

NO PLACE LIKE HOME? A DIALOGICAL JOURNEY WITH SHLOMO BIDERMAN

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ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to think or rethink the concept of home as the contemporary avatar of the age-old question of self-identity. In dialogue with Shlomo Biderman, a comparative philosopher without borders who feels at home both in Jewish and Indian sources, the author assembles a philosophical jigsaw-puzzle made of different materials from different thinking traditions in attempt to reveal a new picture of home (and self) compatible with the changing world of immigration, relocation, dislocation and displacement, a world of emigrants, refugees and exiles, in which we live. The puzzle pieces include Plato's cave, Isaiah Berlin's "inner citadel", Shmuel Yosef Agnon's "Ad Hena", Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener", Salman Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands", Midrash Bereshit Rabbah, the Bhagavadgītā and Śāṅkara, Paul de Man on translation and Zarina Hashmi's artwork "Home is a Foreign Place". The discussion culminates in reflection on translation and the foreignness embedded even in one's own mother tongue which only the translator (or Rushdie's "translated man") can see and feel. If foreignness and alienation are recognized as the common human denominator, and one can sober up from the fantasy of restoring an Edenic past (and language), primordial and complete, then perhaps from within the shards of language, of humanity, a different type of home can be envisioned, based on solidarity and compassion.*

Keywords: *home, immigration, place, Salman Rushdie, Shlomo Biderman, translation*

'Mekomo Shel Olam' (The Place of the World in Hebrew) is the title of one of the chapters of Shlomo Biderman's magnum opus *Masaot Philosophiyim Behodu Vebama'arav* (Philosophical Journeys in India and the West) published in Hebrew in 2003, and later translated into English under the title *Crossing Horizons: World, Self, and Language in Indian and Western Thought* (2008). Biderman, one of the pioneers of comparative philosophy, specializes both in Indian philosophy and Jewish philosophy, a unique combination (focusing at the Indian end on Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta and Buddhist texts and thinkers). Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber coined the

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phrase ‘comparative philosophy without borders’.¹ Biderman’s work shows that this is no empty slogan. “Philosophy without borders” dares to cross boundaries – cultural, lingual, geographic, boundaries set by thinking traditions, and even disciplinary boundaries. Biderman extracts philosophical arguments from literary works (drawing on authors such as Herman Melville and S.Y. Agnon). I follow his footsteps by bringing Salman Rushdie into my discussion, disclosing philosophical threads in his writings.

‘Mekomo Shel Olam’ is not just a chapter title in Biderman’s main work, but also the title of a lecture delivered by him in Tel Aviv in December 2014, broadening the scope of the written chapter. The phrase ‘mekomo shel olam’, he explains, is taken from a Midrash, a commentary on the *Torah*, which refers to God as ‘the place of the world’. Makom, place in Hebrew, is a prevalent name of the Jewish god in the Mishnaic commentarial tradition. The *Mishna*, composed after the destruction of the second Jewish Temple, introduces an alternative place to the ruined temple, metaphysical instead of physical. The Midrash, Biderman further explains, suggests that “Hu mekomo shel olam, ve’ein mekomo olamo” (He is the place of the world, but his world is not his place, *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 68.9). “It creates a sense of ambiguity,” Biderman comments, “inescapable in every attempt of depicting God, at least in the Jewish tradition.”²

In his lecture, Biderman sketches four images through which he looks into the notion of place. But he is interested primarily in inner-geography. This is to say that through the notion of place, Biderman aims to contribute to the perennial philosophical discussion of the ever-burning question of self-identity. The first image which he works with is the double-image of the cave and the open space. The second image is that of the Jewish temple. The third is the image of ‘the inner citadel’, a phrase he borrows from Isaiah Berlin, and the fourth image is home.

In dialogue with Biderman, I aim to assemble a philosophical jigsaw-puzzle, focusing primarily on the notion and the experience of home. I use his fourfold formulation; however, I focus primarily on the fourth image, placing it at the heart of the discussion. I work with Biderman’s images and protagonists, but I add protagonists and texts of my own, which include classical Indian sources (the *Bhagavadgītā*, Śāṅkara), contemporary Indian theorists (Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya, Ramchandra Gandhi) and Salman Rushdie, drawing primarily on his seminal essay “Imaginary Homelands” (1981) and his monograph *The Wizard of Oz* (1992).

