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Article

Religious Diaspora: A New Approach to Its Existence and Meaning

Alina Pătru ⓘ

Orthodox Theological Faculty, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, 550024 Sibiu, Romania; alina.patru@ulbsibiu.ro

Abstract: The present study aims to contribute to the discussion regarding the possibility of conceptualizing a religious diaspora. It proposes a new way of defining it, namely in relation to religious and not to ethno-territorial realities, but without editing the territorial dimension out. After sketching the definition on this theoretical basis, the study refers to six case studies, pointing to the way in which the definitory traits of a religious diaspora are actualized in each situation under study. The evaluation unravels the strengths of the concept as well as certain aspects that still need to be addressed in further research. The inference is that the capacity of religion to generate diasporic feelings and attitudes should also be acknowledged and that the concept of religious diaspora ought to be treated as an analytic instrument useful both in the research and in the decision-making process.

Keywords: religious diaspora; religion and diaspora; diaspora studies; Jewish diaspora; Christian-Orthodox diaspora; Romanian-Orthodox diaspora; German congregations abroad; expatriates; diasporic consciousness

1. Introduction: Problem, Aims and Methods

The scientific debate on the possibility of a religious diaspora has already caused much ink to flow, starting with Robin Cohen's assertion from 1997 that "religions can provide additional cement to bind a diasporic consciousness, but they do not constitute diasporas in and of themselves," as there is no "overlap between faith and ethnicity" and "the myth and idealization of a homeland and a return movement are also conspicuously absent in the case of world religions" (Cohen 1997, p. 189). Proponents of the idea of a religious diaspora have since concentrated primarily on proving that there are religions with an ethnic identity that are tied to a country or to a specific geographical territory, which they consider to be endowed with sacred features. Judaism, Sikhism (Cohen 1997), Hinduism (Vertovec 2000), and even Zoroastrianism (Hinnells 2005) are religions for which the idea of a religious diaspora can be accepted, as they all designate an ethnic identity and refer to a sacred territory that they idealize and long for and to which they strive to return, at least at the discursive level. The existence of a mythical territory, a diasporic consciousness, and a longing to return allows for these religious communities to be considered as diasporas. Another possibility, also acknowledged by Cohen, is to fully de-territorialize diaspora (Cohen 1997, p. 189)—this makes it possible for several religious groups to be viewed as diasporas, but the features of the concept of diaspora are expanded in such a way that its scientific usefulness becomes questionable.

The present study aims to take a different approach and revisit the concept of religious diaspora. The territorial dimension of the diaspora is to be preserved, but the criteria whereby the religious diaspora is considered will be dissociated from the territorial and the ethnic, and instead, they will be related to the religious. The theories that argue for the existence of a religious diaspora by indicating that the religious group in question remains tied to a territory or to an ethnic group, be it sacred or not, ultimately merge the ethno-territorial and the religious aspects. When speaking of a diaspora in a religious sense, the point of reference, the criteria by which this diaspora is defined, must be religious and not ethnic, geographical, or territorial in nature.

Obviously, the theories of religious diasporas based on the existence of sacred territories are valid, as they have a religious value at the core. They only become problematic if they reduce the possibilities of conceptualizing a religious diaspora to just this one type. That would not only disregard other forms of religious diasporas, but they would also center them on a territory or an ethnicity, with or without an added sacred dimension to them or, in the best case, on an ethnically-religiously conflated value and not on religion itself. This shows that such definitions are tributary to the ethnic understanding of the diaspora. The intention of the article is to dissolve this amalgamation, place religion in the center, preserve the territory or the ethnic but as secondary determinants only, and pursue the question of how a religious diaspora can be understood when the diaspora is defined according to religious and not according to ethno-territorial criteria.

Furthermore, this endeavor aims to draw more attention to religion inside diaspora studies. Religion is a key element in the original definition of diaspora, which is based on the Jewish experience that can be traced back to the Babylonian captivity, and which has been theologically reflected on from the Deuteronomic writings onward. The awareness of this is the reason why scholars of religion found it difficult to appropriate the new, sociological concept of diaspora (Baumann 2000, p. 323). Indeed, diaspora studies still lack a proper understanding of religion as a major element of the diasporic experience. "As a sociological concept in Diaspora Studies, diaspora is a religious concept mainly in terms of religion as an identity rather than as having doctrinal import" (Posman 2016, p. 181). If it is right to acquire the language of the social sciences and to contribute to the discussions about socio-politically relevant topics, it is the task of religious studies scholars to show that religion is more than just an identity marker, as it has the ability to bring forth diasporas for its part.

In order to achieve the aforementioned goals, both the concept of diaspora and the concept of religion used here shall first be defined. Then, the concept of the religious diaspora will be theoretically outlined. Six case studies from three different religious worlds will be used, and based on these, it will be worked out what it means to be in diaspora from a religious point of view. The evaluation will record the results of the analysis and check whether the concept of the religious diaspora can be defined in such a way that, by taking into account further case studies that can supplement its details, it will prove a useful tool for both scientific research and the decision-making process.

2. Terminology

2.1. Definition of Diaspora

The definition of the diaspora on which the study relies is based on Robin Cohen and his nine "common features of a diaspora." That is, diaspora being seen not only as the result of a negative experience, as with Safran (Safran 1991, p. 83), but also as the result of deliberate migration with a positive goal. This leads to the possibility of a "distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism." Cohen's definition preserves a part of Safran's, i.e., the idea of mythization of the homeland, the "commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety, and prosperity" and "the development of a return movement." The "troubled relationship with host societies" remains also as a possibility (Cohen 1997, p. 26).

