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Chapter 6

DIFFERENTIATING EXILES

There is something naggingly schizophrenic about the biblical exile. It exists as an ideological force *and* it does not exist as a singular historical reality behind that force; it has shaped the biblical texts if primarily as an idea of a singular historical event in the minds of the biblical authors. But in that it is circular. Its meaning is so central for a restored polity that the biblical desire for restoration necessitates the exile as a *universal* event, one that demonstrates Yahweh's power through his punishment of the disobedience of nations. Yet in terms of historical actuality, *the* exile was not an objective facticity outside the constructed history of the biblical authors. *What would a Babylonian ever have to say about the exile?* Without question, members of the Judean aristocracy were relocated into Babylonia, but their experiences were hardly different from any other conquered people group. There were "exiles" but no world-shaking "Exile." Moreover, the term "exile" necessitates the existence of the very thing that was lost—a nation. Yet the hope for its reclamation was retained, and the biblical authors appeal to a *restored* nation as the basis for the meaning of "exile," and the consequent "mass return."¹ Both ideas reflect utopian desire but not historical reality. More importantly, the biblical meaning of restoration necessitates a corresponding concept of a "disorderly" world, which explains in part its obsession with destruction and boundaries. The "restored world" is the product of an imposed distinction or fabrication of the remnant community distinguishing itself from the surrounding peoples. In short, the biblical (and monotheistic) view of restoration *demand*s difference as a foundational act. It is in that

1. B. Becking put it well, "If the concept of a mass return from Exile were correct, then (1) hints of it should be present in official Persian documents; (2) traces of it should be observable in the archaeological record of Persian-Period Yehud; and (3) a dramatic demographic decrease of Judeans in Mesopotamia should be traceable" ("We All Returned as One!": Critical Notes on the Myth of the Mass Return," in Lipschits and Oeming, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, 7).

sense that we should understand the well-known passage from Jeremiah, one to which we have referred before: “And the LORD said to me, ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ And I said, ‘Figs. The good figs are extremely good. The bad ones extremely bad; so bad that they cannot be eaten on account of their badness’” (24:3, translation mine).

Difference and Distinction: A Primer

Difference is the state in which one can speak of determination *as such*. The difference “between” two things is only empirical, and the corresponding determinations are only extrinsic. However, instead of something distinguished from something else, imagine something which distinguishes itself—and yet that from which it distinguishes itself does not distinguish itself from it.²

Herein we nearly have a paradox in the simultaneous extrinsic and the seeming unidirectional—*it is something I define*—nature of difference. One cannot help but be reminded of Ezra–Nehemiah where it speaks out passionately for the centrality of the *golah* community as well as the community’s social-political relevance. What if, for instance, the *golah* community was only a community by virtue of internal recognition, that it was a community merely by speaking itself into existence, or only as a consequence of literary creation? What if we were able to poll the so-called *am ha’aretz* and ask one simple question: Are there only two groups in Yehud, the *golah* community and you, the *am ha’aretz*?

Blenkinsopp’s observation of the Bible’s internal problem with distinguishing between the *golah* and the *am ha’aretz* finds the same issue but from a different angle.³ The specific *golah*–*am-ha’aretz* distinction seems to exist only in Ezra–Nehemiah. Yet the root of the distinction *does* exist in other relevant biblical texts; the vocabulary is merely different. Perhaps the lack of internal consistency in biblical vocabulary suggests that the distinction was a creation in progress, that the increasingly rigid contours of the distinction increased with the growing centrality of the utopian ideal of restoration as a shared collective symbol.⁴ *The more we understand what we want, the better we are able to express why you are not one of us.* Ezra–Nehemiah takes as a given the existence of the *golah* community, but we cannot afford the luxury of assuming that the community itself

2. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 28.

3. For reference, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 49.

4. It is likely that it would only have been during the late Hellenistic or Hasmonean periods that it would enjoy broad external validation.

was externally recognized as such. *Did the people already in the land recognize a golah community?* Instead, we must look for those signs of group conflict, antagonisms and projections that mark the community as an externally verifiable, distinct community toward whom resistance may be directed—we must look, and let's say it with simple alliteration, for demarcations of difference.

That strategy is the basis of Deleuze's position regarding difference: "Negation is difference, but difference seen from its underside, seen from below. Seen the right way up, from top to bottom, difference is affirmation."⁵ In Ezra–Nehemiah's binarily opposed society, the *am ha'aretz* must legitimate the *golah* community by accepting its distinction, its difference as "other," its inverted relationship to production (and that is precisely the role that Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem individually play; cf. Neh 2:19; 6:1–6). Likewise, it must accept the authority or power of the *golah* community effectively to dictate, "but you have no share or claim or historic right in Jerusalem" (2:20). Given the context in Yehud, that statement is true only if the "rejected" people accept *as true* its lack of "right" in Jerusalem. For an example, one might recall the children's rhyme that goes, "Sticks / and stones / may break my bones / but words will never / hurt me." The point is that the target "I/me" refuses to accept the validity, truth, or value of what the subject person is saying. *If you call me an "ass," for it to shape me I must accept that either you have correctly assessed who I am or that you have the power to define who I am.* Nehemiah claims the latter power, the ability to define the contours of distinction that identify the *golah* community from the *am ha'aretz* and to impose limits upon the *am ha'aretz* as something wholly other. Or to put it in Deleuzian terms, the *am ha'aretz* "other" must *repeat* the inverse restrictions and regulations of its intersubjective relation with the *golah* community, those that positively define the identity of the *golah*. *We say and do Y because we are not golah, which does X.* Yet this would mean that the *am ha'aretz* is knowable only as an inverse of the *golah* community and, in terms of its identity, wholly dependent upon it. That is certainly what the biblical texts seem to expect.

Repetition, then, becomes an act of legitimation. Deleuze writes: "Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it."⁶ The importance is found in the mind of the individual or group that must interpret and repeat the "object," which may be material or ideal. In other words, to use again our

5. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 55.

6. Ibid., 70.

children's rhyme, I must confess to myself and to you that I am an "ass" and embody that realization by internalizing it. I must repeat it not only in my response to you but in my future engagements with others. Or in the case of Nehemiah, the people who are already in the land must identify themselves as the *am ha'aretz* and constrain themselves according to the parameters of that identity. Parameters, we must recall, that are not positive attributions given to the *am ha'aretz* but the negative of such attributions given to the *golah* community; the *am ha'aretz* is knowable on account of its antithesis to the *golah* community. Yet there is more. Deleuze writes: "In considering repetition in the object, we remain within the conditions which make possible an idea of repetition. But in considering the change in the subject, we are already beyond these conditions, confronting the general form of difference."⁷ This emphasis upon the productive qualities of repetition and difference clarifies that for biblical texts such as Ezra–Nehemiah the assertion of group distinction entails a simultaneous rewriting of relations of power.⁸ It must do so. There was no preexisting distinction internal to the province between a *golah* community and the *am ha'aretz* before 539 BCE. But following the growing community of immigrants—and we are assuming there were returns, plural, rather than a singular, grand return—the distinction that existed was between the social-political agents of society within the province of Yehud and those individuals immigrating into the province, from Babylonia and elsewhere.

