

ZOHAR MIHAELY

ON THE DEBATE BETWEEN THE PAULINES
AND THE RABBIS IN LATE ANTIQUITY
AROUND THE BODY AND SEXUALITY
AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE PRESENT DAY,
THROUGH D. BOYARIN'S POSTMODERN VIEW

Daniel Boyarin, an American Orthodox Jewish scholar of rabbinic literature, underwent a fascinating transformation toward using his background as a platform for contemporary cultural critique aimed at “world correction” (Heb. *Tikkun Olam*, תיקון עולם), which included intensive engagement with Christianity and contemporary cultural studies. As a cultural critic, he sees the tension between universalism and particularism, as well as the perception of “otherness” in discussions of identity and gender, as the burning problem today. Following in the footsteps of Michel Foucault and Edward Said, Boyarin immersed himself in classical texts from rabbinic and Christian literature in order to recreate their attitudes toward body and sex, to reveal silenced voices, and possibly to discover that the possibility of living differently from established norms has emerged under current conditions.¹ In other words, he believes that one can learn from it how to live a richer and freer life. All of this is also the reason for his attraction to St. Paul's model.

Dr ZOHAR MIHAELY – independent scholar, he received his PhD from Bar-Ilan University (BIU, בר-אילן אוניברסיטת) in Israel; e-mail: zoharm67@gmail.com; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8423-6616>.

¹ Daniel BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 227.

1. A GENEALOGY OF THE RABBINICAL ARCHIVE

What remains today of Jewish culture in late antiquity – which saw various sects such as Hellenist Jews and Christians – are only texts,² making it very difficult to access their culture as a whole. For example, if we wish to know how this culture perceives the body and sexuality, how can we be certain that a specific text that addresses this issue reflects a socio-cultural reality as a whole?³ Furthermore, in a Jewish context, Orthodox Judaism as the only surviving winner of this culture has silenced the rest of the voices to this day. And it is here that Boyarin turns to Foucault's concept of "discourse," that is, the idea that in each historical period there was a more dominant discourse, out of a plurality of voices – in our case, body management of individuals and populations, as a whole. According to Foucault, "discourse" is a fundamentally social process that is inextricably linked to the mechanisms and institutions that govern the flow of knowledge and power in the community at all stages. Hence, different literary genres are not non-temporal autonomous realms outside the world of experience. When literature is understood as "discourse" in this sense, that is, when it is perceived as a contingent phenomenon (episteme), having equal epistemic status as a historical and ideological product of place and time in culture, then the relationship between texts and the rest of the culture and existence of life is revealed.⁴ According to Boyarin, this is also the concept behind the reading of the "new historicists" in the field of modern Talmudic literature, who called it "intertextual reading." However, following Stephen Greenblatt, he prefers to call it "cultural poetics."⁵

The "Discourse" in Palestine of late antiquity

The reality of life as a minority, under foreign rule, first Roman, then Christian, put pressure on the rabbinic culture (Pharisees), particularly as Christianity intensified and became a threat to their tradition and institutions, transforming their literature into forms of adaptive resistance to dominant culture's practices.⁶ Hence the Talmudic and Hellenistic-Jewish com-

² The culture of the Talmud is a formation for which we have virtually no evidence "outside the texts" – BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

⁵ Stephen GREENBLATT, *Learning to Curse. Essays in early modern culture* (New York–London: Routledge, 1990), 196; BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 11–13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

munities, as well as Paul's, are plagued by the same cultural issue. Assuming that Hellenism influenced the entire Jewish spectrum, including Palestine,⁷ this can be treated as a single "discourse" reflecting practical social tension. Boyarin refers to the Talmudic literature as "one piece" and refers to their texts as a generalization: "rabbinic discourse," because, for example, despite the differences between Babylonian and Jerusalemite Talmuds, or the "early and late" aspect in literature of several generations, with currents and controversies, they are documented in the same canon. As a result, the authority of all voices stems from the same source. While the controversy in rabbinic culture was canonized, the controversies in Christianity were settled by the victory of the Pauline view.⁸ Hence, Boyarin refers to Christianity in general as "Pauline discourse."

In light of the above, we basically talk about two discourses below, rabbinic and Pauline, showing differences between them.

We can, therefore, already say that when we read a text referring to body or sexuality, we know we are reading about "first century sexuality in the Land of Israel,"⁹ from halakhic discussions and decisions to fairy tales about sage students and even the Bible, to the Epistles of Paul and Hellenistic-Jewish thought. In comparison with the Christian discourse on sexuality, which links sex to retirement from the body, the rabbis' link between sex and food teaches a lot about their sexual discourse as a whole.¹⁰

Cultural dialectic

The aim of Boyarin's research is not apologetics, that is, a qualitative comparison between Judaism and Christianity. For example, regarding gender, he has no interest in deciding who is more egalitarian. But only shows differences between rabbinic and Pauline discourse. Instead he developed a method of representation he calls "cultural dialectics,"¹¹ a framework in which they appear as complementary solutions (and failures), to given cultural problems. Putting them in front of each other can perhaps illuminate them through mutual correction. Unlike an orthodox interpretation which sees itself as ultimate, Boyarin's interpretation does not aim to replace its

⁷ Ibid., 3-4. Boyarin mentions that a separation between Jewish and Christian religio-cultural formations should properly be attributed to a later period. He reasoned this view more in detail in *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁸ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 24-25.

⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰ Ibid., 72.

¹¹ Ibid., 22.

predecessors. In general, as a contemporary cultural critic, he does not try to correct the past, but sees himself as committed to taking advantage of the new possibilities that modern research tools have opened up, to try to understand it differently, in order to pave a better way for the present and future.¹² As a rabbinical Jew and a feminist committed to both, Boyarin does not ignore problematic male-chauvinistic moral elements in rabbinic Judaism;¹³ on the other hand, he proposes “generous critique” in response to the Christian-feminist rigid critique of the rabbinic heritage, because other voices in rabbinic culture were marginalized.

2. CONTROVERSY OVER THE DEFINITION OF HUMAN ESSENCE

One of the main differences between the participants in this discourse is reflected in the discourse on sexuality. Theoretically, it is a debate about the definition of man. According to Boyarin, for a variety of reasons, most second-temple Judaism has undergone Platonization, (more precisely: middle Platonism),¹⁴ namely the adoption of an extreme dualistic philosophy of the universe, in which the material world perceived by the senses is a defective reflection of a superior parallel ideal order that comes from God. The human soul achieves wholeness by separating from the world of material desires and participating in the life of the human spirit and mind, i.e., eventually uniting with its divine source and gaining eternal life. The dominant view of the body among Greek-speaking Jews was that the soul is the self, and the body is merely its abode. According to Philo, the body is something evil, the source of ignorance, and the grave of the soul.¹⁵

¹² Ibid., 227. For example, Maimonides’ interpretation of the story of man’s creation introduced the same dualism into rabbinic culture that the Talmud’s sages attempted to avoid. His interpretation of the androgynous’ split is allegorical rather than bodily literal. He interprets the story of man’s creation using Platonic language and Aristotelian physics as follows: Adam and Eve were created together, but in terms of matter and form, which do not exist separately. Through this, he introduced misogynic expressions, such as the idea that a material female is an ontological prostitution. According to Boyarin, such interpretation is destructive in social practice. Maimonides is clearly terrified of the murky substance, and disgusted by physical contact (BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 57-60; see also *ibid.*, p. 21).

¹³ Ibid., 19–22.

¹⁴ Daniel BOYARIN, “Paul and the Genealogy of Gender,” *Representations* 41 (1993): 4.

¹⁵ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 31.

