

**UCLA**

**UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations**

**Title**

Routes of Displacement: The Representation of Exile between Germany, Turkey, Palestine, and Israel

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9k44z6b0>

**Author**

Pack, Ethan

**Publication Date**

2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Routes of Displacement:

The Representation of Exile between Germany, Turkey,  
Palestine, and Israel

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Comparative Literature

by

Ethan Pack

2018

© Copyright by

Ethan Pack

2018

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Routes of Displacement:  
The Representation of Exile between Germany, Turkey,  
Palestine, and Israel

by

Ethan Pack

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Gil Z. Hochberg, Chair

This dissertation focuses on the figure of Jewish exile since the rise of Zionism. My research proposes a unique configuration of German, Turkish, Israeli, and Palestinian contexts, one that sheds new light on the challenge of representing minority subjectivity during moments of collective displacement. I argue that displacement is not only an experience, but also a *structure of representation*. My study begins by examining the representation of Jewish belonging at the turn of the century, when the German-Ottoman imperial alliance provided a potential framework for the immigration of European Jews to Palestine. The aesthetic possibilities that ultimately crystallize in Israeli and Palestinian literature, I assert, are inseparable from the imaginary of Jewish displacement in *fin de siècle* Germany and Turkey.

Germany, Turkey, and Israel each occupy a space of intense critical focus in Comparative Literature. Beginning with Edward Said, scholars have called the discipline's attention to a cohort of German-speaking Jewish academics who fled to Istanbul during the Nazi years. From this canonical moment in the emergence of Comparative Literature, Erich Auerbach's composition of *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, and his work on *Weltliteratur* (or "world literature"), have emerged as prominent models for the discipline's self-conception. The achievements of German-Jewish intellectuals in Turkey would later reinforce notions of "exilic" critique as a practice of heroic opposition to nationalist chauvinism.

These assessments could be enriched, however, by situating the very possibility of Auerbach in Istanbul within the political programs and cultural imaginaries that immediately preceded, and in fact enabled, the German-Jewish scholars' remarkable refuge. My project begins the story of German-Jewish literature and aesthetics a generation earlier. I propose a comparative framework that juxtaposes the Zionist leader Theodor Herzl's five visits to *fin de siècle* Constantinople with the German-Jewish scholars, such as Erich Auerbach, who found refuge from the Nazis in Turkey a generation later. I assert that the production of *Mimesis* is a vital part of the story of the representation of European Jewish exile – perhaps inseparable from the story of Zionism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through close readings of Herzl's wide-ranging corpus of literature, I conclude that this exilic position – one who identifies with and yet (must) live beyond the settled location of the native – was an irreducible feature of Herzl's Zionism. *Mimesis*, as the *re*-presentation (making present, again, elsewhere) of European reality and subjectivity, becomes an essential analytical tool for understanding the relationship

between Jewish belonging and exile.

My dissertation then turns to literary works written in the aftermath of the 1948 partition of Palestine and creation of Israel. I discuss the portrayal of Palestinian exile by two of the most canonical Hebrew authors from the period, the poet Nathan Alterman and the novelist S. Yizhar. My readings explore changes in the representation of exile at the moment when its simultaneous creation and negation comes to define two national communities. The dissertation's final chapter presents an original, comparative analysis of poetry written by Dahlia Ravikovich and Mahmoud Darwish. Through recourse to what I term the *visionary prophetic* modes of Hebrew and Arabic literature, these authors re-open the literary significations of exile to pre-modern traditions of Jewish and Islamic exegesis, liturgy, and history. I assert that their poetics – attuned to the semiotic displacements between vision and text – unravel the political discourses of national belonging generated by the failed partition of Israel and Palestine. These alternative modalities of representation re-envision the nature of belonging in a post-colonial world. I contend that the study of Israeli and Palestinian literature cannot be extricated from broader inquiries into the representation of migration and flight across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

The dissertation of Ethan Pack is approved.

Aamir R. Mufti

David N. Myers

Sarah A. Stein

Gil Z. Hochberg, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

*Dedicated to my parents, who have made everything possible*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	xiii-xi
Vita	xii-xiii
<b>Introduction</b>	1-46
<b>Chapter 1</b>	47-102
German Mimesis in the Orient: Theodor Herzl and the Ottoman Empire	
<b>Chapter 2</b>	103-134
“Auerbach in Jerusalem”: Imperial Collapse, National Revivals, and Exilic Critique	
<b>Chapter 3</b>	135-185
Palestinian Exile and the 1948 War in Hebrew Literature	
<b>Chapter 4</b>	186-251
Exiles’ Return: The Post-1982 Poetics of Dahlia Ravikovich and Mahmoud Darwish	
<b>Selected Bibliography</b>	252-257

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An unconventional project from its conception to its completion, this dissertation would not have been possible in most departments. I owe its intellectual ambition and exciting scope to the team of advisers who mentored me at UCLA. Firstly, I would like to thank Gil Hochberg, who has always been a receptive listener, a staunch advocate, and, of course, an unforgettable teacher. She has an uncanny ability to translate the intricacies of theory into a toolkit that empowers her students to approach our texts with boldness and insight. I am greatly indebted to Aamir Mufti for countless developments in my project, my interests, and my entire understanding of the issues that motivate my academic pursuits. On a boat crossing the Bosphorus between Istanbul's Asian and European shores, he told me about the Berlin-Baghdad Express, thus planting an expansive idea for my research. Back at UCLA, his close attention to the possibilities of my work launched me on a rigorous path that will continue beyond this dissertation.

Sarah Stein helped me build a bridge to historiography, which was essential to my project's intellectual viability. Her wide-ranging scholarly achievements, and her personal kindness, have inspired me along the way. And I am especially grateful for David Myers' contributions; his sheer generosity in adding my project to those under his supervision (at an exceedingly demanding time) demonstrates the depth and sincerity of his commitments to our scholarly community. I would further like to thank other faculty members who shaped my intellectual development and supported my work during my time at UCLA: Saree Makdisi, Ra'anan Boustan, Efraín Kristal, Zrinka Stahuljak, David MacFadyen, Nouri Gana, and Stephanie Bosch Santana. I would also like to thank Rabbi Chaim Seidler-Feller, for his shared interest in exile.

I am profoundly grateful for my dear colleagues and friends with whom I worked at UCLA. Many of them have continued to help me even after they have crossed into the great beyond of other universities and cities. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Fatima Burney, Shir Alon, Ronjaunee Chatterjee, Zen Dochterman, Nasia Anam, Duncan Yoon, Yu-ting Huang, Dana Linda, Alexei Nowak, Sina Rahmani, Suleiman Hodali, Helga Zambrano, and Peter Lehman. I am profoundly thankful to Jessica Herrera, who fought tirelessly on my behalf during a challenging time; without her efforts, I would not have made it this far. I also thank Michelle Anderson and Asiroh Cham for their excellent work in the department. And I owe an infinite debt to my students, who taught me more than they will ever know – I only hope I can share what I have learned from them.

At UCLA, my research was supported by the Graduate Division Dissertation Year Fellowship, the Center for Jewish Studies' Amado Program in Sephardic Studies Grant, and the Center for Near Eastern Studies' Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship. My research in Germany and Turkey was enabled by the International Institute's Dissertation Fieldwork Fellowship and the Center for European and Eurasian Studies' Dissertation Research Fellowship. I am grateful for the opportunities afforded by this support. I would also like to thank the generosity and hospitality of my friends and colleagues in Berlin and Istanbul, including the organizers of the 2015 Israel-Deutschland arts festival, who brought me into their circle: Elad Lapidot, Ofri Ilany, Tal Hever-Chybowski, and Dekel Peretz, among others.

Eight years of work on a dissertation truly represents a collective effort, and I would like to thank my extended community beyond my home campus. Uri Cohen, Hannan Hever, Chana Kronfeld, and David Damrosch all played instrumental roles in

shaping my graduate study. For inspiring me to pursue the study of literature and culture, I will be forever grateful to my professors at Columbia University: Roosevelt Montas, Hamid Dabashi, Dan Miron, Margaret Vandenburg, and Orhan Pamuk, as well as the late Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, of blessed memory.

In Israel, my family, especially my late great uncle Avraham Braun, of blessed memory, have given me a second language and a home throughout my studies. I was first introduced to Hebrew literature and close reading at the Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy in Kansas City; I would like to thank Edna Meltzer, Rabbi Zev Wineberg, Rabbi David Gruber, Yitzhak Zilbiger, and Steve Israelite. I extend my love and gratitude to my friends Sammy Loren, Jon Posen, and the Eisenberg family in Los Angeles. Most importantly, it was only possible to complete this dissertation thanks to the loving resilience of Chloe Winders-Singer. Her dedication, humor, and belief in me overcame the greatest obstacles. This achievement is hers as much as mine.

I wish to gratefully acknowledge my loved ones of blessed memory, whose care and example shaped my goals, including Evelyn Myles. At key moments, my late great-aunt Mae Bratt gave me a little-known extra push forward to finish what I had started. In their commitments to providing for their family, my grandparents Louis and Ethel Pack demonstrated a balance between strength and gentleness that has made my life possible. My grandparents Fred and Maria Devinki fought for the lives they rebuilt – and the opportunities they created for their descendants – at a greater cost than anyone but them will ever know. They survived the Holocaust and the murder of their brothers, sisters, parents, and extended family. My grandmother Maria taught me how to think—sharply,

critically, and always with others in mind. She reserved a deeper honor for learning than anyone I have known, and that has shaped every moment of my education.

My native Kansas City offered my grandparents a refuge from the danger and loss that destroyed their world, but it is also immeasurably far from the cultural richness of that world, the home of Eastern European *Yiddishkeit*. One of the greatest testimonies to my parents is that they have transmitted so many values from these otherwise remote times and places, turning them into our family's most intimate possessions. They have entrusted their children with the full weight and significance of their parents' world. In their tireless dedication to those in need, both in our local community and around the world, my parents have exemplified the lessons embodied by their parents' lives. They have supported me through the most difficult experiences imaginable, but in a manner that continually returns me to a place where these difficulties do not have the last word. They committed all of their energies to enriching my imagination, so as to concern myself with the lives of others. These commitments, for me, are synonymous with the humanities and the study of literature. My parents have put these lessons into practice in a more impactful way than any dissertation could articulate. But the beating heart of this work aspires to their values.

*Sof be-ma'aseh ba-mahshava thila: Barukh ha-Shem.*

## VITA

### Education

*Dissertation:* “Routes of Displacement: The Representation of Exile between Germany, Turkey, Palestine, and Israel”

*Advisors:* Gil Z. Hochberg (chair), Aamir R. Mufti, David N. Myers, Sarah A. Stein

M.A. in Comparative Literature , U.C. Los Angeles, 2011

B.A. in Comparative Literature & Society with Honors, Columbia University, 2008

### Awards, Fellowships, and Grants

UCLA Graduate Division, Dissertation Year Fellowship, 2016-17

UCLA International Institute, Dissertation Fieldwork Fellowship, 2016

UCLA Center for European & Eurasian Studies • Dissertation Research Fellowship, 2015

UCLA Center for Jewish Studies, Amado Program in Sephardic Studies Grant, 2014

UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies, Foreign Language & Area Studies Fellowship, 2011-12

UCLA Department of Comparative Literature, Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Award, 2013, 2011

Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Visiting Graduate Research Fellowship, Spring 2010

### Teaching Experience and Service (UCLA)

#### Teaching Fellow

“Great Books from the World at Large: Washed Ashore,” Comparative Literature 4DW (Winter 2015, Spring 2015)

#### Teaching Assistant

“Literature from the Age of the Enlightenment to the Present,” Comparative Literature 2CW (Fall 2012, Fall 2013, Winter 2014, Fall 2014)

“Literature and Displacement – Migrants, Refugees, and Exile,” Department of Comparative Literature 2DW (Spring 2013, Spring 2014)

“Literature of the Middle Ages-17<sup>th</sup> Century,” Department of Comparative Literature 1B, (Winter 2013)

“Concepts of Comparative Literature, 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries,” Department of Comparative Literature 1C, (Fall 2012)

“Literature of the Medieval Near East,” Department of Comparative Literature 2BW, (Fall 2011)

Vice President, Comparative Literature Graduate Student Association, 2014-2015

## **Conference Presentations**

“Darwish Revised: Violence and Inter-Subjectivity at the Peripheries of Modern Europe.” American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) Annual Conference. UCLA, March 2018

“Desiring Exiles: Sephardic Figures of Political and Aesthetic Representation in Scott and Eliot.” Association for Jewish Studies (AJS) Annual Conference. San Diego, December 2016

“The Eastern Mediterranean as the Center of Europe: An Exilic Triangle Between Germany, Turkey, and Israel.” ACLA Annual Conference. New York University, March 2014

“Beyond World Literature: Languages of the Local in Yoel Hoffman’s Fiction.” ACLA Annual Conference. Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada, March-April 2011

## Introduction

My dissertation deals with the relationship between exile and representation. Who represents exile in modern literature? Where do we find these representations – in what places, texts, authors, genres, and languages? My study focuses on the modes of literary, critical, and historical representation that have shaped the *figure of exile* between Europe, Palestine, and Israel since the advent of modern Zionism.

I propose a transnational study of exile, one that expands out of the European “Jewish Question” and through the question of Israel/Palestine. Though my project deals with authors from different linguistic and national backgrounds, I argue that certain texts – and historical processes – cannot be viewed in isolation from one another, insofar as they form of an integral field of inquiry around questions of exile. Rather than adopting a standpoint restricted within one language or territory, I will organize my study of Hebrew, Arabic, and German texts through the framework of displacement. I will argue that displacement is not only an experience, but also a *structure of representation* that is essential for understanding the intersection of language, literature, and political life.

The challenge of representing a people or group from a standpoint of dislocation, from “out of place” – whether as a social position, a belief system, a country, or a time – pushes aesthetics to experiment with the horizon of its own possibilities. Where is home, and who belongs there? In which languages and communities do authors represent the experience of exile? In reference to which place or time can displaced figures represent themselves? The texts in my study offer radical approaches to these questions.

Approaching the representation of Jewish and Palestinian figures in exile, from 1882



until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, will help illuminate the relationship between displacement and literary subjectivity.

My project begins by examining the intellectual history of literary criticism at the intersection of Germany, Turkey, and Palestine, and then turns to readings of literary texts, including fiction and poetry from Palestine and Israel in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This itinerary reflects the expansion and circulation of the modern European Jewish Question through the German and Ottoman Empires, and into the nation-state projects that emerged from the collapse of those empires. In the route I will trace through Hebrew, Arabic, and German literature and criticism, historical experiences of displacement change the constitution of the minority populations in Europe and the Middle East, along with the literary possibilities for their (self-)representation. In this context, as Hannah Arendt argued, the Jewish Question served as a paradigm for the minority condition, a link between the rise of modern national identities alongside modern forms of exile.<sup>1</sup> The exilic subject, after all, is always in exile from a place – and possibly a time or a subjectivity – over which competing claims to sovereignty exist.

My dissertation will consider the tenuousness of minority representation outside the conditions of modern sovereignty, and, ultimately, outside of the nation-state. A logic of *political representation* underpins the sovereignty of the nation-state: it proceeds from the assumption that a population's very identity *represents* its own possession of a territory. Bounded territories can “belong” to distinct peoples, and the name of every land signifies the people who “belong” to it. 20<sup>th</sup> century critics such as Arendt, Adorno, and Said have already proposed that exile, despite its tremendous burdens, offers individuals

---

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest Book, 1976).

the opportunity to reflect critically upon these attitudes toward belonging. Yet I intend to push my inquiry to further explore the aesthetic possibilities that crystallize in the literature of exile. I will argue that specific modalities of aesthetic representation, such as *historicism* and *visionary poetics*, produce the literature of exile that emerges out of the late modern Jewish Question and the Question of Palestine.

In the first two chapters, I propose a comparative analysis between Theodor Herzl's literary and political projects (which reflected deep investments in the German-Ottoman alliance during the *fin-de-siècle*), and the scholarly-critical projects of Erich Auerbach and his German-Jewish contemporaries in Turkey during World War II. Though these figures are typically approached through disparate – if not opposing – scholarly frameworks, their moments in Istanbul were predicated on the potentially beneficial qualities of *European Jewish mobility* mediating between Germany and the eastern Mediterranean.

My first chapter will focus on the wide-ranging corpus of literature (fiction, theater, journalism, diaries, and political manifestos) that Herzl produced between 1895 and his death in 1904, much of which circulated explicitly as “world literature,”<sup>2</sup> in parallel with his five visits to Constantinople to meet with the Ottoman government about European Jewish immigration to Palestine. My second chapter extends my analysis from Herzl's death to the collapse of the Ottoman and German empires in World War I, examining how their distinctive forms of imperialism and cosmopolitanism shaped modalities of Jewish displacement, especially in relation to Zionism at the time. By

---

<sup>2</sup> See below: Theodor Herzl, *Old New Land*, trans. Lotta Levensohn (Princeton: Block Publishing, 2000); Shlomo Avineri, *Herzl's Vision: Theodor Herzl and the Foundation of the Jewish State*, trans. Haim Watzman (Katonah, NY: Blue Bridge, 2014).

regrounding the *fin de siècle* Zionist “moment” in Constantinople as an extended prelude to German-Turkish-Jewish relations in the 1930s, we can better understand the political imaginaries regarding minorities, displacement, and history that inform Erich Auerbach’s scholarly project – and many of our own. Thus I suggest tracing the German-Jewish intellectual origins of Comparative Literature *and* the formation of Jewish national culture in Palestine through Istanbul, emphasizing the cultural displacements linking Europe, Asia, and Jewish exile.

While existing comparative studies place works of Israeli and Palestinian literature side by side, I will frame the second half of the dissertation within a larger movement of exile and displacement. My study will question the underlying assumptions beneath the geographic, linguistic, and disciplinary categories conventionally employed to determine, and limit, the questions we ask about literature. I will argue against the presumption that scholarship on Israeli and Palestinian literature can be isolated from the representational challenges we find in European literature emerging around the Jewish Question. Furthermore, we cannot dismiss the colonial dimension of the Jewish Question, *already in its European formation*, if we are to understand changes in the geography of Jewish displacement, and in the sense of time that imagines an “end” to Jewish exile. Both of these dimensions are essential for a thorough understanding of the production of Palestinian exile from 1948 onward.

My third chapter will examine the representation of Jewish exile in a visionary mode by Israeli texts that deal explicitly with the link between the creation of Jewish sovereignty and the exile of the Palestinian people. My chapter discusses Nathan Alterman’s poem cycle on the Jewish conquest of Jaffa (“War of Cities”) and S. Yizhar’s

novella on the deportation of a Palestinian village (*Khirbet Khizeh*), which offer two of the most prominent Hebrew literary accounts of the Palestinian Nakba and the 1948 War. Surprisingly, these texts have yet to be considered in relation to one another, despite the consensus that Alterman and Yizhar were the foremost writers of the period in their respective genres. The 1948 War lead Alterman and Yizhar to explore changes in the representation of exile at the moment when its simultaneous creation and negation came to define two national communities.

In my fourth chapter, I will elaborate upon the representation of exile at a later moment in the development of Israeli and Palestinian national cultures. I will turn to the Hebrew poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch and the Arabic poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, focusing on works written after – and in response to – Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon.<sup>3</sup> From the Palestinian perspective, the first Lebanon War effectively destroyed Beirut as an exilic center of Palestinian national life, even as the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza intensified with the creation of Jewish settlements. We must thus view 1982 and its aftermath as “the exile of exile,”<sup>4</sup> both from without (*al-kharij/Lebanon*) and within (*a-dakhil/Palestine*).<sup>5</sup> Ravikovitch revisits Hebrew Biblical visionary prophecy in order to align the textual optics of Jewish exile with the Palestinian victims of modern Jewish sovereignty. Through recourse to the history of medieval Andalusia, Darwish

---

<sup>3</sup> Specifically, I will give readings of poems from *True Love* (1987) and *Woman With Child* (1992) by Ravikovitch, and from *Fewer Roses* (1986) and *Eleven Planets* (1992). The Ravikovitch poetry is available in: Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld, trans., *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch*, By Dahlia Ravikovitch, New York: W. W. Norton, 2009. The Hebrew poems are collected in: Dahlia Ravikovitch, *Kol ha-Shirim ‘ad Koh*, Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me’uḥad, 1995. The Darwish poems are available in Arabic in Mahmoud Darwish, *al-Dīwān: al-‘i‘amāl al-Jadīda*, Vol. 3 (Beirut: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 2004); in English translation, in: Mahmoud Darwish, *The Adam of Two Edens: Poems*, eds. Munir Akash and Daniel Moore (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Najat Rahman, “Threatened Longing and Perpetual Search: The Writing of Home in the Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish,” in *Mahmoud Darwish, Exile’s Poet: Critical Essays*, eds. Nassar and Rahman (Northampton, Mass.: Interlink Press, 2008), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Said and Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 51.

reimagines the representative function of Palestine on the peripheries of the Mediterranean and of modernity. In *Eleven Planets*, Darwish opens up radical aesthetic and discursive possibilities regarding the representation of Palestinian displacement, as well as the displacement of the Arab-Islamic presence from and by European civilization.

### **Mimesis and the Exilic Jewish Subject**

Against the historical backdrop of European imperialism and colonial settlement, scholarly inquiry into the minority condition and its relationship with religious and ethnic identity continues to return to the story of European Jews, Israel, and Palestine. With this in mind, my study of exile in literature begins with a more specific question: how do we imagine Jewish exile in Comparative Literature? Where do figures of (Jewish) exile appear? How do they circulate? How can the same group simultaneously represent a host of contradictory discourses: not only exile, but also colonialism; the minority condition and majoritarian nationalism; cosmopolitanism and ethnic chauvinism; secular modernity and religious revivalism? Humanities scholars continue to respond to these questions from historiographic and critical-theoretical perspectives.<sup>6</sup> But I believe these issues must also be addressed as inescapably *literary* questions, which require close attention to issues of textuality and semiotics. In order to answer the question of what Jewish exile represents, we must understand more about *how* Jews represent.

---

<sup>6</sup> These include Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); as well as older studies by Lyotard, Nancy, and Sartre, which are discussed in: Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19, No. 4 (Summer, 1993): 693-725.

As Karl Marx and his erstwhile colleague Moses Hess intuited in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the emergent political nationalisms (in central Europe, at least) were preoccupied with the question of democratic representation and its consequences for each nation's resident Jewish minority.<sup>7</sup> In the dawning era of nation-states, the Jewish presence in the body politic led to majority populations' anxieties over the alleged *alien* element, whether conceived as theological, sociological, racial, or civilizational. An adaptive but unyielding sense of danger about entrusting political rights into the hands of the Jews led to concerns that, should the Jews assimilate (that is, vanish imperceptibly) into the body politic, the true members of the national group would then be unable to "represent themselves" in a liberal form of government. These anxieties, of course, preposterously exceeded the Jews' demographic numbers.

As Jewish elites, organizations, and laypeople began to respond to the double binds of assimilation and identity, particularly at moments of political violence and crisis, the question "Who can *speak for* the Jews?" became pressing. But 19<sup>th</sup> century European concerns about the Jewish capacity for self-representation within – or apart from – the modern state were not disconnected from the growing imperial projects of these states. As Hannah Arendt argued in the very division of *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*, the Jewish Question bore a decisive parallel to contemporaneous debates about the form of sovereignty proper for the non-European populations then coming under imperial rule.<sup>8</sup>

My project takes this link as an opening, and but I aim to point to the confluence of two

---

<sup>7</sup> Both Marx's "On the Jewish Question" (1843) and Hess' *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862) dealt with the *appearance* of Jews in Emancipated European life as presenting dilemmas of political and historical representation. See: Moses Hess, *The Revival of Israel: Rome and Jerusalem, the Last Nationalist Question (1862)*, trans. Meyer Waxman, Bison Book Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995). Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, Second Edition (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1978), 26–52.

<sup>8</sup> The first two thirds of the book are divided into sections on "Anti-Semitism" and "Imperialism." See further: Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*.

states whose imperial projects are frequently overlooked in studies linking the modern Jewish Question to the rise of Zionism.

But before looking outward toward the imperial (and Oriental) horizon, it is proper to begin with some remarks about the project of German-Jewish assimilation. Scholarship on this topic is rich and vast. Here, I aim only to reiterate a few points that guide my own inquiry. Firstly, that the prospect of Emancipation invited the Jews to simultaneously cultivate and inhabit a number of different subjectivities (whose contradictions were apparent to critical minds such as Marx and Hess): to become the *universal* subjects of reason posited by the Enlightenment; to become *modern, Western* subjects (which presumed that the Jews' pre-existing condition was *particular*, Oriental, and pre-modern); and to be loyal, patriotic subjects of the nation-states in which they lived. As Aamir Mufti argued in *Enlightenment in the Colony*, we can learn much about the self-contradictions of the demand for Jewish assimilation by studying the representational practices of contemporary literature and theater. Among these practices, the strategy of *mimesis* – a faithful *re*-presentation of reality and subjectivity, achieved through performative forms of imitation – is central. Through *mimesis*, both in the literary texts where modern subjectivities were elaborated and in the public sphere where they were reproduced, German-Jews could become “universal men.”

*Mimesis*, of course, has also become an essential term in literary studies because of the magisterial work of that title (with the important subtitle *The Representation of Reality in European Literature*) by the 20<sup>th</sup> century German-Jewish philologist Erich Auerbach.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Auerbach traces the entirety of European civilization, from Homer's

---

<sup>9</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask, 50 anniversary edition (Princeton University Press, 2003).

*Odyssey* and the Hebrew Bible, through the New Testament and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, to the birth of realism in Balzac and Flaubert, concluding with Virginia Woolf's experimental achievement *To The Lighthouse*. And as Edward Said observed, the very history of Auerbach's writing *Mimesis* adds another dimension – an historically Jewish and exilic layer – to its perspective on European civilization. Departing from a comment in Auerbach's epilogue to *Mimesis*, Said adds:

He was a Jewish refugee from Nazi Europe, and he was also a European scholar in the old tradition of German Romance scholarship. Yet now in Istanbul he was hopelessly out of touch with the literary, cultural, and political bases of that formidable tradition. In writing *Mimesis* ... he was not merely practicing his profession despite adversity: he was performing an act of cultural, even civilizational, survival of the highest importance ... To have been an exile in Istanbul at that time of fascism in Europe was a deeply resonating and intense form of exile from Europe.<sup>10</sup>

In *East West Mimesis*, Kader Konuk's study of Auerbach's time in Istanbul, she deepens the analytical stakes of "mimesis." She proposes the term as an organizing concept not only for Auebach's book, but for the very possibility of his refuge as part of Turkey's Westernizing national agenda during the 1930's. The term becomes a methodological tool for exploring "the idea of Europe, concepts of history, and the function of mimesis within processes of cultural and political reform" insofar as "concepts of history and

---

<sup>10</sup> Edward W. Said, "Introduction: Secular Criticism," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Harvard University Press, 1983), 6.



practices of representation are neither incidental to politics nor inseparable from each other.”<sup>11</sup>

I will use a similar conception of mimesis to reframe Theodor Herzl’s writings and diplomatic activity. Herzl was born and raised in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but even as a student, he became deeply invested in the “salutary effect” [*heilsamsten Wirkungen*] of the Prussian (and, later, German imperial) society. My study highlights the ways that Herzl’s ideas about the theater, mimesis, and assimilation are inseparable from his program for European Jewish immigration to Palestine. Herzl’s political and aesthetic formation was shaped by an abiding interest in the cultivation of subjectivity at the boundaries between history and literature.

And yet one could easily argue that Herzl’s greatest achievement was precisely the *opposite* of mimesis. Out of a *text*, Herzl’s 1896 manifesto *The Jewish State*, emerged the modern state of Israel, a real historical phenomenon. And with his 1902 utopian novel *Altneuland* (Old-New Land), Herzl did not *re-present* a reality; rather, the novel, a literary representation, *became* a reality. And quickly. Seven years after its publication, the Hebrew term for *Altneuland* was used to name the new city of Tel Aviv. One is hard-pressed to think of another cultural capital that was named for a middlebrow novel published less than a decade before its foundation – a name, no less, rendered *in translation*, in a revived ancient language, spoken by only a few thousand souls.

But as Dmitry Shumsky’s sharp analysis has recently pointed out, scholars from the anti-Zionist left to the Israeli nationalist right have fallen prey to a host of confluences between Herzl’s texts, the historical context of his political activity, and the forms of

---

<sup>11</sup> Kader Konuk, *East West Mimesis: Auerbach in Turkey* (Stanford University Press, 2010), 10, 11.

Jewish nationalism that became hegemonic only after Herzl and the empires with which he dealt were no more.<sup>12</sup> An image of continuity “places Herzl’s political thought alongside the contemporary state of Israel, where the latter [is] assumed to be the intended result of the former’s vision”.<sup>13</sup> Restoring our attention to the roles of *displacement* and *difference* – within Herzl’s conception of Jewish exile and Zionism, and between Herzl’s and those of the Israeli authors I will discuss – is one of my project’s primary ambitions.

Between *Altneuland* and Tel Aviv, there is a linguistic displacement from German into Hebrew. This prefigured a political development: the replacement of pro-Ottoman German-Jews at the helm of the Zionist movement by Eastern European Jews, after World War I. With the collapse of Kaiser Wilhelm’s empire, Herzl’s former colleagues lost their influence in the international diplomatic sphere, leading to a “changing of the guard,” the consequences of which remain underappreciated. And yet a proper evaluation of the roles of mimesis and displacement will show that even this move atop the Zionist movement – from assimilated Germans to nationalist Ostjüden, from cosmopolitan Berlin and Vienna to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem – was not only a matter of succession. And this issue is worth investigating in order to trace the relationships between reality and its representation at the rhetorical borders between central and eastern Europe; as well as between Europe itself and the Orient (in Palestine).

---

<sup>12</sup> Dmitry Shumsky, *Beyond the Nation-State: The Zionist Political Imagination from Pinsker to Ben-Gurion* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2018), 15-17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 52: “Far from being limited to Israeli public discourse, this image has been increasingly used in academic literature on the subject in the past few decades. However ... its contribution to the work of historians is quite suspect.” Shumsky views this as a “retrospective, extremely selective prism”, one that “affects the representation of the two central founding documents of Herzlian Zionism, namely, *The Jewish State* and *Altneuland* (51, 52).

The movement to revive Hebrew literature began more than a century before Herzl and political Zionism. In a dynamic whose contradictions remain instructive, Haskalah Hebraists were initially not cultural separatists looking romantically back into the mists of antiquity for an identity with which to resist the onslaught of modernity. To the contrary: the aim of Hebrew literature was to modernize European Jewish life on a cosmopolitan and transnational scale.<sup>14</sup> Even the political nationalism that eventually grew out of Hebraist culture did not, at first, aim for a separate nation-state.<sup>15</sup> Nor was Hebrew unique in this regard: other cultural-linguistic revivalist movements (as Shumsky observes of the Czech, Norwegian, and Slovenian movements, among others) aimed at *assimilating* an ethnic group into wider, multinational imperial cultures.<sup>16</sup>

In light of the nuanced notions of cultural reproduction then circulating within the Ottoman, Prussian-German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires, I would argue for reframing the roots of Zionism in Ottoman Palestine. In Europe, Turkey, and Palestine, cultural Hebraism carried an assimilatory impulse, which also underwrote the polyglot orientation of many early Zionists (toward Arabic, Turkish, Russian, etc.), who aimed to create a space for Jewish national life *within* rather than *in separation from* the surrounding imperial cultures. My first chapter follows these lines of inquiry through Herzl's career with respect to the German empire; my second chapter considers the ways that Herzl's immediate successors negotiated these ideas within an Ottomanist context.

---

<sup>14</sup> Simon Halkin. *Modern Hebrew Literature: Trends and Values* (New York: Schocken Books, 1950), 16-19.

<sup>15</sup> Shumsky, *Beyond the Nation-State*, 1-23, and his chapter on Ahad Ha'am. See further: Julia Philips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 104. "'Our Duties as Jews and as Ottomans': An Ottoman Zionist Vision for the Future (1909)" in Julia Cohen and Sarah Stein, eds., *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700-1950*, First Edition (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 213-222.

<sup>16</sup> Shumsky, *Beyond the Nation-State*, 73-75. In another study, one might look at post-colonial movements outside of Europe for a similar trend. The Senegalese poet and president Léopold Sédar Senghor's concept of *Négritude* comes to mind.

In narrating the story of Palestine after World War I, scholars often enter into a mode of inevitability: historical events and cultural developments are interpreted such that each one points to the foundation of the Israeli nation-state in 1948. This regrettable tendency elides the salient role of displacement in the relationship between Jews and Europe. My study calls for a renewed focus on the complexities of displacing two separate projects from Europe to Palestine: (1) the revival of Hebrew language and literature, heretofore conceived as a means to bring Jews forward into modernity and acculturate them to the European canon, and (2) the German-Jewish project of Emancipation, *Bildung*, and assimilation, a project that Herzl believed could still solve the problems of anti-Semitism, but (and in this he was truly original) only *through displacement* out of Europe and into the Orient. As I have alluded to above, mimesis, as the *re*-presentation (making present, again, elsewhere) of European reality and subjectivity, is an essential analytical tool for understanding both of these movements.

With that in mind, I assert that the very production of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, written in Istanbul, in exile from Europe and its genocidal anti-Semitism, is a vital part of the story of the representation of Jewish exile – perhaps inseparable from the story of Zionism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I contend that we should extend Said's framing of *Mimesis* toward the generation of worldly German-Jews who preceded Auerbach in Istanbul, especially Herzl. *Mimesis*, Said writes,

is not ... only a massive reaffirmation of the Western cultural tradition,  
but also a work built upon a critically important alienation from it, a work  
whose conditions and circumstances of existence are *not immediately*

*derived* from the culture it describes ... but built rather on an agonizing distance from it.<sup>17</sup>

Auerbach's utter identification with German culture, and his mastery of European letters, existed in perilous interplay with European anti-Semitism. Auerbach was only spared from the Nazis' Final Solution to the Jewish Question thanks to the modernizing, mimetic national project that Kemalist Turkey happened to undertake at the very same moment.<sup>18</sup> Auerbach was a fitting candidate for such a task precisely because he exemplified the achievements of *Bildung* and German-Jewish assimilation over the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, while also falling victim to the tenuousness of these achievements.

Reflecting on an earlier period, before the option of resettlement in the Orient became aligned with modern nationalist projects, Georg Simmel wrote of the sociological form of "The Stranger", whose "position as full-fledged member [of the group] involves both being outside it and confronting it."<sup>19</sup> Simmel identifies this "social position" through the example of medieval German Jews. It is worth emphasizing that this stranger is not "the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather [is] the person who comes today and stays tomorrow ... the *potential* wanderer." The historian Yuri Slezkine arrives at a similar formulation in *The Jewish Century*.<sup>20</sup> In pre-modern Europe, Slezkine argues, the settled, agrarian Christians (both aristocrats and peasants) were Apollonians, while the Mercurians "were all transients and wanderers [even as they became]

---

<sup>17</sup> Edward Said, *World, Text, Critic*, 8, emphasis mine.

<sup>18</sup> Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 4-12.

<sup>19</sup> Georg Simmel, "The Stranger," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, tr. Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), 402-408.

<sup>20</sup> Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). Slezkine overturns Nietzsche, arguing that the principal division of human society is not between the Apollonian and Dionysian ("Apollonians and Dionysians are usually the same people: now sober and serene, now drunk and frenzied ... Dionysians are Apollonians at a festival—peasants after the harvest") but between Apollonian and Mercurial peoples (24).

permanently settled populations who thought of themselves as exiles.”<sup>21</sup> Slezkine gives a wide-ranging account of the roles inhabited by Mercurians (of whom European Jews became the most exemplary): “multilingual ... professional internal strangers ... trained linguists, negotiators, translators, and mystifiers.”<sup>22</sup>

Their world is larger and more varied [than peasants or pastoralists] because they cross conceptual and communal borders as a matter of course, because they speak more tongues, and because they have those “unspeakable, unthinkable, marvelous” sandals that allow them to be in several places at once ... Bankers, peddlers, yeshiva students, and famous rabbis traveled far and wide, well beyond the edges of peasant imagination.

They did not travel just by land or water. Some service nomads were literate, and thus doubly nomads ... the preeminent manipulators of texts. In traditional societies, writing was the monopoly of priests or bureaucrats; among literate Mercurians, every male was a priest.<sup>23</sup>

Slezkine concludes that the creation of modern nationalism demanded that Jews occupy two places at the same time. Assimilation required an impossible balancing act of imitation and self-reproduction: “the Jews were doomed to a new exile as a result of the Judaizing of their Apollonian hosts: no sooner had they become ready to become Germans ... than the Germans themselves became ‘chosen’”; singular, superior, impermeable.<sup>24</sup> In response, German-Jews attempted to create new “neutral spaces” (as

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 62.

alternatives to the criteria of “sacralized common descent [and] a guarantee of continued endogamy”). But in doing so, they resorted to old Mercurial habits, such as the imaginative mobility of scholarship and textuality: “So strong was the passion and so complete the identification that very soon Jews became conspicuous in the role of priests of various national cults: as poets, painters, performers, readers, interpreters, and guardians.”<sup>25</sup> Jews turned to texts because they couldn’t turn to blood or soil. In fact, texts *represented* the soil, in the affiliative canons of national and world literature, and in the old/new canon of Hebrew literature and Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Outside Within**

Both Simmel and Slezkine acknowledged that a unique form of alienation emerged in Germany’s interaction with its Jewish minority. In a traditional Jewish register, the precariousness of this state was a defining condition of exile. In modern scholarship, we have come to view it as part of the historical formation of European civilization. Displacement and mobility had long existed within – perhaps defined – European Jewish life. I will argue that the Jewish minority position was always already one of exile, in an historical and *representational* sense.<sup>27</sup> And this exilic position – as one who identifies with and yet (must) live beyond the settled location of the native – was an irreducible feature of Theodor Herzl’s project.<sup>28</sup> Herzl’s Zionism sought to

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 69. Slezkine quotes Gershom Scholem: “for many Jews the encounter with Friedrich Schiller was more real than their encounter with actual Germans.”

<sup>26</sup> + Mandelstam and Steiner

<sup>27</sup> The “representational” sense has roots in Christian theology, as will discuss below.

<sup>28</sup> Regarding Zionism as a whole, a similar notion was first theorized by Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Galut mi-tokh ribonut,” *Theoria u-viqoret* 4 (1993): 23-55 and *Theoria u-viqoret* 5 (1994): 113-32. An abridged English translation appears in: Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile within Sovereignty: Critique of the ‘Negation of Exile’ in Israeli Culture,” in *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic*

mimetically reproduce European ways of life, particularly German nationalism, and yet it was simultaneously “built upon a critically important alienation” from these discourses. Taking this exilic form of Europe with them, as Jews, to Istanbul represents the novelty of Herzl and Auerbach’s journeys to the Orient. And we must think of this Orient in all of the senses with which it resounded for highly cultivated Germans such as Herzl and Auerbach: the Orient as the earliest topoi of classical Western history, the origin for the Christian fusion of the Hebraic and Hellenic; but also the Orient that structured the hegemonic European figure of the Other.<sup>29</sup> This final sense of the Orient took an absent-present form, in discourse and history: *absent* in the sense of the “Terrible Turk,” the menacing Islamic threat from without, and *present* in the form of the Jews, singled out as Oriental infidels and intruders during a full millennium of habitation on European soil.

For Said, the confluence between German-Jews and Istanbul instantiates a larger critical relationship. In *Enlightenment in the Colony*, Mufti reads Edward Said’s critical project as “a complex engagement with this critical, cultural, and political legacy”, that is, “the Jewish intellectual attachment to—(and) immanent critique of—the Enlightenment and its legacies.”<sup>30</sup> This sense of “immanent critique,” derived from Adorno, “encodes the ambition to get the critical ‘subject’ inside what we might then no longer so simply be able to call critique’s ‘object’; Adorno frequently contrasts it with ‘external’ critique, critique ‘from outside’.”<sup>31</sup> I propose that the representation of *Jewish*

---

*Perspectives on the History of a Concept*, ed. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr (Columbia University Press, 2017), 393–420.

<sup>29</sup> Said, *World, Text, Critic*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 9, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Steven Helmling, “‘Immanent Critique’ and ‘Dialectical Mimesis’ in Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,” *Boundary 2* 32, no. 3 (2005), 99. This would also seem to be an inspiration for Said’s comment on the need to “reread (the cultural archive) not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and those other histories against



*exile* (in the texts of my study) offers a method of immanent critique. In each configuration, the outside is *always already* within the inside. In the work of Konuk, McMeekin, and Mendes-Flohr, we see that in Auerbach's cultural and scholarly formation, the Orient (Istanbul) is already in Berlin, just as Berlin (in the form of Wilhelmine imperialism and German Orientalism) is already in Istanbul even before Auerbach and his fellow German-Jewish academics arrive there. My project thinks through the implications of this immanent critique with respect to Zionism, Palestine, and Israel. In fact, without this notion, I believe critique itself is terribly constrained.

In Auerbach's late essay "Philology and *Weltliterateur*," Mufti argues, there is a paradox between the comparativist, multi-perspectival, and historicist methods of Auerbach's scholarship and his Eurocentric pre-occupations: his vision cannot see the post-colonial dimensions of its own world.<sup>32</sup> In Herzl's writings, I contend, there is a related paradox between the German-Jewish assimilating project (which incorporates cosmopolitanism, liberalism, and modernism) and the call for the Jewish national project to take place *outside* of the very continent whose civilization has given the project its moorings. My argument is this: *Exile* is the representation of this paradox. I also contend that exile be understood as a paradox, and not as the mere *substitution* of one location for another. The greatest analytical error would be to view exile as a form of substitution, a question of finding a proper location to replace a problematic location. A sub-text in many recent critiques of Zionism is that there are "good Jews," and "bad Jews," and that we can identify them in terms of their relationship to place: Israelis in Berlin or New York are good, just as German-Jewish scholars in Istanbul, but not Jerusalem, were

---

which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts." Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 51.

<sup>32</sup> Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 236-239.

exemplary. In place of these presumptions, I argue that the representation of exile is *not a place*. Exile is about the dialectic relationships between *movement* and *place*, between *migration* and *home*, each polarity always imbued with the problematic arrangements of power in a given historical moment. Every literary representation enacts displacement, but the literature of Jewish exile teaches us that the subjects of literary representation always bear an element of another place and time; *here* comes from *elsewhere*.

Said's provocative reading of *Mimesis* suggests that the Western literary (and even civilizational) perspective must be displaced, transposed, exiled, in order to assume its full meaning. The significance of Auerbach's re-assembling the Western canon lies in his (Turkish) exilic – and (Jewish) minority – position. Auerbach's dislocation in the East illuminates "the relationship between the critical consciousness and its object of study", or "Western Literature", as Mufti writes.<sup>33</sup> I would extend this insight: Auerbach's dislocation participated in a longer German-Jewish tradition that affords a critical perspective on a number of representations of reality within and adjacent to "Western Literature." This perspective requires us to reconsider genealogies of world literature and Orientalism with respect to Eastern European Jews, pan-Ottomanism, and Hebrew literature, among other topics. German-Jewish exile in the Orient – as a form of literature and critique – offers alternative ways of reading European Jewish life and its relation to nationalism in Turkey, Palestine, and Israel.

Recent, laudable studies of literature that deal with Israel/Palestine have shown that Arabic is an inextricable aspect of Israeli identity, through both the Palestinian presence and the (long-suppressed) Arabic heritage of Israel's Mizrahi/North African

---

<sup>33</sup> Mufti, "Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 1 (1998): 102.

population. But this form of comparativism can become parochial when its horizons are enclosed within the contestation of hegemonic Israeli national culture, rather than reaching out toward broader questions of imperial history, alongside exilic, migratory, and post-colonial identity. I suggest turning, instead, toward the relationship between the disciplinary agenda of Comparative Literature and the critique of nationalism. In the works of scholars such as Said, Mufti, Emily Apter, and Judith Butler, mobile figures of German-Jewish exile offer a prototype for the work of comparativism. They model salutary critical-intellectual positions, especially as an antidote to territorial nationalism.<sup>34</sup> With Auerbach and Leo Spitzer prominent among these figures, the 1930s in Istanbul has become a canonical period in the emergence of Comparative Literature as a discipline. I propose an extended foreground for this moment of Jewish exile reveals the paradoxes of Jewish assimilation and estrangement within Europe, even before emigration to the East. Most ambitiously, we might ask then whether *Mimesis*, a canonical reading of the representation of European subjectivity by an assimilated, exiled German-Jew, can teach us how to read about other (perhaps related) formations of exile, such as the exile of European Jewry to Palestine/Israel? Or the exile of Palestinians from the same land?

To answer that question, we must re-evaluate German-Jewry's legacy to critical thought. My second chapter suggests additional avenues of inquiry from the selection (and omission) of various members of early 20<sup>th</sup> century German-speaking Jewish intellectuals. I will question and expand the frame with which Comparative Literature scholars have identified figures of Jewish exile, and thereby urge us to reconsider the position of certain locations – especially Turkey and Palestine – within these frames. To do so, I will emphasize a few guiding considerations: that it was in an *imperial* context,

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 95–125, specifically 104-105.

prior to the monopoly of the nation-state form, that Herzl took up the question of how Jews will be represented (and how they will represent themselves). Furthermore, Herzl shared a linguistic and cultural landscape with German-speaking Jews throughout *Mitteleurope*, a transimperial sphere that extended from the Rhineland to the Black Sea. In that sphere, Prussian/German Orientalism and imperialism shaped the subject position of highly cultured European Jews, from Herzl to Auerbach. And as we know from Said's interest in Goethe and Raymond Schwab, among others, comparativist literary practices took shape within the framework of Central European Orientalism, with its own specific imperial and colonial imaginaries.<sup>35</sup> My aim is thus not to pull Herzl *out* of colonialism (and its subsequent post-colonial critique) but to highlight that Herzl was not alone among German-Jews of his era, whose political and aesthetic ideas were drafted into the programs of Prussian/German expansionism, cosmopolitanism, and Orientalism. Thus it should not be shocking that Herzl's Zionism shares the same cultural and political map with its supposed opposite (Auerbach's comparativism).

Many scholars presume a perfect opposition between European Jewish nationalists, like Herzl and Ben-Gurion, and Jewish cosmopolitans, like Spitzer and Auerbach. Both pairs are imagined, either heroically or tragically, as figures that mark the termination of an "exilic" insider-outsider Jewish subject position *within* Europe.<sup>36</sup> By focusing on the Ottoman-Turkish context, my study may reveal a deeper interrelationship between the late imperial cosmopolitanism that underwrites both Zionism's territorial, political project and Comparative Literature's deterritorialized, cultural project. This

---

<sup>35</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (New York: Vintage, 1979, 1994), 51.

<sup>36</sup> Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 5-10.

perspective is essential for framing my turn to Hebrew and Arabic literature written in Israel/Palestine during and after Israel's establishment.

Turkey, like Palestine, is located "opposite" Europe, though both places were also Orientalist obsessions *within* Europe. Turkey and Palestine acquired significance in European imperial politics precisely because they were imagined to "belong," in a profound sense, to the (Christian) heritage of European civilization.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, these spaces were perhaps the geographic inverse of the Jewish people, who were within the European space in every sense, and yet imagined as outsiders. The Nazi genocide literalized this imaginary in the Holocaust, while also displacing remnants of European Jewish life into Istanbul and Tel Aviv-Jaffa. I contend that the Jewish exilic position, as the insider-outsider of Europe, continues to inhere in both settings, an inextricable element of the otherwise majoritarian nation-states (Turkey and Israel) that arose through the displacement of yet other minority populations. The concentration of expatriate Turks, Israeli Jews, and Palestinians in Berlin suggests further inquiry into the minority and refugee questions that currently resound in Germany and across Europe. This dialectical arrangement suggests an *immanent critique* of Zionism's minoritization of the Palestinians, and of Israel's (ever escalating) intolerance toward minorities and refugees in a variety of exilic conditions.

### **Temporalities of Exilic Representation**

The mobility of exile as a modality of experience and representation demands that we not only focus on geographic frames for location, but that we also interrogate issues of temporality. Not only where is exile, but when? In the case of Jewish exile, we must

---

<sup>37</sup> Said, *World, Text, Critic*, 6-14.

also ask a counter-intuitive question: with respect to exile as a figure, a state, or a condition – *when* is Palestine?

In my first two chapters, I delve into the methodology and significance of *historicism*, precisely when adopted from a position of *exile*. Said focuses on a particular form of historicism from the Enlightenment scholar Giambattista Vico to Auerbach. Said writes that *Mimesis*, “traces the growth of historicism, a multiperspectival, dynamic, and holistic way of representing reality and history.”<sup>38</sup> I propose that reading Herzl with historicist methods – precisely in Auerbach’s sense – reveals that Herzl utilized these very same methods to understand the Jewish Question.<sup>39</sup> One might even say that historicism is the form of temporality produced by an exilic German-Jewish consciousness. David Myers has written extensively on the relationship between historicism and German-Jewish intellectuals, particularly those who relocated to Palestine during the same period that Auerbach worked in Istanbul. This offers numerous opportunities for further development of the propositions I offer at the end of my second chapter. Broadly speaking, discussions of modern historicism, along with philology (Auerbach’s discipline), engage in certain underlying concerns about the nature of historical time. In a Jewish context, the notion of a Jewish “return to history” has been a fruitful topic of scholarship since the publication of Yosef H. Yerushalmi’s *Zakhor*. Without delving too deeply into the debates and innovations that followed Yerushalmi’s work, I will suggest that the larger concern with the “return to history” was common to the two parallel developments I mentioned above, both of whom shared origins in the

---

<sup>38</sup> Said, “Erich Auerbach,” 30.

<sup>39</sup> Nor were Herzl or Auerbach singular in this regard. Both worked from an existing intellectual tradition in German, and German-Jewish, thought. See: David Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Haskalah: first, amongst German-Jewish intellectuals, beginning with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and secondly, amongst writers of Hebrew literature. But what readings of the past (as pre-texts) does historicism make available to the literature of exile?

Insofar as my study examines the relationship between Jewish exile and Comparative Literature (particularly in its post-colonial mode), it is worth noting that historicism serves as the groundwork for the concept of the *exilic* that Said extracts from Auerbach's work. For Said, "exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical".<sup>40</sup> In *Forget English*, Mufti argues that Auerbach values historicism as an alternative to the racial imaginary of nationalism, with its sublimated ties to mythology and religion.<sup>41</sup> My first two chapters are deeply invested in the proposition that Said and Auerbach's very sense of historicism animates Herzl's Zionist writings, particularly his novel *Altneuland*. And yet as vital as this historicism is to the representation of exile in the first half of my dissertation, there is an alternative interpretative framework that I will advance in the second half, one that also stems from Auerbach, but does not receive adequate attention in Said's reading of the philologist's work.<sup>42</sup> Despite Said's interest in both the representation of Jewish exile and Auerbach, he did not see the potential linkage between the two subjects in "Figura," the latter's foundational study on Christian exegesis.<sup>43</sup>

To read into the modern European Jewish, Israeli, and Palestinian contexts of my dissertation, a pre-modern genealogy of exile – as a *representational* problematic – is

---

<sup>40</sup> Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Exile," *Granta*, no. 13 (August 1984), 138.

<sup>41</sup> Mufti, *Forget English*, 218-222.

<sup>42</sup> Gil Hochberg pointed out this aporia to me, which enabled me to situate the analysis that follows. Any analytically weak links are my own.

<sup>43</sup> "Figura" (1944), *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Tr. Ralph Manheim (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11-76. Even where Said discusses "Figura," which was composed in Istanbul at the same time as *Mimesis*, he reads it as leading, teleologically, to the triumph of a secular, historicist humanism, and without relation to the pre-modern representation of exile. See: Said, "Erich Auerbach," 23-29.

necessary. While there are many options for such a genealogy, I will attempt to briefly gloss “Figura” in order to offer organizing terms for questions of representation that take shape in the Hebrew and Arabic literary texts I will discuss (and perhaps, in many modern works of exile). The generation of Jewish exile, and the possibility of its termination by either anti-Semitism or Zionism, cannot be fully explored without recourse to certain questions that Auerbach addresses in “Figura.” For example, who can properly read the Hebrew Bible? When (and *where*) is this revelation “present”? In what place (or time) can the Jews hear, see, write, or read this text? And if there comes a time to take the Jews’ place – not only as the prophets of the Biblical God, but also as the readers of the Biblical text – what *place* remains for the Jews?

In Latin Christian exegesis, as Auerbach points out, characters and events from the Hebrew Bible are understood as *figura* that pre-figure the *veritas*: the universal fulfillment of their historical and spiritual meaning in the coming of Christ. To the early Church Fathers, a

*figura* is something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical. ... the aim of this sort of interpretation was to show that the persons and events of the Old Testament were prefigurations of the New Testament and its history of salvation.<sup>44</sup>

The meaning of the words and prophetic visions of the Hebrew Bible were now dictated by the theological codes of a worldview that, on its own terms, had not only superseded the Jewish tradition specifically, but had also assumed a hegemonic position regarding the nature of historical time itself.

---

<sup>44</sup> Auerbach, “Figura,” 29, 30.



*Possession* and *belonging* are key terms for positioning this transformation in relation to exile. The theological claim that the Jews no longer possessed the correct meaning of the Hebrew Bible was but one expression of a more fundamental truth about reality. The Hebrew Bible no longer belonged to the Jews because the Jewish meaning (and the Hebrew language) no longer belonged to the prophecies of the Bible. Jews (indeed, all peoples) now belonged to the universal history of *verus Israel*: Christendom.<sup>45</sup> The time for a Jewish belief in the Hebrew Biblical prophecies was over. This was borne out by the major political events that followed Christ's crucifixion: the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the collapse of Jewish sovereignty, and the Roman dispossession of Judea's population.<sup>46</sup>

These events not only inaugurated the conditions of Jewish exile, they also reinforced a Christian figural view of the Hebrew Bible and the meaning of history. Auerbach argues that such a view was inextricably linked to the Christianization of Europe.<sup>47</sup> In the theological sense of history that Auerbach proposes, those who anomalously held onto their Jewish belief did not *belong to the* (Christian) *present* in Europe. It is not difficult to see how such a presumption could underpin the medieval Christian sense that the Jews did not truly "belong" to any place, whether to the European lands in which they resided, or to the Holy Land whose sanctity now signified the Christian supersession over Judaism. In short, the deterritorialization of the Jews was at

---

<sup>45</sup> Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Jewish Memory between Exile and History," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97, no. 4 (2007): 538. As Raz-Krakotzkin writes, "the history of the Jews was narrated in such a way as to deny the possibility that Jews or Judaism could **represent themselves** as *verus Israel* ... Jewish history now became part of the process of (Euro-Christian) salvation, part of History, part of the West." The bold emphasis is mine.

<sup>46</sup> Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*. Tr. Henry Bettenson. New York: Penguin Classics Edition, 2003 [1972], 827-828. There is also a gendered dynamic to this understanding, which is not only available in the textual tradition of later Christian theologians. The "Judea Capta" coins minted by the Flavian emperors depict Caesar's face on one side, and a kneeling Jewish woman on the other.

<sup>47</sup> Auerbach, "Figura," 56.

once textual, spatial, and temporal. I would suggest, however, that this interpretative model persisted through the secularization of Christian reading practices in Enlightenment-era philology. Modern philology developed out of the changing relationship to language as an object of empirical, scientific study, and not a medium of Divine revelation.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the transposition from theological to philological reading practices carried an Orientalist assertion: that certain peoples, anachronistically, claim to speak for God, while the Western Enlightenment subject has progressed beyond such a “theological” representational practice. By extension, from the vantage point of the modern Western (scholarly) subject, wherever the poetics or historical understanding of a people developed outside of (or incompletely overlapped with) historicism and philology, such a poetics could be displaced onto the terrain of theology – even as the very notion of “theology” was a reified product of Christian-Enlightenment hermeneutics.

### **Israel and Palestine: Return and Exile**

With two models of temporality that I have elaborated, the historicist and the figural, we might now interrogate the “history” into which the Jews are meant to “return” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sense. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has done much to highlight the political-theological problems that attended Haskalah (and later Zionist) ideas about the Jews re-entering “history.” In a similar manner, I propose re-opening the literary meaning of “history” by considering alternatives to the representations on historical time handed down from the Enlightenment. The Jewish return to history and Palestine, and the

---

<sup>48</sup> And yet, as Khaled Mattawa points out, “historicizing the Bible [originally] radiated from Protestant literalist scholars beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century”. Khaled Mattawa, *Mahmoud Darwish: The Poet’s Art and His Nation*, 109. In his readings of Auerbach, Said, ironically, reproduces modern philology’s claim to be a “secular” or “scientific” – as opposed to religious or theological – reading practice.

representation of exile *in Hebrew* and from within the land of Israel, necessitates yet an additional frame. The authors in the remainder of my dissertation – Alterman, Yizhar, Ravikovich, and Darwish – offer fascinating approaches to the temporality of exile. In different forms, they adopt what I will term a poetics of the *prophetic visionary*, finding new meanings in the Jews’ dislocation within (or outside of) Europe, and, eventually, in their relocation to Palestine. Regarding the latter, I follow Raz-Krakotzkin’s critical insights on the parallel that Jewish nationalists asserted between the political “return to Zion” and its antecedent, the Jewish “return to history.” In other words, one must first be in “the right time,” before searching for “the proper place.”

The notion that Jews belonged in a secular, Enlightened modernity radically revised the representation of Jewish exile, casting it as a pre-modern conception ill-suited to the world of nations. I do not mean to propose that Zionism, even on its own terms, can ever amount to the “end” of Jewish exile. Indeed, my study is premised on the fact that the representation of Jewish exile persists in Israeli literature. As before, Jewish exile remains poised in a dialectical symbiosis between, on the one hand, “settled” Jewish life (as understood through a historical, secular perspective) and the displacement of such a “settled” perspective onto the eschatological timespan of redemption, which is always sought on the *topos* of the Holy Land (even when the latter is imagined in a deterritorialized manner: in a text, for example). But in Hebrew literature within the context of Zionism – specifically in Palestine and Israel after 1882 – this dialectic, which in all other moments necessitates (at least) two physical locations on earth, is squeezed into one and the same space: the land of Israel. A similar compression occurs between the “era of exile” and “era of redemption,” packed into a single Zionist contemporaneity that

uncomfortably incorporates the timescales of secularist modernism, socialist utopianism, and religious messianism.

