

Freud's Vocation of Exile

By Salvatore F. Guido

Review of Betty Bernardo Fuks, *Freud and the Invention of Jewishness* (New York: Agincourt Press, 2008)

There is a truth of exile and there is a vocation of exile; and if being Jewish is being destined to dispersion – just as it is a call to a sojourn without place, just as it ruins every fixed relation of force with *one* individual, *one* group, or *one* state – it is because dispersion, faced with the exigency of the whole, also clears the way for a different exigency and finally forbids the temptation of Unity-Identity (Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 125-26).

If we accept the fact that Jewishness has nothing to do with any given essence, but that it is a construction, a *devenir*, it is possible to follow in Freud this process of movement of *devenir Jew* in relation to the discovery of psychoanalysis. In his subjective expatriations, in his explicit negation of any Jewish identity, in his permanent pursuit of the non-identical and in his real exodus, the movement of *devenir other* in Freud's Jewishness underlies the construction of psychoanalysis as a practice and a theory of the non-identical. (Fuks, "Vocation" 7)

Along with the German annexation of Austria, the burning of Freud's books,¹ his encounter with the Gestapo and final exile to London, Freud's death was virtually coincident with the abrupt launch of psychoanalysis into the era of the after-Freud, an era bereft not only of his voice but also of the unique Central European culture that had sustained the spirit of Freudian psychoanalysis.² The Nazi determination to eradicate everything associated with Jewishness from German language and culture included a direct aim at psychoanalysis. At this moment, when "the fate of psychoanalysis" suddenly became directly "intertwined [. . .]

¹ In May 1933 the official burning of books, including books by Freud, took place in Berlin, coinciding with the first wave of emigration from Germany of Jewish analysts that began a couple of months earlier. The book burnings were coordinated by professors and students in collaboration with the Nazi Party, and were staged in all German university towns (Mosse, "Bookburning" 143). Over 20,000 books blazed in Berlin and more than 2,000 incinerated in other cities. Among the many things to be remembered is the fact that these fires were ignited by the "so-called 'cultured circles,' predominately academics, that is to say, not the Volk or the people without a book, but precisely that Volk who lived by the book," constituting a "betrayal of the intellectuals" (143)

² Extending from the mid-nineteenth century until 1933, that cultural community "blossomed in the most extraordinary way, experiencing a Golden Age" (Löwy, *Redemption* 1), with German-speaking Jewish writers in *Mittleurope* before World War II constituting "a new social category [. . .] Jewish intelligentsia" (3).

with the actual fate of the Jewish people," writes Yerushalmi, "vague phrases about Jewish identity could no longer suffice [. . .] for a man of Freud's intellectual intensity," and he chose to confront what he would soon refer to as "'the *fateful* content of the religious history of the Jews'" (*Freud's Moses* 16; emphasis added).

In 1934, faced with new persecutions, Freud began to write *Moses the Man and Monotheistic Religion*,³ where he took up a question that had been haunting him since *Totem and Taboo* (*Standard* 13:vii-162): the enigma of the transmission of an archaic heritage from one generation to another. What occupied him above all was whether his life-work would withstand Nazi persecution. And so it was that in his final address (March 13, 1938), to the members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society prior to their dispersion, Freud spoke these words: "After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by Titus, Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai asked for permission to open a school at Jabneth for the study of the Torah. We are going to do the same. We are, after all, used to persecution by our history, tradition and some of us by personal experience" (*Jones, Life and Work* 3:221). As Betty Fuks suggests, Freud thus voiced his confidence that psychoanalysis outlives destruction not by means of preservation through rigid institutionalization but by means of transmission via words and letters. The same "links" that had kept the dispersed Jewish people together would also serve to maintain the links among analysts in this "new kind of diaspora", as Anna Freud called it in a letter to Ernest Jones.⁴

Like his ancestors before him, Freud took it upon himself, at the moment of the termination to the short-lived emancipation of Jews in Europe, to rewrite the history of the Jewish people that is told in the Book of Books, that "permanent support of writing" which "gathers together the people in the Diaspora" (Fuks,

³ This is the literal translation of *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion*, which appears in the *Standard Edition* (23:1-138) as *Moses and Monotheism*.

⁴ On March 8, 1934, Anna Freud refers to "a new kind of diaspora" in a letter to Ernest Jones. She adds, "you surely know what the word means: the spreading of the Jews over the world after the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem" (qtd. in R. Steiner, "It Is a New" 44).

Freud and the Invention of Jewishness 78). According to tradition, since the destruction of the second Temple, and the expulsion from Jerusalem, Jews have faced the experience of deterritorialization by writing their history, and Freud's book on Moses "follows in its essence the original estranged condition of the elected people," designating the Jew as "foreigner to himself" and "foreigner to the other" (Fuks, *Invention* 78; see also "Vocation" 10).⁵ To the Hebrew Bible's emphasis on the fundamental importance of the condition as stranger, Freud lends to the biblical signifiers his personal history as a wandering Jew. From Abraham, "the patriarch of the Jewish people," to Ruth, a Moabite, and "matriarch of Jewish royalty," and Jacob, "who struggles with the Unknown, the angel of a Foreign God," each figure manifests that "foreignness (*étrangeté*) and search for exteriority" that is found in the writings of the earliest Hebrew writers (*Invention* 21). Freud will add Moses to this lineage by revealing that the great prophet of the Jewish people was in fact a foreigner, an Egyptian. As such, it is the wandering in the desert which moves Freud to write, during his exodus from Vienna to London, a text which is at once a contribution to the Freudian theory of culture, a reflection concerning the fate of psychoanalysis, and an analysis of the barbarity bound up with the religious structure of Nazism which, "under the sign of hatred, fomented a culture of mortal hostility toward the different" (Fuks, "Vocation" 9).

