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## ***THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ENEMY CITY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: A CASE OF THIRDS PACING***

**Keywords:** *Literary space; critical-spatial theory; Hebrew Bible; enemy; reader response; Jerusalem*

**Abstract:** *Scholarship defines Thirdspace as the production of space through usage (Lefebvre) and as a spatial concept in which traditional binary oppositions dissolve (Soja). At first sight, the enemy city in the Hebrew Bible does not seem to fulfill these requirements. It is mostly regarded as a stereotype of evil, thus a Secondspace, and as the opponent of God and/or the Israelites, thus part of a dichotomy. In this article, I argue that the textual construction of the enemy city is nevertheless a case of Thirdspacing. First, the stereotype ('the city in the mind') blends with the new image created by the text. Second, the newly created space unites what is perceived as real and what is considered imagined. And third, the textual city space is one where the enemy city (the Other) and Jerusalem (Us) are presented as analogous. Therefore, the construction of the biblical enemy city forms an excellent example of Thirdspace where material and mental city become one, real and imagined stand side by side, and the Other resembles Us and vice versa.*

Ah city of crime  
Utterly treacherous,  
Full of violence,  
Where killing never stops!  
...  
I am going to deal with you  
—declares the Lord of hosts -Nah. 3.1,5

With these words the biblical prophet Nahum depicts the city of Nineveh, capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and soon-to-be-destroyed public enemy number one. Generations of Bible commentators and scholars have addressed this violent image of the enemy city in the book of Nahum (O'Brien 100–128; Spronk; Christensen). The book explores the vocabulary of evil, drawing a picture reminiscent of other urban places, including Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18–19), Babylon (Isaiah 13–14; Jeremiah 50–51), and Tyre (Isaiah 23).<sup>1</sup> The image of Nineveh fits a more general stereotype of the evil enemy city. Indeed, scholars have identified

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<sup>1</sup> The similarity between these depictions exists not only on the macrolevel, but also on the microlevel. The book of Jonah, for example, uses vocabulary that reminds the reader of the imagery of Sodom and Gomorra as drawn in the book of Genesis. Recurring terms are 'great' (*gadol/gedolah*), 'many, plenty' (*rabbah*), and 'overturn' (*haphakh*) (Magonet 65; Simon and Schramm 29; Youngblood 134). Note that the behavior of the people in Sodom and Gomorra turns the cities into enemies of God, even though these places do not form the same physical threat to Jerusalem as did, for example, Babylon or Nineveh.

Nineveh as the model for this stereotype when combined with ultimate defeat (Spronk 15–16; Christensen 166; Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah* 15, 151). The enemy abode is typically bad (*ra'ah*), full of people (*rabbah*), fond of killing and destroying, playing the harlot (*zonah*), and gathering material wealth.<sup>2</sup> Examples are plentiful (e.g., in the books of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Nahum).

In the biblical context, the inimical relationship is first and foremost one between the city (as complex entity) and God, and not one between (material) places or their respective inhabitants. The primary opposition is symbolic; hence elements such as evil and harlotry, often a metaphor for the Israelites' spiritual abandonment of God to worship other gods (Ortlund; Becking 15), appear as common denominators of these places in the Hebrew Bible. Enemies are those that oppose God, be they cities, empires, or people. Resultantly, a scene with foreign people (such as the Assyrians, as mentioned in the example above from the book of Nahum) physically attacking a place (such as Jerusalem) becomes a further concretization of the initial, more conceptual relationship between the city and God. In this example, the Assyrians replace the (enemy) city and Jerusalem takes the place of God in the original opposition. Or in a slightly modified rendering, the urban space Nineveh is opposed to the urban space Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the evil enemy city of the Hebrew Bible is, to a large extent, a production of the mind and the text.<sup>4</sup> The personification of urban spaces evidences this: the biblical city is a person, and, in particular, a woman. Note that this is true for many cities, regardless of their status as friend or enemy (among others, Day; Dobbs-Allsopp, "Daughter Zion").<sup>5</sup> Contrary to a real city, as in 'a material, physical place,' the biblical city can be evil, rapacious, bloodthirsty, promiscuous, or greedy. And, though it is described at times as large, beautiful, and full of things and people—typical attributes of a 'city of things' (see below for the critical-spatial explanation of this term)—the overall portrayal of cities suggests that the biblical text favors the imagined city over its real-life counterpart (George 21–22). That is to say, city-women