There are twinned tensions resulting from this compression of time: who can see? Who can speak? These questions inform the *place* of each national collective in the land – where and how Jews and Arabs can be seen; who appears in the figure of the refugee bereft of home and shelter; and which people “belongs” in the present of modernity. In approaching the events of 1948, the task of representing either the end or a new beginning in the life Jewish people reinforced certain aesthetic tensions in Hebrew literature. If Jewish life in exile took place on a traditional, religious timespan, with its deferred eschatological expectation of redemption, Zionist modernism held that Jewish life under non-territorialist conditions was part of the past and, effectively, dead. For the Jewish population of Palestine, the narrowing of territorial options was never merely a shift between different imaginative or rhetorical paradigms. Post-Holocaust writing carried the potential to render lyrical expression impossible, unable to span the chasm between linguistic symbolization and the extremity of the Jewish experience in the 1940s.

The poetic crisis modernist symbolism in Hebrew cannot be separated from the elimination of the dialectic between exile and redemption (or past and future), an outcome of the fact that the Holocaust literalized the termination of Jewish life in Europe that Zionist discourse had only rhetorically imagined. As Hever observes, by 1948, Alterman found himself directly engaged with the ways that a post-Holocaust condition challenges the capacity of language – particularly the lyric image – to render any meaningful correspondence between literary testimony and actual experiences of

(Jewish) suffering.<sup>49</sup> The war that followed the United Nations vote to partition Palestine, less than three years after the Holocaust concluded, reinforced the frightening possibility of collective annihilation amongst the Jewish population. These anxieties were concretized in prewar Zionist efforts to help stateless European Jewish refugees illegally immigrate into Palestine, bearing with them the experience of surviving the Nazi genocide. Oblique references to these figures appear in Alterman's "War of Cities". The poem also depicts the other refugees of 1948, Palestinian inhabitants of Jaffa fleeing their native land onto boats bound for Gaza and Lebanon, as the battle for the city rages.

How can the Hebrew poet represent exile at this juncture? Hebrew's own rebirth as the language of national vision, its spellbinding and illusive power, becomes a leitmotif in "War of Cities." And yet the representation of exile persists in Hebrew texts, even as Israelis, readers and writers, enter national subjectivity. The entire Zionist project that brought Jews to statehood, beginning with the revival of Hebrew literature, comes from texts. In that sense, it is not surprising that when Israeli authors encounter Palestinian exile, they see older Hebrew texts: the Biblical representations of exile, the visions of the prophets, and historical images of European Jewish homelessness. The Hebrew Biblical text becomes inseparable from the Israeli reality – not (only) because of millenarian or historicist readings drafted into the service of nationalism, but also because the "territorial" meaning of the text is once again up for dispute among Hebrew authors living on the land. These authors bear the memories of Jewish history as voiced through the sacred Hebrew texts (the Bible, Talmud, and prayer book) that were preserved in the

---

<sup>49</sup> Hannan Hever, "Lo Tehat Gam Mipnei Al Tagidu beGat': Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit Be-Shirah Ha-'Ivrit 1948-1958," in *"Al Tagidu Be-Gath": Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit Ba-Shirah Ha- 'Ivrit 1948-1958* (Tel Aviv, 2010), 9–53. 17.

Diaspora, texts that internalized the experience and meaning of the Diaspora (as *Galut*, “exile”) into Hebrew.

### **The Prophetic Visionary**

In order to understand the ways that the Palestinians appear – or fail to appear – in the Jewish-Israeli imagination of 1948, I will first attempt to map out *the poetics of visibility* in the Hebrew literature of the period. As a leader and model for other Zionist Hebrew writers, Alterman adopted a poetics that takes form, I will argue, in two distinct modes of representation, the “visible” and the “visionary.”<sup>50</sup> The visible mode aligns with the mimetic conventions of testimony in its narration of actual events and through its realistic, literal description of visible phenomena. In the visionary mode, the poet’s quasi-prophetic access to the larger meaning of events in time enables him to show the Hebrew reader a future that they cannot literally see. Like the prophet whose heightened state of vision sees beyond a mundane perception of visible phenomena, the Hebrew poet elevates his own voice to the vantage point of a far-sighted visionary by transforming everyday images and familiar religious references into symbols of modernization and secular national redemption.<sup>51</sup> The visionary mode is precisely *not* mimetic, and it does not take a linear or historicist account of events as its starting point.

What is the content of the visionary text: a vision that is seen, words that are heard, or graphic figures that are viewed/read? If the modern artist creates at least in part from a secularized understanding of the representational structure of language (and

---

<sup>50</sup> I was originally encouraged to think of this formulation based off a lecture relating to Milton’s influence on Romantic Poetry: Erik Gray, “Romantic Poetry” (lecture, Columbia University, New York, NY, September, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> Dan Miron, *The Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, 1 edition (New Milford, CT, 2009), 159-160.

images), namely that it does not originate with God, then how might the figure of the visionary prophet appear in modern literature on exile? In what form can the modern author *re-present* prophetic revelation?

In the transmission of prophecy, as in all forms of representation, *displacement* is essential: the Voice (or the vision) becomes the text (or the image). The visionary artist, similarly, steps into this impossibility, giving voice to varieties of difference that, by definition, do not speak in discourse: the image, silence, and visions (of the past, future, or God) that must be absent in the presence of linguistic enunciation. The author is liable to be caught in the same “excess” that characterizes all collective political discourse: he *speaks for* subject positions that he does not inhabit, spilling over the boundaries of his individual experience, and breaching the limitations of his own sense perception. Yet unlike political discourse, literature at least carries the potential to open up this process and render it visible, specifically by calling attention to the displacements that occur in the very act of representation: between the subjectivities of the author and the characters; and between the semantic spaces, that is, the *locations*, within which their words acquire meaning and recognition, and across which they travel.

In my study, Israeli and Palestinian authors highlight the role of displacement *in* representation. My interest in displacement, moreover, is not exclusively as an objective reality, reproduced through literary mimesis. In fact, I will argue that the representation of displacement in literature *must* be approached through the structure of displacement involved in the act of representation. This argument has applications for all linguistic and semiotic work, of course. But approaching displacement and dislocation in perceptual, psychological, and intersubjective terms can enrich our understanding of the imaginative

topography of Jewish exile: its religious, historical, and conceptual evolution. It is crucial to map out the *representational structure* of this non-territorial terrain.

The poetics of *displacement* in the prophetic visionary mode is essential to understanding its adoption, in distinct ways, by Alterman and Yizhar in their literary accounts of 1948. In their texts, both authors magnify the operation of displacement (of times and places, but also of peoples and subject positions) that is essential to prophetic visions – indeed, to any form of communication. In the visionary prophetic mode, the divine Voice (in this case, a vision) becomes the text (the linguistic image). Through such sensory and semantic dislocations, the prophetic visionary gives voice to figures that do not speak in discourse, such as images and silence, and to visions of the past, future, or God that are not phenomenologically present at the moment of linguistic enunciation.

Exile, in its paradox, elicits the *visionary* mode of literature, with its explicit staging of the paradox of text and images, words and visions – a practice with a long tradition in Jewish Scriptural interpretation. Precisely because Jews did *not* adopt the Christian figural view of phenomenal prophecy, reading the Hebrew Bible entailed an interminable series of interpretations, *a refusal to bring the text to an end* (salvation), the ceaseless resistance to *make present* the Biblical God Who defies all forms of *re-*presentation. In this manner of reading, assimilation is impossible because the origin of the text is always wholly Other; always, in a sense, “in exile.”<sup>52</sup>

### **The Visionary in 1948**

---

<sup>52</sup> As the Midrash states, “Why do we use a pseudonym and call the Holy One ‘place’ (Maqom)? Because He is the place of the world, but the world is not His place.” See: “Vayetze *remez* 117,” Yalqut Shimoni, accessed October 25, 2018. [https://www.sefaria.org/Yalqut\\_Shimoni\\_on\\_Torah.117.1-130.16?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Yalqut_Shimoni_on_Torah.117.1-130.16?lang=bi) This sense of God’s “exile” is central to Lurianic Kabbalah and its Hasidic popularization.



In their literary accounts of 1948, Alterman and Yizhar engage in the descriptive realism of testimonial narrative, adopting a nearly historiographic mode of writing that suggests the linear progression of events in homogenous time. Yet through recourse to the *visionary* mode of Biblical Hebrew prophecy, Alterman and Yizhar also depart from the conventions of realism and historicism, opening the chronotope of 1948 to an alternative set of relationships between the very words and images that constitute its representation.

At the moment from which Herzl was retrospectively labeled “the visionary of the state” (*hozeh ha-medinah*, also the “prophet-seer” of the state), the Israeli authors see the paradox of European Jewish dislocation reverberating into the space of the land of Israel and the native population of Palestine. In the visionary prophetic mode, the Hebrew author looks at the Jewish return to Palestine and cannot but see *exile*. In Palestine, *exile* is what appears before the visionary prophetic Hebrew text: it sees the past. It is recursive, rather than modernist-futurist. It becomes untethered from the sense of *mimesis* that underwrote Herzl’s assimilation project, and it is no longer “*Mimesis*” as the representation of earthly reality. Exile in Palestine is a rupture in reality, one that is represented through the visionary’s poetics of displacement.

Anchoring the poetic gaze in a moment of 1948 whose fate, though decided, is as yet hidden from view carries the potential to reopen what Shaul Setter calls “1948-time.” In Setter’s account of Yizhar, “1948-time” serves as a counterpoint to the political closure engendered by “the narrative structure of ‘once upon a time,’ of discrete historical events that happened only once and then ended, which can therefore be told

retrospectively, and entirely, from a distance.”<sup>53</sup> For Setter, this rejection of historicism carries an explicit political advantage: it creates “a textual space that opposes the post-1948 political reality [...] It is rather a decisive opposition to the violent partition”. Debates about the Jewish collective’s moral accountability for the Nakba are often framed within the presumptions of a linear, causal historiographic narrative, and thus they focus on the degree to which the ethnic cleansing of Palestine was the result of a centralized Zionist policy; in other words, whether or not it was the “end” of a coherent process with a causal narrative logic.<sup>54</sup> And yet the historicist framework may in fact foreclose a deeper moral reckoning with the Nakba that appears possible in Hebrew texts that self-consciously return to the very emergence – by no means a foregone conclusion – of the Jewish people’s “entrance into history” or historical time, per the Zionist discourse.<sup>55</sup> *Khirbet Khizeh* displaces the historiographic progression of the protagonist’s testimony through the silencing and dispossession of both Palestinians and exilic Jewish history through which the Israeli nation would constitute itself.

### **Alterman and Yizhar**

As Hebrew literature’s most highly regarded writers in their respective genres, Alterman and Yizhar’s works have long been viewed as emblematic of Israel’s founding generation, serving as literary testimonies to the events, and to the moral character, that

---

<sup>53</sup> Shaul Setter, “The Time That Returns: Speculative Temporality in S. Yizhar’s 1948,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 44, 45. Setter’s discussion of Benjamin’s critique of “historicism” will be especially relevant for my analysis. See: Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), 253–64, esp. 262.

<sup>54</sup> Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London ; New York: Zed Books, 2012).

<sup>55</sup> Raz-Krakotzkin, “Jewish Memory,” 530–43.

shaped the new Israeli national subject who would emerge out of 1948.<sup>56</sup> Yet the relationship between the ways that Alterman's poetry on 1948 and Yizhar's novella depict the Palestinian Nakba has yet to be theorized. In these texts, the lyrical subject and the narrator position themselves as first-hand witnesses to the events of 1948, including the Nakba. Thus both texts engage in literary *testimony* about the war, which necessarily presumes some relationship to a realist, mimetic representation of the visible (sights, scenes, events) in words. But Hebrew representation of the Palestinian experience, does not – in fact, cannot – consist of direct testimony to the events of 1948, but also of the ways in which texts look *through* 1948 to other moments in time, both before and after the War.

In *Khirbet Khizeh*, a symptomatic return to silence shapes what Gil Hochberg has called “a semantics of ambiguity located between *presence and absence*, the visible and the invisible” as Yizhar “introduces” Israeli literature to “the emptied Arab villages”.<sup>57</sup> Throughout the novella, two words seem to recur more frequently than any others: *sheqet* and *dmama*, both of which suggest different forms of “silence.” Paradoxically, it is the textual figure of *silence* that exposes Yizhar's poetics of visibility. The novella's opening prefigures the “silencing” of the Nakba itself, as mainstream Israeli public discourse still refuses to acknowledge – and even criminalizes – accounts of its historicity, and of the Palestinians' existence as stateless refugees subject to Israeli military rule.

---

<sup>56</sup> Chanita Goodblatt's review of scholarship on Alterman discusses a number of works that reveal the prodigious extent of poet's legacy in Israel. See: Chanita Goodblatt, “‘A Cage of Order’: Recent Issues in Natan Alterman Scholarship,” *Prooftexts* 24, no. 2 (2004): 217–39. Among an extensive scholarly literature, two of the most central works to explore Yizhar's place in Israeli society are: Anita Shapira, “Hirbet Hizah: Between Remembrance and Forgetting,” *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 1 (2000): 1–62. Nurith Gertz, *Hirbet Hiz 'ah yeha-boker shela-mohorat* (Tel Aviv, 1983).

<sup>57</sup> Gil Hochberg, “A Poetics of Haunting: From Yizhar's Hirbeh to Yehoshua's Ruins to Koren's Crypts,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 66, emphasis mine.

As the national poet, Alterman claims the moral precedence of the Biblical prophets, whose privileged gaze he secularizes through modernist symbolism, allowing him to see beyond a painful mimesis of the present toward a redemptive future. Hebrew prophetic vision also breaks through Yizhar's otherwise realist prose, but Yizhar locates prophecy's authoritative voice in the Jewish past, through *visions* of exile that displace the testimonial voice of the text. Palestinian exile appears at the birth of Israeli literature in 1948, introducing a representational rupture that Alterman and Yizhar explore through the modalities of Hebrew prophetic vision.

At this moment in modern Hebrew literature, Alterman writes as a secular poet-prophet.<sup>58</sup> His modernist vision frees the people from the mystification of tradition, while nonetheless acknowledging the traumas of such a departure.<sup>59</sup> Zionist modernism closed the door to the suspended, deferred eschatological timespan of traditional religious redemption, along with the web of social and textual practices associated with the intervening immediacy of life in exile. As a Hebrew poet, however secular, Alterman is also the heir to Jeremiah and Isaiah, and in that sense, the voice (and vision) of the Jewish poet-prophet holds moral precedence over the collective.<sup>60</sup> Alterman's ability to *speak for* the people, in the modern nationalist sense, is indissociable from the greater proximity to revelation that the Hebrew visionary inherits from the privileged gaze of the Biblical prophets. And yet, ever the modernist, Alterman leaves God in the sky as a silent witness above the national death and birth of 1948 depicted in "War of Cities": the lyrical subject

---

<sup>58</sup> Miron 27.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-160.

<sup>60</sup> Uri Cohen, *Hisardut: Tefisat ha-mavvet beyn mil amot ha'olam be-eretz Yisrael u've-Italia* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007), 173, 181.

warns that the ancient words of God's testimony, Biblical Hebrew, would "shatter" the present time itself.

*Khirbet Khizeh* also engages with the visionary mode of Hebrew Biblical prophecy, a paradoxical mode of representation that depends upon the workings of *displacement* between the voice, the vision, and the text. The narrator's observation of visible sights is often "overwritten" by a prophetic visionary gaze that sees figures of exile, simultaneously, in the Israeli future and from the Jewish past. Yizhar's intertextual gestures are unique and striking: he turns directly to the prophets, like Jeremiah, who lament the *onset* of Exile, rather than the eventual redemption from it. Through such visions, the narrator sees the Palestinians as figures of the weak, despised, and perennially expelled Jewish refugees.

Whenever the narrator attempts to "speak for" the land figuratively, in a manner consistent with the romantic imaginary of Zionism (or any nationalist poetics), the intrusion of the protagonist and his comrades' militarized presence violates the land's primordial perfection and interrupts his rapturous discourse. To address the "silence" in which the land exists in the narrator's visionary lyricism, the text must depart from the narrative mode, thereby introducing a representational tension into its vision of the land. As author/subject of the Jewish Zionist vision, the narrator is supposed to extol the land in his writing. And yet the land he sees has been cast into "Silence," the paradoxical state through which he will speak of the Palestinians throughout the course of their expulsion, and into which he fears his own testimony will sink should he not tell this story.

The figure of silence, moreover, reaches toward the location of an authorial voice that can speak despite, or perhaps as a result of, the sharp dislocations that the war

produces between the attachments of peoples, places, and memory. This voice finds its conditions of possibility when the visionary prophetic mode breaks through the testimonial narrative to reinscribe voices of Jewish exile into the movements between flight and return, absence and presence, even shame and guilt. In this manner, the novella continually imagines the ways that its expressions of “silence” tie the Jewish national return to the massive Palestinian exile.

### **Ravikovich and Darwish**

To understand Dahlia Ravikovich and Mahmoud Darwish’s contributions to the literature of exile, we must look firstly at the watershed moment of 1982 – specifically at writings published in the aftermath of Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, part of its war against the Palestinian Liberation Organization based there. Israel’s invasion of a foreign capital outside of historic Palestine brought the continuation of war and displacement to the most important site of Palestinian exile. After 1982, I will argue that both Ravikovich and Darwish develop a *visionary* mode of lyrical representation that unsettles the poetics of nationalist belonging generated by the failed partition of Israel and Palestine. And for both poets, the visionary emerges from the rupture of exile, the way that exile’s textual representation rips open the present and imagines alternative timescapes of national displacement and return. They revisit the textual language of exile, and in it they locate a visionary viewpoint, re-reading Scripture, history, and modern nationalist poetics to uncover the new (and old) possibilities for representing exile in relation to Israel and Palestine. In this sense, their work ultimately suggests a critique of modern (national)

sovereignty from the now-inseparable perspectives of Jewish and Palestinian displacement.

In *True Love* and *Mother with Child*, Ravikovich collapses the rhetorical distance between modern Israelis and the longer (and more ideologically diverse) history of Jews and Judaism, drawing upon Diasporic and religious discourses that were suppressed in the creation of Israeli national identity. The poet draws upon Biblical and rabbinic Hebrew notions of place in order to reconceive of Jewish national subjectivity. She does not examine the sources of that subjectivity in the western European traditions of the Enlightenment's subjects and popular sovereignty. While her depiction of Israeli violence is unremitting, she locates her critique within the tensions of Jewish discourses regarding the home(land) and its loss in exile.

Ravikovich's poetry explores the mounds of exile upon which Israeli life exists: prophetic visions, diasporic histories, recent (and specifically post-Holocaust) flight and immigration, and then, finally and ever since, the Nakba. In this way, she continues a strain of inquiry found in Alterman and Yizhar: what can be learned from reading the Hebrew representation of Palestinian exile? Yet such a question almost demands rebuttal in the form of another question: from what poetic space can Palestinian *self-representation* take place outside of hegemonic Zionist discourse? When Israeli sovereignty erases the experience and the records of Palestinian habitation in the land, and then undertakes to erase even the language that commemorates their displacement,<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> The so-called "Nakba Law," passed by Israel's Knesset in 2011, "authorises Israel's finance minister to revoke funding from institutions that" among other things "mark the country's Independence Day as a day of mourning" (Patrick Strickland, "Israel Continues to Criminalise Marking Nakba Day," last modified May 14, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/israel-nakba-palestine-150514080431980.html>). Students at Haifa University and Tel Aviv University, for example, are now forbidden from memorializing Palestinian displacement on campus. The original draft of the law, proposed by Knesset member Alex

how can Palestinian exiles, such as Darwish, begin to represent his people's connection to the land? How could his work ever account for the many senses of Jewish exile whose memories now fill the space?

Throughout an extensive and dynamic career, Mahmoud Darwish's work came to be viewed as synonymous not only with the Palestinian cause, but also with the experience and poetic representation of exile. Darwish's poetry presents unique questions on the mobility of exile as a trope. As he looked in and out of modern Palestine, the question of visibility remained central to his poetics: which figures appear in the homeland, and who can see them? In whose language and discourse does belonging to the land take place? These questions led Darwish to continually revise and reformulate the sense of "home" and exile in his poetry.

My comparative study on the representation of exile – toward and away from what became modern Israel – elaborates upon the notion that Israeli and Palestinian national claims to the land are rooted in the meaning of being dispossessed from each people's (proper) state of habitation and sovereignty. *Eleven Planets* (1992) proceeds through an intertextual engagement with Darwish's earlier work, further developing the poet's experiments with the time and history of the home. As Said pointed out, the "Eleven Planets" of the title allude to the prophetic dreams of Joseph in the Bible and Qur'an. Like Joseph, the lyrical subject is implicitly "endowed with the divine power of

---

Miller of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, would have made participation in events commemorating the Nakba punishable by jail time.



prophecy”, and like Joseph, “the narrator of Darwish’s *qasida* assumes both the privileges and the dangers of seeing what others cannot.”<sup>62</sup>

Darwish’s meta-poetic interest in the signifying potentials of vision, text, and song shape the central figure of *al-Andalus*. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, medieval Spain/Andalusia served as an inspiring locus for modern European authors seeking to imagine an alternative geography and temporality for minority Jewish existence.<sup>63</sup> Darwish’s collection likewise returns to the fall of Granada, in 1492, under the Nasrid Sultan Muhammad XII (Boabdil). But Darwish does not, as he is often read, merely replace a timeless nationalist temporality with a forgotten multicultural history.<sup>64</sup> Rather, he fractures the poetic structures of representation that allow for personal and national identification.

The poems acknowledge that the seductive possibility of reversing history can conjure any displaced group’s dream of sovereignty. But an inversion, imagined as a correction, upholds the violent rule of conquest through the imaginary of return (hence, the *Re-conquista*, to say nothing of Zionism). Insofar as one’s home makes itself present in language by displacing, excluding, and thus silencing others, Darwish refocuses the search for the absent home not through a compensatory reconstitution of loss (with the possessive language of nationalism), but rather by embracing poetry’s sensory and semiotic displacements: of images with words; of the inheritance of land with the

---

<sup>62</sup> Edward Said, “On Mahmoud Darwish,” *Grand Street*, 48 (Winter 1994), 114; Said elaborated the concept in his posthumously published work *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Random House, 2006).

<sup>63</sup> Prominent examples include Lord Byron, Heinrich Heine, Walter Scott, Benjamin Disraeli, George Eliot. When Herzl first saw the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II at a ceremony in Constantinople, he likened the Sultan to “The Moorish King” of Heine’s poem, writing “The hill of Yildiz [the Ottoman palace] is perhaps the ‘mountain of the last Caliph’s sigh’” Herzl, *Diaries*, 381; *Briefe und Tachbücher*, 370. Salman Rushdie added another post-modern chapter to this lineage with *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995).

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Rahman, “Threatened Longing,” 49.

malleability of memory. In “The Last Evening in This Land”, the poet writes: “Then we’ll ask ourselves, / “*Was Andalusia / here or there? On earth, / or only in poems?*”<sup>65</sup>

The poem maps the displacement of (the Other’s) memory (*tā’rīkhukum*) into the possessive realm of (the Self’s) language: the collective speakers’ history (*tā’rīkhukuna*).<sup>66</sup> Thus the poem concludes with the impossibility of concretizing Andalusia’s location, “here or there? On earth, / or only in poems?” The speakers express the poem’s organizing paradox: possession of the home must take place in the realm of representation – the mirror, the history book, the poem – and yet representation itself acts through displacement and dispossession. This poem displaces the space of Palestine considerably: first, to a mythical version of medieval Andalusia, and then to the final question of Andalusia’s mobile location, between the world and the text.

In each of these chapters, exilic literature performs a unique form of *immanent critique*, as I alluded to earlier. Rather than ironizing the Zionist reverence for the land, for example, *Khirbet Khizeh* carefully traces what happens to the contents of such a discourse as its speaker witness the destruction of a Palestinian village. Instead of turning away from the discursive contents of the narrator’s own subjectivity in an effort to disavow it or speak for another, Yizhar *returns* to specific voices from the Jewish past, from both traditional Jewish and modern Zionist sources. Yizhar does not merely invert or replace the Zionist understanding of Jewish history. The narrator formulates his objections to the morality of the mission through Zionism’s own emphasis on the

---

<sup>65</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, *The Adam of Two Edens: Poems*, eds. Munir Akash and Daniel Moore (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 150

<sup>66</sup> The Arabic really captures the circularity in the linguistically possessive aspect of history: *sanabḥath ‘amā / kāna tā’rīkhunā ḥawal tā’rīkhukum...*

unacceptable conditions of dispossession in Jewish history, the paramount figure of whom is the European Jewish refugee from the Holocaust. Rather than merely discarding Zionism's sense of its own moral and national mission, the text points to the tragic irony that active Zionist opposition to the oppressive conditions under which Jews live – as bodies that may be displaced at any time – is inseparable from the expulsion of the Palestinians.

And in Ravikovich's poems, the relationship between Jewish and Palestinian exile is more complex than a mere analogy or substitution. Her texts open up the question of displacement – geographical, historical, national, tropological – to the poetic dislocations that already attend the representation of the Self, particularly in its bodily vulnerability. It is important to note that neither Ravikovich nor Darwish's later work offers an escape hatch from either Israeli or Palestinian national culture, nor do they merely cultivate literary counter-figures (against a hegemonic nationalist subject). It would be reductive to read Ravikovich's poems as drawing one set of reprehensible Israelis in order to sketch out the contours of a politically salutary subject, a "good Jew" for whom the Diaspora is the exclusive groundwork for subjectivity. And for Darwish, his later poetry does not simply mark an evolution out of a possessive romantic nationalism and into an embrace of Palestine as a multicultural melange. Rather, in both poets, the engagement with the textual sources of Jewish and Palestinian nationalism serve as an immanent critique of those nationalisms and the (representational) logic of territorial possession that they have adopted (namely, that the land signifies its possession by one people at one time and for all time). Such a critique must reside and emerge from *within* the language of

nationalism, which, at least in the case of Israel and Palestine, bears the seeds of the Self's exile, estrangement, and return as the Other.

### **The Visionary and the Post-Colonial Condition**

If political modernity demands collective sovereignty, aesthetic modernity posits a poet who can speak for the people – and thereby model the nationalist sense of *self-representation*, of the people “speaking” for themselves by virtue of inhabiting a sovereign polity.<sup>67</sup> To these temporalities, exile is a disruption, an aberrant condition that must be corrected by a return to sovereignty and the erasure of alternative modes of representing the relationship between Jews, Palestinians, and the land. For Yizhar, Ravikovich, and Darwish, exile must always return to – and re-emerge from within – its representation through history, sacred Scripture, song, and poetry.

While my literary sources are shaped by notions of authorship that emerge from modern nationalism, their poetics of exile draw upon the intertextual elaboration of pre-modern representations of prophetic vision in order to reconsider sovereignty with respect to exilic Jewish and Palestinian positions. My readings of these texts suggest a poetics of “home” and place that enables the authors to identify, and push beyond, the limits of nationalist political discourse. As a supplement to the historicist mode of reading championed by Said in his reading of Auerbach (and in my own reading of Herzl), the visionary-prophetic becomes a relevant and necessary addition to Comparative Literature's toolkit for the interpretation of exilic Jewish and Palestinian texts.

---

<sup>67</sup> Uri Cohen probes this notion in depth in his study of the pre-eminent Labor Zionist poet Avraham Shlonsky, who published Ravikovich's early work. See: Cohen, *Hisardut*, 175.

The visionary-prophetic mode of representation likewise offers an alternative groundwork for the immanent critique of national subjectivity outside of Europe, and outside of a purely secularist approach to sacred texts. The authors in the second half of my study *read* and *re-envision* texts in the very act of writing their own, offering a form of engagement with the experience of exile that one does not find in the work of the figures of German-Jewish exilic critique (at least those figures that have become canonical for Comparative Literature).

In each the locations covered by my study a contemporary moment, we find ourselves yet again in a highly fraught moment. Aesthetic questions about the possibility of self-representation from a standpoint of displacement remain difficult to separate from political anxieties, expressed differently by both majority/“native” and minority/“exilic”/immigrant populations, over the tenuousness of self-representation outside the conditions of sovereignty. I believe my study helps us understand more about the relationship between *representation* and 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century polemics about whether the Jews constitute a religious minority or a nation. But it also sheds light on a more universal minority question, made palpable in Europe today by post-colonial migration and flight from Muslim-majority countries. In a similar vein, the European Jewish Question and the Question of Palestine, I contend, are inseparable from the challenges of post-colonial sovereignty and immigration. We can read German-Jewish and Hebrew literature as a critical moment in the larger movement of exile between Europe and the Middle East; between Jew and Muslim; between Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab. The senses of displacement that emerge along this route – through a consideration of the visionary in literature – illuminate essential aspects of the exile’s position.

Chapter 1:  
German Mimesis in the Orient:  
Theodor Herzl and the Ottoman Empire

I. The Berlin-Baghdad Express

In Berlin, Istanbul, and Tel Aviv-Jaffa, the mutual interpenetration between three national communities appears in isolated monuments, landmarks, and through influential figures of cultural exchange. Suspended over the Bosphorus, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hayderpaşa Train Station remains an imposing reminder of the expansionist ambition that united the late Prussian and Ottoman empires. The illusory dream of a Berlin-Baghdad Express passing through Hayderpaşa was to change the global balance of power as Europeans traveled eastward, overland, to the Fertile Crescent and beyond.<sup>1</sup> Yet today, refugees stream into Istanbul from the opposite direction. Tarlabaşı Street, radiating out from Taksim Square in the city center, is home to thousands of uprooted Syrians, Iraqis, and Kurds. The buildings along Tarlabaşı Street once housed many of the city's Greek, Armenian, and Sephardi Jewish residents, until violent outbursts of Turkish nationalism led to their emigration in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Arabs and Kurds, exiled by foreign invasions, brutal dictators, and civil wars, are the latest groups to enter Istanbul's complex, contradictory history of welcoming displaced populations. Turkey's Sephardi Jews originated as refugees from the Iberian peninsula, famously welcomed in "mercy ships" dispatched by the Ottoman Sultan Beyazit II following their expulsion in the late

---

<sup>1</sup> Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition edition (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Rifat Bali, "Constantinople, Stamboul, Istanbul," in *The Silent Minority in Turkey: Turkish Jews*, trans. Paul Bessemer (Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2013), 553–58.

15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> During the pivotal decades of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Istanbul played host to modern formations of Jewish exile. The city served as a formative passageway in the lives of German-speaking Jewish savants, like Theodor Herzl, Erich Auerbach, and Leo Spitzer, and Eastern European-born Zionists, like David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi.

A network of displacement – shared by allegedly distinct modes of political affiliation – directs us toward the troubled history beneath modern Germany, Turkey, and Israel with respect to *the minority condition*. I define this as an identity that avowedly secular regimes have paradoxically coded through religious affiliation; a population designated not by its objective size, but by the political impetus to ensure a civil “majority” through its removal, whether in war, ethnic cleansing, or genocide. Such a process has reconstituted the meaning of religious and ethnic existence for populations in many modern nation-states, including those mentioned above. And yet this outward motion continually undermines its purpose, insofar as each of these nations inescapably reproduces itself as a destination for immigrants and refugees, bringing within those who allegedly “belong elsewhere.” I will focus on two moments that have become associated with canonical figures, defining the itineraries of German-Jewish cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and European Jewish territorialism, on the other. Centered in Istanbul, these moments reverberate all the way to contemporary Berlin and Tel Aviv-Jaffa, exposing the ways exile and displacement inhere in the very formation of the national spaces to which these three cities are imagined to belong.

---

<sup>3</sup> Halil İnalcık, “Foundations of Ottoman-Jewish Cooperation,” in *Jews, Turks, and Ottomans: A Shared History, Fifteenth Through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 3–14.

The first “moment” begins with the five separate trips Theodor Herzl took to Constantinople between 1896-1902, as he worked to convince Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamid II and his ally, Kaiser Wilhelm II, to sanction massive European Jewish immigration to Palestine under joint Ottoman-Prussian sponsorship. Herzl insisted that a German cultural influence could rehabilitate imperial Ottoman *and* exilic Jewish life, both of which, he believed, were gravely endangered.<sup>4</sup> After Herzl’s death, his German-Jewish colleagues continued to promote the Ottomanization of the Zionist movement, a trend that spread among the new Zionist immigrants to Palestine. This “moment” reached its apotheosis in World War I: at its start, David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi came to Istanbul to learn Turkish law and pursue political careers in the Ottoman government. Exiled from Palestine, the pair spent the war attempting to raise a foreign Jewish legion to fight for the Ottomans.<sup>5</sup>

Herzl and Ben-Gurion are conventionally imagined as the paragons of statist, territorialist solutions to the European Jewish Question. Yet their activities in Constantinople/Istanbul reveal how the cosmopolitan dimensions of German and Turkish imperialism were formative to the development of Jewish national culture in Palestine. I would emphasize that their Zionist endeavors in the Turkish capital were predicated on the potentially beneficial qualities of *European Jewish mobility* – indeed, displacement – within the cultural spaces of these empires. It is well known that German forms of imperialism and cosmopolitanism shaped the modern Turkish state, the urban landscape

---

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism 1897-1918* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).



of Istanbul, and the representation of both in cultural criticism.<sup>6</sup> And yet these influences are inconceivable without an element of Jewish displacement. The second “moment” of my project turns toward Istanbul during a canonical period in the emergence of Comparative Literature as a discipline, when German-Jewish refugees such as Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach found refuge in the Turkish capital during the Nazi Holocaust. Scholars have read this German-Jewish moment in Istanbul as a prototype for the work of comparativism. The legacy of Auerbach’s European cosmopolitanism – one that emphasizes mobile figures of German-Jewish exile – has been used to ground a range of critical-intellectual positions, especially as an antidote to territorial nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

In Auerbach’s context, as in Herzl’s, Istanbul played host to assimilated German-Jews who sought to preserve the cosmopolitan promise of Europe while inhabiting a German-oriented outpost in the Levant. Auerbach’s project, in this sense, is not so different from Herzl’s: to create a monument to European civilization from a point of dislocation in Asia.<sup>8</sup> Both aimed to salvage the Occident’s endangered cosmopolitan heritage by proving its worth from the Orient. Thus I suggest tracing the German-Jewish intellectual origins of Comparative Literature *and* the formation of Jewish national culture in Palestine through Istanbul, emphasizing the Turkish dimension of the cultural displacements linking Europe, Asia, and Jewish exile. Many scholars presume a perfect

---

<sup>6</sup> Emily Apter, “Global *Translatio*: The ‘Invention’ of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933,” *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 253–81. Kader Konuk, *East West Mimesis: Auerbach in Turkey* (Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Aamir R. Mufti, “Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture,” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 1 (1998): 95–125, specifically 104-105. Mufti discusses a number of Said’s texts, of which the most relevant for my purposes include: Edward W. Said, “Introduction: Secular Criticism,” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Harvard University Press, 1983), 1–30; Edward W. Said, “Reflections on Exile,” *Granta*, no. 13 (August 1984), 137-149; Edward W. Said, “Erich Auerbach, Critic of the Earthly World,” *Boundary 2* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 11-34.

<sup>8</sup> Said writes that “the specific circumstances of [Auerbach’s] exile enabled a concrete critical recovery of Europe” (*World, Text, Critic* 16). I will discuss the parallels to Herzl and German Zionism below.

opposition between European Jewish nationalists, like Herzl and Ben-Gurion, and Jewish cosmopolitans, like Spitzer and Auerbach. Both pairs are imagined, either heroically or tragically, as figures that mark the termination of an “exilic” insider-outsider Jewish subject position *within* Europe.<sup>9</sup> By focusing on the Ottoman-Turkish context, my study may reveal a deeper interrelationship between the late imperial cosmopolitanism that underwrites both Zionism’s territorial, political project and Comparative Literature’s deterritorialized, cultural project.

Turkey, like Palestine, is located “opposite” Europe, though both places were also Orientalist obsessions *within* Europe. Turkey and Palestine acquired significance in European imperial politics precisely because they were imagined to “belong,” in a profound sense, to the (Christian) heritage of European civilization.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, these spaces were perhaps the geographic inverse of the Jewish people, who were within the European space in every sense, and yet imagined as outsiders. The Nazi genocide literalized this imaginary in the Holocaust, while also displacing remnants of European Jewish life into Istanbul and Tel Aviv-Jaffa. I contend that the Jewish exilic position, as the insider-outsider of Europe, continues to inhere in both settings, an inextricable element of the otherwise majoritarian nation-states (Turkey and Israel) that arose through the displacement of yet other minority populations. The concentration of expatriate Turks, Israeli Jews, and Palestinians in Berlin suggests further inquiry into the minority and refugee questions that currently resound in Germany and across Europe.

---

<sup>9</sup> Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2007), 5-10.

<sup>10</sup> Said, *World, Text, Critic*, 6-14.

## II. Comparatists in Istanbul

Beginning in the 1990s, Emily Apter and Aamir Mufti began to refocus critical attention on a cohort of German-speaking Jewish literary scholars who fled to Istanbul during the Nazi years, most prominently Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach. Since Apter's 1994 chapter in Charles Bernheimer's *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*,<sup>11</sup> her work has engaged with the relationship between the discipline's contemporary practice and the legacy of Spitzer and Auerbach's achievements in Turkish exile. Meanwhile, with "Auerbach in Istanbul," Mufti helped to reorient Auerbach's reception by illustrating the philologist's outsized, and overlooked, influence on Edward Said's thinking. These interventions have helped to position the German-Jewish moment in Istanbul as a privileged site for the elaboration of important theoretical paradigms, including secular criticism, Orientalism, world literature, translation studies, and cosmopolitanism, while turning the terms of Auerbach's inquiries (*mimesis*, *figura*, and *weltliteratur*) into fields of study.<sup>12</sup> Other recent scholars have focused on historicizing the political, professional, and discursive conditions that surrounded Auerbach, and to a lesser extent his colleagues, while in exile from Nazi Germany. James Porter, followed by Weinstein and Zakai, have argued that the broader reception of Auerbach's philology does not sufficiently attend to a Jewish dimension that positions itself against Nazi

---

<sup>11</sup> This collection featured position papers in response to the American Comparative Literature Association's 1993 report "Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century", the third of five such decennial reports on "the State of the Discipline": <http://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/about>.

<sup>12</sup> The bibliography is extensive. Beyond the above sources from Apter, Konuk, and Mufti, see also: David Damrosch, "Auerbach in Exile," *Comparative Literature* 47, no. 2 (1995): 97–117; Martin Vialon, "The Scars of Exile: Paralipomena Concerning the Relationship between History, Literature and Politics - Demonstrated in the Examples of Erich Auerbach, Traugott Fuchs and Their Circle in Istanbul," *Yeditepe'de Felsefe* 2 (2003): 191–246; Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) and *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, (Verso, 2013), 193–227; Aamir Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*, (Harvard University Press, 2016), 203–242.

ideology and “Aryan” scholarship in the Third Reich.<sup>13</sup> In *East West Mimesis*, Kader Konuk worked through considerable archival material to better foreground the Turkish contexts – political, intellectual, and institutional – in which Auerbach’s magisterial writings took shape. These inquiries hold conceptual stakes far in excess of biographical study. Auerbach’s exilic state in Istanbul – along with the generation of German-Jewish scholars which he has come to exemplify – has assumed a new centrality for comparative literature.<sup>14</sup> In the past decade, U.S.-based scholars have returned to Istanbul, both physically and intellectually, to hold forth on the very scope of Comparative Literature within the long shadow cast by the German-Jewish scholars’ poignant and seemingly unlikely exile.<sup>15</sup> Contemporary scholars have recharged Auerbach’s terms with renewed urgency, as tools for the discipline to critique the post-9/11 era’s polarities – secularism and religion; nationalism and exile; Eurocentrism and post-colonialism; the “Judeo-Christian” West and the “Islamic” East.

The auspicious cultural achievements of German-Jewish intellectuals in exile have been used to sacralize a number of paradigms that, while held to be distinct by their partisans, all serve to reinforce notions of Comparative Literature as a practice of heroic opposition to the narrow chauvinisms of imperialism and nationalism.<sup>16</sup> In the figure of a

---

<sup>13</sup> James I. Porter, “Erich Auerbach and the Judaizing of Philology,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (2008): 115–47; Avihu Zakai and David Weinstein, “Erich Auerbach and His ‘Figura’: An Apology for the Old Testament in an Age of Aryan Philology,” *Religions* 3, no. 4 (2012): 320–38.

<sup>14</sup> Mufti, *Forget English*, 204–206.

<sup>15</sup> In December, 2008, Columbia University organized a conference in Istanbul that featured talks by Apter, Mufti, Damrosch, as well as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Bruce Robbins, Orhan Pamuk, and others. Many of these talks served as the basis for the critical texts discussed in this article. See: Apter, *Against World Literature*, 1–2, 218–219. The Institute for World Literature, a project spearheaded by Damrosch through Harvard University, hosted its second annual conference in Istanbul, at Bilgi University, in the summer of 2012. Konuk, Mufti, Robbins, and Pamuk were again among the guest speakers (I was a participant, as well): <http://iwl.fas.harvard.edu/pages/2012-istanbul>.

<sup>16</sup> “The German Jewish critic in (‘Oriental’) exile becomes for Said the paradigmatic figure for modern criticism, an object lesson in what it means to have a critical consciousness” (Mufti, “Auerbach in

worldly *Mitteleuropean* Jew, displaced to an Oriental cosmopolis that was also an origin point of Europe's classical tradition, contemporary academics continue to rediscover the forerunner of world literature, the paragon of exilic Jewishness, and the patron of an historicism that de-transcendentalizes the European canon. These assessments and their implications could be enriched, however, by situating the very possibility of Auerbach in Istanbul within the political programs and cultural imaginaries that immediately preceded, and in fact enabled, the German-Jewish scholars' remarkable refuge in Istanbul.

If we push back only a generation earlier, we might well ask what political and cultural groundwork existed such that, of all the modernizing projects on Europe's periphery, it would be Kemalist Turkey that would turn to, of all people, German-Jewish scholars? Shapiro argued that Auerbach's Jewishness, in the context of Nazi-era cultural politics, informed his philological practice. But the larger story of German-Jewish assimilation<sup>17</sup> has not been brought into conversation with the historical relationship between the Prussian and Ottoman empires, which provided the necessary conditions for Turkey's subsequent invitation to German-Jewish scholars. I will argue that this invitation was, in fact, a "late" moment in a series of intersections between Germany, Turkey, and European Jews.

During the first decades of Auerbach's life, the Prussian-Ottoman alliance grew closer, culminating in the first World War.<sup>18</sup> Wounded in the fighting, the young

---

Istanbul," 104). Apter has called this "Mining the humanist tradition for a utopian politics", *Translation Zone*, 81. On Auerbach's own assessment, see: Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 131-2.

<sup>17</sup> The bibliography here is truly massive. I'm thinking of the issues discussed in Hannah Arendt, "Introduction: Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 1-58.

<sup>18</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 1-3, 7-53.

Auerbach received a medal from the Prussian government.<sup>19</sup> Though the war brought an end to both empires, we might ask what ways of thinking about modernity made it possible for one of the successor states of that alliance to force its Jews *out* of Europe at precisely the moment that the other successor state welcomed them *into* its national space, as part of its own Europeanization? Like most of his fellow scholar-exiles in Turkey, Auerbach was the product of a *fin de siècle* Prussian culture whose relationship with the Ottoman Empire provided the foreground for assimilated European Jews to undertake a variety of projects within a German-speaking enclave in “the Orient.”<sup>20</sup> Yet a number of unchallenged antinomies have artificially severed the legacy of German-Jewish exile in Turkey from its immediate antecedents.<sup>21</sup>

Initially a fringe figure in Prussian-Ottoman diplomacy, though well-known as a journalist and playwright, Theodor Herzl emerges as one of the most provocative personalities in this relationship. Herzl’s impact seemed improbable until after his own death and the demise of the Central Powers. Yet his activities are especially striking from the vantage point of contemporary scholarship’s investment in the later moment of German-Jewish displacement in Turkey. On the surface, it is easy to dismiss Herzl as the antithesis of Auerbach. Much like his friend Walter Benjamin, part of Auerbach’s allure to postwar comparatists, I suggest, stems from his very resistance to Zionism, the movement Herzl is credited with launching onto the global stage. Since his own lifetime, Herzl has been attacked for the Eurocentric (or German-centric) bent of his vision for

---

<sup>19</sup> Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-9.

<sup>21</sup> I would gesture here to Stein’s work on extraterritoriality, which considers “the importance of considering the history of European citizenship in dialogue with Ottoman, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern history.” See: Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 10.

Jewish revival.<sup>22</sup> In *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said critiqued Herzl's Eurocentrism within the framework of *Orientalism*.<sup>23</sup> And though Auerbach's milieu and education was similar to Herzl's,<sup>24</sup> the philologist was largely recuperated from charges of Eurocentrism by Said, who recast the "Prussian of Jewish faith"<sup>25</sup> as a model of exilic, minority affiliation with the Western canon, a conception based on Auerbach's time in Istanbul. Auerbach's persecution by Nazi Germany, his oft-cited (if, at the time, well concealed) critique of Kemalist modernization of Turkey, and his relative silence on Zionism<sup>26</sup> grant him the ideal resume to serve as an exemplum of the deterritorialized Jewish intellectual performing an instructive critique of Western-oriented modernization. As American humanists soured on the promises of nationalism during the post-colonial era (especially the nationalisms of peoples, such European Jews and Turks, who were not formally colonized), "Said's Auerbach" became "a model of minority subjectivity running counter to identity politics."<sup>27</sup> Thus Auerbach's legacy appears to elude the romantic myths (or "legends"<sup>28</sup>) of territorial nationalism, and as such, functions as the inverse of Herzl's German-oriented "outpost of civilization"<sup>29</sup> in the Eastern

---

<sup>22</sup> Max Nordau, *Die Welt*, 13 March, 1903. Cited in Christoph Schulte, "Herzl and Nordau as Journalists and Littérateurs," in *Theodor Herzl: Visionary of the Jewish State*, ed. Gideon Shimoni et al. (New York: Herzl Press, 1999), 78–9.

<sup>23</sup> Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, Reissue edition (New York: Vintage, 1992), 70-3.

<sup>24</sup> Kornberg discusses a shared cultural configuration among German-speaking Jews across Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire: Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism*, 1st edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). For another critical view, see: Yfaat Weiss, "Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism," *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no. 1 (2004): 93–117, specifically 98.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Said, "Erich Auerbach," 9.

<sup>26</sup> Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 25, 95-7.

<sup>27</sup> Apter, *Translation Zone*, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask, 50 anniversary edition (Princeton University Press, 2003), 19-20. I'm relying here on Mufti's reading in *Forget English*, 230-31.

<sup>29</sup> Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, Revised edition (New York: Dover Publications, 1989), 96.

Mediterranean, a baldly colonialist project wedded to the presumed supremacy of the modern West.

Said's comments on Herzl and Zionism's origins was an essential contribution, permanently changing the contours of Zionist historiography. It encouraged critics to historicize the conditions of emergence behind Zionist discourses, as Said's previous works had done for imperialism at large. Said likely over-emphasized Herzl's British, rather than German-Prussian, political genealogy.<sup>30</sup> But I believe the animating force of Said's intervention was concerned more with the methodology of criticism than the composition of identity. "For Said," Mufti argues, "minority *is* criticism, a fact that is obfuscated [when] minorities succumb to the 'temptations' of 'orientalism.'" <sup>31</sup> By contrast, Said offers "a critique of minority separatism, the mode of political and cultural behavior that corresponds to the minority's desire to become a majority", which he identifies with nationalism. As a methodological alternative to this nationalist mode, Said offers Auerbach's *historicism*, especially as adopted from a position of *exile*. Auerbach's masterpiece, *Mimesis*, "traces the growth of historicism, a multiperspectival, dynamic, and holistic way of representing reality and history."<sup>32</sup> And since it would contravene historicism not to situate the scene of its enactment, Said underscores *Mimesis*' composition in Istanbul, concluding that the work

is not ... only a massive reaffirmation of the Western cultural tradition,  
but also a work built upon a critically important alienation from it, a work  
whose conditions and circumstances of existence are *not immediately*

---

<sup>30</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 341.

<sup>31</sup> Mufti, "Auerbach in Istanbul," 113. Mainstream Zionism obviously succumbed to this temptation.

<sup>32</sup> Said, "Erich Auerbach," 30.



*derived* from the culture it describes ... but built rather on an agonizing distance from it.<sup>33</sup>

This is precisely the insight that motivates my reading of Herzl and the German-Jewish generation before Auerbach. The Prussian-Ottoman-Zionist moment in Constantinople has been dwarfed by the enormous and catastrophic events that followed (from the world wars to Palestine's partition). These events have led many to read Herzl through a retrospective, teleological lens that quickly becomes ahistorical or, to provocatively apply Mufti's sense of Said, "orientalist." Such readings substitute Said's vital insight with a totalizing approach, flattening Herzl's historical particularity into a transhistorical sameness with German (or simply, "European") imperialism, nationalism, and racialism.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, for the Palestinians, the historical outcomes of Israeli state Zionism fit squarely within those categories. But much like Said's contrapuntal use of "not ... *only*" to describe the relation between *Mimesis* and "the Western cultural tradition," and even as we must view Herzl's writings as situated within (a "reaffirmation of Western") imperialism, I will argue that they are "not only" that. Herzl's Zionist project was simultaneously "built upon a critically important alienation" from the European discourses it would seek to reproduce, including German nationalism. The Jewish minority position, its mobility and displacement, indeed, *exile*, was an irreducible feature of Herzl's project.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., "World, Text, Critic," 8, emphasis mine.

<sup>34</sup> Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 29; Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London ; New York: Zed Books, 2012), 20.

<sup>35</sup> This notion was first theorized by Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Galut mi-tokh ribonut," *Theoria u-viqoret* 4 (1993) 23-55 and *Theoria u-viqoret* 5 (1994) 113-32. An abridged English translation appears in: Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Exile within Sovereignty: Critique of the 'Negation of Exile' in Israeli Culture," in *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept*, ed. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr (Columbia University Press, 2017), 393-420.

At his death, Herzl's achievements could not be located in the rudderless political movement he left behind, nor in a nation-state that took shape four decades later. They were primarily to be found in two texts – *The Jewish State* (1896) and *Altneuland* (1902). Reading Herzl with historicist methods – precisely in Auerbach's sense – reveals that Herzl utilized these very same methods to understand the Jewish Question.<sup>36</sup> For that reason, Saidian tools typically deployed to critique Jewish nationalism (and nationalism itself) appear as part of the historical formation of this national movement – and this, too, is Saidian.<sup>37</sup> An expanded, comparative inquiry into the German and Ottoman contexts that underpin Zionism's formation – as a modality of Jewish worldliness, exile, and Orientalism – suggests an “immanent critique”<sup>38</sup> of Zionism's minoritization of the Palestinians, and of Israel's (ever escalating) intolerance toward minorities and refugees in a variety of “exilic” conditions.

By regrounding the *fin de siècle* Zionist “moment” in Constantinople as an extended prelude to German-Turkish-Jewish relations in the 1930s, we can better understand the political imaginaries regarding minorities, displacement, and history that inform Auerbach's scholarly project – and many of our own. Reading the opening chapter of *Mimesis*, with its framing of an “*antagonism* rather than synthesis” between the Homeric/Hellenic and Biblical/Hebraic traditions, Mufti elaborates upon Auerbach's differentiation between

---

<sup>36</sup> Nor were Herzl or Auerbach singular in this regard. Both worked from an existing intellectual tradition in German, and German-Jewish, thought. See: David Myers, \*\*

<sup>37</sup> Said, “Reflections on Exile,” 140.

<sup>38</sup> Here I am extending Mufti's use of the term in his work on “the Jewish intellectual attachment to—and, as I shall argue, immanent critique of—the Enlightenment and its legacies”, (*Enlightenment in the Colony*, 8).

“legend” and “history” as modes of writings—the latter’s sutured and “difficult” composition across “contradictory motives in each individual,” the “hesitation and groping on the part of groups,” and “psychological and factual cross-purposes” as against the former’s “smoothly” stretched surface from which “all cross-currents, all friction, all that is casual, secondary to the main events and themes, everything unresolved, truncated, and uncertain, which confuses the clear progress of the action and the simple orientation of the actors has [*sic*] disappeared.”<sup>39</sup>

Mufti’s notion of antagonism helps him elucidate Auerbach’s references to Nazi Germany (which “represents the victory of ‘legend’ over ‘history’”). I will suggest that the sense of “history” adumbrated above is necessary for properly situating Herzl, and for understanding the relationship between Herzl’s senses of *Weltliteratur* and German-Jewish exile in the Orient. Mufti wrote that “For Auerbach, the very condition of possibility of the idea of *Weltliteratur* is historicism”;<sup>40</sup> I will argue that this also applies to Herzl’s Zionism, which has a profound relationship to *Weltliteratur*.

Between 1895 and his death in 1904, Herzl produced a wide-ranging corpus of literature: fiction, theater, journalism, diaries, and political manifestos, much of which circulated explicitly as “world literature.”<sup>41</sup> Herzl’s writings offer a window onto a larger world of movement between West and East that was produced by the indeterminacy of the Jewish subject position. Below, I will offer close readings of Herzl’s attempts to account for the relationships between territorial belonging and exile/displacement, which

---

<sup>39</sup> Mufti, *Forget English*, 230-1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>41</sup> See below: Theodor Herzl, *Old New Land*, trans. Lotta Levensohn (Princeton: Block Publishing, 2000); Shlomo Avineri, *Herzl’s Vision: Theodor Herzl and the Foundation of the Jewish State*, trans. Haim Watzman (Katonah, NY: Blue Bridge, 2014).

were mediated by his senses of aesthetics and politics. Due to Herzl's peripatetic lifestyle, and the nature of the diary form, I believe it unwise to pluck excerpts from the diaries in order to reconstruct a singular ideological thrust, though many have done so before. Instead, my approach is inspired by Konuk's adoption of Auerbach's methods to read the philologist's larger history, not as "a history of its origins" but rather "an attempt to read cultural history with literary critical tools."<sup>42</sup> "Mimesis" itself becomes a key term in my analysis of Herzl's preoccupations, which, for good reason, resemble Auerbach's: "the idea of Europe, concepts of history, and the function of mimesis within processes of cultural and political reform" insofar as "concepts of history and practices of representation are neither incidental to politics nor inseparable from each other."<sup>43</sup>

In exploiting the supra-national (or cosmopolitan) dimensions of this late imperial moment, Herzl's forays in Constantinople offered worldly interventions into the same questions that Auerbach (and subsequently, Auerbach scholars) would take up in the city in the decades to come: How German are the Jews? How Jewish is German culture – or European civilization? What syntheses between the particular and the universal are made available by the displacement of European Jews to Asia? What role does (Jewish) exile play in the consolidation of modern national culture, and, for that matter, in the cosmopolitan culture of world literature? And finally, how do political and literary cultures converge through *mimicry* and *mimesis*?

Around the turn of the century, Herzl's extensive, mostly failed efforts to insert the Jewish Question into Turkish-German relations hold surprising implications for our understanding of the territorial nationalisms that came to the fore in Germany, Turkey,

---

<sup>42</sup> Konuk, *East-West Mimesis*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 11.

and Palestine after World War I. Extending my analysis from Herzl's death to the collapse of the Ottoman and Prussian states, I will consider how their distinctive forms of imperialism and cosmopolitanism shaped modalities of Jewish displacement. I will argue further that German Orientalism not only guided the institutional and political relationships between states and empires, but also shaped the subject position of highly cultured central European Jews, from Herzl to Auerbach, who found their way to the Orient, from the shores of the Bosphorus down to the port of Jaffa.

### III. Herzl, the Kaiser, and the Sultan

After making little diplomatic headway during his first visit to Constantinople, in 1896, Herzl began lobbying for a personal audience with Kaiser Wilhelm II, the Ottomans' most influential ally. In the fall of 1898, Herzl embarked on a breakneck series of public speeches and secret meetings that took him, without pause, from Vienna to Amsterdam, the Hague, London, Berlin, Brandenburg, and then to Constantinople.<sup>44</sup> On October 18, at a hotel in the Pera quarter, he received a letter summoning him to meet Germany's Emperor at the secluded Yıldız Palace, the official residence of Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamid II. It would be one of the most improbable moments of Herzl's dramatic career. A Budapest-born subject of the Habsburg Empire, Herzl had no legal status in Wilhelm's newly unified Germany or in Abdul-Hamid's empire. Adding to the intrigue, the meeting was to take place without the Sultan's knowledge, just hours before the emperors were to share an important state dinner. Herzl's ability to obtain this audience, where he could press his case about the benefits of displacing European Jews to

---

<sup>44</sup> Theodor Herzl, *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, trans. Marvin Lowenthal, IV vols. (The Dial Press, 1956), 665-710.

Ottoman Palestine, can only be understood in light of the convergence of German and Ottoman imperial concerns in the *fin de siècle*.

For a century, the other European powers had been pushing the Ottoman state ever closer to economic and territorial disintegration.<sup>45</sup> In contrast with the territorial conquest pursued by imperial Britain, France, and Russia, German imperialists wagered that modernizing Ottoman Turkey offered them a competitive advantage. In the Great Game, Germany's *Drang nach Osten* policy invested in rehabilitating "the Sick Man of Europe" through military support, infrastructure building, and cultural exchange. "After all," Kaiser Wilhelm confided to Herzl at Yıldız, "I am the only one who still sticks by the Sultan".<sup>46</sup>

Herzl's audience in Constantinople, like many of Kaiser Wilhelm's eccentric diplomatic moves, was enabled by the latter's distinctly German Orientalism. After sidelining Bismarck, who famously remarked that "the whole Orient" was "not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier",<sup>47</sup> the young Kaiser turned to personalities who imagined the eastward expansion of Europe as the promotion of Germanness across the Islamic world. Wilhelm's personal fervor for all things Ottoman, including Islam,<sup>48</sup> was

---

<sup>45</sup> McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 1-12, 35-8, 54-81. Between 1830-1885, the Ottomans lost complete control of Algeria (to France, 1830), Greece (1832), Crimea (to Russia, 1853), Romania (1862), Cyprus (to Britain) and Serbia (following the Russo-Turkish Wars of 1877-1878), and Tunisia (to France, 1882). Bulgaria and Bosnia also achieved partial autonomy after 1878. During the 1830s, Egypt's Ottoman wāli Muhammad Ali achieved autonomy across the Levant, the Hejaz, and southern Anatolia. His great-grandson, Khedive Tewfik Pasha, effectively surrendered Egypt, still nominally an Ottoman province, to British control in 1882. European-support for non-Turkish and non-Muslim separatism and nationalism throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century shaped the Ottoman state's relationship with Zionism, both in its ideology and institutional forms; see: Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism 1897-1918*, 32-188.

