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Created from Animals: Thinking the Human/Animal Difference in Jewish and Hebrew Literature

edited by *Anna Lissa*

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Introduction*

by *Anna Lissa*

The Horizontal Relationship

As early as 1838, in his private notebooks, Darwin wrote that he believed true "to consider him [man] created from animals." [1] This notion challenged the prevailing religious views of his time, which posited a distinct and separate origin for humans. Later on, in his *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, first published in 1859, he took his readers on a scientific journey into the depths of time, unraveling an unwritten history that encompasses not just humans but also the entire animal kingdom. In a sense, Darwin has constructed a new History of Animals that integrates humans within it, breaking away from the traditional understanding of history as solely belonging to human civilizations. The phrase History of Animals is fragrant with echoes of Aristotle's teachings, but when applied to Darwin's scientific endeavor, it encapsulates both the scientific inquiry and the collection of data, reflecting the original meaning of the Greek word *istoria*. It also signifies the unfolding of linear time during which and animals have evolved. In *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin did not express himself about humans. He only wrote the following lines in the "Recapitulation and Conclusions" to the work:

> Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history. [...] When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of

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1 Paul H. Barrett, et al., eds., *Charles Darwin's Notebooks 1836-1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 300.

> some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Silurian system was deposited, they seem to me to become ennobled.[2]

In 1859, Darwin remained prudent concerning the involvement of man in the process of evolution like all the other living beings, because the Victorian society of the time was not ready to accept the idea.[3] In *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, first published in 1871, he demonstrated that humans are also involved in the larger and longer process of evolution. They had evolved from "a lower form,"[4] actually from the *Hominidae* or great apes, and are thus only a phase of a much complex and general evolution and one limb of a widely branched tree.

The choice of a quote from Darwin as the title for this collection of articles is motivated by several reasons. Throughout history, many authors, starting from antiquity, have presented arguments, primarily from philosophical and moral perspectives, advocating for the commonality between humans and animals and questioning the ethical implications of killing and consuming them. Aristotle's denial of reason (*logos*), reasoning (*logismos*), thought *(dianoia*), intellect (*nous*), and belief (*doxa*) to animals triggered a philosophical crisis that necessitated expanding the understanding and the content of perception, which in turn risked equating perception with belief. This led to a heated debate about the philosophical definition and boundaries of reason, opinion, and perception in relation to the human-animal difference.[5] In this philosophical battleground the skeptics aimed to challenge Aristotle's doctrines and Stoicism and argued for the presence of some reason in animals, employing a strictly philosophical method and set of arguments that resurfaced during the Renaissance, notably in the works of Michel de Montaigne.

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[2] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, published in *From so Simple a Beginning: The Fours Great Books of Charles Darwin*, ed. Edward O. Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 441-766, 759.

[3] Edward O. Wilson, "Introduction to *The Descent of Man*," in *From So Simple a Beginning*, ed. Wilson, 765-766, 765.

[4] As Darwin himself put it in the title of the first chapter of *The Descent of Man*.

[5] Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca-New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), especially chapter 1 "The Crisis: The Denial of Reason to Animals," 7-16.

However, Darwin embarked on a distinct enterprise. In fact, his groundbreaking scientific works repositioned humans within the animal kingdom, highlighting their ancestral connection to the animal world, a lineage that extended far back in time, predating the written history on which our understanding of human existence has traditionally relied. He did so not by resorting to philosophical arguments and reasoning but through modern scientific analysis, examining various forms of evidence. His work served to reposition humans within the animal kingdom, emphasizing their deep ancestral connection to the animal world that stretched back in time long before the advent of written history, which has traditionally been the basis for understanding human existence. Certainly, the concept of humans descending from the great apes implies a shared history with other animals that spans at least two million years. Even better, animals and humans share a common history, and after all, don't they still share that history nowadays? Are not we, the humans, responsible vis à vis of the animals because of the pollution and the climate change that are ravaging the planet we share with them?

We are created from animals. As Derrida states: "L'animal est là avant moi, là près de moi, là devant moi – qui suis après lui."[6] I am quoting the original French to preserve the double meaning of the verb *suis* as "I am" and "I follow/come after":

> If I am (following) this suite then, I move from "the ends of man," that is the confines of man, to "the crossing borders" between man and animal. Passing across borders or the ends of man I come to surrender to the animal, to the animal in itself, to the animal in me and the animal at unease with itself.[7]

It is indeed widely known that Jacques Derrida's engagement with the subject of animals was sparked by an encounter with his she-cat while he was coming out of the shower. In that moment, he experienced the animal's gaze, the "insisted gaze

[6] Jacques Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006), 28; English translation *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Lallet and trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University press, 2008).

[7] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 3.

of the animal, a benevolent or pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant."[8] This unexpected exchange of gazes led Derrida to contemplate the concept of the animal as Other, at the same time—in a game of seeing and being seen—it also prompted him to consider the possibility of an alternative perspective, "the point of view of the absolute other."[9] In Derrida's exploration, he posits an inherent and profound rupture between humans and animals, a rupture characterized by diverse and shifting boundaries. On the other side of this rupture exists a multiplicity of "the living,"[10] which he expresses using the term "*animot*."[11] This term signifies the multitude of non-human living beings, encompassing various species and forms of life beyond the human realm. Still, "being after, being alongside, being near [*près*] would appear as different modes of being, indeed of being-with. With the animal."[12]

Indeed, the study of prehistory continues to reveal new insights about the relationship between humans and animals in early stages of human development. Drawing upon unwritten sources, scholars have made discoveries proving that humans have been with the animals, wich played a crucial role in the cultural and social development during that early stage. It is now recognized that the presence of animals was not merely instrumental for human survival, such as through hunting or domestication, but also influenced the evolution of human language, the development of writing and the expression of religious feelings. These significant developments took place approximately 40000 years before present (BP) during the Upper Paleolithic period. During this time, humans primarily lived as hunters and gatherers, and as they began to engage in more complex cognitive processes, they likely started pondering their own existence and their relationship with the natural world. It is reasonable to suggest that early humans, in their nascent thoughts and reflections, conceived of themselves as part of a horizontal and non-hierarchical relationship with other animals, rather than placing themselves at the apex of a hierarchical structure.

[8] Ibid., 4.
[9] Ibid., 11.
[10] Ibid., 31.
[11] Ibid., 41.
[12] Ibid., 10.

In the following pages, I shall focus on a few examples, which are admittedly drawn from different ages and geographic locations, but they also provide some consistent and coherent facts supporting my argument. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that the interpretive work of unwritten sources leads to conclusions that are far from definitive. I will begin by discussing two interpretations of some cave paintings, which are especially relevant to the topic of human-animal relations and their cultural expression. They date back to the Upper Paleolithic period, approximately between 40000 and 12000 BP, at the end of the Paleolithic age and the beginning of the Neolithic era, coinciding with the extinction of Neanderthals and the emergence of Homo sapiens.

One possible interpretation of these cave paintings is related to the debate about the origin of language, that remains outside the purposes of this introduction. However, I shall refer to Emmanuel Anati's understanding of paleolithic art not only as an art, but also as an expression of languages that open up new perspectives in order to outline "logical systems of communication and expression deeply rooted in human mind."[13] It is widely acknowledged that animals are the main subject of this art, but according to Anati there is more:

> The analysis of the thematic reveals typologies of figures, signs, and graphemes that constitute the "vocabulary" of prehistoric art. They play the same role as words in a sentence. Isolated signs are rare, just as isolated words are rare in discourse. Sets constructed according to systems of association form the syntax; these are "phrases" composed by grouping or sequencing the graphemes depending on canons that reveal universal

[13] Emmanuel Anati, *Aux origines de l'art* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 19 (all the quotes from this book are translated by the Author). Anati's argument is also supported by analyses of mitochondrial DNA, that date the emergence of the full language faculty to 55000 BP or even to 90000 BP, and by fossils absence-of-evidence and presence-of-evidence arguments. The former date the emergence of language at around 50000 BP and the latter antedating it to 150000-200000 BP, thus including the Neanderthals. Kathleen R. Gibson and Maggie Tallerman, "Introduction to Part II: The Prehistory of the Language: When and Why did Language Evolve?," in *The Oxford Handbook of Language*, eds. Gibson and Tellerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 239-249, 240 and 244-245, and annexed sources; Jessica Serra, *Sapiens animalis. Ce que nous partageons avec les animaux* (Gennevilliers: Prisma Media, 2023), 11 and annexed sources.

> characteristics and constant associations, unrelated to ethnic and linguistic boundaries or predating their formation.[14]

In prehistoric art, Anati identifies three signs, pictograms, ideograms and psychograms; the most widely used pictograms were zoomorphic or anthropo-zoomorphic, also called therianthropes, since paleolithic men were essentially hunters and gatherers and they hunted large animals. Pictograms, as it is well known, convey messages, regardless of a distinctive language. However, it seems possible that the humans who made those paintings already possessed some sort of language and, so to speak, put it in a written form. Furthermore, zoomorphic pictograms were not only the representation of the subjects of the hunt; they also were a representation of "imagined realities" involving "mythological and metaphorical references,"[15] drawn in paintings that "can be related to sacred history texts that give evidence about the mysteries at the origin of the intellect."[16] Another possible explanation of the Upper Paleolithic cave paintings derives its main argument from the history of religions and from the neurosciences. At the core of this interpretation there is the fact that Paleolithic art is above all and "from the beginning to the end [...] an art of animal forms,"[17] and this latter aspect can be explained "by suspecting some form of shamanism."[18] According to this theory, these paintings would be telling the story of a shamanic journey inwards, plunging into the three states of shamanic trance: stage one represents seeing geometric forms; stage two leads to illusioning these forms into objects with culture-specific meaning (religious or emotional); stage three implies plunging into a vortex at whose end are hallucinations with animals, people and so on, coupled with the hallucination of flying or descending into the underworld.[19] The shamanic association with animals is a very common third stage of the

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[14] Anati, *Aux origines de l'art*, 338.

[15] Ibid., 351.

[16] Ibid., 389.

[17] Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams, *Shamanes de la préhistoire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1996). English translation, *Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves*, translated by Sophie Hawkes (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 41.

[18] Ibid., 81.

[19] Ibid. Concerning the three states of shamanic trance, see Chapter 1 "Shamanism," 11-30. Concerning the succession of interpretations of Paleolithic art, see Ibid., Chapter 3 "One Hundred Years of Searching for Meaning," 65-79.

shamanic trance, because the animal becomes a spirit-animal bestowing powers to heal, or make rain fall; and, more importantly, this spirit-animal makes the communication with "another world" possible.[20] The seminal points, allowing the interpretation of Upper Paleolithic cave paintings, deserve to be quoted in full:

> First, many images seem to float on the rock face independently of its shape and features. Sometimes the pendant hoofs of animals enhance the appearance of floating because the animals do not seem to be standing on the ground. Secondly, the images of animals are always presented independently of natural surroundings; they are not part of a real landscape of ground, plants. trees, hills, and so forth. It was spirit-animals that mattered, not the world outside the caves. Thirdly. the images were painted or engraved without regard to relative size; for instance, mammoths are sometimes smaller than horses. Lastly, the animals are, for the most part, unrelated to one another: If, say, horses and bison are depicted together, it is not because these species consort; they were placed together for other, non-realistic, reasons [...].
>
> These four features are characteristics of the projected hallucinations of the third stage of altered consciousness.[21]

Thus, the cave paintings tell the story of the shamanic journey inwards and trance, whose third and final stage can include the transformation into a therianthrope. Accordingly, I would like to dwell briefly on one specific therianthrope cave painting: the theriomorph sorcerer/shaman in the cave of Trois frères (Ariège, Pyrenees France), dating back to ca. 14000 BP. This awesome image merges together a male human form with parts of different animals. In several of his books, the cultural historian Joseph Campbell, goes back time and again to the description and interpretation of this very same painting which deserves to be quoted in full. First and foremost, Campbell remarks that the sorcerer towers over the paintings of several animals in the cave of Trois Frères:

[20] Ibid., 23.
[21] Ibid., 92.

> Above them all [other animal paintings], predominant – at the far end of the sanctuary, some fifteen feet above the level of the floor, in a craggy, rocky apse – watching, peering at the visitor with penetrating eyes, is the now famous 'Sorcerer of Trois Frères.' Presiding impressively over the animals collected there in incredible numbers, he is poised in profile in a dancing movement that is similar, [...], to a step in the cakewalk; but the antlered head is turned to face the room. The prickled ears are those of a stag; the round eyes suggest an owl; the full beard descending to the deep animal chest is that of a man, as are likewise the dancing legs; the apparition has the bushily tail of a wolf or wild horse, and the position of the prominent sexual organ, placed beneath the tail, is that of feline species – perhaps a lin. The hands are paws of a bear. The figure is two and a half feet high, fifteen inches across. [...]. Moreover, it is the only picture in the whole sanctuary bearing paint – black paint – which gives it an accent stronger than all the rest. [22]

There have been many interpretations of this painting, starting from Abbé Breuil, who first studied it and classified it as a sorcerer, later considering it a god or spirit,[23] an interpretation Campbell endorses by stating that the sorcerer is "a *manifestation* of a god."[24] In Campbell's interpretation, the transformation into an animal, and therefore becoming the Other, implies a way to live in harmony with this Other by de-centering the attention from what is solely human. However, the crucial point is that, if one follows this interpretation, the animals remain the Other, while humans make an intellectual effort "to become linked psychologically to the task of sharing the wilderness with these beings." [25] Campbell's interpretation suggests that humans in the Upper Paleolithic were resorting to sympathetic magic to gain control over their hunting, which assumes a vertical relationship between humans and animals, with humans striving to control animals and harness their power.

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[22] Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* 4 vols. (London: Secker & Warburg 1960), vol. I, 309-310.

[23] Ibid., 310 and annexed sources.

[24] Ibid., 311.

[25] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2004 [1st ed. 1949]), 361.

However, the interpretation of this therianthrope painting as the third phase of the shamanic trance could be the clue suggesting that Upper Paleolithic humans placed themselves in a horizontal relationship with animals. If they were indeed performing the shamanic rites to communicate with another world, they must have recognized that their own powers were insufficient, because they "conceived their own humanity as one of the multiple manifestations of the forces in action, on an equal footing with the animals."[26] Not only our ancestors were not the strongest beings of the time; they were also very much aware of the possibility of becoming a prey. To achieve their goals, they needed to attain a state of wholeness; thus, they had to become one with the animals, whom they regarded not only as a source of power, but also as an integral element that completes a whole. Thus, humans were placing themselves in a horizontal relationship with animals, rather than in a hierarchical one.

This same horizontal relationship possibly persisted in the human approach to animals also after the Upper Paleolithic, namely during the period archaeologists have labeled pre-pottery Neolithic (10000-8000 years BP) in the Fertile Crescent (including roughly contemporary Southern Turkey, northern Iraq, Israel, Lebanon and Syria) and more precisely in Göbekli Tepe (Southeastern Anatolian region, Sanliurfa, Turkey), a site excavated from 1995 by the German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt and dating back to 10000 BP, when humans were still hunters and gatherers. The archaeological excavations brought to light several enclosures consisting of a succession of T-shaped pillars, which were not merely structural components of a building but rather formed the core of the enclosure.[27] These pillars showcased many engravings depicting animals, including large felines—possibly lions—bulls, aurochs, gazelles, wild boars, snakes—possibly vipers—foxes, rams, cranes, spiders and possibly even insects—such as the poisonous scolopendra. Additionally, there were some "abstract" H-form pictograms. Schmidt suggests that the site had a primarily religious purpose, possibly serving as a sanctuary, that held immense significance for its builders.[28] He has proposed

[26] Serra, *Sapiens animalis*, 21 (Translation of the Author).

[27] Klaus Schmidt, *Sie bauten die ersten Tempel*, (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2006), French translation by Thérèse Guiot-Houdart, *Le premier temple. Göbekli Tepe* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2015), 169 (all the quotes from this book are translated by the Author).

[28] Schmidt, *Le premier temple*, 147 and 158.

a tentative, yet still not final, interpretation of these T-shaped pillars as anthropomorphic beings, but he remains cautious and refrains from drawing definitive conclusions. In his interpretive effort, he has linked together the T-shaped pillars, the animal engravings, and the abstract symbols. Importantly, he excludes the possibility that these representations were of hunting prey, given that most of the animals depicted on the T-shaped pillars were not typically hunted. Then, he returns to the interpretation of Upper Paleolithic cave paintings as pictograms used in shamanic rituals, for specific purposes and initiation rites. He draws parallels between these cave paintings and the T-shaped pillars adorned with animal engravings at Göbekli Tepe. As a result, he concludes:

> The message of the signs and images of Göbekli Tepe, when compared to cave paintings, remains just as obscure to us. Nevertheless, these figures are presented in a highly sophisticated and completely unexpected form until very recently. It is certain that they served as mnemonic devices to transmit knowledge of the utmost importance for the culture of their creators over long periods of time. If that were not the case, they would not have taken such care and effort to execute them as we see them, nor would they have provided them with such impressive monumental structures as places of worship.[29]

The most captivating interpretive hypothesis Schmidt outlines is primarily based on postulating some sort of continuity between Upper Paleolithic cave art, the art at Göbekli Tepe art and the subsequent cultures:

> It is certain that at Göbekli Tepe, the people of the early Neolithic period had not only monumental architecture but also a significant repertoire of symbols and a sophisticated graphic language through which they could formulate messages for their contemporaries and pass them on to future generations. [...].
> The rich and almost exuberant visual world of the early Neolithic, perhaps still illuminated by the light of campfires from the glacial age, may well

[29] Ibid., 296.

> have enriched the culture of the following millennia as well – [...] – with motifs drawn from the timeless heritage of humanity.[30]

When Neolithic people developed their cultural world and expressed their cultural memory[31] through pictograms, animals were once again with them, surrounding them, and potentially contributing to make them whole beings for their shamanic rites. The discussion as to when this cultural perspective shifted—was it the discovery of agriculture as so many scholars suggest?—will not be addressed here. I shall, however, conclude this paragraph by quoting and discussing two later and written sources, wich indicate that humans still preserved some fragmented memory of their connection to animals, although by then they looked at such a descent with an uneasy mind.

The first source is the *Gilgamesh Epic*, with its earliest identifiable Sumerian texts date back to the mid-third millennium BP.[32] I shall here refer to the later Akkadian version (1200-1000 BP) and focus on Enkidu, Gilgamesh's faithful friend and servant, described as "the wild man brought up by the animals."[33] Enkidu appears to be an original character since Sumerian literature bears no trace of him.[34] This is a story that seems to suggest some awareness, if not of a human lineage from animals, at least of an original commonality with them. A goddess created Enkidu to temper Gilgamesh's uncontrolled energy and strength by becoming his companion in heroic deeds. She molded him from a pinch of clay in the form of a man but with the appearance and behavior of an animal:

> All his body is matted with hair,
> He is adorned with tresses like a woman:
> The locks of his hair grows as thickly as Nissaba's,
> He knows not at all a people nor even a country.
> He was clad in a garment like Šakkan's,

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[30] Ibid., 302-303.

[31] On resorting to Jan Assman's idea of cultural memory to interpret Göbekli Tepe monuments, Ibid., 285-287.

[32] Accordingly, see Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), vol. I, 4-5.

[33] Ibid., 20.

[34] Ibid.

Feeding on grass with the very gazelles.
Jostling at the water-hole with the herd,
He enjoyed the water with animals.[35]

Despite being brought into existence and mold by a goddess, Enkidu does not bear any resemblance to the divine image. His body is "matted with hair,"[36] concealed beneath a layer of hair, it resembles that of a man but also evokes the likeness of an animal covered in fur. Furthermore, he does not belong to any specific community or nation but resides among the undistinguished wild herd, which means that he also behaves like an animal. To facilitate his transformation into a complete human, a hunter devises a scheme in which Enkidu engages in a sexual encounter with Šamḫat the harlot:

After he was sated with her delights,
He turned his face toward his herd.
The gazelles saw Enkidu and they started running,
The animals of the wild moved away from his person.
Enkidu had defiled his body so pure,
His legs stood still, though his herd was on the move.
Enkidu was diminished, his running was not as before,
But he had *reason*, he [was] wide of understanding.
He came back and sat down at the feet of the harlot,
Watching the harlot, (observing) her features.
Then his ears heard what the [harlot] was speaking,
[as the harlot] said to him, to Enkidu:
'you are handsome, Enkidu, you are just like a god,
Why do you roam the wild with the animals?
Come, I will lead you to Uruk-the- Sheepfold,
To the sacred temple, the dwelling of Anu and Ištar!
[...]
Enkidu said to her, to the harlot:

[35] Ibid., 545.
[36] Ibid.

> 'Come Šamhat, take me along
> To the sacred temple, the holy dwelling of Anu and Ištar.[37]

The sexual awakening makes possible Enkidu's transition from his ambiguous blend of human and animal appearance and behavior to a state of humanity. While he loses some of his physical strength, he gains reason and, for the first time, the reader hears him speak and express a desire to acquaint himself with life in the city of Uruk and its religious customs. Consequently, he embraces the ties of human society and forsakes the company of the wild herd. Furthermore, Šamḫat reveals to him his true nature, proclaiming, "You are just like a god," thereby instilling in him an awareness of his own humanity that sets him apart from his animalistic nature. From this point forward, the animal nature becomes a potential risk, something to which humans can be drawn back, sometimes in the aftermath of a great traumatism, as it is the case with Gilgamesh himself. In fact, after the death of Enkidu, he becomes acutely aware that the same fate awaits him too. Gripped by a fear of death, Gilgamesh embarks on a journey through the wilderness,[38] venturing so far that he is asked: "[(Why is it) your face is burnt [by frost and sunshine,] / [and] you roam the wild [got up like a lion?]."[39]
In a later biblical source, being drawn back into animality is depicted as a divine punishment, as exemplified in the story of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar found in *Daniel* 4: 28-33:

> 27. The king spoke, and said: "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for a royal dwelling-place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" 28 While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven: "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: the kingdom is departed from thee. 29 And thou shalt be driven from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; thou shalt be made to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee; until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." 30 The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar;

[37] Ibid., 549 and 551.
[38] Ibid., 667.
[39] Ibid., 681.

> and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hair was grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. 31 "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever; [...]. 33 At the same time mine understanding returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and my splendour returned unto me; and my ministers and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and surpassing greatness was added unto me."[40]

In the text of *Genesis* 1: 26, man is depicted as being created in the image of God, and only God has the power to alter this status, even if temporarily, as a means to punish the sin of arrogance. However, in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, God does not directly transform him into an animal; rather, He pulls him back towards animal nature and behavior, reminiscent of the origins of Enkidu. It is as if the texts of the Gilgamesh Epic and the Bible were preserving some distant and fragmented memory of humanity's descent from and commonality with animals. In the Gilgamesh Epic, this commonality is portrayed as something that must be left behind and transcended in order to become a part of human society. In the Hebrew Bible this memory has taken on a more unsettling connotation, since reverting to animalistic nature is the result of sin and subsequent divine punishment, something to be strenuously avoided through great spiritual effort.
At this point, humanity and animality have undeniably parted ways. Due to space constraints in this introduction, it is not possible to trace and discuss all the phases and stages of the debate about human-animal difference in Western culture. However, before moving on to presenting the essays published in this issue, it is worth briefly addressing the relatively new field of Human-Animal Studies, also known as Animal Studies. This field offers insights into how it approaches the question of human-animal difference and the fresh perspectives it brings to the

[40] English translation The JPS Bible is available at https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pto.htm. Accessed June 5, 2023. Accordingly, see also Peter Joshua Atkins, *The Animalising Affliction of Nebuchdnezzar in Daniel 4 Reading across the Human-Animal Boundary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), Chapter 3 "The Question of Metamorphosis in the Text of Daniel 4," 53-108.

table, especially in relation with Jewish Studies and Jewish and Modern Hebrew Literature.

The Reception of Human-Animal Studies in Jewish Studies and in Jewish and Hebrew Literature: An Overview of Current Scholarship

Nowadays, there are multiple definitions of Human-Animal Studies that primarily focus on the interaction between humans and animals, as well as the social and cultural construction of animals[41] in the past, present, and potentially the future.[42] This field of study, particularly the subfield known as Critical Animal Studies, also examines how the human-animal hierarchy is perpetuated in human relationships, leading to the perpetuation of inequalities.[43] Specifically, it explores questions such as how and why animals are represented and conceptualized in diverse ways across different human cultures and societies worldwide, and how they are imagined, experienced, and given significance.[44] This intersection is particularly relevant to literary studies. Human-Animal Studies draws upon various disciplines, including sociology, philosophy, history, and literature, to provide depth and understanding to the questions it deals with. As Margo DeMello puts it "HAS scholars are drawn from a wide variety of distinct disciplines (interdisciplinary), and HAS research uses data, theories, and scholarship from a variety of disciplines (multidisciplinary)."[45]

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[41] Human-Animal studies are "an interdisciplinary field that explores the spaces that animals occupy in human social and cultural worlds and the interactions humans have with them. Central to this field is an exploration of the ways in which animal lives intersect with human societies." Margo DeMello, *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies* (New York-Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2021, [1st ed. 2012]), 4.

[42] "Animal Studies engages the many ways that human individuals and cultures are now interacting with and exploring other-than-human animals, in the past have engaged the living beings beyond our own species, and in the future might develop ways of living in a world shared with other animals." Paul Waldau, *Animal Studies: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

[43] Dawne McCance, *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction* (Albany: State University of New York, 2013).

[44] Garry Marvin and Susan McHugh, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies* (London-New York: Routledge, 2014).

[45] DeMello, *Animals and Society*, 7.

Two points deserve to be highlighted. Firstly, the field of Human-Animal Studies finds its precursors and *maîtres à penser* among philosophers and historians who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Notable works include Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) and Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights*" (1983, 2004). These influential texts, accompanied by critical contributions from sociology, anthropology, psychology, [46] and cultural studies, [47] have supported the development of Human-Animal Studies. Thus, the origins of this field can be traced back to philosophical, historical, sociological, and anthropological reflections, that can go together with an enhanced sensitivity for these themes extending to activism for the protection of animal rights.[48] These approaches start from the assumption that "being an animal in human society has little to do with biology and almost everything to do with human culture," [49] and that scholars, when attempting to define what is human and what is animal, should aim to deconstruct the societal and cultural construction of animals.[50] In the late 1990s and early 2000s, literary disciplines joined the conversation and started exploring the question of animals, with a focus on challenging the distinction between humans and animals and shifting the centrality away from human beings in various ways—such as de-centering the focus to the value of animal being, downplaying human prominence, blurring the boundaries, and questioning the assumptions involved.[51]

However, moving on to the second point, when it comes to defining what falls within the realm of human and animal, the integration of perspectives from the hard sciences becomes crucial, even within the field of literature. For instance, the advancements in neuroscience studying language development among animals have brought forth new insights. The concept of consilience, which aims to reconnect the humanities and the hard sciences, was proposed by Edward O.

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[46] Ibid., 7-9 and annexed bibliography.

[47] Annie Potts and Philip Armstrong, "Interbreeding Cultural Studies and Human-Animal Studies," in *Teaching the Animal: Human-Animal Studies across the Disciplines*, ed. Margo DeMello (Brooklyn: Lantern Books, 2010), 3-9.

[48] DeMello, *Animals and Society*, 7 and 18.

[49] Ibid., 11.

[50] In DeMello's formulation: "to unpack the various layers of meaning that we have imposed onto animal bodies and try to see the animal within." Ibid., 17.

[51] Kenneth Shapiro, "Human-Animal Studies: Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present; Troubling the Future," *Society and Animals* 28 (2020): 797-833, 808.

Wilson, a myrmecologist and the founder of sociobiology, in the late 1970s. Sociobiology explores the biological foundations of social behavior,[52] seeking "to grasp human nature objectively, to explore it to the depths scientifically, and to comprehend its ramifications by cause-and-effect explanations leading from biology into culture."[53] According to this viewpoint, human nature emerges from the interplay between genes and culture. Hence, both the sciences and humanities share a common challenge:

> We know that virtually all of human behavior is transmitted by culture. We also know that biology has an important effect on the origin of culture and its transmission. The question remaining is how biology and culture interact, and in particular how they interact across all societies to create the commonalities of human nature. What, in final analysis, joins the deep, mostly genetic history of the species as a whole to the more recent cultural history of its far-flung societies? That, in my opinion, is the nub of the relationship between the two cultures. It can be stated as a problem to be solved, the central problem of the social sciences and humanities, and simultaneously one of the great remaining problems of the natural sciences.[54]

This approach is not reductionist but interactionist,[55] recognizing that "the knowledge of the genes or even the circuitry of the brain alone" cannot fully predict the complexity of human evolution, which "can only be adduced by joining the relevant data of cognitive psychology, the social sciences, and the humanities with those of biology."[56] More recently, Roberto Marchesini, who

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[52] Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology the New Synthesis 25h Anniversary Edition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2000 [1st ed. 1975]), 4.

[53] Edward O. Wilson, "Sociobiology at Century's End," introduction to Wilson, *Sociobiology*, v-viii, vii. The introduction has been written in 1999.

[54] Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Rand House, 1998), 137. See also Edward O. Wilson, "Foreword from the Scientific Side," in *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*, eds. Jonathan Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), vii-xi, viii.

[55] Wilson, "Sociobiology at the Century's End," vi.

[56] Ibid., x.

has a background in veterinary medicine, offers a theoretical definition of Human-Animal Studies as "a significant event within the analysis of human-animal relationships, fully integrated into the exploration of animal alterity initiated by Darwin's evolutionary theories and continued through research in behavioral and cognitive sciences and animal bioethics." This definition adds a historical depth to the field, tracing its origins back to the nineteenth century when Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*. Additionally, as Marchesini emphasizes, Human-Animal Studies is a multidisciplinary field that bridges the natural sciences and humanities.[57]

The field of Human-Animal Studies (HAS) began to flourish in the late 1970s and 1980s primarily in English-speaking countries and has since gained significant momentum. Many introductions, handbooks, and companions to Human-Animal Studies have been published, showcasing its growth, diversification, and establishment as an academic discipline.[58] Today, the field is increasingly

[57] Roberto Marchesini, "Animal Studies," *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*, IX Appendice (2015), accessed June 3, 2023, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/animal-studies_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29 (Translation of the Author).

[58] They have begun to appear from the 2010s and onwards: DeMello, ed., *Teaching the Animal*; DeMello, *Animals and Society*; Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely, eds., *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies* (New York-Chichester-West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2012); Waldau, *Animal Studies*; Marvin and McHugh, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies*; Linda Kalof, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Lynn Turner, Undine Sellbach, and Ron Broglio, eds., *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Mieke Roscher, André Krebber, and Brett Mizelle, eds., *Handbook of Historical Animals Studies* (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2021); Matthew R. Calarco, *Animal Studies: The Key Concepts* (London-New York: Routledge, 2021). Concerning the state of the art in France, see the excellent work by Anne Simon, *Une bête entre les lignes. Essai de zoopoétique* (Marseille: Wildproject, 2021), as well as the website managed by the research team she directs https://animots.hypotheses.org/ (accessed June 3, 2023) that provides an overall picture of the research activities in French Universities as well as a network of research institutes on the subject. Another seminal publication in French is Emilie Dardenne, *Introduction aux études animales* (Paris: PUF, 2020, [2nd ed. 2022]). Emilie Dardenne has also conceived and launched a Diplome Universitaire Animaux et societé, at the University Rennes 2 for the academic year 2019-2020, https://www.univ-rennes2.fr/article/animaux-societe-formation-unique-france (accessed June 3, 2023). See also Louisa Mackenzie and Stephanie Posthumus, eds., *French Thinking about Animals* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015). In Italy, it is important to mention the following influential works: Giorgio Agamben, *L'aperto, l'uomo e l'animale* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002); Roberto Marchesini, *Fondamenti di zooantropologia*, vol. 1 *La zooantropologia teorica* (Bologna: Apeiron, 2014), vol. 2 *La zooantropologia applicata* (Bologna:

recognized worldwide, with dedicated courses and positions available in universities and institutions.[59]

In Israel, Human-Animal Studies was established in 1996 by Professor Joseph Terkel from the Zoology Department of Tel Aviv University, who founded the Animals & Society Unit with a particular focus on Animal Assisted Therapy and the broader issue of human-animal relations.[60] This research unit organized an annual conference and participates in various other conferences, hosting their own panels. They also published an academic journal titled *Hayot we-hevrah* (*Animals and Society*) until November 2016. In an article discussing the state of the field in Israel, Hirsch-Matsioulas and other authors highlighted that Israel is a nation with a significant emphasis on veganism and animal rights. However, Human-Animal Studies has not (yet?) fully flourished as an independent discipline within Israeli academia. The Animals and Society Unit, which operated independently, ceased to exist as a separate entity between 2013-2015. It then joined the Israeli Anthropological Association, under whose auspices it continues its work.[61]

Actually, the Israeli emphasis on veganism and animal rights possibly stems also from *tza'ar ba'le hayyim*, (literally, animal sorrow or animal suffering), an issue the Jewish tradition has long addressed to condemn cruelty towards animals. This moral imperative has led to appeals for vegetarianism throughout the 20th century.[62] Consequently, *tza'ar ba'le hayyim* can be viewed as a moral concern,

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Oasi Alberto Perdisa, 2005); Roberto Marchesini and Sabrina Tonutti, *Manuale di zooantropologia* (Roma: Meltemi, 2007).

[59] For an overview of the growth of the field with facts and figures until 2010 see Kenneth Shapiro and Margo DeMello, "The State of Human-Animal Studies," *Society and Animals* 18, no. 3 (2010): 307-318; Concerning the degree programs offered worldwide see Shapiro, "Human-Animal Studies," accessed June 5, 2023, https://www.animalsandsociety.org/resources/resources-for-students/degree-programs/. Generally speaking, the webpage of the Animals and Society Institute remains a primary instrument of information https://www.animalsandsociety.org/. Accessed June 3, 2023.

[60] For all the facts and figures see Orit Hirsch-Matsioulas, Anat Ben-Yonatan, Limor Chen, Yaara Sadetzki, and Dafna Shir-Vertesh, "Human-Animal Studies in Israel: A Field in the Making," *Society and Animals* (2022), 1-20.

[61] Hirsch-Matsioulas and others, "Human-Animal Studies in Israel," 10.

[62] Concerning this issue, I refer the reader to two articles published here: Piergabriele Mancuso, "*Tza'ar ba'ale hayyim* Jewish animal rights advocacy and vegetarianism, from Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Kohen Kook's A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace to Jonathan Safran Foer," and annexed sources, and Naama Harel, "Kids For Calves: Children Against Slaughter in Fin-de-siècle Jewish Literature," especially pp. 47-49, and annexed sources.

paving the way and facilitating the reception and acceptance of perspectives from Human-Animal Studies within the realm of Jewish Studies and Jewish and Hebrew literature. The alignment of these fields with the ethical considerations of animal welfare adds coherence and relevance to the exploration of human-animal relationships. Furthermore, it is important to note that the presence of animals has long been recognized and explored within the field of Jewish Studies, with several significant works that may not strictly align with the methodologies of Human-Animal Studies but nonetheless contribute to the understanding of the human-animal relationship. These works span various disciplines including art history, cultural history, and philosophy.[63]

As for the intersection of Human-Animal Studies and Jewish Studies, there is a notable publication that deserves attention: *Human Beings and Other Animals in Historical Perspective*, was published in 2007 by the Animals & Society Unit of the University of Tel Aviv, as previously mentioned.[64] This collaborative work delves into the historical perspectives and approaches towards animals in thought, literature, and art. The book is organized into four parts: a comprehensive macro-historical introduction, the treatment of animals in Antiquity (including Greece,

[63] See for example Marc Michael Epstein, *Dream of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1997); Pillip Ackerman-Lieberman, and Rakefet Zalashik, eds., *A Jew's Best Friend? The Image of the Dog throughout Jewish History* (Brighton-Portland-Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2013); Yaacov Shavit and Yehudah Reinharz, eds., *Hamoriyut – Massa' be-'iqvot ha-hamor. Mitologiyah, allegoriyah, mitos we-cliché* (*The Donkey: A Cultural History. A Journey through Myth, Allegory, Symbol and Cliché*) (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2014); Jay Geller, *Bestiarium Judaicum: Unnatural Histories of the Jews* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018). As far as Jewish philosophy is concerned, it is impossible not to mention the seminal contributions of Kalman P. Bland. Kalman P. Bland, "Construction of Animals in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in *New Directions in Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Aaron W. Hughes and Elliot R. Wolfson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 175-204; Bland, "Animal Fables and Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Its Literary Forms*, eds. Aaron W. Hughes and James T. Robinson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019), 8-39; Bland, "Human-animal Dualism in Modernity and Premodern Jewish Thought," in *Light against Darkness; Dualism in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and the Contemporary World*, eds. Armin Lange and others (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 277-282; Bland, "Cain, Abel, and Brutism," *in Scriptural Exegesis: The Shapes of Culture and the Religiov us Imagination. Essays in Honour of Michael Fishbane*, eds. Deborah A. Green and Laura S. Lieber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 165-185.

[64] Binyamin Arbel, Yosef Terkel and Sofia Menache, eds., *Bne adam we-hayyot aherot ba-espeqlariya ha-historit (Human Beings and Other Animals in Historical Perspective)* (Jerusalem: Karmel, 2007).

Rome, and the Ancient Near East), the examination of animals within monotheistic cultures, including a dedicated article on the Renaissance, and finally, the exploration of human-animal relationships in modern Western culture.

The exploration of otherness and its construction, blurring, and potential rejection establishes a captivating link between Jewish Studies and Human-Animal Studies. This connection arises from the recognition that both fields engage with questions surrounding the boundaries of identity, the categorization of beings, and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The study of otherness in Jewish Studies involves examining the ways in which Jewish thought, culture, and literature grapple with notions of difference, marginalization, and alterity. Similarly, Human-Animal Studies explores the complexities of human-animal relationships, the social and cultural construction of animals, and the implications for ethics and social justice. By recognizing the parallels between these two fields, scholars have discovered fruitful avenues for interdisciplinary dialogue and inquiry. They explore how the construction of otherness intersects with the delineation of human and animal identities, challenging established boundaries and inviting critical reflection on the hierarchical relationships between humans and animals.

Consequently, it is not surprising that many studies in this area explore both themes and employ diverse methodological approaches. From a philosophical perspective, Andrew Benjamin delves into the interplay between the figures of the Jew and the animal in the Western philosophical tradition, examining their relationship to notions of universality.[65] Ken Stone demonstrates the relevance of animals and perspectives from Human-Animal Studies in enhancing biblical interpretation. He explores various aspects of animal presence in the Hebrew Bible, including the physicality of animals, domesticated animals with a particular focus on dogs and their liminal status in biblical texts, sacrificial practices, animal ethics, and the conceptualization of wild animals.[66] Hannah M. Strømmen draws inspiration from Jacques Derrida, whose exploration of the animal question

[65] Andrew Benjamin, *Of Jews and Other Animals* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).
[66] Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

guides her in examining how the Bible portrays the relationships between humans, animals, and the divine.[67]

Two recent works have shed light on the anthropocentric nature of Talmudic texts, revealing how they shape and define the relationships between humans and non-humans. The first work focuses specifically on the Babylonian Talmudic tractate Avodah Zarah, examining how it addresses the intricate dynamics between Jews and non-Jews within a Talmudic framework that intertwines human, animal, and spiritual realms. This study reveals how the Talmudic anthropology blurs the boundaries of humanity and explores the interconnectedness of these different categories.[68] The second work takes a broader approach, delving into the entirety of the Babylonian Talmud to uncover hidden animal subjectivities embedded within the text. By bringing these overlooked perspectives to light, the study offers fresh insights into the attitudes and approaches of the Rabbis towards animals. It seeks to challenge conventional interpretations and provide a nuanced understanding of the Talmudic engagement with the non-human world.[69]

The scholarly attention devoted to the presence of animals in Jewish Studies can be acknowledged even prior to the emergence of Human-Animal Studies, and this observation holds even more significance in the field of Jewish and Modern Hebrew Literature. Within this domain, numerous articles and book chapters have been dedicated to exploring the representations and symbolic meanings of animals in literary texts, often taking on metaphorical or allegorical dimensions. Notably, there have been extensive interpretations proposed for two *animaux celèbres*: Mendele Mokher Sefarim's mare and Agnon's dog Balak.

As far as the intersection of the fields of Human-Animal Studies and of Jewish and Hebrew literature is concerned, Noam Pines and Naam Harel have both made a

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[67] Hannah M. Strømmen, *Biblical Animality after Jacques Derrida* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018). Concerning the Hebrew Bible and Human-Animal studies see also Philip Sherman, "The Hebrew Bible and the Animal Turn," in *Currents in Biblical Research* 19, no. 1 (2020): 36-63.

[68] Mira Beth Wasserman, *Jews, Gentiles, and other Animals: The Talmud after the Humanities* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

[69] Beth A. Berkowitz, *Animals and Animality in Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

significant contribution,[70] with each publishing a monograph on the subject. Noam Pines explores the relations between humans and animals in Jewish literature in his book *The Infrahuman—Animality in Modern Jewish Literature*. He introduces the concept of "the infrahuman" as a figurative construction that albeit remaining "suspended and unresolved," highlights the complex interplay between figure and experience in relation to Jewish identity. This construction of the infrahuman extends beyond the Jewish context and is associated with figurative representations of animality, "a theological figure of exclusion from a state of humanity and Christianity alike."[71] Pines examines the works of various authors, including Mendele Mokher Sefarim, Hayyim Nahman Bialik, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Franz Kafka, Agnon, Paul Celan, and Heinrich Heine, through this interpretive lens. Naama Harel takes a different approach, focusing specifically on Franz Kafka's animals. She challenges the notion of specific allegorical interpretations and instead employs a zoopoetic approach that critically examines the dynamics between humans and animals and explores the nonhuman animal experience.[72] Harel emphasizes Kafka's species fluidity, which undermines the

[70] Naama Harel, "Antropomorfism bein mada' le-sifrut" (Anthropomorphism: Between Science and Literature), *Animals and Society: The Israeli Journal for the Connection between People and Animals* 25 (2003): 88-98; Harel "Shuvan shel ha-hayyot ha-ne'edarot: Astrategiot qeri'ah le-alternativiot be-meshale hayyot" ("The Return of the Absent Animals: Alternative Reading Strategies in Animal Stories"), *Animals and Society: The Israeli Journal for the Connection between People and Animals* 32 (Winter 2006): 58-66; Harel, "The Animal Voice behind the Animal Fable," *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 7, no. 2 (2009): 9-21.; Harel, "De-allegorizing Kafka's Ape: Two Animalistic Contexts," in *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, eds. Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers 2010), 53-66; Harel, "Hemlah ke-lefi ba'le hayyim ba-sifrut ha-tehiyyah" ("Compassion for Animals in the Renaissance of Hebrew Literature"), *Hador: The Hebrew Annual of America* 5 (2012): 60-70; Harel, "Of Cows and Women: The Animalization of Victimized Women in Devorah Baron's Fiction," *Prooftexts* 37, no. 2 (2019): 243-274; Harel, "Diyoqan ha-rahmaniyyah ke-ne'arah tze'irah: O ha-kelev ha 'ivri ha-rishon" ("A Portrait of a Compassionate Young Girl, or the First Hebrew Dog"), *Criticism and Interpretation* 46 (2020): 235-252; Noam Pines, "Life in the Valley: Figures of Dehumanization in Heinrich Heine's *Prinzessin Sabbat*," *Prooftexts* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 25-47; Pines, "The Love of a Dog: Melancholia in David Vogel's Before the Dark Gate," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2016): 168-190; Pines, "A Radical Advocacy: Suffering Jews and Animals in S.Y. Abramovitsh's *Di kliatshe*," *Jewish Social Studies* 23, no. 2 (2018): 24-47.

[71] Noam Pines, *The Infrahuman: Animal Poetics in Modern Jewish Literature* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2018), xii.

