# TWO RECURRING MOTIFS IN THE BOOK OF LAMENTATION AND THEIR LATER INTERPRETATION (II)

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2. The Representation of the Other

The means available to individual members of society to define themselves are relatively limited, in comparison with the multitude of labels that can be imposed by others.

The subject may choose to express what he deems himself to be and to represent to others, or he may allows the human medium to perform, as E. Durkheim had put it, a "social-axiological task". But the first strategy is liable to be interpreted as incomplete, because of its subjectivity, and therefore, less worthy of consideration than the indirect account. The tatter ie performed by what we have called 'the other(s)', namely people with a more or less close connection to the subject. A person or a group may enunciate those qualities which seemingly fit the image built up by the subject about himself, while all aspects which do not match or overlap the social requirements may be 'outlawed', deprived of any outwardness. To this internal censorship based on a 'feed-back social estimate' (S. Moscovici), should be added a second element: the lack of eloquent means of expression. We are not dealing with rhetoric-drilled people ('rhetoric' in its scholastic meaning), but with those whose *curriculum* does not mention any specific training in the art of speech. Suggestive phrases or a stirring appearance may be not enough to endorse an assertion or to state a certain case, especially when the speaker is at once object and subject. Even if they are effective, a brief survcy of the quality of social contacts may very well convince one that misrepresentations and distortions are believed to occur more frequently during self-discourse and are absent from the indirect report.

Nevertheless, there exists a scheme through which the subject's account on himself becomes believable: by quoting 'the other's' words and deeds in order to set the subject's words and deeds in opposition to them. The contrast scheme uses the same mental propensity towards formal 'self-order' which compels the human to classify everything he comes across. In this case, the most striking analogy could be through a stylistic trick: the litotes. Its definition is straightforward: "an ironical understatement, especially using a negative to emphasize the contrary, e.g. 'It wasn't easy' meaning 'It was very difficult' (I quote A. S. Hornby's *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary Of Current English*, OUP, Oxford, 1989, p.728).

What about defining the self through a similar method? For example, the grammatical negation could be easily replaced by an ethical negation, representing the incompatibility of one's deeds and words with the moral code accepted by the society. What the others do, the subject does not, and vice versa, whether or not this is implicit in a direct speech (the subject's). The method, if well employed may serve to build a tense relationship between the subject and the audience, to the extent that it may be transformed into an evident opposition. The terms engaged in shaping the definition are analogous to those used to lay out a comparison. Several differences in comprehensive targets, dimensions and literary use do not affect the similarity in technique. The contrast is ostensibly fixed as a decisive point in the process of self-definition, thus discharging the direct speech of any suspicion of subjectivity. The strategy of revealing a supposed pre-existent adversity requires a blunt and rough discourse, in which metaphors drawing on negativeness should abound. This is a 'creation of an enemy', and represents what F. Kermode called a "literary plot" (Kermode, 1981, 17).

It functions properly when attached to a temporal, historical conformation. The 'enemies', the 'others' are to be shaped and chiseled in and through history, in order to endow them with the negative attributes in an expressive-understandable manner, intelligible for the reader-interpreter. Otherwise, the blurred outline of the 'enemy' would not serve the plan. All explanations on past and future deeds are agglomerated and placed on the enemy's account. Usually - and this is the way the Book of Lamentations employs the strategy of adversity - the enemy's voice is never heard and the reader doubts whether it does exist or not. Even though God is portrayed like an enemy, He does not utter a single word. Did the authors) think that the lamenting voices are *clamantis in deserto*? The enemy becomes still more accusable! Like a *persona impersonator*, he sets the mechanism of definition going, he bears the stigmas once marking the speaker or the subject, sharing their awful fate. And,

moreover, he is never allowed to air a single word of exculpation; *mutatis mutandis*, God never says anything that could have explained the catastrophe. What the enemy does is what nobody should do. Thus, like a lightning-rod, he collects all the frustrations, the representations of the misdeeds, of sins freeing the subject of any responsibility. The literary existence of an 'enemy' dissolves the literary presence of the real 'sinner'.

Scripture contains many words and formulae coined to symbolize the human difference. Taking over from the first chapter the distinction between 'explicit' (nouns) and 'implicit' (allegories, metaphors, style conventions) terms would be easier then separating the various expressions of 'hostility', using criteria of complexity and pertinence. Many of the Hebrew nouns used to this purpose encompass very delicate nuances in reference to the definition of the 'other'. The range is imposing and gives the impression of intense attention being paid to the concept *per se*. Besides the nouns, implicit periphrases serve the same need of accurate definitions denoting a ceaseless seeking for a better expression of meaning. Definitely the Hebrew language had properly answered to the requirement.

Biblical translations, including the Septuagint and Vulgata, try to be precise in taking over the sundry senses, and al located to the Hebrew nouns synonymal values. "Adversary" and "enemy" in the KJV or the RV, for instance, are very close in nuance and therefore are usually circumscribed to a single area of sense-usage: the antagonistic relationship between two parties. However, this is a very rough and unadequate determination of function and meaning. The 6resk and the Latin versions suffer sometimes from the very same illness. Translations have misconstrued their meanings by moulding them on the peculiarities of the various languages and setting aside new definitions and semiotic correspondences. But the terms, through translation, had lost their proper sense, since they were translated from a "sincretic language", prepared to express natural and human millieus and events, into "analytic languages", such as Greek or Latin, adapted to conceptualize and to foreword a *mundus imaginalis* embedded with concepts (A. Chouraqui). Deconstruction seemed to offer help, in that "there always is a narrow sense of understanding a language in which one may be said to understand a language when he knows the grammar, the literal meanings of all the terms, and even the meaning of idioms. Such understanding does not suffice for the understanding of the metaphors of the language." (Henle, 1965, 185). The concept of 'enemy', or even the broader concept of 'ethnic difference', are "metaphors of the language", expressed in a scriptural text. It is overwhelmingly important to represent the concept's

significance. The 'enemy' is one of the powerful literary devices used to set oft the most difficult task the author(s) had to accomplish: self-definition. And if an immediate reason is needed, then it is worth recalling the *dicta* of Vladimir Soloviov, according to which one of the characteristics of the Jewish people consists of "the extremely intense feeling of human's self-personality and of people's self-personality" (Christendom and Antisemitism).


## 2.1. The 'other' in the Book of Lamentations

Who were the nations which wrought such a wanton destruction? *Lam.* 1:1 gives a specific answer to this question. They were those nations concerning whom the Lard did once give command that they should never be permitted to enter, i.e. to become a part of His congregation. In reference to *Deut.* 23:4, these nations were the Moabites and the Ammonites. But not they alone, for 4:21 ff. mentions Edom in particular as perhaps the most cruel and merciless of all these enemy nations (cf. the opinion of Morgenstern, 1956, 107-108). But is this answer, which lacks proper definition of enemy's attributes, satisfactory enough?

We were startled to discover that most encyclopedias do not contain entries for 'enemy', except, perhaps, some antiquated German ones ṣsuch as Hamburger, I, 1870). For this reason we considered it worthwhile to give an exhaustive list of the 'explicit' terms used in the biblical text to express the materiality of the 'others'. It seems that all of these preserve a definite and clear meaning throughout the text, certainly the definitions acknowledged at the time when it was composed. In order to disclose their hidden purports, we had to follow up each verse where the nouns we deemed representative appeared. Needless to say, the textual setting is exceedingly significant. Our English translation is close to the RSV, with some minor corrections made in order better to display the terms. Sometimes our translation is juxtaposed to the former. For reasons touched above, a parallel to the LXX (ed. Alfred Rahlfs, Stuttgart, 1943) and Vulgata (ed. Matriti, 1965) might be revealing.


a) א’ב, אוי’ב, א’ב’ם- 'enemy', 'enemies'; εχθροζ εχθροι - inimicus, inimici

The noun is mentioned fifteen times in the entire text: five timcs in the first chapter, seven times in the second, twice in the third and once in the fourth chapter, but it is lacking in the last chapter. It is beyond doubt that

the noun plays a very important role in "the economy of symbols" (P. Bourdieu), and not only because it occurs the most frequently among the 'explicite' terms.