These common features as synthesized by Cohen will be complemented by the emphasis on diasporic consciousness, a term already mentioned in the writings of the first modern theorists of the diaspora (Elazar 1986, p. 250; Safran 1991, p. 86f) but which will gain its momentum only later. The concept of diasporic consciousness has been intensively valorized by postmodern authors; it expresses a specific sensitivity, a characteristic of those who are torn between a *here* and a *there*. "Diasporicity," Phil Cohen notes, "is a narrative construction placed upon events, a particular way of mapping territories of meaning, traversed by the experience of migration and settlement, through a strategy of remembrance entailed in long-term principles of hope" (Cohen 1999, p. 9).

The development of the diasporic consciousness is a matter of dealing with one's own experience of being torn between a homeland and a host country. The diaspora, home country, and host country form a triadic relationship. The reflective approach to the three realities has wide individual and social implications. One's own identity as well as that of the group is constantly being constructed in a dynamic process (Hall 1989), fueled mainly by two antagonistic needs, that of adaptation and that of preservation. Re-evaluations and omissions are commonplace so that the homeland as stylized by diasporans is no longer congruent with the homeland as perceived at home. Same as identity, *home* is actively constituted through the experience of the diaspora (Axel 2001, p. 11).

John R. Hinnells points to the fact that a diasporic group "is not only away from the old country but is also a minority phenomenon" (Hinnells 2010, p. 688). A defining factor for a diaspora is the power to represent oneself as such and to move towards political action. Political action should be understood in a broad sense, including every form of acting in the interests of the group and/or of home. In Vertovec's summary, diaspora can therefore be defined as "as a social form," "as type of consciousness," and "as a mode of cultural reproduction" (Vertovec 2008, p. 279).

It should also be noted that in a diaspora group, there are a few members, an elite, who think and act diasporically. Using the example of Cubans living in the USA, Khachig Tölölyan shows that such a group "contains a few assimilated members identifiable only by name and kinship affiliation but otherwise wholly inactive in and for the community; a much larger number of ethnics; a group, whose size is fervently debated, that forms an 'exile community', which is committed to the overthrow of Cuban communism and to a physical return to the island; and a diasporan fraction which is active in political and cultural representation, cares about maintaining contact with Cuba and Cuban communities in other countries [. . .] and re-turns, turns repeatedly towards Cuba, without actually intending a physical return." A diasporic fraction is, for its part, "a multitiered minority, consisting of the committed, the activists, and sometimes a handful of radical activists or militants." They form a "leadership elite" or an "interest group," which confers the entire community a diasporic character. Going one step further, "it would be preferable to speak of individuals and communities who behave as ethnics in some spheres of life, as diasporans in others and, most importantly, who shift from one to the other: mobility is an internal as well as an external characteristic of the contemporary ethnodiaspora" (Tölölyan 1996, p. 17f).

2.2. Definition of Religion

The question of a definition of religion lacks satisfactory answers (see the discussion in Stausberg and Gardiner 2016). Yet, there still are attempts to define religion in such a way that it covers the whole pleroma of religious experiences, practices, and thoughts. One of the most synthetic definitions was articulated by Robert N. Bellah. He defines "religion as a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence" (Bellah 1964, p. 359). This broad definition allows for various forms and values to be considered religious if their relevance for human beings can be described in terms of a relation to the ultimate and to the fundamentals of human existence, but at the same time, it points to the existence of symbolic acts, which are considered an essential component of religion.

A more comprehensive definition is the one formulated by Martin Southwold. Working on Buddhism, he identifies 12 attributes, which are possible to be found in everything that seeks to be called a religion. In Southwold's words:

"anything which we would call a religion must have at least some of the following attributes:

(1) A central concern with godlike beings and men's (sic) relation with them.
(2) A dichotomization of elements of the world into sacred and profane and a central concern with the sacred.
(3) An orientation towards salvation from the ordinary conditions of worldly existence.

(4)　Ritual practices.
(5)　Beliefs that are neither logically nor empirically demonstrable or highly probable, but they must be held on the basis of faith [. . .].
(6)　An ethical code, supported by such beliefs.
(7)　Supernatural sanctions on infringements of that code.
(8)　A mythology.
(9)　A body of scriptures, or similarly exalted oral traditions.
(10)　A priesthood or similar specialist religious elite.
(11)　Association with a moral community, a church [. . .].
(12)　Association with an ethnic and similar group.

The word 'religion' designates cultural systems which have at least some of these attributes." (Southwold 1978, p. 370f).

Manfred Hutter offers a more concise definition that is, at the same time, very comprehensive and very broad: "Religion is therefore a system which, starting from an identity-founding component (for example, a [fictitious] founder, a primordial ancestor, a 'primordial scripture'), constitutes a community (in quite differently dense organizational structure) through common views and interpretations of the world (i.e., 'teaching and practice')." (*Religion ist demnach ein System, das ausgehend von einer identitätsbegründenden Komponente (beispielsweise ein [fiktiver] Stifter, ein Ur-Ahne, eine 'Ur-Schrift') durch gemeinsame Anschauungen und Weltdeutungen (d.h. 'Lehre und Praxis') eine Gemeinschaft (in durchaus unterschiedlich dichter Organisationsstruktur) konstituiert.*) (Hutter 2012, p. 195)

For Hutter, religion unites identity, community, teachings, and practice. Religious practice is therefore an essential element that belongs to religion the same way as teachings, community, and the primary, identitarian event do.

As one can see, all three definitions include religious practice among the components of religion. Religious practice can express itself in rites and rituals, in moral behavior and ethics, and in search for justice and in philanthropy. It can unite these areas or actualize only some of them.

Religious people are therefore people who have a religious worldview (relating to the ultimate, thinking in terms of sacred and prophane, having a set of religious beliefs or of teachings having religious values); who have a religious practice, whether it be more ritual or more ethical; and who form a community of the faithful, inside which the religious norms are regulated.