[72] Naama Harel, *Kafka's Zoopoetics: Beyond the Human-animal Barrier* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 10.

human/animal binary and creates a liminal space described as "humanimal."[73] These works by Pines and Harel contribute to the broader development of Human-Animal Studies in the context of Jewish and Hebrew literature, expanding our understanding of the intricate relationships between humans and animals and challenging traditional interpretations.

In summary, the intersection of Human-Animal Studies with Jewish Studies and Jewish and Modern Hebrew literature highlights two key aspects: the examination of the otherness of animals in a universal context, challenging anthropocentrism, and the exploration of animal otherness in relation to Jewish otherness. With this in mind, the focus of this collection of articles is to assess the perception of the human-animal difference, or rather the blurred distinction, within Jewish and Hebrew literature.

The Success of the Donkey, the Persistence of the Ants, the Wickedness of the Wolf and the Defenseless Calves

While introducing the essays featured in this issue of *Quest*, it is evident that at least three of them delve into animals that hold an ancient, extensive, and esteemed literary legacy—the donkey, the ants, and the wolf. These creatures have played a significant role in shaping our understanding of human and animal nature, often portraying humanity in contrast to animality.

As a whole, the essays in this collection exhibit a tendency towards a discourse that combines universality and cultural specificity, with potential for comparative literature analyses. They not only explore the cultural construction and deconstruction of humanity in opposition to animality but also examine the establishment, definition, and subsequent blurring of human and animal spaces, as well as the dynamics of center and periphery, particularly within the Israeli context. I shall present them here in chronological order, commencing with Noam Pines' exploration of *The Merchant of Venice* and concluding with Ilanit ben Dor Derimian and Riki Traum Avidan's essays on Sami Berdugo's novel *Hamor* (*Donkey*, 2019).

[73] Ibid., 13.

Pines's essay delves into the portrayal of "wolfish" attributes associated with Jewish identity in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, specifically focusing on the character of Shylock. The analysis highlights Shylock's fluctuation between dog-like, currish, and distinctly wolfish features. Pines argues that by representing Shylock with animalistic qualities, the concept of animality itself becomes unstable, drawing from two different notions of animality rooted in Christian typology and mythical natural history. The intertwining of these ideas carries political, legal, and theological implications.

Moving on, Mancuso's article revisits the *tza'ar ba'le hayyim* (animal suffering) concept, extensively discussed in Jewish tradition, and examines Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Kohen Kook's writings published between 1903 and 1910 in Germany and Switzerland. Kook proposes that meat consumption should be considered only temporarily permissible, advocating for vegetarianism as a preferred choice that "theurgically" aligns with the prophetic vision of a Messianic age characterized by harmony and coexistence among all living beings. Beyond addressing animal suffering, Kook's arguments aim to safeguard all creatures from unnecessary exploitation. Mancuso demonstrates the significant influence of Kook's ideas across various branches of Judaism, as his perspective on Jewish vegetarianism offers a more suitable option for adhering to Jewish teachings and principles. A thematic connection arises between Mancuso's and Naama Harel's essays, as Harel explores the theme of animal suffering as well. She analyzes several Jewish literary works from the early twentieth century, including Mordecai Ze'ev Feierberg's "The Calf" ("Ha-'Egel," 1899), Mendele Mocher Seforim's "The Calf" ("Dos Kelbl," 1902), and Sholem Aleichem's *Motl the Cantor's Son* (*Motl Peyse dem khazns*, 1907). These works depict children who, unlike adults burdened with anthropocentric biases, exhibit empathy for animal suffering and take an anti-slaughter stance. Harel highlights how these literary portrayals challenge prevailing anthropocentric perspectives.

Moving forward, Anna Lissa's essay takes a comparative approach, analyzing Yitzhak Orpaz's novella *Nemalim* (*Ants*, 1968) and Italo Calvino's novel *La formica Argentina* (*The Argentine Ant*, 1952). Lissa highlights the inherent otherness associated with insects, a radical otherness that typically excludes possibilities of empathy and often portrays insects, including ants despite their extensive literary history, as pests. Using a Human-Animal Studies perspective and

emphasizing the consilience between humanities and sciences, Lissa explores the blurring of boundaries between humans and ants and its relationship to the blurring of human and animal spaces.

Shifting focus, Ilanit ben Dor Derimian and Riki Traum Avidan offer distinct interpretations of Sami Berdugo'ss novel *Donkey*. In her essay, Derimian adopts an ecocritical and anthropological viewpoint, examining the various nuances between domestication and wildness. She explores the human-animal distinction and the dynamics of center and periphery in Israel, with the Negev desert representing the periphery. Through the cultural representation of the donkey, Derimian illustrates social change and the reconstruction of local identity. In her essay, Riki Traum Avidan analyzes the donkey as a political metaphor in Berdugo's novel. She explores the transformation of the donkey from an object to a subject, and argues that the boundaries between the main character and the donkey collapse, liberating a desire for life and affirmation, referred to as "bare life." Traum interprets the novel as a challenge to fixed boundaries between human and animal, as well as established and fixed sexual identities. The relationship between the main character and the donkey also reflects the problematic dynamics between center and periphery in the Israeli context, with ecological and ecopolitical implications.

In summary, this collection of essays reaffirms the significance of the Human-Animal Studies approach in the realm of Jewish and Modern Hebrew literature. This approach opens up new avenues for interpreting and comprehending both old and contemporary texts, not only as Jewish and Hebrew works but also as contributions to the universal literary heritage. Ultimately, this collection highlights the ongoing relevance of exploring the human-animal dynamic in literature and the interconnectedness of various fields of study.

Finally, as some old manuscripts' colophons state:

> may no harm befall the authors, not today and not ever,
> until the donkey ascends the ladder
> that Jacob dreamt about.[74]

[74] Accordingly, see https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2020/03/until-the-donkey-ascends-the-ladder-hebrew-scribal-formulae.html. Accessed, June 3, 2023.

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A Modern Lycaon: Recalling Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in *The Merchant of Venice*

by *Noam Pines*

Abstract

The article examines the role of "wolvish" characteristics and their association with Jewish identity in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. *Scholars have long noted the tendency of non-Jewish characters in the play to identify Shylock as canine. But this canine character, although fixed in its essence to Shylock, never remains the same, fluctuating between the various designations of "dog," "cur," and "wolf." The essay argues that whereas the "dog" and "cur" designations function as manifestations of Christian typological thinking, the description of Shylock as a "wolf" belongs in a mythic view of humans and their place in the world. Thus, in* The Merchant of Venice *it is not only the human-animal distinction that remains unstable, but also the category of the "animal" itself. At stake is the accommodation of two different conceptions of animality: one belonging in Christian typology, and the other rooted in a mythical natural history. The distinction between these different categories, far from being trivial, has political, legal, and theological implications.*

Shylock as a Wolf

A State of "Nature"

Conversion and Exception

Shylock as a Wolf

Since his appearance in *The Merchant of Venice* in the late sixteenth century, Shylock has remained a paradigmatic "Jewish" figure that continues, even today,

to haunt the Western cultural imagination. Shylock is a distinctly "modern" figure in the sense that, as a Jew, he lives among the Gentiles without renouncing his religious faith and ethnic identity. This state of affairs, not generally available to Jews in medieval Europe, is presented in the play as the outcome of Venetian civil law which protects the commercial rights of both parties in a business transaction, whether they be citizens or legal aliens. As Julia Lupton noted, when two parties sign a bond or contract in the "limited yet economically essential public space defined by 'trade and profit',"[1] it does not matter whether they are Jewish or Christian, Venetian or foreign. In this sense, Venetian civil law functions in the play as a distinctly modern institution, an early form of capitalism in which the legality of the business contract overrides the authority of sovereign decision. Thus, although Shylock's civic liberties remain sharply circumscribed in the Venetian polity—he is neither a citizen nor a legal resident—his money lending activities nevertheless place him at the heart of Venetian economy, albeit as a barely suffered foreign element.[2] In this context, Shylock's unusual yet perfectly legal demand to be paid his bond in human flesh poses an unprecedented challenge for the Venetian polity: namely, how to suppress the cannibalistic potential inherent in capitalism itself, and personified by the "Jew" with his unreasonable demands and merciless business ethics. When considered in these terms, "Jewish" moneylending in *The Merchant of Venice* does not only portend the subversion of Christian morality by new economic means. The problem that Shylock poses for the Venetian polity is fundamentally a political one, since by virtue of a contractual bond that grants him the right of decision over the life of a Venetian citizen, the "Jew" effectively undermines the sovereign power of the State. To be sure, Shylock's cannibalistic contract does not invalidate capitalism as such, but instead it exposes and isolates the dangerous elements inherent in nascent capitalist economy. As David Nirenberg observed, throughout the sixteenth century parties to such contracts were free to specify any mutually agreed-on penalty for nonperformance, with the result that "such bonds enabled penalties independent of—and sometimes grossly incommensurable with—the value of the debt."[3] Thus

[1] Julia R. Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 88.
[2] Ibid., 75.
[3] David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013), 284-285.

the debt contract raised difficult questions concerning economic and political life in Shakespeare's time:

> Are there limits to the freedoms, the autonomies of soul and body, that can be alienated through contract? What legal practices, what ways of writing and reading contract and law, can help us determine these limits? [...] Shakespeare pushed these questions to their limits, not only by staging them as "Jewish questions" but also by posing the legal alienation of self in the extreme form of a carnivorous contract, one that explicitly equates three thousand ducats of Shylock's gold with (on default) one pound of his Christian debtor's flesh.[4]

Shylock's carnivorous contract is evidently "Jewish" because, not unlike the rite of circumcision, it introduces a covenant for which one is required to pay with one's own flesh.[5] In this sense, Shylock's contract functions as a "limit case" of capitalism: a way of exploring the extreme implications of a society based on exchange.[6] More fundamentally, however, Shylock's business contract only makes use of capitalism in order to attain a goal that has little to do with economic profit. Instead, Shylock's insistence on the written word of the bond is presented in the play as part of a "Jewish" vengeful, cannibalistic desire for Christian flesh—a desire that, as Kathleen Biddick noted, belongs in the "bundles of fantasies that bind 'Christian-ness' to supersessionary notions" and that have determined the role of the "Jew" in the Christian typological imaginary.[7] By Shakespeare's time, the representation of Jews as cannibals lusting for Christian flesh and blood already had a long cultural history, with allegations of Jewish cannibalism surfacing in Europe during the course of the thirteenth century. These allegations centered on the so-called "Jewish" practice of ritual murder of children, more commonly known as the "blood libel," which engaged the attention of the highest authorities

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[4] Ibid., 285.

[5] For a discussion of circumcision in *The Merchant of Venice*, see also James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 113-130; Lupton, *Citizen-Saints*, 87-101.

[6] Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 286.

[7] Kathleen Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 1-21.

in Europe at the time, and helped transform the perception of Jews, as Robert Chazan noted, "from a theologically significant minority into a mortal danger, against which the Christian majority had to organize in self-defense."[8] In an important study, Kenneth Stow has shown how the "Jewish" cannibalistic threat to Christian society came to be closely associated in the Christian typological imaginary with the figure of the dog. According to Stow, the dog-figure was often invoked in reference to the desecration of the eucharistic Host. Referring to Jesus' words in Matthew 15:26, "it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs," early Christian commentators interpreted the verse as heralding a supersessionary fulfillment in which the historical roles of "dogs" and "children" were reversed. However, as Stow points out, the historical reality of supersession was not simply to be asserted, but also tirelessly defended against the encroachments of the "Jewish" dogs who were bent, in a figure of typological reversal, on reclaiming both the "bread" and the title of being the "children" for themselves.[9] By the late Middle Ages, this exegetical figure of the "Jewish" dog stealing the bread of Christian children had come to be understood in eucharistic terms as a desecration of the Host and the cannibalistic murder of Christian children. And with particular relevance to *The Merchant of Venice*, Stow notes that the payment of interest or penalty on contractual bonds was often equated in the Christian typological imaginary with eucharistic martyrdom. Jewish moneylenders were perceived as "dogs" stealing anew the eucharistic food of the "children" and "sucking" the blood of the Christian community which stood for the collective *Corpus Christi*.[10] As a figure of typological reversal, "Jewish" moneylending was thus perceived as an attempted inversion of the supersessionary fulfillment of the historical roles of "dogs" and "children." Nevertheless, as we will see, the frequent designations of Shylock as an "inexecrable dog" and "stranger cur" in Shakespeare's play are not confined to the realm of theological allegory. To begin with, the reference to dogs generally appears in Shakespeare's work in negative connotations. As Laurie Shannon noted, the dog serves as Shakespeare's

[8] Robert Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 177.
[9] Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpreters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 4.
[10] Ibid., 28.

"likeliest figure for revulsion and violent ejection from human company. [...] To be a dog is to suffer imminent condemnation or precipitous ejection from a community."[11] As a social metaphor, the dog does not function in Shakespeare's work as a figure for friendship or companionship—a relatively modern notion that gained hold with the emergence of pet-ownership in early modern England. Rather, as Bruce Boehrer pointed out, at stake is in an older and more deeply engrained identification of dogs "with slaves and other abject individuals, and the association of dogs with predatory outsiders."[12] This dual role of the dog as a "tamed foe," who serves both as an Opponent and Helper of the Christian faith, found its equivalent in the identification of "Jews" as witness-people whose hostile energy is harnessed for the defense of the Church. As Leonid Livak observed, "this trope treats dogs and wolves as two faces of the same animal, who can symbolize either a shepherd or a foe of Christ's flock."[13] Shylock, too, is generally considered among scholars in terms of the transition from "dog" to "wolf." For example, Boehrer argued that the invectives against Shylock refigure him "not as domestic slave but rather as interloping carnivore; hence the smooth transformation of 'dog' into 'cur' into 'wolf'."[14] Similarly, Shannon noted that "the discourse of currishness in *Merchant* [...] [figures] a hostile insider, a quasi-citizen and familiar who turns predator within the community. [...] This currishness makes [Shylock] not just any dog, but a malicious one, and therefore no ordinary dog, but one to be prosecuted by the state."[15] More recently, Jay Geller wrote that

> because Jews were often found within the Gentile polis, they were more associated with those domesticated cousins of wolves, dogs. Not the good dogs—the noble hunting dogs that accompanied the aristocracy or that guarded the boundaries of the polis—but the bad dogs: shameless, servile,

[11] Laurie Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakespearean Locales* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 241-243.
[12] Bruce Boehrer, "Shylock and the Rise of the Household Pet: Thinking Social Exclusion in The Merchant of Venice," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, no. 2 (1999): 152-170, 163.
[13] Leonid Livak, *The Jewish Persona in The European Imagination: A Case of Russian Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 75.
[14] Boehrer, "Shylock and the Rise of the Household Pet," 163.
[15] Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal*, 244-245.

> and salacious curs. But the Jewish dog at times betrays the rapacious cruelty characteristic of another canid, the omega wolf.[16]

These interpretations grasp Shylock's transition from "dog" to "wolf" as a hallmark of his "Jewish" identity. However, they also tend to overlook the terms in which Shylock's cannibalistic tendencies are actually described in the play. As we will see, at stake in the identification of Shylock as a wolf is not simply a theological metaphor for "Jewishness," but an index to an alternate prehistory—to a natural-historical account that invokes Pythagorean metempsychosis rather than Christian typology. Here, then, is the key passage in which Gratiano, a character with a reputation for speaking "an infinite deal of nothing" (1.1.121), describes Shylock's "wolvish" ancestry:

> O, be thou damn'd, inexecrable dog!
> And for thy life let justice be accused!
> Thou almost makest me waver in my faith
> To hold opinion with Pythagoras,
> That souls of animals infuse themselves
>
> Govern'd a wolf, who hang'd for human slaughter,
> Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet,
> And, whilst thou lay'st in thy unhallow'd dam,
> Infused itself in thee; for thy desires
> Are wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous. (4.1.130-140)

When reading this passage, let us first note that while he formally disavows the Pythagorean doctrine of transmigration of souls, Gratiano nevertheless follows its internal logic to make the audacious claim that the spirit of a wolf has reincarnated in the body of a "Jew." Of course, the natural-historical account that he presents is invoked as a triviality, since it is based on the decidedly false (pagan) notion of metempsychosis or transmigration of souls—a notion that, as Gratiano admits,

[16] Jay Geller, *Bestiarium Judaicum: Unnatural Histories of the Jews* (New York, Fordham University Press, 2018), 200.

contradicts the tenets of Christianity. Nevertheless, this impossibility is considered in poetic detail and with syllogistic precision. Shannon accordingly notes that "early moderns loved to mock the Pythagorean argument for a transmigration of souls up and down the scale of being, according to a judgment or verdict on the morality of one's life. But like Gratiano, and despite their scandal or merriment, they could not shake the metaphorical power of Pythagoreanism to describe the animated universe they observed. Its apt imagery expressed a cosmos in which the dynamic operations of justice reach well beyond the confines of a human community."[17] Despite its incompatibility with Christian beliefs, the pagan doctrine of metempsychosis is invoked in the play as a natural-historical explanation for Shylock's cannibalistic appetites. According to this explanation, the soul of a murderous wolf has infused itself into Shylock's body while he was still in the womb, foreshadowing his desire for human flesh as an adult. To be sure, at stake is not merely a negative metaphor for "Jewishness," but a natural history that disrupts the traditional typology of the "Jew." The polemical force of Pythagoreanism in the above quoted passage undermines precisely what Boehrer has called "the smooth transformation" of Shylock from "dog" into "cur" into "wolf." Whereas the "dog" and "cur" figures function primarily as manifestations of typological thinking, Gratiano's description of Shylock as a wolf explicitly belongs in a mythic view of humans and their place in the world. We will examine the ways in which the peculiar conjunction of Pythagoreanism and wolfishness provides a natural history of the "Jew," but before doing so, we must first clarify why the notion of metempsychosis remained incompatible with established Christian views, and consequently, what role the figure of the wolf played in this constellation of thought. Simply put, the pagan doctrine of the transmigration of souls was incompatible with the Christian view because it assumed a continuum of life that linked humans and animals.[18] Such a continuity was already denied by early church fathers, and subsequently found its authoritative refutation in Augustine's *City of God*, where he argued that the existence of human-animal hybrids such as werewolves was a theological impossibility. According to Augustine, since human beings are created in the image of God, and animals are

[17] Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal*, 246.

[18] Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 141.

not, the transformation from human to animal and vice versa would imply a shift from one ontological category to another. Therefore, Augustine argued that in accounts of bodily transformation what people really experienced was either an illusion or a phantom produced by a demonic effect.[19] Augustine's distinction between illusory and actual change was influential, and subsequently came to inform the church's position on the question of the human-animal divide. As Dennis Kratz put it, "so monstrous are the implications of a man whose human soul has been replaced by an animal soul, that to attribute such a transformation even to God is irreconcilable with the central Christian doctrine of divine charity. At issue are the fundamental concepts of rationality, sin and salvation."[20] And yet, this is precisely how Gratiano describes Shylock, as a wolf reincarnated in the body of a "Jew." By doing so, Gratiano invokes the specter of a world without grace, a mythic world in which a continuum of life does indeed link "Jews" and animals. At stake, of course, is not just any animal, but a wolf, because according to Gratiano it is the carnivorous appetite of a wolf that has "transmigrated" to Shylock from a previous life. Thus, Shylock's "wolvish" appetite for human flesh forms the crucial nexus in which the natural-historical account constellates non-synthetically with a typology of "Jewish" cannibalism in *The Merchant of Venice*. To be sure, there was nothing new about Gratiano's invocation of the wolf-metaphor for the degradation and bestialization of human beings. There was a long-standing literary tradition that ascribed a host of negative associations to wolves, and Christian thought was informed in this regard by a wide range of sources, most notably from the Bible and the writings of church fathers, as well as from pagan writers such as Pliny, Ovid, and Petronius.[21] Throughout the Middle Ages, the bestial violence of the wolf exerted a strong influence on the Christian imagination, and in medieval bestiaries the wolf was typically depicted as a figure

[19] Augustine, *City of God*, 18.8. See also Dennis M. Kratz, "Fictus Lupus: The Werewolf in Christian Thought," *Classical Folia* 30 (1976): 57-80, 61-62. Caroline Bynum rightly observed that Augustine did not oppose all metamorphosis, and scholars have tended to confuse his position on human-animal transformation with his attitude toward any kind of metamorphosis. Caroline Bynum, "Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf," *Speculum* 4 (1998): 987-1013, 1007, n. 89.

[20] Kratz, "Fictus Lupus," 67.

[21] Ibid., 57-80. Kratz cites an example from *Ezekiel* 22:27 in which the comparison with wolves emphasizes the ravenous greed of the lords of Jerusalem: "Its officials within it are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain."

of rapacity, the image of the devil himself: the devil bears the similitude of a wolf: he who is always looking over the human race with his evil eye, and darkly prowling round the sheepfolds of the faithful so that he may afflict and ruin their souls.[22] In the traditional Christian worldview, the association with wolves thus appeared as a figural representation of the human capacity for evil. But in Shakespeare's play Shylock is not simply depicted as a wolf, but as a wolf "hang'd for human slaughter"—an identification that for Shakespeare's contemporaries touched upon a particularly haunting set of cultural associations. Aside from the traditional depiction of the wolf as a figure of rapacity, Gratiano refers to the practice of hanging wolves for crimes, a practice that by Shakespeare's time was outlandish, since at that point England had been entirely free of wolves for centuries.[23] Nevertheless, the custom of hanging dogs was still alive both in England and on the Continent for various legal offenses (primarily manslaughter and bestiality). As Boehrer notes, "by replacing the hanged dog of England's countryside with the figure of a wolf, Shakespeare revises common English experience, transforming it into a spectacle of strangeness which emphasizes Shylock as both foreign and bloodthirsty."[24] To be sure, this "spectacle of strangeness" is more than just a quaint anachronism. As Boehrer suggests, it serves as an uncanny reminder of a forgotten prehistory: namely, "the expulsion of wolves from England [...] parallels and prefigures the expulsion of England's Jews, accomplished in 1290 by Edward I."[25] In this sense, the mythic figure of the wolf in Gratiano's speech encapsulates a repressed historical experience: namely, the experience of exile and banishment from the human community. Shylock is exposed to such abandonment by the law during his appearance at the Duke's court. After Portia successfully argues her case that Shylock has plotted against the life of a Venetian citizen, the right of judgment and mercy that under Venetian law lay in the hands of the litigant, is wrenched from Shylock and delivered to the Duke of Venice, whose political sovereignty is suddenly reaffirmed. Toward the end of the play, Shylock is divested of the various legal, social, and civil ties that

[22] *The Book of Beasts: Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century*, trans. Terence Hanbury White (Madison: Wisconsin, 2002), 59.
[23] Boehrer, "Shylock and the Rise of the Household Pet," 164.
[24] Ibid., 165.
[25] Ibid., 164.

bound him as a legal alien to Venetian civic life. Yet despite his exclusion, he remains bound to Venetian law in a relation of abandonment, standing before the law as "bare life."[26] Scholars have responded to such a political-theological reading of the play by refining the terms in which Shylock's exclusion from the human community is formulated. As Shannon argues,

> the notion of Shylock as simply dehumanized by the play depends partly on a modern sense of animals as wholly outside the law or political community rather than as the subjects of law they could be in the early modern imagination. [...] The proximity between answerable animals and this 'stranger cur' in Venice places them all inside the multikinded, justiciable cosmos to which it testifies.[27]

Thus, Shannon argues against Agamben's theorization of "bare life" as a state of exclusion and banishment from civic life, since in late medieval and early modern Europe animals "were not only at large in cities but also habitually cognizable to the law in its formal and informal expressions."[28] According to this line of interpretation, the designation of Shylock as a wolf does not necessarily mean that he is thereby bestialized or placed outside the law, but rather, "like a 'malicious' animal, the measure of Shylock's marginal social inclusion registers in his ability to make himself vulnerable to process" by triggering liability under criminal law.[29] Shannon's points are certainly valid, but her reading of Shylock's wolfishness nevertheless appears to be overdetermined by the juridical context in which it is framed. Consequently, the reference to the implicit correlation between wolves and "Jews" in Gratiano's speech—namely, to the repressed historical memory of eradication, banishment, and exile—is marginalized in her account. Yet insofar as this repressed memory remains a haunting presence in the play, Shylock's "Jewish" life is reduced in some measure to a "bare life" with respect to the law. As we will see, since this "wolfishness" becomes a problem for the Venetian state, Gratiano's

[26] For the concept of "bare life" in relation to the figure of the wolf in medieval thought, Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 104-111.
[27] Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal*, 247.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 243.

speech offers the stark realization that primordial cannibalistic forces have returned to haunt the free capitalist market—and they remain unchecked in their new, modern guise.

A State of "Nature"

Notwithstanding the claims of eucharistic theology to explain the cannibalistic tendencies of "Jews," Gratiano invokes in his speech a different tradition: namely, the mythic identification of cannibalistic appetites in human beings with a "wolfish" nature. Undoubtedly, the *locus classicus* of this tradition is found in the tale of Lycaon, the mythic king of Arcadia who was transformed into a wolf by Zeus because of his cannibalism. Although the story appeared in several antique sources, the most popular version remained the one reported by Ovid in the first book of the *Metamorphoses*. According to Ovid, Lycaon was a murderous king who, in an attempt to discredit Zeus, served him a feast of human flesh. Zeus, however, was not tricked and as a punishment for Lycaon's deeds, he was banished from his kingdom and subsequently transformed into a wolf:

> Lycaon himself fled in terror, and when he reached the silence of the countryside, he began to howl—he was trying to speak but he could not: his madness had been gathered in his mouth. His lust for slaughtered flesh made him attack flocks of sheep: He still loved to guzzle blood. His clothing turned to fur, his arms to legs: He was changed into a wolf, but kept some signs of his original form. The same grayness is there, the same violence in his face, the same glowing eyes, the same vicious look.[30]

Caroline Bynum noted that Lycaon is not only an impious tyrant who attempts to morally corrupt his people by inciting them against the gods; he is also a transgressor who breaks the primal taboo on cannibalism: "the two vices are both boundary crossings, mirroring each other and mirrored in the tyrant's subsequent

[30] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Michael Simpson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 14.

transformation. Lycaon violates both the division between human and god, by preparing to kill Jove, and the boundary between human and human, by killing a hostage for cannibalism; hence his own species boundaries are violated by the metamorphosis into wolf."[31] In other words, Lycaon does not transform into an ordinary animal. Rather, he becomes the very image of beastly savagery with his "madness [...] gathered in his mouth." The lust for human flesh emerges in this case as an appetite naturally shared by both depraved people and wolves. As Bynum observes, "this wolf-person as *imago* is *imago* not of humanity's proper exemplar, the gods, but of a corruption, a bestiality, that is what Lycaon is."[32] Lycaon's cannibalistic "bestiality" entails the suspension of the divine law of the gods, marking a natural-historical regression to a pre-mythical state. Lycaon's moral "corruption" is hurled as a challenge at the cosmic order in an attempt to reclaim a forgotten prehistorical world. Accordingly, the mythic punishment for such a transgression is a loss of humanity and banishment from human society, as Lycaon is condemned to a solitary predatory existence. His madness, however, stands in sharp contrast to subsequent depictions of werewolves in medieval Christian literature, where these monstrous hybrids retain their human consciousness, morality, and rationality despite their bodily transformation. Rather than signaling the devolvement of humans into beasts, werewolves in medieval romances such as the *Lay of Bisclavret*, *Arthur and Gorlagon*, or *Guillaume de Palerne* were portrayed as victims, cursed heroes who had been changed into wolves, often through the plots of evil women, and ultimately restored to their original human shape. These figures are "sympathetic" werewolves that exemplify the non-essential nature of metamorphosis, thereby avoiding the prospect of interchangeability of human and animal souls.[33] In this sense, medieval werewolf stories implied a rejection of two interrelated aspects of

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[31] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2001), 169.

[32] Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 170; Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 24-27.

[33] Kirby F. Smith, "An Historical Study of the Werewolf in Literature," *PMLA* 9, no. 1 (1894): 1-42; Kate Watkins Tibbals, "Elements of Magic in the Romance of William of Palerne," *Modern Philology* 1 (1903-1904): 355-371; Charles W. Dunn, *The Foundling and the Werewolf: A Literary-Historical Study of Gauillaume de Palerne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), 116-18; Kratz, "Fictus Lupus," 69-71.

Pythagorean metempsychosis that were incompatible with the Christian worldview: namely, that God can divorce a living person from the possibility of redemption; and that a human being can commit a sinful act for which he is not responsible.[34] Nevertheless, in Christian theology the possibility of divorcing a person from the prospect of redemption was not altogether inconceivable. According to Paul, all of created nature is defined precisely in terms of its exclusion from the promise of righteousness; that is, from the prospect of a life according to the law. In *Romans* 8:19-21, Paul referred to the relation between creation and redemption in these terms: for the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. In other words, creaturely life cannot attain redemption by its own means, but remains essentially dependent on the believers who possess the "first fruits of the Spirit" (*Romans* 8:23). Standing in a non-relation to the law, created nature is personified in Paul's thought: it groans under the burden of futility, under the weight of a bare, earthly life without hope of salvation. By manifesting a "wolfish" spirit, Shylock's actions are framed in Shakespeare's play within a creaturely world that remains excluded from the sphere of justice and law. In these terms, Antonio acknowledges that any attempt to reason with the "Jew" to show mercy is futile:

> [one] may as well go stand on the beach
> And bid the main flood bate his usual height;
> You may as well use question with the wolf
> Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb. (4.1.72-5)

As a wolf, the "Jew" exhibits the characteristic futility of creaturely life. Yet Venetian civil law allows this fallen existence to articulate itself juridically and to even possess certain legal rights within the civic community. When Shylock takes Antonio to court for breach of contract, he wields sovereign power over Antonio's life, and thereby introduces a legal avenue by which the civic order can devolve, by

[34] Kratz, "Fictus Lupus," 78.

purely legal means, into a lawless state in which members of the community engage in reciprocal acts of violence with no governing authority to hold them in check. This is effectively a state of civil war, and thus Shylock's cannibalistic contract creates a "miniature state of emergency, a situation in which someone—in this case, the Duke—must step above the merely civil law and make a decision concerning life and death, reinstituting a moment of political theology within the legal regime of Venetian constitutionalism."[35] Since Venetian constitutionalism prevents the Duke from stepping above the law when business transactions are involved, the decision over Antonio's life initially remains in the hands of Shylock. That is why Portia, who masquerades as Antonio's lawyer, makes her argument for mercy by appealing to Shylock, not to the Duke.[36] Antonio, too, readily recognizes this problem:

> The Duke cannot deny the course of law;
> For the commodity that strangers have
> With us in Venice, if it be denied,
> Will much impeach the justice of the state,
> Since that the trade and profit of the city
> Consisteth of all nations. (3.3.29-34)

Shylock is, of course, likewise aware of this overriding constitutional bind, and he does not fail to remind the Duke that withholding his legal compensation would jeopardize the unique status of Venetian civil law:

> I have possessed your Grace of what I purpose,
> …To have the due and forfeit of my bond.
> If you deny it, let the danger light
> Upon your charter and your city's freedom! (4.1.36-39)

Thus, both Antonio and Shylock agree that "the justice of the state" must be maintained at all costs, even at the price of Antonio's life. But when this justice is

[35] Lupton, *Citizen-Saints*, 96.
[36] Ibid., 88-89.

abused by the "Jew," what measures can the State take to protect the lives of its citizens? This is the point in which the figure of the wolf is invoked in the play. Simply put, the problem that Shylock poses for the Venetian state with his business contract is not only an ethical one, but more fundamentally, it is a political problem. This is because Shylock's contract undermines the power of the State to maintain peace and order within the boundaries of the civic community. As Gratiano declares, Shylock's existence within Christian society violates the principle of justice: as a "dog" or a "cur," Shylock may fall within the premises of the "multikinded, justiciable cosmos" of early modern law; but as a wolf, he stands "before" the law as "bare life" on the brink of extinction and banishment. The point is that the "Jew" poses a grave threat to emerging forms of social and economic organization, and this threat cannot simply be resolved by conventional legal means (namely, by civil law). Indeed, Shylock's case seems to call for the very same measures that were employed back in the day against marauding wolves—namely, the eradication of the threat to the community through the direct intervention of the political sovereign. By designating Shylock as a wolf "hang'd for human slaughter," Gratiano is drawing on an old political mythologeme: namely, that of the werewolf as the figure of a man who has been banned from the human community. According to Agamben, medieval German and Anglo-Saxon legal codes were "founded on the concept of peace (*Fried*) and the corresponding exclusion from the community of the wrongdoer, who therefore became *friedlos*, without peace, and whom anyone was permitted to kill without committing homicide." Notably, these "Germanic and Anglo-Saxon sources underline the bandit's liminal status by defining him as a wolf-man," thereby marking his life as a life that "is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to law and to the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion."[37] A few decades after Shakespeare, Thomas Hobbes will conceptualize this "peaceless" existence under the rubric of a pre-social "state of nature" in which people treat each other like wolves: *homo hominis lupus*. For Hobbes, this naturally violent and lawless existence justifies the absolute power of the sovereign, who, in order to maintain internal peace, must assume monopoly over all means of violent coercion within

[37] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 104-105.

the political community.[38] Similarly, in *The Merchant of Venice*, the restoration of the Duke's sovereign power occurs at the intersection of the boundaries between civil and criminal law. To be sure, Shylock's contract undermines the foundational principle of political sovereignty by legal means, but the real problem lies in Shylock's insistence on a narrow or literal interpretation of the law, which he posits in direct opposition to the foundational principle of political sovereignty—namely, to maintain "peace" within the boundaries of the civic community. In this sense, Shylock's adherence to a legalistic notion of justice—as opposed to a more flexible interpretation of the law informed by the doctrine of Christian mercy—proves to be a mere extension of his "wolfish" appetites. Devoid of mercy, Shylock insists on the bare literality of "bond" and "justice" without being able to provide any reasonable justification for his refusal to receive monetary compensation for Antonio's flesh:

> You'll ask me why I rather choose to have
> A weight of carrion flesh than to receive
> Three thousand ducats. I'll not answer that,
> But say it is my humor. Is it answered?
> What if my house be troubled with a rat,
> And I be pleased to give ten thousand ducats
> To have it baned? What, are you answered yet? (4.1.41-47)

In the absence of a governing Christian principle of mercy, Shylock's contractual demand can only be justified as retribution for personal injuries that he suffered at the hands of Antonio. When asked by Salarino what possible use he could have with Antonio's flesh, Shylock answers:

> To bait fish withal; if it will feed nothing else,
> it will feed my revenge (3.1.52-53)

and elsewhere he confirms that

[38] Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. and trans. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3-6; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin, 1982), 133-175.

> if I can catch [Antonio] once upon the hip,
> I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him. (1.3.46-47)

Shylock's insistence on a literal interpretation of the law to "feed" his revenge corresponds to the typology of a "Jewish" vengeful plot against Christian society. Although by Shakespeare's time medieval tales of "Jews" poisoning wells and desecrating hosts have long passed into the realm of legend, the belief in the fundamentally antagonistic attitude of "Jews" toward Christian morality, justice, and established forms of social and political organization remained intact. In the Elizabethan period, this "Jewish" attitude of revengeful hostility was epitomized in the practice of moneylending. At that time, the legal constraints on moneylending were undergoing a rapid revision with the introduction of the usury statute of 1571 that legalized the lending of money at an interest rate of 10 percent. The crime of usury remained in force, but its meaning was changed to include only those individuals who charged excessively high rates of interest (incidentally, a crime of which Shakespeare's own father had been accused).[39] With the rapid habituation of moneylending at interest among Elizabethans, there was an increased need to distinguish Christian attitudes and practices toward commerce from so-called "Jewish" business ethics, that is, with what Elizabethans identified as "Jewish" practices, since at that time no Jews were living in England.[40] As James Shapiro noted, "English depictions of Jews as usurers during this period when the concept of lending money at interest was undergoing such rapid and startling revision strongly suggest that such representations were in part

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[39] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 98-99; Charles R. Geisst, *Beggar Thy Neighbor: A History of Usury and Debt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 58-96.

[40] The presence of Jews in England during Shakespeare's time remains a matter of academic debate, with scholars such as James Shapiro and Janet Adelman arguing that Jews were present in small numbers in sixteenth-century England. Others, most notably David Nirenberg, have argued to the contrary that Adelman and Shapiro "are misguided in their confidence in the 'Judaism' of the few-dozen descendants of Spanish and Portuguese converts they discover living in Shakespeare's London—none of whom confessed to being anything but Christian [...] [And] more important, their insistence that Christian anxieties about Judaism depend on the existence of 'real Jews' ignores the ability of Christian thought to generate Judaism 'out of its own entrails'." Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 271-2; Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in The Merchant of Venice* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 4-12.

projections: Jews enabled the English to imagine a villainous moneylender whose fictional excesses overshadowed their own very real acts of exploitation."[41] To be sure, Shapiro's evocation of Shylock as a "villainous moneylender" falls squarely within the parameters of typological thinking. As we have seen, payment of interest or penalty on contractual bonds was often equated in the Christian typological imaginary with eucharistic martyrdom. Accordingly, Shylock's insistence on the "legal" or literal meaning of the "pound of flesh," rather than on its figurative or "spiritual" significance, implies a "Jewish" refusal to look beyond the meaning of the written word to the spirit behind the letter. As a representative of the dead letter of the law, Shylock appears to the Duke as a

> stony adversary, an inhuman wretch,
> Uncapable of pity, void and empty,
> From any dram of mercy. (4.1.4-6)

Salerio, too, describes Shylock in similar terms:

> Never did I know
> A creature that did bear the shape of man
> So keen and greedy to confound a man.
> He plies the Duke at morning and at night,
> And doth impeach the freedom of the state
> If they deny him justice. Twenty merchants,
> The Duke himself, and the magnificoes
> Of greatest port have all persuaded with him,
> But none can drive him from the envious plea
> Of forfeiture, of justice, and his bond. (3.2.286-295)

Here we can see how Shylock's insistence on the bare literality of the contractual bond echoes Paul's description of the Jews as "Israel after the flesh" and the entire Pauline trope of the distinction between letter and spirit. However, in Shakespeare's play this characteristic "Jewish" insistence on the literality of the law

[41] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 99.

is not only un-Christian; it is also markedly inhuman. To be sure, Shylock does not insist on the "justice" of the dead letter for moral or religious reasons. Neither are financial considerations at stake, because Shylock clearly recognizes that the legal demand for a pound of flesh contradicts capitalist exchange value. Instead, Shylock's insistence on the dead letter of the law stems from his cannibalistic desires. As he states:

> I crave the law,
> The penalty and forfeit of my bond. (4.1.213-4)

It is this perverse desire for human flesh—masquerading as a legal process—that renders Shylock an "inhuman wretch" and "a creature that did bear the shape of man." As a wolf in human guise, Shylock is a far cry from the "sympathetic" werewolf of medieval literary traditions. His cannibalistic appetites recall those of his predecessor Lycaon: a murderous tyrant whose craving for human flesh ultimately brings about the dissolution of the civic order. In this sense, we can say that when Shakespeare's characters conceive of the otherness of the "Jew," they are not confined to the premises of typological thinking. Despite differences in social stature and temperament, there is an implicit agreement among the non-Jews in the play—Gratiano, Antonio, the Duke, Salerio—regarding Shylock's fundamental inhumanity. Shylock is an "inhuman wretch" whose spirit is "wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous"; he is merciless and unreasonable as a prowling wolf; a "creature" that confoundingly bears the shape of a man. These examples suggest that Gratiano's Pythagorean tale of metamorphosis, far from serving as a trivial digression in the play, is key to understanding the way in which "Jewish" identity is conceived in it. To put the matter differently, Gratiano's natural-historical account of Shylock's "wolfish" origins is not invoked in the play as a philosophical or theological notion. It is, rather, a political myth whose purpose is to justify and facilitate a sovereign decision on Shylock's life. This decision amounts to Shylock's civic death: a state in which he remains utterly exposed to the "mercy" of the Duke as "bare life." In this respect, Shylock's "villainous" acts ultimately provide justification for the doctrine of absolute political sovereignty. The play attempts to limit emerging capitalist forms of economic rapacity by transferring their potential threatening power of physical

violence (achieved by means of a business contract) to the political theology of absolute monarchy. However, by designating Shylock as a wolf, the play does not only provide a *political* distinction between a criminal under civil law (a "cur") and an enemy of the State (a "wolf"). It also mobilizes a *theological* distinction concerning the absolute difference of "spirits" between Christian and "Jew"—as demonstrated by the account of Shylock's "wolfish" ancestry. This indelible difference in "spirits" facilitates the exclusion of the "Jew" from the law's protection (while assuming that even "dogs" and "curs" possess certain legal rights within the Venetian polity). And although Christian theology did assume a fundamental difference in "spirits" between Christians and "Jews," this difference was conceived in terms of the typological distinction between spirit and letter, rather than as a natural history. In other words, for Paul, "Jewishness" is not a naturally inherited trait, but is predicated on a certain interpretation of the law. Significantly, this "carnal" or literal interpretation is not a fixed relation to the law, but a contractual one. As such it can be overcome by a "circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (*Romans* 2:29). As opposed to the Jewish rite of circumcision, which leaves a permanent mark inscribed on the Jew's body as a sign of his exclusive ethnic and religious affiliation, the purview of "spiritual" circumcision through baptism is universal and can be attained by Jews and non-Jews alike. In this sense, Gratiano's speech serves as a site in which two incompatible representations of "Jewish" identity—the natural-historical and the figural-typological—coincide non-synthetically. By formulating a Pythagorean account of the insurmountable difference of spirits between Christian and "Jew," Gratiano advances the un-Christian view that Shylock is human in outer form only, but not in spirit. This mythical configuration is superimposed on the familiar typology of a "Jewish" adherence to the literal interpretation of the law—by establishing itself as the primordial "natural" cause of the "Jewish" insistence on literality. Gratiano's description of Shylock's wolfish origins is thus at bottom an allegorical operation that recovers a hidden meaning ("wolfishness") by declaring the phenomenal human appearance of the "Jew" to be pure surface. Consequently, Shylock's humanity is preserved in the play only as a *semblance*, an empty image-being. Its allegorical designation is none other than the specter of a prehistorical "state of nature" in which people treat each other like wolves: *homo homini lupus*.

Conversion and Exception

In his discussion of Shakespeare's "Jewish Questions," David Nirenberg noted the ambiguity that underlies Shylock's humanity when he wrote that despite his conversion at the end of the play, Shylock remains "in some sense ontologically alien" to Christianity.[42] But Nirenberg does not specify in what sense this difference is to be understood. He consequently fails to note that the determination of ontological otherness of the "Jew" in *The Merchant of Venice* does not rely exclusively on a typological distinction between letter and spirit, but on a natural-historical account superimposed on the traditional typology of the "Jew." Janet Adelman identified this non-contractual difference as a "proto-racial distinction" that emerges as a recurring motif in Shakespeare's play: "Although "Jew" might function primarily as a religious category when it is opposed to "Christian," it becomes an incipiently racial category when it is opposed to "gentle/gentile." In that opposition, "gentile" invariably functions as a marker of those races or nations that are not Jewish."[43] Thus, Shylock's insistence on the bare literality of "bond" and "justice" marks not only his allegiance to a "Jewish" literal interpretation of the law; it also serves as a mark of his indelible racial alterity, his un-"gentle" spirit. As Adelman notes, "the persistent association of [Shylock's] hard-hearted Jewishness with natural phenomena—the wolf, the sea, the stone—has the effect of naturalizing it in him, making it fixed and immutable."[44] Focusing on Antonio's sarcastic remark:

> Hie thee, gentle Jew
> the Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind (1.3.173-174)

Adelman argues that this formulation "illustrates the process of racialization as a response to the prospect of Jewish conversion":[45] Though a Jew might conceivably turn Christian, a Hebrew by definition cannot turn gentile. And this appeal to the realm of inalterable "natural" differences is signaled by the tricky word "kind,"

[42] Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 275.
[43] Adelman, *Blood Relations*, 75.
[44] Ibid., 78.
[45] Ibid.

which undercuts Shylock's apparent turn to kindness by invoking exactly that inalterable realm. Like his nation (*gens*), his nature (*kind*) is reassuringly fixed: this Hebrew will never become gentle/gentile, will never lose his Jewish obduracy, the stony-heartedness that allows Christians to recognize him; he will never change his nature and "grow kind." And whether or not he is forced to convert, he can never join the kind of the Christian: even at the end of the play, he remains "the rich Jew" (5 .1 .291).[46]

It is thus possible to identify two strands of anti-Jewish thought at work in *The Merchant of Venice*: the first casts Shylock as a personification of the negative image of the "Jew" in the Christian typological imaginary; the other affirms the absolute, non-contractual difference of "spirits" between Christian and "Jew" as the product of a distinct natural-historical development. As we have seen, this "natural" difference is epitomized in the play by the tendency of non-Jewish characters to identify Shylock as canine. But this canine character, although fixed in its essence to the "Jew," never remains the same, fluctuating between the various designations of "dog," "cur," and "wolf." The distinction between these canine figures, far from being trivial, has legal as well as theological implications. However, among scholars there is a tendency to subsume these different canine designations under the single rubric of the nonhuman "animal." For example, Paul Yachnin identifies the characterization of Jews as nonhuman as a prevalent feature of Shakespeare's historical culture. According to Yachnin, this was a culture in which the boundary between human and animal was not distinctly drawn:

> The characterization of Jews as nonhuman belongs to the play as a whole. That is the case because Shakespeare's culture is one for which not all creatures that bear the shape of a man are men. While is a fundamental principle of modern political culture that all persons are entitled to the recognition of their human dignity, it was not so to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Shakespearean characterization is based, in this view, not on an ideal of equality among human creatures but rather on an idea that humans are strung out along a hierarchy of capabilities and entitlements

[46] Ibid.