Usually it is employed as a subject (by 'subject' we understand the logical 'subject', i.e. the aristotelic meaning of the semantic label), noticeable mainly while performing direct (transitive) actions: "her enemies *prosper*" (1:5), "for the enemy *has triumphed (has magnified himself - lit.)* " (1:9), "the enemy has *prevailed*" (1:16), "all enemies *have heard of* my trouble" (1:21 ), "all your enemies *rail (have opened their mouth- lit.)* against you" (2:16), they *rejoice* over the destruction (2:17), "those whom I dandled and reared my enemy *destroyed* " (2:22), again "all your enemies *rail (have opened their mouths)* against us" (3:46), *"I have been hunted like a bird by those who were my enemies* without cause (mine enemies *chased me* sore/indeed, like a bird – *lit.*)" (3:52). To these references should be added the indirect evidence, closely related textually to the passages mentioned above. Consequently, "her children are gone into captivity before the enemy" (1:5); "her people fell into the hand of enemy" (1:7), the enemy/enemies "are glad that thou hast done it (the trouble)" (1:21); "they hiss and gnash their teeth: they say: We have destroyed her (swallowed her up – *lit.*)! This is the day we longed for (looked for - *lit.*); now we have it (have found it - *lit.*); we see (have seen) it" (2:16), "they flung me alive into the pit and cast stones on me şthey have cut off my life in the dungeon and cast a stone upon ıne - *lit.*)" (3:53), "men dogged our steps so that we could not walk in our streets (they hunt our steps, that we can not go in our streets - lit." (4:18), they ravish the women in Zion and virgins in the towns of Judah (4:18), they hung up princes by their hands end show no respect to the elders (4:12), they took the young men to grind and the children stagger under loads of wood (4:13). Their abominable behaviour is shown in words such as "vengeance", "device" C3:60), meaning 'intention, purpose', or "taunts" (3:61 ).

After such an impressive enumeration of the 'enemy's' acts performed against the Israelites, we expected to find a definition that could motivate at least the reasons of an unrespectful. hostile demearour. And, not surprisingly, the first chapter casts light upon it. In the secon1 verse (1:2), we read: "All her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies" ‏בל רע'ה בורו בה ה'ו לה לא'ב'ם‎

In other words, the 'enemies' are former friends and, by extension, former allies. Their disloyalty, showed in the most difficult moments following the destruction, should have attracted divine punishment at least in an analogous form to what had been inflicted to the Israelites. They were of

no help when they were most needed; therefore, they can no longer be called 'friends', since they did not prove to be so. No apology could render them unguilty, no whitewash could determine Israel to forgive the unfaithful allies. Thus curses at the end of chapters I, III and IV acquire a basic explanation. Because they rejoice at Zion's profound distress, the Lord is asked to bring the day He has announced the Day of Judgement) (1:21). The last verse from 1:21 opens the first part of a response to sedition in which the supreme authority is besought to 'pay' the enemies for their shameful behaviour according to *lex talionis*: "deal with them as you had dealt with me" (1:22). Interesting enough, the definition of the enemy (1:2) and the prayer for vengeance (1:21) open with the same formula: "there is none to comfort her/me". The implication is scarcely ·concealed: as far as friends have changed their behaviour towards the Israelites, nobody is left to soothe the feelings caused by the distress. The isolation is total and resembles a plague. The more Israel stands alone, the deeper the sensation of desertion.

Where then is the place of God in the poem? Does it have any l ink to the manifold presence of the term in the second chapter? The answer is positive. The divine inflicter, from this perspective, is viewed as conducting himself inimically. However, he is never equated to the 'enemy'; there is always an unequivocal distance between the meaning as referring to humans and what is hinted at in relation with God. Easier than expressing it paraphrastically is to use a grammatical device: the preposition "like" (כ). Hence the terms to be compared are juxtaposed and may support any symbolic implication. In His anger, "He has bent His bow like an enemy" (2:4), "He has become like an enemy, He has destroyed Israel" (2:5). Because He stands for an implacable and rash 'dealer', He had to be perceived as an active element in a joint onslaught launched by the erstwhile friends. Even more, He directs the blows and indicates the targets: "He has withdrawn from them His right hand in the face of the enemy" (2:3), "He has delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces" (2:7). The first quotation also makes a suggestion about a presumptive betrayal by God.

His fierce anger plays an important role in the destructive action. He was the closest adviser of the Israelites, and implicitly is responsible for what happened to His people. If He is culpable, then is *faux pas* are doubly decisive in terms of results. He always has been involved in the history of the Israelites, He represents the other part of the covenantal relationship, so He is considered to know well the weak sides of His people, the places where their defense breaks at the slightest pressure. Moreover, He could

have intervened when the collapse was drawing nearer, thus wiping out any inkling of a divine authorship of the debacle.

Did the author(s) of the Book of Lamentations believe that God's reaction was legitimate? The matter remains unclear. Firstly there is the lack of any clear statement concerning the nature of sin, surprising since these were considered the grounds of destruction. Reasons such as the sins of the prophets and the iniquities of the priests (4:13) do not justify all His manifestations of indignation and wrath. Secondly there is the equivocal appearance of the 'active God': He is described reaching the peak of fury in a purposedly guided operation (2:17), and while He is subject to various comparisons, He never 'rests'. He is keen on doing as much harm as possible and acts mechanically, not allowing Himself a single moment of pause. Could this be only one of the aspects of the divine presence, the one that works itself against the Israelites? This could be compared to the division of Greek deities during the siege of Troy. Could a decision be legitimated by only an 'incomplete' divine appearance? Later on, the Rabbis would grasp the point and interpret it as a separation between the 'active element' and a 'passive' Shekhinah, thus 'permitting' God to be at once "as an enemy" and 'as a lawyer'. Since He represents the only force to which the smitten people can address themselves, His rough manners are 'pardoned', forgotten and eventually He is called on again by those who were afflicted. The third chapter offers the proof for our statement: as the text flows on in a direct speech related to the divine rage, the account is suddenly interrupted by a hymn of praise to Him, which continues in to a third part of the section. It begins with "The steadfast love of Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end" (3:22) and ends in a similar key: "It is not from the mouth of the Most High that good and evil come?" (3:38). Then a different passage is introduced by "Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord" (3:40). Now the monologue is focused on what should be the fate of the enemies, the ones who "opened the mouth against us" (3:46) and who "chased... like a bird" (3:52). Not at random are the only mentions of the א'ב present in this last section of the chapter. From 3:60 on, the divinity is invoked to witness the multitude of griefs caused by the hostile behaviour of the 'enemies'. An enumeration of what Israel understood of this, introduces a series of maledictions. The only agent who is entitled to perform these acts of vengeance, to bring them to en end, is undoubtedly the Lord. Hence, "Thou will requite them, o Lord, according to the work of their hands" (4:64) until He will "pursue them in anger and destroy them" from under the heavens (4:66). This could be a motivation for keeping the belief in His power. But the reader is struck by the deep silence

surrounding the pledges offered to God; He does not answer, which perhaps explains the bitter disappointment pervading the last verses of the fifth chapter.

Almost all references testify to the presence of a symbolic relationship between God and the 'enemy'. The apex is reached in the second chapter: the 'like' bond appears four times out of seven mentions of the 'enemy'. We have mentioned one aspect of the link, but there are some abstruse implications. One could ask why the comparison introduced by the prepositional particle sets the concept of divinity next to אֹיֵב and not closer to צַר, usually translated as 'adversary' or 'foe'. The cause is again to be found in the primeval definition of the 'enemy'/enmity, as a product of the alteration of friendship. The friend who acted treacherously becomes an 'enemy' and the same process was undergone by the Lord. We think it a hardly concealed allusion to an unexpected change of behaviour enacted by the supreme authority towards His earthly partner. The subtext, revealed by a more profound and accurate reading, discloses another possible sense implied by the explanation given before: to a sudden shift in the quality of the relationship corresponds a brusque shift of responsibility, from the sinners, doomed like Dante's *peccatori*, to the Almighty. Certainly, an impressive series of questions may arise from this setting: did He strike them because His fury could not be held back anymore? We would then have to change the conjugation of the verb, since He 'embodies' an unrestrained divinity. How impossible, unfeasable was it for Him to save the remains of the Israelites? Why was it necessary to make obvious the help granted to the enemies? God and enemies alike were in remote times 'friends' and, inflicting a people to the brink of collapse, are still on the same side of the bulwark: they jointly became *mutatis mutandis* 'enemies'. Does it matter if He is said to be 'like' one of the *inimici*? It appears to us that the destruction is also due to a natural difference in the inherent attributes of the combatants: the degree of historicity. God is non-historic, since He is beyond the terrestrian reckoning of time; by the same token, the 'enemies' are carved from 'physical essence', they belong to a similar category to the besieged because of their humanity. But the joint action of God and 'enemies' occurs on Earth and this common denominator permits the author(s) to make statements resembling comparisons. The grade of closeness between God and the Israelites was very high and it had determined the divine Presence to abide near His people, the one foredoomed to represent 'a kingdom of priests' and 'a heavenly host'. Bearing in mind the image of what the chosen people should have been, the complete rejection of both humans and their institutions (formerly sanctioned by

God) assumes the appearance of a treachery. A world whose highest authority sets about to destroy His dearest creation is a world seized with a hellish enthropy, where nothing is erected on solid, lasting foundations. This is a world in which neither time nor space function as universal systems of reference, orientation signs disappear in a ceaseless active environment, and boundaries are reduced to mere fictitious matters. The only valid reaction to the Moloch of relativeness turns out to be passiveness within a nirvanic universe apparently shaped by the Stoics: "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to that soul that seeks Him" (3:25). Those who can wait for Him, lacking any other alternative of living in nothingness, should be the men that had born the yoke in their youth (3:27), namely those who had experienced both happiness and grief. Their answer to destruction is not penitential, but it encompasses a 'thunderous silence' which melts together desolation and grief, bewilderment and hesitation: "Let him sit alone in silence when he has laid it on him" (3:28), he may "put his mouth in the dust" yearning for hope (3:29) and passively accept any insults while thinking of the restoration to come (3:30).

b) אר-'adversary', 'rival', 'foe'; θλιβων, θλιβοντες-hostis, hostes, tribulantis.

