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Enlightening the Skin:
Travel, Racial Language, and Rabbinic Intertextuality in Modern Yiddish
Literature

By

Eli Rosenblatt

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Joint Doctor of Philosophy
with the Graduate Theological Union

in

Jewish Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Chana Kronfeld, Chair

Professor Naomi Seidman

Professor John Efron

Spring 2017

Enlightening the Skin:
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Abstract

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This dissertation argues for a new model of continuity - offered by the Jewish travel narrative form - to explain the appearance of race and racism in the literary history of Ashkenazi Jews. The ascendance of emigration in its heyday invigorated a new social order that derived its legitimacy from entirely different ways of conceptualizing Jewish identity - from a structured, territorialized *Yiddishkayt* of rabbinic authority, ritual observance, and the vernacular to a more ethereal Ashkenazi individuality embedded in the colonial and racial contingencies of the Atlantic world.

The first part of this study examines the first Yiddish adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Wilna, 1868), retitled *Slavery or Serfdom*, by Isaac Meir Dik. I show how the author's rereading of rabbinic slave laws transformed Stowe's sentimental novel of Christian abolitionism into a travel report about the ethical superiority of Jewish over Christian slaveholding practices, and thus the socio-political benefit of Jewish emigration to the United States. During the 19th century Yiddish, in contrast to Hebrew, offered a stylistically pliant medium for Atlantic and racial language to be disseminated to all segments of Jewish society. The second part of the dissertation traces the development of Lithuanian Yiddish in Southern Africa in triangulated contexts of race, travel and intertextuality. I focus on the development of Yiddish literary modernism, which first appears in the midst of the South African War (1898-1902) and culminates in the reappearance of Yiddish as a language of white resistance in the Apartheid era. I analyze biblical and rabbinic intertextuality in the Yiddish literature of Southern Africa, including in texts narrated from the point of view of black Africans.

By reassessing the travel form, I argue that the literature of "Black-Jewish Relations" ought not to be understood as the objective assessment of interracial contact between Jews and African-Americans, but rather an imagined and imaginative construct, internal to modern Jewish literature and culture, and rooted in the global dynamics of Jewish modernization.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my grandfather Maurice ז"ל. He earned acceptance to a university but was compelled to stay home and labor to support his family. He worked beside a die cutting machine in Lynn, Massachusetts for the duration of his life, though he (and not I)

might have been the first in my family to earn a doctorate, had he been given a torch to light the way.

And to Shira, my beloved and best friend, without you none of this is even possible; and to my two daughters, Maerav Lila and Bella Basha, whose wit, love and hugs keep me going, may this work sustain yours to come.

אמר רבי יוסי כל ימי הייתי מצטער על מקרא זה (דברים כ"ה) והיית
ממשש בצהרים כאשר ימשש העור באפלה וכי מה אכפת ליה לעור בין
אפילה לאורה עד שבא מעשה לידי פעם אחת הייתי מהלך באישון
לילה ואפלה וראיתי סומא שהיה מהלך בדרך ואב בידו אמרתי לו בני
אבוקה זו למה לך אמר לי כל זמן שאבוקה בידי בני אדם רואין אותי
ומצילין אותי מן הפחתין ומן הקוצין ומן הברקנין

תלמוד בבלי מגילה פרק שלישי כ"ד –

Rebbe Yossi said: I was long perplexed by this verse: *And thou shalt grope at noonday as the blind gropeth in darkness* (Deut. xxvii, 29.) Now what difference [I asked] does it make to a blind man whether it is dark or light? [Nor did I find the answer] until the following incident occurred. I was once walking on a pitch black night when I saw a blind man walking in the road with a torch in his hand. I said to him, my son, why do you carry this torch? He replied: As long as I have this torch in my hand, people see me and save me from the pits and the thorns and briars.

– Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 24b, Soncino translation [slightly modified].

Terra Incognita in Jewish Form

"I know very well that my ancestors had no desire to come to this place: but neither did the ancestors of the people who became white and who require of my captivity a song. They require of me a song less to celebrate my captivity than to justify their own."

-- James Baldwin, "The Price of The Ticket"

The voyage, or the prospect and anticipation of travel, is a central facet of Jewish experience. The first time we read about Abraham, he is on a journey. The book of Genesis describes how he first traveled with his family from Ur in Mesopotamia to Haran, and later, after leaving his family behind, embarked towards the Land of Canaan.¹ The idea of *terra incognita*, unknown or unexplored territory, is both central to the Jewish travel narrative, and to the travel narrative as a whole. Jewish travel narratives often express to readers that the farther one journeys from civilization and into the unknown, the closer the traveler, and the reader, come to the fabulous marvels at the end of civilization. This sense of closeness intensifies as the apprehension and wonder of the traveler increases. The travel narrative creates an emotive, triangular network between the reader, the traveler and notion of *terra incognita*.²

¹ Genesis 12:1

² For a broad overview of the travel narrative form in both Ashkenazi Jewish and general European contexts, see Elkan Nathan Adler, *Jews in Many Lands* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1905); *Jewish Travelers* (New York: Bloch Pub. Co., 1931). [Selections translated from Judah David Eisenstein's *Otsar Masa'ot*. Reprint of the 1930 edition published by G. Routledge & Sons, London, in series: The Broadway Travelers; Adam Beaver, "Scholarly Pilgrims: Antiquarian Visions of the Holy Land," in *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World* ed. Kate van Liere, Simon Ditchfield, & Howard Louthan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 267-83); Judah David Eisenstein (editor), *Otsar Masa'ot. Kovets tiyurim shel nos'im Yehudim be-Erets Yisra'el, Surya, Mitsrayim ye-artsot aherot. Reshimot 'ole regel le-kivre avot u-kedushim* (New York: J.D. Eisenstein, 1926); new edition, Tel-Aviv, 1969; Jas Elsner and Joan-Paul Rubies (editors), *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel* (London: Reaktion, 1999); Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* Cambridge, U.K.; (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Frank Lestringan, *Mapping the Renaissance World: The Geographical Imagination in the Age of Discovery* trans. David Fausett; with a foreword by Stephen Greenblatt. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999); Limor Mintz-Manor. "Ha-siah 'al 'ha-'olam he-hadash' ba-tarbut ha-yehudit be-'et ha-hadashah ha-mukdemet" (Ph.D. thesis: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* 2nd ed. (London ; New York : Routledge, 2008); Chris Rojek and John Urry eds., *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997); Justin Stagl, *A History of Curiosity: The Theory of Travel, 1550-1800* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995); Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours: A History of Leisure Travel, 1750-1915* (New York: William Morrow, 1997).

P.B. Gove has described in a definitive study a few characteristics common to all travel narratives.³ The first characteristic is that it happened sometime in the past. The travel narrative also happens “in a remote space,” either “there” or “elsewhere.” The narrative is also related in the first person and details movement from one place to another and therefore involves both space and time. The travel narrative is also sometimes borrowed to describe a psychological state, such as a “wandering mind” or “wandering thoughts.” Gove also notes that the traveler’s narrative is not a genre, but that it can be related in any genre. In fact, travel literature can take the form of a poetic epic, as in Herman Melville’s *Clarel*, a lyrical poem, as in Yehuda ha-Levi’s account of his pilgrimage to Zion, or as an epistolary “novel” such as Eldad ha-Dani’s *Sefer Eldad*. In modern literature, the travel narrative can take the form of a satirical novel, such as Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Twain’s *Innocents’ Abroad*, Mendele’s *Abridged Travels of Benjamin the Third*. As D.R. Howard has argued, the traveler’s tale is not necessarily what a traveler saw on his way, but rather reflected what he expected or wanted to see.⁴ Traveler’s tales converted travel into a new entity while being translated and adapted from “real” adventures into language. From language, the traveler’s narrative was understood and readapted in the minds of the reader. The *experience* of a voyage was transformed into a story or another literary form.

Consequently, the traveler’s tale exists in a liminal space between reality and fantasy and as such is a narrative of space, time and “alterity.” Since space and time, as postcolonial critics have suggested, are defined by the culture to which a person belongs, they are not universal concepts.⁵ In addition, traveler’s tales also possess a duality between “here” and “now.” Through the distancing of geographical and chronological settings, the traveler’s tale is always about “then” and “there.” This manipulation of distance is usually complicated by the use of the first person narrative. The technique of first person narrative allows for the wondrous and fantastic aspects of a story to be deployed authoritatively. The authority of the first person narrative, which often positions the details of the plot through eyewitness testimony, still sheds light on the questionable veracity of the story itself.

Traveler’s tales also often assume the existence of an audience. The fabulous adventures and the wondrous events, which form the cornerstones of any traveler’s tale do not belong to a certain place and time. Yet, in order to acknowledge the existence of an actual readership, the traveler’s tale engages in what Alessandro Scafi has called “concretization.”⁶ This concretization placed the fantastic and wondrous in the context of real places and times. For example, Odysseus encountered monsters and sirens on his journey from Troy to Ithaca, a “real” geographical framework in the minds of his listeners and readers. Troy and Ithaca thus “concretize” the fantastic elements in the epic; If Odysseus was a historical personality, when he was made the hero of a traveler’s tale, he was transferred from reality and became a literary character.

Another feature of some traveler’s tales is that the traveler has a guide. This guide can be the captain of a boat or the leader of a desert caravan, but he must “know” the *terra incognita*. Another type of travel narrative details the journey to another world. This other world is not reached by a conventional mode of transportation and is beyond the sphere of concrete

³ Philip B. Gove. *The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction* (New York: Arno Press, 1974).

⁴ Percy G. Adams, *Travelers and Travel Liars, 1660–1800* (Berkeley, Calif., 1962).

⁵ Gayatri C. Spivak, “Who Claims Alterity?” in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 24–38.

⁶ Alessandro Scafi, *Maps of Paradise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 155.

geography. This kind of voyage is exemplified by the biblical Jonah's journey in the water within the belly of the whale.

**

The traveler's tale, as a distinct literary form in post-biblical Jewish culture, is often understood to begin within the complex of *aggadot* found in the tractate Baba Batra in the Babylonian Talmud.⁷ This series of tales became identified as a single unit in medieval commentaries because Rabba bar Bar Hanna, who was an *amora* of the second or third generation (appr. 250-320 CE) and learned in both the Babylonian and Palestinian academies, is at the center of every story. Rabba bar Bar Hanna traveled vast distances between the academies in Babylonia and Palestine and was noted by later commentaries for valiantly defending himself against bandits and other dangers, while his own colleagues and later commentaries mocked his fantastic accounts of journeys on the thoroughfares and rivers that traversed ancient Mesopotamia. Tziona Grossmark has set these rabbinic *aggadot* in their wider context by arguing that the historical and geographic axis of Rabba bar Bar Hanna's traveler's tales can be located in the historical travels of the *Nehutei* (lit. *those who go down*), who were rabbis that journeyed between Palestine and Babylonia along trade routes and maintained cultural and scholastic contacts between Jewish scholars in Exile and in the Land of Israel.⁸ This historical axis intersects with a vertical, chronological axis of a long tradition of travelers' tales along the trade routes of the Near East more broadly defined, which Grossmark identifies with such well-known figures as Sinbad the Sailor or Marco Polo.

The ancient tradition of travelers' tales underwent resurgence in the fourth century when Christian travel to the Holy Land intensified, and many of the themes and events described in the tales associated with Rabba bar Bar Hanna can also be found in Christian literature of subsequent eras. As such, both Christian and Jewish travelers to Roman Palestine presented their own eyewitnessing of biblical miracles. Rabba bar Bar Hanna is recorded as hearing the sons of Korach through a crack in the earth, while a fourth century Christian traveler from what is today France reported sighting the House of Rahab, which was known to have remained intact when Jericho's walls crumbled. Both the rabbis and early church fathers noted their sightings of demons in holy places as well.⁹

Daniel Ben-Amos has noted that the rabbinic travel narrative takes place in three definitive "peripheral" environments, which are the sea, the desert and the Land of Israel. Calling the travel narrative "voyage literature" Ben-Amos notes that such literature can be divided into two types. The first is a voyage to some imaginary realm, such as the netherworld, paradise, or the bottom of the ocean. Tales that detail encounters with Elijah the Prophet or the Angel of

⁷ Tziona Grossmark, *Travel Narratives in Rabbinic Literature: Voyages to Imaginary Realms* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 1-54.

⁸ Tziona Grossmark, "The *Nehutei* as Traveling Agents and Transmitters of Cultural Data between the Torah Study Centers in Babylonia and in the Land of Israel during the Third and Fourth Centuries CE." *Mediterranean Studies* 23, no. 2 (2015): 125-48; Daniel Boyarin, *A Traveling Homeland: The Babylonian Talmud As Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁹ Grossmark, *Rabbinic Travel Narratives*, 14.

Death are emblematic of this first type. The aggadic traditions of a biblical prophet's voyage into the belly of an enormous fish are also part of this type. The second type of "voyage literature" is woven from realistic details. The traveler crosses a border and goes overseas or behind large mountains. In light of Ben-Amos' distinction between two types of "voyage literature", Rabba bar Bar Hanna's travelers' tales belong to the second category.¹⁰

Rabba bar Bar Hanna's tales are comprised of a cluster of legends that include a range of common motifs, which include huge animals and fish, dangerous seas and terrifying waves, strange desert that contains the remnants of a gallant biblical past, the edge of the world, and terrifying monsters that guard treasure. The stories also appear to be meticulously edited and linguistic formulas are used throughout the anthology, such as "We were once traveling in the desert" (*zimna khada khava ka azlinan b'midbara*) and "Once we were traveling on board a ship and saw" (*zimna khada khava ka azlinan sfinanta*.) Many of the later commentaries on this cluster of traveler's tales sought to prove or disprove the truth contained therein. Rabbi Yom Tov Ishbili, the *Ritba*, maintained that a "lack of knowledge" caused these stories to be interpreted by Rabba bar Bar Hanna's contemporaries as fantasies. The *Ritba* was more sympathetic and attributed the tale's depictions of monsters and beasts to the "dreams of the homesick" travelers.¹¹ Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer haLevi Eidels, the *Maharsha*, who lived in Poland during the sixteenth century, believed in the veracity of the tales by citing the Book of Psalms descriptions of sea travel and mighty waters. Yet, he was also inclined towards an allegorical reading of the tales, and ended his commentary with "*Yesh kan devarim b'go*" which means that there was the more in the Rabba Bar Hanna's tales than meets the eye.¹²

Yiddish travel narratives would develop, question, and restructure the concept of the ancient and modern commentaries on the rabbinic travel narrative have also read the tales as allegories. Dina Stein has argued that the cluster of stories communicates the potential of common experience.¹³ In her reading, the traveler's tales are composed of two distinct units. The first is a common rabbinic practice - the exegesis of a biblical verse. The second is more unusual. She argues that Rabba bar Bar Hanna's travel narratives are to be interpreted as the expression of a "mental experience" that was communicated in unique "styles of narrative." Tziona Grossmark has argued that the travel narrative provided a kind of "frame metaphor" for the rabbinic exaltation of God's immensity, perhaps similar to Daniel Boyarin's insight that the rabbis sought to recreate the experience of Sinai through the practice of reading, interpreting and solving textual contradictions.¹⁴ Thus, the traveler's tale becomes a means of communicating the mental experience for trying to understand the larger implication of the natural world - of the "sand as a border to the waves" or the reason for the very existence of huge animals and rough seas. These literary images serve as metonymies not for God itself, but for God's *vastness*. The liminal space between reality and fantasy, or perhaps the consistently failed distinction between the two,

¹⁰ Daniel Ben-Amos, "Talmudic Tall Tales," in Linda Dégh, Henry Glassie and Felix Oinas, eds. *Folklore Today: A Festschrift for Richard M. Dorson* (Bloomington: Indiana Semiotic Sciences, 1976), 25-43.

¹¹ Yom-Tov ben Avraham Asevilli, Moshe Hershler, Mordechai L. Katsenelenbogen, *Hidushe Ha-Ritba* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1983), 45.

¹² Shmuel Edels, *Sefer Hidushe Maharsha 'al Ha-Torah* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1968), 33-4.

¹³ Dina Stein, *Textual Mirrors: Reflexivity, Midrash, and the Rabbinic Self* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 1-13.

¹⁴ Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 10-16.

expresses how the travel narrative served as a form by which the rabbis could concretize divine greatness and magnanimity. As Chana Kronfeld has noted, modern Hebrew writers engaged with medieval travel narrative in both the Western and Jewish traditions. The rabbinic travel narrative, I suggest, could help us better understand how the modern Yiddish travel narrative came to illustrate the techniques of realism and the political power of its counter-modes – the parody, satire and the fantasy.

Most conventional histories of the Jewish travel narrative begin with Benjamin de Tudela, a Spanish rabbi and merchant who recorded an account of his travels in southern Europe, the Mediterranean, the Near East, the Horn of Africa, the Indian subcontinent, the Slavic lands and Germany. The *Sefer Masa'ot*, a circular journey, was well known to both Ashkenazi and Sephardi rabbis in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, though the *editio princeps* did not appear until 1543 in Constantinople, when it was printed in square type by the Soncino family.¹⁵ Little is known about the historical Benjamin de Tudela and consequently, he became a globally recognizable name not by his own volition, but rather through the translation, adaptation and dissemination of his travelogue, which was popularized by the eminent Christian Hebraist Johannes Buxtdorf in the 17th century. The first edition in Latin appeared as *Itinerarium D Benjaminis* in 1633 and was reprinted and disseminated in wide range of European universities, appearing in a definitive Latin edition in Hesse in 1762. The same scholar that translated the text into Latin undertook its simultaneous translation into English and published it as *The Peregrinations of Benjamin the Sonne of Jonas the Jew*. In this edition, the translator wrote:

“It is very clear from the multitude of circumstances, that our author [Benjamin] chiefly intended this work to celebrate his own Nation, to preserve an account of the different places in which they were settled, and to do all in his power to keep up their Spirits under their Captivity, by putting them in mind of the coming of the Messiah. I must confess I consider this in a different Light from most of the Critics, for I do not conceive that a man’s loving his countrymen ought to prejudice him in the opinions of his readers, and though it may possibly beget some Doubts as to the Fidelity of his Relations with Regard to the Jews, yet I do not see how this can with Justice be extended to other Parts of this Book.”¹⁶

As Joseph Shatzmiller has shown, Benjamin de Tudela’s account of his travels were popularized and disseminated largely by Christian scholars who obtained his manuscript in the sixteenth century and understood it to be the earliest accurate account of the existence of ancient

¹⁵ I. I. Benjamin, A. Asher, Leopold Zunz, and F. Lebrecht, *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela* (New York: Hakesheth Pub. Co, 1900).

¹⁶ S. Purchas, “The Peregrination of Benjamin, the sonne of Jonas, a Jew, written in Hebrew, translated into Latin by B. Arias Montanus, discovering both the state of the Jews, and of the World, about foure hundred and sixtie yeeres since” In *Hakluytus Posthumus or, Purchas his Pilgrimes: Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others* [Cambridge Library Collection - Maritime Exploration] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 523-94.

antiquities such as the ancient city of Nineveh, which had not been visited by any other European traveler.¹⁷ Christian Hebraists also were interested in the existence of non-European Jewish communities and the “Oriental Thesis” a political and economic stance which posited that European Jews maintained a useful transnational network of mercantile and scholastic relationships, thus laying the intellectual foundations for the Enlightenment identification of European Jews with the Orient and the rise of relatively benevolent Mercantilist attitudes towards Jewish settlement in the port cities of the Caribbean and elsewhere in the colonies.¹⁸ These attitudes led to several 18th century double editions of the *Sefer Masa’ot* with Menasseh ben Israel’s *Mikve Yisrael*, which both identified Native Americans with the Lost Tribes of Israel and served as an important document in the quest for the readmission of Jews to England in the middle of the 18th century.¹⁹

It is important to distinguish between the text of the *Sefer Masa’ot* and the *mythologization* of the Benjamin persona as it existed in the minds of subsequent generations. The book itself is a concrete account of Benjamin’s circuitous but ultimately crescent-shaped journey from the Navarre province in Spain to the Indian subcontinent and back to Germany. Benjamin is the first-person narrator of the narrative, but he does not indicate the specific purpose of his journey. Shatzmiller suggests that there may be a split sense of mercantile and religious purpose indiscernible to many contemporary readers and but readily detectable to Benjamin himself and his contemporaries.

While Benjamin makes it clear that the purpose of his trip is a visit to the Land of Israel, his account of the Mediterranean basin and Asia contains many particularly vivid observations of economic exchange, local custom and the structure of political control. For example, he notes that the African coast of the Indian ocean is well guarded by the reigning king and that visiting merchants need not worry about the safety of the goods in their parked caravans or docked ships. He gives a fairly detailed account of how to ensure that security services are obtained in other locations, and makes note of cities he deems to be controlled by bandits and therefore avoided.²⁰

At the same time, Benjamin describes local custom with an eye towards detail. This gives the reader the sense that the account is also meant to provide a certain amount of pleasure. One particularly crisp portrait appears when Benjamin arrives in the ancient port of “Khulam” or Kollam, on the Malabar Coast of India. Here, he describes the custom of the local community to embalm the recently deceased with spices, dry their bodies out and place them upright in a long row. He goes on to detail that because of the climate and the high quality of embalment, locals can visit and recognize the faces of their dead relatives long after they’ve passed away.²¹ The vividness and detail that Benjamin paid to cultural difference shows that he attempted to give stylized accounts of the places he visited for the sake of pleasure and entertainment, and to contrast the customs of those he visited with the customs of his own audience.²²

¹⁷ Joseph Shatzmiller, "Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World" *International History Review*. 28.2 (2006): 372-295.

¹⁸ David Sorkin, "Port Jews and the Three Regions of Emancipation," *Jewish Culture and History*, 4.2 (2001): 31-46.

¹⁹ David S. Katz, *Philo-semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England, 1603-1655* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 54-68.

²⁰ Tudela, *Travels*, 55-62.

²¹ *Ibid*, 63-64.

²² Tudela, *Travels*, 26.

In addition to providing ethnological details and statistics on the number of individual Jews and notable rabbinical authorities in far-flung Jewish communities, Benjamin also allowed his readers into the sphere of value perception. After completing most of his journey, he arrived in “Bohem,” (Bohemia, Prague) where he begins to describe the Slavic lands. In the twelfth century, the Slavic lands were not home to a large Jewish community and historians generally agree that at least portions of the Kievan Rus’ were still home to a fairly large number of polytheistic peoples.²³ Benjamin describes the Slavic lands:

ומשם והלאה ארץ בהם והיא הנקראת פראגא היא תחילת ארץ אשקלבונייא בקורים
אותה היהודים הדרים שם ארץ כנען בשביל אנשי הארץ ההיא מוכרים בניהם
ובנותיהם לכל אומות הם ואנשי רוסיא והיא מלכות גדולה משער פראגא ועד שער כיו
העיר הגדולה היא בסוף המלכות והיא ארץ הרים ויערים ושם ימצאו החיות שקורין
ואיורגיש והם זבלינאץ ואין אדם יוצא מפתח ביתו בימי החורף מרוב הקור ועד הנה
מלכות רוסיא.²⁴

[Further on is the land of Bohemia, called Prague, and this is called Sclavonia, which is called by the Jews who inhabit it Canaan, because the people of this land sell their sons and daughters to all nations, this also applies to Russia. The hinterland is vast, reaching from the Gate of Prague to Kiev, a large city at the end of the empire. This land is mountainous and forested, there you will find the beast called *Vaiverges*, which yields fur. No one leaves the door of their house in the days of winter because of the bitter cold. Thus far, [I’ve reached] the Kingdom of Russia...]

Benjamin explains his own perception of “Slavonia” and engages in the rabbinic interpretation of geography. Benjamin records that the Jews of the medieval Slavic lands refer to their home as Canaan because the native people of the region were largely “slaves.” Benjamin picks up on the use of the ethnonym “Slav” to denote the lot of Slavic peoples as slaves. While this etymological theory no longer holds today, Benjamin’s detail that the Jews called this land Canaan because it’s inhabitants were the recipients of the biblical curse to be slaves, will surface repeatedly in the modern texts examined in this dissertation.

Benjamin’s perception of the correlation between the biblical text and lived experience, rather than the historical reality of vibrant trade conducted by Jews, shows that he perceived a wide cultural chasm between Jews and Slavs. At the same time, his ability to discern that “*shklav*,” an archaic root, meant “slave,” could demonstrate that Benjamin was aware that the few Jews of medieval Rus understood (and perhaps spoke) Slavonic (“slave” in German during

²³ Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5-15.

²⁴ Tudela, *Travels*, 111.

this period would be more commonly “*knecht*.”)²⁵ Traditionally educated readers and readers versed in Jewish law would be aware that Israelites and the Canaanite nations were perceived as deeply estranged. Thus, with Benjamin’s subsequent detail that the physical landscape was cold and filled with furry, wild beasts, this grim assessment of life in the medieval Slavic lands intensifies his portrayal of “Shklavonia” as the “Land of Canaan.” Regardless of the historical veracity of this assessment, Benjamin’s cautious intentionality with language belies his stance as an author. Benjamin’s *Travels* is therefore also a literary creation, one that combines the realistic register of objective analysis with the subjective landscape of human property, wild beasts, and brutal winters.

Without the popularization and mythologization of Benjamin de Tudela, there could not have been Benjamin the Second. Benjamin II, whose name was Yosef Yisrael, published his account *Eight Years in Asia and Africa* in German in 1858. Benjamin the Second’s emergence as a 19th century traveler is as much about his ability to create a literary persona, foment connections with powerful members of Central Europe’s intellectual elite and the political, cultural and economic conditions of Jewish Moldavia in the heyday of European colonialism, than it is about his adaptation of Benjamin de Tudela’s literary modes. Born in Falticeni, in today’s Romania, Benjamin II admitted that he took on the persona of Benjamin de Tudela because he failed in the local timber business, cut off all contacts with the business associates that he believed wronged him, and sailed across the ocean to achieve greatness.²⁶

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Benjamin II’s travel narrative is its punctilious revisiting of Benjamin de Tudela’s own observations. In order to echo, or verify, the timelessness of Benjamin de Tudela’s account, Benjamin the Second further details the oppressive and miserable conditions of Jewish communities in Persia. He writes that in Persia the Jews are not permitted to walk in their cities during rainstorms because the dirt “washed off their bodies might sully the feet of the Mussulmans.” In contrast to Benjamin de Tudela, Benjamin the Second could emphasize the degree to which Jews in northern Africa had partially adopted the customs of European colonials but at the same time, his depictions were often inflected by the linguistic register of the European Orientalist:

[I] will now only mention a peculiar custom, which appeared to me very remarkable. – In Alexandria, in the house of an African Jew of some importance, whom I once visited on the Sabbath, I found in a large room a large stuffed Divan, over which one single large coverlet was spread. Under this one coverlet sleep in peaceful harmony the several married members of the family with their wives, each pair occupying a different corner of the divan. On my smiling and inquiring

²⁵ "slave," *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, edited by T. F. Hoad (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1996).

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192830982.001.0001/acref-9780192830982-e-14037>.

²⁶ I. I. Benjamin, *Acht Jahre in Asien Und Afrika: Von 1846 Bis 1855* (Hannover: Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1860), 2-5.

if such a peculiar and objectionable custom was general, I received an answer in the affirmative.²⁷

Overall, Benjamin the Second's travel narrative is remarkable for its admixture of colonial rhetoric about eradication of witchcraft, sexual deviance and superstition and his conservative Enlightenment attitude towards the preservation of "pure" Judaism. One particularly vivid example involves the story of a Polish Jewish tailor living in Tunis that had married a "native" woman.

In Tunis there lived a Jewish tailor from Poland, who had a native woman for his wife. On visiting him one day, I found him most depressed. On inquiring the cause of this, he told me his wife was ill, and that he must solemnize the devil's ceremony with her, and for this he had no money. I scolded him, and asked him how he, as a native European, could permit or countenance such folly?²⁸

Benjamin the Second suggests to the tailor that he allow his wife to undergo the exorcism with other women, but suggested that the tailor and Benjamin the Second hide themselves behind a curtain, and at the right moment the tailor would reveal himself, scatter the witches and beat his wife with the stick. Benjamin the Second then details how the plan was successful in eradicating the native woman's depression. Benjamin the Second seems to always have his audience in mind. The prose is bombastic and the observations of foreign customs, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, often appear to be mocking. The literary value of Benjamin the Second's account is relatively little in comparison to its historical value, which is underappreciated. The second Benjamin's other travel narratives are also of general interest. His travelogue "Three Years in America" was approved by Alexander von Humboldt and its German edition was well received by so many prominent readers that the author included six academic recommendations in the beginning of the German-English bilingual edition.²⁹ Benjamin of Tudela provided Benjamin the Second with a frame persona on which to base an account of the Jewish Diaspora that would perpetuate an Enlightenment view of progress by depicting backwardness with humor and pathos. Benjamin the Second concludes his account by stating "I address myself to my brethren in Poland, Russia and the Moldau. Not one of them can uphold with greater enthusiasm than I do that heavenly treasure, our sacred law...But just for this very law's sake, we dare not close our ears to general knowledge."

Abramovitsh's *Masoës Binyomin ha-Shlishi* is a paradigmatic satire of the Jewish travel narrative that appeared very shortly after *Eight Years in Asia and Africa* by Benjamin the Second. The novella, which details the exploits of Benjamin the Third and his companion Senderl, details the journey of two Jewish men living in Tuneyadevka, a fictional village in the

²⁷ I. J. Benjamin, *Acht Jahre*, 279-280.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 257.

²⁹ I. J. Benjamin. *Drei Jahre in Amerika: 1859-1862* (Hannover: Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1862).

Russian Pale of Settlement, to the Land of Israel. As Robert Alter has noted, Abramovich's prose in Hebrew (and perhaps in Yiddish as well) was an aesthetic quest together with a programmatic renegotiation of the terms of Jewish collective identity.³⁰ Mendele, the narrator of the novella, uses ironic allusion to biblical texts, the rabbinic bookshelf and existing Jewish travel literature to parody the persona of Benjamin the Third and I would suggest, also the bombastic, swaggering persona of Benjamin the Second. By the end of the story, Benjamin and Senderl have literally traveled a few miles, been betrayed by other Jews and imprisoned and registered for induction into the Tsarist infantry, only to be released after the delivery of a dramatic monologue that wins their captor's sympathy and secures their release. The journey itself, does not really begin or conclude.

Dan Miron has identified distinct geographic spaces in Abramovich's prose. Abramovitsh's literary *shtetlekh* are spheres which orbit larger spheres. Miron writes about the role of the distant city in the psyche of Mendele's *shtetlekh*. "All of these [European capitals] are, of course, shtetl fantasies, or rather the reality of Europe in the heyday of colonialism translated into medieval Jewish myth and legend." He continues by adding another, completely mythical sphere.

"This fourth sphere encircles the Mendele geography with the legendary landscape of India, over which Alexander of Macedon still soars on a huge vulture that he feeds with the pieces of flesh he cuts from his own body; with African and Asian deserts full of dragons; with the frenetic mythological river Sambatyon, beyond which the Ten Lost Tribes of biblical Israel still thrive -- but the river, always stormy and throwing big rocks high into the sky...This fourth circle represents not faraway places of which it supposedly consists, but rather the mythological dimensions of the minds of the people of Glupsk and Tuneyedevka. It indicates that the Mendele geography of which it is the outer fringe is essentially a psychic geography; the space it encompasses is metaphorical and mental, psychic and cultural, rather than social and geographic."³¹

Abramovich's *Travels of Benjamin the Third* radically de-mythologizes the personae of the first two Benjamins by parodying their power in the mind of Benjamin the Third. By impressing the grandeur and swagger of the previous Benjamins onto the image of a poor resident of Tuneyevka (No-food-ville), Abramovitsch deflates the journey and the traveler simultaneously. Even before Benjamin and Senderl leave their village, Benjamin's Yiddish speech inflects an unfused Hebraism from the Exodus narrative with irony.

³⁰ Robert Alter, *Modern Hebrew Literature* (New York: Behrman House, 1975), 15-19.

³¹ Dan Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 100-20.

יענע צייט, אזוי זאגט בנימין, איז גאנץ טונעיאדעווקע, ווי גרויס זי איז, געווען אין ארץ ישראל. מען האָט געשמאק גערעדט פון משיח'ן, אָט אָט איז שוין גאַט'ס גרייטאָג נאָך האלבען טאָג. דער נײַער פּריסטאוו, וואָס איז נישט לאנג אנגעקומען האָט גראָד ביד רמה דענסטמאַל געפיהרט דאָס שטעטל, בײַ א פאָר אידן האָט ער אראָפּעגריסן א פאה, עטליכע נעביך געהאפט שפעט ביי דער נאכט אין א געסיל אָהן פּאס פּאַרטען, בײַ נאָך איינעם פארנומען א ציג, וואָס האָט אויפגעגעסן א נײַעם שטרויענעם דאָך און ער איז דערמיט אויך געווען דיא סיבה דערפון, וואָס דער קאָמיטעט אונטערן אויווען האָט זיך שטארק געדורעט מיט דעם תּוּגּר, עד מתי וועט דער שׂר של ישמעאל אזוי שולט זײַן?³²

[In those days, said Benjamin, all of Tuneyedevka, great she is!, was in the Land of Israel. The people spoke with relish about the Messiah, soon will he arrive! The newly appointed [non-Jewish] Police Chief ruled the town with a defiant hand; he cut an earlock off many a Jew, locked up some in a narrow alley overnight for not carrying their passports, while from another he confiscated a goat for no reason other than that it ate some fresh straw off a neighbors roof. This was the reason that the 'committee' by the furnace [in the House of Study] was fervently discussing the Turk; "When will the Sultan (lit. Chief of the Muslims) exert his influence?"]

Benjamin recalls in the first person that his hometown was metaphorically "in the land of Israel." Of course, this sounds patently ridiculous considering that this town in the Russian Empire is "ruled" by a gentile policeman. The absurdity of the situation is intensified when Benjamin describes the policeman as ruling the town *b'yad romo*. Benjamin's failed diction alludes to Exodus 14:8: *And the Lord toughened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; the Israelites going out with a high hand* (b'yad romo.)³³ Here, Benjamin's unfused Hebraism in Yiddish couples the antagonism between the Pharaoh's army and the defiant Israelite slaves with the antagonism between Poles and Jews, except here the actors and their attitudes are comically garbled. It is the Slavic policeman who possesses the defiant attitude and the Jews who, stricken by passivity, endure their fate as he "cuts off their earlocks."

Benjamin seems half-cognizant that the Jews look to the ruler of distant lands for a psychic refuge from the local policeman's aggressions. Benjamin then overhears the rabbinic name for the Turk being discussed by a group of men. This unfused Hebraism *sar shel yishmael* is a veiled reference to historical embeddedness of the satire: three and a half centuries of war between Russia and the Ottoman Muslims to the East (This term for the sultan is also used in rabbinic responsa in relation to *pidyon shvuyim*, or the redemption of captives, a common practice, which could foreshadow Benjamin and Senderl's "captivity" at the end of the novella.) The Yiddish use of the Hebraic *toger*, rather than the more commonplace *terk*, is employed to contrast the Slavic police chief with an idealized Ottoman paradise where Benjamin believes the "Red Jews" live in material and spiritual opulence. In the world of Tunayedevka, the men

³² Mendele Mokher Sforim (Sh. Y. Abramovits), *Ale Verk Fun Mendele Moykher Sforim* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1920), 6.

³³ Translation: Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 391.

huddled and freezing around a furnace, discuss how the Turks will save them from the Tsar's rampages into the shtetl. A fourth sphere of psychic geography allows them to imagine themselves anew in at the gate of an oriental fantasy.

Abramovich, the grandfather of Hebrew and Yiddish realism, fashioned Benjamin the Third and his companion Senderl as a way of expressing the futility of their journey, which never reaches either a goal or an end. The historical and political embeddedness of the story is clear when the character's attempt to become contemporaries with their own myths are blocked by a variety of political, economic, sexual and cultural obstacles.

Yehuda Amichai *Masa 'ot Binyamin ha-Acharon mi-Tudela* (Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela) is an ironically appropriate way to begin a dissertation about the modern Jewish travel narrative form because the poem is itself a radical critique of teleology and the linear development of literary history.³⁴ The poem's title explicitly refers to the medieval traveler, and there is one specific reference to Benjamin de Tudela - this time he is a refugee sailor eyeing women's undergarments on a Jerusalem clothesline. The poem, written in the aftermath of the 1967 war between Israel and various Arab armies, is a surrealist *poema* that moves back and forth across time and geography while remarking about the speaker's relationship to his childhood, father, history, war, sex, love, Jewish ritual and liturgy, among many other things. The poem's speaker is split into the first, second and third person and as such complicates the definitive first person conventions of the fictional travel narrative as its been understood in literary historiography. As Chana Kronfeld has written:

By naming himself [the speaker] the last Benjamin of Tudela, he is acknowledging the other three; at the same time, this act of naming adds to the systematic blurring of the historical and the fictional, as well as to the upending of the generic distinction between poetry and prose.³⁵

Describing the speaker of the poem as being interested in the "archeology of the self," Kronfeld deploys the sharp image of geographic and historical "plates" shifting, and thus, the travel narrative is mapped onto the earth itself. The multifarious uses of "metaphorical collages" are apparent throughout the text, and the speaker is able to use the Hebrew language to freely associate images and words in a non-linear fashion, emphasizing the poem's overarching critique of experience and history as linear. One particular example of this sonic and linguistic playfulness is apparent in the beginning of the poem, when the speaker remarks:

...Render unto matter that which is matter's. Dust, dust,
from man though cam'st and unto man thou shalt return.../

³⁴ Yehuda Amichai, "Mas'ot Binyamin ha-Acharon mi-Tudela" in *Akshav Ba-Ra'ash: Shirim, 1963-1968* (Jerusalem: Shoken, 1968), 109, 114; *Selected Poems*, 67, 70.

³⁵ Chana Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 49-50.

*Shoulder to shoulder, flesh to flesh, dust to dust.*³⁶
(translation: Ruth Nevo)

In Hebrew, the allusion to Ecclesiastes is apparent, as is the sonic rhythm of walking, both towards death and the lover that appears throughout the poem. There is also an erotic force that calls to mind the liturgy of *Kabbolos Shabbes (me-afar kumi...)* which also couples an image of death with the welcoming of a bride. In contrast to the linear nature of the Hebrew travelogue, which relied on a stable “I”, the Last Benjamin of Tudela struggles with the limitations of autobiography in general, and thus allows for the autobiography to symbolize not only the development and memory of an individual, but of a community or the world in its entirety.

By evoking the persona of Benjamin of Tudela, the speaker also uses parody as a starting point for the technique of intertextuality. The numerous references to the liturgy of Yom Kippur emphasize the speaker’s attempts at locating parts of the self obscured over the course of time. These modernist techniques of fragmentation, both of the poet’s body and of the world surrounding the poet, place the poem both within the tradition of the Hebrew travelogue, and within the modernist tradition that critiques it.

In other places, this surrealist poem also maps travel onto the human body itself. In erotic parts verse, the speaker couples images of ancient antiquities, an interest on Benjamin de Tudela, with the “discovery” of the body’s form. Thus, Amichai’s *poema* can be read as a modernist disruption of the travel narrative as a site where the linear development of history and the self is destabilized. In contrast to Benjamin de Tudela, and in an attempt to reinvent a tradition that begins with him, the speaker of Amichai’s poem travels to many places at many times simultaneously, creating a metaphorical collage that both complicates the notion of travel and speaks to the gap between reality and fantasy, history and the self, and home and exile.

Jewish Atlantic: Vilne, New Orleans, Kiev, Cape Town, New York.

This dissertation is about the formation of modern Jewish subjects by the large-scale transformation of Ashkenazi Jews from Europeans to non-Europeans, a process that reached significant momentum beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. Focused on the literature and culture of Yiddish-speaking Jews, it describes how the increased familiarity with new modes of literary travel forms weakened the hold of traditional Ashkenazi Jewish society’s institutions and mores, which led to mass emigration. The choice to emigrate was not apolitical. Though it was never complete, the ascendance of emigration in its heyday invigorated a new social order that derived its legitimacy from entirely different ways of conceptualizing Jewish identity - from a structured, territorialized *Yiddishkayt* of rabbinic authority, ritual observance, and the vernacular to a more ethereal Ashkenazi individuality embedded in the colonial and racial contingencies of the Atlantic world.³⁷

³⁶ Yehuda Amichai and Ruth Nevo, *Travels* (New York City: Sheep Meadow Press, 1986), 16.

³⁷ I am intentionally indebted to Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*, which has produced a wide range of scholarship related to the circulation of culture between Africa, Europe and the Americas, in modernity. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Edmund Gordon and

Race and modern Jewish self-understandings are intimately linked. The linkage is explored here as a complicated, globalized dialectic that has existed for centuries. Against a prevailing view, I argue that Jewish receptions of colonial, racial language and racism emerged out of and as responses to a *longue durée* cultural revolution. This revolution was based in the cultivation of empirical sensibility and feeling amongst Eastern European Jews, rather than solely through the popularization of rational, scientific argument. The Atlantic world and the Yiddish creative intelligentsia immersed in rabbinic travel literature prove crucial to describing this revolution. Atlantic forms of race and racist representation, as they existed in Jewish literature and culture, were both a symptom of modernity and a source of modernization. This transformed a traditional Ashkenazi Jewish society, dominated by a pious elite, into its modern European Jewish variant possessing indeterminate forms of authority, language, and collective difference.³⁸

The first chapter examines the first Yiddish adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Vilna, 1868), retitled *Slavery or Serfdom*, by Isaac Meir Dik. I show how the *maskilic* author's rereading of rabbinic slave laws transformed Stowe's sentimental novel of Christian abolitionism into a political travel report about the ethical superiority of Jewish over Christian slaveholding practices, and thus the socio-political benefit of Jewish emigration to the United States. Tracing this transformation from the margins to the center of Yiddish culture, between 1860 and 1910, the first section of my dissertation analyzes this central literary overture to mass migration. Yiddish, in contrast to Hebrew, offered a stylistically pliant medium for Atlantic and racial language to be disseminated to all segments of Jewish society. It shows how Yiddish-language Enlightenment (השכלה, *haskole*) literature revamped the rabbinic travel narrative form by patterning religious and political "journeys" that reconfigured Judaism as a response to the racial indeterminacies of the Atlantic world.³⁹

The changes in the Yiddish adaptation are significant. Dik changes Uncle Tom's Christian owners to Jewish ones and seems to take an ameliorationist rather than abolitionist stance. At the conclusion of the novel, Uncle Tom is not martyred but lives as a free *ger toshav* [resident alien] with his family in a multiracial Jewish settlement in Canada. The author translates the politics of racial difference into Yiddish terms. This is done not only in his choice of subjects but also in some of his more unexpected aesthetic moments—scenes and images that reveal, ever so subtly, changing attitudes about the Slavic peasant population that assert non-rabbinic Judaism as a political and cultural force. While the author never traveled beyond the Pale and was not writing first-hand *about* the American South, he introduced readers to black Americans *through* his reception of American literary style, which was (and continues to be)

Mark Anderson, "The African Diaspora: Towards an Ethnography of Diasporic Identification," *Journal of American Folklore* 112, 1999: 282-96. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Redicker, "The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3, 1991; Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry* 26, 2000. Herman Bennett, "The Subject in the Plot: National Boundaries and the History of the Black Atlantic," *African Studies Review*, 2000, 43: 101-24; Jacqueline Nassy Brown. "Enslaving History: Narratives on Local Whiteness in a Black Atlantic Port," *American Ethnologist* 2000, 27: 34-70.

³⁸ Amos Bitzan, *The Problem of Pleasure: Disciplining the German Jewish Reading Revolution, 1770-1870*. (PhD. Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011).

³⁹ See appendix for an annotated translation of Dik's original preface to the translation. Isaac Meir Dik, "Slavery or Serfdom." Translated by Eli Rosenblatt. *In geveb* (November 2015): Accessed Mar 20, 2017.

shaped by racially stratified English vernaculars.⁴⁰ By translating “slavery” as “serfdom” on the title page, he voices his intent to expose his readers to the politics of newly emancipated serfs, whose image he casts sympathetically onto Harriet Beecher Stowe’s enslaved characters—Tom the pious field hand, Topsy the sensual child-minstrel, Eliza the domestic servant and George, the folk intellectual.

The second chapter is positioned in dialogue with the first chapter, and traces the development of Lithuanian (ליטוואק) Yiddish in Southern Africa. I focus on the development of Yiddish literary modernism, which first appears in the midst of the South African War (1898-1902) and culminates in the reappearance of Yiddish as a language of white resistance in the Apartheid era (1941-60). I analyze biblical and rabbinic intertextuality in the Yiddish literature of Southern Africa, especially as it relates to the uses of the Hebrew Bible, both thematically and structurally, in the English literature of the country. This reading aims to suggest a Jewish space between Africanist and Europeanist readings of the South African past. In turn, I provide the first attempt at an Africanist reading of Jewish literature theorized from within Southern African Yiddish texts.⁴¹

I argue for this new reading through three paradigmatic Yiddish rewritings of the rabbinic parable (משל). The first, Yankev Azriel Davidson’s *Afrikaner Hagode* (Cape Town, 1912), rewrites the Passover Haggadah as an “exodus in reverse” taken by two Lithuanian Jews from the Pale to the newly built mining camps outside Johannesburg. I pay particular attention to how the Israelite slave in Egypt impresses upon the South African Jewish emigrant both social alterity and political power; imagining the Jewish migrant in Africa as a Europeanized Israelite freedman reverting to enslaved status. The second section closely reads Dovid Fram’s dirge, *Matumba*, (Vilna and Johannesburg, 1937) as a modernist rewriting of rabbinic martyr narratives (עשרת מלכות הריוג מלכות). Daniel Boyarin and Naomi Seidman have, for example, examined the historical and discursive link between the colonial missionary project and European anti-Semitism.⁴² I demonstrate how *Matumba* enriches our understanding of this correlation by representing the central protagonist’s hanging by colonial police as Jewish martyrdom by a Roman hangman. The concluding section reads Nekhemye Levinsky’s *Children* (קינדער) (Orange Free State, 1920) in the light of Tractate Avoda Zara. Levinsky’s short story, which contains no Jewish characters, reconstructs idol worship parables in colonial African space and time. By sublimating colonial racism in the violent relationship between an Afrikaner boy and his Sotho companion, Levinsky frames the broad and complex feeling of racism in the form of Talmudic stories. When

⁴⁰ I want to emphasize here that I am speaking specifically about something *other* than scientific discourse about race. I am drawing a distinction between scientific racism and a more empirical, material sense of racial difference. See John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-De-Siecle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); “Images of the Jewish Body: Three Medical Views from the Jewish Enlightenment,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*. 69.3 (1995): 349-66.

⁴¹ Though Yiddish-language materials were widely available, there are few studies that include and describe the role Yiddish played in the development of South African literature more broadly. Reasons for this are debated from two different vantage points: A. C. Jordan, *Towards an African Literature: The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Chana Kronfeld, *On The Margins of Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁴² Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Homosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

recognized, these three forms of rabbinic intertextuality--the Haggadah, rabbinic martyrology, and idol worship parables--mark a new empirical space that includes Yiddish within the single, multilingual literature of South Africa.