The primal androgyne

The ancient androgyne myth was popular in late antiquity across the Jewish spectrum, among Platonists in Jewish, and later Christian traditions, and appears in *Genesis Rabbah*, the earliest *Midrash* on the Book of Genesis. One of the reasons for its existence is that there are conflicting versions of the story of man's creation in Genesis chapters one and two. In the first story, two species coexisted, whereas in the second, only a male was created, from which a female was made to serve him. All of the aforementioned currents have relied on this myth to provide an interpretation that will resolve that classical contradiction.¹⁶

Philo of Alexandria

Philo, a contemporary of Paul, and a typical representative of Platonic Hellenistic Judaism in the first century, interpreted this as two separate myths depicting two different human types. The first Adam is an entirely spiritual being, androgynous and sexless. The second chapter introduces a carnal Adam, who is at first male plucked from the earth, a creature made of flesh and blood as we know it, and then from whom the female is constructed.¹⁷ That is, God first created the mind, the male, followed by the auxiliary against him, the female.¹⁸ According to Philo, only the first disembodied type is identified as "in the image of God", and its male and female aspects are spiritual. He is an idea, immortal. Sex duplication means really neither male nor female, which is in fact "no one."¹⁹ In his book *On the Contemplative Life*, Philo describes the social practices of such a return to androgynous perfection. For example, in a Jewish sect called the "Therapeutae," single men and women, who during worship reach ecstasy, in which the voices of the women's choir, and the voices of the men's choir merge in an ecstatic connection.²⁰ In fact, it replicates the androgyny of which Philo speaks, that is, a return to the sex-deprived androgynous state of the primal

¹⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹⁷ Ibid., 37.

¹⁸ PHILO, "On the Creation," in *Loeb Classics Philo 1* (London: Heinemann, 1929), 121. Boyarin remarks that this approach of Philo combines two ingredients that are endemic to the discourse of misogyny, namely woman as – essentially – misfortune, and "woman" as the name for that entity which produces gender. See BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 80.

¹⁹ PHILO, "On the Creation," 107; BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 38.

²⁰ See ROSS S. KRAEMER, "Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo on the Therapeutrides," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 2 (1989): 342–370.

Adam. In the ecstatic dance, they spread a psychological symbolism from the bodily, thus resembling the ancient androgyne.²¹

This interpretation provides important context for Paul's gender perception, because Philo describes a religious society and culture that allows gender equality, allowing both cultural and religious expression.²² However, spiritual androgyny is only possible through the denial of the body and its division into species. Philo describes an autonomous freedom of spiritual creativity based on neglect of motherhood and sexuality, as illustrated by a woman who avoids heterosexual relationships.

PAUL'S CULTURAL CRITICISM

In a Jewish context, seeing the Talmudic texts as resistance literature, can be considered as another episode of the old Jewish problem of how the biblical religion fits into common life with other peoples. Already in the stories of Abraham (Genesis 5:17) appears the inclusive idea of "Father to many nations" (אב המון גוים) and later in the concept of "Noahide Laws," conceived by the sages of the *Mishnah*. According to Boyarin, Paul was particularly troubled by this question.²³ Unlike his predecessors, he proposed a radical solution, then, and also for us today. As a Hellenic Platonic Jew and a cultural critic,²⁴ he saw in his vision, the creation of one universal family from the diversity of the human race. He realized that in order to put such an ideal into action, the concept of conversion is insufficient because it excludes Gentiles who do not want it. The converts themselves cut off contact with their native background.

To realize the ideal of a universal person, he combined the biblical concept of spiritual androgyny which transcends gender barriers – there can be no male and female in this dimension of spiritual life but there can be in the

²¹ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 39. See: Wayne A. Meeks. "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *Journal of the History of Religions* 13 (1973): 179.

²² BOYARIN, "Paul and the genealogy of Gender," 10, 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁴ Boyarin places Paul's theology on the cultural-political level because Paul's appeal to this issue stemmed from a critique of the Jewish tradition, and he is therefore a cultural critic; BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 52. And as Langton explains, Paul's theology was not driven by unusual (or mystical) psychological impulses but only by problems, ideas, and religious realities that motivated contemporary Jewry, and he responded to them as a cultural critic; Daniel R. LANGTON, *The Apostle Paul in Jewish Imagination. A Study in Modern Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 170).

flesh life – with platonic dualism, which also erases ethnic and status differences.²⁵ Thus the Greek and the Hebrew illuminate and enrich each other.²⁶ This ideal, according to Boyarin, is summed up in the verse from the Epistle to the Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, Slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3:27–28).²⁷

An allegorical interpretation

While Philo’s platonic and allegorical interpretation, in which faith replaces deeds, remained a theoretical possibility (as did all Hellenic Judaism), Paul went one step further, and deduced from the allegorical meaning of the signifiers, that the bodily historical interpretation of the commandments should no longer be adhered to, and founded a new religious form of Christianity, for Gentiles, around the great universal idea of androgyny, that resets all differences and extracts the “true Jew” (“inner”) from the body.²⁸ However, according to Boyarin, within Paul’s radicalism there is also a very important moderate element. Paul’s Platonic dualism, like Philo’s, emphasized the superiority of the spirit, but not at the expense of total rejection of the body.²⁹ He believed that a body was required for the resurrection, and that man would not go naked. This body is secondary to the mind, and serves only to protect it.³⁰ He argued against those who denied the body, who saw it as a prison, handcuffs, and an unattractive mask. This means that in Paul, while the body is distinct and distinguishable as Jewish or Greek, via male and female anatomy, the spirit is universal.

Flesh and spirit

According to Boyarin, the interpretive key of this cultural critique is the code “flesh-spirit,” which generates the transcendence of ethnicity and gender. In his opinion, understanding Paul without this key is impossible. Aside

²⁵ The erasure of ethnic difference was already prevalent among the Greeks, and Paul’s innovation is in the erasure of ethnicity through the universal Jesus; BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 24–25.

²⁶ BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 78.

²⁷ The letter to the Galatians was entirely devoted to the subject of the “new creation” of one people of God, composed of a united humanity, or “the new Israel,” through the faith, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ (BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 106–107). Throughout the epistle, Paul uses the spirit-flesh code to shatter the Jewish exclusive concept of “sons of God” by erasing the differences through baptism.

²⁸ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 232–234.

²⁹ Paul uses similar platonizing dualist imagery although, significantly enough, without negative imagery of the body as wicked to the soul; BOYARIN, “Paul and the Genealogy of Gender,” 4.

³⁰ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 32. See, for example, 2 Cor. 5:1–4.

from “flesh-spirit,” the linguistic expression of this allegorical interpretive strategy is: letter and spirit, body and mind, and the like. In this dualism, language is perceived as an external bodily shell, and meaning as the reality of an ideal immutable, immaterial, universal invisible entity that lies behind or trapped within.³¹

For this reason, Paul refers to the literal level (Heb. *P'shat*) as an interpretation “according to the flesh,” and to his symbolic interpretation as an interpretation “according to the Spirit.” This strategy is part of the justification of faith in the Epistle to the Galatians 3:26, as a means of containing the Gentiles in God’s Israel (“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith”). A rebirth occurs during baptism, transforming the verbal family tree into an allegorical family tree. Everyone who belongs to Jesus, belongs to the entire allegorical meaning of the “seed” promise. In this dimension, there are no ethnic and gender symbols. The allusion to this allegorical meaning is found in the verse “[...] and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:3) and in the allegorical mention of Abraham’s name as “Father to many nations.”³²

Christology as a cultural policy

Jesus’ dual personality – having both allegorical/spiritual and historical/bodily aspects – relieved Paul’s mental tension between the universal content of the Torah and its ethnic form, for it is consistent with the dual nature of Israel, which in the flesh parallels history as the literal simplification of which the Torah spoke and the realization of the differences between Israel and the nations, while the allegorical Israel is the alternative narrative. The physical gives way to the spiritual universal: just as Jesus stripped off his flesh on the cross and put on spiritual clothing, everyone is invited to do the same through baptism, erasing ethnic and gender differences, and become the true new Israel.³³ Therefore, whoever still grasps the flesh literally, like Jews, or missionaries who physically circumcised the people of Galatia, make the death of Jesus in vain.