> that coordinates to differences of sex, ethnicity, race, religion, and social rank (or breeding or blood). That means that some characters in Shakespeare are far closer to animality than are other characters.[47]

Although Yachnin is certainly right in emphasizing the permeability and instability of the "human/animal threshold"[48] in *The Merchant of Venice*, he fails to take note of the porousness of the category of the "animal" itself. At stake is not simply the inherent instability of the human-animal distinction, but the accommodation of two different conceptions of animality: one belonging in Christian typology, and the other rooted in a mythical natural history. The tension between these views is not resolved in the play. Instead, it is "spatialized" in the empty image-being, the *semblance*, of Shylock's human appearance. This human semblance, despite its negligible ontological status, plays an important role in *The Merchant of Venice*, not only because it contains and obfuscates the tension between typology and natural history, but also because it serves as the means by which Shylock—a veritable wolf—can express himself on the public stage in the Venetian court of law. Like a number of other "animal-people" in Shakespeare's plays, Shylock seeks to gain a public voice and a public audience without casting off his animal "nature."[49] Thus, as Yachnin notes: "However marked is his appearance in court by obduracy, impertinency, and the threat of violence, Shylock is noteworthy because he seeks a public rather than a private revenge against his enemy Antonio."[50] According to Yachnin, Shylock is "noteworthy" because his very appearance in court defies the ancient consensus that animals are neither public nor political. Since Aristotle's designation of humans as *zoon politikon*, a firm line has been drawn between humans and animals on the basis of the exclusive human capacity for speech, moral judgment, and political action.[51] But Shylock's public demand for a pound of flesh in a court of law is also notable for another reason: in contrast to the blood libel charges, which depicted "Jewish"

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[47] Paul Yachnin, "Shakespeare's Public Animals," in *Humankinds: The Renaissance and Its Anthropologies,* eds. Andreas Höfele and Stephan Laqué (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 185-198, 192.
[48] Ibid., 193.
[49] Ibid., 185.
[50] Ibid., 194.
[51] Ibid., 185.

cannibalism as secretive acts, in Venice Shylock can execute his cannibalistic plot legally and in broad daylight by virtue of a contractual bond that grants him sovereign power over the life of a Venetian citizen. To be sure, although Shylock receives a public hearing—he is, after all, a *talking* animal—he is not thereby rendered a *political* animal. On the contrary, Shylock's business contract and his refusal to accept compensation for Antonio's flesh demonstrate that his goal is to undermine the founding principle of political sovereignty and devolve the Venetian civic order to a prehistorical "state of nature." The play spells out the implications of typological reversal in political terms: namely, as a regression to a pre-social state in which people treat each other cannibalistically, like wolves. But—and this point is crucial—the characters in Shakespeare's play make the claim about Shylock's wolfishness by resorting to an alternative prehistory. They invoke the mythic framework of a distinct natural-historical development rather than employing the typology of a contractual difference between Christian and "Jew." By explicitly or implicitly endorsing the claim of Shylock's "natural" otherness, Shakespeare's characters engage in a revision of the figure of the "Jew" as a typological representation of Christianity's prehistory. From the perspective of political theology, "Judaism" appears as the lawlessness of a prehistorical or pre-social state. However, the characters in Shakespeare's play insist that this condition is not contractual but "natural." This "nature" is fixed, so that Shylock's spiritual constitution is essentially different from that of the Christian, and it is a difference that no act of conversion can undo. In this context, Adelman rightly argued that the emergence of such a fixed category of "proto-racial difference" in Shakespeare's play is linked to a

> set of anxieties about sameness and difference, nature and nations [...]—anxieties for which racialized thinking provided an easy remedy, whether or not racial categories were fully in place in the early modern period. By the time of *Merchant*, Christian societies had been worrying about the instability of Jewish difference for generations."[52]

[52] Adelman, *Blood Relations*, 78-79.

As Adelman points out, these anxieties historically surfaced in the aftermath of mass conversions that took place in Spain throughout the sixteenth century:

> Although one theological justification for hatred of Jews had always been their stiff-necked refusal to convert, it turned out that massive conversion brought on its own problems. In sixteenth-century Spain, the danger was not that Jews would remain an isolated community refusing Christian grace but that they would convert and infiltrate Spanish society at all levels, becoming indistinguishable from their Spanish hosts as they entered into the mainstream. For conversion threatened to do away with the most reliable signs of difference, provoking a crisis in a very mixed society obsessively concerned with purity of lineage.[53]

Transposed into the terms of our analysis, Adelman's description suggests that Gratiano's account of Shylock's wolfish origins is invoked in response to the erosion of traditional categories of typology and eucharistic theology in the early modern period. In the Christian typological imaginary, "Jews" were traditionally identified as manifestations of Christianity's prehistory, but state-enforced conversions threatened to collapse this typological difference—with the increased assimilation of converted Jews into Christian society. Shakespeare's play registers the tensions surrounding the crisis of state-enforced conversions by locating Shylock's own conversion in a Venetian court rather than in a church. Against this background, the characters in Shakespeare's play continuously assert the fixed "natural" difference between Christian and "Jew," whether by blood,[54] spirit, or a shared humanity. In this context, the allegory of Shylock as a wolf in human guise assumes an implicit political resonance: namely, it points to the suspicion that converted Jews who had assimilated into the mainstream of Christian society continue to work against this society from within, by means of civil law. As we have seen, the play advocates the political theology of absolute monarchy in response to this threat. In this sense, Shylock's legal demand for a pound of flesh triggers what Carl Schmitt has called a "state of exception," in which a given

[53] Ibid., 79-80.
[54] See Adelman's discussion of Jessica's conversion in *Blood Relations*, 66-98.

political system can no longer guarantee the security of the legal order. According to Schmitt, the exception is that "which is not codified in the existing legal order, [and] can at best be characterized as a case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state, or the like. But it cannot be circumscribed factually and made to conform to a preformed law."[55] Under these circumstances, the sovereign must suspend existing laws in order to save them. And that is precisely what takes place in the court scene in *The Merchant of Venice*: Shylock is divested of the various legal, social, and civil ties that bound him as a legal alien to Venetian civic life. In this sense, the Duke's "merciful" offer to pardon Shylock's life (that is, to grant Shylock the mercy that he never extended to Antonio) serves as a mere façade behind which Shylock's state of exclusion from the Venetian polity is perpetuated:

> That thou shalt see the difference of our spirits,
> I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it:
> For half thy wealth, it is Antonio's;
> The other half comes to the general state,
> Which humbleness may drive unto a fine. (4.1.384-388)

The Duke's sovereign act of Christian "mercy" reduces Shylock's status within the polity to the simple reality of his "bare life": Shylock is not only denied a civic or legal affiliation, but he also forfeits his financial means, thereby remaining excluded from all civil ties to Venetian society. And Shylock understands this point all too well. In his downfall, he exposes the violence that underlies sovereign decision:

> Nay, take my life and all; pardon not that:
> You take my house when you do take the prop
> That doth sustain my house; you take my life
> When you do take the means whereby I live. (4.1.390-393)

[55] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 6.

At this point, Antonio's intervention is required to restore Shylock's civil affiliations, and he "mercifully" offers to rescind the money owed him by Shylock on condition that Shylock convert to Christianity and that his remaining wealth will pass after his death to his converted daughter and Christian son-in-law. Antonio's offer mitigates the Duke's decision by restoring Shylock to the circle of Venetian civil life. And Shylock, in turn, is forced to accept Antonio's offer upon pain of death, as the Duke declares that

> [Shylock] shall do this, or else I do recant
> The pardon that I late pronounced here. (4.1.407-8)

Far from establishing itself as a "spiritual" or religious transformation, conversion thus appears in Shakespeare's play purely as an instrument of political power. As Yachnin noted, it becomes "a way for rulers to exercise control over the inward as well as the outward lives of their subjects."[56] Shylock's conversion accordingly takes place in a "state of exception," when Shylock is reduced to "bare life." This reduction of the legal person to a state of "bare life" serves in the play as a kind of legal-existential precondition for Shylock's reentry into Venetian society—facilitating a political reenactment of a theological scene of "redemption" by means of state-enforced conversion. To be sure, Shakespeare leaves us with little doubt as to the authenticity and "spiritual" worth of such a conversion, as demonstrated by Shylock's last words in the play:

> I pray you, give me leave to go from hence;
> I am not well: send the deed after me,
> And I will sign it. (4.1.392-5)

In his compliance with the Duke's decree, the "wolfish" spirit in Shylock is broken, and the danger that he poses for the Venetian polity is removed. In his last words

[56] Yachnin likewise notes that conversion "served as a justification of wars of conquest that were said to be dedicated to converting whole new populations to Christian rule or, through the period of the Reformation, to the true form of Christian rule." See Paul Yachnin, "Shylock, Toleration, Conversion" in *Imagining Religious Toleration: A Literary History of an Idea, 1600–1830,* eds. Alison Conway and David Alvarez (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019): 18-34, 25.

in the play, Shylock no longer voices any threats or complaints, yet his conversion by no means implies an acceptance of a new faith. On the contrary, Shylock states that he is "not well" and must depart. His statement is not an indictment of absolutist monarchy, but rather a *testimony* of the operation of sovereign power in a "state of exception." As Eric Santner argued, under such conditions the subject is reduced to a creaturely estate.[57] Or, in other words, Shylock is rendered *creaturely* because he stands in a non-relation to the law. In order to "redeem" his social and political status within the Venetian polity, he must first stand "before" the law as a creature condemned to the futility of natural history. At any rate, Shylock's conversion does not release him from his previous identification as a "Jew": namely, as one who fails to internalize the "spirit" of the law. Yet in his reduction to creaturely life, Shylock also expresses a "natural" messianic impulse: the anguished anticipation of all creation to be redeemed from bondage to death and futility. In this sense, Shylock's "I am not well" corresponds to what Paul Celan, in his "Meridian" speech, called a "counterword" [*Gegenwort*]: namely, the poetic phrase that bears witness to the unbridgeable gap between experience and expression, physis and meaning.[58] As a *talking* animal, Shylock partakes in creaturely life and yet is able to express himself in human language. In his downfall at the public forum of the Venetian court, he emerges as a representative figure; an "advocate for all creatures, and at the same time their highest embodiment."[59]

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[57] On the relation between sovereign power and creaturely life, see Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1-42.

[58] Noam Pines, *The Infrahuman: Animality in Modern Jewish Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 124-125.

[59] Benjamin described certain characters in Leskov's stories in these terms. See Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 1935–1938, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 158; translation modified.

Keywords: Shylock, Wolf, Political Theology, Typology, Animal Studies

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Tza'ar ba'ale hayyim: Jewish Animal Rights Advocacy and Vegetarianism, from Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Kohen Kook's *A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace* to Jonathan Safran Foer

by *Piergabriele Mancuso*

Abstract

Tza'ar ba'ale hayyim *is one of the fundamental principles in Jewish law, enunciated in the Bible and then accepted as a mandatory norm in Talmudic tradition, banning any form of unnecessary pain on animals, and requiring people to minimise physical and psychological animal burden, especially, but certainly not exclusively, in ritual slaughtering. Over the hundred years, following the development of meat industry aiming to maximise profits to the detriment of animal's fundamental rights, and with a dramatic impact on the natural environment, several rabbinical authorities have interpreted this principle in broader terms, recommending people to opt for vegetarian diets that are not only morally preferable, but also ethically more recommendable as environmentally more sustainable. The aim of this paper is to offer a succinct view on the meanings and interpretations of Jewish vegetarianism, from its biblical inception, through the rabbinical debate, to more recent interpretations among religious and secular authorities.*

Animal Suffering: Not an Opinion, and Not an Option

The Theoretical Core of Jewish Vegetarianism

Tza'ar: Certainly Not for Fun

We-nishmartem le-nafshotekhem: For the Sake of the Living Body, and of the Planet

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Animal Suffering: Not an Opinion, and Not an Option

Tza'ar ba'ale hayyim, literally "the suffering of living creatures," is one of the most important Jewish ethical and moral concepts and a fundamental principle—together, for example, with the prohibition on making two species of animals work together (Deut. 22, 10), or removing the eggs from a nest in the presence of a mother bird (Deut. 22, 6-7)—concerning the treatment of living creatures, banning any infliction of unnecessary pain on animals. Not a commandment of Biblical origin but the outcome of rabbinical interpretations on the Torah (Exodus 23, 5, "When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless help raise it") *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim* is a concept of Jewish law whose premise is that since suffering inflicted on animals by human beings cannot be avoided completely (the rule of human beings over animals being a divine concession), any form of animal exploitation by humans is permitted if performed for legitimate (not for sporting, recreational or entertainment) purposes and as long as no unnecessary pain is inflicted. *Tza'ar ba'ale hayyim*—causing no unnecessary pain—is certainly not just a moral recommendation but a binding principle in Jewish law, a biblical norm—though formulated by the rabbis—whose application would then justify the violation of the norms of Sabbath, similarly to *piquah ha-nefesh*, the obligation of saving one's life.[1]

If on the one hand the theoretical principles and the purposes of this norm are certainly clear (reducing or at least minimising an animal's pain), what remains to be defined is "pain," if refers purely and exclusively to the physical suffering inflicted upon the animal when it is being slaughtered, or if it includes the forms of physiologic distress than an animal might experience while alive. Should the latter be the case, virtually nothing coming from the modern meat industry could be considered kosher, since rabbinical control is temporarily limited to the final moments of the animal's life, when it is ritually slaughtered, a cruel but relatively short moment. Many Jews and more recently rabbinical authorities are taking

[1] For an analysis of *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim,* see Richard H. Schwartz, *Judaism and Vegetarianism* (New York: Lantern Book, 2001,), 15-39; Jacob Ari Labendz and Shmuly Yanklowitz, eds., *Jewish Veganism and Vegetarianism: Studies and New Directions* (New York: SUNY Press, 2019), 243-248.

stricter stances on this issue. They are considering *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim* by looking at the entirety of the animal's life—from conception to death—an increasingly shorter period spent in cramped pens, deprived of natural light and forced to grow, often with no possibility of wandering in an open space with other animals, running, or mating. Are we really abiding by the rabbinical rules of minimising a creature's pain when we try to do so only in its final moments?

Tza'ar ba'ale hayyim was limited to the pain inflicted while the animal is being exploited for legitimate purposes or *le-shem shamayyim* (for the sake of heaven), in the fulfilment of religious duties (like using skin and leather to make tefillin/phylacteries). At the time of the Sages, one may argue, intensive farming and similar forms of "industrial" exploitation did not exist, and consumption of meat was certainly not as common as it is today. What would the Sages say about the modern chicken industry, for example, where the animals are systematically and indiscriminately mutilated, overfed, subjected to ever faster rhythms of sleep-wakefulness in order to increase their egg production? Where, consequently, they live less than a tenth of their natural life before being jammed into cages and transported to slaughter?

According to Rabbi Richard H. Schwartz, an authority on the Jewish vegetarian movement, there is no way to reconcile the production system of the modern food industry with Jewish law, especially the principle of *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim*, and he suggests fellow Jews to adopt a vegetarian diet:

> The conditions under which animals are raised today are completely contrary to the Jewish ideals of compassion and avoiding tsa'ar ba'alei chayim [...]. Whereas the Torah mandates consideration for animals by prohibiting the yoking of a strong and weak animal together, veal calves spend their entire lives standing on slats, their necks chained to the sides, without sunlight, fresh air, or exercise [...]. Hence, in view of the horrible conditions under which most animals are raised today, Jews who eat meat raised under such conditions seem to be supporting a system contrary to basic Jewish principles and obligations.[2]

[2] Schwartz, *Judaism and Vegetarianism*, 39.

Schwartz's reasoning may seem a bit too consequential, putting too much emphasis on an element that most rabbinical authorities would certainly not consider serious enough to ban meat from Jewish households. How many observant Jews would give up meat knowing that the animals that they are eating had been physically and mentally mistreated *before* being ritually slaughtered? (I suppose a tiny minority, unless the *shehita* has not been performed properly, in which case only *that* specific piece of meat would be momentarily thrown away).[3] Paraphrasing some old ads, you don't need to be Jewish to be vegetarian, and vegetarianism is not part of traditional Jewish religious values,[4] but if you are Jewish and want to become vegetarian, such a choice would certainly not clash with Jewish tradition and *halakhah* that would, on the contrary, offer valid reasons to consider it a perfectly ethically Jewish choice.

It is not the purpose of this paper to answer the numerous ethical and nonetheless halakhic questions concerning the different types of Jewish dietary habits, but rather to identify the ideological and theoretical principles that make vegetarianism and concern for animal welfare, Jewish values too. Instead of trying to cover the totality of such complex ethical issue, we will focus on two authors and sets of writings. Although chronologically, geographically, and culturally quite far from each other, they share the ethical *fil rouge* of vegetarianism: Rav Abraham Yitzhak Ha-Kohen Kook (1865-1935), one of the most important rabbinical authorities and leading spiritual figure in Israel, the "father" of Jewish vegetarianism, and Jonathan Safran Foer (1977), a Jewish American writer and novelist, the author of *Eating Animals* (2009) and *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast* (2019), two worldwide bestsellers and the most detailed and astute investigations yet of the moral-ethical meaning of a meat-based diet. Foer does not make use of Kook's exegetical tools—mostly analysis of biblical and

[3] As in the case of the "kosher meat scandal" at Agriprocess, on which see below.

[4] Today, it would be unreasonable, other than politically incorrect and for some even offensive, to propose those ads. They consisted of a number of portraits of people that at that time would be considered non-Jewish (a Native American, a black boy and an Asian baby, an Italian-looking-like policeman, and so on) holding or chewing a sandwich made by the company Levy's (a traditionally Jewish surname). On the top and lower ends of the ads was written "You don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's real rye"; Stephen Coles, "Levy's ad campaign: "You don't have to be Jewish" (1961–70s)," *Fonts In Use*, September 12, 2016. Accessed June 2, 2023 https://fontsinuse.com/uses/14355/levy-s-ad-campaign-you-don-t-have-to-be-jewis.

rabbinical sources—and Kook is in no way concerned with the environmental issues deriving from industrialised meat production. They arrive at similar conclusions, though, questioning not so much the legitimacy of eating meat, as its supposed necessity. While for Kook, reducing the consumption of meat would result in spiritual elevation, almost theurgically hastening the coming of the messianic times, for Foer turning vegetarian means eliminating an industrial system of food production that causes one third of the overall global warming. We, overfed, oversized Western people, Foer adds, not only no longer need meat to survive but, in contrast, we should give it up, as much as we can and as soon as possible. For the planet, four ourselves, and also to abide by the rule of *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim*.

The Theoretical Core of Jewish Vegetarianism

If asked about the reasons for and principles behind Jewish vegetarianism, most vegetarian Jews would probably appeal directly to the Bible, claiming that human beings were created vegetarians and that eating was a divine concession, not an obligation. "God's initial intention was that people be vegetarians," affirms rabbi Schwartz in the opening chapter of his book. He then gives a long list of commentators and exegetes endorsing this proposition, clearly to show how vegetarianism is inherent to Judaism and perfectly consistent with Jewish tradition, quoting from from Rashi (1040-1105), Ibn Ezra (1092-1167), Maimonides (1135-1214) and Joseph Albo (15th century), through Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), to Moses Cassuto (1883-1951)[5] and Rabbi Kook.

Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Ha-Kohen Kook (1865-1935) is considered the most important rabbinical authority in the study of Jewish vegetarianism as a positive ideal from the Torah. His writings on Jewish vegetarianism published in Germany and in Switzerland between 1903 and 1910 were gathered and edited in 1973 by Rabbi David Cohen (1887-1973), one of his most illustrious pupils ("Nazir of Jerusalem") but published only in 1983 under the title *A Vision of Vegetarianism*

[5] "You are permitted to use the animals and employ them for work, have dominion over them in order to utilize their service for your subsistence, but must not hold their life cheap nor slaughter them for food. Your natural diet is vegetaria," quoted in Schwartz, *Judaism and Vegetarianism*, 1.

and Peace. It was undoubtedly an evocative but misleading title, as vegetarianism is but a portion of a much wider analysis of the ideal relationship among God, the human being, and other forms of animal life. The premise of Kook's analysis is that eating meat was just a temporary concession that human beings were granted after the Flood. Because of their spiritual decadence and being unable to control their physical and emotional impulses, shedding the blood of animals would have resulted in far more ethically degraded behaviour.
For the average human being, eating meat is a minimum ethical concession, a sort of physical and ethical-moral relief valve to overcome natural impulses:

> With the coming of the permission to eat meat, after the sacralization of the mitzvot by the giving of the Torah, [the Torah] qualifies [the permission], as suggested by the words, "[when] you say, 'I shall eat meat', for you urge to eat meat, you may eat whenever you wish. There is here a wise yet hidden rebuke and a restrictive exhortation, namely, that as long as your inner morality does not abhor the eating of animal flesh, as you already abhor [the eating of] human flesh [...] then when the time comes for the human moral condition to abhor [eating] the flesh of animals, because of the moral loathing inherent in that act, your surely "will not have the urge to eat meat," and you will not eat it.[6]

Kook—a strictly halakhic man—never denied the juridical and moral legitimacy of eating meat, emphasizing, however, how restrictively this was conceded, the kashrut imposing several limitations whose main aim is to alleviate the animal's suffering. If Kook found vegetarianism preferable, and certainly not incompatible with halakha, why was he not vegetarian? Because Kook sticks to the well-established kabbalistic-mystical Lurianic concept of "elevation of the holy sparks," according to which the elevation of the holy sparks/components contained in meat would be possible only if those who have already achieved a higher spiritual condition eat and use their energies for religious purposes, to perform mitzvot and

[6] Rav Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, *A vision of vegetarianism and peace*, edited by Rabbi David Cohen, translated, with additional notes, by Jonathan Rubenstein (from his unpublished rabbinic thesis, n.p., n.d.), 4-5, accessed June 2, 2023, https://www.jewishveg.org/AVisionofVegetarianismandPeace.pdf.

to study the Torah.[7] It follows that the *'am ha-aretz*, the average person should refrain from eating meat, as the sparks of holiness contained in it, once consumed, would not attain any higher spiritual position. This seems in contradiction with Kook's previous position on meat consumption as minimal ethical concession to prevent a moral and ethical downfall. This is what prevents Kook from embracing a coherent vegetarian ideal and turning it into a consistent form of religious orthopraxis. While waiting for the messianic times it is the kashrut that through its elaborate regulations raises "the consciousness of the Jewish people [..] with the aim of eventually guiding them back to the vegetarian regimen originally instituted by God in Genesis 1:29."[8] With the coming of the Messiah all these discrepancies will be resolved. With the coming of the Messiah, all living beings—human and animal—will have attained a higher spiritual and moral consciousness:

> When humanity arrives at its goal of happiness and complete freedom, when it reaches that high peak of wholeness which is the pure knowledge of God and the sanctification of life fulfilled according to its nature, then the age of "the prompting of the intellect" will arrive, like a structure built on the foundation of "the prompting of the Torah," which is prior for the whole of humanity. Then human beings will recognize their relationship with all the animals, who are their companions in creation, and how they should properly be able, from the standpoint of pure morality, to combine the standard of mercy with the standard of justice in particular relation to [the animals], and they will no longer be in need of extenuating concessions, like the concessions [referred to in the Talmud by the phrase]: "The Torah speaks only of the evil inclination;" rather, they will walk the path of absolute good. "I will make a covenant for them with the

[7] Richard H. Schwartz and David Sears, "The Vegetarian Teachings of Rav Kook," in Labendz and Yanklowitz, eds., *Jewish Veganism and Vegetarianism*, 217-231, 220. It's outside the scope of this short paper, it is still worth mentioning the position taken on this issue by the 19th century Lithuanian Musar movement, on which see Geoffrey D. Claussen, "Musar and Jewish Veganism," in Labendz and Yanklowitz, eds., *Jewish Veganism and Vegetarianism*, 195-216.

[8] Schwartz and Sears, "The Vegetarian Teachings of Rav Kook," 218.

> beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; I will also banish bow, sword, and war from the land [...].[9]

If Kook had been aware of the environmental consequences of modern super-intensive farming, and especially of the inhumane treatment inflicted upon millions of animals slaughtered for the meat industry—some critics argued—he probably would have taken a more straightforward stance on vegetarianism. In Kook's time, nothing that characterised the modern food industry existed: the physical and psychological distress of an animal was confined to its last few moments. If the aim of *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim* is to reduce the pain inflicted on an animal especially at the time of slaughter, how ethically and halakhically legitimate is the consumption of meat from animals forced to suffer from birth until death? In Kook's "vegetarian" theory, meat is consumed to support the human body, and the death of animal is cruel but necessary. But what, however, if animal life is taken for gluttony, or, worse, for frivolous reasons like sport and leisure? This underpins the ethical legitimacy of meat consumption and is bringing a growing number of rabbinical authorities to adopt and recommend kosher meat-free diets.

Tza'ar: Certainly Not for Fun

Soon after World War II, Kook's writings generated a lively debate among Jews, secular thinkers, and rabbinical authorities, some of whom felt morally and environmentally obligated to rectify the human being/animal relationship, overcoming the boundaries of speciesism and reconsidering the meaning of the biblical idea of God having given man dominion over Creation. Such ideas moved across Jewish denominations, from reform, through modern orthodoxy to

[9] Kook, *A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace*, 12; Schwartz and Sears, "The Vegetarian Teachings of Rav Kook," 222-224, argue that Kook would have probably rectified his position on meat and vegetarianism, if he only knew about the environmental consequences and especially the brutalities committed against millions of animals every day in the modern intensive farms and food industries: "One can only wonder what his view would have been today if he were aware of the diseases, soaring medical costs, increasing environmental hazards, widespread hunger, cruel treatment of animals."

Chassidism.[10] Unlike other forms of pro-animal advocacy that fiercely opposed any form of animal-based diet, Jewish vegetarianism and pro-animal welfare never claimed moral superiority or indisputable truth, defining itself as an easier way to grow spiritually in accordance with the teachings and main ideological tenets of Judaism.

Exploiting animal *le-shem shamayim* or for any other purpose concerning the physical and mental welfare of human beings is legitimate, provided that necessary measures are taken to alleviate animal suffering. What, however, is *tza'ar* when inflicted for a non-vital, but still socially largely accepted and historically grounded reason? A very important precedent is offered by a *she'elah* (answer to a religious legal question) that Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef—a leading rabbinical authority and Rishon le-Tzion (chief rabbi) of Israeli Sephardic Jews since 1973—issued on the legitimacy of bullfighting.

In 1986 a group of orthodox rabbis was invited to an international conference in Spain where they would attend a corrida, a bullfight, a fundamental element of Spanish and Iberian culture. Asked about the legitimacy of bullfight, Ovadiah Yosef did not hesitate to condemn it as the expression of "a culture of sinful and cruel people," a gruesome event based on maximum exploitation of animal suffering, standing in stark contrast and direct opposition to the principle of *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim*.[11] Making the animal suffer—unnecessarily, from a halakhic standpoint—and even deliberately prolonging it—argued Yosef—is not an ancillary event in bullfight, something that can be limited or even eliminated, but a quintessential component of the show.

Yosef forbade Jews from taking part in a bullfight, directly either as bullfighters or as part of the staff or indirectly as part of the audience. This latter role would contribute to the public transgression of a fundamental Jewish value, *moshav letzim* (from Psalm 1:1, "the company of the insolent").[12] Whereas the main

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[10] David Sears, *Compassion for Humanity in the Jewish Tradition: A Source Book and the Path of Baal Shem Tov: Early Chassidic Teachings and Customs, Northvale, N.J., Jason Aronson, c1998.*

[11] "Bullfighting and Visiting a Zoo by Rabbi Chaim Jachter," *Torah Academy of Bergen County* 11 (2001/5762), accessed June 2, 2023, https://www.koltorah.org/halachah/bullfighting-and-visiting-a-zoo-by-rabbi-chaim-jachter.

[12] For more information on Yosef's condemnation of bullfighting and other related matters (hunting and visiting zoos), see "*Tza'ar Baalei Chaim* –Is It Permitted to Watch a Bullfight? A

problem here is the total lack of measures to alleviate the pain of an animal—exacerbated by the spectacularizing of its death—what makes a corrida an illegitimate form of animal exploitation is its complete needlessness.

Having taken note of Yosef's decision on bullfighting—one of the cruelest forms of animal exploitation—some rabbinical authorities started looking at animal exploitation from a much wider standpoint, looking at the totality of the animal's tortured existence. While kosher in strictly halakhic terms, how Jewishly ethical is to eat meat of animals that were confined to cramped cages that did not allow them to move, and that were overfed or forcibly impregnated? At the time of the Sages, today's meat industry was inconceivable. Even when properly executed, shehitah, as any form of inflicted death, is painful for the animal, especially when performed in an industrial environment where animals are terrorized by being forced to watch other animals being slaughtered.[13]

Rabbi Asa Keisar—Israel's "national voice for veganism as a religious ideal"—has no doubts about this issue: modern methods of breeding and farming are simply incompatible with the criteria of dignity and respect codified by the Sages. While not denying the legitimacy of eating meat, Keisar underlines how this is just a concession, something that is permitted but not required. His manifesto, *We-lifney 'iver* (Before the Blind)[14]—a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the most important biblical and rabbinical sources — has circulated widely in Israel, reaching orthodox yeshivot/rabbinical schools and secular milieus. It has also

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Responsum of Harav Ovadiah Yosef, zt"l, based on Yechaveh Da'at 3:61," *Olami Resources.*, accessed June 2, 2023, http://nleresources.com/kiruv-and-chinuch/nle-gemara/permitted-watch-bullfight/#.YrlwJyoRrrc. Interesting to note that, while openly condemning hunting, especially when practiced for recreational purposes, Yosef allowed the visit to zoos, whose animal variety and diversity would teach visitors about G-d's greatness.

[13] A very accurate study on the physiology of animal pain when ritually slaughtered is offered by Sara Rota Nodari and Stefano Cinotti, "Stato delle conoscenze sul dolore animale nella macellazione ebraica," in "Gli animali e la sofferenza. La questione della *schechità* e i diritti dei viventi," eds. Laura Quercioli Mincer and Tobia Zevi, *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 78, no. 1-2 (2012): 181-191.

[14] From Lev. 19, 14 "You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God" [emphasis mine]. The book was published in 2016, with a second expanded edition that appeared in 2018, *We-lifney 'iver ha-shalem*. The text can be downloaded for free from Rabbi Keisar's website at: https://asakeisar.com/en/, accessed June 2, 2023. The book was endorsed and approved by leading rabbinical authorities such as Rabbi David Rosen, former Chief Rabbi of Ireland, Rabbi Moshe Zuriel, Rabbi Daniel Sperber, and Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo.

sparked a lively debate also among ultra-Orthodox Jews. A vegetarian, or even better a vegan diet involving absolutely no form of animal exploitation—Keisar affirms—should undoubtedly be preferred, and use of animal products be totally avoided, unless necessary for the fulfilment of religious duties (including saving one's life), and unless they are processed according to proper kosher methods. If we consistently stick to Maimonides' principle that "there is no difference between the grief of a human and the grief of an animal," and ask ourselves what justifies treating animals in ways that would be horrific if done to humans, we can see the ethical and moral discrepancy that is created when one accepts this model of production.[15]

According to Rabbi Simchah Roth—another prominent figure in the rabbinical pro-animal front—*shehitah*, like the whole of the slaughtering practices aiming to minimize the pain of the animal, should no longer be considered acceptable methods of terminating an animal's life, especially compared to other forms of non-ritual slaughter in which death is inflicted quickly. Aiming to optimize the times of production and then to offer a competitive product, the meat industry applies systems of production that according to Rabbi Roth are totally incompatible not only with *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim* but with the core aims of ritual slaughter that should take place in a physical environment that minimizes the animal's awareness of its impending death. This is unavoidable in the meat industry where the animals, adds Roth, like links in a production chain, are aligned, pushed, and killed in an appalling carousel of death. The recent scandals that involved a considerable portion of North America's most important kosher meat industries might be explained exactly in these terms, as the obvious and unavoidable outcomes of massive production of meat.[16] While in the past the consumption of meat was occasional, now, adds Roth, this can no longer be considered a necessity (and therefore justifiable as part of *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim*), but a choice, or rather, a wrong option, especially given the lack of natural resources

[15] Rabbi Keisar summarizes this in a short video, *Asa Keisar - Cruelty to animals,* accessed June 2, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1N1TIM1ZcwU.

[16] I am referring here to the scandal that involved Agriprocessors, the biggest meat industry in the world, where abuse of animals was so routine to turn kosher meat unkosher. See Aaron Gross, "When Kosher Isn't Kosher," in *Tikkun* 20, no. 2 (2005): 52-55. Worth mentioning is finally Foer's investigation on the kosher meat industry, *If This Is Kosher...*, accessed June 2, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WviIO10AYMo.

and dramatic worsening of environmental conditions caused by intensive farming, as well as in consideration of the numerous health issues caused by meat-based diets.[17] It is not for ethical and environmental reasons, according to Roth, that one should "egoistically" give up meat but rather for the sake of one's health.[18]

We-nishmartem le-nafshotekhem: For the Sake of the Living Body, and of the Planet

As shown by recent scientific research, meat production and intensive farming are both responsible for the current environmental crisis, contributing at least to one third of all global warming. If every human is required to protect and respect his or her own body—a microcosm of God's creation—according to the principle of ונשמרתם מאוד לנפשותיכם (lit. "for your own sake, therefore, be most careful," Deut. 4, 15), one also protect and respect the environment, a common good from which all have the right to benefit.

Should the masters of the Palestinian and Jerusalem Talmud be living today—in a time of food and nutrient overabundance, at least in the Western world—

[17] For more information on Simchah Roth's call for vegetarian and vegan diets, "An Interview of Rabbi Simchah Roth," *JVC*, accessed June 2, 2023, https://www.jvs.org.uk/2013/08/24/an-interview-of-rabbi-simchah-roth/. Roth's call for vegetarianism among Jews echoes what Peter Singer wrote in his pioneering book on animals' rights, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals* (New York Review-Random House, New York, 1975). The quotation here is from the 2009 Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition, 233-234: "[...] meanwhile, those who do not wish to eat meat slaughtered contrary to the current teachings of their religion have a simple alternative: not to eat meat at all. In making this suggestion, I am not asking more of religious believers than I ask of myself; it is only that the reasons for them to do it are stronger because of the additional suffering involved in producing the meat they eat."

[18] This is how Roth summarizes why Jews should opt for a vegetarian or vegan diet: "Modern mass-slaughter of animals constitutes cruelty to animals [צער בעלי חיים] which is forbidden by the Torah; consumption of animal products contravenes the command of the Torah to maintain ourselves in good health [ונשמרתם מאוד לנפשותיכם]; religious Jews should stop eating animal products (meat, eggs, milk etc) in order to lessen greatly the damage we are doing to the planet [שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי]; if religious Jews adopt a vegan diet, they will be greatly contributing to promoting rightousness and justice in the world [צדק צדק תרדף] and to a hastening of the messianic age, Rabbi Simchah Roth, "Why an observant Jew should follow a plant-based (vegan) diet," *The Virtual Bet Midrash*, December 19, 2010. Accessed June 2, 2023, http://www.bmv.org.il/v/vegan.html#02.

wouldn't they be recommending a meat-free diet?[19] Probably not, as intensive farming and meat production is not the leading factor in the general environmental dramatic changes, and banning meat would probably lead to widespread unrest among observant Jews. While probably not so easily justifiable in strict legal-halakhic terms, a ban on meat can certainly be ethically understood, a vegetarian diet not only fully complying with the principle of respecting animal life and avoiding unnecessary suffering (*tza'ar ba'ale hayyim*), but also morally aligning with the notion of *we-nishmartem le-nafshotekhem,* the prohibition to harm ourselves. If not ethically for ourselves and for the benefit of our own body, becoming vegetarian should be more than ever before an urgent moral issue.

In 2009, *Eating animals* offered a critical analysis of what it means to eat animal products in an industrialised world, unveiling dramatic truths about the conditions in which animals live and die in the intensive farming system. If what we eat means something and our choices mirror our ethical positions, eating meat from the food industries and intensive farming means accepting, and tacitly supporting a system in which the animal is conceived and treated like an object, a link in an industrial chain. As a young Jew escaping Nazi occupation, Foer's grandmother refused non-kosher meat that a merciful Russian farmer offered her, despite the exceptional circumstances and the fact that it could save her life:

> A farmer, a Russian, God bless him, he saw my condition, and he went into his house and came out with a piece of meat for me."
> "He saved your life."

[19] Difficult to say, and clearly a rhetorical question. It is interesting to know, for example, that an extremely dangerous habit like smoking - whose threats to human health have scientifically been proved and are nowadays universally well known - even though banned by rabbinical authorities, is still part of everyday life of many observant Jews, especially in the ultra-Orthodox milieus. The Rabbinical Council of America issued the ban in 2006 and it is available online at the following link: http://www.rabbis.org/pdfs/Prohibition_Smoking_Full_Translation.pdf [22 September 2022]. The ban was "inter-denominational," similar bans have been issued also by Conservative and Reform rabbis, on which see https://responsafortoday.com/en/smoking-in-jewish-law/ [22 September 2022]. A significantly more lenient - and I would personally say also ambivalent - position is taken by Chabad authorities: https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default_cdo/aid/2084783/jewish/Why-Dont-the-Rabbis-Ban-Smoking.htm; last, but certainly not least, see rabbi Alberto Somekh's, "Vietato Fumare," *Morashà*, February 7, 2017. Accessed June 2, 2023, https://morasha.it/vietato-fumare/.

"I didn't eat it."
"You didn't eat it?"
"It was pork. I wouldn't eat pork."
"Why?"
"What do you mean why?"
"What, because it wasn't kosher?"
"Of course."
"But not even to save your life?"
"If nothing matters, there's nothing to save."[20]

The point here is that abiding by the rules of kashrut and other biblical-rabbinical norms, is not to overcome the boundaries and limits of a "self" defined by a set of non-negotiable values. What we are facing today is a similar dilemma, one defined by completely opposite terms: though we understand that meat does not grow on trees and that what makes meat so affordable today is a production system based on massive deforestation and over-exploitation of animals and natural resources, our priority remains the satisfaction our most immediate needs, even to the detriment of our own existence. The rules of kashrut whose primary aim is to minimize animal pain, cannot be reconciled with this production system, as shockingly shown in the Agriprocessor scandal, where production was optimized at the expense of animal welfare and, paradoxically as it might seem, in complete disregard of rabbinical and kashrut rules. As Foer explained in *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast* (2019), we live in a time of glaring idiosyncrasies and contradictions, one side being perfectly aware of what must be done, but acting as if in a time of war; instead of turning lights off and rationing food, we keep the lights on and eat whatever we want. Medical and environmental data have expressed a unanimous verdict: eating meat is not only no longer necessary for the vast majority of Western people, at least, but also a leading factors in our own physical and general environmental crisis. We should give up meat now. If not now, when?

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[20] Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), 16-17.

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Kids for Calves: Children Against Slaughter in Fin-de-siècle Jewish Literature

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Abstract

Several canonical works of Modern Jewish literature, written in Hebrew and Yiddish at the turn of the twentieth century, distinctly depict an anti-slaughter stance. Jewish approach to animal slaughter has been largely ambivalent, from the biblical creation story in Genesis 1, where human nutrition was limited to plants only, to various restrictions on the practices of killing and consuming animals—in many cases, due to the religious obligation to care for animals (tza'ar ba'ale hayyim). In this article, I seek to critically analyze three literary works, in which the anti-slaughter stance is voiced by children protagonists: Mordecai Ze'ev Feierberg's "The Calf" ("ha-'Egel," 1899), Mendele Mocher Seforim's "The Calf" ("Dos Kelbl," 1902), and Sholem Aleichem's Motl the Cantor's Son *(*Motl Peyse dem khazns*, 1907). These stories will be examined in the light of the religious ambivalence toward animal slaughter and contextualized within relevant socio-historical conditions.*

Introduction

Jewish Ambivalence towards Animal Slaughter

Feierberg's Calf

Abramovitsh's Calf

Sholem Aleichem's Calf

Introduction

Children's special kinship with animals is often explained by the fact that the former have not been fully indoctrinated into anthropocentrism yet.[1] In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud maintains that "children show no trace of the arrogance, which urges adult civilized men to draw a hard-and-fast line between their own nature and that of all other animals. Children have no scruples over allowing animals to rank as their full equals."[2] The theme of child-animal bond is common throughout Western literature, depicted in classical works such as Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' *The Yearling* (1938), Eric Knight's *Lassie Come-Home* (1940), and Fred Gipson's *Old Yeller* (1956), which all have famous cinematic adaptations as well. This theme also abounds in Jewish literature written in Hebrew and Yiddish at the turn of the twentieth century.[3] Yet unlike typical Western narratives, the Jewish stories, which take place in pre-World War II East European provincial towns (shtetls), focus on neither pets nor wild animals, but rather distinctly revolve around animals for consumption, taking a distinct anti-slaughter stance.

Historical studies have described a growing sensitivity toward animals in the Western World since the early modern period, which also coincided with decreased daily contact between humans and animals, due to the forces of urbanization and industrialization. Slaughterhouses were relocated outside of city centers, partially for economic reasons, yet also as modern societies were no longer capable of bearing vicious scenes of slaughter.[4] This process of separation between humans and animals did not take place among Jews

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[1] Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart, *Our Children and Other Animals: The Cultural Construction of Human-Animal Relations in Childhood* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 37-54; Carmen Dell'Aversano, "The Love Whose Name Cannot Be Spoken: Queering the Human-Animal Bond," *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 8, no. 1 (2010): 73-125, 82; Anna Feuerstein and Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo, *Childhood and Pethood in Literature and Culture: New Perspectives in Childhood Studies and Animal Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 2; Erica Fudge, *Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 70-74.

[2] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey (London: Routledge, 2001), 147.

[3] It is important to note that literary works, whose protagonists are children, should not necessarily be considered children's literature. The Jewish works discussed here, which are written from a child's perspective, were not written for children.

[4] Josh Berson, *The Meat Question: Animals, Humans, and the Deep History of Food* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019); Sarah Cockram and Andrew Wells, eds., *Interspecies Interactions: Animals and Humans between the Middle Ages and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Paula Young Lee, ed., *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2008).

in the shtetls. Due to the requirements of Jewish ritual slaughter, Jews typically kept animals for consumption—and did not have pets—in their homes, and raised them until their slaughter. Such distinct material interspecies relations at the turn of the twentieth century certainly contributed to the unusual literary focus on animals for consumption and their slaughter.