<sup>46</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 733.

<sup>47</sup> McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 8; Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 7-31. During his 1898 tour of the region, "Wilhelm laid a wreath on the tomb of the great Muslim warrior Saladin" in Damascus, and made public statements that gave rise to rumors he had converted to Islam. There were widespread rumors that the Kaiser converted to Islam.

reinforced by a generation of German Orientalists – soldiers, diplomats, engineers, scholars, and investors. These men built upon the vision of General Helmuth von Moltke, the long-serving Prussian chief of staff (and polymath), who had helped modernize the Ottoman army in the 1830s. Fluent in Turkish, von Moltke believed that Germany must “seize the opportunity of extending her civilization ... energy and industry ... beyond the German frontier.”<sup>49</sup> He did not conceive of Jewish settlement, but, as Friedman observes, he did propose “the foundation of a German principality in Palestine [which] fitted into his scheme of *Mittleuropa* and of German expansion towards the highlands of Anatolia and Mesopotamia.”<sup>50</sup> Kaiser Wilhelm hoped that his second state visit to Turkey, in 1898, would advance this vision by securing Germany an exclusive concession to build a railroad through Ottoman territory (from Constantinople to Basra in the Persian Gulf). This “Berlin-Baghdad Express,” in its spectacular ambition and ultimate failure, offers a representative figure of this moment in German-Turkish relations.<sup>51</sup> In the Baghdad railway, McMeekin argues, “the German Emperor’s *Weltpolitik* first took concrete form, seeking to unite East and West, Asia and Europe, and put imperial Germany on the path to world power ... in the very cradle of Western civilization”.<sup>52</sup>

Meeting the Kaiser at the height of these negotiations, Herzl recognized the centrality of the proposed railway to Germany’s self-interests. Herzl pitched his scheme for Jewish immigration as part of the Kaiser’s larger vision of *Drang nach Osten*, which included re-stabilizing his Ottoman ally. Herzl had spent two years working toward

---

<sup>49</sup> Qtd. in Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> See: McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 37-53.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

meeting the Kaiser, first meeting with Wilhelm's uncle, Grand Duke Frederick of Baden. Herzl had expounded to him upon

“the advantages which the project would bring to the Orient ... we could contribute a great deal toward the preservation of Turkey... Next I expatiated on the general advantages of the Jewish State for Europe. We would restore to health the plague-spot of the Orient. We would build railroads into Asia—the highway of the civilized peoples. And this highway would then not be in the hands of any one Great Power.”<sup>53</sup>

In 1898, Kaiser Wilhelm prepared a grand voyage to Turkey, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt to build good will for the Berlin-Baghdad railroad negotiations. Herzl once more wrote the Grand Duke: “German policy has taken an Eastern course, and there is something symbolic about the Kaiser's Palestine journey in more than one sense”.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Wilhelm timed his Oriental tour to coincide with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Napoleon's conquest of Egypt.<sup>55</sup> But where Napoleon's invasion came to symbolize a civilizational opposition between liberal European empires and the despotic Ottoman Levant, the Kaiser's 1898 visit would herald integration between Turkey and a rising European power.

In September, 1898, in a letter to his uncle, the Kaiser agreed to meet Herzl, while enumerating the potential benefits of Jewish migration for German foreign policy:

---

<sup>53</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 338-9.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 639.

<sup>55</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 11-12. During Napoleon's invasion, he “issued a proclamation to Asiatic and African Jews promising ‘to give them the Holy Land’ if they came over to his side”, but the Ottoman Jews remained loyal. During Napoleon's siege of Acre, Ahmad al-Jezzar, the Wali of Damascus and Sidon, appointed his Jewish finance minister, Chaim Farhi, to defend the city, which he did successfully. Despite a notorious reputation, al-Jezzar was one of many Ottoman governors in Palestine who welcomed Jewish immigrants (including one “group of 300 Russian Hassidim”) and encouraged them to settle in cities such as Safed. See: Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism*, 26-27.



the settlement of the Holy Land by the wealthy and industrious people of Israel may do much to revive and develop Asia Minor... In this way the disagreeable Eastern question would be imperceptibly separated from the Mediterranean... The Turk will recover, getting his money without borrowing, and will be able to build his own highways and railways without foreign companies and then it would not be so easy to dismember Turkey.<sup>56</sup>

Days later, the German foreign minister (and later Chancellor) Bernhard von Bülow summoned Herzl to Berlin. Herzl considered his options in his diary: “the suzerainty of the Porte and the protectorate of Germany would certainly be sufficient legal pillars. The only question is whether it should be ‘and’ or ‘or,’ suzerainty and/or protectorate?”<sup>57</sup> The Kaiser, however, would not meet Herzl in Berlin, inviting him instead to a public audience in Jerusalem during his upcoming Oriental tour. Preferring to meet first in private, Herzl was directed to come to Constantinople and wait.

In Turkey, the Kaiser was receptive to Herzl’s program for Jewish immigration to Palestine, and agreed to take the matter up with the Sultan at a state dinner that evening.<sup>58</sup> Herzl was left to compose a draft of the remarks he would then give days later, at a public ceremony in Jerusalem. Herzl wrote the speech overnight – the last passenger ship that could get him to Palestine before the Kaiser departed early the next morning (Herzl

---

<sup>56</sup> qtd. in Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism*, 66.

<sup>57</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 693.

<sup>58</sup> Wilhelm later affirmed Herzl’s account: Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism*, 75.

literally ran on board as it pulled up anchor).<sup>59</sup> As the ship heaved across the Sea of Marmara, Herzl wrote down his recollections.

Kaiser: Just tell me in a word what I am to ask of the Sultan.”

“A *Chartered Company*<sup>60</sup>—under German protection.”

“Good! A Chartered Company!”

While his three deputies took in the classical sites in Athens, Herzl remained out at sea, continuing to record his reminiscences:

“Most of the time the Kaiser looked at me full in the face. Only when I spoke of the new overland route to Asia—Mediterranean, Persian Gulf—did he stare into space as though lost in thought, and the thoughtful expression on his fine, serious face revealed to me that I had fully gripped him.”<sup>61</sup>

In Palestine, Herzl arranged an impromptu photo opportunity with the Kaiser in front of a Rothschild-sponsored Jewish settlement, a stick in the eye of its anti-Zionist patron. Then in Jerusalem, Herzl gave his address (with von Bülow’s redactions), which I will discuss below. Interestingly, despite the elaborately detailed proposals he had articulated since the publication of *The Jewish State*, Herzl’s five-day visit to Palestine involved no assessment of the feasibility of his colonization plans. His only voyage to the Holy Land was entirely the outcome of Prussian considerations. And by that measure, the trip was a failure.

---

<sup>59</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 717-18. Ironically, he boarded a Russian vessel named *Imperator Nicholas II*. The Czar was the scourge of Jews and Ottomans alike. <sup>59</sup>

<sup>60</sup> "Chartered company" is written in English in Herzl's diary. Ibid., 733-4.

<sup>61</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 737.

Hours after Herzl's secret visit to the Yıldız Palace, the Kaiser, as promised, attempted to win the Sultan's support for a Prussian-backed charter for Jewish settlement in Palestine. Wilhelm insisted that "the Zionists 'were not dangerous to Turkey, but everywhere the Jews are a nuisance', of whom one 'should like to get rid'"<sup>62</sup> Abdul-Hamid replied, "I myself am very happy with my Jewish subjects."<sup>63</sup> These remarks almost too perfectly exemplify the fraught dimensions that attended the place – or displacement – of Jewish subjects between Europe and the Orient. I will return to the sultan's response below. But first we must examine the Kaiser's innuendo. The remarks were anti-Semitic, but it would be reductive to insist that anti-Semitism provided Wilhelm's sole motivation for entertaining Herzl's proposal. The German emperor's comments reflect a greater ambivalence that defined Jewish-Germanness in the period. In the central European empires, German-speaking Jews' insider-outsider position created a dialectical tension that was also evident in Herzl's formation.

#### IV. Germanizing Jews

*"Through Zionism it will again become possible for Jews to love this Germany, to which our hearts have been attached despite everything!"<sup>64</sup>*

*–Herzl, October 8, 1898*

In 1890s Europe, as Friedman notes, "the overwhelming majority of Jews had closer links with German culture than with any other; the leadership of the Zionist

---

<sup>62</sup> Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism 1897-1918*, 77.

<sup>63</sup> Amos Elon, *Herzl*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1975), 301.

<sup>64</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 694-5.

movement was in German hands; German was also the official language of their Congress.”<sup>65</sup> Given the broad implications of Herzl’s Zionism on the history of Jewish displacement, it is critically important to historicize the imperial German contexts out of which Herzl developed this movement. Such work will also enrich our understanding of the contexts from which 20<sup>th</sup> century German-Jewish intellectuals such as Auerbach, Adorno, and Arendt – who have shaped our own conceptions of exile – emerged. The contradictory and dialectical tensions of German-Jewish identity shaped Herzl’s engagement with both Prussian imperialism and Orientalism.

Herzl’s investments in the *Germanness* of the Zionist solution dovetailed with the Jews’ traditional roles as Germanizing intermediaries between central Europe and the Continent’s eastern peripheries.<sup>66</sup> In a sense, Herzl extended the radius of this pre-modern position to the Ottoman Levant, in line with Prussia’s contemporary alliance. “Actually it is an element of *German* culture that would come to the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean with the Jews” Herzl wrote to Count Philipp zu Eulenberg, Prussia’s pro-Ottoman ambassador in Vienna.<sup>67</sup> Wilhelm took this idea even further. Patriotic German Jews could afford to support Zionist immigration to Palestine under his sponsorship because, as the Kaiser insisted, “they would not really be leaving Germany.”<sup>68</sup>

The emperor’s claim was at once an affirmation of the Jews’ *Germanness*, and a radical departure from the underpinnings of German-Jewish assimilation. The Reform movement, whose temple in Budapest stood next door to Herzl’s childhood home, had

---

<sup>65</sup> Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism*, 61.

<sup>66</sup> Kornberg, *Herzl: Assimilation to Zionism*, 35-58; Weiss, “Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism,” 108-113, where she discusses how German “internal colonization” of ethnically mixed areas in East Prussia influenced German Zionists, is especially interesting.

<sup>67</sup> Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism*, 62, emphasis mine.

<sup>68</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 729.

eliminated references to Zion and Jerusalem from the prayer service. German-speaking Jews defined their condition as the explicit *antithesis* of exile.<sup>69</sup> In 1848, the Jewish community of Worms, who had lived in that city for over a thousand years, issued a declaration announcing: “No longer must our lips pray for a return to Palestine, while at the same time the strongest bonds tie our souls to the German fatherland whose fate is inextricably woven with ours”.<sup>70</sup>

In the multinational Hapsburg Empire where Herzl was raised, German political and cultural hegemony exerted a magnetic pull on upwardly mobile Jews. The empire’s Jews generally identified themselves nationally as Austro-Germans, a group that, in Andrew Whiteside’s account, viewed the Hapsburg state “as a German creation, an instrument of the German civilizing mission in central and eastern Europe.”<sup>71</sup> Avineri notes that Habsburg Jews “were the promoters of the empire’s dominant culture in its peripheral areas – they were among the prominent Germanizers in the Austrian-ruled regions of Bohemia, Galicia, and Bukovina”.<sup>72</sup> Jewish mobility across German lands cut both ways. In the generation or two before Herzl’s birth, Jews gained rights to enter large cities, schools, and professions. In the metropolises of central Europe, Jews transformed from virtual invisibility into a defining element of social life.<sup>73</sup> Herzl’s own family followed this trajectory. Both parents were born in smaller towns to families that had

---

<sup>69</sup> Avineri, *Herzl’s Vision*, 32.

<sup>70</sup> David Aberbach, “Nationalism, Reform Judaism and the Hebrew Prayer Book,” *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 1 (2006): 139–59. Qtd. on 147.

<sup>71</sup> Kornberg, *Herzl: Assimilation to Zionism*, 43.

<sup>72</sup> Avineri, *Herzl’s Vision*, 33-4. Regarding the canonization of Jewish exile in Comparative Literature, I would point out that these outlying former Hapsburg provinces produced a number of authors beloved by literary critics: Kafka and Celan, and also the Hebrew authors Aharon Appelfeld and Yoel Hoffman. I would suggest the very difficulty in labeling Kafka and Celan’s national identity – in sorting out the Jewish and the German – lies at the heart of their appeal, made clear in Deleuze and Guattari’s “Minor Literature” essay. Celan was born two years after the dissolution of Hapsburg empire.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

been crisscrossing the outlying Hapsburg provinces for generations.<sup>74</sup> But they married in Budapest, where they raised their children in German (not Yiddish). The family moved to Vienna when Theodor was 19 years old. As Herzl ascended the geo-political stage, it is not surprising that he viewed Jewish mobility, indeed displacement, as a potentially uplifting means to become, in effect, more German.

This sentiment is reflected in Herzl's preparatory notes for his meeting with Kaiser Wilhelm about a German protectorate in Palestine: "To live under the protection of this strong, great, moral, splendidly governed, tightly organized Germany can only have the most salutary effect [*heilsamsten Wirkungen*] on the Jewish national character [*Jüdischen Volkscharakter*]." <sup>75</sup> Long before Herzl embraced Jewish nationalism, he had conceived of national subject formation in terms of *mimetic performance*. Herzl's biographers have contextualized this by pointing to his aspirations as a playwright, a calling he believed superior to journalism and politics.<sup>76</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, Herzl believed the theater held great pedagogical potential for German-Jewish emancipation. We can trace this approach back to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* (1779) which, as Mufti writes, "was seen as the embodiment of the ideal of *Bildung* on the basis of which Jewish equality was to be achieved ... a banner for the project of assimilating Jews into the *Bildungsbürgertum*".<sup>77</sup> In Mufti's analysis, Enlightenment notions of *Bildung*, in the experiential sense of developing character through observation, imitation, and acquisition, were reflected in Lessing's dramaturgy. Lessing propagated a "conception of

---

<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, when the Ottoman Empire retook Belgrade from Hapsburgs in 1739, "the Herzls moved across the Sava River [into] Austrian territory. The move was an act of loyalty to the imperial crown for which the family was awarded special privileges." (Elon, *Herzl*, 150).

<sup>75</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 693; *Briefe Und Tagebücher*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Berlin: Verlag Ullstein GmbH, 1984), 635.

<sup>76</sup> Hanni Mittelman, "From Comedies of Dissimulation to Dreams of an Authentic Life," in *Theodor Herzl: Visionary of the Jewish State*, ed. Gideon Shimoni et al. (New York: Herzl Press, 1999), 27–38.

<sup>77</sup> Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 43, 42.

the consummate performer” not as a method actor inhabiting a character’s inner states, but rather “as a great *imitator*, reproducing the ‘*external* signs’ of those states with such precision and deliberation that the audience is ‘taken in.’”<sup>78</sup> Suzanne Gearhart calls this “generalized mimesis”, where the “pedagogical orientation of the actor towards the citizen-spectator ... extends to the teaching of ‘imitation’ itself.”<sup>79</sup> Jewish assimilation would be complete when Jews mastered this form of mimesis. In this sense, the “salutary effect” of German governance over Jewish life in Palestine extended far deeper than political exigency. A German orientation was not only a marker of Jews’ loyalty to the Hapsburg and Hohenzollern crowns who tolerated them; it was a recognizable form of (national) subjectivity. Herzl believed that the performance of public life, as theater and citizenship, could enable Jews to *signify* Germanness.

Herzl tested this notion as a student at the University of Vienna when he joined Albia, a German nationalist fraternity and dueling society. Herzl was one of the last three Jews admitted to Albia, and he stayed in the group after they decided to ban new Jewish members. In Kornberg’s view, “Herzl’s exposure to German nationalism during his university years made him an idealizer of Prussian traits, the mirror opposite of Jewish insufficiencies.”<sup>80</sup> Herzl’s private writings attest to such views, and in Kornberg’s Hegelian analysis, Herzl did not abandon these ideas when he entered politics: “Jewish self-contempt and mimicry of Gentiles were both contained in—and overcome—in the new Zionist synthesis”.<sup>81</sup> I would add another layer to this Herzlian dialectic: a tension

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 49, emphasis mine.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 50. See further: Suzanne Gearhart, *The Interrupted Dialectic: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Their Tragic Other*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 187-97.

<sup>80</sup> Kornberg, *Herzl: Assimilation to Zionism*, 50, 53.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 5.

between aesthetics and politics. Herzl's Zionist synthesis amounted to the politicization of Jewish worldliness and the aestheticization of German nationalism.

#### V. German National Style and the Theater of Indivisible Jews

In an 1881 fraternity photograph taken after a ritualistic duel, the young Herzl wears a blue cornflower in his button-hole, which proclaimed his affiliation “as a radical German nationalist.”<sup>82</sup> Kornberg suggests that “the German model” appealed to Herzl “as political style, not as nationalist doctrine”. His emphasis on *style* is not meant to downplay its importance. Kornberg concludes that “Political Zionism was in some ways a re-creation of *Albia*, writ large.”<sup>83</sup> Even as a student, Herzl performed assimilation by reproducing aestheticized signs of German (and European) culture. In *Albia*, where recruits adopted allusive code names, Herzl dubbed himself “Tancred,” a reference to the Italian Renaissance poet Tasso's epic about a Crusader knight who became “Prince of the Galilee.”<sup>84</sup> But by 1883, Herzl concluded that racial anti-Semitism had replaced the acceptable “anti-Jewish” attitudes of *Albia*'s assimilationists. This allowed no room for Jews like Herzl to expunge what they viewed as their negative but mutable “Jewish spirit” through the performance of German nationalism. After a memorial service for Wagner endorsed the composer's anti-Semitism, Herzl composed an angry letter of

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 58, 53. Years later, when Herzl was told the Kaiser preferred a public audience in Jerusalem (rather than the private meeting he requested), he wrote, “Here I recognized the Prussian. This is the forthright grand old style [*Das ist die forsche alte grosse Art*]. Open and above-board! This way they have accomplished everything” (*Diaries*, 693; *Briefe und Tachbücher*, 634-5). See his definition of Assimilation, below.

<sup>84</sup> Avineri, *Herzl's Vision*, 57. *Tancred* (1847) was also the title of Disraeli's popular novel that described a contemporary British nobleman's eye-opening trip to the Holy Land, where he learns of European civilization's debt to the Jewish people. See: Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: “The Jewish Question” and English National Identity*, First Edition (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1995), 170-233.



resignation to Albia. Ironically, while writing *The Jewish State* years later, Herzl felt compelled to attend Wagner's operas on a nightly basis: "only on the evenings when there was no opera did I have any doubts as to the truth of my ideas," he wrote.<sup>85</sup> The performative and literary arts would continue to shape Herzl's approach to Germanness and mimesis.

According to Peter Loewenberg, Herzl's "final pre-Zionist fantasy was of overcoming anti-Semitism through dramatic aesthetic culture."<sup>86</sup> Herzl's dramaturgy mostly reflected the high Enlightenment ideals of *Nathan the Wise*. In Lessing's work, *Bildung* comprised a theatrical kind of mimicry that would transform the Jew into "a citizen like any other, equivalent to all others, a subjectivity without intrinsic content".<sup>87</sup> Herzl's scripts reflected his idealized sense of "Assimilation," (*Die Assimilierung*) which he later defined as "not only external conformity in dress, habit, customs, and language, but also *identity of feeling and manner* [*ein Gleichwerden in Sinn und Art verstehe*]."<sup>88</sup> Herzl believed his plays enabled him to "correct our fate ... improve it [and] create our own reality".<sup>89</sup> They were largely panned.

Herzl's aesthetic failures may have led to his growing political consciousness. He saw the liberal abstraction of the citizen collapse in an environment that racialized and essentialized the historical causes of Jewish difference. Social forces, including the contradictory demands of assimilation, reproduced the affective, communal, and private

---

<sup>85</sup> Kornberg, *Herzl: Assimilation to Zionism*, 35. Herzl had Wagner's *Tannhauser* played at the Second Zionist Congress: Avineri, *Herzl's Vision*, 102.

<sup>86</sup> Peter Loewenberg, "Between Fantasy and Reality," in *Theodor Herzl: Visionary of the Jewish State*, ed. Gideon Shimoni et al. (New York: Herzl Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>87</sup> Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 50.

<sup>88</sup> Emphasis mine; Herzl specified further that, in actuality, "assimilation of Jews could be effected only by intermarriage." Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 77; Herzl, *Der Judenstaat*, ed. Otto Zeller (Vienna: M. Breitenstein Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1896), 12.

<sup>89</sup> Qtd. in Mittelman, "Comedies of Dissimulation," 28-9.

experiences that characterized “Jewishness.” Mimicry alone was not enough to dissolve the association between individual Jews and these experiences. If anything, an authentic portrayal of German-Jews would show the *invisible* anxieties and pressures of their historical formation.<sup>90</sup> In the first entry of his diary, from 1895, Herzl contrasts life in Austria and Germany, where he feels “constant fear” of anti-Semitic abuse, with Paris, where “I pass through the crowd unrecognized. In this word ‘unrecognized’ [*Unerkant*] lies a terrible reproach against the anti-Semites.”<sup>91</sup> His ability to appear “unrecognized” in Paris, ostensibly as a German, only underscores the impossibility of living as an inauthentic portrayal, insecure in the face of anti-Semites “who force the Jews to dissimulate ... in order to remain ‘unrecognized’.”<sup>92</sup> Emancipation failed as the Jew became an indeterminate sign, neither representing an essence nor successfully imitating the majority in his native country. Herzl struggled to find forms of mimesis that could signify this intermediate position.

The watershed in his engagement with the Jewish Question did not begin with the Dreyfus Affair, but rather in *The New Ghetto* (1894), a play Herzl finished before news of Dreyfus’ arrest spread.<sup>93</sup> Though composed in Paris, Herzl insisted *The New Ghetto* could only be staged in Berlin: “After all, I am writing for a nation of anti-Semites.”<sup>94</sup>

The play’s protagonist, a young lawyer named Dr. Jacob Samuel, identifies the failure of

---

<sup>90</sup> Hermann Goldschmidt writes that German-Jews’ “excessive and defensive mimicry” effaced Jewish particularity, which he defines, among other things, as “the unconditional Jewish devotion to history”. See: Hermann Levin Goldschmidt, *The Legacy of German Jewry*, ed. Willi Goetschel and David Suchoff, trans. David Suchoff, 1 edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 64, 58-9.

<sup>91</sup> “in diesem Unerkannt! liegt ein furchtbarer Vorwurf gegen die Antisemiten” (Herzl, *Diaries*, 5; *Briefe und Tachbücher*, 45).

<sup>92</sup> Mittelman, “Comedies of Dissimulation,” 33.

<sup>93</sup> Herzl’s recent biographers have addressed how “The Dreyfus Myth,” as Kornberg calls it, came to be widely believed.

<sup>94</sup> Qtd. in Avineri, *Herzl’s Vision*, 77, 79-80.

Jewish emancipation in terms of the impossible demands placed on the habitus of assimilating Jewish individuals: “to bow without servility, to stand up straight without rebelling.” The contradictions and negations demanded by this performance constitute the “New Ghetto.” When a Viennese rabbi boasts, “We are, after all, permitted to reside in our homeland [Austria]... the walls have tumbled down,” Samuel retorts: “Yes, the visible walls... We have to get out!” Fatally wounded in a duel with an anti-Semitic officer, Samuel’s last words turn to the collective: “My brothers, Jews, they will grant us freedom only if you ... [mumbles] I want – out! Out – out of the ghetto!”

Herzl the dramatist could not, as yet, articulate a way out of ghetto subjectivity. He could not represent the reality of a crisis whose resolution could find no recognizable form. Immediately after completing the play, Herzl began experimenting with a new form of writing, initially a politically charged novel in the style of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* or *Huckleberry Finn*.<sup>95</sup> He published his text as a manifesto, *The Jewish State*. The work that launched modern political Zionism did not, however, foreclose its author’s literary-aesthetic questions. “In all this,” he reflected on his diplomatic work, “I am still the dramatist. I pick poor people in rags off the streets, put gorgeous costumes on them, and have them perform for the world a wonderful pageant of my composition.”<sup>96</sup> Cast out by the racialist essentialism of German nationalism, Herzl kept faith with the movement’s potent use of symbolism and performance, even as he rejected its ideological cast.

---

<sup>95</sup> He immersed himself in Goethe’s *Bildungsroman*, *Poetry and Truth* in order to comprehend “the tension between imagination and reality”, as Avineri’s observed, but “he did not know in his own mind whether he was producing a novel or a political program. Or perhaps it was a novel meant to promote political action?” (*Herzl’s Vision*, 94, 83).

<sup>96</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 67. Likewise, Zionism’s eventual success, Said argues, derived from the fact that its movements activities were “presented – perhaps *projected* is the better word here – as if onto a kind of world theater stage ... It was always meant to be a didactic alternative picture to the traditional view of Jews in the West.” See: Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 102-3.

Writing to a skeptical Baron Hirsch,<sup>97</sup> he insisted, “the policy of an entire people – particularly when it is scattered all over the earth – can be carried out only with imponderables that float in thin air.”<sup>98</sup> The German Empire, for examples, was created with “Dreams, songs, fantasies, and black-red-and-gold ribbons ... Bismarck had only to briefly shake the tree which the visionaries [*den die Phantasten*] had planted.”

Ultimately, Herzl’s political career also ended in fiction. In 1902, after his fifth trip to Constantinople failed to yield a diplomatic achievement, “Thus closes this book of my political novel.”<sup>99</sup> The same year, his utopian novel *Altneuland* would mark the final high-point of his Zionist activities. At his death in 1904, Herzl’s imagined community remained, in his words, “a fairy tale” (*ein Märchen*),<sup>100</sup> a literary conceit he had failed to reproduce on the stage of global politics.

## VI. Jewish Mobility and Orientalism

The ascent of Herzl’s family from migrant traders on the Hapsburg-Ottoman peripheries to Viennese bourgeois was representative, demographically, of the exponential growth of Jewish life in the central European metropolis. But by the 1880s, the upward mobility of urban Jews was threatened by the very force that had enabled it for a century: the westward migration of Ostjuden. Since the Enlightenment, many had

---

<sup>97</sup> Hirsch had noble titles from Bavaria and the Ottoman Empire, and the Baron personally made a fortune “managing the huge credit enterprise that enabled the construction of the Orient Express” (Avineri, *Herzl’s Vision*, 104-5). Hirsch’s family served as bankers (court Jews) to German princes for generations.

<sup>98</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 28-9; *Briefe und Tachbücher*, 65).

<sup>99</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 1270.

<sup>100</sup> Also, “fable.” On the title page of the novel is Herzl’s famous motto, “If you will it, it is no dream” [Wenn Ihr wollt, Ist es kein Märchen]. In the novel’s epilogue, he considers the inverse: “But if you do not wish it, all this that I have related to you is and will remain a fable.” [Wenn Ihr aber nicht wollt, so ist und bleibt es ein Märchen, was ich Euch erzählt habe]. Herzl, *Old New Land*, 296; Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland* (Leipzig: Hermann Seeman Nachfolger, 1902), 343.

defined Europe's "Jewish Question" as "a product of the influx of East European Jews".<sup>101</sup> Enlightenment polemics in favor of Jewish emancipation were rebutted by the assertion that the Ostjuden brought a clash of civilizations to the heart of Europe. As Arie Saposnik notes, "the very concepts of 'eastern Europe' and the 'Orient' were of contemporaneous origin, articulated in direct relation to one another ... as the twin counterpoints to the idea of a western, or European, civilization."<sup>102</sup>

Writers like Karl Emil Franzos, a Jewish "Germanophile" raised in Galicia who became a literary celebrity in Vienna, defined Eastern European Jews as *halb-Asien* (half-Asian).<sup>103</sup> German-Jews, in their quest for civil equality, further promoted a discourse of incompatibility between "Asian Jews" and "useful citizens".<sup>104</sup> As Steven Aschheim explains, "Half-Asia was not merely a geographical destination, it was also a condition of the mind. It referred to a strange amalgam of European culture and Asian barbarism, Western industriousness and Eastern indolence", producing "an unsettling mixture".<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 62.

<sup>102</sup> Arie Bruce Saposnik, "Europe and Its Orient in Zionist Culture before the First World War," *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 4 (2006): 1106. Jonathan Hess' illuminating work on the Enlightenment Orientalist Johann David Michaelis traces the convergence of anti-Jewish and Orientalist discourses back to the 1770s: Jonathan M. Hess, "Johann David Michaelis and the Colonial Imaginary: Orientalism and the Emergence of Racial Antisemitism in Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 2 (2000): 56–101. Michaelis fused contemporary travel writing on the Bedouin of the Arabian peninsula, Enlightenment theories of race, and Biblical scholarship to argue against Christian Dohm's support for Jewish emancipation in the latter's *Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews* (1781). Under proper conditions, Dohm contended, the "unfortunate Asiatic refugees" could be assimilated into German culture (qtd. in Hess, 87).

<sup>103</sup> Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 27-31. Franzos used the phrase in a series of story collections, starting with *Aus Halb-Asien: Kulturbilder aus Galizien, der Bukowina, Südrussland, und Rumänien* (Stuttgart/Berlin, 1876). Franzos' works were "translated into virtually every European language and sold in the millions" [Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Wayne State University Press, 1991), 83-4].

<sup>104</sup> qtd. in Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 20, where he cites the Jewish German nationalist Johann Jacoby.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-9.

Leading German intellectuals, like the historian Heinrich von Treitschke,<sup>106</sup> warned his countrymen that “there will always be Jews who are nothing else but German-speaking Orientals”.<sup>107</sup> Just as ancient Rome collapsed in the face of barbarian invasions, von Trietschke contended, European civilization now faced an existential threat with the migration of a people “incomparably alien to the European, and especially the German national character.”<sup>108</sup>

In the winter of 1881-1882, when Herzl joined the German nationalist fraternity Albia, the conditions of Jewish mobility in Europe underwent a monumental and irreversible change. The 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II led to the first modern pogroms against the Jews of the Russian Empire.<sup>109</sup> State-sponsored deportations, imprisonments, and new restrictions on Jewish students and professionals compounded the crisis, leading to an exodus of over two million Russian Jews. From 1881 until the start of World War I, 3.5 million Jews emigrated out of Eastern Europe.<sup>110</sup> This was the largest Jewish migration in history. While a minor tributary of this wave immigrated to Palestine,<sup>111</sup> its more immediate implications affected the position of Jews in central and western Europe.

---

<sup>106</sup> A Prussian parliamentarian, von Trietschke coined the popular phrase “the Jews are our misfortune!” which later served as the motto of the Nazi journal *Der Stürmer* (Avineri, *Herzl's Vision*, 41).

<sup>107</sup> qtd. in Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions*, 81.

<sup>108</sup> qtd. in Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 68. The irony is that the barbarians alluded to were the very Germanic tribes celebrated by ethno-nationalists like von Trietschke.

<sup>109</sup> Avineri, *Herzl's Vision*, 44-5.

<sup>110</sup> Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 37. Hundreds of thousands emigrated out of the eastern provinces of the Hapsburg Empire, Prussia (Posen), and Romania. The majority of American Jews descend from this migratory wave: “Between 1905 and 1914 alone, approximately 700,000 East European Jews passed through Germany to embark [from] ports bound for the United States.”

<sup>111</sup> Modern Zionist settlement is typically dated to the Hovevei Zion and BILU settlers who began arriving in 1881. See: Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History* (Brandeis, 2014). Shapira calls the second wave of Zionist immigrants, who arrived between 1904-1914, “the foam atop the great wave of Jewish emigrants leaving Eastern Europe at this time” (42).

Quotas limiting enrollment of Eastern European Jewish students in Germany coincided with expulsions of Jewish refugees from Prussia's eastern provinces.<sup>112</sup> In 1881, 250,000 Germans signed the "Anti-Semites' Petition," calling for a ban on foreign Jewish immigration. The next year, leftist German nationalists in Austria adopted the Linz Program, which "condemned 'semitic traits': rootlessness, alienation from nature, love of profit".<sup>113</sup> Herzl endorsed these views from an assimilationist position, writing in his journal "that the Jews were an oriental people and hence alien to Europe." But he believed that Jewish rootlessness was an historically produced, and therefore mutable, phenomenon. Yet for anti-Semites who would soon predominate in his fraternity, Jewish mobility was an inalienable racial trait. Neither *Bildung* nor German patriotism could overcome the novel claim that the Jews, now racialized as "Semites," embodied the civilizational opposition between Christian Europe and the Orient.

The anti-Semitic movement's hostility toward Eastern European refugees threatened assimilated Jews' integration. Thus when the former began arriving en masse in 1881, German Jews undertook philanthropic campaigns "to facilitate the speedy departure of Ostjuden from German shores".<sup>114</sup> Despite successful efforts to redirect most refugees to the U.S., the Eastern immigrants nonetheless reshaped Jewish life in Germany and Austria.<sup>115</sup> Over the next thirty years, their numbers increased almost 400 percent in

---

<sup>112</sup> Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 61. A parallel phenomenon was already evident in Austria, as Kornberg writes: "the influx into Vienna of relatively poor, ambitious Hungarian and Galician Jewish university students in the 1870s" helped catalyze a burst of anti-Jewish rhetoric and calls for quotas. Though initially embraced by some assimilationist Jews, leading anti-Jewish agitators soon adopted a more racist form of anti-Semitism that left no room for them (*Herzl: Assimilation to Zionism*, 48-9).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 47, 48.

<sup>114</sup> Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 34-5.

<sup>115</sup> In Vienna, the overall Jewish population's proportion to the city as a whole went "from under 2% in 1857 to over 12% in 1890", or "almost 200,000" people, largely from in-migration (Timms 53). See: Edward Timms, "The Literary Editor of the Neue Freie Presse," in *Theodor Herzl: Visionary of the Jewish State*, ed. Gideon Shimoni et al. (New York: Herzl Press, 1999), 52-67.

Germany alone.<sup>116</sup> By the late 1890s, Herzl could convincingly use this point to urge the German government to create a protectorate for Jewish immigrants in Palestine. As he told the Grand Duke of Baden, “The German Jews cannot but welcome such a movement. It will divert the influx of Jews from Eastern Europe away from them.”<sup>117</sup>

And yet it was among this unwanted population, rather than his fellow Prussian and Hapsburg Jewish elites, that Herzl’s ideas took hold. After the publication of *The Jewish State*, Avineri notes that a “proclamation supporting Herzl was published by several Jewish student fraternities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire”, fraternities in which the Ostjuden predominated.<sup>118</sup> A month later, on Herzl’s first trip to Constantinople, a crowd gathered at a train stop in Sofia, Bulgaria, greeting him as “Leader (*führer*), and as the Heart of Israel,” while “the passengers of the Orient Express stared at the odd spectacle in astonishment.”<sup>119</sup> At a speech in London that summer, an audience of predominantly Russian Jews erupted in applause when Herzl announced, “the East is ours”. Herzl was referring to London’s East End, where refugee Ostjuden lived in downtrodden slums, but the audience took him to mean the Levant.<sup>120</sup> This blurring of boundaries is captured in an exchange with the German foreign minister, von Bülow. As

---

<sup>116</sup> At 70,000, by 1910 they constituted “12.8 percent of the total German Jewish population” and “20 percent of Berlin Jewry” (Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 42). In a meeting where the German Chancellor, Prince Hohenlohe, questioned whether “The Jews, who are comfortably installed here in Berlin” would move to Palestine, Herzl responded, “not Berlin West, but Berlin East” (*Diaries*, 701). In the words of another contemporary observer, “As one moves further along Kaiser Wilhelm Street ... one goes ever deeper into the East of the world ... Is this Berlin?” (qtd. in Aschheim, 44). Today one hears similar remarks about the Turkish and Palestinian enclaves in the Neukölln neighborhood, where the thoroughfare Sonnenallee is colloquially referred to as “Gazastreifen.”

<sup>117</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 337.

<sup>118</sup> Avineri, *Herzl’s Vision*, 116.

<sup>119</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 368.

<sup>120</sup> Elon, *Herzl*, 207. This neighborhood produced a great deal of Orientalist anti-Semitism. In 1902, Herzl testified before a British Royal Inquiry Commission on “poor aliens”. Instead of restricting immigration, Herzl argued that Eastern Jewish migrants should be “diverted to a legally recognized national Jewish home, where Jews would no longer be regarded as aliens” (351, 354).



Herzl detailed his plan to redirect the Jews to Palestine, von Bülow remarked that “it would be the first eastward migration of the Israelites. Until now they have always moved westward.” Herzl objected: “This time too it’s toward the west. It is simply that the Jews have already circled the globe. East is west again.”<sup>121</sup>

## VII. Between the World and the Nations

Herzl could embrace the East as West by redefining (and redirecting) the historical migration of Eastern European Jews. As a supra-national minority, the historical worldliness (or worldwide-ness) of the Jewish people had both enabled and imperiled Jewish assimilation into Germanness. Avineri contextualizes this duality within the political climate of the 1890s, when “the very foundations of the Habsburg Empire were being called into question,” with the Jewish Question just one “small subset of the Empire’s larger national problems.” In fact, the Austrian prime minister, Count Kasimir von Badeni, solicited Herzl to devise reforms that would expand the languages of educational instruction, an explosive issue dividing the polyglot empire.<sup>122</sup> Herzl approached the task with a strong conviction that *Deutschum*, which he defined as “the idea of civil liberty”,<sup>123</sup> could provide a cohesive, imperial framework for the resolution of diverse forms of national self-expression. In the “great language dispute in Bohemia”, Herzl later reflected,

German-educated Jews ... wholeheartedly adhered to the German nation. They loved their German identity deeply, and ardently served the German people, as

---

<sup>121</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 705.

<sup>122</sup> Avineri, *Herzl's Vision*, 89.

<sup>123</sup> qtd. in Kornberg, *Herzl: Assimilation to Zionism*, 45.

well as *the idea of civil liberty* ... Then, suddenly, [the Germans] withdrew; suddenly they declared the Jews to be parasites sucking the life-blood of the German race.<sup>124</sup>

Herzl remained committed to the German Enlightenment, but conceded that it had reached “only the choicest spirits” [*die Vornehmsten Geister*].<sup>125</sup> The Jews could not afford to “wait till average humanity had become as charitably inclined as was Lessing [in] ‘Nathan the Wise’”. The pathos of popular sovereignty worked against the proper perspective on the Jews’ minority position, with devastating consequences: “The common people have not, and indeed cannot have, any *historic comprehension*”, he wrote.<sup>126</sup> “Everything tends, in fact, to one and the same conclusion, which is clearly enunciated in that classic Berlin phrase: ‘*Juden Raus!*’ (Out with the Jews!)”

Herzl ties the popular will to forcibly displace a long-resident minority to the failure of *Bildung* – defined as the lack of “historic comprehension.” There is an important parallel to Auerbach here, one that suggests not so much influence as a shared assessment of the processes that continued to shape German-Jewish life, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the rise of the Nazis. In Mufti’s reading of *Mimesis*, Auerbach warns that the “legendary,” Homeric/Hellenic impulse in European culture “needs always to be *tempered* by” the “historical,” Biblical/Hebraic “mode of comprehending and representing reality”.<sup>127</sup> The absence of historical perspective serves as a midwife to

---

<sup>124</sup> qtd. in Avineri, *Herzl’s Vision*, 90-91, emphasis mine.

<sup>125</sup> Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 75, 74; “Wollten wir warten, bis sich der Sinn auch der mittleren Menschen zur Milde abklärt, die Lessing hatte, als er Nathan den Weisen schrieb...” (*Der Judenstaat*, 10).

<sup>126</sup> Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 86, emphasis mine; “Das gewöhnliche Volk hat kein historisches Verständniss und kann keines haben.” *Der Judenstaat*, 22.

<sup>127</sup> Mufti, *Forget English*, 231-2, 228. Almost century before *Mimesis*, Moses Hess offered a similar analysis: “Before the appearance of the Germanic races, there were only two forms of religion, the natural and the historical. The first found its typical expression in Greece, the second in Judaea.” See: Moses Hess,

fascism, and it materializes in the annihilation of European Jewish life, in all its facets and traces. Mufti writes that the crisis of an era of “declining historical consciousness” informed Auerbach’s “melancholic admission” that Goethean cultural elites (like Herzl’s “choices spirits,” he defines them as “certain distinguished individuals, small groups of highly cultivated men [*kleine Gruppen hoher Bildung haben*])”, did not shape society according to their views of emancipatory cultivation, pluralism, or cohabitation.<sup>128</sup> In Herzl’s time, elites served the very opposite purpose, mirroring the populist shouts of *Juden Raus!* with declarations like that of von Treitschke: “on German soil there is no room for double nationality ... they had better emigrate and establish a Jewish state elsewhere.”<sup>129</sup> For Herzl, these calls for expatriation overlooked an historical irony: “in countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers, and often by those whose ancestors were not yet domiciled in the land where Jews had already had experience of suffering.” Nevertheless, he concluded, “The majority may decide which are the strangers.”<sup>130</sup>

For that reason, emigration, by itself, would only exacerbate the failure to achieve civil equality. If the national majorities could not accommodate localized belonging by Jews (and other ethno-linguistic minorities), then the imaginary of estrangement would continue to pull the ground out from any possibility of inhabited Jewish space. In

---

*The Revival of Israel: Rome and Jerusalem, the Last Nationalist Question (1862)*, trans. Meyer Waxman, Bison Book Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 85. Hess’ definition of historicism (249-51) prefigures a great deal of Auerbach’s discussion on the Hellenic/Hebraic.

<sup>128</sup> Erich Auerbach, “Philology and Weltliteratur,” trans. Maire Said and Edward Said, *Centennial Review* 13, no. 1 (1969): 1–17.

<sup>129</sup> qtd. in Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, Zionism*, 10.

<sup>130</sup> Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 76. This lesson would shape Prussian and Habsburg Zionists’ opposition to a minoritarian Zionism that accepted a demographic Arab majority. Arthur Ruppin, the Prussian-Jewish sociologist who directed Jewish settlement in Palestine after 1908, believed “that rights which are guaranteed by the majority are worthless” (Weiss, “Ethnonationalism and Binationalism,” 110). Ruppin was a founding member of the binationalist group Brit Shalom, but left it after the 1929 Arab-Jewish riots.

*Altneuland*, a character reflects on Jewish life in Europe: “they were treated like refugees from plague-stricken countries ... Judaism was an ‘elend’” in the full sense of the old German word that had meant ‘out-land,’—the limbo of the banished ... Elend ... Golus ... Ghetto. Words in different languages for the same thing.”<sup>131</sup> Herzl’s language evokes and yet inverts one of the primary arguments against Jewish emancipation, put forth by the German Orientalist Johann Michaelis in 1782:

The Jews will always view the state as a temporary dwelling, which, if they are lucky, they will be able to leave so as to return to Palestine ... A people that has such hopes will never become completely native ... they are in danger of being stirred up by an enthusiast, or being led astray by the pied piper of Hamelin [*vom Hamelschen Rattenfänger in die Irre geführt*]<sup>132</sup>

As Jonathan Hess writes, Michaelis “makes his argument against Jewish emancipation by invoking a figure from German folklore, who [holds] the position once thought to be the property of their future messiah, threatening to lead the Jews *in die Irre*, to a place that is no place at all.”<sup>133</sup>

After *The Jewish State*, Herzl fit the role of pied piper. Yet the Jews did not follow him out of a lack of attachment to their native place, but in spite of it – an attachment rendered phantasmal by the non-Jews, who could not imagine Jewish space as anything beyond a “temporary dwelling,” “the limbo of the banished.” This civil “no place” defined the Jewish search for solid ground.

---

<sup>131</sup> Herzl, *Old New Land*, 252; cf. *Altneuland*, 289.

<sup>132</sup> qtd. in Hess, “Michaelis,” 74.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-5.

In this search, Herzl radically revised the hegemonic discourses through which Jews were imagined *outside* of Europe's emerging national communities. Writing at the same time as Michaelis, Immanuel Kant had argued, "Judaism was a national religion. The Jews formed a political community (*staatlichpolitische Gemeinschaft*), not a religious sect. As such, they constituted a 'state within a state'".<sup>134</sup> If we take Herzl's proposal for a German protectorate seriously, Kant's terms expand and yet remain quite literal: the Jewish *Gemeinschaft* would take form as a (colonial) *state within a* (German, imperial) *state*. Jewish worldliness exceeded the boundaries of *territorial* nationalism, with its majoritarian logic and racialist temptations. And so Herzl shifted the groundwork for Jewish mimesis onto an *imperial* platform: the Prussian-Ottoman alliance. With this transposition, Herzl believed he had located historical conditions more favorable for the mimesis of Germanness.

Herzl maintained his beliefs in the virtues of Enlightenment *Bildung* for constructing national subjectivity, and that Prussian Germany should serve as the Jews' model for emulation. He simply deepened the stakes of these commitments. Reproducing German *Kultur* (and Prussian-style nationalism) would provide a structure for Jews to maintain the affiliations of the European world that formed them. It would enable Jews to ratify a national subjectivity on imperial German terms, to finally represent "Germanness" and thereby change what "Jew" signified. And yet displacement – exile – was an essential part of the process. Herzl elaborated this notion in a draft of *The Jewish State*:

---

<sup>134</sup> Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, Zionism*, 7.

I am a German Jew from Hungary and *I cannot be anything other than a German*. Today no one *recognizes* me as German. That will come, after we are already there, so each person needs to preserve the nationality he gained,<sup>135</sup> and speak the language which become the beloved homeland of his thoughts.

Some kind of recognition – a form of Jewish attachment to and location within European culture – is *gained* in exile. And this acquisition (“erworbene Nationalität”) is best represented in the multiple languages of the Jews’ erstwhile homes.

Herzl’s comment bears a latent strain of the worldliness (and *Weltliteratur*) he would develop further in *Altneuland*, which I will discuss below. First, it is worthwhile to map this conception onto the insights Auerbach would elaborate in “Philology and *Weltliteratur*,” where he defines his own affiliations. Even as “the most priceless and indispensable part of a philologist’s heritage is still his own nation’s culture and language”, one cannot “earn a proper love of the world” with either an uncritical attachment to one’s native place, or the negation of such attachment.<sup>136</sup> Rather, “only when he is first separated from this heritage ... and then transcends it does it truly become effective.” In this passage, Said detects a reference to Auerbach’s exile in Istanbul, which becomes the key to interpreting *Mimesis*.<sup>137</sup> But Said also observes the cost of exile: the “critically important alienation” from Auerbach’s “earthly home [in]

---

<sup>135</sup> To this point in this crucial passage, I have chosen Avineri’s translation over Zohn’s in the *Diaries: Herzl’s Vision*, 132. Avineri’s selection ends here, and for the last phrase, I have adopted Zohn’s: Herzl, *Diaries*, 171. With my emphases in italics, the original reads: “Ich bin ein deutscher Jude aus Ungarn, und kann nichts anderes mehr sein als ein Deutscher. *Jetzt erkennt man mich nicht als Deutschen an*. Das wird schon kommen, bis wir erst *drüben sind*. Und so soll Jeder seine *erworbene Nationalität* behalten, die Sprache reden, welche *die liebe Heimat* seiner Gedanken geworden ist.” (*Briefe und Tachbücher*, 190).

<sup>136</sup> Auerbach, *Philology and Weltliteratur*, 17.

<sup>137</sup> Said, *World, Text, and Critic*, 8; cf. note 33.

European culture” is predicated on “an agonizing distance from it.” Thus the “world” that must become “our philological home” is only available, as Mufti comments, after “an active struggle with [one’s] particularistic formation and heritage, a *gain* in perspective that is also a profound *loss* at the same time.”<sup>138</sup>

This painful dialectic of gain and loss will shape the most fundamental means of representing (national and exilic) subjectivity, as Herzl writes about the language question. On the one hand, Herzl was deeply aware that “life in a non-Jewish language deepened, rather than narrowed, the richness of Jewish experience.”<sup>139</sup> In the published text of *The Jewish State*, Herzl wrote “Every man can preserve the language in which his thoughts are at home” (“die *liebe Heimat* seiner Gedanken ist”).<sup>140</sup> But the polyglot condition of Jewish language carries the contradictory fates of Jewish belonging, its “agonizing distance” from its local origin: “We shall never cease to cherish with sadness the memory of the native land out of which we have been driven.”<sup>141</sup> Here, Herzl’s Zionism is not, as it is often glossed, the *negation of* (an ancient) *exile*, but rather the *affirmation of* (modern forms of) *displacement*. In Herzl’s conception, Jewish national subjectivity achieves recognition (*Erkennung*) through the very *worldliness* of the Jew: the figure who appears in many nations (transgressing the possessive claims of autochthonous nationalism), yet never as a fully abstract, cosmopolitan “citizen of the world.” Rather, in each instance, the Jew is representative of an inhabited elsewhere.

---

<sup>138</sup> Mufti, *Forget English*, 223.

<sup>139</sup> Willi Goetschel and David Suchoff, “Introduction,” in *The Legacy of German Jewry*, trans. David Suchoff, 1st edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>140</sup> Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 146, emphasis mine; *Der Judenstaat* 75.

<sup>141</sup> “Wir werden auch drüben bleiben, was wir jetzt sind, sowie wir nei aufhören werden, unsere Vaterländer, aus denen wir verdraängt wurden, mit Wehmuth zu lieben.”

It is impossible to read Herzl further without observing the work that historicism performs in his formulation of Jewish displacement to Palestine. Pre-figuring *The Jewish State*, the protagonist of Herzl's play *The New Ghetto* rejected essentialist explanations for the failure of Jewish assimilation: "we were not made by nature into what we are, but through history."<sup>142</sup> Herzl struggled to render this notion through aesthetics and performance (in fact, the play was only staged after *The Jewish State* magnified Herzl's celebrity). In dramaturgy, the figurative walls of the New Ghetto remained "invisible," just as Herzl himself went "unrecognized" (*Unerkant*) as a German-Jew in Paris. But in the manifesto form, Herzl was better able to portray the historical, economic, sociological, and ideological forces that thwarted Jewish assimilation into Europe's modern national communities. Like Marx in "The Jewish Question," Herzl concluded, "We are what the Ghetto made us."<sup>143</sup>

In "Philology and *Weltliteratur*," Mufti finds the basis for "a radically historical humanism" developing from Vico to Auerbach to Said. This notion comprehends humanity as

something that is achieved through social and cultural action by and between divergently situated and constituted individuals and collectivities: 'a conception of man united in his multiplicity'. But this is a form of 'historic perspectivism' that is also comparative and worldly, explicitly

---

<sup>142</sup> Avineri, *Herzl's Vision*, 79.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. In a more radical context, Marx wrote that "Judaism has been preserved, not in spite of history, but by history" (50): Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, Second Edition (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1978), 26–52.



rejecting the proto-romantic view of cultural complexes as distinct and hermetically self-contained entities.<sup>144</sup>

Even in Herzl's turn to Zionism, he operated from a similar intellectual tradition, rejecting the notion that racial essentialism forms the basis of identity. His manifesto argued that Jewish identity remains malleable to historical forces: "prosperity weakens our Judaism and extinguishes our peculiarities." The "distinctive nationality of Jews", whatever its merits, was not constituted by an act of collective will, but by the exclusions of European societies: "We are one people—our enemies have made us one without our consent, as repeatedly happens in history."<sup>145</sup> For Herzl, the broad civilizational inheritance of Judaism, the sedimentations of a minority living within distinct linguistic and national settings, offered *historically explicable* reasons why "our community of race is peculiar and unique".<sup>146</sup> This historicism placed him in opposition to the racialism that predominated in his intellectual milieu, pre-figuring Auerbach's position decades later.<sup>147</sup> Debating Israel Zangwill, Herzl insisted, "We are an historical unit, a nation with anthropological diversities. This also suffices for the Jewish State. No nation has uniformity of race."<sup>148</sup> This contrasts with many broad ascriptions of Zionist intellectual history as "inspired by post-Herder German *völkisch* nationalism", as Masalha phrases it, "a form of tribal, 'organic nationalism' which espoused common descent and racialism", an "intolerant organic (integral) nationalism".<sup>149</sup> The more fascinating irony is that it was

---

<sup>144</sup> Mufti, *Forget English*, 222.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>147</sup> See: Porter, "The Judaizing of Philology."

<sup>148</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 276.

<sup>149</sup> Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba*, 20. Masalha gathers together an unwieldy coalition of Haskalah and Zionist thinkers to adduce this ascription. While valid for many of the examples he provides, it is an

Herzl's very historicist moorings that turned him toward an agenda promoting Jewish displacement through an imperial framework.

For Herzl, Zionist immigration would change the historical elements that shaped Jewish character, demonstrating that the defective sense of communal belonging imputed to the Jews was merely the product of disadvantageous conditions, rather than an excess of particularism, rootlessness, or racial inferiority. Immigration under imperial banners would enable the Jews to escape the double binds that he had identified in *The New Ghetto*, while embodying the “worldliness” that he would develop further as he imagined his political program nested within the Prussian and Ottoman spheres.

In November 1898, two weeks after secretly meeting Kaiser Wilhelm at the Sultan's palace in Constantinople, Herzl deliver remarks at a public audience before the German Emperor and his delegation in Jerusalem.<sup>150</sup> Herzl's address began with a statement emphasizing the equivocal and historical nature of Jewish attachment to the land of Israel: “We are bound to this sacred soil by no valid title of ownership. Many generations have come and gone since this land was Jewish.”<sup>151</sup> Deferring the transhistorical exclusivism of blood, soil, or faith, Herzl turns instead to the history of a faith community:

There is something eternal in this memory; its form, naturally, has underdone considerable changes, with people, with institutions, and with times. The Zionist movement today is an entirely modern one. *It grows out*

---

inadequate assessment of Herzl and other Zionist thinkers – which should give us pause when essentializing movement that drew upon such disparate intellectual foundations.

<sup>150</sup> For extended accounts of Herzl's visit to Palestine: Avineri, *Herzl's Dream*, 1-26; Elon, *Herzl*, 287-302.

<sup>151</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 719-21.

*of the conditions of present-day life, and desires to utilize modern possibilities to solve the Jewish Question.*

Invoking the contingencies that have produced the present call for Jewish immigration to Palestine, Herzl concludes his remarks by situating his vision within the imperial interests of his hosts:

We are thoroughly convinced that the implementation of the Zionist plan will contribute to the welfare of Turkey as well ...

We are planning to establish a Jewish Land-Society for Syria and Palestine [*Jüdische Landgesellschaft für Syrien und Palästina*] ... (and for this company we request the protection of the German Kaiser).<sup>152</sup>

No man's rights or religious feelings are threatened by our idea (which heralds a long-desired reconciliation). We understand and respect the piety of all faiths for the soil on which, after all, the faith of our fathers arose as well ...

We Jews greet your majesty ... and wish that an age of peace and justice may dawn for all humanity. (For us also.)

Herzl's use of the term *landgesellschaft* marks part of his turn toward proposing a non-state entity, which he would develop further in *Altneuland*. After his first round of negotiations with the Ottoman leadership in 1896, a marked evolution toward more inventive and attenuated forms of Jewish sovereignty began to take shape.<sup>153</sup> Before the

---

<sup>152</sup> My translation here follows Elon, who placed parentheses around the lines that Prussian Foreign Secretary von Bülow struck from the draft of the speech, which Herzl had given to him in Constantinople (*Herzl*, 295-6).

<sup>153</sup> While *The Jewish State* deployed strategic ambiguity, Herzl was explicit about his wish for an "independent country" in his initial negotiations with the Ottomans: vassals "think of nothing but how to become independent as soon as possible", he told a Turkish diplomat (*Diaries*, 367). By 1897, Herzl had

first Zionist Congress, in 1897, Herzl announced that the movement aimed “to establish a homeland, guaranteed by international law [*eine völkerrechtliche gesicherte Heimstätte*] for those Jews who are unable, or unwilling, to be assimilated in their current place of residence”.<sup>154</sup> Herzl’s legal internationalism elicited severe antagonism from the cultural and labor Zionists, especially those already in the Yishuv. But it derived from his premise that the Jewish Question “was not a problem the Jews could solve alone,” as Avineri writes. “It was an international, global issue that crossed borders and continents, one that only a concerted international effort could solve.”<sup>155</sup>

#### VIII. The World Literature of *Altneuland*

Herzl imagined that immigration to Palestine could both ratify and resolve the Jews’ minority condition, their homelessness between the nation and the world. This revised conception of Jewish displacement relied upon a tradition in German-Jewish thought that “Judaism formed a unique synthesis between the national and the universal.”<sup>156</sup> The implications of this notion on Herzl’s formulation of Zionism are often overlooked. Herzl gave his most lucid expression of Zionist worldliness in his utopian novel *Altneuland* (1902).<sup>157</sup> It depicts Palestine before and after Jewish immigration, through the eyes of Adalbert Kingscourt, an eccentric Prussian nobleman, and his

---

come to envision his political program under integral Ottoman framework. He toyed with models of Ottoman suzerainty, as had existed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania, Bulgaria, and Egypt. With the publication of *Altneuland*, in 1902, “Herzl no longer contemplated a nation-state, but a new society well outside the accepted framework of European nationalism.” (Elon, *Herzl*, 348).

<sup>154</sup> qtd. in Avineri, *Herzl and the Jewish State*, 148; This appeared in the lead story of *Die Welt*’s first issue, on June 4, 1897.

<sup>155</sup> Avineri, *Herzl’s Vision*, 84-5.

<sup>156</sup> Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, Zionism*, 13.

<sup>157</sup> Despite the numerous antecedent proposals for Jewish nationalism and colonialism, I think it’s worth adumbrating Herzl’s originality in this regard. As Avineri comments that the novel’s political vision was “of a type seldom attempted either in Zionist literature or in that of other political movements.” (168)

secretary, a Viennese Jew named Friedrich Loewenberg, who have spent the past twenty years isolated from society in the South Pacific. On their return voyage, they find a “New Society” flourishing in Palestine. The pair meet David Littwak, a Galician Jew whose life Friedrich saved before leaving Europe. Littwak is now a rising political star in the New Society. Along with his allies, Littwak disavows the exclusivist logic of autochthonous cultural possession, instead situating the work of the New Society amidst the (imperial, cosmopolitan) world beyond Palestine. As Littwak proclaims during an electoral debate,

We made the New Society not because we were better than others, but simply because we were ordinary men with the ordinary human needs ...