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<sup>2</sup> Obviously, there are passages where cities of the enemy are depicted in a more friendly way (e.g., Jeremiah 27). Likewise, Jerusalem at times shows evil behavior (e.g., Jeremiah 2), even though it is generally not considered an enemy city. On the contrary, Jerusalem is perceived as God's abode. Therefore, one should not take the coining of 'evil' and 'enemy' with regard to cities in the Hebrew Bible as a *sine qua non*; rather it should be considered a general rule from which one can deviate. Passages in which Jerusalem behaves negatively, for example, particularly draw the reader's attention because of their atypical depictions. The implication is that Jerusalem's actions should have been different, exactly because it is not the enemy.

<sup>3</sup> Concurring with the idea that "space is inherently relational, not static" (Berquist 26).

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that the empires with which these cities are intertwined were peaceful. There is ample historical evidence that the leadership connected to the cities indeed committed many atrocities. See for example, the Assyrian and Babylonian iconography (Pritchard). Rather, what I refer to here is the specific depiction of the cities in the Hebrew Bible as evil human beings with likewise attributes and characteristics.

<sup>5</sup> The personified city has drawn much scholarly attention. Several hypotheses have been proposed with regard to its origin: a matter of grammar (cities are feminine in Biblical Hebrew), a cultic practice (with a city goddess and her statue); and a literary-theological construct (Dobbs-Allsopp, "Daughter Zion" 132–33).

occur more frequently and more prominently than does the city as an actual place of streets and buildings.

From a critical-spatial point of view (Lefebvre; Soja, *Postmetropolis*; idem, *Thirdspace*), these general observations on biblical enemy cities argue in favor of Nineveh as a Secondspace: a highly symbolic space described with metaphors of base women (e.g., the city is a harlot and a witch). The material appearance of the city, referred to as Firstspace, is given less attention. The text includes only scattered physical details (e.g., the presence of a palace, as mentioned in Nah 2.7, or the great size of the city, according to Jonah 1.2). Indeed, if we endeavored to draw a picture of the city based solely on the biblical information, we would be bound to fail.<sup>6</sup> However, the textual construction of the hostile city in the Hebrew Bible, despite its near absence of perceivable information (Firstspace), its emphasis on the symbolic role of the city (Secondspace), and the exploration of a dichotomy between the enemy city as Other and Jerusalem as Us, is nevertheless a case of *Thirdspacing*. In this article I will illustrate how the reader produces this space as well as how the text guides the reader in this process of spatial production and meaning making. The notion of Thirdspace, developed by critical-spatial theory, allows for assessing the urban space of the enemy in the biblical text in new and unexplored ways. The city becomes a dynamic player in and of the text, offering the reader a spatial experience rather than plain, stage-like descriptions or symbolic interpretation of the space. This experience redefines conceptual dichotomies and reevaluates the role of the enemy city.

### **Thirdspace—A Verb<sup>7</sup>**

Scholarship defines Thirdspace as the production of space through usage. In a reaction to the existing, binary analyses of space, Henri Lefebvre introduced the

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<sup>6</sup> This lack of information has caused a divide in biblical scholarship between archaeological research and textual research, the former studying the real city and the latter the imagined one (O'Connor 18–23). Because these two fields generated starkly different pictures that could not be mutually validated, the biblical city as appearing in the text, and biblical space in general, has long remained underrepresented in research. The city was considered the setting of the biblical story, the “storyworld” (Herman 71), a made-up setting moreover that seemed to offer little contribution to our understanding of ancient spatial conceptualization and experience. Critical spatiality allowed for bridging the gap, reading space as “the product of a particular time and place” (George 29).

