



*Israel: A Diaspora of Memories*

edited by Michèle Baussant, Dario Miccoli, Esther Schely-Newman

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## Israel: A Diaspora of Memories

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*edited by* Michèle Baussant, Dario Miccoli, Esther Schely-Newman

Since the late nineteenth century and the emergence of the Zionist idea, the Land of Israel – after 1948, the State of Israel – has been presented as a shelter where Jews would build a state of their own and put aside their past life and experience in the diaspora.<sup>2</sup> The return of the Jews to the Land of Israel would bring about the emergence of a new “Hebrew” man and woman, of a unified and rejuvenated people, speaking a common language and sharing one ethno-national identity. In fact, Zionism viewed the diaspora (think of the idea of *shlilat ha-galut*) as a set of negative parentheses in Jewish history, something to be forgotten and substituted with other (national) memories. So the ideology and policies built on that basis before and especially after the founding of the State of Israel intended to erase the diasporic origin of the (Israeli) Jew and support this Jew’s feeling of having grown up in a void and of originating as a *tabula rasa* of sorts in Israel. Socialist Zionism and an originally European (Ashkenazi) identity became the hegemonic models to which Jewish migrants would need to conform.<sup>3</sup> However, despite efforts to gather all the Jews from the diaspora in Israel and fuse them as part of the so-called *mizug galuyiot* (“ingathering of exiles”), since its beginnings and especially in the last few decades the country has paradoxically experienced the emergence of new, Israeli, diasporas.

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<sup>1</sup> Cover photo: clockwise from left to right: installation from the exhibition *Latzet mi-bli-lahazor* [Leaving, Never To Return], Muza Eretz-Israel Museum, Tel Aviv, 2019 (photo by Dario Miccoli); Israeli *te’udat oleh* [immigrant card], 1949 (family archive of Esther Schely-Newman); tents in *moshav* Gilat, 1950 (family archive of Esther Schely-Newman); banner at an Israeli demonstration in favor of refugees, Tel Aviv, 2018 (photo by Michèle Baussant); street advertisement about the “Third Temple,” Jerusalem, 2018 (photo by Michèle Baussant); mother and son, new immigrants to Israel from Tunisia, *moshav* Gilat, 1959 (family archive of Esther Schely-Newman).

<sup>2</sup> Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots. Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> See at least: Samuel Noah Eisenstadt, *Israeli society*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969); Dan Horowitz, Moshe Lissak, *Troubles in Utopia. The Overburdened Polity of Israel*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1989); Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness. State, Society, and the Military*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

The State of Israel faced difficulties in integrating North African and Middle Eastern Jewish immigrants as far back as the 1950s and '60s.<sup>4</sup> This led to the emergence of Mizrahi ("Eastern") groups on the margins of the mainstream Ashkenazi society, which in turn often resulted in "little nations inside the nation" – think of the Moroccan Jews, the Bukharians or the Georgians – or in "reversed diasporas."<sup>5</sup> Since then, other diasporas, or other socio-cultural groups overall became visible in Israel: for example, the *haredim* (ultra-Orthodox), the migrants from the Former Soviet Union, the Jews of Ethiopia and the Palestinians that obtained Israeli citizenship since they were living inside Israel's 1948 borders. To these cases, one could add the more recent one of the *'olim* ("Jewish migrants") that have a double nationality (Israeli in addition to their original one) – for example those from France – and that sometimes tend to regard and experience Israel as a satellite of their main (diasporic) home.

The category of diaspora has a long history and is rooted in what has been called "the Jewish paradigm:" as seen from this perspective, any diaspora possesses a common language, memory and often a single religious identity. In addition, a diaspora often defines itself and evolves through an opposition between the context – or contexts – where its members live, on the one hand, and the motherland, on the other (or, in other words, through a continuous relationship with the homeland).<sup>6</sup> This is what distinguishes a diaspora from a more loosely defined socio-cultural group or community. Over the last few decades, the term has stimulated extensive theoretical reflection by social scientists and historians seeking to explain the production of locality and belonging by displaced people. In a globalized era of international migration practices, this gave birth to a specific research field known as Diaspora Studies. The field "emerged in fragmentary fashion, without fanfare or theoretical self-consciousness, as earlier disciplines dealing with nation, ethnicity, race, migration, and postcolonialism felt the need to adjust their methods and categories to the pressures of new transnational and global

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<sup>4</sup> Eliezer Ben-Rafael, *The Emergence of Ethnicity. Cultural Groups and Social Conflict in Israel*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1982); Gershon Shafir, Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli. The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Consider also: Orit Rozin, *The Rise of the Individual in 1950s Israel. A Challenge to Collectivism*, (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Tom Trier, "Reversed Diaspora. Russian Jewry, the Transition in Russia and the Migration to Israel," *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* 14/1 (1996): 34-42.

<sup>6</sup> William Safran, "The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective," *Israel Studies* 10/1 (2005): 36-60; Id., "Diaspora in Modern Societies. Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora. A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1/1 (1991): 83-99.

phenomena.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, if the concept of diaspora nowadays can be interpreted in many ways, it is also extremely significant for understanding the dynamics and effects of migration and displacement, as well as for clarifying one’s position vis-à-vis the homeland and nationalism.<sup>8</sup> In addition, it is essential in elucidating the identity dilemmas and nostalgias common in an age of global uncertainty.

As the contributors to this issue show, twenty-first-century Israel is facing different and sometimes conflicting visions of its past, present and future – visions built both inside and outside the country. Some of these visions aim to consolidate a strong national identity based on the recovery of the ancient Jewish heritage, while erasing, silencing or ignoring the multiplicity of other memories.<sup>9</sup> Others are oriented towards integration and mutual understanding of all the inhabitants of this country, so as to appease historical memories that remain painful and antagonistic.<sup>10</sup> Our aim is to look at some of the processes of diaporization nowadays observable in the State of Israel, reversing the assumption that its foundation sanctioned the end – or at least the decline – of the diaspora.

Going back to the case of the Mizrahim, it has to be remembered that it was thanks to them and their activism – consider the foundation of *Ha-panterim ha-shehorim* (“Black Panthers”), a social movement and later political party, in 1971 Jerusalem by a group of youngsters mainly of Moroccan origin – and the crisis of the Labor party, among other things, that in 1977 Menahem Begin’s *Likud* won the general Israeli elections for the first time.<sup>11</sup> The Jews of Morocco always played a prominent role in Mizrahi society, due in part to the size of this community.<sup>12</sup> Through a cultural-historical analysis of the novels *Avney-shaish tahor* (“Stones of Pure Marble,” 2004) by Herzl Cohen, *Asterai* (2008) by Omri Tegamlak Avera and in *Ha-derekh li-*

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<sup>7</sup> Khachig Tölölyan, “The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27/3 (2007): 647.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Triandafyllidou, “Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Post-Communist Europe. Negotiating Diasporic Identity,” *Ethnicities* 9/2 (2009): 226–245.

<sup>9</sup> Avner Ben-Amos, *Israël. La fabrique de l'identité nationale*, (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Yifat Gutman, *Memory Activism. Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Sami Shalom-Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel. White Jews, Black Jews*, (London: Routledge, 2010); Yehudah Shenhav, *The Arab Jews. A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Ella Shohat, “Rupture and Return. Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews,” *Social Text* 21/2 (2003): 49–74; Id., “The Invention of the Mizrahim,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29/1 (1999): 5–20.

<sup>12</sup> Orit Ouaknine-Yekutieli, Yigal S. Nizri, “‘My Heart Is in the Maghrib.’ Aspects of Cultural Revival of the Moroccan Diaspora in Israel,” *Héspéris-Tamouda* 51/3 (2016): 165–194.



*Yerushalaim: reshith ha-aliyah me-Etiopia we-qelitatah* (“The Road to Jerusalem: From the Beginnings of the *Aliyah* from Ethiopia and on Its Integration”, 1995) by Yilma Shemuel, Emanuela Trevisan Semi compares the memory that the Jews of Morocco and Ethiopia have of their respective history of migration, on the one hand, and of Israel, on the other. As she explains, the aforementioned writers contribute to the formation of a more nuanced collective memory. In their accounts, we find a certain distancing from Israeli reality and a reversal of the exile/redemption discourse, with *Eretz Israel* becoming their new country of exile. Trevisan Semi defines this discourse as *shelilat ha-geulah*, the negation of redemption. Here, the act of writing aims at recovering the history of a past erased and claiming a history different from that making up mainstream Israeli discourse, so as to rehabilitate the country of origin. This is something shared by both Moroccan and Ethiopian writers, and on reading the authors belonging to these two communities – which had very different histories both before and after their arrival in Israel – the similarity of images, feelings, content and goals are striking.

The article by Lisa Anteby-Yemini traces the trajectories of Israeli Ethiopians, characterized by their heterogeneity in terms of regional divisions, social class, degree of religiosity. Also called *Falashas*, they preferred to define themselves as Beta Israel or “House of Israel” in the Geez language.<sup>13</sup> Having built their differences in the long term in Ethiopia as descendants of an ancient exiled Jewish group, they cultivated a myth of return to Jerusalem (*Yerussalem*), imagined as their ultimate homeland, before being recognized in 1975 as Jews and descendants of the lost tribe of Dan by the Israeli rabbinate. In theory, under the Law of Return, this recognition should have immediately opened for them the doors of the Promised Land, but in actuality this only occurred from the beginning of the 1990s. Since then, their dream of “homecoming” has been stained with disenchantment. In Israel, they had to face a process of inclusion and exclusion by the national absorption policies, harsh treatment by the rabbinate and a difficult encounter with Orthodox Judaism, along with socio-economic marginalization, discrimination in the work place, army and education, and spatial segregation that further marginalized them. They were enjoined to erase their culture, their memory and their history and to swap their Ethiopian identifications and names for Israeli or Hebrew ones, in order to integrate while being at the same time racialized, and their religious tradition denied and viewed as illegitimate.

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<sup>13</sup> Tudor Parfitt, Emanuela Trevisan Semi, *The Beta Israel in Ethiopia and Israel*, (London: Routledge, 1999).

This paradoxical injunction – both silencing and overexposing an assigned Ethiopian identity – has apparently produced a line of fracture or a rift between generations: it led the elders to reshape and maintain their linguistic, religious, social, cultural and economic practices in Israel, while the younger generation, initially ashamed of their Ethiopian culture, endeavored to be as Israeli as possible. They claimed inclusion in the Israeli collective, which actually drove them to recover their silenced heritage and create physical and symbolic diasporic spaces through theatre, dance, music, literature or the visual arts, return trips to Ethiopia and heritage tourism. These dynamics between generations and different spheres, both civil and religious, of the Israeli society, reshaped and renewed these Jews who had imagined a return to their homeland, making them into a sort of “reversed diaspora”<sup>14</sup> – both Ethiopian and Black – and turning Ethiopia into a home. Produced within the Israeli environment and, more recently, abroad (most notably in the US), the imagination of this new Israeli-Ethiopian diaspora is obviously also determined by Israeli patterns, such as the importance ascribed to trauma as a founding principle and political means of achieving common identification and affiliation, or the organized root trips for teenagers in order to strengthen their affective and emotional adherence to a Jewish landscape of identity (think, for example, of cemeteries or synagogues).<sup>15</sup>

This means that the memory of the diasporic past should not be observed only from Israel, but also from the perspective of the country that the Jews left. Based on in-depth fieldwork with Jews of Egyptian origin now living in France, Italy, the US and Israel, Michèle Baussant’s article details the tangible sites and objects of memory that can still be traced in Cairo and Alexandria. Synagogues, cemeteries and different forms of material culture not only attest to the Jewish presence in Egypt, but become vectors of contrasting narratives and of different practices of heritagization. In this entangled history at the crossroads between Egypt and the West, Israel appears as a crucial actor whose relations with Egypt – before as well as after the signing of the “cold peace” treaty by Menahem Begin and Anwar al-Sadat in 1979 – continue to influence the paradoxical trajectory of the Jewish heritage in this country: namely, promotion, co-option, abandonment, and rejection. As Baussant clarifies, the Egyptian Jewish heritage is a metaphor both for the physical exclusion of the Jews (who had to leave or were expelled from the country), and for their

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<sup>14</sup> Trier, “Reversed Diaspora;” see also: Eftihia Voutira, *The “Right to Return” and the Meaning of “Home.” A post-Soviet Greek Diaspora Becoming European?* (Berlin: Verlag, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> On Jewish heritage tourism: Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish. Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Erica Lehrer, *Jewish Poland Revisited. Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

symbolic inclusion (when considering Egypt's recent claims of tolerance of multiple communities).

To further understand the connections between Israel and the diaspora, Jews and Arabs, past and present, the contribution by Esther Schely-Newman focuses on contemporary Israeli poets of Mizrahi origin, and particularly on the literary collective '*Ars Poetiqah* founded in Tel Aviv in 2013 by Adi Keissar. By shedding light on this still understudied yet successful group of poets, Schely-Newman explains what it means to write and think of oneself in relation to the countries and languages of the ancestors vis-à-vis the national ethos of erasing the past. The poets brought together by '*Ars Poetiqah*, many of whom come from the Israeli periphery, were all born in the 1980s and belong to the third or fourth generation of Mizrahi Israelis. At stake here is the clash between Israel and *hutz la-aretz* ("outside the Land [of Israel]"), Hebrew and the different mother tongues of the diaspora, and last but not least, the attempt to initiate a more open dialogue to bridge the ethnic tensions between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, Israelis and Palestinians.

The emergence of the State of Israel as a potential end to the Jewish diaspora resulted in the opposite for the Arab population of Mandatory Palestine. The *Nakba* – "catastrophe" in Arabic – divided the Palestinians into refugees, i.e. those who left, escaped, or were expelled from the new state, and those who stayed as Israeli citizens, the Palestinian (or Arab) Israelis.<sup>16</sup> The choice of terms is politically charged as is the decision of how to treat the events of 1948 in the Israeli narrative(s). Based on Pierre Nora's distinction between memory and history, Avner Ben-Amos analyzes the ways Israeli history textbooks treat the tragedy of the Palestinian people from 1950 to the present. Considering the mission of the educational system as a major means of creating collective national memory, Ben-Amos offers a periodization of the way the *Nakba* has been treated in the curricula of mainstream Jewish Israeli high schools. His discussion proceeds from the period when the *Nakba* was completely ignored to a more balanced presentation of events, and from unidimensional top-down history books sanctioned by the Ministry of Education to privately issued texts. Thus, the (absent) voice of the Israeli Arab population enriches our understanding of Israeli multi-identity and narratives.

This said, the cleavages that Israel presents nowadays are not only related to one's ethnic origin. They also have to do with the secular/religious divide that has grown

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<sup>16</sup> We retain these two definitions, acknowledging the fact that both are in use by Arab citizens of Israel, depending on one's personal and political or ideological stances.

enormously since the 1970s and then especially with the growth of the settler movement in the West Bank and – until the 2005 disengagement – the Gaza Strip. The case of *Gush Emunim* (“Block of the Faithful”) explored by Perle Nicolle highlights the often little-known or ignored inner divisions and different ideological margins that have gradually changed the face of the once hegemonic and statist religious Zionist movement.<sup>17</sup> Nicolle depicts how a “new Israeli space” has emerged from the Israeli settlement, which became normalized and did not only gather messianic zealots and radical fundamentalists, but is also permeated by a deep ideological diversity.<sup>18</sup> This “new Israeli space” is composed of both competing and related factions that diverge in their behaviors, aspirations and imaginations and challenge the clear cut Zionist distinction between Israeli redemption and diasporic exile. She portrays different young settlers, men and women, who adopt different tactics and strategies and espouse a complex range of political and ideological positions: notably, in relations with the state and its role as a vector of diasporization inside the country and concerning Jewish redemption from exile (by advancing or by reviving the memory of a mythicized biblical past and erasing the experience of the diaspora) or the different religious views of conflict resolution and alternatives, sometimes contradictory, for the future in the land and for Judaism itself. But she also demonstrates how these young settlers, despite their differences, are strongly bound by the same vision of the disengagement of the Israeli state from the Jewish messianic redemptive process, by their self-distancing from the ideology of the founding generation of *Gush Emunim* and by memories of the diaspora and of past persecutions, which structure their interpretations of exile and redemption from exile. This reframed and renewed way of questioning the dichotomy of Jewish redemption in modern Israel and the idea of Jewish exile, associated with the diaspora, attests to the vitality of messianic hopes in the redefinition of Israeliness today. It sheds light on how the diasporization process and the creation of new centers, generated by Israeli society itself, are being questioned and experienced, defying the Israeli assimilation model and its relevance in an era of globalization.<sup>19</sup>

It should be noted in this connection that the last ten years have witnessed new (smaller) migratory waves from the diaspora. One in particular – the French *‘aliyah* – has attracted the attention of journalists and the public, yet has so far been

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Feige, *Settling in the Heart. Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> As an example, consider the recent work by Sara Yael Hirschhorn, *City on A Hilltop. American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Uri Ram, *The Globalization of Israel. McWorld in Tel Aviv, Jihad in Jerusalem*, (London: Routledge, 2008).

relatively understudied.<sup>20</sup> This migration provides a good illustration of new patterns of social and local integration of migrants into Israeli society, articulating multi-layered identifications, transnational frameworks and a contractual conception of adhering to a community. The motivations underlying the migration of many French Jews to Israel are manifold: from religious or theological-political convictions, to gender and age, to difficulties in the French and European economy in the past decade, up to feelings of insecurity and unease related to ethno-religious identity. The article by Shirley Bar-Lev and Karin Amit questions how these migrants address difficulties in following Israel's dynamics of integration, less in terms of adherence to religious (*dati*) lifestyles than in the various areas of everyday life. Their sometimes limited ability to integrate into the Israeli labor market except in certain job niches is symptomatic of the difficulty. The article follows the trajectories of French women who endeavored to integrate locally through transnational forms of employment such as working in French-speaking service companies in Israel (mostly call centers). These companies provide services in French to French-speaking customers abroad, and require their employees to behave and speak as Francophone natives do in their work (accent training, other methods of de-Israelizing, such as adopting non-Jewish French names and masking the call center's location). In doing so, the companies ultimately maintain their employees' strong connections with the country of departure, France, and create a kind of *enclavement*, reinforced by the precariousness of this form of employment, which also holds out no real prospect of career advancement.

Shirly Bar-Lev and Karin Amit describe the cultural and social isolation experienced by these women in a French Israeli environment, initially shaped by the tendency of French speakers to live in specific communities in major Israeli cities, by their common socio-cultural background (most are educated, religiously observant women and of North African origin) and, contrary to all expectations, their feeling that their economic status has worsened in Israel. As a convenient employment opportunity and a necessary source of income for women, the call centers constitute for their employees a "bubble" where the lines between sacred and secular are blurred, a community center enabling them to practice their religion openly and reinforcing feelings of solidarity. The authors stress how these ambivalent dynamics created by their job environment enable the women both to develop and strengthen

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<sup>20</sup> Erik H. Cohen, *The Jews of France at the Turn of the Third Millennium. A Sociological and Cultural Analysis*, (The Rappaport Center: Bar Ilan University, 2009); Id., *The Jews of France Today. Identity and Values*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Karin Amit, Shirley Bar-Lev, "The Formation of Transnational Identity among French Immigrants Employed in French-speaking Companies in Israel," *International Migration* 54/3 (2016): 110-124.

their feeling of religious and national belonging, French and Israeli, and at the same time to conceal it, turning them into neither Israeli nor French. In a certain sense, these jobs entrench their condition of outsiders in the country, the weakness of the resources mobilized to enable them fully to participate in Israeli society, especially through language and work. Yet at the same time, the authors show how the call center enclave, which functions as a “supralocal” place, does not involve a process of dissolution of the women’s differences as Jewish and French, but values the two aspects, rehearsing a singular conception of their cultural uniqueness in Israel.

Surely, the seventy-one-year-old State of Israel is passing from being a nation founded on a specific and rather rigid identity and memory, to one in which many different identities and memories can coexist. But at stake is if what Eyal Naveh has called “memory privatization” and the proliferation of hitherto hidden or repressed memories are going to function in the long run, and what kind of consequences this will have for the transmission of a more or less shared feeling of Israeliness.<sup>21</sup> The articles in this issue highlight memories and identities in different ways. Some groups remain at the margins of the national arena, and some have only recently started to be more visible. This occurs at the same time that the pasts and the imaginations of the first immigrants are being transformed, discussed, even challenged and sometimes erased by the national and transnational context and the influx of diverse populations who do not share the same experiences or a common past within Israel. One should then ask whether the way in which the experiences and imaginations of the first waves of immigrants were integrated and made Israeli can also be true for successive waves of immigrants settling in a country with an already “fixed” identity? Could it be that, more than towards multiculturalism, Israel is going in the direction of increasing social polarization, replete with identity conflicts that cannot be easily resolved?

For this reason, the relationship with the diaspora remains a central topic, bringing out the need to describe and analyze more deeply the notions of exile, homeland and homecoming in a contemporary context within which people are entangled in dissonant yet connected histories, deterritorialized “spaces of origin and cultures” and transnational belongings, as well as borders, roots, national and clearly territorialized history and identity. These references have often been aestheticized or romanticized, especially by scholars and politicians, who largely failed to address the

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<sup>21</sup> Eyal Naveh, “Israel’s Past at 70. The Twofold Attack on the Zionist Historical Narrative,” *Israel Studies* 23/3 (2018): 79.

issue of identification processes and persistent identity dilemmas experienced by populations going through displacement, exile and resettlement.<sup>22</sup>

The paradoxical and complex dynamics described in the articles of this issue seem to erode the filtering capacity of a country, at least in the sense developed by Georges Perec and Robert Bober,<sup>23</sup> as a kind of ongoing matrix space for populations with multiple interests and expectations. If the filtering process targets a certain homogenization of the many different populations, it also seems to have no end and to have destructive potential.<sup>24</sup> But at the same time, we can also consider that these diverse phenomena of ethnic and mnemonic awakening in Israel, often following the same patterns – first migration and resettlement, then process of “de-diasporization” and erasure or “invisibilization” of the culture of origin as the price of integration, and finally re-diasporization – stoke opposing urges that fulfill a socializing function, even when it is a conflictual one.<sup>25</sup> As Schely-Newman suggests, instead of the melting pot metaphor one should perhaps think of the present and future Israeli society as a salad bowl or *salata baladi* (“country salad”), to quote the title of the documentary that the Egyptian film director Nadia Kamel dedicated to her complex Egyptian Muslim, Jewish and Italian family background: something in which each part keeps its appearance and aroma while contributing to the emergence of a different new whole.<sup>26</sup>

But this also questions the prerogative of the state as the sole definer of citizens’ rights, which thus start to depend on the ability of individuals to gain equal access to local resources. In the *salata baladi* model, integration does not imply a process of dissolution of original identities in a new land, nor an erasure of the past, but produces the affirmation and the recognition of new rights. Far from erasing differences, it values their existence, revealing a singular conception of equality within a system that is nevertheless very stratified and hierarchical. For many Israeli Jews, their links to Jewishness, Judaism and the multiple components of a plural identity, are combined with many other territories and centers experienced or

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<sup>22</sup> For this critique, see: Michèle Baussant, “(R)ecomencements: d’une rive l’autre,” (Paris, Université Paris Nanterre, Habilitation à diriger des recherches, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Georges Perec, Robert Bober, *Récits d’Ellis Island, Histoires d’errance et d’espoir*, (Paris: POL, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Baussant, “(R)ecomencements,” 133.

<sup>25</sup> Georg Simmel, “L’autoconservation du groupe social”, in *Sociologie. Etude sur les formes de la socialisation* (Paris: PUF, 1999). See also Henry de Montherlant, *La guerre civile* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

<sup>26</sup> See: Nadia Kamel, *Salata baladi* (“Country salad”), initially released in 2007.

imagined. On the other hand, in this perhaps romanticized vision of a salad bowl we can also see a humanistic picture of harmonious coexistence of different communities that, however, still keeps many of the members at the margins of the social body: the non-Jewish migrant workers, the ultra-Orthodox population or West Bank Palestinians. In other words, what for many are enchanted dreams and promises, for others are lapsed pasts or dystopias, forcing them to look toward a future from other promised lands or to wait – in diaspora – for a different kind of modern redemption.

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**Michèle Baussant** is a social anthropologist, Director of Research at the French National Center of Research (CNRS) and Fellow at the Convergences Migration Institute (<http://icmigrations.fr/>). She has published extensively on the issues of migration, memory and cultural heritage and has worked four years in Israel at the French Center of Research in Jerusalem (CNRS/MEAE). <https://isp.cnrs.fr/?project=baussant-michele>

**Dario Miccoli** is Lecturer of Modern Hebrew and Jewish Studies at the Department of Asian and North African Studies, Ca' Foscari University of Venice. His research and publications deals with the history and memory of the Jews of the modern Arab world, notably Egypt, and Israeli literature. He is the author of *Histories of the Jews of Egypt. An Imagined Bourgeoisie, 1880s-1950s* (2015) and *La letteratura israeliana mizrahi* (2016). With Marcella Simoni and Giorgia Foscari he edited *Homelands and Diasporas. Perspectives on Jewish Culture in the Mediterranean and Beyond* (2018).

**Esther Schely-Newman** has recently retired from the Noah Mozes Department of Communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her research interests include life stories, migration, literacy, Israeli Hebrew, gender, and folklore. Her book, *Our Lives are but Stories* (published in 2002 by Wayne State University Press) treats life stories of North African women who migrated to Israel in the early 1950s. She has published in *Language and Social Interaction*, *Discourse Studies*, *Pragmatics*, *Narrative Inquiry*, *Nashim*, *Journal of American Folklore*, *Western Folklore*, and *Mehkarey Yerushalyim beFolklore Yehudi* (Hebrew).

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## From *Shelilat ha-Galut* to *Shelilat ha-Geulah* in Narratives of Moroccan and Ethiopian Origin

by Emanuela Trevisan Semi

### Abstract

*This paper analyzes how the Zionist discourse on shelilat ha-galut – “the denial of the diaspora,” or rejection of the image of the exilic Jew, which also implies removal from the culture of the country of birth in the diaspora – is prominent in Hebrew literary works. Whereas this discourse remains very complex in Ashkenazi writers, we can identify even greater challenges and disparities in the output of writers of Moroccan and Ethiopian origin who left the countries of their birth and in whose work “at home” seems to be the very country of exile. In these writers, we find a self-distancing from Israeli reality and from identifying with the “Israelis.” This is a reversal of the exile-vs.-redemption discourse, with Eretz Israel now as the country of exile and the country the writer has abandoned, previously deemed the land of exile, as the homeland. These writers have left a homeland, a supposed land of exile, only to arrive in a promised homeland which becomes even more of a land of exile, and makes them yearn for their former exile. In this article I will restrict myself to analyzing Avne shaish tahor [Stones of Pure Marble] by Herzl Cohen, Asterai by Omri Tegamlak Avera and Ha-derekh li-Yrushalaim: reshit ha-‘aliyah me-Etyopyah u-qelitatah (1980) [The Road to Jerusalem: The Beginnings of the Aliyah from Ethiopia and Its Absorption (1980)] by Yilma Shemuel.*

### Introduction

#### The Narrative of Israelis from Morocco and Ethiopia: Different Feelings

#### Moroccan-Israeli Writers

#### Ethiopian-Israeli Writers

### Conclusion

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## Introduction

Denial of the diaspora, *shelilat ha-galut*,<sup>1</sup> or rejection of the image of the exilic Jew, *ha-yehudi ha-galuti*, which also implies removal from and rejection of the culture of the country of birth in the diaspora, a place of alienation, is a well-known form of political discourse typical of Zionist thought; the approach has been less prominent in literary works. It is thanks to the recent work of Yohai Oppenheimer that the ambivalence of the rejection of the diaspora in literary discourse has been brought to the fore.<sup>2</sup> The discussion focuses on the work of poets and writers of the first *'aliyah*, who were caught between the ideas of *galut* and *geulah*, between exile (the country of birth) and redemption (*Eretz Israel*). Contrast and ambivalence are rife in early twentieth-century Ashkenazi poets and writers such as Shaul Tchernikowski, Haim Nahman Bialik, Yosef Brenner, Leah Goldberg and Natan Alterman, as well as in the post-war period, namely, in Avot Yeshurun and Aharon Appelfeld, according to Oppenheimer's analysis. Among the Mizrahim, Erez Biton, a poet of Moroccan origin, begins to convey a sense of great distance from the Israeli world, which was supposed to have become the new space of re-territorialization of the Jewish imagination. Biton is the first to have taken a clear stance against the erasing of the past and to have opposed Zionist ideological discourse, by imbuing his poetic writing with memories of the past.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Biton (my translation):

I learned very quickly to reject the Arab in my mother, my grandmother, my aunts and my uncles; I hated whatever members of the family recounted of the great times in Morocco. The child in me was convinced that they were all lies invented by the family to defend themselves from what they felt to be insults coming from the Ashkenazim, whom they in turn never ceased to revile. Later I began to hate their songs and to believe that we ourselves were not Jews and, above all, not real Israelis. I was studying in a class of 40 Mizrahim with a female Ashkenazi teacher of good intentions, but I never heard even the slightest allusion to the Jews of North Africa, Persia, Turkey or the Indies. Conversely, at home my father never stopped recounting and languishing in nostalgia. Today I thank him for his stories, which have deeply rooted themselves in my memory; he has saved my soul from spiritual destruction. In this way, the

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<sup>1</sup> *Galut* or *golah* can denote "exile" as well as "emigration" or "diaspora."

<sup>2</sup> Yohai Oppenheimer, *Zikhron ha-galut ba-sifrut ha-ivrit* [*Remembering the Diaspora in Hebrew Literature*], (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

State has succeeded in muddling my identity and in implanting deep down in me the terrible feeling that I hailed from an empty place, a place that was a *tabula rasa*, as if I came from the moon.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to the first-generation Mizrahi writers such as Shimon Ballas, Sami Mikael and Eli Amir, Erez Biton avoids introducing into his poetry significant identity links to Israeli reality, voicing instead his nostalgia for the Moroccan landscape of his youth. Oppenheimer reminds us that Zionist redemption is not a response to metaphysical exile, which is a condition of the spirit and can persist even if bodily exile is over. This becomes all the more true if we consider that after the destruction of the Second Temple, exile became a space of narration, as the Bible, the Talmud, and by extension all Jewish text developed into an identity space for Jews, replacing the territorial-geographical space which the Jews had lost. Hence, with exile as narration, it was not easy to re-territorialize it in *Eretz Israel*. This is particularly true of the *Shoah*, which was expected to lead European exile from an imagined Home to a real Home, as Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi explains:

The Holocaust may have turned European exile from a place in which Home is imagined into a ‘real’ home that can only be recalled from somewhere and reconstructed from its shards: retrospectively, that is, the destruction seems to have territorialized exile as a lost home.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, we will find in post-Shoah writers a different attitude as compared to those who wrote before the Shoah because imagining and relating to the country of origin or exile after the devastation becomes more difficult, since the land is thought of as forever lost. Yet here, too, there are differences. It is enough to think of the feelings expressed by Avot Yeshurun, writing after the Shoah about the condition of unending exile: “For 2000 years have I waited for Tel Aviv from Krasnistaw, for 2000 [years] have I waited for Krasnistaw from Tel Aviv.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, in secular Tel Aviv (not in Zion), a new exile has begun. This concept returns us to the condition of being Jewish as “being elsewhere combined with the desperate wish to ‘be at home.’”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>5</sup> Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *Booking Passage. Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination*, (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 2000), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Oppenheimer, *Zikhron*, 254.

<sup>7</sup> DeKoven Ezrahi, *Booking Passage*, 231.

Thus, while the discourse on *shelilat ha-galut* in Ashkenazi writers remains very complex, we can identify even greater challenges and disparities in the output of writers of Moroccan and Ethiopian origin who left the countries of their birth and in whose work “at home” seems to be the very country of exile.

### **The Narrative of Israelis from Morocco and Ethiopia: Different Feelings**

To highlight the difference between the feelings that we find expressed in Israeli writers from Morocco and Ethiopia and the Ashkenazim, I appeal to the poet Uri Zvi Grinberg, who shows the ambivalence he feels towards Galicia, the land of his birth, which he has left behind. Grinberg writes: “We are obliged to hate even if we have loved.”<sup>8</sup> For Ben Gurion, this being forced to hate also becomes an obligation to forget. In 1950, Ben Gurion proclaimed to the Knesset that the aim of Israel’s government was to have the recently arrived Yemenis forget Yemen “as I have forgotten that I am Polish.”<sup>9</sup> With Ben Gurion we move to the politicization of forgetting, an ideology which was being translated into policies aiming to enforce oblivion. Ben Gurion had chosen to forget about being Polish and wanted to impose oblivion on those not sharing the same sentiments, in this instance the Yemenis, and more generally on all Jews who had departed Arab Muslim countries. This would mean, for the Yemenis and for the other Jews who would become the Mizrahim we know today, renouncing all memory of their countries of origin and of Arab culture, and without finding any signpost to their past in their new country, since their new State had been built along European lines. Ben Gurion could well claim to have forgotten Poland, but Poland was in fact incorporated by Ben Gurion as part of the Westernization of the new State insofar as Eastern European culture became the foundation upon which the State was constructed, unlike the culture of Arab countries.

This feeling of total oblivion or hate of the country abandoned and which previously had been loved is precisely what cannot be detected in the output of writers originally hailing from Morocco or Ethiopia, of whatever generation after immigration.

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<sup>8</sup> Oppenheimer, *Zikhron*, 164.

<sup>9</sup> Tudor Parfitt, *The Road to Redemption. The Jews of Yemen 1900-1950*, (Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill, 1996), 234, n. 24.

A Jewish woman originally from Morocco who emigrated to Argentina states:

It's the only country [of origin, Morocco] with which those who emigrated still keep affective bonds, still feel like visiting, still have nostalgia, while [those from] other countries have set up a wall, they don't want to even set foot in Germany, Poland, nor tell their story... and it gets lost, you know, that history gets lost?<sup>10</sup>

These are sentiments to be found not only among Moroccan Jews, but also in recent writing by Jews from Ethiopia now settled in Israel. Indeed, in the accounts of Ethiopian Jews, feelings of nostalgia for the country of origin are expressed in a fashion similar to what we find in authors of Moroccan origin – nostalgia for the country's beauty, its cultural and religious traditions and, above all, the desire to recount the history of the country left behind. Often it is a matter of the Jewish history of the country one has abandoned and therefore the history of “a sort of homeland in the nation,” to use a phrase from an interview conducted by Michèle Baussant among Jews originally from Egypt.<sup>11</sup> Here reference is made to a feeling of belonging to a country, a feeling shared by the community as well as by the country the Jews have left. In the final analysis, it is a vision which coincides neither with the history of the country abandoned nor with the official version of history as recounted in Israeli public discourse.

These writers enable us to listen to “their story” and “their stories,” hence contributing to the formation of a more nuanced collective memory which prioritizes the distinguishing features both of the country of belonging and of the one abandoned.

In these writers, we find a certain self-distancing from Israeli reality and from identifying with the “Israelis.” This is a reversal of the exile-vs.-redemption discourse, with *Eretz Israel* now as the country of exile and the country the writer has abandoned, previously deemed the land of exile, as the homeland. This is the discourse of *shelilat ha-geulah*, negation of redemption (or of the country of redemption), by contrast with *shelilat ha-galut*. These writers have left a homeland, a supposed land of exile, only to arrive in a promised homeland which becomes even more of a land of exile, and makes them yearn for their former

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<sup>10</sup> Angy Cohen, Aviad Moreno, “Revisiting Morocco from Israel and Argentina. Contrasting Narratives about the ‘Trip Back’ among Jewish Immigrants from Northern Morocco,” *Journal of Jewish identities* 10/2 (2017): 173-197, 192.

<sup>11</sup> Michèle Baussant, “*Aslak eh? De juif en Egypte à juif d’Egypte*,” *Diasporas* 27 (2016): 77-93, 92.

exile. Oppenheimer explains this as the refusal to adopt Israel as an alternative homeland “since this homeland does not awaken feelings of home – *bayit* – in the Mizrahim, feelings which were, by contrast, associated with the world they have abandoned.”<sup>12</sup> Writing to recover a history of a past erased – or to claim a history different from what makes up public discourse – with the aim of rehabilitating one’s country of origin, is a discourse shared by both Moroccan and Ethiopian writers, though fewer accounts have been composed by Ethiopians, whose emigration is more recent. On reading the authors belonging to these two communities – the Moroccan-Israeli and the Ethiopian-Israeli – the similarity of images, feelings, content and goals is striking.

There are a number of Moroccan-Israeli authors who belong to this category: Shelomo Elbaz, Gabriel Bensimhon, Avi Bouganim, Uziel Hazan, Sami Berdugo, Herzl Cohen and Dalia Carlibach Danan, among others.<sup>13</sup> Among Ethiopian-Israeli authors are: Asher Elias, Gadi Yevarken, Asfu Beru, Omri Tegamlak Avera and Yilma Shemuel.<sup>14</sup>

In this article I will restrict myself to analyzing *Avne shaish tahor*<sup>15</sup> [*Stones of Pure Marble*] by Herzl Cohen, *Astarai*<sup>16</sup> by Omri Tegamlak Avera and *Ha-derekh li-Yrushalaim: reshit ha-‘aliyah me-Etyopyah u-qelitatah (1980)* [*The Road to Jerusalem: The Beginnings of the Aliyah from Ethiopia and Its Absorption (1980)*] by Yilma Shemuel.<sup>17</sup> Of these three tales, only Cohen’s can be considered a novel. All three were published in the late 1990s or the first decade of the new millennium and each is its author’s first published work. Herzl Cohen belongs to the second generation, and Tegamlak Avera and Yilma Shemuel to the “one-and-a-half” (they left Ethiopia as children or adolescents).

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Shelomo Elbaz, Gabriel Bensimhon, Avi Bouganim, Uziel Hazan, Sami Berdugo, Herzl Cohen, Dalia Carlibach Danan. On the work of these authors, see Emanuela Trevisan Semi, “Rethinking Morocco. Life-writing of Jews from Morocco,” *Hespéris-Tamuda*, 51/3, II part, (2016): 141-164; Id., “Life-writing between Israel, the Diaspora and Morocco. Revisiting the Homeland through Locations and Objects of Identity,” in *Contemporary Sephardic and Mizrahi Literature*, ed. Dario Miccoli, (London – New York: Routledge, 2017), 84-97.

<sup>14</sup> For a presentation of the work of these authors see Adia Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel. Literary Perspectives*, (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Herzl Cohen, *Avne shaish tahor*, (Tel Aviv: Am ‘oved, 2004 ).

<sup>16</sup> Omri Tegamlak Avera, *Astarai*, (Tel Aviv: Yedi’ot Aharonot – Sifre Hemed Books, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Yilma Shemuel, *Ha-derekh li-Yrushalaim. Reshit ha-‘aliyah me-Etyopyah u-qelitatah (1980)*, (Tel Aviv: Hotzaat sefarim reshafim, 1995).

### Moroccan-Israeli Writers

Orit Ouaknine-Yekutieli and Yigal Salaom Nizri open their article on the Moroccan diaspora in Israel with the answer which Mishael, the main character in Herzl Cohen's novel, gives his Moroccan lover when she asks:

Tell me, ya Sidi, what did they take, the Jews, what did they seize from their hosts?

[...] Everything, ya Lalla; they grabbed it all, whatever was there... They took the melodies, with their tastes, hues and sub-hues, and they took the food, and they adopted the language, with its depths, its hints and secrets...they took with them curses and bans, smiles and greetings, images and colors, the sun and the sky, the heat and the cold.<sup>18</sup>

This passage from Herzl Cohen's novel takes us to the heart of the matter, clearly conveying the ambiguity which surrounds issues of identity in Jewish Moroccan culture. This also helps shed light on what a female painter, who had left Morocco at the age of five, said in an interview to the author of the present article:

In 1990, I held [in Israel] an exhibition of my paintings [on the customs of Moroccan Jews] and a representative of the Moroccan government came... And he said, "That's Moroccan and that's Moroccan," and I said "What are you saying to me?". Personally, I thought I was doing paintings on Moroccan Judaism and now you're telling me that everything is Moroccan, Islamic... That for me was a great revelation, meaning that...for sure there was some influence... I think that deep down the Jews have borrowed a lot, an awful lot of their traditions from the Muslims. The children's little dinner held for Easter, the bread rolls which we made during Easter week, the children cooking, we gave them things, vegetables, everything, and he told me that for Muslims it's the same thing, what they call the feast of herbs, which they hold in the spring... when a boy is born, we draw a line on the wall with a knife to ward off *shedim* [evil spirits], so that they stop there, and they do that too, but to me it was Jewish....<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Orit Ouaknine-Yekutieli, Yigal Shalom Nizri, "My Heart Is in the Maghrib: Aspects of Cultural Revival of the Moroccan Diaspora in Israel," *Hespéris-Tamuda* 51/3 (2016), II Part.: 165-192, 165.

<sup>19</sup> Interview conducted in Israel in 2008; see Emanuela Trevisan Semi, "Entre le contexte oublié



The passage demonstrates how Zionist discourse negating the diaspora (*shelilat ha-galut*) and the ideology and policies based on this denial have erased the socio-cultural context of origin for Moroccan Jews and support their feeling of having grown up in a void and of coming from a place which was a *tabula rasa*. Immigrants who arrived as children, such as the female painter (or Erez Biton or Omri Tegamlak Avera), have grown up nurtured by a discourse that not only denied the *galut*, a concept in which all diasporas are muddled and lumped together, but denied with even greater vehemence any diaspora from Arab countries, whose culture and language became objects of contempt. It is thanks to the intervention of the Moroccan state representative that the woman painter first begins to question the official discourse and to distance herself from it.

With the doubting of the official mode of discourse, the problematization of Arab-Muslim influence on their identity for Moroccan-Israeli authors, or the Ethiopian, Christian or Muslim influence for Ethiopian-Israeli writers, acquires greater importance and becomes something shared. We find the same sharing and promoting of the identity question in the three tales where being Moroccan and being Ethiopian become distinctive features.

Herzl Cohen's novel opens with the burial of his father in Israel, followed by traditional *shiv'ah* (week of mourning), which the protagonist, Mishael, the son who has cast off his *kippah* (thus signaling his rejection of religious tradition) tries to dodge. His mother speaks in Arabic and there is neither a translation within the text nor in a note; the message is clear: the reader is being inducted into the Arab-Moroccan context and will need quickly to become familiar with it. We immediately learn of another *shiv'ah* being observed in Morocco, in the little village of Kharibga, by the rabbi who was once a neighbor of the protagonist's mother. This *shiv'ah* is supposed to sever all ties with the rabbi's daughter, whom he has pronounced dead because she had "gone with the demon" shortly before the family's departure for Israel. The story of the rabbi's daughter, driven out and abandoned, is at the root of the protagonist's trip to Morocco with his family before the death of his father. The journey is purportedly a pilgrimage to family tombs, but in reality, its aim is to find the little girl, now a grown woman, who seems to be only waiting for the return of

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et l'hégémonisation du 'Fait juif.' Quelques réflexions à partir du narratif sioniste," in *Socio-anthropologie des judaïsmes contemporains*, ed. Chantal Bordes Benayoun, (Paris: Honoré Champion 2015), 101-109, 103.

our hero to his homeland, as in the best of literary traditions. From the beginning, the name of the hometown of the family appears, Kharibga (Khurigba, Khriga), a town of the Mid-Atlas, and we are introduced to the practices of Moroccan Jews. In the first part of the novel, the protagonist denounces the hate towards Arabs which has become a part of the discourse of his Moroccan-Israeli milieu, a discourse which denies the evidence of the Moroccan Jews' belonging to Arab culture: "What will remain of you if you remove the Arab part of yourself, for it is in Arabic that your mother dreamed..."<sup>20</sup>

The protagonist denounces the inconsistency of being imbued with this culture and at the same time hating it: "I set about attacking the hate of those Jews now sitting in my mother's home, devoutly chanting and singing psalms and *mishanyot* in Hebrew, all to an Arab melody, obviously."<sup>21</sup> These same Jews intone Arab melodies for *Simhat Torah* – and then go into the streets shouting, "Death to the Arabs!"<sup>22</sup> "These melodies that you love, the poets that you love, the singers that you love, the composers and the musicians, they're all Arabs, more or less pious Muslims... and every nook, every corner is bathed in their Arabism..."<sup>23</sup> Herzl Cohen appears to be suggesting that Uri Zvi Grinberg, according to whom one is obliged to hate what one has loved, has won unknowing converts among Moroccan Jews.

The second part of the book (138 pages), nearly two-thirds of the novel, is entitled "The Journey" and deals with the trip to Morocco. On the one hand, this recalls the Moroccan Jewish tradition of making a pilgrimage by returning to Morocco to accomplish a rite of passage: visiting former homes, parents' graves and the tombs of saints. Yet on the other hand, this is a journey that must loop the loop: find the rabbi's daughter who was driven out because of a relationship with a non-Jew and made to emigrate to Israel. Mishael falls in love with Nadia, the rabbi's granddaughter who has become a dancer, and takes her with him to Israel. Mishael will find himself "between the breasts of the Moroccan woman, Arab Jew and Jewish Arab,"<sup>24</sup> a woman with a composite, hyphenated identity, with whom he will discover the Arab element of his own repudiated, hidden,

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<sup>20</sup> Cohen, *Avne shaish tahor*, 32. [Here and henceforth quoted passages are translated by the author of this article].

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

forgotten identity and display it overtly in Israel. With this young girl who is both Arab and Jewish, he will recover the scattered pieces of his identity and fit them back together as in a puzzle. Talking to Nadia, the main character admits his surprise at not feeling any strangeness about this and says: “In fact, did I not grow up with the language of my mother; were the songs of her mother not also the songs of my own mother; was the taste of her food not the same as the food of my own home?”<sup>25</sup> The part which takes place in Morocco is a sort of coming-of-age journey where the protagonist, on seeing his parents in context, comes to understand behavior, opinions and ways of being which previously he had found unintelligible. It is as if he succeeds in re-positioning them in their context, and by doing so, he, too, finds the missing parts of his lost identity.

### Ethiopian-Israeli Writers

In *Asterai*, the author plunges us into Ethiopia from the very outset. We find ourselves submerged in words in Amharic, vocalized but not translated nor listed in a glossary, with a short glossary only being added in the French translation.<sup>26</sup> We need to reach the third part of the book to find a shift to *Eretz ha-avot* [land of the fathers], the term used for Israel, but it is a matter of roughly 60 pages out of 284. The final part again centers on Ethiopia, focusing on the history of the Beta Israel and thus on the Ethiopia of Ethiopian Jews, “this sort of homeland in the nation” as quoted above. This is a tale which blends various genres, part novel, part autobiography, part history, moving from fictional narrative to documentary and back.

The work opens with the story of Fetgu, a child whose father tells him that he has now become old enough to shepherd the flock on his own. The child shows himself to be brave, innocent and wise, destined to become a charismatic leader of his community. His grandmother, endowed with magic powers, entrusts him with part of these in view of the journey she knows the family will make to *Yirussalem* (the pronunciation of “Jerusalem” in Amharic). To do this, she introduces him to the magic bird *Asterai*, a swan, the word for which gives the novel its title; the bird takes away the sins of the community on the “*Asterai* fast,” the fast of *Yom Kippur*. The bird also brings good tidings from Jerusalem and later asks the child to take grains of corn from Ethiopia to Israel to complete

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>26</sup> Omri Tegamalak Avera, *Asterai*, transl. Rosie Pinhas-Delpuech, (Paris: Actes sud, 2009).

a cycle which had begun with the family's ancestors, who had brought grains of corn to Ethiopia with them when they first came from Jerusalem. The role of the migratory bird, a symbol of freedom and movement, recalls the bird image in Bialik, which forms a link between the diaspora and Eretz Israel. However, in *Asterai* the bird "died of grief, having seen what the people of Beta Israel went through in Sudan and the Holy Land."<sup>27</sup> The bird image, embodying nostalgia for Jerusalem, is common in folklore and in the Ethiopian Jewish tradition.

Shalva Weil recalls an ancient folk tale of the Beta Israel about a stork. This was set to music by Shlomo Gronich, an Israeli pop and rock musician, and begins in this way:

Oh stork, oh stork,  
How is our city of Jerusalem?  
The stork flies to the Land of Israel,  
Spreading her wings above the Nile  
On her way to a distant land  
Beyond the hills,  
The Ethiopian House of Israel  
Sits and waits expectantly...<sup>28</sup>

The dream and yearning to return to Jerusalem, nurtured by religious texts and tradition, found concrete expression in an 1862 active attempt to reach the holy city from Ethiopia. Tragically, the expedition, led by Abba Mahari and described by James Quirin as part of a "millennial 'back to Jerusalem' movement," ended with the death of most of the members of the group.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 218. (Passages quoted are translated from the French version unless otherwise indicated).

<sup>28</sup> Shalva Weil, "Longing for Jerusalem among the Beta Israel of Ethiopia," in *African Zion. Studies in Black Judaism*, eds. Edith Bruder, Tudor Parfitt, (New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars' Press, 2012), 200-213, 204.

<sup>29</sup> A letter, which has become famous, was sent by Abba Sagga Amlak, a Beta Israel, to the Jerusalem community. It gives a clear idea of the spirit in which the unfortunate expedition was undertaken: "Has the time arrived that we should return to you, our city, the holy city of Jerusalem?...a great agitation has disturbed our hearts for they say that the time has arrived: the men of our country say: 'Separate yourselves from the Christians and go to your country, Jerusalem, and reunite with your brothers and offer up sacrifices to God, Lord of Israel, in the Holy Land'." See James Quirin, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews. A History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920*, (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 159.

Yet the Jerusalem of the Beta Israel, as Shalva Weil makes very clear, was a mythical and imaginary Jerusalem unconnected with the real Jerusalem, although the Beta Israel were not the only community to mythologize a utopian Jerusalem and to take it to be real. Many Jews from Morocco made ‘*aliyah*’ to this same Jerusalem imagined by Jews from Ethiopia and not to the real Israel. Weil discusses “A Dream at the Price of Honor,” a tale by Germaw Mengistu, which in 2009 won the best short story prize offered by the *Haaretz* daily, as a good example for understanding “the dissonance between the imagined and the ‘real’ Jerusalem.”<sup>30</sup> The tale recounts the story of an old Beta Israel who leaves Ethiopia by plane for Israel. The old man says that when he heard a voice on the plane saying that they were flying over the city of Jerusalem, silence fell.

Silence. Wrapped in our thoughts, we gazed upon Jerusalem in awe. I know exactly which Jerusalem each one of us sees in their imagination. I am 80 years old. One sees the Temple embellished with gold...another sees the Holy of Holies upon the Foundation Stone, which houses the Ark of the Covenant and the Cherubim in all their glory...<sup>31</sup>

However, these images of sacredness abruptly disappear on arrival at the *merkaz qelital* [absorption center] where the old man hears the manager announce that he will teach the newcomers to forget their past lives and to assimilate their new culture. At this point, the old man utters the words of the title, epitomizing his own bitterness and that of the Beta Israel in general: “We have realized our dream at the price of our honor.”<sup>32</sup>

In *Asterai*, the author describes the beautiful landscapes of Ethiopia and above all her clear lakes and rivers. Water is an important means of purification for the Jews of Ethiopia and plays a central role in the rites and customs of the Beta Israel (the hut for the woman who is impure because of her period or in childbirth, traditional marriage, belief in possession and spirits, the celebration of *sigd* [adoration], and more). This forms an introduction to the life of the Beta Israel before emigration. There is a detailed portrayal of daily life, described as harmonious, worthy and rich in values, as if the author wished, on the one hand, to address members of his community to promote their Ethiopian customs and to strengthen and highlight Ethiopian identity, and, on the other, to show

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<sup>30</sup> Weil, “Longing for Jerusalem among the Beta Israel of Ethiopia,” 209.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

Israelis the dignity and purity of the Ethiopian past. A long section dwells on the trauma of the journey to the Sudan (an experience undergone by the author as an adolescent) and the years spent in refugee camps. The protagonist examines the pointlessness of so many lives lost and denounces those who allowed the immigrants to leave without taking into account the risks: “He was furious with those who had told the community to abandon everything and go to the Sudan. They had organized the journey badly and brought about the death of many of the immigrants. And on recalling the long march, Fetgu shed bitter tears.”<sup>33</sup> Portraying life in Israel, pages cry out against Israeli integration policies, based on the author’s own experience as a boarder: “That is how a joyful, amiable young boy becomes a gloomy, withdrawn adolescent.”<sup>34</sup> Some passages recall other writings, based on similar experiences, by Eli Amir<sup>35</sup> and Daniel ben Simhon.<sup>36</sup> Tegamlak Avera writes that Israel in no way corresponds to the dreamt of Jerusalem. He even has his protagonist say, “So where have I got to? he asks himself. Is it the land of my ancestors? Is it perhaps not the Land of Israel promised to our father Abraham? Have we perhaps lost our way? Are we perhaps elsewhere? Maybe after so many centuries no one knows the way to Jerusalem any longer?”<sup>37</sup>

These lines voice the confusion the new immigrants feel in the face of a *Yerusalem* born of myths and dreams and situated in a country which does not retain its purity, a central value for the Beta Israel who, as the author of this article wrote in 1985,<sup>38</sup> had left a country where they could maintain a perfect state of purity and come to the mythical *Yerusalem* only to find themselves impure. In *Asterai*, the theme of water and purity plays out around the pure rivers and basins of Ethiopia, around the cleansing water into which the main character would dive to achieve natural, religious, mystical purification: Fetgu, in Ethiopia “approached the basin. The rays of the moon tinged the water with a sparkling, metallic whiteness... he dived into the depths and lay there. He imagined himself to be a drop of pure water and saw how he blended with the

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<sup>33</sup> Tegamlak Avera, *Asterai*, 189. The Hebrew text is much stronger: “He was furious over the negligence and the lack of responsibility of those who had brought on death...,” 196 (author’s translation).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>35</sup> Eli Amir, *Tarnegol kapparot*, (Tel Aviv: Am ‘Oved, 1983), published in translation as: *Scapegoat*, (London: Weidenfeld – Nicholson, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> Daniel Ben Simhon, *Ha-marokaim* [ *The Moroccans* ], (Jerusalem: Karmel, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Tegamlak Avera, *Asterai*, 195.

<sup>38</sup> Emanuela Trevisan Semi, “The Beta Israel (Falashas). From Purity to Impurity,” *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 27 (1985): 103-114.

other droplets filling the basin.”<sup>39</sup> In Israel, after dreams in which he is accused of impurity and the Beta Israel shout at him “Impure... Shame on you” he immerses himself in the Jordan River: “He undressed and dived naked into the cool water. Straightaway his body became water and everything he had experienced at the time of the *kwagme*<sup>40</sup> in Ethiopia repeated itself.”<sup>41</sup> Like a Beta Israel monk, for a week he would eat only chickpeas soaked in water and bathe each morning in the basin, the usual way of purifying oneself in Ethiopia. The purifying catharsis allows him eventually to rebuild his ruptured identity.

Yilma Shemuel explains that he wrote *Ha-Derekh li-Yrushalaim* primarily for the young people in his own ‘*edah* [community] so that they might know their own past, but also that he was writing for Israelis in order that they might be better informed about a group with a glorious past. The author was moved to write the work when his younger brother, who was born in Israel and did not understand Tigrinya, asked him why the *engera* [traditional Ethiopian breads] so bitter, explaining that he preferred bread with chocolate spread. Yilma Shemul, confronted with this question, an expression of alienation from Ethiopian origins – *engera* is basic to Ethiopian cuisine – the author feels he is at the *Pesah seder*, where the youngest ritually asks why the evening is different from any other night. He decides to recount “the exodus from Ethiopia” like “the exodus from Egypt,” the central theme of the Passover *seder*.<sup>42</sup>

Yilma Shemuel presents us with a text comprising a number of parts, including sketches, drawings and photos of Ethiopia, the villages left behind, and migration. In the first part, which is autobiographical, he narrates his journey through the Sudan at the age of 11. He is the nephew of Ferede Aklum, who in 1979 fled the Sudan and became an agent of the Mossad, promoting the ‘*aliyah* of the Beta Israel (through the Sudan) in the 1980s. His adventurous life is recounted in the book.

The story begins, as *Asterai* similarly does, with a childhood spent between home and the Addi Vorona (Tigray) village school until it is abruptly interrupted by the news spreading from one village to another of imminent redemption, the *geulah*, “after 2000 years of *galut*.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Tegamalak Avera, *Asterai*, 74.

<sup>40</sup> The *Kwagme* are the 5-6 days during which the community bathes in the river each morning.

<sup>41</sup> Tegamalak Avera, *Asterai*, 210.

<sup>42</sup> Shemuel, *Ha-derekh li-Yrushalaim*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

These were troubled times in the Tigray, where guerrillas of the Tigray People's Liberation Front were fighting the *derg* (Ethiopian military government) of Menghistu, a situation creating a climate of instability in the region. Departures took place in groups made up initially of family members and friends and joined along the way by Beta Israel from other villages, together forming a caravan.

The narrative model is the mythical one of the “exodus from Egypt,” – the Biblical narration in the Book of Exodus taken up in the *Haggadah* and read during the Passover *sefer*, as if the exodus from Egypt became the introjected model for narrating every exodus. The Beta Israel leave silently when in the sky shines a pure, clear moon, an hour after all the other inhabitants of the village have fallen asleep “because our fathers also left Egypt at a similar time.”<sup>44</sup> They leave because Jerusalem awaits them and Ethiopia is no longer their land; even after 2000 years of living there they continue to feel in exile because that is what the sacred text recounted and that is what the tales of the elders repeated. The protagonist narrates that “at home one spoke always of the holy Jerusalem belonging to the Jewish People and all our prayers were directed toward the holy city, Jerusalem. His parents never ceased to speak of holy Jerusalem and all children knew that that was their land and that one day they would get there,”<sup>45</sup> so when the news of the approaching end of *galut* and the advent of *geulah* spread, everyone was ready to set off.

Despite numerous vicissitudes, Shemuel's journey through the Sudan ended happily thanks, in part, to the intervention of Ferede, who put his family on the list of passengers to board the plane sent by Israel (via Athens). However, as in “A Dream at the Price of Honor,” there is overwhelming disappointment upon landing at Lod. Not only did everyone expect to disembark directly in Jerusalem, but they were also certain that the land of their dreams was exceptional, because if Jerusalem was the City of Gold, then the land, too, should have been golden:

Where is the golden Jerusalem? Why ever is the land not made of gold?... how was it possible that in Jerusalem there were only white men and not holy men (like angels)? How was it possible that all the tales we had heard as children from adults about Jerusalem were not true?<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.



Reality emerges when the new arrivals are received at the *merkaz qelitah* in the Negev, where the narrator is supposed to wear a *kippah*, an item of clothing which for him means nothing Jewish at all. It reminds him of the head covering of Muslims instead, along with the need to change his own name and endure a welcome of punches and insults such as “little nigger!” from the local children.<sup>47</sup> From Ofaqim the newcomers are eventually transferred to Beer Sheba; not to Jerusalem.

The theme of Jerusalem returns several times in the tale, a Jerusalem strangely inhabited by a white population, not black as the stories had it in Ethiopia: “I have grown up with the tales of Jerusalem and never would I have imagined that people like this lived there...I was surprised to see that whites inhabited Jerusalem.”<sup>48</sup>

The story that began in Ethiopia ends there, as well, as in *Asterai*. While entire families had left Ethiopia, a group of young people wishing to take part in a journey “back to the roots” departs from Israel for Ethiopia. Yilma Shemuel presents the trip as a sort of “completion of a circle” because “in those roots the future is buried.” This is why, when the young people ask the inhabitants now living in the houses the visitors had abandoned as children, if they might enter their homes, the reason for their request is, “We have not come to look for something but to see where we originate.”<sup>49</sup>

Returning to one’s roots in the abandoned Ethiopia, a mythical and mythicized Jerusalem not corresponding to reality, and an announced but unfulfilled promise of redemption, are some of the motifs in the tale by Yilma Shemuel.

## Conclusion

The protagonists of *Asterai*, *Ha-Derekh li-Yrushalaim*, and *Avne shaish tahor*, in order to piece together the fragments of their ruptured identity, must experience a catharsis involving a return to their country in search of the threads which emigration had broken, threads of gesture, customs and memories of the past.

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-70.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

However, this past and the country of origin are not threatening or terrifying as they are for many Ashkenazi Jewish writers; on the contrary, they are a source of relief, of strengthening identity, of narrative imagination, a necessary step in holding out in the new land of exile, thanks to literary creativity. We can say that in the ultimate deconstruction of Zionist discourse of exile and redemption, an important role will be played by authors of Moroccan and Ethiopian origin.

A similar role has also been played by cinema, where the movies of Ronit Elkabetz, an actress and filmmaker of Moroccan origin, are a good example of the Moroccan case in point. In her movies, there is an abundance of Moroccan idiom, traditions and culture, creating a positive link with the rich past of the country. As for Ethiopia, a new movie has been released, *Etz teena* [*The Fig Tree*] by Elem-Werqe Davidian (2018), an Israeli woman filmmaker who immigrated as a child from Ethiopia. The film was shot mostly in Ethiopia and shows the natural marvels of the land. It provides a good illustration of the same phenomenon as the one analyzed in literature. In this movie, a girl left in Ethiopia with her grandmother by her mother who immigrated to Israel previously, does not want to leave her country when the time comes for her and her grandmother to leave, as well. A similar trend has been analyzed in contemporary Ethiopian Israeli music by Ilana Webster-Kogen. She has noticed that Ester Rada, a well-known Ethiopian Israeli singer, performs in English (or where appropriate in Amharic) but not in Hebrew, and is strongly influenced by African-American, Caribbean and Ethiopian tunes, “linking Ethiopian Israelis to the historical narrative of the African diaspora instead of the Israeli narrative of rejecting the Jewish diasporic state of exile.”<sup>50</sup> Just as with the writers that I have analyzed, the focus is on the “old country,” the country of exile, which should be repudiated and hated, according to Zionist discourse, although we find experienced reality to be the very opposite of this.