The noun occurs nine ttmes in the Book of Lamentations: most appear in the first chapter (six times), with only two in the second and one in the fourth chapter. The Latin translation is very accurate: *hostis* represents the opponent *per se*, deprived of any preceding personal history. Etymologically it is far away from hinting to a presumptive affective link that has been broken before the conflict came into effect. *Inimicus* (אב') is directly antagonistic to *amicus*, closely related to *anima, -ae* ('heart'). *Hostis* is more tied to military, weaponry, soldiers and does not offer a familiar perspective. The simple idea of 'armies' attracts the image of an personified entity, mechanically moving towards the achievement of a definite goal, as specified by the orders of its commanders. It is also pointless to look for a collective behaviour determined by a collective responsibility; the latter might be at most individual, pertaining to the chief.

It shares a quota of direct actions, that show the *personae* within a historical frame, very similar to the semantic setting of the 'enemies'. They "have become the head" (1:5), they have taken the children of Judah as captives (1:5), and, related to this, "her people fell into the hand of the foe" (1:7), they "gloated over her" and have mocked at her downfall (1:7), foes have stretched out their hands over all the precious

things Jerusalem owned (1:10), they surrounded Jacob (1:17), they are exceedingly swift (4:19) (see also GHG, 1940, 15). Their relationship with the divinity is however less intense, less durable, since there is only one example of comparison that juxtaposes God to the 'foe': "He has bent his bow like an enemy, with His right hand set like a foe" (2:4). As it can be seen, the phrase also includes two different notions included in the definition of the 'opposite', the former being endowed with a noticeably greater semiotic value than the latter. Consequently, the link with God is very likely mediated, and therefore weakened. This explanation draws us again near the parallel established by the image of the military. The 'foes' are apparently deprived of any responsibility since their might has been exalted ( קרן ם'ר,ר) by the Lord (1:17).

It is worth recalling that the author(s)'s visible attempt to differentiate repeatedly between 'enemy/enemies' and 'adversary/adversaries', 'foe/foes' makes clear which are the characteristics the labels do not share. The use of separate nouns also relates to 'human opposition' as though in a theatrical proceeding, very similar to the picturesque *trompe l'oeil*: 'the filling of the stage'. Here we enter the realm of a classic non-linguistic system of communication represented by the *mise-en-scène*. To break into it, we have to decipher the signs' code, namely movements on the stage and the background (see Pei,1965,13).

The 'filling of the stage' is one of the devices put to work behind the actors, but not beyond the script. Widely used in the Italian Renaissance, this method provides a necessary variation of the setting, when the latter is hard to change because of the script. It was described by Giulio Camillo in his *L'idea del theatro* as a device to be employed when a tedious scene is subject to a break-down (see Yates, 1966). Let us suppose that all the characters are obliged to move in only one direction, apparently to a fixed point on the stage. The tableau is merely 'static in motion': the actors are moving, but their gestures are the same, thus creating the impression of a single representation. In our case, the tragedy lacks such immense agglomerations of typified gestures. We already know that everything is disrupted in the aftermath of the disaster. However, in the moments when aspects of the siege are called up, there is a single distinct tendency: to move towards Jerusalem and to penetrate it. The 'enemies' are fighting against the city and its people; the scene tacks force and helps to raise the question whether a 'key', a sense and a single representation are present among the general meanings intended by the playwright(ers). One solution concerns the personages. A cunning director will know how to 'diversify' the scene, how to 'multiply' the differences existing between the staging figures by varying the costumes,

by turning the collective attention to the sundry colours of the make-up, by slightly changing insignificant gestures, by re-shaping parts of the decor. By this token, the setting becomes more vivid and powerful enough to help individual expressions to come out. Nevertheless, the only move, as written down in the script, does not undergo any modification, but a shift from the first line of attention to the background. Thus, the stage is 'filled up' with new senses that Intimate nuances, personages are individualised within a bigger outline.

The separation of meanings between "enemy' and 'adversary' was deemed necessary by the author(s). One might recall Shakespeare's words as recorded in *The Winter's Tale*: "There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture" and will grasp the sheer difference between the terms. We offered above a technical reason, which may very well possess theological and historical implications (see Brunet, 1968). But the dissimilarity is textually 'underlined' as well: "Her foes have become the head, her enemies prosper" (1:5), "He has made the enemy rejoice over you, and exalted the might of your foes" (2:17) and the most explicit illustration: "the adversary and the enemy (צר ואוֹ'ב) (should have entered) into the gates of Jerusalem" (4:12). For the quotation from 1:5, it is worth noticing that the verb used for "they become" is ה'וֹ and it preserves an analogous function in 1:2 : "(the city's friends) have become (ה'וֹ ) her enemies". The verb's meaning is circumscribed to pinpointing its uninterrupted flow, but the terms related to the verb describe, in fact, two distinctive levels where the process takes place. 'Lovers' becoming 'enemies' underscores a change in the quality of the attacɛ.ment bond, while 'foes' becoming the 'head' implies a shift in the quality of the hierarchical, structural, monolithic, one-wayed relationship.

We do not claim to have deciphered the etymological value of the two terms. However,�‛ there are several remarks which may shed light on the literary 'physiology' of the 'human opposite' within the Book of Lamentations. Both nouns are masculine and both are related to feminine nouns describing the action performed through or because of the qualities the masculine terms are endowed with. We have extracted meanings from the post-biblical literature, providing a point of departure for the investigation of the rabbinic sources. Many of the textual samples are taken out from (Jastrow, 1926) and (GHEL, 1827).

א'ב, אוּב, ב'א, is the participle of א'ב, 'to hate', 'to be an enemy to', verb which is present only in *Ex.* 23:22 (וא'בחי אח א'ב'ן וארח' אח ארר'ן). The noun appears in *Gen.* 22:17, 49:8, sometimes as a participle governing the case of its verb, as in *1 Sam.* 18:29 (אויב אח דוד). There

is only one feminine equivalent: in *Mic.* 7:8, 10 (אויבה) and it designates 'a female adversary'. 'Enmity' is א'בה in *Gen.* 3:15 and *Num.* 35:21. In the post-biblical literature, the term corresponds to א'בה, which is 'enmity' (see *Sanhedrin*, III, 5; *Yerushalmi D'mai*, IV, 24a) or to 'aversion', 'disgust', 'loss of attraction' (see *Yerushalmi Yoma*, VIII, 44d, where the bride is permitted to wash her face on the Day of Atonement, so that she will not lose her attraction). There exist hints of a concealed semiotical affinity with אב, א'ב, 'the young shoots of a tree' (*Baba Kamma*, 81a) or 'development' (*Shabbath*, VII, 10c).

צך appears only in the later books, either as 'adversary' (*Ps.* 6:8; 7:5; 23:5; *Esth.* 7:4,6; *Neh.* 4:11, 9:27) or as 'affliction, distress' (*Ps.* 4:2, 44:11, 78:42).צרה is the feminine equivalent and shares both senses: 1. 'female adversary', 'rival' as in *1 Sam.* i:6 and it is translated in Greek asαντιζηλζ (cf. *Lev.* 18:18), definitely a technical term for an estranged fellow-wife, answering to Assyrian and Syriac equivalents (Robertson-Smith, 1899, 74); 2. 'distress', 'trouble', as in *Is.* 8:22, *Ps.* 120:1. The verb that served as lexical mould is צרך, which also means 'to be hostile to', 'to persecute' (*Num.* 33:55, 25:18; *Is.* 11:13) or 'to be jealous, to be a rival' (*Lev.* 18:18). The rabbinic literature conveys similar senses: as an adjective, צך signifies 'narrow', hence 'narrow-minded, selfish, envious' (*Yerushalmi Ta'anith*, Ill, 66d). It seems obvious that the parallel drawn with the armed elements is closer to the real understanding of the noun's nature. As 'oppressor, adversary' it is registered in *Genesis Rabbah* 61, *Yalkut Genesis* 62, *Exodus Rabbah* 21, *Sanhedrin* 44b. Both nouns have a feminine counterpart with a slightly different meaning in comparison with the masculine noun's sense, within the same semiotic 'circumstance'. However, the 'feminines' never occur in the Book of Lamentations. The only 'feminine' is the divinity, represented in some passages as a 'she', or the subject 'Judah, 'Jerusalem', as compounds of a familiar-like, kindred-like relationship. א'ב, או'ב and או are, if we are allowed to put it so, very 'masculine',and therefore, play the active role in what we called 'the afflictive role'. They give the blunt reasons for the lamentations to come doubtlessly to justify the title of the biblical text. Perhaps the author(s) tried to set God as a counterweight, and his/their intentions should have been marked by the change of grammatical genre. He/they neither hinted at the divine transsexuality, nor appeased the conflict by 'out-gendering' it. The 'opposite' part is certainty masculine and to it belongs the bulk of attributes usually allotted to male expression (see section 1.1). This is the point where we have to stop our semiotical foray, in order not to overstep the limits of what we deem necessary for a plain explanation.