In addition to using the Atlantic as an analytic category, my work brings several other new literary critical approaches to bear on the Jewish travel narrative, Yiddish reading practices and intellectual culture, and the Jewish experience in modernity. Specifically, I draw on recent work on Atlantic slavery and colonialism and older scholarship on the Jewish travel narrative to revisit the ties that bind modern Jewish literature across the oceans, but also between Ashkenazi and Sefardi Jewry, and the early modern and modern periods.

These approaches from Atlantic and Jewish studies come together in my analysis of emigration -- rather than immigration -- as an experience to be remembered and represented; a process was often first conceptualized and refined while reading. I am interested in the part that these twin practices of reading and feeling played in the transformation of traditional Eastern European Jewish society into its permutation as an Atlantic culture, even before Ashkenazim arrived in the Americas. I argue that the urge to live elsewhere figured first as a defining problem of modernity in the culture from which they emerged. Ironically, the ranks of those wary of or opposed to emigration were populated in part by those who had themselves emigrated. Particularly for the latter, the immersion of young people in non-European, often “creolized” societies could portend the disappearance of the individual and community, the Jew and the Jews, or be the very source of its moral and experiential vitality.⁴³

At the heart of this dissertation is the theory that modernity in the history of the West, conceived in its broadest terms, can be characterized as the multiplication of opportunities for the individual’s pursuit of living elsewhere and the proliferation of discourses at once legitimating and circumscribing this pursuit. The focus of this study is a very particular set of spatial movements – ones which seem to take place first almost entirely, at least at first, in the mind and sensorium of the reader.

This study offers a new interpretation of modern Yiddish literature by linking its origins and development to a geopolitical paradigm shift in sensory experience between Eastern Europe and the Atlantic world. Building on recent works about the popularization of colonial and racial knowledge among Ashkenazi Jews, I foreground a burgeoning public of Ashkenazi Jewish men and women considering emigration. Though sensitive to important discontinuities, this project argues for a model of continuity - the travel narrative form - to explain the appearance of race and racism in the cultural history of the Jews. In so doing, I suggest an alternative to perhaps the last traveler Benjamin: Walter Benjamin- and his view of modernity as representing a dramatic break in the history of the Jews and within Jewish collective memory.⁴⁴ However, I do not argue for the importance of Benjamin’s mysticism in his historical consciousness. Rather, I try to reconstruct the cultural context he sought, traveling over the Pyrenees range, through the travel narrative form conceived much more broadly and ultimately of crucial significance to the study of Jewish modernization.

⁴³ Laura A. Leibman, *Messianism, Secrecy, and Mysticism: A New Interpretation of Early American Jewish Life* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012).

⁴⁴ See for example, Walter Benjamin’s addendum to “On the Concept of History,” Dennis Redmond trans., *Gesammelten Schriften I:2* (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1974).

Part One: Rabbi and Slave: Isaac Meir Dik's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in Yiddish

Duppy know who fi frighten.

- Jamaican proverb¹

This chapter examines the origins and lexicalization of racial terminology and concepts in Isaac Meir Dik's extended Yiddish preface and rewriting of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Dik rewrites Stowe's bestselling novel in Yiddish using widely available German translations. Renamed *Slavery or Serfdom*, the book appears in 1868, published by the youngest editor, Yosef Ruveyn, at the renowned Vilna-based Romm family of publishers.² Modeled on the voice of a Jewish itinerant preacher, Dik's narrator provides a lengthy preface to Stowe's fictional work.³ This traveling preacher (Maggid) paints a complex portrait of the United States - including an account of its settlement and its racialized social structure - framed by racial scientific discourse that had once been accessible only to a small group of male Hebraists.⁴ Dik's rewriting of Stowe's novel must be contextualized as modeled on the genre of a *travel account* of the United States. The travel account was the most widely printed and disseminated form of first person prose narrative in the pre-modern realm of Ashkenazi literary discourse.⁵ This text is not an actual travel account, but a literary fictional use of the genre.

¹ "A ghost knows whom to frighten." Hugh Hodges, *Soon Come: Jamaican Spirituality, Jamaican Poetics* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 75.

² Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Or, Life Among the Lowly* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Company, 1852); Isaac Meir Dik, *Di Shklaveray, Oder, Di Laybegenshaft* (Vilna: Romm, 1868).

³ For example, Dik reflected on his use of Yiddish rather than Hebrew in the extended Preface to a Hebrew-language play. "I degraded the honor of my pen to recount an abundance of diverse stories in *yidish-taytsh*, the vernacular now spoken, to our shame and sorrow, among our people dwelling in the land (Lithuania, Poland, Byelorussia). I wrote them for the benefit of the daughters of our people who have eyes only for the Yiddish [translation of the] Pentateuch, which is written in a stumbling tongue and wherein unseemly passages can be found that should never be uttered by the mouths of pious women and maidens." Isaac Meir Dik, Preface to *Machazeh mul machazeh* (Warsaw, 1861) quoted in Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 20-21.

⁴ Recent studies have examined Atlantic racial discourse in Jewish enlightenment literature. See Iris Idelsohn Shein, *Difference of a Different Kind: Jewish Constructions of Race During the Long Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵ Marcus Moseley notes that the "travel account," often read as a form of autobiography, was the mostly widely printed first person prose narrative form in Sefarad as well. One need only to examine the printing history of the 9th century Eldad ha-Dani, he writes, to understand the massive popularity of the form across the Jewish diaspora. See Marcus Moseley, *Being For Myself Alone: Origins Of Jewish Autobiography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 179-85.

The maggid-narrator says almost nothing about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as literature, but provides ethical instruction and historical background in a dense and disarrayed mix of humanistic concerns, racial theorizing, and rabbinic prooftexts. Dik's changes to Stowe's novel are significant. He changes Uncle Tom's Christian owners to Jewish ones and appears to take an ameliorationist rather than abolitionist stance toward the institution of slavery. At the conclusion of the novel, Uncle Tom is not martyred but lives as a free *ger toshav* [resident alien] with his extended family in a Jewish settlement in Canada. This departs from Stowe's original plot in two fundamental ways. First, the Yiddish Uncle Tom is not a Christian martyr as in Stowe's original. Second, the remaining black characters do not "return" to West Africa as Christian colonists, but instead settle in an autonomous Jewish settlement in French Canada with their former owners.

The ethical superiority of Jewish slaveholding practices over Christian ones is at the heart of Dik's plot revisions. Jewish masters are refined and humane, but not *inherently* so. Rather, rabbinic slave laws moderate Jews in their state of nature, in Rousseau's sense.⁶ In contrast, Christians appear as chaotic and uncivilized in their pursuit of human chattel. When a slave is portrayed as rebellious or disobedient, his condition of being "without religion" (*ohne gloybn*) is blamed. When a slave is a Christian, he appears as passive and meek. Jews are portrayed as white slave-owners who stand not for the abolition of slavery, but for compassionate ownership guided by ethical customs based in rabbinic law.⁷ Ultimately, this law ceases to be relevant when the slave converts to Judaism on his own accord and he is manumitted in the Jubilee year.

Dik is representing here not only the horrors of the African slave trade, but also debates about Jewish emancipation. The debate over Jews' fitness for emancipation was deeply shaped by racial politics of difference. For example, as John Efron as observed, some Jews took up the terms of European race science in order to disprove claims of Jewish racial inferiority. In asserting the congruent racial identity of European Jews and Christians, Dik's writing ought to be seen as an aesthetic response to broader debates about Jewish distinctiveness in modernity.⁸ When he contrasts the conduct of Jewish and Christian slave-owners as evidence that modernity - in this case the slave trade - disrupts man in his state of nature, Dik asserts the white racial identity of the Ashkenazi Jew.

Through the application of Jewish law as a corrective to the brutality of American settlement and slavery, Dik translates the politics of American racism into Yiddish terms, not only in his choice of subjects but also in some of his more unexpected aesthetic moments—scenes and images that reveal, ever so subtly, changing attitudes toward the recently emancipated serfs.⁹ Dik was not writing *about* race, blackness or black Americans per se, but

⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Maurice Cranston, *A Discourse on Inequality* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1984), 44.

⁷ It is important here to note the historically precise meaning of "abolitionism." Abolitionism is the movement to end slavery unconditionally and immediately. It should be distinguished from "anti-slavery" activism, which could argue for a *gradual* approach to the emancipation of the enslaved. This gradualism is referred to as "amelioration" and involves the construction of an apprenticeship system. This system was employed in the British Empire, for example Guyana, after the Emancipation Act of 1833. See Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 131-34.

⁸ John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-De-Siècle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 175-85.

⁹ I am indebted to Alan Tansman for helping me think through this idea.

rather *through* his reception of American culture's aesthetics and form, which was (and continues to be) stratified racially. By translating "slavery" as "serfdom" on the title page, he voices his intent to expose his readers to the new politics of the European peasantry, whose image he projects onto Stowe's enslaved characters of African descent—Tom the pious field hand, Topsy the sensual child-minstrel, Eliza the chaste domestic servant and George Harris, the folk-intellectual. For Dik, the "Black Atlantic" served as both an exotic, colonial panorama rooted in Jewish travel narrative and a place where new aspects of Jewish difference emerge.¹⁰

Uncle Tom's Cabin at Home and Abroad

Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life among the Lowly is a nineteenth-century melodrama of violence, emotional torment, Christian devotion, broken families, and surprising reunions. The plot in brief: The slave Uncle Tom is sold away from his cabin and family on the Shelby plantation in Kentucky; After saving a drowning white girl named Eva St. Clare, Tom is purchased by her father Augustine St. Clare in Louisiana, after which he is sold after their deaths. Tom lands at the Legree plantation on the Red River in Louisiana. There, he is lashed to death rather than betray two runaway slaves. Meanwhile some slaves escape (famously, Eliza across the frozen Ohio River) and reunite with long-lost relatives. Others kill their children and commit suicide. The white characters discuss politics and religion. The characters weep along with the readers at numerous sentimental plot twists.

The tone of "providential history" carries over into Dik's translation. New England Puritans and other Protestant nonconformists popularized this genre, which as Sacvan Bercovitch explains, is a mode of Christian storytelling that resists rather than reveals history.¹¹ In this tradition, Dik's narrator sets down the events of the time in a Jewish literary form close to providential history: the Yiddish and Hebrew travel account. This genre allowed for readers and their descendants to understand the role of the depicted events in the broader link between human beings and the cosmos. We could apply to Dik's narrator what Alice C. Crowley writes of Stowe: "...she speaks with the prophets of old, reminding the nation of its historical commitments, recording its present struggles, warning of the impending wrath of the Almighty if the nation should betray its covenant and destiny."¹²

Uncle Tom's Cabin has emerged over the past half-century as a "leviathan" of American literature.¹³ With this critical revival apparent, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has in the past few decades become a central text through which scholars explore the chaos, contradictions and complexities

¹⁰ There are a few ways to demarcate or identify Dik's subject: America, The United States, or the Americas, the New World, or even the American South. I borrow Paul Gilroy's term the "Black Atlantic" because it better emphasizes the wider, trans-oceanic circulation of radical heterogeneity and difference. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 1-19.

¹¹ See, for instance: Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Volume 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 242-43; Barbara Hochman, "Uncle Tom's Cabin at the World's Columbian Exposition," *Libraries and Culture* 41:1 (Winter 2006), 82-108; John MacKay, *True Songs of Freedom: Uncle Tom's Cabin in Russian Culture and Society* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

¹² Alice Crozier, *The Novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 6-7.

¹³ Cindy Weinstein, *The Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

of race, gender, politics, and class. In contrast to the male-centered narratives of *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn*, Stowe's novel focuses on the experience of female characters. Like Melville, Stowe evokes the high status of the Bible in daily life, and through Stowe's reconstruction of American Christianity in the life of the enslaved, the Jewish translator reconstructs rabbinic Judaism. This challenge is based in differing hermeneutics. Whereas Stowe framed the pain of the enslaved in terms of Christ's suffering, Dik focuses on the sense of injustice done to the slave in the absence of fair laws. Dik reframes the question in rabbinic terms: If the slave of a Christian flees to a Jewish town or estate, are the townspeople required to return him to his Christian master? To phrase it differently and in the terms of European Jewish emancipation, what exactly were Jews before they were "white?"

Stowe's novel has struggled to be classified. Many twentieth century critics have argued that Stowe's critique of slavery is ultimately complicit in the racial structures it seeks to undermine. Most famously, James Baldwin relegated Stowe's protest to the dustbin by arguing that the docile nature of a passive Christian undermined the subversive character of the novel.¹⁴ For more than two decades, scholarship on Stowe has more sympathetically redrawn her as a multidimensional figure. In an effort to move beyond a critical paradigm in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is either dismissed or transcendent, Cindy Weinstein considers Stowe as a web of contradictions – "progressive, romantic racialist, social reformer, closer reader, litigant, Christian, regionalist." (6)

Since the middle of the 1980s, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* garnered attention in feminist literary criticism and African-American studies. Ann Douglas, in her pioneering work *The Feminization of American Culture*, argues that Stowe's sentimental stance rests on the rejection of her father's masculine, emotionally restrained Calvinism.¹⁵ It was through a process of "feminization" that Stowe articulated the political power of language. Jane Tompkins has argued that Stowe's sentimental novel must be seen outside the context of Melville, Twain and other central writers of the nineteenth century; Stowe's novel must not be read for the familiar characteristics of stylistic intricacy or psychological study, but rather as a political enterprise – a form somewhere between "social theory and sermon" that both codifies and attempts to shift cultural attitudes.¹⁶ Much recent criticism thus pivots off the nature and structures of this enterprise, with Douglas arguing that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* represents "the political sense obfuscated or gone rancid, while Jane Tompkins argues that Stowe's novel was a "monumental effort to reorganize culture from a woman's point of view."¹⁷ Michael T. Gilmore presents a particularly constructive historicization of Stowe's novel. By demonstrating how antebellum fiction was marked by a fascination with the power of words to effect social change, Stowe joins Poe, Thoreau, Melville and Hawthorne in inventing the tradition of American revolutionary and evangelical rhetoric. Doubled rhetorics were used to close a negatively perceived abyss between aesthetics and actions in the social world. Stowe's novel in particular strives to join "The Word" of scripture with the act of

¹⁴ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 12-24.

¹⁵ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 245-47.

¹⁶ Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 126-27. See also Sara Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, cited in Weinstein, 8.

abolitionist protest.¹⁸ Thomas Gosset has also shown how Stowe's characters have been widely appropriated in the United States and abroad, and have influenced thinking about race, region, religion and gender.¹⁹ Thus, "Uncle Tom" can evoke widely contradictory feelings of respect, rejection or betrayal.

The history and cultural significance of transatlantic influences has recently come to bear on studies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe, though seen primarily through the lens of American culture, was the most internationally successful American writer of her time. The notion of "American Literature" was itself not an established presence, nor were European critics convinced that American culture could distinguish itself from European literature. In fact, there still exists in American studies of Stowe an implicit ideology that American authors should be defined in opposition to European literary models. However, as Denise Kohn has explained, Stowe ought to be seen, along with many female authors of the nineteenth century, as a *transatlantic writer*. Her European travel narrative *Sunny Memories in Foreign Lands* expresses a familiar appreciation for European literature, in particularly the work of Byron and Dickens.²⁰ As the British editions outsold the American ones, discussion of Stowe's novel turned to explicit critiques of American culture against the orderly "undoing" of slavery in the empire. As Sarah Meer explains, Stowe introduced Europeans to African-Americans and later represented these encounters for American readers in travel reports from the European continent. In this sense, Stowe herself played a significant role in "creolizing and syncretizing" the cultural landscape or circuits that Gilroy calls "The Black Atlantic" in the nineteenth century.²¹

In the Russian Empire, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was printed in fifty-seven editions between 1857 and 1917. Over seventy separate editions appeared in twenty-one different Soviet languages. After World War Two, as John MacKay explains, around three million copies were printed. MacKay further divides the earliest layer of Uncle Tom in Russia into two categories. The first, as a novel published three years prior to the legal emancipation of the serfs, when it functioned as a politically subversive and thus as contraband, and, the second after the emancipation of the serfs, when it served as a Christian pedagogical tool. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* thus compelled the early Russian intelligentsia to reflect on the similarities and differences between Russia and America through the prism of slavery.

Russia can certainly be understood as distant and unrelated to the Atlantic World. Yet after Russia's defeat of Napoleon in 1812, and the expansion of conflict in the Pacific, Baltic and Black Seas, Russian literary circles and the upper classes were drawn into the Atlantic and Western European cultural sphere. Early Russian critics thus are interested in Stowe's analytical power, and her ability to articulate the tensions between master and slave. Her command of the sensorium and ability to make readers weep intrigued a variety of Russian intellectuals. Though serfdom and slavery were distinct, there was no Russian south to secede from the North, and there was little to no free press in Russia, Russian intellectuals continued to debate "the peasant

¹⁸ Michael T. Gilmore, "Stowe: From the Sacramental to the Old Testamental" *The War on Words: Slavery, Race, and Free Speech in American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 102-30.

¹⁹ Thomas F Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 290-97.

²⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (Boston, Mass: Phillips, Sampson, and Co, 1854), 284.

²¹ Weinstein, *Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe*, xxiv.

question.” One source sums up the potential impact of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* during the reign of Tsars Nicholas and Alexander:

The fear is freely expressed and appears to be generally entertained that serious trouble may arise and blood may be shed; as an indication of this feeling, remonstrances have been made that a translation into Russian of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” now in press should not be permitted to be published, for as a French translation has for a long time been in the hands of the educated classes, the issue of the one in question is looked upon purposely incendiary and calculated to mislead the peasantry into the idea that they are no better circumstanced and treated than the slaves in America.²²

This missive from the American consul in Moscow shared Turgenev’s sentiment that Stowe’s novel was a “Russian book.” Sharing a certain pessimism with Stowe, Turgenev thought of Stowe’s novel as a structured, analytical argument against serfdom.²³ Stowe was not relaying the particularities of African-American bondage, but rather a larger, universal structure (here the absence of law). Other Russian intellectuals characterized *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a book that described universal human phenomena, while at the same time recognizing the striking similarities between Russian and American scenes. In one formulation, Russian intellectuals in the mid-nineteenth century identified with American planter gentlemen. The nobility in America and Russia were similarly Europeanized, while their human property was fundamentally different, with Russian serfs faring much better. Overall, however, translations of and criticism relating to Stowe’s novel were largely concerned with the applicability of Stowe’s critique of her own society to their own.²⁴ The United States was both geographically distant and conceptually influential, especially its well-known structure of racism.²⁵

Race in Yiddish Translation

The genealogy of my interest in the Jewish reception of racial language begins with Talal Asad’s notion that cultural translation is always linked with power, and that translation, at least

²² Letter from Francis Claxos, American consul in Moscow to Secretary of State Lewis Cass, qtd. in Norman Saul, *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763-1867* (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1991), 24.

²³ John MacKay, “The first years of Uncle Tom’s Cabin in Russia” *Transatlantic Stowe* ed. Denise Kohn, Sarah Meer, and Emily B. Todd. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 67-80.

²⁴ John MacKay, *Four Russian Serf Narratives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), i-xxii.

²⁵ Jo-Ann Morgan, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin as Visual Culture* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 41-52.

in the anthropological sense, is also an act of subject formation.²⁶ This emphasis on the translator and translated as subjects is further developed by Tejaswini Niranjana.²⁷ Translation itself is also a form of “containment” and this containment imparts “overarching concepts of reality and representation,” which support the hegemony of the translation. “These concepts,” according to Niranjana “...occlude the violence that accompanies the construction of the colonial subject.” Translation in its colonial contexts becomes both a representation of the source and a mask for the sinister aspects of the colonizer-colonized relationship. *Siting Translation* thus argues that translation theory has taken on an overly mythical sense of its mission, and in the search for new “transcendental fidelity” between the translation and its source, the political conditions under which translation occurs have been too often ignored.

Niranjana formulation of colonial translation forces us to think about the political conditions under which Jewish translator’s adapted Western European literature in Yiddish and other Jewish languages. There was little to no acknowledgement in Dik’s translation that its Yiddish iteration would be faithful to Stowe’s original. On the contrary, Dik departs from her narrative arc in bold startling ways. This is problematic because it calls into question the “Jew as colonized” model. , Dik’s mode of Yiddish translation is a counter-model to Niranjana. In the case of Dik’s translation of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, he has set out to “civilize” the Christian text, rather than civilize his audience through a faithful translation of the original. For Jewish translators like Dik reread their own sources as a form of resistance against the Christian hegemon. Niranjana thus encourages a reading of the Yiddish Uncle Tom as a “talking back” to a Christian (rather than colonial) society in which Jewish identity was increasingly described in racial, colonial terms. These racial terms, translated into Yiddish, mirrored but oftentimes differed crucially from their meaning in the original English or German.

Thus, translation is an inherently political act, and in its colonial context, one cannot speak more of translation under the control and within the parameters of the colonial system. Padma Rangarajan reads Niranjana's understanding of translation as “monophonic.”²⁸ Positing that a monophonic model of a “hegemonic” translation lacks flexibility, Rangarajan argues that native texts and native peoples are not always silent or complicit in the process of translation, and that translation as an effect of colonialism does not take into account the varied ways in which translations help natives reread their own sources, nor the diverse and sometimes contradictory effects in which the translation of native texts has on the lives and experiences of translators. Niranjana does not take into account “the Oriental Renaissance” – or the cultural revolution in Europe facilitated by the mass translation of non-European texts.²⁹

This pioneering work in (postcolonial translation studies has garnered a response in Jewish literary studies. According to Naomi Seidman, reinscribing the relations between Jews and non-Jews as that of the colonized and the colonizer can be instructive in understanding the

²⁶ Talal Asad, “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology,” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: a School of American Research Advanced Seminar*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 141-64.

²⁷ Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

²⁸ Padma Rangarajan, *Imperial Babel: Translation, Exoticism, and the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 11-12.

²⁹ Raymond Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

social and political power of Jewish translation. Enlightened Jewish translators become “native agents” for the cause of German culture. Thus Mendelssohn’s *Biur*, a German translation of the bible, is the native agent’s attempt at civilizing the Jews, of making Hebrew a “handmaiden” to German. On the other hand, she views the bible translation of Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber as an act of colonial resistance why working to make the German translation of biblical Hebrew sound and appears as foreign and unassimilable.³⁰

There are limitations to this approach; by gravitating the Jewish masses toward the identity of the colonized, Christianity and Judaism are presented as the foundational opposition. As Naomi Seidman has written in response to Niranjana’s description of colonial translation, Jews can also complicate the distance between the colonizers and colonized as the internal colonized of Europe. In this scheme, it is Jews who are coerced in the process of Emancipation. Seidman demonstrates further how Jewish emancipation remained incomplete, especially in the realm of sexual relations. Seidman describes the modernizing intellectual class of Maskilim as kinds of native agents who mimic the colonizer’s culture, acting as its translator. In Nirinjana’s formulation, these translators embody the fraught politics of colonial translation in the center of Europe.

There is a sense in which this placement of Eastern European Jews in the colonial paradigm fixes their relationship to the European colonizer. This obscures the web of social and political relations that characterized the Jew in the scheme of local hierarchies, which were often delimited first by language and then, increasingly by racial and religious difference. This also constructs an artificial distinction between the maskilic writer as a native agents and his readers, who were mostly other maskilim. However, the role of Yiddish during the Haskalah allows us to chart the effects of these “native agents” on the mass of Jewish readers, who devoured a Yiddish literature increasingly preoccupied with emigration, and thus the concurrent issue of European colonialism in all its varieties. This work also lays the groundwork for examining the way in which the reception of European colonial and racial ideals influenced how Jewish-non-Jewish relations were represented in language. Thus, the translation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is not merely about the reception of racial ideas and the effects of the American Revolution upon European Jewish audiences, but also a story about how characters of African descent were translated and adapted into the literary frame of Slavic peasantry. Thus, the act of colonial translation extends its politics not only vis a vis Christian difference, but also vis a vis Jewish racial difference.

Ayzik Meir Dik, Jewish Readers, and the Russian Imperial Sphere

The literary critic and poet Abraham Yaakov Paperna portrayed the reach of Dik’s writing in the town of Kapulye (Kapył), Belorussia:

In the evening, over a glass of tea, I read aloud for the whole house. The success of the reading surpassed all expectations. Everyone listened attentively; even the maidservant remained

³⁰ Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

standing as if rooted to her place on the threshold between the kitchen and the dining room. All laughed and enjoyed themselves. Very quickly the little books spread over the town and everywhere made a great impression. From that time on Dik became extremely popular in Kapuli [sic]. His stories used to be snatched up. The names of his heroes were common names,³¹ some of his expressions pass over into everyone's mouth.

Paperna's description alludes not only to Dik as a writer, but also, as David Roskies has shown, to his status as a popular icon.³² Paperna's description of the "maidservant" captures the allure of Dik's narrator. The tensions between old and new economies are exemplified here by the maidservant "rooted" in the "threshold." Though we do not know if Paperna's maidservant is Jewish or Christian – the ambiguity is intentional – she is captivated like all others, perhaps even more so, by Dik's ostentatious attention to the socially liminal and economically disempowered characters in Jewish society, as in his popular story of a maidservant who becomes the head of a household (*Di Dinstmeydl, oder a Geshikhte fun Shiksals [The Maidservant, or a Twist-of-Fate Tale, 1866]*).

Dik is responsible for the modern revival of the travel narrative form in both his original prose fiction and translation. While there have been fruitful attempts to categorize Dik's travel, adventure and sea stories separately from his original prose fiction, such a distinction limits our full appreciation of his oeuvre as political as well as popular entertainment. As Eli Lederhandler writes in his article about America in nineteenth century Ashkenaz: "The urge to live elsewhere must...be reckoned a constitutive element of Jewish life and culture in Eastern Europe, reflecting both a perception of the local environment as inhospitable as well as an enduring, idealistic desire for a better life."³³ Categorizing some of Dik's works as "sea narratives" or "adventure narratives" misreads his more frequent tendency to parody - rather than reproduce - the sea, adventure, or captivity narrative. In fact, most of Dik's original fictions are framed as travel narratives, where Jews function both as "exotic" and obviously intimate subjects. It is my intention to show here that Dik was not a travel writer in any literal sense (There is no evidence he traveled beyond the Pale of Settlement.) He was rather a parodist of the travel narrative whose

³¹ Kapulye is the birthplace of Sholem Yankev Abramovich (Mendele Mocher Sforim). See Avraham Yaakov Paperna and P. Raski, *Zikhroynes* (Varshe: Farlag Tsentral, 1923), 45-47. Quoted in Israel Zinberg, *Zenith of the Haskalah* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1978), 89-90.

³² Almost every account of Dik notes the significance of his popularity. See David G. Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 58-97; "Isaac-Meyer Dik and the Rise of Yiddish Popular Literature," Dissertation Abstracts: Section A. Humanities and Social Science, 36 (1975); Dovid Katz, *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*. (New York: Basic Books, 2004), p. 199-200; Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised* (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1996), 3; Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 34, 294, 321.

³³ Eli Lederhandler, "America" in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. Hundert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

interest in the “New World” is artistically and politically grounded in local concerns, including the causes and effects of emigration.

Dik invented two types of travel-narrators, who sometimes coexist in one book. First, the itinerant *maggid* preaches about his implausible travels. He mediates and translates the knowledge that he gains elsewhere, translating his observations into the register of Torah “learning.” This type of narrator is present in the Preface to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* or in one of Dik’s more explicit exotica, such as *Di Vistenay Zahara* (The Desolate Sahara.)³⁴ The *shliach-narrator* reverses the scheme. The *shliach*, usually hails from a “civilized” area, and shares his account of Eastern European Jewish towns and cities. Dik frames this narrator as the source of the colonial travelogue translated into Yiddish. As Max Erik demonstrated in his study of the Haskalah, Dik’s second narrator is in fact a kind of mimic who distinguishes his voice through a self-educated Germanized Yiddish argot. his perceptive attention to the ethnographic subtleties of the shtetl economy give him both an air of distance, and a humorous and ironic closeness to his audience.³⁵ The *maggid-narrator* tells stories that illustrated the diffuse nature of Eastern European Jewish culture. Dik’s first *maggid* narrator represented non-Jews and in the process thematized differences between Jews and non-Jews, whereas his second narrator represented Jews from the perspective of an invented Christian explorer.

My broad argument here is that Dik struggled with the untranslatability of the colonial lexicon – that is, what he did not or would not translate into Yiddish was instead “rotated around the axis” of the text in the parodic tone of travelogue. This was the case with language that did not exist in Yiddish, which had not developed a scientific, geographic or ethnographic lexicon based in extra-biblical sources.³⁶ The terminology of racism, slavery, and colonialism in the Atlantic world were some of the most prevalently “rotated” discourses in Dik’s work, as they helped his readers make sense of the racism that existed in their own society. This “new world” lexicon, and the concepts it relays, appear untranslated in works that concerned only Ashkenazi Jewish characters. For example, in *Di Broder Agune*, the narrator describes a “Hottentot” coming-of-age ceremony in the Cape Colony as a bar mitzvah.³⁷

Biographical Data

Isaac Meir Dik was born in Vilna in 1807. According to Y. Rivkind, he was the descendant of Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller, a disciple of the Maharal of Prague.³⁸ Dik’s father was a cantor in “Zavl’s Synagogue,” one of two large synagogues to be built beyond Vilna’s central synagogue courtyard.³⁹ Rivkind notes that Dik’s father was a grain merchant and that Dik learned this business in his youth. Dik married early in the town of Zhupron (Župrany), which he

³⁴ Isaac Meir Dik, *Di Vistenay Zahara* (Vilna: Romm, 1868).

³⁵ Max Erik, *Etyudn Tsu Der Geshikhte Fun Der Haskole: 1789-1881* (Minsk: Melukhe-farlag fun Vaysrusland, Natssekte, 1934), 119-24.

³⁶ Tziona Grossmark, *Travel Narratives in Rabbinic Literature*, 1-15.

³⁷ Isaac Meir Dik, Paul Azaroff, and Lillian Schanfield, *The Women Shopkeepers, Or, Golde-Mine, the Abandoned Wife of Brod* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 30-31.

³⁸ Y. Rivkind, “I. M. Dik’s Biblyografishe Reshimes” *YIVO-Bleter* (New York) 36 (1952), 192-240.

³⁹ Zalmen Reyzen, “Ayzik-Meyer Dik,” in *Leksikon Fun Der Yidisher Literatur, Prese un Filologye, 2nd edition* (Vilna: Kletskin, 1929), vol. 1, col. 714.

described in his first work, a Hebrew short story titled *Zuprona*. His first wife died young and childless. Dik married a second time to the daughter of a prominent leaseholder in Nesvizh (Nesvyžius) affiliated with Koidanover Hasidim. Supported by his wealthy in-laws, Dik befriended a local Catholic priest who introduced him to German, Polish and Russian languages. There is a high possibility that this priest understood and embraced elements of the Protestant Reformation⁴⁰ Though there are no biographical sources to my knowledge that demonstrate yeshiva attendance or study under elite rabbis, it is clear from Dik's early Hebrew work that by the time of his return to Vilna in the mid-1830s, he had acquired considerable knowledge of Talmudic literature, as well as Kabbalistic writings.⁴¹

Around 1835, together with other maskilim in Vilna, he founded a literary circle. After a brief imprisonment by the authorities over his heterodox stance, Dik signed a covert memorandum with M. A. Gintsburg and Ben-Yankev Brosh, concerning the banning of traditional Jewish dress. He also communicated with the Russian Minister of Education Sergei Uvarov concerning the establishment of independent "Crown" Jewish schools. Dik taught Hebrew from 1851 to 1864 in one of these state financed institutions.⁴²

Dik also was instrumental in the founding of a new synagogue, *Tohoros ha-Kodesh*, though he did not take any official role in it. Shmuel Niger described Dik as a liminal figure in both rabbinic and enlightened circles:

Irrespective of his Enlightenment radicalism, he long retained older views and refused to adapt to the new-style "enlightenment" which lacked both wisdom and Torah. This was the reason that, when *Tohoros ha-Kodesh* became a synagogue not solely for the Enlightened but primarily for ordinary "empty aristocrats," he withdrew from it.⁴³

Dik's attempt to break through with Yiddish storybooks came after the termination of his job as a state-sponsored teacher. The precise chronology of Dik's literary output is hard to determine. Shmuel Niger links his return to Vilna from central Belarus to the beginning of his literary activities. However, if we correlate Dik's choice of subjects to his migrations, his first work was likely the Hebrew story *Zuprona*, which details the town in which he married his first wife. *Zuprona* appeared in print much later, in 1868, but bears few allusions to European models, preferring a variety of midrashic intertexts interlaced with philosophical reflection common to

⁴⁰ More work needs to be done on the intellectual contacts between local Protestants and maskilim. Reformed Church Parishes in Lithuania are in Vilnius, Biržai, Kėdainiai, Slutsk, Dzyarzhynsk (Koydanava), Zabłudów and later in Izabelin (Belarusian: Ізабэлін), see Albert Wardin, *Evangelical Sectarianism in the Russian Empire and the USSR: A Bibliographic Guide* (Philadelphia: American Theological Library Association, 1995), 15-25.

⁴¹ Ibid, 35.

⁴² Joseph Sherman, "Isaac-Meir Dik, Reformer through Fiction" in *The Jewish Pope: Myth, Diaspora and Yiddish Literature* (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2003), 83-87.

⁴³ Quoted in Sherman, *Isaac-Meir Dik, Reformer through Fiction*, 9; Isaac Meir Dik and Shmuel Niger, *Geklibene Verk* (New York: Tsiko, 1954), 7.

pre-modern Yiddish homiletics. Over twenty-five years, Dik writes a series of Yiddish story-books (*mayse-bikhlekh*) and several Hebrew articles, chapbooks and satires.⁴⁴ He writes his second Hebrew work, *Ha-Oreach* (The Guest), in 1846 and publishes it in Königsberg in 1860. Dik's serious debut in Enlightenment Hebrew periodicals arrives with a Talmudic parody entitled *Masekhes Aniyus* (Tractate on Poverty). Schneur Zaks published this work in his anthology *Kanfey Yona* (Dove's Wings) (Berlin, 1848) but did not attribute the work to Dik.⁴⁵ *Masekhes-Aniyus* is a scathing critique of the local Jewish economy in the form of a fictional tractate recovered by a Sephardic traveler in Ashkenaz. The interdependency of Hebrew and Yiddish is an important aspect of this work.

מסכת עניות

ס'ן

תלמוד רש עלמא

עם פירוש רש"ה ותוס'

נמצאת בעיר גוזל עיר מלאה עניים ואביונים.

ונסדרת ע"י הקבצן ראש הדלפנים רב עני הגדול.

ונחוסו בה תוספות חדושים והנחות מהגדו זקני הכסלים אשר
כלו כל ימיהם בקדוק עניות כבוד שם תפארתם נודע בכל
תפוצות ישראל.

According to Zalmen Reyzen, Dik began writing in Yiddish in the late 1840s and wrote no other significant Hebrew works. At this time, Dik found Warsaw Yiddish typesetters because publishing houses in Vilna were embroiled in controversy over the publishing of books censored by the city's rabbinic court. Noting his massive popularity on the Jewish street, in 1864 the prestigious publishing firm of Romm hired Dik to produce chapbooks for the Friday street markets. Romm paid weekly, perhaps the only such case in Yiddish literature at that time.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Solomon Liptzin, *A History of Yiddish Literature*. (Middle Village, N.Y.: J. David, 1972).

⁴⁵ For an annotated bibliography, see Y. Rivkind, "A. M. Diks Bibliografishe Reshimes", *YIVO-Bleter* (New York) 36 (1952), 192-240. David G. Roskies, "An Annotated Bibliography of Ayzik-Meyer Dik" (1980); "Yiddish Popular Literature and the Female Reader". *Journal of Popular Culture*. 10: 852-58; "The Medium and Message of the Maskilic Chapbook". *Jewish Social Studies*. 41 (3/4); "Ayzik-Meyer Dik and the Rise of Yiddish Popular Literature". *Dissertation Abstracts: Section A. Humanities and Social Science*. 36: 327A-28A; Shneur Zaks (Senior Sachs) was a Hebraist and editor of Hebrew periodicals in Paris and Berlin; see Zeitlin, *Bibl. Post-Mendels*. p. 326 et seq; Shmuel Verses. "A.M. Dik's Yiddish Translation of Erter's "Gilgul Nefesh" *Khulyot*. Number 2, 1994, pp. 29-49.

⁴⁶ It is for this reason Dik is often seen as the first "professional" Yiddish writer, see Sherman, "Dik, Ayzik Meyer" *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, <http://www.YIVOencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Dik_Ayzik_Meyer>.

Dik's early offerings for Romm include a variety of rabbinic compilations, usually from lesser-known midrashic sources, that mimic the tone of Yiddish bible commentaries.⁴⁷

One of Dik's earliest works is an anonymous Yiddish booklet titled "The Ten Tribes" (*Aseres Ha-Shvotim*). This chapbook retells in Yiddish the medieval traveler Eldad Ha-Dani's fantastic account of an autonomous Jewish kingdom along the banks of the legendary Sambatyon River. As an ethnographic report among the Persian speaking Jews of Iran and the Caucasus, the Lost Tribes become the parodic object of a Yiddish ethnographer.⁴⁸ *Maseches Aniyus*, which I mentioned above, is likewise framed as a travel account. The author of the tractate is said to have traveled to Ashkenaz from elsewhere and located this lost tractate among the "idle sages" of Ashkenaz. The position of the outsider looking in, and the power that the travel narrative gives to authenticate this stance, is Dik's position. This stance undergirds the variety of narrations present in subsequent Yiddish literature.

Dik's best known works are his original satirical stories. *Khaytsikl aleyh* (Khaytsikl Himself) (Vilna, 1887), 48 pp.; and "Yekele Goldshleger oder Yekele Mazltov" (Yekele Goldmine or Yekele Good-Fortune) (Vilna, 1859). Both are presented as travel accounts written by "Yosef Sturgis." This narrator is likely based on the radical Quaker anti-slavery activist Joseph Sturge. Sturge was Harriet Beecher Stowe's patron and host during her tours of Britain.⁴⁹ These two stories can thus be seen as the precursor to Dik's adaptation of Stowe, and perhaps an indication that he was exposed much earlier to anti-slavery discourse in Europe. As in *Maseches Aniyus*, Dik's narrator transposes Vilna as "Linove" and Lithuania as "Syria."⁵⁰ He imagines the city through Sturgis:

איינע גרויסע מעכטיגע שטאט לינאווע וואס געפינט זיך אין לאנד סוריא זאגט
דער הער ר' יוסף שטירגיס אין זיין רייזע בשרייבונג. וואש זיא ווערט אן
געריפן מיט דעם נאמען מסע במחנות העברים דאש הישט איינע רייזע איבר
דיא אידעשע שטעט...איך האב זיך בעקאנט גימאכט נאר מיט אירע
פארנעמסטע ליטן דאש הישט מיט אירי גרויסע סוחרים מופלגים אין
משכילים זייא זענן אלע זירע בראווע אין ערליך אין לעבין צווישן זיך זייער

⁴⁷ Roskies, *Bibliography*, 42.

⁴⁸ Isaac Meir Dik, *Di Aseres Ha-Shvotim* (Vilna: Dvorzets, 1866). This text, held by the Bavarian State Library, is misattributed to its censor, Yosef Estampe.

⁴⁹ Sturge wrote widely read travel accounts in Jamaica and the United States. In each, Sturge observed the condition of freed slaves, the effect of institutional racism on the economy, and the culture of white Europeans in multiracial societies. He published two critical studies of the United States in the decades leading up to the Civil War. See Joseph Sturge, and Thomas Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837: Being the Journal of a Visit to Antigua, Monsterrat, Dominica, St. Lucia, Barbadoes, and Jamaica: Undertaken for the Purpose of Ascertaining the Actual Condition of the Negro Population of Those Islands* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co, 1838); *A Visit to the United States in 1841* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co, 1842); with Frederick Douglass, *American Slavery: Report of a Public Meeting Held at Finsbury Chapel, Moorfields, to Receive Frederick Douglass, the American Slave, on Friday, May 22, 1846: with a Full Report of His Speech* (London: British Library, 1846).

⁵⁰ The midrashic literature counts the anagram a form of biblical interpretation, הפוך. Here the anagram functions more in a mock-Hasidic sense, as the transposition of letters is meant to transpose psychic realms.

שטיל און שלום זייא וואנגן זייער גראם אין ריין אין דער ציהן אירע קינדער
וויא די אראפיייער... די ממשלה איז מיט פארנעמסטע קלאסע מענטשן זייער
צו פרידן. און האפן אז זיי זאלן זיין צום בייא שפיל צו דיא איברגי יודן וואש
זיי זענין נאך כמעט אזייעטעס דאש הייסט האלב ווילד.

[‘The city of Linove, which I found in the land “Surya”, pleased me greatly,’ said Reb Yosef Sturgis, in his travel narrative. ‘I call the account [in Hebrew] *Journey to the Hebrew Camps*, which means a “Journey to the Hebrew Cities.” I became acquainted only with its civilized (*fornemste*) people, it’s great distinguished merchants and maskilim...they live amongst themselves in peace and tranquility and spaciouly and cleanly, and educate their children like Europeans...The government is very satisfied with the civilized class of people and hopes they will become an example to the rest of the Jews who are still all virtually Asiatics, that is, half-wild.’]⁵¹

Dik’s most well-known characters became internalized tropes in the popular culture of Lithuanian Jews through their representation as objects of ethnographic study.⁵² A “Yekele” became a metonym for the “half-Asiatic” and “half-wild” Jews dressed in the latest Berlin fashions. Since “Yekele” means literally a “little German Jew” and colloquially a self-styled maskil, this appears to be an ironic play directed at someone who, by the look him, owns a merchant ship.⁵³ As Israel Zinberg notes, however, Sturgis describes Yekele not as his own community sees him, but in paternalizing terms. Yekele, who at first is described as the sexton of a small synagogue, had been pressed into dishonest “brokering in maidservants.” Dik so consistently depicts the Yekele as a lowly spectator to civilization, that the audience pities his economic isolation. Yekele Goldshleger it seems, is so locked in primitive status that he’s convinced himself of his own success. He is cosmopolitan, but towards “the East.” “He even knows the language of Moldavia and the Gypsies.” the narrator adds.

When describing the wife of Dik’s archetype Reb Shmayer der Gut-Yontev Biter’s wife, he places her in a medieval Jewish traveler’s psychic space:

⁵¹ Quoted in Israel Zinberg, *Haskalah at its Zenith* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1978), 81. My translation, ER.

⁵² The Eastern European Jewish characters described by the Yiddish Sturgis mimic subvert the discourse of Eastern European as one “Orient.” See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁵³ Yekele has layers of meaning. In one sense, it is one northern Ashkenazi Hebrew pronunciation of Yankl [Standard Yiddish], or Ya’akov [Israeli Hebrew]. It is also a slang term for a German Jew, aka, a Jew who wears a short “jacket” in contrast to the Eastern European Jewish kaftan. A German Jew does not always designate an ethnically or culturally German Jew, but any Jew who has middle European pretensions.

She did not spin flax or wool, nor she did turn a wheel. She only turned her tongue. She prepared the Palestinian earth that she brought from the Holy Land, that is, six miles from Linove. On Shemini Atzeret and Simhat Torah she used to go with her husband to wish people a happy holiday. She was always talking about the patriarchs, the matriarchs, the Sambatyon river, and the vigil that stands at the cave of the Machpelah. In addition, she used to take contributions, pour wax and lead (to tell fortunes), and make a balm for a scabby head. She understood female matters. Through this she always had the opportunity to make herself *fleyshik*.⁵⁴

The woman's description captures the doubled psyche through satire. We begin by reading about this woman's pious deeds: going out to greet other Jews at the beginning of a festival, discussion of the biblical matriarchs, and so on. Then we realize quickly that her piety is expressed in spatial, territorial terms; she sanctifies local soil and speaks about the constant prayers being said at the tomb of the patriarchs. Another side of her piety is expressed through folk healing, much of it based presumably in the universally held local custom. Her penchant for fortune telling, solving fertility issues and skin conditions with traditional remedies is placed opposite Jewish practices. The symmetry structures the narrator's hard distinction between piety and superstition. The pious woman, relegated here to the narrator's determinations, justifies the stance of the narrator, who explains her character in the language of race science and ethnology - the "half-Asiatic / half wild" nature of the Jewish "native." As Dik's narrator explains in *Yekele Goldshleger* words, there is a chasm between the "European Jews" and their "half-wild" counterparts. However, they are part of the same group. The narrator, the would-be traveler-ethnographer is himself satirized by Dik, since he's unable to distinguish between piety and superstitious, criticizing both.⁵⁵

Biblical and Rabbinic Intertexts in Dik's Psychic Travels

Biblical and Rabbinic literature are integral to Dik's style. His first points of reference are the biblical wisdom literature. Quotations appear in Hebrew in Dik's publications, while in the Yiddish he often paraphrases, explains, or interprets them directly after the quotation. A common practice in Jewish discourse, and in the discourse of the *maggid*, this digressive citational style imparts the feeling of traditional Jewish learning. Dik claims in his Preface to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that "the shameful trade in human beings" began when Noah cursed Canaan and his son Ham, thus condemning him to slavery. He explains in Yiddish that slavery thus existed in human societies before the emergence of Israel. He writes that familiar 'holy tales' demonstrate that

⁵⁴ Dik, *Reb Shmaya Der Gut Yontev-Biter* (Vilna: publisher not identified, 1860), 27-28. Quoted in Max Weinreich, *Bilder fun der yidisher literatur-geshikhte* (Vilna, 1928), 292-330.

⁵⁵ I am grateful to Chana Kronfeld for helping me with this formulation.

