed or concealed strategically, according to the law of supply (of Gentiles' atrocities and hostilities against Jews) and demand (for revenge).

Nevertheless, despite the transformation of power relations between Jews and Gentiles brought about by the Zionist movement, the main structure that produces and reproduces Jewish collective memory, which the Haggadah embodies more than any other Jewish text, remains dominant. Many Israeli Jews, and not only Israeli, perceive the Jewish state apparatuses, its armed forces first and foremost, as substitutes for God's outstretched arm, just as they perceive enemy leaders, from Nasser through Arafat to Saddam Hussein, as modern embodiments of ancient pharaoh. And when a threatening Gentile appears, he is viewed within the crossed shadows projected by the Pharaoh of the Nile and the Pharaoh of the Gas Chambers. When a Gentile appears, Israelis call upon the mighty power that protects them. They call upon it to appear immediately and pour its wrath upon the Gentiles who have not known it, or have not yet understood the meaning of its presence in history.²⁵

In the meantime, between the Gentiles' Pithom and Raamises, between Nablus and Gaza and Ossirac, many Jews continue to pour wrath upon Gentiles. Some of them do it while in the tents of Torah, others while in the corridors of power and halls of science; some are engaged in overt missions of wrath pouring, others in secret ones. Or at least, this is how the story is being told, obeying the rules of one grand narrative into which all stories of heroism and glory and torture have been woven. And the people of Israel have grown and expanded, and have become blessed and holy, yet they close their ears to the groaning and curses of their subjugated Others. And each year families gather in order to tell their sons and daughters on that night, at one long stroke, long as the entire exile, the miracles of exodus and the split sea, and the conquered land, and national independence, and immigration, and the seven last wars, and all those still to come.²⁶ And above all, they once again affirm, reproduce, and reestablish the miracle of separation.

NOTES

This chapter is part of a larger research project in progress.

1. For the notion of symbolic capital, see Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," *Media, Culture, and Society* 2 (1980); idem, *Questions de Sociologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).
2. I acknowledge here the influence of Foucault's concept of discourse as developed in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972) and "The Order of Discourse" (in *Unbinding the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. R. Young [Boston and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981]). The notion of a privileged text, however, is my own.
3. Goldstein counts twenty-seven hundred editions since the fifteenth century (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Haggadah").
4. However, I accept as authoritative Daniel Goldschmidt's *Passover Haggadah: Its Sources and History* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1960).
5. Although the kibbutzim amend their Haggadah from year to year, they rarely print them, preferring in most cases cyclostyled forms. In any case, their main contribution belongs to a previous era. In the last three decades the Seder ritual in many kibbutzim has become more traditional. On the kibbutzim's Haggadah and its changes, see Avshalom Reich, "Changes and Development in the Passover Haggadah of the Kibbutz Movement" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, n.d.).
6. One may distinguish three types of attitudes of Orthodox Jews toward the Zionist movement and the institutions of the state: the Orthodox Zionist (or national-religious); the Orthodox non-Zionist (most Haredi Jews, Agudat Israel, Shas); and ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist (Neturei-Karta). I refer above to the two first types.
7. Cf. Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Religion and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). Liebman and Don-Yehiya distinguish three phases of civil religion in Israel according to the degree of conflict between secular and orthodox-religious cultures, and they observe a transition from a "confrontational" stage to a more reconciliatory, "interpretationist" one. If such a transition has indeed taken place, the central position of the Haggadah was maintained throughout it; however, the nationalist-ethnocentric tendencies in Haggadah's interpretations are more characteristic of the last, contemporary stage.
8. For an affirmative interpretation of the presence of national-religious motives in secular culture, see, for example, E. Schweid, *Ad Mashber: Yehudit ve-Tsionut Ba-medina Ha-Yehudit* (On the verge of crisis: Judaism and Zionism in the Jewish state) (Jerusalem: Zack, 1969); idem, *Emunat Am Israel ve-Tarbuto* (The faith of the people of Israel and its culture) (Jerusalem: Zack, 1976). For a critical view, see, for example, S. Yizhar, "Haotz Lihot Hiloni" (The courage to be secular), *Shdemot* 79 (1981): 74-80; Boaz Eytan, *Ha-heshbon Ha-Leumi* (The national account) (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1988); Adi Ophir, "On Sanctifying the Holocaust: An Anti-Theological Treatise," *Tikkun* 2, 1 (1987): 61-67. I mainly have in mind here the emergence and institutionalization of Gush Emunim, the success of its messianic ideology and settlement practices, the more extreme religious nationalism of Rabbi Meir Kahane, but also clear nationalist tendencies among non-Zionist Orthodox in the Sephardic community (that find political expression in the Shas party) and in the Hasidic community, especially in the Chabad movement. Cf. Tsvi Raanan, *Gush Emunim* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Sphriat Ha-Poalim, 1980); Yohai Barruch Rodik, *Eretz Geulah* (Land of redemption) (Jerusalem: Institute for the Study of Rabbi Kook's Teaching, 1989); Menachem Freidman, "Medinat Yisrael Kedilemma Darit" (The state of Israel as a religious dilemma), *Alpaim* 3 (1990): 24-68.
9. The text in bold is part of the Passover Haggadah as translated by Adi Ophir with editorial changes by Laurence J. Silberstein.
10. A similar point is made by Yerushalmi, who emphasizes the link created in the Seder between past and present, text and ritual. "The entire Passover Seder is a symbolic performance of a historical script, and the three main scenes of that script—slavery, liberation, salvation—are the foundation of the Haggadah read aloud" (Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982], 66).
11. The first *poskim* (rabbinic authorities who render legal decisions) mentioned the *karpos* in particular and relied on many hermeneutic and mystical interpretations to justify it. However, either because the vegetable was not available or because its identity was unknown, different vegetables were used in different communities (Adin Steinsaltz, *Passover Haggadah* [Jerusalem: Karta, 1984], 21).
12. The *afikoman* is a piece of *matzah* from the Seder plate that is broken off during the opening section of the Seder and hidden. Custom dictates that the Seder cannot be concluded until everyone tastes from the *afikoman*. Thus, a negotiation takes place between those who have found the *afikoman* and the person leading the Seder. The rules of the *afikoman*'s game vary widely among different communities, and the game itself has not been "commercialized" everywhere. Of special interest is the function of the *afikoman*'s retrieval in official Passover ceremonies in army camps. The game opens channels of communication and exchange between high officers and junior officers on the one hand and rank-and-file enlisted personnel on the other. Almost always the game serves as an opportunity for the rank and file to gain some material benefits, such as a few days off, a television set for the soldiers' club, or other improvements in the living conditions at the camp.
13. The basic structure is maintained even among some contemporary secular Zionists, and certainly among Orthodox-nationalists (*Gush*