³¹ BOYARIN, “Paul and the genealogy of Gender,” 7.

³² BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 144–145.

³³ BOYARIN, “Paul and the genealogy of Gender,” 6–7.

MIDRASH VS. ALLEGORY:
THE RABBIS' DISCOURSE OF RESISTANCE

Although the rabbis were part of the Hellenistic world, their conception of the body departed from the prevailing Hellenistic anthropological notions that other Greek-speaking Jews assimilated.³⁴ They insisted on the physical essence of man, and on physical connection and concrete historical memory as supreme values. Hence they insisted on a literal interpretation of the history the Bible reports and the lifestyles it commands. Even if the method of *Midrash* they apply to the interpretation of events seems occasionally excessive (i.e. imaginary), its purpose is always to reconstruct actual events.³⁵ For them, sexuality was an essential component of human existence, for the human being is an animated body, and not a soul trapped or even housed or clothed in a body.³⁶ One of the prayers in the Jewish Morning blessings for waking up and starting a new day, reads: "Blessed are you Eternal God who formed the human being with wisdom creating it with open openings and hollow hollows.... Blessed are You, Eternal One, Healer of all flesh Who works wonders." Which shows that there is acceptance of the fleshliness in its most material and lower-body forms as the embodiment of God's wisdom, and the definition of the human as his or her body.³⁷ As it reads in the book of Job: "yet in my flesh shall I see God" (19:26). The rabbis therefore rejected linguistic forms of allegorical spiritual dualistic discourse (Pauline and Jewish-Hellenic in general) such as "flesh and spirit" and the like, which transformed them into ghosts. As we will see below, they have mobilized opposition to such discourse practices, centered on escaping from sexuality, to a pure, "truly human" spiritual state. In the world of the rabbis, unlike other forms of asceticism, sexual renunciation was excluded. Everyone is required to marry and have children. And whoever refused to do so was stigmatized as a blasphemer.³⁸ As a discourse of resistance, it is no coincidence that the sages of the *Talmud* used the Greek word *androgynos* (dyprosōpos), because they wanted to reverse its meaning in the Hellenistic Greek culture³⁹

³⁴ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 35. According to Boyarin (in line with Wayne Meeks) there were no hard lines between the Pharisees and Hellenistic Judaism in the first century, as evidenced by Philo, Josephus, and Paul. Josephus and Paul refer to themselves as Pharisees; BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 4.

³⁵ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 235.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

of “lack of sexual identity”, to claim that marriage returns the couple to the primordial state of unity.

The Rabbis’ criticism of Paul extends to later Christian thinkers who held similar beliefs. It is no surprise that Augustine wrote in his *Tractatus adversus Judaeos*: “Behold Israel according to the flesh (1 Cor. 10:18). This we know to be the carnal Israel; but the Jews do not grasp this meaning, and as a result they prove themselves indisputably carnal.”⁴⁰

DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL PRACTICE

All practices of rabbinic culture and Christian culture are derived from these two definitions of the human. Here are a few examples.

Circumcision

Because his interpretation of the Bible is allegorical rather than historical, everything in Paul is transferred from the literal to the spiritual plane. The commandment of circumcision is a prominent example.⁴¹ Regarding Israel,

⁴⁰ AUGUSTINE, “In answer to the Jews,” trans. Marie Liguori, in: *Saint Augustine Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari (Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 387–417.

⁴¹ Paul’s approach to the commandments and the Jewish people was at the heart of his debates, making it one of the most debated topics in the history of New Testament scholarship. As Brad Young pointed out, the challenge in Paul’s studies is in reading correspondence from which only the answers have survived. The context, which is not clear enough, is the reason why such a huge and varied number of interpretations of his life and doctrine have been created throughout history; Brad H. YOUNG, *Paul The Jewish Theologian. A Pharisee among Christians, Jews and Gentiles* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1997), 8–9. Boyarin is confident that his thesis can contribute to finally unpack this mystery. In general, he adopts most of the *New Perspective on Paul* school’s assumptions, because in his view, this group (Paul Sanders, James Dunn, N. T. Wright, Krister Stendahl, and others) – which began in the 1970s to challenge the Lutheran reading of Paul’s historical figure that distorted the image of Judaism and Jews as in the Middle Ages – has finally created a “Paul interpretation that does not despise Judaism”; for example, the *New Perspective* insisted that should be understood first and foremost from the context of Jewish discourse at the time. However, in some cases, Boyarin thinks that it is limited compared to his thesis. For example, the classic problems related to the question of Paul’s consistency are easily solved by his thesis. He discusses this at length particularly in the book *A Radical Jew* (1994), where he reveals through a series of examples the connection between his interpretation and Paul’s cultural critique in action, particularly the connection to his discourse on sexuality, which the rabbis rejected. Among these examples there is also a mention of famous contradictions that have exhausted Paul’s commentators throughout history. According to Boyarin, “cultural reading” based on his interpretive code will reveal that these contradictions never existed. Parallel to these new ideas in Western Christianity, a typical Jewish trend emerged among post-Holocaust

Paul claims that the true (inner) Israel is not the empirical Israel, but rather “Israel in the Spirit”. The Bible did not mean physically keeping the commandments, but believing. Thus, his allegorical recitation of the circumcision in the Torah, as referring to the spiritual, rather than physical reality of this commandment, perfectly symbolizes his vision of humanity free of distinctions and hierarchy, replacing the representation of a physical genealogy with a spiritual one. As a result, empirical Israel (“according to the flesh”) is not the ultimate Israel, and the customs mentioned in the Bible are not of a specific people, but of faith, the universal allegorical meaning of these customs.⁴² In the cultural perspective through which Boyarin looks at the two discourses, it can be said that the Phallus constructs the rabbis’ refusal of Paul’s Platonic logos. The insistence on the verbal and the physical is essentially an insistence on a refusal to the universal.

According to Boyarin, there is a perception in rabbinic texts that sees circumcision as a necessary preparation for a vision of the deity – that is, the bodily act does not signify, but the thing itself. According to the rabbis, God’s vision is a physical vision (“yet in my flesh shall I see God”; Job 19:26) in a concrete historical moment, not a spiritual vision in the platonic sense (mental vision). Even when the rabbinic tradition spiritualizes, it does so through the body. “Spirit” is an aspect of the body, almost the same spirit that experiences the pleasure of sexual act through the body, rather than something apart from or beyond it.⁴³ Circumcision is a spiritual event.

Marriage

According to Boyarin, because of the irony of original sin – that the command to reproduce and at the same time curb sex drive is paradoxical – the dominant attitude in Pauline and Jewish discourses in first century towards sex was negative.⁴⁴ For example the famous Jewish concept of “evil inclination” (Heb. *yetzer hara*, יצר הרע) that may drag a man into the abyss.

scholars (such as Jacob Taubes, and more recently by Paula Fredriksen) who sought to re-present Paul as a Jewish thinker whose doctrine had been distorted by his students, who turned him anti-Jewish. This approach is based on the assumption that the process of separation between Judaism and Christianity was lengthy and complex, and that the schism occurred only in the fourth century, during Emperor Constantine’s reign. Boyarin developed a similar approach in his books *Dying for God* (1999), *Borderlines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (2004), and *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (2012), which deal with the relationship between the two religions, their formation and institutionalization.

⁴² BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 233.

⁴³ BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 126–127.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

But Paul was more total than the rabbis, and with him, Christianity as a whole. According to Paul, Adam and Eve were confused by the lust for sex. They were commanded to reproduce, which sin knows how to exploit. From here stems his identification between the sex drive and something he describes in Romans 7:23: “But I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” – his complaint about some law acting in his members that makes him do the evil he does not want.⁴⁵ From this, a paradigm was created, from the first century and through Augustine and the Reformers, which saw in the flesh the source of sin.