In this study, any value or practice will be considered as being religious if it simultaneously fulfills two conditions: it is deemed as religious by the norms instituted inside the faith community, and it is perceived as religious by the interviewee.

2.3. Definition of Religious Diaspora

Based on the above definitions, the study will formulate the concept of a religious diaspora on a theoretical basis. A religious diaspora requires experience of migration, even when this migration was carried out generations earlier by the ancestors. It presupposes an ambivalent relationship to the host country and the idealization of the homeland. But what is crucial for a diaspora to be considered religious is to understand home in a religious sense. Home is therefore not necessarily a patch of land but rather that which creates a feeling of homeland for those living elsewhere. It is that place and that mode, located in the country of origin, where one felt familiar and where one had the sudden feeling of belonging, of being welcome, of receiving what one needed for personal growth and for meeting his or her innermost desires.

If religious people are the object of study, then the researcher needs to distinguish between their longing for their homeland; for the rest of their family that has remained there; for their native language, customs, and culture in a broad sense; and their longing for the religious forms that cannot easily be recreated in the diaspora. The task of the researcher is to find out whether there is a religious longing that can be expressed in diasporic terms, or the longing for home just comes down to other cultural determinants.

If there are religious forms located in the country of origin that are diasporically longed for and which cannot be transposed into the new milieu, these forms can be regarded as the religious home for the respective people. Of course, this triggers the question of the demarcation between religious and non-religious aspects, which cannot be sharply outlined. For the purposes of this research, the study will dwell on the aspects that are part of a religion's regulations and which are understood by the interviewees as having a religious value. From there, the study will switch from theory to praxis by looking into the field and working inductively. The identity of these missed and longed for religious forms shall be uncovered below by way of examples and not exhaustively, based on six case studies.

The other elements listed above that make up a diaspora should ideally be represented in the case of a religious diaspora if they are found to have the same religious character. There should be a diasporic consciousness, a process of identity construction in dealing with the religious forms from home as well as with those found in the host country, which leads to reassessments and shifts in emphasis, as well as a willingness to take political action, even if that means taking small steps towards promotion or mediation.

3. Methodology of Empirical Research

The thesis, as elaborated above, is that religious diaspora is a reality that is defined by the following characteristics:

1. That what is longed for in the country of origin is of religious nature.
2. People for which the concept of religious diaspora apply develop a diasporic consciousness with reference to that form longed for and to the existing religious realities in the country of their actual residence.
3. They go through an identity development, constructing and negotiating their identity in relation to both the religious home and the religious host.
4. Diasporic elites become active in representing and sustaining their home or even in recreating it on the slot if this is possible. This engagement of the elites is supported by the base, several people united around the same ideals.
5. Through the action of the diasporic elites and the participation of the basis, a community is formed, an existing community gains a new religious dimension, or at least some communal characteristics can be identified.

Since the aim of this paper is to prove that a religious diaspora understood in such a way exists, a few interviews will be sufficient. The intention is not to make any statements about the extension of the occurrence of the religious diaspora nor about the number of its members. In the same way, the debate is not upon whether the religious diaspora understood as such is a fraction of the ethnic diaspora or if it is to be understood as an independent reality. This article is to be understood as a preliminary study that indicates possibilities for further research. In order to make the claim of the existence of a religious diaspora plausible, the study will analyze three religious situations wherein it could be identified by referring to six case studies, two for each of the situations.

The research questions therefore are:

1. Does the interviewee understand home in a religious sense? What is his/her home?
2. Has any diasporic consciousness regarding a religious form from home developed in the case of the interviewee?
3. Is he/she undergoing a process of identity construction and negotiation in relation to both the religious home and the religious host?
4. Does he/she take political action in a diasporic manner, or does he/she support such actions?
5. Does he/she succeed in joining people together in order to follow the same goals? Does he/she bring a diasporic community to life? Or does he/she feel he/she belongs to such a community?

What the above looks like in concrete terms will now be unraveled based on six case studies—six interviewed persons. The subjects were chosen according to their representability to the topic and the objectives of the research, and they were deliberately chosen from three very different zones of both religion and diaspora. Even if they do not refer to, or even mention the term diaspora, they feel and act diasporically, according to the definition of diaspora, which was decoded in the section entitled: *Definition of diaspora*. These subjects are religious practitioners that attend religious services—I have personally met them all at a service in their congregations, which I have visited for research purposes. They all were friendly and readily accepted to be interviewed by me and speak about their religious life and their experience abroad.

The subjects are: two Reform Jews living in Hong Kong; two Romanian Orthodox Christian women living in Graz, Austria; and two Lutheran Germans living in Antalya and Alanya. Here are some brief data about each of them, with the mention that all the names have been changed for privacy reasons. Abraham is a Reform Jew from the U.S. who was 80 years old and had been living in Hong Kong for 42 years at the time of the interview. William is also a Reform Jew from the U.S.; his age at the time of the interview was 60 and the duration of his stay in Hong Kong 33 years. Maria is a 45-year-old Romanian Orthodox Christian who had been living in Graz, Austria, for 20 years at the time of the interview. Ana is also a Romanian Orthodox, aged 40, and had been living in Graz for 15 years. Klaus is a German Protestant aged 77, who had been living in Antalya, Turkey, for 12 years at the time of the interview. Lastly, Werner is a German Protestant, aged 74, living in Alanya, Turkey, for 8 years.

The dates and purposes of the interviews vary. The interviews with Abraham and William were taken in November 2011 and have already been used in another scientific project (Pătru 2018); the interview with Abraham even in one more (Pătru 2017). I will reuse some parts of them here and extract new insights from these data. The interviews with Maria and Ana were taken in January 2019 in Graz, and the interviews with Klaus and Werner in September 2019 in Antalya, with an outcome like this in mind. These four interviews are being analyzed here for the first time.