Negroes (Moors) descend from Ham, and that over time the enslavement that affected only Africans came to spread over the “white man, who descended from Shem and Japheth.” “Holy tales” (*heyilige erzählungen*) refer to popular Old Yiddish texts, including the *Tsene-rene*, a commentary on the weekly Torah portion, and the *Mayse-Bukh*, a collection of didactic folktales, both of which make reference to Moors in various editions.⁵⁶

When Dik’s narrator mentions the names of Ham, Shem and Japheth, he is calling to mind a European philological discourse in which Noah’s sons were used to organize ethnological data, linguistics and geography around notions of biblical genealogy.⁵⁷ This idea of biblical ethnology is described as a “historical law.” (*Historischesrecht*) is contrasted with a “rational law” (*Vernunftrecht*). These terms also appear in Kant and by extension in the German enlightenment discourse of nature. As Tal Kogman has shown, Central and Eastern European maskilim adopted these ideas in part by reading German school textbooks.⁵⁸ *Philanthropismus*, which argues that children can be molded through experiential as well as book learning, influenced Dik and other maskilim to adopt a new Jewish pedagogical structure that emphasized the symmetry of a given dialectic. The Jew is interior and exterior - two halves unformed, in this view, but is essentially malleable into a symmetrical beauty. An idea akin to Locke’s *Tabula Rasa*, as Kogman formulates it, maskilim borrowed Philanthropists’ notion of “education toward bliss” as the intended goal of Jewish literature. On this basis, Dik rewrote Stowe’s anti-slavery novel as guidebook toward sensitive moral development, but also as a way of exteriorizing Judaism in the context of global politics. The contextualization of biblical and rabbinic exegesis in Jewish philanthropism allowed Dik to collapse the psychic distance between rabbinic Judaism and abiding interest in the causes and effects of newly popularized scientific racism. For example, when Dik’s narrator quotes Job in his Preface to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and then translates it into Yiddish using the workaday term for a domestic worker, he connects the universal nature of Job’s predicament to the recognizable ubiquity of maidservants in Jewish society:

אם אמאָס משפּט עבְדֵי וְאִמְתֵי בְרַבִּים עַמְדֵי: וּמָה אַעֲשֶׂה כִּי יָקוּם אֵל וְכִי יִפְקֹד מֶה אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ; הֲלֹא בִבְטָן עֲשֵׂהוּ וַיִּכְוֶנּוּ בְרַחֵם אֶחָד. דָּאָס הֵיִיסט אַזוֹי: הָאָב אֵיךְ דַּעַן פֿאַראַכטעט דָּאָס רַעכט פֿון מֵיין דִּינער און פֿון מֵינער דִּינערִין אֵין זֵיער רִיכטן זיך מִיט מִיר. דַּעַן אֵיךְ הָאָב בֵּי מִיר גַּעדענקט: וואָס וועל אֵיךְ טאָן ווען גאַט וועט זיך פֿאַר זיי אָננעמען, דַּעַן דער זעלביקער וואָס הָאָט מִיך געשאַפֿן הָאָט אִים געשאַפֿן? אֵיין מֵיסטער הָאָט אונדז אויסגעבִילדעט אֵין אֵיין מוטער־לייב?

[“If I did spurn the cause of **my slave, or of my handmaiden,**

⁵⁶ See, for example *Maisebuch*, 1702/03 (Frankfurt Am Main: Univ.-Bibliothek, 1999), “קסא ע”ב-קסא ע”. See appendix for a full translation of Dik’s preface.

⁵⁷ For example, in the way the nineteenth century Hungarian Jewish orientalist Ignaz Goldziher reexamined the Noah narratives. Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 123-27.

⁵⁸ Tal Kogman, “Jewish Maskilim Observe Nature: A Personal Story or a Literary Model of the Enlightenment?,” *Zion* 78 (2013), 379-93; “Intercultural Contacts in Haskalah Texts on Natural Sciences,” in *The Varieties of Haskalah*, ed. Israel Bartal and Shmuel Feiner (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005), 29-42.

when they contended with me, what then shall I do when God rises up? And when He remembers, what shall I answer Him? Did not He that made me in the womb make him? And did not One fashion us in the womb?" This means: Have I then scorned the right of **my servant and maidservant** to seek justice from me? But then I remembered: what will I do when God takes me to account? Did not the same one who created me create them? Did not one Master form us in our mother's womb?]⁵⁹

He includes a footnote that Job's slaves were not actually slaves, but servants and maids who work for monetary wages. He reads Job's language sympathetically, claiming that since he does not account for his servants the way that he accounts for his livestock - as numbers - his servants are not property. Job refers to his young male slaves as *ne'arim* - "boys." According to Dik's narrator, this means they were like his own children. Dik goes on to argue his central point: Since according to the Hebrew Bible all humanity descends from a single man, and are thus a human family, there was no moral or political justification for one human being selling another another as a beast, or in economic terms, as chattel. Just as the Torah inspires moral outrage when Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, modern slavery is positioned to provoke equal outrage.

In an argument against racial inequality, the narrator explains that human beings appeared in "many colors: white, black, brown and red" from a single original ancestor. This four color scheme is likely based on Carl Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* in which humanity is divided into "races." These Linnean races are "Europæus albus" (white European), "Americus rubescens" (red American), "Asiaticus fuscus" (brown Asian) and "Africanus niger" (black African). By formalizing the distinction among the continental populations of the world, his work helped clarify the concept of race.⁶⁰ In disseminating these ideas to his readers, Dik adds a footnote that further explains the concept of racial groups.

עס איז אַ גרויסער שטרײט צווישן די פֿיזיקער (חוקרי־הטבע) איבער די סיבה פֿון דעם מוריס שוואַרצקײט. אַ טײל זאָגן דאָס זײ זײנען געבוירן געוואָרן פֿון אײנעם אָן אַנדערן מין מענטשן. אַ טײל זאָגן דאָס זײ זײנען געוואָרן שוואַרץ נאָר דורך די זון וואָס ברענט דאָרט זײער שטאַרק אין אַפֿריקע וווּ זײ ווײנען דאָרט. און בײדע דעות זײנען נײט ריכטיק. די ערשטע דעה איז פֿאַלש ונײל די תורה דערצײלט נאָר פֿון אַ פֿאַר מענטשן. די אַנדערע דעה איז אויך נײט ריכטיק. מיר זעען דאָך דאָס אונדזערע יִדן ווײנען דאָרט אין אַפֿריקע אַזוי אַ צײט און זײנען דאָך ונײס. דאָהער איז אַמגלײכסטן צו האַלטן מיט דער דעה פֿון אונדזערע חכמים וואָס זאָגן דאָס ונײל דער פֿנען איז געבוירן געוואָרן אין דער תּבה, איז ער אַרויסגעקומען פֿון דער מוטער־לײב שוואַרץ. און דאָס איז ונײל אין דער צײט פֿון

⁵⁹ Job 31:14. Translations of biblical quotations are by Robert Alter.

⁶⁰ A prime example of the Enlightenment's influence in science is Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus' system of biological classifications in *Systemae Naturae*. See Carl Linnaeus, "Volume 1 Regnum Mammalia," *Systema Naturae*, 10th edition, (Stockholm: Laurentius Salvius, 1735).

דעם מבול וואָר אַ גרויסע צעשטערונג אין דער נאַטור. עס וואָר דאָן אַ דיקער טומאַן, קיין זונענשיין. און ווי אונדזערע חכמים זאָגן וואָרן דאָן געהעמט (אַפּגעהאַלטן) אַלע פּלאַנעטן (מזלות) אין זייער מהלך. נון האָט עס געוירקט זייער פֿיל אויף דעם פּנען דאָס ער איז ניט אַרויסגעקומען ווייס. דען זעט מען בחוש דאָס די זונשיין ווירקט זייער פֿיל אויף צמחים און בעלי־חיים, אויך די מורינען ווערן געבאַרן ווייס. ווערן אָבער אין עטלעכע טעג אַרום שוואַרץ. אַנדערע מורינען האָבן ווייסע הענט, ווייסע פֿלעקן אין געזיכט. דערפֿון איז צו לעזן אין מדרש תנחומא. (5)

[There is great disagreement among physiologists (natural scientists) over the reason for the Moors' blackness (*shvarts kayt*). One side argues that they are descended from another species of man. The other side argues that they have become black merely from the sun that burns strongly in Africa, where Moors live. Both opinions are incorrect. The first is false because the Torah tells us that humans descend from a single couple. The other opinion is also incorrect, because we see that Jews, who have lived in Africa for so long, are white. Thus, the most sensible seems to be the opinion of our Rabbis, who say that because Canaan was conceived in the ark, he came out black from his mother's womb. [BT Sanhedrin 108b] This is because in the time of the flood there was massive destruction in nature. Then there was a thick fog. The sun did not shine. As our sages say, all the planets then stopped their movement. This greatly affected Canaan, so much so that he did not come out of the womb white. One can see instinctively that the sunshine affects everything, plants and animals. Blacks are born white, but in some days [of darkness] become black. Other Moors have white hands, white blotches on their faces, about which we read in Midrash Tanhuma.”]

Here Dik provides a novel theory of racial difference in the language of natural science but cadenced in rabbinic dialogue. Environmental determinism, sometimes called climatic determinism, is a belief that physical environment predisposes human populations towards certain trajectories. Dik is arguing against the belief that hotter climates with intense sunshine causes human skin to darken, by arguing that Jews in distant Africa have been and are “white.”⁶¹ Popular in nineteenth century discourse, the scientific racism to which Dik alludes denotes ostensibly scientific methods to justify racist attitudes and worldviews. Racism is based on a belief in the existence and significance of racial categories, but extends this into a hierarchy

⁶¹ James R. Fleming, *Historical Perspectives on Climate Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11-20.

between the races to support political or ideological positions of racial supremacy.⁶² Dik does not endorse political ideologies based on racial *hierarchy*, because the single *origin* of human races renders each type equal. Monogenists argued that human races descended from a single pair of ancestors (usually Adam and Eve), while polygenists argued that races descended from multiple pairs of ancestors. Dik follows Rashi's monogenist interpretation but denies his explanation of different skin colors. According to Rashi, Canaan and his descendants had their skin darkened as a result of sin; or Ham's fornication in the ark, which is recorded in the Babylonian Talmud.⁶³ Dik rejects the Rashi's notion that illicit sex darkens the skin. Instead Dik's narrator combines environmental determinism with a rabbinic framework.⁶⁴ The *Mayse-Bukh* contains a parable that reflects exactly the type of thinking that Dik's narrator rejects. In this tale, a Jewish woman conceives a child with her husband while gazing through a curtain at her Moorish servant. When the woman gives birth nine months later, the child is dark-skinned.⁶⁵

The narrator also uses the terms "*neger*" "*shvartse mentshen*" and "*moor*" interchangeably. By using the word "*moor*," Dik evokes the allure Sephardic culture had for the enlightened Jewish circles of Berlin, Königsberg and Vilna. Dik privileges the rationalist Jewish legal discourse of Maimonides, and reconstructs the symmetry between Jewish and non-Jewish worlds.

This sensitivity is structured by the narrator's explanation of how laws differ for "Hebrew" and "Canaanite" slaves. Concerning Hebrew slaves, he quotes the rabbinic maxim "He who takes a Hebrew slave acquires a Master upon himself."⁶⁶ Dik first assumes the conventional knowledge that a "Hebrew" is equivalent to a "Jew," When a Jew acquires a slave he also acquires the commandments regarding the treatment of his Jewish slave. This acquisition produces a symmetry that lessens the slave's inferiority, for the master is also in a theological

⁶² George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: H. Fertig, 1978), 1-8.

⁶³ The notion that illicit sex in the ark darkens the skin appears in Rashi's Talmud commentary, but also in Yalkut Shimoni, Midrash ha-Gadol, and even in Eisenmenger's "Entdecktes Judentum," see David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 88.

⁶⁴ A similar combination appears in Romanelli's remarks about the slave's body in his travel narrative to Morocco. The author connects the appearance of slaves to Midrash Tanhuma's oblique description of Ham's descendants. See Samuele Romanelli, *Masa Be-arav: Hu Sefer Ha-Korot Asher alu alai Veha-Masa Asher Haziti Bi-Gelilot Ma'arav Ben Ba-Yehudim Ben Ba-aravi'im* (Berlin: Hinukh Ne'arim, 1792), 43.

⁶⁵ *Mayse-Bukh*, 1709, גה ע"א-ע"ב; קסא ע"ב-קסא ע"א 1702; גה ע"א-ע"ב. ספר זכירה ועניני סגולות, Zekhariah ben Jacob, (Hamburg, 1709), 43a-b. The tale reverses the story which originally appeared in מדרש תנחומא, פרשת נשא, about an Arab woman who gave birth to a white child. This particular variation is based on the version found in Nachmanides's אגרת הקודש. The tale was repeated in a wide array of ancient, medieval and early modern texts and folktales, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The *Mayse-Bukh* reflects the presence of dark-skinned "moors" within Europe. See, e.g., מעשה בוך, 1602, (Repr. Frankfurt, 1702), 55a-b; Yagel, גיא חזיון, ed. David Ruderman. (Jerusalem, 1997), 122. see Iris Idelsohn Shein, "Othering from the Outside: Jews and "Race" During the Early Modern Period" *Frankfurt's Jewish Notabilia: Ethnographic Views of Urban Jewry in Central Europe around 1700* (Frankfurt: Frankfurter Judaistica Beiträge 40, 2015), 199-219.

⁶⁶ *Babylonian Talmud*, Kiddushin 2a, 40b.

sense “enslaved” by the divine. This contradiction is also addressed in other ways. For example, the enslavement of another human being, who is also a Jew, unsettles the master-slave dialectic based on the differentiation between Jewish and non-Jewish slaves. Since Dik specifically extends the legal parameters of enslaving a Jew to non-Jewish slaves, he is asserting a form of anachronistic heterodoxy. Since his audience did not include American Jewish slave owners in America, he is modeling a way of thinking about Jewish legal exegesis, rather than its real application. By collapsing the distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish slaves, the master was required to fortify the slave’s home and decorate it, provide him with a wife, and subject him only to tolerable labor, just as God treated Israel.⁶⁷ The narrator’s emphasis on balance extends, rather than contrasts with, the interpretation of laws related to Canaanite (non-Jewish) slaves. Dik notes that Canaanite slaves are also not to be subjected to injury or humiliation. He stops short of requiring a master to support their likely animist lifestyle. On the topic of a Canaanite slave’s requirement to work forever, Dik says this only developed as an equal response to the lifetime service of Hebrew slaves owned by non-Jewish masters. The rhythm and tone of the narrator’s prose in expressing this detail mimics the anxious rise and fall of the traditional preacher as notes a lingering tension between Jews and non-Jews.

In his defense of Jewish slaveholding laws, the narrator attacks the supposedly “civilized” classical societies. He cites the unjust treatment suffered by Greek and Roman slaves, and quotes Marcus Cicero, as well as Campe’s famous *Discovery of America* to illustrate the brutality of European, non-Jewish slave masters. This attack on the ancient non-Jewish slaveholding practices is a rhetorical device in which Dik’s narrator speaks in “*lishna m’alya*,” the rabbinic code-language in which euphemism communicates verbal irony.⁶⁸ As the readers are introduced to the ancient distinction between Rabbinic and Classical forms of slaveholding, they treat these distant “fables” as metaphors for current social and cultural differences.⁶⁹

When Dik leaves the classical world behind and makes reference to the slavery in his reader’s own society, he shifts focus to the causes and effects of serf emancipation. In a long excursus on the virtues of Russian imperial autocracy, Dik lauds the Tsar for freeing the peasants of Courland (Lithuania and Latvia) in line with his counterparts in France, England and Germany.⁷⁰ Dik acknowledges that the Slavic lands had long been associated with the institution

⁶⁷ For example, when quoting Leviticus 25:43, Dik borrows Maimonides’ linkage of the adverb “oppressively” (בפרך) to a sense of humiliation (בזיו.) Dik preserves this link when translating from Hebrew into Yiddish. Noting that oppression and humiliation go hand in hand, the narrator expresses a certain sensitivity to the display of socio-economic disparity.

⁶⁸ It is important to distinguish here between *leshon sagi nehor* (lit. sufficient light, or illuminated language, dramatically “a blind person”) and *lishna m’alya* (elevated language). Whereas the former involves saying the opposite of what is meant, *lishna m’alya* or *leshon nekiyeh* is an elastic term for euphemism.

⁶⁹ It is likely that Dik had read early editions of Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Zerubavel* (editio princeps Leipzig 1863) that briefly mentions the horrors of colonial slavery in comparable terms. See the more widely available edition: Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Zerubavel* (Warsaw, 1886), 70-73.

⁷⁰ Though Dik was known to support the liberal reforms of Tsar Alexander II, unreserved praise for the Tsar also gladdened the imperial censors. See John D. Klier, “1855–1894: Censorship of the Press in Russian and the Jewish Question,” *Jewish Social Studies* 48.3–4 (1986), 257–68.

of slavery.⁷¹ Dik re-articulates ideas that circulated in Hebrew-language Enlightenment literature. As Ken Frieden and Iris Idelsohn-Shein have shown, there existed from the onset of the Haskalah an interest in the sea and captivity narrative, each with its ability to impart certain moral lessons onto readers in exotic and exciting ways. The use of travel literary genres and captivity narratives aside, Stowe's novel form allowed Dik to map local themes onto exotic landscapes.

Emigration by Reading

My focus here is on the first edition of Dik's translation and adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Dik sketched the founding events and social pressures of the "New World" for an Eastern European Jewish audience. He was undoubtedly aware that emigration to the Americas was a fact of Ashkenazi Jewish life, and his writing and allusions hearken back to a previous two centuries of Hebrew and Yiddish literature concerning *terra incognita*.⁷² Dik had to represent the structure and character of American society, which according to Stowe's novel, was based on the institution of slavery. Bertha Wiernik, who immigrated to the United States in the 1880s and wrote in both the Yiddish and American English press, recalls in anecdotal fashion the supposed popularity of the book on the Jewish streets of her youth:

A week after its appearance "Sklaverei" and Dick [sic] were the topics of conversation in all the towns in the Pale— as well they might be. Thousands of copies were sold daily, and within a short time almost every Jewish home in the country possessed a copy of the story.⁷³

Despite its apparent hyperbole, Wiernik is aware of the high status of Stowe's original, which had long been through translation the bestselling American novel at home and abroad.⁷⁴

⁷¹Benjamin of Tudela's travelogue (1165) reflects on a long association of Slavic lands with slavery: "Further on is the land of Bohemia, called Prague, and this is called "Ashklavonia," which is called by the Jews who inhabit it Canaan, because the people of this land sell their sons and daughters to all nations, this also applies to Russia." My translation, ER.

⁷² See Samuele Romanelli, *Masa Be-'arav*; It is likely that Dik had read early editions of Isaac Baer Levinsohn's *Zerubavel* (1863, Leipzig) that briefly mention the horrors of colonial slavery in a scientific register. See the earliest available edition, Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Zerubavel* (Warsaw, 1886), 70-73.

⁷³ Bertha Wiernik, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" Judaized: I. M. Dick's Yiddish Adaption of Mrs. Stowe's Masterpiece, *New Era Illustrated Magazine*, 1904, 147-51.

⁷⁴ Translations of Uncle Tom's Cabin into German were widespread in the United States and sold well. For example, Lewis Dembitz (b. Sieraków, 1833), the uncle of Louis Brandeis, is credited with a popular German-American translation. The book was printed in his adopted city of Louisville, Kentucky. See

Though a central text on American and European bookshelves, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was translated into Yiddish relatively late considering its almost immediate availability in European languages large and small: French – which counted eleven different translations between 1852-1853, German – at least twenty-nine editions between 1852-1853, Polish (1853) and Russian (1857).⁷⁵

The appearance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Yiddish signals the shifting role of translation and the changing self-image of maskilim: It is the first American novel to be translated into a Jewish language. Isaac Meir Dik translated Stowe's work in order to demonstrate how the Russian abolition of serfdom was implemented more effectively than the American emancipation of slaves.

In her study of women's reading practices in nineteenth century Eastern Europe, Iris Parush identifies Isaac Meir Dik as the most read Yiddish writer in the middle of the century. Parush identifies Dik's common address "*tayere lezerin*" – my dear female readers – as a way of legitimating the writing of secular Yiddish literature. Arguing that Dik's strategy is quintessentially "maskilic, bourgeois, and patriarchal," Parush positions Dik's writing as tool of domestication while rejecting the market stalls where many women were compelled to earn a living. David Roskies has also noted that Dik's narrator placed women at their plot's center. This gendered structure has focused our attention on the relationship between Dik's ideological positions and his style. As David Roskies has explained further, Dik's emphasis on distant lands and sensational plots successfully reinforced the obvious didactic structure of his novels. This coupling must be seen, Roskies argues, as an integral aspect of Dik's political-aesthetic project. While explaining American culture in the register of a Jewish traveler returned to the Pale, the narrator draws stark political parallels between the United States and Eastern Europe by portraying Jewish women at the center of Stowe's rewritten plot.

Scholars have addressed only certain aspects of Dik's cultural politics. Rebecca Wolpe argues that Dik's translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and a few later chapbooks about American history and slavery express an abolitionist stance. I argue, however, that Dik's rewriting actually constitutes a rabbinic critique of abolitionism. He states this by expressing preference for the Tsar's *gradual* dismantling of serfdom over the American president's emancipation of slaves by single decree. Amelioration, or the gradual dismantling of the institution, seemed more rational and preferable to Dik's narrator; it was supported by rabbinic sources that have both sanctioned slavery and heavily moderated its practice. In this sense, Dik was in perpetual conversation not only with European literature in its various forms, but also with Jewish Enlightenment literature in Hebrew that narrated the gradual emancipation of European Jewry in various times and in different locations.⁷⁶ As such, as Iris Idelsohn Shein has noted, Dik demonstrates his European

John J. Weisert, "Lewis N. Dembitz and Onkel Tom's Hütte," *American-German Review*, 19.3 (1953), 7-8.

⁷⁵ John Mackay, *True Songs of Freedom: Uncle Tom's Cabin in Russian Culture and Society*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013); "Reading Stowe as a Transatlantic Writer" Denise Kohn, Sarah Meer, and Emily B. Todd, *Transatlantic Stowe: Harriet Beecher Stowe and European Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006).

⁷⁶ Meir Wiener, *Tsu der geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur in 19stn yohrhundert* (New York: YKUF, 1945), 255-261; Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); *Milchemet tarbut: tnu'at ha-haskala ha-yehudit ba-me'ah ha-19* (Jerusalem, Carmel, 2010), 3-10; Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish*

patronage rather than his identification with the enslaved.

Dik's reception and modern rewriting of biblical, rabbinic and Hebrew sources remains vastly underutilized in the exploration of what constituted "patronage." Dik was not only a translator of Western European and American culture into Yiddish, but was also a patron of English Enlightenment literature and thus its foremost translator into Yiddish. For example, when Dik calls his narrator "Yosef Sturgis" he is demonstrating his knowledge of Joseph Sturge, the radical Quaker and early proponent of worker's rights, who introduced the racialized society of the Caribbean to readers of English.⁷⁷ Parush and Roskies have given us a complex view of how Dik imagined his readers, and in turn, how he imagined himself, but we know less about how Dik perceived the widening of Europe's Atlantic sphere. The lexicographer and linguist Alexander Harkavy, who penned the first Yiddish-English dictionary, credits Dik with inspiring his migration to the United States.⁷⁸ But whereas Dik sought to "civilize" his women readers, he also received and lexicalized social, political and cultural terms that existed in distant societies.

Race and Jewish Literary History

Racial themes held a substantial place in American Yiddish poetry and prose, as well as in Yiddish journalism. As Hasia Diner notes in her work on American Jews and African-Americans in the twentieth century, many American-Jewish immigrants in the nineteenth sympathized with the plight of African-Americans and their struggle for equality under the country's laws.⁷⁹ However, this was not always the case, as evidenced by vocal and staunch Jewish supporters of southern slavery and the existence of Jewish slave owners and traders.⁸⁰ Others who have examined the conduct of Jewish slave owners in the colonial Americas have hinted at the notion that Jewish-American attitudes should be considered within a longer history of imaginative Jewish texts concerning *terra incognita*. In discussing the beginning of Ashkenazi engagement with Atlantic slavery, Jonathan Schorsch remarks that "under the sign of the *Haskala* little

Emancipation, 1770–1870 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); Yehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg, eds., *The Jewish Response to German Culture: From the Enlightenment to the Second World War* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985); on Haskalah literature, see Moshe Pelli, "Haskalah Literature— Trends and Attitudes" *Jewish Book Annual* 39 (1981/2): 92–101; on the Haskalah in Russia, see Jacob S. Raisin, *The Haskalah Movement in Russia* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913); and Mordekhai Zalkin, *Ha-haskala ha-yehudit be-rusiya, 1800–1860* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996).

⁷⁷ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 45–47.

⁷⁸ Harkavy, who arrived in the United States in 1883, was a member of the Am Olam Vilna Circle. See Abraham Menes, "Der Am Oylem Bavegung" in *Geshikhte Fun Der Yidisher Arbeter-Bavegung in Di Fareynikte Shtatn* (New York: YIVO, 1943), 203–38.

⁷⁹ Hasia Diner. *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915–1935* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977).

⁸⁰ Bertram W. Korn, *Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789–1865* (Elkins Park: Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel, 1961).

changed...” regarding the recognition of the slave’s humanity.⁸¹ In discussing a short reference by the eighteenth century Hebrew grammarian and poet Isaac Satanov to the enslavement of Africans, Schorsch notes: “One cannot gauge from this single comment whether Satanov knew about the abolitionist movements beginning to agitate in England and France at the time. Satanov’s comment, which was simply reportage, was remarkably non-committal, betraying little, if any, sympathy for these developments.”⁸² Recent scholarship argues that Jews in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Eastern Europe had only hazy exposure to anti-black racism in general before migrating to the United States. According to Diner, some of these Hebrew and Yiddish writers may have heard of the black people through letters from friends in the United States; or, if they had visited London, Vienna, Berlin, or Paris, they may have been aware of abolitionist circles or colonial exhibitions. In this view, rank and file European Jewish readers would have encountered black characters only through literature and what Diner calls other “spotty sources of information”— in articles from the American Jewish press that reached Europe, through the work of some United States-based Yiddish novelists published in Warsaw and Vilna, or in the widely printed Yiddish adaptation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* published by Dik..⁸³

More recently texture has been added to the discussion of just how exposed Eastern European Jews were to racist discourse in its colonial and “new world” varieties. Iris Idelson-Shein has recently asked if maskilic opposition to the enslavement of Africans was an intellectual convention, or even a fashion, among Eastern European maskilic writers. This implies that their lack of direct contact with new world slavery actually facilitated the development of their stated opposition to it. Idelson-Shein also claims likewise that maskilic expressions of opposition to slavery may not have indicated feelings of solidarity with the oppressed. While contemporary scholarship has long argued, perhaps successfully, that forms of American Jewish solidarity with African-Americans reflects a wider Jewish historical experience of oppression, Idelson Shein responds in kind that earlier maskilic opposition to black slavery, was a European phenomenon through and through, and represents a specific type identification with bourgeois European culture and European patronage.⁸⁴ Rebecca Wolpe suggests a related purpose for maskilic references to modern slavery. Arguing against the idea that maskilim saw in the oppression of black slaves no parallel to their own status in Europe, she contends that the Yiddish writer was not merely mimicking the fashions of non-Jewish intellectuals, but also articulating a distinctly Jewish protest against the enslavement of human beings.⁸⁵

These archetypal characterizations of Dik – he is an ardent, Jewish abolitionist or an unambivalent symbol of *embourgeoisement*, may obscure what a close reading amply repays - Dik’s remarkably rich Preface to and free translation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* does express clear solidarity with black slaves but it does not express abolitionist sentiment in its European or American sense. As a Jewish framework for the critique of emancipation, I suggest that the shift

⁸¹ This claim has since been largely disproven, but Schorsch greatly advanced the discussion. The Haskalah encouraged the proliferation of interest in Atlantic slavery. See Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 280.

⁸² *Ibid*, 280.

⁸³ Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*, 23.

⁸⁴ Iris Idelson-Shein, *Difference of a Different Kind*, 12.

⁸⁵ Rebecca Wolpe. *The Sea and Sea Voyage in Maskilic Literature*. (PhD. Diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2011).

of racial themes into Yiddish provided the narrator with a coded language with which he could discuss the relationship of Jews to recently emancipated serfs. While themes of colonial expansion and racist slavery animate the exotic nature of a distant America, Dik's rabbinic and biblical allusions reorient the discussion of American slavery to local, Jewish politics. Dik is interested in comparing the emancipation of Russian serfs and American slaves, and in expressing how rabbinic laws of slavery provide a moderate, *ameliorationist* stance preferable to abolitionism, which argued for an immediate and unconditional end to the institution of slavery.

In a recent article about race and Jewish literary historiography, the Israeli-American scholar Michael Kramer argued: "whether or not in anthropological terms the Jews are a Race, whether or not Races even exist and no matter how Jews have suffered the atrocities of racism, the fact is that the term 'Jews' has always denoted a grouping of people who define themselves (and are defined by others) in terms of biological descent."⁸⁶ Kramer's argument that race, even by virtue of its rejection, delimits and defines the parameters of contemporary Jewish literary study met negative responses. In defiance of his critics, Kramer's argument contends that Jewish cultures have always been defined by the genetic unity of their creators. Suggesting that "race" is an ahistorical category that functions at different times and in different places by delimiting groups of people, it is a fundamental unit of formal analysis that can be used as an analytical tool across time and space. For Kramer, we should associate rabbinic notions of Jewish purity with nineteenth century physical anthropologists' notions of Jewish racial distinctiveness.

Bryan Cheyette responded that students of Jewish literature must consciously reject this analytic tool, that is, the belief that Jewish literature is delimited by the biological circumstances of a writer's birth. Morris Dickstein asserted that "literature" itself is an inherently secular category and that it must be divested from the category of race, which is part of a lamentable, "religious past." Since there is no contemporary "anxiety" in being a secular Jew, Dickstein argues, the prism of "race" is now unable to bring to light the distance between a Jewish writer and his work. Hannah Naveh argues that race is a "zero-sum game" that ultimately amounts to bibliography rather than criticism in the sense that the racial criteria for Jewish Literature ultimately amounts to "a list" of Jewish names.⁸⁷

Taking a somewhat different approach, Gershon Shaked argues that for literature written in Jewish languages, the question of race and racial representation is simply irrelevant. Hebrew and Yiddish literatures are obviously Jewish because they reflect the intertextual and semiotic circumstances that give rise to Jewish culture, even if what is being depicted is a decidedly non-Jewish subject. Shaked argues further that the question of what is "Jewish" about a writer who doesn't write in Hebrew, Yiddish, or other Jewish languages and doesn't include Jewish themes in his or her work, is ultimately pitiable: "The attempt to Judaize texts that have no semblance of Jewishness only because their authors were born Jews strikes me as artificial and, in the final analysis, pathetic." This view assumes that all Hebrew and Yiddish literature was and is written by Jews, which is a very problematic assumption.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Michael P. Kramer, "Race, Literary History, and the "Jewish" Question," *Prooftexts*, 21.3 (2001): 287-21.

⁸⁷ Morris Dickstein, Anne Golomb Hoffman, Gershon Shaked, Bryan Cheyette all responded to Kramer's problematic and fraught claim.

⁸⁸ Gershon Shaked, "Response to Michael Kramer; Race, Literary History, and the "Jewish" Question." *Prooftexts*. 21.3 (2001): 332-34.

Anne Golomb Hoffman agrees that race matters, but in a different way than Kramer suggests. Citing Homi Bhabha, Golomb Hoffman writes: "The way in which [Jewish] cultures recognize themselves through their projections of "otherness" offers the possibility of disrupting the internal opacity, the myth of self-presence that the notion of "race" sustains. A dialogical understanding, therefore, also concerns a willingness to look inward and to examine internal resistances such as the very term "race" hold in place. "Race," in its time, was a metaphor, a condensation, taken as real in a historical process whose consequences we can never erase. To propose "race" as a fundamentum, a foundational concept, in place of a cultural matrix, is to forget, deliberately, that a concept is a cultural matrix in the sense that it is the outcome of a historical process whose determinants can be identified and studied. Kramer's historical analysis demonstrates this potential for analytical study. He is betrayed only by his own nostalgia, which leads him to assert a fundamentum in place of a matrix."⁸⁹

Chana Kronfeld has also discussed, in response to Kramer's claim that Jewish literature in literature written by Jews, that Jewish literature is *not* coextensive with literature written by Jews because modern Jewish writers have long been writing in non-Jewish languages. This fact should require that scholars who study Jewish literatures in Jewish languages make a serious commitment to the study of these rich and challenging languages and "to working with Jewish culture in the diverse contexts available only in and through the discursive practices native to those languages."⁹⁰ Following Kronfeld, we can at once claim that Jews are not a race and not ignore that racism is a crucial element in the composition of American literature and its reception. Therefore, my concern here is not with the well-known history of those necessarily doomed attempts to produce coherent racial categories by picking representative combinations of certain phenotypes: lips, jaws, nose, hair-texture, eye color, and so on. It is far more interesting that this race-producing activity required a synthesis of logos with icon, of formal scientific rationality with something else – something visual and aesthetic in both senses of the word. Together the rational and sensory aspects of racial representation resulted in a specific relationship to, and mode of observing the Jewish body.

Dik was a conscientious and intricate translator of racial terms and concepts that circulated freely during the European Enlightenment. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Jewish emancipation and the Jewish Enlightenment disintegrates. The confusions of Jewish and European cultural formations take hold. This causes a wide-ranging structure of Jewish political identities to emerge. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the novel as a genre and type of literary texts became a forum for experimenting with the rhetorical bases for Jewish political identity. In Yiddish, the acquisition of German diction was considered a way to elevate the style of Yiddish prose, and thus the works of Yiddish novels before Abramovich emphasized German diction. "Daytshmerish" diction, though, had become so naturalized in perceptions of high Jewish culture that there was no need for Dik to justify his Germanizing orientation. However, the simulation (in Yiddish) of American English diction in Dik's translation of Stowe, is in constant need of explanation and justification. Representations of numerous racial terms and

⁸⁹ Anne Golomb Hoffman, "Response to Michael Kramer; Race, Literary History, and the "Jewish" Question." *Prooftexts*, 21.3 (2001), 328-30.

⁹⁰ Chana Kronfeld, "The Joint Literary Historiography of Hebrew and Yiddish" *Languages of Modern Jewish Cultures*, ed. Anita Norich and Joshua L. Miller. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 15-35.

ideas are adapted into Yiddish Americanisms and thus naturalized. Further, in contrast to translations into European languages and cultures, where readers were likely to have some or even considerable familiarity with British or American English, Dik was largely responsible for the translation of racial terms into Yiddish prose where there had been no pre existing terminology for the subject. With his readers having little to no firsthand knowledge of American or Atlantic culture, Dik lexicalized racial terminology through a transnational vocabulary that did not conform to the imperial or national borders familiar to his readers.

In fact, Dik struggles throughout the text to accommodate the American racial script that structured Stowe's sentimental melodrama. Since racial language had not existed in vernacular Yiddish, Dik justified its use within a general project of Germanization.⁹¹ The successful integration of racial language and ideas in Dik's translation does not depend on his ability to inscribe these terms in Yiddish, but rather on the translator's ability to justify it as a new cultural script to which his readers could adhere. In *Siting Translation*, Tejaswini Niranjana remarks that translators are themselves integral characters within their own work, even as "the work from which they seem to exclude themselves (i.e. the translation) is constituted by the traces of *their* historicity, and the gesture of exclusion they perform makes possible the presentation of the text as a whole."⁹² My recovery project begins with the premise that culture is where politics forms its ideological power, and I propose that Dik's literary representation of American racism was fueled by a local political sensibility. The works of Yiddish-language Haskole to which Dik's adaptation belongs are linked by common aesthetic concerns: patterns of knowing, seeing, feeling, and representing the world that can be understood as political even when they seem to have little orientation towards, or influence on towards the realm of politics in nineteenth century Lithuania. Dik's reading of Jewish and German Enlightenment figures like Isaac Ber Levinsohn, Joachim Campe, Shimshon Bloch, Kalman Schulman, Friedrich Schiller, and Shmuel Romanelli link his Yiddish writing to an earlier Enlightenment discourse about the colonial encounter with terra incognita and the people that lived there.⁹³

Dik condensed Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 sentimental abolitionist novel, removed her name and exchanged Uncle Tom's Christian owners for Jewish ones. The book appeared in Vilna in 1868. In his Preface to Stowe's novel, Dik sketches the violent history of the American South, dedicating special attention to the enslavement and genocide of Native Americans, the conditions in the hold of the slave ship, and the horrifying violence of the slave rebellion. He repeatedly draws comparisons between the American and Russian forms of bondage and Jewish and Christian forms of slavery. He lauds the amelioration of serfdom by successive Russian emperors and criticizes the emancipation of American slaves and the brutal war that resulted. By the end of his translation, Tom and his extended family convert to Judaism and flee to a utopian Jewish community in Canada.

Though this is not the place for an exhaustive account of Russian serfdom — a number of excellent works on this subject exist — some impression of the institution needs to be briefly proposed. At the time of the abolition of serfdom on February 19th, 1861, under Alexander II,

⁹¹ see Robert A. Peckerar, *The Allure of Germanness in Modern Ashkenazi Literature: 1833-1933* (PhD. Diss., Berkeley, 2009).

⁹² Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 49.

⁹³ These writers appear in Dik's preface.

just fewer than forty percent of the Russian imperial population, and roughly half the peasant population, had the status of “bound peasants” or serfs. This amounted to around twenty-three million people, whose status was in many ways comparable to that of chattel slaves, despite improvements since the end of the eighteenth century. The term “serf” applies to a peasant legally bound to a plot of land and a landowner, who passed this servile status onto his children.

In contrast to bondage in the Americas, serfdom was gradually superimposed on a peasant society and economy that already existed, in a lengthy process that lasted about three centuries, beginning around the time that servitude declined in Western Europe. Until the mid-sixteenth century, peasants who lived on noble landowners’ estates were tenant farmers who paid rent (in goods, cash and labor) to their landlords, but were also free to leave them to seek out better conditions with other masters. In 1497, this right was restricted to a two-week period after the completion of the harvest. Over the next three centuries, restrictions were tightened and serfs were increasingly helpless to leave their masters.⁹⁴

Reading Uncle Tom’s Cabin in the Beys-medrash

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1851 sentimental novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin: or Life among the Lowly* was first published in installments in Gamaliel Bailey’s Washington, DC weekly *The National Era*. When it first appeared in a Jewish language, with Isaac Meir Dik’s adaptation in 1868, it was among the first *mayse-bikhlekh* (storybooks) to be printed by the Romm Family Press in Vilna.⁹⁵ Stowe’s novel was re-titled *Di Shklaveray oder di Laybeygnshaft (Podanstvo)*. Stowe’s name was removed and Dik’s initials appear only at the end of his Preface. Printed by the same house that published a respected edition of the Babylonian Talmud, the printers used the block-typeset and punctuation characteristic of non-rabbinic Yiddish books. Dik added elaborate footnotes and parentheses in order to clarify Hebrew, German or English terms and concepts. By stating on the title page that slavery and serfdom were practically synonymous, Dik positioned the slave at the nexus of serf emancipation, which had happened seven years earlier, when twenty-one million Russian serfs received their liberty. The Preface’s first paragraph questions the accepted origins of black slavery.

שוין פֿון אומדענקלעכע צײַטן איז אײַנגעפֿירט געוואָרן דער שקלאָפֿנשאַפֿט אַנד
(פֿאַדאַנסטוואָ) אונטער אַלע פֿעלקער, און אונטער אַלע לענדער. דאָס זעלבסט אין
אונדזער תּורה, וואָס איז דער עלטערסטער ספֿר אין דער וועלט, איז שוין צו געפֿינען
גענוג שפורן (סליעדן) פֿון דיזעם שענדלעכן מענטשן־האַנדל למשל ווי מכירת־יוסף. מען
שרײַבט דאָס דאָס וואַקסט נאָר אַרויס פֿון אײַנעם פֿלוק וואָס נח האָט געפֿלוקט דעם חם,
וואָס ער האָט אים געשאַלטן מיט דיזע ווערטער (עבֿד עבֿדים יהיה לאַחיו). גון ווייזט עס
אויס נאָך אירע הייליקע ערצײלונג דאָס די שקלאָפֿערײַ האָט זיך אָנגעהויבן נאָר פֿון די

⁹⁴ John Mackay, *Four Russian Serf Narratives*, 2009; *True Songs of Freedom: Uncle Tom’s Cabin in Russian Culture and Society*, 2013.

⁹⁵ Samuel Shraga Feigensohn, “Le-Toldot Defus Rom,” in *Yahadut Lita*, vol. 1. (Tel Aviv, 1960), 268–302.

נעגער (מורינעס) וואָס קומען אַרויס פֿון חם און וואָס ווערן אָנגערופֿן בײַ אונדז פֿושים. און דערנאָך ערשט האָט זיך מיט דער צײַט דיזער איבל (בייזעס) אויסגעברײַטעט איבער די ווײַסע מענטשן אויך וואָס קומען אַרויס פֿון שם און יפֿת. און דאָהער איז די שקלאַפֿעריי בכלל, הן פֿון ווײַסע מענטשן און הן פֿון שוואַרצע מענטשן, אָנצוזען נאָר פֿאַר אַ היסטאָרישעס רעכט) דאָס הייסט אַזוי אַ רעכט וואָס האָט זײַן יסוד נאָר אין די אַלטע געשיכטן און אין די אַלטע דאַטן. און בֿפֿרט נאָך ווי עס שײַנט פֿון אונדזער תורה דאָס ער קומט אַרויס נאָר פֿון אַ פֿלוך. (אַבער ניט פֿאַר אַ פֿאַרנופֿטרעכט.) דאָס הייסט פֿאַר אַזוי אַ רעכט וואָס איז געגרינדעט אין די וואַרע באַווייזע פֿון דעם מענטשנס פֿאַרשטאַנד וואָס קען זיך קיין מאָל ניט אומענדערן ווי דער רעכענונג פֿון צוויי מאָל צוויי איז פֿיר. (דען דער וואַרער שכל פֿון מענטשן זאָגט גראַדע דעם היפֿך דערפֿון. ער זאָגט דאָס מיר אַלע מענטשן בכלל, פֿון וועלכע נאַציאָן מיר אויך זײַנען און מיט וועלכער פֿאַרבע מיר אויך געבוירן זײַנט זײַנען מיר נאָר אַלע גלײַכע ברידער ווי קינדער פֿון איינעם פֿאַטער. און אַזוי ווילן האָבן אויך אונדזערע ספֿרי־קודש. אַזוי דריקט זיך אויס איוב אין זײַנעם ספֿר) אַם אמאָס משפֿט עבֿדי ואַמתי ברבם עמדי: ומה אעשה פי יקום אל וכי יפֿקוד מה אשיבנו; הלא בבטן עשני עשהו ויכונו ברחם אחד. (דאָס הייסט אַזוי: האָב איך דען פֿאַראַכטעט דאָס רעכט פֿון מײַן דינער און פֿון מײַנער דינערין אין זײַער ריכטן זיך מיט מיר. דען איך האָב בײַ מיר געדענקט: וואָס וועל איך טאָן ווען גאָט וועט זיך פֿאַר זײ אָננעמען, דען דער זעלביקער וואָס האָט מיך געשאַפֿן האָט אים געשאַפֿן? איין מײַסטער האָט אונדז אויסגעבילדעט אין איין מוטער־לייב. נון האָבן מיר קיין רעכט אַזוי איינער דעם אַנדערן צו פֿאַרקויפֿן און אַזוי זיך זעלבסט, פֿונקט ווי די בני־יעקבֿ האָבן קיין רעכט געהאַט צו פֿאַרקויפֿן זײַער ברודער יוסף. ווייל יעדער מענטש איז אַ חלק אלהי ממעל ווי דער פֿסוק זאָגט (בצלם אלהים עשה את האדם) גאָט האָט דעם מענטשן מיט זײַן אייגענעם פֿאַרעם געמאַכט. און מער ווי איין פֿאַר מענטשן האָט גאָט ניט באַשאַפֿן. און פֿון אים זײַנען אַרויסגעקומען שוין אַלערהאַנט פֿאַרביקע מענטשן: ווײַסע, שוואַרצע, ברוינע און רויטע. און דאָהער געפֿינען מיר דאָס אונדזער תורה האָט אין אונדזער נאַציאָן פֿאַרבאַטן זײַער שטרענג (שטראַגע) דעם שקלאַפֿנשאַט. קיין ייד האָט ניט געטאַרט פֿאַרקויפֿט ווערן פֿאַר אַ לײַב־אייגענעם. קוים נאָר אויף זיבן יאָר. און דאָס אויך האָט ער געמוזט באַהאַנדלט ווערן הומאַניש (מענטשלעך), מען האָט ניט געטאַרט קיין שווערע אַרבעט מיט אים טאָן. און אויך קיין שענדלעכע אַרבעט (לא תרדה בו בפרך)

[Slavery was instituted among all peoples and in all lands since time immemorial. Even in our Torah, which is the oldest book in the world, sufficient evidence of this shameful trade in human beings is found, for example, when Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers.⁹⁶ It is said that the trade stems from a phrase that Noah cursed upon his son Ham, when he rebuked him with these words: “a slave of slaves he shall be unto his brethren.”⁹⁷ So it appears in the holy tales that slavery began with the

⁹⁶ Genesis 37: 27-28. Biblical quotations appear in Hebrew in Dik's original, while he often paraphrases, explains, or interprets them in Yiddish directly after the quotation, a common practice in Yiddish. Dik refers to the selling of Joseph, a biblical narrative that serves as a basis for traditional Ashkenazi folk theater. For another central representation of Joseph's enslavement in nineteenth-century Ashkenazi performance, see Eliakum Zunser, *Mahaze mekhires Yoysef: eyn teater shtik in zibn aktun un in zibetsn stenes* (Vilna: Bidfus ha-almanah vеха-ahim Rom, 1893).

⁹⁷ Genesis 9:2. Biblical translations are by Robert Alter. *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. (New York: WW Norton, 1996), 41. On the identification of dark-skinned Africans with the biblical Cushite,

Negroes (Moors) who descend from Ham and came to be called Cushites by us Jews.⁹⁸ And only later did this "evil" spread over the white man as well, who descends from Shem and Japheth.⁹⁹ Therefore slavery, among both white and black peoples, should be seen as merely a historical law. (This means a law that has its foundation firmly in ancient history and in ancient times. Especially, as in this case, in which it appears in our Torah to have originated from a single curse.) It is not, however, a rational law. (This means a law that is grounded in the genuine evidence of unchangeable human understanding, as in calculating "two times two equals four.")¹⁰⁰ Because genuine human reason shows that it [slavery] is the logical opposite of reason, and proves that whatever nation we may reside in and whatever color we were born, we are created alike, as brothers, like children from one father. And this too, is the opinion of our holy books. As Job proclaims in his book, "If I did spurn the cause of my slave, or of my slave-girl, when they contended with me, what then shall I do when God rises up? And when He remembers, what shall I answer Him? Did not He that made me in the womb make him? And did not One fashion us in the womb?"¹⁰¹ This means: Have I then scorned the right of my servant and maidservant to seek justice from me? But then I remembered: what will I do when God takes me to account? Did not the same one who created me create them? Did not one Master form us in our mother's womb? In that case, we have no right to sell one another, nor even ourselves, just like the children of Jacob had no right to sell their brother Joseph, because every person is a portion of God above, as the verse tells us: *In the image of God I made Man.*¹⁰² God made Man with his own form, and he did not make more than two people, and from them man came forth

see Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, 2004, and David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham*, 2003.

⁹⁸ Dik is referring to popular Old Yiddish texts: the *Tsene-rene*, a commentary on the weekly Torah reading, and the *Mayse-bukh*, a collection of didactic folktales, both of which make reference to Moors in various editions.

⁹⁹ Shem, Japheth, and Ham are the sons of Noah. The three sons came to represent the unity of human languages and races. Later, Noah's sons were used to organize ethnology and geography around notions of biblical genealogy. See Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁰ Historical Law (*Historischesrecht*) is contrasted with rational law (*Vernunftrecht*). These terms also appear in Kant and by extension in German Enlightenment discourse of nature. See P. Abela, "The Demands of Systematicity: Rational Judgment and the Structure of Nature" in *A Companion to Kant*, ed. G. Bird (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 408–22; Tal Kogman, "Jewish Maskilim Observe Nature: A Personal Story or a Literary Model of the Enlightenment?" *Zion* 78 (2013): 379-93; Kogman, "Intercultural Contacts in Haskalah Texts on Natural Sciences," in *The Varieties of Haskalah*, ed. Israel Bartal and Shmuel Feiner (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005), 29-42.