Nevertheless, the sexual commitment, analysed from a literary perspective, could indicate one of the methodological directions to be pursued while shaping a comprehensive definition of the 'enemy'. The results may well benefit from the psychoanalytic deconstruction.

In the same category with א'ב, אוי'ב and אוֹ may be included the 'persecutor' רודף; (κατα)διωκονται, (κατα)διωκοντεκ; persecutores, subsequentes, as appear in 1:3, 1:6, 4:19 and also in paraphrastical formulae such as "those who rose up against me" etc.; עלי כל היום שפחי קמי ורגיונם; χειλη επανισαομενων μοι και μελεταξ αυτνων...; Labia insurgentium mihi, et meditationes eorum... (3:62 ff). 'PerSecutors' are situated in a category next to 'enemy' (א'ב) because it takes over the latter's action of shifting from the positive pole of affection to the negative. A second term is 'by-passer', כל עברי דרך; οι παραπορευομενων οδον; omnes transeuntes per viam, who symbolize the insensitive, case-hardened people (1:12) who are mocking and clapping hands (2:15).

c) 'nation', 'nations ; גוי, גוים;εθνοξ, εθνοι; gens, gentes

Altogether with his equivalent מועד ('meeting', 'congregation', 'alliance'), the term appears eight times in the entire text: four times in the first chapter, once in the next and three times in the fourth. The Massoretic Scripture coined a new word far 'people', equated in English with 'nation', but unfortunately much too far from the contemporary understanding of its meaning, since today a 'nation' is historically defined in the frame of modern times.. The LXX is more accurate; it capitalizes the distinction that opposes עמ to גוים: into the pair λαοξ - εθνοξ. The Latin version does not achieve a simi 1ar grasp of sense; it uses the pair *cives-gentes,* but we cannot attribute to עמ any sense derived from the representation of a presumptive original meaning like 'organized crowd', 'socially institutionalized people' etc.

The 'nations' stand for the largest possible definition for ethnic groups distinct from the Israelites. Its usage within the Book of Lamentations is almost similar to the other scriptural texts. The noun is at least as general, as vague as the English semantic relative we employ to describe the 'other'. It helps dissolving the various sides of the delicate relationships established between the Israelites and the communities with which they were in contact, into a dual, bipolar relation, which is more easily perceived and understood. It is so 'roomy' that it may be defined as a geometrical result of a multitude of individual experiences with the 'other' in cultural realm. Theoretically, the 'nations' represent the structure

to be filled up with definite ethnic labels, in order to impose consistency and to assign to the descriptive framework real socio-historical dimensions. It is not so in the Book of Lamentations, where the noun is scarcely explained as semiotically composed of several 'ethnic labeled' units. In other wards, the text does not provide any description of what it may contain, or of how the plural's usage could be justified. It plays the role of an incomplete grown-up concept of human universality, which lacks the limpidity that should have accompanied the textual message. 'Nations' is a bare term that allows the reader to practice in-filling the blank spaces. The rabbis took over the compositional suggestion and trotted out their anthropological and geopolitical knowledge (see Salters, 1986). It shows them reacting to a term that had always required footnotes to be explicit. It should be understood that whatever its meaning is, the term never acquires the qualities of a literary main personage, since it never conveys direct speech. It is mainly an object, not a subject, thus backing up the direct speech. It does not make reference to the human medium, but references from 'outside' are made to it. Its passive position is easily recognizable in quotations like "(the city) was great among the nations" (1:1), echoed by "(the city) was a princess among the provinces (שרתי במדינות)" (1:1), "she (Judah) dwells now among the nations" (1:3), "her king and princes are among the nations" (2:9), "men said among the nations" (4:15), "we shall live among the nations" (4:20). Some passages allude to a presumptive enterprising role, not far from what the 'enemies' and the 'adversaries' do against the Israelites: "the nations invade her sanctuary" (1:10), "He (the Lord) summoned an assembly against me to crush my young men" (1:15); the later example employs the term מועד ('meeting', 'congregation', 'alliance'), which is slightly more semiotically refined than 'the nations'.

Interesting enough, the 'explicit' symbolic units that finally receive a proper name are the afflicted and the should-be-afflicted. By this method, they are moulded into history. There is no doubt who is suffering and there is no doubt either how the grievance took form, what did it look like, but to the 'how?' and to questions related to the ill-willed who surround the vanquished figures we can scarcely find an answer, or at least not a satisfactory one. The only hint to what the înations', and consequently the 'enemies, might be, is drawn in 4:21, where through an analogy to the widespread formula "daughter of Zion", a "daughter of Edom (בת אדום) dweller in the land of Uz" is brought in. She will be the recipient of the divine wrath, she will surety "become drunk and strip herself bare". if this is related to the authorial restriction of 'enemies' or the 'others' mainly to the masculine, then the rule has been broken only to

express implicitly the future fete of the 'enemy'. The "daughter of Edom" alludes to the "daughter of Zion" through an affinity of labels: 'daughter of...' remains constant, while the proper name changes from Zion to Edom. Thus the bitter past of the former would be entirely transmitted to the latter merely by a transposition of substantival attributes. Both Zion and Edom share an innate trait (they are 'daughters of...', "female impersonator" in terms of discourse; see Bakke Kaiser, 1987, 174-82), and therefore, their own histories may well be interchangeable.

In this connection, Delbert Hillers, in the introduction to his Anchor Bible commentary on Lamentations, notes the unusually farge number of metaphorical epithets given to the Israelites. The topic             occurs twenty times in the book, whereas it occurs only about fourty-five times in the entire Old Testament. In addition, the majority of the other occurrences are to be found in Jeremiah. Taking over Hillers' suggestion, we also consider that "they help make explicit the personification of the people or city as a woman" (Hillers, 1972, XXXVIII; see also Dahood,1978,195). Finally, the curse against the daughter of Edam is a reminiscent not only of Obadiah, but of the imprecation against Babylon in *Ps.* 137. The absence of specification of the 'real enemy' might be evidence of political expedience, of a people living under occupation. At any rate, Edom, the brother-cum-enemy, is of far greater symbolic import. This may be seen, as in Malachi, the possible beginning of Edom's career in Hebrew literature as the archetype of Rome and of all the enemies of Israel (see Landy, 1990, 333). We deem the formula to point out another sign of a sexually-expressed bond between the winners and the losers within Lamentations.

d) This fourth section deals with the last chapter of the text. A semantic peculiarity, besides the absence of the alphabetical acrostic, invites interpretation: there is an entire different lexical design to the 'others'. The terms do not even share meanings with the stock phrases or nouns we came across in the first four chapters. Obviously, the fifth chapter is circumscribed to a new setting; or it could be on the account of another authorship (see Lachs, 1966-67, 47-48), but we would rather prefer to eschew the risk of an answer. There are sufficient distinctions between what we consider to be the subtext of the chapter and the semiotical project in which the four other sections are involved.

1 ) Verse 5:2 contains two of them:
"Our inheritance is turned ("surrendered", Meek,1956, 35) to strangers, our houses to aliens"

נחלתנו נהפבה לזרים לתינו לנברים; κληρονομια ημων
μετεστραφη αλλοτριοις, οι οικα ημων ξενοις; Haereditas nostra
versa est ad alienos, domus nostrae ad extranos.

The verse encompasses a theological theme: it stands for the
accomplishment of a Jeremianic prophecy, as written in *Jer.* 6:12: "Their
houses shall be turned over to others (לאחרים)". *Lam.* 5:2 regards the
anticipation with a deeper insight, detailing Jeremiah's words. It denotes
an interesting example of a poetical effect induced by a manifest
*parallelismus membrorum.* B. Albrektson (1963, 197) considers that "the
same thing is said twice in different words". However, an etymological
foray discloses more profound and distinct senses.