The challenge of this puzzlemaking is to think in the direction of an alternative to the conventional notion of home (and self) in the changing world of immigration, relocation, dislocation and displacement, a world of emigrants, refugees and exiles, in which many of us belong simultaneously to different places, different worlds. Even the lives of those who have never traveled from their native place is shaped by movement and fluidity around them, both external and internal. Migration, Rushdie suggests, is everywhere around and within us. The challenge is to think toward a new notion of

¹ This is the title of their edited volume (Chakrabarti and Weber 2015).

² I translate from Biderman’s lecture “Mekomo Shel Olam” (2014). All subsequent quotes from Biderman, unless otherwise stated, are from this lecture.

home – fluid, inclusive, free from the shackles of place, a notion of home that immigration with its difficulties and hopes, literal and metaphorical, is a part of. The picture of this new notion of home will unfold as I assemble piece after piece of this jigsaw-puzzle. In a jigsaw-puzzle glossary online I saw that the phrase ‘working blind’ means assembling a puzzle without referring to the picture on the box. Assembling a philosophical jigsaw-puzzle is always a matter of working blind. There is no picture on the box to guide our work. A comparative philosopher without borders is a puzzle-maker and a puzzle-solver at the same time.

Back to the challenge taken here: we live in a contemporary world but often think in old terms. My goal is to think in the direction of what Mukund Lath, a contemporary theorist, refers to as “identity through necessary change”.³ “There are identities”, he argues, “where difference is not contingent but *necessary* to identity. Identity in such cases is formed and maintained through a process of change. [...] This identity does not only accommodate but also invite change and plurality” (2018, 6, italics in the original). Identity, then, through – not despite – change. I wish to think of the notion of home along similar lines

In the last leg of this paper, I reflect on the notion of home through the prism of language, focusing on the mother tongue (our linguistic home) and the act, the craft, the process, the labor of translation. Paul de Man, in a commentary on Walter Benjamin’s classical essay “The Task of the Translator”, suggests that it is the unique perspective of the translator which reveals foreignness even at home, in one’s own mother tongue. Finally, I touch on this foreignness; foreignness not as an antonym of home, but as one of its cornerstones.

Let us begin with Biderman’s images.

IMAGE 1: THE CAVE

The open, infinite space, Biderman suggests, can only be grasped through its opposite, i.e., through that which it is not. He works with the allegory of the Platonic cave. He speaks of a world which is a matter of manipulation, of the ability to see only that which is projected on the cave’s wall, and about lack of freedom. This shadowy world, Biderman continues to read Plato, is a world constructed by the senses. The human person is a slave of his senses. The Platonic open space, on the other hand, facilitated by reasoning, by ‘pure reason’, is the world of ideas. Two plus two, Biderman reads Plato through George Orwell’s 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is always two plus two. It is a tautology, an eternal truth. But this always is challenged in Orwell’s novel by O’Brien, the interrogator. Sometimes, he tells the protagonist Winston Smith (and us) – if so the Big Brother wishes, or the party, or anyone else who is in power to imprison us in front of the shadows on the wall (or on Orwell’s telescreen, or nowadays on the screens which became not just a part of our lives but of who we are), two plus two is five or three. Not all of us have the freedom to acknowledge that two plus two is four.

³ This is the title of Lath’s essay at the intersection of philosophy and musicology (Lath 2003/2018).

The interplay of the cave and the open space (I am now adding a piece of my own to Biderman's jigsaw-puzzle), or in Sanskrit, between *guhā* and *ākāśa*, is a central feature of Indian traditions of world-renunciation. In the Indian milieu, as against Plato's allegory, the light is to be found in the depths of the cave. This is the reason that the renouncer, the monk, the *mumukṣu* – seeker of *mokṣa* or freedom – dwells in caves. It is an instance of 'immanent transcendence'. Bettina Baumer, who examines the proximity, rather than opposition, between *guhā* and *ākāśa*, cave and open space, in the Vedic and Śaiva traditions, suggests that there is sense of continuity between the cave as the 'womb' of the mountain, and the reference to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Hindu temple as *garbhagrha*, 'the house of the womb'. Baumer looks into the cave-temples of Ellora, Ajanta and Elephanta, connecting philosophy and architecture, theory and practice, and comments that "[t]he cave has always been considered the place of spiritual rebirth. [...] The return to the mother's womb is often indicated by the narrow entrance to some sacred caves" (1986, 112).