<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank Kerstin Shand for pointing out that the French terms for the three spaces are verbal (or at least include a verbal aspect), whereas the English equivalents are nominal. Due to this morphological difference, the French terms grasp both the momentary and dynamic nature of space. Spatial production is an activity, as the verbs show, but also something teleological, reaching temporary goals and completion, hence the nouns. Space can be produced and reproduced. Simultaneously, space also just is, like stills of a movie. The English terms lack this duality; however, the noun Thirdspace easily transforms into a verb. Moreover, Soja himself, when introducing his terminology, uses the term ‘thirling.’ As he writes, “I have chosen to call this new awareness Thirdspace and to initiate its evolving definition by describing it as a product of a ‘thirling’ of the spatial imagination, the creation of another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning” (*Thirdspace* 11).

concept in 1974. Thirdspace ('l'espace vécu,' in Lefebvre's terminology), supplemented both the material space of things, which he labelled 'l'espace perçu,' and the mental space of thoughts, called 'l'espace conçu' (Lefebvre 48–49). Whereas both the material and symbolic spaces remain valuable points of interest, they tend to be separate approaches to space and do not particularly address how people actually experience space as they live in it and use it (Lefebvre 49–50; O'Connor 21; George 29). This is exactly what Thirdspace stands for: it applies the Secondspace concepts of the mind in the Firstspace location. As such, this space bridges the gap between the historical and the social and becomes intrinsically dynamic. Whereas Lefebvre's trialectic space was inspired by Marxist and Hegelian thinking (Stanek 133–64), later approaches were more postmodern in nature, with the work of Edward Soja a prime representative. Soja's Thirdspace is not only an "incorporation of First and Secondspace perspectives" but also "opens up the scope and complexity of the geographical and spatial imagination." Thirdspace becomes "real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual, locus of structured individual and collective experience and agency" (*Postmetropolis* 11). Previous binary oppositions dissolve in the new space where both the possible and impossible are present. Particular attention is paid to the experience of marginalized individuals and groups (Soja, *Postmetropolis* 407–15; Soja, *Thirdspace* 83–105).

### **Finding the Verb in the Bible—*Thirdspacing* the Enemy City**

On a theoretical level, the concept of Thirdspace holds promising insights for the biblical text. Overcoming the gap between physical and symbolic city, it may offer a new perspective on urban space (George 29). However, the main question is whether this contemporary theory, developed with modern-day cities in mind, translates to the biblical text (Camp 66–69; Prinsloo 8),<sup>8</sup> and if so, whether the discourse in the Bible, with its enemy city as the capital of evil against the in-group (Secondspace), is not too disjointed from the real places behind the text (Firstspace).<sup>9</sup> In other words, how much

<sup>8</sup> Gert Prinsloo refers to the difference in customs and ideology. Claudia Camp assumes that Soja's Secondspace is, among others, that of language. If this is the case, biblical cities as represented in the Hebrew Bible are by definition Secondspaces, and nothing more. Camp is correct in considering this problematic. However, Soja's words should perhaps not be taken so literally. After all, the description of places (Prinsloo 8), labelled as Firstspace (Soja, *Thirdspace* 66), also implies the use of language. And it is beyond doubt that the storyworlds created in books by authors and their readers are acts of spatial production that draw upon the historical, the imaginary, and the social realm (exactly as proposed by Soja, *Thirdspace* 10). Rather, what Camp, and subsequently Prinsloo, may have been after is the peculiar nature of textual spaces where all three categories of space are of the same kind, that is, the linguistic, wordy kind.

<sup>9</sup> A similar question could be asked about the depiction of modern-day cities in literature. As Bart Eekhout has noted (personal conversation), at least biblical cities have a strong Secondspace presence in the text. Whereas this may be less the case for a story set in New York or Paris, for which novelists will usually evoke the scenery of the real city, the author and the reader will often already hold a certain mental picture of the city. Especially for well-

of the traditional spaces is needed to construct a space of usage that supersedes the purely physical or mental counterparts?