זך stems from זור, 'to be estranged', 'to be alienated' (see, *Job, Ps.* 78:30).
It may also signify alienation from God, through sin (*Ps.* 58:4). But the
participle זך attracts notice because of its various senses, all converging
on the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek βαρβαρος, βαρβαροι: 1 ) a
foreigner, one who is not an Israelite (*Ex.* 30:33), a barbarian, an enemy
(*Ps.* 109:11, *Is.* 1:7, *Ezek.* 11:9; 28:10; 30:12, *Hos.* 7:9; 8:7). There are
also references to a strange God', a *Deus otiosus* (*Ps.* 44:21; 81:10, *Deut.*
32:16, *Jer.* 3:13; 5:19). αλλοτριος represents something different: a
distinctive form, but derived from the same substance, and the Latin
translation describes the 'other' in terms of property. However, זך may
also be understood as 'another', in opposition to one's self, a fact that
alludes to the 'property of self' (*Prov.* 11:15; 14:10; 20:16; 27:2, 13, 1 *K.*
3:18). The Greek term is relevant to a conceivable translation of the
Hebrew plural זרים as 'adulterers' (see, *Jer.* 2:25, *Ezek.* 16:32), because
husband and wife are, in fact, separate sides, opposite halves of the
unique Whole, namely 'the family'. Is this, then, an intimation to the
symbolic rape inflicted on the "daughter of Zion", when unwanted men
penetrated her and desecrated her inheritance, the dowry of belief in a
single-personed God? To this extent, וכרים may conduce to variations
on 'adultery' and 'adulterers', since it comes from נכר, 'foreignness' (*Ex.*
2:22, *Jer.* 2:21). The Greek ξεινος Invokes the clearcut ethnic
difference: ξεινος are the 'other' about which it is acknowledged that
they are totally 'otherwise', as regards basic elements of anthropological
extract: religion, culture, language, They are the *extranos*, i.e. those from
the outworld, from outside the familiar space (*alienigena, meretrix*). All
these ghastly appearances from a gloomy 'outside' become less blurred in
verse 5:8:

2) "Servants have ruled over us"

עבדים;δουλοι εκυριευταν ημων; Servi dominati sunt nostri. משלו בנו
We witnessed profound changes within an affective relationship, where
friends have become enemies; now we assist the shift in the quality of a
social hierarchical order. Its outcome is the reversed arrangement of the
main roles in the society: slaves took the place of their masters, former
potentates are reduced to the social underworld and act like beggars. The
cycle of implications closes up. The absolute entropy which affects the
"societal continuum" (Moore, 1983, 546) influences the inferior
kingdom, thus modifying irreversibly the delicate equilibrium which
opposes prey and hunter: even foxes dare to prowl over the Mount Zion,
which now lies desolate (5:18). The statement concerning the staves is
preceded by the only passage where historical names are found : Assyria
and Egypt (5:6). Verse 5:8 reverberates within a similar 'prophecies'
accomplishment the Deuteronomical list of the consequences of
disobedience. Through the voice of Moses, the Israelites are threatened in
case of their treacherous behaviour towards God: "Because you did not
serve the Lord your God with joyfullness and gladness of heart, by
reason of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your
enemies (איביך) whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and
thirst, in nakedness and in want of all things; and He will put a yoke of
iron upon your neck, until He has destroyed you" (*Deut.* 28:47, 48).
Common motifs of deprivation are once again deployed (hunger, thirst,
"all things" – מרב כל) and resonate with the sum of personal frustrations
as unfolded in chapters I and II. Could then be the fifth chapter
considered as an analytic abstract of the 'others" actions as described in
the previous sections?
If the new lexical thesaurus was brought into attention to stress the
universality of the human opposite (the "true reality of the all-universal
enemy", as Levi-Strauss had put it [Levi-Strauss, 1977, 50]), then it also
alludes to the polymorphism of the definition. The latter could be better
expressed by a multitude of voices who show evidence of the numerous
semiotic items employed. The multitude of voices connotes the image of
a chorus: collective-aired sounds (endowed with a new Quality, a new
relevance of the sounds, distinctly different from the sounds uttered by a
single mouth) made up the *ungewaechselte Grundflaeche*: the 'enemy'
*per se.*
Thus we draw near W. Lanahan's theory according to which in the fifth
chapter a choral voice is discernible and provides a compositional thread
throughout the entire section (Lanahan,1974, 48). The voice may be
made up of the people of Jerusalem as a community farmed out of a

shared misery and a common purposive attitude towards the divinity. Certainly, the chorus has its own character, subsuming what Lanahan called "individual persona" in an act of prayer, which transcends the viewpoints of the previous chapters. He also brought into evidence the 'iterary presence of four other voices, corresponding to "the reporter", "the city", "the veteran" and "the bourgeois". The chorus voice' embodies 'a multitude', a plurality brought together in order to perform a common action. We agree with the opinion according to which a shift in the 'Quality' of the speaker is substantiated, and therefore we construed i t as a symptom of the multiform dynamics of the spiritual experience. And that happens because we also interpret the lexical transformation as a genuine expression of the variegated approaches towards the 'other'. But how far are we, then, from ascertaining a different authorship to the fifth chapter? It is our turn to stumble over such an Oedipian riddle, *quod non minime probabile est!*

To sum up, the 'other's' image is part of what Gottwald, (1954, 108) named "the theology of hope". It is the hope of universal judgement: in real terms the nations will have to endure it, but not Israel. Eventually, all mankind must conform to the divine will, and the Israelites consider it a normal, expected outcome of all their sufferings. The 'literary clothes' may suggest vengeance , but there is nothing of the modern sense of 'vengeance', 'retaliation'. To put the problem in terms of a 'vendetta' is an "interpretative blasphemy" (Harold Bloom), since meanings transcend an immediate, superficial *lectio*. It substantiates the wish to lower the individual and social status of the 'others', in order to make them feel the agony and how it could be experienced. There is no abuse of personification, since the text suggests familiar circumstances and situations. Personification represents the solution taken by the authors of Lamentations to transfer to the collective persona the attributes of individual experience; 'nations', Israelites and 'enemies' together, because of the stylistic retroversion, are viewed as a whole in the aspect of an individual (Mintz, 1982, 2).

The subtext does not reveal any major signs of interest in a full restoration, even though the comparison with remote times is a commonplace (e.g. 5:21 ). The abvious parallels between 5:21, *Ps.* 80:3, 7, 19, *Jer.* 31:18 and the striking phrase "Renew our days as of old" may help us recognize the setting of the prayer in the fifth chapter. It is clear from *Ps.* 80 and *Jer.* that a congregational prayer for restoration may have formed part of a cult liturgy. It is possible that such a supplication was an element of the national act of penitence at the New Year. But the proper place for that was at the national shrine. When that was destroyed,

the normal ritual actions could not be performed anymore ; and how can the prayer be offered when the Temple is in ruins and the place is forsaken by the Presence (cf. *Jer.* 12:7-11). The suppllication therefore includes a petition for a *divine theological* restoration of the chosen people (an 'explanatory' restoration, a reestablishment of the system which can grant answers to national defeat) and their ritual, through which they may seek a renewal of the covenantal relationship (Herbert,1962, 563; see also Patai, 1967, 1-23). Frustrations inflicted out of love and friendship feature in the later rabbinic concept of של אחבה יסורם and the Midrashim are very rich in examples (Tigay, 1971,1372). The prayers with which Jerusalem tries to comfort herself do not concern delivery, but the equal affliction of her oppressors by God's anger, within a theological realm. Let us take, for example, the last verses from chapter four (21-22). A spiteful wish aims to make the chaos broad enough and temporarily boundless, so that the distant enemy will suffer the same shock of utter dislocation, will not be spared a similar disagregation. It is a kind of 'vindictivness', more or less ineffectual (the reader witnesses only its utterance), which has been nurtured by a quasi-physiological need to express pain. Evil had to be spread out further and further until Israelites and 'nations' would have come to a common denominator in terms of historical experience: the deprivation of God and the toss of a favourable fate. This is the sequel of a misconstrued Phoenix-like dream (see Wiesmann, 1929), flowing over the natural limits of a compensatory wlsh. Quite reasonably, E. Deutsch called it "weird comfort" (Deutsch, 1866, 773).