She underscores the femininity of the cave in terms of womb and narrow entrance which resembles the *yoni*, and speaks of the transformation of the seeker, the *yogin*, as rebirth. Along similar lines, in the context of Kashmir Śaivism, Baumer speaks (drawing on the *Cidgaganacandrikā*) of Śiva as "dwelling in the cave" (*guhāśayaḥ*), namely in Śakti (1986, 114). Another metaphor highlighted by Baumer, besides the metaphor of the womb, is that of the heart, the cave as heart, however "not the physical but the spiritual organ", as she puts it (1986, 107). In this regard, she draws on the *Atharva Veda* (2.1.1-2 and 11.5.10) and the *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* (2.1). The heart metaphor implies that the open space, the Brahman, is inner, and is to be searched for within, in one's cave of caves. But do not be mistaken, the Brahman is not subjective, or individual, or personal. It is rather the "Heart Universal", as Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya (who wrote in the first half of the twentieth century) puts it (Bhushan and Garfield 2011, 199). "It is by finding, discovering, entering, being established in the inner space, i.e. the heart", Baumer suggests, "that one discovers the Ātman, the vastness of all-pervading space, and thus freedom" (1986, 111). To find out how – how to enter and to be established – she examines the case of the Kailāsa-Nātha temple-cave in Ellora. The cave is manmade. It was excavated in the solid mountain-rock from above, Baumer explains. "The space has been created by removing the unnecessary weight of matter" (1986, 117). The numerous intricate carvings of this exceptional cave-temple are all crafted by clearing out layers of rock, with no addition or supplementation of material. This technique, Baumer hints, is reminiscent of the process of self-excavation, in search of one's selfhood, *svarūpa*. Layers of *avidyā*, of day-in-day-out-ness are to be removed. The Ātman is there, always already, waiting to be uncovered.

IMAGE 2: THE TEMPLE

The second image that Biderman works with is that of the Jewish temple, the *Mishkan* in Hebrew. Through the temple, God dwells in the world. However, the temple, and especially *Kodesh Hakodashim*, the Jewish *garbhagrha*, is a taboo, a restricted place.

Whoever enters does not know if or how he will come out. Biderman further implies that the world, or the human space, is not defined only by the temple, but also by its negative, the desert, which stands for sheer otherness, premordiality, chaos. The human person lives in-between. Through the temple, Biderman suggests, and the desert as its antithesis, the middle is revealed. We live in the middle, between temple and desert, center and periphery, purity and impurity. This observation takes me to Charles Malamoud's work *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India* (1996). Malamoud draws a clearcut distinction between grāma and aranya, 'village' and 'forest' or 'wilderness', as two modes of human existence. The village stands for fullness, the forest – a cultural equivalent of the Judeo-Christian desert – for emptiness. The village is further depicted by Malamoud as the locus of dharma, that is, rules, system, society, family and a sense of harmony sustained by yajña, the Vedic sacrifice. However, according to him,

While the forest is the locus of violence in its most elementary form, that violence symbolized by the gods Rudra and Vāyu, it is also the locus within which the ideal of non-violence (ahimsā) is most fully developed. [...] For the sacrifice, that supreme form of village activity is fundamentally violent (1996, 83).

I find Malamoud's distinction between elementary violence (forest) and institutional violence (village) intriguing. Another significant point raised by him has to do with the etymology of the word aranya. It is derived, he suggests, from the word arāṇa, strange, foreign, distant. Hence the forest is established as the other of the village, the other of the familiar and the known. But the point is that grāma and aranya are not just geographical and social designations, but moreover modes of consciousness, pertaining to engagement versus withdrawal. Between these two, according to the *Bhagavadgītā*, a treatise of middleness, the human person lives. The *Bhagavadgītā* prescribes niṣkāma-karma, desireless action, or action which is not intended to fulfill any end besides or beyond the very action itself, as the intermediate space between action and inaction, or again, between participation in and withdrawal from the world and the worldly. "Kṛpaṇāḥ phala-hetavaḥ", "miserable are those who are driven by (their desire for the) fruits (of action)", the author of this famous treatise writes (*Bhagavadgītā* 2.49, Radhakrishnan 1971, 120; my translation).