This anti-slaughter stance among *fin-de-siècle* Eastern European Jews was also greatly inspired by Tolstoyan beliefs, associated with the politics of social justice and pacifism.[5] Moreover, the traditional Jewish approach to animal slaughter is largely ambivalent. In this article I seek to address the Jewish ambivalence towards slaughter and the consumption of animals, and analyze the child-calf relations in three stories, which echo this ambivalence: Mordecai Ze'ev Feierberg's "The Calf" ("ha-'Egel," 1899), Mendele Mocher Seforim's "The Calf" ("Dos Kelbl," 1902), and Sholem Aleichem's *Motl the Cantor's Son* (*Motl Peyse dem khazns*, 1907).[6]

Jewish Ambivalence towards Animal Slaughter

Although animal slaughter and the consumption of their meat is permitted in Judaism, ambivalence about these practices is ubiquitous throughout the Jewish tradition.[7] This

[5] Rafi Tsirkin-Sadan, "Tolstoy, Zionism and the Hebrew Culture," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 24 (2012): 26-35; Jennifer Wilson, "The Revolution Will Not Be Consummated: The Politics of Tolstoyan Chastity in the West," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 60, no. 3 (2016): 494-511.

[6] The *talush* (uprooted), which is a significant figure in *fin-de-siècle* Hebrew prose of a young Jewish man searching for his place in modern Europe, is in many cases a vegetarian that holds an anti-slaughter stance. Such works include Micha Josef Berdichevsky's "Two Camps" ("Mahanayim," 1899-1900), Uri Nissan Gnessin's "Sideways" ("ha-Tzidah," 1905), Yosef Haim's Brenner's *In Winter* (*Ba-horef*, 1903) and "One Year," ("Shanah ahat," 1908), Devorah Baron's "The End of Sender Ziv" ("Kitzo shel Sender Ziv," 1919), and Shmuel Yosef Agnon's "Hill of Sand" ("Giv'at ha-hol," 1919). Nevertheless, *talush* narratives are not included in this analysis, since their protagonists are not children, and their anti-slaughter stance is not driven from Judaism.

[7] Anat Ben-Yonatan, "'Yesterday You Slaughtered Animals, Today You Pity Them': Ambivalence and Resolution Among Jewish Israeli Slaughterers," *Anthrozoös* 35, no. 3 (2022): 355-370; Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity: Ritualization of the Priestly 'Torah of Beast and Fowl' (Lev 11: 46) in Rabbinic Judaism and Medieval Kabbalah," *AJS Review* 24, no. 2 (1999): 227-262; Geoffrey D. Claussen, "Musar and Jewish Veganism," in *Jewish Veganism and Vegetarianism: Studies and New Directions*, eds. Jacob Ari Labendz and Shmuly Yanklowitz (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019), 195-216; Aaron S. Gross, "Jewish Animal Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Ethics and Morality*, eds. Elliot N. Dorff and Jonathan K. Crane (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 419-432; Yael Shemesh, "Vegetarian Ideology

ambivalence harks back to the biblical creation story. Interestingly, while humans are granted dominion over all other animals, their nutrition is solely restricted to plants: "And God said: 'Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed—to you it shall be for food'" (Genesis 1:29). Various commentators from antiquity onward conclude from this verse that eating meat is forbidden. A Talmudic passage states that, "It is derived God told Adam: Eating vegetation is permitted, but eating the animals of the earth is not permitted to you (Sanhedrin 59b). Rashi, the foremost bible commentator of the eleventh century, likewise stresses what God's first dietary law does not allow: "God did not permit Adam and his wife to kill a creature and to eat its flesh" (Rashi on Genesis 1:29).

Animal slaughter and meat eating have been permitted, according to the Hebrew bible, only after the Flood. Several eminent commentators have regarded this permission as a divine compromise. In his classic work on the fundamentals of Judaism, Joseph Albo, the fifteenth century Jewish philosopher, ponders why eating meat was permitted after the Flood, although "in the killing of animals there is cruelty, rage, and the accustoming oneself to the bad habit of shedding innocent blood." He then suggests: "the animals that were permitted were merely a concession to human lust and desire, in the same way as the Israelites were permitted women taken in war" (*Sefer ha-'Iqqarim* 3:15). This view has received significant religious endorsement from Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine, who argues in *Li-Nevukhe ha-dor* (*For the Perplexed of the Generation*):

> Let us hold up, for example, the ethical yearning of not killing any living thing for human purposes. It's impossible to deny something that is sensed by any feeling heart, that there is a general ethical deficiency in the human species that it fails to uphold the good and lofty feeling that it is wrong to take the life of any life for its own needs. And it's completely impossible that the good God would make an everlasting law in a very good creation dictating that the human species could not sustain itself unless it clouds its ethical feelings by spilling blood, even the blood of animals [...] However, after the generation of the flood, where meat was allowed to be eaten, it certainly wasn't meant to remain that way forever, for how can there be an ethical situation that changes and becomes nullified after it had already been the way to act? We are to increase holiness, not decrease it!

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in Talmudic Literature and Traditional Biblical Exegesis," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 9 (2006): 141-166; Barry L. Stiefel, "Yes, but is It Kosher?: Varying Religio-Cultural Perspectives on Judaism and Veganism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Vegan Studies*, ed. Laura Wright (New York: Routledge, 2021), 194-204.

> Rather, the Divine Intellect saw that man had fallen from his ethical state, and until the time comes of recognition and awakening of true ethics, we cannot burden man with an ethical level that does not accord with his value system.[8]

Furthermore, the permission given to Noah to consume meat was not unconditional; there was an immediate prohibition against consuming blood, since blood was associated with the *nefesh*, the animal soul (Genesis 9:4). In addition, various Mosaic laws protect animals not only from physical pain, but also from emotional suffering. In fact, the key term used in Judaism for the obligation to care for animals—*tza'ar ba'ale hayyim*—literally means "animal sorrow." Maimonides, the greatest medieval Jewish thinker, explains a series of prohibitions regarding slaughter and meat consumption vis-à-vis the commandment to avoid *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim*:

> He also forbade slaughtering an animal and its young on the same day, to take care to avoid slaughtering the young before its mother's eyes, for the distress caused thereby to animals is great; there is no difference between the distress felt by human beings and the distress of other creatures, for a mother's love and compassion for the fruit of her womb is not guided by the intellect but by the power of imagination, which exists equally in most animals as in humans. (*Guide for the Perplexed* III:48)

The notion of *tza'ar ba'ale hayyim* was later defined and broadened by the rabbis of the Talmud, which is exemplified in the following Talmudic teaching:

> A calf that was being led to slaughter went and hung its head on the corner of Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi's garment and was weeping, and the Rabbi said to him: "Go, as you were created for this purpose." It was said in Heaven: "Since he was not compassionate toward the calf, let afflictions come upon him." One day, his maid was sweeping the house. There were newly-born rats lying about, and she was about to sweep them out. The Rabbi told her: "Let them be, as it is written: "The Lord is good to all; and His mercies are over all His works" (Psalms 145:9).

[8] Abraham Isaac Kook, 2014. *Li-nevukhe ha-dor: ha-mekhuneh Moreh nevokhim he-hadash* (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot aḥronot, Sifre Hemed, 2014), 65. Sefaria Community Translation. Alongside viewing the permission to eat meat as a moral compromise, it has been also considered as a temporary ecological necessity, since the Flood devastated the flora. See, for example, Isaac Abravanel on Genesis 9:3.

> They said in Heaven: Since he was compassionate, we shall be compassionate on him, and he was relieved of his suffering. (Bava Metzia 85a)

Feierberg's Calf

Mordecai Ze'ev Feierberg (1871-1899), a prominent writer of Hebrew Revival Literature (*sifrut ha-tehiyyah*), was born in the Ukraine as the son of a Jewish ritual slaughterer (*Shohet*). Feierberg's father was interested in teaching his trade to his son, who could not handle the cruelty involved in slaughtering animals,[9] as he later described in one of his prominent short stories, "The Calf," written from the perspective of a nine-year-old Jewish boy named Hofni. The boy is strongly attached to the beautiful calf that the family cow gave birth to, and thus is outraged to realize that his mother plans to slaughter the calf and roast him for Shabbat.

Despite the fact that the story entirely focuses on the child's loving feelings for the calf and resistance to his killing, as well as the clear autobiographical context, critics have tended to read the anti-slaughter theme as a mere vehicle to other concepts, which allegedly stand at the core of the story and have nothing to do with compassion for animals, such as the dismal fate of Jewish children in the diaspora,[10] or—more broadly—pure life and its arbitrary suffering.[11] Moreover, some critics have even argued that the story, which concludes with the slaughter of the calf, actually takes the pro-slaughter position, represented by Hofni's mother.[12]

Alternatively, I seek to read Feierberg's "The Calf" as a groundbreaking anti-slaughter narrative, criticizing human dominion over animals, notably in Jewish society. A foreshadow to this concept is found in an early stage of the story, when Hofni depicts the streets of the small Jewish town, in which he and his classmates rush to the synagogue for the afternoon and evening prayers, sharing the road with numerous farm animals:

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[9] Joseph Klausner, *Yotzrim u-bonim: ma'amare biqoret*, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1929), II: 179.

[10] Aharon Ben-Or, *Toldot ha-sifrut ha-'ivrit ha-hadashah*, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: Hotsaat Yizrael, 1946), II: 140. Rachel Katzenelson-Shazar, *Masot ve-reshimot* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1947), 87.

[11] Baruch Kurzweil, *Sifrutenu ha-hadashah: hemshekh o mahapekhah?* (Jerusalem: Shoken, 1965), 164. Alan Mintz, "Mordecai Zev Feierberg and the Reveries of Redemption," *AJS Review* 2 (1977): 171-199.

[12] Aviad Kleinberg, *'Al ahavat em ve-'al mora av: mabat aher 'al ha-mishpahah* (Tel Aviv: Keter, 2004), 147-148. Samuel Werses, *Mi-Mendele 'ad Hazaz: sugiyot be-hitpathut ha-sipporet ha-'Ivrit* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987), 123.

> Here someone stealing a ride on a billy goat's back and there on a she-goat's, while yet someone else terrorized the animals by stampeding them wildly to let them know he was a man, a scion of that heroic race whose dominion was one with the world. Suddenly, at the herd's edge, I spied our own cow coming towards me by the side of a herdsman, who was carrying a lovely little calf on his shoulder.[13]

Hofni witnesses his classmates' cruelty to animals, when he sees the newborn calf for the first time. The lovely calf was born to this very world, where such power dynamics are at play. Upon spotting the calf, the narrator says: "I wanted desperately to run after him, to throw myself ardently on the calf and kiss him with the kisses of my mouth with love."[14] The boy's first reaction to the newborn calf alludes to Song of Songs 1:2, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," connecting the protagonist and the calf with the strongest love expression in Jewish tradition.

Young Hofni, however, has to restrain his urges, and keep distance from the calf, due to societal norms and restrictions: "But what can I do? What about the rabbi and the afternoon prayer? And what would my mother say if she were to see her son the Talmud student giving in to such unworthy impulses?"[15]. In his grand historiography of modern Hebrew literature, Gershon Shaked argues that in Feierberg's writings the Jewish world stands in opposition to the world of nature.[16] This opposition is manifested here, as Hofni draws a clear-cut distinction between two spheres; the Jewish sphere, to which belong his rabbi and mother, prayers, the Talmud, and the synagogue, and the sphere of nature, to which the calf and the feelings the calf evokes in him belong. Hofni defines his attraction to the calf as "unworthy impulses," which seems to reflect his mother's perspective rather than his own.

Reluctantly, yet only temporarily, he chooses the Jewish sphere over the calf: "and so I had no choice but to force myself to go to the synagogue to pray."[17] As soon as the service was over, Hofni rushed home: "I ran impatiently to the barn, where I knelt before the calf on my knees and ran both hands over his limbs."[18] In contrast to his classmates, who have ridden over the farm animals on their way to the synagogue, he falls on his knees before this one and takes him in his arms. Hofni's compassionate approach is highlighted against

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[13] Mordecai Ze'ev Feierberg, *Whither? & Other Stories*, trans. Hillel Halkin (New Milford, CT: Toby Press. 2004), 32.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Gershon Shaked, *Ha-Sipporet ha-'Ivrit, 1880-1980*, 5 vols. (Jerusalem: Keter, 1977), I: 208.
[17] Feierberg, *Whither? & Other Stories*, 32.
[18] Ibid.

the background of typical behavioral codes in his community. "I fell madly, proudly in love with the pretty calf and pledged myself heart and soul to love him and to repay his love with my own love."[19]

The Hebrew word *ahavah*, which means love, is repeated several times in this sentence, underscoring Hofni's feelings to the calf. The word *ahavah* also appears in the next sentence, when Hofni's mother tells his father that the calf is about to be slaughtered next week in order to be roasted and served for the Shabbat, just the way he loves it. Hofni's love for the calf is thus ironically confronted with his parents' love for the calf's meat. Truly shocked, Hofni asks his mother if she really intends to kill the pretty calf, and she scornfully replies: "People would laugh at you if you talk that way in front of them."[20] Consequently, poor Hofni does not talk about this issue, but no longer restrains himself from expressing his intense feelings for the calf:

> When I returned from the kitchen to visit my calf, my pride and my joy, and saw him lift his eyes to me as though suing for mercy, I burst into tears. I threw myself on him passionately and stroked his sides while the hot tears trickled down my throat. The more I kissed him, the harder I cried.[21]

Hofni also cannot stop thinking. He portrays his thoughts as the voice of a little bird that hatched in his head. The little animal within his head further connects the little boy with the little calf:

> Why was such a calf even made? To be slaughtered? But what for? Why slaughter a sweet little calf? And if he really was made to be slaughtered, why was he made so pretty? Wouldn't it have been enough if he had been born just a piece of meat inside a leather bag? Why does your mother want to kill him? Who gave her the right to kill such a pretty calf?"[22]

In his dream that night, he sees the calf bound (*'aqud*), and the slaughterer's knife spills his blood. This nightmarish scene alludes to the biblical story of the binding of Isaac (*'aqedah*). While in the biblical story the horrific sacrifice of Isaac is prevented by sacrificing an animal instead, in Hofni's dream the very sacrifice of the animal is itself the horrific act.

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[19] Ibid., 33.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

The next evening, Hofni finds the slaughterer talking figures with his mother. Obeying his mother, the child says nothing, but instead holds an internal monologue, constructed as a series of questions that are not to be answered:

> Was I really such a fool, I wondered? But why? Who said that I mustn't have pity on the pretty calf? My mother? But I'd heard her say more than once that we were commanded to be merciful to animals and not treat them cruelly! Not treat them cruelly—but slaughter them? Be merciful—and slaughter them? So she said, but who said she was right? Could she be wrong then? Could mothers be wrong too? Dear God, my mother and the calf are both in Your hands—why did You make the calf live and make my mother want to kill him? God! Why should this calf, that You created perfect in all his parts so he should be able to live for years on the face of Your earth, have to be slaughtered?[23]

This series of questions delves into the inconsistency in Judaism's treatment of animals—banning cruelty to animals, but allowing their slaughter, which inevitably involves cruelty.

At some points, Hofni's theological quest exposes a family tragedy: "and what about my little brother who died when he was eight days old?"[24] The child's questions shift from the forthcoming death of the little calf to the death of his little brother, connecting these two death events, and also presenting the calf as analogous to Hofni's little brother. And, indeed, the calf is about to be killed on his eighth day,[25] just like Hofni's little brother. Moreover, in the original Hebrew, this sentence ends with a question: *ve-ani anah ani ba*? (and as for me, whither shall I go?), which is a clear biblical allusion to the words of Joseph's eldest brother Reuben. In the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers, Reuben persuades his brothers not to kill Joseph. Later, thinking that Joseph is dead, Reuben rends his clothes and says to his brothers: "the child is not; and as for me, whither shall I go?" (Genesis 37: 30). Quoting biblical Reuben, Hofni expresses his brotherly love for the calf, whom he regards as his little brother, as well as his wish to save him.

Alas, Hofni could not save the calf. His last thought, before concluding the story with the report that the calf was slaughtered, was whether he should consult with the rabbi about this issue, a thought he raises and immediately dismisses: "No. I wouldn't even ask him. He would just laugh at me like my mother and call me a fool."[26] This closing thought

[23] Ibid., 34.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 35.
[26] Ibid., 36.

emphasizes that the conflict over the calf's slaughter is not solely determined by the generational gap between a child and his mother. It rather indicates that albeit the child's anti-slaughter stance stems from the very Jewish thought, it is not accepted by the Jewish community and its leadership.

Abramovitsh's Calf

Three years after the publication of Feierberg's "The Calf," Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (1836-1917) published a short story in Yiddish with the same title, "The Calf." Abramovitsh, better known by his pseudonym Mendele Mocher Seforim (Mendele the Book Peddler), is widely considered the founder of modern Jewish literature. His deep engagement with the natural world has been long recognized by various scholars of modern Jewish literature,[27] and the centrality of the theme of compassion for animals in his oeuvre has been also acknowledged by several critics.[28]

Abramovitsh's short story "The Calf" is narrated from the perspective of a Jewish youngster, who is deeply attached to a calf. It starts, like Feierberg's story, with the protagonist's excitement when a calf is born in his home. Similarly to Hofni, he also lovingly bonds with the calf and is likewise shocked into realizing that his mother plans to slaughter the calf:

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[27] David Aberbach, *Realism, Caricature, and Bias: The Fiction of Mendele Mocher Sefarim* (Washington DC: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993), 77-79; Joseph Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature (1785-1930)*, trans. Herbert Danby (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 133; Benny Mer, "Aharit davar: tevat Mendele," in *Massa'ot Binyamin ha-shelishi va-aherim*, ed. Benny Mer (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 2007), 266-268; Dan Miron, *Ben hazon le-emet: nitzane ha-roman ha-'Ivri ve-ha-Yiddish ha-me'ah ha-tesha'-'esreh* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1979), 305-322; Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: A Study in the Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 136-137; Gidi Nevo, "Kama hirhurim 'al ha-tev'a bi-yetzirato shel Abramovitsh," *Mehkere Yerushalayim be-sifrut 'Ivrit* 18 (2001): 163-185; Theodore L. Steinberg, *Mendele Mocher Seforim* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 115.

[28] Aberbach, *Realism, Caricature, and Bias*, 6; Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, 424; Noam Pines, "A Radical Advocacy: Suffering Jews and Animals in SY Abramovitsh's *Di Kliatshe*," *Jewish Social Studies* 23, no. 2 (2018): 24-47. Gershon Shaked has closely analyzed Abramovitsh's representations of animals, but focused merely on their symbolic function. See Gershon Shaked, *Ben tzhoq le- le-dim'ah: 'iyyunim bi-yetzirato shel Mendele Mokher Sefarim* (Tel Aviv: Masadah, 1974), 46-56.

> My love for the calf grew stronger every day, and so at the same time did my anguish about his fate. For my childish heart would pound with terror, overhearing talk about slaughtering the calf and bargaining with the butcher. The animal stood and looked at us so innocently, and licked my mother's hand so tenderly, while she was estimating the value of the tongue which licked her. It felt, really, like a murder.[29]

Killing the calf is described here with the word "murder" (*retzihah*, in the original text),[30] which is typically applied to humans only. This choice of word indicates that the protagonist regards the calf as his peer, as someone and not something. "Torn in two directions," he adds, "I was ashamed to look either at the calf or my mother—forgive me for the comparison—in the eye."[31] The boy has already likened the calf to a human by applying the concept of murder to the calf, and now he equates the calf with his own mother. He is torn between these two directions, namely the calf's direction and his mom's direction. Here too, the protagonist's mother stands for the entire Jewish community and world, which is contrasted with the world wherein the calf belongs.

Noteworthily, a decade after the Yiddish publication of "The Calf," Abramovitsh reworked the story into Hebrew, thickening the original text with religious references and overtones, and also gendering the calf from scratch as female. When depicting the rift between his mother and the calf, the protagonist adds: "I try with all my might to divert the calf from my heart [...] she should die, as she was created for this purpose."[32] While this thought seems to religiously justify the calf's slaughter, it echoes the Talmudic teaching of Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi and the calf that was cited earlier, which actually challenges this very thought.

The unexpected death of the cow saves her calf from slaughter, allowing the friendship between the young protagonist and the calf to grow deeper. In the Hebrew edition of the story, the protagonist's experience with the calf raises further questions. He ponders over the relationship between man and beast, both flesh and blood made from one material, whether they all have the same breath.[33] The words "they all have the same breath" (*ruah ehad la-kol*) in this context clearly refer to the following biblical verse, which analogizes humans and other animals, refuting human advantage over animals: "For the fate of the

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[29] Mendele Mocher Seforim, "The Calf," trans. Arthur C. Jacobs, *The Jewish Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1960): 34-39, 35.

[30] Mendele Mocher Seforim, *Dos Kelbl* (Warsaw: Ferlag Kultur-lige, 1926), 11.

[31] Mendele, "The Calf," 35.

[32] Mendele Mokher Sefarim, *Kol kitve Mendele Mokher Sefarim* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1966), 124.

[33] Mendele, *Kol kitve*, 126.

sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 3:19).

When the protagonist is out of school, he spends most of his time in nature, with the beloved calf:

> For both of us a new world opened up, a world which was bright and attractive and free, and which neither I shut up in the *cheder* nor the calf in its shed had before now experienced [...] Everything was alive and full of spirit [...] All kinds of birds, bees and grasshoppers flew and leapt high into the sky and happily among the grass were singing, humming and chirping. There was music to be heard, there were scents to be savoured and all varieties of the colours of flowers glittered before my eyes. Everything breathes so freely and easily.[34]

Just as the protagonist's mother signifies the Jewish world, the calf represents the natural world. Like in Feierberg's story, and contrary to gender stereotypes, the mother here also epitomizes the anti-compassionate stance. When the protagonist absentmindedly hums a synagogue melody, while roaming in the fields with his bovine friend, "the calf looked at me and mooed as though its meaning were, 'Stop! What's the matter with you?'"[35] The young Jew anthropomorphizes the calf, grants her with the common societal perspective, according to which these two worlds—the Jewish world and the natural world—are in opposition, and cannot be incorporated.

This common societal perspective is later critically thrown at him by his family. "What are the fields and your woods making of you?", his family worryingly wonders, and their conclusion is: "there is only one way for you to become a proper Jew, and that's to go to the *yeshivah*." [36] The nature-*yeshivah* binary is, however, viewed differently by the protagonist: "I was really sorry to be separated from the calf, and from the piece of God's world, which had fitted me with a new spirit."[37] Ironically, he identifies the natural world—and not the Jewish world, embodied here in the *yeshivah*—with God's world.

The abundance of nature stands in stark disparity to the scarcity of the *yeshivah* life. When visiting home, the protagonist contrasts the fine and strong body of the calf with his own "wasted, starved body, with my ashen *yeshivah* student's face."[38] After being back in the

[34] Mendele, "The Calf," 37.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 38.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

yeshivah, he learns from his mother's letter that the calf has calved herself and became a full cow. "She doesn't want to be milked, but throws herself about and cries after her calf," she complains to her son. "Have you ever heard of such a thing, a cow which can't forget her calf? It's like a human mother and her child."[39] While the mother compares cow-calf and mother-child relations as an absurd idea, this comparison is not only valid, but also anchored in Jewish thought, as quoted before from Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*. While reading his mother's letter, the protagonist faints, but cannot share his pain with his friends:

> How could I tell them I was miserable over a calf? How could I say I had fainted out of my feeling for a cow, an animal with whom I had been fated to spend my happiest hours, looking at and enjoying the pleasure of God's word. And how to say my blood rushed with pity for the mother whose child had been slaughtered.[40]

Consequently, the troubled *yeshivah* boy begins to hallucinate:

> It was fearful. The young calf tore itself out of the butcher's hands, and ran crying, with the butcher after it. Knowing she was about to be slaughtered, and so struggling for life, the calf went wild with fright, then hid under someone's skirts, gasping and crying, as if pleading 'Help!'[41]

His mother's account of the cow and her calf is interwoven here with the Talmudic story of Yehudah ha-Nasi and the calf. He seems to experience a mental breakdown, and the story concludes on the day he is taken to the hospital, and a new letter from his mother informs that she lost her financial backing as the cow is dead. This tragic closure, which analogizes the dismal fate of humans and animals, echoes the words of Ecclesiastes, "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same" (3:19).

Sholem Aleichem's Calf

Compassion for animals is a leitmotif in the writing of Sholem Aleichem, the pen name of Sholem Rabinovich (1859-1916), who is the most well-known writer of Yiddish

[39] Ibid., 39.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

literature. His short piece "Pity for Living Creatures" ("Tsa'er ba'ele khayim," 1903) focuses entirely on this theme. It specifies many cases of cruelty to animals, narrated by a compassionate Jewish boy, who vainly tries to protect these victimized animals. Here, too, the young protagonist draws his humane values from the Jewish tradition and his Jewish education, yet ironically his Jewish community is utterly indifferent to animal suffering. Viewing a poor little carp that is about to be killed and served for Shabbat, as if begging for his life, he tells his mother:

> "It's a pity," I said to my mother, "a pity for this living creature."
> "A pity for which living creature?"
> "For this little fish."
> "Who put this idea in your head?"
> "The rebbe."
> "You're a fool and your rebbe is an even bigger one!"[42]

Later, after watching his friend's father, who is a Jewish ritual slaughterer, he tells his friend:

> "your father's a *goy*!"
> "Why is he a *goy*?"
> "Because he doesn't have pity for living creatures."
> "I never knew you were such a sage," his friend replied, giving him the finger right under his nose.[43]

Finally, when the protagonist realizes that he is the only one in his community that cares for animals, he wonders about the gap between the compassionate treatment of animal in Judaism and the cruel treatment of animals within the actual Jewish world:

> Didn't the rebbe himself tell me God loves all His creatures? One shouldn't even annoy a fly on the wall, he declared, because of the precept of pity for living creatures. One Shouldn't kill even a harmful spider. For when the hour of death comes, the rebbe explained, God Himself will take its life. Well and good. But the problem remained. Why were oxen, calves, sheep and fowl killed every day?[44]

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[42] Sholem Aleichem, *Some Laughter, Some Tears: Tales from the Old World and the New*, trans. Curt Leviant (New York: Putnam, 1968), 101.
[43] Ibid., 102.
[44] Ibid., 104-105.

Whereas in "Pity for Living Creatures" the young protagonist is attached to various kinds of animals, in Sholem Aleichem's last novel, *Motl the Cantor's Son* (*Motl Peysi dem hazns*, 1907), the young protagonist—like the young protagonists in the calves' stories of Feierberg and Mendele—builds bonds and affection with a calf. The novel deals with the world of a poor Jewish boy, first in Eastern Europe and then in America, through his own eyes. The novel opens with the following monologue:

> I'll bet you whatever you want that no one on earth is as happy with the warm sunny days after Passover as I, Peysi the cantor's son Motl, and the neighbor's calf Meni. Both of us feel the first rays of the warm sun on the first day after Passover, both of us breathe in the fragrance of the first green blades of grass sprouting up from the newly thawed earth, and both of us crawl out of our dark, cramped corners to welcome the first sweet light of the warm spring morning. I, Peysi the cantor's son Motl, emerge from a cold, damp cellar that reeks of sour-dough and medicines; and Meni, the neighbor's calf, is let out of a worse-smelling spot—a tiny, dark, revolting, mud-covered stall with crooked, peeling walls through which the snow blows in wintertime and the rain whips in summertime. Escaping into God's bright, open world, Meni and I are filled with joy and gratitude to Nature.[45]

While his father is dying, and his mother and older brothers neglect him, Motl finds comfort in playing with Meni, the neighbors' calf, whose name is a nickname for Menahem, which means "comforting." One day Motl is looking for Meni, and Pessi, the neighbor, says she sold it to the butcher, since she had no other choice. "It's enough that we have to feed one dumb animal—we can't manage two!"[46] Motl's reaction to this news is: "Now the calf has become a dumb animal to her? A strange woman, this Pessi [...] And Pessi the neighbor talks a long time to my mother while my heart aches for the logs, the little calf—oh, the little calf! If I weren't embarrassed, I'd burst out crying."[47]
Alongside the emotional loss that Motl experiences, the loss of Meni also brings the young boy into existential thoughts:

> It's just too bad that Meni our neighbor's calf isn't here! He's no longer a calf, but now a dumb animal, as our neighbor Pessi says. What does that mean? And

[45] Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman and Motl the Cantor's Son*, trans. Aliza Shevrin (New York: Penguin, 2009), 171.
[46] Ibid., 179.
[47] Ibid., 179-180.

> why did they sell him to the butcher? Could it be to slaughter him? Was he born only to be slaughtered? Anyway, why is a calf born, and why is a person born?[48]

This series of questions, that are not to be answered, is interrupted by the cry of Motl's mother, as it turns out that his father has just passed away. Meni is not, however, equivalent to Motl's father; as Dan Miron notes in his introduction to the novel, the analogy is clearly between Motl himself and his only friend, Meni the calf. Like the poor little animal, the little Jewish orphan also cannot be supported by his impoverished family.[49] As in Feierberg and Mendele's calves tales, here too, the shared vulnerability of Jewish boy and the calf connects them in the fictional world, as well as in the interpretative accounts thereof, inasmuch as the calves are perceived as the Jewish boys' literary doppelgangers.

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[48] Ibid., 182.
[49] Ibid., 31-32.

Troubling the Boundaries: Human and Animal Spaces in Yitzhak Orpaz's *Nemalim* (*Ants*) and Italo Calvino's *La formica argentina* (*The Argentine Ant*)

by *Anna Lissa*

Abstract

The essay explores the portrayal of insects in literature, focusing specifically on the representation of ants in Yitzhak Orpaz's Nemalim (Ants) *and Italo Calvino's* La formica argentina (The Argentine Ant)*. Both stories delve into the dynamics of species interaction, specifically into the response of two married couples whose homes or apartments are invaded by ants. Despite the humans' efforts, particularly those of the husbands', to regain control of their territory, they are unsuccessful. Throughout the narratives, the ants, functioning as a superorganism, exhibit a greater degree of agency compared to the human characters. The house or flat transforms into an anthill, effectively reverting the anthropized space into a natural environment. Consequently, the two species intertwine, mingle, and hybridize.*

This analysis will be conducted through the lens of animal studies, highlighting the themes of animal agency and Otherness, which are particularly significant when considering insects. Additionally, the essay will draw upon the concept of consilience between the humanities and sciences.

Introduction

What Lies beyond Reality?—Approaches to *The Argentine Ant* and *Ants*

Defining and Circumscribing the Territory

...And Then Come the Ants

The Reversal of Perspectives: Between Symbiosis and Hybridity

Conclusion: Looking at the Sea

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Introduction

In the field of animal studies, insects have relatively recently begun to receive the attention and the consideration they deserve.[1] On the one hand, they are the Other—communication and empathy in their regards are admittedly difficult and for some people impossible. They are monsters or object of wonder,[2] although one must always keep in mind that the Latin word *monstrum* is connected to the verb *monstrare* that means "to point out, to show,"[3] implying that a *monstrum*/monster is, first of all, something that deserves to be shown, but not necessarily a monstrosity.

To demonstrate the otherness of insects it suffices to compare two scenes. The first and most well-known is described by Jacques Derrida in *L'animal que donc je suis* and recalls the accidental encounter and exchange of gazes between the naked

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[1] Cristopher Hollingsworth, *Poetics of the Hive The Insect Metaphor in Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001); Oddone Longo and Alessandro Minelli, *Entomata. Gli insetti nella scienza e nella cultura dall'antichità ai giorni nostri* (Venezia: Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ad Arti, 2002); Eric C. Brown, *Insect Poetics* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Simon King, *Insect Nations: Visions of the Ant World from Kropotkin to Bergson* (Ashby-de-la-Zouch: InkerMan Press, 2006); Charlotte Sleigh, *Six Legs Better: A Cultural History of Myrmecology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Catherine Parry, *Other Animals in Twenty-First Century Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), with a chapter dedicated to "Ants, Myrmecology and Metaphor," 63-110; Tiziana Nicoletta Beltrame, Sophie Houdart, and Christine Jungen, eds., "Techniques et cultures," in *Mondes infimes* 68 (2017); Daniela Bombara, Stefania La Vaccara, and Ellen Patat, eds., "Epifanie entomologiche nella cultura italiana," *Revue de Philologie* 46, no. 1 (2019); Wilt L. Idema, *Insects in Chinese Literature: A Study and Anthology* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2019); Aude Volpilhac, "Micrographies. Les insectes littéraires au XVIIe siècle: Le cas de 'Divers insectes' de Pierre Perrin," in "Créatures 'parlantes' et 'truchement' du conteur. Éthique et esthétique du discours animal," ed. Aude Volpilhac, *Animots, carnet de zoopoétique* (January 2020): 1-17; Anne Simon, *Une bête entre les lignes. Essai de zoopoétique* (Marseille: Wildproject, 2021), with a chapter dedicated to insects "La vermine dans les plis de nos villes," 313-336; Dror Burshtein, *'Olam Qatan: Diyoqan'ot shel heraqim* (Small World: Portraits of Insects) (Tel Aviv: Babel, 2021); Yvan Daniel and Alain Montandon, eds., *Observer et Décrire Des insectes et des hommes* (Paris: Garnier, 2022). In the remarkable series Reaktion Books has dedicated to animals several insects are covered: Charlotte Sleigh, *Ant* (2003); Marion Copeland, *Cockroach* (2003); Claire Preston, *Bee* (2005); Steven Connor, *Fly* (2006); Richard Jones, *Mosquito* (2012); Adam Dodd, *Beetle* (2015); Matthew Gandy, *Moth* (2016); Klaus Reinhardt, *Bedbug* (2018); Richard Jones, *Wasp* (2019).

[2] Simon, *Une bête entre les lignes*, 314.

[3] See P. G. W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), s.v.

philosopher coming out of his shower and his she-cat.[4] In a more ironical approach, the anthropologist Hugh Raffles describes two casual encounters with the big water bug, the American cockroach. Both encounters end up tragically for the bug in question:

> One night, distracted and without thinking, I swiveled around. A healthy-looking water bug was sitting on a pile of books behind my shoulder. We locked eyes. Its head extended like a turtle's. Its face was angular and inquisitive. [...], it had "the lofty brow of the philosopher." Our eyes met as in an animal movie. An understanding beyond words. But I must have moved too suddenly, and it took off and I took off after it, grabbing a broom...[5]

And the morning after:

> I was in the shower, daydreaming as usual under the soothing warm water, thoughts rambling around the chapter of this book I'm trying to finish [...] when out of nowhere, a three-inch water bug dropped from the bathroom ceiling and landed at my feet.
> I admit it: I screamed: Wouldn't you? I shut off the water. It took a moment to get over the surprise. And then there we were, the water bug and I, trapped and defenseless and covered in soapsuds. And we both stayed very still until that very big little animal, a female animal, I noticed, climbed swiftly up onto the towel rack and stopped there at eye level a few inches away, her handsome and intelligent face cocked at a philosophical angle, giving me a funny quizzical look up and down as if amused by this unexpected situation and intrigued to see what would happen next. One of us was very calm. One of us—it was the bathroom after all—began

[4] Anna Lissa, "Introduction," in "Created from Animals: Thinking the Human/Animal Difference in Jewish and Hebrew Literature," ed. Anna Lissa, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 23, no. 1 (2023), viii-ix.
[5] Hugh Raffles, *Insectopedia* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 299.

> carefully to groom her antennae. I won't go into the details of what happened next.[6]

Consciously or not, the second scene echoes, one may be tempted to say re-enacts, Derrida's encounter—the she-water bug, the exchange of gazes—and although it ends up in a fast scene reminiscent of Sergio Leone final duels, it prompts the protagonist to a detailed observation of the bug and to the exercise of a "regard aiguisé"[7]—a sharpened look. Not unlike the exchange of gazes *à la Derrida*, this sharp look brings this insect a little closer to the human, by turning it into a being that deserves attention and observation, bestowing it depth, significance and allowing it to emerge as a potential literary subject.[8] This sharp look is indeed a feature of writers passionate about entomology as it is the case in this essay with Yitzhak Orpaz.[9]

In the following pages, I shall be dealing with insects, more specifically with ants, whose literary career is long and worthy of respect. Yet, the ants I shall be dealing with have less to do with classical literature, myth and folklore and much more to do with the practice of accurate observation, almost bordering on the field of scholarly entomological observation. These ants will not speak a human language, nor will they make an exhibition of their wisdom and prudence. Yet, the images of their pervasive swarming will resurface in the texts I shall discuss, not as the epiphany of a divine power, which has a reason and an explanation from the perspective of mythical imagination, but as the manifestation of a natural power that borders on a metaphysical dimension, while leaving the characters who observe it and have to cope with it puzzled, utterly powerless and in dismay.

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[6] Ibid., 300.

[7] Volpilhac, "Micrographies," 4.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Concerning Orpaz's detailed descriptions as a feature of his writing see Gabriel Moked, "Be-*Tzid ha-tzviyah* rav ha-merumaz min ha-ne'emar" ("In *The Hunting of the Doe* There are More Hints than Clear Words") in *Bi-zeman ha-amiti* (*In Real Time*), Moked (Tel Aviv: Ktav, 2011), 79-80, 79.

What Lies beyond Reality?—Approaches to *The Argentine Ant* and *Ants*

In the following pages, I will propose a comparative analysis of two stories: *La formica argentina* (*The Argentine Ant*, 1952) by the Italian writer Italo Calvino[10] and *Nemalim* (*Ants*, 1968) by the Israeli writer Yitzhak Awerbuch Orpaz.[11] Although no direct influence exists, since Orpaz read Calvino's story much later,[12] the stories share several elements: they are both narrated in the first person, from the point of view of the male characters, and both deal with an interaction between species—a human couple trying to cope with an invasion of ants; both plots revolve around the control of the house, a space conceived and molded by humans for their own habitation.

Calvino's *The Argentine Ant* has been written between August 1949 and April 1952 and published for the first time in 1952, and it is the first story in which the author has set aside subjects related to the Italian Resistance Movement during the Second World War.[13] The plot is simple: a couple with a baby moves into a new house in a new neighborhood on the Riviera ligure, in search of a new life and a

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[10] Italo Calvino, *La formica argentina*, in *Botteghe Oscure* 10 (1952): 406-441; the story has been republished in several collections, among them in *I racconti* (Torino: Einaudi, 1958), 407-440; *La nuvola di smog* (Torino: Einaudi, 1965), 85-127; *Gli amori difficili* (Torino: Einaudi, 1970), 113-141; finally included in the edition of novels and stories *Romanzi e racconti*, 3 vols. 1991-1993, I vol. (Milano: Mondadori, 1991), 445-442, the reference text for the current essay. For a detailed editorial history and for the differences between the first and the following editions see Mario Barenghi et al., "Note e notizie sui testi," in Ibid., 1312-1315. English translation *The Argentine Ant* in Italo Calvino, *The Watcher and Other Stories*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun and William Weaver (New York: A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book-Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1971), 138-181, the English quotes will be taken from this edition.

[11] Yitzhak Orpaz, *Nemalim* (*Ants*) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1968). The story has been republished in two different collections: Orpaz, *Shalosh Novellot* (*Three Novellas*) (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1972) and Yitzhak Awerbuch Orpaz, *Laylah be-Santa Paulinah: sippurim hadashim ve- novellah Nemalim* (*A Night in Santa Paulina: New Stories and the Novella Ants*) (Tel Aviv: Gvanim, 1997), 83-159, the reference text for the current essay. English translation *Ants*, translated by David Zaraf and published in *The Iowa Review* 2, no.1 (Winter 1980): 10-57 followed by an interview Frederick Woodard, "An Interview with Yitzhak Orpaz," 57-66. In this article I shall quote the translation recently republished in Yitzhak Orpaz, *The Death of Lysanda: Two Novellas*, trans. Richard Flint and David Zaraf (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive, 2013), 101-192. The English version of the names of the characters is also based on this translation.

[12] Gaio Sciloni, "Le formiche e... la questione ebraica," introduction to *Formiche*, by Yitzhak Orpaz (Viterbo: Edizioni Stampa Alternativa Nuovi Equilibri, 1995), 5-8, 5.

[13] Barenghi, "Note e notizie sui testi," 1312.

new beginning. They rent a house and try to take possession of it only to discover that the house is completely infested by ants, actually by a very strong species of ants that goes under the name of Argentine ant. The wife is absolutely disheartened; the baby suffers too because some ants manage to enter the cradle he is sleeping in; the husband spends the following days visiting the neighbors to try and figure out a solution to the problem. Every neighbor suggests some insecticides or traps, but nobody has an effective solution at hand, not even the agent of the society for the fight against the Argentine ant, whose remedy appears to be a failure too. Apparently, the husband discovers, the ants infest all the houses in the zone, nobody knows where they come from, nor how to get rid of them. His landlady points out that he and his family decided to rent the house at the very last minute, thus they did not give her the time to do the disinfestation. After two days, at sunset, husband and wife, faced with the impossibility to find a solution, decide to go out for a walk. Their desperation attenuates when they stop in front of the sea to admire the landscape.

The plot of Orpaz's *Ants*, written between 1964-65[14] and first published in 1968 starts with a sketch of everyday life: Jacob and Rachel have been married for some time and they live in a small flat. The smallness of the space makes them bump into each other ceaselessly, causing awkward feelings for both of them and especially for the husband. Actually, the couple is falling apart: Jacob admits that his wife avoids every contact with him. Finally, they agree to divorce. They go to see a Rabbi in order to start the procedure, but the Rabbi advises them to take some more time to reflect. In the meanwhile, they can start looking for a new house—change of place change of fortune, as the Rabbi puts it. Jacob is a construction worker and decides to build a new house and Rachel seems happy with this idea. Suddenly, he spots the first explorer ant. From then on, the invasion unfolds relentlessly. Jacob looks at the ants with mixed feelings, he admires them but at the same time he wants to fight them off. Rachel on the other side is the silent partner, almost a fifth column, in league with the ants. While the invasion is completed and the house is destroyed, Jacob and Rachel succeed in reviving their intimacy, which becomes complete precisely at the moment the house crumbles down.

[14] The dates are given by the author, see Woodard, "An Interview with Yitzhak Orpaz," 60.

The critical approaches to both *The Argentine Ant* and *Ants* in Italy and in Israel, share one point: they display a tendency to overlook the ants as such and their interaction with the human characters, and they do so precisely by stating that the descriptions of their behavior are realistic but they have a non-realistic significance that turns them into symbols or metaphors of the social, political and cultural context and problems of the time. Both stories are indeed suspended between realistic descriptions, and a more general abstract dimension involving human situations and relationships: this is the case with the misery of the family in *The Argentine Ant*, the estrangement and the distance between husband and wife in both novels, possibly a consequence of a difficult life in *The Argentine Ant*, while in *Ants* the falling apart of the couple is at the origin of the story and underlies the whole plot. Both stories lack a precise time and space framework: all the reader knows about *The Argentine Ant* is that the couple moved to a new place near the sea, the year or the period are left unsaid. As for *Ants*, there is no reference to any aspect of reality to be found outside of Jacob and Rachel's apartment. The name of the city they live in is never mentioned, the reader can imply that it is Tel Aviv; some scanty references to Jewish tradition—the Rabbi that is supposed to deal with the divorce procedure, the names of the characters and some inter-textual references to the *Bible*—reveal the Jewish identity of the protagonists.
Calvino very soon replied to his interpreters by pointing out the realistic background of the story:

> Whoever has been in the Riviera knows that there is no exaggeration in my story: the events, characters, systems for fighting against it, different attitudes toward ants, your life dominated by the ants, form part of the regular experience of my childhood. [...] So it is a realistic story, then.[15]

Indeed, the Argentine ant, whose scientific name is Linepithema humile, is a real invasive species and is listed among the household pests. It stems from the region

[15] Calvino's answer to Cesare Cases' interpretation of *The Argentine Ant* as an allegory of capitalism that pervades the life of individuals and to some British critics who "talk about Kafka." Calvino's letter to Cesare Cases is dated December 20, 1958, in Italo Calvino, *Letters 1941-1985*, selected with an introduction by Michael Wood, trans. Martin McLaughlin (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 170-171.

of the Paranà River basin, but human travels have spread it all over the world: in Europe, in a colony that extends from Liguria to Portugal, in California and in Japan. Recent research has shown that these three ant colonies are interrelated in such a way as they can be apprehended as a single super-colony.[16] These scientific findings give further substance to the argument Calvino reiterated about the story thirty years later:

> *The Argentine Ant* is not a Kafkian-oneiric story, as all the critics have always said. It is the most realistic story I have written in my life; it describes with absolute exactness the situation that came about because of the invasion of the Argentine ants into the cultivated areas of San Remo and a large swathe of the Western Riviera during my childhood, in the twenties and thirties.[17]

A real fact is, therefore, at the origin of the plot and realism is the principle that governs the narration.