What we are finding in this analysis is that there is a productive quality to difference. Articulating qualities of difference defines aspects of the parameters of intersubjective relations between individuals and groups. For our study here, we are focusing primarily upon the distinctions and differences articulated by the biblical texts. Those qualities are part of an attempt to redefine the social-political order in favor of the *golah* community, immigrants who sought land and corresponding positions of power. For these texts, the "Exile" is the event *par excellence* that established the fundamental difference between the binarily opposed categories of "remnant" and "profane"—that difference so beloved of the biblical texts.

7. Ibid., 71.

8. Is not the imposing of a collective identity upon an "other" a type of depotentializing of the other? A making of her to be something categorically finite, completed, and therefore easily dismissible? See also Deleuze's discussion of potentiality versus depotentiality in *ibid.*, 174–75.

*The Exile as a “Univocal” Event and Its Quality
as a Symbol of Difference*

For thus says the LORD: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good fortune that I now promise them. Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, It is a desolation, without human beings or animals; it has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans. Fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, of the hill country, of the Shephelah, and of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes, says the LORD. (Jer 32:42–44)

The prophet assumes only one possible meaning for the exile: Yahweh was punishing the people, and the invading nation was simply a tool in the divine hand. But the intent was not simply to explain the events that happened to the people, although it does that. Jeremiah describes Yahweh as being in a position of power over both the fate of the people and the Babylonian Empire, whom Yahweh *used* to make a point upon a grand stage—the empire a tool in a glorious display of phallic power. Yahweh controlled the imperial powers, which includes the Persian Empire after the Babylonian one, not for the sake of authority alone but because *it made restoration possible*. In order to show control over a land associated with imperial territory the power of Yahweh needed to be greater than that of the imperial system. Isaiah certainly made the case when he described Cyrus as a tool in the land of Yahweh—imagery that was frequently associated with power (or the demonstration of it) in the ancient Near East. The supremacy of Yahweh was extended beyond political borders because the legitimacy of the remnant community and its claim to the land necessitated it. Restoration required a power capable of overturning the extant, dominant order in support of one that favored Yahweh’s dominion. Toward that end, Cyrus, and also the Babylonian kings before him, must be, as we have mentioned before, a servant-king.

Thus says the LORD who made the earth, the LORD who formed it to establish it—the LORD is his name: Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known... I am going to bring [to Jerusalem] recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. (Jer 33:2, 6)

Reading Deutero-Isaiah next to this only provides further confirmation of our point:

[I am the LORD] who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose"; and who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." (Isa 44:28)

To fulfill their expectation for restoration, the exile must be a universal event for the authors; it must stand as a singular event with a singular interpretation. The exile must become the foundational moment of difference, a creative act, upon which the idea of restoration is based. But the point that we have been arguing is that the magnetism of the exile emerged simultaneous to its biblically attributed univocality, through which shared anxieties regarding assimilation in Yehud were alleviated.⁹ *We don't have to be like them. God will restore us.* This assertion shares much with that of Niels Peter Lemche who posited that the concept of a unified Israel did not preexist the events of the exile.¹⁰ Persian and later period biblical descriptions of Israel tend largely to be a *theological* entity; such a thing was unnecessary before the absence of Judah as a geopolitical entity. And let's say it here, appealing to the religious institution as a primary determiner of identity was a last resort. In the ancient Near Eastern world, it was uncommon for religion (as an isolated institution) to play such a primary role. An appeal to religion as an autonomous institution in this capacity typically betrays an insecure political position—the only available option offering a vanguard to the threatening anomic world—and a case of ideological imperialism—we *lay claim to the god of this land and to all that god's material holdings*. By this last we mean that the community sought dominion over the god of the land, Yahweh, who was god over Israel/Judah and who was undoubtedly worshiped, as would have been the typical ancient Near Eastern practice, by people already in the land. In support of restoration, the biblical authors privatized the local deity—*Yahweh is ours alone. And according to Ezekiel (cf. 10:18–22; 43:2),*

9. M. Liverani finds a similar point in the act of self-identification through the law, though one should disagree with his claim that the practice was "typical." It was instead the product of the Neo-Babylonian and later periods: "The extraordinary insistence on national self-identification through observance of a divinely-given law is typical of Israel, and answers the precise needs of a nation lacking the normal geopolitical coordinates. Respect for the Law could in fact take place even in social groups scattered over the territory and dependent on different political organizations (but in any case not their own). Self-identification through observance of the Law was certainly linked to the exile and post-exile periods: initially with a wish to maintain cohesion within a community risking dispersion, and later with the will to recreate a nation based on shared values (religious and moral)" (*Israel's History*, 344).

10. As described in Israel Finkelstein, "The Emergence of Early Israel: Anthropology, Environment and Archaeology," *JAOS* 110 (1990): 678.

Yahweh went with us into exile—and re-invented the relationship between god and land, the latter which took on strong ideological meaning.¹¹ But to manipulate effectively the imperial political world, which was necessary for restoration, the god (Yahweh) could no longer be restricted to the land. No longer would the deity be the god of a specific geographic space but a god who acts like an imperial king, taking and giving land as he desires.¹² This shift in thinking is quite apparent in Ezekiel's temporary throne, Deutero-Isaiah's description of Cyrus as a messiah, Ezra–Nehemiah's confessional emphasis upon the political dominion of Yahweh, and so forth (cf. Isa 45:1; Ezek 10–11; Ezra 10:1–44).

Julie Galambush, in her discussion of Ezekiel, offered a similar point: “The exiles’ desire to possess ‘their’ land (Ezek 36.17), negatively projected onto the current inhabitants, finds narrative resolution through the character of YHWH.”¹³ This followed by, “The exiles’ separation from the land is depicted as YHWH’s own, and YHWH’s struggle to conform nature to his will and assert his universal overlordship validates and symbolically fulfills the community’s desires.”¹⁴ The last part is poignant: Yahweh was viewed as conforming nature to his will and asserting his universal overlordship as that which validates and symbolically fulfills the community’s desire(s). The psychoanalytic term for this is “projection.” Projection is the act of externalizing experiences and desired attributes about oneself—and this can be seen in the individual and the collective—and imposing them upon an external object, whether a person, thing, or idea. In a situation such as this, Deleuze points out that the negative is not simply antithesis or negation. It represents the “not us” that is knowable outside of the boundaries that distinguish ourselves from others—but a reality or essence that we also engage in different ways.¹⁵ It is in a similar

11. Regarding the different ideologies of “land,” see the informative study of Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine*.