*One and One is Three*

In answer to these questions, let us first return to the book of Nahum, quoted at the beginning of this article. The prophet Nahum, one of the twelve Minor Prophets, relates in three chapters the destruction of the city of Nineveh. Scholars date the book shortly before or after the actual (that is, historical) destruction of the city in 612 BCE (O'Brien 2–11; Spronk 12–13). Even though the author was a contemporary of the event and thus could have presented ample Firstspace information, the book focuses instead on Secondspace Nineveh, occasionally mentioning material details to complete the picture.<sup>10</sup> The Thirdspace is generated as we read the story of the city, producing meaning and producing the city space. For example, in Nahum 3.10, a verse famous for its harsh imagery, the text reads:

Yet she was exiled,  
she went into captivity.  
Her babes, too, were dashed in pieces  
at every street corner.  
Lots were cast for her honored men,  
and all her nobles were bound in chains.

The 'she' in the verse is Nineveh. The city is personified as a woman. This is common for cities in the biblical text, regardless of their status as friend or enemy (e.g., Dobbs-Allsopp, "Daughter Zion"; idem, *Weep O Daughter*; Maier; Sals). The verse describes the fate of Thebes, mentioned explicitly two verses earlier, where the prophet says to Nineveh: "Were you any better than No-amon" (v. 8: No-amon is an alternative name to refer to Thebes, after Amon, deity of No). Through the comparison, the verse also speaks of the outcome for Nineveh (O'Brien 63). Moreover, according to John Huddleston, the specific Firstspace features present in the passage point towards a description of Nineveh rather than Thebes (97–110).

In the first phrase of the verse, the city is merely a woman, captured and exiled. After that, the personification turns into the metaphor of the mother. The city becomes a particular kind of woman, one with children (O'Brien 63; Baker 38). In both cases, that of the woman in general and the mother in particular, the text treats Nineveh as a Secondspace, a mental space. The metaphor of the mother continues

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known places, certain stereotypes develop over time. These images, willingly and unwillingly, will be evoked when writing about these places. New York is the never-sleeping city, Paris the city of love, etc. Textual cities, therefore, are by definition Thirdspaces: writers produce them and readers reproduce them from bits of material information, but as much from images and associations that are less palpable.

<sup>10</sup> This observation should not be confused with discussion of whether the book of Nahum speaks of the historical Nineveh or not. The information in the text, though scarce, suggests that Nahum indeed had some knowledge of the material city (see Huddleston).

with the children, who are dashed in pieces at the street corners. These corners are those of Firstspace Nineveh, the actual city of things. Thus, the Secondspace city is destroyed by smashing it against the Firstspace city. This act of collision is where Nineveh becomes Thirdspace. The author creates this space; the text captures it; and the reader recreates it. The experienced space is one where the distinction between material and mental city disappears; or rather, where the two meet each other in a new constellation. This act of smashing spaces against each other destroys not only the city as it was—a place of evil (Secondspace)—but also its future, represented by the children—thus, a possible place of evil (Vermeulen, “Dash the Children” 14–15, 25). In Thirdspace Nineveh the possible and impossible collapse.

This example shows that the biblical text creates (or at least captures and prompts the reader to create) a meaningful spatial experience that ingeniously combines subtle Firstspace references with a dominant Secondspace image.

#### *Real and Imagined Spaces*

The city of Nineveh plays a prominent role in the book of Jonah as well. The prophet must visit the city, with a prophecy of doom. After his initial refusal (in chapters one and two), he arrives there in chapter three. Nineveh is the setting of the story here, thereby qualifying as Firstspace.