We only did that which, under the given circumstances and at the given moment, was an historical necessity ... What resulted from the common endeavors ought to be claimed by no one nation for itself. It belongs to all men.<sup>158</sup>

In other words, *Altneuland* offers a worldly form of affiliation, predicated on a humanist form of historicism. Littwak’s speech implicitly suggests a synthesis between two competing discourses of cultural possession, which converge in the multiple senses of the Saidian term worldliness. On the one hand, the *worldliness* of a cultural endeavor consists in its specificity, the historically situated context of its production. And yet a cultural artifact is also worldly insofar as it transcends the boundaries of identity and joins in the common inheritance of humanity.<sup>159</sup> The rich tensions between these

---

<sup>158</sup> Herzl, *Old New Land*, 147.

<sup>159</sup> See: Mufti, *Forget English*, 239.

possibilities framed Said's investment in Auerbach's legacy, which ultimately dealt with the relationship between culture, belonging, and inhabitation (or exile).<sup>160</sup>

In *Altneuland*, Jewish belonging to the world, at the intersection of a multiplicity of languages, norms, and cultures, generates a form of world literature. The New Society creates its own versions of the French Academy and Legion of Honor, whose members "came from various countries whose cultures had been developed in their respective languages and they united on the basis of their common humanity".<sup>161</sup> When the New Society's visionary founder was laying its groundwork, years before, he invited to Palestine an ecumenical, multiracial group from "the intellectual aristocracy of the whole civilized world", men and women who excelled in the arts and sciences. Their journey was recorded daily in a newspaper, where "by far the most valuable section was the literary page [containing] the celebrated 'Table Talks,' which were later referred to as the New Platonic Dialogues". Friedrich and Grandcourt are told that these talks "have long been a gem of world literature."<sup>162</sup> If "*Weltliteratur* marks for Auerbach a unifying process, signifying 'universal' literature, that which expresses *Humanität* in general, [it also] assumes multiplicity and plurality", it should not be surprising that *Altneuland* invokes a similar conception.<sup>163</sup>

In actuality, Herzl's *Jewish State* was already a case study for a kind of Jewish *Weltliteratur*. As Avineri observes, "no other Jewish work of the modern age was so

---

<sup>160</sup> "[I]t is in culture that we can seek out the range of meanings and ideas conveyed by the phrases *belonging to* or *in a place*, being *at home in a place*". And yet "culture" is also "used to designate not merely something to which one belongs but something that one possesses and, along with that proprietary process, culture also designates a boundary by which the concepts of what is extrinsic or intrinsic ... come into forceful play." (Said, *World, Text, and Critic*, 8-9)

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 259; Isaacs.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-4; "eine Kostbarkeit der Weltliteratur" *Altneuland*, 254.

<sup>163</sup> Mufti, *Forget English*, 217-8.

quickly disseminated and as widely read as Herzl's book." In less than a year, translations appeared in English, French, Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Yiddish, and Hebrew, by publication houses from London to St. Petersburg.<sup>164</sup> In 1897, when Herzl founded a newspaper to report on and advance the Zionist cause, he called it *Die Welt*, emphasizing the movement's worldly parameters.<sup>165</sup> *Altneuland* fills in many particulars of the vision promulgated in *Die Welt*. In the novel's Jerusalem, there is a "Peace Palace, where international congresses of peace-lovers and scientists were held" and "inventors, artists, and scholars" supported. Littwak's wife Sarah explains that "its activities are by no means limited to Palestine and the Jews, but include all countries and people."<sup>166</sup> Above the entrance, its motto announces: "*Nil humani a me alienum puto* – Let nothing human be alien to me."<sup>167</sup>

During Friedrich and Grandcourt's visit, the New Society is temporarily riven by a political crisis over immigration and naturalization. A populist party that seeks to exclude non-Jews, natives and immigrants, from the New Society, challenges the existing leadership. Herzl's fictional stand-ins warn that a political formation that privileges Jewish citizens over non-Jews will degenerate into the very forms of estrangement that Zionism aimed to resolve. "The New Society rests squarely on ideas which are the

---

<sup>164</sup> Avineri, *Herzl's Vision*, 114-115.

<sup>165</sup> Hermann Goldschmidt observes that while most of Herzl's colleagues voted to name the paper *Homeward*, Herzl instead chose to call it *Die Welt* – this "preserved the sense of 'homeward to humanity'" (*Legacy of German Jewry*, 106). There were already seeds of this rhetoric throughout *The Jewish State*, which concludes: "whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our own welfare, will react powerfully for the good of humanity" (157).

<sup>166</sup> Herzl, *Old New Land*, 249, 250.

<sup>167</sup> Such viewpoints, of course, derive from a larger intellectual history, one of whose arcs originates with the Enlightenment scholar Giambattista Vico, leads to Erich Auerbach and, eventually, to Said. Mufti traces this chain of influence in terms of "a radically historical humanism, with 'the human' understood not as a pre-given commonness of nature or experience but rather something that is achieved through social and cultural action by and between divergently situated and constituted individuals and collectivities" (*Forget English*, 222).

common stock of the whole civilized world,” declares Dr. Eichenstamm, the New Society’s President. “It would be unethical for us to deny a share in our commonwealth to any man, wherever he might come from, whatever his race or creed . . . Our slogan must be, now and always—‘Man, thou art my brother.’”<sup>168</sup> Eichenstamm grooms Littwak as his successor, advising him that “My last word to the Jews will be: The stranger must be made to feel at home in our midst.” Later, he dies with these words on his lips.<sup>169</sup>

Such rhetoric suggests the most salient question for a post-colonial reader, which Kingscourt articulates in the novel, when he meets Reschid Bey, a Palestinian Arab friend and comrade of Littwak: “Were not the older inhabitants of Palestine ruined by the Jewish immigration? And didn’t they have to leave the country? [...] Don’t you regard the Jews as intruders?”<sup>170</sup> *Altneuland* attempts to refute these charges through the figure of Reschid. On behalf of the Palestinian population, Reschid is made to endorse the Herzlian propositions that the Jews can forge a society embodying civil pluralism, transnational commerce, and technological advancement, all guided by a liberal form of pan-German culture (Littwak hails Reschid in Arabic, and the latter responds to him “in German—with a slight northern accent”, having studied in Berlin).<sup>171</sup> Reschid asserts that the local Arabs’ “religious and ancient customs have in no wise been interfered with.” The agrarian Palestinian peasantry “who had nothing stood to lose nothing” and “benefited from the progress of the New Society whether they wanted to or not, whether they joined or not.” The patronizing attitude toward the Palestinians relies on the same tropes of Orientalist backwardness that Herzl evinced toward the Eastern European Jews.

---

<sup>168</sup> Herzl, *Old New Land*, 152.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 111, 276; “Der fremde soll sich bei uns wohl fühlen!” (*Altneuland*, 126, 318).

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-25.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.



In his first contacts with the Prussians, in 1896, he claimed that if the Jews returned to “our historic fatherland, we should like to do so as representatives of Western civilization [*Culturträger des Westens*], and bring cleanliness, order, and the well-distilled customs of the Occident ... and this obligation will educate our people to the extent that *they* need it.”<sup>172</sup>

And yet Reschid Bey also indexes an alternative version of Orientalism that took hold among many German-Jewish followers of Herzl: the notion of Oriental solidarity, unity, and “spiritual nobility” that distinguished Orientals in general, and the Ostjuden in particular, from the Gentile Europeans, with their guiding principles of rationalism, materialism, and difference.<sup>173</sup> Grandcourt attributes Reschid’s openness to his European education, but the latter objects: “I did not learn tolerance in the Occident. We Moslems have always had better relations with the Jews than you Christians.” Through Reschid Bey, Herzl modifies the conventional Orientalist binaries that he had articulated during the 1890s. As a liberal assimilationist, he had not conceived of Oriental backwardness – whether in Palestine or amongst Eastern European Jews – as an innate ethnic predisposition. It was, rather, an historical condition of development, one that could be ameliorated by German *Bildung*. As time went on, Herzl began to adopt a strategic *figural mobility*. In various contexts, Herzl’s used the prospective Jewish immigrants to signify the Occident (specifically, Germans) or the Orient (Semites). They could simultaneously belong to a romanticized (Ottoman) Orient, while serving as harbingers of European modernization.

---

<sup>172</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 343, emphasis mine on a phrase that reads, in the original, as “und dieser Zwang wird unser Volk erziehen” (*Briefe und Tachbücher*, 337).

<sup>173</sup> See: Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions*, 83-8.

In a passage from *The Jewish State*, frequently cited to demonstrate Herzl's Eurocentrism, he writes, "We should [in Palestine] form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism."<sup>174</sup> The next sentence, though rarely quoted, offers a more surprising characterization of Zionism's program: "We should as a *neutral* State remain in contact with all Europe." Herzl often deployed a discourse of "neutrality,"<sup>175</sup> which I believe was the political equivalent of the figural mobility indexed above. And in the Berlin-Baghdad Express, Herzl found an image that linked the potential benefits of "contact" (or European cultural influence) with a "neutral" cosmopolitan society (outside the European state system).<sup>176</sup> Herzl's hope that the novel would win over recalcitrant Ottoman officials offered diplomatic as well as ideological motivations for eliding any antagonism from the synthesis of Jewish autonomy and Turkish sovereignty.<sup>177</sup> In *Altneuland*, Herzl imagined Jewish national belonging nested underneath Ottoman imperial sovereignty; the Sultan reigns supreme, if also supremely detached.<sup>178</sup> And the Berlin-Baghdad railway is no longer solely a Prussian-Ottoman policy goal; it is an accomplished fact, thanks to Jewish immigration: "Since the railroad bridge over the Bosphorus was finished, it is possible to travel directly from [all the European capitals] to Jerusalem." Additional lines connect Damascus, Jerusalem, and

---

<sup>174</sup> Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 96.

<sup>175</sup> "The settlement of the shortest route to Asia by a *neutral* national element could also have a certain value for Germany's Oriental policy." (Herzl, *Diaries*, 639-40, emphasis mine)

<sup>176</sup> As Herzl wrote the Kaiser in 1898, "all of non-Russian Europe" needed "a railroad from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. The Jews could and must build this great road of the nations which, if undertaken otherwise, might call forth the most serious rivalries" (*Diaries*, 671).

<sup>177</sup> A New Society elder contrasts Europe's imperial militaries, who operate "in enemy territory" at great cost, with the Jewish immigrants: "We, however, were in a friendly country, on our ancestral soil" (Herzl, *Old New Land*, 228). Herzl gave copies of the novel to his contacts in the Turkish government (Avineri, *Herzl's Vision*, 201). In 1920, David Ben-Gurion wrote that "of all peoples, only the Jews are the loyal friends of the Turkish people, because they have no designs for conquest as the others do" (qtd. in Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs*, 21). It is perhaps notable that Ben-Gurion wrote this in Hebrew, for a Zionist readership in Palestine.

<sup>178</sup> Herzl, *Old New Land*, 192-3

Baghdad.<sup>179</sup> “Only we Jews could have done it”, Littwak explains. “Our moral sufferings were as much a necessary element as our commercial experience and cosmopolitanism.”

Herzl aims to show that his project will not simply reproduce the forms of displacement that Jews experienced in their previous habitations. The novel envisions a society that rejects racist exceptionalism, along with the alienation it produces for minority communities. Since the New Society is not exclusive to Jews, its success spurs the immigration of a multinational *mélange*. On Palestine’s coasts, there are new communities from south and east Asia.<sup>180</sup> “Greeks, Levantines, Armenians, and Persians” dominate the merchant class.<sup>181</sup> Women hold full equal rights, as they did in the Zionist Congress.<sup>182</sup> Herzl imagined the port of Haifa, three decades before its actual construction, filled with “cosmopolitan traffic in the streets” and vessels “flying the flags of all the nations”.<sup>183</sup> In Tiberias, the protagonists find “stately mosques, churches with Latin and Greek crosses, magnificent stone synagogues” while “Roumanian and Italian bands in national costume performed on several large terraces”.<sup>184</sup> In essence, *Altneuland* transforms Jewish displacement from Europe into a model and catalyst for the movement of cultural groups beyond national sovereignty. The New Society becomes an exhibition for alternative forms of societal cohesion: “We have no state, like the Europeans of your

---

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 81-82. The novel envisions railways along the Mediterranean coast, from Beirut, down Lebanon and Palestine, to Port Said in Egypt (210, 290). In fact, these railways would be built and destroyed, first in World War I, and then in the 1948 War (McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 270-1, 298). Israel has rebuilt the aforementioned lines within its borders since the late 1990s.

<sup>180</sup> Herzl, *Old New Land*, 67.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 160.

time,” Littwak explains. “We are merely a society of citizens seeking to enjoy life through work and culture.”<sup>185</sup>

Toward the novel’s end, the president of the Jewish Academy, Dr. Marcus, offers *Altneuland*’s *raison d’être*: “we are duty bound to increase Beauty and Wisdom upon the earth unto our last breath. For the earth is we ourselves [*Denn die Erde sind wir selbst*].”<sup>186</sup> Dr. Marcus’ sense of earthliness will resonate with readers of Auerbach – most of all from Edward Said’s reading of Auerbach. In fact, it is in Said’s seminal essay “Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims,” according to Apter, that “*irdisch* takes its place as crucially constitutive of what Said ... characterized as political worldliness”.<sup>187</sup> How could such a specific deployment of a concept ground both the literary genesis of Zionism, and its most poignant critique – itself anchored in literary scholarship? One answer may lie in a deeper intertext. As Apter points out, *Welt* and *Erde*, marked terms of Auerbach’s mature internationalism, redound to the title of his 1929 book *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt*, which was rendered in English as *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*.<sup>188</sup> Said reemphasized the literal meaning of *irdisch* in the title of his posthumously published introduction to *Mimesis*: “Erich Auerbach: Critic of the Earthly World.” In that essay, Said surveys Auerbach’s lifelong philological engagement with *figural* interpretation, beginning with his first book on Dante. “Auerbach’s choice of Dante,” Said writes, highlights the emergence of an historical humanism, “expanding the

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 79. Elsewhere, Dr. Marcus defines the New Society: “we are not a state. We are a commonwealth [*Gemeinschaft*] ... a large co-operative association [*Genossenschaft*] composed of affiliated co-operatives” (284; *Altneuland*, 328-9). Friedrich concludes: “The New Society can exist anywhere,--in any country” (291).

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 262; *Altneuland*, 301-2.

<sup>187</sup> Apter, *Against World Literature*, 216.

<sup>188</sup> “‘Secular’ is something of a mistranslation of ‘*irdisch*,’ normally defined in English as earthly, temporal, or transient.” (Ibid.)

potential range of human action while also continuing to ground it in earthly situations.”<sup>189</sup>

The sense of the “earthly” basis of humanist historicism in Herzl’s writing, alongside his engagement with *Weltliteratur*, appears proleptic of Auerbach and his celebrated achievements in Istanbul. But it would be more accurate to say that Herzl and Auerbach’s discourses were engendered by the same historical and conceptual conditions of possibility. Their thinking was immanent to and inseparable from phenomena that are conventionally discussed in chronological succession or binary opposition: world literature and (German) Orientalism, imperialist politics and cosmopolitan culture, nationalism and displacement. Each of these formations existed simultaneously and reinforced no less than refuted the other.

Contemporary scholarship on Auerbach in Istanbul highlights the role of German-Jewish displacement in canonizing a specific ideological and aesthetic representation of cosmopolitan European civilization. At the same time, German-Jews laid the groundwork for nationalist projects that would outlast the empires under whom such projects were fostered. Thus we return to a central question: under what conditions could (German) Jews be imagined to *represent* this universalist European civilization? And what were the implications of this possibility on the encounter between Europe’s Jews and the peoples living in the Orient?

---

<sup>189</sup> Said, “Erich Auerbach,” 29.

Chapter 2:  
“Auerbach in Jerusalem”:  
Imperial Collapse, National Revivals, and Exilic Critique

I. The View from Istanbul: The Jewish Minority as Foreigners, Ottomans, and Zionists

Herzl was not alone in imagining that Jews could convey German forms of cosmopolitanism and imperialism into the Ottoman Orient. But what did displaced Jews represent to the Ottoman state and its successor, Turkey? From the eve of the first World War to the second, the indeterminacy of the Jewish subject position guided and limited Turkey’s self-conception as an Islamic empire, a Turkish state, and a European civilization. The Turkish context during this period offers productive counterpoints to the questions that underpinned German discourses of cultural identity, representation, and sovereignty: *in what ways* could Jews, as a religious minority, belong? Not only *where*, but *how*? Different forms of the minority question arose across Prussian and Ottoman territories, and in the forgotten political fantasies that grew between them. The nationalist movements that followed (and dashed many of these dreams) emerged from the same imperial systems. An inquiry into the representation of Jewish displacement must therefore proceed *across* the misleadingly clean break separating empire from nation-state, while also breaching the critical separation between two discourses of subjectivity: one national, statist, and political, the other exilic, cosmopolitan, and literary.

Late Ottoman perspectives on minorities and foreign nationals (including the first Zionist settlers) were shaped by the Capitulations, or *ahdname*.<sup>1</sup> These were a series of agreements between the Ottoman state and various European powers that permitted the latter to cultivate subjects bearing extra-territorial rights (and even a measure of juridical

---

<sup>1</sup> In *Extraterritorial Dreams*, Stein provides an extensive historiographic bibliography on the Capitulations, 141. See also: Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism 1897-1918*, 33-49.

sovereignty) while living in Ottoman territory. Originating in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> the Capitulations had become a pre-occupation of Ottoman relations with rival European empires. The Europeans' right to protect their (actual or potential) extraterritorial subjects became a pretext for interventionist policies by Britain, France, Russia, and Austria on behalf of Christian minorities in the empire.<sup>2</sup> Among many other consequences, the Capitulations turned a small but prominent number of “protected” subjects into the instruments of foreign claims aimed at weakening Ottoman sovereignty by dividing or conquering its territory.

From the European side, Ottoman minorities were imagined through a variety of cultural ideologies. Romanticist enthusiasm about the singularity of *volkisch* expression (and support for popular revolts against an autocratic empire) led to a secularization of the religious-civilizational opposition between Christendom and the “Terrible Turk.” These discourses carried political and cultural resonance in Europe, as exemplified by Lord Byron, who died while volunteering in the Greek war of independence. Byron's “martyrdom” helped rally international support against the Ottomans, and in 1829 Greece became the first European state carved out of their empire.

Meanwhile, Asia Minor's classical heritage inspired neo-classicist reclamation projects aimed to shore up a mytho-historical past for Europe's newly self-conscious nations, such as the newly unified Germany, an Ottoman ally. Before the Berlin-Baghdad railroad concession agreement was formally signed in 1899, “a secret imperial *Irade* (decree) ... gave the Berlin Museum further rights to keep artefacts German miners or

---

<sup>2</sup> “Protection” grew symbolic, standing in for the Romanov dynasty's spiritual sovereignty over Eastern Orthodox Ottomans, for example, or justifying Russia's cultivation of ethno-nationalist separatism amongst the Slavic-speaking populations of the Ottoman Balkans. See: Julia Cohen and Sarah Stein, eds., *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700–1950*, First Edition (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 115-8; Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams*, 6.

archaeologists might discover” during the railway’s construction through Ottoman lands.<sup>3</sup> As McMeekin remarks, Berlin’s Museum Island owes much to this arrangement. In exchange, the empires’ foreign ministers agreed that Prussian spies would feed the Sultan intelligence on the activities of his Young Turk opponents throughout Europe.

Ottoman historiography is rich with the tensions between cultural and political figures, locals and foreigners, modernizers and classicists. I wish to extend our consideration of these cleavages into the critical discussion surrounding interwar Turkey’s invitations to German-Jewish scholars (and the origins of Comparative Literature). Insofar as these refugee-scholars were recruited to serve Turkey’s nationalist project, we must understand the relevant antecedents for interwar Turkey’s Westernization and modernization programs. Additionally, the “Auerbach in Istanbul” moment has been instrumentalized to suggest a distinctly Turkish tradition of hospitality and tolerance extended toward European Jews in danger,<sup>4</sup> dating back to the “mercy ships” that Sultan Beyazit II sent for the Sephardi Jews expelled from Spain.<sup>5</sup> But in the decades whose events generated the modern Turkish state (and its reception of German-Jewish academics), the position of émigré Jews was far more ambivalent.

During the Ottoman Empire’s final decades, Ottoman Jews, Zionists, and even the German government represented Jewish immigration as a means to contribute to Turkey’s modernization. This touched upon a defining tension in Ottoman-Turkish

---

<sup>3</sup> McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 83-4.

<sup>5</sup> This was not the only instance of Ottoman sultans sponsoring Jewish in-migration. Mehmet the Conqueror summoned Jews to rehabilitate Istanbul, specifically by repopulating Venetian neighborhoods abandoned in the conquest of 1453. His 16<sup>th</sup> century successors frequently turned to Sephardi Jewish elites to colonize the Ottoman Balkans. See: İnalcık, “Foundations of Ottoman-Jewish Cooperation.” A presupposition of Turkish hospitality to Jewish immigration was widely held by early Zionist settlers, who were surprised to find their immigration restricted.



politics. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, successive Ottoman governments determined that the modernization of their state and society was an existential necessity. And yet modernization suggested notions of citizenship and belonging that contradicted existing Ottoman models, especially for minorities and foreigners. When Herzl accompanied the Kaiser to Palestine with notes on “the suzerainty of the Porte and the protectorate of Germany”, he was constructing a hybrid out of three models that ultimately proved mutually exclusive: pre-modern Ottoman protection of Jews, European imperial “protection” (both extra-territoriality and imperially-sponsored colonialism), and communal self-determination. As the latter became the *sine qua non* of separatist national movements amongst Ottoman minorities, the imperial models of “protection” fell apart.

The European powers pressured the Ottoman state to adopt liberalizing reforms. But with respect to minorities, the Europeans made contradictory demands. They pushed for equal civil rights, while insisting that the extra-territorial privileges of their foreign subjects (mostly non-Muslims, though many were Ottoman-born) remain in place.<sup>6</sup> Jewish subjects (past, present, and aspirational) found themselves torn between conflicting sources of civil legitimacy: that is, between discrepant sources of protection and citizenship. The first “massive and consistent” Jewish immigration to Palestine, an outgrowth of the sectarian split between Hasidic and anti-Hasidic (Mitnagdi) Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, began a century before the Zionist movement. But “unlike the veteran Sephardic community the Ashkenazim were reluctant to become

---

<sup>6</sup> The major reforms of the period dealt with the rights of religious minorities and extraterritorial subjects, including the Tanzimat (1839), the Hatt-ı Humayün (1856), and the Ottoman Law of Nationality (1869). These reforms guaranteed basic rights and equal legal protection. But they were undercut by the treaties that ended the Ottomans’ losing efforts in the Crimean War (1856) and Russo-Turkish War (1879), which preserved the European states’ rights to intervene on behalf of their subjects: “Turkey remained, in fact, outside the pale of international law” (Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism 1897-1918*, 34). See also: Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 27-29; Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams*, 14-16, 21-22.

Ottoman subjects and preferred foreign protection”.<sup>7</sup> This would shape Ottoman attitudes toward the Zionists, who were also predominantly Ashkenazi.

The first major Zionist movement, Hovevei Zion, passed a resolution at their inaugural conference in Katowice, Poland, stating that “Our people wish to settle in the Promised Land as honest and loyal subjects, imbued with sincere love and obedience to the government of the country.”<sup>8</sup> In 1881, before the earliest cadre of Zionists arrived in Palestine (the BILU group), their leadership came to Constantinople seeking the Sultan’s approval.<sup>9</sup> As Romanian Jews, they argued, they were former Ottoman subjects who had, in effect, been unwillingly deprived of the Sultan’s sovereignty by Romanian independence. These negotiations were called off when Britain annexed Egypt the following year, after which the Ottomans forbade further Zionist immigration, lest it serve as a bridgehead for foreign designs on Palestine. The early Zionists’ pro-Ottomanism did not diminish “Turkey’s belief that the Jewish settlers were being used as pawns by the Powers to the detriment of Turkish sovereignty.”

In the last eight years of Herzl’s life, he visited Constantinople five times to meet with the Ottoman leadership about Jewish immigration.<sup>10</sup> Abdul Hamid, the Turkish

---

<sup>7</sup> Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism 1897-1918*, 29-32. By the mid-1870s, the Ashkenazim had overtaken the Sephardim as the majority of Palestine’s Jews. European protection offered relief from the abuses and caprice of corrupt local officials.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 42-3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 37-39. The Ottoman Empire ruled over most of Romania from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until 1878. Thereafter, “the vast majority of native-born Romanian Jews were excluded from Romanian citizenship”; state-sponsored anti-Semitism earned international condemnation in the decades to follow: Elon, *Herzl*, 360. For an even more vexing case involving Ottoman Jewish subjects from Bulgaria, see: Cohen and Stein, *Sephardi Lives*, 192-194.

<sup>10</sup> These negotiations took place at the Yıldız Kiosk, a fortified complex in a wooded hilltop park, where Abdul Hamid moved after attempted assassinations and coups convinced him that he was not safe in the Dolmahbaçe Palace, a Westminster imitation that his father, Sultan Abdulmecid, had built on the shores of the Bosphorus during the Tanzimat era (McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 54-79). Before Kaiser Wilhelm’s final state visit, the Ottomans had to borrow money from Prussia to build a third wing onto the moderately sized villa, which is little more than a country house compared to the Dolmahbaçe and Topkapı

sultan, was dubious about importing European Jews. His reign began in 1876 amidst revolts across the Balkans, and as the Great Powers seized control of his bankrupted state's finances.<sup>11</sup> An autocrat, Abdul Hamid sought to rehabilitate his role as caliph by promoting pan-Islamism.<sup>12</sup> However, when Kaiser Wilhelm let slip that the Germans "want to get rid" of their Jews, Abdul-Hamid had retorted, "I myself am very happy with my Jewish subjects."<sup>13</sup> Like his predecessors, he held no specific objection to European Jewish immigration *as such*.<sup>14</sup> And like his successors, the CUP ("Young Turks"), he welcomed influence from Germany. But for Abdul Hamid, the integrity of the state came before all other considerations: every option, from Zionist immigration to the mass killing of ethnic minorities, was on the table. In this one respect, the last Sultan differed little from the Young Turks who overthrew him, and from the former Young Turk officer, Mustafa Kemal, who succeeded them. Under each government, efforts to establish refuge for Europe's displaced Jews in Ottoman (and later Turkish) territory led to the entanglement of an embattled state's minority question with its needs to modernize its laws, economy, and culture. And in each context, Germany's Jewish Question cast a shadow over Turkish policy. The Kaiser supported Zionism in order to render a dispersed

---

palaces. Recently, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has sought to build an official residence at Yıldız.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 55-6; 38: "Ottoman Turkey had declared bankruptcy in 1875, its finances now under strict European oversight" which held "control of all revenues raised through customs and tax collection in the empire".

<sup>12</sup> McMeekin. Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, 78-79.

<sup>13</sup> "[I]n the context of late Ottoman politics, Jews were rarely singled out as a 'problem' community. Indeed, according to various nineteenth-century commentators, there was no Jewish Question in the Ottoman Empire." Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, xi.

<sup>14</sup> Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism 1897-1918*, 40, 45. Jewish immigration to Palestine was prohibited in 1882, but the Ottoman government offered subsidized lands and tax exemptions to Jewish settlers elsewhere. In 1887, after the Porte began limiting the stays of Jewish pilgrims, the Ottoman Foreign Minister, Said Halim Pasha, wrote, "Today even more, a great number of Jews seek refuge on Ottoman soil. Their religion is not considered a reason for their exclusion. With the exception of Palestine, they are free to establish themselves in the Empire ... in Turkey they had always found peace, security and complete liberty of conscience." Sultan Abdul Hamid adopted the same approach negotiating with Herzl, offering "Mesopotamia, Syria, and Anatolia for large-scale settlement." Elon, *Herzl*, 336, 344-5, 357-8.

minority separable from the body politic, to better solidify the (German) national community. Yet from the Ottoman perspective, the greatest threat to political cohesion came from the movement of dispersed minorities *out of* a multiethnic imperial framework and into self-conscious national groups.

When Herzl first arrived in Constantinople in 1896, Abdul Hamid was known as “the Bloody Sultan” for his brutal suppression of Armenian uprisings.<sup>15</sup> The British, French, and Russian governments were increasing support for the Young Turks’ opposition movement.<sup>16</sup> Herzl’s go-between with the Ottomans, Count Philip de Newlinski,<sup>17</sup> believed that Herzl’s media influence in Vienna could mollify European hostility toward the Sultan, enabling him to reconcile with the Young Turks and the separatist movements (“Macedonians, Cretans, Armenians, etc.”).<sup>18</sup> Herzl, typically, responded that Zionism offered “the Sultan the means to carry this out, in the form of Jewish aid. Let the Sultan give us that piece of land, and in return we shall set his house in order, straighten out his finances, and influence public opinion all over the world in his favor.” From Constantinople, Herzl wired his editors a post that he privately admitted was “friendly to the [Turkish] government.” A day later, his diary observes darkly: “Bad news again today from Anatolia. New massacres at Van.”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 10, 49.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-59. European backers of Ahmed Rıza, the Young Turk leader then exiled in Paris, used the extra-territorial privileges of their consuls and protégés to distribute Rıza’s journal *Meşveret*, which officially named the opposition movement “the Committee of Union and Progress.” The CUP would ultimately overthrow Abdul-Hamid in 1908; Rıza served as the new government’s first parliamentary speaker.

<sup>17</sup> Elon, *Herzl*, 195. An exiled Polish nobleman, Newlinski was a personal adviser and foreign agent of Sultan Abdul Hamid.

<sup>18</sup> Herzl, *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, 362-3; cf. 346, 369, 387. By 1896, Abdul-Hamid faced separatist revolts from Bosnians, Serbians, Montenegrans, Armenians, Cretans, Druze, Lebanese Christians, and others.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 392, 394.

But the Sultan did not yield in negotiations over Palestine: “The Turkish Empire belongs not to me, but to the Turkish people. I cannot give away any part of it.” Candidly, he instructed Herzl, “Let the Jews save their billions. When my Empire is partitioned, they may get Palestine for nothing. But only our corpse will be divided. I will not agree to vivisection.”<sup>20</sup> For financial reasons, the Ottomans continued negotiations with Herzl. In 1901, the Sultan awarded Herzl the Mejidide Order’s Grand Cordon, Turkey’s highest honor (Herzl wore the medal when he met Pope Pius X).<sup>21</sup> Catching the Sultan’s eye at the Ottoman court ceremonies, Herzl saw “a picture of fairy-tale splendor faded away”.<sup>22</sup> But instead of rewriting political events to fit his dreams, Herzl saw the Sultan in the image of German poetry, likening Abdul Hamid, “this magnanimous, melancholy prince of decline”, to “The Moorish King” of Heine’s poem (“The hill of Yildiz is perhaps the ‘mountain of the last Caliph’s sigh’”).

Herzl seemed to have come full circle, back to the world of letters and cultural prestige that had preceded his political adventures. In his first diary entry after finishing the manuscript for *Altneuland*, Herzl drafted a letter to the Sultan emphasizing the benefits of importing worldly Jews into Turkey’s empire. “We Jews play a certain role in university life all over the world. The universities of all countries number Jews among their professors, and we have great scholars in all fields of learning.”<sup>23</sup> Noting that Turkish youth who studied in the West were often “led astray”, he proffered that the Jews “could create a Jewish University in Your Imperial Majesty’s Empire, for example in

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 378, 379, 389.

<sup>21</sup> Elon, *Herzl*, 331-2; 395.

<sup>22</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 381; “Dann löst sich das märchenhaft prächtige Bild auf”, *Briefe und Tachbücher*, 370. An interesting choice of words for the author of *Altneuland*, a text that explicitly defined itself against the *märchen*, “fairy tale.”

<sup>23</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 1274-5.

Jerusalem. The Ottoman students would no longer need to go abroad.” This represents an interesting prolepsis for the 1930s German-Jewish renaissance-in-exile in Istanbul. Herzl promises that *displaced* European Jewish scholars will reinforce a *local-territorial* sense of national integrity, helping the Turkish state to modernize from within. (With the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, founded in 1918, German-Jewish intellectuals would literalize this dream<sup>24</sup> – only outside of Turkish sovereignty.)

Expanding upon his university proposal, Herzl also radically revised his earlier, negative assessment of Jewish Orientalism (as a problem to be solved by assimilation). During his final visit to Yıldız in 1902, Herzl told Abdul Hamid that the Jews “we wish to introduce” into the Ottoman population were “bound to Muslims by racial kinship and religious affinity”, and no less, by the historical tradition of Jews finding refuge in the Ottoman East since “the fifteenth century.”<sup>25</sup> Though Herzl never obtained a political settlement, his final vision of a positively-inflected Jewish Orientalism, nested in Ottoman patriotism and Judeo-Islamic solidarity, closely matched a cultural imaginary arising amongst both Ashkenazi Zionists and Ottoman Jews. Saposnik summarizes Zionist writing in Palestine before World War I as believing that “In the process of reuniting with their true eastern origins and brethren ... the Jews would import the best of European civilization, which they had adopted over the years of their extended exile.”<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Of the founding scholars of the institution, Aschheim writes, “they retained [*Bildung*’s] cultivating ethical and spiritual dimensions and rendered its humanist and cultural impulses central to both their radicalism and their specific brand of nationalism. If they were regarded themselves essentially as Jews in Germany, in many ways they were Germans in Palestine.” He recounts the hostility they often encountered from the *Ostjuden* who predominated in the Zionist Yishuv. Steven E. Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Herzl, *Diaries*, 1321-2.

<sup>26</sup> Saposnik, “Europe and its Orients in Zionist Culture,” 1111.

In this synthesis, the Jews would “act as a bridge between East and West, to the mutual benefit of the Jews themselves and the peoples of the Orient.”

Most Ottoman Jews did not embrace Zionism until Abdul Hamid was overthrown in 1908. But in the 1890s, they did undertake monumental efforts to obtain sanctuary for Eastern European Jewish refugees. Cohen traces a particularly fecund episode in 1892, when Ottoman Jews decided – without precedent – to celebrate the anniversary of the welcome extended by Sultan Bayezid II to the Sephardim expelled from Spain, 400 years earlier.<sup>27</sup> From the anniversary organizers’ perspective, Ottoman patriotism did not require them to renounce transnational fellowship with Jews in other nations (a contrast from nationalist, and later communist, discourse). If anything, Ottoman Jews emphasized the similarity between Jews and Muslims by virtue of their transimperial bonds, as a contrast from (Christian) nationalist separatists.<sup>28</sup> After the Young Turks’ 1908 revolution pivoted the state’s discourse toward an egalitarian Ottomanism of “all the empire’s citizens”,<sup>29</sup> many Ottoman Jews turned to language and cultural politics as a means to unify the empire’s polyglot Jewish communities into a “model minority”, in

---

<sup>27</sup> Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, 48-52. Cohen culls from a number of contemporary sources; one suggested “that Ottoman Jews erect a sculpture portraying the Sultan Bayezid II with his arms outstretched to the Spanish exiles” which “might be placed near Abdülhamid II’s Yıldız Palace”, 52.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 81. The papers also reported on Jews and Muslims volunteers arriving from other parts of Europe to fight on the Ottoman side. See also: Cohen and Stein, “The Fez as a Sign of Patriotism: An Appeal for Imperial Allegiance During the Greco-Ottoman War [1897]”, *Sephardi Lives*, 194-6.

<sup>29</sup> In contrast to Abdul Hamid’s Islamism and the Turco-centrism that would soon follow: McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 73-6, 335-8. The Young Turks’ opponents frequently charged them with being crypto-Jews, Zionists, and Dönme, descendants of Jewish followers of the pseudo-messiah Sabbatai Zevi, who converted to Islam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (*Ibid.*, 75-8). Cohen concludes that CUP cooperation with Zionists “were largely strategic, limited, and noncommittal” (*Becoming Ottomans*, 106).

There is a rich historiography on the Young Turks’ relationship with Ottoman Jews and Zionists. See: Ahmad, “The Special Relationship: The Committee of Union and Progress and Ottoman Jewish Political Elite, 1908-1918”; Landau, “The ‘Young Turks’ and Zionism: Some Comments”; Oke, “Young Turks, Freemasons, Jews, and the Question of Zionism in the Ottoman Empire (1908-1913)”; Cohen and Stein, “A Debate on Zionism in the Ottoman Parliament [1911]”, *Sephardi Lives*, 222-25; Fishman, “Understanding the 1911 Ottoman Parliament Debate on Zionism in Light of the Emergence of a ‘Jewish Question.’”

Cohen's terms.<sup>30</sup> Zionism, largely in the form of cultural Hebraism, took root under the affiliative promise of pan-Ottomanism. As a Salonican journalist argued, "Zionism merely seeks to strengthen Ottoman Judaism and to increase the power of a singular and indivisible Turkey by encouraging Jewish immigrants..."<sup>31</sup> Since the Tanzimat reforms, Ottoman Jewish leaders had urged their largely Ladino-speaking communities to learn Turkish, as a gesture of modernization and loyalty.<sup>32</sup> Now Zionists insisted that Palestine's Jews adopt Ottoman citizenship and forego the protection rights of other European states.<sup>33</sup> Local Zionists insisted that they were "deeply patriotic and thoroughly Ottoman."<sup>34</sup> Their politics imagined that "Palestine would become a national center and place of refuge for persecuted Jews without becoming a separate state—a position the World Zionist Congress also adopted by 1911."

In Palestine, the ascendant Po'alei Zion party, lead by David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi<sup>35</sup> (later Israel's first prime minister and second president, respectively), promoted the "Ottomanization" of the Jews.<sup>36</sup> Ben-Gurion named the party newspaper *ha-Ahdut*, modeling its message on the Young Turks' promotion of *Ittihad* (from a shared root in Arabic), the "unity" of all peoples within the empire. The editors wrote of "our unequivocal recognition that the strength of the Ottoman state, a state comprised of

---

<sup>30</sup> Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, 81-6, 98-102.

<sup>31</sup> "'Our Duties as Jews and as Ottomans': An Ottoman Zionist Vision for the Future (1909)", *Sephardi Lives*, 213-222.

<sup>32</sup> Cohen and Stein, *Sephardi Lives*, 185, 190-1.

<sup>33</sup> Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism*, 42-3. Among the prominent Zionists pushing for the Ottomanization of the Ashkenazi community was Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, "the father of the revival of spoken Hebrew," who "adopted Ottoman nationality."

<sup>34</sup> Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, 104.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen and Stein, "Yitzhak Ben-Zvi Found a Center for the Study of 'Eastern Jews' in Jerusalem [1948]", *Sephardi Lives*, 422-4.

<sup>36</sup> Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs*, 20-9. See also: Shapira, *Israel*, 43-6. Shapira, *Ben-Gurion*, 20-42.



peoples who differ widely in language, culture, race, and history, rests only in internal solidarity.”<sup>37</sup> In 1911, Ben-Gurion began to learn Turkish, “astounding his teacher by how rapidly he grasped the language.” After four months, they “swapped roles ... Ben-Gurion taught him Hebrew and turned him into a Zionist.”<sup>38</sup> Joining Ben-Zvi, Ben-Gurion then matriculated at Istanbul University’s law school, which he hoped would qualify him to run for the Ottoman parliament. After the outbreak of World War I, the CUP government grew increasingly hostile toward national movements that might foment separatism, including Zionism.<sup>39</sup> During a roundup of Palestine’s Zionist leadership, Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi were arrested and deported. But their commitment to the Young Turk regime was unshaken. As Shabtai Tevet recounts, “they did not discard the fez, and on arrival in Egypt, they declared to British port officials: ‘We are Ottomans.’”<sup>40</sup>

Ben-Gurion foresaw a conclusion to the war in which “The Ottoman Empire will stand in need of cultured minds and initiative. Germany will require suitable human resources. The Jews are just such a resource.”<sup>41</sup> Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi spent the duration of the war in United States, where they embarked on a “recruitment campaign”, as Teveth recounts, “to raise at least 10,000 volunteers who would proceed to Palestine when called and there form ‘Jewish legions to fight for Palestine’ on Turkey’s side.” But Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi were not alone in promoting, in essence, an expatriate Jewish

---

<sup>37</sup> qtd. in Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs*, 20. See: David Ben-Gurion, “Leverur matzavenu ha-medini” (Clarifying Our Political Situation), *Ha-Ahdut*, 4 Elul 1910; cited in Shapira, *Land and Power*, 61, 380.

<sup>38</sup> Shapira, *Ben-Gurion*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, *Israel*, 67-70; Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs*, 24-5. Only after the Balfour Declaration, in November 1917, did Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi recant their Ottomanist position, ultimately enlisting in the British military’s Jewish Legion in Egypt: Shapira, *Ben-Gurion*, 37-53.

<sup>41</sup> Qtd. in Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs*, 29.

jihad on Turkey's behalf. During the War, the Central Powers' ambitions created surprising (ultimately, catastrophic) alignments between Russian Jewry's ongoing quest for sanctuary, Zionist immigrants in Palestine, and the Ottomans' unresolved minority question. A tremendous condensation of these histories emerges in the Berlin-Baghdad Railway, the fateful dream of German and Turkish imperialists. The railway had promised the Ottomans financial and territorial cohesion, buttressing their sovereignty over restive Armenians, Georgians, Kurds, and Arabs.<sup>42</sup> Its construction brought the classical remnants of Greek Ionia to the Reich's museums in Berlin. In *Altneuland*, it symbolized the prospects of cosmopolitan modernity for Herzl, ensuring refuge for Europe's unwanted Jews.

When "the guns of August" erupted in 1914, the railway to Baghdad was halfway completed. That same month, the German Foreign Office produced an "Overview of Revolutionary Activity We Will Undertake in the Islamic-Israelite World", which proposed using jihadi propaganda against the British while supporting Zionism in order to inspire Russian Jews to "sabotage" the Tsar's military and ultimately overthrow his regime.<sup>43</sup> The memorandum followed the instigations of Max Bodenheimer,<sup>44</sup> who had traveled to Palestine with Herzl to meet the Kaiser in 1898, and who presently briefed the German officers overseeing sabotage operations against Russia. The German General Staff soon printed propaganda leaflets that read: "Jews of Russia! Rise! Take up arms!" and "To the Jews in Poland! We, your friends, are approaching. The barbaric foreign rule

---

<sup>42</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 40.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>44</sup> Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, Zionism*, 14-7.

is over! ... We expect you to prove your sympathy by deeds.”<sup>45</sup> As McMeekin documents, the German and Austrian foreign ministries printed “no fewer than 150,000 German- and Yiddish-language copies of this pamphlet” which were “dropped by German aeroplanes behind Russian front lines in Galicia.”

After initial German successes on the battlefield, “five million of the 6.5 million Russian Jews had become subjects of imperial Germany”.<sup>46</sup> As a reprisal, Russia expelled “over one and half million Jews”. German fears “that many of the refugees would migrate westwards” helped recreate the very set of events that had set German anti-Semitism, and ultimately Zionism, into motion thirty years earlier.<sup>47</sup> In 1915, the Prussian parliament began to host weekly lectures on the merits of Zionism. The country’s leading Orientalists, expansionists, and writers attracted a wide spectrum of sympathizers among German politicians, who came to believe “the Jews would be able to propagate German *Kultur* and commerce in the Orient.” Officials in the German and Ottoman governments continued to suggest the railway as a zone for the settlement of Russian Jewish refugees.<sup>48</sup>

But instead of resolving German’s minority problem, the CUP’s fears of Armenian uprisings turned the Berlin-Baghdad route into a map of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s first genocide: “Many of the areas where notorious massacres took place during the deportations of 1915 ... were either directly located on the Baghdad railway, or near its

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 232-5.

<sup>46</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 344-5.

<sup>47</sup> Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, Zionism*, 252, 253.

<sup>48</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 351. As early as 1895, Professor Ludwig Stein, a German-Jewish adviser to Prussian State Secretary Bernhard von Bulow, “Stein proposed the acquisition of stretches of land along the projected Baghdad Railway as an alternative outlet for the settlement of Russian-Jewish emigrants” (Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, Zionism*, 64).

vulnerable chokepoints.”<sup>49</sup> The Young Turks even tried to turn the ethnic cleansing on its head by pointing to Muslim minorities expelled after Ottoman defeats. The Grand Vizier alleged that the Armenian deportations were “‘not a question of massacres’, but of the ‘removal’ (*Übersiedlung*) of Armenians to make room for the never-ending wave of Muslim refugees from the Balkans and Tripoli”, territories recently lost by the Ottomans. Between 500,000 and two million Armenians were killed.<sup>50</sup> In the fall of 1915, without irony or remorse, the Director of Germany’s Colonial Department wrote his Chancellor that their government should promote eastern European Jewish immigration to Anatolia, as an alternative to Zionism. “This is particularly desirable since, following the expulsion and extermination of Armenians, connection with European commerce has been broken over a wide area.”<sup>51</sup> Djemal Pasha, one of the Ottomans’ ruling triumvirate (and the military dictator of Greater Syria) who had ordered the expulsions of Palestine’s Zionist leadership, actually endorsed the proposition.<sup>52</sup> But it came with a warning: if Zionists insisted on the Holy Land, “Palestine might become a second Armenia”.

The Hapsburg ambassador, Johann Markgraf von Pallavinci, blamed the Ottoman leadership’s “xenophobic Muslim-nationalism” for a rapid degradation in the status of minorities. He noted that “Armenian persecutions, which are already taking on the character of a general anti-Christian campaign, will ultimately affect the living conditions

---

<sup>49</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 248-9, 252.

<sup>50</sup> McMeekin observes that the Armenian genocide also prevented the completion of the Berlin-Baghdad project itself, which relied upon Armenian laborers and skilled craftsmen (*Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 240-1). In March 1917, “Baghdad was taken without a fight after the Turks evacuated”, and in September, the Haydarpasha train station (from my introduction) caught fire, setting off the explosions of munitions, which “blew out windows in homes in Pera” across the Bosphorus (316-7).

<sup>51</sup> Qtd. in Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, Zionism*, 262.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 330, 279.

of all foreigners in Turkey.”<sup>53</sup> The fate of these “foreigners” dovetailed with that of ethnic and religious minorities: during the war, the CUP deported or resettled over 150,000 Ottoman Greek Christians, and thousands of Kurds. In 1915, the CUP government shuttered the Western press, and removed “advertisements and street signs in Entente languages”, the next year “cracking down on public usage of German ... Armenian and Greek.” At the University of Istanbul, German faculty were made to “master Turkish and wear the fez in the classroom.”<sup>54</sup> In the end, the CUP leadership abandoned a pan-ethnic, constitutionalist Ottomanism. But they were more sober than their successors about the ethno-nationalist violence that would engulf the empire’s former subjects. And yet the Kemalist state that succeeded the empire retained an ethnically-defined national ideology. In this, Turkish nationalism did not differ from the imperial ideology, or from Zionism. And like both, it sought to define itself as an equal (perhaps superior) form of European civilization in the Orient.

## II. AUERBACH IN JERUSALEM?

I have traced genealogies that should shed light on how we read the legacy of German-Jewish scholars in Istanbul during the Nazi era, particularly Erich Auerbach’s work and legacy. Auerbach has become a dense signifier, one that I wish to unpack by utilizing the paradigms, methods, and values he has come to represent in our field. In “Auerbach in Istanbul,” Mufti called attention to the importance the philologist held for Edward Said’s intellectual investments in exile, historicism, and secular criticism. Said himself extended this line of argument in “Erich Auerbach, Critic of the Earthly World.”

---

<sup>53</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 313.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 309-10.

Both articles maintain that the minority condition in Europe and the Orient – with its indelible relation to the history of Jewish displacement – is essential for understanding Auerbach. From that signal insight, I wish to briefly return to recent scholarship on Auerbach and the mission of Comparative Literature, where positively-inflected notions of deterritorialization frame much of discussion. And yet my survey of the preceding generation in German-Jewish-Turkish relations reveals the difficulty of neatly separating the cultural ideologies of mimesis, worldliness, historicism, and comparativism from the discourses of imperialism, nationalism, and Orientalism, or from the political realities of war, displacement, and genocide.

The temptation to claim Auerbach’s intellectual legacy as a herald flatters the appropriate disciplinary politics for the post-colonial era. This approach canonizes the contribution of a select group of mid-century German-Jewish intellectuals, where the litmus for inclusion consists in their not having joined up with the Zionist project in Palestine – and that choice then authorizes an allegedly “exilic,” anti-Zionist politics for Jewish intellectuals in the present. Apter, for example, offers the example of the German-Jewish philosopher Victor Klemperer,<sup>55</sup> who, in the face of Nazi deportation, preferred to “remain a German (because of his identification with the language and culture) than emigrate to Palestine. ‘Belonging to a nation,’ he maintained, depends less on blood than on language.”<sup>56</sup> Herzl’s beliefs about national belonging were even more attenuated. Yet Klemperer, along with Walter Benjamin,<sup>57</sup> became a figure of the proper European

---

<sup>55</sup> In fact, he was Auerbach’s competitor for the post in Istanbul: Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 32-40.

<sup>56</sup> Apter, *Translation Zone*, 71.

<sup>57</sup> Apter writes that “Like Walter Benjamin, exhorted by Gershom Scholem to emigrate to Palestine, Klemperer resisted emigration, remaining fast in his convictions: ‘We hear a lot about Palestine now; it does not appeal to us. Anyone who goes there exchanges nationalism and narrowness for nationalism and narrowness.’” Butler and Jacqueline Rose also make much of Benjamin’s decision. It is more than sensible

Jewish intellectual inheritance by refusing to join the Zionist project in Palestine: “For Klemperer, Jewishness *is* perforce the condition of ‘no-answer,’ a state of statelessness contoured by an abiding commitment to secular humanism.” This thinking ultimately insinuates a paradigm of deterritorialized/exilic “good Jews” and territorial/Zionist “bad Jews,” the latter category, beginning with Herzl and including Gershom Scholem, Max Brod, and, by his omission from a critical canon, Martin Buber.<sup>58</sup> As a corrective, I have suggested reading Auerbach’s situation in interwar Turkey comparatively, against the parallel history of German-Jews, Ottoman Palestine, and Zionism. In the mobile intersection between Germany, Turkey, and Israel, Jewish intellectuals cannot represent a wholly deterritorialized exile that is separable from the majoritarian nationalist movements that enabled them to find refuge. It may be troubling to accept that our intellectual forerunners were enmeshed, if not complicit, in the cultural and human displacements caused by imperialism, colonialism, and territorial nationalism, even as their work has engendered productive critiques of those phenomena.

Konuk reminds us that “the humanism that evolved out of the Turkish-German intellectual exchange of the 1930s and 1940s serves primarily *national*, not transnational interests.”<sup>59</sup> The Turkish-German collaboration in Istanbul was not predicted on repudiating majoritarian nationalism or fostering a minoritarian Jewish *ansatzpunkt* for critique. Retrospectively lionizing these intellectuals’ lack of national attachments (to Germany or Zionism) reinscribes the tragic fact that they could only obtain sanctuary in a

---

to critique collaboration what could have amounted to the colonial phase of Zionism and the majoritarian phase of Turkish nationalism in the 1930s. But we would do well to remember that Auerbach and Scholem survived, while Benjamin did not. Interwar Zionist Palestine was the only society willing to provide refuge to German-Jews who did not have the pedigree of an Auerbach, Arendt, or Einstein. Between 1933-1939, 60,000 German-Jews arrived in Palestine, more than a tenth of Germany’s pre-1933 Jewish population.

<sup>58</sup> From this perspective, Kafka had the good taste to die before his planned move to Tel Aviv.

<sup>59</sup> Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 75, emphasis mine.

country that relegated them to the status of “guests.”<sup>60</sup> As Auerbach reflected, “It is exactly this attitude of somebody who does not belong any place, and who is essentially a stranger without the possibility of being assimilated, which is desired and expected of me.”<sup>61</sup> Reviewing contemporary Turkish sources, Konuk writes that “In the transnational encounter between Germany and Turkey, émigrés seem to need to be denationalized, that is, disassociated from a specific national affiliation, before they could *represent* the quintessence of *Europeanness*”, an essential step for “implementing Turkey’s national agenda.”<sup>62</sup> My genealogy of Herzl’s ideas about *fin de siècle* German-Jewish life reveals that concepts of mimesis were inextricably linked to the potential for Jews to “represent Europeanness.”<sup>63</sup> Herzl’s turn to Zionism did not abandon this project, but, rather, displaced it onto the larger maps of German-Turkish imperial politics. The failure of minority (Jewish) assimilation, both into Germany and later, through Israel, into the “world” of nations, is instructive for examining Turkey’s effort to “[re-create] a ‘high Turkish culture’ in the image of the European scholar, who was in many cases a Jewish German emigrant”.<sup>64</sup> And yet, the figure of these émigré scholars as denationalized “Europeans” reinstates the forcible erasure of their Jewish minority background and its fraught place (or lack thereof) in Germany and, by extension, Europe.

---

<sup>60</sup> Kader Konuk, “Eternal Guests, Mimics, and Dönme: The Place of German and Turkish Jews in Modern Turkey,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 37 (2007): 5–30. For centuries, Sephardic Jews had been imagined through “the trope of the ‘eternal guest’ in the Ottoman Empire”, much like “the ‘eternal Jew’ or ‘wanderer’ in Christian thought” (18-9). Secularization did not ameliorate this tendency.

<sup>61</sup> Qtd. in Konuk, “Eternal Guests,” 20.

<sup>62</sup> Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 74 emphasis mine.

<sup>63</sup> “The tradition of Jewish emancipation into the *Bildungsbürgertum* remained predicated on the assimilation of the Jews into the ‘universal’ culture and subject position of the majority, coded as the standpoint of humanity” (Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 54-55).

<sup>64</sup> Konuk, “Eternal Guests,” 13-14. “Informing the Turkish public that Jewish-German emigrants had come to Turkey because they had been denied full rights as German citizens would have meant highlighting the failure of mimetic and assimilationist enterprises generally” (16).



A surge of recent scholarship has aimed at recovering Auerbach's philological and theological relationship to Judaism. Though fascinating for many reasons, Judaism does not appear in any historically-minded account of his priorities while in Turkey, nor in those of his exilic milieu. Bahar's sociological study of 95 German-Jewish scholars hired in Turkey during the Nazi era demonstrates their "non-interest in Judaism or the Jewish presence in Turkey" and the "absence of any contact" with even the "Ashkenazic community of Istanbul."<sup>65</sup> The German-Jewish scholars in exile knew that they were not brought to Turkey for their minority identity, but to forward a Turkish majoritarian project that resulted in "the intensification, not dilution, of Turkish nationalism and Europhilia."<sup>66</sup> This demanded acquiescence to strong currents of ethno-national anti-Semitism in Turkey. Konuk and others have documented the degree to which the Kemalist Turkish state engaged in cultural suppression of "the remaining Armenian and Jewish communities—seen as resistant to assimilation—[in order] to establish the secular basis for Turkish citizenship, and so achieve a kind of isomorphism between culture, nation, and geography."<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> I. Izzet Bahar, "German or Jewish, Humanity or Raison d'Etat: The German Scholars in Turkey, 1933–1952," *Shofar* 29, no. 1 (2010): 48–72. See specifically: 54, 55.

<sup>66</sup> Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 213. As she writes elsewhere, "The restructuring of the humanities was to play a central role in the dissemination of European ideas and the conceptualization of Turkish citizens as Europeans" ("Eternal Guests," 7). An ironic reversal of the late Ottoman period, when a Ladino journal in Salonica instructed Ottoman Jews, "Rather than imitate the Europeans . . . whose customs do not suit us, we would be well-served to imitate the Turks, removing from our midst various European customs" (qtd. in Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, 94).

<sup>67</sup> Konuk, "Eternal Guests," 14. She concludes, "These assimilationist strategies notwithstanding, inhabiting or representing Turkishness was ultimately reserved for Muslim citizens alone . . . the boundaries of the ethnic Turk came to be drawn along religious lines." This is a specific historical instance of what Mufti described as "the unequal division of the field of national experience into domains marked by religious difference", ("Auerbach in Istanbul, 107) which gives the lie to nationalist versions of secularism in many post-imperial state projects (Turkey, Israel, India, Egypt, Algeria; the list goes on). For more on anti-Semitism in interwar Turkey, see: Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams*, 22.

For this purpose, Auerbach's particular utility was his expertise in Greco-Roman and Romance philology. Kemalist Turkey laid claim to the Greco-Roman past in order to authenticate its nationalist program as historically belonging to the Occident, even as traces of Greek – as “minority” in Mufti's sense – were purged from national life.<sup>68</sup> Lamenting the very project that brought him to Istanbul, Auerbach wrote to Walter Benjamin that Turkey's Westernization led to “nationalism in the extreme accompanied by the simultaneous destruction of historical national character”. In a letter to another former colleague from Germany, Auerbach called this process “für unsereinen traurig (sad for people like us), even ‘gespenstisch’ (eery), *when compared with Germany*.”<sup>69</sup> Auerbach implies that Nazism's racial war against the Jews of Germany (and Europe) was also a process of eradicating the “historical national character” of Germany itself. Conversely, “historical consciousness” would demand not only the repudiation of nationalism, but also the inclusion of (Jewish) difference, of the minority that resists the national.<sup>70</sup> But can this consciousness only be found in heroic moments of exile? And are there conceptions of national belonging that do not stand in negation toward the minor, the worldly, or the displaced? How do we account for the minority position not only *as exile*, but also when it finds itself in an exile that reinforces (other) nationalist ideologies?

Like the Biblical figure of Abraham in *Mimesis*, Auerbach is “fraught with background;” and the layers of his identity “require subtle investigation and interpretation”.<sup>71</sup> “I am a Prussian of the Jewish faith,” Auerbach declared in 1921.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 5, 67-8, 158.

<sup>69</sup> Emphasis mine; both quotes from *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>70</sup> “Said's critique of nationalism ... is made in the interest, and *from the perspective*, of all those who would be minoritized in the name of a uniform ‘national’ culture” (Mufti, “Auerbach in Istanbul,” 112).

