



# **Powers Of Diaspora: Two Essays On The Relevance Of Jewish Culture**

*Jonathan Boyarin*

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Diaspora: the scattering of a people, often described as a condition of helplessness and a pathology to be overcome. It can also be, as Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin assert in this provocative work, a unique source of power and strength. Focusing on Jewish experience, Powers of Diaspora forcefully argues that diasporic communities exercise a distinct form of cultural power in order to maintain themselves.

With reference to rabbinic culture and contemporary Jewish ethnography, the authors evoke the cultural strategies of Jewish diaspora-of regeneration through statelessness-that should prove increasingly relevant to the dilemmas and possibilities of the "new diasporas" born in the midst and in the aftermath of the modern world-system. Their work exposes the ways in which peoples in diaspora "legislate" distinctive ways of life and establish formal communal structures, thus creating fluid yet effective boundaries between themselves and the others who surround them, and critiques the internal power dynamics that can sometimes result.

Powers of Diaspora strongly reasserts the place of Jewish culture in contemporary discussions of diaspora, where the cultural politics of postcolonialism have remarginalized Jewish experience; at the same time, it brings insights from studies of other diasporas to bear on the study of Jews. In challenging the equation of diaspora with powerlessness, the book questions the modern nation-state ideal and suggests that diasporic cultural formations offer important clues toward an alternative means of relating culture to polity.

Daniel Boyarin is Taubman Professor of Talmudic Culture in the Departments of Near Eastern Studies and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley. His books include Carnal Israel (1993), A Radical Jew (1994), and Unheroic Conduct (1997). Jonathan Boyarin is an attorney and an independent scholar in the fields of anthropology and Jewish cultural studies. His books include Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory (Minnesota, 1992) and Thinking in Jewish (1996). Daniel and Jonathan also coedited Jews and Other Differences (Minnesota, 1997).

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