If in the case of writers from East Europe, as I explained at the beginning, there are certain contradictions and ambivalences attaching to the rejection of the diaspora in literary discourse, in the case of writers from Morocco and Ethiopia, this ambiguity is even more noticeable where “home” seems to be the land of exile.

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<sup>50</sup> Ilana Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari. Making Ethiopian Music in Tel Aviv*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 27.

**Emanuela Trevisan Semi** is Professor of Modern Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She has published books, essays and articles in international journals on the topic of Jewries at the margins, on Karaites, on Jews of Ethiopia, on memory among Moroccan Jews, on movements of conversion to Judaism and on the literature of the Mizrahim. Recently she has published "Rethinking Morocco. Life-writing of Jews from Morocco", *Hespéris-Tamuda*, 2016; "Lifewriting between Israel, the Diaspora and Morocco. Revisiting the Homeland through Locations and Objects of Identity" in *Contemporary Sephardic and Mizrahi Literature*, Dario Miccoli (ed.), 2017; "Entre lieux de mémoire et lieux de l'oubli au Maroc. Quelle politique et quels acteurs pour la mémoire juive?", *Ethnologies*, 2018 and *Taamrat Emmanuel, an Ethiopian Jewish intellectual between colonized and colonizers*, 2018.

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**From a Returning Jewish Diaspora to Returns to Diaspora Spaces:  
Israeli-Ethiopians Today**

*by Lisa Anteby-Yemini*

**Abstract**

*This article discusses the processes of de-diasporization and re-diasporization experienced by the Israeli-Ethiopian community in Israel but which take a special twist regarding the homecoming of a Jewish diaspora. At first the Ethiopian immigrants' culture and religion were marginalized or silenced. Yet, the older generation progressively returned to their linguistic, religious, social, cultural and economic practices, forming a "little Ethiopia" in Israel while the younger generation, who strove to become as Israeli as possible, began feeling discriminated, leading to the beginning of a protest movement in 2015, demanding social justice and inclusion in the Israeli narrative. A second part examines physical and virtual "returns" to diasporic spaces through an ethnic revival and the re-appropriation of Ethiopian roots among the younger generation (in theatre, dance, music, literature and visual arts), as well as through return trips to Ethiopia and "heritage tourism;" new identifications, with a global Black diaspora, and the emergence of Israeli-Ethiopian diasporas living abroad, complicating yet again the notion of "home." This paper thus shows how Israeli-Ethiopians challenge notions of homecoming and question constructions of location, displacement and identity.*

**Introduction**

**Returning Home?**

*Silencing Ethiopian Culture, Erasing Beta Israel Identity*

*"Little Ethiopia": Diasporizing the Homeland*

*The Social Protest Movement of 2015*

*Rewriting Ethiopian Jewish History*

## Returning to Diasporic Spaces

*Ethnic Revival: Reclaiming Ethiopian Roots*

*Traveling Back to Ethiopia: Homing Diaspora?*

*A Virtual Black Global Diaspora*

*Emerging Israeli(-Ethiopian) Diasporas*

## Conclusions

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## Introduction

Most Ethiopian Jews lived in small villages in the remote highlands of north-east Ethiopia as farmers and artisans until their immigration to Israel. The quasi-totality of this community now lives in Israel, where Israelis of Ethiopian origin number some 150,000, including more than a third of this group who were born in Israel. Better known as Falashas – a term rejected by Israeli-Ethiopians today – they called themselves Beta Israel, or “House of Israel.” They claim to be descendants of an ancient exiled Jewish group and saw themselves as strangers in Ethiopia. Visions of returning to Jerusalem (*Yerussalem* in the Ethiopian Jews’ pronunciation), portrayed as their ultimate homeland, were passed down from generation to generation, through prophecies, stories, and identity constructs as Others. This ideology of difference was also sustained through ethno-religious borders separating them from local Christians and Muslims.<sup>1</sup> The Ethiopian Jews’ Torah (*Orit*) was written in Geez, the liturgical language of the Orthodox Ethiopian Church, and they followed Jewish Biblical practices and holidays, including strict observance of Shabbat and purity laws; thus, for example, men who touched a corpse were isolated for seven days in a special hut, as were women during menstruation and after childbirth. The Beta Israel did not have access to the Talmud or Rabbinic codes of Jewish law. The yearning for Zion was expressed in their festivals and prayers, when they would face in the direction of Jerusalem. The holy city was seen as the City of Gold and some recall being told

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<sup>1</sup> Hagar Salamon, *The Hyena People. Ethiopian Jews in Christian Ethiopia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

they would become “white” upon reaching the Promised Land. In 1862, thousands of Ethiopian Jews attempted to walk towards Jerusalem, yet failed. The dream was nonetheless kept alive and many Israeli-Ethiopians recounted to me their longing for Jerusalem, expressed through the words they sang as children, in Amharic – their spoken tongue – when they saw storks migrating back to Ethiopia: “*Shimela shimela yä-yerusalem säwotch dehna natchäw?*” [Stork, stork! Are the people of Jerusalem doing well?].<sup>2</sup>

The Ethiopian Jews’ isolation led them to believe they were the only descendants of the ancient Hebrews. It was only in 1865, with the arrival of Protestant European missionaries followed by Jewish emissaries, that they began to think of themselves as members of a global Jewish community.<sup>3</sup> In 1975, the fateful decision of the Israeli Rabbinate recognizing them as Jews, descendants of the lost tribe of Dan, allowed them to immigrate under the Law of Return. However, the dictatorial regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam forbade any citizen to leave Ethiopia, and Israel did not encourage *aliyah*. When political instability and famine in 1983 led thousands of Christian Ethiopians to flee towards Sudan, many Ethiopian Jews decided the time had come to leave. As conditions deteriorated in the Sudanese refugee camps, Israel, pressured by various actors, organized in 1984-5 a massive airlift from Sudan. Codenamed Operation Moses, that brought close to 7,000 Ethiopian Jews to the Jewish homeland. In 1989, an Israeli Embassy opened in Ethiopia, and thousands of Jews left their villages for Addis Ababa in the hope of immigrating to Israel. On the eve of the fall of Mengistu’s regime in May 1991, the Israeli government launched Operation Salomon, airlifting 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel within 36 hours.

This article will discuss the homecoming of this Ethiopian Jewish diaspora, confronted with the harsh reality of absorption policies, Orthodox Judaism, socio-economic marginalization, and racialization in the Promised Land. Yet, within Israel, this group has gradually developed new diasporic identity features, primarily as an Ethiopian, but also as a Black diaspora – and recently beyond Israel, as an Israeli-Ethiopian diaspora abroad. The processes of de-diasporization and re-diasporization found among other migrant groups here lead to questions

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<sup>2</sup> These very same words were recorded in 1935 by French anthropologist Marcel Griaule during the Dakar-Djibouti expedition when he visited Beta Israel villages in Ethiopia.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia. From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century*, (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

about the relationship between homeland and diaspora,<sup>4</sup> especially for a Jewish migrant group returning home to a state where the dominant Zionist ideology negates diaspora identity.

The first part of this article will address the challenges for Ethiopian immigrants, who, returning to a “homeland” never previously seen, experience inclusion along with exclusion, as well as increasing diasporization. The erasing of their culture and religious heritage, the clashes with the Rabbinate, the doubts cast upon their Jewishness, and the unexpected racism have left many Ethiopian Jews disenchanted. Nonetheless, even as their memory and history were being marginalized or even silenced to melt into a Jewish-Israeli national identity, the older generation began again to turn to their native linguistic, religious, social, cultural and economic practices, forming a “little Ethiopia” in Israel, while the younger generation, on the whole, rejected these elements of a diasporic lifestyle and strove to become as Israeli as they could. However, they found themselves excluded and discriminated against. This led to several protests, culminating in a wider social movement in 2015. The young Ethiopian Jews demanded social justice and inclusion in the Israeli collective, as well as recognition of the erased memory of their past and their ignored history in the Israeli-Zionist narrative.

This claim to re-appropriate their past entailed, *inter alia*, “homing” new spaces of belonging, making Israeli-Ethiopians develop into new diasporas. A second section of the article will thus explore today’s physical and virtual returns to diasporic spaces, expressed through an Ethiopian ethnic revival among the younger generation (in theater, dance, music, literature and the visual arts), but also through return trips to Ethiopia and heritage tourism; one also observes new ways of identifying, such as with a global Black diaspora, as well as the emergent phenomenon of Israeli-Ethiopian *émigrés* living abroad (primarily in the USA), following the trend of other young Israelis who (re)emigrate (*yordim*) to the diaspora. This article will therefore endeavor to show how the case of Ethiopian Jews challenges the very notion of ethnic return to the homeland, as well as enables the rethinking of history and memory as they shape the community’s construction of location, displacement and identity, illustrating the tensions between the diasporization of home and the homing of diaspora, to use Avtar Brah’s terms.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas. The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Beginning in 1991, I have been carrying out fieldwork among Israelis of Ethiopian origin in Israel, as well as participating in demonstrations and attending cultural, community and religious

## Returning Home?

Despite huge investments by the Israeli government and numerous NGOs, linguistic, economic, social, educational and cultural absorption of Israeli-Ethiopians continues to be riddled with difficulty; moreover, doubt as to their Jewishness still arises in specific contexts. Police violence, high percentage of youth in detention, discrimination in the workplace, in the army and in education, marginalization, spatial segregation and poverty are the images associated with Israeli-Ethiopians and the topics of most studies on the group. Research on professionals who have attained socio-economic mobility in politics, the military, the arts, business, law, high-tech and more, thus constituting an emerging Israeli-Ethiopian middle class, is still lacking except for a few publications.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the Ethiopian community in Israel is heterogeneous because of regional divisions, social class, degrees of religiosity, affiliation with the Falashmoras, and other factors, thus comprising several sub-groups.<sup>7</sup> This first part will limit itself to examining some paradoxes of Ethiopian Jews' homecoming that have not been given sufficient attention in the literature.

## *Silencing Ethiopian Culture, Erasing Beta Israel Identity*

Many Israeli-Ethiopians feel their culture and religious heritage have been marginalized or even erased. According to Zionist ideology, new immigrants are required to shed their culture and customs of diaspora and adopt a new Israeli-Jewish identity. Perhaps the first and foremost example of the denial of this diasporic past was the imposing of new Hebrew or Israeli names on new immigrants (*olim*) from Ethiopia, as with former Jewish *olim*. Erasing their

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events. Following the protest movement of 2015, I have interviewed one-and-a-half- and second-generation Ethiopian Israelis and several of those who made return trips to Ethiopia or settled in Europe or the USA.

<sup>6</sup> See for example *The Monk and the Lion. Contemporary Ethiopian Visual Art in Israel*, eds. Tal Dekel et al., (Tel Aviv: Achoti-For Women in Israel Publications, 2017); Yarden Fanta Vagenshtein, Lisa Anteby-Yemini, "Migration, Gender, and Mobility. Ethiopian-Israeli Women's Narratives of Career Trajectories," *African and Black Diaspora. An International Journal* 9/2 (2016): 257-273; Sophie Walsh, Abigail Yonas, "'Connected but Moving Onwards... Keeping the Balance.' Successful Ethiopian Women in Israel," *Society and Welfare* 32/3 (2012): 317-346 [Hebrew].

<sup>7</sup> Shalva Weil, "Ethiopian Jews. The Heterogeneity of a Group," in *Social, Cultural and Clinical Aspects of Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel*, eds. Eliezer Witztum, Nimrod Grisaru, (Beersheba: The Jewish Agency for Israel-Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2012): 1-17 [Hebrew].



original Ethiopian names constituted a double silencing, since each name held a linguistic meaning, in Amharic or Tigrinya, as well as a symbolic one, linked to a specific event at birth. Tsahay, renamed Dvora, explained to me that her original name meant “sun” and was given to her by her father who thought her “skin was as light as the sun.” New family names, usually based on the first name of the paternal grandfather, were also imposed on members of what Israeli bureaucrats considered the same “family,” often going against Ethiopian conceptions of kinship and blurring genealogical links. The authorities also required, to issue Israeli identity cards, precise birthdates, which some immigrants could not supply, so that for some, only an approximate year appeared, with no day nor month (e.g. 00/00/1954); one immigrant rightly told me: “Look, it’s as if I wasn’t born!”, perhaps best expressing the feeling of one’s entire identity being erased.

However, the most devastating denial, in the eyes of the community, was the Israeli Rabbinate’s refusal to accept the Beta Israel religious tradition, which had been maintained for centuries in Ethiopia. The non-recognition of the authority of the Beta Israel spiritual leaders (*qesotch*) was a blow to their honor and to the dignity of all Ethiopian immigrants. Furthermore, the *qesotch* were distressed to see that their purity rituals were not observed in Israel and their ritual slaughtering was not considered kosher. Elders asked me repeatedly how it could be that in Israel one could touch a corpse and not be isolated for seven days, or that women were not kept apart during menstruation or after birth, and even attended the circumcision of their newborn boys in the presence of other community members!<sup>8</sup> Many Ethiopian immigrants indicated they believed themselves to be the authentic Jews, and that the Promised Land had become impure.<sup>9</sup> They were, therefore, deeply hurt to discover that the Rabbinate cast doubts on their Jewishness because Beta Israel divorce and conversion did not conform to Rabbinic Judaism. This produced feelings of alienation and frustration, which some consider a major reason for the crisis of the second generation.<sup>10</sup> In addition, because the majority of the youth were sent to religious boarding schools where Jewish Orthodox practices clashed with the parents’ traditions, the gap between the generations widened, rendering the Beta Israel religion further illegitimate. Even though, following a powerful protest by

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<sup>8</sup> Lisa Anteby-Yemini, *Les juifs éthiopiens en Israël. Les paradoxes du paradis*, (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Emanuela Trevisan Semi, “The Beta Israel (Falashas). From Purity to Impurity,” *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 27/2 (1985): 103-114.

<sup>10</sup> Sharon Shalom, *From Sinai to Ethiopia. The Halakhic and Conceptual World of Ethiopian Jewry*, (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2016).

the Ethiopian community, the humiliating symbolic conversion required by the Rabbinate was discontinued in 1985, today Israelis of Ethiopian origin must still follow specific procedures to ascertain their personal *halakhic* status when registering for marriage at religious councils.

Forced changes in the two realms of religion and civil identity, among others, demonstrate how Israeli authorities erased signs of the Ethiopian immigrants' past, repeating the same mistakes as during the absorption of Jews from Arab countries in the 1950s. As a result of this paternalist acculturation process, the younger generation felt pressured to abandon Ethiopian customs, clothing, foodways and languages. Many young immigrants I met in the 1990s spoke of being ashamed of their Ethiopian culture and endeavoring to be as Israeli as possible, while their parents attempted to return to their diasporic practices.

### *“Little Ethiopia”: Diasporizing the Homeland*

Following periods of varying length spent in absorption centers and “caravan,” or mobile home, sites, these new Israelis settled in permanent dwellings and rapidly re-created Ethiopian ways of living. Because they chose to buy apartments next to each other, thus they involuntarily created “ethnic enclaves.” This had negative consequences for the integration of the second generation, but also enabled them to set up Ethiopian neighborhoods with social and economic structures reminiscent of their villages in Ethiopia: mutual help and rotating credit associations (*qubye* or *eqqub*); burial associations (*edder*) to manage mourning ceremonies often attended by thousands of community members and including preparation of food, renting buses to the cemetery, and more; meat-sharing groups which pooled money to buy an animal that an elder or *qes* would slaughter and divide equally among members; coffee groups which meet for traditional *bunna* ceremonies; councils of elders (*shmaggelotch*) to resolve conflicts; and, the emergence of traditional healers to treat problems that could not be cured by Western medicine.

Ethiopian Jewish religious life began thriving again, with ritual celebrations including baby naming, marriage, mourning and house-warming ceremonies, as well as specific holidays such as the *Sigd*, which was officially recognized as an Israel national holiday in 2008. Despite the fact that close to twenty Israeli-Ethiopians have been ordained as Orthodox rabbis by the Rabbinate, they have an ambivalent status in their community and are often seen as traitors competing

with the traditional leaders, the *qesotch*.<sup>11</sup> To date, a Beta Israel religious revival has led to the creation of a dozen Israeli-Ethiopian synagogues across the country, the consecration of thirty young *qesotch*, and the founding in 2008 of a national Council of Israeli Qesotch. Even though the majority of the *qesotch* are granted no official recognition by the Israeli Rabbinate and their interpretation of Jewish law is ignored, they are highly respected by their community and invited to public events such as demonstrations, weddings, and cultural activities to give their blessing, thus maintaining the Geez language and liturgy.<sup>12</sup> However, while secularization has spread, especially among the youth, some Israeli-Ethiopian rabbis try to preserve and adapt the Beta Israel oral tradition (or “*Shulhan ha-Orit*,” as Sharon Shalom terms it) to Rabbinic Judaism.

Traditional foods and dishes have also made a comeback, as elder women again began preparing *indjära*, a flatbread made with *teff* flour, stews (*wät*), Shabbat bread (*dabbo*) and domestic beer (*tälla*). Gradually, Ethiopian grocery stores selling spices, *teff* flour and *gesho* leaves for making beer and restaurants, with catering services, opened around Israel. Similarly, hair salons and ethnic stores offering traditional white cotton shawls (*shammä*) and embroidered dresses or CDs and DVDs of Ethiopian music and films have also appeared. As the older Ethiopian-Israelis decorated their interiors with posters of Ethiopia and traditional artifacts such as woven straw baskets or horsetail whisks, they also watched videos of Ethiopian singers and dancers. The Amharic and Tigrinya languages are also maintained through daily interactions, especially with the older generation, most of whom fail to learn Hebrew, and through daily broadcasts on Israeli public radio, and more recently an Israeli-Ethiopian cable TV channel (ETV). An Amharic language exam has been introduced as one of the disciplines covered by the Israeli state high school completion exams (*bagrut*). A broad network of associations promoting Ethiopian Jewish culture or involved in social, educational (e.g. *Fidel*) and legal (e.g. *Tebeka*) matters has been set up. Most recently, a website called *Little Ethiopia* offers community news and services, testifying to the growing consumption of ethnic culture and products in Israel.

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<sup>11</sup> Rachel Sharaby, Aviva Kaplan, “Between the Hammer of the Religious Establishment and the Anvil of the Ethnic Community,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 14/3 (2015): 482-500.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Alvarez-Péreyre et al., *Anthology of Jewish Ethiopian Liturgy*, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press–Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2018), which also contains CDs of Beta Israel prayers recorded in Israel.

This nostalgia for their native land is also reflected in the discourse of the older generation, who still call Ethiopia *agäratchin* (“our country”) and often spoke to me about how many cattle they had owned, how delicious the *indjära* was, how pure the air felt and even how good the water tasted!<sup>13</sup> As they idealized their former home, they also yearned for Ethiopian values such as honor and respect, which many felt were trampled by the Israeli establishment or even their own children, who had become insolent (*baläge*). Thus, as they constructed a new identity for themselves as Israeli citizens, the parents’ generation also recreated, through linguistic, cultural, religious, social and media practices, Ethiopian *ethnoscapes*, defined by Arjun Appadurai as the native country reinvented in the imagination of deterritorialized groups. These processes of diasporization of the Promised Land and homing of Ethiopia provide clear manifestations of the paradoxes of homecoming also found among other Jewish immigrants.<sup>14</sup> At first, the 1.5 and second generation tended to reject most of their parents’ practices. As they endeavored to become Israelis, speaking Hebrew, eating Israeli food, being educated in Israeli – often religious – schools, serving in the army, studying at institutions of higher learning and entering the job market, they also realized that they were not fully accepted and felt they were treated as second-class citizens. Political activism to defend their rights, accompanied by demonstrations, grew in the 1980s and 1990s, culminating in a large protest movement in 2015.

### *The Social Protest Movement of 2015*

Numerous instances of everyday racism punctuate the life of Israeli-Ethiopians; however the turning point is no doubt the Blood Affair of 1996.<sup>15</sup> For many of those I spoke to, this episode changed their relationship with Israeli society. In the years since, various incidents have sparked protests, such as a building

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<sup>13</sup> Lisa Anteby-Yemini, “Promised Land, Imagined Homelands. Ethiopian Jews’ Immigration to Israel,” in *Homecomings. Unsettling Paths of Return*, eds. Fran Markowitz, Anders Stefansson, (Boulder: Lexington, 2004), 146-163.

<sup>14</sup> Andre Levy, Alex Weingrod, “Paradoxes of Homecoming. Jews and Their Diasporas,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79/4 (2006): 691-716.

<sup>15</sup> The Israeli Blood Bank decided to discard blood donations from Israelis of Ethiopian origin because of high rates of malaria, hepatitis B and AIDS among them, but without disclosing this policy, allegedly to “preserve their honor.” When the practice was revealed by a journalist in 1996, Israeli-Ethiopians demonstrated massively, accusing the government of racism and demanding that the policy be discontinued. Don Seeman, *One People, One Blood. Ethiopian-Israelis and the Return to Judaism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

project's decision in 2012 not to sell apartments to Israelis of Ethiopian origin in Kiryat Malachi, or the unexplained death of Yosef Salamsa, a young Israeli-Ethiopian first arrested and then released by the police in 2014, only to have his lifeless body found shortly thereafter. The release of the April 2015 video of Damas Fakado, an Israeli-Ethiopian IDF soldier, being beaten by two Israeli policemen, triggered a series of demonstrations the following month. These were staged primarily by the second generation to protest against racism, police brutality, and inequality meted out to the Ethiopian-Israeli community, and ended in violent clashes with the police.

While the Israeli-Ethiopians' slogans and their demands had clearly been influenced by the discourse of leaders of the Afro-American black struggle such as Malcolm X, the events of 2015 in Baltimore and the *Black Lives Matter* movement in the USA, their identification with Black Americans also had its limits.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the young Israeli-Ethiopians demanded, first and foremost, to be treated as full Israeli Jewish citizens, equal to the Whites. The Hebrew signs at the demonstrations called for "Integration!" (*hishtalvut*) and "Equality now" (*shivyon 'akhshav*), and the English banners read "Stand Up for Your Rights!". Many young people I spoke to during the protests voiced their feeling of not belonging to Israeli society, even after serving in the army, completing their studies and securing a job. Others said they felt not quite Israeli and not quite Ethiopian, an "in-between" status common to immigrants worldwide, and befittingly expressed in the title of an Israeli-Ethiopian author's book, *Half-Strangers*.<sup>17</sup> Yet they also deeply wished to be included in the Jewish national collective and be recognized as Israelis, often repeating to me "I have no other country" [*ein li eretz aheret*], pointing unambiguously to Israel as their home. They protested against discrimination in employment, housing, education, religious status, as well as over-policing and racial profiling of their community, but also against the differential treatment still applied to "Ethiopian immigrants" (e.g., in the army or in educational programs), after over 30 years in Israel or even being born in the country! They simply asked to be treated like other Israelis, not differently. As one leader declared: "I was born here, I am Israeli. We have the same obligations as the others, so we should also have the same rights." Many of those I interviewed also considered their claims for social justice and equality a concern of the entire Israeli society and not an "Ethiopian issue," again stressing

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<sup>16</sup> Alon Burstein, Liora Norwich, "From a Whisper to a Scream. The Politicization of the Ethiopian Community in Israel," *Israel Studies* 23/2 (2018): 25-50.

<sup>17</sup> Alon Masganaw Demla, *Half-Strangers*, (Holon: Orion Books, 2011) [Hebrew].

the need for their inclusion in the Israeli nation-state. This is also reflected in the concomitant demand for inclusion in the wider historical Israeli narrative.

### *Rewriting Ethiopian Jewish History*

The desire for recognition as full-fledged Israeli citizens parallels the goals of a small but growing body of critical works by Israeli-Ethiopians, particularly in the social sciences, arts and literature, which aims to deconstruct Ethiopian Jews' history, migration journeys and integration in Israel and to include them in the dominant Israeli narrative, relying on post-colonial theories and racial, intersectional and subaltern studies. These writings and artistic productions, mainly by members of the 1.5 and second generations, emphasize the need for voices of the Israeli-Ethiopian community to be heard and to rewrite life in Ethiopia and the migration and absorption experiences from their perspective – not through the eyes of non-Ethiopians. Thus, they aim to restore the memory of Ethiopian Jewry erased during the integration process and increase public awareness of the Beta Israel heritage, which has not been granted adequate exposure in Israeli discourse and public space, causing many Israeli-Ethiopians to feel excluded from official history and Israeli nationhood.

Some suggest a critical analysis of Beta Israel history and religion, such as Israeli-Ethiopian rabbi Sharon Shalom,<sup>18</sup> who closely compares the oral tradition of Ethiopian Jews with Rabbinic Talmudic tradition, but also asks what right and authority Israeli rabbis have to decide which interpretation of the Torah is the correct one or why Ethiopian Jews must adapt their tradition to hegemonic Orthodox Judaism in Israel. A literary approach is taken by Israeli-Ethiopian author 'Omri Tegamlak Avera, whose novel *Asterai* ends with a section on a Beta Israel historical narrative interwoven with fictional twists.<sup>19</sup> In contemporary history, a collective book of testimonies by prisoners of Zion from Ethiopia sheds light on their suffering and the torture they endured because of their Zionist activities,<sup>20</sup> endeavoring to integrate them in the broader Israeli narrative of prisoners of Zion around the world. In the new film by Israeli-Ethiopian director Alamwork Davidian (*Fig Tree*, 2018), set in 1989, the Ethiopian civil war is seen through the eyes of an Ethiopian Jewish girl whose family is preparing to

<sup>18</sup> Shalom, *From Sinai to Ethiopia*.

<sup>19</sup> 'Omri Tegamlak Avera, *Asterai*, (Tel-Aviv: Yedi'ot Aharonot, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> *The Dream Behind Bars. The Story of the Prisoners of Zion from Ethiopia*, eds. Baruch Meiri, Rahamim El'azar, (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2001).

immigrate to Israel; the filmmaker, who was herself a young girl at that time, draws on her own experience of fear and suffering under the dictatorship of Mengistu. Another initiative is the creation in 2016 of a research group at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, headed by social activist and academic Efrat Yerday and titled “A Story Rewritten. Ethiopian Jews Rewriting Their Story;” it comprises Israelis of Ethiopian origin but excludes non-Ethiopians. The project purposes to work out a critical approach toward scholarly study of Ethiopian Jews by non-Ethiopian researchers, a re-examination of the hegemony of the Israeli establishment’s narrative of Ethiopian Jewish *aliyah*, which is presented as the sole possible narrative, exclusive of other stories that do not fit in with it, and the opening of a research field on race in Israel.<sup>21</sup> A more radical group of students of Ethiopian origin set up an online forum, Y.E.S., where some claim to be “strangers” and an “oppressed minority” in Israel, forming an “Ethiopian Jewish liberation front.”

Israeli-Ethiopians’ re-appropriation of their past focuses particularly on the rescue operations organized by the State of Israel, especially Operation Moses, the airlift carried out in 1984-5 from Sudan.<sup>22</sup> Many consider the Israeli narrative as biased, given that it portrays the Ethiopians as victimized Jews that Israel saved and fails to mention the racism of the Israeli government of the 1970s and 1980s or the outstanding role played by Ethiopian Jewish activists already in Israel at the time and by American Jewish organizations in pressuring Israel to save Ethiopian Jewry. The official story neglects Beta Israel agency, leaves out the fact that they left their villages voluntarily and that they endured trauma and loss in Sudan; it only highlights the courage of the Israelis involved, casting them as saviors.<sup>23</sup> Some claim this narrative “ignores Israel’s role in the death of thousands of refugees in Sudan while the government debated how to relate to this part of the Jewish people.”<sup>24</sup> Several autobiographies, novels, poems, plays, films and songs, most of them written in Hebrew by Israeli-Ethiopians, recall the secret departure from Ethiopia, the hardships of the trek to Sudan, the horrendous conditions in the refugee camps, and the death toll, an estimated

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<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.vanleer.org.il/en/research-group/story-rewritten-ethiopian-jews-rewriting-their-story>, accessed May 2, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Shira Havtam Shato, “The Different Narratives of the Journey of Aliya of the Jews of Ethiopia,” MA Thesis, Hebrew University, 2010 [Hebrew].

<sup>23</sup> Sharon Shalom, *Conversations about Love and Fear. The Dialogue between the Rabbi’s Daughter and the Kes’ Son*, (Rishon LeTzion: Yedi’ot Aharonot Books–Hemed Books, 2018), 37 [Hebrew].

<sup>24</sup> Van Leer research group; see note 21.

4,000 Ethiopian Jews who perished on the way. They attempt to counter the dominant discourse, in which their *aliyah* is explained as due to famine in Ethiopia and they themselves are portrayed as passive and grateful for being rescued by Israelis. Some works also uncover silenced stories inside the community, such as the special connections one needed to be chosen by the “Committee” of Israeli-Ethiopians sent to Sudanese refugee camps to designate candidates for *aliyah* and their order of departure. This involved internal struggles, bribery, sexual favors and even rape of young girls.<sup>25</sup>

The narrative of the journey through Sudan is a central theme in the collective memory of the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel, and has also been transmitted to the second generation and appears in their artistic productions, discussions on social media and identity constructs. The flight from Ethiopia is often seen as replicating the Biblical Exodus, borrowing the same symbols of suffering and redemption.<sup>26</sup> Yet many Israeli-Ethiopians feel this was a traumatic experience, and the deaths of their brethren have not been recognized by Israeli society. After a long struggle led by Israeli-Ethiopian activists, in 2003 the State of Israel established a Day of Remembrance (*Hazkarah*) for those who perished on the journey through Sudan, to coincide with Jerusalem Day, which commemorates reunification of the city in the course of the Six-Day War of 1967. The choice of the same day makes a gesture of including this community in the Israeli national memory of the fallen soldiers for Jerusalem; however, the thirty years’ struggle to obtain official recognition of this part of Ethiopian Jewish memory demonstrates its marginalization in the master narrative.<sup>27</sup> The annual commemoration ceremony takes place at Mount Herzl, Israel’s national military cemetery in Jerusalem, where a memorial has been erected bearing over 1500 names of the deceased. Even though some activists argue that Jerusalem Day overshadows their commemoration, which is thus deprived of the visibility it deserves, several institutions (schools, universities, community centers) have begun marking this Ethiopian Jewish Memorial Day, gradually inscribing it in Israeli public space.

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<sup>25</sup> See the film by Danny Adino Abeba, *Code Name. Silence*, 2005, where he condemns the Israeli government for not investigating these cases.

<sup>26</sup> Gadi BenEzer, *The Ethiopian Jewish Exodus. Narratives of the Migration Journey to Israel 1977-1985*, (London–New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Emanuela Trevisan Semi, “*Hazkarah*. A Symbolic Day for the Reconstituting of the Jewish-Ethiopian Community,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 17 (2005): 191-197.



Another new initiative is the recently founded *Forum Yerusalem*, which comprises over 20 organizations and works to include the story of Ethiopian Jewry in the Israeli Zionist narrative. It presents Ethiopian Jewish life stories – Farada Aklum, Baruch Tegegne – to incorporate them as Israeli heroes and heroines in the national discourse. It also promotes educational fieldtrips in Israel to sites telling the story of Ethiopian Jewry, such as the Mount Herzl monument, while also striving to render the narrative more visible in Israeli public spheres. Thus the exhibit “Operation Moses: 30 years after” opened in 2016 at the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv. Despite the absence of a critical approach toward the Israeli narrative, in several portraits of men and women who had immigrated with Operation Moses trajectories of failure (unemployment, poverty, marginalization and even suicide) did appear side by side with stories of success (access to high positions, economic mobility, social integration), accompanied by video interviews by Israeli-Ethiopian filmmaker Orly Melessa. To this day, there is no Ethiopian Jewish museum or heritage center in Israel, in spite of several attempts (in Rehovot, Tel Aviv and recently Jerusalem) which have failed, mainly due to power struggles within the Ethiopian community. In 2019, Ethiopian-Israeli rabbi Sharon Shalom was appointed to the first Chair of Ethiopian Jewish Studies at Kyriat Ono College. It is too early to say if he will rise to the challenge of developing a vibrant center of Ethiopian Jewish study and legacy.

In a similar manner, other marginalized groups in Israel, such as Mizrahi Jews, have been creating new spaces of counter-memory, seeking re-appropriation of their history and challenging the dominant narrative by voicing their “subaltern memories” striving to include them in the Israeli-Zionist story.<sup>28</sup> Egyptian Jews, among others, also feel their migration stories have been silenced and their sufferings lack recognition.<sup>29</sup> The current re-workings of Ethiopian Jewish memory and their contested historical narratives, sometimes assuming political and militant dimensions, are connected with a wider trend of recovering their past among the younger generation of Israelis of Ethiopian origin.

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<sup>28</sup> *Memory and Forgetting among Jews from the Arab-Muslim Countries. Contested Narratives of a Shared Past*, eds Emanuela Trevisan Semi, Piera Rossetto, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 4 (2012), 1-6.

<sup>29</sup> Michèle Baussant, “Aslak eh? De juif en Egypte à Juif d’Egypte,” *Diasporas* 27 (2016): 77-93.

## Returning to Diasporic Spaces

This section will focus on diasporization processes inside the Israeli-Ethiopian community, which unfold through cultural awakening, trips to Ethiopia, identification with a Black diaspora and emergence of Israeli-Ethiopian diasporas abroad.

### *Ethnic Revival: Reclaiming Ethiopian Roots*

There is no doubt that today many young Israeli-Ethiopians are proudly returning to their roots. The silencing of Ethiopian culture and history has given way in the last two decades to a return, a legitimization and an increased visibility of Beta Israel traditions.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the demonstrations of 2015 were accompanied by Israeli and Ethiopian flags, marking both a strong national Israeli identity and pride in an Ethiopian identity. One of the most visible and symbolic statements of this re-identification with their country of origin is the decision of many young adults to change back to the Ethiopian and Amharic names given them at birth, thus re-appropriating their past. The Amharic and Tigrinya languages have also become more legitimate. Young parents have mentioned to me, for example, that they teach their children Amharic, including literacy, through computer programs. Choosing tattoos with Amharic letters or words and launching a fashion line featuring words in Amharic characters (“little princess,” “love”) on clothing and accessories also point to strategic uses of linguistic heritage. In addition, Israeli-Ethiopians’ growing awareness of their ethnic identity emphasizes Ethiopian values, such as politeness, hospitality, honor, or respect for the parents. This is expressed, for instance, in the recognition of community elders and *qesotch*, who are invited to speak at demonstrations and appear in artwork, plays, films, novels and photography by young artists of Ethiopian origin. The 2019 mediatized image of lawyer and newly appointed Member of Knesset Gadi Yevarkan kneeling to kiss the feet of his elderly mother upon her arrival for the swearing-in ceremony, eloquently manifests this desire to maintain certain Ethiopian practices in the public domain.

One of the most dynamic fields of this cultural awakening is the visual arts, including film, painting, drawing, sculpture, graffiti art, video art, installations, and photography, through which artists of the 1.5 and second generations are

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<sup>30</sup> Shalom, *Conversations about Love and Fear*, 156.

attempting to mainstream Ethiopian Israeli culture.<sup>31</sup> They resort to practices, images, sounds, symbols and artifacts linked to life in Israel and Ethiopia, such as Ethiopian textiles and clothes, coffee beans, Beta Israel myths, figures of *qesotch* and elders, and Amharic letters and words. Some rely on childhood memories or return to Ethiopia for inspiration, while others have never set foot in Ethiopia and draw on an imaginary space transmitted by family stories. Some works convey criticism of the integration process through social and political awareness, such as Nirit Takele's paintings (e.g. "Mikveh," recalling symbolic conversion, or "Justice for Yosef Salamsa" with its reference to police brutality). Various Ethiopian-Israeli media often try to convey an alternative image to that of a community of weak, poor, voiceless and excluded citizens;<sup>32</sup> thus Shmuel Beru's film *Zrubavel* (2008), Esti Almo Wexler's photos of successful Israeli-Ethiopians, her children's series "Grandfather Berhano's Travels," her talk show "Women Speaking" and her first feature-film *Lady Titi* (2018). Even so, there are still forces that exclude, silence and marginalize these creations.<sup>33</sup> Despite this, many artistic productions represent Israelis of Ethiopian origin as integrated, protesting for their rights or reclaiming their ethnic identity, thus offering an alternative narrative of integration. By combining Ethiopian and Israeli identities, these young artists are creating a new discourse on gender, race, difference, identity, belonging, ethnicity, and class, and on the experience of being black in would be white Israeli society.<sup>34</sup>

In literature, as well, usually written in Hebrew and sometimes in Amharic or Tigrinya, novels – often autobiographical – essays, poetry, blogs, and forums on social media suggest a new discourse of ethnic pride and criticism of integration.<sup>35</sup> For example, Avera's novel *Asterai* tells the story of a young boy's life in Ethiopia, followed by his tortuous journey through Sudanese refugee camps and his arrival in Israel, only to be disillusioned after several years in the Promised

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<sup>31</sup> Dekel et al., *The Monk*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Esti Almo Wexler, "The Monk and the Lion. A Journey of Identity and of Returning Home," in *The Monk and the Lion*, eds. Dekel et al., 113-124.

<sup>34</sup> *The Monk and the Lion*, eds. Dekel et al.

<sup>35</sup> One can cite among others Dalia Bitaulin-Sherman, *How the World Turned White* [Ekh she-ha-olam nihie lavan], (Modiin: Kinneret Publications, 2013) [Hebrew]; Abraham Edga, *Facing forward* [Im ha-panim Kadima], (Tel-Aviv: Tcherikover, 2002) [Hebrew]; Asher Elias, *An Ethiopian in your backyard* [Etiyopi ba-khatzer shelkha], (New York-Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2001) [Hebrew]; Tsega Malaku, *Not in our school* [Lo be-beit sifrenou], (Steimatzky Publications, 2014) [Hebrew]; Gadi Yevarken, *Start at the Beginning* [Matkhil mi-hatkhal], (Tel Aviv: Halonot Publications, 2003) [Hebrew].

Land; it is only by reconnecting with nature and his roots that the hero finds salvation in Israel. In this moving fictional tale, the young author, who himself made *aliyah* in 1984 via Sudan, uses numerous Amharic words in the text and refers to a wide range of Ethiopian beliefs and practices: spirits (*quollé, zar*), the hut for women during menstruation and after childbirth, marriage celebrations, mourning customs, Beta Israel religious festivals and Shabbat. The powerful longing for Jerusalem is symbolized by a black bird (*asterai*) which is said to fly every year over Ethiopia, bringing good news from Jerusalem, recasting the century-long myth of the stork. The power of cultural heritage is epitomized by the central message of the hero's grandmother throughout the novel: never neglect nor forget your culture and the religion your ancestors transmitted to you. Ethiopia is often pictured in these writings as a Garden of Eden and a lost paradise, where the appropriation of an imagined African identity makes Ethiopia become home and Israel – the diaspora.<sup>36</sup> Other works, by contrast, overtly criticize certain archaic Ethiopian practices.<sup>37</sup> Ethiopian proverbs and traditional tales are also used, as by Esti Almo Wexler (2017), who explains the dilemmas of integration through an Ethiopian folktale. Performers of the spoken word, often inspired by black slam poetry, are also emerging, reminiscent of Mizrahi artists of the *Ars Poetica* movement.

Theater has developed, mainly in the work of the Israeli-Ethiopian ensemble *Hulugeb* ("together" in Amharic) founded in 2004 on the initiative of the Confederation House in Jerusalem and the Israeli Ministry of Culture to promote theater professionals of Ethiopian origin in Israel, as well as highlight Ethiopian culture and the hardships of absorption; some productions have won awards and toured abroad.<sup>38</sup> Other actors or directors of Ethiopian origin also stage plays, some in Amharic for a community-based audience, others in Hebrew, for larger Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian audiences, and several geared to young children or teenagers. Many depict nostalgic and pastoral scenes from village life in Ethiopia, such as the coffee ceremony or wedding celebrations, with figures of elders and *gesotch*; the actors are sometimes dressed in Ethiopian clothing and accompanied by different kinds of Ethiopian music. These plays also address integration issues, such as racism, domestic violence or generational gaps, often with humor and self-derision. Dance troupes have also flourished, the

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<sup>36</sup> Adia Mendelson-Maoz, "Diaspora and Homeland. Israel and Africa in the Hebrew-Israeli Literature of Beta Israel," *Research in African Literatures* 44/4 (2013): 35-50.

<sup>37</sup> Such as Asfu Beru, *A Different Moon*, (Jerusalem: Keter Publications, 2002) [Hebrew].

<sup>38</sup> Sarit Cofman-Simhon, "African Tongues on the Israeli Stage: A Reversed Diaspora," *TDR. The Drama Review* 57/3 (2013): 48-68.

best known being Beta, which present different choreographies including Ethiopian traditional dance (*eskesta*). Israeli musicians of Ethiopian origin have also developed a renewed interest in their roots and in Ethiopian musical traditions, sometimes singing in Amharic or in Hebrew interspersed with Amharic words, evoking Ethiopia or yearning for its culture, and using traditional Ethiopian instruments; some singers record with Ethiopian musicians or shoot clips of their albums in Ethiopia. Ethiopian pop is also widely appreciated among the 1.5 and second generation, and numerous concerts in Israel feature famous Ethiopian singers.<sup>39</sup>

An interesting development is the emergence of cultural entrepreneurs who organize large events celebrating Ethiopian culture in Israeli public spaces, such as the *Hulugeb* festival taking place since 2000 in Jerusalem (dance, music, theater) or the more recent *Sigdadia* organized by Israeli-Ethiopian actor, playwright and director Shaï Ferado. The last edition was held in 2018 at Habima Theater, a central Tel-Aviv venue, targeting an Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian audience, and featured two days of plays, lectures, concerts, films, open dance classes, a fashion show and an arts, crafts and food fair where small Israeli-Ethiopian businesses promoted their products, among which were locally designed clothes and Ethiopian imported clothing, jewelry, books, cosmetics for dark skin, black dolls with different sets of clothing – including a traditional Ethiopian embroidered white dress and a booklet on her migration to Israel. Marketing Ethiopian culture in Israel as trendy and ethnic is also reflected in the opening of new restaurants, such as *Balinjera*, set up by a comedian and a fashion model, both of Ethiopian origin, in Tel-Aviv, and presenting Ethiopian food as cosmopolitan and healthy. In addition, several places present Ethiopian culture for Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian Israelis and foreign tourists: a Beta Israel village and farm complex near Kyriat Gat offers workshops in Amharic calligraphy and Ethiopian-style mud building; in Bet Shean, a theater therapist of Ethiopian origin offers an Ethiopian experience including a traditional coffee ceremony and recounting of the migration journey. Educational programs about Ethiopian culture are being encouraged in school curricula, such as Alemu Eshetie's project "Museum in a suitcase" presented to schoolchildren throughout Israel.

The parents' longing for Ethiopia takes on new forms of post-nostalgia (to use S. Boym's term) among the second generation who, through art, literature, music,

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<sup>39</sup> Ilana Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari. Making Ethiopian Music in Tel Aviv*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018).

and dance express an interest in their cultural legacy and even demonstrate ethnic activism. This trend is part of a wider revival of ethnicity in Israel, such as theater in Moroccan-Jewish dialect<sup>40</sup> or Mizrahi literature,<sup>41</sup> which challenges the Zionist undertaking. The culture of origin thus becomes a resource for artistic creativity and produces a hybrid Israeli-Ethiopian identity, strengthened by return trips to Ethiopia.

### *Traveling Back to Ethiopia: Homing Diaspora?*

After several years in their new homeland, a growing number of Israeli-Ethiopians began returning for visits to their country of origin. These growing numbers of trips to Ethiopia were made for family motives (among those who still had family members living there), medical reasons (visiting traditional healers and bathing in warm springs), business trips (for those involved in import-export and commercial ventures), leisure, heritage tourism or simply nostalgia for the old country. Some have even invested in real estate in Addis Ababa or bought a house for family vacations. Others travel to insure maintenance and restoration of cemeteries and synagogues in former Beta Israel villages. These frequent return trips since the 1990s have led to new transnational practices and economic networks between Israel and Ethiopia.<sup>42</sup>

More recently, the younger generation began to develop artistic mobility between Ethiopia and Israel, with the circulation of several Ethiopian musicians and singers performing in Israel, as well as young Israelis returning to Ethiopia to carry out art projects. This is the case of Ethiopian-born Nirit Takale, who spent several months in Addis Ababa as an artist-in-residence in 2018 and returned to Israel with a new series of paintings which went on exhibit at international art galleries, and Israeli-Ethiopian singer Dega Feder who recorded in Ethiopia with local musicians and then came to Israel to play with her band. Alamwork Davidian has spent six months in Ethiopia shooting her latest movie (*Fig Tree*, 2018) with a crew of local Ethiopians, Israelis and foreigners and a cast of Ethiopian actors, which is why the entire film is in Amharic. This was her first

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<sup>40</sup> Cofman-Simhon, "African Tongues."

<sup>41</sup> Emanuela Trevisan Semi, "La mise en scène de l'identité marocaine en Israël. Un cas 'd'israélianité' diasporique," *A Contrario* 1/5 (2007): 37-50.

<sup>42</sup> Lisa Anteby-Yemini, "From Ethiopian Villager to Global Villager. Ethiopian Jews in Israel," in *Homelands and Diasporas. Holy Lands and Other Places*, eds. Alex Weingrod, Andre Levy, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 220-244.

time back to Ethiopia, confronting her with issues of race, identity and belonging.<sup>43</sup> Eliyah Maharat travels to Ethiopia, following social art enterprises and making transnational connections between contemporary artwork in Israel and Ethiopia.<sup>44</sup>

However, if until a decade ago or so, most return trips to Ethiopia were made by young adults and older Israeli-Ethiopians accompanied by one or two family members or friends, today younger people and even teenagers travel to Ethiopia, and increasingly go on organized trips. Several Israeli associations organize “roots tours” of northern Ethiopia, such as project “Masa – journey to identity” for teenagers of Ethiopian origin. The teenagers visit their families’ villages, try to find their homes, and sometimes meet remaining family members. Itineraries follow places of importance for Ethiopian Jewry, such as cemeteries, synagogues, emblematic villages (Ambover or Wolleka), as well as general tourist sites. Furthermore, because of the gradual institutionalization of such heritage tourism, these trips have also come to include Israelis of non-Ethiopian origin. Some trips are geared to youth in leadership programs and include young immigrants of various origins as well as Israelis. As the Israeli-Ethiopians discover, sometimes for the first time, pride in their heritage, the non-Ethiopians discover, often also for the first time, a culture unknown to them, and share emotional moments with their peers, such as when a group of young Israelis of Russian and Ethiopian origin visited a former Beta Israel prayer house with a Star of David and Hebrew religious books.<sup>45</sup> Other trips are organized by government offices or private companies for Israeli professionals such as state officials and individuals working in education, social work or health and who wish to gain a better understanding of Ethiopian culture. One of the goals of the *Yerusalem Forum* is to promote identity trips to Jewish villages in Ethiopia for Israeli decision makers and influential public figures, in an effort to include Ethiopian Jews’ past in the collective Israeli narrative.

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<sup>43</sup> Conflicts with local Ethiopians arose about the work’s historical subject matter. Because they saw Davidian as one of them – an Ethiopian rather than white or a foreigner – the locals were readier to accept her way of presenting what they felt was “their” civil war (Discussion following the screening of the movie, Tel Aviv, March 2019).

<sup>44</sup> Dekel et al., *The Monk*.

<sup>45</sup> See the 2009 documentary on the trip of Israeli youth of Ethiopian and Russian origin to Ethiopia by Eli Tal-El, *The Name My Mother Gave Me*, (Israel: Tal-El Productions, 2009) [Hebrew and Amharic].

This memorial dimension of the trips and the new forms assumed by return visits geared at learning about family history, Ethiopian Jewish heritage, the country of origin and its culture, are reminiscent of roots tourism among other immigrant groups. Several conversations demonstrate how these trips consolidate the Israeli identity of the travelers. Maya tells me: “In Ethiopia, I realized I was now Israeli;” Shim’on recalls, “I felt like a stranger in Ethiopia.” Dani claims after his trip: “I know now how lucky I am to live in Israel.” Simha recalls upon returning from Ethiopia: “I wanted to see where my father’s house was, but I would never be able to live there.” Many thus feel they do not belong in Ethiopia and realize how Israeli and Westernized they have become, similar to the findings in other pilgrimage trips for Israeli-Moroccans or Israeli-Russians. At the same time, many Israeli-Ethiopians acknowledge a feeling of pride in their roots and their parents’ past and value their Ethiopian ethnicity. Others claim they feel connected to Ethiopia, wish one day to live there and above all do not feel different because of their skin color, as in Israel. Findings clearly show that the older generation feels more nostalgic and often speaks of feeling at home in Ethiopia. However, whatever the age, the majority of Israeli-Ethiopians carry out very short visits to their native villages, trying to find family homes, burial places and former Christian or Muslim neighbors, and usually plan longer stays in cities like Gondar or Addis, or even tour Ethiopia to places unconnected with Ethiopian Jewry. Thus, whatever the nostalgic longing for village life, most find themselves spending their time enjoying and consuming Ethiopian popular culture in Addis Ababa – a way of appropriating a new urban culture which was not theirs before their or their families’ migration. As a result, in spite of processes of homing Ethiopia, almost everyone I have met considers Israel their home and wants their children to grow up Israeli. In addition, a certain part of the younger generation identifies with yet another diaspora, mainly through virtual links.

### *A Virtual Black Global Diaspora*

The discrimination and racism experienced by Israelis of Ethiopian origin entail the adoption of new racial constructs as they discover their blackness, or *négritude*, in Israel. Gradually, a racialized discourse opposing Black and White developed inside the community and a Black identity was put forth by some Israeli-Ethiopians who began to identify with other black minorities in the world. To some extent, the designation “black,” as among other minority groups



in Europe and elsewhere, has become a political color in identity politics.<sup>46</sup> Some studies indicate that middle-class Israeli-Ethiopians emphasize their blackness specifically as a way to denounce racism, whereas the working-class distances itself from Black racialized identity, through de-stigmatization processes, and relies on a local Israeli identity.<sup>47</sup>

This has led some of the younger generation to adopt symbols – in clothing, music, hairdos, gestures – of urban African American culture,<sup>48</sup> appropriating identity models of a Black global diaspora.<sup>49</sup> In particular, through new media channels on TV, social media, and the internet, Israeli-Ethiopian youth have discovered a globalized space of Black music including hip-hop, reggae, and rap, Afro-diasporic culture and beauty models, as well as icons such as the Black American rapper Tupac Shakur.<sup>50</sup> The young people's experiences of marginalization, poverty, and exclusion echo in these Black singers' music. Ethiopian-Israeli rap and hip-hop groups emerged in the 1990s, often singing in Hebrew; other singers of Ethiopian origin identified more radically with blackness. A case in point is Esther Rada, who sings in English while appealing to her Ethiopian roots in her Ethiojazz music and *eskesta* dances, yet presents herself as Afro-diasporic.<sup>51</sup> However, identifying with an imagined Black diaspora should not be seen as a sign of failure to integrate in Israel or resistance to an Israeli identity, but rather as an integration strategy taking a detour through globalized Black music and identity constructs.<sup>52</sup> In fact, taking on Black music and identity can be considered as a symbolic resource to mobilize creativity and build a community.<sup>53</sup> It also reads as a reference to modernity that empowers Israeli-Ethiopians, enabling them to claim a place of their own in Israeli society.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 97.

<sup>47</sup> Nissim Mizrahi, Adane Zawdu, "Between Global Racial and Bounded Identity. Choice of Destigmatization Strategies among Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35/3 (2012): 436-452.

<sup>48</sup> Malka Shabtay, *Between Reggae and Rap. The Integration Challenge of Ethiopian Youth in Israel*, (Tel-Aviv: Tcherikover, 2001) [Hebrew].

<sup>49</sup> Anteby-Yemini, "From Ethiopian Villager to Global Villager."

<sup>50</sup> David Ratner, *Black Sounds. Black Music and Identity among Young Israeli Ethiopians*, (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2015) [Hebrew].

<sup>51</sup> Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*.

<sup>52</sup> Anteby-Yemini, "From Ethiopian Villager to Global Villager."

<sup>53</sup> Ratner, *Black Sounds*.

<sup>54</sup> Gabriella Djerrahian, "The 'End of Diaspora' Is Just the Beginning. Music at the Crossroads of Jewish, African and Ethiopian Diasporas in Israel," *African and Black Diaspora. An International Journal* 11/2 (2017): 161-173.

Furthermore, identifying with a global black diaspora offers an alternative space of belonging, a virtual homeland, situated between Ethiopia and Israel, thus creating an additional twist in the search for the location of home.

### *Emerging Israeli(-Ethiopian) Diasporas*

The Ethiopian community in Israel is becoming more cosmopolitan as its members maintain ties with or travel to other parts of the world, such as the United States, Europe, and Asia. Some travel for vacations, family visits, professional trips (e.g. in high-tech or politics), training, university studies, exchange programs, as members of delegations representing Israel, with youth movements or as guests of Jewish communities abroad. Others tour South America or India, as do numerous other Israeli backpackers. Artists are invited to perform or exhibit their works in Paris, Berlin, London and New York. Links to other non-Jewish Ethiopian diasporas are also developing, mainly in production and consumption of Ethiopian music, which connect different Ethiopian diasporas in the world and include Israeli-Ethiopians in this transnational cartography.<sup>55</sup>

An aspect of this trans-nationalization process is the emergence of an Israeli-Ethiopian diaspora abroad. As far back as the 1970s and 1980s, a small Ethiopian Jewish community settled in Canada and integrated in the wider Jewish Canadian English-speaking community. Today, some members of the second generation have made *aliyah* to Israel. In the last two decades, an Israeli-Ethiopian diaspora has also emerged in the USA. It is estimated at over 1000, including about 500 in New York City. The community's members have set up an association called *Chassida/Shmella* (the double name meaning "stork" in Hebrew and Amharic, recalling the song discussed on p.1 of this article) to facilitate their integration in America, maintain Ethiopian-Jewish rituals and festivals, and teach US Jews about Ethiopian Jewry. The association celebrates the annual *Sigd* festival, inviting Ethiopian-Israeli rabbis and *qesotch* to perform traditional ceremony and prayers, followed by an Ethiopian meal; the celebration is usually held in an American synagogue and is geared both to an Israeli-Ethiopian and Jewish American audience. The reasons mentioned to me for emigrating from Israel were economic motives, seeking a more equal and multiracial society, escaping racism, looking for adventure, the American dream,

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<sup>55</sup> Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*.

artistic opportunities, receiving study grants, winning the Green Card lottery and marrying an American Jew. A small group of Ethiopian-Israelis have also moved to Addis Ababa, the most notorious being former Member of Knesset Addisu Messale. The relocation is primarily for business purposes, but a few claim they have a better economic and social position in Ethiopia and can achieve more than in Israel; some also feel “invisible” because they do not confront daily racism anymore. However, very few have settled permanently in Ethiopia.

As has become clear, Israeli-Ethiopians today form growing transnational communities spread out over several continents. They are part of the more general Israeli trend of (re)-emigrating (*yordim*) from Israel, and should be seen as part of a wider Israeli diaspora abroad. Yet their situation also indicates the emergence of a new Israeli-Ethiopian transnational community, parallel to other communities such as the Russian Jews. This complicates yet again the notion of “home.”

## Conclusions

I have tried to show that Ethiopian Jews returning to their ancestral homeland experience erasure of diasporic memory and identity at first, but this “de-diasporization” later proves a failure. Not only has the older generation rapidly recreated Ethiopian practices, but in the last two decades, the younger generation, initially pressured to forget their origins, are now recovering their silenced heritage. This is clearly linked to a wider phenomenon of ethnic awakening in Israel, among second and third-generation Oriental Jews as well as the 1.5 generation of Israeli-Russians. However, while the parents seem to live in a diaspora within Israel, the 1.5 and second generations show a strong Israeli identity and belonging to the Jewish national majority. Thus, at post-2015 demonstrations, some marched wrapped in the Israeli flag; fewer Ethiopian flags were to be seen. As Steve Kaplan notes: “In narratives and practices Ethiopian Israelis appear to dissociate themselves from such [an Ethiopian] diaspora consciousness in order to affirm their place as Jews returning from Diaspora”<sup>56</sup> to their homeland. But it is perhaps when they become self-confident as Israeli citizens that they can also allow themselves proudly to display their Ethiopianness, and even their blackness. Various factors, including generation

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<sup>56</sup> Steven Kaplan, “*Tama Galut Etiopiya*. The Ethiopian Exile is Over,” *Diaspora* 14/2-3 (2005): 381-396, 383.

and context, explain why Israeli-Ethiopians feel in some cases completely Ethiopian, in others completely Israeli, or mainly Jewish, Black or diasporic Israeli abroad, and sometimes combinations of all these, leading to hybrid identities.

These as with other Jewish immigrants, multiple belongings lead Levy and Weingrod to argue that the same place can be both homeland and diaspora and that homecoming initiates new centers; this is found for example among Israeli-Moroccans, for whom center and periphery become blurred,<sup>57</sup> or Egyptian Jews who maintain multiple affiliations in Israel or in France.<sup>58</sup> The emergence of several centers shows that returning to the Jewish homeland means that Israel does not always remain the center, and that home can be displaced yet again, in old or new diasporic spaces such as Ethiopia, the virtual Black global diaspora, North America or Europe, which in turn become re-imagined promised lands. These multi-sited identity constructs are common to ethnic return migration. However, for a returning Jewish diaspora supposedly at home in the Promised Land, creating a “little Ethiopia,” making frequent return trips to Ethiopia, or emigrating from Israel, all pose questions for homecoming here, raising the idea of a dual homeland, at once in Israel and elsewhere. Orit Teshoma, in a spoken word text in Hebrew “*Sliha, ima etiopia*” [“Sorry, Mother Ethiopia”] asks her motherland Ethiopia to forgive her:

Afraid that the day will come and nothing will remain/because I forgot to leave you room/you see I was preoccupied with daily struggles/...We didn't forget Jerusalem/...but very quickly I forgot you/ you see it's not like I am coming back you know that/ I don't have another country/...

Cabra Casay, singing in Amharic and Hebrew about Israel as her home and Ethiopia as her roots, also introduces this idea of having two homelands,<sup>59</sup> thus unquestionably challenging the Zionist project.

The processes of diasporization of Israel and domestication of Ethiopia (or other diasporic spaces) defy the Israeli assimilation model and demonstrate its obsolescence in an era of globalization. I would claim that multi-layered identifications – such as Israeli, Jewish, Black, Ethiopian and diasporic Israeli – as

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<sup>57</sup> Trevisan Semi, “La mise en scène de l'identité marocaine en Israël.”

<sup>58</sup> Baussant, “Aslak eh?”

<sup>59</sup> Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*.

well as the trans-nationalization of Israeli-Ethiopians should be seen not as a failure of absorption but rather as a sign of their integration into Israeli society and their redefinition of what it means to be Israeli today.

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**Lisa Anteby-Yemini** is an anthropologist, researcher at the CNRS (French National Centre for Scientific Research) and member of the IDEMEC (Institute of Mediterranean, European and Comparative Ethnology) at Aix-Marseille University. She has been doing research in Israel since 1991 with the Ethiopian community and more recently among African asylum-seekers. She specializes in migration studies and in studies on gender and religion, specifically regarding women in Judaism and Islam. She edited a collective volume, *Juives et musulmanes: genre et religion en négociation* (2014, Karthala/MMSH) and recently published *De Gondar à la Terre promise: les juifs éthiopiens* (2018, Albin Michel).

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**“Who gave you the right to abandon your prophets?”  
Jewish Sites of Ruins and Memory in Egypt**

*by Michèle Baussant*

**Abstract**

*This article is dedicated to the cultural heritage of Jews from Egypt,<sup>1</sup> that worked to reaffirm a collective Egyptian Jewish history and identity by preserving Egyptian Jewish architecture, primarily religious buildings, which were falling into disrepair, most often through lack of maintenance, abandonment, sale or damage. This “patrimonialisation” is driven by various actors, who nowadays constitute, in Egypt and in various diasporas, the diffracted constellations of vanished worlds and promote their “dormant” buildings and religious artefacts as living traces of a past that can no longer be associated with current practices performed by any social group in Egypt. These actors, however, do not share a same vision of how to preserve, in the short or in the long term, these emblematic sites of diasporic Judaism, witnessing both the disappearance of a world and the possibility, through the presence of its material traces, of identifying part of a past that can still be written and evoked. This paper explores the paradoxical trajectory of Jewish heritage in Egypt, between promotion, co-option, abandonment, forgetting and rejection. Caught between diverse interests and intertwined stakes, heritage became a concrete trace of the physical exclusion of the Jews (expelled from the country) and at the same time an emblem of their symbolical inclusion, given Egypt’s claim of tolerance of its many communities.*

**Introduction**

**Out of Egypt: The Creation of an Egyptian Jewish Diaspora**

**Coming Back: A World Rediscovered, Turned Upside Down, Lost**

**Preserving Heritage *in situ*: Finding their Place**

**The Spaces of Egyptian Judaism**

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this paper is inspired by a short talk about the Jews of Iraq by Edwin Shuker.