The instrument of data collection is the semi-structured, problem-centered interview, which allows a mixture of a theory-driven approach and an openness to the subjective view of the interviewee (Marotzki 2003, p. 114; Witzel 1985). I regard the change between inductive and deductive procedures, as provided for in the principles of problem-centered interviews, as an optimal prerequisite for a targeted but unbiased gain of knowledge. The method chosen for the analysis of the interviews follows the same guidelines: it is the qualitative content analysis as developed by Philipp Mayring. This method is theory-driven, understands theory "as a system of general sentences about the object to be examined," and assumes that the question of the analysis is clear in advance or that the sub-questions are at least largely known. As a result, categories are "developed in an interrelationship between the theory (the question) and the concrete material, defined by design and assignment rules, and revised and reconsidered during the analysis" (Mayring 1997, p. 52f).

4. Analysis of the Interviews

The analysis of each case will follow the research questions addressed above in order to find out whether it confirms the thesis or not. In the case that the thesis is confirmed, it shall be determined if and in which form it occurs in the case of each participant and what the experience of the interviewees can add to the theory formulated as such. Before doing this, some preliminary information about each of the three groups will be offered, which is important for a better understanding of the context.

4.1. American Reform Judaism in Hong Kong

Hong Kong was a British colony between 1841–1997, and its Jewish community is formed by several waves of Baghdadi/Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews. Until 1986, there was only one synagogue in the city, Ohel Leah, with an Orthodox profile (see more in:

Green and Diestal 2009; Pătru 2018, p. 196ff; Smith 1995). Like all Orthodox synagogues in the British Empire and later in the Commonwealth, Ohel Leah was subordinated to the Chief Rabbi in Great Britain and gained some characteristics of the Minhag Anglia, a form of Modern Orthodox Judaism typical of the British Empire (see for the British characteristics: Freud-Kandel 2012; Apple 2009). Between 1986 and 1989, three more forms of Jewish religious devotion gained a foothold on site: Chabad, Progressive Judaism, and Sephardic-Orthodox (Green and Diestal 2009, p. 1190). Both cases analyzed below belong to the founding members of the Progressive community, known as the United Jewish Congregation, which was founded officially in 1988 (The United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong n.d.).

With regard to American Reform Judaism in general, it must be mentioned that it follows its own paths, absorbing influences from the American religious scene. Since the early 1970s, the mainstream of Reform Judaism has become more traditionalist, reintroducing practices that had been rejected before (Wertheimer 1997, p. 102f), among which are Hebrew as a liturgical language and more traditional songs and forms of chanting. Opposants of this movement, promoters of Classical Reform, are a minority but are active in promoting "the historical, liberal interpretation of our Jewish faith and tradition" (apud Wertheimer 1997, p. 111). Entrusted with this information, we can proceed to analyzing the two case studies.

4.1.1. Abraham, a Reform Jew from Hong Kong

Abraham, 80, an American Reform Jew, one of the founders of the United Jewish Congregation in Hong Kong, had settled in Hong Kong in 1969 and had attended the services of the (at the time) only synagogue in the city. Living in Hong Kong, he longs for the religious form he had known in his native USA: "The reform alternative was the way I'd been brought up, and the one I felt comfortable with." He finds the existing religious situation unpleasing: "it was . . . just not inspiring for me to go to the services here". He considered taking political action and founding a progressive congregation, and moved to action after a decisive moment: the rejection of the Bar Mitzvah of his son, born to a mother that had converted to Reform Judaism. The start-up, which requires a great deal of diplomatic action, PR, and representation acts, was a success: "there was a lot of people in the community who were looking for a different way of doing things, of worshipping, of observing, of being Jewish." Such start-ups are proof that the group is developing an awareness that the group's existence as such is permanent and, at the same time, a sign that it has both an active elite and a supporting base. Abraham, the representative of the active elite, reflects on the religious dimension of the event and regards it as follows: "I think it was a religious issue [. . .] you've got one dynamic on religious side, one issue there and one about, you know, how decision making is done in the community." The type of community leadership can be viewed in turn as a religious matter because it is the leadership of a religious community, which has adopted the membership-based democratic system from American culture but has already integrated it as part of the religious organization.

Abraham and others strive for their homeland in a religious sense and create the necessary basis for this by establishing and maintaining a Progressive congregation. End of the story? Not at all. Only now does the diasporic consciousness really begin to blossom and Abraham's own identity finding starts to develop dramatically, as the form of recreation of home in the diaspora is not the same as the home of home but the result of negotiations and compromise solutions about religious matters within the group. Thus, Abraham states: "And so . . . in the course of that happening, it became . . . not so much what we call Reform Progressive US standard Judaism, which even that . . . everything is constantly moving, changing. [. . .] So . . . I find for myself it's not . . . for whatever reason, because, you know, I'm just not able to relate so well to that . . . kind of . . . service." He realizes that identity formation is a dynamic process and that development in this sense is natural: "it's just symptomatic of what happens I think in religion, and that is . . . it's constantly evolving,

constantly evolving. And that's what happened with us. I think it's very vibrant. I think it's really strong. You know, again, going to our High Holiday services, and seeing all these people, I know we're doing something right. And it doesn't please everybody. But so, it's fine." However, this realization does not help him regard the new realities as his own, but rather the homeland, which is Classical Reform Judaism, is even more longed for and idealized. He considers taking political action again, but the realities on site as well as his own personal realities prevent him from carrying out this plan: "We're such a small congregation that . . . we can't . . . I can't be accused again of splitting the congregation. I don't think I can do this again. Too old for that." Transnational connections meet his need in another way, supporting the idea that the diaspora experience pales in the digital age: So funny is that I discovered that . . . the most important reform congregation, in my opinion, in the United States is in New York, and so when I go there, I go to their service and then I found that they're also broadcasted, put on Internet, so I can listen to it." This brings him to his home: "I have the old prayer books that I had when I was a kid, and . . . but, you know, like I said, I've memorized most of them anyhow. [. . .] They're still using the old prayer book, from 1938 or something like that. [. . .] This is what I grew up with, you know.