Boyarin explains that there are two traditions in the Rabbis’ discourse on sex: dualistic, in which the Torah is a remedy against the evil instinct, that is, the evil instinct is not a motivation for Torah study but its sworn enemy; and dialectical, according to which in order for a desire for sexuality to exist in general, a desire for a forbidden sex must also exist (e.g., adultery that gives birth to bastards).⁴⁶ Removal of the desire for a forbidden sex also removes the desire for a permissible sex, which is required for life to continue. There is no moral dualism of a good god and a bad god; everything is good because it comes from God, including suffering and hell. The evil instinct is dialectical in nature. It possesses both destructive and constructive forces. It is called the Evil desire solely because of its destructive side, from which it cannot escape, but at the same time there is a full recognition not only of the necessity for desire but of its incredibly positive overtones, such as leading to building houses, marrying, procreation, etc.⁴⁷

The dialectical tradition is thus a cultural effort to present sexual desire as something positive, in a cultural environment that views it as a problem. The rabbinical interpretive solution to the danger inherent in sex was an ironic nickname for the evil instinct that is “all good”. According to the Palestinian Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah*,⁴⁸ the first Adam was a corporeal Androgyne, namely a dual-sexed creature, which had genitals of both sexes, and in the act of the creation described in Genesis 2, was split off into two human bodies.⁴⁹ While for Philo and Paul the return to the original state of humankind involves a putting off of the body and sexuality and returning to a purely

⁴⁵ Ibid., 162–163.

⁴⁶ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 64–65.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁸ Jehuda THEODOR and Hanoah ALBECK, eds., *Genesis Rabbah* (Jerusalem: Wahrman Thomas Brook, 1965), 54–55.

⁴⁹ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 43.

spiritual androgyny, the rabbis believed that the physical union of man and wife restores the image of the original whole human.⁵⁰ Hence, marriage, as a social practice, is a return to the ideal, primordial androgenic human in a two-equal-halves state, through the physical union of a man and a woman (“and they shall become one flesh”; Genesis 2:24, Mathew 19:5). The ritual text which is chanted in the rabbinic marriage ceremony, the so-called “seven blessings” that follows the “rib” version of the second creation story, is actually an interpretation of the creation of sex and gender. Just like in the so-called “Therapeutrides” sect.

For one brief moment, the happiness promised to Adam in heaven is re-established in the joyful union of husband and wife in the present, and also forever at the eschaton, where this union will mark the greatest redemption. In rabbinic culture, sex has always been present in physicality, difference, and diversity. The phrase “and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply” (Genesis 1:28) is a synonym for sexuality. Sexuality is inherent in the state of creation, not the state following the expulsion from heaven. It is, therefore, unrelated to any “Fall.”⁵¹ According to the rabbis, the purpose of marriage is to return to the state of perfection of the image of God, the God-created androgynous.

Paul concluded from the sex paradox that if sin is sexual lust, one must shun it as one shuns the flesh, that is, through Christ’s crucifixion. According to Boyarin’s reading of the Epistle to the Romans, chapters 6 and 7, Paul used allegory to transform the they-shall-become-one-flesh physical principle into the commandment of fertility through “marriage to Christ,” and Spirit-led procreation. Sexuality, according to Paul, is tainted with immorality. Being “one spirit” with Jesus entails “producing spiritual fruit” without requiring a physical sexual act.⁵² As the androgyne was the most sublime form of spirituality, without distinctions and without a racial and sexual hierarchy, Pauline Christians saw the union of the Christian with Christ, socially and practically, as more sublime than the physical union of one flesh in marriage in Judaism. Paul himself admitted that it is preferable for a man to be single like him, because only single men are free of gender restrictions, and only single women are free of patriarchal bondage. A man who marries Jesus the Messiah and becomes one spirit with Him is preferable to a man who marries his earthly wife and becomes one flesh with her. According to

⁵⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁵¹ Ibid., 45.

⁵² BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 164–165.

Paul, the instinct for physical multiplication is unimportant, and marriage is only intended to protect weak people from their forbidden sexual desires.⁵³

This conflict between Adam and the Jewish flesh was resolved by Jesus. The flesh is rejected to make the body spiritual through Jesus' resurrection.⁵⁴ Only through the Spirit can the Holy seed be sustained. Physical perseverance is not important, as Paul tells the Jews. After the resurrection of Jesus, "Israel" is no longer defined according to the flesh (according to genealogy), but has been replaced by its spiritual *signified* – the community of believers through baptism. Physical procreation was converted into the birth of spiritual fruit – as the signified that would never die. The social consequence of earlier versions of this anthropology of the ancient androgyne and Platonic dualism, in which there are asexual species inscribed and only a deviant body divided into species, was that the early church saw all Christians as obligated to celibacy, and a spiritual being that enables sex abolition. In later versions, which in Boyarin's view were more in line with the original theory of Paul, a society existed with a layer of Pharisees living in equality between the sexes, alongside a married layer with a hierarchy as a binding code. In any case, virginity and monastic life were considered more sublime than sex, life, and procreation.

THE HISTORICAL PRICE OF THE TWO SOLUTIONS

According to Boyarin, in terms of cultural dialectics, each of the two cultural forms solved something, while leaving something else open. They are analogous to a thesis and an antithesis: each one created an ethical-social problems that the other solves.⁵⁵ Today, after two thousand years of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, these two options are both unbearable in the context of a world in which all of its inhabitants have become interdependent.⁵⁶ They created two forms of racism and misogyny that are diametrically opposed but mirror each other.⁵⁷ The concept of cultural dialectics allows us to confront the two cultural forms in a way that allows them to criticize each

⁵³ Ibid., 171.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 170–172.

⁵⁵ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 231.

⁵⁶ BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 235.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 232.

other, and perhaps we can find solutions to the problem of cultural particularity in the context of universality.⁵⁸

The Universalist heritage of Hellenistic and Pauline Judaism

The benefit of Paul's egalitarian model and freedom to humanity – "there is no longer Jew or Greek, neither slave nor free man, nor male nor female" – made the Bible's message accessible to all peoples through transcendence beyond ethnic restrictions, which aided in the spread of Christianity. At the cost of depreciating sexuality, procreation, and ethnic affiliation, that has led to standardization rather than equality, and the erasure of cultures.⁵⁹ The allegorical reading of Jewish customs, and their emptying of Israel's unique physical-cultural-historical dimension, produced a discourse that contained the seeds of colonialism and imperialism, as well as subsequent conversion to other peoples. Even if Paul did not intend it, the "universal family" that emerged from his vision participated in the heinous patterns of behavior toward "others", established by Christian Europe.⁶⁰

In his genuine desire to include Gentiles in the Torah scheme, Paul paved the way for universal allegorical univocity, which resulted in political injustice, in the form of a European white Christian man. In this Christian tradition, the church not only expelled black Christians, in favor of white colonial Christians,⁶¹ but also anyone who interfered with its unity framework: the female body differs from the male body and can reproduce, hence her gender is not "one". Circumcision is considered feminine, passive, and defective because it is a flaw in the Jewish body. In short, both the Jew and the woman represent "fallen physicality" and "difference," and the Jew marks a particularly persistent difference, because of the cutting of his penis.

According to Boyarin, Paul was not anti-Semitic, but he is the originator of the "Jewish Question",⁶² first among his followers and successors, and then throughout Western history.

⁵⁸ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 235.

⁵⁹ BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 9.

⁶⁰ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 233–235.

⁶¹ The verse: "For though absent in body, I am present in spirit" (1 Cor. 5:3) implies that Paul believed his soul was somewhere where his body was not. This dualism enabled his followers to distort his doctrine of the free spirit, allowing them to torture the body to death in order to save the soul. Although slaves' bodies were allowed to be imprisoned in 15th-century Portugal, this fact allowed their souls to achieve true freedom through Christianity. As a result, black enslavement took on a missionary dimension; BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 234.