¹⁰¹ Job 31:13.

¹⁰² Genesis 1:27.

in many colors: white, black, brown, and red.¹⁰³ Because of this, we find that our Torah severely forbids slavery among our nation. No Jew may be sold for his entire life; barely for seven years [should he toil]. Additionally he must be treated very humanely, one could not make him do excruciating labor. Also no shameful work is allowed: “Ye shall not rule over one another with rigor.”]

Dik understands slavery as a type of universal institution. Here we have Dik’s most emphatic declaration of allegiance to Enlightenment values. While he voices an anti-racist attitude based in monogenism, he adopts a mode of Hebrew Enlightenment discourse by elevating reason through biblical Wisdom Literature, in this case, the Book of Job. In this sense, the introductory discussion of race and racism begins is couched the Jewish textual tradition of citation from sacred texts (*shibutz*) in the style of exegetical translation (*taytshn.*) However, it is important to note that Dik does not only bring the Hebrew verse in its plain sense, but translates the Hebrew phrase from Job into Yiddish

This means: Have I then scorned the right of my male slave

¹⁰³ Dik’s footnote: “There is great disagreement among physiologists (natural scientists) over the reason for the Moors' blackness. [*Shvartskayt*. Popular in nineteenth century discourse, scientific racism denotes ostensibly scientific methods to justify racist attitudes and worldviews. Racism is based on belief in the existence and significance of racial categories, but extends this into a hierarchy between the races to support political or ideological positions of racial supremacy. Dik is specifically referencing the debate over the origin of the human races. Monogenists argued that human races descended from a single pair of ancestors (usually Adam and Eve), while polygenists argued that races descended from multiple pairs of ancestors.] One side argues that they are descended from another species of man. The other side argues that they have become black merely from the sun that burns strongly in Africa, where Moors live. [Environmental determinism, sometimes called climactic determinism, is an older belief that physical environment predisposes human populations towards certain trajectories. Dik is arguing against the belief that hotter climates with intense sunshine caused human skin to darken. See James R. Fleming, *Historical Perspectives on Climate Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11-20.] Both opinions are incorrect. The first is false because the Torah tells us that humans descend from a single couple. The other opinion is also incorrect, because we see that Jews, who have lived in Africa for so long, are white. Thus, the most sensible seems to be the opinion of our Rabbis, who say that because Canaan was conceived in the ark, he came out black from his mother's womb. [BT Sanhedrin 108b.] Dik follows Rashi’s interpretation that Canaan and his descendants had their skin transformed as a result of Ham’s fornication in the ark. Dik rejects the notion that illicit sex darkens the skin but makes use of environmental determinism within the biblical framework.] This is because in the time of the flood there was massive destruction in nature. Then there was a thick fog. The sun did not shine. As our sages say, all the planets stopped their movement. This greatly affected Canaan, so much so that he did not come out of the womb white. One can see instinctively that the sunshine affects everything, plants and animals. Blacks are born white, but in some days [of darkness] become black. Other Moors have white hands, white blotches on their faces, which we read in Midrash Tanhuma.” [This reflects Romanelli's remarks about the slave market in Morocco, which the author connects to Midrash Tanhuma's oblique description of Ham's descendants. See Samuele Romanelli, *Masa Be-‘arav*, 1792.

and female slave to seek justice from me? But then I remembered: what will I do when God takes me to account? Did not the same one who created me create them? Did not one Master form us in our mother's womb¹⁰⁴

By translating the Hebrew term *eved* as *diner*, Dik is making a choice to domesticate the term in the local culture. Rather than translating *eved* as *shklaf*, the common Yiddish word for slave, he is likening the figure of the African slave to that of a local servant, a figure that was exceedingly common in the daily lives of Eastern European Jews, even poor ones.¹⁰⁵ The biblical quotation plays a double role – it elicits meaning in the broader text on the authority that it reflects some affirmation of divine morality, while at the same time forcing the reader to reencounter the biblical text in its own context and positioning it as an aesthetic force.

It is striking that Dik seems to be familiar with the belief that sub-Saharan Africans are the descendants of the biblical *Ham*. In order to communicate the acceptability of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for a predominantly female audience, he alludes to the curse of Ham being mentioned in “holy tales.” This is a euphemism for Old Yiddish literature including the *Tsenerene*, a frequently printed Yiddish guide to the weekly Torah portion, intended primarily for women. Penned by Efraim Luntshits, the *Tsenerene* reiterated a racialized interpretation of the Curse of Ham in its explanation of Noah's three sons, marking Ham as black. Seeking to present slavery as an historical rather than a rational law, Dik's refers to his readers a new qualitative assessment. The slave trade, while referred to in Scripture, had become monstrous through the mistaken imposition of racism onto the biblical text. Old Yiddish literature had thus erroneously communicated the immutability of racial distinctions. In this reading, racism is a baseless recourse to irrational readings of the Hebrew Bible.

Seeking to partition the slave of the Hebrew Bible from the trade in African slaves – and biblical from rabbinic law, Dik's Preface to the Yiddish *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sought to also separate the Jewish master from the Christian one. This paramount distinction – that Jewish characters express themselves differently to their slaves than Christians -- forms the basis of Dik's literary framework. Throughout the text, different levels of diction and tone signal the divisive relationship between Jewish and Christian whites. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would effectively communicate what Dik believed to be the base evil of slavery - the breakdown of the family. The sentimentalized horror at a family's unjust dissolution would undermine any notion among readers that human beings were biologically or “naturally” destined to be dominated by each other based on color, class or nation, since the notion of togetherness and synthesis are paramount.

Dik's translation begins as Stowe's does, with two men conversing in the sitting-room of a well-appointed Kentucky farmhouse, drinking wine. One of the men, Abraham Shelby is healthy in stature and bears the appearance of a courtly gentleman. Haley is described as short, fat and speaking in a gruff, gravelly voice. After setting the scene, we are told, as in Stowe's original,

¹⁰⁴ Job 31:13

¹⁰⁵ Jacob (Jakub) Goldberg, “Poles and Jews in the 17th and 18th Centuries: Rejection or Acceptance,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 22.2 (1974): 248–82. Judith Kalik, “Christian Servants Employed by Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 17th and 18th Centuries,” *Polin* 14 (2001): 259–70.

that Abraham Shelby has fallen deeply into debt and Haley has come knocking on his door looking to collect payment. Abraham Shelby wants to settle things quietly and Haley, having him cornered, suggests that he sell him his favorite slave, Uncle Tom. Shelby refuses, remarking that he wouldn't sell Tom for even one thousand dollars. When Haley requests the sale of Shelby's other slaves, a small child appears through a cracked door and interrupts the tense exchange. Here is how the scene appears in Stowe's original:

Here the door opened, and a small quadroon boy, between four and five years of age, entered the room. There was something in his appearance remarkably beautiful and engaging. His black hair, fine as floss silk, hung in glossy curls about his round, dimpled face, while a pair of large dark eyes, full of fire and softness, looked out from beneath the rich, long lashes, as he peered curiously into the apartment. A gay robe of scarlet and yellow plaid, carefully made and neatly fitted, set off to advantage the dark and rich style of his beauty; and a certain comic air of assurance, blended with bashfulness, showed that he had been not unused to being petted and noticed by his master. "Hulloa, Jim Crow!" said Mr. Shelby, whistling, and snapping a bunch of raisins towards him, "pick that up, now!" "The child scampered, with all his little strength, after the prize, while his master laughed. "Come here, Jim Crow," said he. The child came up, and the master patted the curly head, and chucked him under the chin." Now, Jim, show this gentleman how you can dance and sing." The boy commenced one of those wild, grotesque songs common among the negroes, in a rich, clear voice, accompanying his singing with many comic evolutions of the hands, feet, and whole body, all in perfect time to the music.¹⁰⁶

Dik rewrites the scene as follows:

אין דיזער מינוט גיעפינט דיא טיר פון דיזעם צימער און עש איז אריין אין שטוב אין פיר יאריגעס קינד אין מולאטציק. ער וואר זייער שיין און פיל קלערער אלס אלע אנדערע מולאטעשע קינדער וייל זיינע מוטער וואר איינע מולאטקע פון אמולאטקע. דער צו וואר ער זייער שיין גיוואקסין. ער האָט שוין גיהאט לאנגע שווארצע האר ביז דיא אקסלען. זיינע אייגעלאך ווארין שווארץ וויא דיא קארשין. און האבין ארויס גיבליצט דורך זיינע גידיכטע לאנגע ברעמען וויא צווייא גליהענדע שטערין דורך דיא גידיכטע צווייגין פון איין פינסטערין וואלד. לבד דעם וואר ער נאך זייער שיין גיקליידעט און זייר ריין צוא גיקליבין וויא איין קינד פון איינעם גרויסן הערין זאָה

¹⁰⁶ Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry L. Gates, Hollis Robbins, *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2007), 4.

דזים האררי' האט זיך דער הער אבראם אפ גירופין צוא אים טוענדיק אפיין אונ אויס שיטענדיק אהויפין ראָזינקעס אויף געקליבין זאָ גישווינט וויא איונגע הינדעלע דעם הייפעלע קערנער וואש מען שיט פאר איר אויש דאש דער אבראם האט זיך דאריבער פון איינאנדער גילאכט 'נוא דזים האררי' האט ער צוא אים ווייטער גיזאגט 'קום צו מיר', דאש קינד איז צו אים צו גיגאנגען און דער הער האט אים אן גינומען פאר דער מארדעצקע. האט אים גיגלעט דיא הערליך און האט אים גיבעטין דאס ער זאל א ביסיל זינגען און טאנצין. דא האט דאש קינד אויף גיעפינט זיין קליין שייך מיילכעלע און האט אן גיהיבין צוא זינגען מיט איינער צוקער זיסע שטימע וויא אקאנאריקעל אליד פון די ווילדע נעגער.

[At this moment the door to this room opens and a small four year old mulatto child appears. He was very beautiful and looked lighter than other mulatto children because his mother was the daughter of a mullata also (*a mulatke fun a mulatke.*) Besides, he was also dressed beautifully and put together very clearly, like the child of a great master. His eyes were black like cherries. His face was impressed by eyebrows flashed, and looked like two thick branches in a dark forest. "Oh, Jim Harry (*Dzim-harry*) come to me" Abraham Shelby called out to him, throwing some raisins for him and grabbing him by the neck. The masters giggled and asked the child do a little song and dance. The child opened with a small, beautiful smile and began to sing in a sugar-sweet voice the canary-like song of the wild Negro.]

The interaction between Arthur and Jim Crow and Abraham and Dzim Harry are congruent in their portrayal of a "wild" child, but Dik's Jewish recasting intensifies rather than relaxes the conflict between the Abraham and Haley. Dik describes the boy's mother as "a mulatke fun a mulatke" rather than a "quadroonknabe" as in the German neologism; and to emphasize that this boy, subjugated, childlike and flamboyantly dressed, is part of a larger family. In the Yiddish there is no lavish wardrobe, no chucking on the chin. The grotesque, sensual nature of the child are muted, while his Jewishness is emphasized. The boy's song is described in the language of Jewish folk music, which elaborates the European metaphor of the eyes flashing through his thick eyelashes. Here, rather than being relegated only to the status of a slave, the child is portrayed as the child of a benevolent Jewish master. This opening scene evokes the challenges of translating the aesthetics of American racism into a Yiddish unprepared to absorb it. It is important to note that the standard German translation of this text, reprinted in numerous editions, preserves much of the ornate English style.

Hier ging die Thür auf, und ein kleiner Quadroonknabe, zwischen 4 und 5 Jahre alt, trat ins Zimmer. Es lag in seiner Erscheinung etwas merkwürdig Schönes und Gewinnendes,

Das schwarze, seidenweiche Haar wallte in glänzenden Locken um das runde Gesicht mit Grübchen in Kinn und Wangen, während ein paar große dunkle Augen voll Feuer und Sanftheit unter den vollen, langen Wimpern hervorsahen, wie er neugierig in das Zimmer lugte. Eine bunte, roth und gelb karrirte Kutte, sorgfältig gearbeitet und hübsch gemacht, hob den dunkeln und reichen Styl seiner Schönheit noch mehr hervor, und eine gewisse komische Miene von Sicherheit mit Verschämtheit verbunden zeigte, daß es ihm nicht ungewohnt war, von seinem Herrn gehätschelt und beachtet zu werden. "Heda! Jim Crow!" sagte Mr. Shelby, in dem er dem Knaben psiss und ihm eine Weintraube zuwarf, "hier nimm das!" Mit aller Kraft seiner kleinen Beinen lief das Kind nach der Traube, während fein Herr lachte..Komm zu mir, Jim Croy," jagte er. Das Kind kam zu ihm, und der Herr streichelte den Lockenkopf und griss ihm unter das Kinn, Nun Jim, zeige diesem Herrn, wie Du tanzen und singen kannst." Der Knabe sing an, eines der unter Negern üblichen wilden und grotesken Lieder mit einer vollen klaren Stimme zu singen, und begleitete den Gesang mit vielen komischen Bewegungen der Hände, der Füße und des ganzen Körpers, wobei er immer mit der Musik auf das Strengste Takt hielt.¹⁰⁷

In the Yiddish, the octoroon boy is defined not independently, but through his mother. In the same scene, when Haley requests that Shelby sell the boy's mother Eliza, Abraham Shelby tells Haley that he would not separate the two. Dik completely invents new and distinct exchanges between the Jewish slave owner and the Christian slave trader. In Dik's text, Shelby responds:

נײַן מיין ליבער פריינד' האָט אים דער שעלבי גיענטפערט, ניין דיזער מיטיל, וועט דא ניט אנגיין. דען דיזע עליזע איז ניט גלייך צו יענע ווילדע נעגערינען וואש מען בריינגט זייערסט פון דיא אפריקאנעשע שטעפן. זיא איז איינע גיבילדעטע פרויא און האָט שוין פיל איידעלערע גיפילע אלס אונזערע דאמען.

[No my dear friend, Shelby answered, not this asset, it won't go. You must not compare Eliza with a wild, Negro woman brought only yesterday from the African steppes. She is an civilized woman and already has many more refined feelings than our daughters.]

¹⁰⁷ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Onkel Tom's Hütte, Oder, Negerleben in Den Sklavenstaaten Von Nord-Amerika* (Leipzig: J.J. Weber, 1853), 3-4.

To which Haley responds:

און איוך ניט צוא זיין איין געהעריגער הער איבער שקלאווען. און דאהער וויל קיין קריסטליכער פפלאנצער ניט קויפן בייא מיר אשקלאווע וואש איך האָב אים גיקויפט פון איינעם אידישן פפלאנצער ווייל ער ווערט בייא אים איין האַלבער הער. און דאהער זאָגן אלע דאש דיא יודין זיינען דיא ערגסטע פפלאנצער אין גאנץ ווירגיניען. ווייל זייא מאכין צוא לאָזן זייערע שקלאווען. און מאכין דאהער אלע מאל גרויסע מרידות אנטקעגין זייערע העריגן. "הער האלי' האָט זיך צו אים אפ גירופין דער הער שעלבי. איר רעט נאנץ פאר קערט. העטין זיך אלע פפלאנצער אויף גיפירט מיט זייערע שקלאווען וויא דיא אידעשע פפלאנצער וואלט קיין מאָל צוא קיינע ערפערונג (מרידה) גיקומען. איין באווייז דער צוא דאש נאך האבין זיך דיא שקלאווען פון דיא אידעשע פפלאנצער זיך ווען עמפערט אנטקעגין זייערע העריגן. און דאש איז נור ווייל זייא ווערין פון אונז גוט האהאנדלט. מיר גיבן זייא פרייהייט צווייא טעג אין וואָך שבת און זונטיג. און מיר צווינגען זייא ניט דאש זייא זאָלין ענדערין זייער גלויבן. און מיר בהאנדלען זייא ריכטיג נאך דיא גיזעצין פון תורת משה :

[And [Jewish] masters are not sufficiently master-like. Consequently, no Christian planter will purchase a slave formerly owned by a Jewish master because he'll behave like he's half-master. Everyone says that Jewish masters are the worst in all of Virginia, because they allow their slaves to flee and foment large rebellions against their masters." "Mr. Haley," Shelby replied, "I'll say it's just the opposite, masters ought to raised their slaves in the Jewish planter's way because the slaves will not need to rebel, and this is because by us Jews they are treated kindly. We give them freedom two days a week, the Sabbath and Sunday. We do not force them to convert from their religion. We treat them justly according to the Laws in the Torah of Moses."¹⁰⁸

When Haley accuses Jews of being mastered by their old slaves, he is citing a well-known talmudic axiom *koneh eved ivri koneh adon l'atzmo* [He who acquires a Jewish slave takes a master upon himself.]¹⁰⁹ This rephrasing of rabbinic Hebrew in Yiddish, is an example of Dik's use of verbal irony of which the character is unaware. It also completely embeds Talmudic logic in everyday life. Haley's anti-semitic claim that the Jews are the slaves and their slaves' their masters, is, in the view of the narrator and his audience, a Jewish indictment of Christian morality. When placed subversively in the mouth of the anti-Semite who derides it, rabbinic allusion elevates the Hebrew source above the target language, dividing the voices of the Jew

¹⁰⁸ Dik, *Shklaveray*, 32.

¹⁰⁹ *BT*, Kiddushin 2a, 40b.

and Christian along its edge. At the same time, the implied figure - the slave – remains invisible. The African slave - signified but not seen – is couched in the Dik's Yiddish that channels through its Germanisms the gentlemanly lilt of the Southern-Jewish planter.

Dik's translation is thus not about the critique of slavery as an institution, but actually about the role of rabbinic Judaism in moderating the trade itself. In this case, this progress is the growth of humane, more enlightened i.e. Jewish form of slavery. Rabbinic slave laws – a legal structure of bondage that at times blurs the border between master and slave, is thus an ideal. But to suggest that rabbinic Judaism would have a role in modern politics, least of all in the gradual amelioration of slavery, was to make a controversial if not a funny claim.

This controversy is articulated in three ways. The first is economic and involves the Jewish slave owner being in debt to Haley, presumably the manager of a wealthy Christian businessman's affairs. The second is marital: Avrom will not sever the marriages of his slaves, which were performed according to Jewish law. The third is racial: Eliza herself has been raised as a Jew and shouldn't be considered a "wild Negro" in the first place. The reader is thus introduced to several fundamental attitudes that apply to either "Jews," "white Gentiles," or "blacks." When Avrom Shelby will not sell his wife's slave, he weathers a barrage of anti-Semitic abuse. According to the Gentile slave-trader Haley, the Jews are physically and emotionally weak. Eliza, who stands at the center of this intertextual web embodies the Jewish linguistic continuum between us and them, between those who are "wild" and Israelites. In Eliza, a Jewish soul dwells in the place from which a savage one departed. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is saturated with all kinds of marriages and the theme is hard to miss in any number of translations. As Henry Louis Gates has remarked: "Stowe's novel is thoroughly preoccupied with [marriages]– broken up marriages, failed marriages, hasty, postponed, 'if-only' marriages; in name only, bitter, clinging and doomed marriages."¹¹⁰ Here, a broken marriage is exactly what a Jewish slave owner should above all prevent. The Yiddish adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* should be seen as having as its most profound model the Jewish-Yiddish linguistic dichotomy between Us (*Bay Undz Yidn*) and Them (*Zey, Bay di Goyim.*)"¹¹¹

As evidenced in these passages, Dik struggled to adapt the two poles of Stowe's linguistic repertoire to Yiddish: the diction of the King James Bible and her own imagined African-American Vernacular English. Nevertheless, Dik sought to skew the moral vision of Stowe's novel and reconstitute its inner linguistic and ideational structures through the voice of the traditional Jewish storyteller, or I. The framework of allusions to the biblical and rabbinic texts, largely recognizable to a traditional reader, provides the linguistic hedge for the text's partition of Jewishness from whiteness.

Dik combines two linguistic frameworks: the first is Stowe's original language, and the second are the well-known tales of Rabban Gamliel's slave Tavi. Tavi appears throughout the Babylonian Talmud, identified as the slave belonging to Rabban Gamliel, who lived in the city of Yavneh during the Roman occupation of the Land of Israel. Tavi is presented across the Talmud as someone who was famous for the purity of his Jewish ritual observance and scholarship, though he is identified as a non-Jewish slave. Not only Rabban Gamliel, but others sang his praises. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria was known to say that based on Tavi's knowledge it

¹¹⁰ Henry Louis Gates, *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin*, p. xiii.

¹¹¹ This dynamic was identified as such in Joseph Sherman, "Serving The Natives: Whiteness as the Price of Hospitality in South African Yiddish literature," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, 3 (2000).

would have been appropriate for Tavi to be reclining and for Rabbi Elazar to be serving him. Rabban Gamliel tried on several occasions to identify a halachic precedent to free him, but was stymied in his efforts because of the halachic prohibition to set Canaanite slaves free.¹¹² Nevertheless, when Tavi passed away, Rabban Gamliel accepted condolences as if he was a family member, explaining that Tavi was different from other pagan-born slaves –he was a good and honest man. Consider this well-known tale from Tractate Sukkah:

אמר רבי שמעון מעשה בטבי עבדו של רבן גמליאל. שהיה ישן תחת המטה. ואמר להן רבן גמליאל לזקנים. ראיתם טבי עבדי שהוא תלמיד חכם. ויודע שעבדים פטורין מן הסוכה. לפיכך ישן הוא תחת המטה. ולפי דרכינו למדנו שהישן תחת המטה. לא יצא ידי חובתו.¹¹³

Rabbi Shimon said: It once happened with Tavi the slave of Rabban Gamliel who used to sleep under a bed. Rabban Gamliel said to the Elders: Have you seen Tavi my slave who is a scholar and knows that slaves [and women] are exempt from the laws of sukkah [being a positive commandment fixed by time] and therefore he sleeps under a bed. Thus we deduce that one sleeping under a bed in a sukkah has not fulfilled his obligation.

In *Di Shklaveray*, Uncle Tom is modeled on Tavi and Abraham Shelby is modeled on Rabban Gamliel. Uncle Tom doesn't live in his famous field cabin, but in a small hut with a thatched roof, which reminds readers of a *sukkah*, or a temporary hut built each year during the Sukkot holiday, which commemorates in part the Jews' journey from slavery to freedom.

This kind of parallel is significant because it lends some substance to the notion of what the Yiddish phrase *fartaytsht un farbessert* (translated into Yiddish and improved) can mean in context. The use of the Sukkah as Cabin and Tavi as Tom allows Dik not only to legitimate, or at least contextualize, a foreign text, but it also allows readers to recognize the relationship between aesthetics and politics. Since *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is presented as a translated work, and a work that depicts a society that would otherwise be quite mysterious, the meshing of a Talmudic figure with the characters of a novel is what allows Dik to present the novel as an authoritative form of learning and entertainment, which is in turn a maskilic goal. This also sheds light on the complicated business of writing for multiple audiences at once, for Dik wrote in Yiddish to appeal to the broadest category of Eastern European Jewish readers, while at the same time adding in elements of rabbinic intertextuality that would stimulate his more learned readers to engage with the political implications of the text. These implications – the Jew against a political system that devalues human life, or the Jew trying to do right by his fellow man in the face of structural injustices, is an important feature of the Talmudic text. By mapping the image of Tavi in Rabban Gamaliel's sukkah onto Tom's Cabin – which is owned by Abraham Shelby – we are

¹¹² *BT*, Bava Kama, 74a-b.

¹¹³ *BT*, Sukkah, Soncino Translation, 2:1.

given a particularly vivid instance of intertextual linkage.

In a following chapter, we learn that Eliza, Jim Harry's mother and the Shelbys' house slave had been raised as a Jew, and at the preferable age of twenty was married to a mulatto man named George-Harry, a slave on a neighboring plantation. Though George-Harry had Christian masters, Jewish slave owners had raised him as well. George-Harry is roughly the same as Stowe's George Harris for the duration of the novel, except for a minor change in which George-Harry eventually comes to work as a laborer for a Jewish manufacturer named Mr. Davidson (Mr. Wilson in Stowe's text). Davidson is also relatively benevolent. He gives George-Harry a two-day weekend and allows him to visit Eliza during that time, insinuating his respect for marriage.

The suggestive eroticism of George-Harry's dialogues with his wife Eliza, something highly uncharacteristic of Dik's writing, dissipates in one particular scene, when he suddenly appears distraught in Eliza's doorway. Emily, Abraham Shelby's wife, is away visiting another plantation, and George-Harry confides in his wife that he's going to flee for Canada:

אום גאטעם ווילין' האָט דיא עליזע אויש גישריען 'מיר האבין דאָך חתונה
געהאַט כדת משה וישראל בחופה וקדושין'. נון מיין טייערע עליזע, האט ער
צוא איר גיזאגט. דוא וויישט דאש דיא הזיגע געזעצע זאגט דאש קיין
שקלאווע האָט קיין רעכט צוא פאר הייראטהען זיך. און זיין הער האט דאש
רעכט אלע מאל זיינע פרויא אוועק צוא געבין איינעם אנדערין.

["It is against God's will!" Eliza shrieked. "We are not married to each other, *under the wedding canopy, according to the laws of Moses and Israel?* "So? My dear Eliza," he said to her: "You know that the law of this land gives a male slave no right to marry; his master has the right at all times to take his wife away and give her to another man.]"

The disintegration of *halachic* marriage is positioned as the undermining of a stable institution undermined by the twisted logic of modern slavery. George-Harry, a Jew and a slave, is accused of weakness because he is Jewish and fit for re-enslavement because he is black. Eliza, who possesses no agency, is concerned that she will become an *aguna*, a deserted wife according to rabbinic law because the power of anti-Semitic hatred, here the hatred of her husband is grounded in his Jewishness. The Gentile slave owner believes that he can ensure that George becomes a properly savage black man--angry, violent, physically strong, and valuable--by severing his bonds to his family, and thus to his Jewishness.

In keeping pace with Stowe's original text, Uncle Tom's sukkah-like cabin doesn't appear until the fourth chapter. The cabin is located very close to Abraham Shelby's farmhouse. The narrator explains that Uncle Tom was a heathen before Abraham purchased him, and that thereafter Uncle Tom had become a pious man. Uncle Tom and his wife Chloe pray daily, chant psalms, and read from their Bible together. Dik then makes another revision, changing Stowe's chapter "An Evening in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" to "Isaac Shelby's Visit to Uncle Tom." Replacing Stowe's character Master George with Abraham Shelby's son Isaac, he visits the cabin and

enjoys Uncle Tom's company, gives him some folk art depicting various biblical scenes: "Joseph and his Brothers," "Samson and Delilah," and "Rebecca at the Well." Isaac's reception in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the giving of biblical paintings communicates, through the depiction of this Eastern European custom. To accentuate the helplessness of the son in the face of his father's deeds, Abraham Shelby and Haley are in the plantation house finalizing the sale of Uncle Tom and Eliza's child down the river to the cruel Gentile slave owner Simon Legree.

As the story proceeds, Eliza has decided to escape from the plantation in order to preserve her marriage to George-Harry and tries to convince Tom to flee with her. In Stowe's version, Tom refuses. In Dik's version, he refuses to flee but for different reasons. "*No, Eliza, you go and only you. If I must be sold – well then I will trust in God as did Joseph the Righteous (Yosef ha-Tsadik), when he was sold as a slave to the Egyptians.*" The allusion to Joseph may foreshadow or suggest hope for authority or power in the future. At the same time, this rewriting of Stowe's narrative highlights the difference in Tom's refusal to escape. In Stowe's version, instead of suggesting a brighter future, he claims that he has no choice but to accept his master's bargain:

"Mas'r," said Tom,—and he stood very straight,—"I was jist eight years old when ole Missis put you into my arms, and you wasn't a year old. 'Thar,' says she, 'Tom, that's to be *your* young Mas'r; take good care on him,' says she. And now I jist ask you, Mas'r, have I ever broke word to you, or gone contrary to you, 'specially since I was a Christian?"

Mr. Shelby was fairly overcome, and the tears rose to his eyes. "My good boy," said he, "the Lord knows you say but the truth; and if I was able to help it, all the world shouldn't buy you."

This passage, which is absent from Dik's adaptation, exemplifies the rewriting of Tom's character in Yiddish, namely, that he is not represented so much as a passive character intent on displaying Christian acceptance of his lot as a slave, but rather patience in his trial as a slave. The status of a slave, halachically and as represented by Dik, is a transitional series of moments – the slave is not an immutable figure, but rather one that exemplifies the potential for human transformation. Noticing the parallels to broader biblical narratives is key here, for likening Tom to Joseph presents him not as a martyr, but as a slave, a freeman, and then, ultimately, a representative of an entire group of people, who rises to prominence.

There is a vividly drawn scene in which racial difference is used to articulate the difference between Jews and Christians. George-Harry meets his former Jewish master, Davidson, in an isolated inn during his flight to Canada. At night, when the two men are alone, George locks the door and stares at Mr. Davidson, beckoning him to recognize his identity.

אויף גאָט? האָט זיך דער פאַבריקאַנט אפ גירופין, גאָט וויל דאך דאש קיין
שקלאווע זאל פון זיין הערין ניט אנטלויפן און וואו שטייט עש דען? האָט אים
דער דזאַרדז גיפּרעגט 'דאַרט בייא דער געשיכטע פון הגר, האָט אים דער
פאַבריקאַנט גיענטפערט, אלש זיא איז אנטלאפן פון איר דאַמע האָט איר גאַט

גיהייסן זיך צוריק קערין און לאזן זיך פייניגן אונטער אירע האנט. ווא ווען איר בריינגט מיר יוא איין ראיה פון דער ביבעל דאש מען טאר פון איינעם שלעכטן הערין ניט אנטלויפן וועל איך אייך פרעגן ווידער וואש איז דער מיין פון אונזער תורה וואש זיא האט גישריבן 'לא תסגיר עבד אל אדוניו, דאָס הייסט ווען אייך שקלאווע אנטלויפט טאר מען אים ניט צוריק איבער נעבן אין זיין הערינס הענט. נון איז דאש בעסטע דאש מיר זאלין דיא ביבעל צו רוהע לאזן. דען מיר זייען ביידע קיינע גרויס ביבעלגראפן (לומדים) ניט. נור דאש ווייס איך דאש יעדער האט פאלין רעכט צו רעטן זיין לעבן און זיינע פרייהייט וויא ווייט ער נור קען.

[‘What of God?’ the factory owner proclaimed: This is against the will of the Almighty. He forbids his slave to run away from his master. “Where does it say such a thing? [that God forbids a slave to run away from his master?] asked George. There, in the tale of Hagar, how God commanded Hagar to return to her mistress and to submit herself unto her.” the factory owner replied. Ah if you quote the Torah at me that way, to show that it is forbidden to flee from a bad master, then tell me what the meaning of this in the Torah, as it says *lo saasgir eved al-Adonav* – [When a slave runs away] thou shalt not extradite him to his master. But let us drop this for now for we are not *lomdonim* (learned people): the Almighty will not judge me guilty for seeking my freedom.”]

Davidson, an affluent Jewish gentlemen, brings the story in which God instructs Hagar to return to her mistress Sarai. Here Davidson is arguing that George-Harry should be likened to Hagar, who is associated with Ishmael and thus non-Jews. The notion that Hagar was a fugitive slave is completely invented, and the reader is expected to detect Davidson’s mistake. Hagar, after all, was expelled and did not flee. The reference to God’s command that Hagar return to the home of her mistress sets in motion a cascade of misreadings. Hagar is the mother of Ishmael, the ancestor of Arabs. The Arab tribes, understood to be Midian’s descendants, are identified with Joseph’s slavers, who then sold him to the Egyptians. The implied author and reader both have that knowledge. This establishes George-Harry innocence and the textual irony that rails against blaming the victim. Yet without slavery, the story cannot begin. Humoring Davidson, George-Harry brings a competing verse from Deuteronomy. This is the winning verse, for in quoting Deuteronomy 23, George-Harry deployed commandments that speak directly to his predicament as both a fugitive and a Jewish slave: *Lo sa’asgir eved al-adonav* – “Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee / He shall dwell with thee, in the midst of thee, in the place which he shall choose within one of thy gates, where it liketh him best; thou shalt not wrong him.” In this brief mime of Talmudic dialogue, George-Harry becomes the rational voice. The meaning of the commandment *Lo Sa’asgir eved el Adonav* is about a situation in which a Jew finds a fugitive Jewish slave owned by a *non-Jew who has fled into the land of Israel*. By citing this verse, George-Harry’s black skin – that which

determines his status as a slave is partitioned from his status as a Jew. Mr. Davidson bears the responsibility to treat George-Harry as a fellow Jew who has fled to Jewish space, not as a fugitive slave, but a kinsman. Through the meeting of George-Harry and Davidson, black Jewishness becomes a possibility, a rehashing of the Exodus narrative and a modern application of rabbinic law.

At the same time, this conversation demonstrates the extent to which blackness and Jewishness were competing identities. George flees across a conceptual line from idolatry to monotheism, from Canaanite Slave to Hebrew Slave. Davidson, ignorant of the Bible and basing his knowledge of slavery on misconstrued proof, asserts his own whiteness in competition, or tension, with his Jewishness. In this sense, Dik's Yiddish racial typology includes a Jewish man whose status as a white man is protected.

Conclusion

In 1860, eight years after Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the librarian of the British Museum, Thomas Watts, wrote her a letter:

It is certainly one of the striking features of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, that it has been translated into so many languages...In the east of Europe it has found as much acceptance as in the west...There are two translations into the Illyrian (Albanian), and two into the Wallachian. There is one Polish translation and one adaptation by Miss Arabella Palmer into Russian. A full translation into Russian appears to have been forbidden until lately, lest it might get into circulation among the serfs, among whom it might prove as hazardous to introduce it as the Portuguese version published in Paris among the slaves of Brazil.¹¹⁴

Uncle Tom's Cabin, here lauded by the British Empire's cultural attaché, demonstrated by virtue of its immense popularity, the threat it posed to the landowning classes throughout Eastern Europe. The novel's portrayal of cruelty in the American South and the sentimentalized struggle of black slaves to gain corporeal freedom and Christian redemption proved translatable into hundreds of cultures, almost all of them Christian. By providing a telescopic lens on transatlantic slavery for societies otherwise divided by maritime, religious, linguistic and imperial frontiers, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became an Anglo-American current flowing in the Russian Empire. The rumor that it remains the world's best-selling book after the bible still circulates as the book's relevance again becomes clear.

The literary influence of Stowe's novel is evidenced by the immortality of Uncle Tom, Eliza, Jim Crow, Simon Legree, and George-Harry. These characters exist beyond Stowe's tale in Yiddish; they have become literary archetypes. Uncle Tom began as a Christ figure—a character like Jesus who loves God, loves his tormentors, turns the other cheek, and shows superhuman forbearance in the face of cruelty—but has been transformed into the pious,

¹¹⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 456.

charitable, masculine and stalwart divine servant. In Dik's version, this transformation culminates in becoming a *Ger Toshav* (resident alien.) Eliza remains the model of the desperate mother who will leap across the ice to save her child Dzim-Harry. The name "Simon Legree" has become shorthand for any cruel racist, but in the case of Dik's translation, his anti-Semitism makes him remarkable. Leo Tolstoy claimed that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was his favorite book as a youth, and Chaim Zhitlovsky, known for his theory of Jewish cultural nationalism in Yiddish, left a lost, incomplete translation of Stowe's novel into Hebrew – one among many attempts to translate the bestselling American novel into Hebrew. As Anita Shapira claims: "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* made David Ben-Gurion a socialist" after he read it in Abraham Zinger's 1896 translation into Hebrew. He noted: "I was taken aback by the idea of slavery, that a man could exploit other men so crudely."¹¹⁵ Henry James remarked that he read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Henry James compared the many spin-offs Stowe's novel provoked to "a wonderful leaping fish" that "fluttered down" around the globe, while decades later Yiddish theater goes on New York's Lower East Side witnessed Molly Picon as Topsy, strutting her jazzy step in blackface.¹¹⁶ Rather than "a book that made history," *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a novel that matters because it is continues to provoke heated argument even among those who have never read it.

Many readers continued to wish - well into the twentieth century - that Uncle Tom would stop praying and serving and do something. W. E. B. DuBois saw Tom's "deep religious fatalism" as an example of the stunted ethical growth endemic to plantation existence, where "habits of shiftlessness took root, and sullen hopelessness replaced hopeful strife."¹¹⁷ In Nabokov's *Lolita*, the porter who carries the bags to the hotel room where Humbert Humbert will first have his way with his young step-daughter is called "Uncle Tom."¹¹⁸ He will not get involved. As Hollis Robbins notes: "Uncle Tom" remains, even today, the standard epithet for any black man who serves whites and does not carry a gun."¹¹⁹

To achieve the fuller account of the literary complexity inherent in Dik's reception of

¹¹⁵ Anita Shapira and Anthony Berris, *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 6.

¹¹⁶ Murray Schumach, "Molly Picon, an Effervescent Star of the Yiddish Theater, dies at 94." *New York Times*, 7 April 1992. Internet Resource; Schumach writes "At age 15, she joined a Yiddish repertory company and toured as Topsy in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," switching languages -- English or Yiddish -- to suit the ears of the audience." and; Leslie Hanscom. "The Unsinkable Molly Picon" *L.A. Times-Washington Post*, 28 March 1980. Internet Resource. Hanscom writes: "Picon was Topsy, and her sister, Helen, who retired from the stage shortly thereafter, was little Eva. The production was strictly authentic, says Picon: 'We spoke Yiddish with a southern accent.' Hebrew translations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* include: Abraham Singer, Warsaw 1896. Asher Barash, 1927, 1936 (for children) Eliyahu Meitus, 1952. Yehoshua Khalmish, 1952 (for children) Shlomo Skolski, 1955. Eda Tsarfati, 1969. Raphael Elgad, 1986. Yael Lehrer, 1995. German: Approximately 125 editions, 1852-1971. Russian: 36 editions, 1858-1961. See Kohn, Meer, Todd, *Transatlantic Stowe: Harriet Beecher Stowe and European Culture*, 2006.

¹¹⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, and Brent H. Edwards, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 154.

¹¹⁸ Steven Belletto, "Of Pickaninnies and Nymphets: Race in *Lolita*." *Nabokov Studies*. 9.1 (2005): 1-17.

¹¹⁹ Hollis Robbins, "Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Matter of Influence," *History Now* 12 (Summer 2007): The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. Web. 28 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-now/2007-06/age-exploration>>.

these themes, I've followed Ken Frieden's "Textual Referentialism" in combining methodologies that emphasize the literariness of a text with its reference to the real world. Dik's translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into Yiddish – and the long afterlife of the text in Jewish and other literary systems – challenges the basis of formalistic analysis when it insists on the "true, terrible" tale and "real-world basis" of what it describes. In this sense, I am interested in the relationship between the text's literariness and the real world to which it is inextricably linked. Dik's insistence on recuperating classic techniques of *shibutz* (citation of sacred text) and *melitzah* (satire) to communicate the broader political and cultural discourse about race and racial difference has been the main focus of my analysis. A linguistic and literary approach to Dik's text can provide new insights into literary and cultural trends.¹²⁰ There is a phrase that sometimes appears on the frontispiece of texts translated from European languages into Yiddish: *Fartaytsht un Farbessert* (Translated [into Yiddish] and Improved.) Though this phrase does not appear on Dik's translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the depth of its implications is helpful for understanding Dik's broader participation in the translation of works into Yiddish. Though there is somewhat of a tongue in cheek tone here – the phrase communicates the irony that a Jewish translation could indeed "improve" upon an original artifact of high-European culture, the phrase also communicates the double-edged. *Fartaytsht*, when translated literally, means "translated into *taytsh*," which is a cognate of *Deutsch*, simply: German. By translating a novel into "Jewish-German" – as Dik describes the language of his translation on the title page, the reader is presented with a model of translation that evokes Herder's notion of "translation as improvement."¹²¹ However, *taytshn* is also a Jewish intertextual practice of exegesis, hence Dik's allusive style and posture as a traditional preacher, or *maggid*. More precisely, *taytshn* means interpretation - or translation as interpretation - as well as exegesis in the Jewish multi-lingual, textual tradition. Being the main model for intertextual study, *taytshn* serves as the basis of Dik's mode of translation.

It is hard to know from exactly which edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Dik translated, but it would be safe to assume that he translated Uncle Tom through an intermediate German source. For the purposes of this study, I have used the first and most widely printed German translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when comparing Dik's text with its German counterpart.¹²²

This chapter examined the lexicalization of racial terminology and concepts in the work of Isaac Meir Dik. The Ashkenazi Jews of the nineteenth century functioned as objects of religio-racial othering and in turn reclaimed ideas of race to assert their own subjectivity in modern European terms. One way this assertion was made was translation of European novels into Yiddish and Hebrew. Recent studies of proto- and early Haskalah literature have demonstrated how rabbis, intellectuals and ordinary Jews were active translators of racial language into Jewish discourse.¹²³ In order to contextualize these early irruptions of racial ideas in Jewish languages, a Jewish Atlantic that precedes immigration and links European Jewish

¹²⁰ Ken Frieden. "Literary Innovation in Yiddish Sea Travel Narratives, 1815-24," *Poetics Today*. 35.3 (2014): 357-382; *Travels in Translation: Sea Tales at the Source of Jewish Fiction* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016.)

¹²¹ André Lefevere, *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977), 31.

¹²² Stowe, *Onkel Tom's Hütte*.

¹²³ The "beginning" of racism is to be in the move to impress ideals of beauty upon the classical Greek and Roman face and body. See Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 1978.

modernity to its non-European descendants ought to be further explored. These interconnected Jewish-Atlantic discourses about race and the recognition of racial others largely reflected maskilic identification with European patronage and the acceptance of new ideals of European hegemony, not with other races or racial otherness. With a few significant exceptions about the lives of multiracial Jews in the early decades of the colonial Caribbean, we stare largely backward into a textual abyss, where race and racial others, as modern subjects, seem shrouded in rabbinic notions of heredity, kinship, and group difference.¹²⁴

Andre Lefevere, in his chapter “Translation: Universe of Discourse,” explores the translator’s attitude towards the “Universe of Discourse” expressed in the source text in relation to the one that exists within their own society. The translator’s attitude is thus heavily influenced by the cultural and political status of the original, the self-image of the culture into which the text is translated, the genre and subject matters deemed either taboo or acceptable in the target culture, its’ levels of diction, the intended audience and the “cultural scripts” that the audience is accustomed to or unwilling to embrace.

These aspects are never unchanging, and the work of translation may in fact facilitate the concurrent shifting of the translator’s cultural attitudes. In addition the status of the source text can be wide-ranging. The title page of Dik’s *Slavery* is deliberately and incisively crafted. The “true and wondrous tale” (*ayne vare un wunderlikhe geshikhte*) that Dik has translated is to have happened only two decades prior to the printing. Dik introduces two important points on the title page. The first is that slavery and serfdom should be understood as practical synonyms, and the second is that the story is about Jewish slave owners and their slave Uncle Tom. Uncle Tom is described first in Yiddish as a *neger* (negro) and after that as a Moor. Since Dik often provides parenthesis to clarify unfamiliar terms, it seems that a Moor – a general term for a dark-skinned person, an Arab, Muslim or North African – was perhaps more antiquated recognizable than the German, racial term for a black person – a *neger* (negro.) The text was also published specifically by Yosef Reuven Romm, marking this text as the work of the publisher’s youngest generation.

Thus there are few important linguistic tensions in the text. The first is between the Maggid’s level of diction, which in Yiddish gives the essay a mock-folksy tone, and the use of Hebrew quotation elevates the text and places it in conversation with those familiar with rabbinic literature. At the same time, the reader gets the sense that Dik is also introducing a new aesthetic to his readers, one that incorporates the sounds, images and feelings of a world beyond Eastern Europe. This is why the text is situated somewhat as a type of travel account, or at least it skirts the border between fact and fiction while purporting to be a literary representation of the real. When Dik quotes the Bible *In the Image of God I made Man*, he is calling attention to the confused collocation that the divine speaks of itself in the third person, and that while there the image of God serves as a wellspring of Jewish speculations, it also accounts for the diversity of human forms: in this case God did not make more than two people, and then, as they reproduced, they came forth in many colors – white black brown and red. These categories are drawn, as I’ve shown, from Carl Linnaeus and it is possible that he derived these images not from a principal edition of Linnaeus but from another maskilic work that dealt with human diversity.

Though Dik begins with a description of Jewish laws and narratives related to slavery, he

¹²⁴ Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 19.4 (1993): 693–725.

continues by adding a certain texture from classical sources. The image of a house overturned by a rebellious Roman slave, or the mass slaughter of rebellious slaves is meant to intensify the difference between Jews and Gentiles in their treatment of slaves. It seems here that Dik's representation of the relationship between the slave the master is drawn across ethnic lines. We learn that Cato let his dogs "tear at a slave's flesh." This is juxtaposed against declarations of the civility of the Jews, and the inherent civility of their laws.

Some of Dik's more encompassing aesthetic moments are found in the footnotes to his many scientific claims. One of the more striking moments is when he ventures to explain the "reason" for the dark skin of Africans. He discusses the Moor's blackness (*shvartskayt*) in terms of contemporary race science. First he disputes that "Moors" are another human species, because he believes that all human beings descend from the work of creation. He then reconstructs the environmental thesis, which posited that the hotter the climate the darker the skin of the people. He disputes this thesis by pointing to the existence of Jews in Africa, who he argues "remain white." Thus, conjuring up the image of "white Jews" in Africa is both aesthetic and political. It appears that Dik's explanation is grounded in rabbinic literature. He writes that the Moor's blackness is directly related to the Midrash which states that Canaan was conceived after Ham copulated in Noah's ark. However, Dik does not attach blackness to *sin* the way the rabbis do, but rather points to a more environmental reason that strikes more poetic than scientific.

Isaac Meir Dik's original preface to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* serves as a paradigmatic example of Yiddish literature in the shadow of European colonialism. In this sense, it is both indicative of maskilic ideals, values and literary techniques. Nevertheless, through its critique of European cultural norms, Dik also signals the conclusion of the Jewish Enlightenment. This text belies its optimism by critiquing the Christian society enlightened Jews aimed to join. In that sense, while this work definitely expresses some of the sentiments associated with maskilim of the previous decades, it also signals a great deal of ambivalence. Dik often added prefaces to his translation work, as well as some of his original novels. The author, as David Roskies, has explained, was interested in reclaiming the stance of the traditional Jewish storyteller, or *maggid*, but he was also interested in introducing the notion of public history and the form of the essay to the Jewish public. In this sense, the essay that preceded *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was meant to acquaint readers with the major themes of the novel that came after, but also to provide a sense of scholarly import to a Yiddish literature that was largely disparaged on one hand by Hebraist intellectuals and on the other hand by the rabbinic establishment. In this sense, the translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and its preface was not only a source of pleasurable entertainment, but part of a broader discourse to impart intellectual and political depth to the Jewish reader. With this in mind, I will analyze the structure and poetics of Dik's preface, which can be read also as his theory of translation.