As for the diasporic feelings, modern media is changing the diasporic experience and placing transnational relationships in the foreground. This was back in 2011, when Abraham spoke enthusiastically about his religious practice and religious homeland finding via the Internet. Nowadays, the digitized access to religion has experienced an enormous increase, and hence the question: "Does it still make sense to speak of a diasporic consciousness true to the definition?" becomes pertinent.

What has been described above, however, is the diasporic experience of a diaspora Jew, with all its components, arguments, and phases. Additionally, it is a diasporic experience in a religious sense. For Abraham, home is above all a form of liturgical practice and community organization. The host culture is another form of liturgical practice and community organization in which he ends up and finds unsatisfactory. The new congregation founded by him is a diasporic congregation, an effort to restore a home away from home. The approach is not ideal from the start, as it is based on local possibilities and a great deal of negotiation. However, the new blossoming of diasporic consciousness no longer leads to new political action since digital forms of communication weaken the need for it, and the diasporic gives way to transnational relationships.

The use of the term diaspora with reference to a Jew needs some clarification. Of course, Abraham is a Diaspora Jew, as he comes from the USA. But today, there is a debate among experts as to whether this old form of the Jewish Diaspora can still be viewed as a diaspora (Ezrahi 2012; Ray 2008; Webber 1997, p. 259). In fact, essential features are missing: the diasporic consciousness is very weakened, and the process of self-definition with reference to the home culture and the host culture does not proceed in a true-to-definition way since diaspora Jews do not identify with Israeli culture and in no way regard it as their home culture. On the contrary, the majority of American Jews are home within American culture and the forms of Judaism that thrive on American soil (Wertheimer 1997). They have a feeling of alienation when they encounter Israeli culture and religion (Wertheimer 1997, p. 193f), and they develop a diasporic consciousness when they stay in non-American-Jewish places for a longer time.

Before moving to the next subject, it is of note that the case Abraham consists of two phases: before the founding of the Progressive congregation and afterwards. The first one unites four characteristics of the religious diaspora: idealization of home, diasporic consciousness, political action, and the establishment of a community with the participation of many others. The second phase puts identity finding in the forefront. Now, Abraham realizes what it is that he is truly longing for and what really constitutes his religious form. An even stronger idealization of his religious home and a stronger diasporic consciousness arise. The part of community formation is missing due also to the fact that transnationalism offers new possibilities and reduces diasporic needs.

4.1.2. William, a Reform Jew from Hong Kong

William, 60, follows the same pattern as Abraham. He is a Reform Jew from the U.S. who had been living in Hong Kong and attending the services at Ohel Leah until Abraham came up with the initiative of the Progressive congregation, which he fully supported and which he has attended since then. He also longed for the religious realities in the U.S. and was very critical with the religious realities found on the spot: "It was kind of not satisfactory: the women were upstairs, the men were ... for me, I mean, we never had separation of men and women [...] You couldn't hear a damn thing. The style was so ... I mean I'm Reform, I don't like the mumbling style of the service, where everybody already knows it, so just let's go through it quickly. It's not ... it lacks decorum and inclusiveness."

William fully supported the initiative of Abraham: "And he approached me [...] with another Jewish guy [...], and the three of us said 'Well, we really need an alternative.'" William became active in supporting the new congregation: "I was the one who led services. The involvement of both Abraham and William and the others, who joined and attended the services, led to the establishment of a flourishing congregation, with a permanent rabbi and a cantor and a big religious offer" (see The United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong n.d.).

After the interview with Abraham, I had another chance to meet William. I asked him how he felt about the changes in liturgical practice and mentioned his colleague's discomfort. William considered Abraham "outdated" and explained that the more recent developments would be positive and welcome. He himself was learning Hebrew in order to remain anchored in the new realities of Judaism.

William longs for his religious home, which is American Reform Judaism, with its practices regarding organization of the services and of the community life. He relates to the existing situation and finds it displeasing. In this way, he enters a process of identity finding. He becomes active and engages in the support of the re-creation of this home in the residence country after someone else gives him the impulse for it. He works for the building up of the community. He is a total and active sustainer of Abraham in his first phase. As for the second phase, their ways part there. William is pleased with any form of Reform Judaism, while Abraham needs to have the way of service of his childhood.

4.2. Romanian Orthodox Communities in Western Europe

Before analyzing the next two cases, some remarks are necessary to be made about the Romanian Orthodox presence in Western Europe. The communities address those Romanian migrants who are Christian Orthodox, making up a percentage of about 86% of the Romanian population (Eurydice 2019). Romanian diaspora and Romanian Orthodox diaspora are therefore not totally congruent. The religious communities consist mainly of economic migrants and, in some cases, of a few students as well as a few exiles. The economic migration is a reality of the last 30 years, which has strongly intensified after Romania's EU accession. In some bigger cities, there still are a few Romanian exiles who left Romania shortly after World War II and who carried an exile mentality. However, most of the parishes are young and face the problems of first-generation migration turning into the second (see Buda 2017; Ihlamur-Öner 2014).