## Objects of Religion, Objects of Covetousness, Objects of Discord: Identification and Histories

### Inside or Outside Egypt: Contrasting Views

### Conclusion: Symbolic Inclusion versus Physical Exclusion

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## Introduction

During the first half of the 20th century, economic, political and social changes in Egypt gradually redefined the place of the so-called foreign, *mutamassirun* (Egyptianized) and local people departing the country in the course of more than two decades (with peaks in 1948 and the late 1950s). Although they were part of the overall Egyptian population, which grew from 4.5 million in 1800 to 24 million in 1957, these groups were largely discarded from the imagined Egyptian community designed by the nationalist movement in the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> Some of these groups had only lived in Egypt since the 19th century, but others, including the local Jewish communities, had been there much longer. These Jewish communities, “still fairly homogeneous” and relatively small at the beginning of the 19th century, underwent profound transformations due primarily to a large influx of migrants, mainly between 1860 and 1920.<sup>3</sup> The new arrivals

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<sup>2</sup> It is not my intention here to enter the historical debate about the status of the Jews as foreigners in Egypt. I am mainly interested in the process leading to their “extraneity,” which reveals the fragility of their social relationships and of their condition of belonging, seen here as a process rather than as a permanent status. This process is linked to the way in which political entities define their foreigners and “the inventory of these different figures makes it possible to cover a very wide world and reconstitute the characters of the various political communities which are thus drawn.” Simona Cerutti, *Etrangers. Etude d'une condition d'incertitude dans une société d'Ancien Régime*, (Paris: Bayard, 2012), 16. My aim is not to discuss Egyptian Jewish identity prior to the departure from Egypt, nor whether Egyptian Jews were perceived as foreigners before the emergence of the nationalist movement that reshaped narratives about minorities in Egypt. I am rather focusing on the effects that these narratives and imaginary constructs have yielded in the present.

<sup>3</sup> Following the takeover by Muhammad Ali (1769-1849) and later under his heirs, Egypt welcomed different populations, including Jews. The strong presence of the colonial powers (the British and the French), the new forms of the capitulatory order via the mixed courts, which were

considerably changed the makeup of these communities, making them more heterogeneous. This diversity found its expression in religious rites – Sephardic, Eastern, Ashkenazi or Karaite<sup>4</sup> – and in community history and origins,<sup>5</sup> as well as in the languages, cultures, legal<sup>6</sup> and socio-economic status, and national backgrounds making up these Jewish communities. Egypt was at the same time a land of opportunity for some and of relegation for others, but still far from the image cultivated among Jews both in Israel and outside it, according to which the Jews of Egypt comprise one of the oldest Jewish communities in the Middle East. Described by my interviewees as a “fool’s paradise,”<sup>7</sup> Egypt serves as a matrix of sorts for the space-time of British rule and protectorate among populations with divergent interests.

The series of wars following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 (the Suez Canal crisis in 1956 and the Six Day War in 1967) were largely the reason for the near end of the centuries-long presence of a Jewish minority in Egypt; it has been reduced to a handful of individuals living in Alexandria and Cairo today. Those living outside Egypt at present form a reversed diaspora of sorts,<sup>8</sup> with Egypt as

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better linked to the world economy, the economic boom, notably with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and Mediterranean globalization made the country attractive to immigrants.

<sup>4</sup> We do not precisely know the origin of the Karaites, who came either from a group established in Baghdad in the eighth century, or from a Sadducean branch that had survived the destruction of the Temple. The Karaites adhere only to the Written Law (the Hebrew *Tanakh*) and not the oral tradition (consisting primarily of the Talmud) nor any other rabbinical interpretations and exegesis. See Emanuela Trevisan-Semi, *Les caraites, un autre judaïsme*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> From areas such as the Ottoman Empire (Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Istanbul, Smyrna, Salonika, among others), North African countries, Greece, Portugal, Spain, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Romania, Russia, Poland, Italy, France, and England. Some came as a result of anti-Jewish measures, pogroms and persecutions that intensified in certain countries including Russia and Romania or in regions such as Morocco, Greece, and Syria at the beginning of the 19th century. Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab lands in Modern Times*, (Philadelphia-New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Legal status, in particular of those defined as *musta'min* and *dhimmi*, changed when the *jizya* was abrogated by Khedive Sa'id in 1855 in Egypt. See Güdrün Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989) and Benjamin Lellouch, “Les juifs dans le monde musulman: VIIe siècle-milieu XIXe siècle,” in *Les juifs dans l'histoire*, eds. Antoine Germa, Benjamin Lellouch, Evelyne Patlagean, (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2011), 261-290.

<sup>7</sup> This ethnological work is based on long-term research on Egyptian Jews, including several fieldwork projects in France, the United States, Israel, Italy, Great Britain and Egypt. It combines interviews and observations with material from archives and various other written sources.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Trier, “Reversed Diaspora. Russian Jewry, the Transition in Russia and the Migration to Israel,” *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* 14/1 (1996): 34-42.



their cultural homeland.<sup>9</sup> However, the closing of the 1970s, with the signing of the Camp David accords in 1978 and the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty signed on March 26, 1979, set the stage for two concomitant developments. The first was the return of some of Jews from Egypt, in groups or individually. In Egypt once more, they found their community spaces transformed or even destroyed, while the social milieu that had given meaning to these spaces had disappeared.<sup>10</sup> The second development was the emergence of associations of Jews from Egypt, notably in France and in Israel.<sup>11</sup> These organizations set out to reaffirm a collective Egyptian Jewish history and identity by promoting the Egyptian Jewish cultural heritage and by preserving surviving Egyptian Jewish architecture, primarily religious buildings, which were falling into disrepair, most often through lack of maintenance, abandonment, sale or damage.

But not everyone shared the same vision of how to preserve this heritage in the short or in the long term in a country that had become, or was perceived, like many other places where Jews had been expelled or wiped out, as an “unquiet place.”<sup>12</sup> Should these cultural and religious traces be abandoned? Should they be preserved *in situ* as objects to be visited again and again, promoted as part of Egypt’s national heritage, at the risk of infringing upon their primary religious function? Or would it be better to export this heritage out of Egypt whenever possible? Besides, to whom do this heritage belong? To the few local Jews? A Rabbinical authority outside Egypt? To the Egyptian state? How, finally, can Jewish heritage be symbolically included in Egypt’s national heritage and history without evoking the circumstances that accounted for the progressive expulsion of Jews from Egypt?

This article explores this movement toward “patrimonialization,” driven by various actors<sup>13</sup> who nowadays constitute, in various diasporas, the diffracted

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<sup>9</sup> Eftihia Voutira, *The “Right to Return” and the Meaning of “Home.” A Post-Soviet Greek Diaspora Becoming European?* (Berlin: Verlag Lit., 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Michèle Baussant, “Un nom éternel qui ne sera jamais effacé. Nostalgie et langue chez les Juifs d’Égypte en France,” *Terrain* 65 (2015): 52-75.

<sup>11</sup> Such as the Association for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of the Jews of Egypt founded in 1979 in Paris, the Association for Israeli-Egyptian Friendship in Tel Aviv, and the Union of Egyptian Jews in Haifa.

<sup>12</sup> Erica Lehrer, *Jewish Poland Revisited. Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> For a broader view of the complex processes involved in the definition, production and consumption of heritage and its material culture in the Middle East, as well as the multiplicity of actors concerned, see Rami Daher, Irène Maffi, *The Politics and Practices of Cultural Heritage in*

constellations of disappeared worlds and promote their dormant buildings and religious artefacts as living traces of a past that can no longer be associated with current practices performed by any social group in Egypt. This last is particularly true of synagogue buildings, embodiments of a central institution with many different functions – ritual, secular, social and cultural – that reinforce a sense of belonging. Paradoxically, in interviews with many Jews from Egypt, most of them traditionalists, few spontaneously mention these places when they remember their past lives in Egypt. However, frequenting these sites (and their memory) cannot be taken as the only indicator of Jewish religiosity and affiliation with Judaism, especially given the significant part of Jewish religious practices and rites performed within the home.<sup>14</sup>

But their rare evocation in the narratives collected leads us to question how, once the Jews dispersed outside the country, they could have become emblematic sites of diasporic Judaism, unifying the very diverse community of Jews from Egypt in memory and history. The synagogues witness both the disappearance of a world and the potential, through the presence of its material traces, to identify a place “where the heritage is passed on, where the song still rings sweet to the ear, where it could succumb to the embrace of nostalgia. And this place, even when demolished, even when in ruins, even though it is part of a past that has gone forever, can still be written and evoked.”<sup>15</sup>

### Out of Egypt: The Creation of an Egyptian Jewish Diaspora

Jews left Egypt in three successive waves (1948, 1956 and 1967). Like a great many other foreign or “Egyptianized” populations, their departure came at a time of Egypt’s gradual redefining of its national identity and experiencing a series of upheavals affecting society as a whole.<sup>16</sup> But the Jewish minority was especially vulnerable, as in 1948 half of them had the status of stateless local subjects. In addition, there were about five to ten thousand Jews who had acquired Egyptian

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*the Middle East: Positioning the Material Past in Contemporary Societies*, (London-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Régine Azria, *Les lieux du judaïsme*, (Paris : Le cavalier bleu, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Hassoun, “Juifs d’Egypte. Entre Orient et Occident”, in *A la recherche des Juifs d’Egypte* (mimeographed document, unnumbered pages, 1978).

<sup>16</sup> Frédéric Abécassis, Jean-François Faï, “Le monde musulman. Effacement des communautés juives et nouvelles diasporas depuis 1945,” in *Les juifs dans l’histoire*, 815-840.

nationality and thirty thousand more who were foreign nationals.<sup>17</sup> Unrest and difficulties of various kinds preceded these three waves of departure and after the first conflict following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, in which Egypt participated, some Jews were suspected of being Zionist sympathizers and were arrested.<sup>18</sup> In 1948, more than 1,300 of them – men and women, Zionists, communists, community leaders, businesspeople and individuals with no specific political involvement – were interned in four Egyptian camps, including Aboukir in Alexandria. Whatever assets they had were seized by the state. Once they were released in 1949, some of those with foreign nationality were expelled or asked to return to their official country of origin. The first wave of departures took place between 1949 and 1950: 20,000 Jews, nearly three-quarters of whom settled in Israel.<sup>19</sup>

The 1952 *coup d'état* had no immediate repercussions on Jewish communities.<sup>20</sup> Nasser's rise to power was primarily associated with reducing European influence. With the October 1956 Suez Canal crisis, some people with foreign origins or other nationalities, as well as Egyptian Jews, were expelled. These people were forced to give up their Egyptian nationality.<sup>21</sup> Between November 1956 and 1957, an estimated 20,000 Jews departed, having to leave all their belongings behind.<sup>22</sup> The 1956 expulsions primarily affected those who had French or English nationality, regardless of their religious affiliation. Their personal and professional property was confiscated. The situation for stateless Jews was even more precarious: at least five hundred received an expulsion order, resulting in the departure of all members of their families<sup>23</sup>. Others, having lost their jobs, decided to follow. Some were deported for other reasons after having been imprisoned. In addition, provisions were made to make it easier to strip a person of his or her nationality.<sup>24</sup> 17,000 to 19,000 Egypt Jews gradually left the

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<sup>17</sup> Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry, Culture, Politics and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, (New York & London: NY University Press, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Gudrun Krämer and Alfred Morabia, "Face à la modernité, Les juifs d'Égypte aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles," in *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, ed. Jacques Hassoun, (Paris: Minerve, 1990), 86-87.

<sup>20</sup> Alexandre De Aranjó, Jean-Michel Rallières, "Les Juifs d'Égypte," *Hommes et migrations* [En ligne], 1312 (2015), accessed June 6, 2016, <http://hommesmigrations.revues.org/3524>

<sup>21</sup> Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, 582-583.

<sup>22</sup> Abécassis, Faï, "Le monde musulman," 824.

<sup>23</sup> Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, 256.

<sup>24</sup> Emile Gabbay, "Les juifs d'Égypte et la nationalité égyptienne," *Nahar Misraïm* 45 (2011): 16-20.

country before the Six Day War in 1967. Following this crisis, 450 Jews<sup>25</sup> were sent to prison and, unlike previous internments, some were tortured or otherwise physically mistreated.<sup>26</sup> Those who had foreign nationality spent between six months to one year behind bars, while for stateless persons imprisonment lasted for two years. Thanks to the intercession of Spain, they were released from prison under Spanish protection.<sup>27</sup> Jews who were Egyptian nationals were imprisoned for three years, after which they were expelled from the country as stateless persons.<sup>28</sup>

These families dispersed throughout Europe, Israel, the United States, South America, even Australia. With their first trials of resettlement behind them (this sometimes took place in stages in several countries) and after the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, some Egyptian Jews turned again to their cultural heritage. To renew that bond, some also decided to visit the places where they had grown up and lived in the past.

### **Coming Back: A World Rediscovered, Turned Upside Down, Lost**

They returned to Egypt alone, with their families, or as part of tourist, cultural, or reunion trips organized by associations linked to Egypt, such as *Amicale Alexandrie Hier et Aujourd'hui* or *l'Association de sauvegarde du patrimoine culturel des Juifs d'Égypte*. For some, these trips enabled them to meet with family members who had remained in Egypt or former Egyptian friends and professional contacts. They returned to their neighbourhoods and public spaces (schools, cinemas, and restaurants...). They knocked on the doors of their former homes and visited sites they had never seen before (pyramids, Al Alamein, and so on.). These return trips were tolerated as long as they took place with some discretion, as evidenced by the cancellation in 2008 of a trip organized by members of the *World Congress of the Jews from Egypt*. The purpose of this trip, which brought together a group of Jews from Egypt, some of them from Israel, was twofold: to return to their roots and to attend the First International

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<sup>25</sup> According to Yves Fedida, the Jews in Egypt numbered approximately 2,500 in 1967 (personal communication with the Author).

<sup>26</sup> Maurice Mizrahi, *L'Égypte et ses Juifs. Le Temps révolu, XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Geneva: Imprimerie Avenir, 1977).

<sup>27</sup> Tad Szulc, *The Secret Alliance. The Extraordinary Story of the Rescue of the Jews since World War II*, (New York: Farrar-Straus & Giroux, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Gabbay, "Les juifs d'Égypte et la nationalité égyptienne."

Conference of Jews from Egypt in Cairo. At the last moment, the hotel cancelled all the reservations and no other hotel agreed to accommodate the group, who were suspected of planning to start a legal campaign to obtain compensation for their seized property.<sup>29</sup>

For the descendants of emigrants who had not known Egypt and for those who had left very young, these trips created images that were added to words (or to the absence of words) through visits to places of family memory and collective spaces associated with Judaism, such as cemeteries, synagogues, and others. As they had never – or almost never – known these places, the returning visitors could not assess the transformations which had taken place in these spaces. The trips focused on generic symbols of Egyptian Judaism, which were not always connected with the parents' lived experience, or were but one element of that experience among others. Yet those who were older when they left Egypt were directly confronted with the changes in places they had known or the difference between these spaces and their memories of them. Some noted the disappearance of a social milieu that was still alive when they left. Marc<sup>30</sup> found a city “empty because the people who were supposed to be there were not there. They were full, full, full of people, but not the right ones. They weren't the right ones...”. Those who remained were isolated and increasingly older individuals.

The sense of the disappearance of the community was central to Marc's experience; it became even stronger following the death of his parents. For him, everything started with Sadat's trip to Jerusalem. First driven by an individual quest, Marc returned to the door of his former apartment, looking for “images in stone... an image of yourself, your mother, your father, in a place, standing, lying or moving in such and such an environment.” Then he visited cemeteries, synagogues, shops he had visited with his parents, restaurants, and the office where his father had worked. As he began to build his genealogical history, he discovered that although he had easy access to documents dating from the 15th century in Portugal, he could only obtain information about twentieth-century Egypt with great difficulty. With a few Egyptian Jewish friends, he then

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<sup>29</sup> See the program on <http://www.ajoe.org/X-New-MEP/congr.htm>. See also Al-Aahram weekly, first published in 2008, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/133825/Egypt/o/Jews-of-Egypt-Remembrance-of-things-past.aspx>, consulted June 16, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Born in Alexandria in 1945, he left Egypt in 1956, returned in 1959 and left for good in 1960. Interview of the A., Paris region, 2009.

transformed his quest into a collective project on Jewish material heritage in Egypt:

...it is important that this memory... not disappear, and therefore our association fights for that...we left behind graves, we left people in the graves, and we left... traces in the sand in a certain sense (...) This marked Egypt, and that's what I left. But it doesn't belong to me, it belongs to Egypt.<sup>31</sup>

Marc, Jacques, Raymond, Zaki, and Armand, later joined by David, Joseph, and André,<sup>32</sup> founded the Nebi Daniel Association in February 2003. Its objective is “the preservation of and continuity in the management of the religious and cultural, financial and built heritage of the community as well as the civil and religious registers of the Jewish community of Alexandria and by extension, the Jewish community of Egypt, in respect of Jewish traditions.”<sup>33</sup> The founders all belong to the same generation and some of them were already working to preserve the histories of Jewish communities in the East, through *Sephardi Voices*<sup>34</sup> and *Fleurs d'Orient*,<sup>35</sup> which store the genealogies of Sephardic families in the Ottoman Empire and beyond. Like a large number of Jews from Egypt I met, these people remain very attached to certain Jewish traditions, following the

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<sup>31</sup> Interview of the A., Paris region, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> The names have been changed. Jacques was born in Alexandria in 1933 and attended English schools. In 1950, he left for London, where he became an engineer. Raymond, originally from Alexandria, was educated at the Jewish Union, left in 1959, and completed his studies in electronics abroad. Zaki, born in Cairo in 1929, studied at the French High School; in 1950, he received a grant from the Egyptian government to study to become a chemical engineer. He left for Montpellier before joining the French Rubber Institute in 1952. Armand was born in Alexandria in 1943. He left Egypt in 1956 and studied engineering in Switzerland and then in London, where he became a senior manager at a multinational IT company. Joseph was born in Alexandria in 1934. In 1956, his departure from Egypt forced him to interrupt his medical studies. He left for Italy before settling in Australia. David, born in Tanta in 1931, attended the Jewish Union of Alexandria. He left Egypt in 1955 for France, where he became a textile engineer at the C.A.M.P. Finally, André, born in Cairo in 1944, studied at the French High School of Bab al-Louk in Cairo. He left Egypt in 1961 and settled in France, where he became an engineer. He is the founder of the genealogical website *Les fleurs de l'Orient*. He currently lives in the United States. All are men, which contrasts with other situations such as in Israel, where the main Egyptian Jewish association still active was founded and continues to be run by a woman, Levana Zamir.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.nebidaniel.org/>.

<sup>34</sup> <http://sephardivoices.com/>. Organization dedicated to recording the stories of Middle Eastern and North African displaced Jews.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.farhi.org/genealogy/index.html>

practices that ritually structure the Jewish year and life cycles based on Jewish precepts.<sup>36</sup>

The Association's mission is to implement "in strict compliance with Egyptian law, a solution for the preservation of the heritage that is exclusively that of the community, whether that heritage was imported or created during the development of the former community,"<sup>37</sup> by coordinating actions and establishing a legal, lasting, and legitimate structure identifiable by the Egyptian authorities. The mission has five stated objectives: make copies of the community documents, financed by the Association and to be kept in the charge of one or more Chief Rabbis, since the information in the registers is covered by the law protecting personal data; preserve *in situ* the remaining built heritage of the Jewish Community of Alexandria; ensure continuity of religious services in synagogues for resident or visiting Jews; allow free access to civil registers for the individuals concerned and researchers, under the aegis of a dual authority recognized in Egypt and abroad; and enable exhibits *in situ* and abroad of religious objects not being used for religious services.

### Preserving Heritage *in situ*: Finding their Place

For the Egyptian Jewish associations, the emphasis in the late 1970s was on defining and identifying their intangible cultural heritage, which they reconstructed through memories, linguistic expressions in various languages, religious and cultural "traditions," photographs and archival documents.<sup>38</sup> Only later were steps<sup>39</sup> taken to preserve the material heritage of the Jewish community, partly supported by the tiny Jewish communities still living in Egypt. This occurred in a certain context: during the radical drop in Jewish

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<sup>36</sup> Such as birth, circumcision, redemption of the firstborn, religious majority, marriage, and mourning. Ernest Guggenheim, *Le judaïsme dans la vie quotidienne*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1992). However, they do not always follow all the prescriptions of *Halakha* (observance of all the rules of the Sabbath, keeping kosher, the commandment of *tefillin* for men, and more).

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.nebidaniel.org/>

<sup>38</sup> From the first definition of this heritage in 1978 by ASPCJE. See Emile Gabbay, "En matière d'introduction," *À la recherche des Juifs d'Égypte*, (mimeographed document, unnumbered pages, 1978).

<sup>39</sup> In particular, the preservation of cemeteries or the restoration of certain synagogues. Thus, the ASPCJE, the World Sephardic Federation in Switzerland and the Hassoun group in France helped to build an enclosure wall in the Bassatine cemetery in Cairo. For more on this, see <http://www.nebidaniel.org/cimetieres.php?lang=fr>.

presence in Egypt,<sup>40</sup> the progressive effacing of its built spaces (primarily due to the high demand for real estate and the lack of funds to maintain the extant buildings), and peace between Israel and Egypt. The communities in Cairo and Alexandria managed to maintain some of their buildings and religious activities through locally raised funds and foreign aid. The Egyptian authorities also allowed them to administer their own affairs. Yet this did not prevent the disappearance of numerous synagogues in Suez, Tanta, Mamoura, Ismailia, Port-Said, Kafr al-Zayat, and Damanhur, which contained documents and *Sifrei Torah* [Torah scrolls]. Some synagogue buildings were sold by the communities.<sup>41</sup> Rabbinic law permits the sale of such buildings only in those rare cases in which the proceeds are to be used for restoring and maintaining other synagogues. Some buildings were also sold by the community to fund charity, health needs, or maintenance of other synagogues and cemeteries. Some commercial properties were kept, while other buildings, such as schools, were leased to the state. These buildings provided a source of income for the communities of Cairo and Alexandria, especially since rental payments from commercial property and the like could be freely renegotiated every time a lease was renewed.

From that point on, a key priority for the Association has been to preserve this built heritage – synagogues and cemeteries – along with certain religious and community artefacts (registers, *Mohe*/books,<sup>42</sup> *Sifrei Torah*, and so on) in Cairo and Alexandria.<sup>43</sup> The goal is to identify and then manage the preservation project through “a specific, internationally recognized joint foundation, whose financing is ensured in a transparent and certified manner, by local rental income and by charitable donations.”<sup>44</sup>

The process through which these buildings came to be seen as heritage sites to be protected has two characteristics, which also impact attempts to protect their cultural-religious status: first, the centrality of their Jewish function, which was

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<sup>40</sup> The exact number of Jews currently living in Egypt is not known, the figure varying according to different sources, primarily the media, whether Egyptian or foreign. Some eighteen to twenty people, mainly women, is the statistic most often provided. The issue of children is rarely mentioned with children accordingly left uncounted.

<sup>41</sup> See the Nebi Daniel website, which lists the latter.

<sup>42</sup> The person who performs ritual circumcision.

<sup>43</sup> Based on the fact that in Egypt today, Jews remain in these two cities. In Cairo, some of the civil registers (Karaites, Ashkenazi) have been dispersed or lost.

<sup>44</sup> Association Nebi Daniel, 2006-2007.



not always linked to rigorous religious observance; and second, the several-thousand-year-old roots of the Jewish community in Egypt. In Egypt, affiliation with Judaism was primarily social and political; people were *de facto* considered part of the Jewish community, seen as a social institution<sup>45</sup> in which culture and religion were closely linked. In the past, this framework directly affected the daily lives of individuals through a network of institutions: synagogues, schools, hospitals, charitable institutes, orphanages and homes for the elderly, and study groups.

The official classification of this heritage sometimes triggered problems and tensions, revealing ambivalence; it was perceived, coveted and promoted in different ways by the various actors involved. Their strategies and tactics varied as well. Three actors were involved: the Egyptian state, the Jews remaining in Egypt, and the diaspora of Jews from Egypt, to which we must add the Jews from Egypt in Israel (who define themselves as Jews from Egypt but do not consider themselves a diaspora).

### The Spaces of Egyptian Judaism

Of primary significance are the synagogues of Alexandria and Cairo, some of which have been placed under the protection of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA).<sup>46</sup> The only cases of external intervention and funding were the restoration of the Fostat synagogue by the Bronfman family of Canada and a preliminary restoration of the Sha'ar Hashamayim synagogue by Nessim Gaon.

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<sup>45</sup> On the Jewish community framework, see Yves Fedida, *Shem et Shemot, Registres communautaires en Égypte*, Nebi Daniel website, 2006, accessed 5 march 2009, <http://www.nebidaniel.org/index.php?lang=fr>. In Alexandria in 1907, there were fourteen non-Muslim communities: “Latins (indigenous and European), Copts (Catholic and Orthodox), Greeks (Catholic and Orthodox), Armenians (Catholic and Orthodox), and Maronites, Protestants (German and French mixed, English, Scottish), and Israelite (indigenous and European).” Robert Ilbert, *Alexandrie 1830-1930. Histoire d'une communauté citadine* (Le Caire: Édition IFAO; Paris: Nouvelles Éditions de l'Université, 1996), 414-415. These recognized groups each managed their own civil registers, succession problems, marriages, and internal conflicts.

<sup>46</sup> The association identified about fifteen Jewish monuments. In Egypt, Jews opted either for Jewish law, which provided for the status of *hekdesb*, comparable to the case of *waqf*, or for the *waqf* when that seemed to offer more guarantees vis-à-vis the state. The creation of a *waqf* by a non-Muslim was permitted when its purpose did not conflict with Islamic law. See Dario Miccoli, *Histories of the Jews of Egypt. An Imagined Bourgeoisie, 1880s-1950s*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2015).

After Sadat, restoration work became a national prerogative. In 1987, the SCA created the Jewish Department of Antiquities that organized a committee to identify and assess the historical, religious, and architectural importance of synagogues in Egypt. This led the country to examine the Jewish religious heritage preserved within its borders as a whole and to determine its historical importance according to Egypt's own criteria, an assessment done in coordination with various actors with divergent interests and expectations.<sup>47</sup>

In Alexandria, the Nebi Daniel Association identified twelve synagogues, built between 1381 and 1937, and eight oratories (prayer halls) in various districts. Of this group, only two still exist and have been registered as heritage sites: one is Menasce, in the Mancheya district; built in 1860 and opened in 1863, it remains closed and cannot be visited. In 2017, it was added to the national list of Islamic, Coptic, and Jewish monuments. The other is Eliyahu Hanavi in Nebi Daniel Street, built between 1836 and 1850 by Italian architects on the grounds of an ancient synagogue that had been completely destroyed by Bonaparte's artillery. This temple housed the Jewish court and contained more than fifty ancient *Sifrei Torah* as well as a collection of rare fifteenth-century Jewish books and manuscripts, registered as part of Egypt's archaeological heritage. Declared a historical monument in 1987 by the Minister of Culture, the synagogue until 2012 held religious services on the major holy days, led by an Israeli rabbi of Egyptian origin, Avraham Dayan. Small groups came to pray with the community in Alexandria to constitute a *minyan*,<sup>48</sup> with the help of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. They did so until the 2011 revolution. In August 2008, when the leader of the Jewish community of Alexandria, Max Salama, died, no Kaddish<sup>49</sup> could be recited for him because no *minyan* was able to gather. In 2012, the synagogue was closed for political and security reasons. In 2017, following the collapse of the roof, the restoration of the synagogue started.

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<sup>47</sup> <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/1999/446/tri.htm>

<sup>48</sup> Quorum of ten adult men necessary to enable the recitation of key parts of the traditional Jewish liturgy.

<sup>49</sup> Lit., "Sanctification of God's Name," pronounced during a public service by mourners during the mourning period and then every year on the anniversary of death. The wording of Kaddish does not suggest a prayer for the dead, but leads to a public affirmation that faith has not been shaken by grief. It has been interpreted as attesting to the continuity of the chain of tradition, assured despite the rupture caused by death.

In Cairo, what remains of the community has managed to maintain a larger number of synagogues. However, only four of these have been restored, under the supervision of the SCA. In 1994, the American Research Center in Egypt<sup>50</sup> launched two projects: work on the Haim Kapucci, an Italian synagogue dating from the late 17th century,<sup>51</sup> and on Maimonides Synagogue, with its adjacent yeshiva, in the Harat El-Yahud, (the building originally constructed in the 10th century; the present building dates from the 19th century). These projects were discontinued for lack of clear government plans as to their future use (tourism, place to house cultural events or exhibitions?): “No one could figure out what to do with historic Jewish buildings in modern-day Cairo.”<sup>52</sup> The Maimonides Synagogue was the first to undergo beginning restoration work. It had already been renovated several times: at the beginning of the 20th century by the Egyptian Jewish community, then twice in the 1980s,<sup>53</sup> when the temple was reinvested by members of the Chabad community who celebrated the completion of their study of the *Mishne Torah*.<sup>54</sup> The synagogue then collapsed in the 1992 earthquake. The SCA launched a plan to drain the land supporting the building, and the synagogue was restored in 2010. The presence of this community is probably thanks to the existence of a small contingent of Israeli tourists. The second is the Ben Ezra Synagogue located in Fustat, in Old Cairo. The original synagogue was destroyed in 1012, rebuilt around 1039, and underwent numerous renovations over the centuries since.<sup>55</sup> It was here that the documents known as the Cairo Genizah<sup>56</sup> were found. The synagogue lay in ruins until the early 1980s; the Canadian Archaeological Center began restoration work in 1982. But the synagogue was then damaged in the 1992 earthquake, and its restoration was not be completed until 2007. A small museum – a modest-sized exhibition, rather – dedicated to the Genizah opened near the synagogue, which itself reopened in 2016 after five years of closure. The third is Sha’ar

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<sup>50</sup> The Center commissioned two reports out of the fifty projects that it supported.

<sup>51</sup> Yoram Meital, *Atarim Yehudiyim Bemitzrayim*, (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> <https://womenslens.blogspot.com/p/second-exodus.html>, accessed September 15, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Following the collapse of the ceiling in 1969. Both restorations were financed by a Parisian banker of Egyptian origin.

<sup>54</sup> Code of Jewish law composed by Moses Maimonides between 1170 and 1180.

<sup>55</sup> David Cassuto, “Ben Ezra Synagogue,” in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman Stillman, (Leyden: Brill Online, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> The Cairo Genizah contains some 200,000 documents written in Hebrew, Arabic, Judeo-Spanish and Yiddish and dating from 870 to 1880, which trace the daily life and religious history of different Jewish communities. Today, most of the documents are at Cambridge, with the majority in digital format and accessible to the public.

Hashamayim Synagogue on Adly Street, built in 1899<sup>57</sup> (Rafaat, 1999). It remains active and is also a tourist attraction in central Cairo. In 2010, it was targeted by a bomb attack but suffered no damage.<sup>58</sup> The last is the Moussa al-Dar'i (or Moshe al-Dar'i) synagogue in the al-'Abbasiyah quarter,<sup>59</sup> named after the 13th-century Karaite poet Moshe Dar'i. It was built during 1925-1933, after most of the Karaite Jews had left the Jewish quarter (Haret el-Yahud) and moved to the new suburbs.

It has been more difficult to have cemeteries and tombs classified as national heritage sites. In some cases, their future remains a bone of contention, sometimes due to high demand for real estate and urban development projects. Some of the areas have been damaged, while others have been used for the construction of temporary, ramshackle living quarters. What classification as a heritage site might mean for preservation remains uncertain. Alexandria is home to three Jewish cemeteries, which are guarded but require regular maintenance. One of them, because of its central location in the city's Mazarita district, was considered endangered for a time, although the tomb of Chief Rabbi Amram is located there. In order to preserve it, the governorate took charge of repairing the external walls and required the Jewish "community" of Alexandria to plant massive trees inside to hide the funerary monuments from the view of surrounding buildings. If they would not, the remains of the deceased were threatened with a transfer elsewhere, as had already been done at the Tanta cemetery, which became "a simple plaque over a mass grave."<sup>60</sup> For the other two cemeteries in the Chatby area, where Muslim, Coptic, and Catholic cemeteries are also located, Nebi Daniel had freehand plans drawn up in 1994 and 1995, and more formal plans were made in 2005. Since 2007, the Association has also undertaken the renovation of the lateral and transverse aisles of the large Jewish section of the Menasce Monument in the Chatby 2 Cemetery. In 2017, these three cemeteries were registered as heritage sites by the Ministry of

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<sup>57</sup> Hana Taragan, "The 'Gate of Heaven' (Sha'ar Hashamayim) Synagogue in Cairo (1898-1905). On the Contextualization of Jewish Communal Architecture," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 2/1 (2009): 31-53, and Samir Rafaat, "Gate of Heaven," *Cairo Times*, September 2, 1999, <http://www.egy.com/landmarks/99-09-02.php>

<sup>58</sup> "Bomb Hurlled at Main Synagogue in Cairo; No Casualties," *Haaretz*, February 21, 2010, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5033172>

<sup>59</sup> According to Yves Fedida (personal communication). I have found no information concerning the restoration of this synagogue.

<sup>60</sup> Association Nebi Daniel, <http://www.nebidaniel.org>

Antiquities. Nevertheless, some Jews from Egypt still report that cemeteries in Chatby are nowadays poorly maintained.<sup>61</sup>

In Cairo, the al-Bassatine cemetery, dating from the 9th century, has suffered damage.<sup>62</sup> During a project to build a bypass road through the cemetery in 1988, the Egyptian government agreed to preserve some 300 graves. With the financial contribution of the *Association Pour la Preservation du Patrimoine Culturel Juif d’Egypte* and of the *World Sephardic Federation*,<sup>63</sup> Carmen Weinstein<sup>64</sup> succeeded to build a 3-meter high, two-kilometer long wall around two-thirds of the cemetery, encompassing about 35 feddans, more than half the cemetery. A survey of Jewish graves was carried out in the wake of an anti-Jewish campaign launched by some Egyptian newspapers after the 1994 Hebron massacre perpetrated by Baruch Kopel Goldstein. Nevertheless, before 2011, the cemetery was only partially protected and was still occupied by people who had built housing above the tombs, although paradoxically, visiting the cemetery still requires special authorization. Although several headstones have been classified by the SCA, in 2013, an article in *L’Arche* about the burial of the president of the Cairo “community” still deplored the “sad situation, the vast majority of marble headstones have been stolen and wild dogs wander between the graves among

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<sup>61</sup> Apparently, there are six full-time gardeners on the payroll of the community and according to the guides at the Chatby cemeteries they never go there.

<sup>62</sup> This cemetery comprised 120 feddans, divided equally between the Rabbinical and the Karaite Jews. The part belonging to the Karaites has almost completely disappeared except for two large vaults. According to Bassatine News, “After 1967, most of the marble slabs covering the individual graves were stolen. Most of the vaults, some of the land without graves and some with graves, were squatted on by the migrants from Upper Egypt as well as by destitute Cairenes. (...) In 1978, Carmen Weinstein took upon her own responsibility the task of recuperating what could be saved of the cemetery. Yet in spite of her worldwide appeals through the media and the enlisting of various personalities, she met with lukewarm response and indifference...” <http://www.bassatine.net/bassar.php>, consulted March 30, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Other organizations such as Ahava Ve Ahva Congregation in New York and the United Synagogue Youth USA participated as well in the completion of the cemetery wall.

<sup>64</sup> Carmen Weinstein was born in Cairo, on October 10, 1931, and was a longtime communal activist before holding an official position as President of the Cairo Jewish Community in 2004. Her work on the preservation of Egyptian Jewish artifacts and buildings began in 1975, when she launched “a struggle on behalf of the Bassatine Cemetery, thought to be the world’s second-oldest Jewish cemetery (after the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem).” See Callie Maidhof, “Weinstein, Carmen,” in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman A. Stillman. Consulted online on 29 June 2019.

piles of rubbish.” In the end, Carmen Weinstein was not buried in the family tomb, as it had been “invaded by waste and muddy sewage water.”<sup>65</sup>

### Objects of Religion, Objects of Covetousness, Objects of Discord: Identification and Histories

While some synagogues have been classified heritage sites, other spaces and objects reveal more starkly the paradoxes in the treatment of this Jewish Egyptian heritage. Some react with covetousness or refusal, some with rejection, some co-opt the situation for their own ends—and all of this against a backdrop of tensions linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and internal relations among Egyptian Jews.

The tomb of Ray Abu Hassira (born in Morocco in around 1807 and died around 1880 in Damtiouh, a small village south of Damanhur)<sup>66</sup> is a place of worship contested by some Egyptians. The only moulid<sup>67</sup> dedicated to a Jew in Egypt and located in Izbet Damtiouh<sup>68</sup>, it draws thousands of Jews from Israel and around the world, mostly Jews from Morocco, every year (on the 19th of Tevet, the date of his death according to the Jewish calendar). The pilgrimage was prohibited in 1956 by Nasser following the Suez Canal crisis and was then authorized again in 1979. Since then, the festival has been the subject of several law suits by certain inhabitants and political activists, in connection with the rituals performed by the pilgrims<sup>69</sup> and the security measures taken to protect them.

<sup>65</sup> <https://larchemag.fr/2013/04/20/669/mort-de-carmen-weinstein-presidente-de-la-communaute-juive-degypte/>, consulted March 30, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> See Voir El Youssef, *المعتقدات الشعبية عن الأضرحة اليهودية: دراسة عن المولد يعقوب أبو حسيبة في محافظة البحيرة* (Cairo: Ain Publishers, 1997), quoted by Yasmine Hussein, *Sacred Places and Popular Practice in the Mediterranean*, (Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2009), 200.

<sup>67</sup> [http://www.lemonde.fr/m-actu/article/2015/01/07/en-egypte-les-pelerins-juifs-ne-sont-plus-les-bienvenus\\_4550873\\_4497186.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/m-actu/article/2015/01/07/en-egypte-les-pelerins-juifs-ne-sont-plus-les-bienvenus_4550873_4497186.html), accessed April 10, 2017. Other narratives give him the name of Yaakov Ben Massoud, now Abu Hassira, whose boat is said to have sunk on his journey to Jerusalem. He was reported to have then been miraculously saved by clinging to his straw mat, his only possession.

<sup>68</sup> It is surrounded on three sides by 89 Jewish tombs. Hussein, *Sacred Places*, 200.

<sup>69</sup> In the area in front of the tomb, a large tent is erected and long tables are arranged inside. Small tents are set up for selling leather products, food, bottled water and paper plates. Some vendors located next to the tent sell different types of Jewish candlesticks while others walk around carrying various pictures of Rabbi Jacob Abu Hassira. At the beginning of the ceremony, there is an auction to decide who will be the first person to enter the tomb and the first person to

Objectors point to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and wanted to see the tomb moved. In 2001, the State placed the tomb under the authority of the SCA as an archaeological site, in the hope of easing tensions. Pilgrims then had to buy a ticket to enter the site and could no longer perform certain rituals, such as kissing the tomb and lighting candles. But this decision only made inhabitants angrier, as they feared the site would be invaded by “Israeli tourists” all year round, instead of once a year. Some of them also claimed that Abu Hassira was, in fact, a descendant of Tarek Ibn Ziad, the conqueror of Andalusia and a devout Muslim. That year, the pilgrimage was cancelled and groups of pilgrims from Israel were refused a visa to enter Egypt. The pilgrimage was again cancelled in 2004<sup>70</sup> by the decision of the Alexandrian court, excluding it from official festivities of the three religions recognized under Egyptian law, and again in 2009 during the Israeli Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip. The site was renovated in 2008 with funds from Moroccan Jewish donors,<sup>71</sup> but pilgrimage has been suspended since 2011, when the administrative court of Alexandria stated that “violations of morality and public order had been committed” during previous pilgrimages, without further specifying the nature of these violations. Considering that “Jews had had no particular impact on Egyptian civilization,” the judge ordered that the site be removed from the list of national monuments and antiquities.<sup>72</sup> Israel asked Egypt, through the intermediary of UNESCO, to transfer the mausoleum to Jerusalem, but this request was rejected by the judge in Alexandria as contrary to Islamic principles that prohibit the excavation of tombs. Others claim that Abu Hassira belongs to Egypt: “Abu Hassira is a product of Arab-Islamic culture and consequently, he is ours.”<sup>73</sup>

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light a candle for the holy man. The pilgrims take the water placed on the tomb and clean their faces with it. Some of the men stand in a corner and pray; some of them read from a prayer book; others light candles for Abu Hassira. Women place biscuits on top of the tomb before offering them to those present. They also place coins on the tombs before donating. After the celebration, the participants leave the tomb; some of the Jews approach other tombs to obtain a handful of earth. Then the pilgrims begin to queue around the buffet where there are various types of food.” See Youssef, quoted in Hussein, *Sacred Places*, 200-201.

<sup>70</sup> <https://dafina.net/gazette/article/l'egypte-annule-le-pelerinage-juif-sur-la-tombe-de-abou-hassira>, consulted April 10, 2017.

<sup>71</sup> See <http://jewishrefugees.com>.

<sup>72</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/m-actu/article/2015/01/07/en-egypte-les-pelerins-juifs-ne-sont-plus-les-bienvenus\\_4550873\\_4497186.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/m-actu/article/2015/01/07/en-egypte-les-pelerins-juifs-ne-sont-plus-les-bienvenus_4550873_4497186.html), consulted April 10, 2017.

<sup>73</sup> <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2001/516/eg5.html> consulted April 10, 2017.



Religious artefacts such as *Sifrei Torah* have also become objects of covetousness and dispersion, as evidenced by attempts at their illegal export and their unknown fate thereafter. Some of these objects, which are more than a hundred years old, are covered by the Egyptian law on antiquities. At least a third are probably less than a hundred years old, but, as the years go by, they, too, are eventually covered by the law on antiquities. An inventory was made in February 2004 by the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt for the Eliyahu Hanavi Synagogue: fifty-six boxes containing *Sifrei Torah*, fourteen *Sifrei Torah* without boxes, and three boxes without *Sifrei Torah*. There are also *Kandils* (lanterns); *Ner Tamids* (eternal lamps of silver, of different sizes and patterns); *Rimonim* (Torah ornaments); *Yads*<sup>74</sup> (silver book pointers); 62 *parochets*<sup>75</sup> in Alexandria; and Hanukkah menorahs. In addition to these religious objects, there are also *Ketubbot* (marriage contracts), *Mohel* books, as well as archives, books and photos in the community's possession, many of which have become collector's items.<sup>76</sup> For the synagogue of Alexandria, the community archives (schools' and *Bet Din* archives, and more) proved to be unusable. Some books are in libraries abroad, while manuscripts can be found at universities mainly in the United States and Israel.<sup>77</sup> Some of the items have disappeared, such as the Megillat (Scroll) of Esther.<sup>78</sup> Nebi Daniel also made an inventory of the *Sifrei Torah* in Cairo.

The debates over community registers between the Egyptian Jews in and outside Israel, the Jews in Egypt who preserve the registers, and the Egyptian government reveal another issue raised by this heritage, which is in some respects embarrassing given the rather "cold" peace between Egypt and Israel. The registers, which track the diversity of life histories in Egypt's Jewish communities, do not relate to a distant past; in fact, the documents concern individuals who are sometimes still alive and their descendants. Today, this heritage can be found in the archives of communities of Cairo and Alexandria. In Alexandria, these

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<sup>74</sup> To protect the scrolls, *Sifrei Torah* are provided with wooden handles, minimizing physical contact. The use of a *Yad* has the same aim.

<sup>75</sup> Embroidered curtains placed before the Holy Ark (in Sephardic and Eastern synagogues, the *Heykhal*) and the lectern (the *Bimah* surmounted by the *Tevah*).

<sup>76</sup> For a view of these *Ketubbot*, particularly those from Egypt, see: <https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nli/english/collections/jewish-collection/ketubbot/pages/default.aspx>, consulted August 11, 2009.

<sup>77</sup> The Jewish National and University Library and the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem, and Yeshiva University of New York.

<sup>78</sup> *Megillat* Esther, or the Scroll of Esther, is part of the Hebrew Bible. Handwritten on parchment, its text is traditionally read every year during the feast of Purim.



records<sup>79</sup> date back to the Ottoman Empire, starting in 1830 as the beginning date of the history of the Jewish minority of Alexandria. The records were created by the Jewish community of Alexandria, which recorded the names of persons wishing to obtain official documents. Births, marriages, divorces, deaths, and conversions were recorded until 1956. According to the Nebi Daniel Association, there are two hundred and fifty-five registers comprising some sixty thousand pages of information that covers the entire city and extends to the contemporary period. No copy of this has been made to date.<sup>80</sup>

One of Nebi Daniel's objectives is to digitize these registers, which remain difficult to access. The Association is confronted, on the one hand, with the refusal of the local Jewish communities, who maintain that they require governmental authorization to allow a complete copy to leave the country. On the other hand, the Egyptian government has not intervened or responded in any way; the official stance is that the communities are the sole arbiters of the fate of the registers. Although the documents do not concern personal property, the government is apprehensive that they might be used to bring charges of spoliation of property, a fear reinforced by rumors of attempted theft in late 2011 of 1.7 million documents dating from the 19th century.<sup>81</sup>

The Association also denounces the fact that there is a charge for making copies of documents in Alexandria, while in Cairo the documents are not accessible at all. According to the Association, the registers are important sources for documenting heritage; they also pose a problem of authenticity, insofar as the Jewish authorities in Alexandria and Cairo no longer have "a religious mandate at present to confer an official seal on the certificates issued."<sup>82</sup> Indeed, there is no rabbinical authority in Egypt able to validate the certificates. In addition,

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<sup>79</sup> These are partly manuscript documents, sometimes including photographs, which contain information recorded either on the day of the event or subsequently, and used in particular for issuing certificates (*Chehadat*) for local or foreign civil and religious authorities. These documents are written in several languages: French, Hebrew, Arabic, and Italian.

<sup>80</sup> Fedida, *Shem et Shemot*.

<sup>81</sup> This is undoubtedly an invention by Egyptian propaganda reproduced by the Israelis. The building that burned down during the revolution could not have housed Jewish property titles because all properties, Jewish and non-Jewish, form one confused hodgepodge in the Egyptian cadaster to this day. The Jewish documents were allegedly stolen during the December 2011 riots from a research institute in Cairo and then seized while they were on their way to Israel via Jordan. See <https://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-ownership-documents-confiscated-by-cairo-on-national-security-grounds/>, consulted on March 14, 2014.

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.nebidaniel.org/registres.php?lang=fr>

according to the Association, no legal decision or statement has been made on what will happen to community effects after the demise of the last of its remaining members in Egypt.

In fact, the archives constitute the “only legal proof of civil and religious identity,”<sup>83</sup> in particular, of Jewishness as defined by *Halakha* for Jewish marriage, genealogy, or burial. The documents also furnish proof of nationality, divorce settlements, or inheritance and constitute a record reflecting 150 years of community life in Alexandria. They are especially valuable because, in many cases, foreign archives are incomplete despite consular registration, which did not affect all Egyptian Jews. Finally, the registers enable us to fill in lacunae in the histories of families that have been destroyed and dispersed.

This quarrel over community registers has been partly sealed by their transfer to the national archives, highlighting the dispute between the different actors involved. According to one of my interviewees from Nebi Daniel Association, in 2016,

Magda Haroun heard about the international multilingual petition to President Sisi that Nebi Daniel had launched and which had been signed by all the associations. She immediately contacted the Ministry of Culture to pick up all the community registers. (...) Unfortunately, she also convinced Ben Gaon in Alexandria to accept when the Minister of Culture approached him immediately. This is a great disaster. They now lie in the depths of the national archives. We were unable to see them. We contacted the previous Minister of Culture, who said that he had no objection to a copy but that the Minister of Foreign Affairs should sign to take it abroad. Since then, nothing. Sisi has publicly said that we would have a copy... but when? Our interventions with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and embassies receive only dismissive silence as an answer.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

### Inside or Outside Egypt: Contrasting Views

Preserving the traces of an Egyptian Jewish presence *in situ* necessarily raises different issues for the various actors involved – Jews from Egypt and Jews in Egypt, Egyptians – in a context in which there are Jews still in Egypt and Jews from Egypt in the diaspora and in Israel (who do not perceive themselves as in a diaspora). The fragility of the Jewish community in Egypt, long affected by internal tensions,<sup>84</sup> makes the community closely dependent on the state and probably, at other levels, on the help of Egyptian Jews in the diaspora and in Israel. This guardianship “from the outside” is all the more important for the community from a financial, social, and historical point of view because the very presence of the community is occasionally contested. This community is perceived by some as the *shamash* (servant, guardian) of the Jewish presence and heritage in the country, and its few members as the last to close the door and the lights of the synagogue. But there are ambivalent views about the community, as certain Jews from Egypt in the diaspora or in Israel suspect it of assimilation (in particular because of mixed marriages), and so of abandoning all or part of its Jewish identity. Others regularly level a series of charges at the presidents of the would be communities of Alexandria and Cairo: diverting sales of community goods for their own benefit, converting to Islam, and so on.<sup>85</sup> The continuity of Egyptian Judaism has been preserved, in the eyes of these critics, thanks to the Jews’ departure and the re-establishment of traditions in Israel and elsewhere. From the point of view of these external critics, it is they who represent the real Jews of Egypt and not those who remained in the country, that instead see their legitimacy and rights to community property challenged.

In this configuration, the Egyptian government becomes an arbiter of sorts: against the communities when they try to obtain access to documents and religious objects or attempt to export them out of the country, or in support of the communities when classifying their artefacts as part of Egypt’s national heritage. But this classification, as the site of Rav Abu Hassira shows, is also debated among Egyptians, who no longer co-exist – and have not co-existed for nearly sixty years – with any Jewish minority. Recognizing Jewish history as part of Egyptian history therefore runs up against the conception of Jews as exogenous to the country. This view is, moreover, often linked with the

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<sup>84</sup> Particularly concerning the management and sale of community properties.

<sup>85</sup> [http://www.hsje.org/mystory/Victor\\_Balassiano/presalexandria.html](http://www.hsje.org/mystory/Victor_Balassiano/presalexandria.html), consulted on April 2, 2018.

pejorative associations of labels such as “Jew,” “Israeli” and “Zionist.” This representation is passed on implicitly or explicitly by the media, films and television series.

Some Egyptian Jews in the diaspora favor *in situ* conservation in accordance with Egyptian law and agree with the position of the Jews in Egypt that taking ancient documents out of the country is not only illegal but also denies their Egyptian historical character – these documents are not solely Jewish.<sup>86</sup> This is the view of Nebi Daniel’s members. While including certain synagogues in tourist circuits of Cairo is not one of its direct objectives, the aim does not contradict the Association’s goals. The Association also seeks to include the restoration and conservation of certain synagogues in the Jewish Heritage Program (run by the World Monument Fund), an initiative that reveals the sometimes sensitive situation of the Association:

We did indeed intervene with the WMF for the restoration of Eliyahu Hanavi because of the critical state of the synagogue, at the time of Morsi. Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood no longer wanted to do anything and we wanted to broaden the interveners’ impact. Unfortunately, our request did not succeed because the WMF had no one in Egypt to take up this commitment. We renewed the request after the collapse of the roof... and this time it was accepted. Although we kept the Minister of Antiquities informed of our approach, the Egyptians took the Synagogue’s listing as an endangered site badly because they had just allocated one month before the sum for the restoration, which is still in progress.<sup>87</sup>

Yet not everyone shares the same approach. In Israel, some argue for permanently exporting from Egypt all community documents and religious objects, including *Genizah* documents, and for selling community buildings, thus expressly opting to sever links with Egypt. In the 1990s, Jews from Egypt in Brooklyn asked the Jewish community in Egypt to give up its *Sefarim* (traditional books containing liturgy or texts for study), arguing that in Egypt Jews would inevitably become extinct. This request led Carmen Weinstein, to take action with the Egyptian government to classify the objects as Egyptian

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<sup>86</sup> <http://www.wmforg/jewish.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Interview of the A. with Marc, Paris region, 2019.

antiquities. Magda Haroun<sup>88</sup> succeeded her and in 2016 together with Samy Ibrahim founded anew the Drop of Milk Association,<sup>89</sup> whose objective is to maintain synagogues. The latter are reshaped as places of memory, community and artistic centers, open to all and reconfigured in tourist items as witnesses to a past of interfaith tolerance and harmony.<sup>90</sup> The association relies in particular on social media and uses the tricks of tourist merchandising, including an Internet campaign to sell tee-shirts and sweat-shirts (between 35 and 65 dollars) that sport the Association's logo in the shape of papyrus (palm tree, according to the association) decorating the walls of synagogues in Cairo. It regularly makes the headlines of national and international newspapers praising this mixture of tourism, memory and peace against the backdrop of the disappearance of living people while architecture remains to commemorate Jewish life in the past. Being keen to merge the two communities of Alexandria and Cairo, the Association has also struck a deal with Abercrombie and Kent for organising a tour of Jewish Cairo. This leads to some reactions such as those of the Historical Society of Jews from Egypt, which contacted the American Ambassador in Egypt in late 2017 to protest against the Cairo Jewish community's holding events of a so-called "non-Jewish nature" at synagogues: "Our synagogues are houses of worship and must be used only for religious functions. They are not social clubs."<sup>91</sup>

Despite what some describe as "the government's unwillingness to engage with Egyptian Jewry,"<sup>92</sup> the government has in fact taken several decisions in favor of the preservation and classification of certain Jewish heritage sites and objects that, once classified, should be recognized in the same way as the Coptic and Islamic heritage have been.<sup>93</sup> Some of these very old synagogues have been included in a tourist circuit marked out with signs in old Cairo<sup>94</sup>; others have not. In January

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<sup>88</sup> Daughter of Chehata Haroun, a lawyer and member of the Egyptian Communist Party, which was known to be opposed to Israel. For a discussion of Chehata Haroun's personality, his beliefs, and to what extent the Jewish community and its heritage constitute a part of the Egyptian social and cultural fabric, see Yoram Meital, "A Jew in Cairo. The Defiance of Chehata Haroun," *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 53/2 (2016): 183-197.

<sup>89</sup> First founded in 1921 to help the needy.

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pg/D.O.M.Egypt/about/>

<sup>91</sup> <http://jewishrefugees.blogspot.com/2018/01/egyptian-synagogues-are-not-social-clubs.html>, consulted January 6, 2018.

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/06/egypt-to-repair-middle-east-biggest-synagogue-eliyahu-hanavi-alexandria>, consulted December 1, 2017.

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.drhawass.com/wp/the-restoration-of-the-shaar-hashamayim-synagogue/> consulted April 3, 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Primarily Maimonides Synagogue, Ben Ezra Synagogue and Sha'ar Hashamayim.

2017, a meeting between the Director of International Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, Rabbi Andrew Baker, the Nebi Daniel Association, and the Egyptian Minister of Antiquities, Khaled El-Enany, led to the allocation of £5 million for the restoration of the Alexandria Synagogue.<sup>95</sup> These efforts were then tied to a strategy to make Farouk Hosny, Minister of Culture, become head of UNESCO, and then appoint Moushira Khattab as Director General. They also bear witness to an effort to transform the Jewish heritage into a symbol of different faiths' historical coexistence in the country, in a fragile and difficult present for the minorities still there, such as the Copts.

### **Conclusion: Symbolic Inclusion versus Physical Exclusion**

Composed of community archives, religious artefacts and built places, the material heritage of the Egyptian Jews is grounded in central urban spaces both historically and symbolically. At the same time, this heritage is marked by the now marginalized, although not forgotten, history of Jewish presence in Egypt. While this marginalization occurred in a broader context affecting a number of minorities who shared a similar fate, for the Jews this process featured specific element, such as the long history of Jews in Egypt and the creation of the State of Israel. Paradoxically, it is perhaps these specific elements that also explain the efforts of the most recent Egyptian governments to maintain Jewish heritage *in situ*, which they can do all the more easily because the members of the community are no longer there, a situation common in other Jewish communities in Islamic countries, as well.<sup>96</sup> The safeguarding and preservation of this heritage is sometimes the subject of bitter debate between Jews from Egypt in the diaspora, those in Israel, and Jews still in Egypt; with the Egyptian State often playing the role of arbiter. The debates reveal the asymmetry in expectations, customs, and commitments concerning the history of Jews in Egypt. The fragile position of the Jews still in Egypt, the criticism and suspicion to which they are subjected, even the way that some people (locally or elsewhere) have taken advantage of the community's disappearance and inability to claim ownership of its heritage and its future in order to dissociate it from its integral Egyptian Jewish character and to insist on its purely Jewish - or purely Egyptian,

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<sup>95</sup> The responsibility of the Jewish community according to Article 30 of the Law 117 from 1983 on the protection of monuments.

<sup>96</sup> Susan Gilson Miller, "Sensitive Ruins. On the Preservation of Jewish Religious Sites in the Muslim World," in *Synagogues of the Islamic World. Architecture, Design, and Identity*, ed. Mohammed Gharipour, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

or even purely “Arab-Muslim” – nature, are key to understanding the issues involved in preserving this Jewish heritage in Egypt. These issues are debated among three main actors: the Egyptian government, Jews from Egypt, and Jews in Egypt. Some of them sponsor or seek financial and political support to preserve this heritage *in situ* while others, closing the door to the discussions, try to transport that heritage elsewhere by any means. But Jews from Egypt and Jews in Egypt both seem to agree in recognizing these cultural artefacts and architectural remains as unitary symbols of their Egyptian Jewish history and belonging, revealing the dialectic between identification (with Judaism) and the various uses of its central places-institutions, including the synagogue. They became new emblematic sites of contemporary Judaism, sometimes places of desolation, ruins and memory, where some individuals hope to reconnect with their “origins” and “where a modality, hitherto unprecedented among Jews, of the relationship to the past is experienced, at the same time as a modality of belief that is no longer that of the established tradition.”<sup>97</sup>

However, in this “game,” there is a fourth actor, Israel, whose specific relations with its Egyptian neighbor leave a clear mark on the paradoxical trajectory of the Jewish heritage in Egypt, between promotion, co-option, abandonment, forgetting and rejection. This heritage thus became ironically, in and outside Egypt, a concrete trace of the physical exclusion of the Jews (expelled from the country) and at the same time, in Egypt, a symbol of their symbolical inclusion (for Egypt to claim its tolerance of multiple communities). The destruction of sites and artefacts is not alone in leading to the erasure of the history of Egyptian Jews. The production and the preservation of their heritage might also support the creation of silences, in and outside Egypt and in the shade or fully lit up by Israel. As M.R. Trouillot pointed out, history begins with bodies and artefacts.<sup>98</sup> The bigger and the more visible the material traces are, the more they embody the ambiguities and tension of history, enabling us to touch it and inspiring the illusion of sharing it and the impetus to imagine “lives behind the mortar.” But they do not let us recognize, despite or due to their monumental materiality and their multiple uses, “the end of a bottomless silence”<sup>99</sup> about the very complex

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<sup>97</sup> Régine Azria, “Lieux juifs: solitude du Mont, rumeurs du monde”, *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 4 (2005): 557-572.

<sup>98</sup> Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 28.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

past of those who had to abandon their prophets and, perhaps more than others, have sunk into history.<sup>100</sup>

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**Michèle Baussant** is a social anthropologist, Director of Research at the French National Center of Research (CNRS) and Fellow at the Convergences Migration Institute (<http://icmigrations.fr/>). She has published extensively on the issues of migration, memory and cultural heritage and has worked four years in Israel at the French Center of Research in Jerusalem (CNRS/MEAE). <https://isp.cnrs.fr/?project=baussant-michele>

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<sup>100</sup> Bernard Malamud, *The Fixer*, (New York: Farrar-Straus & Giroux, 1966); consulted by the author in French translation as *L’homme de Kiev*, (Paris: Rivages Poche, 2015).



## Poetics of Identity: Mizrahi Poets between Here and There, Then and Now

by Esther Schely-Newman

### Abstract

*The Israeli literary scene, particularly in the early years of the state, tended to represent the Israeli Zionist life, expressed in Eurocentric style and modes. Nevertheless, other voices and alternative narratives of the Israeli experience are heard, offering different styles and flavors, challenging the dominance of the hegemony and the ethos of mizug galuyot [merging of exiles] that negated Diasporic existence in the process of emergence of a new Hebrew people. In this paper I wish to demonstrate how renowned Mizrahi poets cope with the boundaries of poetics in relation to the Israeli "Other." The poets are roughly divided between "founding fathers," who arrived to Israel as children, and younger poets of Mizrahi origins born in Israel. The paper focuses on poems that specifically deal with Mizrahi-Ashkenazi relationships, themes that continue to concern migrant poets. The chronological perspective allows considering the content of poems as well as new venue of disseminating poetry – the Internet – that enables variations of positioning oneself vis-à-vis the literary hegemonic establishment.*

### Introduction

### Background

### Founding Fathers of Mizrahi Poetics

### Mois Bannaroch - Between Here and There

### Technology - Third Millennium Poetry

### An Emergent We? Concluding Remarks

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## Introduction

### *Rihal Madrid*

by Ronny Someck

*ma nish-ar mib'itat haga'agu'im*  
*shel rabbi yehuda halevi?*  
*ulay kadur mitgalgel 'al deshe novel*  
*ben sha'ar hamizrah leshe'ar hama'arav*

[What remains of the yearning kick  
Of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi?  
Perhaps a rolling ball on fading grass  
Between the goalpost of the East and the goalpost of the West.]<sup>1</sup>

What remains of the past once people leave their homeland and make *Aliyah* - ascend to the Land of Israel? Ronny Someck takes the yearning of millennia - sung on the rivers of Babylon, inscribed in liturgy and in Jewish memory - and sets this in the soccer field of Real Madrid Football Club. Through this playfulness, Someck mixes liturgy, nostalgia, and the Holy Land with contemporary times and places. Using the assonance of the acronym of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (*Rihal*), the 11-12<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish philosopher and poet, with the name of the football club, Someck questions the contemporary meaning of the well-known poem of longing for the Holy Land: *libbi bamizrah vaanokhi besof ma'arav* [my heart is in the East and I am at the end of the West]. Someck's own short poem thus connects times and places, with East and West valorized and assigned ethnic identities rather than representing geographical directions.