12. On the imperial practice, cf. Pierre Briant, “De Cyrus à Alexandre: Histoire Politique de l’Empire et de la Dynastie Achéménide,” *Bulletin d’Histoire Achéménide* 1 (1997): 405–21; Cataldo, *Theocratic Yehud*, 51–56.

13. Galambush, *This Land Is My Land*, 91.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Cf. Deleuze’s discussion of non-being as an expression of difference (in *Difference and Repetition*, 28–69). But note: “in this relation, being is difference itself. Being is also non-being, *but non-being is not the being of the negative*; rather, it is the being of the problematic, the being of problem and question. Difference is not the negative; on the contrary, non-being is Difference: *heteron*, not *enantion*... As for negative, this is only the shadow of the highest principle, the shadow of the difference alongside the affirmation produced” (64).

fashion that the biblical view of “exile” emphasizes as its negative the distinction between insider and outsider. In other words, the exile must mean the same thing for the returnee community (the so-called “exiles”) as it does for those who remained in the land whose expression of identity begins as, “we are *not* the remnant” (cf. Ezek 11:14–21).

Of course, we run into an interpretive problem if we credit Yahweh to be an active agent rather than an ideological construction of the biblical authors—a problem that has brought a number of biblical scholars to methodological demise. If we remove the idea of some universal, abstract big Other selecting, punishing, and restoring, we must find our answers in the productive activities of human agents. *When I say that God will restore me, what I really mean is that the community will provide the institutional space and support for what I desire.* Apart from the possible objective existence she grants the divine, Galambush was certainly correct in her methodological strategy when she defined Yahweh as a character or symbol through which the author sought to find resolution for the exiles’ desire for the land. Let us repeat this increasingly unavoidable point: the narrative character or symbol of Yahweh represents a desire for land and for a collective identity that is based on ownership of that land.¹⁶ Correspondingly, the actions attributed to Yahweh by the Neo-Babylonian and Persian-period biblical texts should be interpreted within the framework of this desire.

Perhaps the more sensual vocabulary of Melanie Klein may be more appealing to those who barely tolerate frolicking in the more abstract fields of theory. Yahweh, and the temple as a physical symbol of the deity’s presence, is the “good breast,” rounded and full of milk, the favored object upon which those things that promote internal stability and satisfaction are projected.¹⁷ The outsider, or profane “other,” is the “bad breast,” sagging and dry, upon which all experiences and ideas that heighten anxiety of anomie (or even physical death) are projected. Consequently, the productive impact of collective projection demands that one cannot presume that the immigrating community shared the same perception of Yahweh as the people already in the land. The god of the immigrating community was a manifestation of its own desire for fulfillment and stability—a desire that emphasized heavily the importance of its own desire for land and social-political authority. In that sense, Zerubbabel was right in his dismissal of the proposed claim of Sanballat and others to worship also Yahweh

16. I also presented this point at length in Cataldo, *Breaking Monotheism*.

17. Cf. her theory in projective identification throughout *Envy and Gratitude* in which she uses the metaphor of the “good breast” vs. the “bad breast” as an extension of Freud’s arguments.

(cf. Ezra 4:1–3). The objectified *desire*, the projection of which constitutes the symbolic force of the divine, of the *am ha'aretz* and the *golah* community, was not the same. *But you have no portion, right, or remembrance in Jerusalem*" (Neh 2:20, translation mine).

Scholarly consensus tends to rest upon the Judean aristocracy, from which we get the "remnant" community, as something that was materially and intellectually valuable to the Babylonian culture. But note Hans Barstad, who writes, "By bringing the aristocracy of Judah into exile, Nebuchadnezzar in fact removed its statehood, which was identical with the royal family and the upper classes... The Judean state was then replaced with a Neo-Babylonian state. This would have but little effect on national production in Judah, where life soon would have 'returned to normal.'"¹⁸ There is a problematic gap between what Barstad describes as the removal of statehood and "little effect on national production." Deleuze reminds us that true production is desire production, and that surplus production is but a part of desire production itself.¹⁹ Thus, the removal of the aristocracy would have unavoidably altered economic production within the territory to the degree that the ruling ideology behind the dominant mode of production changed. That is the critical emphasis for the biblical texts. Return and restoration does not denote simply the physical return of the exiles to the land, it includes a reorganization of the social-political order. Barstad attempts to navigate the blatant social-political problem that any empty land theory must account for: the necessity for the wholesale removal of population and subsequent destruction of various institutional arrangements that characterize the dominant relations of power and the authoritative "class" legitimated by those relations. The basic point behind scholarly arguments for an empty land is that it clears the way for the easy return or restoration of the previous aristocratic "statehood." To

18. Barstad, "After the 'Myth of the Empty Land,'" 3–4. But compare C. Carter, who writes, "There was very likely a substantial disconnect, given the absence of a monarchy and its attendant infrastructure. And the imprint of this disconnect is present in the biblical traditions themselves. An empty land? Not at all. A subsistence-level economy for those who remained, probably overseen by a Neo-Babylonian appointee? A good guess. And the best we can do here is guess" ("Ideology and Archaeology in the Neo-Babylonian Period: Excavating Text and Tell," in Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 311).

19. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 29, 139–40. Note also, "A State desire, the most fantastic machine for repression, is still desire—the subject that desires and the object of desire. Desire—such is the operation that consists in always stamping the mark of the primordial Urstaat on the new state of things, rendering it immanent to the new system insofar as possible, making it interior to the system" (221–22).

further strengthen his position, what Barstad should have argued further was that while the “non-aristocracy” who remained in the land likely did not notice any substantial change, the quiddities of desire production within Judah were modified in support of those who found themselves (if some weren’t already before the exile) in authority.

The dirty secret of the exile is that it supports a radical social-economic stratification. As a literary device, its acquired function is an act of differentiation between insider and outsider. The remnant, comprised of those chosen by Yahweh to be the seed of the “new Israel,” denotes the descendants of the past ruling aristocracy. The biblical separation between sacred and profane is unavoidably shaped by the productive activities driven by the ideological and material desires of the immigrant community. The differentiation between primary groups such as *golah* and *am ha’aretz* that one finds in texts such as Ezra–Nehemiah was already predetermined along traditional economic and ideological levels. All said, the biblical concept of “exile” is concerned less with any actual series of events and more with the meaning of a singular event (should one say “ideal”?) of radical rupture, by which we mean the forced separation of differences. And the reason for this emphasis upon distinction was to carve out new boundaries and networks of authority.

