

# Untitled

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## *The Space of Separation*

*We have known physical bondage and spiritual servitude.*

*We have also been subjected to social degradation.*

*For in the eyes of others we are a subject people...*

*For more than one enemy has risen against us to destroy us.*

*In every generation, in every age, some rise up to plot our annihilation.*

*But a Divine Power sustains and delivers us.*

- The New Union Passover *Haggadah*, 1974

The space of their separation is the shape of their history. For the Jewish

people, identity is inextricably linked with the label of the other. The wanderer, the sufferer, the stereotype - - the Jews have served as forced laborers, scapegoats and victims for over 2000 years. Bound by a monotheistic belief system, a specific language, and a set of ritualistic observances, their successes under the most limited of access and the most dire of circumstances has often made them a suspect people. Envy turned to fear has repeatedly resulted in forced segregation by the communities they once resided within. This segregation, though certainly reinforced psychologically, was made manifest in the labeling of the body and the form of the city.

The Lateran Council of 1179 sought to physically separate Christian Europe from its 'immoral' non-Christian influences. Jews, limited in their occupational opportunities to second-hand selling, money-lending, and medical pursuits, were associated with disease, greed, and eroticism. In 1515, Venice was one of the first cities to officially establish a separate location for Jewish resettlement, taking advantage of the canal system

as a natural moat. This new ghetto (the word coming from the Italian *gettare*) limited the interaction of Jews and non-Jews to day-time business transactions. At dusk, the few bridges connecting the Ghetto Nuovo with the city beyond would be lifted, balconies pulled in and shutters closed, refocusing the community entirely to its inner core.

Separation is inevitably a two-sided coin. In Venice, isolation allowed a highly active and unified Jewish existence to develop within the ghetto walls. While Jews were not allowed to own land outside the ghetto walls, and therefore were not allowed to construct religious buildings of any kind, several synagogues were constructed within the ghetto, quickly becoming the generator for a greater communal religious lifestyle. In this sense, the walls of isolation also served as the walls of protection. When anti-Semitism would turn violent, the ghetto served as a safe haven. Separation allowed the Venetian Jews a zone for free expression, a place where they could dress elaborately without scorn. The space considered profane during the day as viewed by the Christians, became sacred and whole at night.

Additionally, the Jewish spatial construct known as an *eruv* provides a link between seemingly disparate locations through the creation of a common private domain. This new private space becomes a zone in which many public activities outlawed on the Sabbath may occur. The ability to perform these functions - - the doing of any work including the carrying of children, the transporting of food, the carrying of a prayer book - - greatly increases the possibility for interaction on the Sabbath. The *eruv*, with its ringed perimeter and marked entries and exits, is often an attraction for practicing Jews looking for greater flexibility in a modern world.

This research focuses on the physical manifestation of the Jewish space of separation as reflected in the (microcosm) of the body and (macrocosm) of the city. Looking at the historical examples of the *eruv* and the original Venetian and Roman ghettos, this paper will examine the resulting space of separation maintained in many Jewish communities in America today and how questions of heritage, identity, and ritual might be rediscovered through new revelations in spatial connectivity.