This paper analyzes attitudes towards these issues from the point of view of Israeli Mizrahi poets and their relations with the Other, the Israeli literary milieu - the Ashkenazi establishment. I focus on the meaning of peripheral poets within the Israeli ethos of erasing the past concurrently with nostalgic longing for the old countries and languages. Israel and *hutz la-aretz* - the countries outside the Holy Land - Hebrew versus the various mother tongues, and the attempt to create a dialogue that may bridge ethnic tensions between Mizrahim and

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<sup>1</sup> Ronny Someck, *Ha-metofef shel ha-Mahapecha* [The Revolution Drummer] (Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 2001), 30. By permission of the poet. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my literate (not poetic) renditions of the original texts.

Ashkenazim. Based on previous studies of Mizrahi poets who migrated to Israel as children (Mois Benarroch, Erez Biton, Sami Shalom Chetrit, and Ronny Someck), I compare their attitude to that of younger (relatively less studied) poets of Mizrahi origins born in Israel (Adi Keissar and Roy Hasan). The paper expands the arguments developed by Alon, Mendelson-Maoz, and Oppenheimer<sup>2</sup> about the meaning of being Mizrahi in the Israeli literary scene, adding the contemporary *'Ars Poetiqah* phenomenon.

## Background

Jewish ethnic identities in Israel are a thorny issue. Smootha identified the ethnic gap as one of the major sources of social inequality in Israel as early as 1978.<sup>3</sup> Studies by leading sociologists and anthropologists since then have focused on the process of constructing Israeli identity out of the different ethnic groups comprising Israeli society. Other scholars, such as Ram, Swirsky, and Yonah,<sup>4</sup> have demonstrated the interaction between plans for population dispersal and the ongoing problems of sociocultural gaps. The ideology of *mizug galuyot* [merging of exiles] assumed that the Israeli project would result in creating a new people turning its back on the old exilic identities to become Israelis; denial of the diaspora (*shlilat hagalut*) – if not of exile per se – is the upshot. Differences, it was argued, will disappear with intermarriage, so that within a few generations ethnic difference will no longer exist. However, Talia Sagiv,<sup>5</sup> who analyzed narratives of Israelis born to Mizrahi-Ashkenazi parents, found that the “half-and-half” Israelis continue to maintain ethnic identities, overriding their “Israeliness.” Their perceptions follow stereotypes that equate *Mizrahiyut* with

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<sup>2</sup> Ktzia Alon and Yochai Oppenheimer, *Ana min el-Maghreb: Reading Erez Biton Poetry*, (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2014); Ktzia Alon, *A Third Option for Poetry*, (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2011); *To Dwell in a Word*, ed. Ktzia Alon, (Gama Publishing, 2015); Yochai Oppenheimer, *Diasporic Mizrahi Poetry in Israel*, (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2012); all in Hebrew. Adia Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel: Literary Perspectives*, (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Sammy Smootha, *Israel: Pluralism and Conflict*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Shlomo Swirsky, *Lo Nehshalim ela Menuhshalim: Mizrahim and Ashkenazim In Israel*, (Haifa: Mahbarot Leviqoret, 1981); *Israeli Society: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Uri Ram, (Tel Aviv: Breirot Publishing, 1993); Yossi Yonah, *In Virtue of Difference: The Multicultural Project in Israel*, (Jerusalem: Van Leer Publishing, 2005). All in Hebrew.

<sup>5</sup> Talia Sagiv, *Hetzi-hetzi: Israelis of Mixed Ethnic Origins*, (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2014). In Hebrew.

warmth and closeness, while the *Ashkenaziyut* has the associations of intellectualism, coldness, and better chances of upward mobility.

In recent years, the topic of social inequality based on Jewish ethnicity has taken on a significant role in the media and popular culture. Television series such as the 2002 *Ruach Qadim* [Eastern Hot Wind] by David Ben Chetrit, which tells the story of the Mizrahi, mainly Moroccan, migration to Israel, were produced as a counter narrative to the well known television series *Pillar of Fire* (aired in 1981) and *Tequma* [Resurrection] of 1998 that ignored the contribution of Mizrahi Jews to the State of Israel. More recently, two television series focused on the treatment of Mizrahim in the early years of the state. *Salah Po Ze Eretz Israel* [Salah, This Is Israel], a documentary by David Der'i, aired in 2017, tells the story of Moroccan migrants in development towns. This was followed by the four-part series *Ma'abarot* [Transit Camps] aired in 2019, treating the mass migration during 1950-60. The struggle for recognition of alternative narratives continues, and the politics of identity appears in the literary field, perhaps as poetics of identity.

The difficulties of migration have been experienced by people of other ethnic groups. A recent anthology of Israeli poetry on these themes brings together poems written between 1923 and 2016 by men and women who arrived in Israel from places as far from each other as Russia in the East from Morocco in the West.<sup>6</sup> Alroey notes in his introduction that while studies in the social sciences usually treat migrants as groups, migration itself is an individual experience (p. 13). All poets, regardless of their origins, express the pain of leaving the known for the new and different. Exilic existence seems to continue in Israel, where the migrants still feel estranged; a displacement that takes on different forms, changing names, blurring landscapes, and rich in difficulties in the early encounters with the “natives” (Jews, *Sabarim*). The migration poems chosen by Weichart and Alroey for their anthology reinforce the relevance of the concept of diaspora in contemporary Israel, as argued by Oppenheimer and others.<sup>7</sup> For poets who “dwell in words,” to cite Alon, the most difficult and painful is the pressure to adopt a new language. Silencing one's own language is more traumatic for poets from Arabic-speaking countries; in the words of Ronit Mazuz, “Woe is me that the language of the enemy is my mother tongue,” or Almog Behar's poem, *Ha-Aravit sheli ilemet* [My Arabic is Mute], “...My Arabic

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<sup>6</sup> *When I Arrived: Poems about Immigration to Israel*, eds. Rafi Weichert, Gur Alroey, (Iton 77 Books, 2019). In Hebrew.

<sup>7</sup> Oppenheimer, *Diasporic Mizrahi Poetry in Israel*.

is scared / silently pretends to be Hebrew / ... /and my Hebrew is deaf / Sometimes very deaf.”<sup>8</sup>

Differences between poets who migrated to Israel and those born in Israel to migrant parents appear to be almost negligible in this recent collection, as are differences based on the countries of origin. Nevertheless, I wish to consider the struggle of Mizrahi poets of the migrant generation and those born in Israel to Mizrahi parents from two angles: the relationship with the Other, which is the Israeli Ashkenazi literary establishment, and the process of writing and dissemination of poems. My corpus includes early poems by Erez Biton, Ronny Someck, and Sami Shalom Chetrit, with Mois Benarroch as a link to the younger generation of *'Ars Poetiqah*, Adi Keissar and Roy Hasan. Given the extensive studies of Biton, Someck and Chetrit available to date, I will expand on the younger generation, which has not yet received sufficient scholarly attention.

### Founding Fathers of Mizrahi Poetics

Erez Biton (born 1941 to Moroccan parents in Algeria, migrated in 1949), the “father of Mizrahi poetry in Israel,” is the author of eight poetry books, the earliest published in 1976 and the latest in 2019. A laureate of the Amichai (2014), Bialik (2014), and Israel (2015) prizes in poetry and literature, Biton has thus enjoyed significant recognition starting almost 40 years after the publication of his first book. In 2016, he was appointed by Education Minister Naftali Bennett to head the Biton Committee to evaluate school curricula and enrich it with Mizrahi content.

Issues of identity and authenticity are central to Biton’s poetry; his status as representing Mizrahi identity is seen in the choice made by Oppenheimer and Alon to use key phrases from his poetry as titles of studies of Mizrahi poetry: *ma ze lihyot otenti* [what does it mean to be authentic] or *ana min el Maghreb* [I am from the Maghreb]; taken from Biton’s poem *Taktzir Siha* [Summary of a conversation].

In *Hatuna Maroqait* [Moroccan Wedding],<sup>9</sup> Biton attempts to connect the glorious past, the rich and beautiful traditions of Morocco, with the current

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<sup>8</sup> *When I Arrived: Poems about Immigration to Israel*, eds. Weichert, Alroey, 184, 224. Mazuz and Behar were both born in Israel.

situation. The poem speaks directly to the Other, who is not familiar with Moroccan culture and seems to be oblivious to people from the periphery. Biton's plea to the Other for recognition ends with an open invitation:

... Whoever hasn't been to a Moroccan wedding, / here is a ticket, / come  
on in / to the disturbances / of the heart / that you couldn't ever kill.

The need for recognition by the Other, who stands in for the literary establishment, is evident in two other early poems, *Taktzir Siha* [Summary of a Conversation] and *Shir Kniya be-Dizengof* [Shopping Song on Dizengoff].<sup>10</sup> In "Summary of a Conversation," Biton wonders about his identity, opening the poem with a question, "What does it mean to be authentic?" followed by descriptions of behavior, name, and dress. In Hebrew peppered with Judeo-Arabic he declares:

*Ana min el-Maghreb, Ana min el-Maghreb*  
[I'm from the Atlas Mountains, I'm from the Atlas Mountains]  
/ .../ to sit in the Café Roval in brightly flowing robes

//Or to proclaim out loud: "My name isn't Zohar,  
I'm Zayish I'm Zayish."

In this poem, Biton juxtaposes two options – to be part of the literary establishment, identified with the people sitting in Café Roval an option that requires him to change his fundamental self, or to remain "authentic," i.e., Moroccan. Biton emphasizes the differences by pointing to the Atlas Mountains, a part of Morocco that in Israel is synonymous with the birthplace of the "Shluh;" the nickname is a persistent ethnic slur.<sup>11</sup> He refers to the practice of changing the names of immigrant children, and to specific garments that mark

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<sup>9</sup> Translated by Ammiel Alcalay, in his *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writing*, (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1996), 265-67.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-65.

<sup>11</sup> Koby Peretz, a popular Israeli singer of Moroccan origins, was accused of addressing the crowd at a private party as "*shluhim*" in November 2009. The family of the hosts sued Peretz for insulting the guests. Later on, in April 2010, Peretz sued the family for damaging his public image, claiming he had been misunderstood. The affair ended in reconciliation and mutual apologies two years later.

the otherness of Moroccans.<sup>12</sup> And yet, these attempts bear no fruit, and he finds himself,

[...] / neither this nor that, / [...] / and I fall between the circles /  
lost in a medley of voices.

The desperate attempt to belong is clearer in “Shopping Song on Dizengoff,” but buying a shop on Dizengoff does not make any difference for the folks at the Roval Café, who speak a different language:

I don’t face the people at the Roval / but when the people at the Roval  
turn to me/ I unsheathe my tongue / with clean words, / Yes, sir. /  
Please, sir / very up-to-date Hebrew ...

All attempts fail because “ ... the openings here / are impenetrable for me here.”  
At the end of the day, the poet packs his things and “head back to the outskirts /  
and another Hebrew.”

Dr. Sami Shalom Chetrit (born in 1960 in Morocco, migrated to Israel in 1963) is a political scientist, poet, and social activist. He is one of the founding members of *Kedma* [“To the East”], and *Hakeshet Hademoqratis Hamizrahit* [Eastern Democratic Rainbow] working for egalitarian education in periphery communities. He is also a professor at Queens College in NY, and currently the head of Screen Studies at Sapir College in Israel. His poetic works include several books, the first published in 1988, and the latest in 2015. The most vocal and angry poems appeared in *Shirim be-Ashdodit*,<sup>13</sup> which addresses life on the periphery and the experiences of an immigrant child, rejecting demands to erase the past in order to become Israeli.

Opening the collection is a blatant challenge to the Other; rather than looking for a dialogue, the author writes in a cryptic way, *Shelo Tavinu Mila* [so you won’t understand a word]:

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<sup>12</sup> In his translation, Alcalay chose to omit the garment names. In Hebrew: *Lashevet be-roval betziv'onin* (‘agal vezarbiya, miney levush). My translation: To sit at the Roval in colors (‘agal and zarbiya, types of garments).

<sup>13</sup> *Shirim be-Ashdodit* [Poems in Ashdodian] was published in 2003 and includes poems written between 1982 and 2002. *Shelo Tavinu Mila* was written in 1998.

I write you poems/ in Ashdodian / *kus em em emkum/ chla dar bukem*<sup>14</sup>  
/so that you will not understand a word /

Cursing his audience is a response to indifference to the concerns of the poet's people:

Who cares about you / *Oulad el Ahram*<sup>15</sup> / each one of you / when did  
you pay attention/...

The built-in contradiction - writing to an audience but denying their right to understand - speaks to the deafness of the Other, who refuses to recognize the plight of the periphery or even their language.

The mixture of languages and the struggle between wanting to be Israeli and at the same time wishing to retain some sense of the previous life is apparent in the poem *Ele Shemot* [These are the names], written in the spoken language of the periphery that mixes Hebrew, Judeo-Moroccan, and French. The voice of mothers calling their children to come home is loud and clear:

*Allan, viye a-la-mezo, vit / Jacquie, tla' al-dar, d'ghya* <sup>16</sup>

These names, redolent with the scent of *hus laares* [literally, in Moroccan Hebrew pronunciation: out of the land; the diaspora], are not acceptable in Israel. Following common practice, the teacher changes the diasporic names: no more Allan, Jacquie, Brigitte, Alice, but Ilan, Ya'aqov, 'Aliza, Zehava. This experience, shared by many migrants in Israel, referred to above in Biton's "I'm not Zohar, I'm Zayish," and still current among Ethiopians, is seen by Chetrit as yet another attempt to erase the memory of the old country. The need to preserve a bit of that past ends the poem:

We knew. / But we insisted on / a bit more of an overseas scent / Before  
the ringing of bells is silenced: / Sami, Mimi,/ Rachelle, Mardoshe...

Opposition to the new language and names is evidenced both literally and metaphorically, by using words in other languages and the Moroccan

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<sup>14</sup> These are common Arabic curses in Israel, relating to the mother's private parts, then wishing destruction upon the father's house.

<sup>15</sup> "Sons of sin," a common curse in Arabic, both Moroccan and Palestinian.

<sup>16</sup> Translated by Ammiel Alcalay, in *Helicon* 117 (2016): 71. Note that Alcalay chose to translate the mother's call into standard form: "Allén, venez à la maison, vite."



pronunciation of some words, the sound /S/ instead of /T'Z/ - *hus laares* (*hutz la-aretz*), *ksat* (*ktzat*, a little). Chetrit alludes implicitly to the core story of Jewish identity, the Exodus from Egypt. The title of the poem echoes the first words of the Book of Exodus: *Ele shemot bney Israel* [These are the names of the sons of Israel] (Exodus 1:1). The content alludes to a known Midrash enumerating the four reasons why the Israelites were worthy of redemption: they had not changed their names or their language, did not speak evil of others, and not one among them was sexually promiscuous.<sup>17</sup> The poem gestures in an opposite direction: those coming to Israel from other countries are coerced to change their names and their languages. Does this mean that the way back is barred? Once they change names and languages, they are no longer deserving of redemption, seen here as returning to the lands outside (*hus laares*).

The use of language is not incidental: this “peripheral Hebrew,” as Henshke<sup>18</sup> calls it, is influenced by Judeo-Arabic and should be considered a language onto itself, not a deteriorated dialect of standard Hebrew. In another poem, *Freha shem yafê* [Freha is a beautiful name], Chetrit uses a nonstandard form of Hebrew in describing the reasons for choosing the name Freha.<sup>19</sup> Biton, too, uses a mixture of languages in his poems, as well as intentionally mispronounces words, such as “Dizengov” instead of “Dizengoff.” This use of language reinforces what Alon identifies as the influence of traditional Jewish poetry that takes on a “local, Israeli scent.”<sup>20</sup>

Ronny Someck is the most popular poet in Israel and the most translated into other languages. Born in Baghdad (1951), Someck arrived in Israel at the age of three, like Chetrit. He is younger than Biton, but both published their first poetry book in the same year, 1976, and the titles of their books bear a scent of the “old country” - *Minha Maroqait* [Moroccan Offering] and *Goleh* [Exiled].<sup>21</sup> These three poets are the best known of the first-generation Mizrahi poets who brought to the Israeli public voices and poetic styles different from the Israeli-Ashkenazi,

<sup>17</sup> Shir Hashirim Rabbah 84, also in Vayikra Rabbah 32.

<sup>18</sup> Yehudit Henshke, “Israeli, Jewish, Mizrahi or Traditional? On the Nature of the Hebrew of Israel’s Periphery,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 68 (2017): 137-157.

<sup>19</sup> In Israel, the feminine name “Freha,” which means “happy,” became a slur usually describing a young woman of loud speech, extravagant dress, makeup, and more. It is mainly used to refer to a Mizrahi female, the partner of an ‘ars (see below). See Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Freha shem yafê* (Nur Books publishers, 1995), 51.

<sup>20</sup> Alon, *A Third Option for Poetry*.

<sup>21</sup> Gil’ad Meiri, “Mizrahi Spearheads - Erez Biton and Ronny Someck: Two Options of Mizrahi Poetics,” in *To Dwell in a Word*, ed. Alon, 351-88.

and were not involved in the local literary scene (those people at the Roval, in Biton's words). Yet they developed in different ways: Biton is seen as the "head of the Mizrahi tribe" and Someck as "one of the general Israeli tribes."<sup>22</sup> While Biton wrote about futile attempts to become part of the Israeli literary scene, Someck mixes the past (both remote and close) and present with a fair share of irony, "So what if I came here from the place where the Garden of Eden was," or "My grandfather was born in the Lands of Arak."<sup>23</sup> The all-Israeli experience is perhaps better expressed in his *shir patrioti* [patriotic song]<sup>24</sup> that mixes derogatory terms for various Jewish groups,

*Ani Iraq- pajama, ishti Romaniya, / ve-ha-bat shelanu hi ha-ganav mi-Bagdad*

[I am Iraqi pajama, my wife is Romanian / and our daughter is the Thief of Baghdad]

Does such a mixture create a new identity? The poem that starts with the poet's inner circle – I, my wife, daughter, mother, sister – ends with a "we," a new entity still struggling, entangled in a futile battle - shooting at bright stars:

*kulanu po'alim mefutaram shehurdu mipigumey hamigdal/ sheratzinu livnot bevavel*

[We all are fired workers taken down from the scaffoldings of the tower / we wanted to build in Babylon] ...

Someck does not seem directly to address the "Other," whose existence remains implicit in his poetry. As noted by Mendelson-Maoz (following Alon's analysis), poetry has been given an elitist label usually accorded to Ashkenazi intellectual circles.<sup>25</sup> Humor serves Someck even when referring to ethnic inequality. This can be seen in his poem *Kav Ha-'oni* [poverty line], which begins: "As if you could stretch a line and say: below it, poverty" and ends with the point of view of a child living in a transit camp: "The only line I saw was the horizon and under it everything / looked poor."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>23</sup> Opening lines of Someck's poems *foto retzah* [mug shot] and *halav arayot* [lions' milk].

<sup>24</sup> Ronny Someck, *Mahteret Hehalav* [The milk underground], (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan publishing, 2005), 7.

<sup>25</sup> Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel: Literary Perspectives*, 89.

<sup>26</sup> Translated by Alcalay, *Keys to the Garden*, 1999, 326-7.

In a recent anthology of studies of Someck's poetry, Shakargi notes that his type of poetry can be described as "light verse," not "difficult poetry" (terms coined by W.H. Auden). Such poetry has characteristics identified in Someck's writing: communicative language, narrative poems, and themes from the everyday life of the poet and his entourage.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Someck writes about social inequality, the Mizrahi (and Palestinian) plights, but not in a confrontational manner. The few examples brought here reinforce what Meiri calls "popoetics," that is, using images taken from popular culture and street talk to create new and surprising figures of speech that blur the binary opposition of Jewish-Arab to create the potential for a new entity.<sup>28</sup>

### Mois Bennaroch - Between Here and There

Mois Bennaroch can be seen as a connecting link between the forefathers of Mizrahi poetry and the younger *'Ars Poetiqa* movement. He was born in Tetouan, Spanish Morocco, in 1959, a cohort of Sami Shalom Chetrit, and his first poems were published in the military magazine *Ba-mahaneh* in 1979, coinciding in time with the first publications of Biton and Someck. But he arrived in Israel at the age of 12, and writes poems and novels in Hebrew and Spanish, his mother tongue. Israel has changed since the 1960s, yet the themes raised by Biton and Chetrit remain insistently present in Benarroch's poetry.

Issues of identity for a migrant, Moroccan, Spanish and Mediterranean, are major topics in his writing, underlined in the title of his first published poetry book, *Qinat ha-mehager* [The Immigrant's Lament],<sup>29</sup> a title reminiscent of Biton's *Minha Maroqait* (1976), and Someck's *Goleh* (1979). While the process of adjusting to the new country is common to all migrants, Benarroch emphasizes ethnicity as an obstacle to publication and acknowledgement. The futility of attempting dialogue with the "Other," which we saw in Biton and Chetrit, is

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<sup>27</sup> No'a Shakargi, "Prologue," in *Milat hakavod shel harehov* [The Street's Word of Honor: Reading Ronny Someck's Poetry], eds. No'a Shakargi, Yigal Shevars, Ketzia Alon (Gama publishers, 2019), 7-15. In Hebrew.

<sup>28</sup> Gil'ad Meiri, "Popoetics in Ronny Someck's Poetry," in *Milat hakavod shel harehov*, eds. Shakargi, Shevars, Alon, 48-86. Someck wrote about the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, as Hanan Hever and Yigal Shevars note in their contribution to this latest book.

<sup>29</sup> Published in Hebrew in 1994 by Yaron Golan. Translated into English in 2002. Note that Benarroch chose the term *mehager*, not *oleh*, which would instead valorize Israel as a place one "ascends to", rather than a more profane idea of relocation.

reiterated by Benarroch in curt form: *Sheqet, maqshivim la-Ashkenazim* [silence, we are listening to the Ashkenazis] is the title, and *Be-'etzem, ze kol ha-shir* [actually, this is the entire poem].<sup>30</sup> No further words are needed.

The struggle for publication is a Sisyphean effort, according to *Sheqet, hem hoshvim 'al ze* [Silence, they are thinking about it].<sup>31</sup> For thirty years he has been invited to discussions, hearing comments, but then they refuse to publish, or they think about it a little bit more. He concludes that the world could be a much better place if they would think of solving other problems instead. The poem ends with a sarcastic message, in an everyday low register: "Come on, if you are not able to decide/ think about changing your profession."

Problems of publication are partially solved by technology - the Internet - or private publishing ("vanity press"). Yet the struggle for recognition continues and receives a harsher treatment in his "*Hashir sheli 'al Bialik*" [My poem about Bialik].<sup>32</sup> He curses the national poet, especially the fact that the Bialik literary prize has once more been awarded to an Ashkenazi poet. Hayim Nahman Bialik (1873, Ukraine - 1934, Tel Aviv), considered the greatest modern Hebrew poet, whose literary work is required reading in Israeli schools, appears in other poems as a symbol of cultural coercion, as in Someck's poem, *Hawaja Bialik*, about an Arab girl reciting Hebrew poems,<sup>33</sup> or as in Chetrit writing about "a Moroccan poetess who doesn't know Bialik."<sup>34</sup> Zionist symbols are a target of criticism, as in "Cause of death: Zionism" or "Balance of Terror," which juxtaposes the Establishment with its unending resources, with the poet, who has nothing but words.<sup>35</sup>

Biton's questions about authenticity receive a different treatment in Benarroch's poem, "*Otenti*," which repeats phrases valorizing authenticity,

... "*Ata lo maroqai otenti*" / "*Ata lo oman otenti*" / ...

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<sup>30</sup> Mois Benarroch, *The Sea Language*, (Tel Aviv: Makom Leshira, 2013), 51.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>33</sup> Originally published in his 1994 *Bloody Mary* poem collection. Republished in *Gan 'eden le-orez* [Rice paradise], (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1996), 96.

<sup>34</sup> *Isha ahat maroqanit* [A Moroccan woman], written in 1984, included in *Shirim Be-Ashdodit*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Mois Benarroch, *Ktzara Haderech* [The Road's Cut], (Muvan, 2014), 62, 40.

[“You are not an authentic Moroccan” / “You are not an authentic artist”]

But authenticity for the poet is a fake quality, and therefore he concludes:

*She-elohim yishmor oti / mi-lihyot otenti // Ani kol kach sone et ha-mila hazot.*

[ May God preserve me / from being authentic // I so hate this word.]<sup>36</sup>

Oppenheimer suggests that Mizrahi writing is post-Zionist because it does not give up the old country to create a new identity; instead, it attempts to mend broken memory and not ignore the world left behind with its ‘taboo memories,’ as Ella Shohat calls them.<sup>37</sup> Benarroch identifies as Mediterranean, not limited to the boundaries of the new land, Israel. The title of Benarroch’s 2013 book of poems, *Sefat Hayam*, perhaps best represents this “post-Zionist” position. The English title, *The Sea Language*, misses the polysemy of the Hebrew term: *Safa* in Hebrew means “language” as well as “edge” and “lip.” *Sefat hayam* is also a beach, seashore. Benarroch positions himself at the edge of the sea, ready to incorporate multiple places without being limited within one country, one language, or one identity.

### Technology - Third Millennium Poetry

A new wave of contemporary Mizrahi poetry emerged in January 2013 with a different style of poetry reading events. *Ars Poetiqah* started as a onetime event by Adi Keissar (born 1980 in Jerusalem, of Yemenite origins), who said she was looking for a comfortable place for poetry.<sup>38</sup> The appropriation of the derogatory term *‘ars* - pimp in Arabic, a word commonly used for a loud male, usually of Mizrahi origins - as title for an elitist activity of High Culture, poetry, is intentional. The Facebook page of the group describes the events as a *hafla* [feast], “Words dipped in Arak.” At these events, poets read their works accompanied by music, food, and alcohol. Many *Ars Poetiqah* events can be accessed through YouTube, enhancing their virality and thus contributing to the

<sup>36</sup> Benarroch, *The Sea Language*, 25.

<sup>37</sup> Oppenheimer, *Diasporic Mizrahi Poetry in Israel*, 63-70.

<sup>38</sup> Yoav Ben-Haim, “Ani Hamizrahit,” undated interview with Adi Keissar, at: [https://amiaza.wixsite.com/bablis/me\(2013\)](https://amiaza.wixsite.com/bablis/me(2013)), retrieved July 15, 2019.

popularity of the poets and the genre.<sup>39</sup> These events are opportunities for new poets; at least one unpublished poet reads their work on each occasion. Rather than waiting long years for the approval of the hegemonic poetic establishment, Keissar and other Mizrahi poets created their own type of poetic reading events. With the use of the Internet, established “gatekeepers,” who prejudge the value of poetry to select works deserving to be published, become superfluous.

The need for a new style of reading poetry is explained in Adi Keissar’s poem *Ani lo yoda’at lehakri shira* [I don’t know how to recite poetry].<sup>40</sup> Keissar describes poetry events where the poets read their lines in serious, sad, or performing tones, all too pretentious and pompous in her view,

.../and all I wanted was / that they recite as if / they are taking me to a meal/ family with their parents/ and in the middle when everyone is eating / to pick up / the tablecloth / and throw it up like that / in the air / with all the dishes. /...

It worked. The events became popular, with audiences of all ages from all walks of life, no longer a serious reading but a colorful festive occasion, a *hafla*, as can be seen in the descriptions of the participants and the many interviews Keissar and Hasan were invited to give in the Israeli and U.S. Jewish media.<sup>41</sup>

The sudden popularity of *Ars Poetiqa* and its major figures needs to be examined within the context of technological development. The rise in the effect that social media have on poetry writing is not limited to Mizrahi poets. In her analysis of internet poetry, No’a Shakargi notes specific effects of technology and social networks on poetry, most important – of new ways for poets to produce, publicize, and disseminate their work.<sup>42</sup> These new modes of production have led to major changes, among them the elimination of former hierarchy and minimizing the role of “professional” gatekeepers. Furthermore, the new mode is fluid, publication is not necessarily the end point of creation, as poems can be re-formed and changed. Lack of hierarchy, explains Shakargi, has left judgment

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<sup>39</sup> The Facebook page, in Hebrew, had over 13,400 followers as of mid-July 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Adi Keissar, *Shahor ‘al gabey shahor [Black on black]*, (Tel Aviv: Guerilla Tarbut, 2014), opening pages, not numbered.

<sup>41</sup> Wikipedia has a brief article in English on “Ars Poetiqa (Israel),” which quotes three descriptive articles in *The Forward* (2015, 2016) and *The Tower Magazine* (2015).

<sup>42</sup> No’a Shakargi, *Internetica - Poetry in the Internet Age*, (Master thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2015).

about poetical quality in the hands of the crowd, who express their likes or dislikes by entering poets' webpages and sharing their favorite poems with others, thus contributing to the growth of poets' popularity. This popularity, in turn, encourages traditional modes of publication in literary magazines and newspaper weekend editions.

Lack of traditional gatekeepers and the need for larger numbers of likes and extended online sharing may influence the content of poems, in controversial and confrontational slam poetry style. In Auden's terms (see above), this is easy poetry: the poems present social issues in a narrative way, sometimes to be read as social manifestos. No wonder that the English critic of these events received titles such as "The Mizrahi Thorn in the Side of Israeli Left Read"<sup>43</sup> and "Mizrahi Artists are Here to Incite a Culture War."<sup>44</sup> Many poems of the group are very long, and frequently address the Other, the Ashkenazi elite, yet from a different perspective than that of their forefathers, Biton, Someck, or Chetrit.

Adi Keissar gained popularity with her poem *Ani Hamizrahit* [I, the Mizrahi woman], which can be seen as a declaration of the new Mizrahi who refuses to be categorized according to common stereotypes.<sup>45</sup> She, too, speaks directly to the Other,

I am the Mizrahi woman / that you don't know / I am the Mizrahi  
woman that you don't mention...

She is different because she does it all - she is familiar with the popular Mizrahi music ("I can recite all the songs of Zohar Argov"), but she has also read Camus and Bulgakov, and mixes all together. The new Mizrahi woman wants to be seen as she is, and in a direct affront, she tells the educated male,

Don't tell me how to be a Mizrahi woman / even if you read Edward  
Said / because I am the Mizrahi woman / who is not afraid of you / not  
in search committees / not in work interviews/ ...

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<sup>43</sup> Madison Margolin, published in *The Forward*, September 3, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Ayelet Tsabari, published in *The Forward*, March 16, 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Keissar, *Shahor 'al gabey shahor [Black on black]*, 66-70. The feminist perspective is not addressed in this paper; a feminist review of Keissar's poetry cannot ignore other Mizrahi poetesses, from Bracha Seri to Amira Hess, Sheva Salhuv or Haviva Pedaya.

While her predecessors searched for approval or rejected potential dialogue, Keissar confronts the Other, repeating the question, “*ma ta’asu li?*” [what will you do to me?] four times in the poem. She blames the Other for ignoring ethnic problems:

And you scold / if you stop talking about it / it will not exist anymore /  
if you stop talking about it / it will not exist anymore / because today  
everyone marries everyone / ...

In another poem, *sefat em* [Mother tongue],<sup>46</sup> Keissar refuses to be silent or to correct her Yemenite pronunciation, marked by the guttural ‘*ayin*:

Don’t tell my Hebrew / how to speak ... [...]  
Don’t tie my tongue / it breaks like a wave / and blurts ‘a ‘a ‘adi

In her second book of poems, *Muzika Gvohah* [High music],<sup>47</sup> we can also find a direct appeal to the privileged male, insisting on owning her voice and her narrative:

I don’t need / you to write about me / in your history books...  
I don’t need you / to speak about me / on your radio waves/  
You will not be able to silence me / and mom speaks with *het* and ‘*ayin* /  
Though you have been trying for long / to wean her / from Arabic  
speech ...

The denial of ethnic problems and blaming the victims of social inequality are reflected in the first stanza of Benarroch’s poem *Habe’aya lo qayemet* [The problem does not exist],<sup>48</sup>

Since the problem does not exist / it is forbidden to speak about it /  
because if you speak about it / it means there is a problem / and therefore  
you are guilty of creating the problem/ ...

The two poems by Keissar reflect another thorny issue - the pronunciation of the guttural *het* and ‘*ayin*. This is also treated by Chetrit in his 1988 poem “On the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>47</sup> Adi Keissar, *Musika Gvohah*, (‘Ars Poetika publishing, 2016).

<sup>48</sup> Benarroch, *The Sea Language*, 69.



way to ‘Ain Harod,”<sup>49</sup> which describes the father’s loss of the Arabic-like consonants after migrating to Israel.

Roy Hasan was born in 1983 to a mother born in Morocco and a father born in an Israeli transit camp. In October 2013 Hasan published his most famous poem, *bimedinat Ashkenaz* [in the land of Ashkenaz], in the daily *Haaretz*.<sup>50</sup> Hasan declared himself an anti-Zionist (a claim he retracted in 2018), a vocal critic of the Israeli Establishment, particularly the Left. The poem is a political manifesto about being marginal in the land of Israel,

In the land of Ashkenaz the almond tree blooms / in the land of  
Ashkenaz they are waiting for a guest / not a partner / ...

The first two stanzas are a direct borrowing from a well known poem by Leah Goldberg, *Mi-shirey erez ahavati*, which opens with the words, “In the land of my love the almond tree blooms / in the land of my love they are waiting for a guest...”<sup>51</sup> This intertextuality contrasts Goldberg’s welcome with the way the Mizrahim were received in Israel, not as equal partners. The next lines of Hasan’s poem invoke all the slurs, nicknames, and other references to the Mizrahim:

I am a *mufleta*,<sup>52</sup> a *hafla*, ‘ars, destroyer of all that was here when all was white.

The poem includes more references to what was expected of the new citizens, and ends with negation of the State of Israel:

I do not celebrate your independence / until I have a state. / If you chase me away, I will go. / Just don’t call me names, / you got that?

Hasan’s rage against Zionism echoes two of Benarroch poems, “Cause of Death: Zionism,” mentioned above, and - more specifically - *Ha-hodesh Ha-Mizrahi*

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<sup>49</sup> Chetrit, *Shirim be-Ashdodit*, translated by Alcalay, *Keys to the Garden*, 358.

<sup>50</sup> The poem was published in Hasan’s first poetry collection, *Haklavim shenavhu beyaldutenu hayu hasumey peh* [The dogs barking in our childhood had muzzled mouths], (Tangier publication, 2014), 46-48.

<sup>51</sup> Goldberg’s poem was not written about Israel; it is a popular Israeli song.

<sup>52</sup> A kind of waffle dipped in honey, a staple food identified with the Moroccan Maimuna, which is celebrated on the day following the end of Passover.

[The Mizrahi month]:<sup>53</sup> every day of the month has a specific activity for the Mizrahi person. Day 31 has too many activities, a very long sentence spaced only by a few commas, ending without a full stop:

... , a day will come for a month to have a hundred and eighty days so that there will be enough place for all the nonsense the Ashkenazim made up about the Mizrahim and the Mizrahim already accept them as real truth and peace on Ashkenazi Israel

Hasan's criticism of the liberal Left is even clearer in another controversial poem, *kol ha'arsim yavou* [all the 'arsim will come].<sup>54</sup> This manifesto describes leftist "bleeding heart" liberals as hypocrites who dress like the homeless without revealing their grandparents' inheritance; who wish Muslims *Ramadan Karim* and enjoy the Muslim calls to prayer, but reject Jewish public acts of religiosity, and so on. Every segment of the poem begins with "I love those that..."<sup>55</sup> The end of the poem reveals the reason for the ongoing conflict:

An Arab friend once told me about them - they will never / make peace,  
/ because if there is peace, / all the 'arsim will come.

The notoriety of *'Ars Poetiqah* brought about recognition by the Establishment, and their poems continue to appear in literary magazines and reviews. As suggested by Shakargi, the Internet has brought the poems to larger audiences, thus facilitating crowd funding for publication. Since 2017, Keissar's poems have been taught in high schools as well as at colleges and universities, although, perhaps ironically, mainly in sociology departments.

Mizrahi poets who migrated as children and those born in Israel share images and literary figures. However, while the forefathers had to carve their own "third option" out of poetics (as the title of Alon's book), the younger generation seems to be freer of poetic restrictions (e.g., rhyming). They are more concerned with content than with form, telling a story that can be read aloud, with frequent intertextual references to high culture as well as to popular culture. Every reading of poems is a performance intended to raise emotions and consciousness about the state of marginal groups within Israeli society.

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<sup>53</sup> Benarroch, *The road's cut*, 52-55.

<sup>54</sup> Roy Hasan, *Zahav arayot* [Lion's gold], (Tangier Publication, 2016), 47-9.

<sup>55</sup> Hasan uses the Hebrew colloquial phrase, *ani met 'al ele* ... [I am dying for those...]

## An Emergent We? Concluding Remarks

The struggle to find one's place in the literary Israeli scene is described here from the point of view of Mizrahi poets; but poets of other ethnicities are also struggling to fit in. Ilan Berkovitz, in his long poem, *Hameshorer Ha-Ashkenazi Ha-Aharon* [The last Ashkenazi poet]<sup>56</sup> brings the Russians into the ring. In the opening stanza he tells of the last Ashkenazi poet who buys food in the Russian deli, and then adds:

Nobody speaks about the Russians, / [Russian curse], so they talk to each / other in a language of Cyrillic letters so that / the Mizrahim and Ashkenazim/ the locals will not understand.

The struggle of contemporary Russian poets is relevant to our discussion - Rita Kogan<sup>57</sup> speaks of similar experiences - called names, slurs, rejected by other kids in schools, coerced to give up cultural symbols. "For you we are a Russian circus," she writes in *'atzey ashuah lo* [Christmas trees don't]. She too mixes the past with the contemporary, *hutz laaretz* and Israel, ending the poem with a hybrid image – "we all dance the Horah / to the sound of Pussy Riot."<sup>58</sup>

The poems presented here start with the first person pronoun, expressing the personal happy or painful memories of the poets, or else proceed in belligerent and aggressive tones; they frequently end in an inclusive "we." It is not only Someck in *Shir Patriyoti* that sees all ethnic Israelis as fighting Don Quixote wars with rusted lances, but also Berkovitz who sees both Mizrahim and Ashkenazim threatened by the newcomers, the Russian speakers.

The intertextuality and popoetics are evident in the mixing of cultural concepts from Israel as well as from the diasporic world, dipped in nostalgia. It is as if Zohara Alfasiya sings with Pussy Riots and Bialik becomes one of us, a *hawaja* [male honorific, used throughout the Middle East]. This pastiche suggests a rejection of the "melting pot" metaphor replacing it with "the salad bowl" where each part keeps its shape and aroma, while combining with others to create

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<sup>56</sup> Published in the literary supplement to the daily *Haaretz*, April 14, 2015. This is also the title of his latest poetry book, Pardes Publishing, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Kogan was born in St. Petersburg (Leningrad at the time) in 1976 and came to Israel in 1990. The poems here are from her collection *Sus behatzait* [A horse in a skirt], (Iton 77 Books, 2018).

<sup>58</sup> Pussy Riots are a Russian female anti-establishment rock group, whose members spent time in jail for their activities.

something different. Perhaps a common hybrid “we,” with enough space and recognition for each ethnic group.

In this light, the playing field in Someck’s “Rihal Madrid” can be interpreted as a metaphor for Israel and the rolling ball is its emerging culture as it continues to waver between East and West.

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**Prof. Esther Schely-Newman** has recently retired from the Noah Mozes Department of Communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her research interests include life stories, migration, literacy, Israeli Hebrew, gender, and folklore. Her book, *Our Lives are but Stories* (published in 2002 by Wayne State University Press) treats life stories of North African women who migrated to Israel in the early 1950s. She has published in *Language and Social Interaction*, *Discourse Studies*, *Pragmatics*, *Narrative Inquiry*, *Nashim*, *Journal of American Folklore*, *Western Folklore*, and *Mehkarey Yerushalyim beFolklore Yehudi* (Hebrew).

**Key words:** Mizrahi Poets, ‘Ars Poetiqah, Ethnic Relations in Israel, Diasporic Languages, Hebrew

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## The Nakba in Israeli History Textbooks: Between Memory and History

by Avner Ben-Amos

### Abstract

*The aim of the present article is to delineate the way the Palestinian Nakba (“catastrophe” in Arabic), which was one of the consequences of the 1948 War, has been portrayed in Israeli history textbooks since the establishment of the State of Israel until the present. Based on the assumption that all history textbooks can be situated between the poles of history and memory, the article examines three main factors that determine the actual place of textbooks: academic history, the dominant ideology within the ministry of education and pedagogical norms. An examination of history textbooks that have referred to the 1948 War shows that the entire time span can be divided into three periods: first period, from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, in which the official Zionist view of the past prevailed; second, intermediary period, between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s, in which the official Zionist view was slightly modified; and a third period, between the late 1990s and the late 2010s, in which the textbooks became diversified – some presented the official Zionist version, while others presented an alternative, critical version.*

### Introduction: History Textbook Research

#### The Nakba in History Textbooks

#### The First Period: Memory

#### The Second Period: Between Memory and History

#### The Third Period: Memory and History

### Conclusion

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## Introduction: History Textbook Research

In his introduction to the collective volume of *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, the historian Pierre Nora makes a sharp distinction between memory and history:

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it. It nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic – responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again.<sup>1</sup>

The distinction Nora makes between collective memory as a form of social practice and history as an academic discipline is, of course, too dichotomous. Collective memory does not strictly abide by the needs of the present but is also rooted in the past – while history is not always critical and “secular.” At times, the historian functions as an agent of memory, participating in the portrayal of a sacred past with which a community can identify. Nevertheless, Nora’s is a useful theoretical distinction as it differentiates between two kinds of discourse about the past and positions them as hypothetical poles: one that follows strict academic rules, seeks to understand the past from a critical perspective, and is addressed to a relatively small audience; and another, free of any scientific consideration, which aims to evoke a sympathetic attitude toward the past and is addressed to the public.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History. *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (1989): 8-9.

A third type of discourse combines elements of both poles: history education in schools. In the education system, schoolchildren become aware of the past through several channels: formal education, comprised of various school disciplines, and informal education, which includes activities such as commemorative ceremonies and tours of historical sites. History teaching as an educational discipline holds a special place among these activities as it is the only one exclusively concerned with the past. While it is a complex activity, involving curriculum planners, textbook authors, teachers and schoolchildren, the present article examines only one of its components: history textbooks. While the history textbook is central to the teaching process, it cannot tell us much about the attitude of schoolchildren toward the past, as this is influenced by many additional factors such as informal education, the family, peer groups and the media. However, the study of textbooks, which are generally official or semi-official documents approved by the ministry of education, can be instructive as to the national attitude toward the past.

Academic research of history textbooks began after World War I, as a result of the insight that the teaching of national history could increase hostility among nations. Hence, international revision of history textbooks seemed necessary in order to decrease the danger of future wars. The newly created League of Nations took the task upon itself and created in 1924 an “International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation” that developed a model of international consultation of textbooks, so as to avoid biases and inaccuracies.<sup>2</sup> After World War II the effort to advance international cooperation on the research and evaluation of history textbooks was renewed in 1946 by UNESCO, which created a Program for the Improvement of Textbooks and Teaching Materials as Aids to International Understanding. Another initiative in the same domain was taken by the German historian and educationalist Georg Eckert, who founded an International Institute for Textbook Improvement in 1951, later named after its founder. This institute, located in Braunschweig, Germany, which closely cooperated with the UNESCO program, gradually became the main European center for the analysis and evaluation of school textbooks.<sup>3</sup>

While the institute advanced scholarly discussion of methodological issues of textbook analysis, another group of scholars across the Atlantic concentrated on

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<sup>2</sup> Falk Pingel, *UNESCO Guide on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, (Paris-Braunschweig: UNESCO – Georg Eckert Institute, 2010), 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-16; Jason Nicholls, “Methods in School Textbook Research,” *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research* 3/2 (2003): 11-26.

the question of the historical factors determining the content of textbooks. In a series of influential publications, Michael Apple, a sociologist of education, and his associates made the case for the study of curriculum and textbooks in the context of economic and social power relations, notably in the capitalist and liberal West.<sup>4</sup> Current research into school textbooks combines both approaches, and recognizes the need to study them in their multiple contexts. As Maria Repoussi and Nicole Tutiaux-Guillon put it, “any textbook is set simultaneously in educational projects and practices, in scholarly and school-related epistemological contexts, under institutional constraints, political and ideological demands, social requirements and representations.”<sup>5</sup> However, one should add that these various contexts might pull the textbooks toward either the history or the memory pole. Where should history textbooks be positioned along this spectrum? Do they belong near the history pole or closer to the memory pole? The answer to this varies, depending on the interplay between the three above-mentioned main factors: academic history, the dominant ideology within the ministry of education and pedagogical norms.

At times, a history textbook resembles an academic book in presenting a complex, detailed and critical picture of the past. But more often, history textbooks cover broad historical subjects – major themes, long periods and numerous countries, which means that their authors must rely on the work of academic historians to create this synthesis. Furthermore, they rarely include a range of opinions or controversial viewpoints on the subjects they discuss. The transition from the academic history book to the history textbook therefore razes diverse historical perspectives and creates a unidimensional version of the past, similar to that of collective memory. The position of the ministry of education on this subject – from the minister himself to the various officials responsible for history education – is also of utmost importance. If the ministry emphasizes the discipline of history as such, then history instruction in the education system will inch closer to the history pole. On the other hand, when history instruction is treated as a means for cultivating the social or national identity of schoolchildren, it leans toward the memory pole. The third, pedagogical factor pushes history

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, (New York: Routledge – Kegan Paul, 1979); Id., *Teachers and Texts. A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education*, (New York: Routledge – Kegan Paul, 1981); *The Politics of the Textbook*, eds. Michael Apple, Lynda Christian-Smith, (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Maria Repoussi, Nicole Tutiaux-Guillon, “New Trends in History Textbook Research. Issues and Methodologies toward a School Historiography,” *Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society* 2/1 (2010): 157.



instruction toward the history pole when it encourages historical thinking and the analysis of primary documents. However, when pedagogical demands are restricted to rote learning of historical facts, the outcome resembles the discourse of memory.<sup>6</sup>

These three factors form a kind of triangular field of forces that influence the manner in which history textbooks are written. Each factor is independent, but its emphasis – history or memory – and relative importance change over time. It is only by considering this triangle of forces that one can decipher the position of a history textbook *vis-à-vis* a given historical subject.

### The Nakba in History Textbooks

The aim of the current article is to delineate the image of the Nakba (“catastrophe” in Arabic) in Israeli history textbooks since the establishment of the State of Israel until the present. “Nakba” is the word used by the Palestinians to describe their exodus from Palestine during and after the 1948 War – a war termed by Israelis the War of Independence or the War of Resurrection. Any comprehension of the history of the State of Israel necessitates knowledge of the 1948 War and its consequences, including the Nakba. A study of the way the Nakba has been portrayed in history textbooks can, therefore, be indicative of the manner in which the educational agents of the state have wished to create such comprehension among schoolchildren. As research of national movements has shown, study of a nation’s past is one of the important means of creating a sense of national identity and national pride.<sup>7</sup>

Israeli historical research of history textbooks was modelled after its European and American counterparts, but it began later. The delay was due to the fact that the first generation of Israeli historians of education, of the 1950s-1960s, concentrated on issues of institution building, notably the creation of the Zionist school system among the Jewish community in Palestine and in the State of

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<sup>6</sup> For analysis of the history and theory of history teaching in various national contexts see *Teaching History*, ed. Hilary Bourdillon, (London: Routledge – The Open University, 1994); Robert Phillips, *History Teaching, Nationhood and the State. A Study in Educational Policy*, (London: Casell, 1998); Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, Ross Dunn, *History on Trial. Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past*, (New York: Vintage, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Homi Bahbah, *Nation and Narration*, (London: Routledge, 1990); Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Israel, while adopting the Zionist normative point of view. Only the second generation of historians of education, coming of age in the 1970s-1980s, broadened its educational horizon to include cultural subjects such as textbook analysis, while adopting a critical distance *vis-à-vis* the official Zionist narrative.<sup>8</sup>

Among the books that have been written on the history of Israeli education since the turn of the 1970s, only four deal specifically with the history of history textbooks. The first two books, by Ruth Firer and by Eyal Naveh and Esther Yogev,<sup>9</sup> are general surveys of the content of Zionist and Israeli history textbooks, with an emphasis on the manner in which they presented the Zionist official version of the national past. Firer's book analyzes the various generations of history textbooks since the 1920s, and concentrates mainly on their narratives. In contrast, Naveh and Yogev devote a large part of their book to situating the textbooks in their political and social context, and to describing the debates that some of them gave rise to. Two other books, by Peled-Elhanan and Podeh, focus on the treatment of the Arabs in the textbooks.<sup>10</sup> Peled-Elhanan's book analyzes not only history textbooks, but also textbooks of other school disciplines, such as civics and geography, in order to show the negative image of Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. It consists of a close reading of the textual and visual evidence, but its historical dimension is minimal. Podeh's book also concentrates on the image of the Arabs in various school discipline textbooks, notably history and civics, but it is more historically oriented and pays attention to the question of the Nakba. However, Podeh situates the Nakba mainly in the context of the changing political circumstances, his periodization is different from the one that will be presented in the current article, and his overall narrative is overly optimistic: he compares the changes in the image of the Arabs to steps in personal maturation – from childhood to adolescence to adulthood.

As argued above, in order to examine the way in which the Palestinian Nakba is presented in Israeli history textbooks, one must examine three different fields:

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<sup>8</sup> For a historiography of Israeli education see Rachel Elboim-Dror, "To Push the Rock to the Top of the Mountain and Roll it Down Again. The Beginning of the Historiography of Education in Israel," *Iyunim BiTekumat Israel* 9 (1999): 1-36 [Hebrew].

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Firer, *The Agents of Zionist Education*, (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1985) [Hebrew]; Eyal Naveh, Esther Yogev, *Histories. Toward a Dialogue with the Past*, (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2002) [Hebrew].

<sup>10</sup> Nurit Peled-Elhanan, *Palestine in Israeli School Books. Ideology and Propaganda in Education*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012); Elie Podeh, *Against Bewilderment and for Camouflage. The Israeli-Arab Conflict in the History and Citizenship Textbooks in Hebrew 1953-1995*, (Jerusalem: The Truman Institute of the Hebrew University, 1997) [Hebrew].

Israeli historiography of the 1948 War, the ideology characterizing the Israeli Ministry of Education and pedagogical assumptions among the educators in question. However, prior to addressing these factors, it is necessary to examine the deep structure of mainstream Zionist memory that underlies the Israeli perspective of the Nakba.

Zionist memory as a comprehensive national memory began its evolution in Europe parallel to the emergence of Zionism in the late nineteenth century. Its fundamental structure was somewhat altered by the formation of a Jewish Zionist community in Palestine during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and further modified by the establishment of the State of Israel, but remained essentially unchanged. This structure was based on a tripartite division of the Jewish past according to a dual periodization criterion, namely political Jewish sovereignty and Jewish presence in the Land of Israel. These two criteria effectively marked different facets of the same phenomenon as, for the Zionist Movement, Jewish sovereignty could only be concretized in the Land of Israel, where Jewish national identity had been formed. As a result, this periodization took on a qualitative aspect. The first period, the Biblical, which began with the conquest of the Land of Canaan by Joshua and during part of which the Jewish people lived independently in its country, was viewed as a time of economic and social expansion, cultural prosperity and national pride. By contrast, the second period, i.e. the one of diaspora – which began with the failed revolts against the Romans in the first and second centuries CE and saw the Jewish people dispersed throughout different countries, at times enslaved and consistently subjected to persecution and harassment – was largely seen as a dark time of national humiliation, passivity and social and cultural torpor. The third period, which began with the emergence of the Zionist Movement, was an era of renewed hope and national renaissance during which the Jewish people returned to its country, regained its sovereignty and was able to evolve socially and culturally much like in the Biblical era. As seen from this perspective, the Zionist Movement represented the legitimate return of Jews to their homeland in the Land of Israel. This land – Palestine – appeared in the Zionist narrative strictly in association with the Jewish people. The local Arab population was not totally absent from the Zionist narrative, but it played a minor role in it. The Arabs, who were usually considered as foreign invaders and people who had no real roots in the land, could therefore be largely ignored.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> On Zionist collective memory, see Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots. Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). On

While the dimensions and causes of the Nakba are controversial issues among historians, there is growing consensus regarding the merit of the work by Israeli historian Benny Morris, one of the first academic historians to base the history of the Nakba and the Palestinian refugees on archival documents.<sup>12</sup> Although Morris published a revised edition of his first book on the subject with additional information, he did not significantly change his position: the Palestinian exodus was due mainly to the actions of the Israeli army, which expelled the inhabitants of conquered cities and villages, at times by brutal force. There were also several indirect causes for this exodus, such as the early flight of the Palestinian urban elite, which prompted a sense of defenselessness among the lower classes, the atrocities committed by the Israeli army, which incited fear among the Palestinians and the exhortations of certain local leaders to flee rather than surrender. Morris also underscores the refusal of the State of Israel to allow the refugees – estimated by him to include 600,000 - 700,000 persons – to return to their homes after the war ended, for fear of cultivating an enemy from within. Morris regards the Nakba as largely inevitable due to the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – a struggle between two national movements, each striving to establish a homogeneous state while the two coexist in mixed cities or neighboring villages. Though it has not been static and has undergone various changes, the official version of events according to the Israeli Ministry of Education, as relayed in most history textbooks, differs from this account.

Israeli historians of education ordinarily divide the history of Israeli school textbooks according to wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors, such as the 1948 War, the 1967 Six Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, as they consider these major turning points.<sup>13</sup> However, while wars may bring about quick political and territorial changes, educational systems change at a slower pace. Even if an educational initiative is imposed from above in a centralized system, it may take several months and even years before it is implemented by teachers in the classroom. The same applies to changes in school textbooks. These are usually modified in light of new curricula, which correspond to a shift in one or

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the Zionist attitude towards the Arabs, see Yosef Gorni, *Zionism and the Arabs, 1882-1948. A Study of Ideology*, trans. by Chaya Galai, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Id., *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Firer, *The Agents of Zionist Education*; Podeh, *Against Bewilderment and for Camouflage*; Naveh, Yogeve, *Histories*.

more of the elements composing the above-mentioned “triangle:” the academic discipline, the ideology of the ministry of education and the pedagogical ethos. Considering the slow production pace of history textbooks, which usually include visual elements such as maps and photos, their periodization differs from that of wars or political upheavals.

Thus, the history of the textbooks in question should be divided into three periods, based on their approach to Arabs in general and the Nakba in particular: the first period, from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, in which the official Zionist view of the past prevailed; the second, intermediary period, between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s, in which the official Zionist view was slightly modified; the third period, between the late 1990s and the late 2010s, in which the textbooks became diversified – some presented the official Zionist version, while others presented an alternative, critical version. The last period also witnessed several intense public debates concerning the teaching of the Nakba. Generally, the first period was homogeneous in presenting a discourse of memory, the second period witnessed some deviation from this discourse and the third period was heterogeneous and reflected both discourses – that of memory and that of history. The history textbooks examined in the current article are those of junior and senior high schools, as they address the exodus of the Palestinians more extensively than those of elementary schools. All books in question were those used in the Jewish-Zionist educational sector, the largest in Israel. Two others, minority, sectors, were not included in this study: the anti-Zionist, Jewish-Orthodox sector, in which history was not learned as school discipline, and the Arab sector, which had its own history curriculum and textbooks. The latter sector was under the direct control of a special department of the ministry of education, which monitored its curricula and textbooks in order to stifle any Palestinian-nationalist identity.<sup>14</sup> Most of the textbooks that were consulted were either published or authorized by the Ministry of Education, and the remainder had the tacit approval of the Ministry and were used in the classroom.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> On the Arab sector and its history curriculum, see Majid Al Hj, *Education, Empowerment and Control. The Case of the Arabs in Israel*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995); Id., “History Curriculum in Jewish and Arab Schools in Israel: Ethnocentrism versus Controlled Multiculturalism,” in *History, Identity and Memory: Images of the Past in Israeli Education*, ed. Avner Ben-Amos, (Tel Aviv: Ramot – Tel Aviv University, 2002), 137-154 [Hebrew].

<sup>15</sup> In certain cases, in which the Ministry of Education was not satisfied with the books, they were officially banned, as was the case in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. See notes 44 and 45 below.

The analysis of a textbook poses special challenges. By its very nature, a textbook – such as a history textbook – is a complex object, which includes both textual and visual matter, and is often accompanied by a pedagogical supplement. Researchers of textbooks use either quantitative or qualitative methodologies of various sorts to determine the meaning of the textual and visual material they encounter.<sup>16</sup> Because of the variable nature of the texts, which were published over a relatively long period of time, I chose a qualitative method of analysis, which was more sensitive to the shifting meaning of the portrayal of the Palestinian exodus within the context of the other historical issues addressed in each textbook.<sup>17</sup>

### The First Period: Memory

During the first period, the nature of the three factors that usually determine the characteristics of a history textbook – ideology, pedagogy and academic history – was such that they produced a discourse of memory. However, there was also definite overlap among the three domains. For instance, Ben-Zion Dinur, the minister of education during the 1950s and member of the ruling Mapai (Labor) party, was also a prominent historian at the Hebrew University and chief editor of the official history of the Hagana – the main para-military force of the pre-1948 Jewish community and the precursor of the Israeli Defense Forces.<sup>18</sup> Dinur therefore played a central role as both an academic historian and an influence on the history curriculum.

The delay in the publication of this curriculum and its particular nature can be attributed to efforts toward state and nation building during Israel's first two post-independence decades. The pre-state political institutions of the Jewish community had to be developed and adapted to the new situation, with the education domain among the last to fall under the authority of the State. In fact,

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<sup>16</sup> On the various methodologies of textbook analysis see Pingel, *UNESCO Guide on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, 67-79; Nicholls, "Methods in School Textbook Research," 12-25.

<sup>17</sup> This method was developed by Agnes-Fischer Daradi, Laszlo Kojanitz, "Textbook Analysis Method for the Longitudinal Study of Textbooks Contents," in *Yearbook of the International Society for the Didactics of History. Analyzing Textbooks. Methodological Issues*, eds. Elizebeth Erdman, Susanne Popp, Jutta Schumann, (Schwalbach: Wochenschau Verlag, 2011), 47-66.

<sup>18</sup> *The History of the Hagana*, ed. Ben-Zion Dinur, (Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot – 'Am 'Oved, 1954-1972) [Hebrew]. For the historiographical role of Dinur, see Uri Ram, "Zionist Historiography and the Invention of Modern Jewish Nationhood," *History and Memory* 7/1 (1995): 91-124.

it was not until 1953 that the three pre-state, politically-oriented educational school streams were abolished and a national Israeli educational system came into being. As a result, the first national high school history curriculum was only published in 1956,<sup>19</sup> and the first textbooks based on that curriculum did not appear until 1959. The dominant pedagogical approach of this period, upheld by Dinur, was rote learning, with little encouragement of independent and critical thought. Although the young state regarded itself as the mere armature of a pre-existing nation, it was struggling to establish a unified nation on the foundation of diverse Jewish communities from different origins around the world, each with its own language, customs and memories. One method of molding national consciousness was the projection of a common national past, with which the entire population – schoolchildren included – could identify. The ongoing conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors, including the Palestinians who had settled in refugee camps not far from state borders, also shaped the official memory of the recent past. Israel, governed by those who fought and won the 1948 War, placed responsibility for the Palestinian exodus on either the Palestinians themselves, claiming they had willingly fled from the war, or on Arab leaders, who had ostensibly encouraged the Palestinians to leave their homes in order to avoid combat and return as victors. According to this version, the Israeli army made several attempts to hinder them from leaving, but to no avail. This official, hegemonic version was disseminated through various channels: newspaper articles, official booklets and pamphlets, memoirs by veteran soldiers and history books.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, the history textbooks of the first period included only the official, Zionist version of the 1948 War, which hardly mentioned the Palestinians. On the rare occasions when the Palestinians were mentioned, usually in the context of the pre-1948 period, a parallel was drawn between them and the traditional anti-Semitic persecutors of Jews in the diasporic period. Thus, the national Palestinian revolt of 1936-9, which mainly targeted the British, was referred to as “the events of 1936-9” in order to deny its national character. The anti-Zionist violent acts it involved were described as “pogroms” – the Zionist historiographical term for European anti-Semitic violence. The Palestinians were

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<sup>19</sup> On the first national history curriculum, see Yehoshua Mathias, “Under the Sign of National Education: History in the Jewish-Secular Sector,” in *History, Identity and Memory*, 15-46.