Another example of middleness in Indian philosophy, which I can only mention here in brief, is implied by Śaṅkara's concept of māyā. According to him, this pertinent notion refers to our phenomenal reality, namely to the world and the worldly. Śaṅkara places māyā, the transcendental illusion in which we live, between – that is, in the middle between – 'sat' and 'asat', that which 'exists' (in the ultimate sense of the word) and that which 'does not exist'. 'Sat' is Brahman, the selfhood beyond everything worldly; 'asat', Śaṅkara playfully explains (in his commentary on *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* 2.1.1) is the non-entity conveyed by phrases such as "the water of a mirage", "sky-

flowers”, “the son of a barren woman” and “a hare with horns”.⁴ Therefore māyā, the world which we constantly create for ourselves, neither exists, nor does not exist. It is this anirvacanīya, indescribability, ontological elusiveness, neither this nor that-ness, which is the crux of the ‘reality’ we live in. It is this middleness that Śaṅkara insists on (hence constructing the category of ‘asat’ as the opposite of ‘sat’), which allows a sense of flexibility. ‘Sat’ and ‘asat’ are too solid to be touched. But māyā, that is, ‘reality’ as conventionally perceived, is flexible enough to be played with, manipulated, transformed, and even annulled through the power of reflection. This so-called ‘reality’, according to Śaṅkara, is anādi, beginningless (owing to the workings of karma), but of the capacity, or even the necessity of being finally terminated. This termination, which brings about the revealment of the Brahman, is the end (in both senses of the word) of the inquiry prescribed according to Śaṅkara in the *Brahmasūtra*, one of the central texts on which he writes a commentary.

IMAGE 3: THE INNER CITADEL

The third image in Biderman’s formulation, the image of the inner citadel, is sketched by him through Blaise Pascal: “By space the universe encompasses and swallows me up like an atom; by thought I comprehend the world” (*Pascal’s Pensées*, section 6, #348, 1958, 97). Biderman further quotes from Isaiah Berlin’s 1958 lecture “Two Concepts of Liberty”, where Berlin speaks of the possibility of

performing a strategic retreat into an inner citadel – my reason, my soul, my noumenal self – which, do what they may, neither external blind force, nor human malice, can touch. I have withdrawn into myself; there, and there alone, I am secure. (1969, 10)

These two quotes make a distinction between inner and outer, reminiscent of the abovementioned distinction between forest and village as two sites, each seeing the other as outer. Pascal and Berlin, in these short passages, emphasize the power of the inner. In Pascal, the human person as object among objects is swallowed by the vast universe, but as subject, in thought, he can swallow the whole universe. Berlin suggests something different. According to him, one can retreat into oneself, into one’s consciousness, which is separated and well-protected from everything ‘out there’, in the world. Here one can feel safe. Here one can feel at home.

Patrick Lynch contextualizes Berlin’s metaphor and explains that the section “[t]he retreat to the inner citadel’ [in Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty”], deals specifically with the idea that people have often retreated from limits on their freedom, particularly the Stoics or Buddhists who have ‘fled the world and escaped the yoke of society or public opinion’” (2014, 50). Lynch stops here, but Berlin’s sentence continues: “by some process of deliberate self-transformation that enables them to care no longer for any of its values, to remain, isolated and independent, on its edges, no longer vulnerable

⁴ “Having bathed in the water of the mirage,” Śaṅkara writes, “and having put a crown of sky-flowers on his head, there goes the son of the barren woman, armed with a bow made of a hare’s horn” (Śaṅkara’s commentary on *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* 2.1.1, Gambhirananda 1998, Vol. 1, 294).

to its weapons” (1969, 10-11). This does not mean of course that Berlin is in favor of “political isolationism” as he calls the retreatant’s choice (1969, 11).

The metaphor of the ‘inner citadel’, if I may take it out of Berlin’s political context, takes me back to the *Bhagavadgītā*. In chapter 2 of this classical treatise, the yogin, the aspirant of freedom, is depicted as a tortoise: “When like a tortoise who withdraws his limbs inwards, he (the yogin) withdraws his senses from their objects, it means that he is firmly rooted in prajñā (knowledge pertaining to the self)”.⁵

However, the yogin does not only withdraw inwards and closes the gates of externality, but moreover, empties oneself of ‘internalized externality’. He disengages from both ‘external externality’ (as in Berlin) and ‘internal externality’, in search of an inner self preceding any form of externality, even of the internalized kind. Ramchandra Gandhi, a contemporary commentator of the *Bhagavadgītā*, notices the sonorous resemblance between the phrase karma-yogī (the practitioner of the abovementioned action for the sake of action) and the word kūrma, tortoise, employed in the verse quoted above. Ramchandra explains that the retreat of the “Turtle Yogī” as he calls him (kūrma-yogī instead of the standard karma-yogī) into oneself is not a matter of escapism, but of “the yogī’s refusal to see apparent otherness as real otherness, and his resolve to resurrect from the depths of his being the self-images of Self, reality, obscured and caricatured by appearance” (2002, 29). Ramchandra’s analysis takes us back to the ‘open space’ (Brahman, Ātman, Self with a capital-S) at the depth of the cave, of interiority, the exact opposite of the Platonic narrative.