<sup>71</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 12, 13, 15. There is an additional aspect of Abraham's call that is unexplored in *Mimesis*, but relates to the present concerns: the vague relationship between dwelling in the Promised Land

Over a decade later, Auerbach described his dismissal from his academic post in Marburg as depriving him of the “right to be German,” a patriotic note underscored by the fact that his firing was initially delayed due to his military service to Prussia in the first World War.<sup>73</sup> Said surmises that “despite his later diasporic existence he never seemed to have doubted where he really belonged.”<sup>74</sup> This sense that we can unproblematically locate pre-exilic Auerbach in Germany undergirds one of Said’s most productive critical achievements, as he discovers in Auerbach “an instance of both filiation with his natal culture and, because of exile, *affiliation* with it through critical consciousness and scholarly work.”<sup>75</sup> These terms operate dialectically in Said’s work. But the first leg of this insight risks eliding Auerbach’s minority background, simplifying matters just enough to frame Auerbach’s exile in Istanbul as a convenient historical embodiment, or perhaps a “prophetic *figura*,”<sup>76</sup> of our own contemporary alienation from nationalism.

I hope my recourse to the German-Jewish generation before Auerbach can re-open the question of national belonging (to Germany) upon which so much of our thinking about exile and criticism rests. Mufti adds a great deal when he writes that “Auerbach became for Said exemplary of the relationship between criticism and exilic consciousness” not only from his time in Istanbul, but “in the forms of exile that are

---

and being exiled outside of it. Abram is introduced in Genesis as the son of Terach, a man who takes his family from Ur Kasdim, in southern Mesopotamia, “toward the land of Canaan, and they came as far as Harran, and settled there”, in northern Mesopotamia, where Terach dies (11:31). Immediately thereafter (12:1), God calls Abram to “go forth from your land, from your birthplace [or native homeland], from your father’s house, to the land I will show you.” And yet not long after Abraham arrives, he is exiled by famine to Egypt (12:10). Later, he is promised that his descendants will be “strangers in a land that is not their own,” and yet the will become a nation in exile (15:13-16).

<sup>72</sup> Qtd. in Said, “Erich Auerbach,” 19.

<sup>73</sup> Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 32.

<sup>74</sup> Said, “Erich Auerbach,” 19.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, *World, Text, Critic*, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Auerbach, “Figura,” 41.

already inscribed in Jewish life in prewar European society.”<sup>77</sup> Mufti defines this form of exile, “which carries the potential of its own literalization in physical uprooting” as “*minority*.” Modern German-Jewish belonging, in its very constitution, was already an unresolved state, threaded with a worldliness in violation (or excess) of the nation’s ethnic, linguistic, and territorial boundaries.<sup>78</sup> Even *pre-war* configurations of Jewish mobility, migration, and refuge – toward or away from Germany – were haunted by colonial “solutions” that involved displacing Jews to the Orient (even if this meant displacing or minoritizing local populations). Herzl alluded to the contradictory possibilities of Jewish national belonging when he wrote that German nationality was invisible, “unrecognized,” vulnerable to disappearance, and yet could also be “gained” through migration to a German-oriented, colonial outpost in the Near East.<sup>79</sup> The ideologies traversed in Herzl’s literary and diplomatic itineraries thus add a crucial supplement to the story of the “‘Invention’ of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933.” The localized belonging of the assimilated Jew in his/her “natal culture” (e.g. Germany),<sup>80</sup> the very conditions of *fin de siècle* German-Jewish life that produced Erich Auerbach, were *already* shaped by the maps of Prussian imperialism and its (failed) colonial dreams. And 20<sup>th</sup> century German-Jews took this entire constellation with them into exile in the Orient, to locales that were post-imperial but not post-colonial, serving the national projects of modern Turkey and Israel.

---

<sup>77</sup> Mufti, *Forget English*, 207; cf. “Auerbach in Istanbul,” 103.

<sup>78</sup> See: Ibid., *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 38-9.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. above: “unrecognized” in *Diaries*, 5, “Unerkannt” in *Briefe und Tachbücher* 45; “gained” in *Diaries*, 171, “erworbene Nationalität” in *Briefe und Tachbücher*, 190.

<sup>80</sup> “classical example” of the insider/outsider category that Georg Simmel labels “The Stranger.” See: Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 51.

Said suggests that “all” nationalist histories “develop from a condition of estrangement”, and that “triumphant, achieved nationalism then justifies ... a history strung together in a narrative form.”<sup>81</sup> Exile, by contrast, reveals an alternative, “discontinuous state of being.” But he concludes that “a state of exile free from this triumphant ideology– designed to reassemble an exile’s broken history into a new whole – is virtually unbearable, and virtually impossible in today’s world. Look at the fate of the Jews, the Palestinians and the Armenians.”<sup>82</sup> The discontinuities of exile and nationalism erupt in urban sites across Germany, Turkey, and Israel, testifying to the upheavals of the past century. Down the street from Auerbach’s family home in Charlottenburg, an upscale neighborhood in west Talaat Pasha, the former Ottoman Interior Minister, widely held responsible for the worst massacres during the Armenian Genocide, was gunned down by an Armenian student “in broad daylight”, in 1921.<sup>83</sup> The intimacy of intellectual work and exile is not only found in the cosmopolitan representations of displacement from *Altneuland* or the old-new scholarship on *weltliteratur*, but also in moments of violence bearing their full historicity.

In 2010, the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality restored the oldest train station in Ottoman Palestine, reopening it as a “public space dedicated to arts and culture”).<sup>84</sup> The Manshiyyeh Station’s railways once linked Damascus, Beirut, and Ismailia – the eastern Mediterranean orbit whose circulation is now interrupted at Israel’s borders. The station

---

<sup>81</sup> Said, “Reflections on Exile,” 140.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>83</sup> Konuk, *East West Mimesis*, 47-8.

<sup>84</sup> Work on the station began in 1888, when Yosef Navon, a Jewish Jerusalemite and Ottoman subject, obtained a concession from Sultan Abdel Hamid II to build a railway linking Jaffa and Jerusalem. Today, visitors can take a “virtual” tour in an “authentic” restored Ottoman-era car at the shopping and cultural complex. See: “HATACHANA – Culture, Leisure, Entertainment,” Hatachana – The New Station compound in Tel-Aviv Yaffo, Accessed May 2, 2018. <http://www.hatachana.co.il/Home>

sits across the street from a museum dedicated to the Jewish Irgun militia,<sup>85</sup> whose 1948 shelling of Jaffa (launched from Manshiyyeh) led to the flight or death of all but around 5,000 of Jaffa's Palestinian inhabitants, from a pre-war population of 70-80,000.<sup>86</sup> The Irgun museum and Ottoman train station are separated by Yehezkel Kaufmann Street. This four-lane stretch of coastal road is named for the Berlin-educated<sup>87</sup> Jewish philosopher and Biblical scholar whose first work, *Exile and Estrangement*, argued that exile was the fundamental characteristic of historical Jewish existence (and that the impossibility of collective existence in exile defines modernity).<sup>88</sup>

The reclamation of Tel Aviv-Jaffa's Ottoman past joins efforts to revive the city's interwar German heritage, following the 2003 designation of the "White City" as a UNESCO World Heritage site due its wealth of original Bauhaus architecture.<sup>89</sup> These sites exemplify the degree to which even contemporary Israeli life is shaped by Turkish and German influences that persisted long after the Ottoman and Prussian imperial projects collapsed as the political horizons of Zionist activity, ironically commemorating precisely what needed to be destroyed for the current order to exist.

---

<sup>85</sup> *Beit ha-Etzel*, which also calls itself "The Museum in Memory of the Liberators of Jaffa." Housed in an Ottoman-era villa once owned by Palestinians, it commemorates the role of the underground Jewish militia (*Irgun ha-Tzva'i ha-Le'umi*: the National Military Organization) in the fight against the British Mandate and Arab opponents of Zionism.

<sup>86</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, Reprint. edition (Cambridge, 1989), 213-18.

<sup>87</sup> While his nine years in Berlin "were among the most productive of his life ... Kaufman was anxious to portray his west European university education as the source of his rich scholarship in Jewish studies ... Apparently, Kaufmann dreaded being stigmatized as an 'Osjude' during his Berlin years." Thomas M. Krapf, "Some Observations on Yehezkel Kaufmann's Attitude to 'Wissenschaft des Judentums,'" *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Volume C (1993): 71-72.

<sup>88</sup> See: Joseph (Yossi) Turner, "The Notion of Jewish Ethnicity in Yehezkel Kaufmann's 'Golah Venekhar'," *Modern Judaism* 28, no. 3 (2008): 257-82. Kaufmann also held that "the negation of exile" not only characterized Zionism, but also the central European Enlightenment assimilationism that preceded it. In his views, the political Zionism of Herzl, with its vision of "an autonomous homeland", were "only a necessary and not sufficient condition for the continuation of Jewish life" (271, 279).

<sup>89</sup> Sharon Rotbard, *White City, Black City: Architecture and War in Tel Aviv and Jaffa*, Tra edition (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015).

Reflecting explicitly on the postwar refugee crisis and the creation of Israel, Said wrote that “Most remedies for uprootedness in this era . . . are almost as dangerous as with the purportedly remedy.” Three decades later, this precariousness continues in an era of displacements – even self-conscious departures – from the nation-state itself. Berlin today resounds with a new formation of Jewish exile, hosting Europe’s largest population of Israeli expatriates.<sup>90</sup> The reunified German capital is home for multigenerational waves of Turkish immigrants, and, since 2015, tens of thousands of refugees from Syria and Iraq.<sup>91</sup> On December 20, 2016, under the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, whose iconic, scarred spire was damaged by Allied air raids in World War II, twelve people were killed when an ISIS operative, whose asylum request had failed, drove into an outdoor Christmas market. An Israeli was among the victims.<sup>92</sup> In Istanbul, almost a year earlier, an ISIS suicide bomber (and Syrian refugee) killed twelve German tourists beside the “German Fountain” in the historic Sultanahmet district. The fountain commemorated Kaiser Wilhelm’s 1898 visit to the Ottoman capital, the one in which he held a secret meeting with Herzl before a state dinner with the Sultan.<sup>93</sup>

These displacements do not only concern individuals and communities. They also consist in the displacement of history into culture; memory into literature; art into politics; religion into citizenship, or perhaps, the way these categories of experience

---

<sup>90</sup> Dani Kranz, “Forget Israel—The Future is in Berlin! Local Jews, Russian Immigrants, and Israeli Jews in Berlin and across Germany,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 34, no. 4 (2016): 5-28.

<sup>91</sup> Bruce Katz, et al, “Cities and Refugees: The German Experience,” The Brookings Institute, September 18, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/cities-and-refugees-the-german-experience/>

<sup>92</sup> Philip Oltermann, “Christmas Market Truck Attack: Terrorism Fears Darken Germany’s Mini-utopias,” *The Guardian* online, last modified December 20, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/20/berlin-truck-crash-terrorism-fears-darken-germanys-mini-utopias>

<sup>93</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 10-12.

mutually displace one another, how they serve as symbols, surrogates, and substitutes, and how certain sites, texts, and interactions give solid form something that points, by its very location, to someplace that is elsewhere, a map of the specters haunting the juncture between Europe, Asia, and the Jews.

### III. Edward Said and the Dream of Exile

Herzl's utopian novel *Altneuland* concludes in an epilogue filled with meta-textual gestures. First, he inverts the novel's motto: "But, if you do not wish it, all this that I have related to you is and will remain a fable [*ein Märchen*]." <sup>94</sup> He then offers an intertext to the first lines of Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

Now, dear book ... You will have to make your way through enmity and misrepresentation as through a dark forest <sup>95</sup> ... Tell [readers that] dreams also are a fulfillment of the days of sojourn on Earth [*die wir aus der Erde verbringen*]. Dreams are not so different from Deeds as some may think.

All the Deeds of men are only Dreams at first. And in the end, their Deeds dissolve into Dreams.

The Epilogue's notion of "fulfillment" resonates with Auerbach's writings on figural interpretation, a method that reaches its apex in the works of Dante. In *The Divine Comedy*, Auerbach writes, "the literal meaning or historical reality of a figure stands in no contradiction to its profounder meaning, but precisely 'figures' it; the historical reality

---

<sup>94</sup> Herzl, *Old New Land*, 296; *Altneuland*, 343.

<sup>95</sup> "Durch feindschaften und Entstellungen hindurch wirst du deinen Weg nehmen müffen, wie durch einen finsternen Wald." The *Inferno* begins with Dante lost "within a shadowed forest," "*Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura*," *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Inferno*, tr. Allen Mandelbaum, New York: Bantam Classic Edition, 1982, 2-3.



is not annulled, but confirmed and fulfilled by the deeper meaning.”<sup>96</sup> Hermann Goldschmidt offered a similar analysis of Herzl’s oeuvre; the diaries, specifically, “are a literary masterpiece and more: a text whose meaning for the future is yet to be exhausted, much less fulfilled.”<sup>97</sup> And in Willi Goetschel and David Suchoff’s introduction to Goldschmidt’s *Legacy of German Jewry*, they adopt the figural conception from its medieval meaning and apply it to modern German Jewry as a whole:

A legacy ... is history that concerns us in the present – something from the past that remains, as a remnant – but a past whose meaning is not fully present to us, because its task has yet to be fulfilled. The past remains alive, in this sense, not because it has taken place, but because it has not yet fully occurred ... and therefore must be preserved as a living tradition if it is ever to reach fruition.<sup>98</sup>

What type of belonging does this legacy make available to us? Is there a location or home for the past has not yet been fulfilled? In any post-colonial reckoning of the world, these questions ultimately address the relationship between *minority* and *culture*. And this relationship must amount to more than the minority serving as a living model (or martyr) of a one-way openness toward the universal. Apter gives a conventional assessment of the German-Jewish intellectual legacy for “Saidian humanism” or “worldly humanism in exile” when she brings Said’s Auerbach into alignment with Freud’s Moses: “a representative figure of non-exclusivist, nondiscriminatory religious origins ... a

---

<sup>96</sup> Erich Auerbach, “Figura” (1944), Ralph Manheim (trans.), *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 11-76 (73).

<sup>97</sup> Goldschmidt, *Legacy of German Jewry*, 104.

<sup>98</sup> Goetschel and Suchoff, “Introduction,” 18-19.

secular Jew open to non-Jewish traditions.”<sup>99</sup> Such a figure is representative of many contemporary ideals, but I am not convinced it captures the precarity and complexity of minority existence – one that is centered, in a sense, on European Jewish displacement – to which Said and Auerbach were attuned. As Mufti writes, “Saidian secular criticism points insistently to the dilemmas and the terrors, but also, above all, to the ethical possibilities, of minority existence in modernity.”<sup>100</sup> In *Forget English*, Mufti elaborates upon those “dilemmas and terrors,” which not only confront the minority position from without, but challenge “the ethical possibilities” from within our own critical legacies. *Weltliteratur*, Mufti concludes, “emerged precisely alongside the nation-state and nation-form, rather than as a sign of their overcoming.”<sup>101</sup> Moreover, Auerbach’s reticence about “the displacement of Europe” – Europe in a classical, civilizational sense – by the postwar, post-colonial order “compromises the ethical ideal of *Weltliteratur* in its very formulation” and “highlights the necessity with which any conception of world literature (or culture) must now confront the legacy of colonialism.”<sup>102</sup>

From that vantage, it may be less counter-intuitive to retrace the routes of world literature through a reading of Herzl as a pre-figure to Auerbach – precisely because of their contradictory relationships to imperialism, colonialism, and majoritarian nationalism. The legacy of displacement is not only in opposition to those discourses, but also *within* them.<sup>103</sup> Such an inquiry does not imply an apologia for Zionism (no more

---

<sup>99</sup> Apter, *Translation Zone*, 72.

<sup>100</sup> Mufti, “Auerbach in Istanbul,” 107.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, *Forget English*, 217.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, “Auerbach in Istanbul,” 124-5.

<sup>103</sup> In *Enlightenment in the Colony*, Mufti aims to question “how we read literature in terms of certain dominant models of social cohesion,” such as those of the “nation-state. But instead of arguing for a *superceding* of these forms in the current global conjuncture of ‘transnational’ flows, identifications, loyalties, affiliations, and forms of performance and consumption of culture and difference, I hope to point

than our studies of Auerbach have endorsed Kemalist state violence). In truly dialectical fashion, the groundwork that German-Jewish intellectual history created for minority belonging was laid by figures who both eschewed and abetted nationalism – German, Turkish, and Jewish. Perhaps this legacy is all the more salient for the potentials it reveals within – and not only apart from – nationalist movements invested in the history and future of a Europe “unable to survive the consequences of its own history – a question that has been urgently reopened ... in our own times.”<sup>104</sup>

Goldschmidt wrote that “the modernity of an earth whose reaches have been fully explored” demands the emancipation and equality for which European Jews struggled, for every minoritized group.<sup>105</sup> And yet this demand carries “a double meaning that is not completely benign”. It asserts “that a mutual erasure of difference might be the path toward equality... [leading to] an end to all forms of difference, [including] the peculiar particularity of a Judaism that explodes every framework imposed upon it.” German Jewry’s legacy consists of preserving this productive dialectical tension in both directions: a dialogue “reaching outward toward a universal modern culture and inward toward the consolidation of Judaism’s particular strengths ... partners in the same emancipatory quest to establish Judaism’s universal right to particularity.”<sup>106</sup> The intellectual history of humanism, comparativism, world literature, indeed, even *exile* in its Saidian sense, could turn to Auerbach’s German-Jewish contemporaries who went to

---

out some of the ways in which those ‘national’ (and hence canonical) forms have *always* been open-ended, incomplete, and impossible to achieve” (12).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., *Forget English*, 242.

<sup>105</sup> Goldschmidt, *The Legacy of German Jewry*, 56-7. Cf. Goetschel and Suchoff, “Introduction,” 11, 19.

<sup>106</sup> Goetschel and Suchoff, “Introduction,” 9. “In keeping with Goldschmidt’s dialogic perspective, Herzl’s Zionism was a ‘dual legacy,’ both particular and universal in its effect” (10).

Palestine.<sup>107</sup> Many of them were among the Zionist movement's most vocal proponents of a single, binational state (rather than partition), often based upon their experiences as German-speaking Jews in Prussia and Austria-Hungary.<sup>108</sup> But there was also an intellectual formation that underpinned the binationalist Zionists who gathered around the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.<sup>109</sup>

And though Herzl originally imagined Zionism performing a mimetic assimilation to Europe, his work in Turkey and later writings form part of an alterative genealogy of Jewish (auto-)Orientalism. As Saposnik writes, early 20<sup>th</sup> century Zionists in Palestine aimed to inhabit “their position as intermediaries in a multi-directional tangle of the disparate and often conflicted meanings of East and West in European and Jewish discourses.”<sup>110</sup> Further studies of these trajectories would extend our understanding of a German-Jewish tradition in which Auerbach also took part, where dislocation in the East illuminates “the relationship between the critical consciousness and its object of study”, in Mufti's terms. Mufti names this object as “Western Literature,” but I would extend this insight onto the objects of study that pre-occupy our contemporary conjuncture: world literature, Orientalism, worldliness, and (Jewish) exile.<sup>111</sup>

For these paradigms, Martin Buber's work may be the most promising for further inquiry. Beginning with his lectures to a cultural Zionist group in Prague that promoted a

---

<sup>107</sup> “Such reconstitutive projects as assembling a nation out of exile (and this is true in this century for Jews and Palestinians)” involve historiographical and linguistic projects that “also give rise to investigations of self that inevitably go far beyond” mere affirmations of identity. Said, “Reflections on Exile,” 146.

<sup>108</sup> Yfaat Weiss importantly adds that “it was not the liberal spirit of Central Europe but the liberal Jewish criticism of the illiberal turn to ethnonationalist practices in that geographical sphere which gave rise to” Zionist binationalism, the object of her study (“Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism,” 98).

<sup>109</sup> Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions*, 392. See further: Steven Aschheim, “Bildung in Palestine: Zionism, Binationalism, and the Strains of German-Jewish Humanism,” in *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad*, 6-44.

<sup>110</sup> Saposnik, “Europe and its Orientals in Zionist Culture,” 1114.

<sup>111</sup> Mufti, “Auerbach in Istanbul,” 102.

revision of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Orientalist hostility toward the Ostjuden in general, and their Hasidic sub-culture in particular, Buber's achievements culminated in his philosophical and political writings at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Throughout, he modeled a post-Occidental form of world literature. His early writings on Hasidism were published alongside "editions of Chinese, Finnish, Celtic, and Flemish mystical and mythical writings."<sup>112</sup> In Buber's lectures, he "frequently compared the Chinese, Persian, Indian, and Jewish conceptions of redemptive unity" while also drawing upon "Gnostic, Eastern Christian, Medieval Catholic," and early Protestant intellectual history. This work paved the way for the much-vaunted engagement with Jewish mystic theology by German-speaking Jewish writers, from Kafka (a member of Prague group who attended Buber's lectures) to Scholem, Benjamin, Lukacz, Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Ernst Bloch<sup>113</sup> – and ultimately, to the revival of this intellectual legacy by scholars like Apter and Butler. Buber once told the Prague group (of which Kafka was a member" that the dialectical Jewish "striving for unity (*Einheit*) makes Judaism a phenomenon of mankind, that transforms the Jewish question into a human question."<sup>114</sup> If the Jewish Question was indeed universalized –by its re-articulation in the colonial and post-colonial world as the minority question, whose most paradigmatic crisis is the Question of Palestine – then we would do well to reopen the geographical boundaries and genealogical possibilities of exilic critique.

---

<sup>112</sup> Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions*, 88, 87.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-8, 100, 370-89.

<sup>114</sup> Qtd. in *Ibid.*, 86.

Chapter 3:  
Palestinian Exile and the 1948 War in Hebrew Literature

I. Introduction

Nathan Alterman's poem cycle on the Jewish conquest of Jaffa ("War of Cities") and S. Yizhar's novella on the deportation of a Palestinian village (*Khirbet Khizeh*) offer two of the most prominent Hebrew literary accounts of the Palestinian Nakba and the 1948 War. Surprisingly, these texts have yet to be considered in relation to one another, despite the consensus that Alterman and Yizhar were the foremost writers of the period in their respective genres.

Both texts struggle to locate the experience of exile within the dual movements of populations that bound Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel to Palestinian dispossession. The 1948 War leads Alterman and Yizhar to explore changes in the representation of exile at the moment when its creation, or negation, comes to define two national communities. Both authors engage with the *visionary* mode of Hebrew Biblical prophecy, a paradoxical mode of representation that depends upon the workings of displacement between the voice, the vision, and the text. As the national poet, Alterman claims the moral precedence of the Biblical prophets, whose privileged gaze he secularizes through modernist symbolism, allowing him to see beyond a painful mimesis of the present toward a redemptive future. Hebrew prophetic vision also breaks through Yizhar's otherwise realist prose, but Yizhar locates prophecy's authoritative voice in the Jewish past, through *visions* of exile that displace the testimonial voice of the text. Palestinian exile appears at the birth of Israeli literature in 1948, introducing a

representational rupture that Alterman and Yizhar explore through the modalities of Hebrew prophetic vision.

With each passing year, the 1948 War seems to become more prescient to scholarship on Hebrew literature and its relationship to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since its 2009 translation into English, S. Yizhar's novella *Khirbet Khizeh* has served as the locus for much of this intensified interest. Through its account of the conquest of a Palestinian village and the deportation of its inhabitants by the Israeli military, the novella gives unparalleled contemporary testimony to the Nakba, the destruction of Palestinian national life during and after the 1948 War.

In 2010, Zochrot, an Israeli organization that aims to “promote Israeli Jewish society's acknowledgement of and accountability for the ongoing injustices of the Nakba,” published an anthology of Hebrew poetry that deals with the massive displacement of Palestinians during the state's first decade.<sup>1</sup> Edited by Hannan Hever, the collection takes its title, *Al Tagidu be-Gath*, from a verse by Nathan Alterman, the most prominent Hebrew poet of the “1948 generation.” *Al Tagidu be-Gath* includes Alterman's “War of Cities,”<sup>2</sup> a cycle of poems on the conquest of Jaffa by Jewish forces during the 1948 War. The largest Palestinian city to be incorporated into Israel (merged a year later with Tel Aviv, the Hebrew cultural capital), Alterman's cycle narrates a “War of Cities” that holds immense significance in the history of the Nakba and in the creation of the Jewish state, whose independence was declared the day after Jaffa's surrender.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> “*Al Tagidu Be-Gath*”: *ha-Nakba ha-Falastinit ba-Shirah ha-Ivrit 1948-1958*, ed. Hannan Hever (Tel Aviv: Sedek, 2010). See further: “Zochrot,” accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.zochrot.org>

<sup>2</sup> Nathan Alterman, “Milhemet ‘Arim,” in “*Al Tagidu Be-Gath*”, 160–71. In this chapter, the English quotations from the poem are my original translations of the Hebrew.

<sup>3</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 101.

Alterman's poetic chronicles of such seminal events in Jewish national life, together with Yizhar's vivid prose accounts of soldiers' lives during the war, provide Israeli society with formative sources for collective memory and identity.<sup>4</sup> As Hebrew literature's most highly regarded writers in their respective genres, Alterman and Yizhar's works have long been viewed as emblematic of Israel's founding generation, serving as literary testimonies to the events, and to the moral character, that shaped the new Israeli national subject who would emerge out of 1948.<sup>5</sup> Yet the relationship between the ways that Alterman's poetry on 1948 and Yizhar's novella depict the Palestinian Nakba has yet to be theorized. In these texts, the lyrical subject and the narrator position themselves as first-hand witnesses to the events of 1948, including the Nakba. Thus both texts engage in literary *testimony* about the war, which necessarily presumes some relationship to a realist, mimetic representation of the visible (sights, scenes, events) in words.

And yet given the existential stakes of 1948, testimonies about the war can never address the events of that particular year exclusively, but must rather imagine a complex chronotope that includes sights that, in a literal sense, were invisible from the "present" moment of the texts: scenes that took place elsewhere, at another time; moments that had yet to begin, or that have not concluded, even today. Amongst Israel's Jewish population,

---

<sup>4</sup> Efrat Ben-Ze'ev and Edna Lomsky-Feder, "The Canonical Generation: Trapped Between Personal and National Memories," *Sociology* 43, no. 6 (December 2009): 1047–65, especially 1049–1065. See also: Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> In "A Cage for Order", Chanita Goodblatt discusses a number of works, including the documentary *Altermania* (2001), that reveal the poet's prodigious legacy in Israel. See: Chanita Goodblatt, "A Cage of Order": Recent Issues in Natan Alterman Scholarship," *Prooftexts* 24, no. 2 (2004): 217–39. On Alterman's legacy specifically, see Amos Leviatan's review of *Parpar min hatola 'at: Alterman hatsa 'ir: ishiyyuto vitsirato*, Dan Miron's scholarly biography on Alterman: Amos Leviatan, "Hafenomen ha-Altermani," *Iton* 77 25, no. 257 (October 2001): 26–29. Across an extensive scholarly literature, two of the most central works exploring Yizhar's place in Israeli society are: Anita Shapira, "Hirbet Hizah: Between Remembrance and Forgetting," *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 1 (2000): 1–62. And Nurith Gertz, *Hirbet Hiz'ah yeha-boqer shela-mohorat* (Tel Aviv: ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad, 1983).



1948 was and remains haunted by realities that only appeared on the edge of the possible in that exact time and place: the potential annihilation of the Jewish people, nearly achieved in Europe in the same decade; the creation of a new nation-state, with new forms of political, religious, and aesthetic subjectivity; and the transformation of the Palestinian people into nation of refugees, whose collective subjectivity was to be erased along with its demographic majority in the land.<sup>6</sup>

A “strikingly schizophrenic” time, in Uri Cohen’s description, characterizes the representation of 1948. Cohen proposes that in 1948, “war is a chronotope ... what we know as war is in many ways a shape of time in discourse, the figurative, material aspect of the linguistic picture.”<sup>7</sup> In their literary accounts of this chronotope, Alterman and Yizhar engage in the descriptive realism of testimonial narrative, adopting a nearly historiographic mode of writing that suggests the linear progression of events in homogenous time. Yet through recourse to the *visionary* mode of Biblical Hebrew prophecy, Alterman and Yizhar also depart from the conventions of realism and historicism, opening the chronotope of 1948 to an alternative set of relationships between the very words and images that constitute its representation.

The poetics of *displacement* in the prophetic visionary mode is essential to understanding its adoption, in distinct ways, by Alterman and Yizhar in their literary accounts of 1948. In their texts, both authors magnify the operation of displacement (of times and places, but also of peoples and subject positions) that is essential to prophetic visions – indeed, to any form of communication. In the visionary prophetic mode, the divine Voice (in this case, a vision) becomes the text (the linguistic image). Through such

---

<sup>6</sup> Noga Kadman, *Erased from Space and Consciousness: Israel and the Depopulated Palestinian Villages of 1948* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 33–51.

<sup>7</sup> Uri Cohen, “Unraveling the Wars of 1948,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 121.

sensory and semantic dislocations, the visionary prophet gives voice to figures that do not speak in discourse, such as images and silence, and to visions of the past, future, or God that are not phenomenologically present at the moment of linguistic enunciation.

In “War of Cities” and *Khirbet Khizeh*, this mode of representation allows each author to lay claim to distinct moral positions, forged in trauma and poised between speech and silence, between national loss and guilt. In both texts, Alterman and Yizhar struggle to locate figures of exile within the dual movements of populations that bound the Jewish return to the land with the displacement of Palestinians. A study of the poetics of vision in these texts will reveal previously unexamined dimensions of the Palestinian Nakba’s place in the larger chronotope of the 1948 War, and in the formation of Israeli subjectivity.

## II. Nathan Alterman and the Temporality of 1948

Though published in 1955, the literary conceit of “War of Cities” locates much of its narrative in the suspended present of a portentous event whose outcome has yet to be decided, rather than as a retrospective account of the war: “Here the final battle paced back and forth / As if it had already decided itself / Yet the verdict remained sealed, while at the gate / Both peoples now raised their weapons.”<sup>8</sup> Anchoring the poetic gaze in a moment of 1948 whose fate, though decided, is as yet hidden from view, carries the potential to reopen what Shaul Setter calls “1948-time.” In Setter’s account of Yizhar, “1948-time” serves as a counterpoint to the political closure engendered by “the narrative structure of ‘once upon a time,’ of discrete historical events that happened only once and

---

<sup>8</sup> Alterman, “Milḥemet ‘Arim,” 162.

then ended, which can therefore be told retrospectively, and entirely, from a distance.”<sup>9</sup> For Setter, this rejection of historicism carries an explicit political advantage: it creates “a textual space that opposes the post-1948 political reality [...] It is rather a decisive opposition to the violent partition”.<sup>10</sup>

Whether we may attribute such a politics to Yizhar, who served in the Knesset as a representative of the governing Mapai (Labor) party that dominated Israel’s institutions during his parliamentary tenure, from 1949-1966, remains outside the purview of this chapter. Biographically, it would be harder still to argue that Alterman engaged in “an active refusal of the post-1948 Israeli time of sovereignty.”<sup>11</sup> This is crucial, insofar as critics, both Zionist and anti-Zionist, often weigh Israeli authors’ position on Jewish sovereignty as a litmus test for their capacity take accountability for the Nakba.<sup>12</sup> Debates about the Jewish collective’s moral accountability for the Nakba, in turn, are often framed within the presumptions of a linear, causal historiographic narrative, and thus they focus on the degree to which the ethnic cleansing of Palestine was the result of a centralized Zionist policy; in other words, whether or not it was the “end” of a coherent process with a causal narrative logic.<sup>13</sup> And yet the historicist framework may in fact foreclose a deeper moral reckoning with the Nakba that appears possible in Hebrew texts

---

<sup>9</sup> Shaul Setter, “The Time That Returns: Speculative Temporality in S. Yizhar’s 1948,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 44. Setter’s discussion of Benjamin’s critique of “historicism” will be especially relevant for my analysis. See: Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 253–264, especially 262.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. While Yizhar at least vocally objected to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory after 1967, and to Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Alterman embraced the post-’67 politics of “greater Israel” that advocated Israeli annexation of the West Bank. On Yizhar’s politics, see: Shapira, “Hirbet Hizah.” On Alterman’s, see: Dan Laor, *Hama’avak ’al hazikaron: masot ’al sifrut, hevrah vetarbut* (Tel Aviv, 2009), 219-232.

<sup>12</sup> For debates on the relationship between *Khirbet Khizeh* and Yizhar’s position on Jewish sovereignty, see: Shapira, “Hirbet Hizah.” For an anti-Zionist perspective, see: Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2012), especially 158-168, 184-185.

<sup>13</sup> Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba*, 170-175 summarizes many of these debates.

that self-consciously return to the very emergence – by no means a foregone conclusion – of the Jewish people’s “entrance into history” or historical time, per the Zionist discourse.<sup>14</sup> By emphasizing the “potential rupture in historical time” that takes place in Hebrew literature’s return to 1948, Setter demonstrates the potential for literature, and criticism, to offer an alternative basis for what Felman and Laub call the “radical and irrevocable assumption of historical responsibility” – in this case, for the Nakba.<sup>15</sup>

In distinct ways, “War of Cities” and *Khirbet Khizeh* locate 1948 within a liminal space, truly a “schizophrenic” chronotope, in which different representations of the Jewish people’s *place in time* could still prefigure a range of imaginaries of Jewish life with respect to territory, demography, language, and politics. In this sense, Hebrew authors’ focus on the *inextricable simultaneity* of the termination of Jewish national homelessness (the chronotope of exile) alongside the genesis of Palestinian national dispossession may enrich the conceptual vocabulary with which scholars identify responsibility, guilt, and, in a sense, authorship<sup>16</sup> of the Nakba. Depending on the vantage point, however, one may also read Hebrew literary accounts of the Nakba from what Setter calls the “post-1948 Israeli time of sovereignty.” Indeed, Hever argues that Alterman’s poem cycle engenders “a closure that subjugates the Palestinian trauma by integrating it into the redemptive, Zionist narrative.”<sup>17</sup> The Hebrew representation of the

---

<sup>14</sup> Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Jewish Memory between Exile and History,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97, no. 4 (2007): 530–43.

<sup>15</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, 1991), 152. Samera Esmeir explores a related concept with respect to the absence of Palestinian testimonies from historiographic and legalistic records on killings in the village of Tanutra on May 22, 1948. See: Samera Esmeir, “Memories of Conquest: Witnessing Death in Tantura,” in *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa’di (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 228–50.

<sup>16</sup> Hannan Hever, “Lo Tehat Gam Mipnei ‘Al Tagidu be-Gat’: Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit Be-Shirah Ha-‘Ivrit 1948-1958,” in “*Al Tagidu Be-Gath*”, 9–53, especially 17-20 in this context.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Palestinian experience, therefore, consists not only of direct testimony to the events of 1948, but also of the ways in which the texts look *through* 1948 to other moments in time, both before and after the War.

### III. The Poetics of Visibility in 1940s Hebrew Literature

In order to understand the ways that the Palestinians appear – or fail to appear – in the Jewish-Israeli imagination of 1948, we must first attempt to map out *the poetics of visibility* in the Hebrew literature of the period. Throughout the decade preceding Israeli independence, Nathan Alterman demonstrated his mastery of the modernist neo-symbolism pioneered by Avraham Shlonsky and associated with Labor Zionism. This poetics bestowed a far-sighted vision upon the Zionist Hebrew writer, one that takes form, I will argue, in two distinct modes of representation, the “visible” and the “visionary.”<sup>18</sup> The visible mode aligns with the mimetic conventions of testimony in its narration of actual events and through its realistic, literal description of visible phenomena. In the visionary mode, the poet’s quasi-prophetic access to the larger meaning of events in time enables him to show the Hebrew reader a future that they cannot literally see. Like the prophet whose heightened state of vision sees beyond a mundane perception of visible phenomena, the Hebrew poet elevates his own voice to the vantage point of a far-sighted visionary by transforming everyday images and familiar religious references into symbols of modernization and secular national redemption.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> I was originally encouraged to think of this formulation thanks to a lecture by Erik Gray relating to John Milton’s influence on Romantic Poetry: Erik Gray, “Romantic Poetry” (lecture, Columbia University, New York, NY, September, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Dan Miron, *The Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, 1 edition (New Milford, CT: Toby Press, 2009), 159-160.

The six sections of “War of Cities” are united by a large repertoire of symbolic motifs associated with Tel Aviv and Jaffa respectively. Through figurative use of this symbolic vocabulary, the two cities (and their border) function as the grammatical subjects of extended actions. Alterman’s symbolism directs the reader to the as-yet-unseen promise of the Zionist project, which the poet finds latent in images of Tel Aviv, “the first Hebrew city.”<sup>20</sup> In the third section, “The Jews’ City,” we see

A city by the seashore. Look, the flare of the peddlers’ flashlight  
Illuminates it, bleary-eyed and flat-faced.  
Not an ancient inheritance. A city the forefathers did not sanctify;  
A city unloved by the children.  
[...]

Not a city that sprouted from the land according to the law of  
cities whose heritage is Divine  
Not a city whose origins were buried by time. Nor did time engrave  
its image to embellish or destroy,  
For it is entirely an artisan’s work, and the tools of his craft created  
it beneath the sky’s gaping eye  
Until it came to life, speaking and moving in wood and fire and  
stone and glass

The authors of the resurrected generation did not raise a banner in  
it, and rightfully so, for silence is proper  
Yet as it brought them in the entrance like a pauper, and while many  
of them turned their backs to it  
All of a sudden, it flung its noise out to the window of their ancient  
language  
And, as with a magic wand, turned it into a language of the street  
and of newspapers.

Thus, when it was gathered into the generation’s chronicles with  
flashlights and scaffolding and prancing carriages  
One thing was agreed upon as if from the start, a complete novelty since  
the time of Eden and paradise,  
Namely: that its builders are not obliged to revere and respect it  
So that it will be a light burden when the time comes to honor  
appearances while bearing substance<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 145, 111-112.

<sup>21</sup> Alterman, “Milḥemet 'Arim,” 165-166.

Alterman's poem cycle is structured around a politics of representation that appears prominently in these stanzas. "Silence" gives way to the figurative speech of building materials. Images of flashlights and scaffolding, for example, recur throughout the poem, where they portend the redemptive potential of the Zionist project for the entire space.<sup>22</sup> These images are counterposed to the burdensome legacies of "ancient inheritance" and sacred ancestry. This is consistent with the then-dominant discourse of Labor Zionist poetry, with its emphasis on the benefits of Jewish modernization, along with its valorization of prosaic figures such as the peddler, the craftsman, and the pauper over figures with "ancestral pedigree".<sup>23</sup>

Hever argues that the alignment of symbols associated with Tel Aviv and Jaffa prefigures not only the war between the cities, but the entire national conflict.<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere in the cycle, Jaffa is identified with an ancient but decaying past, one that must have no future in the land, if the Labor Zionist vision of "The Jews' City" is to endure.

There is also an implicit association between Arab Jaffa's symbolic status as an antiquated relic and the representational condition of Jewish exile. When the outcome of the battle is finally announced, the people of Tel Aviv reappear, ready for the work of

---

<sup>22</sup> See: Hannan Hever, *BeShavey ha'Utopia: Masah 'al meshihut vepolitiqa bashirah ha'ivrit be'eretz-yisrael beyn shtei milhamot ha'olam* (Kibbutz Sde Boqer, Israel, 1995). As "War of Cities" shifts to the scene of post-war reconstruction, the speaker seeks to set the particular events of the past into a burdensome history that will be thrown out and/or redeemed through a promising future. This is consistent with a larger Labor Zionist poetics, in which force and violence are present throughout, and yet the ultimate benefits of the Zionist victory are universal. As Uri Cohen writes of Shlonsky's lengthy poem, "Facing the Wasteland" (*Mul ha-Yemishoun*), "The poem's message is uncompromising, yet it seemingly produces a universalism when it describes the building activity and the transformation of the space [...] The change in the space occurs at the hands of one group, but the beneficiary is not the people, but the entire space itself. In this way, the struggle between the tools of labor to revitalize the place turns into a struggle between Jews and Arabs. Yet this is hidden within the struggle between civilization and its absence, between modernization and stagnation. The Zionist enterprise is conceived as the breaching of a state of rest and sabbatical in which the ongoing Middle Eastern time stood still, in ineffectual joy, since the Jewish exile and until the return to Zion [...]." Uri Cohen, *Hisardut: Tfisat ha-mavet beyn milhamot ha'olam be'eretz yisra'el uv'italia* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007), 212.

<sup>23</sup> Avraham Shlonsky, "Tzelem," *Hedim* 11–12 (1922): 201. Quoted in Cohen, *Hisardut*, 176.

<sup>24</sup> Hever, "Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit," 14.

renewal: “the tribe, whose cradle was expulsions and oppressive decrees, / changes its skin, ready for fishing nets and cutting”.<sup>25</sup> This transformation must also reshape the purpose of the Hebrew language. In “War of Cities”, Alterman does not turn to ancient Hebrew Scripture in order to authorize Jewish ties to the land.<sup>26</sup> As with Shlonsky, a pointedly modernist use of symbolism enables the Zionist Hebrew poet to cast off the weight of the traditional religious intertext, which is associated with exile and the past – in other words, with obsolescence and the threat of extinction – in order to show the people a promising future.<sup>27</sup>

But while the eventual outcome of the “War of Cities” celebrates the invention of an ahistorical modernity in the figure of Tel Aviv, the poem cycle also portrays the violent struggle through which this secular Hebrew modernity comes into existence. As a military unit prepares an explosive device during the battle, the poet inverts a messianic verse from Isaiah: “and nation *shall* lift up sword against nation / as ten soldiers crawl forward.”<sup>28</sup> Images of the Hebrew language itself are linked to the armed struggle for a Jewish national revolution: the same newspaper for which Hebrew has been repurposed (in “The Jews’ City” section, above) appears in the pockets of the men as they load their guns before battle.

Paradoxically, the poem seems to advocate a shift away from the realm of the verbal (“for silence is proper”), and toward the visual – specifically, the visionary. The vision of the “Jews’ City” (above) appears when “the unraveling winter clouds / Were lit up as they passed over [the city], between darkness and darkness, in a speckled blur”,

---

<sup>25</sup> Alterman, “Milḥemet ‘Arim,” 170.

<sup>26</sup> Hever, “Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit,” 21-23, where he discusses the poem's explicit renunciation of Biblical Hebrew precisely due to its power.

<sup>27</sup> Miron, *Prophetic Mode*, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Alterman, “Milḥemet ‘Arim,” 167, emphasis mine.



reflecting flashes of “workshop fires,” flying sparks, and “the theater in its makeup ... to the point of closing one’s eyes.”<sup>29</sup> Natural sight shuts down and is replaced or augmented by images of human artifice that symbolize the Zionist enterprise. During the battle, meanwhile, the poem depicts two soldiers whose bodies are convulsing, and yet cannot speak: one’s “pale lips are clenched and sealed,” while the other’s “eyes spoke of fear, as if in the night he had / struggled alone with a vile beast.”<sup>30</sup> The soldiers remain mute; only the poetic imagination can imagine what their eyes have seen. As the text self-consciously undermines its own capacity to reproduce speech or to record transparent evidence of the visible, Alterman suggests the compromised position of the Hebrew author as witness to 1948’s violence. The poem cycle’s tableau of literal violence and symbolic renewal reveals a great deal about the relationship between the verbal and the visual in his representation of 1948.

#### IV. The National Poet

As the Zionist poet *par excellence*, the privilege of Alterman’s gaze remains tied to a didactic function. Like many socialist and nationalist poets, Alterman *speaks for* a collective that subordinates the individual’s perspective to a universal national subjectivity, one whose normative force is itself a form of sovereignty.<sup>31</sup> In his introduction to *Al Tagidu be-Gath*, Hever contends that “as a necessary component in the

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>31</sup> Uri Cohen elucidates this concept, in the context of Labor Zionist poetry, with a comment on Agamben: “the sovereign is realized precisely on the edge between inclusion and exclusion, due to the principle structure of the sovereign as the one who decides what exists outside of the collective, while he is yet part of it – and with this power, he deviates from it. Of course, this definition already implies the monopoly on power, and it also demonstrates how Shlonsky’s poetry, and national poetry in general, is an exercise in sovereignty, as well.” See: Cohen, *Hisardut*, 285, where he further cites Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 31-33.

representation of the universal national subject, a clear moral voice crystallized within Hebrew poetry.”<sup>32</sup> Of course, such a moral imperative was not restricted to poetry, or even literature: as Ben-Ze’ev and Lomsky-Feder observe, the writers of 1948 were members of “the canonical generation [...] whose personal stories converge with a formative national event and become a model of worthy behavior.”<sup>33</sup>

Yet as a *Hebrew* author, however secular, Alterman’s moral authority is enhanced by the fact that he writes in the language of the Biblical Hebrew prophets. And in the sense that he is heir to Jeremiah and Isaiah, the Hebrew visionary’s voice holds moral precedence over even the political leadership.<sup>34</sup> In Alterman’s case, this became clear when Prime Minister and Defense Minister David Ben-Gurion read his poem “On This” at a meeting of the Provisional State Council and distributed copies of it to officers of the nascent Israeli Defense Forces (I.D.F.).<sup>35</sup> Published in December 1948, “On This” gives gruesome testimony to the I.D.F.’s massacre of Palestinian civilians at Lydda/Lod and Ramle five months earlier. The poem adopts a tone of righteous indignation; guilt and punishment are a central concern: “for boys and girls, and we are among them, / whether with actions / or a nod of consent / muttering ‘necessity’ and ‘revenge,’ we are pushed / into the domain of war crimes.”<sup>36</sup> Much like “War of Cities,” as Hever points out, “On This” contains a meta-poetic layer that addresses the very status of Hebrew words and images that testify to the events the 1948 War. After depicting a bloodthirsty young

---

<sup>32</sup> Hever, “Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit,” 12.

<sup>33</sup> Ben-Ze’ev and Lomsky-Feder, “The Canonical Generation,” 1047.

<sup>34</sup> Cohen, *Hisardut*, 173, 181.

<sup>35</sup> Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 233-234.

<sup>36</sup> Nathan Alterman, “‘Al Z’ot,” in “*Al Tagidu Be-Gath*”: *ha-Nakba ha-Falastinit ba-Shirah ha- 'Ivrit 1948-1958*, ed. Hannan Hever (Tel Aviv: Sedek, 2010), 68–69.

Jewish soldier spraying bullets into women and old men lined up against a wall, the poem states:

This is an image from the Battles of Freedom, dear friends!  
It's no secret! There are others, more mighty still!  
Our war demands songs and expressions...  
Fine! May it be sung, then, on this, as well!

And then it will be sung on "delicate matters"  
Whose name, in this case – is murder.  
[...]  
And let it not be said, "these are merely exceptions in a glorious  
chapter."  
An exception or the whole  
Both are paired as a rule,  
If this is how the whole listens to the exception recounted here  
And doesn't throw it in the dungeon!

When the poem was anthologized, Alterman added an epigraph that mentions Ben-Gurion's agitation over the massacre while specifying the "force of his explicit endorsement" of the poem.<sup>37</sup> Alterman understood that even above the monopoly on violence accorded to the modern state, the voice (and vision) of the Hebrew poet-prophet is endowed with moral authority over the collective. The author's ability to *speak for* the people, in the nationalist sense, is indissociable from the greater proximity to revelation that the Hebrew visionary inherits from the privileged gaze of the Biblical prophets.<sup>38</sup> While Zionist discourse promotes a modernist transformation of Hebrew symbolism, which must revise its traditional associations, the religious intertext (or pretext) of the visionary mode forces Hebrew authors to adapt, almost symptomatically, the viewpoint of the Biblical prophet.

Given the moral imperatives built into the act of Hebrew literary testimony, the sight of Jewish forces expelling and even slaughtering Palestinian civilians fundamentally

---

<sup>37</sup> Hever, "Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit," 10.

<sup>38</sup> Miron, *The Prophetic Mode*, 27.

disrupts both the visible and the visionary modes of literary representation. There has been substantial scholarly engagement with the ways that the moral scope of the Zionist-Jewish collective narrative demanded that Hebrew authors efface their own capacity to “see” the War of 1948 in its totality, and Alterman’s “War of Cities” offers a momentous example of this struggle at a critical turning point in the conflict. In the title of the poem, the plural “cities” alludes to the relatively unique status of this moment in the war. The 1947 United Nations’ partition plan ordered that Jaffa be preserved as an Arab enclave under Palestinian sovereignty. Alterman’s poem initially positions itself at the border between Tel Aviv and Jaffa; the poem’s first section is entitled “The Southern Suburb.”<sup>39</sup> This is an ironic title from an historical perspective, as it locates Tel Aviv as the center of urban reference. The first Jewish neighborhood in what became Tel Aviv, Neve Tzedek (presumably the “southern” suburb), was founded in 1887 to the *north* of Jaffa, one of the country’s most ancient, continuously inhabited cities.<sup>40</sup>

On April 25, 1948, from bases in the adjacent neighborhood of Manshiyyeh, the Irgun militia initiated an attack on Jaffa with heavy shelling, prompting mass panic in the city, where the civil leadership and infrastructure had already collapsed in the preceding weeks and months.<sup>41</sup> The Irgun commander was explicit about the aims of the assault that began: “to cause chaos among the civilian population in order to create a mass flight.”<sup>42</sup> Over the course of three days, the Irgun shelled Jaffa’s residential neighborhoods with “20 tons of ordnance.” The Haganah later acknowledged that “most of the casualties were

---

<sup>39</sup> Alterman, “Milhemet ‘Arim,” 160-161.

<sup>40</sup> Sharon Rotbard calls attention to this irony in his critique of the modernist architectural mythology surrounding Tel Aviv’s foundation. See: Sharon Rotbard, *White City, Black City: Architecture and War in Tel Aviv and Jaffa*, Tr. Orit Gat (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015).

<sup>41</sup> Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 95-101.

<sup>42</sup> qtd. in Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 96.

civilians”.<sup>43</sup> On the eve of the war, Jaffa’s population numbered around 70,000-80,000. The conquest of Jaffa’s outskirts and bombardment of its interior led to the flight or death of all but around 5,000 inhabitants, who surrendered unconditionally on May 13, 1948.<sup>44</sup>

Needless to say, legible literary images of such profound Palestinian suffering would challenge the moral justification for the Zionist project, a challenge that was not lost on Alterman. From a moral perspective, the Zionist witness must externalize him or herself from the events in which (other) Jews caused the Palestinians to suffer injustice. This demands a very specific approach to literary representation in the “visible” mode, one that assumes a certain *spatial* placement with respect to the national communities. As Mikhal Dekel writes, “only from the position of an external subject can one imagine another nation as absolutely legible, transparent, and given over to interpretation. Indeed, one looking from without always remains fixed, *a priori*, wherever he is”.<sup>45</sup> Such a position would complement the production of lyrical testimony that stands outside the war’s events, observing them with a visionary gaze toward the national purpose.

And yet throughout “War of Cities,” the position of the “seeing eye” is destabilized through the representation of disruptions at nearly every mention of vision (in the physiological sense). The sight of the war also interferes with the division of space in the poem. In the cycle’s second section, “A City Collapses,” the location of the narrative explicitly shifts from Tel Aviv to Jaffa: “Jaffa’s border. A line of doorways opposite / The sand-strewn pavement. / A shutter engraved and adorned like a book, / a

---

<sup>43</sup> Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, Reprint. Edition (Cambridge, 1989), 213.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>45</sup> Mikhal Dekel, *The Universal Jew: Masculinity, Modernity, and the Zionist Moment* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2011). Quoted in Hever, “Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit,” 39.

purple wall and a blue lintel”.<sup>46</sup> With the image of the shutter, Alterman introduces an interior, a domicile for the gaze that externalizes the scene further. Yet this viewpoint, which seems to offer a visual report, immediately conjures up the word, or to be more precise, the ornamentation that may surround words “*like a book*.” The simile insinuates that the battle scene beyond the shutter is not directly equivalent to the book’s contents – words cannot stand in for these images, not even metaphorically. Thus the shutter, at once the passage and the barrier to vision, conjures the text only insofar as it suggests aesthetic mediation and embellishment.

Alterman introduces further friction between language and the act of seeing within the poem. The text repeatedly mediates sight through *reflection*, making visual testimony second- or even third-hand. In the first section, “The Southern Suburb,” a lengthy series of snapshots of daily life Tel Aviv concludes with “dwellings in a jumbled heap and roofed attics, awash in work, play, and fighting, / [The city] is reflected from all of these, as if from the mirror.”<sup>47</sup> The image of the mirror’s reflection recurs in later portrayals of each city’s lifespan, suggesting that everything the reader has been shown heretofore was only a reflection, or better yet, a simile of reflection: “*as if* from the mirror.” Typically, the mirror allows one to see *there* what appears to be *here*. Yet in this case, the (subjective) displacement and reconstitution that takes place in the mirror is further mediated by the conventions of poetry – in this case, the simile. Given the content of the images reflected in these mirrors (two cities, and peoples, at war) Alterman hints at a larger statement about poetry and testimony: his “War of Cities” does not reflect a visible reality; the poem is a verbal analogy, it is the equivalent of saying “as if” or “like

---

<sup>46</sup> Alterman, “Milhemet ‘Arim,” 163.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 160.

this.”<sup>48</sup> Alterman locates the protagonists of the war in the externality of the mirror image, rather than as the direct object of the lyrical subject’s gaze, thereby calling attention to the mediation between language – in particular the Hebrew language in which he writes – and the images of war depicted therein. The text explicitly ties the spellbinding and illusive power of Hebrew’s rebirth as the language of national vision to a kind of “magic trick.”

It articulates the passwords of revival,  
Invented by the Jews of Ashkenaz, with a guttural pronunciation [...] *To the flowery phrase of speakers and lecturers, to complex and learned Hebrew*  
It listens and nods its head as a sign thereof, *as if seeing sorcery*  
But its heart is set toward words of principal – Israel and Zion and things *like this*.<sup>49</sup>

## V. The Eruption of the Biblical Scream

Meta-poetic engagement with the instability of symbolization is as much a hallmark of trauma testimony as of Modernism.<sup>50</sup> As Hever observes, by 1948, Alterman found himself directly engaged with the ways that a post-Holocaust condition challenges the capacity of language – particularly the lyric image – to render any meaningful correspondence between literary testimony and actual experiences of (Jewish) suffering.<sup>51</sup> Nathan Alterman established himself as one of the Yishuv’s most elegiac voices with respect to the doomed fate of European Jewry in the poem cycle *The Joy of the Poor* (1941) and, as news of the Final Solution made its way to Palestine, in his serialized weekly poem in the Hebrew newspaper *Davar*.<sup>52</sup> The war that followed the U.N. vote to

---

<sup>48</sup> In Hebrew, the word *kmo* is used for both of these phrases.

<sup>49</sup> Alterman, “Milhemet ‘Arim,” 161, emphases mine.

<sup>50</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> Hever, “Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit,” 17.

<sup>52</sup> Goodblatt, “A Cage of Order,” 230-231.

partition Palestine, less than three years after the Holocaust concluded, reinforced the frightening possibility of collective annihilation amongst the Jewish population. These anxieties were concretized in prewar Zionist efforts to help stateless European Jewish refugees illegally immigrate into Palestine, bearing with them the experience of surviving the Nazi genocide. These refugees appear, albeit obliquely, at the end of “The Jews’ City,” as the cycle turns toward the battle scenes of the moment:

[The city] was turned toward commerce and trade. But in pieces,  
when the time came to lift  
The mask, it became like a lair besieged: the fate of the land and of  
the era [...]  
And the shattered, rusty shard of a boat beat against it gloomily,  
opposite the red house  
While its enemies were yet at the gate of the land, its people, like  
thieves, rose up from the sea.<sup>53</sup>

There is a noticeable shift in the imagery from the Labor Zionist vision of the city’s future that immediately precedes these lines to a language of fracture, as the Jewish refugees come ashore.

In approaching the events of 1948, the task of representing either the end or a new beginning in the life Jewish people reinforced certain aesthetic tensions in Hebrew literature. If Judaism’s traditional timespan, with its deferred eschatological expectation of redemption, defined Jewish life in exile, Zionist modernism held that Jewish existence under non-territorialist conditions was part of the past and, effectively, dead. In other words, there was no more time to wait; the only future was the present, and it was impossible to represent the Diasporic Jewish past in the language of the present. Yet for the Jewish population of Palestine, this narrowing of territorial options was never merely a shift between different imaginative or rhetorical paradigms. Post-Holocaust writing

---

<sup>53</sup> Alterman, “Milḥemet 'Arim”, 166.



carried the potential to render lyrical expression impossible, unable to span the chasm between the extremity of the Jewish experience in the 1940s and linguistic symbolization. The poetic crisis of modernist symbolism in Hebrew cannot be separated from the elimination of the dialectic between exile and redemption (or past and future), an outcome of the fact that the Holocaust literalized the termination of Jewish life in Europe that Zionist discourse had only rhetorically imagined. Though Alterman inherited the visionary modernist mantle from Shlonsky's interwar poetry, he could not offer a far-sighted, symbolic view of a new Jewish dawn to motivate survival in the present without confronting the temptations of silence and inexpressibility.

In "War of Cities," these tensions inform the *place* of each national collective in the land – where and how Jews and Arabs can be seen. "A City Collapses" begins with four stanzas that define Jaffa negatively against Tel Aviv. The section begins "Not on the border of Tel Aviv, with explosives / And shooting was the verdict of the land sealed", and precedes to describe refugees who keep passing by the same "abandoned house, amidst darkness / and screams, grasping hand to hand." The breakdown of physical sight corresponds to the replacement of conventional speech with forms of pure, expressive sound: the shout and the scream. Images of iron and flashlights suggest the uncertainty of perception while Jaffa collapses.

Cut off by an ambush,  
Twisted by ropes of chaff  
That appeared to it like iron chains –  
With the shriek of catapults it shot  
Groping about, as a flashlight went out<sup>54</sup>

Yet the very same instruments (metalwork and electrical light), which add to the sensory confusion during the battle, serve an entirely different visual function in the post-war

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 164.

section “Dawn in the Suburb”. The barbers, peddlers, shopkeepers and apprentices mentioned in the opening section now gaze from their windows: “they lit the electricity / from rooms while the last watch of night yet / was before them. With ‘we will do and we will hear’ / They spoke out loud.”<sup>55</sup> Again, there is a shriek (*šivḥa*). But in post-war Tel Aviv, it emerges as a redemptive sound, issuing from “the screeching engine and changing gears” of the trucks bringing soldiers back from the frontlines, revitalizing sight as the city opens its artificial eyes:

And the dawn rose. Across the suburb passed the shriek  
Of garage shutters raised by a rod  
Like iron eyelashes. The force of arms returned  
To its place the world of essences and names.<sup>56</sup>

In this visionary account, after the battle, language returns to its unproblematic function: there is an essential correspondence between image and reality, thanks only to the use of “force.” The shriek, though not semantic, attains figurative meaning within this stable symbolic economy of images and sounds. It heralds rebuilding after catastrophe, which, in a sense, represent the post-war, post-Holocaust stakes of Israel’s establishment. As the artificial lights come back on, Alterman’s symbolic code allows the city to reposition the language of Biblical revelation: traditionally, “we will do and we will hear” is the essential formula for the covenant that constitutes the Jewish people in Exodus.<sup>57</sup> Here, the Israelite’s affirmative response to the Divine voice transforms into the discourse of the post-1948 modern city.