<sup>20</sup> On the State’s attitude towards the refugees and the official Israeli version of the Palestinian exodus, see Shelly Fried, *They Do Not Return. The Problem of the Palestinian Refugees and Israel’s Diplomacy in the First Years of Statehood*, (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2018) [Hebrew]; Rafi Nets-Zehngut, “Israeli Memory of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,” *Peace Review* 24 (2012): 187-194.

usually portrayed as “savages” or “bandits” who operated in “gangs,” and thus framed as criminals rather than politically motivated individuals. This helped to uphold the image that Palestine, i.e. the Land of Israel, was an empty land waiting for the Zionist Movement to modernize it and establish the homeland of the Jewish people within its borders. The textbooks simultaneously acknowledged the presence of the Palestinians and rendered it insignificant, as they did not regard them as a people – but rather as a collection of backward individuals. They narrated the 1948 War strictly from a Zionist point of view, and placed responsibility for the exodus squarely on the shoulders of the Palestinians. According to this narrative, it was only fitting that the Palestinians should be the victims of the war they themselves instigated. The following is an example of a typical paragraph from one the textbooks in question:

The Arabs of the Land of Israel declared their adamant objection to the establishment of a Jewish state. This objection led to the War of Independence and the refugee problem... The Arabs claim that they were forcibly and cruelly expelled from their homes, but this is not true. In most conquered localities, including in big cities such as Haifa, the Jews asked their neighbors to stay, but they preferred to leave rather than accept Jewish rule. The Arab leaders had encouraged them to flee, deluding them with promises that in a few weeks they would be able to return along with the victorious Arab armies. Moreover, these same leaders were the first to leave.<sup>21</sup>

The textbooks did not use terms such as “expulsion” or “transfer,” and claimed that the Palestinians had “left,” “fled” or “evacuated.” Generally, the exodus of the Palestinians was described as part of a larger population flux involving the replacement of the Palestinians with Jewish immigrants from the Arab countries of North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Netanel Lorch, “Israel in the International Arena,” in *The State of Israel and the Jewish Diaspora in Our Time*, ed. Michael Ziv, (Haifa: Yovel, 1966), 47-8. All textbooks cited in this article are in Hebrew.

<sup>22</sup> The examined textbooks include: Binyamin Ahia, Moshe Harpaz, *History of the People of Israel. From the Longing of Generations to the Rise of Zionism and the Establishment of the State of Israel*, (Tel Aviv: Shrebrek, 1959); Israel Cohen, Nathan Gelber, *A Short History of Zionism from Its Beginning to the Present*, (Jerusalem: D. Mass, 1962); Moshe Katan, *The History of the Jews from the First World War to the Present*, (Jerusalem: Kolat, 1970); Shmuel Kirshenboim, *The History of the Jewish People in the Last Generation*, (Tel Aviv: Institute for Learning, 1974); Yosef Ron, *The History of the Jewish People in the Last Generations in Israel and Abroad*, (Tel Aviv: Av Eyal, 1967); Eliezer Rieger, *The History of the People of Israel in the*



## The Second Period: Between Memory and History

In the second period, which began in the mid-1970s and ended in the late 1990s, the official Zionist version of the Nakba continued to dominate history textbooks. However, in several instances, new, historical elements began to appear. The mixed narrative of this period reflected the political and educational tensions that had risen following the watershed of the 1967 Six Day War.

In the political and ideological domain, this period was characterized by several contradictory developments. The sudden Israeli victory of 1967 generated a euphoric atmosphere and a sense of national superiority among the Jewish population, but also enabled close contact with the Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories. The setback of the 1973 Yom Kippur War was, for Jewish Israelis, a humiliating experience that demonstrated the limits of their power, but it also led to the 1978 Camp David agreement with Egypt and to a more congenial attitude toward the Arabs. Finally, the 1982 Lebanon War and the 1987 Palestinian Intifada exacerbated the conflict within Israeli society surrounding the future of the occupied territories. The victory of the right wing Likud party in the 1977 elections prompted certain changes within the Ministry of Education, but these were not decisive. The new government's first minister of education, Zevulun Hammer, belonged to the right wing national-religious Mafdal party (1977-1984), while his successor, the dovish Yitzhak Navon, belonged to the Labor party (1984-1990), which took part in the National Union government.

In the pedagogical domain, the most important development occurred in 1966 with the establishment of the Curricula Department at the Ministry of Education, whose core personnel was sent to study in the US, where they were influenced by the modernizing curriculum theory of Jerome Bruner.<sup>23</sup> The department mixed staff consisted of officials who came from the field of education as well as others with advanced academic degrees, and they established close connections with university professors from various disciplines, notably education. They promoted the idea that the education system should prepare schoolchildren for higher education, and as a result, placed emphasis on

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*New Era*, Vol. 3, (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1964); Yosef Spivak, Menahem Avidar, *The People of Israel in Its Land and Abroad*, Vol. 4, (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1960); Ephraim Shmueli, *The History of Our People in the New Era*, (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1958); Michael Ziv, Shmuel Ettinger, Jacob Landau, *History of Our Time*, vol. 4b, (Tel Aviv: Yovel, 1964).

<sup>23</sup> Jerome Bruner, *The Process of Education*, (Cambridge – Mass: Harvard University Press, 1960).

imparting the internal logic of each discipline (the “structure of knowledge”) as it was studied at the university level. They did not consider this scientific and neutral approach a contradiction to the earlier, nationalist approach, as they claimed that strengthening higher education was a means for strengthening the nation.<sup>24</sup>

The history discipline was also modified, and according to the 1975 curriculum, its aims were not only patriotic but also academic, and included instruction in historical thinking and historical concepts. Additionally, the structural reform of the educational system in the 1970s, which separated junior and senior high schools, shifted the emphasis from elementary schools to the more academically oriented high schools.

This period also witnessed a major historiographical event with the publication of historian Yehoshua Porat’s book, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement, 1918-1929*.<sup>25</sup> For the first time, a mainstream Jewish Israeli historian, who taught at the Hebrew University, regarded the Palestinians not as primitive peasants or a violent mob but as a people capable of forming a national movement with an independent political identity. Several additional historical publications came out during this period that presented the Palestinian exodus in a more nuanced way. For example, in his book *The Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1967*, Nadav Safran wrote: “Until roughly the end of May - beginning of June, the refugees fled from areas under Jewish control despite consistent efforts on the part of the Jews to convince them to stay. Subsequently, they were expelled from almost all new territories under Jewish control.”<sup>26</sup> A later history book by Pail and Zamir also deviated from the official version of events: “There were three main reasons for the flight of the Palestinians: a third fled because they were afraid for their lives..., a third fled as a result of encirclements, bombings and the conquests of the Hagana and the IDF, and a third were expelled after the conquest.”<sup>27</sup> In contrast with scholarly publications, school textbooks do not

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<sup>24</sup> On the Curricula Department see Yehoshua Mathias, “Curriculum between Politics and Science. The Case of History in Israel after the Six Day War,” *Political Crossroads* 12 (2005): 47-65; Yehoshua Mathias, Naama Sabar Ben Yehoshua, “Reforms in Curriculum Planning in Israeli Public Education and the Battle over Identity,” *Megamot* 43/1 (2004): 84-108 [Hebrew].

<sup>25</sup> The book was published in English by Frank Cass in 1974, and in Hebrew by ‘Am ‘Oved in 1976.

<sup>26</sup> Nadav Safran, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1967*, (Jerusalem: Keter, 1969), 30 [Hebrew].

<sup>27</sup> Meir Pail, Avraham Zohar, *Israel’s Wars in the Twentieth Century. The War of Independence*, (Tel Aviv: Ramot, 1985), 43 [Hebrew].

normally include footnotes or bibliographical lists, and the history textbooks examined in this article are no exception. It is impossible, therefore, to determine whether the books mentioned above directly influenced the textbook authors. However, it is possible to surmise that these books had at least an indirect influence, since the ideas presented in them could also be found in some history textbooks.

As a result of these developments, textbooks began to present a less stereotyped and more subtle image of the Arabs, acknowledging the great social and national variety within the native population of the Middle East. This included the Palestinians, who were now presented more extensively as a national entity in the histories of the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate. It therefore became impossible to continue regarding Palestine as an empty land waiting to be inhabited and modernized by the Jews. Discussion of the Palestinian exodus of 1948 also underwent certain changes. Most notable among these was a reference to the Hagana's "Plan D," which was carried out during the months of April and May 1948. The plan involved transition into an offensive stance following the failure of the defensive policy implemented in previous months, and preparation for the invasion of the Arab countries after the termination of the British mandate in mid-May. The underlying logic of the plan was to establish Jewish territorial continuity in the areas allotted to the Jewish State by the UN partition plan of November 1947. In order to establish and maintain such continuity, the Hagana had to seize hostile Arab villages, and in cases of armed opposition, destroy them and expel their inhabitants – which it did in the Jerusalem and northern regions.<sup>28</sup> Yet the textbooks did not include the full details of Plan D and its implications. For example, one mentioned only that, "the Israeli armed forces did not resist the flight of the local Arab population to neighboring Arab countries, and at times even encouraged it."<sup>29</sup> Another book referred more explicitly to the plan, and to the "cleansing of Arab villages" after their conquest.<sup>30</sup> A textbook by the Curricula Department gave a balanced account:

The IDF evacuated the Arab population from certain areas during battles or prevented refugees from returning after they had ended... During the Ten Day Operation [9-18 July 1948 – A. B-A.] special effort

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<sup>28</sup> On Plan D, see Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 163-166.

<sup>29</sup> Avigail Oren, *The Jewish People, the Land of Israel and the State of Israel 1919-1977*, Vol. 2, (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1988), 230.

<sup>30</sup> David Shahar, *From Diaspora to Sovereignty. The History of the Jewish People in the Last Generations*, Vol. 2, (Rehovot: 'Idan, 1990), 246.

was made to prevent the flight of the Arab population, especially in the regions of Lod, Ramla and Nazareth.<sup>31</sup>

The textbooks published during this period also differed from their predecessors in form. In line with the new pedagogical policy of the Curricula Department, they now included more visual materials – photos, cartoons, maps and diagrams – that served as important didactical instruments, and questions that encouraged analytical thinking. Special attention was also paid to including textual or visual primary documents, which history instructors could analyze with their pupils in order to demonstrate the process of historical investigation.

However, despite these innovations, there was no profound change in the portrayal of the Nakba narrative in these textbooks, and the pervasive discourse remained primarily memory-oriented. Arabs, Palestinians included, were still presented strictly through the lens of the Israeli-Arab conflict and depicted as enemies whose sole wish was to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state. The new didactic material also reinforced this perspective, as evidenced by maps of Palestine during the British Mandate period that included only Jewish settlements. According to these textbooks, Arab leaders were largely responsible for the flight of the Palestinians, having urged them to leave so as not to interfere with the invading armies with promises of a victorious return once the battles ended.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Third Period: Memory and History**

In the third period, which spanned from the late 1990s to the late 2010s, the textbooks oscillated between the poles of memory and history: some still maintained the official Zionist version of the Palestinian exodus, while others introduced a critical narrative. This divergence reflected the profound political and historiographical changes that characterized this period and aroused

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<sup>31</sup> Shifra Kulat, Ruth Klienberger, Yehoshua Mathias, *The Jewish National Movement and the Establishment of the State of Israel*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem: The Ministry of Education, 1979), 128-129.

<sup>32</sup> Additional textbooks examined: Yosef Affek, *Not on a Silver Platter. From a Homeland to a Sovereign State, 1939-1949*, (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1984); Ada Moshkovits, Shifra Kulat, Asia Ramberg, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Vols. 10 and 13, (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1975); Shifra Kulat, *The Zionist Idea and the Establishment of the State of Israel*, (Jerusalem: Ma'alot, 1985); Moshe Lifshitz, *The History of the Jewish People in the Last Generations. The National Movement*, Vol. 2, (Tel Aviv: Or 'Am, 1985).

insurmountable tensions. Moreover, history textbooks of this time became a conflictual public arena and the subject of debate and controversy among politicians and intellectuals. In certain cases, disruptions of the hegemonic Zionist discourse of memory even prompted an official ban on “deviant” textbooks by the Ministry of Education.

The major political event that marked and influenced this period was the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. As a result of the Accords, a Palestinian Authority was established in parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and a peace process was set in motion with the aim of achieving a peace treaty. The Palestinians transitioned from being enemies to being partners with whom Israelis could cooperate, and the 1994 peace accord between Israel and Jordan was yet another step in this direction. In addition, during the years of Yitzhak Rabin’s government, the Ministry of Education was headed by members of the leftist Meretz party: Shulamit Aloni (1992-3) and Amnon Rubinstein (1993-6). However, the Second Intifada in 2000-5, which involved acts of extreme violence by both the Jewish and the Arab sides, nearly put an end to the Oslo peace process, and increased mutual mistrust.

In retrospect, the publication of Benny Morris’ *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949* in 1991 seems an apt prelude to the Oslo Accords. Although critical versions of the Palestinian exodus had already appeared in Hebrew books during the 1980s, they were partial and embedded in the broader, official narrative of the 1948 War. Morris’ book was the first Hebrew study by an Israeli historian dedicated entirely to this issue and based on archival research. Although it aroused great controversy, the study was eventually supported by the research of other new historians and its critical version of events was gradually accepted by Israeli historians.<sup>33</sup> In addition to this, civil society organizations, such as the NGO Zokhrot, began to establish a new kind of “memory activism” by using symbolic acts to inculcate the memory of the Nakba in the Israeli public.<sup>34</sup> These developments around the memory of the Nakba caused tension within Israeli society, resulting in the government’s passing the “Nakba Law,” which stipulated that state-funded organizations can be fined for

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<sup>33</sup> Nets-Zehngut, “Israeli Memory of the Palestinian Refugee Problem.”

<sup>34</sup> Yifat Gutman, *Memory Activism. Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017).

commemorating “Independence Day or the day when the State of Israel was established as a day of mourning.”<sup>35</sup>

The pedagogical domain, too, was characterized by opposing tendencies during this period. On the one hand, the Curricula Department remained active and continued to implement its policy, preparing pupils for higher education by emphasizing the academic principles of respective disciplines. An innovation in the history curriculum came about in 1994, when the separation between Jewish and non-Jewish history, which had characterized previous state curricula and was typical of the discourse of memory, was eliminated. This separation was based on the assumption that Jewish history was unique, and that Jews could be studied in isolation from their non-Jewish social and cultural environment. In contrast, the new curriculum integrated both histories to create one coherent narrative and gave them equal attention, thus enabling pupils to place the history of the Jews and the State of Israel within a wider context. This changed in 2003, when the history curriculum shifted its emphasis once again; although it maintained the integration of the two histories, about eighty percent of its educational content revolved around the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Moreover, the mandatory historical subjects and periods covered in the final history matriculation exam reflected the mainstays of Zionist memory: the Jewish people in the period of the Second Temple when it was sovereign in the Land of Israel, the Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel, and the Holocaust.<sup>36</sup>

While some textbooks published during this period continued to present the official Zionist narrative of the Palestinian exodus,<sup>37</sup> others were influenced by political and historiographical changes and adopted a historical discourse.<sup>38</sup> The

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<sup>35</sup> On the Nakba Law, *Ibid.*, 90-98.

<sup>36</sup> Edna El'azary, Hana Eden, *History Curriculum for the Upper Division. Secular Jewish Sector*, (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 2003) [Hebrew]. According to the curriculum, teachers could choose between two subjects: the Second Temple and Cities and Communities in the Middle Ages. Almost all teachers, however, chose the former (personal communication, Orna Katz, History Supervisor, Ministry of Education, June 26, 2019).

<sup>37</sup> For example, Shula 'Inbar, *Rebirth and State in Israel and in Other Nations in the Modern Era, 1945-1970*, (Tel Aviv: Lilach, 2000); Eli'ezer Domka, *The World and the Jews in the Last Generations*, Vol. 2, (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> These books include: Elie Bar-Navie, Bruria Ben-Barukh, *The Twentieth Century. History of the Jewish People in the Last Generations* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Books, 1998); Eyal Naveh, *The Twentieth Century. On the Threshold of Tomorrow*, (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv books, 1999); Ktziya Tavivyan, *A Journey to the Past. The Twentieth Century. The Right to Liberty*, (Tel Aviv: The

latter presented the Zionist and Palestinian points of view in a relatively balanced manner in the context of the British Mandate period. They also adopted Benny Morris' conclusions regarding the Palestinian exodus, and included them – some briefly and others in a detailed manner. One example is the below paragraph from the textbook by Elie Bar-Navie and Bruria Ben-Barukh:

The refugee problem arose due to the collapse of Palestinian society. The departure of the Palestinian elites, the confusion among the Palestinians, the attacks of the Hagana, Etzel and Lehi [Zionist paramilitary organizations – A. B.-A.], the inability of the Palestinian armed forces to defend their villages, these – respectively and jointly – led to the Palestinian exodus. In certain cases, there was also intentional expulsion. The psychological factor was crucial. Years of conflict and hostile propaganda expanded the gulf of hatred between the communities and made Palestinians fear Jewish rule in the State of Israel. Hostility and fear were also common among the Jews. Although no political authority decided to expel the Palestinians, it is certain that to great degree, local commanders had carte blanche. From the Palestinian point of view, the 1948 War and its aftermath are perceived as a catastrophe, the Nakba. Not only did the Palestinians lose their land, but they also became a nation of refugees, and as we will later see, formed their collective identity around aspirations of return.<sup>39</sup>

The same textbook includes a special paragraph on the massacre of Deir Yassin, which was committed by units of the Etzel and Lehi on April 9, 1948, in a village near Jerusalem, and was among the reasons for the flight of the Palestinians. The authors regard the massacre as “one of the stains upon the Jewish community's fight for survival and independence.”<sup>40</sup> The didactic appendices of these textbooks also present a complex picture. For example, in Bar-Navie and Ben-Barukh's textbook, the map of the 1948 War indicates both Jewish and Palestinian settlements that were evacuated during the war. In addition, a photo

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Center for Educational Technology, 1999); Dany Ya'qoby, *A World of Change*, (Jerusalem: Ma'alot, 1999). Later books include: Eyal Naveh, Na'omi Vered, David Shahrar, *Knowing History. Nationalism among the Jewish People and among the Nations. Building a State in the Middle East*, (Even-Yehuda: Rekhes, 2009); Yigal Mishol, *Building a Jewish and Democratic State in the Middle East*, (Tel Aviv: Center for Educational Technology, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Bar-Navie, Ben-Barukh, *The Twentieth Century*, 195.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 184. On the Deir Yassin Massacre, see Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 237-240.

included in the book shows the miserable living conditions in a Palestinian refugee camp.<sup>41</sup>

The new approach of these textbooks, and the manner in which they disrupted former beliefs concerning the 1948 War that prevailed among Israel's Jewish population, incited major controversy.<sup>42</sup> This controversy, which began in 1999 around issues relating to history education and the memory of the Nakba, quickly became a wide-reaching, fierce conflict that touched on deep-rooted questions regarding Jewish identity and the future of the State of Israel. This conflict transpired mainly in the popular media – the printed press and television – and reached the Knesset Education Committee as well. Attacks against the new textbooks came from the political right, which regarded the new, historical discourse they presented as either completely false or – even if true – as one that undermined Zionist legitimacy and endangered national security by demanding sympathy for the Palestinians. The conflict waned in 2000 with the outbreak of the Second Intifada, which shifted public attention from the past to the present. However, the representation of the 1948 War and the Palestinian exodus in history textbooks did not cease to be among the major concerns of the Ministry of Education. Additionally, new, controversial books and bold decisions in the educational arenas still made newspaper headlines from time to time – indicating that public interest in these issues was enduring.

During the first decade of the 21st century, shifts in ministers of education prompted pendulum swings between the poles of memory and history in the context of the 1948 War and the Palestinian exodus. In 1999-2000, Minister of Education Yossi Sarid, who belonged to the left wing Meretz party, approved the new history textbooks that presented a historical, critical discourse of the Palestinian exodus. He also decided to include poems by two Palestinian poets, Mahmud Darwish and Siham Daoud, in the literature curriculum. Sarid was then replaced by Limor Livnat of the Likud Party (2001-6), who claimed that the critical textbooks were post-Zionist, and that although they might be acceptable at the university level, they should not be taught in schools. She established a committee to examine Dany Ya'aqoby's textbook, which – among other shortcomings – was found to be too lenient toward the Palestinian refugees and banned as a result.<sup>43</sup> The next minister of education, Ya'el Tamir (2006-9) of the

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<sup>41</sup> Bar-Navie, Ben-Baruk, *The Twentieth Century*, 190 and 194.

<sup>42</sup> On the controversy, see Naveh, Yogev, *Histories*.

<sup>43</sup> Ya'aqoby, *A World of Change*; Naveh, Yogev, *Histories*, 96, 143.



Labor Party, decided to re-introduce the pre-1967 border between Israel and Jordan (the Green Line) into history and geography textbooks, and to authorize textbooks used in the Israeli-Arab educational sector to include references to the Nakba.<sup>44</sup> Subsequently, Gideon Sa'ar (2009-13) of the Likud Party changed the orientation of the Ministry once again. He prohibited any mention of the Nakba in the Israeli-Arab educational sector, and banned three textbooks in the Israeli-Jewish sector due to their approach toward the Palestinian exodus. The first of these, by Eli'ezer Domka, Tsafir Goldberg and Hanna Orbakh, was published by an established, mainstream publisher and had received official Ministry approval.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, post-publication, Sa'ar decided it should be banned due to its inclusion of a quote by a Palestinian historian who claimed the IDF had implemented an ethnic-cleansing policy during the 1948 War. The book was only re-authorized after the quote was removed.<sup>46</sup>

The two other banned textbooks were published by marginal publishers and were more radical and comprehensive in their discussion of the Palestinian exodus. One, *Learning Each Other's Historical Narrative. Palestinians and Israelis*, edited by Sami Adwan and Dan Bar-On, was written by a mixed group of Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian teachers and historians. It presented the Jewish and Arab narratives of the Israeli-Arab conflict alongside one another, including the 1948 War and the Palestinian exodus, in order to familiarize each side with the narrative of the other.<sup>47</sup> The initial aim of the group was together to create a unique narrative based on the model of the Franco-German history textbooks published after World War II, but due to their failure, they settled on two separate narratives.<sup>48</sup> However, two historians, an

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<sup>44</sup> Or Kashti, "The Green Line Will be Marked in the Textbooks in Spite of the Objection of Members of the Knesset Committee of Education," *Ha'aretz*, January 1, 2007 [Hebrew]; Lilakh Wiesmann, Diana-Bahour Nir, "Tamir Authorized Including the Nakba in the Textbooks," *Globes*, July 22, 2007 [Hebrew].

<sup>45</sup> Domka, *The World and the Jews in the Last Generations*; Tsafir Goldberg, Hanna Orbakh, *Building a Nation in the Middle-East*, (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 2009).

<sup>46</sup> Or Kashti, "Who Is Afraid of the Nakba?," *Haaretz*, April 27, 2013 [Hebrew].

<sup>47</sup> *Learning Each Other's Historical Narrative. Palestinians and Israelis*, eds. Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-On, (Beit-Jallah: Prime, 2006, Hebrew version, 2004).

<sup>48</sup> For the Franco-German initiative see Mona Siegel, Kirsten Harjes, "Disarming Hatred: History Education, National Memories and Franco-German Reconciliation from World War I to the Cold War," *History of Education Quarterly* 52/2 (2012): 370-402.

Israeli Jew and an Israeli Palestinian, later succeeded in creating a history book that told the story of the 1948 War as they both interpreted it.<sup>49</sup>

The third banned textbook, *How Do They Say Nakba in Hebrew?*, was published by the NGO Zokhrot and based on an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the Nakba that incorporated history, art, photography and theories of collective memory.<sup>50</sup> Both of these last two books were pedagogically innovative, as they aimed to encourage active learning and self-reflection among pupils regarding their attitude toward the past. In order to enforce the ban, the Ministry formally reprimanded teachers who used these books as well as their school principals.<sup>51</sup> The next two following ministers of education, Shai Piron (2013-2014) of the center-right party Yesh 'Atid and Naftali Bennett (2015-2019) of the national-religious party HaBayit HaYehudi, did not change the policy of the Ministry of Education regarding the teaching of the Palestinian exodus. During their terms, mentioning the Nakba was half-heartedly tolerated in the Israeli-Jewish educational sector, but forbidden in the Israeli-Arab sector.

## Conclusion

The story of the shifts in the image of the Nakba within the Israeli educational system cannot be told as a simple, linear narrative that begins in the 1950s at the pole of memory and ends in the 2010s at the pole of history. Rather, it is a complex narrative that begins with a unidimensional view of the Palestinian exodus, which denies the Nakba and upholds the official Zionist version of the 1948 War, continues with a slightly modified account that introduces elements of historical discourse, and ends with a pluralistic picture in which different versions of the Palestinian exodus are presented depending on the textbook. However, even this eventual pluralism had certain limits, as demonstrated by the official ban on textbooks whose version of events proved unacceptable to the Ministry of Education. An apt metaphor for this narrative would be that of a closed Japanese fan that slowly unfolds until it is almost fully opened, displaying most, though not all, of its imprinted images.

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<sup>49</sup> Motti Golani, Adel Manna, *Two Sides of the Coin: Independence and the Nakba 1948. Two Narratives of the 1948 War and Its Outcome*, (London: Republic of Letters, 2011, in English and Hebrew).

<sup>50</sup> Amya Galili, *How Do They Say Nakba in Hebrew?*, (Tel Aviv: Zochrot, 2008) [Hebrew].

<sup>51</sup> Revital Blumenfeld, "The Teachers who are not Afraid to Teach the Nakba. 'The Refugees Did Not Disappear'," *Walla-News*, April 1, 2015 [Hebrew].

How to explain this complex narrative? First, it seems inevitable that the perception of a major event such as the Palestinian exodus would become less simplistic overtime. In the initial post-1948 decades, the generation that had fought the War still held the power in the State and wished to impose its own version of events. This included the leaders of the Labor Movement, whose hegemonic power over the public discourse about the War controlled the educational sphere as well. In addition, the return of the Palestinian refugees was still an urgent question at this time, and the Israeli government was unwilling to recognize the IDF's role in their expulsion for political reasons. At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, a new generation came to power and the Labor Movement lost its hegemonic role. Moreover, although the problem of the refugees was not yet resolved, the status of the territories occupied after the Six Day War became more urgent. Another change occurred in the academic domain during this period with the opening of historical archives, which helped shift the issue of the Palestinian exodus from the discourse of memory to the discourse of history by allowing historians to look into original documents. In turn, their studies influenced school textbooks. However, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continued, the question of the Nakba became a kind of screen upon which political camps projected their viewpoints. Therefore, any acknowledgement of the Nakba by oppositional players on the political left was met with a riposte by government forces on the right, who tried to suppress the presence of the Nakba in public discourse – either through the Nakba law or the ban of radical textbooks. Yet, as the publication of the Zokhrot textbook indicated, the government no longer had the monopoly over the teaching of the past, and new players, who belonged to civil society, entered the field.<sup>52</sup>

The picture that emerges from this article of the knowledge of Jewish schoolchildren in Israel about the Nakba is complex. Only some of them were exposed to the updated, historical version of the 1948 War as it was taught in the last twenty years. However, due to lack of information about the textbooks actually used in classes, it is impossible to know the exact numbers. Moreover, as mentioned above, a schoolchild's image of the national past is not determined only by history teaching but also by other factors, such as informal education, the family, the peer group and the media. Further research into these domains is, then, necessary in order to figure out how Israeli schoolchildren have grasped the

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<sup>52</sup> For the role of Zokhrot and other “memory activists” in the battle over memory of the 1948 War, see Gutman, *Memory Activism*.

Nakba. Nevertheless, it is evident that the Ministry of Education tried to restrict their historical knowledge of the 1948 War and the Palestinian exodus, but its success was only partial.

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**Avner Ben-Amos** is a historian of education and a member of the School of Education, Tel Aviv University. His main research interests are the formation of collective memory and the teaching of history and civics in Modern France and Israel. Among his publications: *Funerals, Politics and Memory in Modern France 1789-1996*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); *Israël. La fabrique de l'identité nationale*, (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2010); *Patriotism. For the Love of the Country*, eds. with Daniel Bar-Tal, (Tel Aviv, Ha-Kibbutz Ha-meuchad, 2004, in Hebrew).

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**Beyond and Despite the State:  
Young Religious Settlers' Visions of Messianic Redemption**

*by Perle Nicolle-Hasid*

**Abstract**

*This paper explores ethnographically how redemption from exile and the role of the State of Israel in the Jewish redemptive process are interpreted by religious young settler activists and elaborated into new political and social visions – both in recognized statist settlements and on unrecognized hilltops. Using a mechanistic discourse analysis, I show how memories of the Jewish diaspora are mobilized to frame the state as an instrument of exile rather than as a vector of collective salvation, allowing these young settlers to construct a central role for themselves and present alternative collective messianic visions beyond or despite the state.*

**Introduction**

**Zionism, Religious Zionism and Redemption from Exile**

**Settlements, Outposts and Hilltops**

**Settlers beyond the State**

**Settling despite the State**

**Conclusions: “The Product of this Generation in this Land”**

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**Introduction**

While the religious settlement movement has long been considered as a unitary and cohesive entity, both in academic theoretical approaches and in political practice, its inner divisions and profound transformations have become increasingly obvious in recent years. The erosion of the once hegemonic statist

religious Zionist doctrine, which the now obsolete trope of Gush Emunim rested upon, leads to the emergence of alternative ideas as to what constitutes Jewish redemption and how to achieve it, as well as new practices to advance such pursuits. This paper explores ethnographically how redemption from exile and the role of the State of Israel in the Jewish redemptive process are interpreted by young settler activists and elaborated into new political and social visions – both in recognized statist settlements and on unrecognized hilltops. Using a mechanistic discourse analysis, I show how the State of Israel is framed as an instrument of exile rather than as a vector of collective salvation, allowing these young settlers to construct a central role for themselves and present alternative collective messianic visions. A better understanding of these aspirations and how they are translated into practice can help us understand the plurality of ideologies that currently coexist within the settlement movement, shaping both its internal debates and its relations with the state and other actors in Israeli society. It can also help us consider a spectrum of settler practices and beliefs about collective redemption as characteristic of different levels of disengagement from the State of Israel in its current form and essence and secular Israeli society.

### **Zionism, Religious Zionism and Redemption from Exile**

A distinguishing feature of the literature on contemporary Jewry is that it describes Zionism as a political, cultural and spiritual revolution of momentous dimensions. Even among those scholars who differ on whether the essence of Zionism is the transformation of Jewish time by “returning the Jews into history”<sup>1</sup> or Jewish space by returning the Jews to the Land of Israel, the assumption that the establishment of Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel has redeemed Jews from long exile is often shared.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Return into history” is a common expression in Zionist texts and in theoretical discussions on Zionism, particularly in the works of Gershom Scholem. Yosef Ben-Shlomo, “The Spiritual Universe of Gershom Scholem,” *Modern Judaism* 5/1 (1985): 21-38; David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past. European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> For an elaboration on how the Zionist foundation of the Israeli national ethos was constructed as a counterplot to the Jewish exilic narrative, Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots. Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Note that the assumption that the State of Israel constitutes a rebirth following a metaphorical exilic death is embodied in the name of one of the main Israel Studies journals in Hebrew: *Tyunim Bitkumat Israel*, Studies in the Rebirth of Israel.

This premise provides the basis for other conceptual oppositions, such as that of Israeliness and diaspora, arguing a fundamental and formative difference between the Jewish diasporic archetype and the “Promethean” modern “new Jew.”<sup>3</sup> The idea of diaspora in Zionist texts reverberates with themes of estrangement, humiliation or insecurity.<sup>4</sup> The diasporic Jew, correspondingly, is framed as weak, feminine,<sup>5</sup> submissive<sup>6</sup> and incomplete<sup>7</sup> – a “diametric opposite” to the Israeli Sabra, a strong, active and fearless pioneer of the Land of Israel.<sup>8</sup>

Uncovering the roots of the redemptive power attributed to the Zionist enterprise, whose aspirations extend far beyond sheltering persecuted Jews, is a central theme of this study. There is, indeed, a tension between the almost technocratic approach to state building of secular Zionism, which some scholars oppose to irrational messianic yearning,<sup>9</sup> and its promise of utopian progression away from exilic decline, which various scholars see as inherently messianic.<sup>10</sup> The tension between intellectual pragmatism and exalted messianism also divides religious Zionist thought. On the one hand, Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines<sup>11</sup> reduced Zionism to a rescue mission for European Jews and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David Ohana, *The Origins of Israeli Mythology. Neither Canaanites Nor Crusaders*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*.

<sup>5</sup> Tamar Mayer, “From Zero to Hero: Masculinity in Jewish Nationalism,” ed. Tamar Mayer, *Gender Ironies of Nationalism*, (London–New York: Routledge, 2012), 297–322.

<sup>6</sup> Boyarin, Daniel, *Unheroic Conduct. The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, vol. 8, (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> A. B. Yehoshua, “People without a Land,” *Haaretz Magazine*, May 12, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Oz Almog, *The Sabra. The Creation of the New Jew*, (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 2000, 77), 10–13; Yael Zerubavel, “The ‘Mythological Sabra’ and Jewish Past. Trauma, Memory, and Contested Identities,” *Israel Studies* 7/2 (2002): 115–144; Uri Ram, “National, Ethnic or Civic? Contesting Paradigms of Memory, Identity and Culture in Israel,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 19/5–6 (2000): 405–422.

<sup>9</sup> Derek Jonathan Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy. The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870–1918*, (Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991); Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile, History, and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory. Some Reflections on the Zionist Notion of History and Return,” *Journal of Levantine Studies* 3/2 (2013): 37–70.

<sup>10</sup> Ohana, *The Origins of Israeli Mythology*.

<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines (1839–1915), a Lithuanian Orthodox rabbi, was a founder of the Mizrahi, one of the first movements of religious Zionism at the end of the 19th century.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s approach to Zionism and how it influenced various religious Zionist communities in Israel, Nehemia Stern, “First Flowering of Redemption. An Ethnographic Account of Contemporary Religious Zionism in Israel,” PhD dissertation, Emory University, 2014, 170–172.

considered it a useful but profane human undertaking. On the other hand, the most influential figure of Israeli religious Zionism, Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, saw Zionism as a metaphysical transformation of the Jews, rescuing them from incomplete and disembodied spirituality in the diaspora.

While secular Zionism does not consider the Land of Israel, *in and of itself*, as inherently redemptive, the spiritual significance of the Land of Israel is central to Kookian political theology. It “has intrinsic meaning, it is connected to the Jewish people as a life-giving bond” so that “the extraordinary qualities of the Land of Israel and the extraordinary qualities of the Jewish people form two halves of a whole.”<sup>13</sup> Rabbi Kook believed that secular Zionist pioneers had unwittingly jumpstarted the messianic era by answering the call of the land.<sup>14</sup> Through the founding of a sovereign state, the land, Torah and people of Israel would bond anew to cancel the Jews’ ontological exile. In his words: while “the expectation of salvation is the force that saves exilic Judaism, the Judaism of the Land of Israel is salvation itself.”<sup>15</sup>

The two Rabbis Kook, father and son, are the main theorists of the *mamlachti*, or statist, current of religious Zionism, which imbues earthly sovereignty with divine redemptive power. By this doctrine, the State of Israel is not just the vector but the embodiment of the Jews’ salvation: it is the “pedestal of God’s throne in the world.”<sup>16</sup> Building on his father’s philosophy, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook thus established sovereignty as “the absolute first essential”<sup>17</sup> collective undertaking of modern times, preceding even the building of the Temple.<sup>18</sup> The State of Israel is “inherently holy and without blemish,” he wrote,<sup>19</sup> despite the

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<sup>13</sup> Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, *Eretz Hefetz. Teachings on the Land of Israel and Its Edification*, (Jerusalem: Darom, 1930) [Hebrew].

<sup>14</sup> Pinhas Polonsky, *Religious Zionism of Rav Kook*, ed. Galina Zolotusky, trans. Lise Brody, (Newton, MA: Machanaim, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> The first section of the seminal work of Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, *Orot* [*Lights*], is entitled *Eretz Israel*. The cited passage is the last sentence of this section. See: Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, *Orot*, (Jerusalem: HaRav Kook Institute, 1920) [Hebrew].

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>17</sup> Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook cited in Richard Hoch, “Sovereignty, Sanctity and Salvation. The Theology of Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Kohen Kook and the Actions of Gush Emunim,” *Shofar* 13/1 (1994): 90-118, 102.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. “It is clear that establishment of sovereignty, that is, the establishment of national leadership, precedes the building of the Temple.”

<sup>19</sup> Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, cited in Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 136.



secularism of its institutions, since “any government that governs the people by the authority of the people and is not obviously against the Torah must be considered as the current Kingdom.”<sup>20</sup>

Following the territorial conquests of 1967 (and with even greater fervor after the trauma of Israel’s near-defeat in 1973), Rabbi Zvi Yehuda became the spiritual leader of Gush Emunim, and statist religious Zionism formed the ideological base of the nascent Israeli settlement movement. Binding redemption with the establishment of a physical union between the Jews and the whole Biblical Land of Israel, he encouraged his students to implant themselves across Judea and Samaria, in the newly occupied West Bank,<sup>21</sup> securing Jewish sovereignty over parts of the land that the state seemed unable or unwilling fully to control.<sup>22</sup>

He soon recognized that translating mystical philosophy into a practical action plan<sup>23</sup> would lead to political and spiritual struggles within the state and Israeli society. He dismissed them as a basic part of what he envisioned as an unstoppable movement towards redemption. The state, he wrote, “is the highest earthly revelation of ‘Him Who returns His Presence to the World.’ All else is detail (...) that cannot blemish, not even a bit, the validity of the state’s holiness.”<sup>24</sup> As such, he insisted on unwavering faith in the state’s redemptive destiny, even as governments may undermine their goals: “of course, we shall not disconnect from the state,” he noted, “for we are beholden to its divine holiness due to our understanding that it is a heavenly manifestation,” so that even critical issues such as “the integrity of the Land of Israel and defining ‘who is a Jew’ are small details compared to the sanctification of God that is inherent in the emergence of Israeli statehood.”<sup>25</sup> Various scholars have argued that this statist political theology has burdened, “confused and paralyzed”<sup>26</sup> the settlement

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<sup>20</sup> Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook in Yehuda Zoldan, “Patience for Redemption,” *Nekuda* 76 (1984): 22-23 [Hebrew].

<sup>21</sup> Gideon Aran, *Kookism. The Roots of Gush Emunim, Jewish Settler Subculture, Zionist Theology, Contemporary Messianism*, (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2013) [Hebrew].

<sup>22</sup> Hoch, “Sovereignty, Sanctity and Salvation.”

<sup>23</sup> Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, “The State as the Embodiment of the Vision for Redemption,” in Id., *LeNetivot Israel. Collection of Articles*, (Bet El: MeAvnei HaMakom, 2002), 261-272 [Hebrew].

<sup>24</sup> Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, *Within the Public Campaign. In the Press*, ed. Yosef Bermason, (Jerusalem: HaRav Kook Institute, 1986), 28.

<sup>25</sup> Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, *Eretz HaZvi*, ed. Harel Cohen, (Bet El: Netivei Or, 2002), 81.

<sup>26</sup> Moshe Koppel, “*Mamlachtiyut* as a Tool of Oppression. On Jewish Jews and Israeli Jews in the Post-Zionist Era,” *Democratic Culture* 3 (2000): 233-247, 241.

movement over the years and impeded its ability to mobilize effectively against different Israeli governments.<sup>27</sup>

The sense of helplessness of their political and spiritual leadership in the face of repeated land withdrawals has undermined the dominance of the Kookian doctrine among young religious Zionist settlers in recent years. The withdrawals have placed statist communities before a conundrum: can the State of Israel embody Jewish redemption if it relinquishes sovereignty over parts of the Land? The forced evacuation of Gush Katif (Gaza Strip settlements) during the pullout in 2005, in particular, was invoked as a critical juncture by most young settlers that I encountered in my fieldwork, altering their relationship with the state and their understanding of its meaning and role – *as well as their own* – in the unfolding of Jewish history. While Yesh'a leaders tend to invoke the Kookian distinction between the state and its government to sanction strategies of settlement institutionalization and normalization, seeking to engage different sectors of the secular Israeli public, many young religious Zionist settlers openly express doubt as to the sanctity of the State of Israel and question their relationship to it. For many, this implies renewed political and spiritual dialogue with non-Zionist publics and growing sense of detachment from the state. As I discuss in this paper, this political disengagement can manifest itself at different levels.

A second factor undermining once hegemonic Kookian messianism in the settlements is their diversification. Since 1967, more than 400,000 Israelis have moved to the West Bank.<sup>28</sup> While Gush Emunim practiced settling as an act of faith, many Israelis are in the West Bank for completely prosaic reasons: affordable housing, good education, or even reduced commuting times. In 2012, a demographic breakdown of local settlements published by Yesh'a showed that only a third of the settlers were religious Zionists.<sup>29</sup> This situation has only lately been recognized in the academic literature on settlers, which often describes *all* settlers as messianic zealots and radical fundamentalists under the long-obsolete

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<sup>27</sup> 'Anat Roth, *Not at Any Cost. From Gush Katif to Amona, the Story behind the Struggle over the Land of Israel*, (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot and Hemed Books, 2013) [Hebrew]; Eitan Alimi, *Between Engagement and Disengagement Politics*, (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2013) [Hebrew].

<sup>28</sup> This number does not include East Jerusalem, which is not part of the West Bank.

<sup>29</sup> One should read these figures bearing in mind that, as part of its strategy of normalization, Yesh'a has a vested interest in presenting settlements as a non-sectoral issue. See: Yesh'a Council Research Department, "Settlers in 2012. Ideological Profile," January 4, 2012, <http://www.myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=335&ArticleID=5296>.

trope of Gush Emunim.<sup>30</sup> Ethnographic studies have recently shed important light on the heterogeneity of the religious Zionist world, including in the settlements.<sup>31</sup> Valuable other works have discussed the impact of American immigrants on the liberalization of settler discourse,<sup>32</sup> complex relationships between youths living on hilltop farms and nearby settlements,<sup>33</sup> or the way religious philosophies inform conflict resolution parameters for ideological settlers.<sup>34</sup>

The transformations of Israeli culture since the 1990s to encompass challenges to the dominant nationalist and collectivist ethos of Zionism by “competing sub-narratives”<sup>35</sup> thus affect the settlements as a “new Israeli space.”<sup>36</sup> This post-modern contest translates into a progressive detachment from the statist theology of Rabbi Kook, whose collectivist implications mirrored the socialist Zionist vision. This cultural disengagement also manifests itself in different ways. It is exemplified in the rise in influence of the neo-Hasidic theology of individual relationship with God,<sup>37</sup> but also in the emergence of hilltop groups

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<sup>30</sup>For critiques of this types of representation, Joyce Dalsheim, Assaf Harel, “Representing Settlers,” *Review of Middle East Studies* 43/2 (2009): 219-238; Roth, *Not at Any Cost*.

<sup>31</sup> For example: Joyce Dalsheim, *Unsettling Gaza. Secular Liberalism, Radical Religion, and the Israeli Settlement Project*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Stern, “First Flowering of Redemption;” Aron Harel, “The Eternal Nation Does Not Fear a Long Road,” Rutgers University, PhD dissertation, 2015. Note that while this paper focuses on the West Bank, the religious Zionist public spans varied political and cultural contexts across Israel and provides varied ideological and theological responses to the dilemmas I discuss here. Their exploration is outside the scope of this article.

<sup>32</sup> Sara Ya’el Hirschhorn, *City on a Hilltop. American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> Shim’i Friedman, *The Hilltop Youth. A Stage of Resistance and Counter-culture Practice*, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> Ofer Zalzberg, “Israel’s National-Religious Jews and the Quest for Peace,” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 20/4 (2015): 60; Nehemia Stern, “‘I Desire Sanctity.’ Sanctity and Separateness among Jewish Religious Zionists in Israel/Palestine,” *Anthropology of Consciousness* 26/2 (2015): 156-169; Hadas Weiss, “On Value and Values in a West Bank Settlement,” *American Ethnologist* 38/1 (2011): 36-46.

<sup>35</sup> Ram, “National, Ethnic or Civic?”

<sup>36</sup> Ariel Handel, Galit Rand, Marco Allegra, “Wine-washing. Colonization, Normalization, and the Geopolitics of Terror in the West Bank’s Settlements,” *Environment and Planning A* 47/6 (2015): 1351-1367, 1353.

<sup>37</sup> Tomer Persico, “Neo-Hasidic Revival. Expressivist Uses of Traditional Lore,” *Modern Judaism. A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 34/3 (2014): 287-308; Joanna Steinhart, “American Neo-Hasids in the Land of Israel,” *Nova Religio. The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 13/4 (2010): 22-42.

who defy the bourgeois lifestyle<sup>38</sup> and the beliefs of their elders, rejecting relations with secular Israeli society.

In this article, I explore some of these trends to show that while some scholars have argued that the shift towards a more neo-liberal ideology brings the decline of collectivist messianic visions,<sup>39</sup> this is not necessarily the case. I show that as young settlers address the collective roles of the State of Israel and Israeli society and their individual responsibilities as part of the messianic destiny of Israel, they often articulate new *collective messianic visions* based on perceptions of exile and redemption that differ from the hegemonic Kookian perspective of the previous generation.

### Settlements, Outposts and Hilltops

The article draws on long-form interviews and ethnographic fieldwork in the West Bank in the past three years. While all Israeli settlements are illegal under international law, Israel differentiates between “legal” communities on public land, built in coordination with the Defense Ministry, and illegal outposts built without state permits, often on private Palestinian land. Outposts are represented in local settler councils, and their legalization is advocated for by Yesh’a. Hilltops are hills seized by groups of young settlers outside settlements. They are not recognized by settler councils, though local stances towards them vary greatly. They are regularly evacuated by force.

The first section explores how young settlers living in recognized religious Zionist settlements interpret redemption from exile and seek to enact it in practice. Fourteen interviews were conducted in ‘Ofra, Itamar, Teko’a, ‘Otniel, Kfar ‘Etzion and in Alon Shvut. Important ideological distinctions exist among these communities and their ways of challenging Kookian statism thus often vary. The interviewees were political or social activists, raised in religious Zionist families and identifying as part of this public. The men had served in the military and the women in civilian service. They were aged 22 to 30 and married. Most were parents of children attending religious state schools. The second section relies on six interviews and on field notes taken on five hilltops. The term

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Feige, *Settling in the Hearts. Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Stern, for example, describes contemporary religious Zionism in Israel and in the West Bank as “distinctly non-messianic.” Stern, “First Flowering of Redemption,” 10.

“hilltop youths,” widely used, is frequently a misnomer. Most residents of these hilltops are in their twenties and parents to toddlers. They live in wooden shacks or small caravans, sporadically connected to the water or power grid of settlements, with no sewer systems. While some were raised in settlements or outposts, many grew up outside the West Bank. Some of them were evacuated from the Gaza strip in 2005. Most of the men did not serve in the military. The teenagers I met planned to refuse the draft.

In my fieldwork, I sought to understand how redemption from exile and the role of the State of Israel in the Jewish redemptive process are interpreted phenomenologically by young settler activists. How is the role of State of Israel constructed by these settlers, and how is it deconstructed? Do their visions seek to disengage from state nationalism and minimize its influence on their lives, or do they seek to reframe an idealized state whose destiny encompasses their own?

### Settlers beyond the State

During my first conversation with Nehara in her home in Teko’a, a settlement in Gush ‘Etzion, her eldest daughter plays in the background humming a children’s song – “the Land of Israel is beautiful and blooming.” Humming along for a few seconds, Nehara tells me that she has always liked “this time of the year” – the weeks between Passover and Independence Day.<sup>40</sup> “On Yom Hashoah, I would spend the day imagining myself there. In the ghetto (...) without a place to flee to. Then Yom HaZikaron... especially then.”<sup>41</sup> Pausing her folding, she seems for a moment lost in painful thoughts, before she finally adds: “in the morning (on Independence Day), my brothers would come from yeshiva and when my dad came from prayer, he’d bless us. There was so much pride and faith (...) and this is it, we’re here, in the Land of Israel.” Later in the conversation, she sums up the experience of growing up in an ideological religious Zionist family in the settlements: “it was like living in a movie for real (...) you could get popcorn, sit on the bench at the end of our settlement and watch the redemption.” As we

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<sup>40</sup> Jewish and civil calendars intertwine as Passover (the religious celebration of Exodus) is followed by Yom HaShoah (national Holocaust Day), and then a week later by Yom HaZikaron (national Remembrance Day for fallen soldiers and terror victims) and Israel’s Independence Day. On the phenomenological impact of this calendar, Avner Ben-Amos, Ilana Bet-El, “Holocaust Day and Memorial Day in Israeli Schools. Ceremonies, Education and History,” *Israel Studies* 4/1 (1999): 258-284.

<sup>41</sup> Nehara grew up in a terror-stricken settlement, in the midst of the Second Intifada.

fold laundry together on a porch overlooking the desert that evening, I accept an invitation to stay over. Still processing the interview, I ask whether she believes that the state is holy. She laughs: “obviously the state is not the Messiah, it’s a bit childish to think it is.”<sup>42</sup>

In my interviews with young settlers, I have often been surprised at the immediacy with which they signified departure from ideological, political, cultural Kookian frames. Though my informants saw the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel as the beginning of Jewish redemption from exile, they all doubted the State of Israel’s ability to play a further role in the redemptive process. For many, the discrepancy between actual state policies and the state’s idealized redemptive role seemed just too great to reconcile. Yoav, for example, asked rhetorically during an interview in his caravan in ‘Otniel, in the southern Hebron hills: “If the state is holy, then how did Disengagement happen to us?” before answering, “There was a political battle and we lost” and concluding, “The state is not holy, it’s a secular tool that we can use, not a religious one.”<sup>43</sup>

One central way these young settlers depart from Kookian doctrine is by questioning its historical determinism. They do not believe that the simple existence state of Israel *must lead* to redemption. Rather, many of them find that it has strayed from its spiritual purposes to the point that it has become detached from its redemptive essence. This is expressed through a discursive mechanism that I qualify as *diasporization*. Symbols and images of the Jewish diaspora are mobilized to deconstruct the state’s transformative and redemptive power. Through the claim that the State of Israel resonates these images of exile, it is argued that it is in fact an embodiment of continued diasporism – and redemption must happen *beyond*.

The deconstruction of the state’s redemptive value pertains to the three tenets of Kookian theology: the Land of Israel, the Torah of Israel and the People of Israel. Israeli territorial policies in the West Bank provide endless opportunities for young settlers to claim that the state is failing at achieving a *true and intimate bond with the land*. The state’s avoidance of annexing the West Bank or the prayer ban imposed on the Temple Mount are invoked in interviews as central issues which reveal the state’s true diasporic nature through its hesitation and unwillingness to express its true might. Passivity and fear, central Zionist

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<sup>42</sup> Interview of the Author with Nehara, Tekoa, July 10, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Interview of the A. with Yoav, ‘Otniel, January 4, 2018.

perceptions of exilic Jewish experience, are used to *diasporize* the state's character. "The fact that the State of Israel didn't annex Judea and Samaria<sup>44</sup> yesterday, it's not acceptable," denounces Yoav, a teacher at the 'Otniel Yeshiva, "it's like we're still little Jews, so unsure of ourselves, so contained by our fear of others."

Places and mindsets that embody the exilic lifestyle – such as the shtetl and ultra-Orthodoxy – are brought up in conversation to legitimize the claim that the state cannot really embody the redemption of Jews from exile since it is really reenacting the exile. This is exemplified in the following extracts from conversations with David, an informal educator and the owner of a small factory, and Yehuda, a tour guide for Jewish sites in East Jerusalem. Both of them were raised in Itamar, in the north of the West Bank:

If we pray on the Temple Mount, the Arabs will go crazy, they say. If we annex, the Arabs will go crazy and the UN too. Let them go crazy! What, I mean... are we still in the shtetl? The government of Israel is afraid of what the goyim<sup>45</sup> will say if the Jews stand up?! [David]<sup>46</sup>

People say we're dangerous because we want to take some sort of responsibility to change things here, but it's dangerous to do nothing. It's like we turned Haredi<sup>47</sup> and we're suddenly waiting for the end of days (...) I don't presume to know where history is going, I know where I want it to go. So I'm taking responsibility, here and now (...) Jews shouldn't have to be scared to be here, it's the capital of the State of Israel. [Yehuda]<sup>48</sup>

Ultra-Orthodox Jews, detested figures in secular Zionist lore, are not evoked here just as a nemesis to modern pioneerism in the Land of Israel, but also as symbols of resistance to religious Zionist messianic activism. In contrast to them, who continue – even as they live in Israel – to perceive themselves in spiritual exile

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<sup>44</sup> The Biblical name of the area that is internationally defined today as the West Bank.

<sup>45</sup> The word *goyim* is a standard term for non-Jews in Hebrew.

<sup>46</sup> Interview of the A. with David, Itamar, June 22, 2017.

<sup>47</sup> The Hebrew word *haredi* is a term for ultra-Orthodox Jews.

<sup>48</sup> Interview of the A. with Yehuda, standing over archeological digs in East Jerusalem, April 6, 2017.

and wait for the advent of messianic days,<sup>49</sup> and contrary to the state – which they perceive as equally diasporic – these young settlers present themselves as fearless and demand to shape the land to achieve their pursuits.

The state's redemptive value for Judaism is deconstructed by arguing that it lacks will and power to cater for *the spiritual renewal of the Torah* itself. While the State of Israel saved the Jews physically, the proponents of this view contend, it also perpetuates their metaphysical exile through their practice of diasporic Judaism, and as such cannot embody the redemption. This longing for a physically anchored Israeli Judaism accompanies a trend of renewed interest and engagement of the young religious Zionist public in Temple activism in recent years,<sup>50</sup> as a growing number of religious Zionist rabbis break from the Kookian doctrine on this issue, encouraging their students to ascend the Temple Mount.<sup>51</sup> "Zionism has succeeded, the people of Israel are not dispersed," says Nehara, explaining the transition from her statist upbringing to Temple Mount activism. But "the Torah in exile, that's another story that continues, it's much more tragic."<sup>52</sup>

For many, the fact that the Torah remained an essentially diasporic artifact explains why most Israeli Jews have remained secular, impeding progress towards collective redemption. "The Torah, it's like a heavy brick that we've carried on our backs for 2000 years," elaborates Yoav in 'Otniel, "but it's alive! Except that, since what happened with the Temple, it's a dead brick."<sup>53</sup> The perpetuation of this spiritually diasporic Judaism, outside the course of Jewish history, thus, is threatening to make it "irrelevant" and "too heavy" for most Jews. "We can't discuss if something makes sense or not, or if we should change the way we think about things. There is no Sanhedrin! We're stuck with the brick," he laments.

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<sup>49</sup> For further discussion of ultra-Orthodox perceptions of exile and life in modern Israel, Joyce Dalsheim, "Exile at Home. A Matter of Being out of Place," *Anthropology Today* 33/6 (2017): 11-15.

<sup>50</sup> Per the numbers of the settler organization "Yeraeh," which encourages Jews to ascend the Temple Mount and publishes weekly statistics, 29,939 Jews ascended in 2018 – most of them young settlers – compared to 5,658 in 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Rabbi Zvi Yehuda did not prioritize a Third Temple. He also forbade the ascending of the Mount. On evolving practices at the site, Meyer, Gedalia, Hanoach Messner, "Entering the Temple Mount Precincts in Halacha and Jewish History," *Hakirah* 10 (2010).

<sup>52</sup> Interview of the A. with Nehara, Teko'a, July 10, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> Interview of the A. with Yoav, 'Otniel, January 4, 2018.



On the Mount, crowds of young settlers signal their spiritual longing for a Judaism that is embodied in space, occasioning frictions with Muslim authorities, who impose a ban on Jewish prayer at the site, and the police. Criticizing the submissiveness of the state, the settlers claim to be the authentic successors of the Zionist enterprise whose actions are advancing a true redeeming of the Torah from exile. The Temple Mount is then presented in interviews as a generational struggle that befits the heirs of Gush Emunim. “You know about the story of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda in Sebastia? Now there are half a million people in Judea and Samaria,” says Hagai, a military officer from ‘Otniel, “if you’d gone to my grandpa as a little yid and asked him if he would see the Jewish state, he’d have laughed. What Jewish state? (...) We’re here. It’s the same story. (...) Maybe I won’t, but my sons will pray in the Temple.”<sup>54</sup>

The negation of the state’s redemptive value for the people of Israel completes the deconstruction of the Kookian triad and revolves around the claim that it does not offer alternatives to the diasporic identities imposed on the Jews by exile. The state, my informants contend, perpetuates ahistorical Jewish identities. As expressed by Yoav in ‘Otniel:

For the past 2000 years, others have told us who we are. The Christians said we’re Israel in the flesh, the Muslims said we’re sinners. (...) Now that Israel has returned to its land, we can say who we are by ourselves, but (...) we’re not showing who we are, we’re still stuck in time (...) What does it mean to be a Jew here? (...) The State of Israel has no clue where it’s going or what for.<sup>55</sup>

By contrast, my informants sought to assert territorialized and historicized identities that reinforced their claim to the land. This was exemplified to me during a visit at David’s small factory in Itamar, which proudly brands its produce as “Hebrew labor.” This term effectively means that the factory does not employ non-Jews. It also echoes the way early Zionist pioneers designated their work, as pointed out by one of his employees, a young man from a nearby hilltop whose tee-shirt proclaims “we don’t work with enemies.” I ask David why he does not say “Jewish labor.” He cringes: the term “sounds scary” to him, hinting at its resonance with modern memories of forced labor.<sup>56</sup> “I like the

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<sup>54</sup> Interview of the A. with Hagai, Jerusalem, March 28, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Interview of the A. with Yoav, ‘Otniel, January 4, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Walk-along Interview of the A. with David, Itamar, June 22, 2017.

word ‘Hebrew’ better than ‘Jew,’” he explains, “I’m a native, back in my homeland, for some reason we don’t want to say that we act like we’re squatters.” To David, a technological young man constantly checking his cellphone, the term “Hebrew” rather than merely evoke the past, looks toward a Jewish future in the land. “What about ‘Israeli labor?’” I ask. “It doesn’t say who we are,” he objects. “Not all Israelis are Jews. Not all Jews live in Israel. We’re *Jews of the Land of Israel*, here, that’s what it means.”

In his analyses of contentious political processes, Charles Tilly observes that the phenomenological exploration of the identity of social actors helps understand their relations since identity and self-boundaries become part of the stories people tell to alter social and political relations.<sup>57</sup> By activating an identity boundary between Israelis and Hebrews (“*Jews of the Land of Israel*”), David claims an identity that exists politically and culturally *beyond the State of Israel* and the classical religious Zionist world – but not in opposition to it. Other informants activated a parallel boundary by referring to themselves as “the young settlement” movement. By this, they meant a generational movement of idealistic young settlers whose aspirations were unbridled by the statist ideology of Gush Emunim. Yet, no matter how clearly constructed in thoughts and enunciated in words, this ideological detachment does not translate into acts of political disengagement:<sup>58</sup> these young settlers are law-abiding Israeli citizens who educate their young children in state-run religious Zionist schools where the Kookian political theology is still dominant, serve in the military and participate in Israeli elections.

Throughout the interviews, the discourse of the young settlers interviewed and cited in this section was rendered cohesive by three aspects. First, they all shared suspicion toward and a sense of detachment from the political arm of the settlement movement, the Yesh’a Council. Their rejection was accompanied by claims that the leadership of Yesh’a was too institutionalized to defend their interests. Second, they expressed a common understanding that the State of Israel is limited as a vector to achieve divine collective redemption in the collective religious Zionist sense. This conception was reinforced by doubts about the way

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<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of the development of Tilly’s understanding of actors, agency, culture, and social construction, John Krinsky, Ann Mische, “Formations and Formalisms. Charles Tilly and the Paradox of the Actor,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 39 (2013): 1-26; Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21-22, 84-85.

<sup>58</sup> It translates into acts of cultural disengagement by altering prayer wordings, refraining from saying specific blessings or challenging the obligation to rejoice on Independence Day.

to advance on the deterministic Kookian path to redemption and about their generational role. Third, all of them sought to *diasporize* the State of Israel, seeing it as an instrument of exile so as to deconstruct its redemptive role and legitimize their own visions and undertakings taking place beyond the state's real or perceived limitations, which one of my informants poetically termed "fragments of exile."<sup>59</sup>

Two groups based on such alternative approaches can be contrasted: those that wish radically to transform the state to seek collective messianic redemption through renewed engagement with a new political construct, and those who seek to minimize state structures so as to achieve messianic redemption through collective disengagement. Offering an alternative to a state that has been dismissed as diasporic, they allow these settlers to claim a central role in the Jewish redemptive process – continuing and adapting the revolution induced by the Zionist enterprise beyond the limitations imposed by its embodiment into the State of Israel.