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: “Get up, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation that I said to you.” And Jonah got up and went to Nineveh in accordance with the word of the LORD. And Nineveh was a mighty<sup>11</sup> great city, a three days’ walk. (Jonah 3:1–3)

In addition to the material aspects, the city also carries symbolic values. The greatness of the city applies not only to its actual size, but also to its power and influence (Sasson 72, 228; Simon and Schramm 4, 28; Kamp 160). This duality is present in what has been translated, in the Jewish Publication Society’s rendering, as “enormously large city” (*ir gedolah lelohim*). The Hebrew text uses the word *’elohim*, which refers both to God in the singular and with a capital letter and to gods in the plural, rather than the more common *me’od* “very.” A literal rendering results in “a city great to God” or “a city great to the gods.” The former implies that the deity is the Israelite god and, consequently, that Nineveh is subject to this almighty god (as the one who created everything, including the enemy cities). In the latter, the gods are most likely the native Assyrian gods, with Ishtar as patron deity of the city.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the superlative (“(al)mighty great city”) and the point of view option (to God/gods), the expression can be understood as a possessive (God’s city) (Sasson 228). Regardless of what exactly is meant, the mentioning of the divine realm introduces the notion of power into the text. Consequently, the greatness in this phrase appears to include, yet again, both material and symbolic aspects. Another Secondspace characterization of the city in Jonah is that of wicked place (Prinsloo 13–

<sup>11</sup> Following the Jewish Publication Society translation.

<sup>12</sup> The plural gods can be inclusive, with the Israelite god, or exclusive, referring only to the Assyrian deities.

14), as referred to in Jonah 1:2, a variant of the previously mentioned second verse of chapter 3.

2 “Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim judgment upon it; for their wickedness has come before me.”

Initially, Jonah removes himself from the wicked city. Instead of following God’s command to go to Nineveh, Jonah flees in the opposite direction (Halpern and Friedman 80–81; Prinsloo 14–16). Yet, in creating this spatial distance with Firstspace Nineveh, he actually moves closer to Secondspace Nineveh and its evil.<sup>13</sup> Remarkably, once Jonah approaches Firstspace Nineveh, he no longer finds the utterly foul city that God had condemned. Jonah moves towards and through the material city, connecting its physical greatness with the mental picture of its being an evil place. When he utters his prophecy in verse 4, the text creates an interpretational and spatial openness that was not present before.

Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown/shall overthrow itself!

The key in this prophecy is the verbal form *nehappakhet* “it shall be overthrown/shall overthrow itself.” This form has both a reflexive (and thus active) and a passive meaning. In other words, the prophecy can announce a self-overturning of the Ninevites, i.e., they repent, and, if they are lucky, this will save their lives and the city. Or the prophecy proclaims the physical end of the city, with God intervening in a violent way (Trible 180; Ben Zvi, *Sings of Jonah* 24).<sup>14</sup> The former option addresses the Secondspace evil city; the latter the Firstspace presence of Nineveh. The Thirdspace, created as Jonah utters the prophecy, is thus a place of both destruction and rescue. It expands the spatial future of the city, coinciding neither with the stereotypical evil enemy nor with the atypical reversal often discerned in more traditional readings that consider the book of Jonah a message of God’s universal love (Sasson 24–25).<sup>15</sup> Instead, the Thirdspace combines both aspects.

The saved/sacked spatial image of the city transgresses even more boundaries. Given the historical setting of the text, written after the destruction of Nineveh and for a readership that was keenly aware of the event (Ben Zvi, *Sings of Jonah* 15–16), the Thirdspace is one that plays out the tension between what can be deemed the ‘real’

<sup>13</sup> Several scholars have noted the parallel between the physical removal from Nineveh, the place God asks Jonah to go, and the prophet’s mental removal from God (Prinsloo 9–11; Person 71; Sutskov 212).

<sup>14</sup> For a different reading, see Vermeulen, “Save or Sack the City” 10–12.