There is a rough parallel with Žižek’s description of difference:

Here we encounter the Lacanian difference between reality and the Real: “reality” is the social reality of the actual people involved in interaction and in the productive processes, while the Real is the inexorable “abstract,” spectral logic of capital that determines what goes on in social reality. One can experience this gap in a palpable way when one visits a country where life is obviously in shambles. We see a lot of ecological decay and human misery. However, the economist’s report that one reads afterwards informs us that the country’s economic situation is “financially sound”—reality doesn’t matter, what matters is the situation of capital.²⁰

There is a distinction between the experiences of the people “on the ground,” so to speak, and the values and desires that motivate their productive activities. The biblical reference to “exile” embodies a shared meaning that resides at the distinction between member (e.g. *golah*, remnant, “Israel,” etc.) and nonmember. That distinction is a product of group conflict, driven by the immigrating community, in Yehud between those who “returned” and those who were already in the land. When we see the singular concept of “exile” within the Bible we must first look to the group struggles occurring within the Persian province of Yehud.

20. Žižek, *Violence*, 13.

The critical investigator employing the term “exile” in its full biblical glory must be able to answer: From whose perspective? Any given answer already predetermines subjective and objective values of the biblical texts that broach the topic. Likewise, we have already predisposed ourselves to a certain position regarding the credibility of a mass return from “Exile.”²¹ To be clear, however, the question is not really whether there was a series of events that could be described as “exile.” Let’s accept that there was a significant series of events that affected the loyalties of Judeans removed from the land. Even with sufficient doubt cast against the authenticity of the biblical narratives, there is still little reason to doubt that something, or somethings, had a profound impact upon the cultural memory of those responsible for the production of the biblical texts. As Philip Davies argued well, the notion of the exile operates on several levels: the canonical, the literary, and the historiographical. On a canonical level, the deportation brings the period of the Former Prophets to a close.²² On a literary level, the exile stands at the center of a complex intertextual issue.²³ And on a historiographical level, “exile” as an idea can be mapped.²⁴ Again, we need not dismiss that something, or somethings, happened in order to question what “exile” meant both to the community who employed the term and those who did not. Such questions may begin with, which meaning, which value system, which product of desire do we credit with the term? Exile means what for whom? But did the idea of exile mean anything for the so-called *am ha’aretz*? To say yes, would that not be like arguing that the self-imposed exile of Hollywood movie stars, whom we might quite begrudgingly acknowledge as members of the aristocracy, to the French Riviera has radically impacted my social identity as an academic and the consequent productive quality of my social-political agency (*even if I am in love with Johnny Depp*)? To construct any historical or sociological reconstruction of Yehud while including the exile as the watershed moment that radically altered the entirety of the social context of Yehud is entirely problematic. It myopically employs *golah* ideology, the product of desire of a minority group, as the lens and framework through which to interpret the social-political world of the province.

Or perhaps a different angle would be more helpful. “Exile” is similar to the motto “Currahee” of Easy Company, 2nd Battalion of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division. The word

21. Of course, see again Becking’s point regarding the real problem with any theory that supposes a mass return did occur (“Critical Notes,” 7).

22. Davies, “Exile!,” 129.

23. Ibid., 130.

24. Ibid., 131.

purportedly comes from the Cherokee language and means “We stand alone, together”²⁵ and was also the name of a 1735-foot mountain near a U.S. Army training camp in Stephens County, Georgia. The company adopted the name of the mountain as its motto because its recruits were frequently made to run up and down the ascent with and without full gear. The motto represented the shared experience, a force of bonding, for the soldiers of Easy Company. Its adoption became an act of distinction between those soldiers and all others. It served as a reminder of what others were not: they had not endured the same experiences that were definitive of the collective identity of Easy Company. Our suggestion is that the biblical writers, notably of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian-period literature, used “exile” in a similar manner to designate a shared experience distinguishing “remnant” from all other people in the land. That is certainly what Mario Liverani meant when he wrote, “The returnees, during their exile, had built up a strong ideology, based on the new covenant, on Yahweh’s exclusiveness, on “the remnant that shall return” (*shear-jashub* is the name given by Isaiah to his son; Isa 7:3, see also 10:21).²⁶ In that sense, the events of the exiles were less important than the “archetype” they served: the shared meaning that defined the contours of a collective identity distinct from the people already in the land.²⁷ That is also the point that Davies’s previous comment identifies. For social, historical reconstruction one cannot depend upon the *biblical portrayal* of the exile as historically veritable. While we can be fairly confident events identifiable as “exiles” occurred, we should not for want of historical evidence default to the biblical meaning of “Exile.” In fact, such a portrayal was never the intention of the biblical authors. David Freedman is close to this point when he writes, “[T]he Bible as a literary entity is a product of the exile.” And, “*While we know little of the ordinary events of the exile*, we do have what is undoubtedly more important, a careful and extensive record of the revolutions of the human spirit that took place during those years.”²⁸

25. There is some indication that “currahee” is in fact Spanish and not Cherokee. Nevertheless, the motto remains and is attributed to the Cherokee language.

26. Liverani, *Israel’s History*, 256. But note also that he contrasts the *am ha’aretz* as disorganized and leaderless, ignorant, and illiterate (ibid.). In doing so, he has fallen victim to the unfortunate tendency of shaping his view of Yehud within the framework of *golah* ideology.

27. Cf. my discussion in “Yahweh’s Breast.”

28. Freedman, “Son of Man,” 172, emphasis mine.

The exile as a univocal event is meaningful within the value and meaning systems of those Judeans immigrating to Yehud. Its truest meaning is found not in historical events but in its function as a symbolic ideal that, to use Peter Berger's terms, externalizes and objectivates as an unbridgeable gap the differences between the "remnant" and "everyone else." *We, the remnant, are the ones who have endured the exile* (cf. Jer 29:14, 16–17). This shared experience defines the boundary between insider and outsider.

The Role of a Value System in Self-Preservation

Deleuze will not accept that there just "is" a structure of differences. He insists on thinking the genesis or emergence of difference: how is it that we have a system of differentiated signs, such as language? How did we come to think of ourselves as differentiated from the world, as subjects? Deleuze insists that we have to confront this problem by thinking of difference positively. Only positive difference can explain the emergence of any differentiated thing, whether that be the system of differences of a language or the differentiated human individual.²⁹

According to this point of view, the psychology of the mature human organism is an unfolding of emergent process that is marked by the progressive subordination of older behavioral systems to newer, higher order behavior systems. The mature human being tends normally to change his psychology as the conditions of his existence change. Each successive stage or level is a state of equilibrium, he has a psychology which is particular to that state. His acts, feelings, motivations, ethics and values, thoughts, and preference for management all are appropriate to that state. If he were in another state, he would act, feel, think, judge, and be motivated in a different manner.³⁰

Graves's point, our second epigraph, that individual psychologies are particular to a given state of equilibrium, is important—and the weight of this point is the same for collectives as for individuals. Throughout this work we have continually emphasized the social drive for stability, that God and restoration are projections of that drive but directed toward an idealized stability. Graves's point also assumes that change between states is a consequence of "upward direction." The dialectical snare that occupied modernist theory for generations is obvious in Graves's assumption regarding the nature of human activities as progressing in

29. Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 13.