The first group can be described as *post-nationalistic*. These visionaries seek to appease the diasporic echoes of the present by normalizing the situation of the Jews in the land through mutual understandings with its other inhabitants.<sup>60</sup> Hagai, for example, affirms: "I don't want checkpoints, I'm also against the occupation. I want annexation, I want coexistence."<sup>61</sup> As indicated by the interviews with Yoav and Hagai from 'Otniel, Nehara in Teko'a, or Shimi and Elish'a, both of them educators at the religious boarding school in Kfar 'Etzion, they seem to emerge in places that have been deeply influenced by neo-Hasidic thought and where the past religious Zionist taboo on studying Hasidic literature has long been broken.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Interview of the A. with Ohad, 'Ofra, Decembre 15, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Yifat Gutman, *Memory Activism. Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine*, (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017).

<sup>61</sup> Interview of the A. with Hagai, Jerusalem, March 28, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> These visions follow the guidance of prominent spiritual leaders. In Teko'a, the late Rabbi Froman, a founder of Gush Emunim, sought a spirituality that would cross national and religious boundary lines. Many of the educators in Kfar 'Etzion are students of Rabbi Froman. It is also one of the birthplaces of the "Two States, One Homeland" initiative, advocating for peace through a Jewish-Arab confederation. 'Otniel is influenced by the support of one of the head rabbis of the yeshiva for an Abrahamic Confederation, a solution based on mutual recognition between Jews and Muslims on the basis of their common belief in God and belonging to the land.

These visions are linked by a belief that Israeli Jews must overcome statist Zionism – their normalization *as a people* through the establishment of a sovereign state – so as to achieve normalization through the inherent redemptive qualities of the Land of Israel, by blending in with its cultural and historical realities. As such, they stress the need for cooperation – and even fusion – with others, on the basis of their presence in the land, beyond the particularistic nationalism of secular Zionists and the narrative of absolute Jewish self-determination of the Kookian approach. Though these visions are sometimes designated as religious conflict resolution initiatives,<sup>63</sup> one must note that the young settlers who advocate for them seek not just physical peace but a metaphysical redemption through the restoration of harmony in the world.

Why did Oslo fail? It's because it was signed in Oslo and not in Hebron or Jerusalem (...) We need a vision that's from here, it needs to speak our language, that's made for us, our cultures, Jewish and Arab culture. (...) Oslo spoke the language of Europe, it's not ours. (...) Look, my own brother is an atheist that lives in Berlin. Most of the time, I feel more connected to the Palestinians that are around us than to him.<sup>64</sup>

The path of this mystical collective undertaking is both similar and contradictory to that preconized by the Kookian doctrine. On the one hand, it is by the fusion of Jews and non-Jews – uniting opposites, an important concept in Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's messianic philosophy<sup>65</sup> – that divine redemption is advanced. On the other hand, furthering this redemption is only possible by rejecting the Kookian attitude of reverence towards a centralized State of Israel whose destinies merge with those of the entire Jewish collective. "This is the vision of the prophets, 'the wolf will dwell with the lamb', 'My house will be a house of prayer for all peoples,' and now that we have the State of Israel, we must work for it," illustrates Elisha.<sup>66</sup> This does not imply that Jewish particularism is abandoned in favor of a fused regional cultural identity. On the contrary, it is claimed as the basis of a fusion based on common Abrahamic memory, returning the Jews to their territorial and spiritual origin and finally redeeming them from their exile.

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<sup>63</sup> Ofer Zalzberg, "Israel's National-Religious Jews and the Quest for Peace," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 20/4 (2015): 60.

<sup>64</sup> Interview of the A. with Yoav, 'Otniel, July 15, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Isaac Abraham Kook, *Orot Hakodesh* I, (Jerusalem: Rabbi Kook Institute, 2002), 179.

<sup>66</sup> Interview of the A. with Elisha, Jerusalem, April 6, 2017.

While these visions build on a more individualistic tenor in neo-Hasidic theology, detaching from the statist ideal of redemption through the state of Israel, their interpretation of redemption is decidedly collective. Religious redemption is achieved by weakening one's nationalist engagement. However, the idea is not to disconnect from the State of Israel but rather radically to transform it. This is expressed through Yoav's description of his debates at the yeshiva about practical aspects of his detachment "There is this ongoing discussion that we are having at the synagogue. Should we bless the state because it is 'the first flowering of our redemption' or so that it 'will be the first flowering of our redemption'?" he notes, signally, that he desires an evolution rather than a rupture.<sup>67</sup> He adds, "Right now, I'm not so sure that the State of Israel is really the beginning of redemption. I want it to be, yes! But I don't know."

As such, one should not read these visions as attempts to minimize the state. Indeed, the political construct resulting from the fusion – whether a confederation or another form of government – is envisioned in centric terms that very much echo the idealism of statist political theology. "You say theocracy, I say Kingdom of Israel. The Knesset will not just be a place of corruption, like you see now, it will be like an assembly of priests that serve... like it's supposed to be," describes Elisha.<sup>68</sup> Resonating the neo-Hasidic philosophy of Rabbi Froman, these young settlers assert that while the Zionist enterprise has jumpstarted the redemptive process, it must be achieved beyond the limitations of state nationalism. It is by refraining from becoming "a nation amongst the nations" that the Jews can simultaneously appease and remember their diasporic experiences: they can then avoid forcing a reenactment of these experiences upon others, fully freeing themselves from exile. As such, though the State of Israel is denied a further role in the Jewish redemptive process, the Palestinians are recognized as having some level of agency in it.

Zionism is not the final destination. (...) The Arabs are a mirror for us. If we were alone in this land, our nationalist pride might have become so overwhelming that we wouldn't be able to become "a light unto the nations" (...) They're sort of reminding us of what it is to be in exile, so we can't be tempted to return to the diaspora by behaving towards them the way people behaved towards us in the diaspora.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Interview of the A. with Yoav, 'Otniel, January 4, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Interview of the A. with Elisha, Jerusalem, April 6, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Interview of the A. with Nehara, Teko'a, July 10, 2017.

These visions can be contrasted with those defended by other young settlers such as Ohad, a military officer raised in 'Ofra, Batya, a bride counsellor and the wife of a rabbi in Alon Shvut, and David in Itamar. While the first corpus sought a redemption of the collective, they seek individual redemption for Jews in the land through the minimization of state structures – a vision that largely echoes conservative libertarian models. “If the state doesn’t have solutions, then it shouldn’t stop us from living our lives freely,” asserts David, in what sounds like a radical privatization of the settlement enterprise. If the State of Israel does not have the will or the strength to realize its collective redemptive role, individuals must be given the freedom to realize their own purpose undisturbed. In the words of Ohad:

I want things so that “Each man will sit under his vine and fig tree.” This is the gathering of a holy people in its land. (...) The state is a tool. It’s secular. That’s fine, it’s not a problem if it doesn’t meddle in our lives. (...) When the fight is right, the people of Israel will rally behind the same flag.<sup>70</sup>

By their rejection of an idealized state with central, potentially coercive government, these visions diverge from both secular and statist religious Zionism. Specifically, they challenge the core Kookian premise that collective redemption *must necessarily be obtained through* the State of Israel. “I’m not buying redemption with lights from the sky, and the Messiah suddenly coming to Israel, that supernatural description (...) ‘we live in the beginning of the redemptive era,<sup>71</sup> that I do believe,” says Batya.<sup>72</sup> She explains, “We live in abundance, without horrible diseases, we’re not hungry.<sup>73</sup> The State of Israel has done good for the Jews (...) and Rabbi Kook, with all due respect, got a bit carried away.”

It is not by creating their own state that Jews can overcome exile, contend these settlers, but rather by becoming free of state constraints. “When you lived in France, you had to make yourself small, so as not to provoke,” she says, referring to this researcher’s origin, and continues: “In exile, the Jews are the minority. In

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<sup>70</sup> Interview of the A. with Ohad, 'Ofra, December 15, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> She uses the Aramaic term “Atchalta DiGeula” (אתחלתא דגאולה).

<sup>72</sup> Interview of the A. with Batya, Alon Shvut, March 8, 2017.

<sup>73</sup> I interpret this as a loose reference to Maimonides’ natural redemption vision, invoked to validate her assertion that the redemptive era has started.

the State of Israel, you're free, you can be any kind of Jew. But it's an illusion. And we see this clearly in Judea and Samaria!" She takes in a deep breath and elaborates about how the state denies the freedom she conceives as transformative for Jews: "If you live in Judea and Samaria, the state will tell you where you can live, where you can drive, and if you allow it, what you can think. That's not redemption."

By contrast to statist religious Zionists, these young settlers are thus very adamant in their criticism of the State of Israel – since any exercise of its authority inherently perpetuates their exilic situation. By disengaging and freeing themselves from these state structures, taking on a modernized and technologized Hebrew identity – they contend – Jews will individually undergo a transformation that can eventually redeem them from an exile of oppression at the hands of others. Messianic times, in these visions, will then be reached as this freedom is claimed collectively by Jews reintegrating their "natural place" in the Land of Israel. "Freedom and roots, that's opposites for most people. For Jews, it's different. We can only reach the Land of Israel if we're free," sums up Ohad.<sup>74</sup> Strongly drawing on romanticized and idealized representations of the Biblical past, these visions also completely omit the presence of the Palestinians as a potential spoiler of the Jews' idyllic freedom. The idea that Jews must also display unbridled force to retain complete domination over the land and its inhabitants, overcoming "the fragments of exile" by claiming an exclusive relationship with the land and subduing others, is always implicit.

### **Settling despite the State**

While the settlers of the first section of this article seek to transform but continue the Zionist enterprise, the young informants encountered and observed on West Bank hilltops loudly proclaim a rupture. Their sense of detachment from statist religious Zionism is translated into acts of political disengagement that set them apart from (and sometimes in opposition to) other settler communities. As in the previous section, in this part I discuss how memories and images of the Jewish exilic past permeate narratives and structure interpretations of exile and redemption from exile among hilltop settlers. I discuss two major differences between their discourse and that of the first section.

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<sup>74</sup> Interview of the A. with Ohad, 'Ofra, December 15, 2016.

First, hilltop settlers do not subscribe to the Zionist idea of a redemption entirely and completely led by man. As such, they do not believe that they can bring the redemption about, no matter how radical their attempts. Second, while the informants of the previous section saw the State of Israel as profoundly Jewish but sought to overcome its limitations, the hilltop critic is much more radical. In hilltop settler discourse, the state is not simply criticized as exilic but as foreign – and its actions are equated with those of the Jews’ persecutors in the diaspora. As such, these settlers’ aspirations are expressed not simply beyond but *despite the state*. While various authors see the hilltop lifestyle as a radical privatization of the settlement enterprise, I argue that neither their detachment from statist collectivist messianism nor their rejection of the State of Israel and secular Israeli culture implies a disengagement from messianism or collectivism. Rather, their visions involve both delimiting the State of Israel as we know it today and the rise of a new power which will open the way for divine redemption.

The first distinction became apparent in my very first visit to an illegal hilltop established a few hundred meters outside a settlement in the north of the West Bank. Meeting with No’a and Hodaya, both in their late teens, in their small hut, I asked whether they thought that their actions on the hill were advancing the redemption.<sup>75</sup> No’a answers: “We are worshiping God and doing His command, living a life of Torah, and believe that this is what will bring the redemption.” Hodaya adds: “You’re thinking of it backwards! (...) if we do the commandments, eventually redemption will come. It’s not the other way, like we’d be here in order to advance redemption.” Similarly, the other residents on the hill affirm total faith and submission to God, awaiting redemption at His will – an interpretation of redemption that negates their agency in the process and is much closer to ultra-Orthodoxy than to Zionist doctrines.<sup>76</sup> “What’s wrong with the Haredim?,” No’a insists, underscoring her rupture with statist religious Zionist world further. “They kept the Torah in exile, they’re the reason we’re here.”

Even those hilltop settlers who believe that the return of the majority of the Jews to the Land of Israel marks the beginning of the Jewish redemptive era (a key religious Zionist premise) express doubts as to their ability to shape the land so as to set the stage for the arrival of the Messiah. But their diasporic interpretation of redemption, based on the expectation of divine intervention upon the return of

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<sup>75</sup> The following exchange is reported from field notes, Binyamin Hills, January 16, 2019.

<sup>76</sup> Dalsheim, “Exile at Home.”



the people of Israel to religion, makes the secularism of the state and the majority of Israeli society all the more problematic. To them, Zionism – which has returned the people to the Land of Israel by rebelling against divine redemption – has condemned the Jews to indefinite metaphysical exile. Yamit, for example, who lives with her new husband on an isolated hilltop in the northern West Bank, in complete rejection of Kookian philosophy, explains that by allowing secular Jews to flourish in the land, the state of Israel is actually lowering rather than raising them spiritually:

In a way, the State of Israel is allowing the people of Israel to be in a place worse than in the diaspora. It's definitely worse than under the British (...) People tell themselves, "Okay, we can live here, and we will have Israel without the other bank of the Jordan," or "I'm Israeli but I don't feel Jewish or keep the commandments," or "I don't need to fight, the army is here." And maybe, from an ethical standpoint, it's worse than the diaspora, because now the state really encourages secularization.<sup>77</sup>

By contrast to the visions painted by the settlers of the previous sections, the hilltop settlers do not seek to achieve visions that fulfil the needs of the Jews but rather to conform to divine decrees. Their constant friction with the state thus extends far beyond a critique of the state's territorial policy into a scathing critique of its secular culture and mainstream public. And though they are conscious that they represent a tiny minority, "So what?," shrugs Elkana, a young father living in an illegal hilltop extension near a state-sanctioned settlement, "revolutions are usually started by minorities."<sup>78</sup> In 2015, the Shin-Bet dismantled the Revolt,<sup>79</sup> a radical hilltop network seeking to destabilize Israel's secular regime by generating large-scale unrest and pave the way for a religious revolution. Ro'i, a former sympathizer, reveals the extent of the group's antagonism to secular Israeli culture by describing a vision that entails imposing religion on the mainstream public to force it back in line with prophecy:

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<sup>77</sup> Interview of the A. with Yamit, Binyamin Hills, December 27, 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Interview of the A. with Elkana, Tapuach West, December 28, 2017.

<sup>79</sup> The Revolt was a manifesto circulated amongst hilltop settlers, calling to establish a religious regime in Israel. The network that formed around this manifesto was dismantled (at least partially) in 2015, in a crackdown on hilltop groups following several "Price Tag" arson attacks against churches in Israel proper and a terror attack in the village of Duma, which killed 3 Palestinians.

The secular must return to religion, whether they want it or not. If they're doing something in the privacy of their home, okay, maybe there is no need to intervene, at least for now. But if they want to ride their car in the street on Shabbat? What exactly should be their punishment - I don't know. But we talked about this (...) Why should I need to convince them?! I want to force them. (...) It's for their own good.<sup>80</sup>

While visions developed in the other group were also based on the centrality of Jewish spiritual redemption, none entailed imposing religious law on the secular public. Indeed, they hoped for a collective redemption derived from the natural fusion of all "opposites in the land" or the radical transformative power of freedom. In the Revolt's vision, secular Jews must either disappear or submit to the domination of an authoritarian state whose culture is different from theirs – paradoxically, a drastic return to the exilic situation. A paradox which Shaul, another sympathizer of the Revolt living on a hilltop near Yitzhar, is quick to deny though the image of the "camps" he invokes unwittingly confirms that he also understands this resonance:

It's not like we'll send people to camps if they don't comply, we won't arrest people or things like that. I think that a lot of people drive on Shabbat because everyone does it. One of the things I liked about the Revolt was that it was practical. (...) So, for example, we had this idea that we were going to block Ayalon on Friday night. At first people will get angry (...) and eventually they will stop using the road. We'll educate progressively and they'll understand.<sup>81</sup>

This hilltop vision is thus necessarily exclusive of other aspirations, even within the Jewish collective. It asserts that Jews *must* be freed and advance towards a collective interpretation of messianic redemption, even if by coercion. To achieve this, the functions of the current State of Israel must be minimized until they can be replaced by "a religious power" that will enact religious laws and "rule according to the Torah." One should note that, contrary to Kookian Zionists, these hilltop activists do not attribute any inherent redemptive power to this new politico-religious construct. Rather, its all-encompassing authorities will ensure that Jews are worthy of redemption at God's will.

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<sup>80</sup> Interview of the A. with Ro'i, Gush Etzion, February 13, 2019.

<sup>81</sup> Interview of the A. with Shaul and his wife Avigail, Yizhar hills, November 24, 2017.

Their need to minimize the current government structures is clarified by the second difference noted at the beginning of this section. While the claim of the settlers of the previous section (which criticized the state as diasporic on the grounds that its character and policies did not express the transformations undergone by the Jews in the Land of Israel) also informs the hilltop context, it is reinforced by another, much more radical argument: the State of Israel is perceived as a hostile alien whose actions perpetuate in the Land of Israel the Jews' persecution in the diaspora. As for the *diasporization* described in the first section, this *alienation* is constituted by invoking exilic memories of persecutions: "We lived through expulsions and pogroms and the Shoah," says Avigail, Shaul's wife, joining the conversation, "now, there is a state. You say it's Jewish, but it's not behaving like a Jewish state. It's uprooting Jews and sending its army against us, that's not really Jewish sovereignty."

As such, the State of Israel is paradoxically rejected both as a weak exilic construct and as a coercive alien oppressor; it is thus neither Jewish nor revolutionary enough. Similarly, hilltop settlers describe themselves as exilic, in the sense that they are victims of state persecution, and territorial Jews whose strength is dedicated to conquering the land. This duality is revealed in an exchange between No'a and the young women of her hilltop about the fence enclosing the closest settlement.<sup>82</sup> "This idea that we're weak and we need protecting, it's diasporic," she grimaces. "Living behind fences, as if we're in the ghetto, persecuted and about to be killed." "A fence is nice against evacuations," retorts a girl whose family was evacuated from the outpost of Amona in 2017. "It doesn't help," cuts in another one, "when they have orders, they have to destroy everything. If you're in the way... even girls, they'll beat you up."

The redemptive role that was attributed to the state by religious Zionists, they claim, must now devolve upon them, since they are truly connected to the land. In contrast to the state's modern pragmatic relationship with territory, they stress their own intimate relationship with the land, which is sanctified not only as a symbol of divine promise, but as a sort of "metaphorical womb"<sup>83</sup> from which the Jews can be reborn to their true nature – and redeemed from exile. Their vision entails Jewish redemption by the land itself, rather than by the human enterprise returning the people to Israel. "We must separate ourselves from Zionism," explains Elishev'a, a former settler of the Yitzhar hills, referring to

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<sup>82</sup> The following exchange is reported from field notes, Binyamin Hills, January 21, 2019.

<sup>83</sup> Ohana, *The Origins of Israeli mythology*, 19.

Kabbalistic undertones in the philosophy of Rabbi Ginzburg whose yeshiva she brands as “the most radical place in the West Bank,” evidently delighted: “It’s like the shell that’s protected the fruit, and now to taste the true taste of the fruit, you must detach it.”<sup>84</sup> Their deconstruction of the Zionist concept of the new Jew is truly fundamentalist. Their aspiration is not for a modern new Jew in the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people, but for a revival of the ancestral Jew – never exiled and thus free from the Jewish diasporic past.

This idealized figure is embodied through aesthetic choices such as long hair covered by large and colorful, sometimes beaded, cloths, by which hilltop women adopt a style reminiscent of “the women of Israel.” It is also put in practice by a rejection of modern technology. None of these settlers, for example, owns a smartphone or a personal computer. Finally, it is enacted by picking living arrangements that echo those of ancient Hebrews. “I’m living in a tent, like the people of Israel in the Shiloh period,”<sup>85</sup> says Yehonatan,<sup>86</sup> walking me through his dark tent erected in Area B of the West Bank, a territory where Israeli civilians are not permitted to live. The meaning of his settling there is a defiant challenge to the limitations imposed on movement as a result of modern politics and the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Together, these strategies of archaization signify the settlers’ disengagement not only from the state but also from modern Israeli society, reviving the memory of a mythicized Biblical past<sup>87</sup> and signifying its symbolic continuity with their present selves. In perfect opposition to the Zionist mindset, redemption is sought by going back into the past, rather than by moving into the future.

Because they perceive connection with the land as the defining characteristic of the people of Israel, this relationship is claimed to be exclusively authentic, and the fact that others coexist with Jews on this land is abhorred. The state’s tolerance of Arab presence and Christian worship<sup>88</sup> on Israeli territory is interpreted as a challenge to the Jews’ absolute claim to the land. Elishev’a, for

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<sup>84</sup> Interview of the A. with Elisheva and her husband, Hebron hills, January 1, 2019.

<sup>85</sup> Part of the Biblical period between the entry of the Israelites into the Land of Canaan and the building of the First Temple, when the Tabernacle’s location in Shiloh made that town central for Israelite worship (as becomes apparent from Joshua, 18:1, or Samuel I, 3:21).

<sup>86</sup> The following exchange is reported from field notes, Yizhar Hills, November 24, 2017.

<sup>87</sup> Nehemia Stern, “The Social life of the Samson Saga in Israeli Religious Zionist Rabbinic Discourse” *Culture and Religion* 19/2 (2018): 177-200.

<sup>88</sup> While Muslim worship is opposed on mostly political grounds, I have noted that Christian worship is resisted in religious terms, as idolatry, and specifically detested.

example, describes her connection with the land in almost erotic terms and denounces its parallel use by Arabs as a desecration:

The land is part of us and we're a part of it. It's so intimate that sometimes I see Arabs planting trees, touching the soil, they're putting their seeds into the land, and I feel violated. It's stronger than me, I feel like they're raping me (...) I have this physical sense of illness. Hebron, of all places, the city of our forefathers and mothers, where the land gave birth to us, and they're planting their seeds.

In order for the Jews to be reborn of the land of Israel into their ancestral selves, others must leave the redemptive Jewish space. Constant friction with the Palestinians is interpreted as a sign of the complete need to exclude them from the Land of Israel. Violence against the non-Jews on the land thus receives value in the redemptive process: in order to free themselves from exile, the Jews must express their true territorial nature and rid the land of its other inhabitants. "We've been groomed into good Jews, disconnected from our animal nature," says Shaul, noting that the state is "once again preferring submissive Jews to free ones."<sup>89</sup> In order to achieve redemption, the Jews must express their true nature, "and taking revenge," he insists, "is a natural instinct." As such, while hilltop settlers also seek to integrate a Jewish collective identity spirituality into the Israeli space, in sharp contrast with the visions explored in the first section, hilltop redemptive ambitions are profoundly exclusive and entail erasing other memories, aspirations – and physical existence. The presence of others in the land – secular Jews, statist Jews, Christian pilgrims, or Palestinians – is a constant reminder that history has moved forth since the Biblical era. It must be removed to fulfil a messianic vision that can only be achieved despite the intruders.

### **Conclusions: "The Product of this Generation in this Land"**

Despite the very strong differences between the visions proposed by the two groups, they form together an important corpus of alternative to the statist religious Zionist political theology that once characterized the Israeli settlement movement. They derive from the beliefs and practices of a settler generation that has fostered doubts about the worldview of its elders. Far from the efforts of Yesh'a to normalize and urbanize settlements, this paper has explored alternative

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<sup>89</sup> Interview of the A. with Shaul and his wife Avigail, Yizhar hills, November 24, 2017.

(and often contradictory) collective visions of a new generation of religious and idealistic settlers who seek not only the rebirth of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, but that of Judaism itself. This spiritual pursuit, which gives rise to dreams of either exclusion or fusion with other aspirations in the land, is shared by settlers across this paper's two ethnographic sections.

A key difference between the settlers cited in the two sections pertains to their vision of what constitutes redemption. The first group claims a central role in the Jewish redemptive process, framing the state as an instrument of exilic Judaism so as to shape Jewish destinies beyond its limitations. Doing so, they frame themselves as the true heirs of the Zionist enterprise, which they demand to reinterpret in light of interpretations of redemption that are territorialized in the Land of Israel but not in the State of Israel in its current form and essence, entitling them to leadership towards alternative collective visions *beyond the state*. The second role dismisses the state not merely as an instrument but as a reenactment of Jewish exile in the Land of Israel and an instrument of Jewish persecution. The settlers thus seek a Jewish identity that is both free from exile and removed from the modernity inherent in Zionism, a radically fundamentalist identity, and to impose their redemptive vision by force, through the erasure of other histories and aspirations in the land, *despite* the State of Israel.

While various authors have approached the transformations of the religious Zionist public through its theological sources and ideological production<sup>90</sup> and through an economical perspective,<sup>91</sup> this paper has explored specifically how redemption from exile and the role of the State of Israel in the Jewish redemptive process are interpreted phenomenologically by young settler activists and elaborated into political and social visions that largely depart from statist religious Zionism. I have shown how memories of the Jewish diaspora are mobilized as discursive objects to frame the State of Israel as an instrument of exile rather than as a vector of collective salvation, allowing these young settlers to assign themselves a central role in the Jewish redemptive process. Their visions

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<sup>90</sup> Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Messianism and Politics. The Ideological Transformation of Religious Zionism," *Israel Studies* 19/2 (2014): 239-263; Motti Inbari, *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Dov Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism. History and Ideology*, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009); Stern, "First Flowering of Redemption."

<sup>91</sup> Nissim Leon, "The Transformation of Israel's Religious Zionist Middle Class," *The Journal of Israeli History* 29/1 (2010): 61-78.

thus seek to detach the State of Israel from the process of Jewish redemption. I argue that this disengagement is not simply political but is often also accompanied by a scathing critique of secular culture in Israel, which is embodied in significant trends of disengagement from secular Israeli society.

Further, exploring whether these visions seek to minimize or rather maximize the influence of collective political constructs on the lives of Jews in the Land of Israel, I have argued that neither their disconnection of the state from the Jewish redemptive process in rejection of statist religious Zionism, nor their proximity with neo-Hasidic philosophies, inherently imply that they are distancing themselves from redemptive messianism or even collectivist ideals. Indeed, while some authors have understood the emergence of new visions as driven by the disenchantment with the redemptive promise of the early settlement days,<sup>92</sup> I understand their aspirations as signals of the vitality of these messianic hopes, which are reinterpreted and infused with new meanings by a new generation of settlers – questioning the dichotomy established by Zionist thinkers and their scholars between exile, which is associated with the diaspora, and the State of Israel, which embodies collective redemption. In the words of one of my informants, these visions constitute “the product of this generation in this land.”

The ethnographic approach of this paper has often highlighted the fact that seemingly irresolvable theoretical oppositions are often resolved through creative arrangements in daily practice. A hilltop couple described to me having inscribed the bride’s right to celebrate Israeli Independence Day in their wedding contract out of respect for her parents. This despite their shared rejection of the institutions and policies of the State of Israel. She had reciprocated by allowing the groom yearly pilgrimage to the tomb of Rabbi Nahman of Breslov, the reviver of Hassidic mysticism, in Ukraine. This, despite their shared belief that Jews should not absent themselves from the Land of Israel. The ability of the young settler interviewed in this paper to navigate different theological and ideological frameworks despite (and perhaps for) their inherent contradiction may be the most obvious manifestation of neo-liberal influence on young religious Zionist settler publics.

One should not be tempted, as such, to see the settlers of the two sections as mutual opposites. Despite the difference in their beliefs and aspirations, they should be considered as expressing different levels of political, societal and

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<sup>92</sup> Ram, “National, Ethnic or Civic?”; Stern, “First Flowering of Redemption.”

cultural disengagement. The boundaries between them are flexible and do not suffice to sever them from each other. They signal points of reference on a spectrum rather than rupture lines. Competing for resources and influence over the settler public, the settlers of the two sections are also bound together by various activist endeavors (such as Temple Mount activism) and by deep social and economic ties. Throughout my fieldwork, I paid attention to dynamics of integration and exclusion of hilltop settlers in settlement communities. Though it cannot be denied that many statist communities fear the influence of the hilltop lifestyle on their youths, and sometimes exclude their children who have taken it on, it is today almost impossible to find ideological homogeneity in settler communities across the West Bank.

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**Perle Nicolle-Hasid** is a PhD candidate in the department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her dissertation explores the political and societal dynamics of radical Jewish groups in Israel since the Gaza pullout of 2005. Her research is supported by the Hoffman Leadership and Responsibility Fellowship, the Ruthi Gilutz Fellowship at the Truman Research Institute in Jerusalem, and the Scholarship for Excellence and Innovation in Research of the President of Israel.

**Keywords:** Israeli Settlement Movement, Religious Zionism, West Bank, Messianism, State of Israel

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## Employing Women Immigrants from France in Israeli French-Speaking Companies: Honey Trap or Safety Net?

*by Shirly Bar-Lev and Karin Amit*

### Abstract

*This study focuses on the employment experience of French immigrant women working in French-speaking service companies in Israel (most of them call centers). We asked whether this employment pattern represents an opportunity for the French women immigrants (“safety net”) or a barrier (“honey trap”). To answer this question, we interviewed 31 French women immigrants employed at French-speaking call centers and conducted interviews with the managers of five call centers. Our study points to several themes, revealing the call centers as a necessary income source that also offers flexible work conditions, defines norms of emotional behavior, blurs the lines between secular and sacred, and serves as a community center. In addition, our study reveals that French immigrant women working in call centers express ambivalent attitudes toward their workplace and are aware of the complexity arising to their work pattern. It appears that while in the short term the transnational employment pattern presented in this study fulfills an economic, communal and social need for the immigrants, in the long run it may hinder their integration into the Hebrew-speaking job market.*

### Introduction

#### Women’s Employment and Social Compensation

#### Immigrants from France

#### Research Method

#### Findings

*Theme 1: The Need to Earn a Living – The Call Center as an Income Source*

*Theme 2: The Importance of Flexibility at Work*

*Theme 3: Display Rules and Identity Management at the French-Speaking Call Center*

*Theme 4: Blurring the Lines between Secular and Sacred – The Call Center as a Community Center*

*Theme 5: Ambivalent Attitudes toward the Workplace – “Honey Trap” or Safety Net?*

## Discussion

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## Introduction

The number of immigrants from France to Israel has increased dramatically in recent years, reaching a peak of over 7,000 in 2015. The number subsequently dropped to about 5,000 in 2016 and fewer than 4,000 in 2017 (CBS, 2017). A significant percentage of the immigrants from France are between the ages 18-65, and can thus be expected to join the Israeli workforce. According to recent studies, although these immigrants come from a Western country and may be classified as skilled migrants, they face challenges in integrating into the Israeli labor market.<sup>1</sup>

This study focuses on a relatively new development closely linked to this in the Israeli employment landscape: work in companies located in Israel that provide services in French to French-speaking communities abroad. Most of these are service centers offering relatively flexible employment conditions, making them attractive to women immigrants from France. However, the call centers are also relatively unstable. In most cases, employment at these centers is temporary, with almost no prospect for advancement. In addition, call center representatives must speak fluent, native French. These requirements transform the call centers into a cultural and social enclave, which can either preserve the French

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<sup>1</sup> Karin Amit, Shirly Bar-Lev, “The formation of transnational identity among French immigrants employed in French-speaking companies in Israel,” *International Migration* 54/3 (2016): 110-124.

immigrants' foreignness and prevent them from integrating into the Israeli job market, or afford them the tools necessary to advance their integration.<sup>2</sup>

We analyze the experiences of 31 French women immigrants working at French-speaking call service centers, with a view to deciding whether this employment pattern represents an opportunity for them or a barrier. We study the women's perceptions related to their labor market experience and the difficulties they face, and try to assess how structural conditions shape their subjective responses. In this respect, the study responds to the growing interest in immigrant women's experience at work.

Research in immigration and labor indicates different coping strategies for immigrant men and women. In the present study, we show how women immigrants from France who are employed at French-speaking call centers have chosen to position themselves in the labor market. While we recognize the low quality of this employment pattern, which offers poorly remunerated jobs in nonstandard forms of employment, we also note that the call centers offer some positive opportunities for immigrant women.<sup>3</sup> Based on the different individual employment experiences of these immigrant women, we aim to uncover how the unique characteristics of the French-speaking call center serve to reinforce these women's sense of belonging and facilitate the formulation of their own sense of national and religious identity.

### **Women's Employment and Social Compensation**

Women immigrants are clearly key figures in global migration movements.<sup>4</sup> Lippi-Green<sup>5</sup> encourages the study of the gendered effects of migration, namely, how migration affects gender roles both in the labor market and at home. In this study, we ask how migration affects women's career choices and trajectories. We

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

<sup>3</sup> Sigal Nagar-Ron, Einat Lachover, "Special issue. Feminist perspectives about work", *Hagar: International Social Studies Review* 11/2 (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Castels, Mark Miller, *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2013); Uzi Rebhun, "Immigration, gender, and earnings in Israel," *European Journal of Population/Revue européenne de Démographie* 26/1 (2010): 73-97; Katharine M. Donato et al., "Social Science Research Council. A glass half full? Gender in migration studies," *International Migration Review* 40/1 (2006): 3-26.

<sup>5</sup> Rosina Lippi-Green, *English with an accent. Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*, (London – New York: Routledge, 2012).

do so by contextualizing the employment choices of female immigrants of French descent in the Israeli online services market, operated via the internet and telephone.

Most studies of female immigrant labor have focused on uneducated women employed in low-skilled jobs.<sup>6</sup> They have presented evidence of the double disadvantage of these women in the labor market due to their being both women and immigrants.<sup>7</sup> But globalization processes have led to the emergence of new employment patterns based on communications and advanced information technologies, with the new jobs requiring higher level skills. One key example of the new patterns of employment is service centers that operate using the telephone and internet (call centers). These jobs are characterized by flexible and convenient conditions (minimal hours, close to home) that encourage the active participation of women, particularly immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

Gender studies literature indicates a paradox in connection with the change that is taking place in women's status in global employment.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, women are penetrating fields to which they had little or no access in the past, thus reducing the gender gap in the employment market. On the other hand, women's employment today still suffers from structural disadvantages that substantially impact women's ability to plan for their financial future.<sup>10</sup> According to Yuval-Davis,<sup>11</sup> these patterns reinforce gender differences in the job market.

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<sup>6</sup> Jose C. Moya, "Domestic service in a global perspective. Gender, migration, and ethnic niches," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33/4 (2007): 558-579.

<sup>7</sup> Rebeca Raijman, Moshe Semyonov, "Gender, ethnicity, and immigration. Double disadvantage and triple disadvantage among recent immigrant women in the Israeli labor market," *Gender & Society* 11/1 (1997): 108-125.

<sup>8</sup> Donato et al., "Social Science Research Council."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*; Nira Yuval-Davis, "Women, globalization and contemporary politics of belonging," *Gender, Technology and Development* 13/1 (2009): 1-19.

<sup>10</sup> Orly Benjamin, "Gender research in Israel in the context of accelerating neoliberalization and effort to challenge it," *Gender* 1 (2012): 23-42; Orly Benjamin, "The Narratives of New Public Management in an International and Israeli Perspective and the Gendered Political Economy of Care Work," Special issue on *Care. Work, Relations, Regimes, Soziale Welt* 20 (2014): 253-268.

<sup>11</sup> Yuval-Davis, "Women, globalization and contemporary politics of belonging."

Employment at French-speaking call centers should be considered in light of the opportunities and barriers presented by the Israeli job market.<sup>12</sup> In 2012, the labor force participation rate of Israeli Jewish men stood at about 83%, while the rate for Israeli Jewish women was 86% (a relatively high figure compared with European countries).<sup>13</sup> The liberalization of the Israeli job market in the early 2000s consisted of wage reductions and massive layoffs, especially in the public sector workforce. It curtailed benefits and transfer payments, especially child benefits, unemployment compensation and income support, and the adoption of stricter eligibility guidelines.<sup>14</sup> The expansion of the service industries, particularly in the public sector, enlarged employment opportunities for Israeli women. However, recent global economic crises have resulted in higher job instability for both Israeli men and women. Highly skilled men and women can experience unemployment for prolonged periods of time, as well as frequent switching between jobs. These disrupted work patterns characterize women's employment more than men's.<sup>15</sup> Despite increasing liberalization of the Israeli job market, men's employment remains more stable than women's, thus affording men higher rewards than women from formal employment. Men's salaries are higher, and they have more opportunities for advancement and access to lucrative jobs.<sup>16</sup>

Call centers are a good example of how communication and information technologies are expanding employment opportunities for immigrant women, as well as changing traditional attitudes toward place and time in the working world. Most of the centers act as service contractors – they employ call representatives through short-term employment contracts and “irregular”

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<sup>12</sup> Galit Aharon, “Gender careers in Israel and their effect on salary,” *Israeli Sociology* 18/1 (2016): 31-55.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Bental, Vered Kraus, Yuval Yonay, “Ethnic and gender earning gaps in a liberalized economy. The case of Israel,” *Social science research* 63 (2017): 209-226; Patricia B. Barger, Alicia Ann Grandey, “Service with a smile and encounter satisfaction. Emotional contagion and appraisal mechanisms,” *Academy of Management Journal* 49/6 (2006): 1229-1238.

<sup>14</sup> Mimi Ajzenstadt, “Moral panic and neo-liberalism. The case of single mothers on welfare in Israel,” *The British Journal of Criminology* 49/1 (2008): 68-87.

<sup>15</sup> Aharon, “Gender careers in Israel and their effect on salary.”

<sup>16</sup> Francine D. Blau et al., “The declining significance of gender?,” in *The Declining Significance of Gender?*, eds. Francine D. Blau et al., (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 3-34; Haya Stier, Yaish Meir, “Occupational segregation and gender inequality in job quality. A multi-level approach,” *Work, employment and society* 28/2 (2014): 225-246.

employment formats.<sup>17</sup> This employment pattern enables the immigrants, most of whom (about 80%) are women who speak no or poor Hebrew, to integrate quickly into the Israeli labor market using the language and cultural skills that they acquired in their origin country. In a similar pattern, ultra-Orthodox and Arab women are employed with relatively low salaries in the high-tech industry in Israel.<sup>18</sup> In their research, Whittock et al.<sup>19</sup> assert that partial employment of this type can prove to be a “honey trap,” as it ultimately prevents women from improving their Hebrew and advancing professionally.

As noted, French-speaking call centers in Israel provide services to customers in many French-speaking countries. The fate of these companies is significantly affected by fluctuations in the French economy as well as by French labor laws and regulations. Besides displaying a service mentality and persuasive ability, call center representatives are expected to speak native French and to convey the impression that the caller is in France. In addition to accent training, other methods of “de-Israelizing” employees at French-speaking call centers might involve management-imposed requirements to adopt non-Jewish French names and mask the call center’s location.<sup>20</sup> The masking provides a valuable context for our study of nested and cross-cultural identities at work.<sup>21</sup> Even more specific to our study’s objectives, these “communication events,” involving strict boundary-setting processes, offer immigrant women opportunities reflectively to construct their own sense of Israeli identity.

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<sup>17</sup> Orly Benjamin, Rona Goclaw, “Narrating the power of non-standard employment. The case of the Israeli public sector,” *Journal of Management Studies* 42/4 (2005): 737-759.

<sup>18</sup> Gadi Algazi, “Matrix at Bil’in. A story of colonial capitalism in contemporary Israel,” *Theory and Criticism* 29 (2006): 173-191 [Hebrew].

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Whittock et al. “‘The tender trap’. Gender, part-time nursing and the effects of ‘family-friendly’ policies on career advancement,” *Sociology of Health and Illness* 24/3 (2002): 305-326.

<sup>20</sup> Raka Shome, “Thinking through the diaspora. Call centers, India, and a new politics of hybridity,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9/1 (2006): 105-124; Premilla D’Cruz, Ernesto Noronha, “Doing emotional labour. The experiences of Indian call centre agents,” *Global Business Review* 9/1 (2008): 131-147; Vandana Nath, “Aesthetic and emotional labour through stigma. National identity management and racial abuse in offshored Indian call centres,” *Work, employment and society* 25/4 (2011): 709-725.

<sup>21</sup> Diya Das, Ravi Dharwadkar, Pamela Brandes, “The importance of being Indian. Identity centrality and work outcomes in an off-shored call center in India,” *Human Relations* 61/11 (2008): 1499-1530.

## Immigrants from France

In recent years, the number of French immigrants to Israel has risen significantly, reaching a peak of over 7000 in 2015. In the past three years, the number of new arrivals dropped to around 4500 immigrants from France per year, a rate which remains significant when compared to other immigrant groups. Yet despite growing public interest in the Jewish community of France and its immigrants to Israel, academic research on this population remains sparse.<sup>22</sup>

According to Cohen's studies,<sup>23</sup> several factors push the Jews to emigrate from France: the increase in anti-Semitic incidents and terror attacks targeting Jews and fear for continued Jewish existence in France; concern over the aggressive attitudes that certain circles in France (such as its large Muslim population) display toward Israel due to its policies in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and difficulties experienced by the French and European economy in the past decade. Research on French immigrants in Israel, mainly based on immigrant surveys, shows that the main motives for immigration are Zionist and religious.<sup>24</sup> Fear of anti-Semitism, although emphasized in the Israeli media, is not indicated in the surveys by the immigrants themselves as a significant motive. However, this finding must be qualified, as it may be explained by immigrants' rationalization following immigration and their desire to emphasize the pull (positive) motives for immigration to Israel.<sup>25</sup> The studies also show that immigrants from France are characterized by higher than average levels of education and lifestyle, and most define themselves as traditional or religious.<sup>26</sup> In a recently published

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<sup>22</sup> Erik H. Cohen, *The Jews of France at the Turn of the Third Millennium. A Sociological and Cultural analysis*, (The Rappaport Center: Bar Ilan University, 2009); Id., *The Jews of France Today. Identity and Values*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Sergio Della Pergola, "Jews in Europe. Demographic trends, contexts and outlooks," in *Jewish Experience in Unifying Europe*, eds. Julius H. Schoeps, Olaf Gloagier, (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3-34; Karin Amit, Shirly Bar-Lev, "Immigrants' sense of belonging to the host country. The role of life satisfaction, language proficiency, and religious motives," *Social Indicators Research* 124/3 (2015): 947-961; Karin Amit, Shirly Bar-Lev, "The formation of transnational identity among French immigrants employed in French-speaking companies in Israel," *International Migration* 54/3 (2016): 110-124.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, *The Jews of France at the Turn of the Third Millennium*; Id., *The Jews of France Today. Identity and Values*.

<sup>24</sup> Karin Amit, "Life satisfaction of immigrants who come to Israel from Western countries," *Hagira* 1 (2012): 80-97 [Hebrew].

<sup>25</sup> Sergio Della Pergola et al., "The Six-Day War and Israel-Diaspora relations. An analysis of quantitative indicators," in *The Six-Day War and World Jewry*, ed. Eli Lederhendler, (Bethesda, MD: University of Maryland Press, 2000), 11-50.

<sup>26</sup> Amit, "Life satisfaction of immigrants who come to Israel from Western countries."

book, Ben Rafael & Ben Rafael show that French immigrants tend to live in ethnic communities in major cities (Jerusalem, Netanya, Ashdod), and that they share several characteristics in common, lending them a homogeneous aspect as a group: most are educated, middle class, religiously observant and of North African origin.<sup>27</sup>

Studies of the integration of French immigrants into the Israeli job market indicate that they are very active economically (98%), especially in comparison with other immigrant groups from Western countries (North Americans – 79%, other Europeans – 61%, according to Pupko<sup>28</sup>). In terms of their socio-economic status, French immigrants resemble those that came from North America.<sup>29</sup> However, as English speakers, immigrants from North America find it easier to integrate into the Israeli job market, due to the global nature of the Israeli economy and the dominance of English in the international market. In addition, the Israeli government recognizes North American credentials in many professions, thus allowing immigrants to continue working in their field. By comparison, highly skilled French immigrants face more difficulties in obtaining Israeli government recognition for their professional credentials and academic diplomas. French immigrants in Israel are often asked to undergo long and demanding certification processes, and in Hebrew. For many of the French immigrants, this obstacle is insurmountable. Thus, many French immigrants feel that their economic status has worsened in Israel.<sup>30</sup> In addition, many maintain a strong connection to their country of origin (through physical employment in France or employment in French in Israel).

A recent study based on a survey of 355 immigrants from France examines issues related to their integration into the Israeli job market.<sup>31</sup> At the time of the survey, some 70% of the respondents were working as salaried employees, while 22% were independently employed. Of the salaried employees who participated in the survey (188 immigrants), 48% reported that the dominant language spoken

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<sup>27</sup> Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Miriam Ben-Rafael, *Sociologie et sociolinguistique des francophonies israéliennes*, (Frankfurt, Berlin, New York: Peter Lang, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Israel Pupko, *Multi-local Aliyah. Placing two feet in two places*, (Jerusalem: The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Amit, "Life satisfaction of immigrants who come to Israel from Western countries."

<sup>30</sup> Pupko, *Multi-local Aliyah. Placing two feet in two places*; Anat Meidan, "French olim struggle to practice their professions in Israel," *Ynetnews*, December 14, 2017, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4945080,00.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Karin Amit, Shirly Bar-Lev, "Transnational Identity of French Immigrants Employed in French speaking Companies," *Hagira* 4 (2015): 34-52 [Hebrew].



at their workplace was French (most were employed at call centers). The study's findings indicated ethnic isolation of the French immigrants both at work and outside it: French immigrants employed at French-speaking companies live in neighborhoods with a high concentration of French speakers, and most of their friends are French speakers. These immigrants speak poor Hebrew. However, the study found that despite their cultural isolation and without any relation to their job, most of the French immigrants have a strong feeling of belonging to Israeli society. The researchers explained these findings based on the French immigrants' strong Zionist and religious motivation for immigration, and on the fact that most define themselves as connected to the Jewish religion (traditional or religious).

## Research Method

This study follows the recommendation of researchers on gender and immigration who assert that qualitative methods lead to significant conclusions regarding the integration of women in job positions through a broader understanding of the context in which they operate.<sup>32</sup>

In 2012-2013 and again in 2015, we conducted a series of 31 interviews with women immigrants from France who were living in Israel and were employed at French-speaking call centers. In addition, we held interviews with the managers of 5 call centers that we visited. We contacted the interviewees through a preliminary contact list of 80 French-speaking companies that employ immigrants from France. This list was provided by AMI, a leading non-profit organization providing assistance for French immigrants. We also contacted 5 call centers in Jerusalem and Netanya that employ French immigrants. The first contact was with the general managers and human resources managers at the call centers. We then coordinated visits for on-site observations and interviews with employees.

The age of the interviewees in the study ranged between 23-62 (average 42.7). Most of the interviewees had immigrated to Israel in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and had been living in Israel for around 10 years. Most came from families that had immigrated to France during the 1950s and 1960s from North

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<sup>32</sup> Donato, "Social Science Research Council."; Patricia R. Pessar, "On the homefront and in the workplace. Integrating immigrant women into feminist discourse," *Anthropological Quarterly* 68/1 (1995): 37-47.

Africa (primarily Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco). Some 45% of the interviewees had a higher education. At the time of the interviews, 21 of the interviewees (78%) were employed at French-speaking call centers in Israel. The rest were self-employed or in the process of establishing a business, but had worked at call centers in the past.

The interviews were conducted in French, with the goal of encouraging the interviewees to talk about their employment experience in Israel in a way that would expose their world of personal and subjective meaning.<sup>33</sup> The interpretive paradigm suggests that social action should be analyzed from the actors' standpoint. To gain this type of empathic insight we tried to keep our questions to a minimum, and let the participants invite us into their world. We accordingly structured the interview to include four basic questions. We began by asking the women to share their immigration stories. We then asked them to tell us how they ended up working in the call center. Next, we asked how they experience their work (hardships, amusing anecdotes, work relationships with colleagues and bosses). Finally, we asked them to share their future plans as well as their perspective on their identity as immigrants, mothers, and wives. We identified five central themes that were reiterated by the interviewees: 1) the call center as an income source, 2) display rules and identity management in the French-speaking call center, 3) the call center as a community center, 4) the importance of flexibility at work, and 5) ambivalent attitudes toward the workplace.

To supplement the data obtained from the interviews, we carried out observations at five call centers – three in Jerusalem and two in Netanya. Most of the employees at these companies are women (80%). The work is organized in shifts, and most of the employees work part-time (4 hours per day). At the companies we visited, workdays are Monday through Thursday. The base salary is between 30-50 NIS per hour, not including sales bonuses. The role of the call representatives is to promote and/or sell services or merchandise to individuals or companies in France. The employees go through a training session of several weeks (depending on the company and product sold), during which they learn about the product, the relevant market for this product in France, and the sales process. Each employee is expected to handle an average of 120 calls per day. The

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<sup>33</sup> Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, Gabriela Spector-Marzel, "Introduction. Narrative research definitions and contexts," in *Narrative research. Theory, creation and interpretation*, eds. Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, Gabriela Spector-Marzel, (Jerusalem: Magnes and Mofet, 2010), 7-42 [Hebrew].

French customer on the other end of the line usually does not realize that the call is coming from Israel.

Several of the interviewees in our study had worked as call representatives for gambling websites of questionable legality. Perhaps for this reason, some of them were reticent about discussing their workplace. They tended to be vague about the work routine and supplied few details about their work experience at the center. However, most of the interviewees were cooperative.

## Findings

### *Theme 1: The Need to Earn a Living – The Call Center as an Income Source*

None of the interviewees perceived their work as a career venue; instead, most asserted that they worked to earn a living. They considered their salaries higher than what they would be offered elsewhere in the Israeli labor market. The call center was often thought of as a temporary solution that mainly served as a convenient, easily accessible source of income. Most of the interviews noted poor command of Hebrew as a main barrier to competing for other jobs in the Israeli labor market. Eva was 35 at the time of the interview, married with two children. She worked at a call center in Jerusalem. She immigrated to Israel in 1997 after completing 13 years of education. Prior to working at a call center, she had worked in a family business which went bankrupt.

I must work – we were thrown into the deep end. We survive thanks to these call centers. We need them. If these companies didn't exist, we wouldn't survive here... Maybe I should look for a job in Hebrew. I can speak, but writing is hard for me.<sup>34</sup>

Eva acknowledges her poor Hebrew as a significant barrier in searching for other employment and is thus appreciative of the opportunity offered by the call centers to earn a living.

Clariss is single, 32 years old, and lives in Tel Aviv. She immigrated to Israel ten years prior to our interview. At the age of 18, she felt she was "too religious to serve in the army," so she returned to France, where she participated in the 2012

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<sup>34</sup> Interview of the first and second Author with Eva, Jerusalem, December, 2012.

protests against anti-Semitism. Eventually she returned to Israel. She also recognizes the benefits of working in a call center, but is overwhelmed by its disadvantages:

At some point, I thought of working in a [gambling] call center to make money. But I know it is a bit of a scam. And you have to make calls, which is off-putting. The people who work there hate it. They do it only to earn money. Apart from that, it adds to their stress. You are sitting in your small cubicle, cut off from everyone, and you have to call people for hours and be productive. It's hard... I am in Israel. If I don't learn Hebrew, I will not be able to work at a [good] company. And I am almost done with my studies.<sup>35</sup>

Muriel arrived in Israel in 2010. She is a wife and the mother of an 18-year-old daughter and a 14-year-old son. Settled in Ashdod, Muriel describes herself as a Shabbat and Kashrut observer. When asked, "How would you describe your workday?" she responded:

I wanted to keep busy. I wanted to earn a living [*parnassah*]. I asked myself what I could do. I refused to retake the accreditation exam. I got an offer from a call center. I chose the easy path: To work in an office, answer the phone. I am well paid. And here I am a year later... I am not excited about the job, but it is a living.<sup>36</sup>

The women interviewed maintained a practical attitude to working in a call center. An instrumental or a sensible approach to work is aligned with the vocational discourse predominant in certain religious circles,<sup>37</sup> in which women are encouraged to seek employment in the community while also tending to their children, thus freeing their husbands to study Torah in a Kollel or Yeshiva. In this context, discourse of self-fulfillment and empowerment is often frowned

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<sup>35</sup> Interview of research assistant with Claris, Tel-Aviv, February, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Interview of research assistant with Muriel, Ashdod, December, 2012

<sup>37</sup> Liat Kulik, "Explaining Employment Hardiness Among Women in Israel's Ultraorthodox Community: Facilitators and Inhibitors," *Journal of Career Assessment* 24/1 (2016): 67-85; Azi Lev-On, Rivka Neriya-Ben Shahr, "To browse, or not to browse? Third person effect among Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women, in regards to the perceived danger of the internet," in *New media and intercultural communication. Identity, community, and politics*, eds. Pauline Hope Cheong, Judith N. Martin, Leah Pauline Macfadyen, (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 223-236.

upon.<sup>38</sup> This norm may explain why the women we interviewed rarely expressed a sense of pride in their work, nor openly celebrated their many accomplishments. However, the way they constructed their stories implied a general sense of self-sufficiency and a belief in their ability to influence important aspects of their lives. In many of the stories, men (usually their husbands) were mentioned only in passing. Often, the speaker's perseverance would come to the fore immediately following details of her husband's failure to provide adequately for the family. Muriel's story is most illustrative:

My husband wanted to integrate into the Israeli job market. He spoke basic Hebrew. He was unemployed for so long that it caused a lot of tension with the children and with me. He worked at a supermarket, in the fruits and vegetables section. He stayed one week: he said it was laborious. He said that the bosses mistreated him. He left and started working as a security guard in a parking lot. He figured he didn't need to talk much in this type of a job... but he didn't keep that job either. He then worked at a call center. The conditions there were harsh. He was bored. Some friends launched another call center. It paid much better than an 'immigrant job' in the Israeli labor market. However, remaining in the French-speaking market did not improve his Hebrew. He managed to stay with this call center for 14 months. But the job did not give him what he wanted anymore. He left. Now he is trying another call center. So, I thought to myself, where can I work to help?<sup>39</sup>

Nava works at a call center in Natanya. She immigrated with her husband and three children eight years prior to this interview.

I had to fight with the school administration, so they would not put my child in an 'Olim class. I wanted her to mix with Israelis. And I did it!!!! She is now in Shnat Sherut at Misrad Habitahon (doing national service for the state security office). With my son, it was a nightmare. They stuck him in an all 'Olim class and forgot him there. School ends at 14:00, and I had to work. My husband did not speak a word of Hebrew. He was a hairdresser in France, but here he couldn't converse with the clients. He ended up in a call center. But it was too much for him. We thought this

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<sup>38</sup> Rivka Neriya-Ben Shahar, "For we ascend in holiness and do not descend.' Jewish ultra-Orthodox women's agency through their discourse about media," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 18/2 (2019): 212-226.

<sup>39</sup> Interview of research assistant with Muriel, Ashdod, December, 2012.

job would last till retirement, but he keeps moving from one call center to another... I am very professional. I speak nicely to the customers, and I know my job.<sup>40</sup>

Again, Nava describes her determination in stark opposition to her husband's ineffectualness. For others, the men in their lives were an absent presence. Isabel immigrated to Israel in the early 1990s. She arrived with a nine-month-old baby, and soon thereafter she and her husband opened a restaurant, which failed. Eight years prior to the interview, her husband left her with three grown children:

I have been working at call centers for eight years now. He comes and goes, but I provide for my family. My son still lives with me. But now that he is 21, I can work 140 hours a week non-stop. I try to put in as many hours as I can. I stop only for lunch. The rules are not made to accommodate single mothers and their children, but I manage.<sup>41</sup>

The women composed their stories as series of banalities. Yet subtly they each told a story of successful coping with obstacles that emerge on both the work and the home fronts. Nevertheless, the identity they put forward is a complex one – their work identities must complement their identities as dedicated mothers and wives, as per the dictates of religious discourse concerning women's employment.

### ***Theme 2: The Importance of Flexibility at Work***

For most of the women working at call centers, employment flexibility was very important. This was needed to allow young mothers to raise their children without needing a paid childcare arrangement. For the older women, flexible work hours enabled them to help take care of their grandchildren, attend religious classes, do housework and even work a second job. Charlene is a single mother who immigrated to Israel in 1997. She was 30 at the time of the interview, a widowed mother of three, and had completed 13 years of schooling. She was employed at a call center in Jerusalem:

After the children were born, it was easier to work at jobs for the French. They gave me half-day shifts and I earned well. I don't work on Sundays,

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<sup>40</sup> Interview of research assistant with Nava, Ashdod, January, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Interview of research assistant with Isabel, Ashdod, January, 2013.

nor on Fridays or Saturdays. With the bonuses, I can earn up to NIS 7000. Not bad for four hours of work per day. It works for me.<sup>42</sup>

Barbara immigrated to Israel in 2007. She describes herself as an observant Jew. At the time of the interview she was 44, married with three children, and had an MBA. She was employed at a call center in Netanya.

In Israel, I studied at an ulpan (Hebrew immersion program). But the first year was very difficult – a year of depression. I cried constantly. I felt helpless in dealing with the education system... I started working here 5 1/2 years ago. It was hard to go back to work. I had no choice, because I don't speak Hebrew and I had to find work quickly. I manage with the hours. I've stayed with the company because of the proximity to home and flexible work hours, although the job doesn't pay very well. But that's not the most important thing. My husband couldn't find stable employment. He worked at odd jobs for 25 NIS per hour (he's a computer guy). For the past three years, he has worked at a French-speaking call center. Together, we manage with the kids.<sup>43</sup>

Anael also emphasizes the importance of flexibility as a significant factor in choosing to work at a call center. In her case, language was not a central factor, as she speaks fluent Hebrew and had worked for Hebrew-speaking companies. Anael immigrated to Israel in 2007. At the time of the interview she was 25, married with two children, and held a BA degree in business management. Yet she chose to work at a call center in Netanya.

I didn't have a problem with the language. I worked for two years at an Israeli finance company in Tel Aviv. After I had my first child, I continued to work until 4 pm. But travelling back and forth every day was exhausting. When my daughter was born, I didn't work for a year, so that I could take care of her. I'm alone, I have no [other] family here... I went back to work just two weeks ago, 4 hours a day. That way is best for the family. This time, I chose to work in French, even though I have no problem in Hebrew, for two reasons: the salary and the flexibility. That's a default, it's not my first choice. We're not talking about personal ambition or career goals. This job is what's there. I would like to find

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<sup>42</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Charlene, Jerusalem, February, 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Barbara, Netanya, August, 2015.

another job, but it's hard because of the kids. It's not easy to combine work and family. My first goal is to take care of my kids, to be available for them.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Theme 3: Display Rules and Identity Management at the French-Speaking Call Center***

The French-speaking call center maintains norms of emotional displays to instruct workers (mainly women) how to interact with callers in socially acceptable ways. Employees are selected, trained, and monitored for friendly and enthusiastic displays,<sup>45</sup> so as to ensure customer satisfaction and service quality ratings.<sup>46</sup>

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild's seminal study, "The Managed Heart," extended this line of thought by suggesting that emotional control is a variant of social and economic control. She defined "emotional labor" or "emotional work" as the efforts that employees are expected to invest in adopting the company's ideology regarding how they should feel in a variety of situations.<sup>47</sup> Under this definition, "emotional laborers" are workers who must suppress their emotions in order to sell their company's image. Display rules are the explicit and implicit expectations of emotional expression while at work. These display rules are a key component of emotional labor jobs in which the employee is expected to "produce an emotional state in another person." Through training and supervision, management "exercises a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees."<sup>48</sup>

Arie is 48 years old and married. He immigrated to Israel in 2008, and in 2009 founded a call center in Netanya that provides secretarial services for French

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<sup>44</sup> Interview of research assistant with Anael, Ashdod, January, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>46</sup> Patricia B. Barger, Alicia Ann Grandey, "Service with a smile and encounter satisfaction. Emotional contagion and appraisal mechanisms," *Academy of Management Journal* 49/6 (2006): 1229-1238; Douglas S. Pugh, "Service with a smile. Emotional contagion in the service encounter," *Academy of Management Journal* 44/5 (2001): 1018-1027.

<sup>47</sup> Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 147; Lori Sideman Goldberg, Alicia Ann Grandey, "Display rules versus display autonomy. Emotion regulation, emotional exhaustion, and task performance in a call center simulation," *Journal of occupational health psychology* 12/3 (2007): 301.



physicians in France. He describes the working conditions and behavioral expectations at his call center:

I employ 10 women, religious and non-religious; some work part time and others full time. Work hours are 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. from Monday to Saturday. In terms of skills, I look for someone who can write and know how to express herself in correct French. She also needs to have a pleasant manner and understand people. The job is very stressful, especially on Monday mornings. Dispatchers must manage 30,000 calls a month, 200 calls a day... Our clients are unaware that we are in Israel. I do not disclose this information. But it is not a problem. Most [French-speaking] call centers operate in North Africa. Our company employs only women – that is preferable in the medical field. All our employees are new immigrants of French descent. The most veteran has been in Israel for ten years, and the newest immigrated to Israel six months ago. Their age ranges from 25 to 60. Five of the women are single mothers. They chose this job because it allows them to work from home. Most live close by in Netanya, but some come from Haifa and Hadera. For educational background, I demand the minimum – a high school diploma... They need to be able to close themselves in a room and interact with a computer the whole day. They don't actually meet or see people. An ideal worker is one that is conscientious and punctual. The expectation is that the women will be polite, pleasant, punctual and articulate. This job is founded on trust. I trust my employees and I do not monitor their response time. I am a little bit like their brother or friend. We have a lot of personal conversations. They share their personal problems with me. And the women also talk among themselves, because they share the same profile.<sup>49</sup>

Arie's description of the working conditions and job expectations is representative of most call centers we encountered. Arie describes a combination of management techniques, ethical regimens, and administrative systems aimed at making the women employable in transnational service work in the call center industry in Israel. Arie places great emphasis on how the women display their feelings towards customers. This type of emotional display can be described as detached pleasantness. Indeed, as can be deduced from Eveline's and Jessica's statements, the women are well aware of the expectation that they will "act

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<sup>49</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Arie, Netanya, February, 2013.

pleasant and happy to serve the customer.” Their acting cheerful despite any private misgivings or conflicted feelings they may have is especially striking considering the women’s statements (up front and at the start of most interviews) that this job was not their first pick of career path.