⁶² BOYARIN, 156.

Christianity and Gender

The allegorical discourse that gave rise to the “Jewish Question” also gave rise to the “Woman Question”. Another sector that has been abstractly devalued in this Christian historical economy is women, who were admitted only as pseudo-feminine Christians. Women, like Blacks, were required to sign a waiver of their bodies in order to be admitted. According to Elizabeth Castelli, early Christian women were granted access to holiness at the cost of subverting the accepted gender divide. The majority of early Christian literature depicts this sex paradigm and its possibilities. In the case of the tortured Saint Perpetua, who retired from her family and gave up her child, life in the Spirit is death in the body. Thus the erasure of sex is a spiritual event.⁶³

The separatist legacy of rabbinic Judaism

Of course, the Jews’ response to Paulinism did not result in anything resembling Western Christian civilization. Playing cards on Christmas Eve or spitting on the synagogue floor while saying the prayer *Aleinu leshabeach* (עלינו לשבח), which is recited at the end of all three daily services,⁶⁴ were the most abusive activities that rabbinic Judaism developed in exile toward others. Psychologically, the status of a chosen people breeds arrogance, but not a desire for violent conversion, as in the Christian system, which asserts that faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for all.⁶⁵ More was required to recognize the negative consequences of genealogical particularism. What was missing was governmental power directed at others. Boyarin cites a precedent for this idea in Rabbi Yehuda Halevi’s book *Kuzari*, who warned his contemporaries in medieval Spain that their modesty was a function of their powerlessness, but when they gained the upper hand, they would be just as cruel as any other people.⁶⁶ Particularism, in conjunction with governmental power, gives rise to tribal wars or fascism, both of which result in cultural destruction. Jewish segregation and its sole emphasis on caring for other Jews may turn – even when Jews are dominated by others – into an ugly indifference to

⁶³ Elisabeth CASTELLI, “I Will Make Mary Male: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Woman in Late Antiquity,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge), 42; BOYARIN, “Paul and the genealogy of Gender,” 18.

⁶⁴ The first part contains words of praise to God that the Jews were privileged to pray before him, unlike Gentiles who pray to false god. The second part expresses hope that all human beings will recognize the uniqueness of the God of Israel and worship him.

⁶⁵ BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 233.

⁶⁶ Rabbi Yehuda HALEVI, *The Kuzari. In Defense of the Despised Faith*, trans. N. Daniel Korobin (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1998), First Essay, verse 114 (p. 51). BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 242.

the fate of others and thus to another form of racism. This form logically opposes the first form, but is no less dangerous.

Gender roles in Judaism

According to Boyarin, rabbinic Judaism assumed that the body, specifically the sexual body, could not be given up at all and that the birth of offspring was a religious principle even in an unhappy marriage. This came at the expense of establishing a harsh and unequal social hierarchy that did not allow the various modes of sex separation practiced by the early Christians, such as celibacy. As a result, every possibility of a woman's life beyond motherhood was cut short, trapping them in the marriage slavery of a man's wife. There is no doubt that Christian women had more opportunities for creative and autonomous lives than rabbinic Jewish women.⁶⁷

CRITICISM OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Based on this thesis-antithesis, Boyarin has developed a cultural critique of contemporary Western thought, a specific type of Christian feminism, Orthodox Judaism, and, most notably, Zionism.

Effects of Pauline allegorism in postmodern thought

The "Jewish Question" that Paul raised in his allegorical interpretation was carried on in the late twentieth century by neo-Lutherans such as Rudolf Bultmann and his disciple Ernst Kaesemann, who revived the classical Lutheran approach in which the Jew is a metaphor for everything disgusted by God.⁶⁸ In this regard, Boyarin supported the principled critique of the "New Perspective on Paul" school against Lutheran reading.

However, as a cultural critic, he goes beyond that, critically examining most of secular postmodern continental thought, and recognizes, even implicitly, the influence of Pauline dualism on the works of, for example, Robert J. Hamerton Kelly,⁶⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, Jean-François Lyotard,⁷⁰ and Mau-

⁶⁷ Boyarin, "Paul and the genealogy of Gender," 15.

⁶⁸ BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 211–213.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁷⁰ In his book *Heidegger and "the jews"* J. F. Lyotard went further than others in using "Jewish" language as an allegory for "otherness". The title tells the story: Heidegger is capitalized, while Jews are written with a lowercase *j*. This was done to represent those who remained outside, "nonconformists" such as artists, anarchists, blacks, homeless, Arabs, as well as the Jews;

rice Blanchot, in which the treatment of the Jew serves as an allegory for all those who are left out. Boyarin is not claiming that these “postmodern descendants of Paul” are racists, but that such thinking may serve new racist purposes, as it has in the past.

Gender and the discourse on essentialism

On hermeneutical approach, in which language is perceived as an external physical shell with an invisible ideal reality behind it, Paul also used the term “true Jew” (as opposed to something else).⁷¹ He did mean that there is a “Jew” who is related to a trait or inner virtue (such as a “secret Jew”), rather than to genealogy, history, or specific worship (externality). According to Boyarin, the problem with this wording is that it left an opening for the interpretation that anyone can be a Jew. A phenomenon we see today in the discourse on Essentialism.⁷² For some post-structuralists, being a woman is not the ownership of a particular type of body but an experience of an inner trait, hence anyone can be a woman if only they choose to. For Lacan, for example, a woman is an entity that “went beyond the phallus”⁷³. In Jacques Derrida’s work, even spaying (neutering) undergoes allegorization.⁷⁴ All of this demonstrates how much postmodern thought tends to follow Paul’s paths. It is present not only among anti-Semites, but also in mainstream European discourse, including the writings of leftists who opposed anti-Semitism and also in the writings of certain Jews. Hence the frightening reflections regarding the existence of the Jew in the world today.⁷⁵

Feminism

In the context of the general discussion of gender here, Boyarin notes, obviously, feminism’s critique of the separation of mind and body. For example, Judith Butler, one of today’s most prominent feminist voices, chal-

Jean-François LYOTARD, *Heidegger and “the jews”*, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1990.

⁷¹ BOYARIN, “Paul and the Genealogy of Gender,” 5.

⁷² BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 220.

⁷³ Ibid., 225. Boyarin relies here on the claim of Diana Fuss in her *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

⁷⁴ Jacques DERRIDA, “The Purveyor of Truth,” trans. Alan Bass, in *The Purloined Poe*, ed. John P. Muller and William J. Richards (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 185, 194–195.

⁷⁵ BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 227.

lenges the authenticity of the traditional gender roles.⁷⁶ According to her, the critique of mind–body dualism is already present in the founding text of modern feminism, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), according to which the rejected and despised materiality was thrown into the female sphere, and thus defined the body in general as feminine. So the female sex is limited to its body, whereas the male body – which has been completely rejected – has become a tool for extreme apparent freedom: the universal mind is masculine.⁷⁷

Specifically for Christianity, Boyarin refers to the overt contradiction pointed out by Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, in a typical feminist-Christian move, between Paul’s approach in the Galatians (3:28–29), which erases differences and hierarchies, and the cultural conservatism he performs in the first letter to the Corinthians (12:12–13) that advocates hierarchies, that is, the return of women to their “natural place”. According to Christian feminists like Fiorenza, Paul seems to have returned to his “rabbinical” past.⁷⁸ Boyarin simply wishes to state that in his reading, according to which Paul was a Platonist with a moderate dualism that does not cancel out the flesh, he was consistent. Namely, it is a theology of the Spirit in Galatians, as part of the justification of faith, as a means of containing the Gentiles in God’s Israel (“for you are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus”; 3:26). A rebirth occurs during baptism, transforming the verbal relationship tree into an allegorical family tree. While in 1 Corinthians it is a theology of the body. The Corinthians believed they had internalized the ideal of “neither male nor female”, to the point where they could externalize it, in a libertarian lifestyle. For example, Paul was skeptical of their achievements and therefore omitted the motif “neither male nor female”.⁷⁹

Criticism of feminism

Boyarin, as a feminist, identifies with both feminist claims and work assumptions.⁸⁰ He, like Foucault, is of the opinion that sexuality is a discourse, effect, or product of power. In fact, the “politics of identities” is a political agenda. Boyarin does not ignore the fact that the rabbis in the *Midrash* saw

⁷⁶ See Judith BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), and subsequent articles.