30. Clare W. Graves, "Deterioration of Work Standards," *Harvard Business Review* 44, no. 5 (1966): 121.

an “upward direction.” Moreover, Graves is not entirely clear about what makes the individual aware that her position, or state, is no longer in equilibrium. But her point that the contours of individual productive actions as characterized by a drive toward equilibrium is important and is no less true of historical individuals than modern ones.

But like our own personal Virgil, Deleuze offers a possible way out of the dialectical snare. One recognizes the deterioration of stability in the non-closure of the “other,” in the other’s constant resistance to closed categories: “[T]he identity of anything is an effect of difference. It is not that there is a world of beings that we then perceive as being different from each other—a being is what it is only through its difference from another thing.”³¹ Identity is a performance preserved in relationships marked by non-closure. This constant expressibility of identity resists being constrained by closure because it is always in the process of defining itself in relation to new directions in the productive activities of others. *Because your attitudes and actions change, and because they affect our relationship, I must continue to make adjustments in my position before you.* Deleuze makes the case that the pursuit of desire, which is always a productive one, is the basis upon which any stability or equilibrium must be based. Equilibrium entails the full, complete satisfaction of desire. Yet the full articulation of my desire, contrary to those who argue for a strict individualistic relativism, is possible only within “creative circuits of social relationality.”³² *I know what I desire because the difference between us helps shape the objects of my desire. I desire them because of the meaning we have attributed them with.* Yet my desires and values are ineffective at maintaining stability, or equilibrium, against internal and external forces if they are not legitimated in the dominant cultural value system, which regulates the productive actions of individuals.

There should be little question, then, regarding the statement that the value system of the remnant community was based on the preservation, the stability or equilibrium, of the community as a “restored” community—a community whose identity is defined according to a utopian world in which the threats against the community have been abolished. Thus, the value system of the community was based on *future* actions, those that

31. Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 7, who summarizes Deleuze’s argument.

32. Donati, *Relational Sociology*, 113. Donati writes further, “By ‘relationality’ I mean the property of ‘being in relationship’, which has a Janus face: the property of *being* a relationship (social ontology) and the property(ies) that emerge(s) from reciprocal action (the relationship is contingently generated by reciprocal action)” (113 n. 17, emphasis in original).

reflected creative aspirations for stability and how it could be achieved. *The “good citizen” of our coming nation, which will be restored, will behave in consistency with these laws as we have them now.* Yet while value systems are partially open sets of morals, ethics, standards, preferences, and beliefs, the biblical texts are conservative. That is, the biblical texts attempt to *close* completely the value system. But this closure exists not in a value system that is part of any normative but one that is part of a utopian ideal. In Deleuzian terms, the relevant biblical texts advocate the production of desire, which is always in the “to come,” while simultaneously restricting the possibilities in production, often in the form of the *torah*. *This is the way things should be; this is the limit upon what you can do.* Is this simultaneous—one could well say “schizophrenic”—emphasis not the meaning behind this passage, one that emphasizes material and ideological desire production?

The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on the adversaries who took advantage of you. Then you shall again obey the LORD, observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, and the LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, when you obey the LORD your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut 30:7–10)

We must finally accept that the core of “restoration ideology” that shapes the biblical texts is a desire for self-preservation. It is an attempt to sustain in equilibrium collective identity as an effective defense against multiple sources of conflict. As Pierpaolo Donati writes astutely: “Every way of being one’s self—as the *I*, *me*, *we*, or *you*—is a dialogue (an internal conversation) with one’s *I* (personal identity). Social identity is formed from the dialogue between the *I* and the other identities. The battlefields for conflicts of identity are everywhere and occur at every moment of personal and social life.”³³ In that sense, the biblical ideal of stability is often measured against a glorified past even if that past is utopian and even while it emphasizes future actions. The exile as a universal and symbolic act imposes itself as a world-creating act, the hollowing out of a space, as an initial difference necessary to establish the distinction between the “true Israel” (cf. Ezra 6:16, 21; 7:7; 9:4) and

33. Ibid., 51.

everyone else. But the genius behind Ezra's re-appropriation of the term is found in its refusal to be restricted by the historical contingencies of a real event. *Doesn't it function effectively under Persian, Greek, Hasmonean, Roman and even by extended metaphor to modern times?* And that is what preserves the term's continued symbolic use, in conjunction with restoration, in an increasing number of Jewish and Christian communities. The continued celebration of the Passover within Judaism even today is a ritualization not of any real, historical event in Egypt. It is the ritualization of Ezra's imposing of the *torah* upon Yehud (cf. Ezra 6:19–22 followed by 7:1–10—a glorious act preserved in perpetuity, a utopian narrative that describes the beginning stages of restoration).³⁴ After all, what is the Passover if it is not the radical choice by a divine Other who enjoys power greater than any surrounding nations, a choice that creates and imposes distinction between communities, upon which the cultural value system of the chosen community must be based, and so part of the greatest imposition of debt upon the community (“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore...” [Exod 19:4–6])? Participation within the ritual expects a full adoption of the value system that gives it meaning precisely because participation necessitates that one is one of the “saved,” as that term would be understood in terms of remnant, or elect. In other words, the Passover is a ritual only for members because it is an act of difference that repeats the boundaries of communal identity.

In Deleuzian terms, the ritualization of the Passover is a productive preservation of difference that dissolves and retranslates a previous convergence of assimilated identities—people in the province of Yehud are not seen to constitute a single social-political body—into a series of incompatible and divergent acts. For hypothetical example, the “Israelite” as insider cannot assimilate “Egyptian” culture because Egyptian culture represents the antithesis, the chaotic instability against which a stabilized state exists primarily by distinguishing itself from the other. Likewise, the categories *am ha'aretz* and *golah* are incompatible. The utopian idea of “Israel” necessitates the rejection of any preexisting social-political structures. Thus, the social-political intent of controlling the forces of identity production (*is not the killing of the firstborn the radical destruction of the future of identity?*) behind the ritualization of the Passover and its celebration is, in Žižek's terminology, a *revolutionary* act. It is bent on the

34. Even the description of Josiah keeping the Passover in 2 Kgs 23:22 is consistent with this idea that the ritual is less about the saving of any historical community and more about the creation of an ideal one.

destruction of the dominant normative order and the subsequent creation of a new one, or killing the first-born and the subsequent dismantling of the social-political institution that would empower it.