A central practice of religious life in Eastern Orthodox Christianity is regular confession to a priest. Between the confessor and the people who regularly confess to him, a spiritual relation emerges, which is expressed in terms of filial relations: he is their spiritual father, and they are his spiritual sons and daughters. Confessions are not limited only to acknowledging sins but regard all aspects of life, which are interpreted through the spiritual lens of the spiritual father, and thus set up a form of spirituality.

4.2.1. Maria, a Romanian Orthodox Christian from Graz, Austria

Maria, a Romanian woman aged 45, is a long-time member of the Romanian Orthodox community in Graz, Austria. At the time of the interview, Maria had been living in Graz for 20 years. Immediately after her arrival, she became a member of the Romanian Orthodox congregation in Graz, which had existed since 1994 (Biserica Ortodoxă Română

Sfântul Nicolae Graz n.d.), became involved in their activities, and since then has regularly attended their services.

Before moving to Graz, Maria has had an intensive spiritual relation with her spiritual father, a priest monk from a monastery in Romania. Now she longs for her spiritual home, which is to be understood both as a place, the respective monastery, and as a way of looking at the world: "It is this spiritual relation and the whole atmosphere at the monastery which I miss most and which I can't have here [...] I miss and long for my spiritual corner at home—that was paradise!" (*Această relație duhovnicească și întreaga atmosferă de la mănăstire îmi lipsesc cel mai mult și nu le pot avea aici [...] Sufăr și tânjesc după colțișorul meu duhovnicesc de acasă - era paradisul!).* She develops a real diasporic consciousness in relation to her spiritual home and has a minimalizing view of the realities on site: "You know, what we are doing here is what is possible, it's a minimum ... " (*Știți, ceea ce facem noi aici e ce se poate, e un minim ...*). She enters a process of identity negotiation in relation to the religious realities from home and those found in the country of residence. In the course of that process, she becomes more understanding towards the realities on site: "our priest [...] at the beginning I considered him to be quite superficial. Now I understand he has to keep together people with so different backgrounds and expectations." (*Preotul nostru [...] la început am zis că e destul de superficial. Acum înțeleg că el trebuie să țină împreună oameni cu background-uri și așteptări atât de diferite.*). Her identity development makes it possible for her to partially accept the new situation: "now I've accepted that I ought to live here, that I ought to confess to our parish priest and to follow his advice ... " (*Acum am acceptat că trebuie să trăiesc aici, să mă spovedesc la el și să fac cum îmi spune ...*). Still, this does not help her satisfy her longing and fully accept the reality. She starts a program to promote the monastery she feels connected to, to raise funds for its social projects, and to sensitize people to become close to that form of spirituality. She is successful in raising money for the monastery but not in convincing people to go and see and practice such a form of spirituality.

In this case, we deal again with a religious homeland, which is to be equated with a religious form pertaining to the country of origin, a form that is missed and idealized, and for which a return plan has been developed that is never actually supposed to be implemented: I wish I could return one day. Who knows, maybe after retirement ... " (*Sper că mă voi putea întoarce într-o zi. Cine stie, poate după ce ies la pensie ...*).

The diasporic consciousness appears in a pronounced form, through the idealization of the homeland and through the demarcation from the values of the world in which she has landed. Furthermore, Maria goes through a process of identity development in dealing with the realities found in the diaspora: she originally confronts the situation there critically, but over time learns both to reassess the situation and to change herself to adapt to the situation.

As far as her politically active role in relation to her religious homeland is concerned, Maria is committed to the monastery and the religious form observed there; she supports it from afar and advocates it.

Maria is thus in the position of the diaspora elite who wants to mobilize the others and who partly succeeds in doing so. If one were to look at the parish from the outside, one would notice the almost annual collections for the monastery and for its social projects. An outside observer would speak of the close relationship between this parish and that monastery and perhaps even regard the parish as a diasporic arm of the monastery. All of this can only be traced back to Maria and her commitment. Maria has thus created a religious form of diaspora.

Maria's diaspora experience unites all components of a religious diaspora. She longs for a religious form that is home to her and that is in her homeland. She develops a diasporic consciousness but also goes through an identity evolution and learns to reevaluate the existing religious forms, those that she finds in the Romanian Orthodox parish in Graz. She develops a political agenda to promote and support her homeland, thereby giving the

religious group to which she belongs a diasporic character regarding this homeland. This creates a religious home and a religious diaspora.

4.2.2. Ana, a Romanian Orthodox Christian from Graz, Austria

Ana is also a Romanian woman, aged 40, and a member of the Romanian Orthodox congregation in Graz. She also attends the services of the Romanian Orthodox Church and feels "somehow unpleased by the spiritual offer of the parish" (*oarecum nemulțumită de oferta spirituală a parohiei*) and longs for "the level of spirituality from home" (*nivelul de spiritualitate de acasă.*). When asked what this level is about, she mentions mainly the fact that "people have a more intense relation to God, they go to their spiritual father, have an orderly life" (*oamenii au o legătură mai strânsă cu Dumnezeu, se duc la duhovnic, au o viață ordonată . . .*).

When asked whether she longs for something in her home country, she replies: "There's nothing else I long more for than the fact that it was possible for me to go to a monastery and speak with a spiritual father anytime I needed to . . . There was so much comfort in that!" (*Nu e nimic după care să-mi fie mai tare dor decât faptul că puteam merge oricând aveam nevoie la mănăstiri, să vorbesc cu un părinte duhovnicesc . . . Primeam atâta mângâiere!*). The missed and idealized home is therefore also a religious one. About the religious offer on site, she mentions: "I felt very alone inside the parish at the beginning, but as Maria started to organize campaigns for her monastery, I felt I could do something meaningful. I started helping her, and we became good friends. Later, other people joined the initiative, and now we are a group that organize the events" (*Mă simțeam singură în parohie la început, dar când Maria a început să organizeze campanii de susținere a mănăstirii ei, am simțit că pot să fac ceva cu sens. Am început să o ajut și ne-am împrietenit bine. Mai târziu ni s-au alăturat și alți oameni, iar acum suntem un grup care organizăm evenimentele.*). This shows that Ana has started to engage politically, following the impulse coming from the elite, and that a group, a community, has formed around the diasporan elite. The group consists of both more active and less active people, but nevertheless, it proves that a religious diasporic community has emerged.