⁷⁷ BOYARIN, “Paul and the genealogy of Gender,” 1.

⁷⁸ Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

⁷⁹ BOYARIN, “Paul and the genealogy of Gender,” 13, 16.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 46–48.

circumcision as a sign that makes the body a sacred object, implying that only the male receives holiness, and thus this is a separationist politics.⁸¹ On the other hand, the Jew-Hellenistic discourse of Paul and Philo, which undervalued the body, also undervalued the woman, resulting in the universal subject becoming only a Christian male. As we have seen, for Paul the Jewish Question and the Woman Question are essentially the same question.⁸²

According to Boyarin, Butler's analyses of gender relations are still constrained by the same rhetorical framework that feminism sought to replace. For example, Monique Wittig's proposal of "sex disintegration" whereby women, like men, can grasp the position of the universal subject,⁸³ does not address the fact that Wittig is lesbian is simply another version of the woman represented by Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity, meaning that she became a man through abstinence from married life.⁸⁴ With regard to Christian feminism, according to the principle of Paul's moderate dualism, meaning that he did not completely reject physicality, Boyarin lowers feminist expectations and explains that Paul meant gender equality only on the spiritual plane, while on the physical plane he preserved the differences, for example in the family.⁸⁵ In later Church doctrines, which, according to Boyarin, were more compatible with Paul's original doctrine, there was a society with a stratum of people separated from sex life, living in gender equality, alongside a stratum of married couples with hierarchy as a binding code. However, in Fiorenza's critique of the Jewish patriarchy, whenever it appears to her that Paul did not insist on gender equality, she refers to him as a "Rabbi" with a derogatory tone. That is, the Christian feminists' criticism is stuck because of a misunderstanding of Paul's theology, which has trivialized his character by relying on false and biased descriptions of Judaism.

⁸¹ BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 37.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸³ Monique WITTIG, "The Straight Mind," *Feminist Issues* 1 (1980): 11–103. Wittig is a radical feminist theorist.

⁸⁴ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 238–239. Metaphysically speaking, nothing has changed. Like Perpetua, Wittig's lesbian is not a woman.

⁸⁵ BOYARIN, "Paul and the genealogy of Gender," 13. Boyarin wants to argue that it is not that Paul was inconsistent in the name of preservation of male privilege, but rather he held that Jews and Greeks need ultimately to cease being Jews and Greeks, and the equivalent is that husbands and wives need ultimately to cease being husbands and wives, yet Paul felt that the last is unrealistic for most people, even Christians; BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 199–200.

Ethical Historicism, Generous Criticism

Boyarin's interest, as stated, is to derive from the tensions revealed here, tools for synthesis, that will give value to sexuality, while also liberating the woman, or minority identity, in today's hegemonic culture. In his opinion, the way out of this is not to destroy gender relations, but to redesign the hierarchy that is based on them. As a result, he seeks a method of cultural criticism that will allow this ancient culture to enrich us today. He embraces Mieke Bal's position on a commitment to the text and people of antiquity as to the people of the "East," for example, in order to avoid sifting and condescending judgment on the "other."⁸⁶ Yet he restricts Talal Assad's position according to which it is not moral to disagree with a culture of the past, namely with people who cannot respond to our criticism, and therefore we can only translate and explain their culture.⁸⁷ According to Boyarin, because an objective description of rabbinic culture implies agreement with the negative aspects of this culture on us today, it is appropriate to criticize it. Thus, he proposes an original "ethical historicist" approach, i.e., non-apologetic analysis, that shows an understanding of the needs and impulses, that motivated groups to make the cultural decisions they did, which he refers to as "generous criticism."

There are exceptional stories in the *Talmud* attesting to the rule that on the fringes of the dominant discourse, something different resounded, breaking the framework, namely male opposition to asymmetrical gender relations. Although the preservation of evidence of female autonomy did not serve male hegemony, Jewish tradition has consecrated tools for their preservation, for example, the *Mishnah* brings rejected opinions for future use in other conditions. Even now, rabbinical orthodoxy is attempting to silence it. Now, according to Boyarin, although there were patterns that competed with hegemony, such as the Beruria story,⁸⁸ which teaches that women could study Torah, only a few did. That is, these fragmented acts of resistance were unable to undermine or replace the hierarchy. However, they give us the ability to reconstruct a past that can be used in the present. Despite the efforts of the contemporary Orthodox hegemony to suppress this

⁸⁶ BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 228–229. Mieke BAL, "The Point of Narratology: Part 2," in *Poetics Today* 2 (1990): 734.

⁸⁷ Talal ASAD, "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology," in *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁸⁸ A famous female Talmudist; see BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 181–182.

Talmud-rooted correction, it can serve as a model for correcting gender relations in traditional Judaism.

Boyarin's answer to the Feminists

According to Boyarin, the lesson of rabbinic Judaism's insistence on physicality, and the difference between a Jew and a Greek,⁸⁹ which served as a counter-discourse to imperialism during the Second Temple period, is that "difference" can serve as a liberating force in the world today. It is a contemporary political force at work among feminists, gays, multiculturalists, and post-colonialists against the oppressive dominant discourse known as the "vision of no difference" (all are the same, standardization instead of true equality that respects differences).⁹⁰ Another advantage of this tenacity is that Talmudic culture's positive attitude toward sexuality as God-given has prevented the abhorrence of the fleshly aspect of women, and anxiety about it, which developed in Hellenistic Judaism because of Platonic dualism, and from there throughout Western history.⁹¹

TOWARDS A REVISION OF JEWISH IDENTITY

Paul, according to Boyarin, posed a serious challenge to Jewish identity.⁹² Although Judaism, unlike Christianity, has no geopolitical aspirations or desire for religious hegemony on a global scale, insisting on "difference" and tribal concern for other Jews, national political Judaism has been, and still is violent towards "others" (and traditional-orthodox Judaism often supports

⁸⁹ BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 235.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁹¹ Boyarin examines the difference between the two discourses on sex, also through Charles Mopsik's observation that the result of the Christian dualistic ideological legacy between spirit and inferior flesh for two thousand years is that in modern culture the aspect of procreation is perceived as polluting sexuality, making it the instrumental that oppresses the *Eros*. Modern societies therefore tend to separate sex for procreation from sex for pleasure (fleeting satisfaction), meaning that modern man has two bodies that he can replace as he pleases. Hence, it can be said that the movement for sexual liberation today is rebelling against the utilitarian approach of the Christian heritage that has become a normative ideal in the West. Hence the dialectical approach in rabbinic culture is an opposition to that Christian heritage, which sees sex as a sin in itself. This is learned from the rabbis' analogy between sex and food. Food is meant for the existence of the body and also for pleasure and social interest. From a halakhic point of view, they allowed a barren woman to marry and a married woman to have sex during pregnancy; BOYARIN, *Carnal Israel*, 70–71.

