

Literary Diasporas in Ashkenaz: Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literatures

June 13th–14th, 2016, Paris

International conference co-organized by the Middle East and Mediterranean Research Center (CERMOM) at the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilization in Paris (Inalco), the Paris Yiddish Center – Medem Library (Maison de la culture yiddish – Bibliothèque Medem) and the Department of Jewish Culture at Saint Petersburg State University.



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Description

“Diaspora,” a term long associated with the Jewish historical experience, has undergone since the 1970s “an amazing inflation that peaked in the 1990s, by which time it was being applied to most of the world’s peoples” (Dufoix 2008). During the last few decades, “diaspora” has been subject to further reconceptualizations and theoretical redefinitions, resulting in what has been observed as a “diaspora” of the term itself (Brubaker 2005). Scholars began to explore the

virtues of diaspora, stressing the “positive dimensions of transnational existence” (Werbner 2002) and the ability of diasporas to “mobilize a collective identity [...] in solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries” (Cohen 2008). The conceptual paradigm of center and periphery being increasingly contested (Clifford 1994; Levy 2005), “diaspora” has been recently redefined as “a synchronic cultural situation applicable to people who participate in a doubled cultural (and frequently linguistic) location, in which they share a culture with the place in which they dwell but also with another group of people who live elsewhere” (Boyarin 2015).

It is within the context of these reconceptualizations that this conference wishes to revisit the modern Hebrew and Yiddish literatures of Ashkenaz as literary diasporas, starting with the Haskala and through to the present day. “Ashkenaz” refers here both to a geographic place and to a cultural context, far exceeding the boundaries of Europe. Emerging in similar and related circumstances, both literatures are diasporic in more than one sense:

First, both literatures emerged “in the diaspora” according to the most common understanding of the term in its Jewish context. However, considering “diaspora” as the dispersion of people across geographic areas, analogous to the fertile dispersion of seeds (according to its etymology, from the Greek *dia-*, “throughout”, and *sperain*, “to sow”), Hebrew and Yiddish literatures can be defined as diasporic for they have been germinating in various places and spread across a vast geographic area, establishing a series of consecutive and parallel literary centers in Europe, North and South America, Palestine, South Africa and Australia.

Hebrew and Yiddish literatures produced in places such as Odessa, Vilnius, Warsaw or Berlin, were, on the one hand, anchored in those literary centers and their cultural and political contexts; on the other hand, they were part of a non-territorial republic of letters and were addressed to readers scattered across the world. The diasporic “doubled cultural location” of these literatures can be attributed to their main sources of inspiration: Jewish traditional literature, written mostly in Hebrew and Aramaic, and European modern literatures. In addition, both literatures can be said to have been situated in a doubled cultural and linguistic location, both in relation to their non-Jewish surroundings and in relation to one another.

Schedule

Monday, June 13th

Venue: Room 3.05 at Inalco, 65 Rue des Grands Moulins, 75013 Paris

- 10:00 **Greetings**
Masha Itzhaki, Cermom
Yitskhok Niborski, Paris Yiddish Center – Medem Library

Keynote lecture

- 10:30 **Daniel Boyarin (University of California, Berkeley)**
A Traveling Homeland

First panel: Theory of Literary Diasporas

- 11:30 **Tal Hever-Chybowski (Paris Yiddish Center/Humboldt University of Berlin)**
Figures of Diaspora
- 12:00 **Zohar Weiman-Kelman (Ben-Gurion University)**
Diasporic Temporalities: Irena Klepfisz and Emma Lazarus By the Rivers of Babylon

Second panel: Places of Literary Diasporas

- 14:30 **Efrat Gal-Ed (University of Düsseldorf)**
Yiddishland and the First Transnational Yiddish Cultural Congress (Paris, 1937)
- 15:00 **Jan Schwarz (Lund University)**
Transnational Ashkenaz in a Yiddish Key: Bashevis' Work in Globus, 1932–1934
- 15:30 **Madeleine Cohen (University of California, Berkeley)**
Here and Now: Do'ikayt in Modernist Yiddish Literature
- 16:00 **Michal Peles-Almagor (University of Chicago)**
Two Viennas, One Homeland: (Re-)Writing Jewish Diaspora

Third panel: Politics of Literary Diasporas

- 17:00 **Adi Mahalel (University of Maryland)**
Negating Zionism, Affirming Diaspora: Y. L. Peretz's Satires of Choveve Zion in Hebrew and in Yiddish
- 17:30 **Raphael David Koenig (Harvard University)**
From Warsaw to Alabama: Internationalist Diasporism in Leyb Malach's Yiddish Theater Play Misisipi (1935)
- 18:00 **Anna Elena Torres (University of California, Berkeley)**
"An Avant-Garde of Refugees": Yiddish Anarchist Views of Diaspora

Tuesday, June 14th

Venue: Room 3.05 at Inalco, 65 Rue des Grands Moulins, 75013 Paris

Fourth panel: Literary Diasporas in Movement and Immigration

- 10:30 **Sharon Bar-Kochva (Inalco)**
Sholem Aleichem's Wandering Novel Blondzhene shtern
- 11:00 **Jack Kugelmass (University of Florida)**
Yiddish Writers on the Battlefields of Spain
- 11:30 **Natasha Gordinsky (University of Haifa)**
"Adam-Makom": Gabriel Preil's Diasporic Condition
- 12:00 **Eli Rosenblatt (University of California, Berkeley)**
Diaspora in Reverse: Yiddish Modernism in Southern Africa

Fifth panel: Literary Diasporas in Translation and Reception

- 14:30 **Valentina Fedchenko (Saint Petersburg State University)**
Diaspora from Within and From Without in the Late Novels of I. Bashevis Singer
- 15:00 **Elazar Elhanan (The City College of New York)**
Non verbum e verbo: Politics of Untranslatability in Hebrew and Yiddish
- 15:30 **Arnaud Bikard (European University at Saint-Petersburg)**
Immanuel of Rome's Reception in Yiddish and Hebrew Literatures in the 19th and 20th Century, or How Diaspora Conditioned the Transmission of a Literary Classic
- 16:00 **Agata Grzybowska (University of Warsaw)**
Reimagining the Crimean Diaspora: Shaul Tchernichovsky's Idylls and Their Homeric Origins
- 17:00 **Concluding discussion**

Closing event

- 20:00 The conference will conclude with a festive celebration of a new European Hebrew journal, *Mikan Ve'eylakh* (מכאן ואילך), which is dedicated to diasporic Hebrew (ed. Tal Hever-Chybowski). The closing event will take place at the Maison de la culture yiddish – Bibliothèque Medem (29, rue du Château-d'Eau 75010 Paris).