

Between the Home We Leave and the Home We Create

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Abstract

This paper begins with a summary of the thesis put forth by Jeremy Adelman¹, Walter Samuel Carpenter III Professor of Spanish Civilization and Culture at Princeton University, in his book *Frontier Development: Land, Labour, and Capital on the Wheatlands of Argentina and Canada 1890-1914*, though we will also draw on two of his other books, *Republic of Capital: Buenos Aires and the Legal Transformation of the Atlantic World*, as well as *Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman*. In those books, Jeremy Adelman offered a story of migration between the Old World of Europe and the New World of Argentina cast in the language of economics and economic history. This essay argues that the economic tale told of that migration is but an exemplification of and variation on a much older biblical narrative rooted in “deep memory” that begins with the biblical heritage of the West and the words, “My Father was a Wandering Aramean...”

The deeper biblical narrative includes the following ten elements:

- Loss of home means “Betweenness” not “Placelessness”
- The promise, as distinct from the right, of return
- A moral framework of oppression, transgression and obligation to the other
- The concept of land as a gift rather than a possession, especially important in a capitalist context of possessive individualism versus native rights
- A tension between the indigenous (a “natural” right to land) by autochthones as a myth of origins and the concept of “strangers in a strange land”
- An ontology in which exile dominates along with the vision of building a new home in a new land: “Go you forth from your land, from your kin, from your father’s home to the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1)
- The conditional nature of that movement between a home left (and not a home less) and the home founded, not only on promise, but on an implicit covenant
- The vision of forging a great nation in a landscape flowing with milk and honey
- Preservation of that narrative architectonic structure in contemporary lived life that undergirds rather than defines identity, an identity in tension with that of an autonomous agent initiating action and articulating a specific voice
- In the modern world, everyone but the indigenous natives are at heart quintessential Hebrews (*‘ivri*, literally “one who crosses over”) as well as, in a very deep sense, aliens.

The paper will also draw on a wide body of research from the resettlement of Vietnamese to the displacement and return of Tutsis in Rwanda following the genocide, from the flight of Tibetans to the refusal to allow the return of the Keren refugees to Myanmar, and from the settlement of Jews in what became Israel and the dispossession from the land of Palestinian refugees.

¹ Jeremy Adelman is the brother of Rachel Adelman, Professor of Bible, Hebrew College, Newton Centre, Massachusetts, and the son of Howard Adelman, Professor Emeritus Philosophy, York University, Toronto and founder of the Centre for Refugee Studies.