⁹² BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 228.

it), and no less racist than that kind of coercion of conformity in Christianity.⁹³ As a result, Jews today cannot dismiss the power of Paul's criticism solely because of his negative impact discussed above. Paul, as a cultural critic who spoke from within Jewish tradition, to reveal a universal aspect of it, urged Jews to take a progressive approach to their tradition and to participate in universal human solidarity. According to Boyarin, this lesson is addressed to us, the Jews, like a letter still awaiting an answer.⁹⁴ As a Jew, Boyarin addresses the issues raised in Paul's letters by seeking a Jewish particular identity that is free of racist ethnocentrism, which could serve as a model for any other type of particular identity.⁹⁵

Race, essentialism, the “Woman Question”, and the solution to the question of the Jews

Boyarin points to two common bases for identity construction: shared geography and shared genealogy. Both justify violence, though only for genealogy the title “racist” is contagious, a negativity that stems from Paul. At the same time, Boyarin suggests that genealogy can serve as a function of essence for Jews. Historically, in ancient times until the 17th century, “race” was often perceived as a marker of an ethnic group on a biological basis.⁹⁶ However, from the words of the Roman writer Dio Cassius: “I do not know the origin of the name ‘Jew’, but it refers in reality to anyone who follows their customs, even Romans and other foreigners,” it appears that in ancient times, the essence of Jewish identity could be treated with the help of the term “race”, not only in a biological sense but also as a signifier of something else, another trait, for which one did not give a definite expression. This possibility was ruled out in the modern age because, following the development of the concept of “blue blood purity” by the Spaniards and then with the “scientific” racism in the 19th century that formed the infrastructure of modern anti-Semitism, the term “race” was directed against Jews.

The term “race”, in the modern sense, has taken a significant epistemological turn consistent with Cassius' position, thanks to, among other things, Foucault's discourse on sexuality. According to Foucault, in the generations following the 17th century moderns created heterogeneity, which means that there is variety: straight, traditional family, etc.⁹⁷

⁹³ Ibid., 235.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 228.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 229.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 229.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 239–240.

On this basis, Boyarin understands Jewish identity today in such a way that it is unlike anything else (gender, gay sexual practices, or individualism). Indeed, many Jews believe that their Judaism was imposed on them at birth. As a result, without being racist, Judaism is an essence that sometimes has no content other than itself. In general, the discourse on Essentialism now constitutes “opposition” to hegemony, that is, the insistence of minority groups on their right to exist, which always refers to the body as the “real thing”. The values complained of by women, homosexuals, and Jews, are the same as those of the dominant group.⁹⁸ It varies from positive to negative only depending on the political status of the group. A racist in the dominant group becomes an “opponent” in the controlled minority.

On this basis, Boyarin developed in the last chapter of his book *A Radical Jew* (1994)⁹⁹ the idea that in order to preserve genealogy as a tool of Jewish identity, not for generating political racism, it must be for Judaism what Essentialism is for feminism, i.e., a discourse of opposition to a dominant culture.¹⁰⁰ The position of the minority enables the emergence of a non-repressive, flexible, open and critical Jewish identity, one that will in fact serve as a model of “otherness” for resolving the current tension, between a hegemonic universal culture and the particularism of minorities. Boyarin calls this model “diasporized identity” (or “exile identity”). It is a form that goes beyond the particularist dilemma by allowing the complex continuity of Jewish cultural creativity, as a full participant in the cultural life of the environment, as was possible in Islamist Spain. For example, Avicbron (Heb. Solomon Ibn Gabirol), Shmuel Hanagid, and Maimonides even wrote in Arabic. We have the Talmudic rabbis who created innovations in tradition in Babylon, being immersed in the surrounding culture. According to Boyarin, the Talmudic sages’ approach can be seen as a response to the Pauline Universalist challenge, namely relinquishing any possibility of control over others, through a complete abandonment of political sovereignty. This response of de-territorialization helps us today in answering the question of how humankind can survive in delicate interdependence, when Christ is not yet in sight, and in the face of the failure of national uniqueness in the form of nation-states. It is not similar to the formula “be a Jew in your home and a person when you leave”, in the style of Jewish Enlightenment, but two identities that live together in the same “polysystem”. For example, Boyarin sees

⁹⁸ Ibid., 241.

⁹⁹ BOYARIN, “Answering the Mail – Toward a Radical Jewishness,” *A Radical Jew*, 228–260.

¹⁰⁰ BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 236.

Judaism and his Americanism not as private-public or particular-universal, as was expected of Jews in Napoleonic France, but as two particularities simultaneously.

The Zionist mistake

In the face of its exile distortion, Zionist ideology purported to represent a purely Jewish cultural essence. Indeed, the political solution of Jewish hegemony in the form of a nation-state was a rescue operation in an emergency, but eventually it became a disadvantage. For example, in Israel, where Jewish political power is concentrated exclusively and state resources are widely disproportionately divided between the two Jewish and Arab populations, the meaning of practices such as charitable giving, education, and so on (ruling out any possibility of targeting non-Jews in the Diaspora), has changed for the worse. The just surviving cultural pattern of concern for the “poor of your city”, in the conditions of exile, became institutionalized discrimination on behalf of the State.¹⁰¹ When the insistence on ethnicity overlaps with control of a defined piece of land, the holy places of others become a dark threat. While Zionism as a static nationalism wants us to choose “this or that”, a “diasporized identity” allows, as previously mentioned, to hold two routine identities together in the same “multi-system”. Human beings are divided into men and women, as we have seen in the discourse on Essentialism, but that is not the entire story of their physical identity. In this view, Paul’s dualism of specific bodies and universal souls can be converted into a dualism of bodies that are partly Greek and partly Jewish, implying that they are specific at times, unspecific at other times. Boyarin agrees with liberal Arabs (and some Jews, too) who claim that Jews in the Middle East are “Jewish Arabs”, and believes that Zionist ideology obscures the issue, which is the heart of the idea of “diasporized identity”. We are proud to hear that at the University of Cairo today, Rabbi Saadia Gaon is studied as an important Arab or Egyptian philosopher.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ For Boyarin, the problem here is not related to the political right or left, but to the wrong premise which is built into the Zionist idea of a Jewish nation-state according to which ethnic/cultural separation behind closed borders is necessary in order to prevent the cultural mixing that leads to violence. In their rightist forms, these arguments call for expelling the Other. In their liberal forms, these arguments call for the formation of two states that are sealed off from each other. Both are racist programs (*A Radical Jew*, 250).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 244.

“Exile identity” – a model that is ideal but not utopian

Boyarin proposes a “Diaspora Identity” as an ideal model in place of the Jewish nation-state model. However, this is not a utopian model, and it will go down in history. However, Zionism hastened the end.¹⁰³ He claims that Neturei-Karta (from the Aramaic: Guardians of the City), a small ultra-Orthodox group (or sect) in Jerusalem, known for its opposition to the State of Israel and Zionism, is currently employing this model by refusing to visit the Western Wall without a PLO visa. They are unwilling to make use of their Israeli citizenship, even when the Wall is made available to them for religious purposes. According to Boyarin, they teach us a lesson by insisting on preferring exile even when Jewish sovereignty is possible. Therefore, the most significant contribution of Judaism to the world has been exile rather than monotheism. He states that he does not place his reading as “correct,” in front of a Zionism’s “incorrect” particular reading of Jewish culture, but only claims that Zionism is not the only reading.¹⁰⁴

EPILOGUE

Apparently, Boyarin’s criticism of the very existence of a Jewish nation-state attracted criticism from right-wingers in Israel. Some of them even saw his position as a betrayal. In the present context, I think Boyarin’s work deserves more matter-of-fact critical opinions. From the variety of responses to his work, I have selected two that touch on important aspects of it. For example, Nicholas T. Wright, one of the authors of “The New Perspective on Paul” school, within the modern scholarship on St. Paul, disagrees with Boyarin’s conception of Paul as a cultural critic, namely an intellectual who is troubled by the problem of reconciling the uniqueness of his people with the unity of God, and who eventually discovers a certain “idea” on the way to Damascus. Because historically Paul was a fanatical Pharisee, and those fa-