However, since the novel has been published immediately after the Six Days War, it has been first ascribed political and ideological implications. The ants, specifically, have been considered a hint at the author's involvement in Israeli life after the war,[18] and a symbol or even the embodiment of the nightmare of the war and of the feeling of being under siege.[19] Afterwards, the novel has been

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[16] Alexander Wild, "Taxonomy and Distribution of the Argentine Ant, Linepithema humile," in *Annals of the Entomological Society of America* 97, no. 6 (November 2004): 1204-1215; Sunamura et al., "Intercontinental Union of Argentine Ants: Behavioral Relationships among Introduced Populations in Europe," *Insectes Sociaux* 2 (July 2009): 143-147.

[17] Italo Calvino, *Letters 1941-1985,* 529. See also Mario Barenghi, "Italo Calvino e i sentieri che s'interrompono," *Quaderni Piacentini* 15 (1984): 127-150, 131: "*La formica argentina* è il resoconto, fra scherzoso e tragico, di un'avventura onirica di sapore kafkiano."

[18] Hayyim Nagid, "The Destroyers Ants," *Masa*, May 24, 1968.

[19] Ehud Ben Ezer, "A Narrow Step," *'Al ha-Mishmar*, April 28, 1972. Yet, Orpaz rejected the interpretation of the story as a political allegory *tout court*, although he did not deny that when he wrote it there was a strong feeling of siege in Israel, see Woodard, "An Interview with Yitzhak Orpaz," 60. For further and more recent political interpretations of the story see Shimrit Peled, " 'Mastery Regained': Israeli Jewish Sovereignty and Space in three Israeli Novels 1967-1973," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 10, no. 2 (July 2011): 263-284, 273-274; Ariel Pridan, "Beyond Conflict: The Non-adversarial Aspect of Yitzhak Averbuch Orpaz's Prose Fiction," *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 265-289, 270-278.

interpreted as surrealistic, with the ants considered as a trivial part of reality penetrated with a symbolic demonic force aiming at destroying the protagonist's bourgeois life[20]; it has been apprehended as a meta-realistic work, like Orpaz's fiction in general, and therefore featured by the cracking and breaking of the borders of the connections and relationships that order reality and especially by "the abolition of the usual borders separating man from animal"[21]; as a piece of experimental writing in search of new possibilities of expression with realistic descriptions of trivial matters and tiny things, ants included, that only hint at the tension between the world of sorrow and regret of the modern protagonist of a story and the careful description of meaningless things[22]; as an existentialist work with a dialectical tendency toward the fantastic as well as a tension between the realistic, detailed descriptions of reality and the search for the deep inner meaning of the same reality[23]; as an allegory of the way of a man with a virgin and at the same time of the existence of the Jewish people in the Diaspora.[24] Finally, the ants have also lent themselves to a psychoanalytic interpretation apprehending them as

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[20] Gershon Shaked, *Ha-sipporet ha-'ivrit 1880-1980* (*Hebrew Narrative Fiction 1880-1980*), 5 vols. Vol. V, *Be-harbeh ashnavim be-kenisot tzdadiyot* (*Through Many Rear Doors through the Side Entrances*) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Keter Publishing House 1998), 152, where the author comes back to this interpretation. For the bibliography of the previous interpretations underscoring this issue see Ibid., 513 n. 19. For a general evaluation of surrealism in Orpaz's works see Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction*, V, 45-53; Giulia Miller, *Reconfiguring Surrealism in Modern Hebrew Literature: Menashe Levin, Yitzhak Oren and Yitzhak Orpaz* (London-Portland: Vallentine Mitchell 2013), 1-19. Concerning surrealism and *Ants* see Giora Leshem, "Surrealizm heraqi anoshi" ("Human-Insect Surrealism"), *Moznayim* 6 (May 1982): 45-46. See also Ran Yagil, *Sefer le-'adam eḥad: Monographiyah ḥufshit* (Orpaz: A One Man Book – Free Monograph) (Tel Aviv-Yafo: Emdah, 2018).

[21] Hillel Barzel, *Sipporet 'Ivrit Metarealiztit* (*Metarealistic Hebrew Fiction*) (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1974), 100. Barzel also writes that in *Ants* Orpaz inclined toward allegory (p. 99).

[22] Gabriel Moked, "Mi-nemalim 'ad garger ha-hol" ("From the Ants up to a Grain of Sand") in *In Real Time*, Moked, 165-166.

[23] Ortzion Bartana, *Ha-fantasiah ba-sipporet dor ha-medinah* (*Fantasy in Israeli Literature in the Last Thirty Years*) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1989), 49, for an in-depth analysis of *Ants* see 162-171. See also Giora Leshem, "Lihiyot hereq lihiyot 'adam" ("To be an Insect to be a Man"), *Makor Rishon*, April 26, 2011. Accessed June 4, 2023, https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/app/index.php?do=blog&encr_id=7b710fc4596b25648b44472262adc013&id=1166.

[24] Yedidiah Yitzhaky, "Yizhaq Orpaz rishon le-sofre 'Dor ha-Medinah' - heleq rishon mi-tokh massah ha-maqifah 'et qol ha-sipporet shel Yitzhak Orpaz" ("Yitzhak Orpaz the First Writer of the Generation of the State: First Part of an Essay about all the Narrative Works of Yitzhak Orpaz") *Gag* 42 (2017): 50-64, 59.

an erotic symbol, because they rebuild the mutual erotic attraction between the Jacob and Rachel.[25]

A reading of both stories from the perspective of animal studies, integrated by Edward O. Wilson's idea of consilience between science and humanities,[26] can open the way to interpretations that will look at the (lack of definite) boundaries between human and animal, where species meet and even mix. with the awareness that these are also stories of the Anthropocene. Taking this consilient approach, I shall focus on the interaction between the two species, humans and ants, concerning the issue of territory or space. They are both in competition for the defense of the territory. In fact, according to basic evolutionary theories, all living organisms compete in order to survive. Survival includes mating, reproduction in the specific case of the ants, access to the resources and defense of the territory. Competition may also include conflict. Culture intervenes in the way human groups or individuals live and choose to come to terms with competition, turning it into a moderate or extreme conflict, and solving it with a mediation or with the destruction of the competitor.

The resort to the interactionist, consilient approach complements the animal studies perspective, because this Other under the form of ants is "eusocial."[27] Furthermore, from a biological point of view eusociality has proved itself a very successful survival strategy because it has given life to what has been labeled superorganisms.[28] This eusociality comes to discard the assumption that man is

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[25] Nitza Abarbanell, *Hawah we-Lilit* (*Eve and Lilith*) (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University 1994), 135-150.

[26] Lissa, "Introduction," xxi-xxii.

[27] Eusociality implies that "(1) individuals of the same species cooperate in caring for the young; (2) there is a reproductive division of labor, with more or less sterile individuals working on behalf of fecund nestmates; (3) and there is an overlap of at least two generations in life stages capable of contributing to colony labor, so that offspring assist parents during some period of their life." Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 398.

[28] Among the most detailed works concerning the superorganism there is Bert Hölldobler and Edward O. Wilson, *The Superorganism: The Beauty, Elegance, and Strangeness of Insect Societies* (New York-London: W. W. Norton-Company, 2009), whose many learned and in-depth arguments may appear a little impervious to some Humanities scholars. Thus, concerning eusociality and its success see also the more enjoyable Bert Hölldobler and Edward O. Wilson, *Journey to the Ants: A Story of Scientific Exploration* (Cambridge-Massachusetts-London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994).

the social animal,[29] and makes it so that characters of *The Argentine Ant* and *Ants* are not simply confronted with tiny, fragile individual ants but with a superorganism thoroughly organized and painstakingly efficient:

> The ants organize their colonies with many chemical systems like those used to transmit alarm. Their bodies, [...], are walking batteries of glands filled with semiotic compounds. When ants dispense their pheromones, singly or in combination and in varying amounts, they say to other ants, in effect: *danger, come quickly*; or *danger, disperse*; or *food, follow me*; or *there is a better nest site, follow me*; or *I am a nestmate, not an alien*; or *I am a larva*; and through a repertory of ten twenty messages, with the number differing according to caste (such as soldier or minor worker) and species. So pervasive and powerful are these codes of taste and smell that all together they bind ant colonies into a single operational unit. As a result each colony can be viewed as a superorganism, a congeries of conventional organisms acting like a single and much larger organism. The colony is a primitive semiotic web that crudely resembles a nerve net, a hundred mouthed hydra writ large.[30]

As a superorganism, the ants are endowed with an agency that allows them to destabilize and transgress "human orderings, including spatial ones."[31] As I will show below, the ants are endowed with even more agency than the human characters. As such, they can confront human beings *vis à vis* and as equals, if not as superiors in might, determination and organization.

Finally, *The Argentine Ant* and *Ants* are stories of the Anthropocene, understood as a "human-dominated, geological epoch."[32] Both plots are based on the ants invading a human-shaped space not only to (re)turn it into a natural space but also and especially to shed doubt on the real nature of this space, and in so doing they

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[29] Paul Waldau, *Animal Studies: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 194-196.

[30] Wilson, *Consilience*, 76.

[31] Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, "Animal Spaces, Beastly Places An Introduction," in *Animal Spaces Beastly Places New Geographies of Human-animal Relations*, eds. Philo and Wilbert (London-New York: Routledge 2005 [1st edition 2000]), 1-35, 5.

[32] Paul J. Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind," *Nature* 415 (January 2002): 23.

come to discard precisely the extent if not the very idea of human dominion. As for *The Argentine Ant*, it is eminently an Anthropocene story, since, as Serenella Iovino puts it, "species such as the Argentine ant are very good ambassadors for the biosphere of the Anthropocene."[33] In fact, the Argentine ants' invasion is the result of human travels and commerce.[34] Thus, Iovino reads the story as an anticipatory critique of human contamination and pollution of the environment[35] affecting the biosphere's balance, while the ants' sophisticated organization and behavior "prompts us to rethink the borders of nature and culture (and the scale of these very borders) in unprecedented ways."[36]

Defining and Circumscribing the Territory

Biology usually defines territory as "an area occupied more or less exclusively by an animal or a group of animals by means of repulsion through overt defense or advertisement."[37] Accordingly, the diagnostic feature of territory is defense of its boundaries and not its usage.[38] Territory can coincide with the home-range, "the area that an animal learns thoroughly and habitually patrols."[39] Within the home-range there can be the core-area that is the area "of heaviest regular usage."[40] In the stories I am going to discuss, the territory includes the home-range, with the kitchen and the bedroom as a core-area. In *The Argentine Ant* territory also includes a small garden annexed to the house; in *Ants* territory also includes the roof where Rachel uses to have her suntan hours.

In both stories, the issue of territory/space/house is related to the hope of a new beginning in life. The protagonist couple of *The Argentine Ant* moves to the

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[33] Serenella Iovino, *Italo Calvino's Animals: Anthropocene Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 8. For a general approach to the issue see Jody Frawley and Iain McCalman, *Rethinking Invasion Ecologies from the Environmental Humanities* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[34] Ibid., 10-11.

[35] Ibid., 13 and 16.

[36] Ibid., 16.

[37] Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 256.

[38] Ibid., 261.

[39] Ibid., 256.

[40] Ibid.

Riviera ligure and to a new house after their baby has recovered from an unspecified illness. The husband must look for a job, but first of all the family must take possession of the house they have just rented:

> When Signora Mauro had gone, I carried the mattresses inside. My wife wasn't able to move the cupboard by herself and called me to help. Then she wanted to begin cleaning out the little kitchen at once and got down on her knees to start, but I said: "What's the point, at this hour? We'll see to that tomorrow; let's just arrange things as best we can for tonight." The baby was whimpering and very sleepy, and the first thing to do was get his basket ready and put him to bed. At home we use a long basket for babies, and had brought one with us here; we emptied out the linen with which we'd filled it, and found a good place on a shelf, where it wasn't damp or too far off the ground should it fall.
>
> Our son went to sleep, and my wife and I began looking over our new home (one room divided in two by a partition—four walls and a roof), which was already showing signs of our occupation.[41]

The process of the appropriation of the territory has started. The lady's decision to start cleaning the kitchen and the search for a proper place for the baby are signs that the core-area of the territory has been defined. Order is imposed upon this territory to turn it into an anthropized space, namely into a proper home fit for human living. The process continues with the garden:

> I wanted to take a turn over the surrounding plot; for *our house* [emphasis mine] stood on a piece of land consisting of two large flower, o rather rough seed beds, with a path down the middle covered with an iron trellis, [...]. Signora Mauro had said she would let me have this plot to cultivate as a kitchen garden, [...].
>
> My intention now, by this first evening's walk of ours around the plot, was to acquire a sense of familiarity with the place, *even of ownership in a*

[41] Calvino, *The Argentine Ant*, 83. In the Italian text there is no mention of a "window ledge," I have thus replaced it with shelf.

> *way* [emphasis mine]; for the first time in our lives the idea of continuity seemed possible, of walking evening after evening among beds of seed *as our circumstances gradually improved* [emphasis mine].[42]

For the first time, the husband calls the house "our house." The process of taking possession of the territory continues and the stroll in the garden can be paralleled with the patrolling of the territory.

In Orpaz's novel, the house is already fit for human living. The home-range, the apartment, the core-area, kitchen and bedroom, and the roof as the rest of the territory are already defined:

> Our apartment was small, on the top floor of an old house, with a small living room and a hall. The hall led into the main room, the main room lead into a tiny kitchen, the tiny kitchen into a very small washroom, where the shower—there is no bathtub—and the toilet stand close together. All the doors run in a straight line from the door to the roof.[43]

Apartments under the roof are usual in Orpaz's literary production, stressing the search for a detachment from everyday reality and the will to keep moderately in touch with this very same reality.[44] Jacob and Rachel must live together in this small space although the enterprise is proving itself difficult:

> We can't help bumping into each other again and again. It's embarrassing. When we were first married Rachel would giggle and then escape. Now she scratches, not ungracefully, under her arm, between her breasts, or just above her belly.[45]

Jacob and Rachel try to keep what the biologists call individual distance "the compromise struck by animals that are both attracted to other members of their

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[42] Ibid., 144.

[43] Orpaz, *Ants*, 105.

[44] Moked, "Triptiqon hadshani shel Yitzhaq Orpaz" ("An Innovative Tripticon of Yitzhak Orpaz"), in *Moked, In Real Time*, 127-130, 127.

[45] Orpaz, *Ants*, 105.

own species and repelled by them at short distance."[46] The concept can be applied to humans too and it is culturally defined, for example Mediterranean people can stand shorter individual distances than northern-European peoples.[47] Rachel, anyway, seems to be an exception for she cannot stand being too near to her husband in their own apartment. The smallness of the flat and the short distances are among the reasons that have brought Jacob and Rachel on the verge of divorce. The stability of the couple is somehow connected to the flat. Thus, they both accept the Rabbi's suggestion to build a new house.
In both novels, the couples seem to be at the start of a pathway that should bring them into a new life. All of a sudden, the programs are subverted.

...And Then Come the Ants

The ants are mentioned in the very first lines of *The Argentine Ant*. Nonetheless, the husband and the wife do not pay attention to their mention, nor do they worry when the first evening by having their first stroll in their garden they notice that one of their neighbors is pouring insecticide out in his garden. In *Ants*, the ants are a disembodied presage materializing on Rachel's body from the very first pages of the novel:

> While she was answering the rabbi, she rubbed under her breast, with her long, beautiful fingers, as though she had an itch. After we left the rabbi's office, I asked her why she had made such a rude gesture in his presence. She had felt, she said, as though ants were crawling over her body.[48]

In both stories, the husbands act in order to protect the wives and in fact their whole family: Jacob wants to rebuild his connection to the estranged Rachel and the husband wants to protect his wife and baby from the ants. This is not an unusual behavior because in the animal kingdom there exist "close connections

[46] Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 257.
[47] Ibid., 259.
[48] Orpaz, *Ants*, 104.

[...] between territorial aggressive display and courtship."[49] In *Ants*, Rachel, the flat and the ants form a triangle: she first feels them on her body, then she says that "the house is crawling,"[50] later on Jacob himself states that he has "eradicated the enemy from inside it [the flat]."[51] To confirm the connection between the flat and his wife, he ultimately admits: "Any foreign body between my wife and myself was hateful to me. Inside me, in my mind, I always spilled their blood out of jealousy. Surely it was this that had made me rise to wage war so uncompromisingly against the black ant?"[52]

In both stories, the ants appear at night. In *The Argentine Ant*, they reveal themselves in the core area of the house, when the wife goes to the kitchen to get a glass of water and she first sees them in the kitchen sink:

> My wife went to the washbasin for a glass of water. "Bring me one too," I called, [...].
> "Oh!" she screamed. "Come here!" She had seen ants on the faucet and a stream of them coming up the wall."
> We put on the light, a single bulb for the two rooms. The stream of ants on the wall was very thick; they were coming from the top of the door, and might originate anywhere.[53]

Immediately after having seen the ants, the husband tries to calm his wife down and to protect their baby, who had been attacked that very night:

> But in the middle of the night the baby cried; [...] we began asking ourselves: "What can be the matter? What's wrong with him?" [...].
> "He's covered with ants!" cried my wife, who had gone and taken him in her arms. [...]. We turned the whole basket upside down and undressed the baby completely. To get enough light for picking the ants off. [...]. It

[49] Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 261.
[50] Orpaz, *Ants*, 105.
[51] Orpaz, *Nemalim*, 102 (my own translation from Hebrew).
[52] Orpaz, *Ants*, 144.
[53] Calvino, *The Argentine Ant*, 146.

> was pitiable looking for ants on that skin which reddened as soon as it was rubbed.[54]

In *Ants*, the grey ants also appear at night for the first time and, consistent with the first presage, on Rachel's body:

> Behind me, from the bed, there came noises of rustling and creaking. I turned my head and what did I see? My wife Rachel, with her eyes closed, throwing her head from side to side, her nostrils trembling, her thighs twitching, and her feet kicking. What has shaken her body so, what has taken it out of its glorious iciness?
> A little ant, it seems, but full of energy; it had emerged from a fold in the sheet and onto the lower end of the curve of my wife Rachel's thigh. It climbed fast along the delicate curve and stopped there for a moment to raise its head and rub its antennae one against the other. I looked at the uncovered, sleeping bit of thigh where the ant had crossed, and an evil feeling welled up in my eyes and heart. For thirteen years I have constructed houses, hundreds of floors, thousands of tons of building material, and I have never succeeded in exciting my wife the way a little ant can.[55]

Both passages deserve to be read in parallel, because they show how the attack is immediately and tactically brought against the most precious and defenseless beings especially in the case of the baby. Furthermore, the attack is not directed to the (re)conquest of the space but it is first and foremost brought on the bodies of the characters, immediately blurring the basic boundaries between human and animal: "Our hands were now covered with them, and we held them out open in front of our eyes, trying to see exactly what they were like, these ants, moving our wrists all the time to prevent them from crawling up our arms."[56]
In both stories. the protagonists are puzzled about where the ants come from. The very night he has discovered the tiny ant on Rachel's body, Jacob notices a trail of

[54] Ibid., 147-148.
[55] Orpaz, *Ants*, 107-108.
[56] Calvino, *The Argentine Ant*, 146.

grey ants on the roof of his flat "marching in slow procession to the front door."[57] In *The Argentine Ant*, they are already everywhere, and the husband reflects *en passant* on a substantial fact: " *They were there before*, too, and *we didn't see them*! [emphasis mine]"—as if things would have been very different if we had seen them before."[58]

This statement expresses a natural fact entomologists are familiar with, since the first fossils of ur-ants date back between 112 to 90 millions of years ago, that is the middle Cretaceous.[59] In this sense, it also makes an essential point clear: however anthropized the house, or the flat, they will never fully belong to humans as much as they belonged, belong and will belong to nature and therefore the ants. Finally, the fact of existing in the past and in the future also reminds Derrida's meditation about the animals were with the humans.[60] Having been there long before, the ants in *The Argentine Ant* the ants destroy the hope in a better future: "We hadn't the pleasure now of feeling we were starting a new life, only a sense of dragging on into a future full of new troubles."[61] In *Ants*, the ants *are* the future, as Rachel implies, after Jacob announces his tactical victory:

> In light of my achievement there was, to say the least, something odd about my wife's reaction, she who had been dozing in the sun most of the day:
> "Are you absolutely sure there aren't any left?" [...].
> After all, it was obvious that they would seek new burrows after I had uprooted them from their old homes. That, at any rate, was something I could count as a success. A definite tactical victory.
> I told Rachel so; she only nodded.[62]

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[57] Ibid., 108.

[58] Ibid., 147.

[59] In chapter 6 of Hölldobler and Wilson, *Journey to the Ants*, "The Ur-Ants,", 75-84, 77, 79 and 205; "Ants have lived on Earth for more than ten million of their generations; we have existed for no more than a hundred thousand human generations."

[60] Lissa, "Introduction," viii.

[61] Calvino, *The Argentine Ant*, 147.

[62] Orpaz, *Ants*, 118.

In *The Argentine Ant*, the struggle in the name of the defense of the territory starts in the morning after their discovery: "We were very soon up, nagged by the thought of [...] having to start an immediate battle against the persistent imperceptible enemy which had taken over our home."[63] In *Ants*, the phases of the battle go on in a kind of crescendo: the day after the sighting of the first ant remains uneventful. The night after, however, Jacob wakes up because of a strange noise coming from inside the walls: "A kind of growling or dripping from deep down, but drier, like stones rolling, but duller."[64] He gets up, goes to the bathroom, and spots the grey ants dismembering a half-dead cockroach, and yet the ants "are careful about cleaning up the battlefield. By tomorrow, nothing will be left of them nor of that glorious creature they have dismembered."[65] The day after, coming back from work Jacob finds Rachel crying in the kitchen:

> A long, dense stream of ants stretched from the cup to the tiled part of the wall—with barely an opening in the wall to be seen. They marched in multi-lane processions, an army of stippled lines, and they filled the bottom of the cup.[66]

The morning after, Jacob does not go to work and begins the fight by trying to exterminate the ants with boiling water. During this first battle he cannot help but admiring the power, the organization and the extreme sense of duty of the single parts of the superorganism: "I cannot help but confess that here and there my higher order of intelligence was impressed by their lower."[67] He spends also the next two days in battling the ants with poisons and by filling gaps and cracks so that any access to their nest would be blocked. The day after, the fight begins once again and since the ants seem to like the honey Rachel has a sweet tooth for, Jacob prepares traps with honey jars encircled by water, so that "the formic launching pad [would be] thus confined to the ceiling only." Futhermore "the indirect route was daring (a jump into space) and clever (circumventing an obstacle), which—

[63] Calvino, *The Argentine Ant*, 149.
[64] Orpaz, *Ants*, 111.
[65] Ibid., 115.
[66] Ibid., 116.
[67] Ibid., 117.

probably—only the strong would attempt, so that the elite of the race would be annihilated."[68] The battle against the tiny, grey ants is won, they all lie dead in the honey jars, but a few minutes afterwards:

> My wife's laughter turned to silence. She withdrew her feet from me, withdrew them and enfolded them within her gown, and her pure white gown danced where her feet had been kicking in excitement. What had excited her feet?
> "Ants." I heard my own frightened answer, and I looked around.
> The honey jars were again crawling with life. Bridges of live ants spanned the moats, a raft of live ants holding each other by means of their mandibles. And black, very quick ants, the likes of which I had not yet seen in our house, were galloping across.[69]

This is a new race of very powerful ants—Jacob labels them "the bronze ant"[70]—that will prove to be unstoppable. Nonetheless, Jacob will find a connection to these ants, while for the gray ants he felt nothing but disgust. While the plot unfolds, the flat is progressively turned into a sort of anthill with a lot of cracks in the walls and Rachel starts decorating them:

> What decorating means in a building where the walls are cracked and crumbling and fine dust sifts from them all over the place is hard to say. Perhaps we had better call it *rearranging* of the house [in the original *siddur ha-bayit*]—an attempt to make it look suitable for its new state of being, the reality of the ants.[71]

At this almost final stage, the flat is not a flat anymore nor is it simply an anthill. The change the black ants bring about in Orpaz's novel is more radical than in *The Argentine Ant*, because they change the ontological reality of the flat, while Rachel

[68] Ibid., 123.
[69] Ibid., 127.
[70] Ibid., 128.
[71] Orpaz, *Ants*, 133.

and Jacob plunge progressively in a kind of liminal dimension that stands between dream and wakefulness outside of time, where human and animal mix and mingle. In *The Argentine Ant*, it becomes progressively clear that the territory does not really belong to its legal human tenant or landlady, nor will it be easily turned into a human space fit to live in. In fact, later, in broad daylight the house and the garden reveal their real nature:

> The more I looked, the more new ways I discovered by which the ants came and went. Our new home, although it looked so smooth and solid on the surface, was in fact porous and honeycombed with cracks and holes.[72]

As a matter of fact, the house has the appearance of an anthill. While examining the garden in full daylight, the husband discovers that in the whole "piece of ground, which had seemed so small yesterday but now appeared enormous in relation to the ants, the insects formed an uninterrupted veil, issuing from what must be thousands of underground nests and feeding on the thick sticky soil and the low vegetation"[73] The ants are part and parcel of the territory that resists every human attempt of transformation. Furthermore, the husband perceives them as different from the other sorts of ants:

> If he had mentioned ants, as perhaps he had [...] we would have imagined ourselves up against a concrete enemy that could be numbered, weighed, crushed. Actually, now I think about the ants in our own parts, I remember them as reasonable little creatures, which could be touched and moved like cats or rabbits. Here we were face to face with an enemy like fog or sand, against which force was useless.[74]

The Argentine ant is thus a peculiar species through which all the potentiality of the superorganism materialize themselves. There can be no communication whatsoever, no exchange of gazes, between the human characters and this

[72] Calvino, *The Argentine Ant*, 149-150.
[73] Ibid., 150.
[74] Ibid., 151.

disembodied enemy. The otherness of the ants is transmitted to the territory they inhabit, which is apparently a human space with houses and gardens but as a matter of fact, human presence is only superficial because the whole territory, houses included, is an enormous anthill. From then on, the whole perspective of the novel is turned upside down, legitimating the reader to think that the humans are in the process of being turned into the actual invaders.

The husband describes the various strategies his neighbors are adopting against the ants, not without an ironic tone. Ostensibly, poisons and traps are useless.[75] In the evening, however, he observes his neighbors having their dinner or enjoying a cup of coffee after dinner while placidly ignoring, or feigning to ignore, the ants. The husband appears very dispirited by this attitude, that stands somewhere halfway between some sort of ancestral Mediterranean fatalism and adaptation.

The Reversal of Perspectives: Between Symbiosis and Hybridity

Faced with the perspective of living in an anthill, or in a flat whose ontological reality has been altered, the protagonists are confronted with different possibilities of getting along with their lives. In *The Argentine Ant*, Signora Mauro and Signor Baudino embody two different alternatives: feigning to ignore the ants while living in some kind of symbiosis with them or becoming an ant, that is hybridity. While dealing with Signora Mauro, the husband catches a glimpse of a life in symbiosis with the ants and gets an idea of the surrealistic implications. Biology defines symbiosis "as the prolonged and intimate relationship of organisms belonging to different species,"[76] a relationship that can involve even two societies and that has not necessarily only negative outcomes, in fact it may even result in mutual advantages, although this is not the case in *The Argentine Ant*.

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[75] Very acutely Serenella Iovino point out that the names of the poisons "sound like a blend of mythology and hexing rituals." Iovino, *Italo Calvino's Animals*, 12.

[76] For the complete definition see Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 353: "Symbiosis, [...], is conventionally illustrated in the biological literature by interactions of pair of organisms. But many other cases are known of individuals that enter symbiosis with societies, and even symbiosis between entire societies." There are several kinds of symbiosis, the relevant one in the context of this article is "social parasitism: one species benefits, the other suffers. [...]. *Xenobiosis*: one species nests close or within the nests of another and begs food from it." Ibid., 354

Signora Mauro is the rich landlady who has rented the house to the family, she lives in a villa nearby high on a hill, from which one could look at the infested houses from above and from far away, at least apparently:

> And standing up there we could forget that all those places were black with ants; now we could see how they might have been without that menace which none of us could get away from even an instant. At this distance it looked almost like a paradise, but the more we gazed down the more we pitied our life there, as if living in that wretched narrow valley we could never get away from our wretched narrow problems.[77]

There is clearly no hope to get away from the ants that become the materialization of nature's overwhelming and blind power, whose origins remain unaccounted for. Accordingly, Signora Mauro appears as the embodiment of a superior power whose logic remains mysterious and standing on the edge of absurd—one would be tempted to use the word Kafkaesque if Calvino himself had not dismissed this approach.[78] In this capacity, she answers to the wretched couple: "Keep the house clean and dig away the ground. There is no other remedy. Work, just work."[79] If related to the situation in point, the advice is practical and sensible, if interpreted metaphorically it indicates that man's confrontation with nature is ceaseless and Sisyphean. The only viable solution is to try and struggle to survive day by day. Furthermore, the distance gives only an illusion of immunity to the invasion and accordingly Signora Mauro is only apparently immune to ants:

> "Don't they breed up here too?" asked my wife, almost smiling.
> "No, not here!" said Signora Mauro, going pale, then, still holding her right arm against the side of the chair, she began making a little rotating movement of the shoulder and rubbing her elbow against her ribs.
> It occurred to me that the darkness, the ornaments, the size of the room, and her proud spirit were this woman's defenses against the ants, the reason why she was stronger than we were in face of them; but that

[77] Calvino, *The Argentine Ant*, 172.
[78] See above, 68.
[79] Calvino, *The Argentine Ant*, 175.

> everything we saw around us, beginning with her sitting there, was covered with ants even more pitiless than ours; some kind of African termite, perhaps, which destroyed everything and left only the husks, so that all that remained of this house were tapestries and curtains almost in powder, all on the point of crumbling before her eyes.[80]

Denial offers a possibility of survival that is, anyway, embedded with the fact of living in symbiosis with the ants, having them on the body, and while this happens, they are even turned into the more dangerous and invasive African termite. From this perspective, Signora Mauro loses the aura of a superior being to find herself projected in the same restless and endless struggle as the other characters. On the other side, through her denial of living in symbiosis with the ants, Signora Mauro shifts the balance of the story from realism to surrealism, the kind that gives an uncanny feeling to the reader.

In a similar move, with Signor Baudino, Calvino takes another step further away from realism. This character embodies the alternative to symbiosis that is some kind of hybridization, becoming an ant, or something that stands between the human and the ant. Biology currently defines the hybrid as the offspring resulting from the mating of parents (animals and plants) belonging to different species. Hybridization contributes to gene flow that is a factor producing microevolution "which is evolution in its slightest, most elemental form."[81] Although relatively rare, interspecific hybridization can prove itself more effective per generation "because of the larger number of gene differences that normally separate species."[82] This, however, does not fully apply to Signor Baudino: he is "the ant man," [83]—in the original Italian "l'uomo della formica"[84]—as the neighborhood calls him, with the double interpretation of the label as "the man who deals with ants"—he is the representative of the society for the fight against the Argentine ant—or an uncanny hybrid and eventually a potential accomplice, even a "fifth column" of the ants:

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[80] Ibid., 174-175.
[81] Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 64.
[82] Ibid., 66.
[83] Calvino, *La formica argentina*, 167.
[84] Ibid., 464.

> If I describe Signor Baudino in such detail, it's to try to define the strange impression that he made on us; [...]. Watching him like that, I realized why he had made such a strange impression on me at first sight: he looked like an ant. It's difficult to tell exactly why, but he certainly did; perhaps it was because of the dull black of his clothes and hair, perhaps because of the proportions of that squat body of his, or the trembling corners of his mouth corresponding to the continuous quiver of antennae and claws. There was however, one characteristic of the ant which he did not have. And that was their continuous busy movement. Signor Baudino moved slowly and awkwardly.[85]

Like Signora Mauro's symbiosis, Signor Baudino as a hybrid gives the story a turn toward the fantastic, especially if we understand the fantastic as a genre in Tzvetan Todorov's definition: as the hesitation, the doubt felt by someone who only knows natural laws and finds him/herself faced with a fact that apparently has no natural explanation. Hesitation, always in Todorov's formulation, must involve the reader and the character in a way that turns doubt into one of the subjects of the work and that excludes allegorical interpretation.[86] In a review published on August 15, 1970 of the Todorov's essay above mentioned, Calvino made two remarks about the fantastic that are relevant for my analysis. I shall here focus on the first one, and I will discuss the second one below.[87] Calvino pointed out that the fantastic in the twentieth century becomes an intellectual engagement, as a game, irony, hint or even a meditation about the deepest human desires, without seeking an emotional reaction from the reader as nineteenth century fantastic literature used to.[88]

Indeed, in *The Argentine Ant* Signor Baudino's hybridization remains a hint, perhaps only an impression of the husband or a neighborhood's slander. In fact,

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[85] Calvino, *The Argentine Ant*, 169-170.

[86] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, translated from the French by Richard Howard (Cleveland-London: The Press of Case Western University, 1973 [1st ed. 1970]), 25 and 33.

[87] See below, 92-93.

[88] Italo Calvino, "Definizione di territori: il fantastico," in *Saggi 1945-1985*, Calvino, ed. Mario Barenghi (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1995) 2 vols., I vol., 266-268, 267.

only for a tiny moment the reader has the impression that Signor Baudino's description complies with the definition of fantastic literary hybrids as beings whose bodies are composed of different anatomical parts and whose physical appearance is not normal.[89] Signor Baudino's hybridization is as uncanny as the symbiosis, because it implies a contradiction inherent to his very nature: he shares some physical features with the ants, but he is not endowed with their main virtue, industriousness. At the same time, he is human, and he is supposed to work in order to eradicate the Argentine ant. Actually, the remedy he proposes is the only one that has a real scientific foundation: feeding the ants with a kind of sweet, poisoned syrup the workers bring into the anthill and give to the queen so that the queen herself will die bringing about the extinction of the whole anthill. Nonetheless, the neighborhood accuses him of feeding them in order to keep them healthy and alive.

The tension and the suspects reach their zenith when an ant enters the ear of the baby of the couple, right after the visit of Signor Baudino:

> Even before we reached the house we heard him crying. [...]. An ant had got into his ear; [...]. My wife has said at once: "It must be an ant!" but I could not understand why he went on crying so, as we could find no ants on him or any signs of bites or irritation, and we'd undressed and carefully inspected him. We found some in the basket, however; I'd done my very best to isolate it properly, but we had overlooked the ant man's molasses—one of the clumsy streaks made by Signor Baudino seemed to have been put down on purpose to attract the insects up from the floor to the child's cot.[90]

Signor Baudino's clumsiness reassures the reader with a rational explanation for the cot's invasion being only an accident, but on the other side it also leaves a tiny place to a shadow of doubt. Signora Mauro and Signor Baudino do not fully belong to reality, they are ambiguous characters, useless at best but possibly even

[89] Claude-Claire Kappler, *Monstres, démons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Payot, 1999 [1st ed. 1980]), 147.

[90] Ibid., 175. For an interpretation of the scene in relation to the Anthropocene see Iovino, *Italo Calvino's Animals*, 12.

malevolent, unexplained and inexplicable, beyond logical understanding just as the ants' invasion is. There is no escape from the scourge, only a temporary relief on the seashore.

In *Ants*, Jacob manages to find a connection with the "bronze ants" and through them with his wife. These bronze ants stand halfway between the realistic description of their behavior in the destruction of the flat and the Biblical intertextual references through which their features and might are described. What's more, Jacob admires them and is impressed by them.

The Biblical text is implied and even embroidered in the whole plot of the novel, starting from the names of Jacob and Rachel, husband and wife, and Bilha, the neighbor, friend and servant of Rachel.[91] This intertextual relation, crossed with a metaphoric interpretation of the flat as a national metaphor converges toward a political interpretation of the whole text. However, coming back to Orpaz's words the perspective changes:

> All my childhood and youth, I was fascinated with ants ... I remember at least a couple of passages in the Bible: first in a parable in the Old Testament. It says go to the ants, learn her ways and be wise. Now I read the Bible very early—at four, five or six—and those things had a great effect on me. And then I began to see the ants and I began to look at how they live how they work. Then another place in the Bible, I came across the description by one of the prophets of a plague that will come. He describes not the ants but ... [...]. Locusts ... I didn't see the locusts but I saw the ants. And as I worked on the piece when I described the ants, I felt the ants were a kind of locusts, the same tribe.[92]

Through Orpaz's words, the ants themselves appear as a hybrid, they are virtuous and industrious as ants are supposed to be (*Proverbs* 6:6) on the one side, and like locusts plaguing the Land on the other side on the basis of *Joel* 1: 4 and 6,[93] that

[91] *Genesis*: 29-30.

[92] Woodard, "An Interview with Yitzhak Orpaz," 57.

[93] "4. That which the palmer-worm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the canker-worm eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten. [...]. 6. For a people is come up upon my land, mighty, and without number; his teeth are

parallels locusts and other insects plague to the Assyrian invasion of the Land of Israel. In fact, every Shabbat evening Jacob reads passages from the Book of Books, that is the *Bible*, and the passages Rachel loves the most are taken from *Joel*, especially 1: 6, that expresses the premonition of the ants' invasion. Moreover, the black ants have, in Rachel's phrasing, "dragon's teeth,"[94] a reference to *Proverbs* 30: 14.[95] To this must be added one further parallel, at the peak of the invasion the ants resemble some divine horses:

> Let me try to describe in all its beauty the head of the bronze ant. Its shape is oval. It rises and swells from the place where it is joined to the dorsal segment, in a smooth, strong line, gleaming like hammered, beaten steel, graceful in its broad curve, storing strength in silence, resting in its energy, and suddenly, out of the stillness of the restrained strength, a free flow of slanting lines, convex, severe, bursts forth powerful, and encloses the mandibles. It is a head that stretches in battle like a horse's neck, gleaming in the light like a mane. [...].
> Hell! I meant to describe an ant and have instead described a kind of divine horse.[96]

The horses raging though the land in all their might and fury, are described in *Joel* 2: 4-10, quoted at the end of chapter XIII of the novel.[97] These hybrid ants/locusts/horses appear as the epiphany of a divine power in their unstoppable swarming, a divine power that has his roots in the Biblical text understood in the context of the novel not as the source of the word of the unique God, but as a text delving more deeply in the past, when polytheism was dominant in the Ancient Middle East.

The association between hybridity and polytheism also allows us to understand Rachel's character who, as many other Orpaz's female characters, appears as a

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the teeth of a lion, and he hath the jaw-teeth of a lioness." English translation: accessed June 4, 2023, https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt1401.htm.

[94] Orpaz, *Ants*, 120.

[95] "There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their great teeth as knives." English translation: accessed June 4, 2023, https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2830.htm.

[96] Orpaz, *Ants*, 181.

[97] Ibid., 186.

distant polytheist goddess, more precisely as a goddess of the ants. In fact, she has been in connection with them from the very beginning of the story: her body, the flat with its walls and the black ants make but one thing. The tiny grey ants Jacob destroys in the first part of the novel are but a game to Rachel and a harbinger of the black ants. While the plot unfolds, she transforms herself: she eats honey, and she also feeds the ants with it. She starts wearing a dress made by a black net creating the illusion that her body is ceaselessly covered by swarming ants:

> The white of her skin peeped innocent and pure through the little squares of the black netting that covered her body. [...].
> Even the netting in her skin, which she had pulled on like a stocking from the soles of her feet up to her shoulders, had become a manifesto of insult and treason. Ants by dozen scurried between the threads of the net that barred her so painfully desired body from me, her husband.[98]

The intermingling between Rachel and the ants goes even beyond hybridization: she is the superorganism and the superorganism is her and she feels the changes it makes to the walls of the flat:

> As the walls began to swell, her half-asleep, devout-dreamy mood changed into a kind of strange nightmarish vitality; [...]. Her flesh seemed to awake to life, but not to me. She would bolt without warning, as if she was having a fit, as if she was being stung or tickled by those ants who were strolling through the thousands of gateways of her black netting with a familiarity that made me jealous.[99]

When Jacob joins Rachel in the religious worship of the wooden figure, he has been carving for her—a man at first, then a horse but finally an ant—their intimacy is renewed and cemented:

> "It is an ant," my wife said. And I saw it was truly an ant.

[98] Ibid., 172.
[99] Ibid., 173.

> Her eyes glowed and deepened. The slits of pupils widened and exuded the honey of mercy as she went down on her knees and placed my broad, rough hand, the hand that had worked the wood onto her forehead. Her eyes were on the dark wooden sculpture and she intoned: "Pray!" I murmured something. Rachel slowly rose from her knees, pulled a thread out of the netting she wore, and used it to tie the ant sculpture to the cord of the unlit lamp above her headboard of our bed, so that the proud, magnificent face of the ant would never stop looking aslant the place where we were to celebrate our ultimate union.[100]

It is not only that Rachel is one with the black ants. In fact, the black ants become the connection between Rachel and Jacob. This ultimate union, celebrated in the presence of the ant-idol brings them back to a primeval, Edenic condition—"We were both naked and without any shame"[101]—a prelude to the final scene where Jacob and Rachel are wrapped together while the house breaks down and in a sort of *cupio dissolvi* they find themselves finally happy.

This going back to the Edenic condition deserves a few final remarks, since it also implies going out of history and of anthropized space in order to be projected in a primeval scene to be partaken with plants and animals in equal measure. Indeed, the animals have been with the couple all along because, beyond the invasion of the ants, in the novel each and every character has his/her own animal double or some animal features: Bilha in Jacob's eyes is but a beetle,[102] Rachel and Bilha "would drag out their wailing laughter like cats,"[103] Rachel is "like a tigress that is weaned and suddenly feels the strength of her teeth,"[104] Jacob's contractor is a Mister Kerzenbaum,[105] with a mix of Hebrew *kartzit*, tick, and German *Baum*, tree, that is the tree of ticks. Jacob and Rachel's flat has always been filled with animals, the ants only helped to reveal its authentic nature.

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[100] Ibid., 185.

[101] Ibid., 186. For the Biblical intertextual reference see *Genesis* 2:25.

[102] Ibid., 145.

[103] Ibid., 131. I have emended the English translation "like cars," undoubtedly a misprint, with "like cats," to respect the original Hebrew "*ke-hatulot*," Orpaz, *Nemalim*, 107.

[104] Ibid., 173.

[105] Ibid., 154.

Finally, like in *The Argentine Ant*, outside of the flat, a little far away, there is the sea Jacob and Rachel look at from their windows.

Conclusion: Looking at the Sea

The parallel reading of these two novels, conceived by different authors, who, I repeat, did not know of each other's work, is highly significant. There is no arguing with Gaio Sciloni's remark that Orpaz's ants are so very Jewish,[106] but at the same time approaching both texts from the point of view of animal studies and biology, myrmecology in this specific case, allows a reading that keeps together cultural specificity and a general discussion about what it means to be human, to be Other, to be animal, enhancing the connections between them, stressing the fact that, as the ecologists put it so often, everything is connected. Which brings about a reflection about the idea of nature.