Yet in an apparent contradiction of his own poetics, in other parts of the poem cycle Alterman uses the Hebrew Biblical intertext to redefine the “shriek” that emerges

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>57</sup> Exodus 24:7; cf. 19:8.

from the war, as well as the ability of the visionary to see such a sound. In these key moments, Alterman's turn to Biblical Hebrew may offer his strongest statement about witnessing the Palestinian Nakba. The poet's ability to look forward to the outcomes of victory, renewal, historic restoration, and a revolutionary future is simultaneously disrupted by the identification of the war's consequences for the Palestinians, specific forms of trauma that derive meaning from the Jews' own historical reference: from seeing something they have seen before.

The first four stanzas of "A City Collapses" begin with a number of negations that differentiate Jaffa from "Here" (i.e. Tel Aviv). Among them, there is a reference to the Hebrew Bible's first explicit reference to images: "and the Lord created the man in His image."<sup>58</sup> The verse appears as follows in the poem:

Not here, from the fire, from the top of a boulder,  
One friend carried on his back the other  
And when he was created from dust in the image  
Man was created from the sacrifice of his brother.<sup>59</sup>

These beautiful and haunting lines seem to invite Midrashic exegesis. Firstly, "sacrifice" (*qarban*) can also mean victim or, in an idiomatic translation of the lines above, "victimization." In this, there is a doubled allusion to the creation of humanity and the story of Cain and Abel.<sup>60</sup> Alterman suggests that whatever is Divine in man's nature – the visual metaphor of God's image – is at the essence of death in war. The allusion can be interpreted in multiple ways. God's image may account for man's love of his fellow, which leads soldiers to lift their dead comrades upon their backs in the midst of battle, or

---

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 1:27. This phrase, in Hebrew (*va-yivra' Elokim et-ha'adam be-šalmo, be-šalem Elokim bara' oto*"), is the source of the name of the Israeli human rights group Btselem, whose emblem depicts the cantillation marks of the Hebrew verse in Biblical script. See: "Btselem," accessed August 17, 2018, <https://www.btselem.org/>.

<sup>59</sup> Alterman, "Milḥemet 'Arim," 162.

<sup>60</sup> Genesis 4:1-16.

to die for one another. Alternatively, it may be God's image (or broadly, religion) that motivates people to fight each other. Indeed, Cain killed his brother after God accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's.

Later in the section, the poet uses the other Biblical word for image (*dmūt*)<sup>61</sup> from the creation story to speak of Jaffa:

And its image – between the wolf and the dog  
Who strikes and bites and disappears.  
And a thousand of its years stood on end  
As in sorcery that has not been known since then,  
Strong, and without strength it falls  
And with its fall, the falcon already dreams of spoils.

The mention of “sorcery” (*kishouf*), which elsewhere in the poem defines the rebirth of Hebrew language in a secular Zionist modernity, suggests that even the Zionist revolution cannot be severed entirely from the precarious condition of magic. “Without strength”, the figures of this conflict will become the spoils of nature's predators.

The fate of Jaffa's image, and in turn of Alterman's representation of 1948's Palestinian victims, emerges toward the conclusion of this section: “Jaffa's calamity and end. Besieged / And its image split in two”.<sup>62</sup> In the wake of this fracture, the lyrical speaker offers the poem's most vivid description of civilian chaos as Jaffa collapses. Here, the narration of the Palestinian refugees' terrified flight from Jaffa presents two provocative images of sight:

There its masses descend, eyeless  
Gathering on the knoll's slope  
And with crutches tapping and trampling  
Its possessions are rolled out before it  
Fishing and merchant boats

---

<sup>61</sup> Preceding the verse cited in note 58, Genesis 1:26 reads: “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image (*be-šalmeynu*), after our likeness (*ki-dmūteynu*).” Both nouns, *šelem* and *dmūt*, connote an image, likeness, or appearance.

<sup>62</sup> Alterman, “Milḥemet 'Arim,” 164. “Image” here is *šalmah*, from *šelem*.

Bearing man, curse, and wailing  
Heaven broke its rock asunder  
As the sea and God testify, —

For [the city] is barred to heaven and the sea  
While the rule of its rock is torn away<sup>63</sup>

The designation of the Palestinian masses as “eyeless,” as Hever points out, is not merely a description of a physical wound: this term, *stum ‘ayin*, “is also the [traditional] nickname of the Biblical foe Bil‘am”, sent to curse the Israelites in the Wilderness.<sup>64</sup> This allusion thus activates meaning on opposite poles of the axis between the visible and the visionary – for Bil‘am symbolizes at once the non-Jew as historical enemy *and* the power of prophetic sight. In the Bible, the Ammonite king Balaq, uneasy over the potential Israelite encroachment on his territory in Canaan, brings the reputable pagan prophet Bil‘am to a high point overlooking the Israelite camp in the desert in order to curse them. But upon viewing them, Bil‘am prophesizes, instead, “How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel.”<sup>65</sup> Bil‘am speaks from the prophet’s viewpoint, though his actual sight, the Israelite encampment, overturns his intended discourse. The object of his gaze, in other words, turns the hostile potential of the curse into a blessing upon the Hebrew collective. The spatial dimension of this canonical verse, whose recitation Jewish law mandates upon entering a synagogue, is especially salient here. Though Bil‘am literally sees a wandering community, or a community in exile – figured through the image of tents, dwellings places, and, retrospectively, houses of prayer – his prophecy portends the eventual settlement of the Israelites in the Promised Land.

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 164-165.

<sup>64</sup> Hever, “Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit,” 16; cf. Numbers 22:2 – 24:25

<sup>65</sup> Numbers 24:5, also recited in the Jewish daily liturgy.

Yet in Jaffa in 1948, the curse emerges from the mouths of the dispossessed, and God Himself is a witness. In a revealing moment of duality, Alterman not only places God in the same mute position (“the sky’s gaping eye”) in which He will appear over “The Jews’ City,” he also cautions the reader to look away from this testimony, and toward the immediate concerns of the Jewish collective: “for [Jaffa] could yet turn its face / at any sign of a change in fortune / And burst forth” to use the split rocks of heaven and ocean for military purposes against Tel Aviv. This duality accentuates the tension of Alterman as a Hebrew visionary who, self-consciously, directs the reader’s gaze toward the struggle for the national, modernist redemption promised by Zionism, while including a more ancient, natural, and Biblical viewpoint from which he cannot speak, but to which he is still compelled to allude, with cautious restraint.

This time is the place of the resurrection  
Of the Bible’s symbols, yet from their power it shatters  
Stammering and thirsty. So less is better, –  
Lest every flowery phrase speak from within them.

Therefore when their treasures go to gloom  
And ancient power blazes, let us overcome our wills  
With lightning, lest their flaming plume become dull,  
Though time with its own quills may go forth.

Ancient spirits, until your names are entered into writing  
To enliven the poem and the proclamation at assembly,  
Would it not be better to smash your chains  
And replace them with the shriek of wild birds over the earth.

Though Alterman leaves God in the sky as a silent witness above the national death and birth of 1948, the ancient words of God’s testimony, Biblical Hebrew, “shatter” the present time itself. Almost compulsively, the poem’s shriek (*shivha*) returns, as befits the

recurring nightmares of trauma.<sup>66</sup> It is voiced by the wildbird, and in this Alterman articulates a wish beyond the previous stanza's warning: a wish for Hebrew, in the fullness of its ancient religious power, "to smash your chains" and become the falcon, the very force of nature and aggression that the entire poem has attempted to suppress and defeat. This also underscores the visual perspective used throughout "War of Cities" – the bird's-eye view. The poem does not (and cannot) resolve the tension between the ability to see everything, including the injustice of violence, and the implication of language in this same violence. To evade this, "War of Cities" offers elaborate substitutions and mediations to the textual record of the visible: mechanical sight replaces human eyes, newly-built Tel Aviv turns on its lights while Jaffa hides its face, humanist modernity holds back ancient religion, and a new Symbolist vocabulary takes over both Biblical Hebrew and realist testimony. Yet the repressed violence returns, unincorporated and unredeemed, in the wish to become the bird of prey who "still dreams of spoils." For in the end, the only spoils we see are the abandoned places and property of Jaffa's Palestinians. And it is from this sight that the poet, for all his symbolist innovations and figurative mediations, cannot protect the Jewish collective.

#### VI. S. Yizhar and the Place of 1948

Published weeks after the war's conclusion in 1949, S. Yizhar's novella *Khirbet Khizeh* stands out perhaps more than any other contemporaneous text in its direct testimony to the Palestinian Nakba. *Khirbet Khizeh*'s unnamed narrator, a young soldier,

---

<sup>66</sup> As Cathy Caruth writes: "The repetition at the heart of the catastrophe—the experience Freud will call 'traumatic neurosis'—emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind." Cathy Caruth, "Unclaimed Experience", in *Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 2.

recounts his unit's expulsion of Palestinian civilians from a conquered village late in the war, probably in autumn of 1948, when the victory of Jewish forces appeared likely. The frank narrative, along with Yizhar's position as the period's undisputed master of Hebrew fiction, continues to inform cultural and scholarly debates about the ways that his writing has shaped Israeli society's relationship to its violent national birth.<sup>67</sup> All but one of Yizhar's major texts take place during the 1948 War, and many were written while he was a soldier. As a promising young writer, Yizhar was recruited to serve in the Knesset for the Mapai Party the same year *Khirbet Khizeh* was published. Yizhar won the Israel Prize, the state's highest cultural honor, in 1959, and *Khirbet Khizeh* became part of the Israeli high school curriculum five years later. The outsized role of this particular text and its author has also served as a cultural lightning rod. In 1978, during the first Likud government, a made-for-television film of the novella was briefly banned, though ultimately broadcast amidst vociferous controversy.<sup>68</sup>

The degree to which the novella is *representative* of a certain Israeli subjectivity (and which subjectivity, precisely) has occupied polemics from the anti-Zionist and Zionist Left to the far-Right of Israel's political spectrum. Much of this derives from the tendency to read *Khirbet Khizeh* as "a testimonial text" – though critics interpret this testimony through vastly divergent lenses. The novella has been read as testimony to the universal struggle of the individual against the group; the morality of the Israeli soldier as conscientious objector; a "fig leaf" for systemic Israeli state violence; and as "prophecy"

---

<sup>67</sup> A special issue of the journal *Jewish Social Studies*, which "presents the proceedings of a conference entitled "History and Responsibility: Hebrew Literature and 1948," held at Stanford University in June 2011", no less than five out of fourteen articles focused on *Khirbet Khizeh*. See: Amir Eshel, Hannan Hever, and Vered Karti Shemtov, "Introduction," *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 1-9.

<sup>68</sup> For the most comprehensive history of the novella's reception, and Yizhar's biography within it, see: Shapira, "Hirbet Hizah".



of Israel's lifelong inability to take responsibility for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and for the refugees' desire to return.<sup>69</sup>

At some remove from these readings, Shaul Setter has argued that Yizhar's writing does not participate in the construction of an Israeli national subjectivity at all. Against "both the celebratory and the critical readings," which assume a "post-1948" temporality, Setter argues that Yizhar's fiction is located in "1948-time," in which "'Israel' is not there yet as an already-naturalized national Jewish space defined by a sovereign state law; there is only Israel/Palestine, a yet-to-be-determined place of habitation and struggle" and therefore there "it is not yet a collectivity for which the narrator of 'Hirbet Hiz'ah' could serve as representative."<sup>70</sup> Though my reading presumes some meaningful relation between Yizhar's writing and the construction of Israeli subjectivity, Setter's terms nonetheless help to reframe the literary representation of 1948 in terms of its temporality – a time, as we know from Alterman, when the passage from exile and the past into Zionist modernity seems to elicit a certain visionary poetics from the Hebrew author. The *specular* aspect of Setter's "speculative temporality" suggests a visionary dimension that characterizes Yizhar's writing, one that offers more than a repository of descriptive testimony to the events and subjectivities of 1948. Rather, as with Alterman, the visionary poetics at work in Yizhar interrogates the very time and

---

<sup>69</sup> Hochberg writes that the novella "is not simply a testimonial text recounting the experiences of a young Jewish soldier... it is also a prophetic text predicting the impact of this expulsion on future Israeli generations." Gil Hochberg, "A Poetics of Haunting: From Yizhar's Hirbeh to Yehoshua's Ruins to Koren's Crypts," *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 57. Hochberg critiques the readings of Shaked and Miron on the story as an allegory of the individual against the masses. See further: Gershon Shaked, *Sifrut az, kan ve-'akhshav* (Tel Aviv: Zmora Beitan, 1993), 181–203; Dan Miron, "S. Yizhar: Some General Observations," in *Midnight Convoy and Other Stories*, by S. Yizhar (New Milford, Ct.: Toby Press, 2007), 257–73. In "The Time That Returns," 46–47, Setter further cites Shapira, "Hirbet Hizah," and Hannan Hever, *Ha-Sipur veba-Le'om* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007), 211–38, as sources, respectively, for readings of the novella that focus on the narrator as either a conscientious objector or a "fig leaf".

<sup>70</sup> Setter, "The Time That Returns," 47.

space from which Hebrew writers can represent the forced dislocation of Palestinians at the same moment that Israel's establishment brings an "end" to the temporality of Jewish exile.

Unlike Alterman's symbolist poetry, the conventions of realist narrative fiction locate the testimony of *Khirbet Khizeh* in the voice and eyes of a single character, a soldier who narrates his story in the first person. Yizhar uses the narrator's body to map out a range of affective responses to the violent dislocation of the Palestinian villagers. The thematic resonance of exile takes form through the narrator's vision, which begins to dictate his position in physical space. The very representation of the act of seeing, in fact, shapes the discourses through which the text positions its own speech: its testimony. The narrator's observation of visible sights is often "overwritten" by a prophetic visionary gaze that sees figures of exile, simultaneously, in the Israeli future and from the Jewish past. These shifts from the testimonial narrative to the poetic and even prophetic register characterize the narrator's interior monologue. And yet, paradoxically, it is the textual figure of *silence* that exposes the poetics of visibility in the novella. Throughout *Khirbet Khizeh*, two words seem to recur more frequently than any others: *sheqet* and *dmama*, both of which suggest different forms of "silence."<sup>71</sup> A symptomatic return to silence

---

<sup>71</sup> While I have not thoroughly counted the use of these words (in their various forms) relative to others, I feel safe in proposing that they are the abstract nouns Yizhar employs most frequently in the text. While *sheqet* is the more conventional form of "quiet" and "silence," it can also connote tranquility, relaxation, and serenity. *Dmama* may also connote "stillness." *Dmama* carries strongly Biblical overtones. The most noteworthy, which I think is relevant to its use in *Khirbet Khizeh*, is I Kings 19:11-12.

The context for the passage is as follows: after killing the pagan prophets of Ba'al, the Prophet Elijah has fled from the Israelite King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, who seek to murder him. In the southern Negev desert, Elijah asks God to take his life. An angel appears and feeds him, telling him to continue on, and Elijah journeys forty days to Mt. Horev, another name for Mt. Sinai (reversing the forty years the children of Israel journeyed from the same place of revelation).

And lo, the LORD passed by. There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks by the power of the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind—an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the

characterizes many of the text's central motifs and themes. The articulation of silence shapes what Gil Hochberg has called “a semantics of ambiguity located between presence and absence, the visible and the invisible” as Yizhar “introduces” Israeli literature to “the emptied Arab villages”.<sup>72</sup>

Recently, critics have called attention to the ways that the novella's opening prefigures the “silencing” of the Nakba itself, as its historicity and the Palestinians' existence as stateless refugees subject to Israeli military rule continues to be displaced from Israeli public discourse.<sup>73</sup> Such official silence has a visual component, as well, in the erasure of Palestinian sites from the Israeli landscape.<sup>74</sup> From the onset, the protagonist positions the space of narration in opposition to literal silence and moral complacency, both of which he locates in his own self-consciousness, and in the Israeli culture that would emerge in the aftermath of 1948:

---

earthquake—fire; but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire—a soft murmuring sound.

The phrase that JPS translates as “a soft murmuring sound”, *kol dmama daqa*, may also be rendered “a still, silent voice” or, paradoxically, “a thin, silent sound.” This phrase also occurs in the centerpiece of Days of Awe liturgy, when the Voice of God is heard to announce “who shall live and who shall die” in the coming year (from the medieval prayer *Unetaneh toqef*). The phrase is sometimes identified with the blowing of the ram's horn (*shofar*), which calls the Jewish people to repentance and, in mystic understandings, announces the universal enthronement of God.

As I will discuss in chapter 4 of the Dissertation, Dahlia Ravikovich also opens up the poetic possibilities of “silence” with respect to the author's visions of Palestinian displacement. And as I will show, she also turns to the liturgical text of the *Unetaneh toqef*.

In the passage above and in the rest of this chapter, the Biblical citations generally follow *Tanakh The Holy Scriptures: A New Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, ed. The Jewish Publication Society (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985); though I have translated words differently where noted.

<sup>72</sup> Hochberg, “A Poetics of Haunting,” 66.

<sup>73</sup> The so-called “Nakba Law,” passed by Israel's Knesset in 2011, “authorises Israel's finance minister to revoke funding from institutions that” among other things “mark the country's Independence Day as a day of mourning” (Patrick Strickland, “Israel Continues to Criminalise Marking Nakba Day,” last modified May 14, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/israel-nakba-palestine-150514080431980.html>). Students at Haifa University and Tel Aviv University, for example, are now forbidden from memorializing Palestinian displacement on campus. The original draft of the law, proposed by Knesset member Alex Miller of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, would have made participation in events commemorating the Nakba punishable by jail time.

<sup>74</sup> See note 6, above.

True, it all happened a long time ago, but it has haunted me ever since. I sought to drown it out with the din of passing time, to diminish its value, to blunt its edge with the rush of daily life [...] But sometimes I would shake myself again, astonished at how easy it had been to be seduced, to be knowingly led astray and join the great general mass of liars—that mass compounded of crass ignorance, utilitarian indifference, and shameless self-interest—and exchange a single great truth for the cynical shrug of a hardened sinner.<sup>75</sup>

The protagonist's language suggests that the personal, ethical drama of his narrative overlaps with a number of symbolic economies, including the vocabularies of religious morality ("hardened sinner"), shame (or in this case, "shamelessness"), and the visual dimension that will be inseparable from his testimony (in "knowingly led astray", the adverb in Hebrew is *galuyi 'eynayim*: literally, "with open eyes"). The act of narration proceeds by defying silence in rather spatial terms: "I saw that I could no longer hold back, and although I hadn't made up my mind where it would end, it seemed to me that, in any case, instead of staying silent, I should, rather, start telling the story."<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> S. Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, trans. Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck (Jerusalem: Ibis, 2008), 7. For the Hebrew, see: S. Yizhar, "Hirbet Hiz 'ah," in *Sipur hirbet hiz 'ah: Ve-'od Shlosha Sipurei Milhama* (Tel Aviv: Zmora Beitan, 2010 [1949]), 36–95. That edition contains the original text published in 1949, which differs slightly from Yizhar's revised 1989 edition, which de Lange and Dweck used as the source for their translation. Where relevant, I will indicate the original Hebrew pagination.

<sup>76</sup> For the phrase "and although I hadn't even made up my mind where it would end," de Lange and Dweck offer the correct idiomatic translation of *gamarti-'omer* as "made up my mind", though the words literally mean "I hadn't finished speaking." A literal translation would draw attention to the mutual imbrication of the closure of enunciation ("I hadn't finished speaking") with phrases that emphasize position and location (in Hebrew *heykhan kan ha-motze', harey nir'eh li mi-kol maqom...*), such that an unconventionally literal translation of the entire phrase might read: "and although I hadn't even finished saying *where* the *point of departure* is *here*, it nevertheless seemed to me *from every place* that instead of staying silent, I should start telling the story" (emphasis mine). The obvious idiomatic sense of the sentence does not convey the spatial suggestion of *place* from the Hebrew. See Yizhar, *Sipur hirbet hizeh*, 36.

And yet silence begins to appear everywhere, in the Jewish soldiers' boredom and in their indifference to the ethical consequences of their mission. The soldiers literally silence the Palestinian villagers as they destroy their homes and load them onto trucks for deportation, through the use of force, and even through shrieks and screams.<sup>77</sup> The composite figure of silence haunts the cruel, grueling testimony to wartime brutality, much in the way that Felman and Laub interpret de Man's *Allegories of Reading*: "the testimony of a work that performs actively an exercise of silence," which they characterize as "the absolute refusal of any trivialization or legitimizing discourse (of apology, of narrative, or of psychologizing explanation of recent history)".<sup>78</sup> Such a reading opens Yizhar's text beyond the scope of fictional autobiography, an extended confession (or justification) of Israeli guilt for the Nakba. The figure of silence, rather, reaches toward the location of an authorial voice that can speak despite, or perhaps as a result of, the sharp dislocations that the war produces between the attachments of peoples, places, and memory. This voice finds its conditions of possibility when the visionary prophetic mode breaks through the testimonial narrative to reinscribe voices of Jewish exile into the movements between flight and return, absence and presence, even shame and guilt. In this manner, the novella continually imagines the ways that its paradoxical expressions of "silence" tie the Jewish national return to the massive Palestinian exile.

Early in his retelling, the narrator turns his attention away from the mission with a misleading comment that momentarily closes the testimonial record: "we saw that this whole Khirbet Khizeh presented no problem, truly did not justify any further

---

<sup>77</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 13-17, 75-76, 98-99.

<sup>78</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 152.

explanation.”<sup>79</sup> He immediately shifts to describe the transcendent quality of the landscape, which he calls *ha-domem ha-gadol*: “the Great Silence.”<sup>80</sup> Yizhar encodes this shift, which recurs elsewhere in the text,<sup>81</sup> as a turn away from the specific time and place of the mission, toward the pristine serenity of nature and the timeless rhythms of (Arab) peasant agriculture. Yizhar’s oeuvre, as a whole, is known for its mystification of the land’s beauty, rendered in undeniably beautiful and descriptive prose.<sup>82</sup> But as *Khirbet Khizeh*’s narrator places his portrayal of nature within “the Great Silence,” Yizhar underscores deeper semantic tensions in the text.

Whenever the narrator attempts to “speak for” the land figuratively, in a manner consistent with the romantic imaginary of Zionism (or any nationalist poetics), the intrusion of the protagonist and his comrades’ militarized presence violates the land’s primordial perfection and interrupts his rapturous discourse. The transcendent language the narrator uses to express his enchantment with the landscape creates palpable dissonance alongside the ironic, bitter tone of the narrative, which spares little sentimentality as it recounts the story of the callous soldiers and their mission. In order to address the “silence” in which the land exists in the narrator’s visionary lyricism, the text must depart from the narrative mode, thereby introducing a representational tension into its vision of the land. As author/subject of the Jewish Zionist vision, the narrator is

---

<sup>79</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 11.

<sup>80</sup> “The Great Silence” is my translation from the Hebrew; see: Yizhar, “Hirbet Hizah,” 38. de Lange and Dweck translate this phrase as “the inanimate realm.” I emphasize the more literal meaning “silence” in *domem*, which is no other form of the noun *dmama*: see note 71.

<sup>81</sup> The juxtaposition between the end of the fifth chapter, and the beginning of the sixth, when the soldiers come upon an abandoned horse, exemplifies this tension: Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 64-77. Yizhar outlines a parallel gesture in the opening paragraphs of the similarly-themed story “The Prisoner.” See: S. Yizhar, “The Prisoner,” tr. V. C. Rycus, in *Israeli Stories*, ed. Joel Blocker, New York: Schocken Books, 1962, 151-174

<sup>82</sup> Gershon Shaked, *Modern Hebrew Fiction*, tr. Yael Lotan, ed. Emily Miller Budick (London: Toby Press, 2000), 145-148.

supposed to extol the land in his writing. And yet the land he sees has been cast into “Silence,” the paradoxical state through which he will speak of the Palestinians throughout the course of their expulsion, and into which he fears his own testimony will sink should he not tell this story.<sup>83</sup>

Throughout the narration of the Palestinians’ expulsion, the narrator’s recurring expressions of “silence” betray the paradoxical subjectivity of testimony about the Other’s trauma. The narrative speaks about silence, although silence, especially the Other’s silence, is by definition the absence of speech. On some level, this demonstrates Yizhar’s awareness of the problematics of “speaking for” the Palestinian Other. The text refuses to seamlessly ventriloquize Palestinians, insofar as this would double, and thereby reinscribe, the hierarchical alienation that has already taken place between the Jewish subject and the Palestinian Other. If nothing else, the narrator will not occupy and displace the Other from his or her own voice. In order to navigate the tension between the subjectivities of this terrain, Yizhar adopts a complex textual approach. Rather than turning away from the discursive contents of the narrator’s own subjectivity in an effort to disavow it or speak for another, Yizhar *returns* to specific voices from the Jewish past, from both traditional Jewish and modern Zionist sources. Yizhar brings these voices back into the symbolic economy of the narrator’s testimony precisely through expressions of “silence,” along with the inescapable corporeality of shame that issues forth from the eyes.

The narrator’s enchanted admiration for the landscape, for example, reads at some remove from much of the novella’s tone, in which Yizhar spares little sentimentality in describing the soldiers’ attitudes and behavior. But when speaking of the land, the

---

<sup>83</sup> See further: Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 108-109, and the final passage of the book below.

narrator dispenses with the ironic and disillusioned style with which he characterizes his fellow soldiers and the mission. Thus *Khirbet Khizeh* does not simply negate the Zionist reverence for the land. Rather, the novella carefully traces what happens to the contents of such a discourse as its speaker witnesses the destruction of a Palestinian village. After the unit has rounded up most of the population, the protagonist is sent to check the surroundings. After an internal monologue questioning the mission's ethics, the narrator loses himself in the sight below – but only momentarily.

A first glance and the great land stretched out before you [...] a breath of beauty, of enjoyment, to the point that it could be tasted, a thrill of pleasure. Everything took on a new dimension [...] until the next moment, as its being became real [...] suddenly upon all these an orphaned longing descended, a shadowy veil. *Fields that would never be harvested, plantations that would never be irrigated, paths that would become desolate.* A sense of destruction and worthlessness. An image of thistles and brambles everywhere, a desolate tawny, a braying wilderness. And already from those fields accusing eyes peered out at you, that silent accusatory look as of a reproachful animal, staring and following you so there was no refuge.<sup>84</sup>

The sentence I italicized articulates a dystopia for Zionism, the inversion of the goals dearest to its ideological core. The passage begins with stirring, lyrical prose, envisioning “something that had almost been forgotten but actually seemed solid, and you could lean on it”: a sensory, embodied attachment to the land. And it is precisely this vision that cannot be maintained inasmuch as the land's reality, bereft of its inhabitants, interrupts

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 88-89, emphasis mine.



the verbal rapture, the poetic elaboration of discourse, by returning the narrator's gaze with an accusation of guilt (*'otan 'eynayim shel 'ashmah*). The text locates the *accusation* – which in Hebrew is the causative participle form of the word “guilty” – in a hybrid of silenced speech and expressive vision (*zo shtiqat mabat ha'ashemah*). While the narrator is inclined to unite his optics with the values and codes of his (Zionist) discourse, another discourse – or perhaps the same one – “appears” and turns the land's silence into a new vision, one that can “speak” guilt through the gaze of the eyes, while offering no escape to the one who wishes not to be seen.

The displacement between visual perception and textual inscription is essential to the novella's status as testimony. This testimony not only consists of the text that records what the protagonist sees (that is, the narrative as a whole); it is also formed by the interpenetration of traditional Hebrew verbal codes into *visions*, real and imagined. The narrator crosses the village's paths, “beyond which the crops were sprouting as from time immemorial [...] But I imagined I saw a hand inscribing sternly, ‘Won't be harvested,’”<sup>85</sup> This alludes to the floating fingers that inscribe the famous “writing on the wall” in the Biblical book of Daniel, which takes place in the court of the Babylonian emperor Belshazzar.<sup>86</sup> This episode foretells Babylon's imminent defeat to the Persian kings Darius and Cyrus, an event that will lead to the first “return” of the Jewish people from exile and the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, in 517 b.c.e. This setting, poised between exile, punishment, and redemption, makes for a striking invocation at the birth of the modern state of Israel, especially in light of the ideological

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>86</sup> See the Biblical Book of Daniel, 5:1-30.

terms through which the Zionist movement viewed the outcome of the 1948 War in Palestine.

Babylon, of course, serves as the symbolic figure for the alienation and degradation (in the moral, religious, and metaphysical senses) that accompany Jewish exile, and for the oppressive temporal powers that maintain that condition.<sup>87</sup> Babylon represents everything Zionism purports to disavow and upend through a Jewish return to the land of Israel. But in *Khirbet Khizeh*, what *returns* in the air above the village is the writing on the wall of Babylon's palace. The writ of accusation condenses the worst nightmare, so to speak, of the Zionist imaginary regarding the land: "Won't be harvested."

In the Afterword to the English edition, David Shulman discusses the Biblical allusions that Yizhar deploys to suffuse the multiple valences of the narrative voice with the texture of Jewish religious sources.<sup>88</sup> These allusions amount to more than intertextual pyrotechnics, inasmuch as they relate to the status of the text as testimony. For it is not merely what the narrator sees that creates this particular narrative; after all, the other soldiers see the same things and interpret them differently. Yizhar, however, locates the authoritative voice of the sacred Jewish past in the displacement of silence with visions that "speak" – or at least return the subject's gaze – in a manner that necessarily rewrites the text of his own sight.

## VII. Shame and the Palestinian Other

---

<sup>87</sup> In the following chapter, I will discuss a number of poems by Dahlia Ravikovich that relate to Babylon's place in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in rabbinic and liturgical texts from the Jewish tradition.

<sup>88</sup> David Shulman, "Afterword: Back to Khirbet Khizeh," in *Khirbet Khizeh*, by S. Yizhar (Jerusalem: Ibis Books, 2008), 115–31. See especially 118–122.

As mentioned, the narrator's transcendent visions of the land intermittently encompass the Palestinians (as "Arabs") within larger figures of nature's sublime alterity. This is consistent with the Orientalist strains in the Yishuv imaginary, which naturalized Arabs into the eternal cycles of the land.<sup>89</sup> As in all Orientalist discourse, such idyllic representations coexisted, despite apparent contradiction, with portrayals of the Arabs as ugly, useless, and repugnant. This instability in the figuration of the Palestinians undermines the lyrical exaltation of the landscapes upon which the narrator repeatedly turns his gaze. His genuinely Zionist idealization of the land challenges his ability to put either the Jews or the Arabs "in their place." The contradictory representations of the Palestinians take shape in the narrator's affective responses, in his face and eyes as much as in his language. The inescapable corporeality of shame issues forth from the eyes of his fellow soldiers and from the defenseless Palestinian civilians, but perhaps most of all from the dislocated appearance of visionary Hebrew prophecy. Through such visions, the narrator sees the Palestinians as figures of the weak, despised, and perennially expelled Jewish refugees. His intense consciousness of displacement, ironically, produces an embodied sense of shame that *prevents him from moving* beyond the physical and ethical location of his deeds.

The fluctuations in the ways that the narrator perceives the Arabs and their village, from reproducing the spiteful attitude of his fellow soldiers to articulating the lone voice of moral opposition, are consistent with the proximity that Silvan Tomkins proposes between two affective responses: disgust-contempt and shame-humiliation, terms which surface explicitly, and frequently, in *Khirbet Khizeh*. The soldiers'

---

<sup>89</sup> Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, tr. Haim Watzman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 187-192.

preoccupation with characterizing the Arabs as “miserable” and their villages as “disgusting, infuriatingly disgusting” betrays an attempt to displace and expel the Other, which is also the military objective of their mission. Thus when the narrator describes the conquest of villages earlier in the war, he mentions that the soldiers avoided sitting on that earth, which wasn’t the soil of fields but a putrid patch of disgusting dirt, spat upon by generations that had cast their water and excrement and the dung of their cattle and camels upon it, those dirt plots around their hovels, touched by the stench of the refuse of wretched cramped human habitation. Everything was filthy.<sup>90</sup>

As an affective response, the subject experiences “disgust-contempt” in a physical, spatial sense: “The response intends to *maximize the distance* between the face and the object which disgusts the self”.<sup>91</sup> As the narrator says, “what did our young, fleeting lives have to do with their flea-bitten desolate suffocating villages?”<sup>92</sup> Tomkins proposed that “Whenever an individual, a class, or a nation wishes to maintain a hierarchical relationship, or to maintain aloofness it will have to resort to contempt of the other.”<sup>93</sup> Shame, meanwhile, differs from disgust-contempt, but only insofar as the shame “does not renounce the object permanently.”

For the young soldiers in *Khirbet Khizeh*, the affective state of shame is characterized by silence. Early on, the narrator discusses “a rather different silence” that used to accompany the fear the soldiers felt before combat: “a humiliating, shameful

---

<sup>90</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 12-13.

<sup>91</sup> Silvan Tomkins, *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 135, emphasis mine.

<sup>92</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 26.

<sup>93</sup> Tomkins, *Shame and Its Sisters*, 139.

silence before the action, small devious ruses to deny it”.<sup>94</sup> As Shaked and Miron’s readings have emphasized, the text details the narrator’s shame at (potentially) failing to reproduce his comrades’ ideal of soldiering.<sup>95</sup> But at Khirbet Khizeh, with the terror of combat no longer present, the narrator encounters shame most frequently when he reflects upon his moral objections to the villagers’ expulsion. These instances of shame seem quite relevant to the critical readings of *Khirbet Khizeh* as a “shooting and crying” text, where the narrator’s shame, as evidence of a strong moral constitution, ultimately reconstitutes the sovereign Israeli subject.<sup>96</sup> As Sara Ahmed writes, “Shame binds us to others in how we are affected by our failure to ‘live up to’ those others, a failure that must be witnessed, as well as seen as temporary, in order to allow us to re-enter the family or community.”<sup>97</sup>

The temporal aspect of Ahmed’s insight – that the shame be “seen as temporary”, that it must come to an *end* so that the nation may move forward into the future – points to the unique dynamics of shame in the novella. Through liberal Zionist eyes, witnessing the shame of the conscientious objector testifies to the high moral character of the national community that could incorporate such testimony. Such inclusion justifies the nation’s existence by redrawing its boundaries around an elevated moral center. In this way, the protagonists of “shooting and crying” narratives reinforce the identity of a canonical subject, thereby allowing linear time to move forward. By contrast, the shame of *Khirbet Khizeh* prevents time from advancing by emphasizing the embodied, spatial restriction of the affect. In shame, the narrator is unable to move – not only forward, into

---

<sup>94</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 23.

<sup>95</sup> Shaked, *Sifrut az, kan ve-‘akhshav*, 181–203; Miron, “S. Yizhar: Some General Observations,” 257–73.

<sup>96</sup> See: Gil Hochberg, *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 31.

<sup>97</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, First Edition (New York: Routledge, 2004), 107.

the future “post-1948” time of Israeli sovereignty, but to move anywhere, physically: he cannot dislocate himself from the space where the shame of creating the Palestinian exile takes place.

Yizhar’s visual poetics of displacement are key to understanding the nature of the subject whose shame indeed requires a witness, while expressing itself, paradoxically, through silence. When the narrator looks through the crowd of Palestinians awaiting deportation, he finds that they can only be differentiated from a festive village gathering by “this silence [which] left no room for delusion”.<sup>98</sup> A man “demonstrating the last scrap of freedom remaining in his possession” by rolling a cigarette “was now made all the more pathetic and gullible since you (like the Lord in Heaven, as it were) knew what he did not.” Yet this quasi-divine foresight does not relieve the narrator: “My eyes roamed this way and that. I was ill at ease. Where did this sense come from that I was being accused of some crime.”<sup>99</sup> He attempts to replace the vision before his eyes with an incantation of sights that would justify an adversarial relation to the villagers:

*I conjured up before my eyes all the terrible outrages that the Arabs had committed against us. I recited the names of Hebron, Safed, Be’er Tuvia, and Hulda [...] I once again contemplated the mass of people seething indistinctly at my feet—and I found no comfort. I prayed at that moment that something would happen to seize me and take me away from here so I would not see what happened next.*

---

<sup>98</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 86.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

[...] It was easy to understand how I leapt up and how *we uprooted* ourselves from where we were (with *all eyes watching* our actions)<sup>100</sup>

The narrator's discourse and his physical behavior betray his symptomatic relapses from contempt into shame. He repeatedly seeks to flee, to walk away, but shame continually stops the movement of his of his body – and his narrative testimony.<sup>101</sup> Yizhar dramatizes the narrator's failure to “renounce the object” of his gaze by locating shame between the eyes, as a response to an embodied yet silent accusation. At the sight of a Palestinian mother and son, the narrator responds characteristically: “I felt ashamed in her presence and lowered my eyes. It was as though there were an outcry in their gait, a kind of sullen accusation”.<sup>102</sup> Yet the protagonist cannot avert his eyes from what he sees, and what he sees is *exile*, the most shameful condition in the moral universe of Zionist discourse. The novella amplifies Ahmed's statement that “the nation is reproduced through shame”,<sup>103</sup> but in a compounded sense: 1948 constitutes *two* nations through the displacement of one by the other (rather than strictly as the genesis of Israel's internal struggle over its moral character).

In the Zionist ethos, the invocation of exile is a source of motivating shame. Witnessing the powerless Palestinian villagers, mostly women, children, and the elderly, reminds the protagonist of the Jewish exiles and refugees whose condition Zionism seeks to transform. These weak Jewish figures, and by extension the Palestinians who inhabit the same position with respect to exile, bring to mind the ultimate source of national

---

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 87-88: my emphases point to the interweaving between visual language and the affective physicality of shame, which inhibits spatial movement.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 46, 80-81, 82, and the passage from 104-105 quoted at length below.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>103</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 108.

shame, the Jewish victims of anti-Semitic violence who were willing to be lead “like sheep to the slaughter,” according to a Zionist trope.<sup>104</sup> And thus ironically, even as the narrator reflects upon the monumental historical stakes of the Jewish return to the land, he can only put what he sees into words through the language of exile:

All at once everything seemed to mean something different, more precisely: exile. This was what exile looked like. We produced exile for them.<sup>105</sup>

I couldn't stay where I was. The place itself couldn't bear me. I went round to the other side.

I had never been in the Diaspora—I said to myself—I had never known what it was like ... but people had spoken to me, told me, taught me, and repeatedly recited to me, from every direction, in books and newspapers, everywhere: exile. They had played on all my nerves. Our nation's protest to the world: exile! It had entered me, apparently, with my mother's milk. What, in fact, had we perpetrated here today?

There was nowhere to wander or to distance myself. I went down and mingled with them like someone looking for something.<sup>106</sup>

Tellingly, this passage ends with the narrator finding himself unable to create distance between himself and the Arab villagers. With no place else to go, he brings himself into immediate contact with Palestinians on the verge of deportation. Yizhar's poetics of displacement comes to the fore as an abundance of shame prevents the narrator from

---

<sup>104</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 85; cf. Shapira, *Israel*, 265.

<sup>105</sup> This sentence is in Yizhar's original 1949 edition, but it does not appear in the English translation, which was based upon a revised Hebrew version of Yizhar's text published in 1989. See note 75.

<sup>106</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 104-105.



renouncing his attachments to figures of exile – from the Hebrew Scripture, from the recent Jewish past, and from the scene unfolding before his eyes. The prophetic visionary content of Yizhar’s testimony appears through the work of *displacement*: as an object of representation and as a representational process. The narrator’s visual turn (“looking for something”) finds, instead, the absent voice of prophecy speaking through the “silenced” refugees:

Words rang in my ears. I did not know where from. I passed among them all, among those weeping aloud, among those silently grinding their teeth [...] those ashamed of themselves and their disgrace [...] those weeping for the fields that would be desolate, and those silenced by exhaustion, eaten away by hunger and fear. I wanted to discover if among all these people there was a single Jeremiah mourning and burning, forging a mouth of fury in his heart, crying out in stifled tones to the old God in Heaven, atop the trucks of exile...

In a passage cited frequently in recent scholarship on *Khirbet Khizeh*, “the old God” appears as the village bursts out with silence, which again is not only the absence of speech but also the gaze of unseen, absent eyes:

Once villages were something you attacked and took by storm. Today they were nothing but gaping emptiness screaming out with a silence that was at once evil and sad.

These bare villages, the day was coming when they would begin to cry out. As you went through them, all of a sudden, without knowing where from, you found yourself silently followed by invisible eyes of

walls, courtyards, and alleyways. Desolate abandoned silence. Your guts clenched. And suddenly, [...] the village that a moment ago was nothing more than a heap of wretched hovels, harsh orphaned silence, and heart-wrenching threnody, this large, sullen village, burst into a song of things whose soul had left them; a song of human deeds that had returned to their raw state and gone wild; a song that [...] remained like a kind of curse that would not pass the lips, and fear, God-in-Heaven, terrifying fear screamed there [...] like a flash of revenge, a summons to fight, the God-of-Vengeance has shown himself!... These bare villages... As though you were actually to blame for anything here?<sup>107</sup>

Yizhar employs a semantic contradiction (“screaming out with a silence”) to introduce his visionary prophecy, which points to the Palestinian Other’s absent-presence in the Israeli future-to-come. At this moment, right before the soldiers overrun an unguarded Khirbet Khizeh, the only “speech” that the narrator can hear/see from the village is its silence. The text dramatizes the dislocation of the Palestinian subject from the space by calling attention to the substituting logic of linguistic enunciation itself, which is compounded when the speaker re-presents the act of displacing another subject’s voice. Yet as with the shriek (*shivha*) in “War of Cities”, the “scream” (*ša‘aqah*) that recurs in Yizhar’s text indexes a sound outside of discourse, one whose signification is unmediated and which, therefore, does not operate through displacement.

As the above passage continues, the narrator attempts to dispel the images that his visionary sight has brought backwards against the flow of time, on the edges of speech:

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 26-27. The passage is quoted in no less than four of the articles in *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3, a special issue that deals with Hebrew literature and 1948.

“shadows of things whose death yesterday was still unimaginable, [...] some kind of question that posed itself of its own accord, or a kind of aside, that must be said, something about something that was not this”. The narrator insists that it is possible to “rid oneself of [...] that very village, what was its name, the one in front of us” by displacing an act of sight (“a furious glance”) with a mode of cultic speech: “to translate the glance into a out-and-out curse, which, at the end of the day, when all was said, was the only thing that would be heard”.

In the larger sweep of Yizhar’s novella, such a visionary gaze – one that can see what will be heard “at the end of the day” – does not amount to a curse, but rather to an interpolation of the perspective of Biblical prophecy into the future, into the impending sense that “the God-of-Vengeance” will appear (*hofiya*). Yizhar’s inclusion of that verse in the excerpt above highlights the visual quality of Divine justice that enters into the sensory and ethical drama of exile in 1948. The novella’s conclusion evokes a sense of God’s vision by returning to the figure of silence that pervades the entire work:

Tomorrow, both painful humiliation and helpless rage would turn into a kind of casual irritation, shameful but fading fast. [...] All around silence was falling, and very soon it would close upon the last circle. And when silence had closed in on everything and no man disturbed the stillness, which yearned noiselessly for what was beyond silence—then God would come forth and descend to roam the valley, and see whether all was according to the cry that had reached him.<sup>108</sup>

Yizhar locates the final silence in yet another wordless articulation: the cry that will reach up to God. Shulman points to the Biblical verses about Sodom and Gomorrah that this

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 112-113. In Hebrew: Yizhar, “*Hirbet Hiz ‘ah*,” 95.

passage weaves into its conclusion, where God tells Abraham that He will “descend and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it [*hakeša ‘aqatah*], which is come unto Me.”<sup>109</sup> As Shulman writes, in *Khirbet Khizeh* “The Hebrew sentence ends with the dangling phrase—‘according to the cry’—”. The clipped, incomplete intertext mirrors the enunciation of silence (*ha-shtiqah*, which recurs three times in this passage, along with *ha-dmama*) in that it points to an absence that cannot be covered over. As Shulman defines this term, *hakeša ‘aqatah*, as “one last unmistakable word that leaves the story open-ended, wounded, incapable of ever coming to rest.”

Here, God’s voice appears as a gaze. God will “see whether all was according to the cry” – the translators add the words “that had reached him”, perhaps to flesh out what would otherwise be an obscure reference for English readers. Yet there is more to the intertextual movement suggested by Yizhar’s mid-sentence suspension of the verse from Genesis. The final phrase of the novella also echoes a dramatic moment in the story of the Hebrews’ Exodus from Egypt.

The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God. God heard their moaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

God looked upon the Israelites, and God knew.<sup>110</sup>

God first *hears* the cries of the Hebrew slaves and then *remembers* the covenant. And the final verse (2:25) implies that these modes of perception and intellection are not enough: only after “God *looked* upon” the children of Israel can the text inform us that “God

---

<sup>109</sup> Genesis 18:20-21. I have reworked the translation Shulman provides in order to emphasize that Yizhar employs the very same verbs as those used in Genesis: *yored* (“descend”) and *ro’eh* (“see,” “look”). See: Shulman, “Afterword,” 121-122.

<sup>110</sup> Exodus 2:23-25.

knew” [*va-yare’ Elo-him et bnei Yisrael; va-yeyd’a Elo-him*]. This may be the very knowledge that the narrator “you, (like the Lord in Heaven, as it were) knew”, the knowledge of the Palestinians’ fate shared by the mother who “seemed as if she were the only one who knew exactly what was happening”, which causes the narrator to lower his own eyes in shame.<sup>111</sup> (103; 90). From the seminal Biblical story of Jewish nation-building, both in the traditional-religious and Zionist readings, Yizhar replaces the Hebrew slaves, who will eventually be “redeemed” through the exodus and the journey to the land of Israel, with the Palestinians, who are in the process of becoming refugees from the same land.

Yizhar’s selections from the Hebrew Biblical intertext highlight the inseparability of the absent Divine Voice and the prophet/author’s vision, which breaks through the linearity of historical time by bringing the unseen future (or the Biblical past) into sight of the present. Yizhar’s innovative, perhaps underappreciated, engagement with the poetics of visionary prophecy merits discussion, especially when set against the conventional approach to the Biblical intertext adopted by leading Hebrew authors at the time. In the high Zionist texts of the Yishuv period, engagement with the Hebrew Bible is structured around the absence of the Biblical voice of transcendent Divine justice that can determine guilt and exact punishment – specifically in terms of the covenantal relationship through which religious commandments, including ethics, are understood. Zionism replaces such a voice with a materialist, political understanding of collective Jewish action in history. The secularist approach to history informed the ways Zionist

---

<sup>111</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 103; cf. Note 102, above.

writers dealt with the representation of exile in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>112</sup> References to Biblical moments of exile and degradation, such as those described by the prophets, typically serve to reinforce the promises of collective redemption which generally occur late in these texts, re-interpreting and in a sense “secularizing” them as calls for Zionist activity: settlement, agriculture, sovereignty, self-defense, even vengeance. Not surprisingly, such an approach often characterized allusions to the Exodus from Egypt, recounted in the last four books of the Pentateuch, insofar as it offers a story of national birth and miraculous redemption, which ultimately leads to settlement in the land of Israel. Such uses demonstrate a pointed shift in emphasis, subject matter, citation, and interpretation from pre-modern religious Jewish culture. In Zionist readings of the Exodus, the authors expressly jettison the central role of God as Redeemer, in a rejection of traditional religious readings that emphasize a covenant obliging the Jewish people to perform the commandments (*mitzvot*).<sup>113</sup>

In this light, Yizhar’s intertextual gestures are unique and striking: he turns directly to the prophets, like Jeremiah, who lament the *onset* of Exile, rather than the eventual redemption from it. The narrator aligns the emancipatory Divine promise of Exodus and the Prophets with the experiences of the Palestinians *and* the Jews, through

---

<sup>112</sup> To the contrary, from Bialik to early state-era poets such as Shlonsky, Alterman, Gouri, and Gilboa, reinterpreting Scriptural passages in a Zionist interpretative mode was a mainstay of Hebrew literature, particularly poetry. Generally, there was a transition of emphasis from the “moral” message of condemnation articulated by the Hebrew prophets against the political leadership to a pointed recuperation of Biblical figures with noteworthy achievements in the “secular” realm of sovereignty and power, even those who, from the traditional prophetic “religious” perspective, were disastrous leaders (for example, King Saul). Similarly, the Prophets and Writings sections of the Hebrew Bible were often mined for references to the beauty and importance of the land, references that were removed from their original context – the covenantal relationship between God and the people of Israel – and inserted into secular Zionist discourse.

<sup>113</sup> This is nowhere more evident than in the popular, foreshortened use of the verse where Moses says to Pharaoh “Let my people go!” as a rallying cry and slogan for many Zionist immigration projects. In Hebrew, the verse actually reads “The LORD God of the Hebrews has sent me to you to say, ‘Let my people go *that they may serve Me* in the desert...’” (Exodus 7:16, emphasis mine).

explicit parallels to the Jewish history of victimhood that Yizhar identifies in the deportation of the Arab villagers.<sup>114</sup> By restoring God to the scene, so to speak, Yizhar calls attention to the necessarily relational formation – with God as a witness who becomes involved and makes demands – that Zionist uses of the Biblical text elide insofar as they shift the agency for Jewish selection/redemption through the land into the realm of history, with its ostensibly atheist field of nationalist political activity.

But Yizhar does not merely invert or replace the Zionist understanding of Jewish history. In fact, the narrator formulates his objections to the morality of the mission through Zionism's own emphasis on the unacceptable conditions of dispossession in Jewish history, the paramount figure of whom is the European Jewish refugee from the Holocaust. Rather than merely discarding Zionism's sense of its own moral and national mission, the text points to the tragic irony that active Zionist opposition to the oppressive conditions under which Jews live – as bodies that may be displaced at any time – is inseparable from the expulsion of the Palestinians:

Oh, my guts screamed. What hadn't they told us about refugees.

Everything, everything was for the refugees, their welfare, their rescue ... our refugees, naturally. Those we were turning into refugees<sup>115</sup>—that was a totally different matter. Wait. Two thousand years of exile. The whole story. Jews being killed. Europe. We were the masters now.

The people who would live in this village—wouldn't the walls cry out in their ears? Those sights, screams that were screamed and that were not

---

<sup>114</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 30-31, 104-105.

<sup>115</sup> I have altered de Lange and Dweck's translation of *megalim lihiyot plitim*, which they render "those we were driving out," (109-110) into a more literal phrasing. See: Yizhar, "*Hirbet Hiz'ah*," 93.

screamed [...] the silenced weak—would the new settlers not sense that  
the air here was heavy with shades, voices, and stares?

To witness Khirbet Khizeh is to see the scream and the absent “stares” that will bind the Jewish and Palestinian refugees to the space. Such a link exists outside of discourse, in the affective realm that cannot be displaced through the narrative language of linear history, where events conclude and time moves only forward. *Khirbet Khizeh* displaces the historiographic progression of the protagonist’s testimony through the silencing and dispossession of Palestinians and exilic Jewish history through which the Israeli nation would constitute itself. Yet Yizhar’s narrator locates this link through an articulation, rather than a disavowal, of Zionism’s most fundamental discourses, such as the idealization of the land, the political activation of Jewish religious texts, and the militant opposition to victimhood. This amounts to a testimony that extends beyond the affect of shame and even into the religious category of guilt, in the Talmudic Hebrew sense of *hova*, an obligation, a debt whose existence is witnessed by the most unspeakable silence, the Voice of God that sees and knows.



Chapter 4:  
Exiles' Return: The Post-1982 Poetics of Dahlia Ravikovitch and Mahmoud Darwish

I. The Continuing Migration of Exile as a Trope

The late Dahlia Ravikovitch's work occupies a central place in Israeli literature, as well as in mainstream culture.<sup>1</sup> Her poetry has been adapted for song lyrics, dance performances, plays, memorials, and school curricula.<sup>2</sup> One of the central conflicts that attends Ravikovitch's legacy, however, remains the question of continuity between the earlier poetry that earned her significant literary acclaim, beginning with her first collection in 1959, and her more explicitly political poetry, which she began to publish around 1982.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Mahmoud Darwish's monumental output has often been bifurcated between the iconic poems that brought him to the forefront of Palestinian national life, and of contemporary Arabic literature, which he began to publish in the mid-1960s, and more complex poetry and prose-poetry he wrote after 1982. While the earlier poetry drew upon a clear romanticist-nationalist poetics, and earned him the moniker "the Resistance Poet," his later work was often allusive and challenging, favored more by critics – it was

---

<sup>1</sup> For the Ravikovitch poetry, unless otherwise noted, all English excerpts, line numbers, and citations are from: Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld, trans., *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch*, By Dahlia Ravikovitch, New York: W. W. Norton, 2009. The Hebrew citations are from: Dahlia Ravikovitch, *Kol ha-Shirim 'ad Koh*, Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uḥad, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld, "Introduction," *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch*, 15-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Reading Hebrew Literature: Critical Discussions of Six Modern Texts*, ed. Alan Mintz, Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 2003, 210-245, features essays from Chana Kronfeld, Barbara Mann, and Nili Scharf-Gold on the political reception of one particular Ravikovitch poem, which I will discuss below. In Ḥamutal Tsamir and Tamar Hess, eds., *Kitmei or: ḥamishim shanot biqoret u-mehqar 'al yetsiratah shel Dahlia Ravikovitch*, Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uḥad, 2010, a number of essays and reviews deal with this topic.

a source for Edward Said's concept of "Late Style"<sup>4</sup> – than the stadium crowds who, he later said, continued to call for his earlier, anthemic work.<sup>5</sup>

On first glance, it would seem that Ravikovich moved away from poetry rooted in private reflections and virtuosic lyricism toward a didactic political poetry of protest – right at the moment that Darwish moved in the opposite direction. But to understand each poet's contribution to the literature of exile, we must look firstly at the watershed moment of 1982 – specifically at writings published in the aftermath of Israel's invasion of Lebanon, part of its war against the Palestinian Liberation Organization based there.<sup>6</sup> As part of her activism against the Israeli invasion, Ravikovich allowed what would become a signature poem of her career ("Hovering at a Low Altitude") to be published in an anthology of anti-war poetry.<sup>7</sup> Darwish survived the I.D.F.'s aerial bombardment of Beirut and the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by Israel's Lebanese Phalangist allies. Shortly after Israel's siege ended in August, Darwish fled to Tunis, along with most of the P.L.O. leadership and fighters. This led to a period during which Darwish was almost constantly relocating between France, Greece, Cyprus, and other Arab capitals.

But Ravikovich and Darwish had a longer history. The political struggle over the land played a role (for Darwish, the defining role) in traumatic childhood losses

---

<sup>4</sup> Edward Said, "On Mahmoud Darwish," *Grand Street*, 48 (Winter 1994), 112-115; Said elaborated the concept in his posthumously published work *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*, New York: Random House, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, interview by Raja Shehadeh, *BOMB*, 81 (Fall 2002), 54-59.

<sup>6</sup> For broader surveys of this literature, see Barbara Harlow, "Palestine or Andalusia: The Literary Response to the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon," *Race and Class* 26 (1984): 33-43; Ibrahim Muhawi, "Introduction," *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982* by Mahmoud Darwish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), xxi-xl; Glenda Abramson, "Oh my land, my birthplace: Lebanon War and Intifada in Israeli Fiction and Poetry," in *Narratives of Dissent: War in Contemporary Israeli Arts and Culture*, eds. Rachel S. Harris and Ranen Omer-Sherman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 221-240; Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History*, (Brandeis University Press, 2014), 378-389.

<sup>7</sup> Kronfeld, *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 244, note 2.

experienced by both poets. During the British Mandate over Palestine, Ravikovich's father was killed when a drunken British soldier ran him over. She was six years old. At thirteen, she was sent to Haifa, where she moved "from one foster family to another."<sup>8</sup> Darwish was born in al-Birwe, a small village in Galilee, in 1941.<sup>9</sup> During the 1948 War, Israeli forces destroyed al-Birwe, but Darwish's family escaped to Lebanon. They returned to the Galilee in 1949, but as a result of not being counted in Israel's first census of its remaining Palestinian Arab citizens, the family was classified under the anomalous legal status of "present-absentees" or "internally displaced" Palestinians. Until 1966, Israel's Palestinian-Israeli population lived under martial law. Denied citizenship papers, Darwish needed a permit to travel from one village or town to another, and he was frequently arrested for permit and curfew violations. In 1961, Darwish moved to Haifa, where he published his first poems in literary journals that he edited for the Israeli Communist Party and the United Workers Party (Mapam). In the late 1960s, when the young Palestinian poet was placed under a legal curfew, Ravikovich led a group of activists on a solidarity visit to Darwish's home, and then accompanied him to protest at the Haifa police station where he was required to "register twice each day".<sup>10</sup> In 1971, Darwish chose to leave Israel for good, ultimately working in Cairo and then Beirut as the editor of a literary journal devoted to the Palestinian national cause.

From this point onward, Darwish's literary output raised significant questions about the meaning of being exiled from the Holy Land. My comparative study on the

---

<sup>8</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld, "Introduction," 16.

<sup>9</sup> Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman, "Introduction," *Mahmoud Darwish, Exile's Poet: Critical Essays*, eds. Nassar and Rahman (Northampton, Mass.: Interlink Press, 2008), 1; "Biographical Note," in Mahmoud Darwish, et al., *Victims of a Map*, tr. Abdullah al-Udhari (London: Al Saqi Books, 1984), 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> Yitzhak Laor, "Ve-nafalti apayyim artza ve-nishbarti lishvarim," *Ha'aretz*, August 22, 2005, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.1037450>.

representation of exile – toward and away from what became modern Israel – elaborates upon the notion that Israeli and Palestinian national claims to the land are rooted in the meaning of being dispossessed from each people’s (proper) state of habitation and sovereignty. One could restate this as a central question: for whom is Palestine *not* a homeland? And, after 1948, who is (or *is no longer*) in exile from a normal national life as a result of Israel’s creation?