Biderman uses the image of the inner citadel to introduce a new position, which sees place as a matter of perspective, far away from the Platonic objectivity at the beginning of his conceptual journey. In *Crossing Horizons* (CH), Biderman takes the discussion of the relationship between inner and outer forward through two idealist philosophers, Vasubandhu and Berkeley (in the chapter “It’s All in the Mind: Berkeley, Vasubandhu and the World Out There”). It is an exercise in comparative philosophy, reading these two thinkers, belonging to different eras and thinking traditions, one vis-à-vis the other. Biderman offers the following observation:

At first glance, it would seem that Berkeley and Vasubandhu are identical twins – a rare species of a Buddhist philosopher breathing through the nostrils of an Irish Bishop. However [...] there is a specific point, where Berkeley’s philosophy comes to a halt, while Vasubandhu, his twin, turns headily along on a course that for Berkeley is much too dangerous (2008, 276-277).

The heart of the matter is that “specific point”, where “Berkeley’s philosophy comes to a halt”. To preserve self and world, Berkeley cannot allow – as Vasubandhu does – the possibility of symmetry between epistemology and imagination. “He seeks to prevent a situation”, Biderman explains, “in which the human faculty of abstraction will take the genie out of the bottle” (2008, 285). In other words, to prevent the ‘emptification’ of the subject, hence of the world, Berkeley puts a limit on the human

⁵ yadā saṃharate cāyaṃ kūrmo ’ngānīva sarvaṣaḥ, indriyāṅindriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā (*Bhagavadgītā* 2.58, Radhakrishnan 1971, 124; my translation)

capacity of imagination. For Vasubandhu, on the other hand, at least according to Biderman, the borders of consciousness are not different from the borders of imagination. There is a clear limit to Berkeley's idealism, which Vasubandhu does not adhere to. The latter is not afraid of the consequences of a total collapse of the distinction between externality and internality, reality and imagination. For him, such sheer disorientation reflects the human state of affairs as it really is. The total collapse that Berkeley is afraid of, is for Vasubandhu the key for release, for freedom of the soteriological type.

IMAGE 4: HOME

Biderman's fourth and final image is the image of home. Traveling between Shmuel Yosef Agnon's story "Ad Hena" ("To this Day", 1952), and Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" (1853), Biderman argues that the question of place, at its core, is a question of identity, even self-identity. From Plato's 'open space', through the Jewish temple, the inner citadel apropos Pascal and Berlin, and at another level Vasubandhu and Berkeley, Biderman reaches the present day, namely the post-everything world in which we live. Through Agnon and Melville, Biderman touches the collapse, or breakdown of the subject. "I would prefer not to", says Melville's Bartleby, who is always in the office, having no home to return to; the same Bartleby who used to work (before joining the law firm as a scrivener) at the Post Restante, the postal address of those who do not have a permanent address, sorting through unclaimed mail. "He lost his identity", Biderman comments, "or his identity is that of someone without identity. Descartes' legacy is 'Think!' But if the only thought is 'I would prefer not to', what is left?"

Biderman offers his listeners a possible answer, or if not an answer then at least a thinking direction, to the question what is left? through the story within story about the Emperor and the Chinese architect in Agnon's "Ad Hena". Here, an old architect is asked to build a new palace for the Chinese emperor but, "[y]ears passed and the palace was not built, since the architect was old and no longer interested in wood and stones".⁶ Instead of building a palace, he sketched one on a huge canvas. When the emperor, first taken by the image, is informed by his courtiers that it is just a drawing, he scolds the architect for cheating him by creating "tsura mehuka", instead of a building. Tsuramehuka means 'a flat image', like 'kapit mehuka' (a level teaspoon), but it also conveys a sense of erasability, as against sustainability, continuity, even perpetuity. In response to the emperor's accusation, the architect taps with his finger on the door he has drawn. The door opens, and he enters, never to come out again.