Emunim), who tell the story of the birth of Israel and its continuous war against the Arabs. The Zionist narrative exemplifies here an impressive continuity with the traditional narrative of Jewish history, the Haggadah being one of its most important sources and clearest realization. History always lies between total destruction and slavery on the one hand and final redemption on the other hand. Political events are interpreted as indications for the present state of Israel, always lying somewhere between the two extremes, and historical processes are understood as concretization of one of two possible trends, downward to Egypt or upward to the land of Israel—except that among secular Jews, omnipotent God is replaced by a seemingly omnipotent army. About this point see below.

15. According to an explicit mishnah (*Pesahim* 10, 4), every man is commanded to study and interpret the Torah's verses in the Haggadah only from the section beginning, "A Syrian tried to destroy my father. . . ." This abbreviated version of Israel's history was also to be read (without its midrashic commentary, of course) by the Pilgrims to the Temple at the ceremony of Pentecost (Deut. 26:5-9; cf. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 30).
16. This last issue received much emphasis in the midrash:

Rabbi Meir says, when The Holy and Blessed One revealed Himself to the Egyptians at sea, He was revealed with ninety thousand angels of terror. Some of these angels were angels of Shaking (*ziva*), some of Trembling (*yetteh*), some of Hail (*barad*), some of Flame (*shalhevet*). And anyone who sees them is trembling with fear. They [the angels] said to Him, Sovereign of the world, let us do your will in Egypt. He said to them, my anger will not cool down till I myself will take revenge of those who hate Israel. Therefore it was said, *vayyanighehu bi-khedut* [Mekilta of Rabbi Simon b. Jocahi, Hoffmann's edition [Frankfurt a.M.: Kauffman, 1905], 52).

A different version of the same midrash appears in the *Vitri Machzor* and other manuscripts of the same period and it probably echoes a historical debate concerning the existence of angels (Goldschmidt, *The Passover Haggadah*, 86; Louis Finkelstein, "Pre-Maccabean Documents in the Passover Haggadah," *Harvard Theological Review* 35, 4 [October 1942]: 295-332).

17. This is also the case for many secular Zionists whose historical expectations remain entrapped within the scheme of destruction and redemption. Accordingly, minor terrorist threats are often interpreted as threats to the very existence of the state; major military operations are presented as decisive solutions to the Israeli-Arab conflict; and the so-called peace process is described by opponents as a recipe for destruction, and by supporters as the road to salvation. For these secularists, who are skeptical of divine intervention, the IDF has replaced God's outstretched arm.