This is why one must conclude, contrary to Manfred Oeming's argument, that Ezra–Nehemiah's emphasis upon ritualization should not be read simply as a concern to establish proper religious behavior.³⁵ It may include that, but "proper religious behavior" does not explain *why* ritualization occurred. Writing on the behavioral sociology of ritualization, Richard Davis said:

The stimulus for the ritualization of human behavior is likewise the presence of anxiety of some sort. This anxiety may be ecological (as is the case in the performance of agricultural rituals); economic or political (as in cargo cults, for example); interpersonal (such as propitiating an ancestor or a living parent in response to guilt); doctrinal (striving to achieve salvation in response to learning that one is damned, for example); internal (such as prayer or magic in response to a fear of one's own growing fear); or merely symbolic (a response to the anxiety felt by others)... To say that ritualization is a response to anxiety does not necessarily mean that ritual alleviates anxiety, however.³⁶

With this restriction on the function of ritualization regarding the Passover in mind, what better explanation of anxiety in Ezra–Nehemiah than as the result of a loss of any possibility, as might happen through assimilation, of a unique social-political identity and corresponding authority? The radical intervention of divine election, in which the group becomes the basis for a nation, becomes through the ritualization process itself a shared symbol of the fundamental difference between the immigrant community—the one who is in waiting for a geographic territory to call "home"—and the people who are already in the land. And let's push the concept of ritualization further with a little help. Pierre Liénard writes, "Ritualized behavior is the consequence of the combined elicitation of various systems devised for processing specific materials different from ritual information and it is not the outcome of dedicated ritual mechanisms."³⁷ In other words, ritual does not exist in and of itself, as though the product of an isolated set of religious or other mechanisms.

35. See Oeming, "The Real History," 131–49.

36. Richard Davis, "The Ritualization of Behaviour," *Mankind* 13, no. 2 (1981): 106.

37. Pierre Liénard and E. Thomas Lawson, "Evoked Culture, Ritualization and Religious Rituals," *Religion* 38, no. 2 (2008): 157, 162.

Ritual, an act of circularity creating religious-cultural schemas deployed in various ways meant to restructure social(-political) situations for the benefit of the group but which also imposes restrictions upon the attitudes and actions of the group, is a backbone of religious behavior.³⁸ It is a response to external stimuli threatening the stability or equilibrium of the normative order, a response that defines the attributes of the social-political world in which the group resides. This last means that ritual can be a response to anxieties brought on by a real threat or a perceived one. Pierre's statement clarifies that ritual is not the end-goal in itself but is a product, in the form of a behavioral pattern given religious legitimization, of material and ideological stimuli acting upon the group or individual. Rituals can be meaningful in themselves, but they are never unaffected by imminent existential concerns.³⁹

Perhaps one can already see how rituals, ritual dramas, or ritual systems can be mechanisms through which prejudices against an other are suppressed or legitimated. Rituals are aspects of social relations, which Donati describes thus: "The relation is not only a medium, it is the viewpoint from which whoever is analyzing and operating must define their objects, if they want to capture their nature."⁴⁰ The most simplified kind and degree of relation, he posits, is the binary code (0–1, yes–no, inside–outside).⁴¹ Such codes are the repetitions of imposed sets of categorization the intent of which is to preserve difference. The collapse of this difference, which Žižek describes as the "unbridgeable gap," is itself the breakdown of a stabilized order, or equilibrium.

And that emphasis upon the qualities of difference is something that Deleuze seems well aware of when he writes,

38. Cf. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 210; Bell, *Ritual*, 81.

39. R. Bellah refers to this as "enactive representation" (*Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011], 13–14) based on Jerome Bruner's thesis that this type of representation is the earliest form of true representation in children. Deleuze refers to this simply as repetition.

40. Donati, *Relational Sociology*, 125.

41. Ibid. But note that he also adds that this simplified relation is not fully helpful for sociology: "To define an object in relational terms, sociology needs codes of greater complexity than the reductive selection effected by either/or binary codes. Appropriate symbolic codes and models of analysis are required. A *symbolic code* is needed that does not look solely at the *relata* (*that which is related*) but at relations themselves, as mediations not reducible to their components" (126).

It is said that difference is negativity, that it extends or must extend to the point of contradiction once it is taken to the limit. This is true only to the extent that difference is already placed on a path or along a thread laid out by identity. It is true only to the extent that it is identity that pushes it to that point. Difference is the ground, but only the ground for the demonstration of the identical.⁴²

Difference is the foil against which we know ourselves. But difference also exists precisely because we know ourselves. *I know who I am because I know I am not you.* That is one reason why Lacan, for example, emphasized the need of a third party, the so-called big Other. My identity, for hypothetical example, is expressed in the qualities of my intersubjective relationship with you. But that which makes a relationship, or simply a “common ground of recognition,” even possible is the existence of a difference between a third party and ourselves. We may not be conscious of that difference, but we are aware of the similarities and differences between ourselves and our abilities to communicate them. We respond to others because they are different, and we categorize them in relation to us. That is precisely what Deleuze asks us to recognize when he describes the productivity of difference. In such terms, the differences highlighted by the biblical texts (e.g., *golah* community—*am ha'aretz*, sacred—profane, “Israel”—foreign, etc.) serve a productive role in both identifying qualities of a fundamental difference between social groups and articulating the identities based on that difference, which emphasizes a distinction between the particular and the general, or the “I” and the “other.”⁴³ This distinction, which necessitates the exile as a central and universal symbol, is what is referred to in passages such as, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and righteousness” (Zech 8:7–8). In that there is the creation of a difference between “my people” and the peoples of the east and the peoples of the west. While the emphasis is upon articulating the identity of the people Yahweh has chosen, it necessitates a reductive categorization of others. The prophet’s emphasis upon the restorative activities of Yahweh is a repetition of the fundamental concern, one that is both defensive and offensive: preserving the community that immigrated in the hopes of establishing itself in a “desolate land” (Zech 7:14).

42. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 49–50.

43. Are not the problems of defining the self in this manner—though how can we avoid it?—not exhaustively laid out in E. Said’s work on “orientalism” (*Orientalism* [New York: Vintage, 1994])?

What this prolonged discussion of ritual means is that the ritualization of the Passover is a product of a complex set of relations that exist initially independently of the ritual itself or the ritual drama surrounding it. In some cases, such as in the Passover in Ezra–Nehemiah, rituals develop out of a fear of a loss of identity. That is, rituals such as the Passover are responses to this anxiety that ritualize the difference in order to preserve it. That is one motivation behind the passover ordinances described in Exodus, which show a clear symbolic tendency toward an insider–outsider distinction:

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: This is the ordinance for the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, but any slave who has been purchased may eat of it after he has been circumcised; no bound or hired servant may eat of it. It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. The whole congregation of Israel shall celebrate it. If an alien who resides with you wants to celebrate the passover to the LORD, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it; there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you. (Exod 12:43–50)

Note that the emphasis upon circumcision is again not an emphasis upon the act itself but upon the ritualized meaning behind the act. Circumcision is the physical, ritual symbol of a full assimilation of the group's collective identity, including its systems, structures, and patterns of relations. More directly, it includes the adoption of the values and value systems that uniquely define the identity of the group *and preserve the stability of that identity*.