<sup>15</sup> Many of these readings interpret the message of Jonah in light of the New Testament (Matt 12.41 and Luke 11.32). Whereas this is a valid interpretation in itself, one should keep in mind that the notion of universality is not present in the Jonah text of the Hebrew Bible. Critiques to readings of the book of Jonah as being influenced by the New Testament, therefore, mostly contest these universalist claims, deeming them invalid for the original context and readership of the text. They acknowledge, however, such claims’ value for later reading communities with different textual canons (in addition to Sasson, see also Simon and Schramm viii-x).

and the ‘imagined.’ The categories ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ do not stand for the physical and mental aspects as portrayed in the text, or the Firstspace and Secondspace of critical-spatial theory (Soja, *Thirdspace* 10). Rather, ‘real’ refers to the city according to the readership’s image of it. This image is a combination of material aspects and more symbolic images and associations, and thus is already a Thirdspace in itself. It is the picture of the city as present in the cultural memory of a community and perceived as coinciding with reality. The ‘imagined’ city, then, is the city as envisioned by the text. Again, elements of Firstspace and Secondspace contribute to this image. The ‘imagined’ city can resemble the real city; however, in the book of Jonah this is not the case. Here, according to one reading of the prophecy in Jonah 3.4, the ‘real’ city is the one that had been destroyed. The other reading of the same prophecy maintains that the ‘imagined’ city, created by the story, is the saved space. The book of Jonah has often been catalogued as parody, persiflage, and even fiction, exactly because it presents the city of Nineveh in a form that it historically had never assumed (e.g., Gitay 201–6; Youngblood 134; Bolin 109–110). For the story this is not a problem; what is more, the story situates the imagined city alongside the real one (Vermeulen, “Why the Ninevites Repent”).

### *Us and the Other Is Three*

Thirdspacing the enemy’s city takes yet another form, well-illustrated by the construction of space in Psalm 137. This Psalm, starting with the words “By the rivers of Babylon,” features three places: Babylon, Jerusalem, and Zion.<sup>16</sup> At first sight, the text seems to oppose Babylon, the enemy space and the place of exile of the speakers, to Jerusalem and Zion, friendly locations and home of the speakers and their God (e.g., Savran 45; Ahn, Exile 83). A closer reading not only confirms that the spatial picture is more complex; it also reveals that the psalmist has produced a network of spatial relations that once again results in a spatial experience that both incorporates Firstspace and Secondspace Babylon and opens conceptual realms.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of the psalm the speakers are in Firstspace Babylon:

By the rivers of Babylon,  
There we sat,  
Sat and wept,  
As we thought of Zion.

Babylon is the place of the enemy, referred to as the place afar, “there.”<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the speakers are sitting precisely in that distant space. Their willingness

<sup>16</sup> The psalm mentions a fourth place, Edom. However, this place is secondary to the spatial tension and not a city but a region, as I argue elsewhere (Vermeulen, “The Space in the Crack,” 3–4).

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed analysis, see Vermeulen, “The Space in the Crack.”

<sup>18</sup> This spatial distance has also been interpreted temporally, as a reference to the past. The speakers were once in Babylon, but no longer at the moment of their singing this psalm (Bellinger 9; Ogden 89; Plank 182).

to mentally separate themselves from Babylon exists simultaneous with their physical presence in material Babylon (Berlin 65). Firstspace Babylon is also the Firstspace of the ‘we’ in the psalm. And though the thought of Zion, a mental escape, allows the speakers to travel and even dwell in Secondspace Zion, their physical bodies continue to anchor them in the place of the Other. The Thirdspace becomes thus an impossible, yet possible combination, not just of Firstspace and Secondspace but of two spaces, one defined as Other and one conceived as Us.<sup>19</sup> The psalm then explores the possibilities of this newly created space.

First the Babylonians disturb the Thirdspace, emphasizing their claim on the Babylon of things and even invading the Zion of thoughts: “for our captors asked us there for songs, our tormentors, for amusement: ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion’” (verse 3) (Vermeulen, “The Space in the Crack” 9–11). Whereas the singers initially refuse, still rejecting the odd Thirdspace that is both theirs and the Babylonians’, they venture an exploration in verse 5 and following (Ahn, “Psalm 137” 272; Ben Zvi, “Introduction” 286). Via a creation of Jerusalem, they reclaim Zion, and eventually even Babylon.