4.3. German Catholic and Lutheran Communities in Antalya and Alanya, Turkey

Since 2003, a Roman Catholic German speaking religious establishment exists in Antalya. It was opened for the pastoral care of the 14,000 German residents living there at the time, both Catholics and Protestants, most of them retired leisure migrants. Since 2004, a purchased building has functioned as a church and community center (Sankt Nikolaus Kirche 2004; St. Nikolaus Kirche Antalya n.d.). Additionally, since 2004, a new center was established in Alanya as well—this one as an Evangelical–Lutheran initiative (Tuntas 2017). As both centers are frequented by both German Catholics and Protestants, most of the services offered are ecumenical services (Kirche in Alanya n.d.).

In German Protestant understanding, a central part of the mission of the church is to be active in this world, to advocate social justice, and to contribute to its realization wherever possible: "For the most part, the religious life of Christians in Germany happens in their local parishes. However, the Evangelical Church in Germany is even more than this, because on account of our faith, we also assume responsibility for society." (EKD Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland n.d.). This has become part of the religious self-understanding of many Protestant Christians, for whom social and caritative work is a very important religious practice.

4.3.1. Klaus, the German Protestant from Antalya, Turkey

Klaus is a leisure migrant, a German Lutheran from Berlin aged 77. He moved to Antalya after retirement and joined first the Catholic community at the St. Nikolaus Church in Antalya (St. Nikolaus Kirche Antalya n.d.). He attended the Catholic services saying: "Anyway, I do not understand why we need to have two churches!" After the founding of the evangelical community in Alanya, he started to attend their services, saying: "I'm

evangelical, after all!" Asked whether he was pleased with the religious offer, he said: "No way! Church is not only services. Church is social justice, is prophetical voice, is service to the poor! All this is underrepresented here!" After I pointed to the size and consequently to the reduced possibilities of the community, he said: "These are all people with a good material condition. They could afford to do more". The comparison with home falls in favor of home:" In my own community in Berlin, the neighborhood was not so well, materially speaking, but we had projects, we were organizing a food delivery service for elderly people, we were helping a partner community in Tanzania ... We were church: we were there for the ones in need!" Furthermore, he affirms: "These are missing, I do not really think we are doing something meaningful here. It's senseless! I wish I could be back home and live a fulfilling Christian life!" This shows that a diasporic consciousness regarding realities perceived as religious arises as well as a longing to return, although this is never supposed to be put into practice. Asked about the possibility to recreate home remotely, he complains about his compatriots, "who are here only to enjoy the sunny sides of life." His perception of the community and of himself changes over time: "I was very vehement about this in the beginning. But with the years passing, I understand that people are old and cannot engage as strongly as they might have done earlier. I am also getting older. But you can't be that passive, you have at least to say, to advocate social justice!" This proves an identity development in relation to both home and local realities. Asked whether he tried to influence people and to convince them to become more active, he said: "Of course, I do. And I have a few people who support me. We became quite a group on our own, we meet and talk more often." With regard to the practical results of his endeavors, he mentions: "Sometimes the community collects donations for various situations, often on our recommendation."

As the quotes above show, Klaus has a religious home which he is missing, i.e., a socially engaged evangelical community. He develops a diasporic consciousness and goes through an identity-finding process in relation to both home and local realities. He tries to advocate for the religious form that he is missing and has some practical results as well as some results in communitarian terms.

4.3.2. Werner, the German Protestant from Alanya, Turkey

Werner is also a German Lutheran leisure migrant, coming from the Ruhr area, aged 74, living in Alanya for 8 years and belonging to the same community. He met Klaus shortly after his arrival and was impressed by his commitment to justice and philanthropy. He realized that Klaus was right, that this is the essence of Christian life: "Meeting Klaus and listening to him, I have realized that the purpose of the church is to bring about social justice. This is something I never thought about at home because it was a matter of course. But here this becomes obvious." His words show that he also undergoes an identity change in relation to both home and host: "I myself started to become more aware, to be more interested in doing something for social justice." Now, he thinks in terms of *home* and *here*, idealizing *home* and longing for it: "But here we do not have the possibilities we had at home. There we had social projects in almost every parish, it was a dynamic, an activity, a possibility for everybody to engage in something meaningful. I really miss that!" He proves both that Klaus is a leader and that a small community has gathered around him: "Me and some other friends met regularly with Klaus, and we discuss the social problems that we see, and we think how we can help." Practical results remain modest, though: "But there is not much that we can do here. If we were at home ... "

Werner represents the basis, the people who are moved by the diaspora elite. Klaus succeeds in raising a diasporic consciousness in him, in making him understand religious home in a certain way and miss this home. A communal form arises around Klaus' claims and the readiness of some others, such as Werner, to let themselves be inspired and follow.

5. Evaluation

The examples given above show that in all three religious situations, there are people for whom the concept of a religious diaspora as previously defined is an accurate description of their condition. They also show that the religious homeland as well as the religious diaspora are primarily to be localized on the level of personal feelings and attitudes of the individuals. If there are more individuals who feel similarly about a religious issue from home and if they start sharing their thoughts and feelings and encouraging each other, a communal diasporic formation takes shape. People who belong to it have had an intense religious socialization inside a certain religious form in the country of origin, they experienced migration, and they go through a diasporic process of dealing with their own identity in relation with both home and host, a process in which the missed religious form gains a central role and is reinterpreted according to the actual needs of the migrant. Furthermore, people who had experienced a strong connection to a certain religious form in the country of origin, a form that will not be recreated inside the diasporic religious formation, will develop a diasporic consciousness in relation to this form. By meeting, talking to each other, and organizing political activities for promotion, representation, or initiation, communal diasporic formations occur, with a religious value or a religious practice at the core.