The story of the Chinese architect tells us something about the relation between the artist and his work of art. The artist, it is implied here, lives in his art. At another level, the story can be read as reflecting Agnon's ambivalence about Israel as a Home for the

⁶ The translation from Ad Hena is mine.

Jewish People.⁷ This story reminds me of another story, a Tamil story, translated from Cekkilār's 12th century *Pēriya Purāṇam* by David Shulman (2012, 4-6). This is the story of Pūcalār, a modest devotee of Śiva, who built a temple in his mind. Through the power of imagination, he assembled workers and materials, all in his mind, and built this imagined temple meticulously according to the Āgamic rules, with unfaltering attention to the minutest detail. Around the same time, not far away, in Kacci (Kāñcīpuram), King Kāṭavar Komān had built a marvelous stone temple for Śiva, at vast expenditure. One night before the inauguration of the king's temple, Śiva appeared in his dream and told him that he will not be able to join the celebrations of installing his image in the temple the next day, since he is about to attend similar celebrations in a similar inauguration, at Pūcalār's temple. The king woke up with amazement, finding it difficult to believe that in a nearby village, someone unknown to him managed to construct a temple, impressive to the extent that it is prioritized by Śiva (in his divine schedule) over his own temple. Is it the devotion which counts, or the power of imagination, or the inner more than the outer? Both stories resonate the perennial philosophical question 'what is real?' and show that stones and wood are not enough to fulfill the (unfulfillable?) yearning for home.

Biderman's commentary on the Chinese architect story in Agnon is sharp, painful, almost Buddhist:

You want to go home? There is no home! Home is just a painting on a canvas. The only shelter is the deep understanding that there is no shelter. If I make a sketch of myself, it will always be a broken, fragmented image. The architect was swallowed by his work of art. [...] In order to reach home, I have to sacrifice myself. But then, there would be no one to reach home.

Biderman's analysis sits well with one of the protagonist's dreams in "Ad Hena", after reading the story of the Chinese architect. In this dream, a distorted version of the biblical story of Yiftach Hagiladi, he is drafted to fight in a great war. "I vowed", he says, "that if I return safely, I will sacrifice the first person who comes out to greet me when I reach home. I returned safely, and it was me, myself, who came out to greet me".⁸

This is Biderman's point: to reach home, one has to sacrifice oneself. Shmuel Yosef, the protagonist of "Ad Hena" reads the story of the Chinese architect in a book that he finds "accidentally" on the table near his bed, when he spends a night at Lunenfeld, on his way to Berlin. What can be more remote and otherly for a Jewish wanderer in

⁷ On home as a national home, Nitza Ben-Dov writes in her chapter "A Dream of Home, The Zionist Dream" (1997, 85-112). She underscores the biographical similarities between Agnon and his namesake, Shmuel Yosef, the protagonist and narrator of "Ad Hena". Agnon, Ben-Dov notes, immigrated to the land of Israel (then, Ottoman Palestine) from Galicia in 1907, but in 1913 left for Germany, where he remained for the next ten years. He returned to Israel (now under the British Mandate) for good in 1924. She suggests that "'Ad Hena' – a story about his wanderings in Germany, after leaving the land of Israel – is brimming with Zionist reflections, conveying Agnon's yearning for the Homeland, and regret for leaving his room, balcony and garden in Jaffa" (1997, 90, my translation).

⁸ I continue to translate from Agnon's "Ad Hena".

Germany (I refer to the two Shmuel Yosef-s, author and protagonist, together) than a Chinese legend? But often it is through the remote other that one manages to see one's own self – self which is closely related to the notion of home – more lucidly. The protagonist dreams about the return from the war when he comes back to Berlin. However, his usual boarding house is unusually full, and he spends the night in a bathtub, which the maid – after measuring him duly with her gaze like a gravedigger measuring a corpse, Agnon (self-) mockingly remarks – prepares for his night sleep. In the confines of the bathtub that serves as his home for the night, he dreams about the impossibility of homecoming.