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
Let my right hand wither,  
Let my tongue stick to my palate  
If I cease to think of you,  
If I do not keep Jerusalem in memory  
Even at my happiest hour.  
-Ps 137.5–6

Jerusalem is first presented as a Secondspace, a conversation partner. Jerusalem stands for home (Vermeulen, “Home” 13–15). But as the song progresses, it becomes clear that there is also a material aspect to this Jerusalem of memory and joy. This becomes clear when the city’s fall is mentioned in verse 7 (“remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem’s fall; how they cried, ‘Strip her, strip her to her very foundations!’”). Jerusalem is both a physical and mental place (Becking 287). The singer, focusing first on the mental picture, connects Jerusalem to Zion, yet also establishes a firm foundation for the Thirdspace to be created from its physical collapse. In short, when Firstspace Jerusalem is explicitly mentioned, it is not a place, or better, it is no longer a place.<sup>20</sup> Thirdspace Jerusalem hence becomes a bodiless space. The singer does not mention a version of Jerusalem before the destruction, which would have affected the Thirdspace evolving from that. Rather, the spatial experience is rooted in a destroyed Firstspace notion, so that the Jerusalem

<sup>19</sup> Shimeon Bar-Efrat understands the adverb ‘there’ as a symbol of the “otherness” of Babylon (67).

<sup>20</sup> Jerusalem not being a place should not be confused with it being a non-place. Non-places are “space[s] which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (Augé 78). Typical non-places are hotel rooms or airports. To the psalmist, it is exactly Babylon that is conceived as a non-place to a certain degree, even though the people’s stay is long.

created by the song is a valid one, adapted to the specific circumstances of the singer (Vermeulen, “The Space in the Crack,” 16–18).

Once Thirdspace Jerusalem is created, the singers, now in plural, turn again to Babylon. They address the place in a way similar to Jerusalem: Babylon is personified, clearly a Secondspace (Lemche 91; Vermeulen, “The Space in the Crack” 18–19). Yet this is not a sign that the speakers are finally accepting their spatial fate and are truly merging the place of the Other with their space, both envisioned on the symbolic level. On the contrary, the addition of Secondspace Babylon in the Thirdspace of the text is short-lived. Daughter Babylon will repay what she has inflicted upon Jerusalem, following the *lex talionis* (Ben Zvi, “Introduction” 293; Bellinger 13; Steenkamp 306–7). And her children will be killed (verses 8–9).<sup>21</sup> The end of the psalm evokes a destruction of Firstspace Babylon, similar to what Firstspace Jerusalem experienced. Furthermore, Secondspace Babylon will also be affected: without children, there can be no Secondspace future (Vermeulen, “The Space in the Crack” 21).

Interestingly, the end of the psalm renders the final Thirdspace of the text as (at least temporarily) placeless. The dichotomy between Us and the Other has become non-existent, because the Other is completely annihilated. While the singers are awaiting the reconstruction of Firstspace Jerusalem, they are residing in Secondspace Jerusalem (the end of the Psalm). Yet before that happens, they dwell in Firstspace Babylon (the beginning of the Psalm).

### **In Conclusion—*Thirdspacing* as Biblical Answer to Hostile Space**

The examples discussed here show that the enemy city in the Hebrew Bible is not just the evil place that opposes God and his people. In reading the text, the stereotype plays a role in a meaning-making and space-producing process that is far more complex. The cities are construed as spatial experiences that play with Firstspace and Secondspace depictions. The enemy city is never exclusively one or the other, though one type of space may be more prominently present than the other. The cityscapes draw upon the communal memory of biblical readers and their presuppositions, creating fictional realities or real fictions. These in turn invite the readers to produce a space that makes sense in their own context and for their own time. *Thirdspacing* brings the enemy city and Jerusalem into one spatial field, blurring the boundaries without fully destroying the separate categories. The practice is representative for the quest for identity, at the core of the biblical text and necessarily in conversation with other already existing spaces. Hence, when the singers in Psalm 137 exclaim “How can we sing a song of the LORD on alien soil?” the answer is *to Thirdspace* it, as they proceed to do.

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<sup>21</sup> For an elaborate discussion on possible meanings of the children’s death, see Vermeulen, “Dash the Children” and the bibliography mentioned there.

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*Cultural Representations of the City*

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