Apparently, Jacob and Rachel can only be happy after, with the help of the ants, they left behind their former selves to go back, or perhaps to move forward—and here Derrida's insight about the animals being there before and after resurfaces again—to a new Edenic condition outside of history but in connection with the animals that therefore they also are, waiting for a disembodied voice, whose origin and sound remain unknown. Orpaz's idea of nature reveals on the one side a disenchanted approach to and description of a natural fact such as a case of ants' invasion and on the other side a narration of the invasion mediated by mixing Biblical intertextuality and the references to polytheism. There remains, however, an in-depth hard core of reality that cannot be explained and at the same time a striving for an undefinable metaphysical dimension. Hence the mysterious disembodied voice, while the other possible escape is the far away sea Jacob and Rachel can see from the windows of their flat. Yet, there is no possibility to get out of the flat and go to the sea.

In a similar way, and yet with deeper implications, the sea appears at the end of *The Argentine Ant*:

[106] Sciloni, "Le formiche e... la questione ebraica," 6.

> The sea rose and fell against the rocks of the mole, making the fishing boats sway, [...]. The water was calm, with just a slight continual change of color, blue and black, darker and farthest away. I thought of the expanses of water like this, of the infinite grains of soft and sand down there at the bottom of the sea where the currents leave white shells washed clean by the waves.[107]

The sea is a possible and yet only temporary escape, just like in Eugenio Montale's poem "Meriggiare pallido e assorto" (1916-1922), "sea scales" "scaglie di mare" throbbing between the branches far-off in a pale and arid afternoon suggest a possible relief from an otherwise unexplained "male di vivere." In the same poem the "male di vivere" is embodied by red ants: "In the cracked earth or in the vetch, / watch the red ants' files/ now breaking up, now meeting/ on top of little piles."[108] While in Orpaz's works there is a striving for a metaphysical dimension that may lay beyond reality and nature, in *The Argentine Ant* Calvino formulates his idea of nature that excludes every metaphysical dimension and is focused on its blind cruelty:

> [*The Argentine Ant*] proposes a definition of *nature* and man's attitude toward it. ... I am interested above all in how we consider nature, which is much more important than any capitalism or other passing epiphenomena; but to our eyes nature presents herself as a mirror of history, in it we find the same cruel, monstrous reality that we find in the times in which we live (capitalism, imperialism, Nazism, the Cold War).[109]

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[107] Calvino, *The Argentine Ant*, 180-181.

[108] English translation: Eugenio Montale, *Collected Poems 1920-1954*, Bilingual edition translated and annotated by Jonathan Galassi (New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1998), 41. See also the original Italian: Eugenio Montale, *Tutte le poesie*, ed. Giorgio Zampa (Milano: Mondadori, 2000), 30: "Nelle crepe del suolo o su la veccia/ spiar le file di rosse formiche/ ch'ora si rompono ed ora s'intrecciano/ a sommo di minuscole biche." For the composition years of the poem see "Nota ai testi," in Ibid., 1061-1062.

[109] Calvino, *Letters 1941-1985*, 171. See also Serenella Iovino's discussion about this passage in quoted in Iovino, *Italo Calvino's Animals*, 9-10.

Calvino considers himself as someone who believes "in a relation of man-to-reality (reality understood in its complete sense, **nature** plus history."[110] Both quotes clarify why he considered *The Argentine Ant* a realistic story, since for him realism is a way to reflect about nature and history, whose main feature is cruelty. This brings about Calvino's second remark about the fantastic in his own works[111] and the passage deserves to be quoted in full:

> For me at the centre of narration there is not the explanation of an extraordinary fact, instead there is the *order* that stems from this extraordinary fact in itself and around it, the pattern, the symmetry, the network of images settling around it as it happens in the process of crystal formation.[112]

The ants' invasion and human suffering it brings about cannot be explained in full, but they establish an order, because in the end the whole neighborhood is absorbed in the fight against the ants with different approaches and methodology. Yet, this order remains the result of nature's blind cruelty. Calvino's appraisal of nature and its cruelty cannot but remind the reader of the "Dialogo della natura e di un islandese" from the *Operette morali* of Giacomo Leopardi, and especially Nature's answer to the Icelander's complaint:

> Did you ever think then that the world was made for you? It is time for you to know that in my designs, operations, and decrees, with very few exceptions, I never paid attention to the happiness or unhappiness of man. If in any possible way I make you suffer, I am unaware of the fact, with very few exceptions; in the same way, normally, I do not know whether I give you pleasure or prosperity. Furthermore, I did not do any such things nor actions, as you incline to believe, to please you or to help you. *Finally,*

[110] Ibid., 123.

[111] See above, 85.

[112] Calvino, "Definizione di territori: il fantastico," 267 (my own translation).

> *should I ever by any chance happen to cause the extinction of your species, I would not even notice* [emphasis mine].[113]

A philosophical idea of nature that is indebted to Lucretius *De rerum natura*, but also, nowadays, a warning we should all keep in mind.

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[113] Giacomo Leopardi, "Dialogo della natura e di un islandese," in *Poesie e prose*, ed. Rolando Damiani, vol. 2 (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1988), 76-83, 81 (my own translation): "Immaginavi tu forse che il mondo fosse fatto per causa vostra? Ora sappi che nelle fatture, negli ordini e nelle operazioni mie, trattone pochissime, sempre ebbi ed ho l'intenzione a tutt'altro, che alla felicità degli uomini o all'infelicità. Quando io v'offendo in qualunque modo e con qual si sia mezzo, io non me n'avveggo, se non rarissime volte: come, ordinariamente, se io vi diletto o vi benefico, io non lo so; e non ho fatto, come credete voi, quelle tali cose, o non fo tali azioni, per dilettarvi o giovarvi. *E finalmente anche se mi avvenisse di estinguere tutta la vostra specie, io non me ne avvedrei.*" [emphasis mine].

The Expression of Israeli Southern Periphery's Voices Through the Symbolism of Domestic versus Wild Animal

by *Ilanit Ben-Dor Derimian*

Abstract

This article focuses on the animal symbolism used for representing the local identity of the southern periphery in Israel. From an ecocritical point of view, the domestic and the wild animal images will be analyzed as expressions of different shades (domestication and wildness) in the category of Nature, on the Nature-Culture dichotomy. The anthropological research method of discourse analysis has been adapted here to review the domestic donkey's image in Sami Berdugo's novel, Donkey *(2019), and the discourse on the wild ass's image in the media and especially by activists from the Negev. While the representation of the two types of animals raises awareness of the existential problems of southern periphery's inhabitants, it also exposures nuances in their social status and the local identity reconstruction process.*

Introduction

Categorical Perception of Man and Animal in the Dichotomy of Nature versus Culture

Relationships between Man and Donkey in Sami Berdugo's Novel

The Donkey's Figure and the Israeli Society

The Focus on Marginality and Social Critique in Sami Berdugo's Literary Work

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A Search for Authenticity and a Sense of Belonging through the Relationship between Human and Animal Description

Representation in Public Discourse of the Wild Ass Rewilding in the Southern Open Spaces

The Project of Rewilding Animals in Israel - Ecology and Nationalism

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Local Identity Reconstruction through Public Discourse on the Wild Ass Presence in the Area of Mitzpe Ramon

Conclusion: Links between the Domestic Donkey's and the Wild Ass' Representations

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Introduction

The entire southern part of the State of Israel, which extends over 60 percent of its territory, can be perceived as a peripheral area, whose inhabitants are often considered more transparent and neglected by state institutions, compared to the hegemonic privileged center.[1] Recently, however, groups and agents from the south have raised their voices and been heard. These voices manage to create fluctuations in the prevailing attitudes towards the south. Although the desert continues to represent the oriental wild Other in comparison to the occidental cultivated Self on the categorical dichotomy between nature and culture,[2] it

[1] For a full overview of the development of the Negev's image and its representation in the context of center-periphery relations, see Ilanit Ben-Dor Derimian, *From the Conquest of the Desert to Sustainable Development: The Representation of the Negev in Public Discourse in Israel* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2021).

[2] According to the structuralist anthropological approach, binary thinking is at the base of human thought, and it is through this form of thinking that man defines his world in binary categories, see Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New-York: Basic Books, 2008 [1963]). The contrast to which the study refers, between "Culture" and "Nature," is part of the hierarchical dichotomies revealed by the postcolonial approach, as an expression of one primary dichotomy: The Occidental-Western "Self" versus the Oriental "Other," see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1978]).

gained an appreciated authentic Hebrew-ecological-image. That image competes with the forsaken image from the past of development towns and unrecognized Bedouin settlements. This shift in image is to be found mainly in southern areas of desert tourism that are remote and far from urban centers: for instance, around the town of Mitzpe Ramon, on the edge of the Ramon crater.[3] Yet it has also affected other southern localities' images, through the rise of cultural activity and the search for an authentic voice.[4] The question is how are these shifts in images expressed in the current public and literary discourse? How does the use of animal symbolism represent these shifted images? In previous studies, from an ecocritical approach, we followed the changes in the representation of the desert as the Other due to political changes and the penetration of ecological ideas. In this study, we will examine the representation of the nuances in the current perception of this otherness between different regions in the south, which cannot be generalized to include all its communities under one definition. Loyal to the ecocritical point of view, we chose to discuss, through anthropological discourse analysis, the domestic donkey and the wild ass representations in Israeli literature and media from the south. The reference to literature as an arena of social discourse stems from the perception of literary texts as influenced by the construction of social reality and at the same time as a source of influence on social construction.[5]
The animal figures will be analyzed in the context of the sub-division, through social construction, into human and animal categories, within the dichotomy of Nature versus Culture.

[3] For further details, see chapter 7 on Mitzpe Ramon in Ben-Dor Derimian, *From the Conquest of the Desert*, 160-190.

[4] For example, in Beer Sheva, Sderot, Dimona, and Yeruham (Ibid., 128-159).

[5] In accordance with the principles of sociocriticism which emphasizes the social context in which the text was written. Claude Duchet, ed., *Sociocritique* (Paris: Nathan, 1979); Ruth Amossy, "Sociocritique et argumentation: L'exemple du discours sur le 'déracinement culturel' dans la nouvelle droite," in *La politique du texte: enjeux sociocritiques. Pour Claude Duchet*, eds. Jacques Neefs and Marie-Claire Ropars (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1992), 29-50.

Categorical Perception of Man and Animal in the Dichotomy of Nature versus Culture

Various scholars have already referred to the dichotomy between nature and culture, which began with the development of Western culture in Ancient Greece, when "nature has been defined by way of contrast with or opposition to an antonym." [6] A paradoxical duality in this categorical division is perceived. [7] Although everything that is man-made is unnatural, man himself is a product of nature. That is, the category of Nature, on the one hand, contains man and on the other hand places man outside it, as one who observes nature and makes use of it.[8] The animal, too, for all its being a real physical entity, is a categorical construction of human ideas and concepts. It is perceived by man in his mind. Man is the one who defines and represents it, and in such a representation it constitutes a mirror image of himself.[9] In the same context, the art critic, John Berger,[10] traces the meaning of the fascination and nostalgia that underlies the relationship between modern man and the animal world. He observes the modern process of drifting away from nature: a cultural and physical process in which once ago "animals interceded between man and their origin because they were both like and unlike man,"[11] but have since then been completely pushed to the existential fringes of modern man and are disappearing from his life. Despite all this, however, Berger claims that it is not so easy to erase animals from the human imagination: "Sayings, dreams, games, stories, superstitions, the language itself, recall them [...]. The images are of animals *receding* into a wildness that existed only in the

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[6] Stanley Rosen, "Remarks on Human Nature in Plato," in *Philosophies of Nature: The Human Dimension*, eds. Robert S. Cohen and Alfred I. Tauber (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 151-162, 151.

[7] This paradoxical duality in the Man-Animal's categorical division was also mentioned by Noam Gal, "A Note on the Fictional Non-Human in Haviva Pedaya's *The Eye of the Cat*," *Mikan* 14 (2014): 395-417, 400-402.

[8] Tim Ingold, "Introduction," in *What is an Animal?*, ed. Tim Ingold (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 1-16.

[9] Bob Marvin and Garry Mullan, *Zoo Cultures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). See also: Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991) who claims that the animal serves as a mirror to the human structure, to maintain social norms.

[10] John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1980), 3-28.

[11] Ibid., 6.

imagination."[12] Within the space of imagination, in particular, man allows himself to play with the boundaries of this categorical division between culture and nature.

Beyond the fact that the categories at both ends of the dichotomy are not so distinct, in each category there are sub-categories. Mainly, we would like to address and analyze the sub-categories in animal representation, of the wild animal and the domesticated animal. The adjective "wild," which originated in Ancient Greece, expresses everything outside the city, the Polis, the embodiment of the civilized world, the expression of man's control over nature.[13] The "natural," in this classical conception, is "wild" and therefore unpredictable and irregular, while man acts to regulate nature and adapt it to his needs. In the case of the animal, the adjustment is made through training and domestication. The perception of the "wild" as "more natural" gives the "wild" a higher degree of authenticity, since it is not subject to social norms, compared to the domesticated animal. At the same time, the wild Other evokes ambivalent feelings of desire and fear, such as the ones that have been awoken towards the Bedouins who were perceived as part of the Other, the wild nature of the desert. We suggest a possible interpretation of the choice to present different socially constructed sub-categories of animals, the "wild" ass and the "domesticated" donkey, in the social discourse from the south. Let us first look at Sami Berdugo's literary work and his focus on the relationship between a man and a donkey.

[12] Ibid., 15-17.

[13] Stephen Scully, "The Nature of the Gods and Early Greek Poetic Thought," in *Philosophies of Nature*, eds. Robert S. Cohen and Alfred I. Tauber (Dordrecht; Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1998), 163-176.

Relationships between Man and Donkey in Sami Berdugo's Novel[14]

The Donkey's Figure and the Israeli Society

The donkey figure appears in numerous literary works in world literature. Shavit and Reinharz[15] explain in the introduction of their book their choice to dedicate a whole volume to the donkey's character in culture. They claim that unlike other personified animals in writings throughout history, the donkey's representation is not one-dimensional, but has several traits and represents the antinomies and strata in human existence. Among these antinomies the cultural researchers include, on the one hand, characters as sublime, revered, wise, strong, and good-hearted; and on the other hand, vicious, wicked, stupid, humble, and harmful.

The pursuit of the history of the donkey representation in Jewish sources and Hebrew literature reveals changes in Hebrew-Israeli society. The donkey appears numerous times in the Bible, mainly as a beast carrying a burden (Genesis 45: 23), but it has also been used by women to ride on (Joshua 15:18). It symbolizes wealth and honor, as in the case of Abraham (Genesis 12:16). Even the name "donkey" (*hamor* [חֲמוֹר]) in Hebrew stems from the same root (ח.מ.ר) as the word "matter" (*homer* [חוֹמֶר]) and symbolizes materiality. But riding a donkey is also considered a sign of humility, which is why the Messiah is also described as poor and riding a donkey (Zechariah 9: 9).

With the beginning of the Zionist enterprise in *Eretz Isra'el*, the Jewish pioneers adopted the native Bedouin's agricultural heritage, as well as the use of the donkey within it. The donkey figure had turned into an iconic animal of the Jewish agricultural settlement, rooted in the land of Israel. Thus, it is not surprising that the donkey appears in many literary works for children since the beginning of the twentieth century. The ideology behind this symbolic act is expressed in a later children's story (from 1966) by Leah Goldberg (1911-1970), *The Desert*

[14] Sami Berdugo, *Hamor* (*Donkey*) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2019).

[15] Yaacov Shavit and Jehuda Reinharz, *Hamoriyut – Massa' be-'iqvot ha-hamor – mitologiyah, 'allegoriyah, mitos we-cliché* (*The Donkey: A Cultural History: A Journey Through Myth, Allegory, Symbol and Cliché*) (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2014).

Adventure.[16] In this story, some children of Kibbutz Revivim in the Negev join their father, the archaeologist, on a tour to the Nabataean city of Shivta. On the way, they see Bedouins with a white donkey. The children admire the donkey and ask their father to buy it for the kibbutz's petting zoo, and the father immediately agrees and buys the donkey. Symbolically, there is a link between the donkey and the native Bedouin, from whom the Jewish settlers want to learn how to become the lords of the desert, by appropriating the animals that connect him to nature, whether it is the donkey or the camel. The Bedouin, in accordance with Zionist ideology, collaborates with these terms of trade and the power and dependency relations that follow. Other children's literary works formed an integral part of the cultural landscape of the pre-statehood period and were perceived as one of the characteristics of the new Zionist space. For example, in the story "The incarnations of Miri," by S. Yizhar (the pen name of Yizhar Smilansky, 1916-2006) published in the newspaper *Davar* for children in 1947, the description of the connection between Miri, the female donkey, and the society surrounding it, is used to point out the social changes in Eretz Isra'el society as a result of modernization and distancing from nature. These changes include the perception of Israeli society as being torn apart between East and West; tradition and modernity; and nativity and exile, in association with ideological tenets about agricultural work and the relations with the neighboring Arab society.[17]

The representation of the donkey figure allows us also to learn about hierarchical relations in society. A particularly representative case appears in the book *People in the Desert*.[18] Bedouin society is presented as a stereotypical and patriarchal one where the man rides the camel "as befits a strong man," while the woman, in an inferior position, rides the donkey "as befits a modest woman." The hierarchical division also appears in Nathan Alterman's poem from 1947, "*Miryam Bat Nissim*," which describes a large Yemeni family. This poem also points out the gender division and power relations between humans and animals, in situations

[16] Leah Goldberg, *Harpatqah ba-midbar* (*The Desert Adventure*) (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1966). This book was published first in Sweden in 1964 under the name "Eli lives in Israel," with photographs by Anna Rivkin, who visited Kibbutz Revivim in 1964.

[17] See this story on the Ben-Yehuda Project website, accessed June 21, 2023, https://benyehuda.org/read/23842.

[18] Jonathan Ben Israel, *'Anashim ba-midbar* (*People in the Desert)*, photographs by Ervin Farkash (Tel Aviv: Amihai, 1962).

where the family moves from place to place, and they leave in a hierarchical order. The daughter Miriam, who is the speaker in the poem, is the last to march after the rest of the family. The caravan is sealed by the little donkey Bil'am. Once more, the connection is revealed between the low status of women in the gender context and the donkey, as it represents the animal category at the margin of the hierarchical order.[19]

The Focus on Marginality and Social Critique in Sami Berdugo's Literary Work

In recent years, there has been a growing tendency to focus on animal figures in Hebrew literature, particularly in literature written from the periphery or about the periphery in the context of the marginality and transparency of life there.[20] The historical representations of the donkey in the Eretz Israeli social hierarchy can explain Sami Berdugo's choice to give this animal a central place in his novel, *Donkey* (2019), in the context of representing the periphery. The author presents the donkey as a submissive, sickly, and miserable animal, without any affinity with the ethos attributed to it, connected to wealth or the appearance of the Messiah. The donkey in the novel apparently suffers from the trauma of his past abuse and is in the process of dying. The human protagonist himself lives his life in neglect and in a marginalized existence in the periphery and is desperate after his unsuccessful empathetic attempts to save the donkey.

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[19] For further reading on the analysis of the donkey figure in Hebrew literary children's works, see: Uri Rozenberg, "Ha-hamor shel Leah Goldberg" ("Leah Goldberg's Donkey"), *Noshanot*, last modified December 1, 2021, https://prrozza.com/tag/אריה-נבון/.

[20] See, for example, the first prose book of Haviva Pedaya (born in 1957), *Be-'eyn ha-hatul* (*The Eye of the Cat)* (Tel Aviv: Am-Oved, 2008). We have referred to this literary work in other writings (see: Ben-Dor Derimian, *From the Conquest of the Desert*, 244-246) and it has received widespread attention from other researchers regarding raising awareness of the relationship between man and the environment in general and the southern and marginal periphery in particular. See Noam Gal, "A Note on the Fictional Non-Human in Haviva Pedaya's *The Eye of the Cat*," *Mikan* 14 (2014): 395-417. In Pedaya's book, stray cats serve as a metaphor for marginalized people in the south of the country.

Berdugo explains in an interview with the literary critic Yoni Livne[21] that his writing stems from the need to tell the story of people like him, because until he started writing he felt he had not found a character or voice in Israeli literature somewhat similar to his own: "I have not encountered stories that tell anything about my world, which can be called a peripheral world, or an Oriental world, or a world of immigrants."[22]

Berdugo is defined as a demanding writer, who asks his readers to strive and delve deeper into the layers of his literary work. The author has won the Brenner Prize and the Sapir Prize for Hebrew Literature of 2020 for writing this novel. The Sapir Prize Judging Committee stated some of its motivations:

> In a virtuosic and resolutely original language, with wisdom and courage, Sami Berdugo's *Donkey* sheds light on corners of abandonment and neglect in a way that has not been done before. [...] yet its characters remain in their foreignness and thus also maintain their independence. Writing that is pure being – moment by moment, alive and sharp.[23]

Indeed, Berdugo is known for inventing a unique writing style that also touches the margins while producing expressions and using sub-standard language that is consciously and intentionally mixed with high-standard language.

On the back cover of the novel, Berdugo's writing is compared to that of renowned Israeli writers, including S. Yizhar. Surely, it is impossible not to find a resemblance between Yizhar's literary works about the south[24] and this novel, both of which are influenced by *the Stream of Consciousness* writing style, while describing in great detail both the thoughts of their protagonists and the southern desert

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[21] Yoni Livne, "Re'ayon 'im Sami Berdugo, Hamor" ("An interview with Sami Berdugo, *Donkey*"), *Mitat Sdom*, accessed June 22, 2023, https://bedofsodom.wordpress.com/2019/12/10/ראיון-עם-סמי-ברדוגו-חמור/.

[22] Berdugo was born in 1970 to Moroccan parents. He grew up with his three brothers in Mazkeret Batya. He lost his father at the age of 13. He has so far published 9 literary works, between the years 1999 - 2019, for which he has won prestigious awards, such as the Levy Eshkol Literary Work Prize for the year 2006.

[23] "Sapir Prize for Literature," News, *la fleur's*, last modified February 4, 2021**,** https://lafleurs.com/news/2021/02/04/mifal-hapais-celebrates-20th-anniversary-of-the-sapir-prize-for-literature/.

[24] For example: S. Yizhar, *Yeme Tziqlag* (*Days of Ziklag*) (Tel-Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1989 [1958]).

landscape. In a second interview with Yoni Livne, Berdugo explains the choice to use this unique style:

> The introverted stories I tell, the use of the stream of consciousness and their wallowing language - are the product of my critical position as a writer. [...]. In the last decade, I have realized that I want to say my opinion concerning place and time, questions of identity, and cultural-linguistic aspects. Probably my way of demonstrating criticism is to create protagonists who have something distorted about them, as though they are the product of a defective place. They carry in their bodies the wounds of this space.[25]

In another interview on the occasion of the publication of his book with the poet Sarai Shavit, on the literary TV program *Shovrim Shurah*, of November 14, 2019, Berdugo refers to the social criticism of Israeli society that emerges from the novel. He claims that the protagonist decides to retire from all Israeli systems of life—social, political, economic, human, cultural, and historical, because he, as a writer, may be tired of them. Berdugo explains that one of the tragic characteristics of Ruslan, the book's protagonist, is that he seeks to shake off any category and at the same time also strives to be defined. Berdugo testifies that "in Ruslan's relationship with the donkey, there is an attempt to reach some state of correction or peace, to find the good in the very basic aspects of life."[26] We will follow the description of the relationship's evolution alongside Ruslan's developing ambition to express an authentic correct voice.

Description of the Plot and Ruslan's Connection to the Donkey

Ruslan Isakov, around 50 years old, born in Azerbaijan, has recently resigned from his job as a building engineer at the local planning and construction committee in

[25] Yoni Livne, "Re'ayon 'im Sami Berdugo be-'iqvot ha-zkhiyah ba-pras" ("An Interview with Sami Berdugo after Winning the Prize"), *Mitat Sdom*, accessed June 22, 2023, https://bedofsodom.wordpress.com/2021/03/05/ראיון-עם-סמי-ברדוגו-בעקבות-הזכייה-בפרס/comment-page-1/.

[26] The quotation is taken from the recording of the interview with Sarai Shavit, on the literary TV program *Shovrim Shurah*, of November 14, 2019.

Ashkelon and lives in isolation in a peripheral small locality, Bat-Hadar, near Ashkelon. There, in the neglected backyard of the modest housing unit he rents, he hides a donkey, which has been entrusted to him by the police, apparently after being abused by a delinquent teenager from the neighborhood, and it is not clear to whom it belongs. The book's plot unfolds over eight days in June 2018, a few weeks from the moment of Ruslan's encounter with the donkey, as a result of which Ruslan devotes himself to its care until it dies.

Throughout the book, the beast does not get a name and is called "donkey" (*hamor*) without a definite article. This naming according to the species category strengthens the donkey's anonymity, similar to that of Ruslan, the transparent protagonist. By avoiding giving the donkey a name with symbolic connotations, the author strives to present the materiality of the donkey's simple life, "the habit of a donkey. Simply a donkey."[27] In the interview with Yoni Livne, Berdugo explains the choice of the donkey, because the donkey, for him, "with all the catastrophes, the diseases, and the persecution, is an expression of the desire to return to matter,[28] to humanity, in the simplest sense of the word."[29] The novel's protagonist is drawn to this quality: "Perhaps because it is perceived by him as someone who knows nothing about his place and destiny [...], disciplined [...], this whole sight [...] has captured Ruslan."[30]

The description of Ruslan's encounter with the police, during the first meeting with the donkey, illustrates his identification with the animal, while Ruslan notices the resemblance between them when he looks "at donkey's fixes black eyes, that seemed opaque," and he interoperates in this gaze "that surrender by consent of Donkey, following which he also recognized his own submission in face of the police."[31]

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[27] Berdugo, *Donkey,* 15. All quotes from the novel have been translated by the author of this article (the novel has not yet been translated into other languages).

[28] As mentioned above, the name "donkey" in Hebrew stems from the same root as the word "material."

[29] Livne, "Re'ayon 'im Sami Berdugo*, Hamor.*"

[30] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 9.

[31] Ibid., 10-11.

This is a silent and languageless fateful partnership, presented in the exchange of glances between the two characters, between the man and the animal.[32] In this context, John Berger writes that an animal "does not reserve a special look for man. But [...] man becomes aware of himself returning the look."[33] Berger attaches special importance to the gaze of the animal, which is similar to the gaze of man and, at the same time, also completely separate from it. Indeed, in this novel, it appears that several times Ruslan tries to make eye contact with Donkey and fails to do so since Donkey's gaze is directed towards the ground[34] or his eyes are opaque.[35] Ruslan also assumes that Donkey "does not see too much, [...] because how does a donkey see? How does it perceive colors and shapes? Who knows?"[36] Towards the end of the novel, however, active eye contact is described and even Ruslan felt that Donkey speaks to him through the gaze.[37]

To the process of identifying the animal gaze as familiar, as Berger described it, it is worth adding the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's[38] distinction between the look and the gaze. According to Lacan, in the moment of looking there is a fixation and pause, for no reason, on any object, and only then does the subject's identification with the thing he sees takes place. The moment of gaze, on the other hand, is the moment when the subject sees his gaze returning to him from the object of his observation. The gaze returns to the observer, or, in other words, the subject is reflected in what he has chosen to observe.[39] This reflexivity, the return of the gaze, takes place because the subject sees in the object something of himself.

Throughout the novel, Berdugo expresses the human protagonist's identification with the donkey while observing it, at the same time transparent, detached, and indifferent. The protagonist's sense of marginalization is also expressed across the novel. At the beginning of the novel, the reader becomes aware of Ruslan's

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[32] Emphasis on the exchange of glances between Ruslan and Donkey appears several times in the novel. See for example ibid., 15 and 167.

[33] Berger, *About Looking*, 5.

[34] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 15.

[35] Ibid., 10.

[36] Ibid., 28.

[37] Ibid., 167.

[38] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar 6 of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1998 [1965]).

[39] Ibid.

preference for wandering the bypass road of the settlement in which he lives, walking idly on the marginal road. There he also feels "distant, and moreover - remote, and especially expelled, an outcast from life."[40] However, social margins and existential detachment do not ultimately lead Ruslan to dissipate, following his sensation of the "evaporation of life from his body,"[41] described at the beginning of the novel. On the contrary, as the literary critic, Yosef Oren[42] claims, the novel exposes a very present, material, and physical existence, which increases during the evolution of the relationship between Ruslan and the donkey. Ruslan is involved in taking care of the donkey's needs and becomes very active as a result—feeding and watering, cleaning and caring. The bad odors from Donkey's body did not deter Ruslan from giving him treatment either, because, in the face of the donkey's pile of fresh dung, Ruslan felt "upright in his life, living literally, with its proper purpose."[43] That is, caring for the donkey and its basic needs, also revives Ruslan's feeling of existence.

When one day, Steve, Ruslan's lover, comes to visit him and finds him in the yard with the donkey, Steve says to Ruslan: " 'You are here' " and for Ruslan this statement expresses what Steve thinks, that "this is how he is: marginal." Ruslan rebels against this perception, though, while thinking that in these words "Steve presents what is probably so incorrect in the backyard, neither 'you' nor 'here'." And he replies to Steve: " 'We are here'."[44] Precisely in the neglected backyard, the feeling of shame due to the awareness that others probably dislike someone living in this squalor with a donkey and even having an erotic relationship with it, is replaced by a sense of pride from the very choice to live life in its simplicity.

Donkey, as if planted in Ruslan's backyard, "so relaxed [...] integrates"[45] in an ongoing present, and serves as a model for Ruslan who also strives for a passive and peaceful present. But Ruslan doubts that he can reach this ideal existence. He contemplates: "And when will Ruslan be just a fact in his own eyes? For a long

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40 Berdugo, *Donkey*, 8.

41 Ibid.

42 Yosef Oren. " 'Hamor' – Rom'an retzini u-mefukakh shel Sami Berdugo" ("*Donkey* - A Serious and Sober Novel by Sami Berdugo"), *News1*, last modified September 11, 2021, https://m.news1.co.il/Archive/0026-D-150332-00.html.

43 Berdugo, *Donkey*, 167.

44 Ibid., 23.

45 Ibid., 7.

time, he has been filling the days and leaving them incomplete for himself. And that's not what he wants."[46]

Ruslan is fascinated by Donkey's indifference to its subordinate existence. He thus finds a resemblance to the state of his life, when he too continues to maintain the routine of life without any purpose, without rebellions. His only rebellion is his choice to shed the rituals of what is considered normative life. He felt that, like Donkey, he had no fear of life, because he had shed from himself every desire and every sense of belonging while trying to live an individual and independent lifestyle. In this context, on the Israeli cultural television program *Sokhen Tarbut*, broadcasted on December 22, 2019, Berdugo describes Ruslan as someone who "decided to exempt himself from all normative lifestyles and laws. He cuts himself from work, from people, from the past, from history, from a place, and tries to maintain some kind of individual, autonomous lifestyle,"[47] which may give rise to a sense of self-alienation as well as detachment from the environment. But, as Berdugo concludes: "Along with the alienation, hatred or, I would say, the rejection he has towards the spirit of the time and place in the Israeli present, [...] I think he is trying to find some points to hold on to."[48]

A Search for Authenticity and a Sense of Belonging through the Relationship between Human and Animal Description

Seemingly, in the present time of the plot, almost nothing happens in the reality surrounding the protagonist and the writer dwells on detailed descriptions of the protagonist's daily Sisyphean experience and his inner world. On the other hand, the novel also reveals in stages a constitutive trauma from the past, which has led to the experience of the protagonist's current detached existence. Through this oscillation between past and present, the Israeli experience is revealed in all its shades: the landscapes, the identities of individuals and different groups in society (immigrants from the USSR, religious streams and Mizrahi-Ashkenazi divisions), different economic classes and center-periphery positions.

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[46] Ibid., 15.

[47] *Sokhen Tarbut*, broadcasted on December 22, 2019.

[48] From an interview with Berdugo on the Israeli cultural television program *Sokhen Tarbut*, broadcasted on December 22, 2019.

Ruslan escapes the hopelessness of the northern periphery, namely Kiryat Yam, the most excluded neighborhood, as the narrator defines it,[49] where he grew up. Even after settling in the south, though, he still does not feel at home, and wonders "how long does it take for him to know in his feeling that the residential structure, which is now behind him, is permanent for him?"[50].

However, as already mentioned, from the beginning of the novel we are exposed to a metamorphosis that Ruslan experiences following the encounter with Donkey, when its presence for five weeks in Ruslan's yard evokes a certain optimism and vitality in Ruslan. He feels that "since Donkey entered the wild yard, every time Ruslan sees it, his independent freedom coalesces and becomes justified."[51] Ruslan feels more at home in the housing unit precisely because of his attention to the "backyard of the deserted garden,"[52] where Donkey resides. The wild authenticity of the garden is enhanced by the very attention to it. There, Ruslan recognizes the value of freedom in the wild and quiet nature: "The wind blows silently and there is no disturbance and no hint of overturning, so that liberty also gets to spread further, [...] the yard is sealed on the right and left and also in front thanks to the fleshy bright green colored leaves, joyful leaves."[53]

Through the connection with the donkey, Ruslan gains a re-connection to nature and authenticity, when he realizes that in his marginal housing unit's backyard, "what is perceived and seen naturally as backward is for him a forward, a kind of forward."[54] That is, the marginal wild backyard, which recalls the perception of the periphery as Israel's backyard, becomes the center of the stage. It is a symbol of a simple and authentic presence. As a result, Ruslan feels the undermining of the definitions between the periphery and the center in the face of the universal material existence as it is:

> Then the settlement of Bat Hadar [...] will disperse and evaporate from him, and further in the distance, Ashkelon too will disappear, and not out of contempt will these places be erased, but because Ruslan knows, for a

[49] Ibid., 60.
[50] Ibid., 17.
[51] Ibid., 16.
[52] Ibid., 17.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

> short time, who he is now in the presence of Donkey: he is a man alive, inside of life. Neither on the side of life nor above it, [...] and in his heart, it is said: I am therefore not alone in the world.[55]

The connection with Donkey seems to compensate for Ruslan's social loneliness and disgust with Israeli society. Indeed, his connection with the animal has therapeutic consequences. This therapeutic process happens almost against all odds, because the domesticated donkey is imprisoned in a small yard with a barren olive tree, which does not bear fruit. Moreover, the open spaces the protagonist reaches are the arid fields around the settlement, beyond which the presence of industrial civilization predominates. This ambivalent attitude, ranging from connecting to and moving away from authentic nature, gains more presence as the novel continues and the disease of Donkey progresses. Then, Ruslan feels helpless and is not sure whether he understands correctly how to treat the donkey. He feels the lack of communication between them, in their "mutual silence that could never be dispelled."[56] The feeling of disconnection that exists between him and nature is strengthened inside him. He recognizes his opaque attitude towards nature and of his own authenticity. Nevertheless, later on in the story, Ruslan feels strongly the existence of some communication between him and Donkey:

> The black eyes [...] are now completely open, wide open beyond their capacity, and they are not indifferent, they now lack their usual opaque childlike innocence, and they say something. The staring gaze of Donkey mumbles, speaks, hell yeah speaks.[57]

Ruslan interprets the message he reads in Donkey's gaze. He recognizes "the statement [...], in which the essence is hidden: I live as I should live."[58] If so, despite the feeling that nature is imprisoned and regulated, Berdugo describes a process of awakening to life in the periphery, through the connection to natural authenticity, represented by human-animal relations.

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[55] Ibid., 18.
[56] Ibid., 118.
[57] Ibid., 167.
[58] Ibid., 168.

Moreover, the author outlines throughout the novel the concept of southernness, which is not necessarily the same thing as the peripheral south of Israel. Although Ruslan and Donkey live in the peripheral "southern south,"[59] this space reflects the Israeli existence in general as an "unlighted southern country,"[60] since:

> After all, the nature that exaggeratedly dominates Ashkelon and its metastases in the southern district is in fact the character of the entire State of Israel and its annexations. Because where in this whole country is there a space where the sun does not reside - and reside there most of the hours of the day? Where is the sun really hidden and concealed so that the area should be called "Northern Israeli" or "Northern Palestinian"? There is no such thing; Here is a land-flooded entity of south. This is actually the place, this is its quality, which is not only geography.[61]

In fact, according to Berdugo's approach, the peripheral otherness has already permeated all corners of the country and beyond. It is similar to a process of desertification. This approach relates to the Global South theory, which focuses on geopolitical power relations in an era of globalization. The theory is based on the notion of the "South" as an epistemological position, with the aim of undermining the "Northern," i.e. European-American, hegemonic culture which claims to possess universal knowledge. Scholars in the social sciences have proposed instead the notion of knowledge of the South.[62] Southern knowledge, they argue, is knowledge created from the struggle of social groups that oppose centers of power and structures of global inequality. The global south approach looks for the particular knowledge of various communities, which are considered southern, not necessarily because of their position on the map—although the majority of these societies live in the Southern Hemisphere—but because of their

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[59] Ibid., 106.
[60] Ibid., 173.
[61] Ibid., 75.
[62] Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Sciences*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Theory from the South, or How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

economic and social dispossession from a position of power and knowledge in a globalized world.

In this context, this article joins the claims of Israeli social researchers regarding Israel as part of the Global South.[63] Berdugo, in a way, captured this idea of the possibility to identify Israel at some point as part of the Global South. In fact, Ruslan is described as someone who has recoiled from "a messy and slippery depletion" that "continues to plague the country, especially here, in the southern cities disguised as capitalists with great success."[64] This description intensifies the perception of Israeli society as a southern entity, depleted by the processes of Americanization. Likewise, Shaul Setter, in his introduction to a volume of 2021 that connects the south of Israel to the Global South theory, also refers to the perception of the south in Berdugo's novel: "It is not the 'second' (Southern) Israel versus the 'first' (Northern) Israel, because there is 'no such thing' as the latter. There is only Israel as South. Berdugo's book poses a nonreactive, non-antagonistic South. Peripheral but expanding."[65]

Following the Global South approach that undermines the hegemony of "northern" knowledge and emphasizes the importance of knowledge coming from the South, we find that Berdugo himself also offers in this novel an opportunity to think from the South, to listen to the peripheral southern authentic voices through the description of human-animal relations.

Representation in Public Discourse of the Wild Ass Rewilding in the Southern Open Spaces

The Project of Rewilding Animals in Israel - Ecology and Nationalism

Voices from the periphery are expressed differently in the context of public discourse regarding the efforts made since the 1970s by the Israel Nature and Parks

[63] See: Haviva Pedaya, "An essay about the South," *Theory and Criticism* 54 (2021): 115-134; Erez Tzfadia and Oren Yiftachel, "Urban Displaceability: A Southeastern Perspective," *Theory and Criticism* 54 (2021): 59-86.

[64] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 16.

[65] Shaul Setter, "Preface: On the Way to Thinking from the South," *Theory and Criticism* 54 (2021): 5-21, 6-7.

Authority (INPA)[66] to "return biblical animals" to their original natural habitats. It is considered part of a global effort to rewild animals. Indeed, since the 1970s, Israeli society has been influenced by international global processes, with the deterioration of the dominant Socialist Party's status and the penetration of liberal principles. Since then, the global ecological movement has gained power, and also in Israel, the influence of the environmental discourse has increased. Still, the discourse on the rewilding of biblical animals can also be viewed from a national level, as part of the State of Israel's efforts to legitimize the Jewish presence in this region of the Middle East, by strengthening the idea of the historical continuity of the Jewish people's presence in the region from biblical times to the present day. It is clear, though, that for the INPA, the ecological-scientific argument is important, as explained on the Authority's website, in a page dedicated to describing the international project, posted on March 3, 2022. It is stated that the goal of the project is to bring back to the area animals that have disappeared from the local landscape. As part of the project, several extinct species were brought from abroad and released to nature, including the oryx and the Persian fallow deer. In the present article, we will focus on the release of the *Asiatic wild ass* (*onager*) into the Negev region.

The Onager/ Asiatic Wild Ass - Myth and Public Discourse

The Asiatic wild ass is also known as the onager (in Hebrew: *Pere'* [פרא]) and its scientific name is *Equus hemionus.*[67] The onager is indeed described in numerous verses in the Bible. In these descriptions, the image of a wild free animal is already emphasized, galloping in space with its enormous power and speed, unreachable for man and therefore impossible to restrain and tame. It is the complete opposite of the image of the domesticated donkey. In fact, the adjective which represents the notion of "wildness" is also named "*Pere'.*" Accordingly, the image of the onager in the Bible is used to describe situations of complete freedom and power. For example, the prophet Jeremiah describes the sinful people of Israel as the

[66] The Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) was established by a government decision in 1964 with the aim of protecting nature and cultivating natural reserves in the country.

[67] "Asiatic wild ass," *Britannica*, accessed June 22, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/animal/Asiatic-wild-ass.

onager, who obeys no authority and is eternally galloping after the lusts of its heart (Jeremiah 2: 24). This image has permeated Zionist and Israeli cultures. The onager which roams today in the open spaces of the Negev fits perfectly into the image of the wild landscapes of the desert, which are the symbol of complete freedom and biblical authenticity.

The narrative of recovering the biblical land is amplified by informational materials distributed by the INPA, which convey a sense of 'pride' because of the project's success, with about 300 onagers currently roaming in the Negev. For example, in a film produced by the INPA that was released on its website on February 12, 2021, the project is presented solemnly and respectfully. Against the background of western music and photographs of desert animals in the Hai-Bar Yotvata wildlife reserve, the director of the reserve between 1982 and 1990 transmits the history of the project to several young INPA workers standing around him and listening attentively to him. The film reveals photos and historical archival videos of the release of the wild ass and its adaptation to the open space, which highlight the historical importance of the project.

Nevertheless, the onager that was released eventually in the Negev does not match exactly the subspecies described in the Bible, since this species has long since become extinct, mainly due to hunting activity. [68] Since the extinct Syrian subspecies could not be brought in, two related subspecies were imported to Israel from Iran and Europe in 1968: the Iranian and Turkestan wild asses. Through a process of hybridization, a new subspecies was created in the Hai-Bar wildlife reserve of Yotvata, which is the wild ass that was released into nature between 1982 and 1987. So, even the rewilded onager is not exactly "natural," but was assembled by man through his scientific and technological capabilities. These onagers are larger than those who lived in the Negev before. Scientists estimate that as a result, they do not have natural predators in the area, as they had in the past, and so they reproduce in an uncontrolled manner.[69] This fact leads us to discuss the current

[68] The Syrian wild ass became extinct in the area in the 1930s. It is the subspecies that fits all the characteristics described in the verses of the Bible. See: Zohar Amar, "Pere' ve-hamor vu-mah she-beinehem" ("Onager and Donkey – and how to Distinguish between them"), *Leshonenu* 76 (2014): 265-283.

[69] According to the ecologist Shirley Bar-David, in her lecture at The Negev Highland LTSER platform conference (Mitzpe Ramon, October 28, 2021), where she referred to the issue of the wild ass restoration .

public discourse about the wild ass in the Negev, where on the one hand, there is admiration for the success of the project, and on the other hand fear of the consequences of the animals' uncontrolled number currently roaming free in the region.

For scientists and INPA personnel, the onager rewilding operation has been a huge success. After several decades, it is evident that their presence has had a positive effect on the ecosystem in which they live.[70] The discourse that supports species restoration is also reflected in the press, where articles are praising this phenomenon. For example, in an article written by Erez Erlichman, published in the *y-net* online newspaper on May 30, 2009, the headline already heralds the national ideology: "Returning to the ancient sources" (in Hebrew: "*Hozrim la-meqorot*").[71]

On the other hand, some articles publish the failed results of these restoration operations. For example, in an article published on December 5, 2007, on the *y-net* website, the same journalist, Erez Erlichman, announces in the title that "In less than a week, 12 rewilded Persian fallow deer died" (in Hebrew: "*Tokh pahot mi-shavua' metu 12 yahmorim she-shuhreru la-teva'*") after their return to nature several months earlier. This type of article is consistent with the criticism of the phenomenon by various international bodies, including ecological ones, on the grounds that it is precisely such an intervention in nature that can cause more harm than good. Some scientists warn that there is not enough information about the consequences and fear the possibility of conflicts between humans and animals, especially when it comes to predators released into nature.[72]

Indeed, farmers in the Negev region see the successful results of this project as a serious problem for the region. They do admire the successful way in which the wild ass was absorbed in the open spaces of the Negev and enjoy the authentic sensation it evokes, and that fact that it promotes their desert tourism enterprises.