¹⁰³ While in the diaspora form, grasping a specific place is converted into a shared memory of a place to be used in the future, that is, the place is replaced by time, Zionism sought a concrete place and ignored the fact that a place is only a sign of the future. Its tragedy is that, in their desperate attempt to mitigate the threat to Judaism and Jews, they have concretized in the present what is a symbol of the future. Separatism was its response to the fear of threatening Jewish identity in exile, which meant that Zionism tried establishing a social structure that brings together the impossible by closing borders to prevent biological and cultural mixing, similar to separatist feminism; BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew*, 243–246.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 243–246.

natics were not theorists, but zealots for a great social and political liberation to be carried out by God. In other words, Paul's problem was not intellectual before his conversion, but a political and theological one, namely when and how the people of Israel will be liberated, and how God will bring his righteousness about. Even the combination Boyarin made of the post-structuralist sexual language, is too strange for Wright. For example, in Paul's vision of human solidarity, the difference of the Jews from other peoples is symbolized in the cut phallus. Boyarin bases this on Paul's remarks against circumcision. At the same time, Wright notes that Boyarin's postmodern reading of Paul creates a genre of its own.¹⁰⁵

In the context of the Christian-Jewish theological dialogue, Wright argues for Boyarin's credit, pointing out that most scholars who saw Paul as Hellenic, saw it negatively – that is, as something Diaspora-specific that does not belong to Israel, or to portray him as a non-Jew. While Boyarin presents a figure of Paul in such a way that, despite the fact that his theology was developed in Hellenistic terms, one does not need to look outside of Judaism to understand it. To Boyarin, Hellenistic influence pervaded all of first-century Judaism. Even though Paul's theology adheres to the “replacement theology”, it is considered within the Judaism of his time as an extremist but not antisemitic voice. In this regard, he is no different from the Essenes, the sect which claimed to be the only true Jews left. Furthermore, while it is clear that Boyarin favors the Talmud and the Midrashic approach of the rabbis over allegorization, he does not mock Christianity. He makes no claim that his interpretation of the texts is the only one that is correct.

Similarly, Sam Moshinsky notes Boyarin's significant contribution to the field of Paul's scholarship thanks to the richness and informative depth of his analysis, which crosses the boundaries of our understanding to this day, of Paul's teaching and lays it on new foundations, that contribute to a clearer understanding. However, he disagrees with Boyarin's conclusion that Diaspora Jewry will achieve a multicultural environment and a balance between Jewish particularism and Pauline universalism, because in his view, humanity is not yet ripe for universal existence and Paul's vision is too sophisticated to be absorbed by the masses. Furthermore, Moshinsky does not believe that Jews would want to return to a state of helplessness (in cases of disaster), which was their lot until the establishment of the modern state of Israel. However, this does not mean that it is neither possible nor desirable, to

¹⁰⁵ N. T. WRIGHT, “Two Radical Jews: A Review of Daniel Boyarin's *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*,” in *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 3 (1995): 15–23.

strive in the current situation to live with mutual respect, despite the ethnic and other differences, until the final redemption. Today, Boyarin can and should play a key role in reducing tensions between Jews and Christians, at least in the short term.¹⁰⁶

I think that Boyarin has set a high standard for future Jewish scholars in the field of Judeo-Christian discourse. The discussion he has developed, is up-to-date on all the important new thoughts in the field of Christian scholarship since the 1970s, and his creativity has been blown into this age-old issue of Jewish-Christian relations, on which everything seems to have already been said, new life, that is, has really made it topical and useful. Given the unprecedented political intensification of the Orthodox sectors in the State of Israel in recent decades that explicitly intend to take over the Zionist narrative – sectors that are tainted by all the negative features of the rabbinical heritage I explained here, not only towards non-Jews, but this time also towards secular Jewish Israelis – Boyarin's cultural claim that Paul is the key to correcting Jewish identity seems truly relevant.

It seems that today the State of the Jews has run out of excuses to escape the lesson that Paul addressed to them two thousand years ago.

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¹⁰⁶ Sam MOSHINSKY, review of *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* by Daniel Boyarin, *Jewish-Christian Relations*, accessed June 15, 2022, <https://www.jcrelations.net/book-reviews/review/boyarin-daniel-a-radical-jew-paul-and-the-politics-of-identity.pdf>.

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ON THE DEBATE BETWEEN THE PAULINES AND THE RABBIS
 IN LATE ANTIQUITY AROUND THE BODY AND SEXUALITY
 AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE PRESENT DAY,
 THROUGH D. BOYARIN'S POSTMODERN VIEW

Summary

The goal of the present paper is to formulate a concise framework for part of Daniel Boyarin's work which he is most known for, namely his analysis of sexuality in late antiquity Judaism and the critique of contemporary culture he eventually derived from it, above all his objections to the idea of the Jewish nation-state. Within the brief scope here I intend to provide

the reader with a simple roadmap for orienting oneself in Boyarin's relevant literature. Boyarin, a Jewish-American scholar, traces rabbinic, Jewish-Hellenic, and Pauline texts that he believes were part of one arc of Jewish culture in Palestine of late antiquity, and reveals the discourse that was at the center of this one Jewish culture, namely that the famous debate between Judaism and Christianity was essentially over the interpretation of the physical body and sexuality in the Bible, a debate during which critical cultural decisions were made that still have an impact on Western society today in the realms of gender and identity. Through his original "cultural reading" that employs critical current postmodern methods, Boyarin demonstrates that both have complex ethical and political issues, such as rigid hierarchies, colonialism, and racism, but they also have a lot of promise, namely that by examining them side by side, the possibility of finding a more just alternative for our present and future is increased, through mutual correction of each other.

Keywords: Daniel Boyarin; St. Paul; rabbis; cultural criticism; postmodern.

PÓŻNOANTYCZNY SPÓR PAULINÓW Z RABINAMI NA TEMAT CIAŁA
I SEKSUALNOŚCI. JEGO ZNACZENIE DLA WSPÓŁCZESNOŚCI
W POSTMODERNISTYCZNYM UJĘCIU DANIELA BOYARINA

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest nakreślenie ścisłych ram dla tej części twórczości Daniela Boyarina, z której jest on najbardziej znany, a mianowicie jego analizy seksualności w judaizmie późnego antyku i krytyki kultury współczesnej, którą ostatecznie wyprowadził tegoż, przede wszystkim zaś jego sprzeciwu wobec idei Żydowskiego państwa narodowego. W artykule zamierzam w zwięzły sposób zorientować czytelnika w literaturze Boyarina w interesującym nas zakresie. Boyarin jest żydowsko-amerykańskim badaczem, który analizuje teksty rabiniczne, żydowsko-hellenistyczne i paulińskie, a które jego zdaniem stanowiły fragment całości kultury żydowskiej w Palestynie późnego antyku. Ujawnia dyskurs leżący w centrum tej jednolitej kultury żydowskiej, argumentując, że słynny spór pomiędzy judaizmem a chrześcijaństwem dotyczył zasadniczo interpretacji ciała fizycznego i seksualności w Biblii, w trakcie którego podjęto krytyczne decyzje kulturowe, które do dziś wywierają wpływ na społeczeństwo zachodnie w sferze płci i tożsamości. Jego interpretacja kultury, w której Boyarin wykorzystuje współczesne metody krytyki postmodernistycznej, pokazuje, że obie religie mają złożone problemy etyczne i polityczne, takie jak sztywna hierarchia, kolonializm i rasizm, ale mają także duży potencjał – analizując je w zestawieniu, mamy większą możliwość znalezienia uczciwszej alternatywy dla naszej teraźniejszości i przyszłości, ponieważ obydwie religie wzajemnie się korygują.

Słowa kluczowe: Daniel Boyarin; św. Paweł; rabini; krytyka kulturowa; postmodernistyczny.