Frustrations were produced by the *actes manques* towards the belief in God, and subsequently an 'impotence' of faith determined God's change of affection. When we come closer of the sexually-related explanation, since we tried to disclose the significance of the grammatical genre usage, the topics of 'mother's love deprivation' or 'rape', namely the absence of God and the invasion of the 'others', could be linked to any of the labels that define the enemy. Jerusalem, the Israelites, the heavenly people are at once puzzled and ill at ease because they have to face a sexual taboo inflicted on them. The subtext alludes to the absence of a valid explanation. Apparently abandoned by God and forced to accept the cohabitation with the heathens, aware of the profanation of their religious intimacy, the subject of the biblical text has to face a world turned upside-down; the rape, for instance, cannot be punished in a troubled society - there is no time to bother with unimportant matters. The prayer for chastisement therefore underscores the need for a settled environment, wherein the ancient moral principles should be set up

again. To this extent, A. Mintz reads: "The force of this image of violation is founded on the correspondence body-Tempte and genitals-Inner Sanctuary. So far have things gone that even in the secret place of intimacy to which only the single sacred partner may be admitted, the enemy has thrust himself and "spread his hands over everything dear to her" (1:10). Violated and desolate, Fair Zion's nakedness (the Hebrew ערוה conveys both physical nakedness and sexual disgrace) lies exposed for the world to see." (Mintz, 1982, 4). Both the puzzle and the sexual prohibition have an essential factor in common: "the knot that is dangerous to untie since, untying it, you are magically untying the knot that holds the natural order together" (Burgess, 1968, 259).

Lamentations are a matter not just of lingering suffering but also of continued exposure to victimisation because of the 'enemies'. Zion is described in the opening verse of the book as אמנה, 'widow'; in the ancient Near East the noun designated not so much a woman who has lost her husband, as the social status of a woman who has no legal protector and who may thus be abused with impunity (see Cohen, 1973). Moreover, it might be said that Nebuchadnezzar's army had dealt Jerusalem a double blow: the city was razed and its leaders led away into exile. The figure of the grieving woman who thus remains forlorn while her sons are taken captive to a far-off land, mirrors the simultaneous stasis and dispersion that were Isrsei's fate. However, by this merciless action, îenemies', described as originators of all afflictions caused to the Israelites, also serve to introduce history into the text. Paradoxically, because of them, the relationship between God and Israel undergoes a re-grounding within the terms of history. The destruction by itseif is untied to any temporal rubric. The presence of the enemy at the end of chapter three does much to bring the event back into history and thereby delimit its unbounded horror.

## 2.2. The rabbinic understanding of the 'other'

Who are the 'others' for the Rabbis? They did not regard supposed differences between the 'enemies' category and the 'others' category in a similar manner to the author of this paper, who barely holds untouched the boundary between the terms. Those who did not share the acknowledged socio-cultural qualities that defined the Israelites, might have been included in the first category. Nevertheless, this unselective incorporation had to be assisted by a definition. Several nouns are employed, each af them having its own special connotation: גו, נרכי, עמות, העלום. The first may refer no longer to collective groups tbiblica

(usage), but to disparate individuals, the second ('stranger') to a non-Jew, but also to a Jew who is a stranger in the sense that he is not a member of a particular family. Both terms "appear to be subconcepts of the more inclusive concept of אמות העלום, the nations of the world", which regards the entire non-Jewish world as a single entity, within the frame of a collective personality (cf. Kadushin, 1972, 40-41).

It is difficult to give a proper definition of what the Rabbis understood by 'nations', without pinpointing the religious difference. Israel is not a 'nation' in the common sense of the world, namely it is not a nation by virtue of race or of certain peculiar political combinations. As R. Saadya expressed it in ודעות (3:7): אומתינו איננה אותה אם כי בתורותיה אי("Because our nation is only a nation by reason of its Torah") (Schechter, 1909 (1961), 105-106; see also *Mekhilta*, 956). The difference from the modern definition of 'nation' concerns the 'race', i.e. the anthropological data: a 'nation' nowadays is considered to be a 'racial' entity and historically constituted and determined. Racial determinations are usually responsible for feelings of superiority s nation might have in regarding other nations. İt is useless to try understand the rabbinical approach from a Christian perspective. In Christianity the annulment of nationalism became an actual problem, since it espoused the idea that the messianic era had already begun and the dominion of the princes of the 'nations' had come to an end. Eusebius saw, for example, the earthly kingdom the Roman Empire - as corresponding to the Heavenly Kingdom; the Roman Empire will overcome, in his conception, the problem of peoples and nationality. Such s view does not match the Jewish ceaseless seeking for a 'national' definition; moreover, Judaism do not share with Christianity the propensity to universalism, i.e. the loss of ethnic and cultural identity on behalf of a single religion. But in the rabbinical definition, the concept of 'nations' does not allude to any manifest superiority; national differences are accepted, but national superiority lacks. The Book of Lamentations offers a definition shaped in historical terms: the description of what followed the siege, the quality of the relationship established between the losers and the winners, allusions to exile. The Midrash prefers s double determined definition: both historical (see the allusions to Rabbis' contemporanity) and cultural (e.g. the lack of understanding for the Jewish customs). In the Midrash, the 'nations' have the right to speak on their behalf and it is through the words they utter that their definition is set out and the concept of 'other' is shaped. Jacques Chevalier called this characteristic of the rabbinical setting as "active Logos", a human simila of the primordial active Word (Chevalier, 1855, 557).

There are enemies in the city, i.e. in the midst of any Jewish community, and a lot of other dangers outside the congregation. Minting coins on the existence of a continuous insecurity due to external and internal enemies alludes to a still-actual method of propaganda which targets communal isolation. The social utopia represented by this intention of installing autarchy (nowadays called 'monroeism'), allows the revival of the hope in a prompt restoration. When R. Assi and R. Ammi were sent by R. Judah the Prince on a mission to organize the religious education in the cities of the land of Israel, their questions importuned and puzzled the inhabitants of the places they reached. They asked for the "guardians of the city" and both the captain of the guard and the magistrate were brought before the scholars. Their exclamation proves what the policies of social reluctance were that they aimed to implement and to help developing in the communities threatened by dissolution: "These are the guardians of the city?! They are its destroyers!" Relying solely upon them would attract the utter destruction of the city. The rest guardians should be "the instructors in Bible and Mishnah, who meditate upon, teach and preserve Ihe Torah day and night" (*Lam. Rabbah*, proem II, 2; pages as in the Soncino edition).

The antidote for another destruction are the 'teachers in Torah', and the Rsbbis, threatened with a nigh end, enact a cunning blackmail: if you do not honour the Rabbis, a second cataclysm will come from the heavens. They had a definite opinion about the causes of historical misfortunes, related to the belief in God through a mediated relationship. The 'teacher' would play an active rote. Secondly, those who are to be blamed for the series of disasters are the 'civilians', the state officers, the castes of secular authorities and soldiers. This is the failure of a 'political commitment', i.e. the 'earthly' solution which aimed to preserve the social-political coherence of the community facing the 'others'. It is obvious that those who could save it through armed power (the soldier) or applying the civil law (the magistrate) felt short of being so. They are of no avail; in connection with the activities they carry on, they are allegedly provoking harm. They may be suspected of a sabotage *ante quem*. Hence, the Rabbis suggest pondering over social and cuitural seclusion and even more, an individual strategy towards self-deliverance, performed through the study of the sacred texts. Wc deem it to be a symptom of the increasing influence of the *keter Torah* within the congregations to the detriment of the needless *keter malkhut* and *keter kohanim*, underscoring a sudden and definitive shift in the nature of internal power. Eventually the new-age 'guardians' became the very enterprising subjects of later (amoraic) political commitments and

slogans of remarkable impact ṣsee Cohen, 1989, 52). Solely by taking heed of what the oppressors enacted and behaving accordingly may spare the community (*Lam. Rabbah*, proem II, 2-3). Nevertheless, the link with God is granted by the scholars in Torah and only they can succeed to advocate on behalf of the Israelites before the divinity. Hence, their social status should undergo an absolute change, so that "Israel will never be idle in Torah, neither by day or night" (*Lam. Rabbah*, proem XXIII, 30).