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[70] This opinion was expressed by both Zehava Sigal from the INPA and the ecologist Shirley Bar-David at the same conference on the subject (see the footnote above).

[71] See other articles, such as: Noa Haslovizer, "Teivat Noah ha-modernit: mi-sakanat hakhadah le-hashavah la-teva' " ("The modern Noah's Ark: From endangered to return into nature"), *y-Net*, March 22, 2018. Accessed June 22, 2023, https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5182107,00.html.

[72] Tzafrir Rinat, "Ha-hayot she-ha-teva' lo' noten la-hen hizdamnut shniyah" ("The animals nature does not give a second chance"), *Haaretz*, March 11, 2016.

However, they complain that the onagers are destroying their property and crops, and they fear that the problem will get worse due to the rapid pace of their proliferation. These claims by the farmers are emphasized in the media[73] and are raising public awareness of the issue.

In the public discussion that arose about how to deal with the phenomenon of the onager's proliferation, various factors and bodies in Israeli society are involved, such as the farmers, the Bedouins, the other residents, the scientists, and the state institutions. Through this discussion on the human-animal relationship, which we already started to present in this sub-chapter, it is possible to examine the voices of different social bodies involved in the process of reconstructing the local identity of the area.

Local Identity Reconstruction through Public Discourse on the Wild Ass Presence in the Area of Mitzpe Ramon

In our previous studies, we have referred to the concept of a continuously reconstructed "spatial local identity," a term coined by the Finnish geographer Annsi Passi.[74] Beyond the identity of a specific territory, which is defined through educational systems and cultural institutions, lies the inhabitants' regional identity, the "regional consciousness," which refers to the identities given to the region within civil society, through the regional activism of social agents. It is also possible in the context of environmental struggles to address the issue from an ecological direction through a parallel concept, that of the "socio-environmental imagination,"[75] which is the attempt by social groups to design a space as a healthy

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[73] See: Roi Chiki Arad, "Ha'im ha-pra'im she-Hu'alu le-Isra'el me-Iran hem tiqvat har ha-Negev o ason eqologi" ("Are the onagers brought to Israel from Iran the hopes of the Negev or an ecological disaster?"), *Haaretz* December 20, 2017; Erez Erlichman, "Pere' ve-Adam: Ha'im ha-haqla'im ve-ha-pra'im yatzlihu lihyot yahad?" ("Wild and Human: will the farmers and the onagers manage to live together?"), *y-Net*, March 7, 2019. Accessed June 22, 2023, https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5473121,00.html; Shahar Rezkin, "Ha-pra'im ba'im" ("The onagers come"), *Kenes-Media*, April 28, 2021. Accessed June 22, 2023, https://kenes-media.com/קו-למושב/פרא-חמור-בר/.

[74] Anssi Paasi, "Europe as a Social Process and Discourse: Considerations of Place, Boundaries and Identity," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 8, no. 1 (2001): 7-28.

[75] Diana K. Davis, *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011).

environment with positive and normative values. Thus, the onagers can also be perceived not only as the subject of scientific research but as part of the political ecology of the region and the socio-environmental imagination.[76] Indeed, as described in our previous studies,[77] with the establishment of the state, the construction of local identity relied on the socio-environmental imagination of the region following the anthropocentric Zionist project of the 'conquest of the wilderness.' In the 1970s, though, with the penetration of environmental ideas, as was described before, the socio-environmental imagination began to change in the direction of landscape conservation and the return of animal species to nature. New migrants came to Mitzpe Ramon from the privileged Center, with an agenda of seeking to return to nature and establishing ecological ventures, after winning tenders for the creation of agricultural and tourist farms. They contributed to a change in the construction of the local identity, to the point that today Mitzpe Ramon is defined as 'the desert eco-tourism capital of the Negev.' In this paper, we claim that the discourse on the process of rewilding the wild ass is also part of the power relations to gain legitimacy in the region, which redefine or reinforce the local identity.

A television reportage by Yigal Mosko, "Onager, man" (in Hebrew: "*Pere', adam*"), on *Channel 12*, which was broadcast on August 30, 2019,[78] discussed the project of returning the wild ass to the Negev desert. First, the reporter quoted the well-known biblical verse in which the onager appears, in the book of Job (39: 5): "Who hath sent out the wild ass free?"[79] The rhetorical question conveys God's pride in this wild beast he created. Next, farmers told stories of trying to stop the onager from entering the agricultural lands, but without success, because of their great strength. One of the farmers told of his first encounter with an onager, how he tried to send it away using a broomstick, and how the onager simply broke it. Another farmer explained that he tried installing all possible types of fences, including an electric one, but no fence could stop the onagers. The farmers also

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[76] The political ecologist, Miri Lavi-Neeman, referred to these aspects in her lecture at a conference of the Arava Institute, held in Mitzpe Ramon on October 28, 2021.

[77] Ben-Dor Derimian, *From the Conquest of the Desert to Sustainable Development*.

[78] See the reportage on the *Mako* website, accessed June 22, 2023, https://www.mako.co.il/news-channel2/Friday-Newscast-2019_q3/Article-a3ce72e2253ec61026.htm.

[79] "Job 39:5, King James Version," *Bible Gateway*, accessed June 22, 2023, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job%2039%3A5&version=KJV.

pointed out the danger of the encounters with these animals on the roads. In an article published on April 2021 in the newsletter of the kibbutzim and moshavim portal,[80] the reporter quotes one of these farmers, who complains about car accidents that caused serious damage to both humans and animals. He recounts his personal experience and emphasizes the helplessness he felt as a result of this inevitable encounter with this wild and fast beast.

Still, despite the damage this animal has inflicted on farmers, they marvel at its strength and might. Overall, although it causes economic damage to the farmland, it encourages tourism to the area through the reinforcement of the authentic wildlife area's ethos, which brands the area as a unique place for desert tourism.

Yigal Mosko's television's reportage of, "Onager, man," intensifies the image of a wild area while comparing it to the nature reserves of Africa. The reporter invites the public to take advantage of the comfortable access to this national 'safari,' within a driving distance from home, as the title of the reportage states: "This is not Africa, this is here in the Negev" (in Hebrew: "*Zeh lo' Afriqah, zeh ka'n ba-Negev*"). At the same time, the reportage pretty quickly moves to show the complaints of the farmers and those of the Bedouins. In this respect, human-animal relations create a possibility of cooperation between different social groups to establish a local identity that will suit different groups of inhabitants. This is so because, alongside this frame story of rewilding animals, images and representations of the region emerge, and with them the attempt to influence its identity and the perception of who belongs there. Since the region is identified with the Nature category, within the dichotomy between Nature and Culture, the debate is ultimately related to human categorical thinking that following contemporary ideologies establishes what is included in the category of Nature ("wild") in this region and what is excluded ("domestic"). In fact, the discourse around the rewilding of the wild ass also contributes to the recategorization of populations perceived as strongly related to nature, such as the farmers who cultivate the land and the traditional nomadic Bedouins. In the latter's case, their agricultural activity is considered by the INPA as interfering with the natural ecosystem's stability. Thus, they are shifted towards the domestic category, while their legitimacy to influence decisions related to the Nature category is reduced.

[80] Rezkin, "The Onagers Come."

It is interesting to mention INPA's position on farmers in the area, as reported by Roi Chiki Arad in his article published in *Haaretz* in December 2017. [81] This position is presented by Dr. Assaf Tzoar, the ecologist of the Southern District, who claims: "There is very little vegetation in the desert, and on the opposite, agriculture runs lots of water into the area, which becomes very green. Naturally, it will attract wildlife. The availability of food increases the number of animals, so more animals cause more harm."[82]

By using this discourse, the INPA ecologist seems to place some of the blame for the uncontrolled reproduction of the onagers on the farmers who are violating the natural ecological balance. Nevertheless, he also claims that "we work with the farmers" to find a solution to minimize the damage. At the same time, it is harder to find solutions for Bedouin farmers. The redefinition of the region's identity based on the onager as the ultimate animal symbol reflects the political struggle between the Bedouins and the institutions of the state. For the state's institutions, the project of rewilding biblical animals is the perfect expression of the historical continuum of the ongoing Jewish presence in the area from the heroic period of the mythical biblical times. This expansion of the heroic biblical period is enhanced by the wild, powerful, liberated symbolism of the onager, which humans have failed to domesticate and subdue.

The policy of bringing biblical animals back into the landscape changes it, and at the same time connects Jews to their homeland and outlaws the practices of the Bedouins and the animals they own. [83] Thus, the camel, the animal most identified with Bedouin culture and with wanderings in the desert, is not defined as a local animal by the INPA members. On the contrary, it is tagged as a domestic animal that was artificially imported into the Negev desert by the Arab population and harms the region's ecosystem. [84] In this struggle, one can see a symbolic attempt by the authorities to downplay the Bedouin's share in the local identity and even exclude them from such an identity, by also strengthening the image of

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[81] Arad, "Ha'im ha-pra'im".

[82] Ibid.

[83] Irus Braverman, "Wild Legalities: Animals and Settler Colonialism in Palestine/Israel," *PoLAR* 44, no. 1 (2021): 7-27.

[84] Adalah's News, "Adalah Demands Israel end its Discrimination against Bedouin and Camel Herders," *Adalah* (The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel) website, last modified June 14, 2020, https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/10034.

the Bedouins as law violators. This approach is reflected in the reportage of Yigal Mosko,[85] that addresses this perception and the fact that the Bedouins were recently fined for keeping camels in the Negev. The Bedouin's representative in the reportage, who owns a tourist campsite in the region, resents this and claims that the Bedouin himself is part of nature and that the authorities have forgotten that. He accuses the authorities of not taking care of the proper balance of nature and not bringing alongside the onagers a predator that could prey on it and dilute its spread. By using this discourse, it seems that he is trying to elevate back the status of the Bedouins to people who are closer to nature and know better how to maintain the ecological balance there. The shared opposition of Jewish and Bedouin farmers to the uncontrolled breeding of the onagers in the area creates a common identity for them, of locals who know their environment better than foreign elements who do not respect the place and do not consider the needs of the local population.

Despite the ambivalent relationship between humans and animals in this debate, conflicting opinions on the subject in the name of different interests, and a sense of hopelessness, it is precisely this debate that generates renewed attention to the area containing such exotic animals. The public discourse on the subject reinforces the perception of the desert as a place where one can still be impressed by wild nature, and where authentic close-to-nature Jewish and Bedouin inhabitants have local knowledge of the region and collaborate to reconstruct their local identity.

Conclusion: Links between the Domestic Donkey's and the Wild Ass' Representations

In the existing literature on relations between the periphery and the center, the periphery is often referred to as one piece. In this paper, we have shown, through an ecocritical approach, nuances in the characterization of identities and lifestyles in the periphery by reviewing the representation of human-animal relations. We have used different representations of animals and human-animal relations in literature and public discourse. These representations reflect the different

[85] Mosko, "Onager, Man."

reconstructions of local identity in different peripheral regions, on the continuum between proximity to nature ("wild animal") and distance from it ("domestic animal"). The differences in images between the wild ass and the domestic donkey represent the two sub-categories of the different identities that are being built in the periphery.

On the one hand, in the far southern periphery, in the depths of the desert, the locals manage to overcome the transparent marginal image. They are constructing an image of a coveted place, with a powerful wildlife and brave inhabitants fighting for their place against and alongside biblical wild animals. On the other hand, Berdugo's donkey is presented as a disciplined, non-fighting animal, suitable for life in the urban periphery, closer to the center, whose inhabitants are still struggling to define their identity and find their authentic voice. However, it is possible to recognize in this discourse the perception according to which the authentic and coveted desert image in the style of Mitzpe Ramon, could also permeate the urban periphery in the Ashkelon area and the development towns in the Negev. This tendency is expressed in Berdugo's novel when the novel's protagonist, Ruslan, imagines a different end for Donkey. According to this illusion, if he had acted like a wild animal and used his power to fight for his freedom, he would have survived:

> The donkey has power. If only it wished to use it with one of the stiff hooves at the bottom of its thin, athletic leg [...] things would be different. And he wished he could see this all, [...] and also how Donkey goes then, leaves, jumps with a donkey's speed, imitates the skips of an Israeli deer and hurries on the road, vanishes in the field, disappears into his life and ... all of these things Donkey did not do, because he did not kick.[86]

This description fits the message that emerges from the plot of Ruslan's own search for authenticity and vitality. Throughout the article, we saw how both in the novel and the journalistic texts, the symbolism of the human-animal relations illustrates the social status of the inhabitants and even paves the way for a

[86] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 78.

pronunciation of knowledge coming from the south that permits social change and a solid local identity.

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Man, Interrupted: Abjection, Animality and Agency in Donkey *by Sami Berdugo*

by *Riki Traum*

Abstract

Donkey's presence is an essential characteristic of the Israeli Palestinian landscape. This essay addresses the donkey as an agent of a subjectivity that has been denied by the Israeli establishment, through a reading of Sami Berdugo's novel, Donkey *(2019). The essay examines the political functionality and biopolitical significance of the donkey as a metaphor, companion, and scapegoat. I argue that Berdugo portrays the donkey as the agency that enables a transition from object/other to subject. This subjectivity is built on human/animal continuity and fluidity; in his novel, Berdugo collapses the boundaries between his protagonist and Donkey and renders what in life resists power, domination, and eventually the different forms of death. The essay analyzes the alternative sociopolitical matrix that Berdugo portrays in which animality mobilizes a change; it also examines Berdugo's literary strategy of "interrupting" the hegemonic cultural tyranny that has established, for years, rigid boundaries between humans and animals and by that denies freedom. Berdugo challenges "accepted" categories such as heteronormative sexuality, masculinity, and standard Hebrew through abjection and perversion; he "interrupts" and teases out the tyrannies of sexual and gender normativity by questioning and queering heteronormativity. Challenging the "accepted" and revealing its under-the-surface wounded matrix, is a literary concern that Berdugo has had for a long time; however, in* Donkey *he criticizes the Israeli tragic biopolitical condition, and he also challenges the narrator's traditional stance. The essay discusses ecological and biopolitical issues that reveal the tragedy of both humans and donkeys in Israel, and particularly in the southern periphery. Reading the Israeli reality through the human-cum-donkey prism renders the neglected peripheries as an alternative Israeli existence, which forms the sociopolitical subtext of Berdugo's novel. It is here, in the periphery of mental and material poverty, that Berdugo insists on the very idea of life.*

Introduction

Part I

"Life Doesn't Keep Its Promise": The Tragic Life and Death of Human-Donkeys

Ecological Tensions: The Force of Life

Donkey as Agent

Part II

Naked, Limp, and Perverse: The Abject as Interruption

Masculinity, Interrupted

Hebrew, Interrupted

Conclusion: Canon, Interrupted

Introduction

> "And if there were not the donkey to keep Abraham company it would be infernal. But there is the donkey. The animal [...] who puts a limit on abandonment."[1]

Donkeys physically and metaphorically traverse the Israeli Palestinian landscape. In Hebrew and Israeli literature, the donkey is often Othered;[2] in some cases, the

[1] Hélène Cixous, "Writing Blind: Conversation with the Donkey," in *Stigmata*, Hélène Cixous (London-New York: Routledge, 1998), 115-125, 118.

[2] Palestinian artists tend to anthropomorphize the donkey. See for example Mahmud Darwish in Simon Bitton and Elias Sanbar, dir., *Mahmud Darwish: As the Land in Language* (France, 1997),

donkey is depicted as a contemptible animal, whose inferiority maintains the human/animal distinction and through that the binary oppositions of inferiority/superiority, abuser/abused, mindfulness/mindlessness, as well as binary heteronormative ideals of masculinity/femininity.[3] The donkey is a trope that carries sociocultural perceptions, and at the same time, it is a beast that is denied a proper sociocultural space. In these representations, the donkey exemplifies a tragic and ongoing codependency between human and animals, one that has engendered a humanist approach that anthropomorphizes the donkey's suffering, and a non-humanist approach that uses the donkey as a strategy of othering and dehumanizing individuals by likening them to donkeys. Since the prevailing tendency among both humanists (who anthropomorphize the donkey) and non-humanists (who animalize people) is to avoid any critical study of the politicality of the donkey that represents, perhaps more than any other animal, Israel's conflictual sociopolitical matrix, it is this politicality that concerns me the most, and that has given rise to this essay. This is my first objective: to decipher

documentary; Talia Lakshmi Kolluri, "The Good Donkey", *The Common* 21 (Amherst, MA: Amherst College, 2021), accessed June 5, 2023, https://www.thecommononline.org/the-good-donkey/; Mahmoud Shukair, *Me, My Friend, and the Donkey*, trans. by Anam Zafar (Ramallah: Tamer Institute for Community Education, 2016). An exception case is Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist,* trans. by Salma K. Jayyusi and Trevor LeGassick (Northampton: Interlink Books, 2003). I will return to this work in my conclusion where I draw a poetic, aesthetic, and political comparison between Habiby's book and Berdugo's *Donkey*.

[3] In his letter of October 1, 1906, David Ben-Gurion wrote to his father in Pinsk about the emerging Hebrew culture and its national revival: the Hebrew signs in every shop, the Hebrew speech in the streets [...] Here is a young Hebrew boy galloping a fast horse with confidence, a Hebrew girl is riding a donkey. In Yaacov Shavit and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Donkey; A Cultural History: A Journey through Myth, Allegory, Symbol and Cliché* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2014), 153. I refer here, however, to writers who used the trope of the donkey to contend with or avoid the political significance of the animal or present it as a kind pet. Examples are Leah Goldberg, "The Donkey," in *What Do the Does Do* [Hebrew] (Sifriyat Poalim: Ankorim, 1949); Eliezer Steinbarg and Hamor-Hamoratayim *Project Ben-Yehuda* [Yiddish], trans. by Hanania Raichman (1954), accessed June 5, 2023, https://benyehuda.org/read/16314; Gershon Shofman and Braying Donkey, *Project Ben-Yehuda* [Hebrew] (1960), accessed June 5, 2023, https://benyehuda.org/read/35902. Exceptions might be S. Yizhar, Miri's Metamorphosis, in *Davar for Children*, ed. Yitzhak Yatziv (Tel Aviv: 1947), 26-27; Yosl Birshteyn, *Between the Olive Trees* (1954), trans. Adi Mahalel, accessed June 5, 2023, https://iberzets.org/arttranslation/%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%95%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%9F%D7%90%D7%99%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%A8%D7%98%D7%9F/. An interesting critical stance regarding the donkey is presented in a short film by Shira Geffen and Etgar Keret, dir. *And What about Me* (Israel: Israeli Cinematheque, 2012,).

and foreground the political functionality of the donkey through a reading of Sami Berdugo's groundbreaking novel, *Donkey* (2019),[4] for which he received in 2020 Israel's two most prestigious literary awards: the Sapir Prize and the Brenner Prize. As a point of departure, my essay examines Berdugo's major practices of first reframing the Israeli sociopolitical matrix by shifting the focus onto its environmental issues that narrate the biopolitical tragedy of both humans and donkeys. Second, he portrays the donkey as an agent of a new subjectivity; the donkey turns the status of the protagonist into that of a subject. I read Berdugo's novel as a striking foregrounding of a human-cum-donkey subjectivity that rewrites the Israeli southern periphery. In that sense, *Donkey* both aligns with and deviates from Berdugo voluminous body of work that includes collections of short stories and the seminal novels, *And Say to the Wind* (2002), *That Is to Say* (2010), *Land upon an Ongoing Tale* (2014), *Because Guy* (2017), and *All Five of Us* (2022). While Berdugo is interested in the mental-cum-physical exposure of his characters, one should note the proximity of his often painful and repulsive exposure to carnal and sexual pleasure.[5] In his work, suggestive sexuality and ill bodily conditions not only correspond to the mental climate of the plot, but they are also anchored in the author's relationships with the troubling contemporality of the state of Israel and its social-peripheral agony. In *Donkey*, however, the animal's presence reveals a biopolitical aspect of Berdugo's tormenting relationship with Israeli society, *one that must be released through animality to counter the inherent binaries that the national ethos (like any other national ethos) aims at perpetually recreating.* This binary system sets ontological boundaries between human/animal, but also (perhaps mainly) between the Self or the individual realm and what happens "outside" of this individual realm, a virtual-cum-palpable zone that Hannah Arendt calls "the world" or "the public space."[6] In *Donkey*, Berdugo teases the

[4] Sami Berdugo, *Hamor* (*Donkey*) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2019). All (English) translations from Hebrew are by the author, unless stated otherwise.

[5] Hanna Soker-Schwager, "His Breaths in the Flesh of Words: Bodily and Linguistic Spares in *Because Guy* and *And Say to the Wind* by Sami Berdugo," in *Spare Thoughts: Superfluity in Hebrew Literature 1907-2017* [Hebrew], ed. Soker-Schwager (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press), 342-394, 342.

[6] Miguel Vatter, "Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt," *Revista De Ciencia Politica* 26, no. 2 (2006): 137-159, 146. Arendt's conceptualization of animality both informs and inspires my writing on Berdugo. The preservation of animality in men is a political interest that allows

power to deny life to the point of animality; he presents a protagonist whose allegedly (insignificant) life becomes meaningful (or full of life) because of his donkey. The protagonist whose relationship with his donkey evolves around intimate arousal and disgust, condescension and submissiveness, is inevitably doomed to become his donkey, to share his virtual-cum-palpable piece-of-life with the animal. It is also through donkey, however, that Berdugo identifies that what resists this domination in life also resists death. If donkeys' life and thus human-donkeys' life are the target of political power and domination, then these human-donkeys "must be capable of becoming the subject [...] of resistance to domination."[7] I rely here on an approach whose "indistinction" is borrowed from Gilles Deleuze, Donna Haraway, Giorgio Agamben, Rosi Braidotti, and Matthew Calarco,[8] all of whom question the ways in which the human/animal continuities are portrayed "as running unidirectionally from human to animal—why aren't continuities sought in the other direction?"[9] In this regard, I am inspired by Agamben who,

> Instead of reinforcing traditional human/animal distinctions or searching for new versions of the anthropological difference, [...] argues that we should aim to stop this machine and try to think more carefully about the *indistinction* of human and animal life [. . .] What kind of politics might emerge beyond the exclusion of human animality and the biopolitical shaping of "proper" humanity? What practices might correspond to a life

domination, according to Arendt. See Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1978).

[7] Vatter, "Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt," 145.

[8] Gilles Deleuze, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003); Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Matthew Calarco, *Thinking Through Animals* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

[9] Calarco, *Thinking Through Animals*, 50.

> in which "human" and "animal" are no longer sharply delimited and separated?[10]

I suggest reading Berdugo's literary practice as a set of "interruptions"[11] to the hegemonic cultural tyranny: Berdugo breaks what he calls, "the as-accepted"[12] that is also of a biopolitical nature. By interruptions I refer to Berdugo's authorship, but also to the struggle that his protagonist is situated in, between the desire to overcome normativity (or to "interrupt" it) and at the same time, to engage with it.

How, then, Berdugo does this in *Donkey*? The protagonist and his donkey continuously negotiate with and respond to environmental challenges; environmental precarities and considerations underlie the novel and rewrite the social matrix of the southern periphery. In the first part of my essay, I outline the novel's reframing of the Israeli sociopolitical matrix through an alternative one in which the donkey is the agent of change. Out of the peripheral mental and material poverty and through the donkey, Berdugo extracts life. To better understand the type of social matrix that Berdugo shapes, his plot should be conceived as one that is "interrupted," through which the passive object of domination (and death) wrestles the active subject of freedom (and life).[13] In the second part, I analyze the novel's set of "interruptions"; *Donkey* shows how these "interruptions" in fact constitute the (tragic) Israeli "biopolitical condition." With Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection as my lens,[14] I will examine Berdugo's use of abjection to "interrupt" Israeli identity through its animalization. I then show how Berdugo

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[10] Ibid., 54. Agamben uses the anthropological machine to describe a (political) mechanism that fabricates, reproduces, maintains, and perpetuates the human/animal distinction.

[11] By interruptions I invoke Bonnie Honig's critical practice in her alternative reading of *Antigone* by Sophocles. Honig writes, "As a social practice [...] interruption postulates both equality, as when two people interrupt each other to knit together a conversation in tandem, and inequality as one party must yield the floor, as it were, to the other." Honig presents her reading as posing as an interruption [...] a hybrid that seeks agonistically to engage with prior operations of this powerful text [*Antigone*], and to overcome some of them see Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 13.

[12] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 125.

[13] Vatter, "Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt," 145.

[14] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

breaks codes of masculinity and heterosexuality, as extensions of the hegemonic order. Finally, I explain how in *Donkey,* Berdugo "interrupts" standard speech—in fact, the very act of speech itself—as part of the eco/biopolitical tensions that the novel renders. Berdugo's linguistic performance "interrupts" the linguistic matrix of the novel, but it also undermines the type of political human-life that denies this performance. In this context, the paratexts[15] of the novel, including its chapter-headings, linguistic registers, the interplay among Hebrew, Arabic, and English, the epilogue, and even Berdugo's interviews, are not only part of Berdugo's interruptive authorship, but they also support Berdugo's focus on an individual whose desire for life is easily dismissed.

Part I

"Life Doesn't Keep Its Promise": The Tragic Life and Death of Human-Donkeys

Donkey was inspired by the tragic death of a young worker in a construction site accident in Israel, something that is becoming increasingly common. Berdugo's protagonist (or anti-hero) is named after the dead worker, Roslan Isekov, an Azerbaijanian immigrant. Berdugo tells the story of one member of a much larger community whose life and death remain a phantom limb of the Israeli political body that Berdugo resents. What is intriguing in *Donkey* is the non-foundational metonymy of the donkey that constitutes a discursive economy of displacement and invisibility. Alternatively, it is the invisible donkey that "does not count," who brings into focus invisible Israelis who, like the donkey, "do not count" and are being rapidly and constantly supplanted by the hegemonic force. The novel, set over eight days in 2018, develops around two axes. The main plot opens with the serendipitous encounter between the protagonist, 50-year-old Roslan Isekov and

[15] By paratexts, Gerard Genette refers to material that lies on the threshold of the narrative. This includes chapter-headings, pictures, promotional material, interviews given by the author, dust jackets, preface, foreword and even other novels written by the author, which can influence our understanding of the narrative and hence, become part of the narrative. Divya Anand, "Words on Water: Nature and Agency in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*," *Concentric: Literature and Cultural Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008): 21-44, 22.

Donkey. Two police officers ask him to take care of the abused animal temporarily, but never return to reclaim it. The story follows the evolving relationship between the two who are now in Roslan's house in Bat-Hadar, a planned community in southern Israel. This axis follows Roslan's life after quitting his job as a secretary in a local Committee of Planning and Building on the shore of Ashkelon. Roslan's position exposes him to bureaucratic and ecological issues of neglect that he projects on the life of the (peripheral) residents in these areas: he "heard the voices of both women and men, for worse he heard them, their anger, their complaints, their despair, the southern *hutzpah*, the prostitution of their vocality that reached him not because of its loosened, worn, slaughtered nature, but because of it being simply a prostitute, forced to be penetrated, used, lacking singularity, dismissive, and oppressed, that doesn't feel her own pain anymore."[16] Roslan meets the donkey at a point in his life when he has lost his passion to live and his hope in human existence, a hope that even his affair with his Jewish-American lover, Steve Silberman, cannot not salvage. The second axis recounts the events of one day in 1994, when 26-year-old Roslan, a student of practical engineering, the only child of Olga and Arthur from Kiryat Yam, decides to move away for no apparent reason. This axis focuses on Roslan's grim childhood in Kiryat Yam, and the existential struggle of his impoverished immigrant parents to survive. The Azerbaijanian community too exists in poverty, rage, and neglect that ties it to the southern settlement in which Roslan lives with his donkey years later. That wintry day of 1994, when Roslan leaves home, ends in tragedy as his waiting parents fall asleep and the spiral heater in their living room sets their small apartment on fire. Roslan, by then on his way to the old Central Station in Tel Aviv, does not know about their deaths, and attempts to live his life-"in spite of it all," almost in Y. H. Brenner's spirit. But in a way, the story begins on that day in 1994—in the past that insists upon remaining the present—when Roslan simply "continues" to live, until his encounter with the donkey, when he takes ownership of the animal, conquers the dichotomy between the two of them, and in so doing takes ownership of himself.

[16] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 89.

Ecological Tensions: The Force of Life

Berdugo surgically focuses on what the environmentalist critic, Lawrence Buell defines as "refractions of physical environments and human interactions with those environments."[17] Clashes between the characters in the novel and their environment are presented already through the troubled domestic life of Roslan parents in Kiryat Yam. The sub-narrative foregrounds Roslan's parents in 1994, also appears under the laconic meta-title of "Transition" (to mark the transition to the past), and emphasizes the father's severe cold and coughing, while failing to keep the cold winds out of their apartment:

> Cooold... very. The wintry weather broke through with no preparation to its beginning, which is usually milder. On Ben-Zvi Boulevard, the first floor of building 29, Entrance C, in Isekov's apartment, they try to ram the coldness. The pane of the big window in the living room is closed almost entirely, not hermetically. Earlier, just before 4p.m., Arthur dragged it in its old track, with the little energy that was left he brought the heavy glass to its possible edge and trapped it with its plastic lock that still left some narrow open space to the outside, where he held his hand for a moment to check the movement of the penetrative wind , a dead movement, and then he pulled the curtain on top of everything—100% of high quality polyester fabric in the color purple—he hoped that the house will get warmer like that, or that the coldness won't increase, and most of all, Arthur wished quietly in his heart to finally recover from the flu that fell on him.[18]

Arthur's struggle to protect his home and family underpins the narrative of these sections, a struggle that highlights the thin-walled apartment and thus the permeable and vulnerable existence of the family in the north. The hardworking family, whose dull routine could easily have been typical of the daily life of many immigrants, suffers from the "invasion" of a bad wind, that takes over the apartment and threatens the father's frail health. Even though the real threat is

[17] Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 30.
[18] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 45.

preconditioned, a threat that comes "from the house and the family,"[19] the ecological drama marks the impossible triumph and the parents' inevitable fate. Immigrant parents are never safe, even "the heart of their home is not caged properly, a conspiring chill invades it silently, trembled mainly the strong and covered arms of Arthur who carries a severe flu."[20] The caged apartment is a charged metaphor that underlines not only the apartment's bad condition but also the status of the (parents) immigrants: put in cages as a human (animal-like?)—threat that menaces the existing "civilized" life that the state has established; it is the 'everlasting temporality' shared by many immigrants in Israel. Added to this preconditioned exposure, Arthur's illness suggests a physical vulnerability that accentuates the family's alienation (and the father's alienation as the head of the family): his body struggles with the virus while being defeated by the wind. In the meantime, Olga, the mother, is "passively absorbing the future of the temperature."[21] This tension between passivity and struggle characterizes Roslan's lonely youth that is marked by the lack of agency that makes change possible. Indeed, Olga and Arthur die in their sleep, while their small apartment burns. Berdugo's choice of fire as their cause of death is ecologically intriguing: the fire is domestic and private, a result of a malfunctioning heater. If the dramatic weather had previously defeated the family from the outside, it is the domestic fire that kills them from the inside. The fire becomes a biopolitical trope that represents the politics of death in the story the inevitable "thanatopolitics."[22] The ecological drama, however, accompanies Roslan throughout the novel: during his escape to Tel Aviv, for instance, as he recognizes "a storm on the shoreline and serenity in the middle of the sea, and everything is simultaneous in one unified organism."[23] Amazed by this vision, he wonders, "is this nature?" and replies immediately, "no, this is probably life."[24] Through the "unified organism," Berdugo flattens topographic differences and distills a sense of life, a concept that he insists on throughout the novel; Roslan recognizes the inseparability of life and nature and

[19] Ibid., 53.
[20] Ibid., 94.
[21] Ibid., 89.
[22] Vatter, "Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt," 145.
[23] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 186.
[24] Ibid.

reclaims the lost sense of what Berdugo calls in his epilogue, "Mere life."[25] This is where the donkey serves heuristically to change Roslan's fate. The southern sun that counteracts the cold north, is described as "unpleasant sun"[26] whose solar radiation exposes Roslan and his donkey to a new set of ecological challenges. But to Roslan's amazement, the drying neglected yard, the soil, and its natural yield welcome both Roslan and donkey:

> Donkey tapped lightly with his horseshoes, and to Roslan it seemed like a respectful march, as if donkey is thankful for his food before meal—a jocular food blessing. And when he reached the pile, he [donkey, R"T] lowered his head and started to gather weeds, in a nonselective manner, and yet it looked as if he is pulling them in preciseness with his thick rough tongue, chewing them gently with his stony teeth, glidingly swallowing them, and gathering more of them in his mouth. Donkey was probably hungry in a non-animalistic passion, and Roslan stood next to him and wondered, amazed by the simplicity of health, by the necessity of food and its justification, and astounded by his proper choice of weed and how he gathered what's necessary, and the more donkey consumed the grains the deeper was the feeling in Roslan's round lower-belly: the art of animal and life.[27]

This "simplicity of health" brought by donkey is epiphanic to Roslan. The above passage, it seems, recalls the two conflictual Greek concepts, zoē and *bios*: the cyclic "bare life" of animals, men, and gods (*zoē*) and what Giorgio Agamben perceives as, "the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group" (*bios*).[28] Donkey reintroduces Roslan with the very idea of "bare life"; yet the donkey's hunger

[25] Ibid., 263.
[26] Ibid., 214.
[27] Ibid., 43.
[28] For Agamben, the event of modernity is allowed by the entry of zoē into the sphere of the polis. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 9. See also, Elizabeth D. Gruber, "Nature on the Verge: Confronting 'Bare Life' in *Arden of Faversham and King Lear*," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 22, no. 1 (2015): 98-114, 99. *Zoē* and *bios* have received much scholarly attention by Hannah Arendt; however, the philosophical discourse of these two terms is beyond the scope of this paper.

should be conceived in "non-animalistic" biopolitical terms of "health," "necessity," and "justification." Roslan's backyard functions as simulacra of the Israeli periphery whose brutish physicality of pain, duress and immobility permits the condition in which "a human lapses into presumptively 'lower' state"[29] that enables what otherwise is denied. Noticeably, the neglected backyard and the parents' apartment represent human spaces that are "forced to be penetrated."[30] The permeable metaphor that Berdugo applies to the Israeli periphery situates life and death in an eerie juxtaposition. It is precisely here where the human-donkey correspondence comes into play, while the donkey becomes an "agent of revelation" and offers Roslan a haunting sensation of the familiar and the strange.[31] The depiction of donkey's eating and Roslan's lower belly that apparently digests the animal's food, clarifies the natural (and continuous) bonding between the two; it anchors the most familiar passion in a blunt state of anomie. But there is more. Berdugo offers here an alternative agenda that denies any residues of the Israeli chronicle (protected by its *bios*). When he opens his "transition" to the past, Berdugo adds a subversive comment that one might easily dismiss:

> It was one day. 1994. A day that is not an allegory, but a singular day, in and of itself. A day at the beginning of November. No one has been murdered yet in this November of 1994, who can even think about *a future grandiose death*, or falling in love, or cherry bloom in Israel, or about a permanent enslavement to loneliness.[32]

The "future grandiose death" evokes the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995. But by juxtaposing this (political) grandiose murder with love, cherry bloom, and permanent loneliness, Berdugo unveils his literary intention to narrate an alternative set of priorities that rethinks and reorganizes the political order and agenda.

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[29] Elizabeth D. Gruber, "Nature on the Verge," 100.

[30] Even the prostitution-like southern diction evokes this type of permeability see Berdugo, *Donkey*, 89.

[31] Jeanne Addison Roberts, *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus, and Gender* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991,) 75.

[32] Ibid., 45. My emphasis.

Donkey as Agent

In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2006), Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin discuss animals in terms of agency. They note that:

> [A]gency has been a problematic issue for both postcolonial and environmental studies since, in the anthropocentric version of this problem, 'others' may speak but their speech is often pre-positioned so as not to be heard by those in power [...]. Animals, similarly, are rarely seen independent actors, a sometimes strategic human failing that reminds us that "what is at stake [in recognizing animal agency] is our own ability to think beyond ourselves."[33]

In the novel, the donkey moves beyond a metonymy to an actual "participant that dynamically engages and exerts an impact on the human drama."[34] The donkey, as both animal and symbol, exposes "the competing claims" of human and non-human species for life.[35] I will return to the "competing" component in the novel, but even before that, since the donkey arouses and stimulates Roslan,[36] one might read it as a clear affirmation of the very idea of Eros. The novel develops towards an alternative form of life that perceives vulnerability, suffering, and animality as resources for some enacted reality. Precisely because "donkeys are commonplaces,"[37] Roslan, the anti-hero, can claim for existence on the small piece of land that he shares with the animal.

This claim for existence or sense of life, where freedom is put into place, occurs when Roslan gathers weeds for his donkey for the first time. In this simple act of gathering food, "the life or death of the weeds are insignificant to him," since all

[33] Erica Fudge, *Animal* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 22. See also, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London: Routledge, 2015), 208.
[34] Fudge, *Animal*, 23.
[35] Anand, "Words on Water," 23.
[36] In the novella, "My Young Brother Yehuda," Berdugo also describes an intimacy between the protagonist and his dog. Sami Berdugo, *Orphans* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2006).
[37] Jill Bough, *Donkey* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 7.

that matters is keeping the donkey fed and active. The vivid descriptions mimic the promise of life that feeding itself conceals, as Roslan

> takes advantage of what nature delivers in such easiness, gift by gift. And what type of simple doing it is to take from whatever exists, whatever is given, for free, with grace [...] and all this pleases Roslan, wraps his heart tightly, and even his arms get a blissful essence, turn happy, hungry, while gathering more and more.[38]

The description is not only passionate and energetic, but it accentuates Roslan's liveliness in a manner that is rare in the novel. What Berdugo depicts here is a food web in which Roslan is allowed to fully participate and to feel valuable as a subject. This sense of approval—of being an active participant in the event of life—is further accentuated in the following depiction:

> No, it's this hour, in the neglected backyard, that actually locates Roslan erect amid his own life, life literally, with its right purpose, and when he saw donkey standing not far from the fresh animal droppings, he took a warmed and wide breath to his lungs, as if by inhaling he affirms the force of life.[39]

In its emotional and libidinal energy, the donkey's force of life might be compared to Roslan's lover Steve, who indeed, "demands the immediate vanishing of the animal, and maybe even more than this, if only possible." Roslan's lover rejects the donkey and uses threats and brutal language to express his disapproval: "I'm telling you, if you don't do something with this donkey, I don't know what I..."[40] The blunt threat of the lover reaffirms and validates the irreplaceable merit of the donkey, juxtaposed here with the human lover. The fact that this threat comes from Roslan's lover, locates the donkey at the emotional-libidinal matrix of the characters, assuring his presence not only as an essential companionship but also as a desired living entity. Steve's reaction also brings to mind Agamben's question,

[38] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 40.
[39] Ibid., 167.
[40] Ibid., 36.

"why Western politics first constitutes itself through an exclusion (which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life. What is the relation between politics and life, if life presents itself as what is included by means of an exclusion?"[41] Translating these questions into the Israeli reality that Berdugo portrays, it seems that donkey carries the peculiar privilege of being the excluded one who mobilizes Roslan's (excluded) subjectivity. The sense of life and the type of emancipation that donkey offers, cannot be offered by any other human agency.

Part II

Naked, Limp, and Perverse: The Abject as Interruption

The subchapter titled "Abjection," appears early in the novel. It opens immediately after a graphic description of the sexual encounter between Roslan and Steve:

> Even when he held in his mouth the ejaculation, and hastened to the shower to spit it there in the deeply and severely cracked sink, even then Roslan kept doing nothing, remained naked and limp on the futon sofa bed, and mostly rediscovered, and quickly, that he is detached, that looming time's particles do not deserve their existence, to be followed, that for him, they are all fallen, uprooted[42]

This proximity of the limp body, post sexual activity, to a deep sense of displacement is meaningful: just before spitting out the sperm, still impure, sinful gay man, Roslan experiences his utmost displacement. Could sexual activity be more antinormative, provocative, and political? It is here that Roslan considers the very idea of agency, or more precisely the lack of it: "what could have happened, if he-himself did nothing? It is Steve Silberman who was active..."[43] While holding the symbolic abject in his mouth, Roslan is decoding the sexual act into

[41] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 11.
[42] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 33.
[43] Ibid.

active/passive, pursuer/pursued categories which accentuates the tension between the sexual functionality of his own body (whose masculinity is questioned by Roslan throughout the book) and its political significance, and by that also its relation to and placement at the "body politic."

In *Powers of Horrors: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Julia Kristeva argues for a theory of subject formation in which a disavowed "founding repudiation" of the maternal body is the basis of the social self. According to Kristeva, to come into being, the social self must abject, or cast away, "those material elements that remind it of the original union with that body."[44] Kristeva's long list of such materials includes tears, blood, sperm, urine, and more—all of which accentuates behaviors that "do not belong to the 'clean and proper' social body: incest, crime, etc."[45] To become a social being, the "I" must expel elements that cannot be entirely expelled, and thus remain a threat.[46] Abjection then resides in "that liminal state that hovers on the threshold of the body and body politic."[47] Judith Butler, who posits a similar dynamic of rejection, argues that "this exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain abject beings, those who are not yet 'subjects,' but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject."[48]

The novel presents different forms of abjection, while breaking the binary distinction between abject/subject. The major distinction that the novel aims to collapse is the one between Roslan and Donkey: in this sense, the latter is the all-too-obvious abject. But the indistinctiveness between Roslan and his donkey is expressed by the fact that they both represent different forms (animal and human) of an abject. It is through the so-called forbidden sexual pleasures, illness, and bodily discharge that Berdugo releases the idea of an abject that resides within Roslan: Roslan is the abject who denies his immigrant parents or his foreign lover, and at the same time as a gay immigrant who is part of a minor community he is

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[44] Délice Williams, "Spectacular Subjects: Abjection, Agency, and Embodiment in Indra Sinha's Animal's People," *Interventions* 20, no. 4 (2018); 586-603, 587.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*; Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London-New York: Routledge, 1995).

[47] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 71.

[48] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London-New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

socially, politically, and culturally denied by the normative hegemonic "center." His exclusion is evidential, and he shares a crucial existential meaning with his donkey.[49] Nevertheless, Roslan is aware of the abjection that he carries as a mark of Cain and reconciles with it: "Hence Roslan was an abject, and did not refuse to accept the abjection, folded his legs on the futon mattress, tried to hide by threading in between them his almost dead penis that mimics woman's genitals that he never wanted because he felt angrily...".[50] The effeminacy that Roslan attributes to his genitals positions him as another form of abject, the feminine one. But the reader should note here the type of negation employed by Berdugo to stress the process of Roslan's reconciliation (with this effeminacy): "*did not refuse* to *accept*" (my emphasis). This is the undoing of what Kristeva describes as the inability to fully expel: the denied subject, the abject, who is fully aware of his position, reconciles with it, settles, and accepts his threshold position. The doubled negation of "did not refuse" (instead of simply "accepted") accentuates Roslan's conflict between his desire to refuse and his involuntary consent. Although the language suggests Roslan's choice, the reader knows that Roslan is denied choices. Kristeva calls attention to the function of effeminacy in the economy of indistinctiveness between the subject and what is external to the subject. "What we designate as 'feminine,'" she writes, "will be seen as an 'other' without a name, which subjective experience confronts when it does not stop at the appearance of its identity."[51] The subject experiences coming face to face with what Kristeva calls "an unnamable otherness." This "unnamable" marks the

[49] Donkey's health deteriorates throughout the book, but as soon as Roslan gets the animal, he notices the donkey's skin ailment: his walk is dragged out the road and his eyes are fixed at donkey, focusing now on his gray-brownish fur, whose lateral part, behind the back leg is shaved-like, or maybe even violently cut, and probably will not regrow. The narrator returns periodically to this bald patch. Roslan himself has *pityriasis rosea*, a temporary rash of raised red scaly patches. This condition requires a series of doctor's appointments and Roslan knows that nothing has changed. The rash neither increased nor disappeared, and if so, so what is it [...] maybe these are signals from the thickness of the body, the inwardness of his limbs, a dormant disease that bursts out Berdugo, *Donkey*, 7 and 77. The condition of the body, however, is one of the novel's greatest ironies: in its natural state the organic body cannot be trusted to remain intact and is vulnerable to illness and infection. Rina Aryeh, "The Fragmented Body as An Index of Abjection," in *Abject Visions: Powers of Horror in Art and Visual Culture*, eds. Rina Arya and Nicolas Chare (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 146-163, 149.