The preface begins with the declaration that slavery – that is the institution that makes one human being the physical property of another – as a universal institution among both whites and blacks. It is important here to note that Dik assumes that his readers know that there are people known as white and black, and he seems to believe that these labels are based in the natural skin color of the person. Slavery begins, as it were, with the selling of Joseph into slavery by his brothers. However, it is important to note here that Dik is combining the biblical story of greed and deception with the modern trade in slaves. Then Dik introduces an important proof-text – the Curse of Ham –, which he acknowledges forms the basis and justification for the enslavement of Africans. There are quite a few dimensions to this assertion – the first being that the connection

between Ham and blackness is made in in rabbinic sources from the Gaonic period, through exposure to Islamic scholarship, and Dik understands that learned Jews might recognize this connection. The second is that he is conscious of the fact that the curse – a linguistic utterance regulated by rabbinic law – is an ongoing aspect of Jewish discourse.

The new Eastern European Jewish society that Dik envisioned gradually crumbled after the assassination of the emperor yielded a Jewish street battered by anti-Semitic violence. As things turned out, land distribution for peasants was actually meager. The landowners maintained most land and power, especially over fields for grazing, a monopoly on liquor, and so on. An unintended consequence of peasant emancipation was to put the peasant and the Jew on an economic collision course, as peasants emerged as new economic competitors. This indirectly led to anti-Jewish boycotts, riots, and pogroms. Dik's decades of optimism about the Russian/Polish emancipation of the peasantry is significant, however. The writer Dovid Kassel describes walking through Vilna with Dik in his later years, describing him as a “passive man” who was often “dissatisfied with his position.”¹²⁵ East European emancipation/reconstruction of the serfs that Dik praises may have gone off somewhat more peacefully than in the American South, but it did, in fact, lead to a great deal of violent conflicts. Consequently, this text will read strangely for American readers, but it is nevertheless prescient.

¹²⁵ Isaac Meir Dik, *Geklibene Verk* (Vilna: Sh. Shreberk, 1922), 1-5.

Part Two: Nusakh Afrike:

Rabbinic Intertextuality and Yiddish Modernism in Southern Africa

Similarly dispersed, porous, and commingled is private life.

What distinguishes Naples from the other large cities is something it has in common with the African *kraal*¹: each private attitude or act is permeated by streams of communal life. To exist — for the northern European the most private of affairs - is here, as in the kraal, a collective matter.

- Walter Benjamin, “Naples” (1925)

This second chapter is positioned in dialogue with the first chapter, and examines the development of Lithuanian (ליטוואַק) Yiddish in Southern Africa.² I focus on the brief proliferation of Yiddish literary modernism, which first appears in the midst of the South African War (1898-1902) and culminates in the reappearance of Yiddish as a postvernacular language of white resistance in the Apartheid era (1948-1994). I foreground biblical and rabbinic intertextuality in the Yiddish literature of Southern Africa, especially as it relates to the Hebrew Bible, a pillar in the literature and Christian self-understanding of the country. This reading aims to suggest a Jewish space between older Europeanist and more recent Africanist readings of the South African past. In turn, I hope that an Africanist reading of Jewish literature theorized from within Southern African Yiddish texts will emerge.³

I argue for this new reading through three paradigmatic Yiddish rewritings of the rabbinic parable (משל). The first, Yankev Azriel Davidson’s *Afrikaner Hagode* (Cape Town, 1912), rewrites the Passover Haggadah as an “exodus in reverse” taken by two Lithuanian Jews from the Pale to the newly built mining camps outside Johannesburg. I pay particular attention to how the Israelite slave in Egypt impresses upon the South African Jewish emigrant both social alterity and political power; imagining the Jewish migrant in Africa as a Europeanized Israelite freedman returning to the land of his enslavement. The second section closely reads Dovid Fram’s dirge, *Matumba* (Vilna and Johannesburg, 1937) as a modernist rewriting of rabbinic martyr narratives (עשרת הרוגי מלכות). Daniel Boyarin and Naomi Seidman have examined the historical and discursive link between the colonial missionary project and European anti-Semitism. I demonstrate how *Matumba* enriches our understanding of this correlation by representing the central protagonist’s hanging by colonial police

¹ A “Kraal” is a village of southern Africans, English “corral,” from Portuguese via Afrikaans, *curral*: pen for cattle, enclosure, from Vulgar Latin ‘*currare*’; an enclosure for vehicles.

² “Southern Africa” denotes a geographic region comprised of Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Southern Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. “South Africa” refers to the nation which gained independence from the British Empire in 1948.

³ For a comprehensive bibliography of South African Yiddish sources, see Veronica Belling, *Bibliography of South African Jewry, Volume 2: South African Writers of Jewish Origin* (Kaplan Center for Jewish Studies: University of Cape Town, 1997).

as Jewish martyrdom by a Roman hangman. The concluding section reads Nekhemye Levinsky's *Children* (קינדער) (Orange Free State, 1920) in the light of idol worship parables. Levinsky's short story, which contains no Jewish characters, reconstructs idol worship parables in colonial African space and time. By sublimating colonial racism in the violent relationship between an Afrikaner boy and his Sotho companion, Levinsky frames the relationship between the racist and his racism as a psychic struggle with the temptation to worship idols. When recognized, these three forms of rabbinic intertextuality--a reverse exodus, colonial holy martyrs, and idol worship stories--mark a new space that includes Yiddish within the single, multilingual literature of South Africa.

The previous chapter links the formation of Eastern European Jews as modern subjects to growing literary and material engagement with the Atlantic world. I showed how Isaac Meir Dik represents European settlement, colonial conflict and the Atlantic racial lexicon through his Yiddish rewriting of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Catalyzed by his Hebraist contemporaries' experiments with travel narrative, Dik's narrator artfully misrepresents his own Yiddish novels as genteel European travel accounts in translation. His Yiddish "explorer's tongue" positions a colonial lens on the provincial Lithuanian Jewish towns. Isaac Meir Dik, I suggest, marks the first extended Yiddish literary engagement with the empirical world of European colonialism; without ever leaving the Pale of Settlement. The Yiddish "armchair colonist" recognized the extent to which Dik's narrator felt comfortable claiming the voice of a European explorer; and in this sense, Dik's storyteller recites the prologue to mass Jewish emigration in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴ By placing the emphasis on *emigration* rather than immigration, I aim to give a clearer picture of how Ashkenazi ideas of race and racial difference changed over time. While Yiddish writers exhibited a deep ambivalence about the authenticity and value of race by questioning Jewish whiteness, Jews did indeed arrive in the colony with a sense, facilitated by Dik and the popular culture of travel tales he fostered, of a "European-Jewish" identity rooted in rationalist, maskilic readings of the Hebrew Bible.

This chapter brings one setting that appears in several of Dik's works into focus: Southern Africa. The tendency to read Southern African Yiddish texts as immigrant literature has obscured their rich stylistic and material interplay with Yiddish modernists. Just like Der Nister and I.J. Singer in Eastern Europe, Yiddish writers in Southern Africa were deeply engrossed in modernist rewriting of traditional Jewish observance and material culture. By reading Southern African Yiddish literature in the light of Dik's "Uncle Tom," these Yiddish texts become purposefully unmoored from their local context and placed in dialogue with the Ashkenazi rabbinic culture from which they were extricated. How are we to position this geographically distant Yiddish literary center in relation to its counterparts in Vilna? By examining persistent uses of rabbinic intertexts, with the parable (*mashal*) forming the most integral stylistic element, I examine instances in which colonial, racialized language, subjects and aesthetics continue to evoke the traditional Lithuanian rabbinic Jewish society from which these writers emigrated.⁵ Detailed and ornately allusive descriptions of the settings often

⁴ Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 37-49.

⁵ In historical terms, I am speaking about writers who were born in the provincial towns and villages of Lithuania, but lived in Southern Africa for the majority of their adult lives. Lithuania's relative proximity to the Baltic Sea allowed for access to British imperial ports, especially as ocean commerce became mechanized in the second half of the Nineteenth Century. These writers arrived through the port of Cape Town, often on circuitous journeys that brought them to other areas of British colonization. Yiddish-speaking, they inherited the communal institutions established by longer-settled Anglophone Ashkenazi and Western Sephardi Jews. In addition, these Jewish writers and cultural activists built

seem like stylistically transformed representations of the society from which these writers had emigrated. My aim here is to carve out a new theoretical space in which Yiddish literature is positioned as a crucial vector through which to observe the single, multilingual literature of South Africa that has emerged after independence; but it is also to place a Jewish form of colonial literature in dialogue with the Jewish-European modernist tradition.

South(ern) Africa: Literary Historiography and Multilingual Space

Southern African literature - a single, multilingual literature - is a client of the Hebrew Bible, which it received through the introduction of Christianity to the region by European missionaries.⁶ Modern Yiddish (and Hebrew) literature constitutes a significant element in the literature of Southern Africa, an aspect that is often ignored or minimized in literary historiography but that is also evidence of resistance to this missionary project.⁷

First, it is necessary to give a broad overview of South African literary historiography. Southern Africa, a region rather than a sovereign state, was under colonial government – Dutch and British – for three hundred years. Internal colonization and legal, enforced racial segregation functioned for half a century. Comprising at times in its history several autonomous states (Boer Republics, the Cape Colony, Bantustans, the states of Lesotho and Swaziland) in what is now one country, South Africa is home to speakers of eleven official languages. Having been home to a range of groups whose arrival ranges from millennia past to just a few decades ago, Southern Africa is, in one dominant reading, a place of radical heterogeneity and difference.⁸ Simultaneously, South Africa harbored legislated racial separation and oppression, based on a government principle of divide and rule. This makes the desire for cohesion and unity a strong presence in the national narrative and psyche. The study of South African literature after Apartheid has been caught in the doubleness of the conflicting impulses of national unity and multinational colonial space.⁹

The best attempt to define something called ‘South African literature’ in a cohesive sense was that of Stephen Gray in his *Southern African Literature: An Introduction*.¹⁰ Stephen Gray proposes

cultural institutions that mirrored the reading circles and presses of Vilna, Warsaw and Vitebsk, and they sought audiences in Europe and the Americas.

⁶ Shmuel Rozshanski, *Dorem-afrikanish* (Buenos Aires: Yoysef Lifshits-Fond fun der Literatur-Gezeleshaft baym YIVO, 1971); Joseph Sherman, *From a Land Far Off: South African Yiddish Stories in English Translation* (Cape Town: Jewish Publications, Southern Africa, 1987); Solomon Liptzin, “South Africa and Australia” in *A History of Yiddish Literature* (Middle Village, N.Y.: J. David, 1972).

⁷ Michael Chapman, “The Politics Of Identity: South Africa, Storytelling, And Literary History” in *Journal Of Literary Studies* 3-4 (2002), 224.

⁸ R. Thornton, “The Potentials of Boundaries in South Africa: Steps Towards a Theory of the Social Edge,” in R. Werbner and T. Ranger (eds.), *Postcolonial Identities in Africa* (London, Zed Books, 1996), 158.

⁹ L. de Kock, ‘The End of “Southern African” Literary History? Judging “National” Fiction in a Transnational Era’, in Chapman and Lenta (eds.), *South African Literature Beyond* (2002), 36.

¹⁰ Stephen Gray, *Southern African Literature: An Introduction* (Cape Town: David Phillip; London: Rex Collings, 1979), 10-25.

the geological model of an *archipelago*; different literatures (English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, etc) compose its ‘islands.’¹¹ Gray describes how the peaks of each island “protrude in set positions, even if one does not readily see the connections between them and the surface.” David Attwell and Derek Attridge critique this metaphor in the *Cambridge History of South African Literature*, remarking that the “archipelago metaphor is appealing because it enables one to imagine the distinctive qualities of each of the literatures while positing the unity of the underlying landmass to which each is attached; nevertheless one suspects that its usefulness has something to do with its continuing to obscure rather than map its underlying unity.”¹² At the heart of Gray’s metaphor lies the question of whether one constructs literary history in relation to a particular language, or whether one looks for “shaping influences [which] cut across language barriers.”

The past few years have seen the publication of significant comprehensive histories of South African literature. Several scholars have written studies of individual literatures in Southern Africa, divided along the lines of language or language groupings: D. B. Z. Ntuli and C.F. Swanepoel¹³ on African languages; J. C. Kannemeyer¹⁴ on Afrikaans; A. C. Jordan,¹⁵ B. E. N. Mahlasela, J. Opland, H. Scheub and R. Kaschula on Xhosa; B.W. Vilakazi and C.L. S. Nyembezi on Zulu; M. Sanders on Sotho; P. V. Shava and J. Watts on black writing.¹⁶ M. Chapman, C. Gardner and Mphahlele and M. van Wyk Smith on English. Several more recent studies have continued along these lines, though often substituting identification by race, gender or modality for that of language or language grouping as for example Attwell on black writing; Govinden, Chetty, and Frenkel on Indian writing; Wessels on

¹¹ David Attwell and Derek Attridge, *The Cambridge History of Southern African Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), xvii-5.

¹² *Ibid*, 3, 7.

¹³ D.B.Z Ntuli and C.F. Swanepoel, *Southern African Literature in African Languages: A Concise Historical Perspective* (Pretoria: Acacia Books, 1993). □

¹⁴ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur* (2 Volumes) (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1978); *History of Afrikaans Literature* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1993); *Die Afrikaanse Literatuur: 1652 – 2004* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 2005). □

¹⁵ A.C. Jordan, *Towards an African Literature: The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). B.E.N. Mahlasela, ‘A General Survey of Xhosa Literature from its Beginnings’, *Working Paper No. 2* (Grahamstown: Department of African Languages, Rhodes University, 1973); □J. Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry: Aspects of a Black Southern African Tradition* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983); *Xhosa Poets and Poetry* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998); C.L.S. Nyembezi, A Review of Zulu Literature (Pietermaritzburg: Juta, 1961); B.W. Vilakazi, ‘The Oral and Written Literature in Nguni’ (PhD Diss. Johannesburg: University of the □Witwatersrand, 1945); H. Scheub (ed.), *The Xhosa Ntsomi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); *The Tongue Is Fire: South African Storytellers and Apartheid* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); □R. Kaschula, *The Bones of the Ancestors are Shaking: Xhosa Oral Poetry in Context* (Cape Town: Juta, 2002).

¹⁶ M. Chapman, C. Gardner and E. Mphahlele (eds), *Perspectives on Southern African English Literature* □(Johannesburg: Donker, 1992); M.van Wyk Smith, *Grounds of Contest: A Survey of Southern African English Literature* (Cape Town: Juta, 1990); □M. Titlestad, *Making the Changes: Jazz in Southern African Literature and Reportage* (Pretoria: Unisa Press; □Leiden: Brill, 2004); □C. Stobie, *Somewhere in the Double Rainbow: Representations of Bisexuality in Post-Apartheid Novels* □(Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007). □M. Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the Southern African Transition* □(Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007). □

the /Xam Bushmen; Gunner and Brown on orality and performance; Scott and Steyn on white writing; and West on white women's writing.

Another type of literary scholarship has emerged that traces the thematic or discursive strings through Southern African literary and cultural studies: jazz in Michael Titlestad's *Making the Changes: Jazz in South African Literature and Reportage*; (bi)sexualities in Cheryl Stobie's *Somewhere in the Double Rainbow: Representations of Bisexuality in Post-Apartheid Novels*; women and gender in Meg Samuelson's *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the Southern African Transition*; place and identity in Duncan Brown's *To Speak of This Land: Identity and Belonging in Southern Africa and Beyond* and Rita Barnard's *Apartheid and Beyond: Southern African Writers and the Politics of Place*; missionaries and mission presses in Leon de Kock's *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa*; or animal studies in Wendy Woodward's *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in South African Narratives*.¹⁷ The linguistic doubleness of harmony and radical difference, which has always inflected the study Southern African literature, continues to exist. This catalog is largely restricted to a monolingual lens, showing how the multilingualism of the South African does not translate into studies that assume the existence of South African "literatures" rather than a single, multilingual literature.

Yiddish in Southern Africa

Yiddish literature and culture in Southern Africa may be considered "from a land far off," but its emergence is linked to some of the twentieth century's most significant political and spiritual crises.¹⁸ Southern Africa appeared as a subject in modern Ashkenazi texts before mass migration, but mostly as a paradigmatic frontier without much cultural specificity.¹⁹ This intricate mosaic of captivity narrative, rabbinic responsa, natural history, and sentimentalist travelogue – translated and adapted from German, English and Dutch sources - laid the linguistic groundwork for a Yiddish poetics of colonial Jewishness.²⁰

¹⁷ R. Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond: Southern African Writers and the Politics of Place* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). □L. de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1996). □W. Woodward, *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in Southern African Narratives* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008); Duncan Brown, Reimagining Southern African Literature, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (2014) 40:5: 1109-1123; A.S. Gerard, *Four Southern African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1971); *African Language Literatures: An Introduction to the Literary History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (London, Longman, 1981).

¹⁸ Joseph Sherman, "Introduction" *From a Land Far Off: Southern African Yiddish Stories in English Translation* (Cape Town: Jewish Publications, Southern Africa, 1987).

¹⁹ Shein, *Difference of a Different Kind*, 22-28.

²⁰ I am thinking here of the modern Ashkenazi communities of Jamaica, Venezuela, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, Egypt, and so on. Isaac Meir Dik is well known for popularizing the Cape Colony as a

Yiddish poetry and prose fiction produced *in* Southern Africa, however geographically isolated from Yiddish centers, was not an explosion in the distance, but a vibrant, stateless subculture in the cultural exchange between Jewish Eastern Europe and its ever-expanding satellites. The first three decades of Yiddish poems and stories written in Southern Africa were published both locally and in East European Yiddish literary journals. Consequently, in its choice of individual subjects and more encompassing aesthetic moments, Yiddish texts in Southern Africa did not vaguely vacillate between Europe and Africa in a vague sense, but did so in very specific and highly ambivalent ways. This vacillation meant that Southern African Yiddish literature displayed the subjectivities of both the colonizer and the colonized in a distinct division of experience.²¹ The terms of Jewishness shifted in colonial space: where Jews in Eastern Europe experienced the racialization of Jewish identity in scientific terms, Jewish migrants in Southern Africa experienced the concretization of Jewishness as an empirical, material form of whiteness. The texts examined here confront this transformation, and as such reach towards the *mashal* (משל) as a traditional form of Jewish social critique. The landscape of South Africa is conceptualized as an open matrix for social relations. Many of the dynamics expressed allegorize the racialized division of European and African manifested through reference to rabbinic literature. The nineteenth century Czech-German scholar of Jewish literature Moritz Steinschneider likens this Jewish form of allegory to Classical “Gnomonics”, or the ability for groups of sacred words to represent a total truth in the realm of social relations.²²

The parallels between South African and American contexts are also instructive in the study of modern reworkings of rabbinic and biblical intertextuality. The scholarly debate about the aesthetic representation of racial difference in American-Jewish literature and culture erupted in the mid-1970s, when Irving Howe saw in blackface specifically an allegory for the Jewish immigrants’ ambivalent sympathies for black suffering. Claiming that dark skin “became a mask for Jewish expressiveness, with one woe speaking through the voice of another,” Howe provided a theoretical framework for positive Jewish identifications with African-Americans.²³ Challenging this idealized view, younger scholars point to the exploitative and derogatory aspects of Jewish blackface, and thus place the Jewish immigrant text in an intertextual relationship with the European society from which it arrived. “Where Howe sees only solidarity, I see transfer as well,” writes Michael Rogin. He adds: “Switching identities, the jazz singer acquires exchange value at the expense of blacks.” Matthew Frye Jacobson echoed this sentiment: “The burnt cork at once masks Jewishness and accentuates whiteness,” a typical scene in *The Jazz Singer* shows the blackfaced Al Jolson wiping a white glove across his eyes, leaving a streak across his face and “thus heightening the visual impact of Jolson’s white skin”; in this way, “paradoxically, by donning blackface the Hebrew becomes Caucasian.”²⁴

At the same time, in an incomplete return to Howe’s still popular position, Matthew Frye Jacobson and others have stressed that the elaborate aesthetics of minstrelsy catalyzed a dialectics of

generalized frontier-like Jewish space. see Isaac Meir Dik, et. al. *The Women Shopkeepers, Or, Golde-Mine, the Abandoned Wife of Brod.*

²¹ Joseph Sherman, “*Serving the Natives*”.

²² Moritz Steinschneider, *Mashal U-Melitsah Le-Horot Na’are Vene Yiśra’el La-Lekhet Be-Darkhe Ha-Musar Ule-Havinam Melitsat Leshon Ha-Kodesh* (Berlin: 1861), 3-5. For an instructive assessment of the parable form in rabbinic literature, see Galit Hasan-Rokem *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

²³ Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 562.

²⁴ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 118-120.

“love and theft” (Eric Lott’s phrase).²⁵ This ambivalence, in turn, has been linked to the Jews’ complex racial status in US society and culture.²⁶ Exploring the notion of the Jews’ “chameleonic blood,” Daniel Itzkovitz has shown how the Jewish movement into whiteness provoked anxieties about Jewish performativity and the difficulty of identifying and defining Jewish difference.²⁷

In these critical analyses, Jewish identification with black characters does not simply whiten the Jews; rather, it highlights their fraught position in the “racial conundrum” in the United States. As Eric Goldstein has observed, far from simply “becoming” white in America, “Jews negotiated their place in a complex racial world where Jewishness, whiteness, and blackness have all made significant claims on them.”²⁸

In the new Yiddish culture emerging in Southern Africa from the 1920s onward, the literary and artistic representation of racism acquired different meanings. If in the United States the difficulty of establishing Jewish whiteness was predicated on the Jews’ ability to assimilate into an existing dominant racial order, in Southern Africa the notion of Jewish whiteness was shaped by the possibility of being a distinct “racial group.” Narrated from Johannesburg rather than Mississippi, then, the story of the Jewish yearning for whiteness is not about assimilation and acculturation but rather about colonial desire.²⁹

In the first decades of immigration, Southern African Yiddish (and a few Hebrew) writers embraced the affinities, both linguistic and physical, between Ashkenazi Jews and Afrikaners. This privileged White stance, as Joseph Sherman has shown, stood in stark contrast to the racial hierarchies of the immediate past, in which Jews increasingly became marked as of inferior race. As Jacob Mordecai Sherman suggests in his Yiddish essay *Di Afrikaans Shprakh un Literatur* (1936), the identification of Jewish communal life with imperial British aesthetics depended on the gradual disassociation of these cultural affinities, and cleaving to an independent Jewishness based in the materialist needs of a minority community. Afrikaner nationalism and racism would ultimately partition Jewish from Afrikaner identity.³⁰

²⁵ Ibid, 116.

²⁶ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14-28.

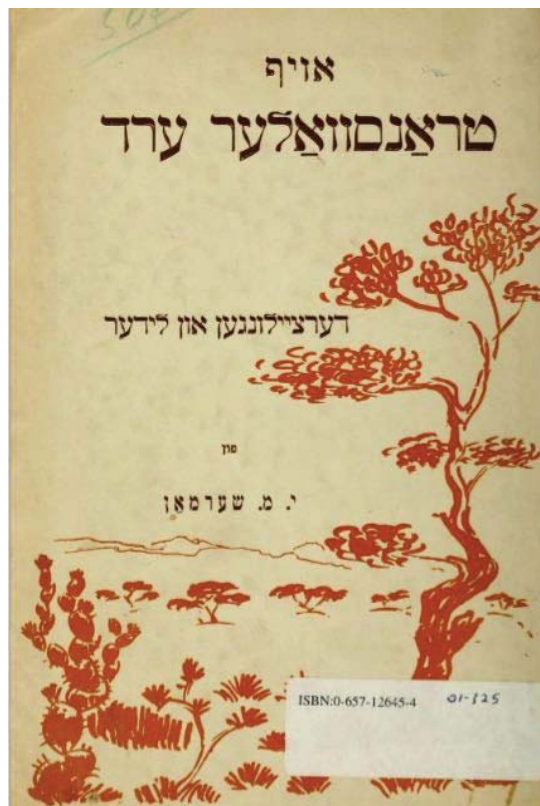
²⁷ Daniel Itzkovitz, “Passing Like Me: Jewish Chameleonism and the Politics of Race” in Linda Schlossberg and María C. Sánchez eds. *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 43-47.

²⁸ Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²⁹ Colonial desire in this case hews close to the descriptions laid out by Robert Young, who posits that “desire” undergirds any discussion of hybridity, which is a more empirical way of talking about the mixing of “races.” This discourse of hybridity unmasks, in Young’s view, the core of postcolonial thought, which itself is based on the assumption that race can be refuted by science alone. For Young on Apartheid, see Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 17-20.

³⁰ This is not to say that Ashkenazi Jews did not contribute to the very founding of Afrikaans literature. A convert to Christianity, Jan Lion Cachet (d. 1912), who came from the Netherlands in 1861, published *Sewe Duiwels en wat hulle gedoen het* (“Seven Devils and What They Did”). Written in serialized form, it appeared in one volume in 1907. The work includes several Jewish characters based on anti-Semitic stereotypes. Sarah Goldblatt (d. 1975), a writer of Afrikaans children’s books and short stories, was the literary executrix of Afrikaans writer C.J. Langenhoven (1873–1932). J.M. Friedenthal (1886–1959) also

The aftermath of the Afrikaner Nationalist government rise to power in 1948 engaged a political motivated resurgence of locally published Yiddish books, many of them the first or second printings of work written during British rule. Between 1948 and 1983, these reissued texts were, according to their stewards, coded gestures of protest against and inaccessible to the Security Police. Hidden from the Apartheid regime, writers and readers of Yiddish literature in Southern Africa enjoyed a paradoxical freedom.³¹ Yiddish culture in its native lands was destroyed by Hitler. Yet, well into the 1970s, Yiddish continued to function as a kind of “demisecret code,” free from political regulation, and providing an important window onto a period in which unrestricted access to archives remains unusual.



Jacob Mordecai Sherman, *Oyf Transvaaler Erd* (On Transvaal Soil: Stories and Poems). Johannesburg, 1949

wrote Afrikaans animal tales based on local lore. See Joseph Mordecai Sherman, *Di Afrikaans Shprakh Un Literatur* (Yohanesburg: Yidishn kultur farayn, 1936), 4-12.

³¹ Due to a shortage of printing facilities, the first Southern African Yiddish texts were written published in Warsaw and Vilna. The short stories of the modernist Nekhemye Levinsky, for example, were written during the time of the wars between the British Empire and Boer Militias, but were not published in South Africa until the 1950s. By the time much Southern African Yiddish literature became available, a large part of the Jewish audience could not read it. After the rise of the Apartheid regime, the Security Police did not have access to or no interest in Yiddish, and thus Yiddish literature published after 1948 provides us with a peculiar language politics.

Before South African independence in 1948, Yiddish writers' choice of subjects relayed a sense of macabre violence and grotesque emotion, often in reference to the dislocation and alienation of its central Jewish characters. This emphasis on the uprooted male (the figure of the *talush* in Eastern European Hebrew and Yiddish literature) contrasts with the pastoral, neoromantic stance of the Afrikaans farmer-poet. The uprooted Jewish male anticipates the Afrikaans poet of the Sixties, who questions the white Christian nationalism of their literary forebearers.³² While scholars of Southern African Yiddish literature have long placed emphasis on the persistent representation of Africans, other scholars suggest that these writers offer a distinctly Jewish view of racism, albeit one based in more pure materialist sense of Jewishness. Astrid Stark and Cedric Ginsberg have introduced us to numerous writers for whom Jewish-Afrikaans and Jewish-African interracial sexual and social contact became a central subject.³³ In contrast, Joseph Sherman has emphasized the continuities of racial segregation in Southern African society and Eastern European society, suggesting that Jews saw in each Southern African racial group an altered reflection of their previous status in Europe. Depending on context, Sherman argues, Jewish writers depicted Afrikaner, English, and Jewish immigrants in mutable skins, insisting on the fundamental fictions that justified the hardening of legal racism.³⁴ Following Sherman, I focus closely on the integrated, circulating nature of South African Yiddish literature. Rabbinic and biblical intertextuality pervades Southern African literature, and the politics of textuality and orality in religious expression intersect in different respects with questions of racism.

In his incisive analysis of Southern African Yiddish modernism between the two world wars, Joseph Sherman demonstrated how Jewish male protagonists, accustomed to their own powerlessness in the face of European Christian power, repositioned the Yiddish linguistic dichotomy between Jews (אונדז/us) and Gentiles (זיי/them) as the opposition between Whites (us) and Blacks (them). In effect, this linguistic division of experience partitioned their Jewishness from the Whiteness that they sought to better fulfill their material needs.³⁵ Through their rapid acquisition of a South African vocabulary drawn from English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Sesotho, the male Jewish bodies found in South African Yiddish literature are themselves marginalized by the white ruling class but socially and politically privileged over blacks. Yiddish-speaking Jews that emigrated to Southern Africa negotiated these enormous moral and cultural shifts and modified both their ethics and their vernacular, often reinforcing one element with the other. As intermediaries in a broader exchange, these characters populate a colonized Yiddish literature.³⁶

³² Jack Cope, *The Adversary Within: Dissident Writers in Afrikaans* (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1982), 99-128.

³³ Astrid Starck, "South African Yiddish Literature and the Problem of Apartheid," *Jewish Affairs*. 65.1 (2010): 6-23; "Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in South African Yiddish," *Studia Rosenthaliana*. 36 (2002): 157-69; "Fictional Images of Jews in South Africa." *Critical Arts*. (1998); Cedric Ginsberg, "Joseph Sherman - the Passion for Yiddish," *Jewish Affairs*. 65.1 (2010): 4-13.

³⁴ Joseph Sherman, "Serving the Natives: Whiteness As the Price of Hospitality in South African Yiddish Literature," *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 26.3 (2000): 505-22.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 505-07.

³⁶ Recent studies have positioned Eastern European Jewish culture in dialogue with European imperialism. These studies analyze sources produced in Eastern European centers. Ken Frieden, "Neglected Origins of Modern Hebrew Prose: Hasidic and Maskilic Travel Narratives", *AJS Review*. 33.1 (2009): 3-43; Iris Idelson-Shein, "*Their Eyes Shall Behold Strange Things: Abraham Ben*

As Joseph Sherman suggested, the racialization of Yiddish linguistic dichotomy between “Us” and “Them” could not account fully for the deep cultural weight of the Jew and Judaism in the colonial, missionary society. The colonial environment shaped the ways in which Davidson engaged the traditional Jewish texts he sought to reclaim for modern literature. In turn, he introduced the colonial African society as a legitimate site for generating aesthetic and epistemic categories integral to modern Jewish literature. Consequently, I suggest that the acclimation of Jewish literary language to a racialized environment is subtle and continues today. Southern Africa, a region consisting of different races, cultural identities, languages and ethnic bonds, has harbored a state-recognized Ashkenazi Jewish community since the early Nineteenth Century. During colonial times, the Dutch East India Company introduced the practice of racial segregation, but tolerated Jews as individual traders among other Europeans. These traders, who managed contracts in Amsterdam, Liverpool, Barbados, Cape Town and Cochin, formed a thin but prominent layer of Ashkenazi Jewry in an area where the African slave trade, and the industries for which it supplied labor, stood as pillars of the economy.³⁷ In 1795, when the British took control of the Cape of Good Hope, they continued the Dutch policy of racial segregation.³⁸ Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants, this time from Prussia, joined the British colonial economy as a direct result of their emancipation in 1812. They established communal organizations on the British imperial model. Nevertheless, their emancipation was legally and culturally uneven.³⁹

The memoirs of the *maskil* and Southern African Yiddish journalist Nekhemye-Dov Hoffmann identify word of mouth (*shmuesn mi-peh la-ozen*) as a decisive catalyst in an entire Jewish village’s emigration to colonies in Africa.⁴⁰ Informal speech and banter drawn from Zulu, English, fused and unfused Hebraisms and Yiddish neologisms is transformed into Yiddish literary language.⁴¹ This informal speech, as it is represented in literature, is heteroglossic in a Bakhtinian sense, and contains significant patterns of overlapping languages, levels of diction and social groups. In Hoffman’s recollections, Jewish migrants would appear at the port of Cape Town. When a word about his

Elijah of Vilna Encounters the Spirit of Mr. Buffon. "AJS Review. 36.2 (2012): 295-322.

³⁷ Though Ashkenazi Jews were themselves exposed to modern forms of slavery (especially sexual slavery), and most certainly to Russian serfdom, the historical layer of Ashkenazi Jewry, I am referring was a distinct cultural group in the Atlantic, a cultural sphere linguistically differentiated from Eastern Europe. These communities were linked to the Ashkenazi rabbinic courts in Amsterdam, Hamburg and London. Their intellectual life – the rabbinic authorities they read and the newspapers they circulated – provided a collective public culture. See Yosef Kaplan, *The Dutch Intersection: The Jews and the Netherlands in Modern History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Shlomo Berger, and Irene E. Zwiep. *Epigonism and the Dynamic of Jewish Culture* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008).

³⁸ Robert Ross, “Unification,” in *A Concise History of Southern Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁹ John M. Efron, Steven Weitzman, and Matthias B. Lehmann, *The Jews: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 231-49.

⁴⁰ N. D. Hoffmann, *Seyfer Zikhroynes: Erinerungen fun a Litvishen Maskil in Dray Velt Teylen: Eyrope, Amerika Un Afrike* (Cape Town: N D Hoffmann, 1916); and Lilian Dubb and Sheila Barkusky, *Book of Memoirs: Reminiscences of Southern African Jewry: Contemporary Observations on the Social Environment of Southern Africa in the Early Twentieth Century* (Cape Town: Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, 1996).

⁴¹ Joseph Sherman, “Introduction,” in *From a Land Far Off: Southern African Yiddish Stories in English Translation* (Cape Town: Jewish Publications Southern Africa, 1987).

adventures and successes in the harsh conditions reached a market place, prayer room or sabbath table in Lithuania, another person would up and make the journey.

Vilna, the center of Jewish Lithuania, experienced a massive influx of a Jewish proletarian class at the end of 1905, which was, according to one historian, eased by a sudden departure among hundreds of men for Southern Africa.⁴² Yiddish literature in Southern Africa has largely come to reflect the experience of this layer of Yiddish-speaking migrants, who were mostly uneducated men. Many of them were veterans of Tsarist militias with few prospects for economic integration in the lands of their birth.

Studies of Southern African Yiddish literature have understandably focused on the strangeness or exoticism of its descriptions. With vivid, often ethnographic detail, scholars have emphasized the newness of the immigrant and the novelty of the African environment. According to this view, Yiddish literature in Southern Africa grows out of a radical break with the Lithuanian Jewish past. However, as Joseph Sherman notes, Yiddish texts written in Southern Africa also narrate the transference of Jews from one type of racist society to another, with Jews not “learning racism” as a result of their new status as Whites, but acclimating or even preserving their own Jewish, Eastern European concepts of difference to the rigid racist typologies of British imperialism in Africa.⁴³

The ever-expanding linguistic palette of colonial, imperial, scientific and religious utterances specific to Jewish experience in a racially stratified society offers us a site of cultural translation. Here Yiddish writers in early Twentieth Century Southern Africa translate the politics of racial difference into Jewish terms, not only in their choice of subjects but also in some of the more unexpected aesthetic moments—scenes and images that reveal, ever so subtly, rabbinic intertextuality as both a form and a method of political speech. African Yiddish, a fusion of Yiddish linguistic elements with English, Afrikaans, Sotho and isiZulu, absorbed levels of diction that reflected a Jewish world clashing in terms of class, race, and religion. This heteroglossia did not narrate the end of Ashkenazi Judaism, as many of its subjects lamented, but rather what Jeffrey Shandler has called the “post-vernacular” afterlife as a creolized variant of English.

The reflection, or perhaps the shadow, of this linguistic situation is represented within the lonesome Jewish “gulch” in the Pale of Settlement in Dvora Baron’s Yiddish/Hebrew story *Fedka*. In Baron’s story, the shtetl is recast as completely female, owing to the mass migration of men to “Amerike” in the Yiddish version, and “medinat ha-am” (overseas) in the Hebrew version.⁴⁴ By reading South African Yiddish modernism alongside its European contemporaries, we can see how the social structures stylized through racial language in the colony exist also in Eastern European Yiddish modernism, albeit in the terms of religious difference.

⁴² Mordechai Zalkin, “Vilnius,” in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

⁴³ Joseph Sherman, “*Serving the Natives*,” 505-21.

⁴⁴ Nurith Govrin, Avner Holtzman, and Devorah Baron, *Ha-mahatsit Ha-Rishonah: Devorah Baron-Hayehah Vi-Yetsiratah, 648-683*. (Yerushalayim: Mosad Byalik, 1988). *Fedka* also appears in English translation: Dvora Baron, *The First Day and Other Stories* trans. Seidman and Kronfeld (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 178-90.

Knotted Tongues: Yiddish and Colonial Politics of Language

The position of Yiddish in the colonial setting also demonstrated the racially ambivalent position of Jews. At the beginning of the century, the playwright Peretz Hirshbein satirized the position of Yiddish when he visited Oudtshoorn, Eastern Cape, a town known for its trade in peacock feathers.⁴⁵

ווי דער שטייגער, האט זיך דער שמועס אנגעהויבן אויף א צעבראָכענס ענגליש מיט א בורישן אקצענט. אזוי הייבט זיך דאָ אן צו פארבינדן א שמועס, ווען יידן באגעגענען זיך. פּאָסט נישט גלייך אנצוהויבן רעדן יידיש. קאָוונער יידיש. בלויז איינער, אין די מיטעלע יארן, וואס איז געזעסן מיט מיר אין אווטאמאביל, ווען מען איז געפאָרן פון באן, ער אליין האט גלייך פון אנהייב אנגעהויבן צו רעדן יידיש צו מיר. די שפראך און די אויסשפראך ריין מיט צומיש פון העברעיִשע ווערטער, אבער דאס איז נישט געווען קיין ייד. א פולבלוטיקער קריסט, דער שטאָט-מעיאַר פון דער יידישסטער פון אלע שטעטלעך. ער איז ארויסגעפאָרן באגעגענען דעם יידישן שרייבער און אפגעפן אים כבוד. י א נ ק ע ל ע — אזוי רופן אים די יידן. ער איז זייערער. ביי זיי און מיט זיי אויסגעוואַקסן.

[As was customary the conversation opened in broken English in an Afrikaans accent. When Jews meet here this is the normal way they engage in conversation; it is not thought proper to start a conversation in Yiddish. Only one middle-aged gentleman who met me at the station and with whom I traveled in the car immediately began to talk with me in Yiddish. Kovner Yiddish. His language and pronunciation were fluent, idiomatic and interspersed with Hebrew expressions. This gentleman however was not a Jew. He was a full-blooded Christian, the mayor of the most Yiddish speaking of all towns in Southern Africa. He had travelled out to meet the Yiddish writer and to pay his respects to him. Yankele - this was how the Jews called him. He was theirs. He grew up among and with them.⁴⁶]

Here Hirshbein juxtaposes a Jewish-Afrikaner-English pidgin against idiomatic, pure Kovner Yiddish spoken by a non-Jew. Hirshbein is miffed to be greeted publicly in a local jargon. The inversion is ironic and foreboding. According to Hirshbein, this code has been mastered by a supposedly “full blooded Christian” interlocutor. Who is this mayor? How can someone be a “full-blooded Christian?” (This implies a race-theory of religion.) The possibility that this mayor is indeed a Jewish Christian, as the reader is led to suspect, accentuates the narrator’s sense of Africa’s radical break with the European past. Yiddish, or *speaking Jewish*, is introduced ironically as the language of the government figure. Drawn from the crucible of linguistic contact, the Jews mimic, in sound and vocabulary, the Afrikaner’s mimicking of English, acting as if they are not sure of which

⁴⁵ Peretz Hirschbein, *Felker Un Lender: Rayze-ayndrukḥ Fun Nayzeyland, Avstralye, Dorem-Afrike 1920-1922* (Vilna: Vilner farlag fun B. Kletsin, 1929), 195-196.

⁴⁶ Ibid. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

language or culture to adopt. But here, for a change, it is they who are being mimicked.⁴⁷ The languages of the majority African population are completely absent from Hirshbein descriptions. This conspicuous absence is a further clue that the scene is not fact or pure reportage, but rather a literary representation of Jewish conditions, in which the black labor force is a sight unseen. After all, a Peretz Hirshbeyn is a Yiddish writer, and the travelogue, as we know, tends by genre and tradition towards fiction. Patterned on the narrative posture of the Jewish traveler, Hirshbeyn's bilateral linguistic mixing is both ironizing and impressive. The reader is informed that Yiddish, disassociated from the Jew, is powerful political speech, which the Jews themselves are drawn by necessity to a new Southern African pidgin.

The ambivalent portrayal offered by Hirshbein concretizes Bhabha's concept of mimicry. Mimicry's deployment is rife and striking in Yiddish literature, but it has been little examined in Yiddish texts produced outside Europe, which focus on the literary representation of Christian Europeans. This passage also demonstrates Bhabha's point that contact transforms both the colonized and the colonizer. The discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.⁴⁸ The mutual assimilation of the mayor to Yiddish language and the Lithuanian Jews to an emergent English are themselves ironic, baffling or even funny. When contrasted with the utter absence of the African native in Hirschbein account, this mutual assimilation represents the reciprocity -- and exclusionary practices -- of Jewish and European identity in the colony.

Der Afrikaner: Yiddish and The Dutch Colonial Sphere

Southern African Yiddish texts have usually been read as authentic representations of Jewish encounters with modern racism.⁴⁹ The character of the community, which can be compared to United States Jewry, also encountered a society deeply oppressive towards blacks. As such, the indeterminate racial conundrum of Jewish difference animates much of the work.

Yiddish writers in Southern Africa were, in their earliest years, predominantly working class and solitary. The earliest group in the southern end of Africa were also almost exclusively men. Oral histories show us that many of these men were former child soldiers in the Tsar's infantry.⁵⁰

The acquaintance of Ashkenazi Jews with Dutch speakers did not begin in Southern Africa. The majority of Ashkenazi Jews who settled in Amsterdam from the Eighteenth Century onwards earned their living in the streets of the city, and thus gained a command of Dutch. The acquisition of the Dutch language contributed decisively to the influence of Dutch culture and politics, which led to

⁴⁷ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 85-92.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 54.

⁴⁹ It is well known that Amsterdam had one of Europe's largest African populations in modern times. For Jews of African and European descent in Dutch colonial networks, see Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 93-100.

⁵⁰ Hasia R Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 30-57.

new forms of media in the Yiddish language. These Eighteenth Century travelogues, journals and translations from Dutch shaped the taste, aesthetic, and political awareness of readers. The earliest layer of Yiddish journalism in Amsterdam reflected sympathy with the Huguenots, who arrived in Amsterdam from France. Huguenots were among Europe's earliest advocates for religious tolerance, and they often included Jews in their arguments for freedom of religious expression. These publications were synonymous with what Paul Hazard calls the "crisis of European conscience" that foreshadowed the European Enlightenment.⁵¹

At the same time, internal factors also led to the dissemination of travel literature and colonial reportage in Yiddish. Ashkenazim looked up to Sephardim and their culture, wealth, customs and aesthetics, which were established in Amsterdam and its colonial satellites. Many books from Spanish and Portuguese made their way into Yiddish, including Seventeenth Century travelogues from India and South America.⁵² These Jewish networks expanded as Jews moved to and circulated between England and its colonies, and Ashkenazim slowly aligned themselves with the new cultural network oriented towards the British Commonwealth and the United States.

At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, Jewish identity became contested as an "authentic" European identity. The Immigration Restrictions Act of 1902, which was aimed at excluding economically undesirable Indian and Jewish immigrants from settling in the Cape Colony, depended on a simple test. If an individual could complete an immigrant application by hand in any European language to the satisfaction of the authorities, he or she would be granted residency. In the eyes of the colonial administration, Yiddish was not a European language because it was written in Hebrew, or "Oriental," characters. This Act, and the Jewish communal advocacy that eventually won the recognition of Yiddish as a "European" language, was what Joseph Sherman calls "a thin veil over the antisemitism of the Cape Authorities."⁵³

Indeed, Eastern European Jewish arrivals in South Africa began a campaign to convince Cape colonial authorities that Yiddish qualified as a European language. In this sense, Jewish language politics in Africa was not simply a radical break with the past, but an intensification of these politics in a new racial hierarchy. Transferring anxieties about the status of Yiddish to the colony preserved continuities with the past while elevating Yiddish. The British mining industry and its myriad auxiliary businesses offered a new economic sphere that included Jews and Africans on one hand, while at the same time reproducing ethnic antagonisms. Surrounded by but not in control of the native masses, Jewish writers portrayed a multilingual commercial and social space - seven different African languages could plausibly be spoken in one cafeteria operated by a Lithuanian Jew. Southern African Jewish literature, if it could be said to be a full-fledged component of the multilingual Southern African literature, depicts a fluid world in which Jews are the economic buffers between Africans and Europeans, belonging to neither. While both Jews and White Christians groups benefitted starkly from their elevated status above blacks, Jews occupied economic niches that lessened their racial position in the eyes of Europeans.⁵⁴ In contrast to the Jewish immigrant communities of the United

⁵¹ Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680-1715* (Cleveland: World, 1963).

⁵² Shlomo Berger, *Speaking Jewish--Jewish Speak: Multilingualism in Western Ashkenazic Culture* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003).

⁵³ Joseph Sherman, *Constructing Jewish Immigrant Identity: The "Kaffireatnik" in Southern African Yiddish Literature* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, Institute for Advanced Social Research, 1997), 1-25.

⁵⁴ Eli D. Goldstein. "Litvaks in the Rural Southern African Economy." *Jewish Affairs*. 57.2 (2002): 9-13.

States, Jewish immigrants to Southern Africa first settled in remote towns and villages and only later moved to cities. On the one hand, their association on the one hand with the economic nature of Afrikaner homesteading and African village life, and on the other their acquisition of the English language made them a distinct community in the British imperial sphere. This is occasion for a deep dislocation, and the works of literature insist on an image of Africa as “a land far off” or a “a land of gold and sunshine” - a natural environment in stark contrast to the cold and cloudy Eastern European environment. Beyond ecology, however, and perhaps in the choice of individual African themed subjects, Southern African Yiddish literature is deeply conversant with the major streams - and physical, material environments - of Yiddish literature in Eastern Europe and the United States. Though Southern African literature certainly contains the new and fantastic images of an exotic Africa, in its more encompassing aesthetic moments we can see not the transfer of Yiddish literature from Europe *to* Africa, but a model for what Edouard Glissant has described as discursive “*creolization*.”⁵⁵

Another aspect of the arrival of Yiddish-speaking immigrants on Southern African shores is their reception by the already existing Anglo-German Jewish elite, who influenced the structure and high aesthetics of the established Jewish community. Each community had very different Jewish self-understandings. The Lithuanian Jewish immigrants emphasized the heterogeneity of traditional Jewish practice, and identified their piety with the aesthetic of the Eastern European Jew in his long black coat and beard. The Anglo-Jewish elites, in contrast, maintained an emphasis on decorum and British imperial aesthetics in their dress and synagogue liturgy and actively suppressed Yiddish due to their cultural biases.