The biblical emphasis upon ritualization as a primary means of exclusion is due to the emergence of the monotheistic identity within the province during the Persian and later periods. For example, Zechariah's emphasis upon the themes of divine anger, evil deeds/ways, and return clearly reflect a concern for the breakdown of the fundamental distinction between insider and outsider. The prophet's opening salvo frames, which employs the exilic typology, the text by this dominant concern:

The LORD was angry with your ancestors. Therefore say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds." But they did not hear or heed me, says the LORD. Your ancestors, where are they? (Zech 1:2–5)

Zechariah's urgency suggests that the identity of the group was an *emerging* identity, that it was not secure, and that the group must establish behavioral patterns, or rituals, to preserve it. Where the prophet emphasizes coordinated action (the group must act as one) he maintains it should take place in resistance to the dominant normative order.⁴⁴ And through that expression, the boundaries of collective identity would be known. *This group, for whom restoration will occur, is recognizable by the qualities X.* The law preserved those boundaries, supporting the authority of Yahweh through ritualized and legalized obedience. And in that it created for the community a codified, always stable boundary preserving the community's collective identity.⁴⁵ The community's religious law (the predecessor of which is referenced in Zech 7:12, and from which we can infer the existence or idea of a revised form of the law) functions in this case in a constructive rather than descriptive manner. *The law does not reflect what we already are but what we are becoming.*

Deutero-Isaiah's qualification of Cyrus as messiah can be explained in this manner as well. The richness of the metaphors in Isa 45:1–7 is evident:

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him—and the gates shall not be closed: I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. I am the LORD, and there is not other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the LORD do all these things.

44. As Klein notes, "[e]xcessive idealization denotes that persecution is the main driving force" (*Envy and Gratitude*, 192). Yet this perceived persecution was not a physical oppression but the possible dissolution of the remnant identity. In other words, if the community did not share the prophet's vision of restoration, nor the prophet's vision of the importance of the temple for collective identity, the collective identity of the remnant as the national self-identification of the citizens of a restored polity would be irrelevant.

45. See also Liverani, *Israel's History*, 344.

The repetition of the phrase “I...though you do not know me” invokes the idea of ‘the Third’ as necessary for the articulation of identity and its underlying difference. Cyrus acts for the benefit of the identified subject, not for his own benefit but as a mechanism that simultaneously establishes the absolute authority of Yahweh and the uniqueness of his chosen, “Israel.” Within the typological framework of exile, Yahweh creates the space in which the difference that marks the uniqueness of the chosen subject may be productively acted out. Under the biblical concept of exile, the metaphorical gameboard was wiped clean and a new game with new rules created.

Note also the fundamental binary distinction elicited in v. 7: “I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the LORD do all these things.” The manner in which the juxtaposition is set up seems important. Yahweh forms “order,” which is frequently synonymous with light, and creates darkness, which is synonymous with chaos. Likewise, prosperity and lack come from the hand of Yahweh. Whether one is prosperous or in need depends upon one’s relational status to Yahweh. Note, for example, the following two verses:

Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may spring up, and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also; I the LORD have created it. Woe to you who strive with your Maker, earthen vessels with the potter! Does the clay say to the one who fashions it, “What are you making”? or “Your work has no handles”? (Isa 45:8–9)

The righteousness (*tsedeqah*) referred to here can be equated with what modern discourse usually denotes as “morality.” It is not specific to ritualistic behaviors but, like morality, is concerned with the status of the relationship between individuals and groups. One could say, then, that the biblical emphasis upon righteousness, and morality, is for the purpose of maintaining stability, or equilibrium. While the law provides an external framework through which the actions of individuals may be regulated, *tsedeqah* demands consistency of action within that framework. The parallel with morality can be drawn further, especially as Žižek defines “morality.” Morality at its root refers to the basic principle, the intent of which is to “hold back death,” “don’t do to me what you don’t want me to do to you.”⁴⁶ When we speak of *tsedeqah*, then, we mean the quality of one’s actions in relation to God or to others within the framework of law, as it serves the purpose of preserving stability.

46. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, location 440.

Apart from the law and righteousness, both of which define and regulate the necessary parameters of intersubjective relations for the monotheistic community, the focus of Isa 45:1–7 is upon Israel. God acts, including through his use of Cyrus, for the stated purpose of, “so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen...”⁴⁷ Knowledge of God and God’s power necessitate intimate knowledge of the “chosen” community. God is not seen but presumed by the subject who draws on the distinction between insider and outsider. Is this not the monotheistic ideal at its purest? That the very fabric of social reality necessitates the distinction of the monotheistic community from the profane world? That the community exists for the sake of the knowledge of God and his power? That the community must exist, must be distinct, for the sake of an ordered world, the core of which is expressed in its own value system? That the value system of this community must be closed so that its stability cannot be interrupted, that its image remains unchanged, so that the absolute authority of God remains uncontested? That would mean that the real identity of this God is not some otherworldly being but the idealized stability of the community. It would mean that at heart, biblical, monotheistic values and ethics are more about self-preservation than any pure, genuine altruism. That like morality, they are motivated foremost by anxieties over “death” articulated best in the collective desire for social-political boundaries.

The Necessity of Exile for Restoration Betrays Utopian Desire

The basic supposition of this section is that the biblical concept of restoration—a desire for which is a primary drive in monotheism—cannot exist without the exile because the exile, to use Žižek’s terminology, is the radical event that destroys the existing social and political structures to make space for new ones (along the lines of what Dtr. and others envision as a theocracy). This is the meaning behind Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles:

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find

47. Note that Isaiah assumes the historical background of Cyrus’s consolidation of the Medes and Persians in 550 BCE, the defeat of Croesus in 546, and the defeat of the Babylonian Empire in 539. For further discussion, see for example, Hanson, *Isaiah 40–66*, 3.

me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. (Jer 29:11–14)

And that followed by:

Thus says the LORD concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who live in this city, your kinsfolk who did not go out with you into exile: Thus says the LORD of hosts, I am going to let loose on them sword, famine, and pestilence, and I will make them like rotten figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten. (29:16–17)