Ravikovich’s poetry works through the fact that the Israeli-Jewish national project aims to reconstitute Hebrew as the *local* culture of the Holy Land, and thereby overcome the alienation of the minority condition: both as the Jews’ long historical memory of social existence in Europe, *and* as the recent trauma of having been forced out – literally, physically displaced – from homes in Europe and the Middle East. In this complex arrangement, Ravikovich probes the iterations of Israeli Jews as returning exiles (per Zionist discourse), recently arrived immigrants, and as foreign colonizers. Her poetry returns again and again to figures of Israeli/Hebrew habitation in Palestine that cannot be foreclosed, the open-ended signs of Israelis’ being “at home” – such as the Hebrew language, the importation of European Jewish historical memory, the reopening of canonical readings of the Hebrew Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

Ravikovich’s poetry explores the mounds of exile upon which Israeli life exists: prophetic visions, diasporic histories, recent (and specifically post-Holocaust) flight and immigration, and then, finally and ever since, the Nakba. In this way, she continues a strain of inquiry found in Alterman and Yizhar: what can be learned from reading the

---

<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical citations that follow are from *Tanakh The Holy Scriptures: A New Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, ed. The Jewish Publication Society (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

Hebrew representation of Palestinian exile? Yet such a question almost demands rebuttal in the form of another question: from what poetic space can Palestinian *self-representation* take place outside of hegemonic Zionist discourse? When Israeli sovereignty erases the experience and the records of Palestinian habitation in the land, and then undertakes to erase even the language that commemorates their displacement,<sup>12</sup> how can Palestinian exiles, such as Darwish, begin to represent his people's connection to the land? How could his work ever account for the many senses of Jewish exile whose memories now fill the space?

In different ways, both poets, I will argue, develop a *visionary* mode of lyrical representation that unsettles the poetics of nationalist belonging generated by the failed partition of Israel and Palestine. And for both poets, the visionary emerges from the rupture of exile, the way that exile's textual representation rips open the present and imagines alternative timescapes of national displacement and return. To understand these alternatives, we must recall that in Zionist discourse, as Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has written, "The return to Palestine was presented as the 'return to history,' in the sense of a history of the West ... as opposed to, say, the Islamic East."<sup>13</sup> These spatial and temporal returns took historical form when the broader Zionist ambition to (re-)generate collective Jewish life through Hebrew culture became aligned with the creation of a modern nation-state. On a rhetorical level, the claim of Jewish statehood is meant to banish the Palestinian claim from the Western political history into which (Zionist) Jews have placed themselves. And insofar as this effort represents the activation of the political

---

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 3 of the Dissertation, note 73.

<sup>13</sup> Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective," in *Orientalism and the Jews*, eds. Ivan Kalman and Derek Penslar (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 168.

inheritance of Western nationalism, it leads to war over Jewish sovereignty in the land, the Nakba of 1948 and its daily continuation up through the present. But there is also an aesthetic corollary to these returns. If political modernity demands collective sovereignty, aesthetic modernity posits a poet who can speak for the people – and thereby model the nationalist sense of *self-representation*, of the people “speaking” for themselves by virtue of inhabiting a sovereign polity.<sup>14</sup> To these temporalities, exile is a disruption, an aberrant condition that must be corrected by a return to sovereignty and the erasure of alternative modes of representing the relationship between Jews, Palestinians, and the land.

By contrast, the visionary poetics that Ravikovich and Darwish would employ, at least after 1982, returns to the primary texts of Israeli and Palestinian national life (including their own, earlier poems) and sees displacement in the very act of – personal, perceptual, and national – representation. They revisit the textual language of exile, and in it they locate a visionary viewpoint, re-reading Scripture, history, and modern nationalist poetics to uncover the new (and old) possibilities for representing exile in relation to Israel and Palestine. In this sense, their work ultimately suggests a critique of modern (national) sovereignty from the now-inseparable perspectives of Jewish and Palestinian displacement. For both poets, exile must always return to – and re-emerge from within – its representation through history, sacred scripture, song, and poetry.

It is important to note that neither poet’s later work offers an escape hatch from either Israeli or Palestinian national culture, nor do they merely cultivate literary counter-figures. It would be reductive to read Ravikovich’s poems as drawing one set of

---

<sup>14</sup> Uri Cohen probes this notion in depth in his study of the pre-eminent Labor Zionist poet Avraham Shlonsky, who published Ravikovich’s early work. For Cohen, the relationship between the poet and the national community necessarily involves the figurative “death” and martyrdom of the poet. See: Uri Cohen, *Hisardut: Tefisat ha-mavvet beyn mil amot ha’olam be-eretz Yisrael u’ve-Italia* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007), 175.

reprehensible Israelis in order to sketch out the contours of a politically salutary subject, a “good Jew” for whom the Diaspora is the exclusive groundwork for subjectivity. And for Darwish, his later poetry does not simply mark an evolution out of a possessive romantic nationalism and into an embrace of Palestine as a multicultural melange. Rather, in both poets, the engagement with the textual sources of Jewish and Palestinian nationalism serve as an immanent critique of those nationalisms and the (representational) logic of territorial possession that they have adopted (namely, that the land signifies its possession by one people at one time and for all time). Such a critique must reside and emerge from *within* the language of nationalism, which, at least in the case of Israel and Palestine, bears the seeds of the Self’s exile, estrangement, and return as the Other.

## II. Ravikovitch’s Legacy

A growing number of critics view an underlying political sensibility running throughout Ravikovitch’s oeuvre, informing the highly personal yet richly allusive poems of the first half of her career, as well as the poetics that she would later use to speak more directly, and critically, about Israel’s military conflicts in Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories.<sup>15</sup> From this critical perspective, Ravikovitch’s early feminism reads as more than a singular thematic concern. It is rather part of Ravikovitch’s lifelong

---

<sup>15</sup> See: Ḥamutal Tsamir, “ha-Tzofah le-veit yisra’el mi-bifnim: Dahlia Ravikovich, ha-Shirah ha-le’umit-yisra’elit, ve-ha-migdar shel ha-yetzugiout”, in *Kitmei or*, 600-645, see especially 603-605; Bloch and Kronfeld, “Introduction,” 17, 28-34; Yoḥai Oppenheimer, *Ha-zekhut ha-gedolah lomar lo: shirah politit be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Magnes), 319-350.

integration of the private, personal sphere with the public, political representation of the Israeli-Arab conflict and its victims.<sup>16</sup>

In the collections *True Love* (1987) and *Woman With Child* (1992), clear references to political violence begin to play a more prominent role in Ravikovitch's poetry. Many of the poems address discrete historical incidents with unambiguous titles, explanatory notes, and epigraphs.<sup>17</sup> But in both collections (beginning with writing that Ravikovitch composed before Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon), the poems with overtly national signifiers are not the only ones that point to the traumas of war and displacement. In these collections, Ravikovitch continues to employ formal practices that characterize her allegedly pre-political poetry, thereby creating an integrated literary space that reinscribes the more "personal" concerns of her work (early and late) into poetry that addresses the conflict directly. If the apparently "more political" poems from the early 1980s onward mark a change in Ravikovitch's work, it is not a mid-career break that altered the content of her verse, but rather a further development of the visual dimension in her longstanding intertextual mode.

In Ravikovitch's poetics, the subject matter is often inextricably tied to the complexities of the Hebrew language. Her lexical range calls attention to the contexts and connotations of different historical registers, including Biblical texts and idioms from observant Jewish life, as well as contemporary colloquial speech and the evolving syntax

---

<sup>16</sup> See: Allison Schachter, "A Lily among the Bullfrogs: Dahlia Ravikovitch and the Field of Hebrew Poetry", *Prooftexts* 28, no. 3 (2008): 310-334; Chana Kronfeld, *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 232-245.

<sup>17</sup> In *Hovering at a Low Altitude*, see all the poems under the series title "Issues in Contemporary Judaism", 189-199, and the poems "But She Had a Son" (212), "What a Time She Had!" (213), "A Mother Walks Around" (214), "The Story of the Arab Who Died in the Fire" (217), "Lullaby" (219), "Free Associating" (220), and "The Captors Require a Song" (227-228).



of modern Hebrew.<sup>18</sup> This self-conscious use of language amounts to more than a literary device; the themes of her poetry depend upon a thoroughly intertextual mode of expression. In *True Love* and *Woman With Child*, Ravikovitch elaborates her poetics by bringing issues of visibility, witnessing, and perceptual accessibility to the fore.

A close reading of Ravikovitch's treatment of vision in these collections highlights the considerable integration of thematic concerns with formal structure in poems that otherwise appear divided between "political" and "personal" content. Through the workings of vision as a mode of poetic representation – in the relationships between the speakers, figures, and readers assembled through her texts – Ravikovitch collapses boundaries within and between the national (Jewish/Arab) and temporal (past/present) binaries suggested by her subject matter. Her poetry explores the conventional distances and separations out of which language, specifically Israeli Hebrew, imagines these categories. In these two collections, Ravikovitch continues to mine the Bible, rabbinic texts, high Zionist lyrics, and modernist poetry (including her own), as well as everyday turns of phrase adapted from Israeli culture, media, military parlance, and ubiquitous stereotypes. Such intertextual references cultivate a larger interplay between the verbal and the visual modes, which Ravikovitch stages as an ethical interpenetration between poetry and reality.

The importance of Ravikovitch's visual frame lies in its figuration of the relations between perpetrator, victim, witness, and reader. This framework is all the more relevant with poems that are not transparently political. In these, familiar themes from Ravikovitch's oeuvre surface, calling attention to the private domain of the self in its

---

<sup>18</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld, "Introduction," 22-3.

experience of depression, isolation, and mourning. Yet the Biblical intertexts in these poems adapt a decidedly visual orientation toward these issues, focusing on the prophetic *call to see*, and how this call leads to an inextricable blending of the personal and the political, perception and emotion, and alienation and belonging. The prophetic intertexts deepen Ravikovitch's pre-existing questions about the mutual interrelation between poetry, testimony, and silence. Tensions between detached, literal description and modernist symbolism energize the underlying ethical urgency of the poetry. These ethics are firstly "Jewish"; they emerge from the religious tradition and the Hebrew language, not from philosophical abstractions or moral formulations external to the linguistic texture of Judaism. Yet in her original rearticulation of this material, Ravikovitch creates an aesthetic space where a visual poetics of witnessing and its textual representation erode conventional separations between internal and external, as well as between identity and perception. Personal suffering seeps across national lines, while inner torment evokes the (Hebrew prophetic) admonition to look outward, to bear witness. With such an aesthetic, Ravikovitch presents images through texts, constituting vision as no less than an ethical, collective, and self-reflective covenant to protest injustice. I will analyze Ravikovitch's use of the Biblical intertext, as well as purely formal choices in syntax and rhyme scheme, in order to propose how poems throughout *True Love* sustain a larger engagement with the *prophetic visionary* mode, which, in turn, informs Ravikovitch's figures of exile.

### III. Prophetic Vision in *True Love*

The first poem in *True Love*, “The Beginning of Silence,” transforms silence into a dynamic, all-powerful, and threatening poetic figure. “I am waiting for the silence, / waiting for the silence to come. / [...] Now it’s about to pounce / like a whirlwind.”<sup>19</sup> The poem conjures up images from the prophet Ezekiel’s vision of God’s glory enthroned on the celestial chariot, an ekphrastic depiction of the Divine world with virtually no parallels in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>20</sup> In their introduction to Ravikovitch’s collected poems, Bloch and Kronfeld observe: “Throughout her oeuvre, she is drawn to rare and arcane biblical expressions.”<sup>21</sup> The translators note at least three intertextual references to Ezekiel in this short poem. Furthermore, lines 9-10 (“Tissues in a rainbow box, / the odd-colored chairs”) and lines 16-17, call to mind the *keshet* (rainbow) and the *kise’* (the chair or “throne”) that Ezekiel sees in his vision.<sup>22</sup> Ezekiel’s theophany is the source of one of the oldest traditions of Jewish mysticism, alternatively referred to as *ma’aseh ha-merkavah* (“The Work of the Chariot”) or *heikhalot* (“palace texts”).<sup>23</sup> The sensory and semiotic complexities of Ezekiel’s text have made it a central pre-occupation for Jewish mystic contemplation since Talmudic times.

In addition, the allusion to Ezekiel in “The Beginning of Silence” develops Ravikovitch’s complex relationship to the Modernist tradition of the Hebrew poet as

---

<sup>19</sup> Ravikovitch 161.

<sup>20</sup> “There can be no doubt that the view that became normative in the history of Judaism is one that favored auditory over visual images. With very few exceptions Jews shunned the graphic representation of God, preferring language as the appropriate means to describe and characterize the divine nature”, Eliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld, “Introduction,” 23.

<sup>22</sup> Ezekiel 1:28, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 18-19. In the *Qedushah* recitation, the highpoint of the Jewish daily prayer service, Ezekiel’s vision (3:12) is liturgically grouped with the other major Biblical theophany, Isaiah 6:3, as I will discuss below. During the *Qedushah*, the congregation and prayer leader recite the verses of praise that Isaiah and Ezekiel attribute to the celestial court in these two visions, in effect re-enacting the angelic chorus. Regarded as a moment of paramount sanctity, the *Qedushah* may only be recited in a quorum of ten Jewish adults.

secular, national prophet.<sup>24</sup> In this tradition, which emerged in the Zionist Yishuv before Israel's establishment, the poet-prophet takes on subjects that concern the collective. In certain cases, the poet-prophet even constitutes the national community as such.<sup>25</sup> Such poets' Modernism and Zionism self-consciously sunder the transcendental semiotics of Judaism's (Diasporic) religious tradition, transforming the language of the sacred texts into a new, symbolist poetics. Transcendence is either disavowed or, through symbolism, transmuted into the modernist (at times, also socialist and/or futurist) vision of the revived Hebrew nation.<sup>26</sup>

"The Beginning of Silence", however, seems to shrink from this burden with the posture characteristic of the Statehood Generation of poets, to which Ravikovich belonged.<sup>27</sup> In "The Beginning of Silence", the lyrical subject does not peer up into the heavens. Rather, she watches as the transcending image of "*ha-sheqet*," the silence, descends into the domestic space in the first stanza, and then takes over "the sea" and "the land" in the second. The figurative portrayal of silence in active terms hints at an inner contradiction in the speaker's language.<sup>28</sup> In "The Beginning of Silence", the paradox culminates when the silence and the speaker's voice penetrate one another: "And

---

<sup>24</sup> Schachter, "A Lily Among the Bullfrogs", 312. See also the discussions in Michael Gluzman, "'To Endow Suffering with Elegance': Dahlia Ravikovich and the Poetry of the Statehood Generation", *Prooftexts* 28, no. 3 (2008), 282-310.

<sup>25</sup> Uri Cohen, *Hisardut*, 177.

<sup>26</sup> Dan Miron, *The Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry: and Other Essays on Modern Hebrew Literature* (New Milford, Ct.: Toby Press, 2010), 182-190, 465-466.

<sup>27</sup> "Anti-rhetorical, anticollectivist, antinationalist, and thoroughly committed to the private unheroic experience and its colloquial articulation, this poetics favored poetry that treated personal existential issues", Miron, *The Prophetic Mode*, 181. Tsamir argues that while the Statehood Generation claimed Ravikovich, they also praised her precisely for her deviance from their poetics: Tsamir, "ha-Tzofah le-veit yisra'el mi-bifnim," 600-601.

<sup>28</sup> As I will discuss below, this contradiction is also a significant rhetorical strategy in "Hovering at a Low Altitude", with its dubious refrain "I am not here."

the silence shrieks inside me / and I shriek inside it. / And I look, and behold: / opening, revolving / entire worlds within the room”.<sup>29</sup>

The tension that bursts when the silence speaks – in fact, shrieks – leads immediately to a heightened state of poetic vision. The Hebrew here evokes Ezekiel again: *va-ani mabīṭah, va-ani ro’ah*, literally, “and I look, and I see”. In a technique familiar to Biblical exegetes, the speaker’s use of “look” and “see” in the same line calls attention to the difference between these verbs, suggesting that each offers a distinct mode of vision. In this manner, the poet demonstrates the power of language to encode sensory perception with differentiated values. The following line, *niftāhim u-mitgalgalim* (“opening, revolving”), indicates the objects of these different forms of sight – Bloch and Kronfeld suggest that this line alludes to Ezekiel’s description of the wheels (*ofanim*) of the Divine chariot (1:16-21).<sup>30</sup> For them, “the prophet Ezekiel’s ecstatic visions of the divine” offer Ravikovitch “a metaphor for the workings of the poetic imagination”.<sup>31</sup> Thus the poet’s looking and seeing opens her own language to that of other texts and worlds. From the privacy of the speaker’s room, her gaze takes on the prophet’s extraordinary visionary revelation, as well as his characteristically privileged position as the conduit between Divine speech and sacred text. Yet what does she see? What is her privileged testimony? The final line in “The Beginning of Silence” reads: “And I am quiet, and I am calm.”<sup>32</sup> As Bloch and Kronfeld read the poem, this line would reinforce the notion of the poetry as a quest for personal revelation, using silence as a form of protection from the

---

<sup>29</sup> Ravikovitch 161.

<sup>30</sup> A Zoharic passage on the mystic functions of the chariot’s wheels, from the section *Va-Yehi*, also employs this vocabulary.

<sup>31</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld 23-4.

<sup>32</sup> “Quiet” may also be read as “silent,” given that the Hebrew *shqeytah* is simply a verbal form of the poem’s central figure of silence, *ha-sheqet*.

intrusive tumult of the world outside. In this sense, the prophetic figure may be a visionary poet, but she is not a “Watchman for the house of Israel” (*tzofeh le-veit Yisra’el*), a moniker applied to Ezekiel (3:16) and re-appropriated amongst the modern Hebrew poets working in the pre-state, collectivist tradition.<sup>33</sup>

The third poem in the collection, “He Will Surely Come”, incorporates a number of prophetic intertexts in a similar pattern.<sup>34</sup> The title, originally a verse from the prophet Habakkuk (2:3), is a common Jewish refrain regarding faith in the ultimate arrival of the Messiah.<sup>35</sup> In Yehudit Barel’s reading, the Biblical allusions underscore the poet’s efforts to protect her private revelation, serving as a “sharp contrast to ... the human dimension [which] represents a crude, vulgar existence”.<sup>36</sup> As in “The Beginning of Silence,” the lyrical subject’s capacity for poetic revelation is seemingly tied to her mental detachment: “Years tick by me here in a stupor, / absent minded / false minded” until the epiphany, represented as a messianic birth: “It will surely come.”<sup>37</sup> The Hebrew syllabic pattern<sup>38</sup> reinforces the link between depressive passivity and the revelatory event, which is figured visually: “I sleep late / I wait and wait. / When he comes, he will be seen.” With another verse from Ezekiel, the prophetic erupts into the poetry, albeit fleetingly:

*I breathe upon these slain that they may live.*<sup>39</sup>  
Only a few dared and lived for a fleeting instant.

<sup>33</sup> Miron, *The Prophetic Mode*, 184. This is precisely the claim Tsamir seeks to overturn. I concur with her analysis, though I arrive at this standpoint through a focus on the prophetic visionary mode, which she does not pursue.

<sup>34</sup> Ravikovich 163-4.

<sup>35</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld, n. to Ravikovich 163.

<sup>36</sup> Yehudit Barel, “He Shall Surely Come,” in *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself*, Ed. Burnshaw, Carmi, et al, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003, 234-5.

<sup>37</sup> “He” and “it” are interchangeable in Hebrew: *bo yavo*.

<sup>38</sup> “*Ani yeshaynah harbeh / ani mehakah harbeh. / k’she’hu ya’giy’a hu yay’ra’eh*.” Bloch and Kronfeld have “he’ll be one to behold”, which is probably a better translation, but softens the visual directness of *yay’ra’eh (r.a.h)*.

<sup>39</sup> Ezekiel 37:9, emphasis mine.

To the others I was no longer of any use.  
I hold my tongue and stop my ears

The poem echoes the structure from the climax of “The Beginning of Silence”, with its eruption of shrieks back and forth between the lyrical subject and “the silence”; only here, it is “the terrible shrieks” of the marketplace to which she responds: “Only at times do I scream in rage,” before rebuking herself for the outburst. The poem concludes with a return to silence and waiting, its last line describing a vision yet to come: “No eye has ever seen its kind.”<sup>40</sup> Barel suggests that “Ezekiel’s vision [above] implies personal (but failing) efforts to hasten redemption”. I would argue further that the poet’s prophetic visionary capacity is at the core of both of these poems. But I believe this visionary mode is meant to ironize the notion of the private sphere (the lyrical subject’s isolation from the public/political sphere) as the locus of poetic expression.

“The Beginning of Silence” concludes in silent self-satisfaction (“I am quiet and I am calm”), while “He Will Surely Come” seems to endorse a sensory shutdown beyond silence (“I hold my tongue and stop my ears”). But considering the explicitly political poems to follow in *True Love*, these lines could be read proleptically, implying a veiled critique of the passive Israeli individual who does not speak out against the injustice committed by her society. Thus Ravikovitch begins *True Love* by representing silence as a dynamic interplay between the positions of poetic speaker and mute witness, as well as a passage between the domains of vision and linguistic expression. This concern has a parallel in the original texts of Hebrew visionary prophecy: attempting to depict the invisible God in words, Ezekiel can only account for what he has seen through highly

---

<sup>40</sup> My translation differs from Bloch and Kronfeld, again, with a more literal rendering of the verb *r.a.h: kmoto 'ayin lo ra'atah*.

symbolic mediation and simile.<sup>41</sup> His vision then gives way to the Voice that admonishes the Jewish people for failing to see; and this Voice must eventually find its way into a written text, both within Ezekiel’s vision and in the book of Ezekiel itself. In the first poem of *True Love*, “the silence” – and not the heavenly host – is the transcendent object of sight whose speech opens up the poet’s visionary dimension: but this merely leaves the speaker “quiet” and “calm”, enclosed among the familiar possessions her home. As with other less explicitly political poems in the collection, there is looking and seeing, but only of the kind that leads to silence and inaction.

Yet it is in precisely this manner that Ravikovitch’s poetry foregrounds the paradoxical inversions that can either enable or obstruct testimony by witnesses of trauma. This work is necessary to stage the more explicitly political relations between speaking subjects and representations of victims that the reader will encounter throughout *True Love* and *Mother and Child*. In Laub’s study of trauma testimony, he writes:

---

<sup>41</sup> The opening verses of Ezekiel 1 refer to the visual first, and in the first-person (“I saw visions of God” 1:1); subsequently, the text switches to the third-person to describe the verbal: “the word of the LORD came to the priest Ezekiel son of Buzi...” (1:3). This would seem to emphasize the immediacy of the vision, in contrast to the mediated, secondary character of “the word” of the prophecy. In fact, the entire chapter makes no mention of any words spoken by God to the prophet.

The seemingly unprecedented level of detail of the *merkavah* scene offers some of the most productive Biblical verses for later Jewish mystical traditions, even as the descriptive language employed here calls attention to its own mediation. Indeed, there is a tension between the elaborately detailed portrayals of the angelic creatures (*hayot*) and the frequent use of the mediating terms *mar’eh* (“appearance,” “semblance”) and *dmut* (“figure,” “likeness,” “image,” “form”) throughout Ezekiel 1. (depending on context, some of these English terms can be used for either *mar’eh* or *dmut*). There is also the repeated interdiction of the Hebrew letter *kaf*, meaning “like” or “as,” to qualify the object of description. As the chapter builds up to the theophany, so too does the frequency in the use of the *kaf*, which appears five times in verses 26-27 alone. The anthropomorphic figure of God on the throne, for which this prophecy is famous, can only be described by combining all these mediating terms at once: *ke-mar’eh even sapir dmut kis’eh ve-al dmut ha-kis’eh dmut ke-mar’eh adam...* [the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and on top, upon this semblance of a throne, there was the semblance of a human form] (Ezekiel 1:26). If Ezekiel’s vision – that is, the glory of God – is the *signified*, the linguistic *signifiers*, in the form of verbal/textual description and conventional simile, take pains to call attention to the mediation of language as such.



The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself. ... the speakers about trauma on some level prefer silence so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to—and of listening to themselves... The listener must know all this and more. He or she must *listen to and hear the silence*, speaking mutely both in silence and in speech, both from behind and from within speech.<sup>42</sup>

In a sense, Ravikovich turns the reader into “the listener” who must “hear the silence....” Like the visionary prophetic text, Ravikovitch’s poetry is highly self-conscious of the transitions between sight and voice, image and text. Silence becomes an active figure in Ravikovitch’s meta-poetic interrogation of her own position outside and against the Israeli collective, who looks but fails to see continuity between the Palestinian experience and the representation of Jewish exile.

In another vein, the poetic enunciation of silence speaks to the poet’s role as the witness of Palestinian suffering, whose testimony appears in the precarious space where the Palestinian voice has been displaced. Thus Ravikovich’s poetry stages itself as only a witness for the Hebrew community. She cannot speak in the place of the Palestinian subject – for how could she give voice to the Other’s interiority without presuming its transparency and legibility? Such expression would appear to be the “natural” right presumed by the author and, more problematically, by the hegemonic national Self. The presence of Palestinian figures in an Israeli text necessarily invokes the dilemma that, in

---

<sup>42</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 58.

the realm of national politics, modern Jewish sovereignty (with its political and aesthetic dimensions) is the very formation that renders Palestinian self-representation impossible. How can Israelis – sovereign Jews in the land of Israel and Palestine – represent Palestinians without usurping their voice yet again?

#### IV. Ezekiel's Visions of Jerusalem

“Hovering at a Low Altitude” is one of Ravikovitch’s signature poems, and the most discussed work of the latter half of her career. Bloch and Kronfeld chose the poem as the title to their English translation of Ravikovitch’s collected poetry, explaining in their Introduction that it is “an epoch-making poem that integrates many of Ravikovitch’s personal and political themes (gender, violence, outrage, flight)”.<sup>43</sup> It first saw publication in 1983 in the journal *Hadarim*, alongside “many protest poems” that were written in response to the outbreak of Israel’s 1982 war in Lebanon; it was republished later that year, “with the poet’s consent,” in an anti-war anthology.<sup>44</sup> But Ravikovitch composed and submitted the poem for publication before Israel’s June 6, 1982 invasion of Lebanon. Some critics cite this as evidence that the poem’s subject matter is not the political violence often read into it, but rather a private psychological exploration of trauma and denial. Critical debate also surrounds the location of the poem in the middle of a cycle entitled “The Window,” given that Ravikovitch placed *True Love*’s overtly political poems in the subsequent cycle, “Issues in Contemporary Judaism.”<sup>45</sup> While arguing over whether this placement enhances or diminishes the prospect of reading

---

<sup>43</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld, 32.

<sup>44</sup> See above, Note 7.

<sup>45</sup> See: Barbara Mann, in *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 215; Scharf-Gold, in *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 221.

“Hovering” politically, scholars have implicitly accepted that the poems in “Issues in Contemporary Judaism” are somehow *more* political than those in “The Window”, and indeed, than the rest of *True Love*.<sup>46</sup> I will argue, however, that the visual dimension throughout *True Love* suggests that many of its poems are invested in larger questions about the text’s position vis-à-vis the witness to political violence and the visibility of its victims.

Looking inward, as Ravikovitch’s earlier poetry ostensibly did, the Israeli subject turns her gaze away from the collective and toward the autonomous space of personal matters.<sup>47</sup> At least, this is the familiar critical interpretation of “Hovering at a Low Altitude”. In “Hovering”, the speaker praises her own sense of detachment, though she has witnessed the rape and murder of a young (and likely Arab) girl: “I am not here / [...] / The light will not scorch me. The frost cannot touch me. / Nothing can amaze me now. / I’ve seen worse things in my life.”<sup>48</sup> Kronfeld writes of “The poet’s self-critical account of her own—and her generation’s—‘disengaged’ aestheticism resonates with the urgency of ethical condemnation and extends to the culture of political detachment and escapism.”<sup>49</sup> Barbara Mann further argues that the poem’s “blurring of the personal and the collective” operates through the Biblical intertext:

---

<sup>46</sup> Kronfeld points out that “Hovering” is placed in “*The Window* among poems concerned with a woman’s voice and a woman’s life and death,” (Kronfeld, in *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 244 n. 2). Tsamir’s essay, however, pulls apart the pre-existing critical consensus on this issue. Where critics read Ravikovitch’s *private* (or “*psychological*”) poetry in political terms, it is often in an exclusively gendered sense, thereby suggesting that *feminism* is the politics appropriate to the confessional lyric poem, while the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Lebanese conflicts are the proper subject matter of *public* “protest” poetry. See: Tsamir, “Ha-tzofa le-veit yisrael mi-bifnim,” 601, 630-632.

<sup>47</sup> Mann, in *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 213.

<sup>48</sup> Ravikovitch 175.

<sup>49</sup> Kronfeld, in *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 233.

the poet embeds biblical allusions concerning the relation between God and the people of Israel in descriptions of the anonymous shepherd girl. Thus, a poem that ostensibly depicts an individual's flight from involvement in the world—"I am not here"—reverberates with the words of the prophets, who, one might say, invented the problem of personal responsibility toward the nation.<sup>50</sup>

I believe Mann's analysis here not only applies to "Hovering at a Low Altitude" – it also sheds light on the Ezekiel passages in "The Beginning of Silence" and "He Will Surely Come", where the "problem of personal responsibility to the nation" is rendered specifically in terms of the prophet's vision and his status as privileged witness. The Biblical prophet – specifically Ezekiel, as the model of Hebrew visionary revelation – is committed to concerns that are national in scope. Ravikovich's intertextual selections from Ezekiel make this clear. Parchments containing Ezekiel 37, with its ultimate vision of a miraculous, collective resuscitation in a valley filled with "dry bones," were uncovered in excavations of the ancient Zealot synagogue at Masada.<sup>51</sup> This serendipitous discovery shaped the Zionist investment in the Masada site/narrative as a motivating symbol of Jewish heroism and national revival.

From this perspective, Ezekiel's visions become a particularly loaded choice for the opening poems in *True Love*. With them, Ravikovich sets out to radically revise Hebrew modernism's figuration of Israel's restored sovereignty, and her own role as a

---

<sup>50</sup> Mann in *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 217.

<sup>51</sup> Yigael Yadin, *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*, tr. Moshe Pearlman (Bnei Brak: Steimatzky Edition, 1997 [1966]), 187-189.

poet-prophet(ess), an effort that culminates in “Hovering at a Low Altitude”. The layering of Ezekiel’s visions suggests that any ethical indictment of individualistic, yet collective, silence depends upon the poet’s admonishing the misdirected Jewish gaze. And this is the very type of admonishment that God addresses to Ezekiel after the prophet’s vision of the supernal throne.

Ultimately, Ezekiel is a prophet of exile: “when I was in the community of exiles by the Chebar Canal, the heavens opened and I saw visions of God” (1:1).<sup>52</sup> His words are addressed to a community poised between the land of Israel and Diaspora – an almost exact reversal of the staging in Moses’ revelations in the Torah, right before the children of Israel cross into the Promised Land to become a sovereign community. But like Moses’ revelations in the Wilderness of Sinai,<sup>53</sup> Ezekiel’s text offers a covenantal identity through the semiotic paradoxes of prophetic revelation: the impossibilities of representing Divine speech in a human text, to say nothing of the visions of an invisible God. This semantic liminality parallels the prophet’s spatial and ethical liminality with respect to the people of Israel. This positioning is a key for understanding Ravikovich’s revision of the modern Hebrew poet-prophet figure. In Ravikovich, as in the prose of S. Yizhar, Biblical prophetic vision offers a mode of representation, a Hebrew *visionary* ethics, encoded in texts, for witnessing. As I will demonstrate below, a number of poems

---

<sup>52</sup> The Biblical scholar and British chief rabbi Dr. J.H. Hertz observed that that Ezekiel “was the first prophet to live and prophesy in exile”: *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, ed. J.H. Hertz (London: The Soncino Press, 1960 [1937]), 1027. On Ravikovich’s allusion to the wheels, see above, notes 22-23.

<sup>53</sup> The rabbinic tradition (going back to the first century of the common era, if not earlier) emphasized this parallel in the ordering of the *Haftarot*, a prescribed Biblical text from the canon of Prophets and Writings that was chanted immediately after the weekly portion of the Pentateuch during communal prayer on the Sabbath morning. The rabbis assigned all of Ezekiel 1, and 3:12, as the *Haftarah* for the Pentecost (*Shavu’ot*). The Pentateuch reading for Pentecost consists of Exodus 19-20, which recounts the revelation of the 10 commandments to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai (in rabbinic Judaism, Pentecost celebrates this event), thus pairing Ezekiel’s vision with the revelation at Sinai.

in *True Love* (including “Hovering at a Low Altitude”) utilize this textual ethics of witnessing to represent the Palestinian experience of displacement and victimization at the hands of the Israeli state.

While the opening poems in *True Love* lack any explicit references to the Israeli political reality, they stage the interpenetration of poetic vision, speech, and silence together with the prophetic encounter *par excellence*. Uniquely, Ezekiel not only presents the revelation of God’s voice in language, but the sight of the (invisible, inarticulable) Divine dwelling itself. In “The Beginning of Silence”, the titular *sheqet* is likened to an all-encompassing “hand” swooping down from above. This not only suggests Ezekiel 1:3, as Bloch and Kronfeld note, but perhaps even more directly, Ezekiel 8, where the “hand of the LORD ... took me by the hair of my head. A spirit lifted me up between heaven and earth and brought me *in visions of God* to Jerusalem” (8:3).<sup>54</sup> These visions are explicitly interstitial, transpiring between realms. They also convey spatial movement to and from exile, along an axis from Babylon to Zion.<sup>55</sup> Ezekiel 8 presents an inversion of Ezekiel’s earlier theophany, in which God allowed him to gaze upon the celestial Divine sanctum. Here, God announces that He has withdrawn His invisible Presence (the *Shekhinah*) from the Temple in Jerusalem, the earthly home of the Presence.

Importantly, this withdrawal of God’s Presence is the consequence for a *visual transgression*. In the Jerusalem Temple’s inner sanctuary, God compels Ezekiel to witness the depravity of Judea’s leaders, who have covered the walls with idolatrous

---

<sup>54</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>55</sup> Discussing the image of the wheels on the Divine chariot Ezekiel 1:16-21, Hertz comments: “The main feature of the *Merkabah* ... was its mobility, and this explains the *wheels* in Ezekiel’s vision. No wheels were seen by Isaiah in his vision of the Divine Throne or by any other prophet. In the vision of the departing *Merkabah* Ezekiel read the impending departure of the Divine Presence from the Temple in Jerusalem and the fall of Judea.” Cf. note 53.

images. Worshipping these images in the privacy of darkness, the Judeans assume that “the Lord does not see us; the Lord has abandoned the country” (8:12). The leaders mistake their perception of Divine *displacement* for Divine *blindness*. Ezekiel’s text reverses this arrangement, portraying the elders as truly blind to God’s covenantal gaze. The Judeans are guilty of looking at the wrong things, and they fail to recognize that God’s Presence may be outside the scope of their sight. But their lack of perceptual access (God’s seeming “invisibility” in relation to their visual codes, which demand graphic representation) does not annul the obligation to witness and testify. When the collective fails in this obligation, it then becomes the prophet’s task.

The people’s assertion of God’s blindness causes Him to declare, ironically, “My eye will show no pity” (8:18, 9:10). He commands a scribe “with a writing case” to mark the wayward people of Zion, who are then executed by loyal angels toward the conclusion of Ezekiel’s vision (9:2-11).<sup>56</sup> The scribal assassin returns with ominous words that in much of the rest of the Hebrew Bible would mark an apotheosis of the covenantal relationship: “I have done as You commanded me” (9:11). This demonstration is more than a mere assertion that the pen is mightier than the image. Ezekiel’s text emphasizes, rather, that the covenant, in its observance and its breach, depends upon a proper conception of the overwhelming power of God’s sight and of transposing Divine language into the interdependent and limited forms of human representation: visions, speech, and text. The Hebrew verb used to characterize the elders’ fetish objects that are “depicted” on the walls is *mehuqeh*, which may also be rendered “engraved.” Owing to

---

<sup>56</sup> I first developed these comments in an unpublished paper under the supervision of Professor Ra’anan Boustan: “Semiotics and Prophecy in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Abraham Abulafia,” March 17, 2011.

this meaning, the root of this word, h.q.q., is the source of the word for “law,” *hoq*. This points to a triple tension between depiction (images), engraving (words), and the sacred covenantal Law.

In this rare example of visionary prophecy, the entire distinction between the prophetic and the abominable hinges on the passage from sight to representation: the elders believe that if the Hebrew God cannot see them, they may paint competing deities on the wall, in darkness and behind plumes of incense. They conflate spatial proximity with sight, absence with blindness. This misrecognition lies behind the corrupt status of their representational practice. The elders seek to pull the transcendental Signified into the graphic signifier, to concretize the relationship between images seen and images depicted, and in the process they remove the mediating space of sacred language. Ezekiel 8 thus passage suggests that language remains the medium that conveys the transcendental Presence of the Signified most immediately – not in spite but because of the interplay between its semiotic mediation (indeed, displacement) and its spatial/sensory immediacy as a phoneme.<sup>57</sup>

#### V. “Hovering at a Low Altitude”

The violent stakes of the poet’s vision come forth ominously in “Hovering at a Low Altitude.” Mann writes that “the problem of witnessing is at the heart” of the poem.<sup>58</sup> “Hovering at a Low Altitude” dramatizes how the poet’s – and through her, the

---

<sup>57</sup> See: Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 14-15, where he develops this notion from an early Derrida essay, “Speech and Phenomena.”

<sup>58</sup> Mann, in *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 213. Given that Ravikovitch’s later poetry testifies directly to Israeli, Palestinian, and Lebanese suffering, Kronfeld asks, “how can the poet aestheticize such violence ... without being implicated herself?” (in *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 234).<sup>58</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld



reader's – ability to witness at a "safe" distance cannot actually protect them from the violence they behold, which is inescapably political. The poem is all the more effective for its implication (through visuality) rather than direct accusation (through speech) of the Israeli witness to traumatic injustice. Kronfeld and Mann agree that the speaker's use of the first person "I" structures the narrative such that any critique must first pass through the poet: the individual (though not the text) is an indifferent witness. As with "The Beginning of Silence", the issue is not whether the speaker looks and sees – she most certainly does – but how the speaker encodes what she has seen in a discourse of private, emotional detachment rather than collective, outward responsibility.

Nili Scharf-Gold contends that when Ravikovitch included "Hovering" in *True Love*, she "nestled it among other lyrical poems" in the series "The Window", rather than "under the marked political" series "Questions in Contemporary Judaism".<sup>59</sup> Scharf-Gold takes this as "an interpretative signal from the author, that 'Hovering at a Low Altitude' is first and foremost a personal, lyrical poem." Yet such a reading overlooks the persistent concern throughout *True Love*, including in "The Window" poems, with the ways an individual's insulation and distance from what she sees can silence, anaesthetize, and paralyze her.

"The Window" series begins with a poem of the same title. The first three lines read: "So what did I manage to do? / Me—for years I did nothing. / Just looked out the window."<sup>60</sup> The unusual syntax in line two, where the verb follows, rather than precedes,

---

counterbalance this concern by noting "it is notoriously difficult to write political poetry without lapsing into harangue", "Introduction," 30.

<sup>59</sup> Scharf-Gold, in *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 221.

<sup>60</sup> Ravikovitch 171. Ilana Szobel also reads the image of "The Window" as inseparable from the political content of the visible in poems that follow: "the window is the frame for Ravikovitch's work, and, crucially, it serves as an aperture for her gaze ... This condition combines distance and caution in an extreme way

its object, repeats in line 14: “Me—I didn’t do a thing.” This is more pronounced in the Hebrew: *Ani shoum davar lo ‘asiti*, which in a word-for-word translation would read, “I a single thing I did not do.” Such a syntax emphasizes and even poeticizes a statement by bringing heightened attention to the relation between the subject, who is actually named twice, and its object. This syntax recurs in two crucial lines in “Hovering at a Low Altitude.” In lines 39-40, after sustained consideration of what the shepherd girl might be thinking, the speaker announces, “She still has a few hours left. / But that’s hardly the object of my meditations.”<sup>61</sup> In Hebrew, line 40 reads, *ani lo ba-‘inyan hazeh hagiti*, – literally, “Me, not in this matter have I pondered.” The line’s first four words also form their own phrase, a bit of slang that means, “I’m not into this [issue].” The famous lines where the speaker states the poem’s title follow:

My thoughts, soft as down, cushion me comfortably.  
I’ve found a very simple method,  
not so much as a foot-breadth on land  
and not flying, either—  
hovering at a low altitude.

The speaker once more adopts the inverted syntax five lines from the conclusion of the poem, when she says, *ani davar lo ra’iti*: “I haven’t seen a thing.” The final stanza is worth quoting in its entirety for the following discussion:

I am not here.  
I’m above those savage mountain ranges  
in the farthest reaches of the East.  
No need to elaborate.

---

throughout the poem ‘Hovering at a Low Altitude,’” (Szobel 169). Connecting “The Window” to “Hovering”, Szobel writes “The poem does not define ‘*what is* the reality that the artist ought to see—a brutal act that has been done to an innocent young girl’, but rather defines *the way of seeing* that same reality.” See: Ilana Szobel, “‘Unveiling Injustice’: Dahlia Ravikovich’s Poetry of Witness,” in *Narratives of Dissent: War in Contemporary Israeli Arts and Culture*, eds. Rachel S. Harris and Ranen Omer-Sherman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 167-186; see further Szobel, *A Poetics of Trauma: The Work of Dahlia Ravikovich* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

With a single hurling thrust one can hover  
and whirl about with the speed of the wind.  
Can make a getaway and persuade myself:  
I haven't seen a thing.  
And the little one, her eyes start from their sockets,  
her palate is dry as a potsherd,  
when a hard hand grasps her hair, gripping her  
without a shred of pity.<sup>62</sup>

In “The Window”, the speaker says, “Me—I didn’t do a thing”, while above, the speaker wishes to claim, “I haven’t seen a thing.” Syntactically, these lines are identical; the only difference is the substitution of *‘asiti* (“did”) with *ra’iti* (“seen”). This parallel calls attention to the ethical implications of complacently looking through “The Window” which, like the “very simple method” of “Hovering at a Low Altitude”, offers only inaction in the face of what is seen outside the window – or on the ground beneath the hovering. In this light, “Me—for years I did nothing. / Just looked out the window” comes across as an alibi, a pretense rendered suspect by the collection’s intertext: to look and see while remaining “quiet and calm,” as in “The Beginning of Silence”.

When read through the more violent narrative of “Hovering at a Low Altitude”, the syntax and repetition call attention to the fact that both speakers believe they don’t need to do anything about what they see. In the final stanza of “Hovering”, the Hebrew for the speaker’s statement “No need to elaborate” reads *‘inyan she-ayn tzrikhim le-hit’akev ‘alav*, with the verb for “need” [*tzrikhim*] written in the plural, implying others, perhaps the poem’s readers, who ostensibly do not need to focus too much on the violent scene because they can also push off and hover above, each one saying to him or herself, like the speaker, “I have not seen a thing.”

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 176.

Nonetheless, as Kronfeld demonstrates, the language of the poem pulls apart this claim in its very utterance, through the use of Biblical and Israeli cultural allusions, as well as in the poem's structure.<sup>63</sup> Kronfeld's reading focuses on how the poem carefully orchestrates a growing identification between the speaker and the shepherd girl, while, at the same time, exposing the speaker's disingenuous strategies for maintaining an (impossible) position of disengaged observation. Ravikovitch achieves this by interpolating the danger of the male gaze, through the figure of "that man" who will soon rape and murder the girl, into the speaker's otherwise cool, unemotional narration; and by a grammatical feminization of the rhyme scheme through gendered possessive suffixes, pronouns, and diction, at times using feminine words for terms that are typically masculine in Hebrew.<sup>64</sup>

The poem's fourth stanza emphasizes the narrator's detachment:

I am not here  
I've been in the mountains many days now,  
The light will not scorch me. The frost cannot touch me.  
Nothing can amaze me now.  
I've seen worse things in my life.

I tuck my dress tight around my legs and hover  
very close to the ground.

Kronfeld proposes that the tucking of the dress is tied "to the dilemma of witnessing as collaboration." Despite her assertions of invulnerability, the speaker engages in this act of modesty because she has identified with the little girl enough to realize that she too could become the victim of "the same murderous male gaze if it were to be turned upon her.

---

<sup>63</sup> Kronfeld, *Reading Hebrew Literature* 238.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-238.

[...] As Ravikovitch has her ‘unconsciously’ project the consequences of the male gaze onto her own body, the reader is included in her cycle of knowledge and terror.”

But in order to “collapse the distance between eyewitness and victim, and turn the reading process itself into part of the inescapable witnessing”, as Kronfeld writes,<sup>65</sup> the poem must also articulate the compulsion for the witness to close the testimonial discourse prematurely, to produce a form of silence with ready-made excuses before the trauma has even taken place. In Hebrew, the word “now” (above, line 28, “Nothing can amaze me now”) is *shouv*, literally meaning “again.” Thus the poet implies that this entire episode is a cycle. Once more, as ever, the witness cannot allow herself to be shocked by what she sees. Yet the speaker is also a witness to the *limits* of her own specular knowledge, even during the moments when her omniscient gaze enables her to predict/remember the violence with a factual, reportorial disinterest. The girl first appears “from an *unseen* tent. / She won’t live out the day, that girl!”<sup>66</sup> In the fifth stanza, the speaker struggles to peer into the girl’s thoughts, wondering “What ever was she thinking, that girl?” – but she can only respond through recourse to her own perception: “Wild to look at, unwashed.” Wild, that is, to the speaker’s eyes.

Ravikovitch layers this inner tension – the perceptual distance between visibility and access to the inner experience of the victim – with Biblical overtones. Kronfeld observes that in the description of the girl in the third stanza,<sup>67</sup> the poem makes a compound reference to Isaiah and Jeremiah.<sup>68</sup> In these prophetic texts, the people of Israel have metaphorically sundered their covenant with God through sins of the eyes, as

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>66</sup> Ravikovitch 174, emphasis mine.

<sup>67</sup> Lines 21-24.

<sup>68</sup> *Reading Hebrew Literature*, 243.

in Ezekiel. In contrast to the Biblical daughters of Zion, the poem's Arab girl "doesn't walk with neck outstretched / and wanton glances. / She doesn't paint her eyes with kohl. / She doesn't ask, Whence cometh my help." The stanza's final line alludes to another Biblical verse that turns upon the gaze, from the pilgrimage Psalm 121:1-2, "I turn my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come? / My help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth." Kronfeld argues that the poem reverses the Bible's stock metaphorical associations: unlike the psalmist, the shepherd girl "doesn't express dependence on a higher authority."<sup>69</sup> Instead, Kronfeld out, "it is 'that man,' not God, who appears on the mountain":

The girl is right there, near him,  
not another soul around.  
And if she runs for cover, or cries out—  
there's no place to hide in the mountains.

And yet there is a powerfully suggestive Biblical intertext that does not appear in Kronfeld's analysis. Where Bloch and Kronfeld's translation has "not another soul around", the Hebrew reads, "*ve-ayn ish zulatam*" – literally, "*and there was no person besides them.*"<sup>70</sup> In Exodus 2:12, the adopted prince Moses flies into an outrage when he witnesses an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave: "He turned this way and that and, *seeing* no one about [*va-yar'ah ve-ayn ish*], he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." Moses' glance to and fro was incomplete, however: there *was* a person present to witness the murder. While breaking up another fight the next day, a sarcastic Hebrew slave refers to the incident, and Moses flees Egypt for Midyan. In a similar fashion, the speaker in "Hovering" is incorrect in saying that "there was no person

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>70</sup> Emphasis mine.

besides them”, just as she betrays herself with the semantic contradiction of her refrain, “I am not here.” The speaker *is* the person there (that is, “here”) with the little girl and the attacker, unless *ve-ayn ish* inadvertently testifies to her own dehumanization – that as an inert witness to rape and murder, she has in some sense forfeited her humanity.

The scopic drama of prophet, poet, and witness that takes place between Ezekiel’s visions and “The Beginning of Silence” points to a further failure in the passage from sight to text in “Hovering.” The claim that the girl “doesn’t ask, Whence cometh my help” betrays the speaker’s own failure to lift up her eyes. She omits the Psalmist’s second verse, “my help comes from the Lord” from this final line of the third stanza, and then immediately intones her own mantra – “I am not here” – at the beginning of the fourth. In this movement from the broken intertext back to the hovering position of disengaged witness, it becomes clear that the speaker deprives the girl of the capacity to seek either divine or human assistance. The speaker later admits that she is unable to access the girl’s thoughts; perhaps the girl does not conflate the absence of a *visible* God on the mountains with the absence of a human responsibility to intervene, to testify to the injustice of the traumatic scene. The speaker conflates her lack of access to the girl’s interior experience with a dissociative denial of the trauma’s significance: the view from the eyes of the victim. Just as the Judean leaders’ error lay in failing to perceive that God could see them (and their misdirected gaze), so too this speaker incriminates her own failure to see that, on the mountains, God’s help consists of the ethically encoded gaze. Unlike the prophet, she fails to translate her privileged vision into a lyrical statement of responsibility for the fate of others. In this manner, Ravikovitch delineates the self-imposed distance between the speaker’s discourse – which overwrites the testimony of

her eyes, allowing her to “make a getaway and persuade myself: I haven’t seen a thing” – and the victim’s eyes, which literally leap out of their sockets at the shock of the unseen violence. Yet in the larger poetics enacted through “Hovering” and developed in the rest of *True Love*, the poet’s singular, gifted vision fatefully transforms into a textual witness. And what she sees is exile.

## VI. Visions of Exile

There is no critical dispute regarding the cycle that follows “The Window” poems, titled “Issues in Contemporary Judaism”. There is undeniable political thrust to its poems, with titles like “Get out of Beirut”. Ravikovich adds dates and footnotes that clearly refer to Israel’s aerial bombardment of densely populated Palestinian refugee camps, and the street fighting and massacres that followed, as Israel became embedded in Lebanon’s Civil War. A continued focus on Israeli-Palestinian violence predominates in her subsequent collection of poems, *Mother with Child* (1992). In these works, I will argue, Ravikovich continues her engagement with the prophetic visionary mode through the Biblical intertext. More specifically, her poems address the political violence of the Israeli-Palestinian reality through a framework of Hebrew and Jewish exile, bearing in mind that Jewish exile is the condition whose negation and antithesis, Jewish sovereignty, provides the *raison d’etre* for the Israeli state. As such, Israeli society is built upon hegemonic nationalist interpretations of exile in its Biblical and historical iterations. In these discourses, Diaspora and exile placed the Jews outside of (Western) history, and thus the return to Jewish sovereignty in the land is a negation of exile in all its



significations.<sup>71</sup> Ravikovich's poetry links these discourses of exile to the dispossession of the Palestinians. Ravikovich often realigns or inverts the conventional Zionist rejection of exile. Yet her poems do not critique Zionism as a remote abstraction set in opposition to her own politics. Rather, as the contemporary heiress to the Hebrew poet-prophet, Ravikovich engages in a visionary mode that sees new meanings (or ancient lessons) in the Zionist "return to history" and in the relocation of Jewish collectivities to Palestine. Ravikovich uses Biblical and prophetic modes of representation to define the contours of the Palestinian exile produced by the Jewish state – as an exile from the very senses of time and homeland that define Hebrew/Jewish national life.

"Issues in Contemporary Judaism" begins with "A Jewish Portrait." For a series that seems to deal with political events ripped from the headlines of Ravikovich's Israel, the choice of *Yehadut* and *Yehudi* has been read as a way for her to reframe the poetic discussion of Israeli state violence under the more expansive categories of Jews and Judaism.<sup>72</sup> From the outset, this cycle collapses the rhetorical distance between modern Israelis and the longer (and more ideologically diverse) history of Jews and Judaism, drawing upon Diasporic and religious discourses that were suppressed in the creation of Israeli national identity. But the turn from "Israeli" to "Jewish" also foretells a more ominous phenomenon from our current decade: the rise of political parties and laws that emphasize Israel's "Jewish" character in order to redefine it as an ethnocracy, bringing

---

<sup>71</sup> Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Exile within Sovereignty: The Critique of 'The Negation of Exile' in Israeli Culture", in *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept*, eds. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, Nicole Jerr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 393-420; the complete original article appeared in two parts in Hebrew: "Galut betoch Ribonut: Le-Bikoret 'Shlilat haGalut' ba-Tarbut ha-Israelit," *Teoria u-Bikoret* 4 (Fall 1993), 23-53 and 5 (Spring 1994), 113-132. As Raz-Krakotzkin argues above and elsewhere, the Western "history" to which the Jews returned is a Christian theological history predicated on the denial of the legitimacy of Jewish self-representation through the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>72</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld, "Introduction," 22.

the de facto apartheid conditions the occupation in the West Bank into a de jure reality in Israel proper.<sup>73</sup> Ravikovich was decades ahead of her time in shifting the groundwork for political disputation from the vocabulary of the secularist Left (whose hegemony would suffer its final blow in the bloody unraveling of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process) to the religious web of significations that Zionism had rejected during its ascent through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In so doing, Ravikovich reopens questions about the way that the Jewish-Israeli national community relates to its Diasporic past.

“A Jewish Portrait” conjures up a blurred series of refugee figures. It begins: “She / is not your sort. / She’s a Diaspora<sup>74</sup> kind of Jew whose eyes dart around / in fear.” And yet the poem slowly adds seemingly divergent layers of identity to figure of this woman, to her portrait: caravans of “Ukrainian peasants” and “dark-skinned refugees, screaming” come into view. The poem’s final lines read: “Her eyes are the blue eyes of Khazars, / her face a broad face, / her body the heavy body of a native woman, / third generation in the Land of Israel. / June 4, 1982.”<sup>75</sup> In Tsamir’s brilliant close reading, she argues that the subject of the “Jewish Portrait” is not a binary opposition or counter-figure to Ravikovich herself:

her belonging, her being “a native woman”, is *not the inverse* of her identity as an “exilic Jew” and a refugee, as a woman and as a visionary-

---

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, the renaming of the National Religious Party (Mafdal) as “The Jewish Home” (*ha-Bayit ha-Yehudi*) under Naftali Bennett, who has served as a senior cabinet minister in the previous two Israeli governments. With the support of the Jewish Home party, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s ruling coalition was able to pass a law enshrining “Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people”, while at the same demoting Arabic from an official language to a “special status,” a long-time goal of the Israeli far-right, in July, 2018: Allison Kaplan Sommer, “Basic Law or Basically a Disaster? Israel’s Nation-State Law Controversy Explained,” last modified August 8, 2018. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-israel-s-nation-state-law-controversy-explained-1.6344237>

<sup>74</sup> “Exilic” would be an equally tenable translation for *Yehudiyya galoutit*, as I will employ below.

<sup>75</sup> Ravikovich 191.

poet. Even the scathing opposition with which the poem begins, between the [exilic] woman and the [Israeli] “your sort”, comes apart here: “we” (the non-exilic?) only seem to be her opposite, though in fact we are exactly like her, and have been from the [poem’s] start. And now it turns out that all of us, both “we” and her, are uprooted from place, placeless.<sup>76</sup>

To this I would only add that as a *portrait (diyokan)*, the entire cycle begins by calling attention to *the visual* in its relationship to Jewish identity and, as the poem continues, to the transience of Jewish habitation, in a set of images that self-consciously blur into scenes from the Palestinian Nakba. This “Jewish Portrait” emphasizes that the poet’s work is inseparable from a visual articulation, and that the visible is always already encoded in language – especially when representing figures of exile.

Another poem in the cycle, “You Can’t Kill a Baby Twice”,<sup>77</sup> opens with a clear invocation of Psalm 137,<sup>78</sup> the most recognizable dirge commemorating the Babylonian Exile. The Psalm’s first line, “By the waters of Babylon,” situates the text geographically and theologically, following the destruction of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem in 586 b.c.e. As portrayed in Ezekiel and other prophetic accounts, the destruction of the Temple not only led to the first loss of Judean political sovereignty, it also signified the withdrawal of the Divine Presence from Jerusalem – a fundamental break in the covenant. Psalm 137 has been liturgically associated with mourning Jewish exile for millennia; religiously observant Jews recite it after every weekday meal, and verses 5-6

---

<sup>76</sup> Tsamir, “ha-Tzofah le-veit yisra’el mi-bifnim,” 613. Tsamir’s close reading of this poem spans 606-617.

<sup>77</sup> Ravikovich 193-4.

<sup>78</sup> Given the many allusions I will discuss here and below, I have provided the entire text of the Psalm in the Appendix to this section. The translation and format are based upon the JPS *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*, 1272. However, I have made some changes favoring a more direct diction, and with phrases familiar from the (Protestant) Revised Standard Version.

are often provided as the rationale for the ritual of breaking a glass under the wedding canopy.

“You Can’t Kill a Baby Twice” begins “By the wastewaters of Sabra and Shatila, / there you transported human beings, respectable / quantities of human beings, from the animal kingdom / to kingdom come.”<sup>79</sup> There is even a rhythmic parallel between the rest of the first verse, “there we sat and also wept, as we remembered Zion” // “*sham yashavnu gam bakhinu b’zachreynu et Sion*” with Ravikovitch’s brutal lines “*qodem yaru / aḥar kakh talu / l’va’sof shahatu ba-sakinim*” // “First they shot / then they hanged the lot, / the rest they butchered with knives.” The ancient Babylonians mocked the Judeans upon arriving at the mighty Euphrates, but the scene the poet describes at Sabra and Shatila is far more abject. In the Palestinian refugee camps, where the people dispossessed from the land have been deposited, the conqueror pursues them in order to continue the slaughter.

Can this use of the Biblical text account for the differences between the two historical situations? And what does it tell us about the power relations when, as Kronfeld has noted, the Palestinians can only be humanized as victims once they are Judaized?<sup>80</sup> Is Ravikovich proposing a (familiar) analogy – that the Palestinians are the new Jews? Packaging such an analogy in the intertext above would no doubt elicit objections on both sides. Palestinians could fairly object that they are doubly dispossessed when their suffering is reappropriated into a Jewish vocabulary – can they not represent themselves, in their own terms? Zionist Jews, meanwhile, would be horrified at seeing “Those sweet

---

<sup>79</sup> These lines are quite difficult to translate. As an alternative to Bloch and Kronfeld’s, I also offer: “By the wastewaters of Sabra and Shatila, / there you transported quantities of human beings / who deserved the honor / from the realm of the living to the realm of truth.”