The effort of self-definition is to be seen in the midrashic comparisons with the contemporaries. For the Rabbis, the historical vagueness is a dangerous vacancy. For at the time when *Lamentations Rabbah* was composed, Rome and Greece were the principal actors on the political scene. They substantiate all historical juxtapositions within the text, which are in fact variations on the theme of 'election'. The Midrash refers to Nebuchadnezzar as to the epitome of 'enemyî for the Rabbis, beside Vespasian, Titus *et alii*. They describe how he once had to choose at a crossroad between two directions. The biblical passage to which the interpretative expose is related is from *Ezek.* 21:26: "For the king of Babylon standeth at the parting of the way", i.e. at the point where the roads branch off. "At the parting of the way" was construed as "at the head of two ways" and hence, the Assyrian was imagined to stand midway betwen two roads, one leading to the wilderness and the other leading to Jerusalem (*Lam. Rabbah*, proem XXIII, 31). Firstly, it stands to reason that beside Jerusalem there are no other significant destinations for a king on his way to battle. Nebuchadnezzar 'was dedicated' to the conquest of the city, since he was not able to choose another target because of the evident lack of choices. We even may delete the quotation marks and take the word in its plain sense, thus drawing near the rabbinical idea of the king - instrument of divine wrath and will. There is a second implication as well: to take the way to the wilderness is to repeat the very impressive episode which divides the Israelite history in two ages of belief. The wandering through the desert was an action commanded on behalf of a people sunk in slavery and grievance; how then could a king reiterate the sacred act, since he is a heathen? Again, the direction towards Jerusalem was the only possible one, the only one that was permitted. Nebuchadnezzar thus 'decomposed' the history of the Israelites' liberation. it is the same path, but with a contrary aim; the king unfetters the symbolic chains which tied the former freed people to its liberator, the Lord. During the same trip, Nebuchadnezzar tried to "shake arrows" in the name of Rome and in the name of Alexandria, but without success; doing it in the name of Jerusalem, he succeeded. Sowing seeds

and planting plants in the name of Rome and Alexandria also fails; only when planted in the name of Jerusalem do the plants sprout. Any torches and lanterns kindled in the name of Rome or Alexandria do not light, but only when they invoke Jerusalem do they light up (*Lam*. Rabbah, proem XXIII, 31). The sacred city is at once the heart of physical heat and light (and, subsequently, an intellectual nidus), the fertile soil which may cause seeds to yield and plants to sprout, and it suffices to call upon its name, to invoke it even in the absence of a ritual, to have all wishes fulfilled. Arrows, a classical sign of armed power, may be also torn by performing the quasi-magical summons. When transposing those feats from the natural realm into human deeds, namely when changing the level of generality, the importance of Jerusalem gains the relevance needed to separate it from ordinary places. The capital, *y compris* its inhabitants and, consequently, the Israelites, gets its vital sap from a territory which feeds on superlatives. The more stress is put on exaggeration, the better is shaped the self-definition.

Certainly, 'nations', 'enemies', 'foes' and so on are reduced to microscopic dimensions: "Lamentations Rabbah raises the heights and lowers the depths" (Cohen,1982, 93). Compare *Lam*.1:1 ("How lonely sits the city that was ful l of people") with the exegesis of R. Samuel: "There were twenty-four thoroughfares in Jerusalem. Each thoroughfare had twenty-four entrances; each entrance had twenty-four roads; each road had twenty-four streets; each street had twenty-four courts; each court had twenty-four houses and each house had residents double the number of those who came out of Egypt" (*Lam. Rabbah*, I, §2). According to R. Samuel's calculation, Jerusalem's population was $24*24*24*24*24*2*600,000$ which is approximately nine and a half trillion. The Midrash provides another estimate too: a more modest sixty million. The fortress of Betar was tiny by comparison: its minimum number of school children was only one hundred and fifty thousand (*Lam.Rabbah*, II, 2, §4; see also Bergmann,1938). The superiority of Israel is the theme of the long section on the sages of Athens and Jerusalem. For *Lam*. 1:4 ("She that was great among the nations"), the Midrash reads: "Great" in intellect, R. Huna said, "Wherever a Jerusalemite went in the provinces, they arranged a seat of honour for him to sit upon in order to listen to his wisdom (*Lam. Rabbah*, 1, 1, §4). Further on, its 'reputation' among the nations is the subject of a long string of anecdotes, where the 'others' are successively provincials, Athenians, Samaritans, children, even people that look for the interpretation of their dreams. No detail, no fact of life was spared to magnify Jerusalem's and Jerusalemites' attributes. Jerusalemites' wisdom

is not religious knowledge, textual erudition, or scholarly acumen, but rather the kind of cleverness and ingenuity that one finds commonly in the heroes of folklore, which, in the end, is exactly what these stories are (see Mintz, 1984, 64). The point of the tales is to demonstrate that the wisdom of the Jerusalemites, and even their children, excelled that of the wise men of the 'nations', especially the fabled sages of Athens. From Lamentations' sole allusion to the food habits of the Jerusalemites ("Those who feasted on dainties perish in the streets"; 4:5), the Midrash deduced that the Jerusalemites of old excelled in the social graces and the culinary arts. They ate only the finest foods, including white bread and vintage wine (*Lam.Rabbah* II, 12, §6; IV, 5, §8), and followed a strict code of etiquette (related to "The precious sons of Zion", 4:2; (*Lam.Rabbah* IV, 2, §2, 3, 4). Business also flourished to an incomparable extent (*Lam.Rabbah* I, 1, §2; II, 15, §19). In other words, Jerusalem before its fall was a paragon of urbanity and elegance, in contrast to the barbarians who dared pounce upon it. Undoubtedly we have here evidence of the Rabbis' evaluation of the ethical standard of the 'others' with whom they came in contact, although it was exacerbated by their polemical trend (see Urbach, 1979, 533). All these tales emit a naive national pride that could survive only as a memory after the great humiliation of Israel at the hands and in the eyes of the 'other'. The dialectics of history, felt under the stress of sheer poverty, recalls the image of the 'enemy' out from the background. it is necessary and inevitable to pass through it, as described by the Jewish preacher J. Eybeshutz referring to *Lam.* 3:15, in order to overcome difficulties in dealing with the evil inflicted by the Gentiles. It is worth noticing that the whole philosophy of the 'other' may easily be outlined in culinary terms, opposing tasteful 'food' to disgusting 'food', healthy 'dishes' to poisonous 'dishes'. When *la cuisine* is transferred into the factual world sensations of taste and smell change into moral taxonomy (see Bettan, 1987, 361).

To a question touching the causes of the destruction of the first and second temples, the Midrash had found a surprising answer: the entire fault is the Romans', not the Israelites', because they cannot understand the customs of the people they subdued. Therefore, their anger had been converted into a deep and poisonous hate. The Emperor Hadrian plays the part of the dull Marseitlois and his misunderstandings always end up tragically for the Jews: "A Jew passed in front of Hadrian and greeted him. The king asked, 'Who are you?' He answered, 'I am a Jew.' He exclaimed, 'Dare a Jew pass in front of Hadrian and greet him!' He ordered, 'Take him and cut off his head.' Another Jew passed, and seeing what had happened to the first man, did not greet him. The king asked,

'Who are you?' He answered, 'A Jew.' He exclaimed, 'Dare a Jew pass in front of Hadrian without giving greeting!' He ordered, 'Take him and cut off his head.' His senators said to him, 'We cannot understand your actions. He who greeted you was kilted and he who did not greet you was killed ('He replied to them, 'Do you seek to advise me how I wish to kill those I hate!' And the Holy Spirit cried out and said, "Thou hast seen all their vengeance and all their devives against me (3:60)." (*Lam. Rabbah* III, 58, §9).

Similarly, Hadrian first killed Jews who were hirsute and then those who were bald *Lam. Rabbah* V, 5, §1). Both quotations are related to suggestive verses from the bibtical text; for the tatter, the quotation is taken from 5:5: "With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven". All these details aim to describe detrimentally the 'enemies' as stupid and weird creatures, of a evident tower degree of civilization than the Jews. Secondly, the Romans misunderstood the Jews and the Jewish customs; by this token, the war of 115-117 C.E. could be explained as breaking out because of the gross ignorance of the conquerors:

"The wife of Trajan the accursed gave birth to a child on the night of the ninth of Ab while all the Israelites were mourning. The children died on Chanukkah. The Israelites said, 'Shall we kindle the lights or not?' They decided to light them and risk the consequences. They t it the candles, and some persons slandered them to Trajan's wife, saying, 'When your children was bom the Jews mourned, and when it died they kindled lights!' She sent a letter to her husband: 'Instead of subduing the barbarians, come and subdue the Jews who have revolted against you.' He boarded a ship and planned to do the voyage in ten days, but the winds brought him in five. On his arrival he found the Jews occupied with this verse, "The Lord will bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as the vulture swoopeth down" (*Deut.* 27:49)" (Lam.Rabbah IV, J9-20, §22).

The Kamza bar Kamza story also stands as an argument to the rabbinic interpretation: the Jews are aware that the Romans might misconstrue one of their observrances, but decide to follow it anyway (*Lam.Rabbah* IV, 2, §3). The Romans even try to change the customs that did not match with their manners: they interfere with the moral principles of the inhabitants. This is the case of the Hebrew boy confined in the prison and kept there for an "immoral purpose". R. Joshua b. Chananiah saw "the boy who had beautiful eyes, a comely face, and curly locks and was used for a perverted practice" When he noticed the sharp intelligence of the lad, he ransomed him and taught him the Law. Later, the *libertus* became R. Ishmael b. Elisha (*Lam.Rabbah* IV, 2, §4; *Gittin* 58a). In all these

stories, God has no place, no influence, since they are accounts about what threatens Israel, about the enemies who encircle the well-guarded "fortress of belief". God is ignored in such a report also because it is built on human commonplaces, on daily occurrings, too far from the heavens. The intention of the commentator does not relate to a divine arbiter, but to the ignominy of Israelites' fellows, to their utter ignorance and irrational hatred. Because of their distinctiveness, the Jews are the butt of jokes at circus performances. One of the passages concern *Lam.* 3:14: "I have become the laughingstock of all peoples, the burden of their songs all day long": ordinary men do not eat carobs like the Jews, reckon life's length using scoffing remarks ("How long do you want to l ive? As long as the shirt of a Jew which is worn on the Sabbath"), they moek the Jewish customs of mourning and of keeping Sabbath (*Lam.Rabbah* III, 14, §5).