The relationship of Yiddish to Afrikaans, as to Hebrew, is fraught with larger ironies. From the Depression onwards, the Afrikaner nationalist party expressed outright anti-Semitic attitudes in its rejection of Jewish immigrants. However, the peddlers and isolated Jewish migrants in areas of Afrikaans-speaking settlements realized quickly as well how much they shared culturally, linguistically and theologically with the Afrikaner, especially in contrast to the British. The Jews who traveled from village to village conceptualized their own existence - much like the Afrikaner - as God’s Chosen People in Southern Africa, who experienced a “Great Trek” that mirrored the exodus from Egypt. A mythic discourse merged in which anti-Semitism was said to not exist amongst Afrikaners, who felt a respect toward the descendants of the biblical Israel.

Others have noted that in the Afrikaners the Jews found an exact correspondence to the pious peasants of their Lithuanian homelands, whom they served as innkeepers and general dealers. *Vis a vis* the British colonial authorities, Afrikaans and Yiddish were classified as inferior languages, with a common struggle to be recognized as languages at all. Yet, the urbanization of the Jews in Southern Africa intensified Afrikaner resentment. The powerful growth of Afrikaner nationalism drove the Jewish community toward identification with the British Empire. The great opportunities afforded by a society based on a white elite and a massive black proletariat transformed the Jews into a white middle class.

The Haggadah of the African: Reversing the Exodus

⁵⁵ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. 1989), 20-161; Milton Shain, “*Imperialist Judaism in Africa: The Anglo-Boer War and the Image of the Jew in Southern Africa*,” in *Jewish Affairs* 54 (1999): 43-47.

This section examines a parody of the Passover *Hagode* published as a holiday supplement to *Der Afrikaner*, a Yiddish-language monthly that appeared in Johannesburg and its environs between 1909 and 1914.⁵⁶ The text imitates the standard structure, but replaces the traditional Hebrew-Aramaic text with a Yiddish-language dialogue between two fictional immigrants, Yankev-Shmerl, a canteen owner serving black laborers, and Itshe-Meir, an unemployed *melamed* currently working as a traveling peddler on the Rand.⁵⁷ The commentary doubles as a dialogue between these two men at their improvised Seder, which was later transcribed from memory by a fictional third guest named Hirsh-Dovid Rasses. Rasses befriended Yankev-Shmerl and Itshe-Meir on a journey among gold mining camps in the Transvaal Colony, which became part of the British Empire after 1902.⁵⁸ As an archival source exhibiting significant literary-historical value, the *Afrikaner Hagode* demonstrates how, as Walter Benjamin seems to warn us, ancient narratives are heard amidst the grime and confusion of an industrialized landscape.⁵⁹

The characters that populated South African Yiddish modernism could have easily recognized the *Afrikaner Hagode* as the work of Yankev-Azriel Davidson because the narrator was Hirsh Dovid Rasses, the alter-ego of Lithuania-born journalist whose parodies and vignettes filled the African Yiddish press in the early twentieth century.⁶⁰ Though dressed in the garb of a traditional *seyfer* (sacred book,) the *Afrikaner Hagode* predictably reflects Davidson's invention of Hirsh-Dovid Rasses' ambivalent stance toward retelling the Exodus story in a racist, colonial society in which slavery existed in different forms. Hirsh-Dovid Rasses' relentless attacks on known Jewish criminals, absent fathers, colonial officials, poverty and secularization are all reflected in the *Afrikaner Hagode*

⁵⁶ Yakov Azriel Davidson (Unattributed), *Afrikaner Hagode* (Ms. Cape Archives, Cape Town, Republic of Southern Africa). The Yiddish vocalization *Hagode* is used to denote Davidson's text. *Haggadah* is used to denote the traditional Hebrew-Aramaic text.

⁵⁷ A teacher of young boys; considered a profession of low prestige. "The Rand," or Witswatersrand, is the ridge of mountains near Johannesburg where gold was discovered.

⁵⁸ Although small amounts of gold were found in the northern and eastern Transvaal in 1871, what transformed Africa into a Jewish destination was the discovery, on the Laanglaagte farm in 1886, of gold deposits that persisted deep into the earth and stretched for fifty kilometers. Massive investment from England, Germany and France followed and an enormous and inexpensive black labor force formed in its wake. African mine laborers gradually became deprived of any right to own or use agricultural land. Denied any access to upward mobility, Africans were constrained as a group of migrant laborers. Southern Africa's social structure divided the country's capital and labor along strictly racial lines. The gold mining industry sought to control African mineworkers by confining them to large barracks. Regulating how and where these workers spent their wages barred them from entering white towns and villages. This arrangement also guaranteed a monopoly for cafeterias and concessions selling near the African population. Yiddish-speaking Jews constituted the majority, although not the entirety, of those that ran these businesses in the early twentieth century.

⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin and Rolf Tiedemann, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999), 221-22.

⁶⁰ Yakov Azriel Davidson (Unattributed). *Afrikaner Hagode*, (Ms. Cape Archives, Cape Town, Republic of Southern Africa, c. 1909). Davidson was active in the Southern African Yiddish press between 1898 and 1914 and is not counted among Yiddish modernists writing in Southern Africa. Yakov Azriel Davidson, Veronica Belling, and Mendel Kaplan, *Yakov Azriel Davidson: His Writings in the Yiddish Newspaper, Der Afrikaner 1911-1913* (Cape Town: Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, 2009).

as part of the narrator's broader parody of the *mitsve* of *sipur yetsies mitsrayim* (the biblical commandment to retell the story of the Exodus), which demands that every Jew recount and discuss the story of the Exodus with his children as if he went through the experience himself.⁶¹

The Afrikaner *Hagode* demonstrates the lengths to which Davidson went to uncover the various motives that brought Jews to South Africa. By extension, in retelling the story of the Exodus, he was able to articulate the ways in which Jews, many of them veterans of Tsarist militias, left the Pale of Settlement to recover their masculinity and individual sense of worth in the British Empire. These alienated, gritty Jewish men serving Africans amidst the mines were reconstructed as literary tropes that endured in South African Yiddish literature until the middle of the twentieth century and continue to challenge our narrative of Jewish modernization.

Yankev-Shmerl raises the matzo and bellows “*ho lochma anya*; this is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in Egypt.” Yankev evokes a chaotic maritime scene: Lifting the matzo high into the air and shaking it at Itshe-Meir, he begins to recount his own reverse Exodus from Europe to Africa. Noting the presence of Jews pitifully returning to Africa for a second time, he continues:

אבער דעם 2-טען מאהל פארער קיין אפריקא, וועלכע קענען א ביסל
ענגליש-בוריש-קאפיריש-לשון האבן אריינגעמען די נבאות אין די הענד,
און וועסן ווי האבן געוואלט האבן זיי געגעבן מנת אחת אפים,
און וועסן ניט.

[But second-time travelers to Africa, who know a little mixed up with English, Afrikaans (*boerish*), and native languages (*kaffirish-loshn*). They take predictions (*neviyos*) from their hands. Who will be given a double portion in the coming year and who will not?]

In this scene, which records the two men as they sit down to their Seder, recalls the scene on their second sea voyage to Africa. Yankev-Shmerl's recollection of the deck scene alludes to *u'netaneh tokef*, the liturgical poem of the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur services composed by a Rabbi sought by Christian authorities to be tortured. Rather than drawing upon biblical and rabbinic sources that describe divine scrutiny of human conduct, the creolized Yiddish of these ship prophets

⁶¹ This biblical commandment instructs the Jews to tell their children the story of the Exodus each year on Passover. The Mishna in Tractate Pesachim 10:5 begins: “In every generation, one is obligated to see oneself as if they left Egypt, as it is said (Exodus 13) And you will tell your child on that day, saying, ‘Because of this that God did for me when I left Egypt.’” Therefore we are obliged to thank, praise, glorify, extol, exalt, beatify, bless, etc., etc. to the One who did all these miracles for our ancestors and for us: Who brought us out from slavery to freedom, from sadness to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to great light, from servitude to redemption. And we say before God, Hallelujah.”

[בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים שנאמר (שמות יג) והגדת לבנך ביום ההו לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים לפיכך אנחנו חייבין להודות להלל לשבח לפאר לרומם להדר לברך להלל ולקלס למי שעשה לאבותינו ולנו את כל הניסים האלו הוציאנו מעבדות לחירות מיגון לשמחה ומאבל ליום טוב ומאפילה לאור גדול ומשעבוד לגאולה ונאמר לפניו הללויה.]

emphasizes human scrutiny of human conduct, and in particular, the ethical problematics of desiring material wealth. When Yankev Shmerl asks who will get their “double portion” he is referring of course, to immigrant success. He is also making a direct reference to the first chapter of the Book of Samuel, when Hannah prays for a child and is mistaken as a drunkard. By confusing prayer for intoxication and material wealth for a “double portion,” Yankev Shmerl evokes instability and ambivalence. The deliberate usage of the Yiddish neologistic term "*kaffirish-loshn*," rather than simply *Kaffirish*, deliberately displaces the well-known term *mame-loshn*. By using *kaffirish-loshn* as a synonym for the English colonial term "native language," Yankev-Shmerl's neologism replaces the European Yiddish dichotomy between Yiddish and Goyish with a colonial hierarchy of European languages over African dialects. Then, as he erases the distinctions between the myriad African languages, Yankev-Shmerl's coins a new Yiddish term: *kaffirish-loshn*, which frames a social world where Yiddish presides over native tongues as a medium of colonial privilege.⁶²

In a humorous turn, Itche Meir interjects and unmasks Yankev-Shmerl's pretension:

This matzo you hold is a biscuit that we would eat on the ship [to Africa.] We stayed hungry until dinner and you bought this biscuit for one shilling from the kosher kitchen. Why are you so hacked up with sorrow, shaking a piece of bread as if it's matzo?

Itshe Meir's response introduces his ethical position in the text. Though short on words, Itshe-Meir's ambivalence towards Yankev Shmerl's commentary demonstrates how uneven and incomplete Jewish acculturation to the Southern African environment was. Whereas Yankev-Shmerl sees his biscuit as an appropriate stand-in for unleavened bread, Itshe Meir sees it as a symbol of Yankev Shmerl's alienation from the substance of the ritual. Rather than a symbol of modern Exodus from slavery to freedom, Itshe-Meir sees the biscuit as the object that symbolizes Yankev Shmerl's misunderstanding of the commandment. Later, when Yankev-Shmerl recites The Four Questions, Itshe Meir replies:

פרעגט זיך: פון וואָס ווענען לויפט מען אין אפריקא? איז דער תרוץ: עבדים היינו במצרים, אונדזערע עלטערן זיינען געוועזען קנעכט אין מצרים, וועלכע געפינט מען אין אפריקא, און זיינען אזוי צווגעווינט געווארען צו אפריקא מיט די שווערע ארבייט, באקומענדיק דערפאר ציבעלעס, קנובעל און קירבעס צו זאט, און זיי האָבן בשום אופן חשק געהאט צו פארלאָזן אזעלכע טרייערע אנטיקן. איצט מיר שלעפּ ציגעלעך און מאַשקע צו ווייט און האָבן די צו פיייערן אונדזער "פרנסות" - דאס ייד מיט אַ באַרד (יאַנקעוו-שמערל) איז דער ערשטער צו באַרימערן צו זיין לאַנדסלייט; ער זאגט עס איז זיין פּערזענלעך

⁶² For a concise rendering of how new languages come into being, see John A. Holm, *An Introduction to Pidgin and Creoles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). On defining Yiddish as a creole, see “Post-Exilic Jewish Languages and Pidgins/Creoles” in Joshua A. Fishman, *Yiddish: Turning to Life* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1991).

געבאָט (מצבה) צו זאָגן די געשיכטע פון [זיין] יציאת-מצרים!

[Like all other nights? I ask you Yankev-Shmerl, for what reason have people been running off to Africa? *Avodim hayinu b'mitzroyim* - and they were thus use to Africa with the hard labor, getting for it onions, garlic and squashes to keep satiated, they had no interest in giving up such dear treasures. We were slaves in Egypt. Our ancestors were servants (*knecht*) to the Pharaoh in Egypt, which one finds here in Africa. Now we schlep goats and liquor to distant villages and have the nerve to celebrate our "livelihoods"? (*parnasos*) – This Jew with a beard (Yankev-Shmerl) is the first to boast to his fellow Jews; He says it is his personal commandment (*mitsve*) to tell the story of [his] Exodus!]

Itshe Meir is indignant. He believes that Yankev Shmerl has misconstrued the meaning of the commandment. Whereas Yankev Shmerl insists that he has been liberated by his choice to come to Africa, Itshe Meir sees his own emigration in a more ambivalent light. He remarks that Jewish existence in Europe should be likened to Israelite enslavement, but in contrast to Yankev Shmerl's reliance on the redemptive power of becoming a white African at the expense of being an Eastern European Jew, Itshe Meir sees his whiteness as a newly imposed but reinforced state of bondage. He describes the exodus of Jewish immigrants to the colony in terms bringing goats and liquor from the colonial city to the mining barracks rather than as a collective journey from slavery to freedom. The livestock and alcohol commonly sold by Jewish traders to African laborers represent Yankev-Shmerl's ironic embrace of a new White identity even as these two commodities symbolize his actual association with the lowest classes of colonial society. They also refer back directly to the largely Jewish alcohol distribution trade in Eastern Europe. Yankev-Shmerl's inability to acknowledge his social link to Africans demonstrates the division of experience that seeks to partition his Jewishness from the Whiteness he seeks. The modern Exodus has become a journey from Jewishness to Whiteness.

The frontispiece of the Afrikaner *Hagode* announces the creation of a new version of the Passover liturgy:

סדר פסח הגדה לפי נוסח אפריקא
זיצנדיק צווישן דעק פון דער עמיגראנטען שיף
צו ווייט-אפריקא, זאגט יעקב-שמערל, דער
שניט-קרעמער
צו איטשע-מאיר דער מלמד ביידע פון דער ק"ק
רעלופישוק

[*Pesach Hagode* according to the Style of Africa (*l'fi nusakh Afrike*) first conceived underneath the deck of an immigrant ship

to distant Africa, from the mouth of
Yankev-Shmerl, owner of a little shop, to
Itshe Meir the Melamed, both from the
Holy Community of Relufishok.]

The creation of a new tradition based on one of the central narratives of the Hebrew Bible and of Jewish textual tradition is both an audacious move on the part of the author and evidence of the text's parodic stance. By replacing the text of the Haggadah with a transcribed exchange between two men, the reader is forced to question the narrator's motivations and the text's authority. Is the narrator parodying the Exodus story in a time and place where the continuum from slavery to freedom is clouded by the reality that Jews themselves are not the enslaved, but rather masters by virtue of their white skins? Are Yankev Shmerl and Itshe Meir simply caricatures of themselves and grotesque victims of the same typology that translates so easily into the racist Southern African environment?



Frontispiece, Yakov Azriel Davidson, *Afrikaner Hagode*, c. 1910.

What is the difference, then, between parodic anachronism and the commandment to retell the story of the Exodus in a way that dialogues with the future?⁶³ How does a Jewish story remain Jewish when its interpretation becomes the domain of a character seeking to subvert or suppress that Jewishness? Biblical and rabbinic language, and the social critique it supports, contributes a Jewish space between Africanist and Europeanist readings of the Southern African past, and in turn, provides space for an Africanist reading of Jewish literature theorized from a social space where Jewishness unsettles rather than entrenches the racial typologies in the Yiddish language.

Southern African literature - seen as a single, multilingual literature - continues to be deeply influenced by Christian readings of the Hebrew Bible, which it has received through the supersessionist stance of Christian missionaries among Africans.⁶⁴ Yiddish literature thus constitutes a theologically subversive element in the literature of Southern Africa, a feature that is regrettably ignored or minimized in both Europeanist and Africanist readings of Southern African literature. It is a curious coincidence, perhaps, that Walter Benjamin, a Jew passionately engaged with the aftermath

⁶³ Parodic anachronism is a central feature of Old Yiddish literature, revived in the modernist context e.g. the *purim-shpil* and Itzik Manger's *Megile-Lider* and *Medresh Itzik*.

⁶⁴ Shemuel Rozshanski, *Dorem-afrikanish*; Joseph Sherman, *From a Land Far Off*; Solomon Liptzin, "South Africa and Australia" in *A History of Yiddish Literature* (Middle Village, N.Y.: J. David, 1972).

of forgetting, places the figure of the Jewish peddler reminiscent of our narrator, Hirsh-Dovid Rasses, at the significant waystations of Western modernity.

All the inhabitants of the town were acquainted with the man, and they knew that he did not hold a high office, for he was neither a state official nor a military man, but a little supervisor at the tiny supply depot, where together with the rats he chewed on the state rusks and boot soles, and in the course of time had chewed himself together a nice little frame house. It is evident that this story reflects the traditional sympathy which storytellers have for rascals and crooks...But because no one is actually up to this role. it keeps changing hands... Now it is the tramp, now the haggling Jewish peddler, now the man of limited intelligence who steps in to play this part. In every single case it is a guest performance, a moral improvisation. (The Storyteller, XVIII) ⁶⁵

African Afterlife: Haskalah in the Colony

The “Afrikaner Hagode,” though produced at the onset of the twentieth century, is emblematic of the geographic dispersion of Yiddish language Jewish Enlightenment, or *Haskole* literature. Though many scholars consider the advent of mass migration a signal of the Jewish Enlightenment’s end, it is recast here as the beginning of Ashkenazi placement into spheres of European imperialism. Upon the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, a number of Jewish intellectuals could not simply give up on their idea of Jewish-European synthesis, but rather many searched for new settings in which this synthesis could be theoretically achieved. Some migrated west and south to colonial environments. Nekhemye Dov Hoffmann, the first person to establish a Hebrew-Yiddish printing press in Southern Africa, arrived in Southern Africa at age 32 in 1889. Born in the Kovno province of Jewish Lithuania, he came in contact with major figures of the Haskalah prior to emigration including Avraham Ber Gottlober, Shmuel Yosef Fuenn and Avraham Ber Levinson. Kalman Shulman and Zvi Nissan Golomb were also his literary patrons, and in 1879 he became an editorial assistant for Mikhl Levi Radkinson’s Hebrew weekly *Ha-Kol* and its Yiddish insert *Kol l’Am*. Hoffmann’s first book, *Sipurey Ha-Teva* (Nature Stories), was a compendium of tales adapted from Shulman’s Hebrew-language natural science textbooks.⁶⁶ The Vilna publishers Golomb and Matz encouraged Hoffmann to write for Yiddish periodicals. As a result, he published *Lebn in Harem*, an orientalist tale, for *ha-Tsefira* in Warsaw. In 1882, he was asked by Haim Zelig Slonimsky to write regularly for that newspaper. In 1886, the New York-based Yiddish editor Kasriel Zvi Sarason financed

⁶⁵ Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, and Harry Zohn, *Illuminations*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968).

⁶⁶ Nekhemye Dovid Hoffmann, *Sipurey Ha-Teva: Sipurim Me-‘inyaney Yedi‘ot Ha-olam Veba-Teva* (Varshe: Y. Goldman, 1887).

Hoffmann's passage to New York, where he worked for *Tageblatt*, the first Yiddish daily in that city. He returned to Europe within the year and took up the editorship of *ha-Magid* in Berlin.⁶⁷

Three years later, Hoffmann emigrated to South Africa, and a year later imported the first Yiddish linotype machine to the continent. This allowed him to establish the first Yiddish weekly in Africa, titled *Der Afrikaner Israelit*. This lasted for only six months. Hoffmann's second and third weekly, *Ha-Or* and *Der Yidisher Herold*, lasted for three years. In 1898, he produced *Der Afrikaner Telegraph*, as well as the weekly *Yidische Folkstsaytung* with the London journalist Isaac Stone. Hoffmann transformed this paper into his most impactful project. *Der Afrikaner*, which ran from 1909 to 1914, published the first instances of literary Yiddish modernism in Southern Africa.⁶⁸ David Goldblatt, another founding editor of the Yiddish press in Southern Africa, was a co-editor with Hoffmann of *Der Afrikaner Telegraph*. Born in Radom, Poland and having lived in Warsaw, Berlin, and London, he engaged deeply with anarchist philosophy. He claimed to have met and discussed ideology with Peter Kropotkin in Eastern Europe, and with William Morris and Morris Winchevsky in England. He spent a considerable amount of time strengthening the literary standards of London's *Der Arbeter Fraynd*. His first independent project in Southern Africa was titled *Der Kreigstaphet* and consisted of news updates about the Anglo-Boer War, editorials detailing his political views, and news excerpts from Jewish communities around the world. Goldblatt also wrote in English and was an ardent advocate in the campaign to classify Yiddish as a European language.⁶⁹

The Yiddish intellectual milieu was marked by an interest in the natural sciences, including physical and cultural anthropology, into the question of sense experience and empirical evidence. Kalman Schuman, who translated Eugene Sue's "Mysteries of Paris" into Hebrew and the satirist poet Avraham Ber Gottlober, clearly shaped Hoffmann's sensitivity to a Yiddish press that accounted for the role of the senses in mediating the social order. His editorial taste, which presented Yaakov Azriel Davidson in a variety of venues, was clearly framed by an ethnographic view of the Eastern European migrant. Hoffmann's memoir was itself the first full-length Yiddish book published in South Africa, and was also among the first to describe the broader encounter of Ashkenazi Jews with South Africa in autobiographical, travel-narrative form.⁷⁰ The memoir foregrounds the hardships of a life as a "smous" or "tocher" - an itinerant Jewish peddler. Hoffmann's memoir also contextualized Southern African Yiddish literature's major archetypes as culturally eviscerated products of incomplete Jewish emancipation.⁷¹ In Hoffmann's view, there existed a certain symmetry between Europe and its colonial appendages. For every Jewish migrant who managed to make a living in the colony, there were masses that remained poor and destitute all their lives, living in an economic class elevated only above the black proletariat. These Jews became involved in the criminal underworld and black market, just as their relatives existed in the rapidly expanding European urban slums. The illegal diamond and gold trade became associated with Jewish criminals, and the Boer government

⁶⁷ Veronica Belling, *Bibliography of Southern African Jewry. Southern Africa: Jewish Publications-Southern Africa* (Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, 1997).

⁶⁸ Yiddish does not appear in histories of Southern African modernism. See Neil Lazarus, "Modernism and Modernity: T. W. Adorno and Contemporary White Southern African Literature," in *Cultural Critique* 5 (1986): 131-55.

⁶⁹ David Goldblatt, *The Jew and His Language Problem* (New York: s.p, 1943).

⁷⁰ N D Hoffmann, *Seyfer Zikhroynes*.

⁷¹ Maurice Skikne, "Yiddish South Africanisms" *Jewish Affairs* 63, 2 (2008): 42-43.

officials, basing legislation on the discourse of Christian anti-Judaism, implemented policy that encouraged the impoverishment and disenfranchisement of Jewish workers.

Another aspect of Jewish literary culture in Southern Africa was the absence of proper mechanization. The two Jewish printers in Southern Africa used outdated equipment. It was cheaper to export Jewish newspapers and printing back to Lithuania, where many even small towns contained a printing press and competent workmen. After a series of short-lived newspapers written in South Africa and printed in Europe, a locally printed Yiddish newspaper appeared in 1911. Titled *Der Afrikaner* and edited by Shimen Fogelson, the paper printed feuilletons and short stories alongside practical articles about navigating local economic conditions. For five decades thereafter, *Der Afrikaner* published a weekly edition. By 1948, the editors had published noted American Yiddish writers - Yankev Glatstein, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Chaim Grade, for example. A vigorous left-wing editorial orientation persisted after World War Two. Those who came to Southern Africa established a literary patrimony shaped by the “Klassiker” writers of the modern canon: Mendele, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz.⁷² As Marcus Moseley has amply shown, the literature of this generation, no matter where it resided, intermingled autobiography and fiction. The journal *Dorem-Afrike* published a series of issues, first in 1922-1923, and then five years later for three years. There was a tendency in these papers to understand Jewish life in materialist terms. Most first generation immigrants remained poor all their lives, struggling to find consistent employment and becoming disillusioned with the myth of the gold mines. Single Jewish men remained alone, unable to bring over their prospective wives from Lithuania. Men returned to Lithuania to seek brides themselves, or marriages were arranged by post and telegraph with brides sent on their own. If families, husbands and wives were apart for long, the separation and reunification would have dire emotional consequences. Marriages and their breakdown are a frequent subjects in South African Yiddish literature.

A great many of these immigrants became small merchants. However, small trade meant primarily the commissaries or “eating-houses” near the mines. Jewish migrants, who were granted concessions by Jewish magnates, were employed in these institutions as brokers. There they lived most often alone, working long hours in brutal environments. Consequently, these men, like Yankev-Shmerl, are depicted as emotionally coarsened by their experience, and leading a hollow life devoid of significance. To describe these characters, the Yiddish writer in Southern Africa developed two neologisms, the *kaffireater*-- from the pejorative English title “kaffir-eating house”; and *kaffireatnik*--the Jew who worked in these eating houses. *Kaffireatnik*, a Yiddish noun of agency, is formed by a fusion of Arabic, English, and Slavic elements.⁷³

The *kaffireatnik* embodied contradiction. As a result of feeling emotionally deadened by the capitalist structure that rural African life presented, he was consumed by longing for his former home and idealized a world that he perceived to be governed by the Jewish calendar. The other type common in the literature was a man who easily discarded the trappings of Jewishness, whom Yiddish writers portrayed as a new Jew that emerged from the African immigrant experience. This character was highly masculinist and constructed in contrast to the passive, feminized diasporic Jewish male

⁷² Hoffmann, *Zikhroynes*, 34-57.

⁷³ “Kaffir” is an insulting and contemptuous term for a black South African. The word is derived from Arabic, where it means “non-believer” or “one without religion.” It was first employed in South Africa by Arab traders and became lexicalized in Afrikaans and English. The term can be traced to the Semitic root C-F-R (to cover [in darkness]), in Hebrew כּוּפֵר.

figure. The chasm between black and white affected the construction of Southern African Jewish masculinity. The experience of the Eastern European Jewish man, aware of his own economic precarity, recognizes the privileges of white racial identity. This division of experience between black African and white Jew is expressed paradigmatically in the satiric travel, or “reverse exodus” of the *Afrikaner Hogode*.

Other significant “reverse Exodus” narratives add additional texture to the ways that Haggadah animated Yiddish literary modernism. Hyman Polski’s short story “The Belated Seder” (*Der Farshpetikter Seder*, short story) narrates the circumstances of Leyzer Shkudviler, who as an acculturated African Jew decides to relocate into exclusively “kaffir” territory and open up a concession store for the locals. This story hews closely to the “Reverse Exodus” narratives popularized by Yankev Azriel Davidson. Leyzer adopts the identity of a *konsesnik*, (lit. Concession Store owner), a Yiddish Africanism and archetype in a variety of stories. The narrator describes Leyzer’s plan:

ווען לייזער שקודווילער איז אפגעווען א לאנגע צײַט אין אַפֿריקע, אויסגעפרוּווט א סך פֿארשיידענע פרנסות און גאַרנישט געקענט אויפטאָן, האָט ער באשלאָסן זיך אוועקצולאָזן גאַנץ ווייט אין די קאַפּיר-מדינות, וווּ קיין ייִדישע 'שאפּן' זיינען נישט, 'טאַכערס' קומען דאָרט אַהין זייער זעלטן, ס'איז נישט קיין קאַנקורענץ און מ'מאַכט געלט. אמת, ס'איז זייער נישט אנגענעם צו לעבן אין א ווילדער געגנט צווישן קאַפּערס, וווּ מ'זעט נישט קיין ווייסן מענטש פֿאַר די אויגן. אבער לייזערס אויסרעכענונג איז געווען, אז ס'איז כּדאי אפצוקומען א פֿאַר יאָר, אבי צו קענען צוריק אַהיים קומען צו דער פֿאַמיליע ווי א מענטש און פֿאַרזאָרגן קינדער מיט לייטן גלייך.

[When Leyzer Shkudviler had been in Africa for a long time, had tried out many different ways of earning a living and had succeeded in nothing, he decided to move far into the kaffir heartland where there were no Jewish shops, where *tochers* were a rare sight, where there was no competition, and where one could make some money. True, it was very unpleasant to live in the middle of the wild among *kaffirs*, where no one ever saw a White, but Leyzer reasoned with himself, and he decided it was worthwhile to get by for a few years there if only it would allow him to return home to his family like a real human being and provide for his children like everyone else.]⁷⁴

The particular circumstances of Leyzer’s inland trek are born of economic aspiration and bravado. The narrator borrows these frontiering themes from *Afrikaner* mythology in order to defamiliarize Leyzer’s Jewishness, which is described in satiric terms. The satiric force of this story rests on the Passover Haggadah as recurrent intertext in Southern African Yiddish. The ironic return of Israel to Africa from Europe frames this narrative, which depicts a character embarking on a journey that symbolically unravels a progressive narrative of Jewish modernization familiar to the narrator and his readers. In a sense, Leyzer Shkudviller is fulfilling one promise of Jewish emancipation: the freedom to disassociate from Jewish space. He is free to participate, rather, in the

⁷⁴ Morris Hoffman, *Unter Afrikaner Zun* (De Aar, Kaypland, 1939, Johannesburg: Kayor, 1951), 189.

expansion of European culture into Africa. Ironically, this expansion comes in a pre-modern Jewish economic form. This traveling merchant, however, does not drive him forward into the European city - Warsaw, Paris, St. Petersburg, but rather to the colony. The impersonal narration (*vi me'zet nit eyn vaysn mentsh*) doesn't necessarily express that Leyzer sees himself as white or as a colonist, but rather as a man with a materialist conception of the present. This ambiguity, be it social, economic or racial, in Leyzer's self-perception makes his racist attitude both blatant and farcical, since no white merchant would so insert himself into the "Kaffir-medines." Leyzer, being a materialist, is mostly non-observant, except on Passover, when he observes the commandment to remember the Israelite's flight of Egyptian slavery, through the rigorous time-based calculations of Lithuanian Judaism.⁷⁵ Leyzer arrives in his new home and falls sick. He is nursed back to health by an African nurse who heals him with local herbs. Leyzer begins preparations for the Seder after he recovers. He makes his own *kneydlekh* and prepares for a festive holiday atmosphere. Then, an unexpected guest appears. Amused by the scene, the Jewish traveler informs Leyzer that he is a week late in celebrating the Seder. This is likely due to the remoteness of his post, the visitor surmises. Leyzer realizes the fact that his African nurse, who saved his life, had told him he was sick for three weeks rather than four. This loosened his grasp of when the eve of Passover was to arrive. "See what can happen to a Jew in such a savage country?"⁷⁶

The premise of this story is built on the protagonist's impulse to observe Passover on the proper day. This gives him a sense of time, and the entire structure of rabbinically mandated timing - *zmanim* - connects the otherwise disconnected protagonist to the venerable Lithuanian rabbinic tradition, which was famous for its emphasis on the precise timing of prayer and other ritual acts. At the same time, Leyzer is completely isolated. His first site of migration, presumably an African port, proved to hard to handle, and he decided to take a shot at rural life in the so called "kaffir-medines." These "savage" (*vilde*) places are unknown to him, and he acknowledges that in those areas he would not only be physically isolated from other Europeans, but living almost exclusively among Africans. The blatant racism of his mindset is clear - he uses racist language and refers to the woman that saves his life in condescending terms. Nevertheless, the reader gets a sure sense that there is some distance between the narrator and his nettlesome subject. Leyzer, though himself economically marginalized from white society, is a liminal figure wedged between the urban, Christian elite and the African masses. He reflects the divided nature of this status and as such, he blames his imprecise timing on the "savage" nature of his surroundings. He conflates "civilization" with Judaism, and "savagery" with his new environment.

Though it may be tempting to read this and other "reverse exodus" tales as an authentic representation of Jewish immigrant life, they can also function as parables of European Jewish modernity in general, just as Benjamin likens the streets of Naples to the African Kraal. For example In the short story "A Stranger" (*A Fremder Yid*, 1939) a Jewish man brings his family from Lithuania to South Africa. The story pivots again off the "reverse exodus" trope. He realizes quickly that his experience living isolated from other Jews has distanced him from his traditional family. The man is a

⁷⁵ Though decidedly lax in his observance, he comically maintains insistence on the time-bound nature of Pesach. Though Leyzer is completely unmoored from civilization, he follows a punctual psychic schedule that connects him, ironically, to the importance of proper timing in the Lithuanian rabbinic tradition. See Mordecai Zalkin, "Lithuanian Jewry and the Concept of Eastern European Jewry." *Polin* 25 (2012): 57-70.

⁷⁶ Hoffmann, *Unter Di Afrikaner Zun*, 198.

fallen *maskil* who takes a job as the “rabbi” of a small town in Southern Africa, after he is left with no economic prospects in Europe. When his wife and son join him in Africa, they realize that he is not a rabbi at all, but completely detached from traditional observance. This story is another vantagepoint from which to observe the “displaced” nature of Yiddish writing in South Africa.

J.M. Sherman’s short story “Paul” (1912) tells the story of a Jewish boy who is born and grows up until adolescence in Lithuania.⁷⁷ This story hews closely to the trope of “reverse exodus” that characterizes other works mentioned in this chapter. His parents are concerned about his career prospects because he is of modest intelligence. He identifies with and adopts the agricultural lifestyle of the surrounding Lithuanian peasants. He does not want to learn a vocation commonly held by Jews, so he takes jobs at a farm and works the land. Taking pity on his family’s honor, an uncle sends for him in Southern Africa, and he arrives there. He lives for a short time with the uncle and then sells himself off as a farmer, and lives among the Boers. He completely assimilates, so much so that the people nickname him Paul Kruger, the first President of the Transvaal Republic and the embodiment of Afrikanerdom. It is even said that he shares a physical resemblance with Kruger. The nickname is shortened to “Paul.”

One night a Jewish peddler bunks with Paul at his home and Paul asks him to read a letter that he is unable to read. The Jewish guest reads the letter to Paul. Paul’s mother has died, and his father beseeches him to say *Kaddish*. He struggles with this request, feeling more like a Christian than a Jew. He goes into the town, and it happens to be Yom Kippur. He stands at the entrance to the shul, and someone asks him in English if he needs a prayer shawl. He freaks out and leaves, and says to himself, “I’ve completely lost any connection to Jews or Judaism, and I simply cannot reclaim it.” Paul asks for a memorial prayer from a Christian minister instead. This story exemplifies the presence of Christian biblical tropes in the Yiddish literature of South Africa. There is a framework in the story that likens the protagonist’s adoption of Kruger as a kind of tragic moment in which the trajectory of this Jewish boy is towards another particular, Christian identity in the form of an imperial autocrat. At the same time, the convention of “reverse exodus” allows us to see the narrator in better focus. Here, the short story takes on both the new African landscape and the European world rarely glimpsed. This cultural situation, in which a Jewish individual adopts the appearance and economically subordinated class of the Lithuanian peasant, is made to look symmetrical. Both Eastern Europe and South Africa appear as places of Jewish re-enslavement. The “reverse exodus” to South Africa defamiliarizes a process already underway in Europe.

In Sherman’s short story “Ben” (1939), a Jew named Ben owns a store near Vlakfontein station, “Ben’s Corner” where he sells hardware and household items.⁷⁸ The store is racially segregated according to local custom. There is a small section for black customers, and a nicely decorated, larger section of the store for whites. Ben is very strict about never letting a black person in the white section. “*Hey Kaffir, get the hell out of here!*” he yells at someone who crosses the line. A “reverse exodus” is animated by the isolated, individual nature of Ben’s status on the Afrikaner estate, his economic subservience to the Afrikaner farmers, and his sexual relationship with a “foreign” woman. Contextualizing Ben’s life within this frame, which reminds readers of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, Ben embodies the resentment of fallen aristocracy, putting on his *tefillin* but simply mumbling what might appear in the prayer book he doesn’t own. The story is infused with aspects of this satirical irony. He places the *tefillin* back in his tobacco pouch, for example, and waits until next

⁷⁷ Jacob Mordecai Sherman, “Paul,” in *Oyf Transvaler Erd* (Johannesburg, Kayor 1949), 60-64.

⁷⁸ Sherman, *Oyf Transvaler Erd*, 80-86.

Sunday, when he will eat a home-cooked meal prepared by one of his African servants, one of three he employs. The narrator notes that he doesn't have an intimate relationship with any of them, but he treats them decently and pays them more than the bare minimum, thus producing a kind of benign neglect that characterizes the conditions in Europe. These ironic reversals are all the expressions of a pious idiot, who in traditional Yiddish culture cleaves so close to the observance of the commandments that he refuses to save a dying woman lest he see her naked.

However, the intertextual link is stronger because nakedness is ultimately what calibrates Ben to the values of the communities surrounding him. When an Afrikaner woman he impregnates dies during childbirth, he almost instantly arranges to give her family's weekly foodstuffs as recompense, in a formal exchange reminiscent of Afrikaner myth and ritual. Ben is blamed for her death, because he is the father and there is a belief among the local Afrikaners that only male seed causes death during childbirth. He realizes that he is in danger of being driven off the Afrikaner's estate. We learn that he had once been in jail for stealing horses, and as a convict, he would have likely be denied entry into a new community. Ben utters a Yiddish sentence for the first time in years – when he asks his Jewish assistant to write him a letter in Yiddish inquiring about a Jewish bride to be sent to him. Ben *davens* again. A widow comes to check out his rural digs, and she decides instead to go back into the city. She cannot live in such an isolated place. Ben is devastated. While this story certainly reproduces the “reverse exodus” as a frame, other features include other tropes discussed in this chapter. Simultaneously, the death of the woman carrying his child invites parallels to Rachel's death. The inconsistent nature of Ben's Judaism links the story to the trope of idol worship. In the story by Sherman, Ben's Jewish identity emerges only in linguistic and moral terms; Ben's conduct towards African customers oscillates between strict adherence to racist segregation, and not described as relishing in the racism he enacts.

Shmuel Leibovits' *Bereh* (1945) tells the story of a man who works in a middle management position in a concession store on the mining reef.⁷⁹ He feels superior to the mass of black workers he supervises, but is also completely beholden to the British “*baas*.” In this sense, this story conforms to the “reverse exodus” trope, except that this time the Jew returns to Africa to be a master rather than a slave. In the moment we glimpse, Bereh has a day off. He gets a cash advance on his paycheck and boards a train to Johannesburg for a bit of fun. He is attractive, though aging, and, we are told, has a certain amount of boyish charm. He goes to a movie theater and falls asleep. He is looking for a woman. He goes into a Jewish restaurant and eats the food with relish; the description of his eating is both disgusting and comical. After he eats, he buys some food to go and carries on through a frantic city. Bereh comes upon a Zulu watchman, and speaks to him in Zulu, transliterated into Yiddish by Leibovits:

נגובאני לאָ דער שומר געבעטן
ימיני לא האט בערא געזאגט
המבא קאלעה דער שומר געבענטשט
ניסלע קאלעה געזאגט בערא און ער פארשווינדן אין
די יארד.

⁷⁹ Shmuel Leibovits, *Dorem Afrikaner Zamlbukh* (Johannesburg: Durkhn Literarishn Krayz in Yohanesburg, 1945), 56-71.

[Ngubani lo? (Who is there?)demands the watchman. Yimini lo. (It's me) answers Bereh. Hamba Kahle. (Go well.) the watchman wishes him: "Nisale khale," (Stay well) Bereh answers and he disappears into the yard.]⁸⁰

When Bereh is among other Jews, he is happy, but he has no genuine interest in the political and cultural life of the Jews. He is rather boorish, and only interjects when he senses anger or impending physical altercation. At that point, he shows his stuff and starts cursing or bringing people down with insults. People razz him as well using traditional Yiddish humor, "*Do you think your boss is gonna put up a golden tombstone to commemorate your donkey work?*" One thing that stands is Bereh's appetite for women, whom he "devours" in all shapes and sizes. When Bereh takes out his dental bridge, and that signals that he is finished interacting with you. He goes back to his bunk, which he shares with a Yugoslav who smells terrible. He puffs his pipe and sleeps. Bereh's depiction as a pseudo-primitive Jew has been discussed at length in Sherman's article about the "price of whiteness" in South Africa.⁸¹ Though there is certainly an emphasis on the "whitening" of the Jews in South African literary studies, Jews in South Africa came to the country as European whites, and were never disenfranchised in the way that native Africans or Asian immigrants were excluded through law and custom. Thus, the impulse to primitivize *Bereh* doesn't necessarily derive from the indeterminate nature of his race, but rather, the vague and progressively fading sense of Jewishness. This is precisely why he shares a bunk with a "Yugoslav," a modern ethnonym that denotes anyone from the "South Slavic" lands.

This primitivization is further intensified along the story's plot lines: We learn that at a certain point in his life, Bereh owned his own eating-houses and was well respected among the working class whites. However, over time with miner strikes and economic shifts, he lost his fortune. He tried to get into a variety of businesses - ostrich feathers, gold, yeast - but nothing really worked, and he went from being called Mr. Zimzowitz to plain old Bereh. Disenfranchised, he begins to deal in opium, *dagga* (marijuana), and cocaine. In a further plunge down the economic ladder, Bereh finally takes a job at an eating-house. Asked about the legacy he wants to leave, Bereh says "behind my coffin will trudge a dozen prostitutes, a few bastards, some colored newspapers sellers and a lame dog." The carnivalesque imagery here is both satirical and allusive. In it, we see not only images of society's lower classes, but also the moment of their redemption. Even in death, this funeral parade reminds me of the short story by I.J. Singer titled *Lyuk*, which records a similar scene at the moment when the Soviet Union is established on the periphery of the Russian Empire in Ukraine. In this scene, in

⁸⁰ Translation by Joseph Sherman, *Land Far Off*, 203.

⁸¹ Sherman, *Serving the Natives*, 344.

seeming symmetrical scene, the Jews are disguised as Roma.⁸² In South Africa, the revolution culminates in the protagonist's martyrdom, remembered only by those severed from society.

Out of this funeral scene, the eating-house comes to life in the next scene. Bereh is delivered bread, so he summons a literate hand to sign for it, since he is unable. The mine workers come in, dressed in army jackets, helmets, khaki shorts, and muddied. A sheep's head, with wool still attached, is boiled in a cauldron. The employees, all of them Jews, prepare the meat the morning for the evening rush. The narrator mentions details: Bereh gently greets a tomcat, Bereh performs a gruesome operation on a dog, removing a vein from its mouth. He speaks to the dog in Zulu and releases it. This is another moment in which Bereh's primitivization accentuated by references to vestiges of traditional Jewishness. In a frightful and violent removal of the dog's vein (traybern), the reader is reminded of Jewish dietary laws, which require the removal of the sciatic nerve (nikur) and any infected blood vessels. When Bereh says something unintelligible in Zulu, this incantation replaces and thus intensifies the absence of the Hebrew blessing. In another example, Bereh takes an intestine and lifts it up, as the raising of the Torah after its public recitation (*hagba*) but instead of lowering it back, he slices through it in midair, gaining great pleasure from this. In another reference to the Passover Seder, which commemorates the Exodus, his fellow workers hide an intestine under his pillow "like an *afikomen*."⁸³ The pillow is from the old country. As Bereh ages he gets extremely agitated by the younger generation, who do not violently attack the Afrikaner Greyshirts who insult Jews and seek to break the unions. He clicks his false teeth and disappears. Jewish holidays are nothing to Bereh, but he also has some modicum of respect - for when *Kiddish* is made, he stands at attention the way that he did when ordered to stand at attention in the Tsar's infantry. The group of rabbinic allusions that demonstrate Bereh's loosened affiliation with Jewish culture culminates in the transfer of Yiddish culture from his domain to that of the African workers he employs. This culture transfer is dramatized through racism rather than indicative of Bereh's own adoption of racist views. To the contrary, we get the sense through persistent allusions to rabbinic Judaism, that Bereh's cultural loss is in fact his African employees' "gain." In a cynical image of this transfer, Bereh gives a group of African workers a gramophone with some Yiddish records for Christmas. As the story concludes, the narrator hears "a *khazn a shiker*" (a folk song titled "a drunk cantor") carry over the slimy gulch where the African masses live in improvised shanties.

⁸² "Liuk" (Luc) was first published in the Warsaw journal *Literarische bleter*, 30 April 22 May 1925, and in New York in *Forverts* in two installments on 10 and 17 May 1925. It was included in Singer's second volume of short stories, entitled *Af fremder erd* (Warsaw: Kletskin, 1925), pp. 249-78; see Joseph Sherman and Henrietta Mondry, "Russian Dogs and Jewish Russians: Reading Israel Joshua Singer's "Liuk" in a Russian Literary Context." *Prooftexts* 20, no. 3 (2000): 290-317.
doi:10.2979/pft.2000.20.3.290.

⁸³ Leibovits, *Bereh*, 34, 54.

Matumba, or Cultural Loss as *Kidesh Ha-Shem*

“Matumba,” written by David Fram between 1920 and 1940, is an modernist *poema*.⁸⁴ The piece narrates the life story of an African who migrates from his rural village (*kraal*) to the big city. David Fram was born in Panevėžys, Lithuania (Russian Empire) on October 14, 1903 and died in Johannesburg on July 10, 1988. Having been exiled to Siberia during World War I, he returned to Vilna in 1921. He began publishing in 1923 in Yiddish newspapers and journals in Kovno, Lithuania. Fram emigrated to Southern Africa in 1927, but also lived for many years in London and Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe). Fram’s work became more well known after he took a four month trip in 1946-47 to Paris, Basel, Antwerp, and New York in order to meet with other Yiddish writers and to discuss the nature of his contribution to Yiddish modernist poetry. He published two collections of his poetry—*Lider un poemes* (Poems and Poemas; Vilna and Johannesburg, 1931) and *A Shvalb Oyfn Dakh* (A Swallow on the Roof; Johannesburg, 1983)—as well as two long poems, *Efsher* (Possibly) and *Dos Letste Kapitul* (The Last Chapter, London, 1947). A significant amount of his work remains unpublished. Fram corresponded with some central figures in modernist Yiddish letters, including Yankev Glatstein, and Yisroel Yankev Shvarts, Yudl Mark, Nachman Mayzel and Jacob Botoshansky. *Matumba* appeared in book-form only in 1983, when the Johannesburg publisher Kayor issued a collection of his early work *In Shvalb Oyfn Dakh*. 1983 was an exceedingly violent year in Southern Africa, with numerous violent episodes convulsing in cities, a poignant backdrop for the plot of this work.⁸⁵

David Wolpe, another noted poet in South Africa, divided David Fram’s work into three stages that roughly correlate to his geographic location. The first period (c. 1905-1920) places Fram within the poetic and existential outlook of the so called “anti-modernist” Dovid Einhorn. This poetry maps the language of religious longing for the past onto negative images of European decay and destruction. In this period, we find Fram at odds with the European cultural orientation of nascent Yiddish modernist circles. His subsequent emigration first to London and then to Cape

⁸⁴ David Fram, *A Shvalb oyfn Dakh* (Johannesburg: Kayor, 1983), 54-60. The *poema*, a Russian genre of long narrative poem, was used extensively in modern Hebrew and Yiddish literature. Judith Bar-El, *Ha-po'emah Ha-ivrit Me-Hithayutah Ve-ad Reshit Ha-Me'ah Ha-esrim: Mehkar Be-Toldot Z'aner* (Jerusalem: Mosad Byalik, 1995); Benjamin Harshav, *Three Thousand Years of Hebrew Versification: Essays in Comparative Prosody* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 121; Avraham Novershtern, “Chezyonot v-ketz Ge-ula v'Mavet be-poema Modernistit ba-Yiddish,” Moshe Leyb Halpern, A. Glanz-Leyeles, Peretz Markish, H Leivick, Ido Bassok, and Abraham Novershtern, *Yovdu Shamayim Va-Arets: Shirat Ha-Apokalipsah Ha-Yidit*, (Tel Aviv: Keshev, 2002), 131-67.