<sup>80</sup> Kronfeld, seminar, Yale University Annual Seminar on Modern Hebrew Literature and Jewish Literatures, May 12, 2017.

soldiers of ours” (line 28) in an even more sadistic role than the Babylonian conquerors who brought an end to Jewish sovereignty, the very state that Zionism aims to restore. But I will propose a third way of reading this intertext, showing how it reveals Ravikovich’s larger poetics in “Issues in Contemporary Judaism” and *Mother with Child*. In these works, the relationship between Jewish and Palestinian exile is more complex than a mere analogy or substitution. Her texts open up the question of displacement – geographical, historical, national, tropological – to the poetic dislocations that already attend the representation of the Self, particularly in its bodily vulnerability. The self-representation of the displaced is an open question, one that nationalist discourse proposes to close with the state, and, where the state’s sovereignty is disputed, with violence.

Ravikovich’s poetry is invested in the insufficiencies of fixed discourses, especially where questions of Jews, Palestinians, and displacement are invoked. This is evident in “Beheaded Heifer”, which follows closely after the previous poem.<sup>81</sup> Beginning with its title, the poem is preoccupied with a Biblical conception of community, violence, and space. As Bloch and Kronfeld note, the beheaded heifer refers to laws from Deuteronomy and Numbers, which enumerate the “rites of expiation” that a community must perform if an unidentifiable corpse is found in fields outside its city. The biblical injunction presumes that there will be anonymous victims, deaths that tempt us toward retribution, and that we must make significant sacrifices in order to avert an open ended cycle of vengeance.<sup>82</sup> Ravikovich’s poem begins in media res with the description of a wounded man, staggering, “drenched in blood”. In line four he is

---

<sup>81</sup> Ravikovich 195-6.

<sup>82</sup> *Qurban*, the Biblical word for “sacrifice,” also means “victim” in contemporary Hebrew.

identified as a Jew by his “yarmulke”, but the next lines self-consciously blur this detail:  
“Ten steps more / and he’s not a Jew / not an Arab anymore – / disembodied.”

In this instance, the visible determinants of national identity are tied directly to the man’s death. Both communities assume the bleeding man was attacked by the other:  
“God-awful uproar; people shrieking, Why are you murdering us? / Others scuttering about, / rushing to exact revenge.” The plural subjects of these actions, like the man, can not be identified as Jewish or Arab – they could plausibly be both, and indeed, Ravikovich said “Beheaded Heifer” was “based on an actual incident in which a yeshiva student was shot [in Hebron] and left to die because no one knew his identity; the Israelis assumed he was a Palestinian, and the Palestinians—an Israeli.”<sup>83</sup> As the man expires gruesomely in front of the mob, the poem contrasts the indeterminacy of spatial identifiers against the abject suffering of the body:

He lies gasping on the ground [ *‘al ha’aretz* ], a death rattle,  
a body torn open,  
and the blood spilling out of the flesh.  
The blood spilling out of the flesh.

He died here or there [ *po o sham* ]  
--some degree of uncertainty remains.  
What do we know for a fact?  
“One found slain in the field.”

The Hebrew transliterations above demonstrate the importance of space and location more decisively than the English can render. The man does not merely die on some generic spot “on the ground,” but also “upon the Land” – *ha’aretz* connotes *The* land, the land of Israel, whose mention in this context suggests that *the Holy Land as such* lies at the heart of the murderous dispute. “Here or there” – a poetic phrase with tremendous

---

<sup>83</sup> Ravikovich 195.

significance to the Darwish poems that I will discuss, below – is a common Hebrew phrase. But it also echoes the title of perhaps the most widely read and debated work of Hebrew non-fiction dealing with Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, Amos Oz’s *In the Land of Israel*, whose Hebrew title is *Po V’Sham be-Eretz Yisra’el bi-stav 1982* [Here and There in the Land of Israel in the Fall of 1982].<sup>84</sup> Oz’s book is a collection of essays written from the famous novelist’s peripatetic conversations across Israel in the months after it became clear that Israel’s operation to clear south Lebanon of PLO militants – which Prime Minister Begin originally believed “would last only a couple of days and cause few casualties” – had become an open-ended war and occupation.<sup>85</sup>

In these essays, originally published in the Labor Party’s journal *Davar*, Oz immerses himself amongst the erstwhile marginalized communities (Mizrahim; ultra-Orthodox; far-right nationalists) who had help elect the right-wing Likud government in 1977, removing the Labor Alignment from Israel’s governing coalition for the first time since the state’s founding. Oz’s interlocutors in *Po V’Sham* continue to support Begin, his defense minister Ariel Sharon, and the war against the PLO, even as the largest street protests in Israel’s history assembled after the Sabra and Shatila massacres to demand Begin’s government resign.<sup>86</sup> As Uri Cohen commented, Oz’s canny title is explicit in

---

<sup>84</sup> Amos Oz, *In the Land of Israel*, tr. Maurie Goldberg-Bartura (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1983 [1982]).

<sup>85</sup> Shapira, *Israel*, 380-381. Israeli forces unilaterally withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000; cross-border clashes have continued since then, most notably in the 2006 war between Israel and the Lebanese Hizbullah militia.

<sup>86</sup> Superseded only by the peace rally at which Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated on November 4, 1995. During another protest against Begin, following the release of the 1983 Kahan Commission report which “leveled harsh criticism against the prime minister and recommended that [Ariel] Sharon be dismissed as defense minister,” a right-wing counter-demonstrators threw a grenade into a crowd of Peace Now marchers, killing Emil Grunzweig, who, like many of the anti-war protestors, was a veteran of Lebanon. “This was the first time that a Jew had been killed in the State of Israel by another Jew because of his political beliefs”: Shapira, *Israel*, 385-386.

locating its author's position in time and space.<sup>87</sup> Oz makes the conversations in the text – which expand to cover the most fundamental debates about the Jewish political return to statehood and Zion, as it were – inseparable from the specificity of the invasion of Lebanon and its consequences. Furthermore, he names the spatial politics of his nation's *here* and *there*: the celebrated, urbane Israeli novelist represents the Labor consensus (the hegemonic *center*, at least until that moment) reaching out to the ethnic, religious, and political *periphery* – out there, in the “development towns” and further afield, in the West Bank settlements – who hold an entirely different vision of the nation's history and purpose.<sup>88</sup> Oz's “here and there” may thus shed some light on the “uncertainty [that] remains” in Ravikovich's “here *or* there”, especially insofar as “Beheaded Heifer”, as mentioned, is found in the series of “Issues [or Debates – *Sugiyot*] in Contemporary Judaism”.

Thus “Beheaded Heifer” points outward toward the cycle's other poems that depict Israeli-Palestinian conflicts in a variety of locales, from the “outside” (the urban warfare of Beirut's Palestinian refugee camps) to the “interior,” in this scene of neighborhood violence in Hebron (at once one of Judaism's holiest cities and the bridgehead of Jewish settler extremism on the occupied West Bank).<sup>89</sup> Here or there? On what side of the national divides did this man live? Is a death in Hebron *here*, within the

---

<sup>87</sup> Cohen, seminar, Columbia University, May 12, 2005.

<sup>88</sup> “When you guys were on top,” one of Oz's interlocutors argues, “you hid us away in holes ... so the tourists wouldn't see us; so we wouldn't stain your image; so they'd think this was a white country. But that's all over now, because now we've come out of our holes. You still haven't figure out what hit you, have you? It's your arrogance that's hit you. What, the State of Israel comes from the papa of the [Labor Party] Alignment? Not from the Bible? Not from our sweat? Not from our backbreaking work? Not from our blood? Who built this country? [...] You guys, your time is past. Even after Begin you won't make a comeback. You won't make a comeback in another hundred years.” Oz, *In the Land of Israel*, 40-41.

<sup>89</sup> Below, I will discuss the poetics of a similar phrase in Darwish: “*huna aw huna*,” and Said's writing on the relationship between the “interior” (*a-dakhil*) and “exterior” (*al-kharij*) of occupied Palestine. See further: Edward Said and Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 40-41, 51-85.



Israeli national consensus, or *there*, beyond its fringes? Or does his death mark the end of one *here* and its displacement with a *there* – the remote, the distanced, the body whose proximity to the city demands a sacrificial disavowal of culpability? The question of responsibility, dismay, and revenge immediately points to larger questions about the particularly *Jewish* consequences of being *here* or *there*, dead or alive, at home in the land or outside of it, in exile.

The poem's penultimate stanza begins with a series of biblical and liturgical Hebrew phrases:

It is said, Suffering cleanseth sin,  
man is like dust in the wind,  
but who was that man  
lying there lonely,  
choking on his blood?

Again, readers are led to ask for an identification that the poem refuses to provide: "Suffering cleanseth sin," but *whose* suffering? *Whose* sin? The question "who was that man?" (*Mi ha-Ish?*) is a broken intertext from a famous set of verses from Psalm 34, which carry great importance in Jewish liturgy and are traditionally recited on the Sabbath and Festivals: "Who is the man who truly seeks life / Who loves days of seeing good? / Stop your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceitfully / Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it" (34:13-15). These verses equate the good life with ethical interpersonal behavior, whose ultimate end is the tireless pursuit of peace. The poem's divergent follow-up to *Mi ha-Ish* – the man's abandonment and death rattle – inverts the Psalm's life-seeking directives.

And what of the poetic persona? It seems she saw snapshots of the man's demise and the riot that followed, but, as with "Hovering", she admits that she is incapable of

inhabiting the victim's point of view, pointing the reader, instead, toward the unknowable final images witnessed by the murdered man: "What did he see / what did he hear / in the uproar that seethed / above him?" In place of speaking for the victim's vision, the Biblical intertext and quotations enable the poetic persona to portray what she did not witness: a community that intervenes to save an anonymous life, a community that "seeks peace and pursues it." Having refused to answer the question of what the dying man saw, the poem instead continues with a Biblical law that commands a different form of ethical sight: "If thou seest even thine enemy's ass / lying under its burden, / thou shalt surely help."<sup>90</sup> Together with Deuteronomy's laws on the anonymous corpse, Ravikovich draws upon Biblical precepts that demand obedience to a higher morality, one that supersedes the distinction between friend/enemy that lies at the heart of rivalries between individuals and communities.

The scene in "Beheaded Heifer" demonstrates the consequences of turning away from a body dying, where the failure to recognize the man indicts the (visible) association – the assignment of national identity – that led to the murder in the first place.<sup>91</sup> The poem asks one of the conflict's most essential questions: who are we seeing when we see a victim: a Jew or an Arab? And what are we not seeing when we let someone die? If suffering of the enemy's animal must be seen and alleviated, how much more so the bare humanity of the bleeding body? Even an anonymous corpse demands communal responsibility and sacrifice, one that overcomes the certainties of an individual's belonging to one group or another, here or there.

---

<sup>90</sup> Exodus 23:5.

<sup>91</sup> Szobel's reading also emphasizes the role of the witness, but focuses less on the spatial dimensions of political language: Szobel, "'Unveiling Injustice,'" 176-178.

In this manner, Ravikovich draws upon Biblical and rabbinic Hebrew notions of place in order to reconceive of Jewish national subjectivity. She does not examine the sources of that subjectivity in the western European traditions of the Enlightenment's subjects and popular sovereignty. While her depiction of Israeli violence is unremitting, she locates her critique within the tensions of Jewish discourses regarding the home(land) and its loss in exile. Her poetry must then also imagine how Palestinian exile becomes infused with these tensions. In *Mother with Child*, many of the poems continue to probe these issues through Ravikovich's engagement with a visionary poetics. She stages the visionary as the viewpoint that sees national sovereignty from both within and outside its canonical discourses. In "Free Associating",<sup>92</sup> for example, the lyrical subject shifts seamlessly from the Zionist romance with the land into scenes of violent oppression of the land's inhabitants:

Our storehouses are filled with grain<sup>93</sup> [...]  
The Song of Nature.  
And that Arab they beat to death.  
Actually broke his body with their blows.  
But not in Zikhron Ya'akov [...]  
those sleepy old towns of the Baron de Rothschild  
that blend so nicely into the landscape.

"Free Associating" highlights the disjunction between the values encoded into the same *topoi*, the scenes from the land and the "associations" that cannot keep them separate.

The poem concludes as it began, with Ravikovich paraphrasing the voices of the people, who (ironically, on a meta-poetic level) reject her capacity to speak for them.

What does she have to say?  
She's just looking for ways to suffer,  
to say a bad word.  
She's not one of us,

---

<sup>92</sup> Ravikovich 220-1.

<sup>93</sup> This references "a patriotic song from the 1950s, based on Proverbs 3:10" (Ravikovich 221).

she can't see what's good and beautiful in life.  
She won't see us the way we are.  
*Anu banu artza:*  
We Came to Build the Land.<sup>94</sup>

In the end, the people refuse to include what “she” sees in their own collective representation. Her “free associating” vision is pathologized, placing her outside the national community. The people insist on defining the Jewish-Zionist return to the land as a constructive project of self-representation. Yet this caricature of her – alienated, depressive, antisocial – in fact reinforces her position as the poet-prophet.<sup>95</sup> This poem, then, offers a key to Ravikovich’s self-conscious blurring of the discourses – and visions – conjured by the passage from exile to return.

## VII. The Hebrew Home & Palestinian Exile

“The Captors Require a Song” is the final poem in *Mother with Child*. The title is another allusion to Psalm 137,<sup>96</sup> whose use in “You Can’t Kill a Baby Twice” was discussed above. The poem begins with an epigraph from a poem by Leah Goldberg (one of the great Hebrew poets of the generation prior to Ravikovich) which also alludes to Psalm 137: “How shall we sing of the songs of Zion / when we as yet hear not?”<sup>97</sup> Then Ravikovich’s poem begins in earnest: “Sing us one of the songs of Zion / for an ear that hears not.” While the first line parrots the Babylonian captors, the second line alludes to Isaiah 6:10.<sup>98</sup> As noted above, in Jewish liturgy, a verse from this vision of Isaiah is

---

<sup>94</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld note that this is an allusion to a familiar “pre-State pioneer song”.

<sup>95</sup> Cohen, *Hisardut*, 177-190.

<sup>96</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>97</sup> Ravikovich 227-8. Cf. Goldberg, “From the Songs of Zion.”

<sup>98</sup> Bloch and Kronfeld quote Isaiah 6:9-10, but my reading relates to the prophet’s entire vision in Isaiah 6. The following excerpt merely situates the line quoted by Ravikovich:

And He said, “Go, say to that people:

recited together with a verse from Ezekiel’s vision in the *Qedushah*, the paramount devotional moment of public prayer.<sup>99</sup> And yet that moment of revelatory sanctity immediately leads to the burden of prophetic representation, in Isaiah 6:5. The prophet bemoans the contradiction between the sacred status of the vision and the degraded status of the visionary, who is corrupted by his verbal association with the people to whom he must prophesy: “I am a man of unclean lips / And I live among a people / Of unclean lips; / Yet my own eyes have beheld / The King LORD of Hosts.” Once again, Ravikovich turns to the most privileged text available in Jewish prophetic literature, and elaborates its positioning of the seer as a critic of the people through the distinction between sensory apprehension and covenantal meaning. It may be noteworthy that in the conclusion to Isaiah’s vision, collective repentance – which God foreswore earlier in the chapter, in the verse Ravikovich brought into her poem – is offered as a means of redemption *only after* the fulfillment of the prophecies of exile.<sup>100</sup>

Meanwhile, “The Captors Require a Song” continues: “Sing us some insider songs / that the soul will recoil from singing / beyond the innermost circle / of the

---

‘Hear, indeed, but do not understand;  
See, indeed, but do not grasp.’  
Dull that people’s mind,  
Stop its ears,  
And seal its eyes—  
Lest, seeing with eyes  
And hearing with its ears,  
It also grasp with its mind,  
And repent and save itself.” (Isaiah 6:8-10)

<sup>99</sup> See Notes 23, 55.

<sup>100</sup> Isaiah 6:11-13:

I asked, “How long, my Lord?” And He replied:  
“Till towns lie waste without inhabitants  
And houses without people,  
And the ground lies waste and desolate—  
For the LORD will banish the population—  
And deserted sites are many  
In the midst of the land.

But while a tenth part remains in it, it shall repent...”

Home.” The poem as a whole makes clear that the captors are Israelis, the captives Palestinian, while the richly allusive language continues to pull in additional directions, toward divergent registers. In the lines above, “The Home” (*ha-Bayit*) seems to suggest a space so private and intimate that its violation makes the soul “recoil.” Yet in other register, *ha-Bayit* is a common euphemism for the Jerusalem Temple, with its national connotations (its first destruction occasioning the exiles recounted in Psalm 137) and mystic resonances (as the sacred space in which covenantal Hebrew worship opens a space for the wholly Other, the *Shekhinah* or “Divine Presence,” sustaining our finite, material world in its connection to the Infinite).<sup>101</sup>

And perhaps more than Ravikovich could anticipate, the polyvalent term also presages the nationalist-religious turn in Israeli politics, where the two far-right-wing parties reveal their deep anxiety about belonging with the insistent use of the noun *Bayit* in their party names (*Yisra’el Beiteinu* and *ha-Bayit ha-Yehudi*).<sup>102</sup> All three of these meanings – the private Palestinian home; the Judaic “house of God”; Israeli nationalist militancy – weave in and out through the remainder of the poem, swinging between the particularistic to universal, the historical and the contemporary.

A binary opposition between Self and Other comes forth in the lines, “We’ve got a brute urge to inflict pain, / to torment. / For what are we without the cup of your sorrows? / A broken potsherd. / A broken potsherd too the loathing in your throat.” At first glance, the message is a clear exposition of the Schmitt-like politics underpinning all

---

<sup>101</sup> Miron, *The Prophetic Mode*, 9-10.

<sup>102</sup> See note 73, above. The two parties’ names translate to “Israel is our Home” and “The Jewish Home.” They have attained levels of parliamentary power that would have unimaginable when Ravikovich died in 2005 and (in different formats) they were among the smallest in the Knesset. As of this writing, their leaders hold the Defense and Education ministries; they have scored legislative victories amending Israel’s Basic Law; and in the Knesset and media, their members regularly engage in racist diatribes that, as recently as a decade ago, were considered grounds for prosecution.

national conflict.<sup>103</sup> The Palestinian Other's suffering, anger, and will to vengeance is precisely what the (Israeli) subject would be exposed to without power. In other words, without the Palestinian's agony (*y'gonkhem*), the Israeli would be made into the Jews of Psalm 137, taunted to sing an intimate song of the home from which they have been dispossessed. But yet again, Ravikovich's layered choice of words suggests a deeper stratum of meaning. The "broken potsherd" image<sup>104</sup> (*heres nishbar*) appears in the solemn medieval prayer *Unetaneh Tokef* that is recited on Yom Kippur, and which famously depicts God judging the fates of all the living ("who shall live and who shall die..."). The prayer concludes with a meditation on human mortality, quoting a series of Biblical phrases: "Man is likened to a broken potsherd ... like dust in the wind ..."<sup>105</sup> The latter is the source for the line in "Beheaded Heifer" that leads the poet to inquire about the bloodied man, *Mi ha-ish?* "who was that man?" In short, the frailty of human life lies beneath the Israeli-Palestinian power dynamics and its violent conflict. "A broken potsherd" is a Palestinian detainee, the fear of a Jew without power, a body bereft of nation and homeland. But it is also the urge by the powerless to exact revenge, the Jew's will to become the Babylonian – a doomed venture, as Psalm 137 ends with a horrific and brutal call for retribution directed against the conquerors.

Yet beyond all of these, in its liturgical source, the broken potsherd is a sinful mortal entreating for mercy before the throne of Divine judgment. These are the stakes of

---

<sup>103</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 35: "For only in real combat is revealed the most extreme consequence of the political grouping of friend and enemy. From this most extreme possibility human life derives its specifically political tension."

<sup>104</sup> The "potsherd," alone, appears in the final lines of "Hovering at a Low Altitude", when the girl's "palate is dry as a potsherd, / when a hard hand grasps her hair, gripping her / without a shred of pity."

<sup>105</sup> These two particular phrases come from Jeremiah 19 and Isaiah 5:24. A bilingual text of the prayer may be found at: "Unetaneh Tokef," Sefaria, accessed September 20, 2018. [https://www.sefaria.org/Unetaneh\\_Tokef?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Unetaneh_Tokef?lang=bi)

the torture scene Ravikovich creates. The uncommon verb [*le'anot*] that she uses for “to torment” appears in the terse Biblical command for the observance of the Yom Kippur: “and you shall afflict yourselves” [*ve-’initem et nafshoteykhem*].<sup>106</sup> The Jewish self-affliction, in this poem, is to torture another, though not truly an Other because the creation of exile amongst the Palestinians becomes a form of masochism against the Jewish Self. Rather than effecting atonement, such an *’inui* would bring down the Divine punishments reserved for Babylon and Rome upon the Jews; or, in a recursive movement, would place contemporary Israelis in the position of the Israelites who did not heed the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and were thereby deprived of revelation – which, in theological terms, is the deeper cost of exile. Balanced on the Hebrew source of the Atonement ritual, the torture scene becomes of matter of life and death on the personal, national, and Jewish-existential planes.

Kronfeld has suggested that this poem a meta-poetic answer to Leah Goldberg and Isaiah: “*How (eykh)*... how you can listen, if we haven’t yet heard?” And what have we not heard? What prophecy has reached the people who the prophet would “stop its ears and seal its eyes”? There is a poetics of estrangement in the textual importation of Diasporic and Palestinian homelessness into the Israeli homeland. But this is not about liquidating the Hebrew/Israeli content from the space; and the Diasporic does not offer the exclusive, authentic option for exilic Jewish writing. Rather, Ravikovich’s Hebrew poetry of exile is the second half of a broken verse, the larger text out of which to re-evaluate Israeli Hebrew’s relationship to the people of the land.

---

<sup>106</sup> Leviticus 23:26. Alternatively, “You shall afflict your own souls.” This mysterious term is the source for the Mishnaic prohibitions (Yoma 8:1) for Yom Kippur, which more familiarly include abstaining from food, drink, sex, washing, etc.



## Appendix 1: Psalm 137

- [1] By the rivers of Babylon,  
there we sat down,  
and also wept,  
when we remembered Zion.
- [2] There on the poplars  
we hung up our lyres,  
[3] for our captors asked us there for songs,  
our tormentors, for amusement,  
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”
- [4] How can we sing a song of the LORD  
on foreign soil?
- [5] If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand forget its strength;  
[6] let my tongue cleave to my palate,  
if I cease to think of you,  
if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory  
even at my happiest hour.
- [7] Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites  
the day of Jerusalem’s fall;  
how they cried, “strip her, strip her  
to her very foundations!”
- [8] Fair Babylon, you predator,  
a blessing on him who repays you in kind  
what you have inflicted on us;  
[9] a blessing on him who seizes your babies  
and dashes them against the rocks!

## VIII. Mahmoud Darwish: Poet of Exilic Palestine

Throughout an extensive and dynamic career, Mahmoud Darwish’s work came to be viewed as synonymous not only with the Palestinian cause, but also with the experience and poetic representation of exile. Indeed, the largest English collection of critical essays on his legacy is entitled *Exile’s Poet*. Darwish’s poetry presents unique questions on the mobility of exile as a trope, such as where and when Palestinian figures

of exile come into view? As he looked in and out of modern Palestine, the question of visibility remained central to his poetics: which figures appear (in the homeland), and who can see them? In whose language and discourse does belonging to the land take place? These questions led Darwish to continually revise and reformulate the sense of “home” in his poetry.

Across his oeuvre, home appears as a place on earth from which to assert political claims, a mobile literary space, and the fluid yet searing site of individual and collective memory. Indeed, Darwish never ceased to explore the variety of possibilities that his home might express along a dynamic spectrum, from the literal homeland of Palestine to the figurative home(s) of his poetry. At times, Darwish was accused of making precisely the opposite movement as Ravikovich: from the clear symbolism and romanticist nationalism of his “resistance poetry” to an obscure late style that forfeits political engagement for allusive, even cryptic aestheticism. And yet all of his experiments derived from his period as the “Resistance Poet,” when Darwish gave voice to a romantic-nationalist rhetoric that confronted the Israeli occupation of Palestine with claims of originary belonging to the land. In “Identity Card” (1964), “A Lover from Palestine” (1966), and “Passport” (1970), Darwish’s poetic images offer a clear symbolic repertoire for the lyrical origins of Palestine, in the primordial time of the land that regenerates its people as organically as its trees, birds, crops, and vegetables. Against the modern Israeli military and bureaucratic apparatus designed to separate Palestinians from their homes, the poetic persona naturalizes his ability to speak on behalf of the land and

its people, emphasizing genealogy and natural imagery.<sup>107</sup> The speaker's confrontational claims to belonging call attention to the signifying powers of the written word, the poetic image, and representations of vision as such. Through Marcel Khelifé's composition, "Passport" also became an anthem for the Palestinian cause in the Arab world, further accentuating the collective dimension of Darwish's poetry as legendary song.

In these early works, the meaning of the Jews' presence in Palestine/Israel is precisely that they are "out of place," which is to say, they have violated the pure time of the land's eternal present as the possession of the Palestinian nation. In fact, the lyrical status of time is crucial for understanding to the poetic image of Palestine (and who belongs in that image). With notable exceptions (such as the "Rita" poems), the Jewish Other in these early poems is always already an outsider, an interruption in the single, transhistorical moment of the land. Darwish's later poetry, however, marks a considerable departure from the literal subject matter and the nationalist discourse of his earlier work. Through self-conscious references to themes and motifs from his earlier poetry, and the larger nationalist rhetoric in which it takes part, however, Darwish develops his ongoing meta-poetic interest in the signifying potentials of text, image, and song. Critic Najat Rahman identifies the period following Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon as a turning point: Rahman writes that his work in this period

responds to nationalist demarcations of collective identity that have failed and that have brought on the critical situations of the present ... exile from the physical home, exile from the physical refuge, and exile in the poetic condition. Darwish had to address the complexity of the experience of the

---

<sup>107</sup> Faisal Darraj, "Transformations in the Image of Palestine in the Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish," tr. Hala Khamis Nassar and Areeg Ibrahim, in *Exile's Poet*, 59-64.

siege of Beirut in 1982 that resulted in another displacement of the

Palestinians: not from their original home but from their place of refuge.<sup>108</sup>

When sectarian fighting again brought heavy civilian casualties to Beirut's Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, in the spring of 1985, Darwish wrote: "In which direction is the Palestinian expected to turn now to await a new massacre?"<sup>109</sup> The ongoing, repeated destruction of Palestinians' literal homes (and even places of refuge) necessarily challenges the imagined time of the land that was so integral to Darwish's earlier poetics.

A particularly dramatic example of this occurs in "The Earth Is Closing on Us", from *Ward 'āqall* [Fewer Roses], a 1986 collection. The poet evokes eschatological time as he speaks of "the last passage," "the last of us," "the last defence," and "this last space."<sup>110</sup>

Where should we go after the last frontiers? Where should the birds fly  
after the last sky?  
Where should the plants sleep after the last breath of air?

There is a temporal paradox to the echoing phrase "after the last..." (if something is "the last," what could come after it?). The semantic pressure of this paradox, which the poet also imagines as spatial (the last "passage" *al-mamarr*, "space" *al-fiDaa'*, "border" *al-hudood*), forces the language to call for a fundamental reconsideration of the time and space wherein the poetic image may be seen. Are we in modernity or the apocalypse? Palestine, 1948, or Lebanon, 1982?

---

<sup>108</sup> Najat Rahman, "Threatened Longing and Perpetual Search: The Writing of Home in the Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish," in *Exile's Poet*, 41.

<sup>109</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, "The Madness of Being a Palestinian," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15, no. 1 (Autumn, 1985): 138-141.

<sup>110</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, in *Victims of a Map*, 12-13.

The poem concludes, “We will die here. Here in the last passage. Here or here our blood will plant its olive tree.”<sup>111</sup> This offers a radical revision of the familiar image of the olive tree as the symbol of Palestine, and perhaps more potently, of the life-giving compensation for martyrs’ shed blood. In this poem, we see only a monstrous orgy of killing that leads to apocalypse. The “or” that separates the repetition of “here” erodes the redemptive determinacy of the place where “our blood will plant its olive tree.” In this final time, when “we” have reached the final iteration of every symbol, the repetition ironizes the importance of the particular site of bloodshed. Whether the Nakba of Palestine in 1948, Black September in Jordan in 1970, or the destruction of Beirut in 1982, “here or here,” no “here” offers the poet a home, for even the land itself squeezes the limbs off the people’s bodies as it pushes them toward the end.

And yet there is also a strange synchronicity to this homeless end time: “The Earth is Closing in On Us” was published the same year as Ravikovich’s “Blood Heifer”, with its unidentifiable corpse, a victim outside of the symbolic order, dying “here or there.” Both texts question whether poetry can rewrite the distribution of power and belonging (to the land) through the signifying force of words and their alignment with the gaze of certain subjects – or their turning away from the sight of others. Also in 1986, Edward Said adapted a line from “The Earth is Closing in On Us” as the title and epigraph to *After the Last Sky*, a hybrid collaboration with the photographer Jean Mohr that interrogates the relationship between image and text, posing questions on the status of the poetic image (as the visions of the lyrical or, in Mohr’s case, photographic) subject.

---

<sup>111</sup> Darwish, *al-Dīwān: al-‘i‘amāl al-Jadīda*, Vol. 3 (Beirut: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 2004), 115-116. I have chosen to translate *huna aw huna* as “Here or here”, though *aw* can function as a kind of joint “and/or.”

## IX. Palestinian Vision

“The Earth Is Closing on Us,” like “Passport” and, as we shall see, *Eleven Planets*, deals explicitly with the question of vision in poetry. The failure to imagine the land in terms of a pure, redemptive cycle of time forces the poet to revisit the very status of the image and the word – the capacity of vision and the feasibility of poetry in relation to a home whose “endings ... do not quite coincide with the end”, as Nouri Gana has written.<sup>112</sup> As a witness to historical and cultural memory, the speaker interrogates his own capacity to produce the poetic image, taking us along a spectrum poised between extremes of mutability: from the “dead image” of hackneyed symbolism, through devastated fantasy, to the near impossibility of giving voice to actual, sensory vision.

I wish we were pictures on the rocks of our dreams to carry  
As mirrors. We saw the faces of those to be killed by the last of us in the  
last defence of the soul.  
We cried over their children’s feast. We saw the faces of those who will  
throw our children  
Out of the windows of the last space. Our star will hang up mirrors.

Elsewhere, the speaker wishes (“...*laituna*”) that (the symbolic *verbal image* of) the land could be the people’s compassionate mother, and that the people could grow out of her in a life cycle that promises continual rebirth. The longing to become “pictures” functions similarly: if only our image appeared constant as stone; if only our dreams could adhere to the rocks like an image to film; if only our dreams were projected onto the mirror of mimesis, instead of our reality. But the descent into the horror of mutual killing in the “end times” alters the very language of poetic expression.

---

<sup>112</sup> Nouri Gana, “War, Poetry, Mourning: Darwish, Adonis, Iraq.” *Public Culture* 22, No. 1 (2010): 40.

The mirrors in these lines are significant. They offer the possibility for the collective self's constitution through its own representation. But self-recognition remains impossible in an apocalyptic scene of mutual killing. The only recognition that takes place in the poem consists in the act of murder. Violence (the Self and the Other killing one another) comes to substitute for the work of signification. This precludes the possibility of even the Self's proper representation.

In *After the Last Sky*, Said opens up Darwish's somewhat cryptic poem by discussing the representational forms that have mediated Palestinian realities to others. Referring to the breakthrough in Palestinian visibility in the sixties and seventies, he wrote: "Too many of us feel that we have gained representation and media visibility at an exorbitant cost. We became known as hijackers and terrorists".<sup>113</sup> Violence, as the tactic of resistance, subsumed all other forms of representation: listing Darwish above all, he observes that

with the exception of a handful of literary works ... the concrete human detail of Palestinian existence was sacrificed to the big general ideas. I have long believed, for instance, that our insistence on 'armed struggle' ... played right into the hands of Israel, which with its superior propaganda apparatus turned everything we did against its occupation ... into 'terrorism.'<sup>114</sup>

I would elaborate this further: Israel's semantic representation (or substitution) of "terrorist violence" for "Palestinian" is required by its own self-definition. Its nationalist historiography and ethos justifies inhabitation in the land by virtue of – and as a

---

<sup>113</sup> Said, *After the Last Sky*, 122

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-7

militarized response to – the threat of violence, displacement, and erasure (in this case, of Jews). In this representational logic, Israel does not fight against the “Palestinians” (a signifier severed from a signified), but against a tactic. “Terrorism” does not signify a distinct population (with whom one could empathize). “Terrorism” signifies only the mutilated (Israeli) Self – the victim of terrorism whose interrupted life demands a further reinscription of the Israeli nation as an unfinished project of self-constitution through “self-defense.” Every victim is thus a signpost toward a victimized (and therefore incomplete) Self; and a sign of more violence yet to come.

To Palestinians, as Said observes, Israelis are likewise an icon of violence: “Israel means less to me as a real place than as a force whose imponderable power and purpose weaves disparity and contradiction into a figure in the carpet.”<sup>115</sup> This disfigurement forces Palestinians to “read ourselves against another people’s pattern, but since it is not ours – even though we are its designated enemy – we emerge as its effects, its errata, its counternarratives. Whenever we try to narrate ourselves, we appear as a dislocation in *their* discourse.”<sup>116</sup> Neither nation can represent itself through any sense apart from conflict. Alongside Darwish’s mirrors, Said concludes that Palestinians cannot see ourselves any longer the way we once did, when we caught glimpses of ourselves as a reflection, if not an imitation, of earlier, successful resistance movements. ... We have not fully assessed the complex and thoroughly mixed circumstances that bind us together as a people. There has not been time.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 124.



The compression of time brings us back to the paradox of Darwish's repetition of the phrase "After the last..." On the one hand, Jewish nationalism confronts the Palestinian subject – as in Darwish's early poem "Identity Card" – as a force of militarized, triumphant modernity. And yet, Jewish nationalism has also articulated itself as a return to origins, whether ethno-national or theological, a reclamation of (long) past historical glories (the figure of the "New Jew" as an ancient Hebrew or Canaanite). That this "return" caused another collective displacement demonstrates the historically distorting effects when victims of European hegemony adapt European romanticist-nationalist discourse.<sup>118</sup> In his late poetics, Darwish plays with the constitution of Israel and Palestine as "late" occurrences of the national moment (modernity) by peoples peripheral to Europe.

The power of the written word transforms from a source of identity into ephemerality: "We will write our names with scarlet steam. / We will cut off the hand of the song to be finished by our flesh." Lyric is interrupted; its vitality takes on a new form, as the violence perpetrated upon the body. The implication of this line varies depending on the material context of *al-nashīd*, "the song" (or "the lyric"). A focus on the textuality implied by these two lines evokes Darwish's formal practice in *Memory for Forgetfulness*, his long prose-poetry account of the siege of Beirut. In Ibrahim Muhawi's introduction to his English translation of that work, he comments upon the narrator's frantic search for a newspaper while his apartment building is being shelled.

---

<sup>118</sup> During the "War of the Camps" in Beirut in 1985, between Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, and Druze factions, Darwish wrote: "the former victims who learned from their own murderer nothing but reckless mimicry, just as that murderer mimicked his own murderer in the past. [...] And here come the murderers, the comrades-in-arms of yesterday; here they strut, mimicking the earlier murderers, their murderers, the Israelis. Why does a victim so often mimic his murderer?" Darwish, "The Madness of Being a Palestinian," 138, 141.

“Why am I looking for the paper when buildings are falling in all directions? Is that not writing enough?” In this ironic exchange of roles, the text becomes the world, and the world, the text. The page here is equated with the landscape and becomes the mimetic space where negation is negated and forgetfulness is to be forgotten by means of writing. Thus the print medium also acts as a metaphor, the printed page as an icon of the action, as if the exploding shell burst into fragments of discourse on the page, just as the actual shell reconfigures the city’s landscape.<sup>119</sup>

The passage above enables us to read the line “We will cut off the hand of the song to be finished by our flesh” in a variety of ways. In one sense, it calls attention to the mutability of text, inasmuch as the poem (and the song) will be cut off by the body’s impending murder or death. Alternatively, the text could become every bit as vital as the body, when the flesh takes on the task of completing the song. The orality/aurality of *al-nashīd*, the song, requires the body’s memory. In *Eleven Planets* (1992), these dual movements through song and body, and image in text, shape the central figure of al-Andalus. As Said pointed out, the “Eleven Planets” of the title allude to the prophetic dreams of Joseph in the Bible and Qur’an. Like Joseph, the lyrical subject is implicitly “endowed with the divine power of prophecy”, and like Joseph, “the narrator of Darwish’s *qasida* assumes both the privileges and the dangers of seeing what others cannot.”<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> Muhawi, “Introduction,” in *Memory for Forgetfulness*, xxii.

<sup>120</sup> Said, “On Mahmoud Darwish,” 114.

This collection served as the basis for the essay that came to Said's application of Theodor Adorno's term, "late style," to Darwish's poetics. Said saw *Eleven Planets* as a development through and beyond "The Earth is Closing on Us":

Since Darwish left Beirut in 1982, one of the main topoi in his verse is not just the place or time of ending (for which the various Palestinian exoduses are an all too persistent reference) but what happens *after* the ending, what it is like to live past one's time and place, how survival after the aftermath becomes an esoteric and certainly an exotic situation for the poet and his people.<sup>121</sup>

The intertitle of the first series in *Eleven Planets* is actually an elaboration of the *diwan*'s title: " 'āhad 'ashar kawkaban 'ala 'ākhir al-mashhadi al-āandalusī" [Eleven Planets over the Last Andalusian Scene]. As Said and other critics have argued, these poems were occasioned both by the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1492, and "as an allegory and critique" of Palestinian capitulation to Israel during the Madrid and Oslo peace negotiations, leading to "a terrible nadir of dispossession."<sup>122</sup>

This collection's first series consists of eleven poems, in which Darwish elaborates upon his increasingly complex treatment of time, working with a number of formulations that offer neither a linear nor synoptic view of Andalusia's history. It offers a profound contemplation of war, ethnic cleansing, exile, and the conditions determining the possibility or impossibility of poetry, not only

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 114.

in the Arab world but also in a worldwide historical context of ancient and constellating or recursive barbarisms...<sup>123</sup>

It is difficult, if not impossible, to outline and discern a single speaker in each poem. It may be more accurate to suggest that the poems move through a polyvocal web of speakers, rather than to collapse each use of the first person into a single figure. The poems address the cycles of history through different gestures: at times, Andalusia's conquest evokes a sense of betrayal by history; elsewhere, the poems articulate the departure of the "we" and their replacement by the conquerors as an ambiguous "changing of the guard," so to speak, in a historical sweep that is at once epic and indifferent. The speakers relate to the figures of the conquerors (the Spanish Catholics of the Reconquista, if we take the historical metaphor at face value) through a variety of postures: resentment, sarcasm, and anger, of course, but also ambivalence, projection, and amused interest. Tracing these positions is crucial for mapping the poems' sense of time, in history and memory; through these, furthermore, a new sense of home and belonging to the land emerges, illustrating the reinvented contours of Darwish's later poetics.

The title of the series' first poem, "On the last evening on this land" [*fī al-masā' al-'ākhīr 'ala hadhī al-'ārḍ*],<sup>124</sup> combines lines from two poems in *Fewer Roses*, "The Land is Closing on Us" and "On This Land." This calls our attention to the distinct concerns of these two poems, the first of which, as discussed above, takes up the finality of endtimes to mercilessly undermine the nationalist conception of home and belonging, while the second expresses this romantic conception (a direct identification of the poet

---

<sup>123</sup> Gana, "War, Poetry, Mourning," 46-47.

<sup>124</sup> Darwish, *Ahad 'ashar kowkaban* (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1992), 9.

who belongs to the land *as Palestine*) without irony.<sup>125</sup> Thus from the outset, this *diwan* announces its intertextual relation with Darwish's previous work, while further developing his interest in the time and history of the home. Darwish does not, as he is often read, merely replace a timeless nationalist temporality with a forgotten multicultural history.<sup>126</sup> Rather, he fractures the poetic structures of representation that allow for personal and national identification.

The titular phrase "on the last evening" occurs twice more in the poem, each time resuming the poet's speech after ellipses; we also read of the last *ādhān*, the Muslim call to prayer. This emphasis on the prodigious stakes of time bears an indelible relation to "the invaders" whom the speaker sarcastically invites into his and his people's home to enjoy its domestic pleasures after "the long siege". Yet there is more to the speaker's relationship with the invaders than either sardonic resentment or exaggerated defeatism. The impending invasion and flight at once condenses and expands historical time:

On the last evening  
 we bid farewell to nothing  
 we've no time to finish,  
 everything's left as it is,  
 places change dreams the way they  
 change cast of characters.<sup>127</sup>

The expedited time of departure evokes both the Palestinian flight during the Nakba and the Jewish story of the Exodus from Egypt, when the children of Israel were instructed to

---

<sup>125</sup> " 'Ala hadhihi al-ārd' [On This Land], *al-Dīwān*, Vol. 3, 111-112. Though formally quite distinct from the declamatory "Identity Card", there is a figural continuity between that earlier poem and this three "stanza" prose-poem. Both texts set up an opposition between "invaders" and "tyrants" on the one hand, and the vast variety of human experience on the other. "On This Land" then explicitly names the immutable temporality of the land through the signifier of Palestine: "It was named Palestine. Then its name became Palestine. My Lady: I deserve, because you are my Lady, I deserve life." Thus the speaker professes his fealty – through identification – to the land *as Palestine* in a manner that vitalizes both himself and the eternal time to which his figuration points and upon which it depends.

<sup>126</sup> See, for example, Rahman, "Threatened Longing," 49.

<sup>127</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, *The Adam of Two Edens: Poems*, eds. Munir Akash and Daniel Moore (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 149.

make such haste that they would not have time for their dough to rise. Such layered references already pull multiple directions. As a Palestinian poet, the gesture to the Nakba alludes to the Self's personal and national dispossession. The Exodus, paradoxically, conjures up the themes of liberation and return, as well as the Jewish people's journey to the land of Israel, which, if the land of this poem connotes present-day Palestine, would allude to an organizing national myth for the invader, the (Jewish) Other.<sup>128</sup>

These contradictory movements complicate the temptation to read the poems' historical/epic Andalusia as a clear metonymy for the author's historical/literal Palestine. In *Eleven Planets*, Andalusia does not merely serve as an historical analogue, nor could Palestine appear as a flat referent. In fact, Darwish had already begun to penetrate, deconstruct and even reconfigure the Palestinian tragedy's lyrical and symbolic vocabulary. Najat Rahman writes that, after 1982,

Darwish identifies a long literary heritage that not only speaks of dispossession and effacement, but also suggests that those very predicaments are historically enacted through nationalist and religious readings of inherited stories."<sup>129</sup>

In this light, the figure of Andalusia offers more than a quintessential negative exemplar of unfulfilled Arab or Palestinian national claims. In both Andalusia and Spain, military conquest provided the means to achieve ethnic or religious sovereignty. Such means remain open to any displaced group's dream of sovereignty, an inversion

---

<sup>128</sup> This parallel is further developed in "On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea," a poem elsewhere in the collection. See: Darwish, *Adam of Two Edens*, 71-81; *Ahad 'ashar kowkaban*, 53-62. See further: Angelika Neuwirth, "Hebrew Bible and Arabic Poetry: Mahmoud Darwish's Palestine—From Paradise Lost to a Homeland Made of Words," in *Exile's Poet*, 167-190.

<sup>129</sup> Rahman, "Threatened Longing," 42.

(imagined as a correction) that upholds the violent rule of conquest through the imaginary of return: hence, the *Re-conquista*, to say nothing of Zionism or even militant Palestinian nationalism. Instead, *Eleven Planets* articulates the unshakeable discontinuity between the grand historical sweep of conquest and sovereignty against the personal experience of losing one's home:

On our last evening in this land  
we tear our days down from the trellises,  
tally the ribs we carry away with us  
and the ribs we leave behind.  
[...]  
places change dreams the way they  
*change casts of characters*".<sup>130</sup>

The poems' mythical, historical, and personal temporalities of home – in its possession and in its loss – destabilize the univocal attachments through which Darwish's earlier, nationalist temporality imagined the poet's immutable genealogy that fuses blood and soil. Without in any way minimizing the pain of invasion and displacement, and in fact through a sensitive excavation of its most private grievances, Darwish begins to unspool the opposition between the poem's imminently exiled Self and the conquering Other. The last two lines of the selection above, more literally translated, would read: "and the place exchanges *our* dreams and exchanges *its* visitors" (or "guests") [*fa-al-makān yubadilu āhlāmna / wa-yubadilu zuwārihi*]. This line sutures the collective self's most private possession, "our dreams", with the subtle implication that, at the apotheosis of violent leavetaking, even the conquerors are mere guests, and the *place* possesses *them* ("its visitors"). In the exchange between eras, the personal and national Self cannot possess

---

<sup>130</sup> Darwish, *Adam of Two Edens*, 149

the place through continuity with the inheritance of conquest, but rather through the interruptions of time in the work of memory.

Rahman identifies Andalusia as a literary topos where, through Darwish's "attempt to reconstitute the trope of home differently from its inherited configurations, he recalls moments of interruption in his heritage that grant new possibilities of thinking about home."<sup>131</sup> In much of Darwish's oeuvre, there is an analogy between Palestinians as Andalusí Muslims (and Jews as Spanish Conquistadors). Yet in *Eleven Planets* this correspondence breaks down amidst the shifting series of speakers that are impossible to consistently identify with any one subject position: historical, allegorical, or otherwise.

Conquerors come, conquerors go...

It's getting hard to remember my face in the mirrors.  
Be memory for me  
so I can see what I've lost. [...]

Time turns around in vain to save my  
past from a moment that gives birth  
to the history of my exile  
in others and in myself. [...]

Conquerors come, conquerors go...  
heading south as nations decompose  
on the compost of change.

I know who I was yesterday,  
but who will I be tomorrow  
under the Atlantic flags of Columbus?<sup>132</sup>

The individual and historical peoples who inhabit the space change place in the movement of time, specifically through the representational work of mirrors and writing.

In Darwish's work on Andalusia, Rahman writes: "Home is no longer constituted by a

---

<sup>131</sup> Rahman, "Threatened Longing," 42.

<sup>132</sup> Darwish, *Adam of Two Edens*, 163



land or people but by the possibility of a poetic gathering of voices.” In her reading, the Self’s exile, multiplication of voice, and perpetual movement through time are not only historical references, but also essential elements of Darwish’s post-1982 poetics.

Insofar as one’s home makes itself present, in language, by displacing, excluding, and thus silencing others, Darwish refocuses the search for the absent home not through a compensatory reconstitution of loss (with the possessive language of nationalism), but rather by embracing poetry’s sensory and semiotic displacements: of images with words; of the inheritance of land with the malleability of memory.

Enter our mirrors so we can vacate the premises  
completely!

Later we’ll look up what was recorded in our history  
about yours in faraway lands

Then we’ll ask ourselves,  
“*Was Andalusia*  
*here or there? On earth,*  
*or only in poems?*”<sup>133</sup>

The call to “enter our mirrors” invites the invaders into the representational space through which identity is constituted. We can imagine this movement taking place on a visual level, as the displacement of one gazing subject by another who stands before the mirror. In the next line, the poem continues to chart this elliptical substitution in the reverse direction, performed by the displacement of (the Other’s) memory (*tā’rīkhukum*) into the possessive realm of (the Self’s) language: the collective speakers’ history (*tā’rīkhukuna*).<sup>134</sup> Thus the poem concludes with the impossibility of concretizing Andalusia’s location, “here or there? On earth, / or only in poems?” The speakers express

---

<sup>133</sup> Darwish, *Adam of Two Edens*, 150

<sup>134</sup> The Arabic really captures the circularity in the linguistically possessive aspect of history: *sanabḥath ‘amā / kāna tā’rīkhunā ḥawal tā’rīkhukum...*

the poem's organizing paradox: possession of the home must take place in the realm of representation – the mirror, the history book, the poem – and yet representation itself acts through displacement and dispossession. This poem displaces the space of Palestine considerably: first, to a mythical version of medieval Andalusia, and then to the final question of Andalusia's mobile location, between the world and the text.

In Rahman's reading, the preservation of the home in poetry and the ability to keep the verbal record of history open offers hope to the exile; and yet poetry that mourns the physical, experiential loss of the home doubles the loss through the absencing work of language.<sup>135</sup> The foreclosing of representational possibilities by heritage, history, and the political exigencies of present conditions threaten poetic expressions of desire for a home. Yet through the visionary dimension of *Eleven Planets*, Darwish responds to these threats by opening up the poetic voice itself to the forces that would otherwise seal it shut: to the visions that elude verbal articulation, and through open engagement with figures otherwise distanced by the elliptical, adversarial histories of conquest and exile. Thus, Darwish's Andalusia unravels the very oppositions set in place by the possessive work of language (which absents the Other): "In every poet there is an Andalus. Otherwise how do we interpret the sadness of poetry and its thrust into two contradictory directions: the past and the future?"<sup>136</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> Rahman, "Threatened Longing," 46-48.

<sup>136</sup> Darwish, qtd. in *Ibid.*, 49.

## Selected Bibliography

- Abu-Lughod, Lila and Ahmad H. Sa'di, editors. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Alterman, Nathan. "Al Z'ot." In "*Al Tagidu Be-Gath*": *ha-Nakba ha-Falastinit ba-Shirah ha-Ivrit 1948-1958*. Edited by Hannan Hever, 68–69. Tel Aviv: Sedek, 2010.
- . "Milhemet 'Arim." In "*Al Tagidu Be-Gath*": *ha-Nakba ha-Falastinit ba-Shirah ha-Ivrit 1948-1958*. Edited by Hannan Hever, 160–71. Tel Aviv: Sedek, 2010.
- Apter, Emily. *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. New York: Verso, 2013.
- . "Global Translatio: The 'Invention' of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933." *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 253–81.
- . *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Arendt, Hannah. "Introduction: Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, by Walter Benjamin, 1–58. Edited by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- . *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harvest Book, 1976.
- Aschheim, Steven E. *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982.
- Auerbach, Erich. "Figura" (1944), in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, 11–76. Translated by Ralph Manheim. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- . *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- . "Philology and Weltliteratur." Translated by Maire Said and Edward Said. *Centennial Review* 13, no. 1 (1969): 1–17.
- . *Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach*. Edited by James I. Porter. Translated by Jane O. Newman. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

- Avineri, Shlomo. *Herzl's Vision: Theodor Herzl and the Foundation of the Jewish State*. Translated by Haim Watzman. Katonah, NY: Blue Bridge, 2014.
- Bloch, Chana, and Chana Kronfeld. Introduction to *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch*, 15–35. New York: W. W. Norton, 2009.
- Cohen, Julia. *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Cohen, Julia, and Sarah Stein, editors. *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700–1950*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014.
- Cohen, Uri. *Hisardut: Tfisat ha-mavet beyn milhamot ha'olam be'erezt yisra'el uv'italia*. Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007.
- . “Unraveling the Wars of 1948.” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 120–35.
- Darwish, Mahmoud. *The Adam of Two Edens: Poems*. Edited by Munir Akash and Daniel Moore. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.
- . *al-Dīwān: al-‘i‘amāl al-Jadīda*. Vol. 3. 3 Volumes. Beirut: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 2004.
- . “The Madness of Being a Palestinian.” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15, no. 1 (Autumn, 1985): 138-141.
- Darwish, Mahmoud, et al. *Victims of a Map*. Translated by Abdullah al-Udhari. London: Al Saqi Books, 1984.
- Elon, Amos. *Herzl*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1975.
- Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Friedman, Isaiah. *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism 1897-1918*. New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 1997.
- Gana, Nouri. "War, Poetry, Mourning: Darwish, Adonis, Iraq." *Public Culture* 22, no. 1 (2010): 33-65.
- Gertz, Nurith. *Hirbet Hiz'ah yeha-boker shela-moḥorat*. Tel Aviv: ha-Ḳibuts ha-me'uḥad, 1983.
- Goetschel, Willi, and David Suchoff. Introduction to *The Legacy of German Jewry*, by Hermann Goldschmidt, 1–22. Translated by David Suchoff. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

- Goldschmidt, Hermann Levin. *The Legacy of German Jewry*. Edited by Willi Goetschel and David Suchoff. Translated by David Suchoff. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.
- Halkin, Simon. *Modern Hebrew Literature: Trends and Values*. New York: Schocken Books, 1950.
- Harris, Rachel S. and Ranen Omer-Sherman, editors. *Narratives of Dissent: War in Contemporary Israeli Arts and Culture*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013.
- Herzl, Theodor. *Altneuland*. Leipzig: Hermann Seeman Nachfolger, 1902.
- . *Briefe und Tagebücher*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. Berlin: Verlag Ullstein GmbH, 1984.
- . *Der Judenstaat*. Edited by Otto Zeller. Vienna: M. Breitenstein Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1896.
- . *Old New Land*. Translated by Lotta Levensohn. Princeton: Block Publishing, 2000.
- . *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl*. Translated by Marvin Lowenthal. IV vols. The Dial Press, 1956.
- . *The Jewish State*. Revised edition. New York: Dover Publications, 1989.
- Hess, Jonathan M. “Johann David Michaelis and the Colonial Imaginary: Orientalism and the Emergence of Racial Antisemitism in Eighteenth-Century Germany.” *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 2 (2000): 56–101.
- Hess, Moses. *The Revival of Israel: Rome and Jerusalem, the Last Nationalist Question (1862)*. Translated by Meyer Waxman. Bison Book Edition. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Hess, Tamar and Ḥamutal Tsamir and Tamar, eds. *Kitmei or: ḥamishim shanot biqoret u-mehqar ‘al yetsiratah shel Dahlia Ravikovitch*. Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me’uhad, 2010.
- Hever, Hannan. “Lo Tehat Gam Mipnei ‘Al Tagidu beGath’: Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit Be-Shirah Ha-’Ivrit 1948-1958.” In “*Al Tagidu Be-Gath*”: *Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit Ba-Shirah Ha-’Ivrit 1948-1958*, 9–53. Tel Aviv: Sedek, 2010.
- Hochberg, Gil. *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of the Separatist Imagination*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

- . “A Poetics of Haunting: From Yizhar’s Hirbeh to Yehoshua’s Ruins to Koren’s Crypts.” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 55–69.
- . *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
- The Jewish Publication Society, editors. *Tanakh The Holy Scriptures: A New Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985.
- Konuk, Kader. *East West Mimesis: Auerbach in Turkey*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- . “Eternal Guests, Mimics, and Dönme: The Place of German and Turkish Jews in Modern Turkey.” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 37 (2007): 5–30.
- Kornberg, Jacques. *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism*. 1st edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Masalha, Nur. *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*. London; New York: Zed Books, 2012.
- McMeekin, Sean. *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power*. 1st edition. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2010.
- Mendes-Flohr, Paul R. *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
- Miron, Dan. *The Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*. New Milford, CT: Toby Press, 2009.
- Morris, Benny. *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*. Reprint Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Myers, David. *Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Mufti, Aamir R. “Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture.” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 1 (1998): 95–125.
- . *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- . *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*. Harvard University Press, 2016.

- Muhawi, Ibrahim. Introduction to *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982* by Mahmoud Darwish, xxi-xl. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Nassar, Hala Khamis and Najat Rahman, eds. *Mahmoud Darwish, Exile's Poet: Critical Essays*. Northampton, Mass.: Interlink Press, 2008.
- Oz, Amos. *In the Land of Israel*. Translated by Maurie Goldberg-Bartura. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1983 [1982].
- Porter, James I. "Erich Auerbach and the Judaizing of Philology." *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (2008): 115–47.
- Raz-Krakotzkin, Amnon. "Exile within Sovereignty: Critique of the 'Negation of Exile' in Israeli Culture." In *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept*, edited by Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr, 393–420. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.
- . "Galut betoch Ribonut: Le-Bikoret 'Shlilat haGalut' ba-Tarbut ha-Israelit," *Teoria u-Bikoret* 4 (Fall 1993): 23-53 and *Teoria u-Bikoret* 5 (Spring 1994): 113-132.
- . "Jewish Memory between Exile and History." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97, no. 4 (2007): 530–43.
- Ravikovich, Dahlia. *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch*. Translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld. New York: W. W. Norton, 2009.
- . *Kol ha-Shirim 'ad Koh*, Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad, 1995.
- Rotbard, Sharon. *White City, Black City: Architecture and War in Tel Aviv and Jaffa*. Translated by Orit Gat. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015.
- Said, Edward W. "Erich Auerbach, Critic of the Earthly World," *Boundary 2* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 11-34.
- . "On Mahmoud Darwish," *Grand Street*, 48 (Winter 1994), 112-115.
- . *Orientalism*. 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- . *The Question of Palestine*. Reissue edition. New York: Vintage, 1992.
- . "Reflections on Exile." *Granta*, no. 13 (August 1984), 137-149.

- . *The World, The Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Said, Edward W., and Jean Mohr. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Setter, Shaul. “The Time That Returns: Speculative Temporality in S. Yizhar’s 1948.” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 38–54.
- Shapira, Anita. *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- . “Hirbet Hizah: Between Remembrance and Forgetting.” *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 1 (2000): 1–62.
- . *Israel: A History*. Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis, 2014.
- . *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Shimoni, Gideon, et. al, editors. *Theodor Herzl: Visionary of the Jewish State*. New York: Herzl Press, 1999.
- Shumsky, Dmitry. *Beyond the Nation-State: The Zionist Political Imagination from Pinsker to Ben-Gurion*. New Haven: Yale University Press: 2018
- Slezkine, Yuri. *The Jewish Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Stein, Sarah Abrevaya. *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Szobel, Ilana. *A Poetics of Trauma: The Work of Dahlia Ravikovich*. Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2013.
- Teveth, Shabtai. *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Weiss, Yfaat. “Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism.” *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no. 1 (2004): 93–117.
- Yizhar, S. “Hirbet Hizah.” In *Sipur ĥirbet ĥizeh: Ve-‘od Shlosha Sipurei Milĥama*, 36–95. Tel Aviv: Zemura Beitan, 2010.
- . *Khirbet Khizeh*. Translated by Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck. Jerusalem, Israel: Ibis Editions, 2008.