18. Of course, not all Gentiles are depicted as being as radically evil as Pharaoh, nor is their otherness presented as being as radical as his. Even Pharaoh would not have been all that radically evil had God not deafened his heart. Thus, one sees an obvious contradiction between the reification of the Other as radically evil and that accumulated historical experience that shows that Gentiles are capable of kindness and repentance and willing to improve and mend their ways. One way of overcoming this contradiction is by interpreting texts in light of historical experience, thereby opening the way for differentiating among Gentiles and empathizing with them. Another way is to impose a literal reading of the Haggadah on the text of historical experience, thereby assuming the Gentiles' essential wickedness. The following example of the second approach is taken from a contemporary preface to a new edition of the manuscript of *Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, Rokeach's Commentary on the Passover Haggadah*:

Gentiles are closed off from repenting, for they are quick to become excited. Pharaoh had to wonder, for he saw all those miracles and wonders and supernatural events. [Hence God] made an effort to strengthen the point of evil which resides in the Gentiles' inner nature. This point stems from the depth of their hatred to Israel, from the Aggadah that "it is known that Esau hates Jacob," which means the Gentile draws his strength from it. Since the Gentile is an innate liar (*hesed laumim hatat*), even his outer appearance is covered with deceit in the sense that all Gentiles are uncircumcised. Thus Esau was born with a coat of hair, which is the body's decrements. (Rabbi Moshe Hershtler, ed., *Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, Rokeach's Commentary on the Passover Haggadah* [Jerusalem and Chicago: Beit Hamidrash Latorah, 1984], xiv)

19. The plagues calculations have occupied many interpreters for many generations. Cabalists have been especially good at it, as they have deciphered numbers and letters time and again, back and forth, till nothing has remained of the poor Egyptians except for a series of signs of signs, and the entire corpus of the holy scriptures has turned into a scene of divine revelation. Once again I am quoting occasionally (from the Haggadah of *Orah Haim*, Jerusalem, 1963):

A marvelous remedy to read at Passover eve, which is transcribed from the writing of the Holy Cabalist, Rabbi Shimson Magid from Astropolia [who quoted what] the ARI, blessed be his memory, wrote in his notebook called *Mary Wonders* in the part called "The Outgoing from Egypt," chap. 3, p. 42, side 1, and this is what is written there: "I have already let you know that Pharaoh was stricken in Egypt with those ten plagues by three thousands two hundreds and eighty angels of terror who reign in three spheres (skies) of impurity. One is called *SHARAA*, the other is called *TEMUCH* and the third *BISHEHA*. . . . These things are wonders, opaque and closed and nobody can interpret them. . . . [But] I am going to uncover a secret revealed to me in a dream in a night vision

... these are the ten plagues which I have inscribed letter by letter, which make up three thousands two hundreds and eighty angels of terror in charge of the purification of the evil ones, and this is a wonderful literal interpretation, no one has ever seen. And here is the calculation properly set, when we write *CNM* without the *Yota*, and also *ARY* without the *Waw*, and also *HSHECH* without the *Waw*, and then the sum is indeed no more and no less than three thousands two hundred and eighty angels of terror who punish the evil one. (51-53)

20. Zionist culture, especially Labor Zionist, has contributed a rich repertoire of songs that are sung at this point. But the most popular songs, even in secular families, remain the traditional "Had-Gadya" and "Ehad Mi Yodea."
21. Ps. 79:6-7; Ps. 69:25; Lam. 3:66.
22. The passage "Pour Out Thy Wrath" was added to the Haggadah sometime during the Middle Ages, and it was probably the last to be fixed. The available manuscripts and early prints contain different versions of curse upon the Gentiles, all of which are taken from different verses from Prophets and Hagiographia (Goldschmidt counts twenty such curses). Different communities have arranged these verses differently. It seems that different communities had first introduced independently a passage of curses to be included in the official ceremony, and only later, with the advent of printing, the final form of the curse was more or less fixed. Different communities used to pronounce a different number of curses: the Italian Jews, one; the Spanish Jews, two; the Ashkenazic Jews, four; and other communities even more. See Goldschmidt, *The Passover Haggadah*, 62-64.
23. This is Yerushalmi's claim in *Zakhor* regarding the basic patterns of Jewish collective memory in general.
24. Cf. Emil Fackenheim, "The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz," *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). For a more critical discussion of the same theme, see Adi Ophir, "On Sanctifying the Holocaust: An Anti-Theological Treatise," *Tikkun* 2, 1 (1987): 61-67.
25. I am not speaking of some lunatics or of a marginal phenomenon, not even about the messianic Lubavitchers, or the nationalist, fascist Orthodox Jews of Gush Emunim, or the racists of Kahane. It is mainstream Zionism that I have in mind here and its most recent expressions. One particular example, Dan Meiron's call during the Gulf War ("If there is an IDF, let it appear at once.") serves as the heading for this section.
26. For a clear example of the theme developed above, see "Haggadat Harel," in which the quite extravagant design consists of a series of straightforward allegories between recent events of Jewish and Israeli history and key moments in the Passover story. On the first page of the text its producers declare:

The traditional text of the Haggadah, which speaks of the way out, from slavery to redemption, is accompanied by illustrations describing the return of the Jewish People to its homeland from the beginnings of the Zionist movement to the establishment of the State of Israel. . . . Through this Haggadah the idea of freedom embodied in the holiday of Passover is linked to the modern return to Zion and to the independence of Israel. Thus we add another chapter to the story of the outgoing from Egypt. (David Harel [design] and Chava Harel [text], *Rebirth of Israel: Passover Haggadah* [Israel: Harel, 1987])