I would like to continue to reflect on the notion of home through Salman Rushdie's monograph *The Wizard of Oz* (1992), where he offers a contrarian reading of the 1939 American musical-fantasy film of the same title. Rushdie argues that the famous one-liner of the film, "There's no place like home", stands in striking contrast to the film's real message. He shows that the text, namely the movie as a text, has no obvious author, or in Indian terms, that it is *apauruṣeya*. "Who is the *auteur* of *The Wizard of Oz*?" Rushdie asks, and in reply suggests that "No single writer can claim that honour, not even the author of the original book" (1992, 16). The movie is a transcreation of Frank Baum's book from 1900 (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*), Baum who named his magical world after the letters o-z on the bottom drawer of his filing cabinet. At least four directors were involved in making the movie, besides three credited writers, and several other, non-credited writers who contributed important details to the finished screenplay. A studio memo – Rushdie the detective discovered – hints that it could have been the associate producer Arthur Freed, who first came up with the "cutesy slogan", as Rushdie puts it (1992, 14). But Rushdie does not merely imply that the slogan was added to the screenplay to make it more mainstream and marketable. He argues that it was added against the spirit of the film. Kansas is described as a depressing place, where everything is grey, both figuratively and cinematically. "And *this* is the home that there's no place like?", Rushdie asks, "*This* is the lost Eden that we are asked to prefer (as Dorothy does) to Oz?" (1992, 17).

As against the monochromatic Kansas, Oz is full of color. Dorothy is depicted as "stepping into color and is clearly struck by the absence of her familiar homey grey" (1992, 33). "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore", she says. "But Dorothy", Rushdie notices,

has done more than step out of the grey into Technicolor. Her homelessness, or unhousing, is underlined by the fact that [...] she will not be permitted to enter any interior at all until she arrives at the Emerald City. From Tornado to Wizard, Dorothy never has a roof over her head. (1992, 33)

Like a good Indian *bhāṣya-kāra* (classical commentator), Rushdie 'interferes' in the text. When Glinda the Good Witch says to Dorothy: "And now those magic slippers will take you home in two seconds. Close your eyes, click your heels together three times, and think to yourself 'there's no place like...'", Rushdie steps into the movie and says "Hold it. Hold it." He prevents the famous slogan from being completed.

“How does it come about at the close of this radical and enabling film,” he asks in protest, “that we are given this conservative little homily?” (1992, 57). “Home again”, Rushdie summarizes the remaining of the movie,

is black and white, [... and] Dorothy begins her second revolt, fighting not only against patronizing dismissals of her own folk, but also against the scriptwriters, and the sentimental moralizing of the entire Hollywood studio system. “It wasn’t a dream, it was a place”, she cries piteously. “A real, truly live place! Doesn’t anyone believe me?” (1992, 57).

Rushdie believes her. He does not believe the slogan which became identified with the movie. He later writes that “Home has become a scattered, damaged, hydra-various concept in our present travails” (1992, 60).

In “Imaginary Homelands” (1981) Rushdie famously confesses: “I, too, am a translated man. I have been borne across” (1981, 17). And he depicts the freedom of the “translated man”, with the bold statement: “We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork” (1981, 15).⁹ Rushdie continues to portray his translated man (and woman) in his essay “Gunter Grass”: “Migrants, borne-across humans, are metaphorical beings in their very essence; and migration, seen as a metaphor, is everywhere around us. We all cross frontiers; in that sense, we are all migrant peoples” (2010, 278-9).

For Rushdie, every homeland is imaginary. However, this simultaneously painful and liberating truth can only be seen through the eyes of the translated man. Translation, according to Rushdie, is a synonym of migration. It is not translation or migration from-to-, but an existential position, a realm of between, perennial between-ness, which can become a different type of home. To reach home, Biderman argued, one has to sacrifice oneself. Rushdie’s take is different. He prefers to sacrifice home, in the conventional sense of stones and wood, of immobility, of “It is good to die for our country”,¹⁰ and to remain “unhoused”, as he puts it, “from Tornado to Wizard”, and “to step into color”. He prefers eternal yearning over the conventional grayish fulfillment of the homecoming dream. His mokṣa, or freedom, lies in a sādhu-like wandering, in the never-ending crossing of the Heraclitean river of life. In a recent visit to JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi), I saw this graffiti writing on the wall:

THOSE WHO DO NOT MOVE, DO NOT NOTICE THEIR CHAINS. (Rosa Luxemburg)

Is a home without chains, home which does not exclude movement, a misnomer?

⁹ To cross the ‘black water’ (kālā pānī in Hindi) means to leave the body (soil) of India, surrounded by water on three sides, and is considered a ‘sin’ with fatal consequences as far as ‘caste purity’ is concerned. During the colonial British Rule in India, the phrase ‘kalapani’ was applied in the Indian Penal Code to the transport of political prisoners to penal colonies on the Andaman Islands, out of mainland India. Rushdie extends the ‘black water’ metaphor to migrants like him, who transgress boundaries, smash old myths, and willingly eat the forbidden fruit.