⁸⁵ Patricia Hayes, “Everyday Life in Soweto” in *The South Africa Reader: History, Culture, Politics* eds. Clifton C. Crais and Thomas V. McClendon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 261-77.



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Town shapes his second phase, which is characterized by intense social awareness, sense of irony and playfulness indicative of a modernist poetic turn. While Fram never adopted the expressionist stance of Soviet Yiddish modernists like Hofshteyn, Wolpe demonstrates how Fram's work began to construct the Yiddish folk-bard as a satirizing critic of African political economies. This period was Fram's most politically charged. His poems are explicitly political; he feels poetry and journalism worked hand in hand in refining the ethical sensibility of Jewish migrants. Wolpe's third period covers the time that Fram spent in a return trip to Europe, in which he met with leading Yiddish cultural figures and developed contacts with literary critics. Wolpe is primarily concerned with showing how geographic location correlates to certain stylistic changes. This approach, however,

does not take into the account he persistent but changing use of rabbinic and biblical intertextuality in Fram's oeuvre.⁸⁶

David Fram's reputation as a political dissident also inflects later readings of his work. As Milton Shain and Robert Mendelsohn have observed, Fram's outspoken belief in material, face-to-face racial reconciliation, his interest in representing native African subjects in Yiddish, and his outspoken criticism of racist violence, were tempered by the paternalism exhibited in some of his portrayals.⁸⁷ As South African Jewish communal figures oriented local political identities towards the British Empire on the one hand, and Zionism and Hebrew culture on the other, Fram's poetry has recently been relegated to vestiges of European taste. Rather than an attempt to create a territorialized, South African literature, Fram resisted the increasing popularity of prose storytelling in South African culture more broadly and its role in reflecting a "white African" rather than a European identity.⁸⁸ These Yiddish stories, as Shimon Levi observed, correlate the struggle of Yiddish and Afrikaans, which were both maligned by British authorities as vestiges of nationalism.⁸⁹ As Afrikaner nationalism intensified in the years leading up to World War One, Fram penned a series of articles criticizing Boer politicians for stoking xenophobic and anti-Jewish attitudes among Afrikaners.⁹⁰

There is a marked late shift in his use of biblical and rabbinic intertextuality towards subversive, modernist tendencies. This is especially true in his poem "Matumba." In the first extended study of Fram's work, Hazel Frankel details these aesthetic transformations as crucial for an understanding the poet's contribution to Yiddish literature more broadly. Frankel traces his early affiliations with David Einhorn and his anti-modernist, neo-romantic orientation towards Jewish sources.⁹¹ The persistence of longing and nostalgia for the old Lithuanian world is articulated in the language of messianic redemption. The longing for the traditional Jewish shtetl and the rhythms of traditional life are territorialized as neo-romantic, Zionist attachments to Palestine.

As we will examine further, this longing and nostalgia for the past as future is ironically recast as the pain over the native African's cultural loss and martyrdom. Fram's aesthetic shift from

⁸⁶ David Wolpe, "Dray periodn in shafn fun Dovid Fram" in *Dorem Afrike*, Jul-Aug 1963: 16-19; 'Yidishe literatur in Dorem Afrike,' *Dorem Afrike*, Dec. 1956: 21-23; "Yidish loshn un vortshafung in Dorem Afrike" in Shmuel Rozhansky, *Antologya Dorem Afrikanish, Fragmentn fun forsharvetn tsu der karakteristik un zikhroynes*. (Buenos Aires: Ateneo Literario en el Iwo, 1971), 312-313.

⁸⁷ "Between Ideology and Indifference: The Destruction of Yiddish in South Africa.' *Memories, Realities and Dreams*, eds. M. Shain & R. Mendelsohn (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2000); 'David Fram Centenary Tribute.' 2004. Web. 16 May 2007. (<http://shakti.trincoll.edu/~mendele/tmr/tmr08001.htm>.) 1-17.

⁸⁸ C.J. Ginsberg, "End of an Era? Forty Years of 'Dorem Afrike' and 'Yiddish Kultur' in South Africa," *Journal for Semitics* 20.1 (2011): 44-86.

⁸⁹ A. Shavan. "Dovid Fram – dikhter un perzonlikhkayt," *Der Yiddisher Tribune*, 6 Feb. 1931; "Tsu Dovid Fram," *Dorem Afrike* Sept-Oct 1973: 14-15.

⁹⁰ Fayvl Zylgbaum, "Dovid Fram's Yoyvel" *Dorem Afrike* Oct. 1953: 3-5; 'Lithuania and South Africa. Twin Themes in David Fram's Work.' *Zionist Record and S. A. Jewish Chronicle*. 23 Aug. 1963, 25; 'Tsu Dovid Fram's avekforn' *Dorem Afrike*, Aug. 1949: 22-23.

⁹¹ Hazel Frankel, *David Fram: Lithuanian Yiddish Poet of the South African Diaspora and Illuminating Love*. (PhD. Diss., University of Sheffield, 2013); Hazel Frankel, "David Fram: Lithuanian Yiddish Poet of the South African Diaspora," *Jewish Affairs*. 68.1, (2013).

neo-romantic to modernist techniques can be traced to the politicization of poetry in Southern Africa. Fram embodied the modernist poet in his rootlessness, and especially in his desire to represent the Jew in South Africa not as Jewish immigrant, but as a European-Jewish emigrant. The disintegration of European Jewry in the throes of migration shaped his representation of South Africa as a European modernist center. This scholarship has foregrounded the territorialized nature of Fram's early verse, his neoromantic yearning for communion with nature, and above all, his fascinated estrangement from the deeply pastoral lives of native South Africans.⁹² Joseph Sherman argues that Fram was a great manipulator of poetic silence; by paying attention to the sonic quality of his verse, one detects the rhythms of Jewish liturgy.⁹³

Matumba calls to mind a folk song. It is written in quatrains, each containing a complete unit that moves the plot towards its climax. The poem is further divided into two parts. The first half recalls Matumba's migration to the city and describes his stark alienation from the urban environment built and inhabited by Europeans. The second half of the poem details Matumba's ambiguous sexual encounter with his white employer. Matumba has left three wives in his ancestral village (*kraal*). He has not paid the white governor his full tax, and is now bonded labor. Matumba works in an urban world alien to his agrarian origins in order to pay his debtor. He dreams of his favorite wife Sesula. The interspersing of rhyme among otherwise flat, structured soundscapes gives the delivery a somewhat anguished feel, as if we don't know whether the rhythm is about to roll or break. Towards the middle of the poem Sesula is introduced, and find out that at some point in Matumba's life she had been near death. This profoundly affected his attachment to her, and though he was a polygamist, he longed for her as he languished working in the city. This poem is modernist in its use of rhyme, with off-rhymes coexisting as scenes shift. This correlates with techniques typical of Hebrew and Yiddish modernism.

מאטומבאָ איז געקומען פון ווייטן קראל,
 ער איז געקומען דינען זײַנע
 ווייסע באלעבאטיים.

ערגעץ-ווי אין א ווינקל פון טראַנסוואַל
 איז געבליבן זײַן רויטע, ליימענע כאטע.

[Matumbo iz gekumen fun vaytn kraal
 er iz gekumen dinen zayne
 vayse balebatim.

ergetz-vu in vinkl fun transvaal
 iz geblibn zayn royte, leymene khate.]

[Matumbo came from a village far off

⁹² Hazel Frankel, "From Steppe to Veld: The Landscape Poems of the Yiddish Poet David Fram" *Journal for Semitics*, 25.1 (2016): 235-52.

⁹³ Joseph Sherman, "Singing with the Silence: The Poetry of David Fram" *Jewish Affairs*, 44. (1988): 39-44.

He came to serve his
white bosses.

Somewhere in a corner of the Transvaal
his red, earthen hut remained.]

We are introduced to a man from wide-open spaces and a small village in the Highveld Plateau, a dry subtropical climate. Matumbo is a man who has been torn from his home and forced into the political economy of hardening racism. Yet, this migration has not affected the existence of his home, it still exists in time and space.

וואָלט דאָך אַלצדינג געווען אזוי וויל,
ווען נישט די מנהגים פון ווייסן, —
האַט דא אבער פונקט ווי א קויל
געדאַרפט אים אן אומגליק צערײַסן...

[Everything would have gone so well,
If not for the customs of whites –
That here came like a bullet
to tear him apart in misfortune ...]

There are a few inversions in the plot of the epic poem that serve to show the disassociation of racial from religious difference. The first inversion happens when Matumba goes from being a virile, proud tribesman to serving as the white man's footman. This is a rare display of a black man's subject position in any writing from this time, not only in Yiddish. Another is the very fact that it appears that the speaker of the poem is a Jew and, thus the poem provides the representation of Jewish subjectivity in a new social and racial arrangement, allowing for the defamiliarization of that arrangement.

Fram's language is structured by dramatic shifts between time and space: in using unfused Zulu terms in Yiddish, he signals a somewhat acculturated African Jewish speaker, but one who nevertheless intersperses his speech with Hebraism and rabbinic allusion, simultaneously, the off-rhyme stanzas signify the poem's stylistic link to the Yiddish and Hebrew modernist poem in Europe and the Americas. This language is obscure in the highly multilingual environment created during years of British rule in Southern Africa. Fram uses *minhogim fun vaysn* (customs of the whites) to describe the forces that break down Matumba's dignity. It is after all the speaker of the poem who describes the European colonial culture using the term *minhog*, a term meant to describe the customs specific to a Jewish community. While engaging a rabbinic dialectic that seeks to differentiate between what is required of Jewish law and what is established as a mere custom, Fram is also constructing a speaker who both claims and resists "the customs of the whites." The speaker describes European culture in Jewish terms, leaving the reader to determine the nature of Matumba's customs. Yiddish and Zulu are "equated" and Matumba's migration structures a martyrological narrative of cultural death that doubles the colonial and Eastern European Jewish experience. Matumba, as a representation of Jewish modernity, has a Svengali-like Jewish body; sallowness,

grotesqueness, and a figurative predisposition to violent sexual perversion. The relationship between Matumba and the poem's audience induces anxiety about Matumba's own frustrations as an uprooted and despised guest. Simultaneously, Fram's recourse to racial stereotypes draws a sharp distinction between the European-Jewish lyricist and his African subjects. Identification and estrangement contradict each other in the Yiddish speakers lament. Antinomies of sensory revulsion and sexual excitement coexist with sympathy and identification. The speaker comes across, in fact, as someone completely motivated by libido and machismo. Matumba is satisfied with cattle and wives, but there is a deeply drawn racist stereotyping. The image of Matumba's beloved Sesula is both grotesquely disfigured and sexually enticing. Her ugliness and his loyalty evoke a Jewish stereotype of the overbearing wife. When remapped onto the Yiddish speaker's own social position, the dynamic between Matumba and his social relationship stands as a displaced representation of the Jewish modern.

Matumba's migration to the city corresponds to the death of his culture. He longs for lost love, resigns to depression and dehumanizing labor. He is depicted as being uncontrollably desirous of his white employer. He acts first as a voyeur, then it appears that he rapes her under dubious circumstances. The poem indulges in the expected racist stereotypes of white female insecurity in the face of sexually deviant Africans. Accused of rape, he is lynched in the town square with no one present but the hangman. The death of the African, then, is aestheticized by its narration in Yiddish, a language itself perceived as both a "jargon" of low prestige and the foundation of a culture. The power dynamics structured and contained through the poem in persistent quatrains creates an elegiac dissonance, culminating in the death of the subject.

Zulu-isms are an important marker of this doubling of Jewish and African cultural loss. The name "Matumba" means "intestines." It usually appears not as a proper name, but as the characteristically unappetizing meal of African mine workers. Naming the protagonist after this dish alludes to another migrant Jewish archetype – the *Kaffireatnik* – who serves the "matumba" to his customers in the miner's canteens. Food that is prepared in the mornings for the evening rush as men return from their labor is a recurring image. This food, described as a sheep's head with bloody wool and nostrils still flaring, boils slowly in a iron pot. The resonance of the name and the dish is created via a loan translation, or a calque, from Yiddish "*kishkes*" which may cause readers to recognize a primitive character type driven by "gut" feeling. Naming the subject as intestines also connects to a semantic field of experience familiar to Yiddish speakers, that of the stomach and its attendant functions. Matumba is a man who seems to live by his cravings, but also within the bounds of intuition rather than power relations.. His favorite wife, Sesula, - her name means "to erase, to delete, or to dust" is what he longs for: the evacuation of his bowels, but also a sanctified retreat from the pressures - economic and imperial - upon his material world.. In this sense, Matumba is the guts of something on the verge, and in this disgusting but ultimately effective hybrid image, we are facing the Jewishness of the speaker, who narrates in real time Mr. Intestines' life-span, a life-span that is historical as well as individual in scope.

Yet the poem does not necessarily lend itself to a realm beyond myth. For, if we were to assume that this poem is not about an African migrant but about the split within the Jewish psyche, we could extend Fram's metaphors into the realm of traditional Jewish discourse. There is a question as to the extent to which this poem functions intertextually. The speaker is conversant in different levels of colonial diction. He appears accustomed to the sexual imaginary of colonial Africa; to what extent may we recognize these male sexual images in the Hebraisms – fused and unfused – in the poem's language? There are two moments when terms from Jewish discourse are deployed. When the

speaker describes the reality that Sesula may have found another man in the village, the narrator jests that perhaps if Matumba found out he would go to the *royfe* (healer) and obtain a *segule* (a protective or benevolent remedy). Though the translation of this passage would necessitate that we render *royfe* a “healer” and *segule* a “remedy,” they are deeply imbricated in the popular sexual hierarchies of Eastern European Jews, in which matches are secured through divine petition rather than through romantic conquest. We are encouraged to connect this fraught evocation of conquest with Matumba’s desire for an unattainable Sesula, and to the Jewish structures of sexual relations which correlate to this longing.⁹⁴

Sesula has found another man because the economic forces driving Matumba have separated him from his family. In the scene where Matumba feels compelled to have sex with his employer, he is dusting his employers belongings – a punning interplay between Zulu and Yiddish terms, *shtoybn/sesula*. This kind of linguistic mirroring continues. The animalistic imagery that describes the urban encounter evokes Matumba’s home and livestock. Everything here is the equal and inverse of what came before. After the sexual encounter, we are given the sense that Matumba has been charged with a crime, since the image that precedes his death is that of the gallows. He has ended up at the hangman’s. We do not know if these are real gallows or metaphorical ones in the sense that Matumba’s death, and all that it symbolizes, is simply universal and public. Unable to reconcile the dynamics of his desire with the unjust reality of his material world, Matumba is not executed, but murdered. By translating the Zulu into Yiddish, the intertextual reference to *Koheles* (Ecclesiastes) becomes possible:

הַפֶּל הוֹלֵךְ, אֶל-מְקוֹם אֶחָד; הַפֶּל הָיָה מִן-הָעֶפֶר, וְהַפֶּל שָׁב אֶל-הָעֶפֶר.
 [All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all return
 to dust.]⁹⁵

און קיינער האָט אים צו זיין מיתה באגלייט,
 צום ווינט נאָר ער האָט זיך געטולעט
 פֿאַרציטערט, געפֿאלן, מאַטומבאַ איז טויט,
 — עה.. עה... סעוסלאַ, סעסולאַ!..

[And no one saw him to his death,
 He could only huddle in the wind,
 Shaking, forsaken, Matumba is dead,
 Oh, oh, Sesula, Sesula! [Dust, Dust!]

The poem, like the poetry of Ecclesiastes, Frame’s greatest intertext, also contextualizes the solitude of Matumba’s death. It cradles its sounds in a back and forth motion, but also offers resolution to the problem of racism on one hand, and of urban alienation on the other. In this sense, race is both a phenomenological problem and a problem of psychology. Society necessitates the

⁹⁴ Naomi Seidman, *The Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 71-113

⁹⁵ Ecclesiastes 3:20, trans. JPS.

adoption of racial attitudes to overcome daily life while at the same time, it deforms morality into an allegory for emotions politically prevented from being felt. Matumba thus demonstrates the linguistic partitioning of Yiddish from vernacular to post-vernacular.

Matumba as Jewish Martyr

African cultural loss in “Matumba” is a positive outcome from a Christian missionary standpoint, but from the perspective of the Jewish bard narrating his journey, it is cast into terms of Jewish martyrological tropes. These tropes are grounded in rabbinic literature, but also reclaim Jesus as a Jewish martyr, a gesture common to modernist Hebrew and Yiddish literature. The successful conversion of native Africans to Christianity, a conversion that Jews elided, remains one of the central paradigms of South African literature.⁹⁶ The dynamic between Jews and Christians of either race begins with the transformation of orality to textuality, and the translation into Zulu of the Christian Bible, including the Old Testament.⁹⁷ The figure of the Jew - constructed in Fram’s poema - is a response to local theological controversies integral to the Christian discourse in colonial Southern Africa.

In her article on the figures of Shylock and Jesus as the prisms through which Jewish racial difference is conceived in Europe, Susannah Heschel constructs a dialectic in which anti-Semitism in Europe and colonialism in Africa are contrasted through two paradigmatic Jewish figures: Jesus and Shylock. The racial ambiguity of Jesus – racially a Jew yet spiritually Christian - is contrasted with the racial degeneration of the “savage” Shylock:

The genocide of the Jews represented a Christian expurgation and a cleansing; the colonizers’ longing for virgin theological territory represented a metaphorical “theological bulimia.” In colonialist terms it meant eliminating the savage for the sake of civilization and making room for civilization to spread itself. It was not an effort at acquiring new colonial territory (such as securing converts to Christianity through missionary effort) but an expulsion and extermination based on an axis of theological morality versus degeneracy, which appeared parallel to the colonial civilized vs. savage axis.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ I have dealt with some of these themes in the previous chapter.

⁹⁷ The first portions of the Hebrew Bible to be translated into Zulu appeared in 1837. That edition is most readily available in *Ukucathula 1; Incwadi Yokuqala: First Zulu Reading Primer*. Pietermaritzburg: Co-operating Lutheran Missions in Natal, 1943; For a comprehensive history of Zulu biblical translations in the 19th century, see *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments Translated Out of the Original Tongues into the Zulu Language: Ibaible Eli Ingwele Eli Netestamente Elidala, Nelitya Ku Kitywa Kuzo Izilimi Zokuqala, Ku Lotywa Ngokwesizulu*. (New York: American Bible Society, 1893).

⁹⁸ Susannah Heschel, "From Jesus to Shylock: Christian Supersessionism and the Merchant of

In fact, the earliest South African texts about Jews are precisely about their symbolic and material role in the colonial mission. John William Colenso, the first Anglican bishop of Natal, wrote prolifically about what Heschel terms “virgin theological territory” and the problematic presence of Jewish merchants and shopkeepers adjacent to the colonial missions. Colenso was the first translator of the Hebrew Bible into Zulu.⁹⁹

Colenso’s missionary approach is catalyzed by his claim that the origins of biblical Hebrew and spoken Zulu are related. This alternative genealogy of the Hebrew language – from Egypt to Southern Africa rather than Palestine – made Colenso a theologically controversial thinker and a threat to the British imperial authorities, since he implied that the ancient Hebrews and the African natives were racially related. By making the The Israelite Exodus from bondage to freedom something biological rather than metaphorical, the logical basis for the emancipation of “saved” Africans from bonded labor became a politically potent, rational argument based in the “scientific” racial theories that justified European expansion. As the Jewish population in the colony increased over time and missionaries broadened their efforts amongst Jewish migrants, the Dutch Reformed (Afrikaans) Mission in Southern Africa addressed the mission Colenso founded in 1931 and noted contrasting behavior: “As far as Jews are concerned, it is stated that a missionary has laboured among them for five years without making a single convert.” The report then states that Jews are “people who are strangers to the God of their forefathers, who have time and respect for nothing else but capital and capitalists, and who are clearly worshippers of Mammon.”¹⁰⁰ Colenso’s diction links Jewish and pagan ritual, representing the Jews in European terms as in pursuit of material wealth. These “worshippers of Mammon” are described as the inverse of the converted native. The Hebrew Bible has thus played a symbolic and textual role in the political and cultural unification of Southern Africa by identifying the “enslaved” majority with biblical Israel.¹⁰¹ The byproduct of this Christian missionary orientation has been the relegation of Jewish languages in Southern African theological and literary history to either footnotes or invisibility. As an extension, Jews figure in this literary scheme more as arbiters of negative feelings than as constituents of the empirical world. Relegated by Colenso’s philological argument to irrelevance, Jews reemerge in the colonial space as ciphers for negative aspects of the sensorium: strange appearance, greed, and lust for money.

The chief missionary to the Eastern European Jews, Alexander McCaul, engaged Colenso as a theological opponent.¹⁰² One of McCaul’s motivations for expanding the Christian mission to the

Venice." *Harvard Theological Review*. 99.4 (2006): 407-431.

⁹⁹ Though there is evidence that portions of Genesis were printed in Zulu, Colenso was the first to publish a complete translation of the Hebrew Bible. See John W. Colenso, *Izindaba Zokupila: Kuka' Jesu-Kristu Indodana Ka 'dio Unkulunkulu Inkosi Yetu*. (Emgungunhlovu: May & Davis, 1857); Jonathan A. Draper, *The Eye of the Storm: Bishop John William Colenso and the Crisis of Biblical Inspiration* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003); E. A. Hermanson, "Colenso's First Attempt at Bible Translation in Zulu," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (2003): 5-28.

¹⁰⁰ "Jews and Missionaries in Southern Africa." *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* [New York] 15 May 1931.

¹⁰¹ Gerald West, "Interpreting 'the Exile' in African biblical Scholarship: An Ideo-Theological Dilemma in Post-Colonial Southern Africa," in Bob Becking, and Dirk J. Human eds., *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers Read at the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of Southern Africa Otswa/otssa* (Pretoria, 2007; Leiden: Brill, 2009)

¹⁰² Eliyahu Stern, "Catholic Judaism" *Harvard Theological Review* (forthcoming).

Eastern European Jewish migrant was to preach, in the absence of family and community, the eternal damnation of a Jewish migrant's ancestors, thus relegating Jewish history before migration to a time and place outside of history, and encouraging Jewish converts to understand emigration itself as a type of conversion. Colenso refused to propagate the belief in eternal damnation and instead asserted the linguistic-genetic relationship between biblical Israel and the Zulu. As a newly discovered vestige of biblical authenticity in a rapidly industrializing colonial frontier, Colenso concretized the association of Hebrew with African languages, and distanced the body of the modern Jew from the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰³ In addition, as we see from Fram's "Matumba," the individual narrative of migration from village to metropolis was as much a tale of cultural martyrdom as it was a tale of "conversion." Colenso opposed colonial designs to preserve the "savage" (polytheistic) nature of the native.¹⁰⁴ Colonial officials held that traditional animism protected black social and linguistic isolation from whites. The Christian mission was historically and theologically instrumental in de-familiarizing manifold aspects of African cosmology. Colenso believed - paternalistically - in the essential malleability of the Zulu language to Christian theology. He contrasted his influential translation of the Zulu Bible with his opponents' failed endeavor to convert the Jews.

Part of advocating this theology involved explaining the very existence of the European Jews. Abraham Benisch, who responded to Colenso's claims in an extended treatise, questioned the uses of mistranslation in Colenso's attitude toward Zulu conversion:

Commenting on Exodus xxi, 20, 21, the Bishop, in his introduction (pg 9), describes the horror excited in the mind of an intelligent Christian native, with whose assistance he translated the Bible into the Zulu tongue, when they came to the following passage. *If a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand, he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished, he is his money.* The revulsion of feeling experienced by the Bishop's coadjutor is clearly traced by the Doctor to the implied sanction given by God in His Law to Slavery, and to the cruelty involved in the injunction...But is the sense given to this passage according to the Anglican version borne out by the original text? Certainly not...The correct translation of this passage is: "And if a man smite his servant or his maidservant with *the* rod, and he die under his hand, he shall surely be *avenged*."

¹⁰³ This, of course, was part of a larger philological discussion in the service of racist doctrine. See Maurice Olender and Arthur Goldhammer, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁴ A. F. Keith, William Gibson, John Morgan-Guy, Bob Tennant, H E. Robert, and Gerald Parsons, "Preaching the Broad Church Gospel: The Natal Sermons of Bishop John William Colenso," *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 479; J. Guy. "Class, Imperialism and Literary Criticism: William Ngidi, John Colenso," *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 23.2 (1999): 219-42.

Notwithstanding, if he continue for a day or two, he shall not be *avenged*, for he is his money.”¹⁰⁵

Benisch’s response employs philological methods to redefine the text as well as its political and religious implication. There is also an attempt here to draw an alternative scene. Benisch paints a vivid portrait of the “native agent.” This “intelligent Christian native” is given pause over the problematic notion that God sanctions cruel acts towards slaves. It is significant however, that it is the Zulu, not Colenso himself, who “discovers” the cruelty of the Israelite. Though Colenso has presented the text to the native, the moment to which the native objects is precisely the part that constructs the Jew contra the Christian. This discovery of the Jew by the native occurs at what Heschel calls “the axis of theological morality versus degeneracy” that exists in the colony. The converted Zulu’s open Christian heart discovers the closed, hardened heart of Israel, just as he discovers Christ. The colonial environs become a displaced, repositioned Jerusalem, in which dark-skinned gentiles encounter the Jews.

Benisch critiques the central trope of Christian missionary activity and South African literary conventions rooted in missionary zeal. The social position of Southern African Yiddish writers as Jews in missionary society drew them to the representation of Christianity and animism in interracial contact. Racial hierarchies thematize the hierarchical relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Since social progress in Southern Africa meant conversion to Christianity, Yiddish writers wrote in a linguistic medium outside the colonial paradigm and maintained their focus on a European and American readership.¹⁰⁶ The narrator of Matumba is precisely the Jew who exists as the object of missionary desire, yet the Yiddish narrator himself, rather than seeing Matumba’s migration from kraal to city as a spatial metaphor for animist to Christian conversion, remaps the Jewish anxiety of cultural loss and the martyrdom it exacts - onto the African’s body.

In other instances, Southern African stories reiterate the trauma of cultural loss. Hyman Polsky’s short story, “Who Comes First?” (*Ver iz Bilkher?*) narrates the story of impending martyrdom as a narrative of Jewish economic decline.¹⁰⁷ The third person narrator depicts a man

¹⁰⁵ Abraham Benisch, *Bishop Colenso's Objections to the Historical Character of the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua in Part I Critically Examined* (London: Jewish Chronicle, 1863), 27-28.

¹⁰⁶ Mikhail Krutikov, *Yiddish Fiction and the Crisis of Modernity, 1905-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 158-59.

¹⁰⁷ Hyman Polsky was born in 1871 in Skidl, the Grodno region in what is today Belarus. To escape conscription in Tsarist battalions, he fled to London in 1891 and became a tailor’s assistant. He then opened a successful portrait studio, where the Yiddish writer Sholom Asch sat for a photograph. In 1910, Polsky immigrated to Southern Africa. He worked as an itinerant photographer, traveling from town-to town taking portraits of Jewish residents. He became involved in *Der Afrikaner*, and eventually edited the newspaper from 1912 until 1933, when it merged with Boris Gorshman’s new venture *Afrikaner Yiddische Zeitung*. Polsky wrote prolifically. His most important work is a collection of short stories published in Warsaw in 1939, entitled *In Afrike*.# Six copies of this book are extant. He was stricken for the remainder of his life that his work, and its readers, had been annihilated. In 1952, to honor his memory, the Southern African Yiddish Cultural Federation reprinted the book under the imprint *Kayor* in

named Mendel, who has become emotionally and financially attached to his lame and elderly workhorse. The horse enables him to earn a livelihood as a peddler among the diamond mines. The horse eventually helps him earn adequate funds to pay for his wife, Khaye-Yente's ship passage, but she arrives in Southern Africa having been sickened by poverty and loneliness in Lithuania. Khaye-Yente ignores chest pain for a time. She endures without having to pay to see a doctor but, ultimately, she decides that she needs to seek attention. She grabs some saved coins for payment. Just as she is about to leave the house, her husband returns, saying that the horse is also stricken with illness and needs to see a veterinarian if they intend to stay afloat. The wife languishes:

סיפערד טאָר ניט קראַנק זײַן: עס איז זייער ברויטגעבער, זייער מפרנס. דאָס ווײַב זעט אויס שלעכט. אַ ביטערער רחמנות אויף איר צו קוקן... זי איז אבער א מענטש מיט שכל – טראַכט ער — און א יידענע דערצו, א יידענע קאן אריבערטראָגן... זײַן פערד אבער איז דאך ניט, און אז עס גייט ניט — איז ניטאָ פונוואנען צו לעבן... מענדל פארשטייט אבער, אז דאס איז ניט קײן ריכטיקער חשבון... ער בלייבט שטיין, קוקנדיק פון איין חולה אויפן אנדערן, און קלערט: ווער איז בילכער?...]

[The horse is not allowed to be sick: it is their breadwinner, their support. His wife looked terrible. A bitter pity it is to look at her... But, she was a human being with smarts, a sentient being - he thought - and a Jewish woman at that, a woman could see herself through adversity...His horse, however, could not and, if it did not move -- there was nothing from which to make a living, no success. Mendel understood, however, that this was not a fair reckoning... He stood there, looking from one female patient to the other, and pondered: “Who comes first?”¹⁰⁸

In a perverse privileging of capitalism over human love and dignity, Mendel's twisted equation foregrounds the naturalistic, parabolic nature of the story. Told in the dramatic present, the protagonist prioritizes economic stability over the halachic obligation to preserve human life. Set squarely within this rabbinic and ethical conundrum, the narrator portrays the family's bonds as grotesquely disfigured. This strange ethical conundrum both reduces the terms of the broader social world to brutality, but represents Jewish ethics as degraded by-products of the colonial encounter.

The White Calf: Nekhemye Lewinsky's “Children” and the Uses of Parable

Johannesburg. See Hyman Polski, *In Afrike: Bilder Fun Yidishn Lebn in Dorem-Afrike, in Di Frierdike Yorn* (Johannesburg: Yidisher Kultur-Federatsye, 1952), 91-94.

¹⁰⁸ Hyman Polsky, *In Afrike*, 94.

Nekhemye Levinsky (1901-1957) was born in Rygorod, Lomza, Poland. Levinsky was educated in a traditional *cheder*, a Jewish elementary school, but by the age of 11 enrolled in secular education in Ostrova, Poland, where he remained until World War I. He then moved south to Ukraine, and joined a leftist Zionist youth movement. At the end of 1918, he returned to Poland and served in the Polish Army for a short time, then moved to Kovno, and then to South Africa in 1921. During the course of his journey through London and onto Cape Town, he met his wife. Levinsky lived with her in Bloemfontein, Free State, for the rest of his life. He and his brother Berel were the driving forces behind Yiddish cultural life in the city, and published Southern Africa's short-lived but finest avant-garde Yiddish journal, *Freistater Baginen* (Free State Dawn). He was committed to the cause of racial equality, and he depicted the brutally unjust treatment of blacks in modernist prose. According to his children's brief introduction to his collection of short stories, it grieved him that Jewish youth grew up with ingrained racial prejudice. These stories were - by his own calling - "race stories" (*rasn-geshikhtes*), reflecting both the antagonism and ironic closeness of Jews and Africans in the colonial economy. When Lewinsky died in 1957, his brother published a book called *Der Regn Hot Farshpetikt* (The Rains Came Late) that compiled his stories into one volume.¹⁰⁹ The release of the volume coincided with the Alexandra Bus Boycott, one of the more successful moments of resistance against the Apartheid regime.

¹⁰⁹ Nehemiah Levinsky, *Der Regn Hot Farshpetikt* (Blomfontein: Farlag Mishpokhe, 1959), 1-2.



נ. לעוויןסקי
(1901—1957)

Levinsky's characters often confront uncertainty and attempt to assuage this uncertainty through various means. In the short story "On a Farm" (*On a Farm*, 1935), in which an acculturated Jewish farm is visited by urban Jewish officials, Levinsky remaps the structure of colonial relations onto intra-communal Jewish relations. Consequently, Levinsky grapples with Jewish-African colonial relations as parables of idol worship in which the Jews and Pagans (Africans) are hybrid and conflicted representatives of their respective cosmologies. For example, the short story begins with a scene in which a housewife spends her time swatting flies. Dead flies lie all over the floor, the narrator assesses the woman's preoccupation with killing vermin to be a kind of ritual, and she entrusts her African servant to collect the dead bugs and dispose of them. Her six year-old daughter speaks Yiddish, Afrikaans and Sotho and socializes with all the local children. A car arrives, and it is the rabbi and his assistant, Reb Vishniak. The family is excited about the guests because they are isolated and rarely meet other Jews. Their daughter Ruth does not understand what a rabbi is; she thinks he is a Christian minister - a *Predikant* - because he is dressed like one. The rabbi asks her in English what her name is and the mother responds: "She doesn't understand English." At home she speaks Afrikaans and understands Yiddish, the mother explains, but when she plays with the black children, she speaks Sotho. Ruth interjects and claims to know the Hebrew blessing over the sabbath candles, and then demonstrates this by singing something unintelligible. This discussion is markedly tense. The description of the child, rife with imagery that highlights the multilingual and creolized nature of Jewish life in the South African rural areas, is in direct contrast to the mission of the rabbi

and his assistant, who aim to integrate the peripheral Ashkenazim into an urban middle class modeled on the economic structure of the British Empire.

Vishniak responds by noting the “spark of Jewishness” in the house, which accentuates the ambiguous identity of the Jewish characters. The rabbi admits that he has come to collect a contribution for a new synagogue in town. The family is surprised they are being asked, as they have no money and have lost most of their assets in drought and hail. The rabbi concedes his demand for payment, but insists that they pledge to donate, saying that this beautiful new synagogue will impress the non-Jewish neighbors. The rabbi requests to buy a fowl, some eggs and jam, but the family offers it for free. The idealization of the economically pressed Jewish family nobly offering their products for free both communicates a rabbinic value of hospitality, and an ironic critique: the Jewish farmers are compelled to provide charity upwards, rather than towards their African neighbors. Absurd class exploitation, here cast as a conflict between the precise Jewishness of the rabbi’s delegation and the Jewish farm, shifts when Jewish family is depicted engaging the Africans that they employ.

The scene turns to Joel taking his daughter Ruth on a walk through the fields, where an African preacher has gathered an audience for his sermon. The Africans respond to the arrival of Joel and Ruth with timid and polite greetings. Ruth asks her father if the blacks have rabbis or *predikants*. The father responds by saying that blacks do not have rabbis. An ornate scene of praise-song ensues. The child asks why they would be praying for a good crop if they don’t own crops, and Ruth responds that because they work for us who own the crops, they want us to have a good crop so they have enough to eat themselves. Joel wants to sit with the people while they play the guitar, but he can’t because he knows that white men are not allowed, at least by custom, to fraternize with black workers. This middle section of the story specifically likens the situation of the Jewish family to the rabbis to that of the African kraal encountering the Jewish farmers. The child’s speech embodies this coupling, as she has not internalized the economic or social attitudes that affirm racial hierarchies, and thus points directly to the dynamics of racial and spiritual exploitation that characterize class conflict. To accentuate her role as a wise child, she naively voices what is both invisible to her and visible, if unspoken, to the others in the story.

Malke falls ill and Mrs. Van Aswegen, an Afrikaner medicine woman, comes to treat her with herbal medicines. After the treatment, Malke’s condition worsens and Joel becomes scared. He doesn’t own a prayer or remember the prayers, though he feels compelled to pray, he wonders if he is being punished for not contributing more to the synagogue building. He wakes at daybreak to supervise the Africans that have taken over Malke’s chores. He notices a man who is kneeling beside a sick man. He is dressed in leopard skin, and other striking clothing. He cuts into the sick man’s wounds with a blade and rubs herbs in the incision. Joel is skeptical of this folk doctor, and in turn, the doctor doesn’t seem to even acknowledge his presence, so Joel leaves and checks on the milking cows. He returns to Malke and the Boer medicine woman. She is enthused to hear that Lopatsi is close by, and she tells Joel he should be invited to cure Malke. Joel returns to the village to ask but Lopatsi refuses to come see Malke, arguing that the white man’s law bars him from healing Whites - for he is not a European-trained and credentialed doctor. Joel insists and Lopatsi relents. He requests a goat. Joel comes back from the field and with Lopatsi brings the goat into the room with Malke. With hesitation, he convinces Malke to place her hand on the head of the goat, Lopatsi recites incantations, and then leads the goat out. Then he sits on the ground next to Malke and lays out some bones, carved with goat heads and monkeys and other animals. A bone falls with its face down. Lopatsi claims this means that Malke will not die. Lopatsi leaves and then returns, sprinkling blood in the corners of the house. He then mixes blood, herbs and spices and meat and gives it to Malke to

drink. The Boer woman forces the woman to ingest it. Malke recovers, but the man whom Lopatsi treated among the black laborers, dies. Malke looks at Joel and asks, “If Lopatsi is such a great healer, why didn’t he cure him like he cured me?”

This discourse revolves around rabbinic parables about Jewish physical proximity to idol worship, parables which often revolve around the sanctified status of cattle. The narrator’s triangulation of Afrikaners, Jews, and Africans provides us with a prism through which to view the Levinsky’s parable-like style. Somewhere between fantasy and reality, Levinsky’s prose oscillates between the culturally specific, almost ethnographic perceptions of South African life, with parable-like descriptions of social relations that represent ideas or symbols. This dual frame encourages the reader to distinguish between the sacred and mundane. Both within the text and outside it, the dialectic of sacred and mundane organizes the foreign, colonial landscape as both a material and sensory world.

Nekhemye Levinsky’s short story “*Kinder*” (Children) appeared in book form in 1959 in Bloemfontein, the city where Levinsky spent all of his adult life.¹¹⁰ The short story is sparse and impressionistic in its depiction of the interplay between African and Afrikaner individuals in rural areas. There are no identifiably Jewish characters, and the story is told by an omniscient narrator. Though the natural landscape is never described in detail, there are consistently drawn symmetries between the exterior and interior worlds. Two “columns” exist in the story: one white and agricultural and the other African and urban. The solemn tone pivots off this asymmetry and evokes the ambiguity of the rabbinic *mashal*. As Daniel Boyarin explains, the rabbinic parable functions as a way through which discursive gaps in the understanding of two verses from the Hebrew Bible are filled. In this sense, Lewinsky’s “Children” serves as a means for Southern African writers employed rabbinic literary intertexts to “fill in the gaps” of a dysfunctional or imperfect social world. Thus, “Children” ought not to be seen as a *reflection* of Jewish culture in South Africa, but as a subversive use of rabbinic intertextuality in Jewish colonial cultures. With Jews absent in the story, the narrator structures the tension between the Afrikaner’s Christian faith and African animism, ultimately taking the antinomian view in which animism struggles and ultimately triumphs over Christianity. As we will see, the use of specific phrases and terms related to rabbinic Judaism frame the movement of the Afrikaner child through space and time.

Hassie is an Afrikaner child who lives on a vast farm and attends a local Afrikaner school:

אין שול איז האססי געווען א פלייסיקער תלמיד, הגם געלערנט האָט ער זיך ניט פיל, נאר ער האָט גרינג אליץ באנומען זיך ניט אנשטרענגענדיק און די לעקציעס צוגעגרייט פינקטלעך און גיך. אפטמאָל פלעגן זיין מוטער אים מוסרן, ווען ער האָט זיינע אויפגעבעס אפגעפארטיקט אין א קורצער צייט.

[At school Hassie was a diligent pupil, although he did not study much. He grasped things easily and naturally and prepared his lessons quickly and expediently. Often his mother would reproach him when he completed his homework in such a short time.]

¹¹⁰ Nehemiah Levinsky, *Der Regn hot Farshpetikt*, 50-70.

Hassie is described here as a “*talmid*” rather than a student to evoke a traditionally religious atmosphere and connect Hassie to Jewish culture. Upon his return from school, Hassie’s father beats him and to cope, Hassie beats black children that live in the townships adjacent to his farm. He is satisfied momentarily after these violent outbursts, yet the narrator describes how, though Hassie is intelligent and outwardly pious, black children accept his beatings as his way of expressing friendship. He envisions himself as a “magistrate” who dispenses lashes to enforce the law. Hassie’s vision of absolute power is not based in fear, but rather in the respect that he believes the prospect of violence ensures. Hassie is political empowered through religious, Hassie describes is Christian desire for colonial domination, which correlates in ethically problematic ways to the monarch as a divine figure. The paragraph quoted above, Hassie is refined through specifically Jewish methods: he is disciplined by his mother’s “מוסרן,” the moralizing tone of his mother, and the violent outbursts of an angry father towards his son.

In contrast, the narrator describes the African “location” (לאַקייִשׁוֹן) as a social sphere distinct and foreign to Hassie’s frame of reference, despite his physical closeness to it. (“Location” is an English term for an African township.) When Hassie goes down to the location, he moves towards the gulch and pushes the mangy dogs and children away, but one boy remains. This boy’s name is Zulu and he awaits Hassie’s own *musern* in the form of violent beatings. The boy’s body represents the collective, with the cornrows arranged like “a plantation.” Zulu is aestheticized by racial stereotypes. His arms hang at his side “like a monkey” who waits with “wide, trusting eyes” that do not know whether to expect a beating or an embrace.¹¹¹ When Zulu and Hassie begin to speak, Hassie lays out his plans of becoming a “magistrate” and Zulu enthusiastically goads Hassie’s goals “to judge” others and send them to the prison. Occasionally marred by violence, their relationship is interdependent; the narrator describes each child internalizing the other’s attitude towards difference. The narrative is also characterized by long retrospective monologues, a perspective that situates the story in the past. The past’s immediacy is an important component of tone in rabbinic parables, though this aspect does not make the story an allusion to any particular parable.

Rather, space evokes the epic proportion of antinomy in the violent friendship between Hassie and Zulu: a portrait of Christian de Wet, a Boer military man instrumental in battles against the British, hangs on the wall of Hassie’s family home to announce correlation between order and chaos. Zulu comes to Hassie and tells him that they are building a school in “the location.” Hassie is pleased and looks forward to a going to school together. At this moment, the narrator describes the sun darkening Hassie’s skin, as if to symbolize his progressive closeness to the African “location.” This darkening evokes rabbinic narratives in which darkening is correlated to sin, which the narrator’s linkage asserts without corroborating evidence.

The second section of the story narrates the funeral of Hassie’s grandmother and further develops the struggle between animism (Zulu) and “religion” (Hassie). The narrator describes the decorum of Afrikaner (Boer) farmers at an ethnographic remove. The grandfather, stern and angry clergyman who carries a Bible under his arm, stands beside his wife’s coffin, which rests next to a bed surrounded by herbal medicines and vessels of liquid medicine.

¹¹¹ Levinsky, *Kinder*, 54.

אין איין האַנט האָט ער געהאַלטן די צוגעגרייטע דרשה. ער האָט יעדן פון די ארומיקע דערלאנגט די האנט און זיך נאכגעפרעגט: 'הו גאַן דיט?' (ווי גייט עס?) ער האָט זיך אפגעשטעלט לעבן האססין, אים געטאַן א גלעט מיט א מינע, ווי ער וואלט געגלעט א יתום. אבער זיך דערמאנענדיק אז די פארשטאַרבענע האָט נאר דערוואקסענע קינדער, איז ער געשווינד אריין אין שטוב. ער האָט זיך אָפגעשטעלט אין מיטן צימער, געגריסט אלעמען, צוגערופן א 'דיאקאן' (שמש). אים עפעס געזאָגט מיט שטילן געבעט, צומאכנדיק שטייף די אויגן. אלע האבן געהאלטן די קעפ אראפגעבויגן און שטיל, צערודערט נאכגעזאָגט די תפילות. עס האט גערוישט ווי אין א בינשטאק.

[In one hand he held a prepared sermon (*droshe*.) He shook the hand of each person around and enquired: *Hoe gan dit?* (How's it going?) He stopped next to Hassie, stroked his head with an expression as though he was stroking the head of an orphan. However, remembering that the deceased had only adult children, he quickly entered the house. He stopped in the middle of the room, greeted everyone, called a Diaken (beadle), said something to him. He said a quiet prayer, with eyes tightly closed. Everyone bowed their heads and repeated the prayers quietly. There was a buzz as in a beehive.]

Here, the description of the funeral employs specifically Jewish terminology. The minister delivers a *droshe* (critical explanation of a biblical text). Like a rabbi, he greets congregants informally after the sermon, and physical expresses sensitivity to the weak. To express this, he strokes Hassie's head *as if* he were an orphan, but then in an expression of cold pedantry, moves on from Hassie when he remembers that Hassie isn't an orphan. The description of the concluding prayer correlates the minister's benediction (*gebet*) with the congregation's prayers (*tfiles*). In this scene, there is a vivid portrayal of Afrikaner Christian performance, but expressed in Yiddish terms that blur the division between Jews and Christians. Since the story is about the relationship with a European and African child, the use of rabbinic terms in reference to Christians stabilizes Judaism in the realm of European whiteness. In the subsequent scene, we have the frame of the idol worship mapped into the dialogue. "And our black people, Hassie, do they go to heaven?" "Perhaps blacks go to "Location Heavens" – there must be such a place there for blacks to live. God is after all white, and Jesus his son was also white, and whites don't like blacks. No, Hassie, I won't pray to the white God any longer, I don't need Him."¹¹² Hassie looked at Zulu in confusion, and wanted to defend the wrong against God by beating Zulu. Alluding to various definitions of idol worship the Talmudic rabbis characterize Jewish worship of one god as diametrically opposed to a variety of paganisms. Levinsky's Jewish narrator reconstructs one form of this Talmudic dialogue between Christian Hassie and Zulu, a converted African child rethinking his faith. The narrator, rather than representing this dialogue as a Christian moment of clarity for the African, articulates idol worship which includes

¹¹² ניין האססי, איך וועל מיר ניט דאווענען צום ווייסן גאט, איך דארף אים ניט 6 *Levinsky*,

Christianity as both the idolization of political power and the worship of a divine human.¹¹³ By questioning the racialization of the divine, Zulu evokes a well known rabbinic dialogues about the danger of worshipping the human form. Aniconism, best synthesized in the Shulchan Aruch, specifically forbids the contemplation of God as a human form, or any depiction of the heavenly realms.¹¹⁴

Instead of the dichotomy between Christianity and Paganism, Zulu contemplates the rejection of Christianity. At the same time, Zulu asserts his own analysis, positing that the earthly and heavenly realms aren't all that different, with one mirroring the brokenness of the other. This parallelism of a racist earth and racist heaven are what divests Zulu from his dependence on white society for a sense of spirituality. In Yiddish, this dialogue mirrors both the rabbinic debates about the boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, but also the Jewish theological notion that the spiritual "brokenness" of the material world indicates the equal brokenness of the cosmic realms.