A religious diaspora is therefore a reality that develops under the precise circumstances mentioned above. It has a common set of characteristics, which have also been synthetized above. The variable is the core, the religious value around which such a religious diaspora constitutes itself. It can be a sacred territory or a sacred ethnicity (e.g., a chosen people), as in the cases already acknowledged by the researchers, but it can also be a certain way of understanding or of celebrating or a certain religious practice, as in the cases analyzed in this study.

Moreover, the examination of the religious diaspora shows once again that—just as it was registered by the ethnic diaspora studies—*home*, *host*, and *diaspora* are constructed realities. A religious home emerges in the diaspora because out there, the longing for the religious forms that are no longer available allows them to be stylized as home. It is to be noted that, in such cases, the host is to be identified with the religious formation existing in the host country and not with the country of residence or its culture. The dissatisfaction of the religious diasporans is directed at the religious community to which they belong or at the religious institution whose services they attend. This tension is to be carried out both by the religious diasporans and by the community. The outcome can be self-isolation, as in case of Abraham in the second phase; active involvement to promote one's own home, as in case of Maria and Klaus; involvement up to the fission of the community, as with Abraham in the first phase, if there are enough members to form a basis upon which the diaspora elite can build.

If religious diaspora is primarily a matter of personal experience, its group-related value can be recognized in all three situations: with Abraham, it can be traced back to the fact that William and many others are attracted to his initiative to establish a new congregation so that Abraham's actions give rise to a clearly identifiable social form. With Maria, it is not such a clearly demarcated social institution, but it is the fact that some people, like Ana, gather around her and support her initiatives and that the already existing social form takes on new features and is now also characterized by the commitment to a certain locus in the country of origin. With Klaus, there is the aspect that he unites some people who share his views, like Werner. They form a subgroup inside the community and recommend collections of funds, which are sometimes carried out. Abraham, Maria, and Klaus are in the position of the diaspora elite, conferring a diasporic character to their whole group. The fact that religious diaspora expresses itself primarily on the level of the personal experience of the individual does not make it different from other forms of diaspora. Diaspora, as well as other cultural realities, is expressed by the few and reaches many and, as well as other political initiatives, is carried out by the few and impacts many.

A still open question is whether a religious diaspora understood as such stands the test of time or whether such experiences can be passed on to future generations. As far as the passing on of experiences and thus the continuity of existence are concerned, the examined cases cannot provide useful insights. All of them are first-generation migrants. This study is intended as a preliminary paper, wherein insights are gathered and then evaluated according to the proposed concept, which ultimately leads to new possibilities for further research. Further studies and field research in long-term, established diaspora groups are required in order to check whether the concept of the religious diaspora understood in this way also stands the test of the generational transition or not. Even though this test should not be passed, the acknowledgment of a religious diaspora in the sense described above has a value both for the analysis of the religious dynamics within a group of migrants and for understanding the personal feelings of individuals. Both are relevant for a peaceful and conflict-free coexistence within a society. The concept also has an important heuristic value for theorizing inside the field of diaspora studies. It indicates that religious realities give rise to their own forms of diaspora, which involve a diasporic consciousness, a process of identity construction and that, at the same time, lead to political action.

6. Conclusions

Religious diaspora is a reality that can be identified in the case of people for which a specific religious form located in the country of origin becomes extraordinarily important. This can be a certain way of liturgical praxis, a certain religious practice, a certain form of spirituality, or social engagement understood as religious commandment, as in the three situations described above, or anything else that can mobilize people strongly enough so that they develop a diasporic consciousness, enter a process of reflection upon their own identity, change in relation to the forms they meet in the context of their actual residence, and start engaging politically and culturally in a diaspora-conform way. Religious diasporicity relates to a religious form in the country of origin, which gains the value of home and of familiarity as well as to the existing religious form in the country of residence, which are loaded with the value of host culture. Religious diasporicity means to be torn between these two worlds, suffering, idealizing, and negotiating cultural values but, at the same time, to develop an agenda for cultural and political representation. A religious diaspora is therefore "a type of consciousness" and "a mode of cultural reproduction" and, to a certain degree, even "a social form" (Vertovec 2008, p. 279). The latter relates to the fact that diasporic social forms can be traced back to the work of a small diaspora elite, which gathers people around itself and eventually gives the whole group a diasporic character.

Coming back to the discussion about the existence of a religious diaspora, the study contributes with the insight that, if the possibility of conceptualizing it is extended to comprise not just a sacred territory or ethnicity but various religious values and practices, which are located inside a country of origin, many more groups and subgroups inside religious communities can be seen as religious diasporas. The usefulness of regarding them in this way is given by the fact that such diasporic positions imply tensions and dynamics that can escalate to levels that might prove improper for social coexistence but which, once recognized, can be converted into valuable acts in favor of diversity and a more fulfilling life for everybody.

Furthermore, the study shows that religion and even religious elements, such as religious values, practices, and understandings, create their own homelands and their own diasporas, all of which are basically realities of human perception, marked according to the religious factor and not to the ethnic one. Religion proves to be a dimension of human experience that is strong enough to operate such transformations on the individual and on the social level. Therefore, it would be in the interest of both scholars and decision makers to pay attention to such dynamics, which show that human interference with their surrounding world is multifaceted and richer than commonly expected.

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