

# Refuge, Religion, Home: Diaspora Studies and the Enhancement Life

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## Theologicum 0.133

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### Course Overview:

“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion” (Ps. 137, 1), the story of diaspora has often been told as a tale of woe: forced migration, dispersal, longing for home and a sense of alienation or even fantasies of violence vis-à-vis the new “host society” have become crucial definitional criteria to determine the collective identity of diaspora communities from the Israelites to the Armenians. At the same time scholars from cultural studies and the sociology of religion have pointed to the positive, creative potentials of a diasporic constellation. In his book on “Global Diasporas” (2008) Robin Cohen encouraged a programmatic revision of diaspora as a condition for the enhancement rather than the limitation of life. Based on a bold rereading of “Babylon as a Site of Creativity”, he depicts the early Jewish diaspora as an intellectual avant-garde ascending from gloomy tribalism to a cosmopolitan culture. Other authors have pointed to the “middleman function” religious and ethnic minority groups may perform in their respective countries of arrival.

The course is to further excavate and elucidate enhancement of life as a thread of discussion within diaspora studies. Departing from a discussion on working definitions of “diaspora”, “exile” and “transmigration”, we will consider important contributions to diaspora studies from a sociological, anthropological and cultural studies background. Particular emphasis will be given to Cohen’s work which seeks to combine a clear delineation of diaspora as a comparative concept with an optimistic focus on diasporic identities. In the final part of the seminar we will make use of empirical material from the context of the Enhancing Life Project “Scattered tribes and promised lands: spiritual aspirations in modern mass migration” to explore perspectives of enhancement in the biographical reconstructions of migrants.

### Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to **apply** and **critically reflect** on various definitions on “diaspora”, to **distinguish** between several phases or conjunctures in diaspora studies and to **identify** and **evaluate** pessimistic and optimistic tendencies in the history of diasporic thought. In addition, participants will gain **empirical insights** into the migration biographies.

### Teaching Methods:

All regular sessions follow the same pattern: short introduction and recapitulation the state of discussion, working groups concerned with selected dimensions of the reading and a concluding plenary discussion. All discussions will be visualized on the black board as mind maps or tables. The seminar includes an excursion to the border museum and the refugee camp in Friedland, a village nearby Göttingen.

### Course Schedule:

Date	Topic	Reading
12.4.	Introduction	
<i>Terminological Reflections</i>		
19.4.	Exil, Diaspora, Transmigration	Kuhlmann 2014
26.4.	Diaspora in critical terms	Mayer 2005
3.5.	Three Meanings of Diaspora	Vertovec 1999
10.5.	Diaspora in a culture comparative perspective	Safran 1991
<i>Diaspora and the enhancement of life</i>		
17.5.	Phases and conjunctures in diaspora studies	Cohen 2008, 1-20
24.5.	Babylon: A Site of creativity?	Cohen 2008, 21-38
31.5.	Victim-Diaspora as sub-type	Cohen 2008, 39-60
7.6.	Empirical applications and normative implications	Cohen 2008, 159-177
<i>Applications</i>		
14.6.	The diaspora of German expellees (Heimatvertriebene)	Interview transcript
21.6.	The Yezidi diaspora in Germany	Media reports
28.6.	„By the rivers of Babylon“: a glance at the musical history of reception of Psalm 137	Musical adaptations from the Age of Reformation to Boney M.
5.7.	Excursion to Friedland (border museum and refugee camp)	Interview transcript, camp director
12.7.	Concluding Discussion: Diaspora between tale of woe and transnational project	

## **Bibliography:**

Cohen, Robin (2008): *Global diasporas: an introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London: Routledge.

Kuhlmann, Jenny (2014): "Exil, Diaspora, Transmigration", in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ 42/2014)*, 9-15.

Mayer, Ruth (2005): *Diaspora. Eine kritische Begriffsbestimmung*, Bielefeld: Transcript.

Safran, William (1991): "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return", in: *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1(1), 83-99.

Vertovec, Steven (1999): "Three meanings of 'diaspora', exemplified by South Asian religions", in: *Diaspora* 6 (3), 277-300.