To illustrate this rabbinic topos, the two boys go to a black cemetery, where the graves are strewn with broken glass, according to custom. They come upon Zulu's father's grave, and Hassie is astonished. He did not know that Zulu's father had died in a cholera epidemic that ravaged the "location." "Zulu your father must have been a good boy; I wish he could get a good job in heaven."

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אויף ברעטלעך הארטע שלאָפן מענטשן זאלבע-פינפט, זאלבע-צענט אין
 איין צימער. די הייזקעס וויגן זיך פון ווינט, די דעכער גידעריק
 הייס-ברענענדיקע בלעכענע דעכער, וואָס ליגן האַרט איבערן קאָפּ און
 קילן זיך אָפּ, ווי מיט קנאלן פון בייטשן. דאָ שלאָפן מענטשן טונקעלע ווי
 די נאכט, שוואַרצע ווי די שאַטנס, און זיי חלומן ניט. פאַרמאַטערטע זיינען
 זיי פון ברענענדיקע טעג, פון אַרבעט, פון שווייס פאַרגאַסענע ביים גראָבן
 גערטנער, טראָגן שווערע זעק, האַדעווען ווייסע קינדער, פון האַמערן און
 בויען, קלעפּ און בזיונות.¹¹⁶

[On hard planks people sleep together five, ten in one room.
 The huts sway in the wind, the roofs are low, bearing down
 on the head, burning hot tin roofs, which cool down with the
 sound of a cracking whip. Here sleep people dark as the
 night black as shadows and they do not dream. They are
 exhausted from the scorching days, from hard work, from
 sweat pouring while digging gardens, carrying heavy sacks,
 feeding after white children, from hammering and building,
 from blows and humiliation.]

¹¹³ Allen Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 12-32.

¹¹⁴ Shulchan Aruch, Chapter 11:2-4.

¹¹⁵ זולו, דיין טאַטע איז מסטמא געווען א גוטער 'בוי איך וואלט וועלן, אז ער זאָל דאָרט אין גן-עדן קריגן אגונן דזשאב

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¹¹⁶ Levinsky, *Kinder*, 61.

Another scene demonstrates the loose but steady correlation to idol worship. When Hassie is denied an opportunity to visit the city as Zulu has earned, he punches Zulu straight in the face. He continues to beat Zulu, screaming “*Kaffir, Kaffir!*” When his hand meets Zulu’s skull, he jumps back in pain. He moved away from Zulu yelling Oh Oh. *Kaffir!* He goes to sit on a rock, and contemplates his actions. How dare an African like Zulu go to the city when he cannot? They re-encounter each other, and though Zulu expects to be further bloodied, they tumble to the ground laughing hysterically. The climax of the story occurs here, when the balance between the white and black is unsettled in violence. This violence, which accompanies laughter and tussling, embodies the lack of a neat social and spiritual borderline between the two children.

The use of the term *kaffir* is both a striking use of the racist South African lexicon and a type of unfused Hebraism that was likely not lost of readers. Though the term derives from the Arabic language of early traders, the term hearkens back to the use of the term to describe those who actively deny an accepted religious truth. Thus, while the story illustrates the relationship between Christian Europeans and their African mission, it also describes the division between Jews and others.
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The narrative now focuses on Zulu returning to his “location.” Zulu sits alone and counts the money that he has saved in order to take the trip to the city. Zulu has earned some of his money carrying packages for white men and other menial, and feels that he should share his “wealth” with Hallie. In a sense, Zulu comes across as someone so naïve as to not understand the nature of the beatings against him. Zulu then goes to the city, with other black children who have filled the car. Hassie is on the same train as Zulu. Hassie’s experience in the city is markedly fancy, with mealtimes laid out in the park with tablecloths and delicacies. The black, children however, are paraded around the city as show-choirs. When the white children eat, the black children are taken to the Exhibition halls, where they are displayed. The black children also stay in the townships. The teachers do not explain to the black children what they are seeing, while the white students are given full educational narrations around the city.

Over the course of the story, the reader progressively realizes that the story is a micro-representation of race relations in South Africa on a political, social and economic level. While the racial hierarchies of Hassie’s world are conceptualized and formed in Europe as a type of racescience, they exist in the structured interactions of two children. Hassie and Zulu thus do not represent “white and black” but rather each exhibit both the scientific, rational and empirical aspects of colonial experience. Hassie, in this sense, represents the individual seduced by the empirical aspect of his friendship with Zulu. He abides by the scientifically justified racism that sustains his power over Zulu. Each reference to the fraught ethical terms of idol worship animate a particular aspect of the relationship between Hassie and Zulu with the story progressing from ethnographic detail to broad, distanced depictions of social relations.

¹¹⁷ There is a wide temporal frame that allows Hassie’s reaction to be seen within a long tradition of those who deny other’s their privilege. For an example of Hassie’s behavior in the Talmudic sugya, see BT Baba Batra 16b, עשו הכופר.

Idol Worship as Assimilation

In Hyman Polsky's short story "Old Reb Aron" (*Der Alter R' Arn*) an elderly immigrant narrates his struggle to identify with the son who sponsored his journey to Southern Africa.¹¹⁸ This story hews close to the idol worship parables pervasive in South African Yiddish literature. While the son has actively abandoned Judaism for material comfort, his children are completely ignorant of the tradition. Nevertheless, his son and grandchildren live nearby a synagogue and Reb Aron attends. The narrator writes:

ניין, ער האָט ניט קיין אייניקלעך, זיי זײַנען ניט זיינע קינדער, זיי קוקן אויף אים ווי אויף
אן אלטן נאר, ווי אויף א ווילדן...ער קען מיט זיי ניט ריידן, ער פארשטייט ניט זייער
שפראך, ער פארשטייט ניט זייער דערציאונג...

[No, he has no grandchildren; they are not his children...they regard him as an old fool, a savage... He cannot speak with them, he can not comprehend their language, nor their upbringing.]

Here is another example in which value systems are contrasted. R' Arn's attitude towards his grandchildren is one of mourning. Guided by rabbinic attitudes towards Jews that no longer observe Jewish customs, R' Arn's views the grandchildren as if they are dead. There exists symmetry, then, when the narrator remarks that the grandchildren look upon their grandfather as a *vilde*, which I've translated here as "savage." Though this term can be translated as "wild" the term's use must be seen in context. There is no doubt that Arn's traditional mourning and the reciprocal dehumanization of the grandfather as a "savage" correlates to larger social structures evident in the Southern African Jewish context. In order to escape this reciprocal process of estrangement, R' Arn accentuates it. He turns his back on the youth. He struts into a nursing home and checks himself in, where he is lauded by the other residents. He regains the esteem and respect of a learned man among traditional Jews. The triangulation of grandfather (Europe), father (colonizer/native agent) and children (colonized) stands as an allegory of the African aristocracy unstable position within a European colonial social structure, and with the internal divisions extant in the ongoing colonial encounter. Polsky follows the didactic form of the Yiddish novel, popularized by Isaac Meir Dik. With humanistic ideology, Polsky offered stories that he felt would influence the behavior and attitudes of his readers. Three stories are remarkable. The first, "The New Merchant" (*Der Nayer Soykher*) details the contradictory and unjust economic travails of men in the "*Shammes-Yard*," the name for the first Jewish shantytown in early Johannesburg. Like the Lower East Side or London's East End, it is represented as a completely Jewish urban space. "Who Comes First?" (*Ver iz Bilkher?*) examines the over-determined economic niche of the Eastern European Jew between the white elite and its black labor force, and "The Belated Seder" (*Der Farshpetikter Seyder*) depicts the spiritual vacuity of African-born Jewish children. Their parents, whose futile attempts to inculcate Jewish religious consciousness in the young, are described in the short story "Old Reb Aaron" (*Der Alter R' Arn*.) Polsky's prose is subdued yet shows subtle transformations in the characters sketched. While he draws on stereotyped portrayals of gender difference, these depictions resonate with older folkloristic archetypes: submissive, feminized men and headstrong, overbearing women. However,

¹¹⁸ Hyman Polsky, *In Afrike*, 23-57.

Polsky's narrator evokes these clichés to foreground their socially conditioned rather than natural existence. Polsky thus describes the solitude of Jewish males in Southern Africa as a kind of medical condition, especially if that solitude leads to the flamboyant individualism of the nouveau riche. His narrators also mock the sometimes downward mobility of the Jewish male and his "pseudo-boer" tendencies. Polsky harangues the son who rejects the traditionalism of the father.

Morris Hoffmann (1885-1940) was first published in European Yiddish journals, and explored themes of racial division through rabbinic intertexts that relate to idol worshippers. Before 1905, his poems appear in *Di Tsukunft* (New York) and *Der Veg* (Warsaw). Despite working over twelve hours a day in Hopetown, Hoffman learned English and Afrikaans from a priest and, in turn, taught the priest Hebrew. He published in Warsaw his expansive poetic work, titled *Voglungsklangen* (Wandering Sounds.) In 1952, his wife expanded and republished his short stories as *Unter Afrikaner Zun*.¹¹⁹ The Karoo, a desert area, provided Hoffman a backdrop for an unsentimental, naturalistic view of Jewish life, in which he starkly dramatizes the rising popularity of Afrikaner nationalism during the 1930s. His focus on the language of nature renders him the poet engaged most deeply with the African landscape. Hoffman's epic poem *Malpenheim* (Monkeyhome, 1919) depicts human moral decay governed by the laws of a food chain, in which human beings participate in the violence of the "animal kingdom." His Jewish characters appear close to their Boer neighbors, but in his view, they retain a spark of Jewishness in their sensitivity to the hardship of their servants and employees.

¹¹⁹ Morris Hoffmann, *Unter Afrikaner Zun* (De Aar, Kaypland, 1939, Johannesburg: Kayor, 1951). Hoffmann narrates the intensifying attempts to align Jewry with British imperial culture rather than the Afrikaner identity. There is no doubt that the chasm between the Afrikaner man and the Jewish woman is bridged by feeling, rather than intellect. The odd parallel that exists with Isaac Meir Dik's sentimental reconstruction of Jewish slaveholding practices as "too kind" is apparent. The idol - the "kaffir" in this case - is a vessel through which to the narrator describes Jewish difference. This difference exists not in the realm of science but in the realm of feeling.



For example, in “*Adoneses Ayferzucht*” (Adonis’s Jealousy, 1920) Hoffmann constructs an inverted racial hierarchy through an idol worship parable, in which the commodification of the

African body serves as a kind of “new idol.”¹²⁰ A black servant named Adonis (אדוניעס) tells his boss that he is quitting his employ. The boss, named Valdman, is a Jewish bachelor. The story then shifts to a scene in which Valdman hires Adonis after a flu epidemic decimated the nearby black villages. Adonis was among only a few survivors. Adonis watches white gravediggers carry black bodies off to a mass grave. The scene shifts forward and returns to Valdman’s frustration at Adonis’s choice to quit. We are told Adonis is valued as a laborer and as a piece of property, yet Valdman shows more affection and emotional attachment to his dog. This angers Adonis and causes him to leave Valdman’s service. The narrator laments the broad chasm between blacks and whites in Africa and each group’s inability to recognize feelings in the other. Here, the mythical reference thematizes the “idol worship” topos. This social dysfunction is foregrounded by the significant inversion of clan and race hierarchy. The black servant is named Adonis, even at first glance, associated with the Greek mythological character and a symbol of classical beauty. However, when glossed in Hebrew, it can be read as “master’s.” The Jewish employer is named “Forest-Man,” which references the European primitive forest-dwelling man.¹²¹ As a critic of the racist order, the narrator gives Adonis a powerful name and a weak position; Valdman himself demonstrates affection for his dog and shows no such affection for his human property. The terms “master” and “slave” occur throughout the Jewish liturgy to describe the relationship between the Jew and God. In this case, the master and slave relationship exists between two human beings, ironically inverted and reified.

Conclusion

This second chapter is positioned in dialogue with the first chapter, and traces the development of Lithuanian (ליטוואַק) Yiddish in Southern Africa. I focus on the development of Yiddish literary modernism, which first appears in the midst of the South African War (1898-1902) and culminates in the reappearance of Yiddish as a language of white resistance in the Apartheid era (1941-60). I analyze biblical and rabbinic intertextuality in the Yiddish literature of Southern Africa, especially as it relates to the parallel use of the Hebrew Bible, both thematically and structurally, in the English literature of the country. This reading aims to suggest a Jewish space between Africanist and Europeanist readings of the South African past, and in turn, an Africanist reading of Jewish literature theorized from within Southern African Yiddish texts.

I argue for this new reading through three paradigmatic Yiddish rewritings of the rabbinic parable (משל). The first, Yankev Azriel Davidson’s *Afrikaner Hagode* (Location, 1912), rewrites

¹²⁰ This story appeared only in the later edition; In 1939, a selection of his Yiddish stories under the title *Unter Afrikaner Zun* (Under African Sun) was prepared for publication in De Aar, Cape Province, but published professionally only after his death. See Morris Hoffmann, *Unter Afrikaner Zun* (Johannesburg: Kayor, 1951). The Hebrew version of these stories was published in Israel in 1948 Morris Hoffmann, *Tahat Sheme Afrikah: Sipurim ‘im Reshimah Otobiyografif* (Tel Aviv: Masada, 1948). See Ber Kotlerman, "South African Writings of Morris Hoffman: between Yiddish and Hebrew," *Journal for Semitics*, 23.2 (2014): 569-82.

¹²¹ In the Eastern European Jewish case, this character is typified by “*Ira ha-Ya ‘ari*” and other Primitive types based on Jewish receptions of Robinson Crusoe. See Shein, *Difference of a Different Kind*, 65-98; Leah Garrett, "The Jewish Robinson Crusoe," *Comparative Literature*, 54.3 (2002): 215-28.

the Passover Haggadah as an “exodus in reverse” taken by two Lithuanian Jews from the Pale to the newly built mining camps outside Johannesburg. I pay particular attention to how the Israelite slave in Egypt impresses upon the South African Jewish emigrant both social alterity and political power; imagining the Jewish migrant in Africa as a Europeanized Israelite freedman reverting to enslaved status. The second section closely reads Dovid Fram’s dirge, *Matumba*, (Vilna and Johannesburg, 1937) as a modernist rewriting of rabbinic martyr narratives (עשרת הרוגי מלכות). I demonstrate how *Matumba* enriches our understanding of this correlation by representing the central protagonist’s hanging by colonial police as Jewish martyrdom by a Roman hangman. The concluding section reads Nekhemye Levinsky’s *Children* (קינדער) (Orange Free State, 1920) in the light of rabbinic assessments of idol worship. Levinsky’s short story, which contains no Jewish characters, reconstructs Jewish struggles with idol worship in colonial African space and time. By correlating colonial racism to the violent relationship between a Afrikaner boy and his Sotho companion, Levinsky frames the broad and complex feeling of racism as a form of struggle between idolatry and ethical conduct. When recognized, these three forms of rabbinic intertextuality--the Haggadah, rabbinic martyrology, and idol worship parables -- mark a new empirical space that includes Yiddish within the single, multilingual literature of South Africa.

Biblical and Rabbinic intertextuality functions in this study as a broad stylistic component. This component structures the triangulation of Yiddish language, rabbinic and biblical intertexts, and the literary realism that pervades the texts offered here. Though this chapter was not meant to offer a complete bibliography of Southern African Yiddish texts, I aimed to identify the synthesis of art and politics in the work of these writers. My historiographical “use” of biblical and rabbinic language is meant to contribute a Jewish space between Africanist and Europeanist readings of the Southern African past, and in turn, to provide an Africanist reading of Jewish literature theorized from within the Southern African Jewish texts themselves. Southern African literature - a single, multilingual literature - continues to be deeply influenced by the Hebrew Bible, which it has received with the Christian supersessionism introduced by Christian missionaries. Yiddish (and Hebrew) literature constitutes a constituent element in the literature of Southern Africa, a constituent that is regrettably ignored or minimized in both Europeanist and Africanist readings of Southern African literature.

Epilogue

At the heart of this dissertation is the desire to write a prehistory of “Black-Jewish Relations,” a well-known catchphrase that continues to inspire a complex array of Jewish-American writing across genre, time and space.¹ By reassessing the travel narrative form in the cultural history of Yiddish-speaking Jewry, I’ve argued that the literature of “Black-Jewish Relations” ought not be understood in the terms of American exceptionalism, but rather as an imagined phenomenon and an imaginative construct internal to Ashkenazi literature and culture that spans centuries.

In so doing, I suggest an alternative to the model proposed by Karen Brodtkin and Matthew Frye Jacobson that imagines a socio-political process in which Ashkenazi Jews “become white” in the United States.² Rather, I try to develop the idea that, as Hasia Diner notes, Ashkenazi Jews were “already white” when they settled in the United States.³ Thus, as the African-American psychologist Kenneth B. Clark noted in 1946, specifically American-Jewish attitudes towards African-Americans and anti-black racism may have no important significance in themselves, but serve rather to indicate the extent to which the pathologies of the dominant white society infected all groups and individuals within that society.⁴

Rather than focusing on Jewish immigrant writing and its depiction of social interactions with people of African descent, I have attempted to give a better sense of the “emigrant” represented in modern Yiddish literature outside of the United States. As a new iteration of the Jewish traveler, the emigrant, I suggest, was not a non-ideological actor; nor was Jewish travel constrained to the physical world. Rather, migration and travel across and throughout the Atlantic world specifically implicated Ashkenazi Jews in Eastern Europe and outside “Yiddishland” in a series of modern European ideologies of colonial travel, all of which continue to shape Jewish discourse throughout the diaspora. In order to treat the relationship of specifically racialist attitudes to modern Jewish literature, I identify the travel narrative as a generic form that rereads, sustains and subverts rabbinic sources in an effort to re-apply them to the contingencies of the Atlantic world. These persistent forms of rabbinic intertextuality are, as I hope to have demonstrated in this dissertation, crucial to understanding Jewish receptions of perceived racial difference, and the origins of “Black-Jewish Relations” as a trope in American Jewish culture. This trope, it seems, will guide the development of this dissertation into a manuscript that speaks to past, present and future.

- ER, ניסן תשע"ז

¹ Lenwood G. Davis, *Black-Jewish Relations in the United States, 1752-1984: A Selected Bibliography* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1984).

² Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

³ Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 165.

⁴ Kenneth B. Clark, "Candor About Negro-Jewish Relation," *Commentary* (February, 1946), 8-14.

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Slavery or Serfdom (Bondage)¹

This is a true, terrible and wondrous tale
that happened in America some twenty years ago concerning a
certain Negro (Moor) named "Uncle Tom," a slave owned by a certain
Jewish planter and landowner named "Abraham Shelby."²
This tale was written in English and translated into all languages.
Now we have it translated into Yiddish, with a beautiful introduction.³

Vilna

Printed by Yosef Reuven son of Menakhem-Man Romm, 5628 (1868)

Foreword⁴

Slavery was instituted among all peoples and in all lands since time immemorial. Even in our Torah, which is the oldest book in the world, sufficient evidence of this shameful trade in human beings is found, for example, when Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers.⁵ It is said that the trade

¹ Slavery and serfdom are equated in Yiddish, terms derived from German and Polish: *Sklaverei* and *Leibeigenschaft* (German: Slavery and Serfdom) and *poddanstwo* (Polish: Bondage); see John Mackay, *True Songs of Freedom: Uncle Tom's Cabin in Russian Culture and Society* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013). For Dik's likely German source edition, see *Onkel Tom's Hutte, oder das Leben der Sklaven in Amerika, nach Harriet Beecher Stowe, für die Jugend* (Berlin: Faudel, 1853). See also Grace E. Maclean, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in Germany (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1910).

² In Stowe's original, Tom's owner is a Christian named Arthur Shelby. Replacing Arthur with a Jewish planter and slave-owner is a first sign that the novel has been adapted for a Jewish audience.

³ *Yudish-Daytsh*: literally "Jewish-German." Literary Yiddish based on Western Yiddish and High German dialects, meant to Germanize the grammar and diction of Eastern Yiddish, which was considered a primitive "jargon." Dik's choice to write in Yiddish was justified by necessity: "I degraded the honor of my pen to recount an abundance of diverse stories in *yidish-taytsh*, the vernacular now spoken, to our shame and sorrow, among our people dwelling in the land (Lithuania, Poland, Byelorussia). I wrote them for the benefit of the daughters of our people who have eyes only for the Yiddish [translation of the] Pentateuch, which is written in a stumbling tongue and wherein unseemly passages can be found that should never be uttered by the mouths of pious women and maidens." Isaac Meir Dik, introduction to *Machazeh mul machazeh [A Play vs. a Play]* (Warsaw: n.p., 1861) quoted in Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁴ Dik translates terms that he suspects his readers will not understand; for a difficult word of Germanic origin (here, *forbarikht*), he suggests a term common in Jewish discourse (*hakdome*).

⁵ Genesis 37:27-28. Dik refers to the selling of Joseph, a biblical narrative that serves as a basis for traditional Ashkenazi folk theater. For another central representation of Joseph's enslavement in nineteenth-century

stems from a phrase that Noah cursed upon his son Ham, when he rebuked him with these words: “a slave of slaves he shall be unto his brethren.”⁶ So it appears in the holy tales that slavery began with the Negroes (Moors) who descend from Ham and came to be called Cushites by us Jews. And only later did this “evil” spread over the white man as well, who descends from Shem and Japheth.⁸

Therefore slavery, among both white and black peoples, should be seen as merely a historical law. (This means a law that has its foundation firmly in ancient history and in ancient times. Especially, as in this case, in which it appears in our Torah to have originated from a single curse.) It is not, however, a rational law. (This means a law that is grounded in the genuine evidence of unchangeable human understanding, as in calculating “two times two equals four.”⁹) Because genuine human intelligence shows that slavery is opposed to reason, and proves that whatever nation we may reside in and whatever color we were born, we are created alike, as brothers, like children from one father. And this too, is the opinion of our holy books. As Job proclaims in his book, “If I did spurn the cause of my slave, or of my slave-girl, when they contended with me, what then shall I do when God rises up? And when He remembers, what shall I answer Him? Did not He that made me in the womb make him? And did not One fashion us in the womb?”¹⁰ This means, I have scorned the right of my servants to quarrel with me. But then I thought: what will I do when God takes me to account? Did not the same one who created me create them? Did not one Master form us in our mother's womb?¹¹ In that case, we have no right to sell one another, nor even ourselves, just like the children of Jacob had no right to sell their brother Joseph, because every person is a portion of God above, as the verse tells us: *In the image of*

Ashkenazi performance, see Eliakum Zunser, *Maḥaze mekhires`Yoysef: eyn teater shtik in zibin aktn un in zibetsn tsenen* (Vilna: Bidfus ha-almanakh vcha-aḥim Rom, 1893).

⁶ Genesis 9:2. All biblical translations are by Robert Alter. On the identification of dark-skinned Africans with the biblical Cushite, see Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and David M Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2003). Biblical quotations appear in Hebrew in Dik's original, while he often paraphrases, explains, or interprets them in Yiddish directly after the quotation, a common practice in Yiddish.

⁷ Dik is referring to popular Old Yiddish texts: the *Tsene-rene*, a commentary on the weekly Torah reading, and the *Mayse-bukh*, a collection of didactic folktales, both of which make reference to Moors in various editions.

⁸ Shem, Japheth, and Ham are the sons of Noah. The three sons came to represent the unity of human languages and races. Later, Noah's sons were used to organize ethnology and geography around notions of biblical genealogy. See Maurice Olender *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁹ Historical Law (*Historischesrecht*) is contrasted with rational law (*Vernunftrecht*). These terms also appear in Kant and by extension in German Enlightenment discourse of nature. See P. Abela, “The Demands of Systematicity: Rational Judgment and the Structure of Nature” in *A Companion to Kant*, ed. G. Bird (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 408–22; Tal Kogman, “Jewish Maskilim Observe Nature: A Personal Story or a Literary Model of the Enlightenment?” *Zion* 78 (2013): 379-93; Kogman, “Intercultural Contacts in Haskalah Texts on Natural Sciences,” in *The Varieties of Haskalah*, ed. Israel Bartal and Shmuel Feiner (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005), 29-42.

¹⁰ Job 31:13.

¹¹ IMD: “From these humanitarian words of his it is clear that this holy man had only servants or maids that worked for monetary wages and which were not chattel slaves. These words: “my slave” mean only he who is paid and nothing less. Sturdy evidence for this is found in that the book does not count the number of his servants as it does his oxen, camel, and sheep. And Job also calls his servants simply “boys” with the same words that he uses to refer to his own children. *It fell upon the children, and they died* [Job 1:19].”

*God I made Man.*¹² God made Man with his own form, and he did not make more than two people, and from them man came forth in many colors: white, black, brown, and red.¹³ Because of this, we find that our Torah severely forbids slavery among our nation. No Jew may be sold for his entire life; barely for seven years [should he toil]. Additionally he must be treated very humanely, one could not make him do excruciating labor.

Also no shameful work is allowed: “Ye shall not rule over one another with rigor.”¹⁴ See, our rabbis have decreed that a Hebrew slave need not haul water to the public bath for his master.¹⁵ When he finishes his time as a slave, his master must present him with blessings for his home: “Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock.”¹⁶ This means they should lend beauty to and crown his dwelling with all the goods found in their own stables. The rabbis summed it up like this: “He who acquires a Hebrew slave acquires a master upon himself.”¹⁷ Our Torah also takes care to support the Canaanite slave. If his master punched out his eye or a tooth, he was thenceforth free. If he died under the lash of

¹² Genesis 1:27. The four-color scheme is likely based on the first edition of Carl Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae*: "Europæus albus" (white European), "Americanus rubescens" (red American), "Asiaticus fuscus" (brown Asian) and "Africanus niger" (black African).

¹³ IMD: “There is great disagreement among physiologists (natural scientists) over the reason for the Moors' blackness. [*Shvartskeyt*. Popular in nineteenth century discourse, scientific racism denotes ostensibly scientific methods to justify racist attitudes and worldviews. Racism is based on belief in the existence and significance of racial categories, but extends this into a hierarchy between the races to support political or ideological positions of racial supremacy. Dik is specifically referencing the debate over the origin of the human races. Monogenists argued that human races descended from a single pair of ancestors (usually Adam and Eve), while polygenists argued that races descended from multiple pairs of ancestors.] One side argues that they are descended from another species of man. The other side argues that they have become black merely from the sun that burns strongly in Africa, where Moors live. [Environmental determinism, sometimes called climactic determinism, is an older belief that physical environment predisposes human populations towards certain trajectories. Dik is arguing against the belief that hotter climates with intense sunshine caused human skin to darken. See James R. Fleming, *Historical Perspectives on Climate Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11-20.] Both opinions are incorrect. The first is false because the Torah tells us that humans descend from a single couple. The other opinion is also incorrect, because we see that Jews, who have lived in Africa for so long, are white. Thus, the most sensible seems to be the opinion of our Rabbis, who say that because Canaan was conceived in the ark, he came out black from his mother's womb. [BT Sanhedrin 108b.] Dik follows Rashi's interpretation that Canaan and his descendants had their skin transformed as a result of Ham's fornication in the ark. Dik rejects the notion that illicit sex darkens the skin but makes use of environmental determinism within the biblical framework.] This is because in the time of the flood there was massive destruction in nature. Then there was a thick fog. The sun did not shine. As our sages say, all the planets stopped their movement. This greatly affected Canaan, so much so that he did not come out of the womb white. One can see instinctively that the sunshine affects everything, plants and animals. Blacks are born white, but in some days [of darkness] become black. Other Moors have white hands, white blotches on their faces, which we read in Midrash Tanhuma.” [This reflects Romanelli's remarks about the slave market in Morocco, which the author connects to Midrash Tanhuma's oblique description of Ham's descendants. See Samuele Romanelli, *Masa Be-'arav: Hu Sefer Ha-Korot Asher. . . 'alu 'alai Yeha-Masa Asher Haziti Bi-Gelilot Ma'arav ... Ben Ba-Yehudim Ben Ba-'aravi'im* (Berlin: Hinukh ne'arim, 1792).]

¹⁴ Leviticus 25:43

¹⁵ “The Hebrew slave should not be humiliated.” Maimonides. *Mishnah Torah*, Laws of Slaves, Chapter 1, Law 7.

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 15:12-15

¹⁷ Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin* 2a, 40b

his master, his master is killed, just as if he had killed a free Jew. The Torah allowed the Canaanite slave to serve forever only because other tribes allowed a Hebrew slave to serve them forever.¹⁸ Just as the Torah allowed us to charge non-Jews interest because non-Jews allowed themselves to charge interest to Jews.

In those times, however, slavery was not the same among other peoples who were already highly civilized. They took slaves from among their own brothers and treated them worse than their dogs. Though both Spartans and Helots were from the Greek nation, they [Spartans] oppressed them [Helots] and made them slaves. Their children learned to aim at them with their bows and arrows. Even Plato, the greatest of Greece's sages, writes in his *Laws* that a slave does not have the right to defend himself. The Romans were known to restrain their naked slaves in a doorway and chain them up.

The Romans also have a law that one should kill all the slaves that are found in a house where the master has been killed. With this law as justification, the hangmen killed four hundred slaves in the town square because they found the masters struck dead. There is also a law that elderly slaves who can no longer work are set down on an island in the river Tiber to starve.¹⁹ The great general Cato did this with all his old slaves, and afterward fed his dogs with their flesh. There was also a law, that if a man caught someone who shot a hare in another's forest, he had the right to defend himself by claiming that he was actually aiming at an old slave."²⁰ Well, my dear reader,²¹ you ought to see how humane is our own Torah in this field, when compared to all these tyrannical laws, and all the more in other matters as well. Moses deservedly boasted about this: "And what great nation is there, that hath statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?"²² That means: and where in the world can be found such a great and civilized nation that has such righteous laws and such just judgments as are found in this Torah that I give to you now? Take note, and rejoice, because you belong to such a noble lineage that has been imbued with humanity (compassion toward man) from time immemorial.

I did wrong, my dear reader, to tell you about the tyrannical practice of slavery that existed in ancient times and how it was among the ancient people who have left no trace. All that might seem to you only a fable, while I have so much to explain about the slave trade in England, France and even in Poland.²³ Not long ago in these nations, which still exist in our civilized Europe today, it was entirely commonplace to see peasants traded for horses and dogs, whipped excessively and worked endlessly. What's more, my dear reader, you probably remember this yourself. Well, thank God that this has

¹⁸ Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah*, Laws of Slaves, Chapter 4.

¹⁹ "The custom of exposing old, useless, or sick slaves in an island of the Tyber, there to starve, seems to have been pretty common in Rome." Cicero, Marcus T, and Cyrus R. Edmonds, *Cicero's Three Books of Offices, or Moral Duties: Also His Cato Major, an Essay on Old Age; Lælius, an Essay on Friendship; Paradoxes; Scipio's Dream; and Letter to Quintus on the Duties of a Magistrate* (New York: Harper, 1855).

²⁰ "And yet a man will shoot a Negro with as little emotion as he shoots a hare, several instances of which have come within my own knowledge." Benjamin West's original letter, which describes slavery in South Carolina, is found in the Smithsonian. It was likely quoted or reprinted in abolitionist literature. West, Benjamin, and James S. Schoff, *Life in the South, 1778-1779* (Ann Arbor, William L. Clements Library, 1963) 33).

²¹ Here and elsewhere Dik addresses a female reader, "lezerin," though he was widely read by men and women.

²² Deuteronomy 4:8

²³It appears that Dik means to suggest the opposite. Providing an overview of slavery in ancient societies is meant to illuminate the novel at hand. It is likely that Dik had read early editions of Isaac Baer Levinsohn's *Zerubavel* (1863, Leipzig) that briefly mentions the horrors of colonial slavery in comparable terms. See Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Zerubavel*. Warsaw, 1886. (70-73)

ceased in Europe—in France, England, and Germany, about a century ago! In our own land, these laws have only recently been repealed. Alexander the First only had time to free the peasants of Courland. The blessed Emperor Nikolai I freed the peasants from the Crown Lands, and made it illegal to sell someone away from his family. He restrained the nobility from tyrannizing and oppressing the peasants at their will.

His son Alexander the Second, our beloved Emperor, our monarch who governs now in our land (*may his royal majesty reign!*); he has done much more in this matter than the previous rulers. He has freed the peasants in their entirety and wiped away this dishonor from his subjects. In this matter he was truly the greatest in Europe! He - with his own noble will - freed over twenty five million serfs who had been languishing in the deepest slavery for an inconceivably long time. Well, we can rightly quote our sages: “The benefit of a good deed is due to one who completes it.”²⁴ This means that merit is due to the person who completes the good deed, and not to the one who begins it. No other except his majesty has done such an act of charity, which will remain, eternally in memory, from generation to generation. His deeds will outlast all marble monuments and statues. Indeed, all becomes dust in the end. But a good deed does not age—with every year it is enriched by beautiful legends, and he who performed the deed remains holy.²⁵

And at the same time that our Emperor was carrying out this unforgettable good deed in his great lands in the most peaceful and calm way, the same good deed occurred in the United States, but with what differences! First, their emancipation touched only five million slaves. Second, this emancipation did not leave the freed slaves better off. They are not able to make a living and cannot find refuge anywhere. The large majority of the freed slaves starve in the streets. This is not the case with our peasants. Our monarch has ensured them with a piece of land, with a dwelling, and they are highly satisfied with their position. Thirdly, the American Emancipation made twice as many people unhappy as it had hoped to make happy. That is because it was achieved through a terrible war between the northern states and the southern states. About five million free European men were killed on both sides. This war cost more than one billion dollars, besides the fires and other damages that occurred during this war!

The slaves that live there are exclusively Negroes or Moors. They were long ago brought from African countries. They are a strong class of people. They grow tall, with short, tightly coiled hair and thick lips. The majority of them are heathens, and already from time immemorial were used in Asia as slaves. In Timbuktu and also in other cities, they were sold in the market like herds of sheep. Like long ago here with the European peasants, the Africans were sold by their own princes.²⁶ Sometimes, enslavement was a punishment for small sins, sometimes a fate for war captives, or sometimes payment for debts.

Since America was discovered, the slave trade increased ten times over. The source of this was

²⁴ Credit for the performance of a biblical commandment is reserved for the person who completes the commandment. When Moses is unable to bury Joseph's bones in Shechem, the credit goes not to Moses, but to the Children of Israel, who complete the burial. See Midrash Tanhuma and Rashi on Parashat Eikev.

²⁵ Though Dik was known to support the liberal reforms of Tsar Alexander II, unreserved praise for the Tsar also gladdened the imperial censors. See John D. Klier, “1855–1894: Censorship of the Press in Russian and the Jewish Question,” *Jewish Social Studies* 48.3–4 (1986): 257–268.

²⁶ Benjamin of Tudela's travelogue (1165) reflects on a long association of Slavic lands with slavery: “Further on is the land of Bohemia, called Prague, and this is called “Ashklavonia,” which is called by the Jews who inhabit it Canaan, because the people of this land sell their sons and daughters to all nations, this also applies to Russia.” Translation by Eli Rosenblatt.

the cruelty of the Spaniards, who were the first rulers of America. Upon their arrival, they discovered about ten million men, the native-born American of red color, who is known to be weak and lazy. The Spaniards easily took them, made them their slaves and divided them like sheep. They began to work them in the gold mines and silver mines (quarries, that is) that were abundant there at that time. They worked them further in the pearl fisheries.²⁷ And this was carried out with such hard pressure that in a period of fifteen years, this class of men that had numbered ten million was reduced to very few. The majority of them took to drowning themselves and hanging entire families. In addition to that, great amounts of blood were spilled over religious matters. In short, America became empty and desolate. America became, in a manner of speaking, populated by masters without servants! They were compelled to bring slaves from Africa, and from that time the human market there in Africa began to expand day by day. The minor princes there began to lead wars more often than before in order to take prisoners and sell them as slaves.

Now, there were already many slave traders who, in most cases, were from European peoples. They would journey around the African countries to buy slaves from the princes there. And they would trade with very little money, around thirty dollars for the best slaves, and sometimes even for some worn, discolored Spanish boots or a bottle of liquor and other such small things. With the minor estate owners, they would trade beads, mirrors, knives and similar things. In this way they would buy a homeowner out of his house, a father away from his family, a mother from her children, and children from their parents. No one noticed the tears and no one heard the cries. They thought of them merely as cattle, even though in truth the Negro has a greater bond with his family than us Europeans.

Just as the buying was easy and cheap, so was the transport very difficult and often fraught with danger and great loss. The slaves that had been traded from deep in Africa had to be guarded heavily to ensure that they didn't flee, and so that they did not kill the slave merchant. On the neck of every slave they would put long wooden beams, which were wide enough to reach over the head on one end and narrower on the other with a peg struck into it with which they attach one slave to the neck of the other. They would attach a third slave to the beam in the same way, and so on. And so went a series of twenty to thirty men. Skins of water and bags of rice for cooking would hang on the wooden beams. When they would arrive at a place to rest, they would release each slave from the others. They let the slaves lay down quickly on the ground and they could not get back on their feet until the slave trader's men helped them, the stocks choked them so. When they approached a village they would be forced to sing and rejoice accompanied by drums and whistles.²⁸ Such a journey often used to last until they came to the seashore after three or four weeks, and often longer. At each village, the pack of goods would increase. One landowner would sell ten or twelve, and then each homeowner might sell a spare person for some useful thing. Some would be bartered, for example, for bottles of French schnapps, or a red vest. For a necklace of red beads one could clear out half the village and yet, only a tenth of this living merchandise would be packed into the ship because many would die on the difficult journey from the great weights they were forced to carry, from the extreme

²⁷ "The pearl fishers who are generally poor slaves and are compelled to risk their lives in the employment stop their nostrils and ears with cotton take a piece of sponge dipped in oil in their mouths and then with a rope tied round their waists they dive down to the bottom to fetch up the mussels. You may readily conceive how many human beings must lose their lives in such an employment." Joachim H Campe *The Discovery of America: For the Use of Children and Young Persons*, (London: Printed for J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul's Church Yard, 1799). The original German can be found in Joachim H. Campe *Die Entdeckung von Amerika: ein angenehmes und nützliches Lesebuch für Kinder und junge Leute* (Hamburg: Bohn, 1781).

²⁸ Bloch. *Sheviley ha-Olam: Tekhunot Kol Artsot Tevel* (Zolkiew: Bey Meyerhoffer, 1822): 7a-10b.

heat, and from great suffering. The slaves would long for home terribly. Yet this journey over land was like a walk in fields of wildflowers when compared to the journey that they had to take over water on the ships to America.

They were packed in there in the hulls like geese in a cage, with husbands, wives and children together. It was so tight, filthy and damp there that the doctor that entered there each day to check in on them every morning could barely get out—he could barely breathe because of the stench, since they relieved themselves right where they were. Not more than ten minutes was anyone allowed to stay on the deck of the ship. And even then just a few at a time to get some fresh air and to be washed with cold water.

Under there it was worse than hell. Dank and dark, the yammering and crying would deafen the ears. Many of the people were sick, with some on the verge of death. Every day several corpses would be collected and cast overboard like stones, without a procession and without ceremony. They would soon be eaten by the sharks that always followed such slave ships to eat the dead bodies. Worse than anything was the fear that they were brought to America just to burn them there and use their ashes to distill sugar.²⁹ If the slave trader would bring ten percent of the slaves to America healthy, it was considered a lucky trip.³⁰

When they arrived the slave handler would make a big scene in which he would bring all the slaves together, wash them and dress them in short pants, the women in short dresses. And then people would start to notice. This would continue for a few days as merchants and buyers began to gather. Then would begin the horrible scene of separation. The plantation owner or planter would buy a mother and not her child, others, a child and not her mother. So there was ceaseless wailing and lamenting. Then came an endless farewell. The slaves clearly understood that they would not be around too much longer, that their days were numbered. They would curse the day that they were born.³¹ Among the slaves you could find children of Moorish princes; and men with profound wisdom who would later play major roles in the slave revolt of Santo Domingo, such as the world famous Negro Gustavus Vassa, who in Benin was sold for six silver groschen.³² Now you can surely understand how painful it was for such men of spirit (great and wise men) to carry the heavy yoke of slavery for so many years—and how greatly each longed for home!

And there in America the masters would work the slaves like horses and strike them without pity. They would look for ways to frame them simply to punish them severely so that they would always feel downtrodden and inferior and never have thoughts of freedom or become rebellious. The more a master oppressed his slaves, the more the local government praised him.

There was one plantation owner who would often harness eight or ten Negroes to his carriage

²⁹ The heart-rending depiction of the Middle Passage echoes the description in Shimshon Bloch's *Shvilei Ha-Olam* (Zolkiev, v.2 1827.)

³⁰ The sentimental nature of this description, likely adapted from Bloch, has interested scholars who seek to identify the inner motivations for anti-slavery discourse in Haskalah literature. Iris Idelson-Shein, *Difference of a Different Kind: Jewish Constructions of Race During the Long Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 82-89; R. Wolpe, "From Slavery to Freedom: Abolitionist Expressions in Maskilic Sea Adventures," *AJS Review* 36, no. 1 (2012): 43-70.

³¹ Job 3:1

³² Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), known as Gustavus Vassa in his own time. For more information on slavery and abolition in German Enlightenment discourse, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

and would drive them in the greatest heat through deep sand. He would strike them with a long whip until blood and sweat would run down their backs, and when they came home he would make them wash the wounds with vinegar and salt so that the branding would not fade.

Some masters who owned pretty female slaves would force them to work and earn shameful money in brothels. They would send little slave children to run in the fields to catch the little birds which we call hummingbirds, so that distinguished women could adorn themselves with their golden feathers. In the previous era the plantation owner even had the right to kill his slave, and when a planter had a slave hanged because he was suspected of being rebellious, the local government was thankful and would bestow an award on him. Not only would he be reimbursed for what he had paid for the slave, he would also be given a month free from taxes. Given this, some planters would hang the slaves who became crippled and no longer could do their job and the local government would reward the planter. Some would intentionally buy lame or old slaves for a trifle and slave traders would give them a paper that they had paid a lot for them, so that they would have someone to hang and be paid for it. This practice has since been stopped only because the deceit was discovered.

Among the American slaves there were many different classes. One class is the true African, black as pitch with short, tightly coiled hair. The second class is the mulattos. This means someone who was born of a black mother and a white father. These are not entirely dark and have a more beautiful countenance. The third class is the mestizo, those born of a white mother and an Indian father. This means that he is from the original American whom Europeans found when they discovered America. These people are lighter skinned, and there are many other mixes, for example the children that come from a mulatto that lived with a mestiza.³³

The free people there are also divided into two classes. One class is those that came from Europe, they are as white as we are, and they stay white until they die. The other class is the Creoles. This means the children who were born in America from white parents. These people have already lost much of their whiteness, and they appear tanned.³⁴ They are very beautiful nevertheless, and mature very quickly. A ten-year-old child there comprehends situations as if he was a grown man, though consequently becomes old very quickly. These classes of people are the masters, the planters, and the owners of estates.

Well, all that remains to explain to you, my dear reader, is about the difficult labor that the slave performed and of the rebellions they often foment. The most difficult labor was in the sugar factory. Not more than ten years can the strongest slaves endure the work and after that they become weak and sickly. In most cases, the slave would be out of service even earlier because it was very easy to become a cripple in the sugar mills. A hand or a foot could be ripped off, and sometimes hair gets tangled into the machine and drags the head in as well. The cotton picking and cleaning is also very difficult and very dull. The slaves fall into a grim melancholy. They stop eating, drinking, and working. No entreaties or beatings are of any use. They remain seated in their places until they pass away or hang themselves. Their master is left a pauper.

³³ Dik coins new Yiddish racial terms: *mestitsn*, *mulatn*, and *kreolen*. Dik's understanding of racial types would have been unfamiliar to nineteenth century Americans outside of New Orleans and its Caribbean network.

³⁴ It appears here that Dik acknowledges the mutability of race.

Also the food of the slaves is very dismal, because the master would give them nothing but a small piece of earth to sow in their off-hours. This meant at night when they returned from work or on Sunday, and by the Jewish planters on the Sabbath as well.³⁵ They would have very little - barely enough on which to live. The same constraints would go for their clothes—they clothed themselves in coarse linen, which they crafted from thin bast fibers.

With some masters they would be treated in a much better fashion and, as a result, they would be faithful and diligent in their work. Some masters though would treat them so bad that they would commit suicide,³⁶ escape, or even rise up and rebel.

No disaster in the world compares to the disaster of a slave rebellion. The slaves would guard their secrets expertly and would never reveal another's intentions. And sometimes they would keep a conspiracy against their master secret for a decade, nothing would be known of it until the last minute. Woe to the master whose slaves rise up against him! They kill the master and his whole family—with the greatest cruelty in the world they burn his storehouses and kill everything that breathes except themselves on the plantation. They don't leave a single brick unturned, a stone whole, or a tree left standing. They destroy and wipe out everything. Then they run away deep into the woods or to the far mountains where they already have bands that are called Bushmen. These bands were armed and attacked the planters with great wrath. They would devastate everything. The worst rebellion was in Santo Domingo, which we have come to call Haiti. We will write about this at length later.

Well, my dear reader, I have sufficiently made known the issues that are necessary for you to understand our tale about the pious and brave slave Uncle Tom, who was neither Jew nor Christian, nor Heathen. Only a believer in the Creator, praised be He, and in the Bible. We can by rights call him a *ger toshav*, a resident alien³⁷—before he was an African heathen (without belief in God) but upon coming to America he came to a Jewish Planter, where he had the opportunity to get to know the one God and his holy books. From this story one can learn ethics and the fear of god, and patience in all hardships. And lastly, how much one must thank God and our Emperor, may his majesty reign, that he dissolved the slave trade from our land and with time, from the entire world. Indeed, our emperor is freeing slaves in Asia as well, in those new lands that God has blessed to be ruled under his humane government.

A. M. D.

³⁵ European debates about Jewish emancipation affected the racial status of Jews living in the colonies, especially in areas where communal identification was complicated by the mixed racial descent of Jewish individuals. See Laura A. Leibman, and Sam May, "Making Jews: Race, Gender and Identity in Barbados in the Age of Emancipation," *American Jewish History* 99, no. 1 (2015): 1-26.

³⁶ IMD: "The Negroes have the ability to choke themselves with their own tongues. They swallow the tongue down with great haste so that it gets stuck in their throats like a bite of food. One who was tortured so gravely to force him to reveal something about the rebellion bit off his own tongue in great anger and then he spit it out in his master's face."

³⁷ IMD: "A resident alien means for us Jews when a heathen, someone without religion, begins to believe in the one God, and vows that God gave the Torah to the Jews. Yet he is required to observe the seven commandments that God gave Noah, and nothing more. He may even be circumcised, but he can eat unkosher animals, even pig. Such a man among us Jews, in our land, had the same residency rights and was a citizen, like any good Jew."