Jeremiah stresses that the exile was Yahweh's plan to desolate the land and rebuild a nation upon it. That he will let loose on the people who remained in the land implies that true change must be preceded by a complete destruction. The implication is that so long as the prevailing social-political structures exist, they stand in the way of a realized Utopia (cf. Jer 30:1–3). The parallel with Žižek's point seems to lend credence to our interpretation of both passages from Jeremiah. The restoration of "Israel" envisioned by biblical texts such as Ezra–Nehemiah, Haggai–Zechariah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, cannot occur in the midst of an already established society. That is the real intent behind the biblical paranoia over the distinction between the remnant and the profane and foreign: the possible unattainability and loss of control or authority.⁴⁸ To embrace the "foreigner" increases the risk of assimilating his culture. And for an immigrating community who was for all intents and purposes "foreign" vis-à-vis the people already in the land, the risk of assimilation was even greater. When that ideology of foreign is accepted without question, it presents a problematic academic position regarding "what went on" on a social-political level in Yehud. For a moment, Liverani, who we've cited favorably before, buys into the authenticity of the portrayal of the social-political context of Yehud given by the biblical texts:

48. Consequently, R. Gibbs's description of the role of the remnant fits within a modern religio-philosophical context but does not accurately describe the social-political context of Yehud: "The role of remnant is central to Jewish existence since the time of the prophets. It performs the responsibility of remembering and hoping in a way that can model the social form of remembrance. The remnant makes the one who remembers herself into a sign of loss, a sign of suffering for others to interpret... The remnant waits and promises to remain. Or perhaps it is promised to remain—it is assigned a post it cannot renounce: it must remain until the redemption" (*Why Ethics?* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000], 375).

But in assessing the triumph of the returnees and the marginalization of the remainees we should above all bear in mind the social status and cultural influence of each group. The deportees all belonged to the palace milieu (i.e. to the “political” class), or had worked in the Jerusalem temple (priests and scribes), or were landowners. The remainees were members of village communities, poor peasants and serfs, left by the Babylonians to work the land.⁴⁹

While Liverani grossly simplifies the distinction between the groups by reducing the basis of identity to a simplified binary opposition, his description of the distinction between the groups, while perhaps exaggerated in its emphasis upon the returnees as authoritative versus the unbridgeable divide between them and the “paupers” who remained in the land, portrays the exclusivistic ideological attitude of the immigrating community as it is represented in the biblical texts.⁵⁰ This attitude is seductive in its prevalence. It is easy to buy into its “propaganda.” As Jeremiah put it, “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you” (Jer 31:2–3). But that gesture fell short

49. Liverani, *Israel's History*, 256. He writes further, “The returnees, during their exile, had built up a ‘strong’ ideology, based on the new covenant, on Yahweh’s exclusiveness, on the ‘remnant that shall return’ (*shear-jashub* is the name given by Isaiah to his son: Isa 7.3; see 10.21). They had fanatical determination, leaders and a paramilitary structure; they had an educated class (the scribes who returned introduced the Aramaic script into Palestine; replacing the Phoenician one previously in use), economic resources and the support of the imperial court. The remainees were illiterate and ignorant, scattered, with no leaders, poor and without hope, with any strategy and without a god” (256). Liverani is certainly incorrect in his overly reductive description of those who remained in the land. It is correct that the Babylonians exiled members of the aristocracy, but those who remained in the province were likely no more scattered than before the loss of the aristocracy. The Babylonians appointed political leaders, and it is the nature of every social group to develop its own internal hierarchy. It is also likely that we would see the rise of a new landed aristocracy, which would explain the common tendency of the returnees to intermarry with people already in the land.

50. Liverani’s position here is not unique. Bedford, for example, writes, “It is only being in the exiled remnant of Judah, or among the descendants thereof, whether living in the homeland or the Babylonian diaspora, that accords legitimacy... With the homeland devoid of Judeans, the first generation of repatriates is sent as a colony of Judeans from the Babylonian diaspora to re-inhabit the homeland (Ezr. ii)” (“Diaspora: Homeland Relations in Ezra–Nehemiah,” *VT* 52 [2001]: 153).

of the “peasant” who remained to maintain the land for the “aristocratic” returnees.

This powerful distinction is also behind Dtr.’s position that complete destruction was necessary before restoration, and that restoration was possible only under the regulation of a divine law:

When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you if you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the LORD your God has scattered you... The LORD your God will bring you back into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors. (Deut 30:1–3, 5)

Thus, the fidelity of Yahweh was to a select group of people and not to the land (a position that Ezekiel shares). What this means is that the concept of Yahweh within the text is the particular ideological product of the author and the community he represents. *Yahweh has been freed from the land. He is anchored to the community.* What the exile symbolizes in the biblical texts, what gives it its preeminence in terms of value of meaning, therefore, is not really the historical events of dislocation. It is a symbolic reference to the radical rupture that breaks down the power distribution and institutions of authority of the old society and creates space for the creation of a new, utopian one—the state of restoration. Consequently, one can always say there exist two forms of exile for Israelites and Judeans: the biblical one and the historical series of (forced) relocations. In light of this distinction, which is traditionally conflated in typical discussions between biblical interpreters, Erhard Gerstenberger’s admonition rings out resoundingly:

The following at least should be clear: the biblical patterns of explanation were born out of situations of the time, presuppose the interpretation of faith of the time, and in all probability appear differently for Israel’s ancient neighbor nations, the Persian authorities, and us in the twenty-first century C.E.⁵¹

The “exile” is an ideological strategy supporting the claim of the “returnees” to the land and authority within the province—both of

51. Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period*, 30.

which are absolutely necessary before restoration can occur. As we have mentioned repeatedly, we are not saying that historical events associated with the exiles never happened—there is evidence ample enough to suggest events of forcible relocation *did* happen. But the exile described in the biblical texts is not intended as a historiographic account. It is an ideologically laden account and speaks less to the suffering of people and more to its utopian aspirations, justification even, for “restoration.” “Exile” is the gap that stands between insider and outsider. It is, in Žižekian terms, the radical rupture that creates space for restoration. Restoration as an ideological motivation is the response to the “problem” of the loss of land and nationhood. As Ackroyd writes:

The problem for the exilic thinkers, in the light of failure, was to find a means by which the future people should really embody the divine will... In the first place there is the response of piety, which we have already linked with the idea of the Temple. The maintenance of worship, the development of the synagogue, the marked emphasis on prayer which becomes increasingly clear in the later post-exilic years, all indicate a deep concern with the inner life of both individual and community to ensure the rightness of condition in which the blessings of God can be appropriately received. In the second place, the evolution of law—already a dominant element in earlier thinking, but coming to occupy an increasingly important place in the later period and especially in the post-biblical writings—is marked by a concern both for the purity of the people’s life—so especially in the mass of ritual law—and also for the covering of every aspect of life—and so by an inevitable development of casuistry.⁵²

The cult inserted into that space was meant to become the institutional response or mechanism that both preserved the distinction of the community and ensured its divine blessing—blessing that took the form of land and nationhood.

52. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 254–55.