Jews are Considered to be of the lowest origin, and therefore, beyond morality, beyond any human significance. They had last, because of the total failure all the eminent qualities they once owned ,and now their name is the definition of shame. in connection to *Lam.*1:11 ("Look, o Lord, and behold, for I am despised"), the Midrash reads the story of R. Pinechas: "It happened that two harlots of Ashkelon were quarrelling. In the course of the quarrel, one said to the other, 'You should not go out because you look like a Jewess.' They subsequently became reconciled, and the one said, 'I forgive you everything you said except the remark that I look like a Jewess." (*Lam.Rabbah* I, 11, §39). One preliminary conclusion comes to our attention: the existential contrast between Israel and the nations is much more central to the Midrash than to the biblical text.

The Book of Lamentations hints at the privileged status enjoyed by the nations. Actually this was at once a social and a historical fact at the time when the midrashic commentaries emerged. It needs no interpretation about *what* the favoured status represents, but about *how* it could occur to peoples to all appearances destituted of any importance before God, and why were they favoured by the divinity. There are no descriptions of the actual standing of life of the 'nations', except some scattered details of no great interest. The last questions realty bothered the Rabbis and compelled them to look for credible answers, especially if the latter fit in with the midrashic 'theology of hope':

a) "The Rabbis said, "Israel spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'We are yours and the heathen peoples are yours; why do you have no pity upon your people?" (*Lam. Rabbah* V, 1, §1).

b) "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned" (1:8). Do the heathen nations, then, not sin? But although they sin, it has no sequel in punishment. Israel, however, sinned and were punished" (*Lam. Rabbah* I, 8, §35).
Talmudic echoes to this topic are countless and their conclusions puzzles more than explains: "How could one nation maintain its existence among the (other) nations?" (T. B. *Yoma* 59). The Midrash is not entirely satisfied with divine justice, at least at this point. In particular it is mystified by the triumph of the nations. But unlike the author(s) of Lamentations, the author(s) of the Midrash set out to write a book which could not only lament the past, but also give consolation for the present and confidence for the future. The Lamentations curse had to be reversed, theology should be made certain, the future securer and the present tolerable. No matter if foxes dwelt on Mount Zion, the attitude should change from a deep scepticism into the most optimistic perspective on life. The laughter of R. Akiba and his explanation when his fellows showed bewilderment, are revelatory; he finally is acclaimed as Messiah's harbinger (*Lam.Rabbah* V, 18, §1; see also Deutsch, 1866, 773). However, the redemption, as seen in *Lamentations Rabbah*, is depersonalized: there is no person (a Messiah) about whom is said he might restore "the days of old"; the messianic theology still lacks precision.
Although Scripture and Midrash share the belief that at some point in the future God will punish the nations, none of them realize that they are the unconscious agents of God. God could have employed bears, wolves, scorpions, and other noxious creatures to do his bidding against the Jews. But because they do not realize the commitment, God will punish them (*Lam.Rabbah* I, 16, §50). In the meanwhile, before the messianic deliverance and the discomfiture of the nations, the Midrash urges the Jews to show disdain for gentile kindnesses and favours, and to remain confident that they are superior to the nations. The attitude ensues from the story of Vespasian and R. Yochanan b. Zakkai. The rabbi asks the emperor to abandon the siege of Jerusalem; the request is denied. But when he asked for that R. Zaddok, the ααθροζ (the 'weak' ) (see Baarda,1987, p.70 ff.), the request was granted [*Lam.Rabbah* I, 5, §31], The Midrash, in comparison to other versions of the story, tacitly denies that the preservation and continuation of rabbinic Judaism are the gift of the Romans to a Jewish collaborator; "let the Jews rely on themselves" it concludes (Cohen, 1982, 32). Confidence in one's own power of belief is a way to show God the loyalty towards faith, and symbolically denies the nations any influence among Jews. Israel is enticed to abandon monotheism (*Lam. Rabbah* III, 21, §7), it may stumble when pondering

over the advantages incurred from conversion (*fluctuat...*), they did not accept to change names (see Horsley, 1987), but it never accepts a dishonouring end (*...nec mergitur*): they know that they could intermarry and thereby end their pain (*Lam.Rabbah*, I, 21, §56), but they suffer in exile because of their devotion to the commandments (*Lam.Rabbah* I, 3, §28).

Is history to be believed? The Rabbis were quite reluctant to consider it a point of departure for any previsions concerning the Jewish fate. The immediacies of history are the wrong place to look for a source of true consolation. Though history is not illusory, it still cannot be understood on its proper terms. But history can be manipulated through the power of hermeneutical rules and so happens to its actors as well. After seeing the foxes, R. Akiba mocked at the history and, subsequently, mocked at what he deemed to be 'an unreal reality'. The meaning of history is guaranteed by Scripture; one observes an event in the historical world and discovers its meaning by understanding it as an actualization of a scriptural text. This is the shared ground between all the rabbinical commentators when referring to destruction and to its authors. The difference between them lies in the degree of ingenuity and faith with which history can be 'read'. For the Rabbis the fulfillment of Scripture in devastation engenders despair and gave them the impression of a 'consumed history', of a history without happy end. For R. Akiba it brings joy, because for him any event in history, no matter how terrible, which confirms the predictive power of Scripture, is to be welcomed; in confirming a part it confirms the whole. Scripture and history do not permit the faculty of indignation to atrophy, one may say paraphrasing Dr. Johnson. The 'others' rule must therefore come to an end. This end means in fact the expulsion of the 'others' from history; their death is inexorable and will have cosmic dimensions, they will be deprived of historical identity. In other words, *damnatio memoriae* will be inflicted on them; this is the thoroughest punishment (see *Lam.Rabbah* I, 2, §23), related to "She weepeth sore" (1:2). The statement was later clarified using common terms and not a complicated parallel: "The Holy One, blessed be He", said R. Phinehas b. Chama, "said: If the Angel of Death should come and ask "Why was I created?" I shall answer him " a stationarius have I created thee over the nations, but not over my children". For they accepted the Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, clothed them with the splendour of His majesty" (*Exodus Rabbah* 51, 8). The 'others' prepare the motivations for God's action against them; the 'nations' tread on their own tail, the more they mock at the Jews, the greater the divine punishment: "I (God) will render vengeance to mine enemies, and I will

recompense them that hate me" (*Mekhilta*, II, p.33, ed. Lauterbach, Philadelphia, 1933-5). Finally God has joined the Israelite camp and history will follow the natural (favourable) course, thus counteracting the effect of ill-omen of the Book of Lamentations.

The commentators swiftly understood the slackness of the 'concept' of the 'other' and strove to pin it up on the historical events board. To a great extent they succeeded in overcoming the semiotic trap, by defining what lacked a clear shape. They had to face the so-called "fluid personality" in the literary space. The topic, as propunded by E. Durkheim (in *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 1915) and Levy-Bruehl (in *How Natives Think*, 1926) is generally assumed to be based on one of the aspects of primitive psychology. In early thought, the highly defined individualism characteristic of modern man had not yet emerged. Hence the individual was both representative of his group and merges and disappears within it. So it happened to the term, which was empty of any particular, coherent meaning; the only attempt to outline it more accurately was done through semantic methods, such as promoting synonyms. But owing to the force of circumstances, semantic compositions fill up a quite narrow range of combinations. With a historical approach, definitions acquire at once a broadness and temporal setting, and a clear cut shape. It seems that the Rabbis grasped of what '(self)identification' and 'anthropologic label' represent. We came across biblical examples of Ego's self-definition, *recte* subject's self-definition, in terms of different personae. The latter may be identified either with the father and the mother, or with two partners in the aftermath of an unlawful intercourse. However, the process needed explanations from the author(s) and therefore relationships were structured as bipolar: good-evil, sufferers-inflicters. .The move from one position (pole) to the other cannot always be pinpointed with certainty within the biblicai text. Nevertheless, the Rabbis, since they used history like a grinding tool in order to 'smooth' the raw meanings of the scriptural text, managed to 'locate' semiotically the 'other' within a less fictionated, more familiar framework, namely in very actual and hence understandable surrounding. Years, events, proper names create a new texture, a coherent explanatory system, a *Mischgattung* which could indicate the existence of a previous unsolved theological and historical dilemma (see Gordis,1967-68, 15). Obviously, the predicament stems from the biblical text.

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