Eveline gives voice to these frustrations. She is 58 years old, immigrated to Israel with her husband in 2011 and works as a medical secretary at a French-speaking call center in Netanya. She also describes herself as an observant Jew.

I didn’t choose this job. Since I speak no Hebrew, I had trouble finding employment, and this is what I could get. I work 35 hours per week. It requires no real training and it is not a difficult job. All I need to do is speak fluent French, write properly and be polite. [The customers] want adequate responses to their queries. They are not interested in us as individuals. We are numbers to them. There is no human aspect to this job. We mean nothing to them. We are expected to be responsive and pleasant, otherwise they get upset. I am certain that if my customer is a French-speaking Muslim originally from North Africa, he wouldn’t like knowing that the call center is situated in Israel and not in a suburb of Paris.<sup>50</sup>

Jessica works at the same call center. She is 28, married, also immigrated to Israel in 2011, and describes herself as religiously observant. Her account echoes Eveline’s experience.

I am not here by choice. I simply do not speak enough Hebrew to pursue a career in optics, which is what I studied in France. I schedule doctor appointments and relay messages. The most important thing is not to make mistakes. We need to comply with the doctors’ orders and not confuse the appointment books. We need to be meticulous, quick, punctual and responsive. We need to want to help people. We are the only ones connecting the patients with the doctors. It is very important that we sound like Parisian French... Telling the patients that we are in Israel can cause problems... because of politics. We work with patients who are not necessarily Jewish. Customers want to be helped by a

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<sup>50</sup> Interview of research Assistant with Eveline, Netanya, February, 2013.

Frenchwoman and think that this is a French service. It doesn't bother me. All I need to do is be polite and responsive.<sup>51</sup>

While emotional self-regulation is common to most service jobs, the non-traditional work arrangements at the French-speaking call center create new forms of emotional labor – one that centers on the management of identity.<sup>52</sup> French-speaking center managers place a high value on the linguistic abilities of employees and require that they either emulate Parisian accents or “neutralize” their own during customer interaction.<sup>53</sup> Poster<sup>54</sup> has cumulatively termed the accent alteration and name and location masking demands as “national identity management,” designed either to manage customer disillusionment about dealing with offshore centers or to buffer agents from abuse.<sup>55</sup>

Nadine spoke about a slip-up in masking her real identity. She is 73 years old, an ultra-Orthodox widow who lives in Jerusalem. She immigrated to Israel in 2001, and works at a call center that books enrichment courses for professionals

“When I first started out, I didn’t realize that we had to be able to converse about daily affairs in France. There was a big blizzard in France, and electricity was out for three days. The streets were covered with snow. People were shut in at home... I called a client and asked her why she hadn’t called to schedule lessons. She was shocked. She said, ‘Don’t you know that the phones were out of service?’ How was I to know that I had to read the French newspaper every morning before I came in to work? From then on, I make sure to update myself on current events in France. I always check the weather reports [laughs].”<sup>56</sup>

Esther was the only interviewee who spoke about the difficulty of reconciling the organizational demand to conceal her Jewish identity and her newly found sense of Jewishness in Israel. She described herself as an observant Jew; she had

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<sup>51</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Jessica, Netanya, August, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Batia M. Wiesenfeld et al., “Organizational identification among virtual workers. The role of need for affiliation and perceived work-based social support,” *Journal of Management* 27/2 (2001): 213-229.

<sup>53</sup> Nath, “Aesthetic and emotional labour through stigma.”

<sup>54</sup> Winifred R. Poster, “Who’s on the line? Indian call center agents pose as Americans for US-outsourced firms,” *Industrial Relations. A Journal of Economy and Society* 46/2 (2007): 271-304.

<sup>55</sup> Premilla D’Cruz, Ernesto Noronha, “Experiencing depersonalised bullying. A study of Indian call-centre agents,” *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation* 3/1 (2009): 26-46.

<sup>56</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Nadine, Jerusalem, December, 2012.

immigrated to Israel seven years prior to the interview. Esther began her interview by describing her reasons for immigration:

I could not picture myself living in France. I lived in a neighborhood that experienced many anti-Semitic incidents. I always told myself that I should leave. I never felt that France was my home... Observant Jews in France are not considered patriotic. Santa Claus never visited my home, and I remember that I was disappointed. He visited my cousin – they were secular. So, my mother told us that Santa Claus does not visit Jews. She could not say that he did not exist, because she was scared that we'd repeat what she said... I worked a bit in France. I guess the difference is that we are all Jewish. We do not need to ask a special favor of our boss to let us take off on Saturday. We have Shabbat and Fridays off. In France, you had to fight for it [to take Shabbat off].<sup>57</sup>

She then explained how her work at the French-speaking center conflicts with her national identity:

The call center is an income, which is very hard to come by in Israel. My job is not a career, but a temporary solution. In the long run, it interferes with our attempts to integrate in Israeli society. I have to wish callers 'Merry Christmas,' and though it does not lessen my observance and I know how to separate my job from my home life, it bothers me.<sup>58</sup>

Masking their true national identity calls for the use of perfected social skills during interaction on the part of the women, and therefore can expand the range of emotional experiences and accompanying emotional exertion.<sup>59</sup> Conforming to management-imposed requirements of masking employee identities so that the interaction experience is pleasing to customers is expected to yield high levels of stress, depression,<sup>60</sup> emotional dissonance and burnout.<sup>61</sup> However, Esther's

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<sup>57</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Esther, Jerusalem, January, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Esther, Jerusalem, January, 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Nath, "Aesthetic and emotional labour through stigma." Agata Gluszek, John F. Dovidio, "The way they speak. A social psychological perspective on the stigma of nonnative accents in communication," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14/2 (2010): 214-237.

<sup>60</sup> Sharon C. Bolton, Carol Boyd, "Trolley dolly or skilled emotion manager? Moving on from Hochschild's managed heart," *Work, employment and society* 17/2 (2003): 289-308; Dana Yagil, "When the customer is wrong. A review of research on aggression and sexual harassment in service encounters," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 13/2 (2008): 141-152.

comment is not representative of the other women we interviewed, none of whom reported experiencing the demands of identity aestheticization as stressful, abusive or degrading. On the contrary, it appears that the daily interaction with French customers allows the women to construct unique identities, and to assert and maintain a sense of belonging to the here and now that is Israel. They transform the call center into a socially and symbolically bounded locale where they can construct and rehearse new national identities as Israelis. The call center becomes a “backstage” – clearly bounded social terrain through which the women enact a sense of belonging.<sup>62</sup> The women thus navigate between their former French identity and their newly acquired identity as Israelis.

The first step in this process is to put some distance between themselves and their French customers. They proceed to define social boundaries by drawing stark distinctions between the Israelis and the French. Nadine’s co-worker Sarah is about 50 years old, and immigrated to Israel in 2011. She is a divorced single mother.

I love being around Israelis. They are not polite. But for me, politeness is not the most important quality in a person. Israelis live in a country that must fight all the time. They struggle. It toughens them. The French are soft. They’ve never had to fight for anything.<sup>63</sup>

Julia immigrated to Israel in 2006. She is 50 years old. Despite friends and family advising her to postpone her immigration, she insisted on moving to Israel in the middle of the Second Lebanon War. When asked what makes her feel Israeli, Julia commented:

In France, I think people are polite but hypocritical. They don’t give a damn about you. Here, people are crude and harsh but very warm. The French are more individualistic. We lived in a kind of ghetto in France.

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<sup>61</sup> Grandey Alicia, Glenda M. Fisk, “Display rules and strain in service jobs: what’s fairness got to do with it?,” in *Exploring Interpersonal Dynamics (Research in Occupational Stress and Well Being, Vol. 4)*, eds. Pamela Perrewew, Daniel C. Ganster, (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2004), 265-293.

<sup>62</sup> Erving Goffman, “Role distance,” in *Life as theatre. A dramaturgical sourcebook*, eds. Dennis Brissett, Charles Edgley, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1961[2005]), 101-111; Galit Ailon, *Global ambitions and local identities. An Israeli-American high tech merger*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

<sup>63</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Sarah, Jerusalem, January, 2013.

Now, even though I associate only with French- speaking people, I don't feel like I'm in a ghetto.<sup>64</sup>

Oriella is 40 years old. She immigrated to Israel in 1995 and works at a call center in Tel Aviv. She describes herself as traditional Sephardic. She speaks with great passion of her family's decision to leave France and immigrate to Israel.

I am not a foreigner at all. I feel Israeli. I felt Israeli even before I came to Israel! But, still, I cannot deny my French origin. After all, I lived in France for 35 years. However, I never felt French. I always thought of myself as Jewish first and then French. I love Paris deeply as an architectural and cultural city...French culture was once something to admire, but in the last 20 years French culture as I knew and loved it has become extinct. There is no more French culture. My parents are cosmopolitan, and I always felt in between cultures. Still, for my mother, leaving her flat in France was devastating. I felt nothing... I visit France as a tourist. France today is not the France of my childhood. Then, we could live with our differences. I became aware of anti-Semitism very early. But France had values, cultural diversity, and creativity. Now France lives on its past 300 years of glory. There is nothing left of its greatness: cinema, literature, music... nothing. Even fashion and perfume – the big French companies have been bought by Americans.<sup>65</sup>

Our interviewees express a deep sense of disappointment with the French people for failing to protect them against the growing wave of anti-Semitic violence in France. Beyond feeling that the French have abandoned them, they feel that the French Republic has betrayed its ideals of patriotism, secularism, and security. Their sentiments echo public statements made by Jewish community leaders such as Roger Cukierman, president of the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions, who has stated that Jews have been living in France for 2,000 years and have been full citizens since 1791. Yet now they feel that they are looked upon as second-class citizens. In France, the historic source of liberty, equality and fraternity, Jews are now struggling to maintain their safety and security in the face of rising radical Islamist violence.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Interview of the research assistance with Julia, Tel-Aviv, August, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Interview of the research assistance with Oriella, Tel Aviv, August, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> James McAuley, "In France, an uncertain future for Jews," *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/in-france-an-uncertain-future-for->

In 2014, the newly elected chief rabbi of France accused French society of being apathetic about anti-Semitism. He also stated that the large number of Jews leaving France for Israel that year partly reflected a delayed reaction to the 2012 killing of four Jews and three soldiers by an Islamist terrorist.<sup>67</sup> In the next section, we explain why this type of emotional separation was pertinent to the immigrants' construction of a solid Jewish Israeli identity while maintaining a cultural affinity to French culture and French values of humanism and liberalism. This hybrid Franco-Israeli-Jewish identity was supported and encouraged by the owners and managers of the call centers.

***Theme 4: Blurring the Lines between Secular and Sacred – The Call Center as a Community Center***

In his seminal book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson claims that “communities are to be distinguished by the style in which they are imagined.”<sup>68</sup> He goes on to note that imagined communities are characterized by three key identifiers: elastic boundaries, identification rituals and a deep sense of camaraderie. We argue that by turning the call center into a place where religious practices such as communal prayer, candle lighting and Torah study can take place, managements and employees display their new identities. Myerhoff coined the term “definitional ceremony” to denote a group ritual by whose means a group informs itself and all around it of its existence and its identity.<sup>69</sup> Myerhoff claims that definitional ceremonies are of the utmost importance to groups of immigrants who have lost their connection to their past culture and whose lives proceed in a world of “strangers.”<sup>70</sup>

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jews/2016/05/07/7b6e2e8c-12e8-11e6-a9b5-

bf703a5a7191\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\_term=.1f8aae439179

<sup>67</sup> “French society seemingly apathetic to anti-Semitism, says chief rabbi,” *Jerusalem Post*, September 16, 2014. <https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/French-society-seemingly-apathectic-to-anti-Semitism-says-chief-rabbi-375504>

<sup>68</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London: Verso Books, 1986), 6.

<sup>69</sup> Barbara Myerhoff, “Rites of passage. Process and paradox,” in *Celebration. Studies in festivity and ritual*, ed. Victor Turner, (Washington, D.C : Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 109-135, 11.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*; Rachel Sharaby, “Significance of Prenuptial Rituals as Ethnic Definitional Ceremonies among Immigrants,” *Advances in Anthropology* 7/2 (2017): 55-78.

While distancing themselves morally and ethically from the French (customers and, more broadly, the French people), the women enacted a locally bounded sense of belonging. They spoke of their colleagues and even managers in ways that often suspended occupational, hierarchical or other distinctions among them. Though some of them worked from home and did not regularly meet the women at the call center, most spoke highly of the sense of camaraderie that developed among the workers with whom they shared the call center experience.

At the time of the interview, Sarah had been working at a Jerusalem call center for four months. Her daughter, who had recently given birth to a baby girl, was also working at a French-speaking call center. Sarah speaks of the sisterhood exemplified at the call centers:

My daughter gave birth two weeks ago. Every day, [the women] visit us and bring meals for us to eat. They help each other a lot. They help even those who are not observant. Helping others is very important to them. It's not because they're religious. It is because they have a Jewish spirit. Where else does such a thing exist? Only here in Israel. We laugh with each other, help each other, and work together. I have so many friends here.<sup>71</sup>

Laura has tried several types of employment including waitressing, private tutoring, and working at a call center. She now works at a call center for an Israeli manager. In the following passage, she reminisces about a previous call center where her boss was of French descent.

I think I felt more at ease with a French boss. We could talk with him and share what we had in common. This is the first time I have no direct contact with the boss. If I ever meet my former bosses, they would surely say 'hi.' They would certainly remember my name. In the advertising company where I worked, we went to each other's weddings, and celebrated Israel Independence Day together. My first real professional experience was in a very familial environment.<sup>72</sup>

When asked what she liked about her current employment, Muriel answered:

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<sup>71</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Sarah, Jerusalem, January, 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Interview of the research assistant with Laura, Tel Aviv, August, 2012.



There is solidarity here – a Jewish spirit that prevails. If there is someone in need, we pray for her, or organize a small fundraiser.<sup>73</sup>

Eveline immigrated to Israel in 2011. She is 58 years old and works at a French-speaking call center in Netanya.

I don't enjoy this work much. I only do it to keep myself busy. It is not very stimulating intellectually, nor is it economically rewarding. But it has a family atmosphere and the boss is very sympathetic. We communicate so well with each other. I can really share with the other women here. There is good teamwork here. We are very close to one another, and I feel comfortable disclosing intimate details about my life. Every week we go to the beach together.<sup>74</sup>

For most of the women, work at the call center serves a social and communal purpose. For some, the social ties formed at the centers are a substitute for family that have remained in France. The French-Jewish culture they share serves as fertile ground for developing relationships and helping each other. These ties are also very natural as many of the women share a religiously observant lifestyle.

Marcelle immigrated to Israel in 2008. Her style of dress identified her as ultra-Orthodox. At the time of the interview, she was 62, had completed 12 years of schooling, and was working at a call center in Jerusalem.

It's like a family here. There's lots of warmth. I love it. It's not like in France. Here we address each other in the second person familiar form, and that removes lots of barriers. Everyone respects each other, everyone is observant like me. We feel like one people... Yes, I come to work happily, because I feel good. I'm free, I can pray and wear a head covering. I don't have to worry that I might be forced to desecrate the Shabbat or holidays – not like the situation in France. Here people need a second family.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Interview of the research assistant with Muriel, Ashdod, December, 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Eveline, Netanya, February, 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Marcelle, Jerusalem, January, 2013.

Most of the women we interviewed described themselves as observing Jewish law. They perceived the observance of *Halachah* (Jewish traditional law) and Jewish customs as a moral imperative, and vehemently rejected conventional Israeli categories such as *Masorti* (traditional), *Dati Leumi* (nationalistic religious), or *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) to describe their type of Jewish religiosity. The vague category of “religiously observant” is general enough to include multiple forms and modalities. For most of the immigrants, living in Israel enables them openly to practice their religion. Covering their hair (for women), observing Shabbat, keeping kosher and taking part in religious ceremonies are publicly practiced and encouraged. In the call centers we observed, the management allowed gender segregation by separating the women’s cubicles from the men’s, and even set aside times and spaces for religious ceremonies. At one company, a glass-fronted bookcase filled with prayer books in French stood at the entrance to the office. These books were printed at the company’s expense and had the company logo on them. Another company placed a similar bookcase in the conference room, where they also held classes on Judaism. At yet another firm, the women set a small donation box next to some memorial candles in the hope of raising money for a recently widowed employee.

This blurring of the lines between sacred and secular in the workplace allows for the consolidation of a unique ethnic identity. Some workplaces (call centers) intentionally nurture this identity to make the job attractive to the ultra-Orthodox men and women who work there. Yael, who immigrated to Israel in 2011, expressed her appreciation of this. At the time of the interview, she was 34, had completed 12 years of education, was married with three children, and worked at a call center in Jerusalem:

I participate in the religious services at work. It’s heartwarming. We follow a way of life based on the Torah. Being among our own brings us closer, it creates stronger ties, more shared experiences (like Pesach cleaning). We share the same concerns.<sup>76</sup>

Many of the women felt they were constantly moving back and forth between the ‘imagined community’ of the call center and Israeli society. They crossed these symbolic gates of their “enclave culture” on a daily basis. With its unique rituals and sense of camaraderie, the call center allowed the women to reinvent themselves as spiritual figures working within the bounds of the traditional

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<sup>76</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Yael, Jerusalem, January, 2013.

female religious sphere and extending it to the secular sphere of the workplace, as well.<sup>77</sup> It also allowed them to construct and publicly display a coherent identity where their work activities and work identities complemented those practiced at home.

***Theme 5: Ambivalent Attitudes toward the Workplace – “Honey Trap” or Safety Net?***

Is work at French-speaking call centers a “honey trap” or a vital safety net for the immigrants from France? The women we interviewed were ambivalent toward the call center’s contribution to their integration in the Israeli labor market in particular and in Israeli society in general. Some argued that the call center, with its flexible hours and the convenience of conversing in their mother tongue, discouraged the immigrants from trying to improve their Hebrew, familiarize themselves with Israeli work culture, and apply and interview for other jobs.

Ilana immigrated to Israel in 2010. At the time of the interview, she was 26, with an MA in communications. She worked at a call center in Tel Aviv. She spoke of the call center as a demotivating factor in looking for better employment

I really didn’t see it happening to me... I looked for work and ended up at a French-speaking call center. I met nice people here. The atmosphere is very pleasant, and familial... French. At the end of the month my earnings are not bad, considering the hours I’ve worked. And that’s really the problem. You get used to it... It’s a trap.<sup>78</sup>

Devora immigrated to Israel in 2004 and also has an academic degree in communications. At the time of the interview, she was 40, married with three children.

I get the impression that the call centers are a “breath of fresh air” for many immigrants. If they didn’t exist, many immigrants would go back to France. The call center is a source of income for an entire population.

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<sup>77</sup> Susan Starr Sered, “Women, religion, and modernization. Tradition and transformation among elderly Jews in Israel,” *American Anthropologist* 92/2 (1990): 306-318.

<sup>78</sup> Interview of the research assistant with Ilana, Tel Aviv, August, 2012.

But it's sad that the work at these centers isolates us and causes us to remain isolated in a French environment.<sup>79</sup>

Clara is in her late twenties. She arrived in Israel by herself at age 19. She lives in Tel Aviv and has had several short-term jobs. She also complains that the call center is a dead-end career move.

I wanted to avoid these kinds of jobs for new immigrants. For a while, I couldn't find a job, and I asked myself if I should go back to France. I saw a lot of people who gave up on their career. I did not want to sacrifice. I thought that I wouldn't stay in Israel at any cost. I finally found a job in marketing for an Israeli toy company, but my career isn't moving forward, and I am not improving my skills... I work for an online casino now. The work is in French. All the customers are French. It's legal, but just barely. The casino (online) is available from France only... I don't know if I'll ever have the opportunity to work in a Hebrew-speaking company. I've never interviewed for a job that required working only in Hebrew, perhaps because I undervalue my abilities. I have a friend who immigrated and started to work completely in Hebrew. She had no choice and even though it was hard, her Hebrew is perfect now. I lack confidence.<sup>80</sup>

While these women spoke negatively of the call centers as demotivating, two of our women interviewees described them positively as an invaluable springboard to starting their own small businesses. Charlene relates:

Combined with my work here, I'm taking a course in how to set up a small business. I dream of opening my own small business. I know how to organize henna parties [North African-style engagement parties], and I really love it... That's what I want to do – organize henna parties. I brought supplies over from Morocco. I'll teach the women how to dance at these parties. It's coming back in style. I need lots of happiness in life, and it's happy! The target market will be mainly French speakers (immigrants), but if others are interested – with pleasure, I'm all for it.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Interview of the research assistant with Devora, Netanya, February, 2013.

<sup>80</sup> Interview of the research assistant with Clara, Tel Aviv, August, 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Interview of the first and second A. with Charlene, Jerusalem, January, 2013.

Laura also spoke of the French-speaking call center as a valuable platform for learning the market and acquiring important business skills.

I started to work in Netanya at a call center. I discovered that I was a natural. I was a good worker. It was in renewable energies, and it was very easy. Then I worked in an advertising office, and I still have good relations with them. That company set up a French health magazine intended for French readership and sales in France... I learned everything I needed to know on the job, in the world of media and advertising. I realized that I could get ahead even more if I studied communications. Then I met a girl my age. We went out to lunch, and we decided to launch a magazine... We knew about the demands, the expectations. We talked with people over the phone, we saw what was going on the internet. What works very well is content focused on eroticism. There are many online sites selling lingerie and sex toys... We decided to launch a magazine for couples. We had our concept. We looked for French-speaking graphic designers, we looked for an office, and got started.<sup>82</sup>

Charlene and Laura's experience at call centers heightened their business awareness, and thus, with hindsight, they viewed it as an opportunity. These women entrepreneurs exhibited rare drive and enthusiasm. For them, working at a call center served as a springboard for integrating as businesswomen in the global market (not necessarily Israeli). Many other women we interviewed combined work at a call center with studies at various types of entrepreneurship and business management programs.

## Discussion

We have focused on the work experience of immigrant women working in the French-speaking call center industry that has recently developed in Israel. The explicit requirement that workers mask their national and religious identities has paradoxically led to the saliency of both national and religious identifications.<sup>83</sup> However, while previous studies spoke of the demoralizing effect of identity management or masking, we have shown how identity masking inspired women's sense of identity as they turned the call center into a safe enclave in

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<sup>82</sup> Interview of the research assistant with Ilana, Tel Aviv, April, 2012.

<sup>83</sup> Das et al., "The importance of being Indian."

which to draw distinctions between themselves and their callers, disengage from their previous lives as Frenchwomen, and refine and practice their Israeli identity. Many of the women found the center provided them with a supportive social network of women who shared their situation and could relate to their problems and challenges. Work at the call centers was convenient and flexible, thus permitting a manageable balance between work and family life. Furthermore, for some of the immigrants, this job enabled them to obtain knowledge of both the Israeli and French markets and to pursue studies in their free time. Some even dared to experiment with opening their own small businesses, knowing they had a safety net they could fall back on. On the other hand, working at a call center preserved their social position as foreigners – eternal immigrants. With this in mind, can we correctly define these call centers as honey traps (mainly for the younger, more educated women)?

To answer this question fully, we must consider the ways in which working at a call center provided the women with a sense of community. Most of the women we interviewed arrived in Israel either alone or with their spouses. Many started a nuclear family here in Israel, leaving behind their parents and siblings. In the absence of an extended family, the women working at call centers formed strong ties with their women colleagues and even bosses. This type of “simulated” family not only gave them the emotional support they sought, but also provided a supportive network of connections and a sense of belonging to a community – a community where they could practice their Judaism, share their problems and find employment. Through the workplace, the immigrants could rehearse their French and Jewish identity, and openly express their cultural uniqueness in Israel.

At present, the growth of a unique Francophone culture among French immigrants, as exemplified at French-speaking call centers, is apparent in broader contexts throughout Israeli society. In cities with large French populations, such as Netanya, Ashdod, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, we observe concrete evidence of this in the opening of new French restaurants, real estate agencies, and other businesses focusing on French clientele. The cultural particularity of the French immigrants is marked by distinct religious Jewish characteristics. For example, French immigrants open kosher restaurants offering French-style cuisine; they establish French-speaking synagogues and Torah study institutes.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ben-Rafael, Ben-Rafael, *Sociologie et sociolinguistique des francophonies israéliennes*.

As we have seen, the French-speaking call centers intentionally encourage their employees to express their Jewish identity alongside the French, viewing the two types of identity as complementary rather than competing. This linguistic and cultural particularity, as Ben Rafael and Ben Rafael argue,<sup>85</sup> does not necessarily indicate the immigrants' desire to isolate themselves in a cultural bubble. On the contrary, the immigrants consider the freedom to exist in these two cultural worlds as a benefit that is possible only in Israel. The call center, with its strict boundary-setting processes, thus offers these immigrant women opportunities reflectively to construct their own sense of Israeli identity. It thus provides a valuable context in which nested and cross-cultural identities can be fostered.

While in the short term the transnational employment pattern presented in this study fulfills an economic, communal and social need for the immigrants, in the long run it may hinder their integration into the Hebrew-speaking job market. Policy makers should consider how better to integrate the highly educated, skilled professionals whose credentials are not recognized in Israel. Furthermore, these women could benefit from government-sponsored business courses in Hebrew as part of their immigration packages.

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**Shirly Bar-Lev**, senior lecturer in the Engineering School at Ruppin Academic Center.

**Karin Amit**, Head of MA program in Immigration and Social Integration and associate professor in the Department of Business Management at Ruppin Academic Center.

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

Dana E. Katz, *The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination of Early Modern Venice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. xiii + 188.

by *Cristiana Facchini*

In some of his remarkable publications, famed urban sociologist Richard Sennett explored the interconnection between religious notions and the construction of space. In both *The Conscience of the Eye* (1990) and *Flesh and Stones* (1994), Sennett confronted the body in the city, or more generally, he attempted to look at the built urban environment through the perspective of the “human condition.”<sup>1</sup> Whereas the former title constitutes the third part of a trilogy (*The Fall of the Public Man* 1977 and the novel *Palais Royal* 1986),<sup>2</sup> the latter is in many respects indebted to his friendship with Michel Foucault. In *Flesh and Stones* Sennett explores how Christian theology and Christian notions of the body find expression in the urban environment, and he considers the cathedral and the cloister as a counterpoint to the bustling life that characterized the market with its dangers and violence.<sup>3</sup> Detecting a structural ambivalence at the core of the Christian city, Sennett proceeds to explore its potential contradictions in reference to those in the city who were not Christians, and in doing so he certainly tries to criticize a certain scholarly tradition that had idealized the medieval city. “The medieval adage,” he writes, “*Stadt Luft macht frei* would leave a bitter taste in the Jew’s mouth, for the right to do business in the city did not bring a more general freedom. The Jew who contracted as an equal lived as a segregated man.”<sup>4</sup> The chapter Sennett devoted to the ghetto in *Flesh and Stone* may be regarded as a tribute to the sociological debate about the ghetto, initiated at the beginning of the twentieth century by members of the school of urban sociology of Chicago.<sup>5</sup> Notions about the “ghetto” played a significant role in American urban sociology. Louis Wirth published a short and provocative article in 1927 and a book in 1928, where historical analysis blended with sociological

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of the Public Man*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Id., *Palais Royal* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone. The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994).

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

<sup>5</sup> *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett, (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1969).



theories revolving around the problem of immigration in the great American metropolis.<sup>6</sup> In doing so, Wirth offered a universalized history of the ghetto, using the Jewish experience to understand ethnic grouping and behavior in the American city. However, he also attempted to sketch a psychological and cultural portrait of an “urban minority.” “The ghetto is not only a physical fact, it is a state of mind,” he wrote. “The forms of community life are likely to become more intelligible to us if we have before us the natural history of the Jewish ghetto. The ghetto may therefore be regarded as typical of a number of other forms of community life that sociologists are attempting to explore.”<sup>7</sup>

Although quite original in its scope, his endeavor is the result of a wider discourse on the ghetto which had animated the intellectual debate both in America and Europe. In fact, Wirth’s book must be understood not only within the cultural ambience of sociology at the time, but also against the background of a wealth of discourses about the “ghetto,” both negative and positive, which were triggered by two different social and political developments. The first, linked to the slow path of political emancipation throughout the nineteenth century, was composed of articles and books on the history of the Jews in many European cities, portrayed mainly by members of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. By the second half of the nineteenth century a few important publications would be devoted to the Jews of Rome, whose miserable condition symbolized the evil of the Catholic Church and its ghetto, the walls of which would be officially destroyed only after the fall of Rome in 1870. At the same time, a number of publications appeared, reflecting upon the psychological consequences of social seclusion, in order to offer answers for a better and faster assimilation of Jews in their national context and to counter the rising tide of antisemitism.<sup>8</sup> The second development was inspired by the wave of migrants from Eastern and Central Europe to many European and American cities. In some cases, it romanticized the idea of the ghetto through the use of new creations, such as novels and theatre plays<sup>9</sup>; in other instances, it attempted to

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<sup>6</sup> Louis Wirth, “The Ghetto,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 33.1 (1927): 57-71; Id., *The Ghetto*, (Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 1928). For a recent discussion see: M. Duneier, *Ghetto. The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Wirth, *The Ghetto*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the controversial book by the Italian criminologist, Cesare Lombroso, *Antisemitismo*, (Turin: Bocca, 1894) or Theodor Herzl, *Das Neue Ghetto*, (1903).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the popular works by Israel Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto* (1892) and *Dreamers of the Ghetto* (1898), and in general his works on ghetto’ culture and the notion of the “melting pot,” fundamental to his famous theatre play, *The Melting Pot*, (first staged in 1908).

explore its meaning in order to find practical solutions to various forms of hostility toward migrants.

Sennett's contribution belongs to this intellectual tradition and it deserves some discussion, especially in the wake of recent historiographical works on urban history and the Jews. According to Sennett, the dialectic between *communitas* and exclusion is at the core of the Christian city, which needs to implement different repressive strategies to deal with those at the margins of its sacred civic body. "Venetian Christians," wrote Sennett, "sought to create a Christian community by segregating those who were different, drawing on the fear of touching alien, seductive bodies. Jewish identity became entangled in that same geography of repression."<sup>10</sup>

Although Sennett's interpretation of the ghetto of Venice has rarely been used by historians, as it may be historically inaccurate, it is useful to flesh out some of his arguments. The Venetian ghetto is interpreted through Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, with a focus on Jewish bodies and the "fear of touching" as the driving forces which lead the Venetian authorities to implement a policy of segregation. As Venice's political and economic might was shattered by military defeat, a rhetoric of purification and discipline emerged among religious leaders, because economic losses were caused by moral weakness. Jewish professions, notably physicians and money lenders, made Jews visible as polluting elements of Christian society.<sup>11</sup> Often, in moral treatises of the time, they would be associated with prostitution, and perceived in similar ways as both necessary and dangerous.

Sennett's emphasis is on surveillance and isolation, even when describing the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi*, a compound inhabited by wealthier German merchants, situated close to the Rialto Bridge in a building embellished with frescos by Giorgione. With the rise of the Reformation the presence of heresy would unquestionably grow, and so the German *fondaco* became even more dangerous for the city. Nevertheless, the authorities decided to keep these merchants in Venice, at the cost of increased surveillance. For Sennett, the Venetian ghetto

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<sup>10</sup> Sennett, *Flesh and Stone*.

<sup>11</sup> In other cities, they were moved into areas where prostitutes would also be seclude confined. For Florence before a ghetto was established see: Justine Walden, *Spatial Logics, Ritual Humiliation, and Jewish-Christian Relations in Early Modern Florence*, in *Global Reformations. Transforming Early Modern Religions, Societies, and Cultures*, ed Nicolas Terpstra, (London – New York: Routledge, 2019)

exemplifies one of the most significant themes of urban society, by incorporating “impure” and yet necessary social groups into the fabric of the city. “Purity of the mass would be guaranteed by isolation of the minority.” No one would reclaim the Jews for the city, as “in this, the ghetto of Venice embodied a different ethos of isolation from the ethos practiced shortly afterward in Renaissance Rome [...]. The Roman ghetto was indeed meant to be a space to transform the Jews.”<sup>12</sup> The social rationale of the Roman ghetto was to humiliate the Jews in order to convert them. The Venetian ghetto was meant to separate and isolate them from the civic body of the city.

In her recent book on the Venetian ghetto, published in the wake of its 500 year anniversary, Dana Katz pays tribute to Sennett’s insights, and describes the rise of the ghetto, among other things, as rooted in the “fear of seeing,” whereas for Sennett the ghetto was the outcome of a deeply ingrained “fear of touching.”<sup>13</sup>

For Katz the Venetian ghetto is a “visual paradox” that challenges, from its margins, the Christian social body of a city that is, since its birth, a complicated engineered space both socially and ecologically. The book revolves around four material elements of urban life: the city’s margins, conceived as laboratories of “urban planning;” strategies of enclosure as a Catholic response to forbidden gazes (“enclosure as topographies of vision”); windows as sites of disturbance; and a final chapter devoted to “walls as boundaries of the night.”<sup>14</sup>

The first example of Jewish urban segregation is taken from Frankfurt, where in 1462 the city council decided to move its Jewish settlement out of the center to an area labeled *Judengasse*,<sup>15</sup> the example is used to prove that locating Jews at the margin or outside the urban polity was a common strategy for dealing with religious minorities. Informed by a strong theoretical approach, *The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination* speaks of the ghetto from the perspective of the Venetian authorities, privileging the language of power and its ability to frame religious diversity in the urban environment. Katz highlights the fact that

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<sup>12</sup> Sennet, *Flesh and Stone*.

<sup>13</sup> For the use of the notion of purity/impurity in spatial analysis of Jewish enclosed areas see *Rome, Pollution, and Propriety: Dirt, Disease and Hygiene in the Eternal City from Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Mark Bradley, Kenneth Stow, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Dana E. Katz, *The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination of Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Katz, *The Jewish Ghetto*; it is also used by Wirth as an exemplary model: Wirth, *The Ghetto*, 1928, 41-62.

through segregation the Republic applied its policy of religious tolerance as a mere corollary of its economic interests: “The separation of foreigners into distinct ethnic enclaves became a physical expression of the republic’s policy of tolerance.” As Venetian authorities sealed off their religious groups in order to reduce their visibility, often walling off windows and balconies that faced the Christian borders, the ghetto itself very quickly developed into a new form of urbanity, giving birth, with its multi-story buildings, to a verticality that challenged the Christian gaze.

The first chapter is indeed focused on “spatial marginalization” as a strategy to achieve hierarchical organization and manage ethnic and religious diversity in the city, depicted as an ideal Renaissance polity whose beauty often paralleled the harmony of its political system (being that of the ancient republic). Marginality is conceived, in her words, as “a lived experience of social and geographical displacement marked by negotiation of position” (p. 29). Venice was a city of lived religious diversity which inhabited the built environment. Jews were one of the many religious and ethnic groups that contributed to the welfare of a city that was simultaneously the capital of a maritime empire with its colonies (which implies a hierarchical space), and the hub of a trading network composed of multiple groups, often labeled as *stranieri*.

The rise of the ghetto is placed against the backdrop of Venice’s economic decline, which was hardly visible to observers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. But Jews arrived in Venice relatively late compared to other groups, and were very soon relocated to the area of the ghetto, the site of the old foundry. The decision seems to have aimed both for marginalization and inclusion, in contrast with other situations where the viable options were forced conversion, expulsion, or even massacre. And yet, according to Katz, the corporate body of the Jews in the city remains marginalized even when the ghetto is placed, after the promulgation of the *Cum nimis absurdum* (1555), at the very center of the city, where in some cases the market is located as well (Florence, Rome, Padua, Verona). Comparisons with other Italian cities seem to call for a different analysis that goes beyond the notion of urban marginality suggested by Katz. The religious motive that drives the Roman enclosure of the Jews and the subsequent establishment of the ghettos is relatively different from the urban logic of the Venetian enclosure, which partly followed in the footsteps of urban

zoning, even if with hierarchical logic.<sup>16</sup> But the question of how to look at the rise of secluded Jewish areas as the consequence of different religious and theological traditions remains unanswered.

Katz is also attentive – as Sennett was before her – to how marginalization produced a new form of “urbanity,” conceived of as “an alternative form of urban living” (p. 41) which was defined by its verticality. In this connection, the author compares the modern urban verticality of the twentieth century, as embodied in megacity tenement halls, with the unique Venetian type of verticality. The comparison is suggestive, yet to my mind it fails to reveal the complexity of modern verticality as compared to that of the early modern period. If tenement halls (exemplified in this book by the case of Pruitt Igoe in Missouri) proved a total failure as spaces conceived to host marginal social groups, not all modern urban experiments meant to dignify the urban condition of less privileged social classes failed. Urban verticality has also been deployed, both in the past and the present, to glorify the religion or culture of dominant groups. In this sense, the ghetto presents an interesting case, very much in opposition to other architectural examples of vertical magnificence, redirecting the gaze from the dominant to the dominated. However, it is unlikely that its verticality attracted foreign visitors, who were more inclined to cross the ghetto’s walls for other reasons, among which the most relevant are sheer curiosity, religious zeal and the urge for confrontation.

Chapter Two explores the ghetto as compared to other forms of religious enclosure, of which the one most typical of the time was the female cloister. Here the author begins with the interesting insights on the nineteenth-century notion of the city square (*piazza*) as an ideal enclosed space of the urban *civitas*, as found in the work of Austrian architect Camillo Sitte or in the ground-breaking book *The Stones of Venice* by John Ruskin (p. 49-51). Katz defines enclosure as a

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<sup>16</sup> Some of these questions are addressed in Cristiana Facchini, “The City, the Ghetto and Two Books. Venice and Jewish Early Modernity,” in *Modernity and the Cities of the Jews*, ed. Cristiana Facchini, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, 2 (2011): 11-44. For the Roman case see Kenneth Stow, *Theatre of Acculturation. The Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth Century*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); Serena Di Nepi, *Sopravvivere al ghetto. Per una storia sociale della comunità ebraica nella Roma del Cinquecento*, (Roma: Viella, 2013); for Florence see Stefanie Sigmund, *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence. The Construction of an Early Modern Jewish Community*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); for Counter-Reformation policies against the Jews, see Renata Segre, *La controriforma: espulsioni, conversioni, isolamento*, in *Gli ebrei in Italia*, vol. I, ed. Corrado Vivanti, (Torino: Einaudi, 1996), 709-778.

“spatial condition predicated on the construction of boundaries to segment spaces.” The *piazza* is punctuated by openings, whereas other forms of enclosure are based upon sealed gates, as in the case of the ghetto, whose visual accessibility was also ruled out by decisions to wall up its windows.

Windows were also prohibited to women, who were confined to the private space of domestic seclusion. The visibility of a woman through a window suggested prostitution, therefore laws kept women far from these types of apertures.

Similarly, the architecture of *clausura* confined monastic life to an interior space, away from undesired gazes. This idealized conception of enclosure was strengthened by the norms of the Council of Trent. A comparison of ideal forms of religious enclosure would have been appropriate here, in order to understand whether the process which led to the “confessionalization paradigm” might shed light on religious policies concerning spaces in general. Similarities and differences are particularly enlightening, as enclosure defines sacred and “polluted” spaces, that is, spaces of ideal Christian life or the restricted life of “infidels.” “Both the sequestration of nuns and the ghettoization of Jews engender a relationship of power and discipline that expresses how a spatially confined subgroup articulates politics and ideology,” Katz writes, focusing on the potential power of sight as capable of nurturing forbidden sexual encounters. While the nuns aimed to protect themselves from the outside world, the Jews were kept apart as dangerous and yet useful urban subjects.

Katz insists upon notions of segregation, surveillance and tolerance, but in her narrative this complicated dynamic seems to repeatedly emphasize, in Foucaultian terms, the notion of surveillance, especially when hinting at the image of the panopticon that after all, in her own words, need not be evoked in order to understand the ghetto (p. 62-63).

Chapter Three delves deeper into the complex visual relationship between the Serenissima and the Jews by focusing on the material aperture of the window. Not surprisingly, evoking the *Merchant of Venice*, Katz writes that “Jessica’s abandonment of her father and conversion to Christianity is marked at the window” (p. 68). Windows are liminal spaces which connect the inside with the outside, where many forms of interaction take place. They are also vital for the organization of labor as they allow light and air to circulate inside.

Using the case of early modern London as a comparison, Katz introduces the theme of windows as spaces that are thoroughly regulated by civic rules, and from which it is possible to detect types of social interactions between the private and public domain; or they can be understood as places where outbursts of violence were enacted. In London windows are the prerogative of citizenship. For legal residents, any form of obstruction of the window or misuse of it represents an attack on private décor; however, for religious refugees (Protestants from other countries), whose work was permitted, their shop windows had to be obstructed in order to keep their merchandise out of sight, making profit more difficult to pursue (p. 73).

According to Katz, the decision to wall up windows and balconies in the Venice ghetto should be interpreted as a logical consequence of the Christian city's aim to "prohibit ocular contact with Christians" (p. 74). Even when the ghetto expanded due to the continuous influx of Levantine and Ponentine Jewish migrants, who were permitted residency in exchange for their commercial services, rules about the closing of windows or other apertures on the border lines with Christian neighbors were enforced. In some cases, Jews tried to avoid rigid enclosures, especially if they threatened the health and hygiene of the ghetto. Windows were also considered dangerous sites during Christian processions: Jews were accused of screaming and cursing at the Eucharist from their windows; conversely, charged religious rituals could easily spark off conflict and violence, as during Eastertide, when Christians assaulted and destroyed Jewish windows.

The chapter attempts to provide an alternate explanation for two types of confinement, both of which are rooted in religious rationales: the temporary one during Easter, when Jews were compelled to shut their windows and to stay inside their houses, and the permanent one of the ghetto, whose windows were walled up. Whereas the recurring enclosure framed a seasonal construction of religious identity, "the walling up of the ghetto windows symbolized a permanent mark of domestic exile, an architectonic march toward civic isolation, that built subjugation into the urban form. Ghettoization institutionalized a city of alienating environments that inscribed religious difference into the urban fabric and in it prescribed a larger social order" (p. 83).

As Daniel Jütte argued, windows were places of social interaction between Christians and Jews before and after the construction of the ghettos, and that is why city authorities attempted to regulate reciprocal gazes: not only were Jews

forbidden to look on during Christian rituals or inside Christian sacred spaces, such as monasteries and churches, but Christians were also not allowed to look at Jewish space.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, while this chapter evokes the relevant theme of religious and civic rituals as occasions of civic and urban belonging, it does not dwell on the problem that civic and religious rituals pose to religious grouping in the early modern city. One should therefore ask where all interactions between different religious groups were spatially placed, and what it really meant to manage religious diversity in the city of the early modern period.

The ghetto is read through the senses, primarily the optical one, but at times also through tactility. This is the case of chapter Four, which is devoted to walls and nocturnal life. Here the night is associated with the “fear of contact” characteristic of many types of relationships between Jews and Christians, and plausibly between different religious antagonists. Drawing on Simmel’s definition of the wall, the focus is on movement, and interconnectedness. The wall as a means of separation is explored through its porosity during the real time of enclosure, after dusk, when Jews are compelled to stay inside and when the gates are locked. It is at night, Katz argues, that the fear of the Jews reaches its peak, as the night is the time of ambivalence. Particular religious and civic rituals take place after dusk in the city and among Jews, in whose life nocturnal ritual plays a prominent role: from circumcision ceremonies to kabbalist devotional rites, the night, even if spent in segregation, is inhabited by a plethora of religious activities.

The walls of the ghetto, as with other walls meant to keep outsiders separated from the civic body of the city, are also tools that support the widespread fear of touching and prohibit sexual encounters. “The nighttime lockdown of Jews within ghetto walls acted to avert sexual forays entre Jew and Christian. Preventing carnal contact between Christians and Jews was hardly original to Cinquecento Venice. What was new was the use of architecture to prohibit it” (p. 107). In his chapter on the ghetto, Sennett argued that the separation between Christians and Jews was rooted in the fear of contagion, as the Jewish body (especially the male body) was conceived as a receptacle of dangerous illnesses (syphilis) or the Jews as a group as polluting agents, responsible for the plague or the poisoning of wells. Yet Jewish doctors were praised professionals, permitted

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Jütte, “‘They shall not keep their door or windows open.’ Urban space and the dynamics of conflict and contact in pre-modern Jewish-Christian relations,” *European History Quarterly* 46/2 (2016): 209-237.



to walk more freely outside the walls of the ghetto for the welfare of their Christian patients or the city (as in cases related to the plague or other urban disasters).

Katz's analysis of the Venetian ghetto offers an interesting reading of urban spatial relations between Christians and Jews, where two different forms of power, the civic and the religious, seem to forge and inscribe religious diversity within the urban fabric. At times the book seems to be redundant with recurring themes – such as the one of sight and verticality – and theory seems to be structuring the interpretation of historical data. The emphasis on power structures and city legislation highlights how urban seclusion became a structural condition of Renaissance statecraft. However, whilst this approach reveals the deep ties between the Christian city and its built environment, it adumbrates the complexity of city life, and it often silences the agency of the individuals and groups that inhabited it. Segregation fosters *communitas*, Sennett claimed. But what was the impact of enclosure on Jewish culture? What kind of urbanity did the Jews forge in reaction to this process of segregation? How did they perceive the deterioration of their urban condition? Was this model the only one that rendered religious toleration viable in a time of increasing religious strife?

Criticism of this cultural interpretation may shed light on Jewish and other individual agency, and ultimately offer a more nuanced representation of power relations in unequal societies. Urban historians, for example, have stressed that in many Italian cities physical segregation followed two patterns. Most of the time ghettos were walled up in areas with a pre-existing loose Jewish settlement, usually located in the city center in proximity of the market; the land destined for enclosure would be of mediocre quality and therefore relatively inexpensive. Nevertheless, these areas were home to numerous infrastructures that aimed to improve the inhabitants' quality of the life. The material approach to the study of enclosed areas of settlement, while acknowledging the undeniable power of the Counter-Reformation Church, has shown that in some cases Jews attempted to voice their criticism, and even tried to postpone the construction of the enclosed area, as for example in Padua. Jews often negotiated with the government for better living conditions, and did their best to improve the quality of their urban spaces and their dwellings, shops, and storehouses.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Donatella Calabi, "Les quartiers juifs en Italie entre XVe et XVIIe siècle. Quelques hypothèses de travail," *Annales* 52/4 (1997): 777-797; *La città italiana e i luoghi degli stranieri*, eds. Donatella Calabi, Paola Lanaro, (Bari: Laterza, 1998).

Jews were aware of their precarious place in the Christian city, as they often described the rise of the separated zone of residence as a *ghet*, the Talmudic term for divorce, meaning that they had been divorced by means of separation from the rest of society.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the case of Venice clearly shows that the Jewish enclave, even under surveillance, fostered a rich and refined culture that was expressed in a number of different languages – Hebrew, Italian, Spanish and Latin – and which took advantage of the major printing presses in the city. Elsewhere I have shown how some texts composed by Jews in Venice reached a wide audience thanks to the inter-faith encounters that the port city allowed, despite its ideals of closure.<sup>20</sup>

The ghetto may also be interpreted as a liminal space with porous borders which allowed encounters to take place regardless of their ability to strengthen amicable relationships, and enabled information and knowledge to circulate from within and without. The inhabitants of the Jewish ghetto composed a diverse society in terms of class, ethnicity, and even religion. Wealthy Iberian Jews, for example, lived with their servants and slaves, some of whom came from Africa. This social diversity of the ghetto (which was replicated in many other cities) contributed to forming an alternative type of spatiality, typical of diasporic networks and built on family and business ties, religious collaboration, and expertise. The Jews of the Venetian ghetto were situated at the center of a wide diaspora structure that linked cities of the Turkish empire, Italian port cities, and new settlements in Hamburg, Amsterdam, Livorno. They simultaneously lived a life of compulsory enclosure and the life of a port city. Indeed, Jews were aware that the ghetto was one of the various options that Christian society offered, and they knew that elsewhere segregation was not implemented, as in the case of many port cities. The emphasis on surveillance also precludes analyzing the power structure within the segregated area itself. Only rarely does this approach combine study of internal religious rules with that of regulations imposed by the host

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<sup>19</sup> Isaac H.C. Cantarini, *Pahad Yitzhak*, (Padua, 1685); Cristiana Facchini, “Il Purim di Buda. Rimembranza liturgica e narrazione storica”, *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 18/2 (2001): 507-532. See also Kenneth Stow, *The Consciousness of Closure*, in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David Ruderman, (New York: New York University, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Cristiana Facchini, “Voci ebraiche sulla tolleranza religiosa. Pratiche e teorie nella Venezia barocca”, *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 2/30 (2013): 393-419.

environment, thus failing to detect multiple sources of disciplinary strategies, not to mention potentially significant social differences.<sup>21</sup>

It is also tempting to follow the suggestions Wirth himself developed almost a century ago, focusing on forms of cultural production and sociability within the secluded areas. While there is a wealth of research available on the case of Venice, we lack more general accounts that consider a broader sample of cases, and investigate forms of multiple cultural belonging, as ghetto dwellers were, at times, people that lived on the fringes of a number of different cultural and religious realms at once.<sup>22</sup> There is still much to consider regarding the types of urbanism produced by early modern cities in managing their different religious and ethnic groups, and how different groups increasingly became a part of the city's civic life and economic wellbeing.

*Cristiana Facchini, Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna*

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<sup>21</sup> The case of Amsterdam has been analysed in some detail, especially with reference to the lives of Baruch Spinoza and Uriel Acosta. See, for example, Steven Nadler, *Baruch Spinoza. A Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Wirth, *The Ghetto*, 34-39.

Dana E. Katz, *The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination of Early Modern Venice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. xiii + 188.

by Nicholas Terpstra

This book occupies that ambiguous ground where hard edges and soft tissue meet. On one level, the Venetian ghetto was all about walls and bodies, and the surveillance state that was early modern Venice had deep experience in raising the former in order to separate, sequester, and discipline the latter. Yet as Dana Katz reminds us, the softest tissue of all is inside the head. Venetian fears and anxieties made the edges of its ghetto harder than some other local enclosures, heightening walls, bricking up windows, and raising drawbridges at nightfall. Yet Venetian needs, curiosity, fascination, and dreams – about soft tissue above all – introduced cracks in those same walls and windows, which allowed for some more fluid exchanges.

Katz begins building her analysis with the most basic empirical facts. The ghetto space authorized in 1516 remained fixed for two-and-a-half decades. Even the expansions of the *Ghetto Vecchio* in 1541 and the *Ghetto Nuovissimo* of 1633 were not enough to accommodate the hundreds of people who kept pushing into a space defined by ever firmer walls. With no ownership possible which might have generated more imaginative housing solutions, the existing buildings had floors added haphazardly one on top of the other, putting ever greater pressure on foundations that were shaky both architecturally and socially. And so the very Jewish presence which the Venetian Senate had aimed to contain and curtail began to edge up above surrounding buildings and claim the kind of visual attention that few structures other than church bell towers normally commanded. The fact that this particular island on the northwestern margin of the city had been chosen at least in part because it had no church or bell tower only made the irony more delicate and awkward. An island's bell tower never marked its locale passively, but sent sonic and visual messages out into surrounding neighborhoods and across the city. But Jews had no license to look or speak, either explicitly or implicitly, and so as the platform of the ghetto inched ever higher, the anxieties grew about what the Jews might be seeing and saying. Moreover, the social logic of enclosure increased the economic value of those higher floors that enjoyed more expansive views and rooftop terraces (*altane*) and belvederes. So the Jews who were seeing and seen were not the marginalized poor and social subordinates who occupied attics across Europe, but the wealthier and more articulate members of the Jewish community. The

most immediate solution was to blind the buildings by sealing up those windows that faced outwards and to silence the squares and terraces with curfews. The 1541 expansion of the *Ghetto Vecchio* forbade balconies that might provide points of visual, oral, and social exchange, and in 1560 Venetian officials took the logic a step further and ordered all external-facing windows, doors, and balconies to be bricked over or removed.

Venetian authorities would continue pursuing these kinds of reactive responses over the coming centuries, adapting what they assumed was the elegantly simple and eminently practical model of the ghetto to local realities in ways that proved increasingly problematic and unworkable. Like generals fighting the last war, these authorities had begun down the road of enclosing Jews in 1516 by taking the models to hand of convents, brothels, merchants' quarters, and pest houses – the Venetians were past masters at segregating, enclosing, and exploiting social groups of one kind or another. Their actions suggest that they initially assumed that the Jews would pose a challenge of scale, but not of kind for a city that had long managed to balance openness to trade, labor, and capital with strict limits on civic engagement and ownership. Yet apparent parallels broke down in the realities of attempting to sequester an entire community, and the improvised reactions of the following decades only compounded the problems.

Katz moves systematically through four dimensions of this unfolding dynamic: the urban margins as the location for this experiment; the enclosure as the form of it; the physical openings that might mediate or undermine it; and the temporal quality given to walls and boundaries when they were open at some times of day and closed at others. As an architectural historian, she approaches the ghetto less through its historical development than through the place it occupied in the Venetian imaginary thanks to how it emerged, grew, and developed. In the process, Katz engages with histories of the senses, of emotions, and of space, though more often through theoretical than archival means.

At a certain level, the ghetto represented a shifting horizon of expectations over its almost four centuries of existence, not least because Venetians do not seem to have expected that it would be different in kind from their other enclosures. They hadn't looked over that horizon, and when it moved closer to them they weren't certain how to deal with it. The *Fondaco dei Tedeschi* had operated as a merchants' hostel-warehouse since 1228, and the expanded structure built from 1505-1508 still functioned as the heart of the itinerant German merchant community when the swelling tide of traders washed into surrounding hostels.

The pest houses of the *Lazzaretto Vecchio* (ca. 1400) and the *Lazzaretto Nuovo* (1468) similarly served to quarantine those whose bodies and goods were only passing through; their island location may have made walls redundant, but brick and water together gave a comforting security. Brothel workers and clients were equally transient, and in their case walls kept a necessary evil from infiltrating neighboring streets and squares. By contrast, convents were the permanent homes of their residents. Yet they were so deeply integrated into family strategies and kinship networks, so widely diffused across the city, so central to its religious identity, and so well outfitted with functioning doors and windows that they were fully part of the fabric of Venetian society, and their walls and gates seem hardly to have registered as barriers. As Katz notes, unlike Venice's other enclosures, convent walls were meant to protect those inside from external influences, not the other way around. Their ineffectiveness at separating inside and outside was certainly a growing complaint of church reformers in the sixteenth century, and a signal achievement of the Council of Trent that resonated locally was the tightening of convent enclosures – though here too, the walls remained strategically porous.

Venetians may have assumed that the Jewish ghetto would function much like the German *fondaco*, giving a secure base to mainly transient male merchants and making foreign goods and capital available to Venetians without intruding or imposing on what they considered to be permanent, distinctive and definitive in their local community. They clearly expected the numbers of Jewish merchants to be somewhat greater than the Germans, and the peripheral location assigned to the ghetto may have been as much about ensuring easier access for transshipment as about marginalizing and restricting a religiously alien presence which many Venetians considered polluting and contagious. In Rome, Bologna, Florence, and Siena, the ghetto had a central location, often adjacent to civic or ecclesiastical structures, that put Jews under closer surveillance and protection. There can be no doubt that most Venetians looked on Jews as worse than the plague, a more odious necessary evil than prostitution, and a biological, spiritual, and religious presence from which *they* wanted protection. The fact that they allowed this presence in the city at all points to their serene confidence that they could shape its form and control its impact. Yet *la Serenissima* was always backpedaling furiously to keep up appearances, and in the decades after 1516 there was desperation and improvisation of their responses as they simultaneously expanded the urban footprint while restricting the points of contact between the inside and outside of the ghetto perimeter. It suggests that the Venetians were taken aback by what developed, both in this new enclosure

and in their own psyche, once the walls and gates were up, and once whole households began moving into the moated island and making it a permanent home. Gender changed everything. Venetians began seeing this particular enclosure differently. Religion still provided the rationale, but sex provided the anxiety. As if in confirmation, when Venice opened the *Fondacco dei Turchi* in 1621 to house merchants from the Ottoman empire, it reverted to allowing space for transient male traders only.

Katz is particularly good at exploring how sexual anxiety increased the stakes in the games played around Venice's Jewish ghetto. Authorities claimed that exterior windows and balconies had to be blinded because Jews were observing Christian processions with a mocking gaze and insulting gestures; Venice could not risk what this looked like in the eyes of a wrathful God. But the ones at those windows were, as Katz notes, almost certainly primarily women. What unsettled authorities more, she suggests, was not so much what these women saw, but rather who might see them. The trope of the woman as temptress was intensified when refracted through the lens of religion and race, and Katz argues that it was the fear of Christian men being drawn to and through the window and so to perdition that had authorities reaching for a bricks and mortar solution. Katz then moves to expand further on what happened when windows became walls, and indeed when the loss of sight made it all the more important to find other forms of contact, first of all, touch. Ghetto walls proved no less porous than convent ones, and for much the same reason – too many Christian men wanted to connect socially with what was inside.

Katz notes that she is not aiming to write a history of the ghetto's construction and development. Others have done that already, and of all early modern ghettos, the one on the periphery of Venice must be among the most thoroughly studied in its historical evolution, its built and social forms, its religious and cultural life, and its commercial activities both internally and outwards, reaching for the contested margins of the Venetian and Ottoman empires. In aiming instead to apply visual and spatial theory to the ghetto, Katz works to explore what words – above all those in archival documents – seldom convey about how a space feels and acts, and how those living in it engage with each other and those alongside and outside its walls. She does this extraordinarily well, and among this book's many qualities is not simply what it states but what it suggests and what leads it triggers. This is due in part to the fact that it's relatively slim at only 115 pages. Yet these are densely argued and economically expressed pages, and they are anchored with forty images and maps and a further 70 pages of documentary

apparatus which fill out the narrative with historical and contextual detail. The even greater anchoring lies with a sophisticated theoretical framework on marginality, tactility, sexuality, visuality, and spatiality that Katz deploys with nuance and sophistication in order to account most fully for the meanings of this space.

Katz's intensely economical style sometimes renders these theoretical analyses less legible than we might wish, and some sentences and concepts elude comprehension. Beyond that, some of the theories she works with more often deal with what emerges than with the improvisations of that emergence. This gives the analysis a finished and determined quality which can let mixed intents, paradoxes, improvisations, and contradictions slip from view. Katz claims that what we learn from Venice can help us understand ghettos across Europe, but this will only be the case if we allow for those broad variations and inner contradictions. Siena and Florence located their ghettos in the city center, the former bricking its windows and the latter establishing a *cordon sanitaire* of Christian apartments around the outward-looking perimeter. Siena eventually allowed Jews to settle outside these bricked up walls, but Florence did not. Meanwhile, nearby Livorno, with no enclosed ghetto, had a Jewish community that grew to comprise over 10% of the total population. What do we make of the fact that it was here, where there were no limits on where Jews could own and build, that they constructed residences that towered over their neighbors much like those in Venice's *Ghetto Nuovo*? These three very different urbanistic forms developed under a single Tuscan political authority, yet each mortared cultural anxieties into built structures in different ways, and each generated distinct social engagements with surrounding Christian society. There was no predictability to that meeting of hard edge and soft tissue. Neither Florence, Siena, nor Livorno developed Jewish communities as intensely engaged with the worlds outside their boundaries as Venice. It's a paradox that continues to fascinate, and we need bold and probing guides like Dana Katz to help us make some sense of it.

*Nicholas Terpstra, University of Toronto*

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Naomi Leite, *Unorthodox Kin. Portuguese Marranos and the Global Search for Belonging*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), pp. xvi + 344.

by Davide Aliberti

How does the quest for a sense of belonging to an imagined community<sup>1</sup> in the globalized world from a position of triple social exclusion (neither Jew, nor Christian, nor crypto-Jew) take place? What role do tourism and social media play in the construction of both individual and collective identity? These are two of the main questions answered in the book *Unorthodox Kin. Portuguese Marranos and the Global Search for Belonging* written by Naomi Leite, Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

The book is the result of eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out by the author between early 2004 and mid-2005 among the members of the two Portuguese urban Marranos associations: HaShalom Jewish Association in Lisbon, and Menori Jewish Cultural Association in Porto. Urban Marranos is a term coined by Naomi Leite (p. 9), referring to the self-titled Marranos from major Portuguese metropolitan areas. Urban Marranos are very different from the rural/ancient crypto-Jews like the Belmonte community, whose members secretly maintained Jewish practices and rituals until they were first discovered in the early 20th century.

Urban Marranos are not necessarily descendants of crypto-Jews. Their sense of Jewish self is often formed through cloudy legends about crypto-Jewish family traditions, handed down over generations, as well as through a lonely process of introspection. Moreover, prior to media coverage of the Belmonte community, they were also unaware of the existence of Portuguese crypto-Judaism. Nevertheless, they share a conviction that they have Jewish ancestors, as well as desire for acknowledgment of their Jewishness by others and experiences of being individually and collectively marginalized (even by the Portuguese Jews from Lisbon and Porto). Their sense of being “other” is not due to their Jewishness but to other criteria underlying Portugal’s profoundly stratified society based on

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

countless forms of social hierarchy and exclusion, from social class to regional, geographical, and genealogical distinctions (p. 12).