As in the book of Exodus, Freud's nomadism is animated by a vocation of exile, an ethical impulse to choose to pursue hitherto unknown paths.⁶ And with his elaboration of the biblical metaphor in the book on Moses, he announces that the impossible profession of being an analyst consists, above all, in making possible an exile that each analyst necessarily experiences. Weaving together her unprecedented account of Freud's invention of his Jewishness and

⁵ Deterritorialization, a concept introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), quickly migrated into other disciplines such as anthropology where it has undergone various transmutations.

⁶ The title of Fuks's book, originally published in Portuguese in 2000 as *Freud e a judeidade, a vocação do exílio*, may be translated quite literally as *Freud and Jewishness, the Vocation of Exile*.

of psychoanalysis with the biblical vocation of exile that was inaugurated by, and remains associated with, the name of Abraham, Fuks has not only opened a new chapter in the field of studies of Freud and opened a new way into the history of psychoanalysis, but has also reconfigured the question concerning the Freudian legacy, a question inaugurated by Lacan in particular in his return to Freud. Drawing on biblical studies, her analytic practice and reading of Freud, as well as the work of Deleuze, Levinas, and Blanchot among others, Fuks takes up and re-elaborates distinctions proposed by Albert Memmi in his *L'homme dominé*⁷ for her innovative approach to Freud's construction of an original Jewishness in connection with his invention of psychoanalysis.

In Memmi's schema, "Judaism" refers to "the set of cultural and religious traditions"; "Jewry" (*judaïcité*) refers "to the totality of the Jewish as a demographic reality, scattered in various communities around the world"; while "Jewishness" (*judéité*) "alludes exclusively to the fact of feeling Jewish," the way or "how a Jew is Jewish, subjectively and objectively" (qtd. in Fuks, *Invention* 18). Crucially, by calling attention to Freud's "*becoming-Jew*"--signifying by this that what constitutes his Jewishness is *not* to be confused with his "Jewish condition," the accidental circumstances of his birth, or his predicament or "situation" as a Jew—Fuks underlines *how* Freud exerted or exercised his Jewishness, shifting the focus away from the tautology whereby "Jewishness" is

⁷ The first edition of *L'homme dominé* was published in 1968, and a second edition in 1973. The first edition has been translated as *Dominated Man: Notes Toward a Portrait*. In 1966 he became a professor at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, where he focused on the social effects of colonization, devoting much of his work to the exploration of parallels between the situation of "the Jew" and that of colonized peoples. And in the early 1970s, in connection with his reflections on what it means to be Jewish, he took up the notion of *judéité*, or Jewishness as the basis for further exploration. Memmi's 1957 book, *Portrait du colonisé, precede du portrait du colonisateur* (*The Colonizer and the Colonized*), written in reaction to colonial rule in the fifties and sixties is one of the foundational texts of postcolonial theory, along with work by the Martinique writer Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) and Frantz Fanon (1925-1962), among others. Born in Tunisia, Memmi wrote it in response to the decolonization of North Africa in 1956, when Tunisia and Algeria gained independence from the French. In his preface to this book he writes of being "sort of a half-breed of colonization, understanding everyone because I belonged completely to no one" (*Colonizer* xvi).

merely another identifying aspect of "being Jewish." From this perspective, Freud's "*becoming-Jew*" found in psychoanalysis "the utmost expression of this *devenir*," this becoming, which entailed "the very act of *withdrawing* from the Jewish majority" as well as from "the established identifications given by others to his situation as a Jew in the Viennese diaspora" (Fuks, "Vocation" 7; emphasis added). Fuks retains *devenir* in the French, here and elsewhere, in order to convey the precise signification it carries in the work of Deleuze. It is important to emphasize that Freud's Jewish *devenir* "radically differs from his Jewish situation" and that his vocation of exile has less to do with a "past inheritance" than with "*the future* of what he strove" to shape "*like the writer and the poet creating a book or a poem*" (Fuks, "Vocation" 8; emphasis added). As such, Freud's "unique way to practice and demonstrate the kind of Jew he was" appears in sharp contrast to the idea of passive endurance (Fuks, *Invention* 65). By *positively* asserting his own Jewishness, he was always in the process of inventing, and his Jewishness, peculiar to what had been "agreed upon as designating a Jew in the West," remained unclassifiable also in terms of the categories of "Jew" found in the Vienna of his time (Fuks, "Vocation" 1).⁸ At the same time, the construction of psychoanalytic theory and practice, in conjunction with the "struggle against resistances to psychoanalysis," called for "an homologous movement" to that required for the construction of an original Jewishness, and *this "choice of withdrawing,"* this time "*from the scientific culture of his time,*" which was "marked by the logic of that period," pressed upon him "his nomadism" (Fuks, "Vocation" 7; emphasis mine).

⁸ Fuks writes: "Jewishness should be understood as something that must always be defined and constructed and never finished, even for those to whom Judaism as a religion is not relevant. In this context one is reminded of Jacques Derrida's definition of Jewishness as an expression that inaugurates an act, a way of becoming another." (Fuks, *Invention* 18)
She refers to the Foreword to Derrida's *Archive Fever* (33-81).

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