¹⁰ A slogan which is a cornerstone of the Israeli ethos. It is allegedly based on the last words of Joseph Trumpeldor (1880-1920), a Russian-born Zionist activist who died defending the Jewish settlement of Tel-Hai in the Galilee.

I wish to close with translation. Thinking of home, we should also think of our mother tongue. What could be (and feel) more homey than one's mother tongue? But Paul de Man, in response to Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" (originally, the Translator's Note appended to his 1923 German translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*), suggests that the translator is in the position of seeing (and again feeling) a sense of foreignness even in one's own mother tongue:

We think we are at ease in our own language, we feel a coziness, a familiarity, a shelter in the language we call our own, in which we think that we are not alienated. What the translation reveals is that this alienation is at its strongest in our relation to our own original language, that the original language within which we are engaged is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular alienation, a particular suffering. (2000, 24-25).

Alienation and suffering are the common human denominator which the translator is capable of seeing, not Benjamin's Edenic language preceding God's curse (in the biblical myth of the Tower of Babel), which according to Benjamin, the translator alone can restore. de Man's translator feels this alienation when unable to find 'the right' word in his mother tongue (his "own original language") for a human experience expressed in another, an-other, language, namely the language from which he translates. The translator sees the short handedness of his mother tongue, its failure. The translator sees and feels in practice, not just theoretically, that I am the other of my other in the same way that he is my other. This is an astounding experience of sameness. If one can see this foreignness, this alienation as the common denominator, and no longer aspire for an Edenic language, primordial and complete; if the shards are the common denominator, then a different type of home can be envisioned, based on solidarity and compassion.

Paul de Man's take on the translator's gaze takes me to artist Zarina Hashmi, a translated person a-la Rushdie (as her life story and the themes of her work show), who like him works in the direction of a new concept of home, home as a site of fragility, vulnerability, and temporariness. Her work "Home is a Foreign Place" (1999) is a collection of 36 woodcut prints on handmade paper that collectively create a large mosaic. de Man's shards or fragments are collected by Hashmi into a picture of a 'homeless home'. Here notions such as displacement and partition should be taken into account.¹¹ Not just the violent 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent, but the different partitions that our world is made of, that we are made of. Each of the fragments of Hashmi's work conveys a moment of home(lessness): rain, dawn, journey, time which does not pass (entailing a sense of imprisonment). Under every image we find a word (a title?), written in two languages, Urdu and English, which join the visual language of the image itself. Home as an act of translation between languages, cultures, and identities. Home as a failure (like every translation, de Man

¹¹ See Homi Bhabha's lecture "Translation and Displacement" (2016), a postcolonial commentary on Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" (1999).

harshly or soberly suggests), failure which like suffering and alienation is part of who we are, of being human.

What then is the picture revealed by our jigsaw-puzzle, the picture of a different, contemporary notion of home? “We all cross frontiers [...] we are all migrant peoples”, Rushdie claims. Or at least we can discover this aspect of our humanity, I wish to add. Paul de Man and Zarina Hashmi showed us that foreignness and alienation are felt (at their strongest, de Man stresses) at home, in me. It is the translator’s eye, the eye of the insider-outsider, of Rushdie’s immigrant, that sees alienation at home. This seeing-understanding, we saw, is both painful and liberating. Zarina showed us that home is an amalgam, a jigsaw-puzzle made of pieces that fit and do not fit. The non-fitting pieces are not less essential than the fitting ones. In closure I wish to return to Mukund Lath, who thinks about self-identity through classical Indian music (Hindustani music, Rāga music) as plural and consisting of myriad possibilities, just like the Rāga, the musical archetype of this genre. Every execution of a rāga is different from previous executions and is always new. “The rāga pattern,” Lath explains, “is given and forms the basis of a free and open ālāpa, or improvised elaboration according to a set of rules which assume the pattern but allow room for imagination” (2018, 6-7). I wish to borrow this open-endedness and room for imagination for our discussion. Lath also emphasizes the centrality of dialogue between the musician and the Rāga as a ‘living personhood’. The Rāga is developed (sung, played) through this dialogue. He thus invites us to think of identity, our identity, as formatted in dialogue between each of us and the world one lives in, human and nonhuman. The same is true, I would finally suggest, with regard to the notion of home. Home is a dialogue.

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