In the first chapter of the book, the author retraces the foundation of the social category of Portugal's crypto-Jews,<sup>2</sup> from the fifteenth century to the emergence and rapid growth of urban Marrano associations in the late 1990s and 2000s. In her reconstruction of Portuguese Marranos' history, Leite pays special attention to crucial developments such as the survival of crypto-Judaism in Belmonte and the rise and fall of Barros Basto's revival movement.

In the second and third chapters, Leite explores the processes through which people become Marranos in contemporary urban Portugal, as well as the practices through which the Marrano self is constructed and expressed. More specifically, chapter 2 focuses on the identification process. This is achieved through delineating three different modes of self-identification as Jewish, through three different life trajectories of seven representative individuals sharing certain features. Identification is described as a dialogical process that takes place through social interactions, whether face-to-face or through ICT (Information and communication technology),<sup>3</sup> which allows the individual or a collective to become self-aware and develop their sense of self (p. 79). Consequently, the encounters with Jewish foreign tourists and expatriates (a continual presence for members of the Marrano associations since the 2000s), as well as Portuguese Jews and other self-identified Marranos, play a crucial role in shaping urban Marrano identity (p. 40).

Chapter 3 describes the processes through which these individuals become Marranos, the existing social category closer to their way of feeling. Here, the author gives particular attention to how they learn to recognize and narrate the ways in which they feel ancestrally or essentially Jewish. Future urban Marranos acquire their first notions about Judaism and Jewishness through the internet and books. Specifically, social media such as the *Nostálgia* forum, which allows them to get in touch with, and be acknowledged by, other people who are

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<sup>2</sup> The "crypto-Jews or Marrano" social category refers to people practicing Judaism in secret after having converted to another religion; Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1941).

<sup>3</sup> Colrain M. Zuppo, "Defining ICT in a boundaryless world. The development of a working hierarchy," *International Journal of Managing Information Technology (IJMIT)* 4/3 (2012): 13-22.

experiencing (or have already experienced) the same identity quest, as well as by foreign Jews.

Furthermore, Leite investigates what happens when urban Marranos try to enter the world of Portugal's organized Jewish communities, which rejects them as non-Jews. This refusal places them in an in-between space,<sup>4</sup> not between Catholicism and Judaism, as the standard definition of Marrano would suggest, but between their intimate sense of belonging to Judaism and the eternal quest for acknowledgment among Jews merely on the basis of this personal feeling. It is this tension between their internal sense of self and their treatment by others that shapes their otherness, and thus their conception of themselves as Marranos.

In the fourth and fifth chapter, the author examines all the facets of the interactions between urban Marranos and their Jewish foreign visitors. In particular, the fourth chapter shows how they began to see one another as individuals, with diverse life stories that diverged from the main historical narrative about crypto-Jews. Acknowledgment and acceptance through first-person interaction lead to the formation of a completely new identity. However, in chapter 5 the author explores the repercussions of the two primary ways urban Marranos are approached by foreign visitors, as described by Leite's informant (p. 222): being looked at as a "beautiful thing" and being treated as a "brother in the faith." These two main trends are not necessarily characteristic of a specific category of foreign visitors (e.g., respectively, tourists and rabbis) and are due to the importance given by visitors to urban Marrano narratives and collective status. These two ways of seeing lead to different ways in which urban Marranos could feel recognized by, and incorporated into, the Jewish people.

As the author demonstrates, it is both the creation of the associations and the continual face-to-face interaction with visitors from abroad that led to the consolidation of urban Marrano identity. It is an identity characterized by a triple perceptive dissonance: on the one hand, the feeling of being intimately Jewish; on the other hand, the experience of being continuously excluded by the local Jewish communities; and finally, the acknowledgment by foreign visitors and online correspondents (the global dimension).

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<sup>4</sup> The "in-between space" is a third/new space that allows other positions to emerge, as explained in Jonathan Rutherford, "The third space. Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity. Community, culture, difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, (London: Lawrence&Wishart, 1990), 207-221.

In her conclusions, the author refers to the law that went into effect in 2014, amending the Portuguese Civil Code by providing ways to acquire Portuguese nationality for the descendants of Jews persecuted by the Inquisition and forced to leave the country in the 15th and 16th centuries. Leite highlights the contradictions of this law, which, like the one proclaimed by the Spanish government that same year, awards full decisional competence to Orthodox religious bodies (the Jewish communities of Lisbon and Porto). These religious bodies bear the responsibility of deciding who has Jewish origins and who does not, often according to ancient criteria of kinship which consistently exclude urban Marranos.

One of the most interesting issues highlighted in the book is the ethnography of Portugal's urban Marrano movement, through which the author realizes that technological connectivity, although essential in the process of self-awareness and searching for other people who share the same sense of otherness, does not necessarily give rise to social intimacy. Face-to-face social interactions still take primacy. Global interconnectivity produces new localities (p. 28), new face-to-face interactions that in turn shape global processes. Direct one-on-one interaction remains an essential component in both the process of exclusion and the acknowledgment of collectivities that transcend the local sphere.

Finally, it can be suggested that Naomi Leite's book is an essential work in several respects: firstly, because it brings to light the peculiarities of a very specific group, urban Marranos in modern day Portugal; secondly, because it contributes to reconsidering the role of social media in the processes of identity building; and finally, because it redefines the role of tourism and foreign actors in the processes of exclusion and inclusion in a given social category.

*Davide Aliberti, Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"*

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*Neoliberalism as a State Project. Changing the Political Economy of Israel*, eds. Asa Maron, Michael Shalev, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 219.

by Ira Sharkansky

Eleven authors contribute to this book, most of them sociologists. Yet the topic is highly political in its nature. The theme is that state actors – principally the Ministry of Finance are largely responsible for moving Israel from a high dependence on the state and the Histadrut, to neoliberalism. Chapters focus on the Labor Movement, Big Business, the Ministry of Finance, reforms, a failed innovation brought from overseas (Wisconsin Works), child allowances and health care, employment and labor subcontracting.

Israeli neoliberalism emerges as something of a muddle, battered by the needs of employing large waves of immigrants, coping with the costs of war, a major reform produced by inflation reaching 400 percent and moving toward 1,000 percent annually in the mid-1980s, and continuing tensions between politicians and senior bureaucrats in finance, health, and employment.

Here and there the authors mention Benjamin Netanyahu as a key figure in lessening the weight of the state in favor of neoliberalism, but there is no focused discussion of his actions.

John L. Campbell writes a Foreword that argues for the inclusion of Israel in the research on neoliberalism, and the editors return to this theme in their Introduction and Conclusions.

Yet Israel seems to be a distinctive case. Its 70 year history has included a unique rise in population from less than 800,000 to more than nine million, along with wars in 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, and 2006, several prominent military operations in response to West Bank intifadas or provocations from Gaza, and uncounted terror attacks before, between, and after all of those. The weight of the state is heavier than any other western democracy in the defense sector, as is its dependence of outside aid from the US government, Germany, and private contributions, from overseas Jews and others who identify with Israel.

All these conditions are mentioned by the authors in this book, but are left in the background to detailed descriptions of manipulations by government ministries of Finance, Sick Funds, Health, the initial power and decline of the Histadrut

and Labor Party. What had once been the unchallenged dominance of Labor has now been reduced to six Knesset Seats, or five percent of the total in what might join a government as a minor figure. Prominent in the book are the institutions that have provided health care, social insurance payments, and have sought to manage public sector employment.

Important in the story is the history of medical care. Until 1994 most of it in the hands of a Sick Fund linked to the Histadrut. Then the politician who became the head of the Histadrut cut the ties to the Sick Fund, and supported a national program that forced all citizens and residents to become members of one Sick Fund or another. More recently, it's become apparent that the Sick Funds do not meet all the needs. So private insurance plans have emerged, which serve a substantial portion of the population in paying for what the Sick Funds do not provide, or do not provide as quickly or as well as the insurance paying public desires.

Also playing roles in the Israeli economy and policy-making circles in ways to affect state control or neoliberalism are religious Jews (Orthodox) and the ultra-Orthodox. Their political parties have been in almost all governments, and they have affected the weight of the state by their demands with respect to settlement in occupied territories, especially prominent in the case of Orthodox voters, and their demands for exclusion from military service along with welfare payments in the case of the ultra-Orthodox. The combination of the ultra-Orthodox and Israeli Arabs have marked Israel as a marginal society, with a social gap between economic classes larger than those of any democracy except the United States. Both settlement in the occupied territories and payments for welfare to Arabs, ultra-Orthodox Jews, and other needy people provide power to government, and get in the way of neoliberalization.

These issues also find their way into the pages of this book, but not in any concentrated or detailed manner.

Muddle could be the theme of this book, with several descriptions of conflict between governmental actors, private sector employers, demonstrators, politicians, and the Histadrut. Authors mention reforms that are proposed and enacted, but implemented partially if at all after several years. There are no clear time lines of what has produced the Israeli state, economy, and population. While an overriding theme is the responsibility of state actors for the production of neoliberalism, a sub-theme concerns differences in perspective and behavior

between the Ministry of Finance, academic economists, various actors in the health, social welfare, and employment sectors, as well as banks, private corporations and wealthy individuals.

Some of the wealthiest of investors have had overseas bases, or have been financed at least partly by overseas supporters. Several have run afoul of Israeli regulators and the judicial process.

Nochi Dankner is mentioned in the book, and he has since been sentenced. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert spent a year and four months in prison. Benjamin Netanyahu has been under investigation for more than two years, and as I am writing this he is likely to be indicted for three or more crimes.

These are parts of the Israeli muddle. A side effect of neoliberalism? It's among the questions that could have been addressed in the book.

There are few straight-line political scientists among the book's authors. That may be its major weakness, given the political nature of the material. *Neoliberalism as a State Project* focuses on the roles of the Finance Ministry and other governmental actors in reducing the role of the state as service provider. It's been essentially a political process to reduce the role of politics in deciding how the state operates, even though the state remains dominant in the overriding Israeli field of national defense.

It's a mystery, as well as a muddle. More political scientists may have helped focus on some of the numerous questions that remain unanswered.

*Ira Sharkansky, Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

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Petra Ernst, Shtetl, *Stadt, Staat. Raum und Identität in deutschsprachig-jüdischer Erzählliteratur des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts*, (Wien-Köln-Weimar, Böhlau Verlag Wien, 2017), pp. 474.

by Francisca Solomon

At first glance, the study of the formation and development of German Jewish literature is a matter that has been thoroughly debated, especially in German, as well as in cultural and literary studies of the past decades. One might assume that all possible interpretations have been exhausted by the numerous well-established or smaller publications, whose achievements vary greatly thematically, critically and in their methodological approach.<sup>1</sup> The book by the German and cultural studies scholar, Petra Ernst, was published at Graz University in the series *Schriften des Centrums für Jüdische Studien* (vol. 27), to whose foundation and development she actively contributed until her untimely death in 2016. Her research is part of the monumental effort to examine the formation and evolution of German Jewish literature; clearly distinct from the earlier superficial writing on the subject, it is distinguished by the critical and reflexive approach afforded by its descriptive analysis and synthesis. Ernst opts for a complex, interdisciplinary methodology and displays remarkable interpretive proficiency, as well as very good knowledge of primary and secondary literature in philology, history and literary criticism, not to mention cultural and Jewish studies. Ernst's work reflects the recent trend of studying literary works by resorting to theories from related areas in order to gain a new understanding of the subject matter.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The comprehensive books published by Renate Heuer between 1982 and 1996 in her momentous work *Bibliographia Judaica. Verzeichnis jüdischer Autoren deutscher Sprache*, as well as further additions made in *Lexikon deutsch-jüdischer Autoren* (München: Saur, 1982-1992, until vol. 16; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992-2013); *Verborgene Lesarten- Neue Interpretationen jüdisch-deutscher Texte von Heine bis Rosenzweig*, (Frankfurt a.M.-New York, Campus, 2003); *Deutsch-jüdische Literatur-Geschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Aufsätze, Vorträge, Rezensionen* (Berlin-Leipzig, Hentrich&Hentrich, 2018), as well as the studies by Hans Otto Horch are only some of the relatively recent contributions to the development of the field. These authors have carried on the tradition of German philology and are undoubtedly a wonderful starting point for further analytic studies of the Jewish literary achievement in the Central European context.

<sup>2</sup> The following can be seen as an example of this tendency: *Raum und Bewegung in der Literatur. Die Literaturwissenschaften und der Spatial Turn*, eds. Wolfgang Hallet, Birgit Neumann, (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009); *Raumlektüren. Der Spatial Turn und die Literatur der Moderne*, eds. Tim Mehigan, Alan Corkhill, (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), Marjan Asgari,



The study investigates prose texts by Jewish writers who published in German throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, such as Leo Herzberg-Fränkell, Nathan Samuely, Karl Emil Franzos, Leopold Kompert, Selig Schachnowitz, Eduard Kulke, Max Grünfeld, Salomon Hermann Mosenthal, Salomon Kohn, Fritz Mauthner, Georg Hermann, Hugo Bettauer, Leopold Hichler, Theodor Herzl, Ernst Sommer, Sammy Gronemann, Karl Teller and others. The three main conceptual elements at the basis of her analysis are *space*, *place* and *identity*, correlated with the situation of the Jewish diaspora in the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, as well as with historical events of the time. Petra Ernst makes productive and original use of theories from cultural studies, especially those of Georg Simmel, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault. The book is comprised of four main chapters followed by three final chapters which contain a synopsis of the work, a bibliography and an index.

The first chapter focuses on the theory and methodology informing the study as a whole, thus achieving remarkable coherence and enabling the reader to perceive the red thread of the text. One of the book's achievements is the perspective on the concept of German Jewish literature, which in Ernst's belief is a phenomenon so complex that a profound understanding of it can only be gained by making use of interpretive models borrowed from the theory of systems. Consequently, German Jewish literature is seen as part of a broader, autonomous system, which in turn reflects the identity mobility of the community shaped by numerous internal and external factors in its interaction with several historical and cultural contexts. In the first part of the work, the explanation of the key terms (Jewish) *space*, *place* and *identity*, deeply joined to the narrative act, bears testimony to the author's praiseworthy understanding of current developments in the research of the subject matter and her ability to make use of the theoretical approaches that best serve the analysis. The starting point is the realization that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *space* is a central category of numerous German Jewish literary texts. *Space* is in close connection to the political, economic, social, religious and cultural changes that swept a great number of diverse geographical *places*. Petra Ernst identifies *topoi* such as the shtetl, the city or the state, which in turn determine the formation of specific types of text such as the "*Ghettogesichte*" (stories which focus on the life of the shtetl or ghetto), the "*Großstadtroman*"

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*Makom, deterritorialisert. Gegenorte in der deutschsprachigen jüdischen Literatur*, (Heidelberg: Winter, 2019).

(the city novel) or the Zionist novel. These macro spaces are, on the one hand, references to existing geographical places with concrete components such as the synagogue, *cheder*, cemetery and tavern in the case of “*Ghettogesichte*” or streets, boulevards, neighborhoods, hotels, cafés, restaurants and theatres in the case of the “*Großstadtroman*.” On the other hand, one must not forget that these spaces must not be understood as fixed, changeless structures, but as spaces going through perpetual transformation - themselves under the influence of phenomena such as industrialization, urbanization and migration – and as such their significance is dynamic and contextual. The next three chapters concentrate on the three above named types of narration. A few of the considered questions are: the way in which spaces and places are constructed in a narrative sense, the presence and significance of some motifs and *topoi*, and the role played by Jewish literature written in German in the context of the significant social transformations between 1840 and 1920.

Petra Ernst’s book represents a judicious contribution, based on thorough arguments and detailed documentation, that follows the origin, evolution and functioning mechanisms of German Jewish literature from the beginning of the 19th until the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the analyzed texts are truly outstanding, taken from works by unjustly forgotten or not widely known authors such as Nathan Samuely, Michael Klapp, Salomon Kohn, Max Grünfeld, Georg Hermann, Ernst Sommer, Karl Teller.

Although the work would primarily be of interest to specialists in the fields of Jewish or cultural studies and German literature and history, due to its thesis, methodology and selected texts, it can also be a stimulating read for those interested in the history of the Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe as it offers a productive mode of interpretation and reflection.

*Francisca Solomon, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași*

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Shir Hever, *The Privatization of Israeli Security*, (London: Pluto Press, 2018), pp. 256.

by Aide Esu

Shir Hever, an economic researcher of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories, in the book *The Privatization of Israeli Security*, sheds light on one of the less explored questions of modern state transformations: the privatization of security. The author conducts a comprehensive analysis of this issue, questioning the Weberian concept of legitimate monopoly of force as one of the pillars of state constituency. Hever investigates the extent to which the security privatization process has weakened this classic interpretation of modernity. At the same time, he also demonstrates how in our late modernity the state does not collapse, but finds a new balance between public and private interests by outsourcing some functions, and new ways to exert control by reshaping the concept of defence and security. Israel is at the core of an international trend blurring the line between the public and private spheres in security, extending security issues from national defence to the security of individual persons. The book tries to demonstrate how in the past 50 years the allocation of resources and economic and political developments contributed to the role of Israel in the internal and international arena of security, and how because of its distinctive peculiarities Israel represents a fascinating case in the speed with which it has moved since the early 1990s.

The six chapters of Hever's book present a narrative following two tracks: a geographical one, from 1967 borders, through the Occupation of Palestinian Territories (OPT), to today where Israel is a player in the security global market, and a diachronic path on which Hever draws to perform a conversion from consideration of public security forces to a progressive privatization pattern.

The first chapter illustrates the theoretical grounds of the book; the economic Differential Accumulation Theory (DAT); Bourdieu's theory of social capital and securitization; the theories of Israeli occupation; and the culture of security. In spite of the dominant view of privatization as a sign of state weakness, the author prefers to foster the more complex view of porous relation between state and private elites, with technological solutions being given preference over diplomatic patterns. Therefore, Hever highlights the Israeli approach to conflict management of Palestinian resistance, in terms of the securitization and politicization of social problems, as preferred to diplomatic solutions.

Securitization and politicization, after the second Intifada, find in the occupation the ideal sphere in which to enact “privatization of the occupation,” by extension of the colonial bureaucracy model through the matrix of occupation, controlling Palestinian mobility through biometric power and outsourcing checkpoints, thus testing the first model of security privatization. The role of elites and the development of new social capital are crucial in this process; the modern version of Charles Right Milles’s power elite (well analyzed in chapter Five), associated with neoliberalism and the growing demand for security from several sectors of society, are the drivers of this process.

In Chapter Two, Hever illustrates the source and the methodology. The historical transformation of the Israeli military and Israeli security is drawn in the third chapter. Hever underlines the relevance of the military-security sector in the economy and the politics of the country. The analysis of neoliberal policies’ role in triggering and accelerating the transformation of securitization highlights the reshaping of public resources, the decline of public actors and the rise of private players. Examples, such as the Israeli police force or outsourcing the control of checkpoints in the OPT, substantiate this examination. The author considers that the decline of conscription (the book provides interesting data) into military service, associated with the rising importance of technological solutions, is a substantial argument for the privatization pattern. Technology neutrality is framed as easy to accept, and good for all, becoming the new face of political control; thus, the notion of military victory is replaced by the neoliberal conflict management concept.

Chapter Four addresses the process of privatization, illustrating primary case studies and analysing the three forms of privatization – sale (army industries), outsourcing (consultancy) and privatization by default, mobilization of the civilian population to create a string of “lone farms” – to prevent the return of Bedouins to retake the land. An analysis of failed attempts is also provided in the case of private prisons. In order better to understand the porous mechanism activated by the privatization process, Hever supports the interpretation by introducing scales of priorities in public choice, adopting the approach of core versus periphery. The successful privatization follows peripheral state interests; the core function, like prisons, airlines and security of natural resources, remains under state control.

Chapter Five examines a critical point related to the core-periphery dichotomy. The author analyzes the outsourcing of the occupation, illustrating the steps of

this process: 1) the counterinsurgency pattern, the case of the South Lebanon Army (SLA) and the formation of the Palestinian Authority to manage security operations in area A; 2) the rise of security companies in the homeland security sector, following the growth in demand after the second Intifada; and 3) the outsourcing of the larger checkpoints in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The author underlines how the outsourcing practices have developed in a political frame of occupation denial in which the task of occupation is considered peripheral to state functions. The political consequence is that outsourcing generates a third agent, to be responsible for acts committed in the name of security.

The last chapter discusses privatization of Israeli security in the global perspective. Economic data for changes in budget flows are provided, to draw a dynamic picture of US military aid as a trigger of change. Additional data on the contribution of the military and security export to national GDP provide a broader picture of the growing economic relevance of private military and security companies. International dimensions are extremely relevant, even if in Israel privatization grew later than in the US or the UK because of the role of militarization in Israeli society. The strong ties with US aid policies deeply impacted this process, driving the growth of Israeli private investors in the arms sector and downsizing the function of state companies. Israel's power in the international arms trade is proved by data on import-export made profitable by global security demand. War on terror was a fertile occasion, followed by the EU's growing demand for security. Israeli security companies capitalized on these opportunities by developing expertise in technologies, designing surveillance to control populations and becoming a world leader in producing items like the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV). A data comparison of top arms exporters in terms of dollar value demonstrates Israel's leading position in per capita arms export, ranking Israel first (2008-11) with almost twice as many exports as the USA, which is second on the list.

In the final remarks Hever considers theoretical economic tools as quite poor in explaining the phenomenon of security privatization. Neoclassical theory considers security a public good, but at the same time, neoclassical economists promote the privatization of security and the adoption of business models in company management. Even militarization theory does a poor job of explaining security privatization, and disregards the fact that Israeli political and military authorities contemplate the OPT as a secondary question. Nonetheless the business model is useful to maintain military occupation by outsourcing

management, in order to avoid involvement in colonial policing. The commodification of security transforms symbolic capital into a material one in the expansion of the world market for security, shifting the balance of capital from the public to the private sector and unveiling the crisis in Israeli security elites, wherein they have to reinvent themselves.

*Aide Esu, Università di Cagliari*

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Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic. An Iranian Revolutionary's Journey to the Jewish State*, (Brooklyn, New York: Restless Books, 2017), pp. 186.

by Lior Sternfeld

In 1963 Jalal Al-e Ahmad, accompanied by his wife, the renowned Iranian novelist, Simin Daneshvar, traveled to Israel as an official guest of the country. He later wrote a travelogue about the journey, published in Iran under the title, *Safr beh vilayet esrail* [Journey to the Land of Israel] in the literary journal *Andisheh va Hunar* in 1964. Two years earlier the author had gained his leftist internationalist credentials when he published one of the most important Third World manifestos, known as “Gharbzadegi” [A Plague from the West]. Al-e Ahmad is perceived to have laid the intellectual and ideological foundations of the 1979 revolution in Iran; both the leader of the Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and Iran’s current Supreme Leader considered Al-e Ahmad to be an influence and role model.<sup>1</sup> This article reviews the most recent translation of Al-e Ahmad’s travelogue, and will be useful to anyone who wants to know more about modern Iran.

Translator Samuel Thrope’s introduction allows the reader to understand the profound complexity that characterized Al-e Ahmad throughout his career. Thrope provides excellent biographical and historical contextualization of the text. He also confronts one of the profound dilemmas facing Al-e Ahmad’s reader. The use of *Vilayet* in the title can be translated in two different ways. One is charged with religious meaning as “Guardianship of Israel,” while the second carries the more prosaic meaning of Territory. As the travelogue itself makes clear, Al-e Ahmad himself was divided about Israel’s role in that land.

As a large section of the Iranian left, Al-e Ahmad viewed Israel as part of the Third World. Al-e Ahmad juxtaposes East versus West and draws the borders of the East from “Tel Aviv to Tokyo,”<sup>2</sup> acknowledging Israel’s ability to create an indigenous culture (unlike in Iran, as he analyzed in *Gharbzadegi*), that did not blindly mimic other cultures but was based on the ancient Hebraic Jewish culture. Al-e Ahmad was especially impressed with the revival of the Hebrew language. His admiration for almost everything he saw in Israel, did not prevent

<sup>1</sup> See for example: Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent. The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 39-101.

<sup>2</sup> Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic. An Iranian Revolutionary's Journey to the Jewish State*, (Brooklyn, NY: Restless Books, 2017), 56.

him from arguing that the Palestinians, and by extension the East in general and the Arabs and Muslims in particular, paid the price for the sins committed by Europeans in the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup>

In the second, chapter Al-e Ahmad recounts how the Holocaust and immigration legacies of Israel shaped the country in its first decade and a half. He visited Jerusalem, and the Yad Vashem memorial museum for the victims of the Holocaust, almost every person he meets on that trip was either a survivor or an immigrant. When he met with an inspector of the Ministry of Education, he was able to identify him as a *Sabra* (an Israeli-born) and a second-generation from Algeria. The third chapter revolves around the Kibbutz, or as Al-e Ahmad calls it “the true cornerstone of the house of Israel.”<sup>4</sup> he inserts the Kibbutz, into the contemporary Iranian-leftists (and perhaps even global) ideological crisis. The Kibbutz, for Al-e Ahmad, was the answer for a non-Stalinist Communism, a fault line that caused the great split of the communist Tudeh Party in Iran, which had Al-e Ahmad in its ranks.<sup>5</sup> In Jerusalem and the Kibbutz, Al-e Ahmad tries to make sense of the events of 1948—the Israeli independence and the Palestinian Nakba—and to find a way to reconcile the demands and the rights of the Arabs with the rights and demands of the Jews.

This text opens a window to the mindset of the Iranian left. Al-e Ahmad’s praise of Israel articulates his (and other Iranians’) dispute with the Arabs, his harsh criticism of Arab governments, and refutes Arab ideas about Iran’s inferiority.

The last chapter of the travelogue shifts tone and criticizes Israel for abandoning its Third World position and becoming a colonial power in its own right. The origin of the section is the subject of some controversy. Some believe that it was written in 1968 after the 1967 war and just before Al-e Ahmad’s death (in 1969), and reflects his own and the Iranian left’s disillusion with Israel. During the 1967 war, when Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights and then imposed military control over the entire population of non-citizen Palestinians, it became impossible for observers like Al-e Ahmad to view it as a nation that had taken part in a postcolonial struggle. The other explanation is that after his death, this chapter was written by his brother, Shams Al-e

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>5</sup> More on Al-e Ahmad, the Tudeh Party, and the Kibbutzim, see: Lior Sternfeld, *Between Iran and Zion. Jewish Histories of Twentieth Century Iran*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 84-87.



Ahmad, in order to get it approved in the radical revolutionary circles, for publication in Iran in 1984. Thrope adds some useful comments about this controversy as well. Thrope's suggests that it was Jalal Al-e Ahmad himself who wrote this chapter, and that the voice expressed there is one of a literary character (a friend who wrote a letter to Al-e Ahmad). By presenting this fictional dialogue, Al-e Ahmad contemplates his ambiguous stand towards Israel and Zionism, or as Thrope writes: "Could Zionism really serve as a model for the remedy that Iran required? Just as importantly, as a Muslim, an Easterner, and an intellectual opposed to the Shah's policies, which included close relationship with Israel, how should he relate to the Jewish State's existence in the heart of the Muslim Middle East?" In this chapter, Al-e Ahmad not only criticized Israel as a colonial power, he harshly criticized the European intellectual left and singled it out for what he sees as double standards. While they vehemently fought against the colonization of Algiers and were outspoken in their criticism of the colonial project as a whole, they could live peacefully with the colonization of the territories gained by Israel in 1967. Al-e Ahmad blames Jean-Paul Sartre and Claude Lanzmann for leading this dreadful trend. He also blames the military regimes of the Arab countries for their incompetence in facing the changing reality of Israeli policy, and the "Petrodollar Empires" of the Persian Gulf for myopic political and economic goals in only caring about the oil industry.

This book recounts a fascinating journey undertaken by an Iranian intellectual to an Israel that existed primarily in the author's mind. The kind of utopia Al-e Ahmad saw would strike many Israelis as odd. Yet, I am sure that every reader would find this book (and its excellent translation) to be a window on the prerevolutionary Iranian left at a time when it was possible for an Iranian intellectual to embrace certain aspects of Israeli society; to get a glimpse of the history of the Israel-Iran relations and the greater Middle East too.

*Lior Sternfeld, Penn State University*

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James Loeffler, *Rooted Cosmopolitans. Jews and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 384.

by Marcella Simoni

This volume is a mighty *tour de force* that explores the role of various Jewish lawyers, law professors, idealists, activists, organizers in Europe, the US and Israel in establishing and developing human rights in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These should be understood as a discipline and as a practice in international law, and as a legal and political issue. One of the declared aims of the volume, certainly met by its Author, is to rescue this rich, complex and fascinating history from the “collective amnesia” (p. 298) that, for various historical and political reasons, made it disappear from scholarship and public awareness, and from more specific debates in the field of international legal history, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As we shall see below, the A. addresses the reasons for such a disappearance – and the political dynamics behind it - mainly in the third and last part of the volume. “Left out of the history of human rights,” writes Loeffler, “are the voices of the rightless” (p. xii), and among them the Jews of Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> To reintegrate them, this volume analyzes and discusses at length the careers, the intellectual contributions, the debates and the political connections and works of a number of Jews who founded the discipline. Their scholarly and political publications, exchanges, political lobbying, debates, as well as their different approaches and inevitable intellectual clashes, intersected in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century across and between the UK, the US and British Palestine/Israel. After World War Two they found a more concrete application, for example during the first trials against Nazi criminals.

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<sup>1</sup> The history that is told in this volume recalls Philippe Sands’ best-selling non-fiction novel, *East West Street* but the two books differ in several ways. One of the most obvious distinctions is that the latter places the birth of human rights law after World War Two and as a result of the Holocaust, while the former places it in the context of the post-Versailles order when, the Mandate system and, most of all, the Minority Treaties, tried to give new shape to the relationship between States and national minorities. Both volumes agree on the geographical starting point of such an enterprise, “the living shtetls of Eastern Europe” (p. xii) and in particular the city of Lwów/Lviv (Lemberg): here, immediately after the First World War the Polish and Ukrainian armies clashed for the control of the city, giving way to one of the worst episodes of uncontrolled and prolonged violence against the city’s Jewish population since the beginning of the century. See Philippe Sands, *East West Street. On the Origins of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2016).

In particular, Loeffler concentrates on the life paths and works of five men whose brief bios are presented in the introduction: Hersch Zvi Lauterpacht (the Polish-Anglo international lawyer who drafted the early versions of both the International Bill of Human Rights and the Israeli Declaration of Independence); Jacob Blaustein (the “Baltimore oilman that brought human rights into US foreign policy”); Rabbi Maurice Perlzweig, “the British Zionist leader who created the modern international NGO at the League of Nations and the UN;” Jacob Robinson, a Zionist leader from Lithuania who helped design the UN Commission for Human Rights and the Nurnberg and the Eichmann trials; and Peter Benenson, a British Zionist activist who converted to Catholicism and founded Amnesty International. As Loeffler writes: “Their lives spanned continents. Their ideas reshaped the legal fabric of international society. Their language has become our language” (p. xiii).

To detail such a fascinating history, the volume is divided in three well balanced parts: the first one, entitled “Emergence” (chapters 1-3), discusses the life histories, theoretical approaches, groundbreaking work, politics (and also the differences) between Lauterpacht, Robinson, Perlzweig and Benenson in the eventful timeframe 1918-1945. The first section raises two central questions: in the first place, how to secure collective rights and guarantees to national minorities within States (and therefore also to Jews). Secondly, how necessary is the active presence of a State (and thus of an army) in the international community (that is within its main diplomatic institution, the League of Nations (LoN) and later the UN) to defend and voice the rights of a persecuted national, religious or ethnic minority. The first question acquired a particular relevance after 1918, when many Eastern European countries (from Estonia to Turkey) signed the so-called Minority Treaties. These were treaties conferring basic rights to all the inhabitants of their country regardless of birth, nationality, language, ethnicity or religion as obligations placed under the guarantee of the League of Nations (a map of the LoN’s Minority Treaties system is at p. 46). The answer to the second question had become painfully obvious already in the aftermath of the Lwów/Lviv pogrom and only found a confirmation in the following decades with the rise and consolidation of Fascism in Europe, and with the spreading of anti-Jewish discrimination. Connected to these themes, another question is central in the volume, i.e. how is Zionism as a national-political project connected to the rise, development and consolidation of human rights in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? According to Loeffler, it was so in at least two ways. In the first place, through the personal and professional commitment of Lauterpacht, Robinson, Benenson, Perlzweig and Blaustein, all convinced Zionists; and secondly, because

the Minorities Treaty and the Mandate system were interlocked within the framework of the LoN. With the deterioration of the international situation both in Europe and in mandatory Palestine (culminating with the British White Paper of 1939 limiting Jewish immigration), the connection between the Minorities Treaty and the Mandate system showed the frailty of the international order that had emerged out of the First World War, especially for Jews, as it came to represent a serious obstacle for their search for a refuge.

The second section of the volume – entitled “Convergence” (chapters 4-6) – focuses on the 1940s, pairing the birth of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948. By pairing these two events, this second section discusses the contradictions of national sovereignty which represents both a source of rights and a challenge to those rights: on the one hand, with the establishment of the State of Israel, the international community had legitimized a new request for national sovereignty; on the other, with the UDHR, it promulgated a new type of international human rights “intended to constrain sovereignty” (p. 144). This section of the volume also discusses the existence of the inevitable differences that separated the universalistic values contained in the legal principles, the *realpolitik* of the institutional places where Human Rights Law was being forged in those years, and the much harder political reality of the various scenarios which required the legislators’ attention. Just to give one example, one of these sites was the Middle East: here, on the one hand, in 1947-49, hundreds of thousands of Jews from Middle Eastern countries were suffering anti-Semitic attacks; on the other, the War of 1948 in Palestine/Israel caused the displacement of 750,000 Palestinians and the creation of a new problem of stateless refugees.

This section also aims at deconstructing one of the standard narratives on the rise of human rights (and on the role of the Jews in it) which considers the Holocaust as a central factor in pushing American conscience towards the adoption of human rights. In reality, as Loeffler demonstrates, the UDHR was the product of American policy makers “who replaced the delegitimized European model of minority rights with a new ideal of American style civil liberties” (p. 87). That was so despite their lack of awareness on the situation of national minorities in the rest of the world, which was due also to America’s failure to join the LoN in the pre-war years. To bridge this gap of knowledge and political approach we again find some of the main characters whose history is told in this volume, and in particular Perlzweig, Robinson, Blaustein and Lauterpacht. Robinson was both one of Israel’s top lawyers at the UN and the first legal advisor to the UN

Commission on Human Rights; Lauterpacht wrote drafts of both the Israel's Declaration of Independence and of the International Bill of Rights; Perlzweig worked on drafting the UN Declaration of Human Rights and Genocide Convention; he was also the first to charge Arab States with genocide for their treatment of Jewish populations (p. 144).

Of particular interest in this second section are the debates and the actions that involved all of them in various capacities when the Allied governments started to address the question of how to frame the prosecution of Nazi war criminals: was there a Jewish specificity in Nazi crimes? Could Jews be grouped with all the other "civilians victims of criminal warfare" (pp. 132-33)? Should the Holocaust be framed as genocide or as crimes against humanity?

The third and concluding section of this volume – entitled "Divergence" (chapters 7-10) – analyses the history of human rights in the Middle East during the Cold War. As the title shows, the parallel paths of human rights and nationalism, which – according to the interpretation of Loeffer – had been walking hand in hand until this time, started to diverge. Even more so, those of human rights and Zionism, both in the perception and representation by the International community of what Zionism was, and in the actual evolution of this national movement after 1967. The 1960s and 1970s are central in this third section: the characters that we have encountered in the previous two sections of this study continued to act as prominent actors in this long last phase too: for example Robinson, was asked by the Israeli government "to draft the nearly one million dollar war reparations agreement with West Germany" (p. 177); he also became involved with three key projects that marked the history of human rights: the 1951 Genocide Convention and the 1951 International Refugee Convention and the International Criminal Court. In 1961 Benenson, now converted to Catholicism, established "a radically new kind of human rights organization: Amnesty International" (p. 203) that would mobilize people and resources for human rights from the grassroots, rather than speak the language of international justice. In 1961 the Eichmann trial opened in Jerusalem while the decade closed with the military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip after the Six Day War (1967). All these (and other) events made human rights enter global consciousness and language and helped develop a new activist political culture based on the notion of human rights; at the same time – considering the inevitable contradiction between universal ethics and ethnically based nationalism (which Loeffer more mildly terms group identity) – the State of Israel, and later Zionism, became the *bête noir* of such a political culture (p.

262). By the early 1970s, veteran Jewish human rights organizations such as the World Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee closed their UN offices, “exiting in defeat.” The separation culminated in UN resolution n. 3379 of 1975, which equated Zionism and racism. From here onwards, the path could only continue to diverge.

*Marcella Simoni, Ca’ Foscari University of Venice*

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Lewis Glinert, *The Story of Hebrew*, (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 263.

by Alessandro Guetta

The history of Hebrew is particularly interesting for many reasons. The most influential collection of books of all times, the Bible, was written in this language, except for a few sections in Aramaic; Hebrew was considered by Jews and Christians, until modern times, the original language of mankind or the perfect one, of divine origin – God created the world in this language, according to the age-old understanding of the Book of Genesis. A third reason is historical: its resurrection or revitalization, which occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and transformed a written language limited to religious purposes into the living idiom of an entire nation. We could add to these features the stunning variety of this language, whose pronunciation was declined in many different ways, as an effect of the dispersion of the Jewish people across the lands of Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East.

Lewis Glinert, professor of Hebrew Studies at the Dartmouth College, author and editor of a series of books on the Hebrew language,<sup>1</sup> retraces the history of Hebrew in a lively and readable way, displaying breadth of scholarly knowledge while avoiding the jargon of specialists. The book presents, as the author describes it in the introduction, a “stirring and suspenseful tale;” a “story” more than a “history,” recounted with passion and with clear empathy. The reader is taken through a journey across times, regions, peoples: from the almost obvious beginning quoting the beginning (the first verse of the Bible, opening *be-reshit*) to the fonts of Microsoft.

Besides its remarkable style, this book contains some original developments in comparison to earlier works on the same topic. It expounds at length, for example, the Christian knowledge and conception of Hebrew in the Middle Ages and Renaissance (and beyond) as an important stage of the story. The contribution of the English Hebraists of the 16<sup>th</sup> (William Tyndale, translator of the Pentateuch) and 17<sup>th</sup> (the King James Bible) centuries is opportunely recalled, alongside the better known activity of the German Protestant scholars of the

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Glinert, *The Joys of Hebrew*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Id., *Modern Hebrew. An Essential Grammar*, (London-New York: Routledge, 1994); *Hebrew in Ashkenaz. A Language in Exile*, ed. Lewis Glinert, (Oxford: Oxford university press, 1993).

same periods. Another interesting contribution is the mention of the popular Hasidic tales of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which forged, according to Lewis Glinert, a type of language completely different from the sophisticated prose of the *maskilim*, and which constituted a basis for the further evolution into modern spoken Hebrew. Study of the once meaningful and now almost completely forgotten American Hebrew literature is also an interesting and original contribution of the book; who remembers today the poets Binyamin Silkiner, Ephraim Lisitzky and Gavriel Preil, the last representatives of a rich Hebrew literature composed outside the *Yishuv* and, later, the State of Israel?

The section dedicated to the development of Hebrew in Israel is, quite understandably, the most detailed one. Here, too, Glinert is at once correct and original in recalling the participation of Orthodox Jews, the *haredim*, in the collective construction of a common national language, in spite of the ideological differences which are, in this case, a source of enrichment.

The book is highly recommended for all these qualities: its style, the scholarship displayed, the originality of some of its contributions.

It also has some shortcomings. The downside of the author's palpable passion is his tendency to insist on the exceptionality of Hebrew, which the reader would easily associate with the exceptionality of the people who used and conveyed it, the Jews. The omnipresent absent of the book is the comparative dimension. We would probably learn more about Hebrew by comparing it to other languages which have or had a comparable structure and evolution. The implicit insistence on its unicity risks flattening its features instead of highlighting them, and produces a rhetoric a little misplaced in a scholarly book, even if it is destined for a wide readership.<sup>2</sup>

We can also reproach the use of a traditional historiographic scheme, which envisages three or four fundamental phases of the history of Hebrew: 1) the biblical stage, 2) the Middle Ages, mainly in Islamic and Arabic-speaking Spain, 3) the *Haskala* in Germany and Eastern Europe, which further developed into 4) contemporary, i.e. Israeli, Hebrew. This outlook embraces the Bible as a unity – the author compares the literary styles of books such as Exodus, Ezekiel,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, in the "Epilogue," p. 247: "Is there, one wonders, a parallel anywhere on earth to the intimate and unbroken engagement of Jews with their ancient literature, in its original tongue?... Crucial to the story is the extraordinary social and political history of the Jews and their treatment by non-Jews."



Ecclesiastes and the Psalms, concluding on the “stylistic breadth of the Bible.” The important span of time and the different social addressees of these texts are not taken into account: the Bible is a collection of texts, far from making a literary and conceptual unity.

Besides, this temporal scansion accepts the vision of a “long Middle Age” for Jewish history, applied to the history of language. The Renaissance and the early modern period are treated only in relation to Christian Hebraism, as if Hebrew had stagnated for three centuries. It is time to extend to linguistic research the numerous historiographic contributions of the last decades, which point to a reappraisal of the uniqueness and innovativeness of these periods in Jewish history. The story of Hebrew from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is still awaiting serious studies.

Some minor remarks to be made concern the relatively little space allotted to Karaism, the religious dissenting group that placed Hebrew at the center of their intellectual agenda and contributed powerfully to its early linguistic and theoretical analysis. Some of the first biblical translations and grammatical studies were made by Karaite authors not later than the 10<sup>th</sup> century; it was the Karaites who at a later time (Judah Hadassi, 12<sup>th</sup> century) considered the knowledge of Hebrew a fundamental religious duty.

Another subject simply mentioned but which probably deserves more careful study is the Hebrew spoken fluently, though as a second language, by the Arab citizens of the State of Israel and of some of the Palestinian-controlled territories today.

Also, recognition of the existing histories of the Hebrew language would have been welcome, for instance, the ones written by Angel Sáenz-Badillos<sup>3</sup> and Mireille Hadas-Lebel.<sup>4</sup> True, Glinert’s book takes into consideration more facets of the history of Hebrew, such as its sociological and philosophical aspects, and is not solely concentrated on linguistics, but its work does not come out of a scientific desert.

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<sup>3</sup> Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *Historia de la Lengua Hebrea*, (Sabadell: AUSA, 1988) (English translation 1993, Italian translation 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *L’hébreu. 3000 ans d’histoire*, (Paris : A. Michel, 1992) (Italian translation 1994).

*Alessandro Guetta*

Notwithstanding these remarks, *The Story of Hebrew* is a very good book. Its reading is not only extremely enjoyable but also useful for students, for specialists and for a public of readers interested in the fascinating history of a language so important for the shaping of European culture, so ancient – and still exuberant.

*Alessandro Guetta, INALCO, Paris*

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*Bundist Legacy after the Second World War. Real Place Versus Displaced Time*, ed. Vincenzo Pinto, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 127.

by Nethanel Treves

Anniversaries are always good occasions for remembrance; sometimes, they prove good occasions for *reflection* on remembrance, as well. This appears to be a key source of inspiration for *Bundist Legacy after the Second World War*, edited by Vincenzo Pinto for Brill to coincide with the 120<sup>th</sup> Bund anniversary. As is well-known, the Jewish Labor Bund was founded in 1897 in Vilnius. The Bolshevik Revolution left no room for it in Soviet Russia, but the Bund soon became established as one of the strongest Jewish forces in interwar Poland. With its core devastated by World War II, what had survived of the Bund, along with its multiple diasporic branches, evolved into a world organization with a network of chapters spread out all over the globe. The “Bundist experience” lasted until the 1990s when, suffering from the crisis in both socialism and Yiddish culture, the Bund went through its final demise, thus concluding its near-century-long history of calamity and reiterated recovery. What of this remains with us, and what the Bund might represent in today’s memory of the past, are some of the questions Pinto’s book tries to tackle.

The volume is a collection of essays, differing in both focus and nature. Although most of them already appeared in print as articles or book chapters, their juxtaposition and the general frame outline a compelling and to some extent original interpretation. As an East-to-West survey of local Bund organizations in post-World War II years, the book has an obvious precedent in David Slucki’s *The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945*,<sup>1</sup> whose chapter on the New York Bund the present collection in part reproduces. Confronting this earlier publication, *Bundist Legacy* differs in two important respects: firstly, it tries to take its point of departure from behind the Iron Curtain, investigating postwar Bundist history from within the USSR and then delving deeper into its five years in liberated Poland. Secondly, wherever possible, the volume assigns local contexts to scholars hailing from the places focused on in any one discussion, with all the advantages and disadvantages implied by such a choice. As compared with Slucki’s work, the emergent plurality of voices makes for a less systematic approach to each one of the case studies, but at the same time also

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<sup>1</sup> David. S. Slucki, *The International Jewish Labor Bund After 1945. Toward a Global History*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

results in a set of gazes from within, enabling the construction of different perspectives and understandings.

The first essay, by Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat, deals with the Bundists' flight from occupied Poland to the USSR. Rusiniak-Karwat makes use of both archival resources and personal interviews in order to reconstruct the repressive operation enacted by the state – of which she identifies three distinct phases – and its underlying criteria. Bundists, she argues, have been “persecuted not only for national reasons, but mainly as social defectors and ‘social fascists’” (p. 16). The “move to the West” then begins with Bożena Szaynok's study on the relations between the Bund, reorganized in Poland already by 1944, and the Jewish Fraction of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR). The author analyzes the political tensions and the debates between Bundists, Zionists, and Communists, as well as the competing arguments within the Bund itself: whether to keep the organization alive as a separate entity, merge with the PPR, or disband and emigrate.

Through an examination of the relations between the Parisian Bund and the American Jewish Labor Committee, Constance Pâris de Bollardi re portrays the situation of many Bundist chapters after the war: politics, cultural context, and organizational needs often led them to collaborate, inducing the Bund to develop new connections despite political distances. A similar set of problems is faced by the New York Bund, as shown by Slucki in the fifth chapter. In the “crowded world of Yiddish leftist activism” (p. 72) of New York, the Bund struggled to find its place among the many other parties of the Jewish Left. Too small to exert an influence on its own, the Bund attempted to do this through the Arbeter Ring, a considerably larger group at the time, while also advocating for unity within the Jewish Left. At the same time, the New York branch also became the administrative office of the World Coordinating Committee, the head of the International Jewish Labor Bund.

In significant ways, the fourth and the sixth chapters of the volume stand apart from the others. The former, by Gali Drucker Bar-Am, addresses the exceptional and paradoxical situation of the anti-Zionist Bund in the State of Israel. Like Szaynok and P  ris de Bollardi re, Drucker Bar-Am considers a personal account. Focusing on the figure of Ben Zion Tsalevitsh, Drucker Bar-Am retraces his life from early union activism in the Yishuv to the official founding of the Israeli Bund in 1951. Doing this enables her to pinpoint some of the most important shortcomings of the Israeli Bund: after a veritable golden age in the 1950s, the

organization missed the necessity to reconfigure its ethnic and social composition, and started to wane. The author argues that the Bund had remained an Eastern European ghetto, incapable of facing its own “Ashkenazi privilege,” and thus failing to become a genuine party of the masses. While the judgment on the end of the Bund in Israel is likely accurate, one may well ask if the “ethno-socialism” Drucker Bar-Am sees in the Israeli Bund of the fifties is not being retro-projected by the author onto the original Bund as well, which she describes in analogous terms at the beginning of the chapter (p. 57).

Two topics seem to be recurring along the whole volume: that of the Bundist *mishpokhe*, the idea of a close-knit community, a Bundist family; and the question of memory. The mutual entanglement of both can be traced throughout the collection: from the small circles commemorating Alter and Erlich, the two Bundist leaders killed in the Gulag in 1943 USSR, to the effort to recreate a *community* about the reborn Polish Bund, to the latter’s diatribe against the PPR on the need to “revise” the party’s history in order to join the workers’ party. The peculiarity of the French Bund is made manifest: Pâris de Bollardière puts in evidence the fragmentation along generational lines of the Bund in Paris (corresponding to the three waves of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe: the Russians, the Poles, and the wartime refugees). At the same time, the strong ties between the Bund and the American JLC appear to have left more traces of the memory of the latter than of the former, as proved by the “non-Bundist American memory [...] imposed on the walls of the *Arbeter-ring*’s institutions” (p. 48) by non-Bundist JLC donors. In a sense, a similar kinds of *memory pressure* acted upon the Bund in Poland and in France, coming from both Jewish and non-Jewish sources.

On the opposite side of the Atlantic, obsession with the organization’s history is a distinctive characteristic of the American Bund, whose *Farlag Unser Tsayt* – the organization’s official publishing house – found itself under attack for producing history books in large numbers, but “virtually nothing on politics” (p. 87). The pamphlets originally printed by the old Bundist press in Europe had all been substituted by historiographical works and memoirs.

The question of memory is also pivotal for the concluding essay in Pinto’s edited collection: a substantially revised version of a 2013 article by Roni Gechtman reviewing Israeli historiography of the Bund and comparing the information it provides to popular knowledge about the Bund and Jewish socialism overall. Despite the reforms of the 1990s and the attempts to merge (Zionist) Jewish

history with the general history curriculum, Bundism and Yiddish socialist currents are to this day virtually absent from state school teachings, which Gechtman takes to be the main source of Israeli collective memory (p. 104). Academia offers a more promising setting for research. Gechtman traces the fate of Bund studies, from the neglecting attitude of the first Zionist historians to the attempts by more recent scholars such as Jonathan Frankel, Ezra Mendelsohn, and Yoav Peled to achieve an in-depth understanding of the Bundist experience. Be its national element imposed from the top or demanded from below (the main point of disagreement among these three authors), all of them interpret the Bund's Jewish element as a nationalist claim. Things get even more problematic with the so called "Tel Aviv school," whose attempt to *nationalize* the Bund becomes prominent in works by Moshe Mishkinsky, Matityahu Minc, and Yosef Gorny, all of whom try to integrate the Bund within the Zionist teleological framework.

In closing, a word on Pinto's introduction. The collection's editor calls for a more philosophical approach to the history of the Bund, one that will be capable of taking into account the changed conditions of its matter. "We must," writes Pinto, "leave behind the 'modern' and schematic vision of a Jewish party struggling for rights and replace it with a temporally 'displaced' perspective." We must also "seek another space between past and present. This space is not a 'refugium melancholicum,' but a new dimension of brotherhood, solidarity and authentic hospitality" (p. 5). In order to accomplish this, we should reread – with a "deconstructive approach to the texts" – the personal accounts and the Bundist sources. Then he utters a prediction: "There are two possible paths for the next Bundist historiography: to struggle for an 'Hegelian' recognition by the Hebrew-Zionist father, or to lose its 'religion' in order to gain a new way of life" (p. 6). The metaphor recalls a passage that we find in Gechtman's chapter. He tells that Gorny chooses to interrupt his historical reconstruction in 1985 because at that time the Bund finally *admitted* that the Jews scattered all over the world were constitutive of a single people. It was the "prodigal son's final (and inevitable) return to the bosom of the nation. The Bund's history had reached its *telos*" (p. 102). Gorny's *Converging Alternatives* (where the title gestures implicitly toward Zionism and Bundism) thus epitomizes a specific trait of Zionist historiography, which was often paternalistic towards the Bund, shaping reality according to its goals. Rather than look for recognition or abandon the political arena in search of a transcendental *mishpokhe*, why not study more closely what Bundist historiography today can reveal concerning the mechanisms of nationalist memory?

*Nethanel Treves, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa*

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David Fraser, *Anti-Shechita Prosecutions in the Anglo-American World, 1855-1913. "A major attack on Jewish freedoms ..."*, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018), pp. xxiv+233.

by Todd M. Endelman

David Fraser's study of prosecutions to curtail *shechitah* in English-speaking lands (Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States) uncovers the depth and persistence of the hostility of humane societies to the traditional Jewish mode of slaughtering animals. Initially, humane societies objected to Jewish opposition to pre-slaughter stunning, opposition rooted in the requirement in *Halakhah* that the animal be healthy and uninjured at the time of its death for its meat to be considered kosher. In time, the societies also protested the casting of animals, that is, restraining them with chains and ropes and placing them in a position where their throats are exposed to the *shochet's* blade.

Although expressive of humanitarian concern about the mistreatment of animals, these protests, as Fraser explains, were also rooted in ignorance (about both *shechitah* and animal physiology) and, most critically, in hoary anti-Jewish sentiments. In the first case, the humane society inspectors failed to understand that the initial, swift cut by the *shochet's* blade severed the blood supply to the brain and the central nervous system, thus preempting suffering (however measured). They also misinterpreted the thrashing of animals following the slitting of their throats as the persistence of consciousness and prolongation of suffering and agony rather than as the involuntary reaction of the nervous system. (Think of the proverbial chicken with its head chopped off running madly around the farm yard.)

Fraser convincingly shows that hostility to Jews and Judaism, more than ignorance, was the driving force behind the humane societies' persecution of Jewish slaughterers. He does this through a sensitive analysis of the language they used in condemning *shechitah* and a close examination of the legal proceedings they initiated. At the level of discourse, Fraser exposes how consistently the humane societies framed their case around the well-established trope of Jewish cruelty and bloodthirstiness. They opposed Christian humanitarianism to "a seemingly innate and inescapable Jewish cruelty" (p. 60), as manifested in the Jews' seemingly barbarous method of slaughter, which they represented as exotic, abnormal, and extraordinary – unlike the "Christian" mode, which they considered normal and ordinary. In his concluding chapter, Fraser extends this



line of interpretation one step further. Here he argues that, even when legislation regulating slaughter includes provisions allowing Jews (and, increasingly, Muslims) to slaughter animals without prior stunning, the result is, nonetheless, the creation and perpetuation of “the otherness of Jews, their beliefs, and practices, thereby creating the indefeasible dichotomy of public morality and a somehow opposable Jewish morality.” There is humane slaughter – and, in contrast, the Jewish mode, which, like the Jews themselves, “is always constructed as other” (p. 211).

Fraser’s investigation of more than a dozen legal cases in the Anglo-American world also uncovers how the anti-Jewish bias of the humane societies manifested itself in practice. Repeatedly, when anti-cruelty laws were used to combat *shechitah*, the societies failed to prosecute Christians who assisted in the slaughtering, like workmen who helped to cast the animals and the owners of the abattoirs, while not hesitating to prosecute Jewish leaders who neither did the casting nor played a role in the slaughtering. Given the increasing emphasis on the barbarity of casting in anti-*shechitah* literature, this failure to prosecute those who actually carried it out is revealing.

Fraser also describes the specific historical context in which the prosecutions arose. The animal welfare campaign was one of numerous evangelically inspired social reform movements in English-speaking countries. These movements emphasized the potential for human perfectibility on earth, rather than mute acceptance of God’s will, and the power of human moral action to correct social ills. Local societies were well aware of the success or failure of prosecutions in different countries and of the development of new avenues of argumentation, thanks to the national and international “transfer of knowledge” among them (p. 77). Where the Anglo-American societies differed from their German counterparts was their reluctance to embed their attack on *shechitah* in a broader attack on Jews. Indeed, spokesmen for these animal welfare groups explicitly denied that their intent was in any way anti-Jewish – even when it undoubtedly was. In this sense, animal welfare zealots in this period resemble today’s left-wing critics of the existence of the State of Israel, who deny that they are hostile to Jews even though the only form of national sovereignty they oppose is Jewish. Their obsession with Israel functions in the same way as the obsession of animal rights activists with *shechitah* did.

This volume also raises a broader interpretive issue that transcends the history of anti-*shechitah* agitation. On the Continent, anti-Semites also campaigned to

outlaw circumcision. Their polemics represented Jews who performed the procedure as cruel, knife-wielding bearded men. The emphasis on blood, blades, and beards in both movements may not be a coincidence. It may also not be a coincidence that in Eastern and East Central Europe blood libel accusations proliferated in the years before World War I. Fraser is aware of these parallels but he does not explore their possible meanings. The need remains for a more speculative and broad-ranging investigation of these kinds of trans-national, multi-denominational Christian obsessions.

*Todd M. Endelman, University of Michigan*

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Eden K. McLean, *Mussolini's Children. Race and Elementary Education in Fascist Italy*, (Lincoln – London: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), pp. 320.

by Michele Sarfatti

*Mussolini's Children* traces how, from 1922 on, Benito Mussolini and his Fascist State used the elementary school system – the *scuola elementare*, generally intended for ages six to eleven – and the language of racial superiority to forge “the New Italians of a New Italy” (p. 2). The system was tasked with “instill[ing] [...] faith in the power of Fascism, faith in the unity of the fatherland, faith in the supremacy of the race” (p. 162).

The book is divided into four parts, corresponding to the years 1922-1929, 1929-1934, 1934-1938, and 1938-1940, respectively, and ending with Italy's entry into the Second World War; the concluding chapter goes on to provide a sketch of subsequent developments until 1945.

The author has studied numerous collections of documents kept in the *Archivio centrale dello Stato*, as well as official bulletins, specialized magazines, books, and pictorial and other documentary materials, including schoolbook covers, from those years. She has also examined an impressive array of secondary sources. Of these latter, however, some important documentary works on the history of racism in schools and others on the implementation of racist practices at the local level following the promulgation of the Fascist Manifesto of Race and the anti-Semitic laws of 1938<sup>1</sup> seem to have been left out. Sadly, even in Italy to date these sources are little known.

According to Eden K. McLean, the Fascist regime “developed an increasingly totalitarian education system that worked in tandem with – and lay at the heart of – a comprehensive and ever more exclusionary racial campaign” (p. 2). In her view, the process Mussolini wanted to set in motion of bringing up new, strong, racially pure generations possessed of a racial and racist consciousness was inclusive of all other major political, cultural, and economic Fascist policies

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<sup>1</sup> On instruction concerning “races” in the school curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Education, cf. Gianluca Gabrielli, *Il curriculum “razziale.” La costruzione dell'alterità di ‘razza’ e coloniale nella scuola italiana (1860-1950)*, (Macerata: EUM, 2015). On racism in Taranto schools, including reading *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* for elementary school children, cf. Francesco Terzulli, *L'impossibile emulsione. Una città al tempo delle leggi razziali*, (Bari: Palomar, 2009).

affecting youth. Thus even the education reform introduced in 1923 by Giovanni Gentile, with all the empowerment which it ensured for the Catholic religion, was in fact designed to further Fascist racist education (p. 36). In the same way, campaigns promoting nationalism, militarism, pronatalism and public health, language homogenization, extended colonialism, and imperialism, among others, although clearly defined each within its separate realm, were also all an integral part of the effort to create a racist Italy beginning with a racist youth. The author seems to be absolutely certain of this, without considering interpretations advanced by other scholars.

McLean details the development stages of Fascist policies concerning youth and education, consistently highlighting legislation that directly or indirectly affected children both within and beyond school walls, including measures targeting the little-known institution of “rural schools.” She points to speeches by Mussolini and his ministers, showing the link between them and the content of schoolbooks and specialized publications; she also draws attention to the gradual disappearance of female role models, along with other developments indicative of the entrenchment of the new regime’s ideology. The book provides an eloquent portrayal of the totalitarian tactics used by Mussolini and the Fascist State to manipulate children and the intensification of these tactics with time, comparing them with what she calls “Western pedagogy.” Interestingly, fewer comparisons are made with the Nazi approach to education, despite the fact that this latter had considerably greater similarity to the Italian system that did the “Western.”

The Fascist Manifesto of Race and the enactment of “legal anti-Semitism” with the promulgation of Italy’s racial laws in 1938 are prominent in their chronologically designated section of McLean’s work. Several pages are devoted to the former, focusing attention on its new aspects. In terms of significance, however, McLean’s view is that the Manifesto was not decisive: despite the introduction of the biological criterion, and “despite the new ‘scientific’ thrust of language, [...] [it] did not prove to be a remarkable departure from the foundational concepts of race” (p. 182). The author goes on to a limited discussion of the anti-Jewish legislation, without, however, attempting to situate it within the larger historical context of Jews and of anti-Semitism in Italy or in Europe overall. As she sees it, the legislation “was part of a much larger network of ideas, policies, and actions regarding the Italian race and nation-state” (p. 7). She does take up the interpretation offered by a significant number of scholars, explaining that she disagrees that the Manifesto marked “the beginning of the

domestic Fascist racial campaign because of these substantial legal developments” (p. 186).

Readers may find it hard to subscribe to some of the evaluations in McLean’s study of these two key developments of 1938. Leaving in-depth analysis for a different, more extensive discussion, suffice it at this juncture to note that in Fascist Italy racism and anti-Semitism were distinct, albeit interrelated phenomena; the ushering in of anti-Semitism as a state policy marked a turning point, not a moment of tortuous continuity with earlier years. The decision to adopt a biologically racist approach was not the only defining element of this momentous turn. The composition of the Fascist Manifesto of Race and forcing it upon the public did not constitute a powerful *crescendo*, but marked the starting point of the transformation of Italy into a racist state.

With this said, we need to draw attention to the fact that Eden K. McLean has provided us with an excellently thorough presentation of the way in which the children of Mussolini’s Italy were subjected to increasingly racist indoctrination.

*Michele Sarfatti, CDEC, Milan*

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