[50] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 34.

[51] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 58-59.

economy of non-distinctiveness when the subject cannot differentiate inside from outside or pleasure from pain. "The subject," writes Kristeva, "will always be marked by the uncertainty of his borders and of his affective valency as well; these are all the more determining as the paternal function was weak or even nonexistent, opening the door to perversion or psychosis."[52] Abjection, Kristeva stresses, "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses."[53] This type of abjection that Kristeva describes, of the liminal space where the subject experiences a crisis of meaning, is where transformation—that is, life itself—is possible; the difference between internal and external becomes unclear, and in the process, conditional identity is stripped away to reveal a queer object.[54] This is the possibility that Berdugo wants his reader to consider. It is established early in the book, perhaps in donkey's very first hours at Roslan's yard, where Berdugo introduces the possibility of perversion (or bestiality) as the donkey arouses Roslan, awakes his sexual desire, while Roslan, "watches his tiny blade, the one that evokes the forbidden stimulus, measurably forbidden, even if during these moments he doesn't care about what is not-allowed [...] since donkey enters the wild yard, each time Roslan sees it, his independent freedom is unified and becomes also justified."[55] The pleasure that momentarily overcomes the pain is in and of itself justified; it is also this pleasure that makes Roslan feel less passive, and he turns from an object to subject whose freedom is justified/valued. This great sense of freedom is conditioned by the presence of the donkey.

Masculinity, Interrupted

A major task that *Donkey* is engaged in is the blurring and queering of normative masculinity of the type that represents normative heterosexuality, establishment, and Israeli systems of power that constitute the Israeli political-militant mentality. By "queering" I wish to emphasize the fluidity of Roslan's identity: Berdugo wishes, first and foremost, to queer-and-question heteronormative sexuality and

[52] Ibid., 63.
[53] Ibid., 2.
[54] Robert Phillips, "Abjection," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1-2 (2014): 19-21.
[55] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 16.

examine its politicality. As mentioned, Roslan constantly explores and questions his (and not only his) masculinity. While working towards the human/donkey indistinction, Berdugo attends to masculinity whose significance to the Zionist enterprise has received much scholarly attention.[56] This blurring-cum-undermining is achieved through the collapsing of gender binary, often depicted in the novel as a stumbling block or impediment, in the national psyche. A poignant expression of this collapse-turn-indistinctiveness recurs when donkey's gender is in question, a query that puzzles Roslan: "Is Donkey a boy or a girl? Actually, not like that; one should ask, male-donkey or female-donkey, as merely anatomic typology of animals, as they were born, and not according to their sexual orientation or according to the behavior they acquire throughout their lives."[57] Berdugo asks to reverse the "gender trouble" and retrieve its origin: sex that marks the most basic preconditioned category, before (gender) roles are inscribed according to the conventional social order. Essentially, masculinity is portrayed as an environmental condition or indicator; at times, it is an ecosocial matter.[58] In a supermarket, where Roslan expects to encounter women, he wonders, "And why women do not come to the place? Where were the mothers lost?"[59] In the immediate literary sense, he might be referring to his own mother, but the question reveals a poignant political concern of imbalance between a necessary lost force (the mother) and a national contagious "infection" (masculinity). This absence of the (m)others (or the female figure in general), creates a void that allows Berdugo to feminize his male characters through their sexuality, habits, or lifestyle, and complicate the abjection by teasing it. For Berdugo the boundaries of Jewish abject—the hesitant one, whose sexual identity is blurred—are intimately connected to properly embodied masculinity, the one that should take hold

[56] Tallie Ben-Daniel, "Zionism's Frontier Legacies: Colonial Masculinity and the American Council for Judaism in San Francisco," *American Studies* 54, no. 4 (2016): 49-71.

[57] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 169.

[58] Ibid., 94 and 114. In the novel, Israeli masculinity is an affliction, a condition that infects other metonymies of the Israeli space and society. The palm trees in Kiryat Yam, for instance, are infected by this spiky masculinity that is coarse and rough, an image that suggests the way man affects, conquers, and masters nature; or the male shoppers at the local supermarket, whose bodies are content, fed up, calmed, walking in a crawling that is fertilizing and security-like, of the IDF. Once again, an image that evokes a repulsive heroism associated directly with its most prominent agency: the IDF.

[59] Ibid., 113.

instead of the normative one, that he defines as the "average male." Throughout the novel, Berdugo provides different representations of how "men negotiate and perform their masculinity and compete for hegemony, focusing on what might be called failed or abject masculinity in particular."[60] Berdugo's references to masculinity are scattered throughout the novel, but embedded in a way that demands his reader's attention. At one point in *Donkey*, for instance, Berdugo poses in parentheses that "interrupt" the flow of Roslan's reflections (on his boyfriend's anatomy), some focal/basic questions: "(and who is the average male? Where is he exactly? Well, let us see him already, so we can point at him.)"[61] First, Berdugo questions the existence of a category such as "average male" and second, he "points at him" almost as an act of shaming. But does he refer to the average man as a statistic or rather as a mediocre man, neither too good nor too bad? The questions, however, bring the two options to mind. The form of masculinity that the novel portrays might best be described in Kristeva's terms as "neither subject, nor object."[62] Roslan is unable to perform masculinity in a way that is socially accepted, and thus his subjectivity, that remains "open" or "in the making" is called into question. Who are then the male prototypes in the novel? Roslan's major male-representative, perhaps his only role-model, is his father Arthur, whom he describes as a "home-male" who "carries forever the certification of his birth, keeps it in his memory so that is never forgotten."[63] Note the proximity between the animalized collocation "home male" and the phrase "domesticated animals" (in Hebrew: 'ḥayat bayit,' home animal). Here, too, Berdugo, aspires to release animality from masculinity which leaves the latter as a set of almost savage, tribal codes, vulgar, and essentially of eastern origin and brutish nature.[64]

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[60] Ellen Rees, "Abject Masculinity in Niels Fredrik Dahl's *Herre*," *Scandinavian Studies* 93, no. 2 (2021): 266-286, 267.

[61] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 212. The line evokes Yona Wallach's well-known poem, "Presleep Poem," in which she writes: "If there is another sex br/ing it here so that we'll get to know it..." see Zafrira Lidovsky Cohen, *Loosen the Fetters of The Tongue, Woman: The Poetry and Poetics of Yona Wallach* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2003), 66. For the poem in Hebrew, See Yona Wallach, *Selected poems 1963-1985* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1992), 65.

[62] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1.

[63] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 137.

[64] This vulgarity is also emphasized in Berdugo's description of the male circle of prayers at the synagogue. Here, Berdugo relies on Hebrew and Arabic as he mimics the specific jargon and its vulgar vocality. Ibid., 247-248.

Masculinity is described as a tribal event in this family, and is associated with and validated by physical potency and strength: "The strength of the house in Azerbaijan as well as its support, were also compared to a male, and he, Arthur, obviously belongs to that group of men, because *kol ehad*, and not *ahat*, began to be there, in Kavkaz, a home-male already in early stages of his youth, and even before that, as he was born."[65] Berdugo's diction here, and particularly his choice of "kol ehad" (everyone) versus "lo ahat" (literally: "not even one," in its feminine form) is highly important, sophisticated, and manipulative since the phrase "lo aḥat" could mean both "not once" and "not even one female." Both phrases/meanings fit the context of the sentence, while leaving the initial intention of the writer rather blurred. Clearly, Berdugo is interested in this duality that complicates and subverts cultural tradition in general and Roslan's (eastern) Azerbaijanian lineage, in particular. Roslan, however, admits that he "doesn't really belong anymore to the legacy of the young republic of Azerbaijan."[66] Berdugo "kills" the two major father-figures in the novel (Roslan and Steve's father), and although Roslan's (abject) mother,[67] Olga, is also "killed" (going up in flames with her husband), the killing of the father is a literary "act" that Berdugo uses (not for the first time).[68] We are all familiar with the Freudian thesis of the murder of the father in *Moses and Monotheism:* "In connection with Judaic religion the archaic father and master of the primeval horde is killed by the conspiring sons who, later seized with a sense of guilt for an act that was upon the

[65] Ibid., 137.

[66] Ibid. The etymological origin of the name Ruslan is an old Caucasian form of the Turkic word arslan that means lion. Roslan (or Ruslan), then, could refer to lion (*Arye* in Hebrew), which suggests the lion with its masculine aspirations as the totem of the family. This masculine aspiration—that again, relies on animals—is firmly counteracted by the donkey, who challenges the traditional and heteronormative masculine psyche. The lion here, Roslan, not only exiles himself from the legacy of predators, but he also lives and takes care of a donkey. The tribal legacy of the Isekov family and its totem is contaminated by the donkey, the abject-Totem.

[67] According to Kristeva, the maternal body is neither an object nor non-object for the baby, but rather abject. As the process of subjectivity develops through the infant's separation from the mother during the course of weaning, the infant undergoes a stage of abjection in which it 'abjects,' or finds abject, its mother's body See Jayne Wark, "Queering Abjection: A Lesbian, Feminist, and Canadian Perspective," in *Abject Visions*, eds. Arya and Chare, 50-76, 55.

[68] This topic has been discussed with Berdugo in different interviews. For a further reading see Sami Berdugo, *Land Upon an Ongoing Tale* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2014) [Hebrew]; Sami Berdugo, *Because Guy* (Tel Aviv Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2017) [Hebrew].

whole inspired by ambivalent feelings, end up restoring paternal authority, no longer as an arbitrary power but as a right."[69] By breaking this primal taboo (by killing not only Roslan's father, but also the father of his lover Steve), Berdugo interrupts the all-too-secured line of fathers, breaks their continuity and restores the chance for a new type of authority.

Hebrew, Interrupted

In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt asserts that words and action "are the political events that 'mark' the linearity of a human life such that its *bios* can become that subject matter of a 'story' written by those who have witnessed the effects of the actions and words."[70] It is this linearity that *Donkey* breaks to the point that language here becomes an autonomous biopolitical indicator; it is the event that shapes identities, redefines and recreates political categories. In the linguistic context, the novel's political ambition is to accentuate the failure of the standard Hebrew to render the complexities that the peripheral reality offers. Chapter 2, for instance, opens with a striking insight that captures the mental-cum-linguistic poverty of the southern periphery:

> "You're here." Like that [. . .] Steve asserts with his superficial voice, and poor dimples are exposed in his cheeks. And suffice it to say that he is exactly like that: insignificant; his personality is like that too. Here, in two words Steve sums up what is apparently so untrue to the back weedy yard, neither 'you' nor 'here.' "We are here" says Roslan and remains standing.[71]

Berdugo breaks down Steve's casual expression to juxtapose exclusion with inclusion; the poignant contrast between the second-person singular pronoun (you) and the first-person plural pronoun one (we), teases not only the conflictual Israeli politics, but mainly the distinction between Roslan and the donkey, one that the former wishes to clear away. This, we should note, is narrated early in the

[69] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 56.
[70] Vatter, "Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt," 146.
[71] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 23.

novel, when Berdugo establishes Roslan and Donkey's form of 'We.' In another chapter, Berdugo conveys his linguistic perspective while describing a futile, "wasted" dialogue between Roslan and a policewoman (the "authority") regarding the donkey. "It is clear to the eye and heart that here, in these seconds, a mere linguistic event took place, a language-instance that doesn't constitute a certain new reality, that doesn't involve any enthusiasm or concern for a change."[72] But what is the exact biopolitical meaning of the "*mere* linguistic event"? The "mere" suggests linguistic immobility with no single promise or even a chance for a political change. When Roslan encounters the authority, Berdugo describes him as "paralyzed," enveloped in a disappointment, "in the killing of a chance."[73] This is the linguistic stagnation in which time (Roslan's here-and-now, the present) freezes and any movement is denied. By "movement," I mean a chance for life, the "additional capacity" in Agamben's words, "that must be understood as problematic"[74] by the authority. Conversely, following a casual friendly remark in Arabic, Roslan admits that the person who had just greeted him "approves of me, laughs with me, understands me, he's something of me [...] and there's no need to translate the words, their kindness appears in their prolonged pronunciation, their liberty is stamped in the air." The metalinguistic-cum-metaphysical understanding is at play here and it goes beyond words—as between Roslan and donkey. Unlike his conservative lover Steve, who preaches for a homogeneous (standard) Hebrew that functions as superego to block assimilation, Roslan/Berdugo maintains that the Arabic which is "non-Hebraic and non-Jewish, is proper [...] overflowed with preciseness the mutual fondness, and solidarity, even if for a few seconds."[75] Berdugo connects the "abject" Arabic (which threatens the "pure" Jewish identity) to human freedom: the neighbor-language that blurs the borderlines between the Israeli subject and standard Hebrew, between the closed territory and the open-border, is the language that signifies a deep sense of solidarity and a chance that Roslan cannot obtain anywhere else. The subchapter titled "Speech" is striking in its clarity: words are described here as a creative tool that a person possesses—creative even if they

[72] Ibid., 158.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 11.
[75] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 115.

(words) hold "the strongest destructive force that the same man possesses."[76] Language, then, may both create worlds and destroy them. It is in this chapter that Berdugo voices Roslan's wish to avoid this linguistic excessiveness and "extends the boundaries of silencing."[77] The distinction between silence (noun) and silencing (gerund) is dramatic: between the banal act of speech—excessive yet free speech—and its (political) denial, raises a comfort zone of possibility where Roslan wishes to dwell.

Conclusion: Canon, Interrupted

In *Donkey*, Berdugo considers and constructs a type of subjectivity that the Israeli body politic severely excludes. Berdugo creates a bio-"interval": a space of humans who are neither fully human (or whose humanity is overlooked) nor fully animal (or alternatively a bit of both) that enables despair, Thanatos, and "slim likelihood" to coexist along with Eros, hope, and even delight. From an eco/biopolitical perspective, the novel reveals how the peripheral neglect, as a subversive narrative that rewrites the Israeli southern periphery through different forms of violence, poverty, and political apathy, takes on a different significance: rather than accepting the actual tragedy of the historical Roslan, Berdugo releases life. At the end of the book, following the chilling and graphic depiction of the parents who perish in fire, Roslan is described as one who actively "took himself off the main paved road and turned into a narrow one."[78] The type of subjectivity that Berdugo wants us to consider is one that *actively* resists death as the fate that one's state and society designate. The genesis of this life, out of the allegedly inevitable death, is enabled through the collapsing of the relentless hierarchy between Roslan and his donkey and also through the constant teasing of the idea of death in its different forms. For that reason, Roslan is excited by the fire that he sets in the "Mizraḥi summerizing areas"[79] outside his parents' building. His excitement incited by death is a form of conquering death.

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[76] Ibid., 89.
[77] Ibid., 90.
[78] Ibid., 261.
[79] Ibid., 140.

In Emile Habiby's highly acclaimed book, *The Secret Life of Saeed, the Pessoptimist* (1974), the title character is a Palestinian who escaped to Lebanon in 1948 and finds his way back to (now) Israel, as an informer. Saeed credits a donkey with his rebirth.[80] Habiby describes the donkey as "the substitute, the scapegoat, the supplement" that is also metonymic to Saeed who is "the substitute, the scapegoat, and the supplement" of the Israeli establishment. [81] In this book, Habiby presents the human-donkey as a possible threat to the Israeli political establishment. In a subversive act of authorship, Habiby writes his fourteenth chapter as a footnote in which he graphically recounts the grisly fate of stray donkeys following the war of 1948.[82] Yet, his powerful allegoric statement that "Many are the nations saved from a butcher's knife by an animal!"[83] resonates with Berdugo's novel that first problematizes and eventually rejects the preeminence of man above beast, while emphasizing the shared fate of man and animal throughout Israeli existence.

Berdugo abandons the national "accepted" narrative, for the story of a single marginal man, "the scapegoat," whose life is reclaimed thanks to donkey, and by that he both creates an intertextual relation to Habiby's footnote (that in itself marks a textual marginality) and concretizes his allegory. Here Berdugo challenges the traditional position of the Observer of the People of Israel—a position that has traditionally been taken by established writers, out of their public authority and historical responsibility, to define Jewish life—through observing the overlooked and unattended, neglected areas of Israel and their lost potential. Precisely from his well-established and highly acclaimed status as a writer, Berdugo shifts hierarchies and ridicules the political agenda and its "accepted" categories. Berdugo then pointedly teases the literary canon and abandons the traditional stance of the narrator. At the peak of this exchange between fiction and reality, Berdugo settles the open account with his literary milieu:

> On what the hell are you writing, the writers?

[80] Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed,* 6.
[81] Soker-Schwager, *Spare Thoughts*, 282.
[82] When asked where their asses had gone, the Hebron officials laughed and replied that Tel Aviv butchers had used them all to make sausages. Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed,* 44.
[83] Ibid.

> Why are you buried in all that?
> Wake up! Wake up to the land, to the inherent pain of the local settlers, to the invention of the buildings and roads, to the breaking of the ugly Hebrew, to the not-good children, to the youngsters who just matured, wake up to the ostentatiousness of all the people of Israel and the people of the territories that are subject to it, go out to the eastern splendor that westerns its foundation, to the beauty that Roslan knows for the first time in his life, before these moments will pass from him.[84]

The lines have the tone of a manifesto that clarifies Berdugo's rage at his fellow writers who cannot see what is at stake: the bad children, the ugly speech, and unattended beauty that reveals itself momentarily as an authentic source of "bare life" that is perpetually denied and thus is about to disappear. Berdugo's complaint here is both authoritative and vulnerable, a silent (as a written text might be) scream that is unleashed before it's too late. Reading the donkey as an analytical category allows the debunking of social situations reified as natural; in a way, Berdugo writes this book to resist what has become natural. Berdugo adds an epilogue in the form of a letter to the late Roslan Isekov who gave the protagonist of the novel his name. Berdugo's writing is stormy and emotional, as he insists that Roslan has not died but in fact lives "much" on narrow wooden logs of scaffolding, in construction areas, where "he walks in heights." Here, Berdugo foregrounds the issue of visibility as a trope that recurs in the book. "I see you not disappearing, you've never disappeared," he writes, while addressing the sad fact that the Israeli society ignores Roslan as much as it overlooks the donkey. The final sentence with the dramatic apostrophe: "See him—he is alive, his blood be in *your* own eyes" [my emphasis] is not only a twist of the phrase "*damo be-rosho*" (his blood be in his own head, that is, he bears the responsibility), but it is a direct accusation against the Israeli establishment of not seeing the real, flesh-and-blood Roslan in both his life and death.

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[84] Berdugo, *Donkey*, 242-243.

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Keywords: Biopolitics, Sami Berdugo, Donkey, Abjection, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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Antisemitism and the Image of Jews and Muslims in Nineteenth Century French Colonial Algerian Writings*

by *Sharon Vance*

Abstract

This paper focuses on descriptions of Jews and Muslims in writings by officials and journalists in nineteenth century colonial Algeria and their recycling by antisemites at the end of that century. These writers assumed that Muslim Arabs shared their beliefs and would acquiesce to French rule and serve its military imperial expansion.

Francophone descriptions of Jews and Muslims in colonial Algeria began in the decades immediately after the French conquest, creating images recycled throughout the rest of the century. One element of these descriptions, which is the focus of this paper, incorporated longstanding European antisemitic stereotypes that were accompanied by assumptions of Muslim animosity against Jews. These assumptions became a repeated theme that is probably unique to this version of antisemitism, which developed in the colonial context. The nineteenth century antisemitic wave reached its height at the end of that century. When discussing its ideological leadership in colonial Algeria, studies have tended to focus on Édouard Drumont and Max Régis,[1] two major leaders of the antisemitic movement in colonial Algeria. However, their ideas were not original but were repetitions of

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[1] Michel Abitbol, *Mi-Kremyeh le-Peṭen: anṭishemiyut be-Alg'iryah ha-ḳolonyalit, 1870-1940* (Yerushalayim: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-toldot Yisra'el: ha-Merkaz ha-benle'umi le-ḥeḳer ha-anṭishemiyut ʻa. sh. Vidal Sason, 1993), 44; Genevieve Dermenjian, *La crise anti-juive oranaise (1895-1905) L'antisémitisme dans l'Algérie coloniale* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1986), 140; Sophie B. Roberts, *Citizenship and Antisemitism in French Colonial Algeria, 1870–1962* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

images from earlier stereotypes. In this paper I will focus on how these images and stereotypes were propagated and applied to the colonial situation from the beginning. The role that the mobilization of Muslims played in this disdain for Jews necessitates a consideration of the images of both Muslims, particularly Arab Muslims, and Jews in these writing. They were generated by French military officers, clerics, journalists, and politicians from the early days of the conquest and were repeated by later antisemites in Algeria up to the end of nineteenth century.[2] The earliest examples were communications, some of which were later published, that were concerned with the stability, progress and expansion of the conquest and gave an appraisal of supposed Muslim support for it. When these rosy predictions of Muslim acceptance, acquiescence and even support for the on-going conquest were proven to be false by the ongoing resistance, Algerian Jews were blamed. The portrayal of Jews and these accusations against them were later attached to the popular antisemitic movement developing in colonial Algeria and France at the end of the nineteenth century, especially as they were articulated by Édouard Drumont, the most well-known and consequential exemplar of nineteenth century French antisemitic discourse. His writings and political activism encompassed both France and colonial Algeria, where he ran for and won a seat in the French Chamber of Deputies in 1898, representing Algiers. While I will be discussing him at the end of this paper, given that his *La France juive* (1886) spawned a number of similar works devoted specifically to colonial Algeria, I will first show how such ideas were developed by these officials prior to his publication. The fact that none of these accusations and stereotypes are original should not be surprising given that antisemitic discourse is characterized by

[2] Édouard Drumont *La France juive*, 43 ed. (Paris: C. Marpon & E. Flammaron, 1886); G. Meynié, *L'Algérie Juive* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Parisienne, 1887). Regarding antisemitism in the Algeria, Benjamin Stora had this to say, "L'antisémitisme n'est pas le soule doctrine fondée sur la haine de l'autre, mas ses formes particulières d'ancienneté, de récurrence, d'intensité, en fond un phénomène paradigmatique qui renvoie par son idéologie, ses mots d'ordre, ses pratiques, ses objectifs affirmés ou induits aux différents types de racisme. C'est pourquoi étudier l'antisémitisme en Algérie pendant la période coloniale française reste un sujet d'étude important," in Geneviève Dermenjian, "Préface," in *Antijudaïsme et Antisémitisme en Algérie coloniale 1830-1962* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2018), 5. For a discussion of whether there is a meaningful difference between antisemitism and "anti-Judaism" see Dermenjian, Ibid., 9; Marianne Moyaert, "Understanding the Difference Between Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism," *Antisemitism Studies* 6, no. 2 (2022): 373-393; 375, muse.jhu.edu/article/868124.

repetition and recycling, with slight variations, of such long-standing myths, allegations, and conspiracy theories.[3] What is unique about the colonial Algerian context is that when it comes to antisemitism, the texts discussed here summon Arabs and Muslims as participants in attacks against Jews, as will be seen below.

In focusing on these French portrayals of Jews placed in the mouths of Muslims, I am not implying there is a uniquely French origin to anti-Jewish attitudes among Muslims or that such attitudes do not exist. It is important to not overlook the research on the history of anti-Judaism and its contemporary manifestation in the Muslim World and among Muslim immigrant communities in Europe. There is a growing body of research on this unfortunately violent phenomenon and I will only mention a few of the researchers on late 20th and 21th century antisemitism and extremism including Jikeli Günther, Meir Litvak and Robert Wistrich,[4] along with studies on antisemitism in France by Georges Bensoussan, Pierre Birnbaum, Shmuel Trigano and Michel Wieviorka.[5] In addition, studies by Camilla Adang,

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[3] Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005); Leon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton 2013), 464; Peter Shäfer, *Judeophobia Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 7; Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, *Antisémythes: L'image et la représentation des juifs* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2005); Michel Winock, *Nationalism, anti-semitism, and fascism in France* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1998), 98.

[4] Günther Jikeli, "L'antisémitisme en milieux et pays musulmans: débats et travaux autour d'un processus complexe," *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine* 62, no. 2-3 (2015): 89-114; Meir Litvak, "Islamic Radical Movements and Antisemitism: Between Old and New," in *Confronting Antisemitism in Modern Media, the Legal and Political Worlds*, eds. Armin Lange, Kerstin Mayerhofer, Dina Porat, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (New York: De Gruyter, 2021), 133-148; Robert Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (New York: Random House, 2010). Regarding contemporary antisemitic violence in Europe see for example the European Commission's Fundamental Rights Agency's European Union-wide data on antisemitic hate crimes and incidents http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/antisemitism-overview-2011-2021; Commission on Security and Cooperation's report on escalating antisemitic violence in Europe https://www.csce.gov/international-impact/events/alarming-rise-antisemitism-and-its-threat-democracy. Both accessed June 5, 2023.

[5] Georges Bensoussan, *Les Territoires perdus de la République: Antisémitisme, racisme et sexisme en milieu scolaire*, 3e édition augmentée (Paris: Pluriel, 2015) documents governmental loss of control of the public schools in the face of antisemitism, racism and sexism; Pierre Birnbaum, "Jour de Colère," *Revue d'histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 62, no. 2-3 (2015): 245-259; Shmuel Trigano, "Antisémitisme: Une analyse en forme de déni," *Times of Israel*, December 18, 2014.

Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Sarah Strouma and Uri Rubin have provided detailed analyses of Muslim anti-Jewish polemics in the medieval period. [6] The comprehensive *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, edited by Norman Stillman, has entries on the history and status of Jewish communities in that region, along with a detailed overview on the history of anti-Judaism, antisemitism and anti-Zionism.[7] When discussing the extended history of antisemitism it is important to recognize that negative attitudes towards Jews in both the Muslim World and in European Christian regions waxed and waned over time under various historic circumstances. Old stereotypes were recycled and given new justifications and updated to suit the predominant concerns of a given time and place. Some periods were more conducive to their propagation and acceptance than others. Moreover, some individuals and groups were more receptive to them than others. A further complicating factor is that some individuals could hold negative attitudes towards "the Jews," while having Jewish friends and associates. As such, case studies of amical relations between Jews and Muslims, a whole other subject of inquiry, do not preclude the existence of overall animosity towards "the Jews" or provide sufficient data regarding their status in society as a whole. A study of anti-Jewish and antisemitic rhetoric, its dissemination, and an examination of whether this defamation led to actual violence are essential for understanding the extent, and significance of antisemitism in any society and time period.

In the early years of the conquest, military commanders played the dominant role in shaping colonial society and in creating the earliest images of the indigenous

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Accessed June 5, 2023, https://frblogs.timesofisrael.com/antisemitisme-une-analyse-en-forme-de-deni/. Trigano critiqued Michel Wieviorka for rebuking the French Jews, accusing them of particularism and for being responsible for the violence directed against them; Michel Wieviorka, *The Lure of Antisemitism: Hatred of Jews in Present-Day France* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), studied the fear of antisemitism in present day France, including in French schools, emanating, in part, from young French Muslims, and asked whether French Jews are to blame for being targeted (xxiv).

[6] Camila Adang, ed., *Muslim writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible from Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999); Sarah Stroumsa, "From Muslim Heresy to Jewish-Muslim Polemics: Ibn Rawandi's Kitab al-Damigh," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 107, no. 4 (1987): 767-772; Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'an: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1999).

[7] Jonathan Fine, Norman Stillman, İlker Aytürk, and Steven Uran, "Anti-Judaism/ Antisemitism/ Anti-Zionism," in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, vol. I, ed. Norman Stillman (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010), 221-240.

population, both Jewish and Muslim, under its rule.[8] As the conquest was consolidated, many soldiers and officers transitioned into the bureaucrats of the Bureaux arabes or became "scholars" upon retirement.[9] Both often published their memoires.[10] The correspondence of others, such as Marshal and Governor-General of Algeria Thomas Robert Bugeaud and Captain and later General Melchior Joseph Eugène Daumas were published posthumously.[11] Rather than provide a comprehensive overview of all works by French military officers in colonial Algeria, I will concentrate on a few whose writings are available today in digital form. Given that these are still in circulation it is possible to conduct a follow up investigation to see whether they are continuing to influence attitudes today. Of the two, Daumas is a lesser-known figure, yet his descriptions contain themes and images often reproduced by later colonial Algerian officials.

Captain Daumas (1803-1871) arrived in Algeria in 1835 and later helped organize the Bureaux arabes. He eventually achieved the rank of general and wrote other works on Algeria in addition to his correspondence, such as his *Les Chevaux du Sahara* (1851), a book devoted to Arab equestrian skills that also contained a great deal of translations of Arabic folklore, including derisive appraisals of Jews.[12] His

[8] Patricia Lorcin, "The Soldier Scholars of Colonial Algeria: Arabs, Kabyles and Islam: Military Images of France in Algeria," in *Franco-Arab Encounters: Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon*, eds L.C. Brown and M.S. Gordon (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1996), 128-150; Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick [etc.]: Rutgers University Press, 2010). Schreier discusses nineteenth century colonial attitudes towards Algerian Jews, framing it in the context of the conquest and colonial discourse and France's self-appointed civilizing mission without considering its antisemitism.

[9] F. Gourgeot, *Situation politique de l'Algérie* (Paris: Challamel 1881), 164, accessed June 5, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5788592b?rk=21459;2; Lorcin, "The Soldier Scholars of Colonial Algeria."

[10] François-Charles du Barail, *Mes souvenirs* (Paris: Plon, 1897), digitized by the Internet Archive in 2012 with funding from the University of Toronto, accessed June 5, 2023 http://archive.org/details/messouvenirs01duba; Jacques Louis César Alexandre Randon, *Mémoires du maréchal Randon* (Paris: Typographie Lahure, 1875).

[11] Thomas Robert Bugeaud and Henry-Amédée Lelorgne Ideville, *Le Maréchal Bugeaud, d'après sa correspondance intime et des documents inédits, 1784-1849,* ed. H. d'Ideville (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1885), accessed June 5, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6479022g?rk=21459;2; Eugène Daumas and Georges Yver, *Correspondance du capitaine Daumas, consul à Mascara (1837-1839)* (Alger (Place du Gouvernement): Impr. de A. Jourdan, 1912).

[12] Daumas and Yver, *Correspondance ;* Daumas, *La Grande Kabylie* (Paris : L. Hachette, 1847); *Le Sahara algérien études géographiques et historiques sur la région au sud des établissements français*

correspondence described animosities and divisions between different Muslim communities (e.g., Arabs and Imazighen), but stated that, despite these internal conflicts, they all held Jews in disdain and would never accept them as equals.[13] This is a theme, along with that of Jewish deceit and exploitation of others, that would return over and over again throughout colonial Algerian writing.[14] At the end of the nineteenth century these themes were embedded in antisemites' refuted claim that granting French citizenship to Algerian Jews caused the Muslim revolt of 1871.[15] Despite its questionable use in this discourse, the notion of Muslim aversion nevertheless does rest on the fact that in the Islamic World, including in pre-colonial Algeria, Jews were defined as *dhimma*, "protected" subjects with unequal status.[16] These writings equated that status as debased, enslaved and subhuman.[17] Daumas' correspondence is full of accounts of Algerian Jews being robbed, or pretending to have been robbed, and occasionally killed.[18] He and the other military officials saw themselves embarking on a civilizing mission, or at least rendering justice, including their treatment of the native Jewish population, which they considered to be more humane, despite their disparaging depictions of them and the fact that the debate over Jewish citizenship and equality also was not at all clear cut in nineteenth century Europe.[19]

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en Algérie (Paris: Langlois et Leclercq, 1845); *Les Chevaux du Sahara et les mœurs du désert* (Paris, Lévy, 1858), accessed June 5, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8838666.

[13] Daumas, *Correspondance*, 322, 605.

[14] Geneviève Dermenjian, "Les Juifs d'Algérie entre deux hostilités (1830-1943)," in *Les Juifs d'Algérie Une Histoire de Ruptures*, eds. Joëlle Allouche-Benayoun and Geneviève Dermenjian (Aix-en-Provence: Presse Universitaires de Provence, 2015), 105-133; Abitbol, *Mi-Kremyeh le-Peṭen,* 86-87.

[15] Richard Ayoun, "Le décret Crémieux et l'insurrection de 1871 en Algérie," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 35, no. 1 (1988): 61-87, doi: 10.3406/rhmc.1988.1439.

[16] Fred Astren, "Dhimma," in Encyclopedia *of Jews in the Islamic World.*

[17] Daumas, *Correspondance*, 605; du Barail, *Mes souvenirs*, 403.

[18] Daumas, *Correspondance,* 85, 86, 142, 145, 150, 250, 262, 265, 268, 304 and 306, ff.

[19] For a measured appraisal of the change in Jewish status brought by the colonial regime see M. Abitbol, "Le rencontre des Juifs de France avec le judaïsme d'Afrique du Nord," in *Les Relations intercommunautaires juives en méditerranée occidentale XIII^e – XX^e siècles Actes du colloque internationale de l'institut d'histoire des pays d'outre-mer*, ed. Jean Louis Miège (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1984), 229-242; for a positive assessment of the effect of the conquest on Algerian Jews, see Pierre Hebey, *Alger 1898 La grande vague antijuive* (Paris: NiL éditions, 1996), 15-16. Regarding the status of Jews in Europe see Paul Mandes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World A Documentary History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

An additional theme that runs through these texts is the supposed deceitful nature of Jews and their lack of trustworthiness.[20] Regardless of whether this was in fact a true reflection of Muslims' attitudes towards Jews, it is a classic theme of European antisemitic discourse.[21] Yet despite this supposed Jewish deceit, in this early stage of the conquest the French army needed to rely on Jewish translators and merchants for communication and supplies, along with their services as intermediaries.[22] Daumas himself harbored suspicions of his own translator that proved to be unfounded.[23] Another leitmotif of French colonial antisemitism in general is the supposed cowardliness and lack of martial skills of the Jews.[24] This is contradicted in Daumas' correspondence. In his account of why the Guard nationale was renamed in colonial Algeria, he affirmed that both Algerian Jews and Muslim served in it.[25] Yet his *Les Chevaux du Sahara* Daumas quotes Arab expressions that compared their brave warriors with supposed Jewish cowards who abandon their women. According to these sayings Jews were not men but beings similar to horses that could be mounted.[26] Along with this reported Arab scorn of Jews, most of Daumas' texts were focused on the Arabs, who, along with the Kabyle and other Algerian Muslims, put up prolonged resistance to the French conquest. His appraisal of them mixed fear with admiration and an assurance that with the proper management "the Arabs" could be aligned as auxiliary military units (e. g. zaouias, spahis, and later tirailleurs) to advance France's colonial interests. In *Les Chevaux*, Daumas' colonial discourse combined paternalism and utilitarianism. He praised "the Arabs" for their equestrian knowledge and warrior spirit, but he did not see them as equal. They enjoy destroying their enemies and their equestrienne skills need to be attached to the French national interest, to make Algeria a part of France and mobilize them in the colonial project.[27] Daumas'

[20] Daumas, *Correspondance,* 86; *Les Chevaux du Sahara*, 242, n. 2.
[21] Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 183.
[22] Daumas, *Correspondance,* 102.
[23] Ibid., 123.
[24] Daumas *Les Chevaux du Sahara*, 320-21; du Barail, *Mes souvenirs,* 403.
[25] Daumas, *Correspondance,* 193, n. 1.
[26] Daumas, *Les Chevaux du Sahara*, 321.
[27] Ibid., 201, 235; Lahouari Addi, "Colonial Mythologies: Algeria in the French Imagination," in *Franco-Arab Encounters*, eds. L. Carl Brown and Matthew Gordon (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1996), 93-105; Abdelmajid Hannoum, "Colonialism and Knowledge in Algeria: The Archives of the Arab Bureau," *History and Anthropology* 12, no. 4 (2001): 343-379, 370.

own derision of Jews is expressed in his gathering, translating, and quoting Arabic sayings with these themes, helping to consolidate often repeated maxims of what would later become colonial Algerian antisemitic discourse. This, along with the idea that the Jew was uniquely responsible for Muslim revolts against colonial rule and for their impoverishment and misery,[28] despite the fact that it was caused by the conquest itself,[29] would be an important element of this discourse.

Another French military commander wanting to harness the Arab warrior spirit to French imperial interests was General Count François Charles du Barail (1820-1902). He fought with the spahis in Oran in 1840 against Emir Abd al-Qadir, who resisted the French conquest of Algeria. He also participated in the Battle of Isly (1844) between the French army and Morocco, and later in the Franco-Prussian War (1870), retiring in 1887.[30] His memoires were published in 1894 and republished in over a dozen editions. By the time of the first publication, the Crémieux Decree (1870), which was a series of decrees establishing republican rule in colonial Algeria that politically empowered the European civilian colonial population and severely weakened the role of the military, had been in effect for over two decades. The Army, through the Bureaux arabes, saw itself as the "protector" of the native Muslim population from European civilian land grabbing, even as it continued to be responsible for putting down ongoing revolts of that population. After 1870 it was politically weaker than the civilian administration.[31] In addition, with the establishment of civilian rule over all of Algeria, land was more easily privatized and expropriated from the Muslim population, which still remained under military rule and lacked citizenship. The Crémieux Decree also extended French citizenship to Algerian Jews. Despite these changed circumstances, much of du Barail's statements regarding Jews and Arabs repeated the previous theme: Arabs justifiably hate Jews, considering them worse

[28] Daumas, *Correspondance,* 601.

[29] Charles-Robert Ageron, *Modern Algeria A History from 1830 to the Present*, trans. and ed. Michael Brett (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1991), 53-56.

[30] Narcisse Faucon and Corneille Trumelet, *Le Livre d'or de l'Algérie, histoire politique, militaire, administrative, événements et faits principaux, biographie des hommes ayant marqué dans l'armée, les sciences, les lettres, etc., de 1830 à 1889*, vol. 1 (Paris: Challamel, 1889), 37, accessed June 5, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k103575v.

[31] John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 74.

than dogs. To this he added the charge that Jews did not take up arms defending France while Arabs did and were not rewarded.[32] He also claimed that Jews caused the 1871 Muslim revolt against colonial rule.[33] Du Barail proposed to quell Muslim discontent by taking supposed Arab feelings and prejudices against Jews into consideration and respecting them.[34] However, he cautioned against simply accepting Arab Muslim culture in general. Instead, he proposed that the sons of elite, wealthy Arab noble families be educated in French military schools and be allowed to become officers so they could learn French values and ways of doing things, thereby facilitating their motivation to suppress rebellions in Algeria and guard its borders.[35] In this vision, Arabs were mobilized into defending colonial rule and putting down revolts of their own people in an alliance with France. It also displaced the supposed cause of these revolts from the conquest onto Algerian Jews. The basis for such an alliance was a reported shared contempt for Jews, who were seen as "the lowest stratum of society."[36] The glue of this alliance was a distain for Jews and was predicated on a fundamental inequality between the two parties, French and Muslims.

The next source I will consider, by an anonymous French officer, was published two years before the fall of the July Monarchy (1848). It challenges the colonial government's policy regarding religious freedom for all and preventing the Catholic Church from proselytizing indigenous Muslims. While there was much support for the Church among the military, many of the *colons* (French colonists) were decidedly irreligious.[37] Daumas himself applauded the arrival of the bishop in Algiers.[38] This work went considerably further calling for the conversion of

[32] du Barail, *Mes souvenirs*, 403.

[33] Ibid., 403-404.

[34] Ibid., 404. For an analysis of Muslim attitudes towards Jews in the wake of the Crémieux degrees see Benjamin Stora, "Prologue – The Crémieux Degree" in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, eds. Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[35] du Barail, *Mes souvenirs*, 388, 393 and 399-402.

[36] Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 103.

[37] Charles-André Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie Contemporaine La Conquête et les débuts de la colonisation (1827-1871)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), 159; Dermenjian, *La crise anti-juive*, 16.

[38] Daumas, *Correspondance*, 493.

Muslims as a means of consolidating the conquest.[39] The official policy of the colonial regime, enshrined in the Convention of Capitulation of 1830, was freedom of religion for all of the established religions, including Islam.[40] However, in practice, particularly when it came to Muslim property rights, this was often violated.[41] Still the government's policy in the 1840s was to avoid allowing Catholic missionaries to proselytize Muslims. This officer acknowledged this but considered it a grave mistake because he thought that as long as the indigenous Muslims were attached to their religion, they would be an implacable enemy of France. "It is Muslim fanaticism that gives them the force to resist us."[42] To counter this he favored evangelizing them, which he assumed would facilitate their work for the colonization, especially in the field of agriculture.[43] Their "warrior spirit" could be used to advance France's civilizing mission in Africa and in the process attach a rich empire to France.[44] The Arab "character," being "simple and ignorant" and always "speaking in God's name," would not allow them to easily separate from their marabouts. The way to achieve conversion would be through a few *mauvais* neophytes whose children would become real Christians.[45] He recommended educating the children of these new converts, along with translating the Gospel into Arabic, as a means of affecting this conversion.[46] This text only makes one mention of Jews, along with non-French Europeans, in a discussion of their "petit industries" and "finesse," which the author claimed had resulted in rising prices since the Conquest and made it impossible for city dwelling Muslims in contact with the French, to compete. As a result, they were reduced to misery.[47] This theme was later expanded and repeated incessantly in French Algerian

[39] *De la conversion des musulmans au christianisme, considérée comme moyen d ' affermir la puissance française en Algérie par un officier de l'armée d'Afrique* (Paris: J. Lecoffre 1846), accessed June 5, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5788849c; Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie,* 160.
[40] Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 49.
[41] Charles-Robert Ageron, *Les Algériens Musulman et la France (1871-1919)*, vol. I (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 294 *ff.*; Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie*, 91 and 240. See also Judith Surkis, who argues that France was interested in assimilating Algerian land, but not its people, *Sex, Law, and Sovereignty in French Algeria, 1830–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 29.
[42] *De la conversion des musulmans,* VI.
[43] Ibid., 35.
[44] Ibid., 37-38.
[45] Ibid., 34.
[46] Ibid., 22.
[47] Ibid., 10.

antisemitic writings, but by the end of the nineteenth century it focused exclusively on Jews as exploiters of the indigenous Muslim population.

The Bureaux arabes, in addition to being staffed with military personnel, also employed French interpreters, among them François Gourgeot, who later wrote a number of books on Algeria, including *Situation politique de l'Algérie* (1881), and, under the influence of Édouard Drumont's popular bestseller *La France juive* (1886), *La Domination juive en Algérie* (1894). Inspired by Drumont's solution to France's Jewish problem, he proposed the expulsion of Jews and confiscation of their belongings.[48] Prior to the publication of Drumont's antisemitic diatribe, Gourgeot focused most of his attention on the native Muslims. He saw them as a menace, but not simply those in Algeria. For him the entire Muslim world was a threat. All of Europe looked to France to deal with it and the battle would be fought in the Sahara, where effective repressive measures would be needed.[49] Moreover, what was needed was a reorganization of the decadent Bureaux arabes and an extensive system of surveillance of the Muslim population and its religious institutions.[50] For Gourgeot the most significant difference within indigenous society was between the Muslims in the North who could be included in the French army and those in the South who needed to be excluded, along with anyone who was a member of a Muslim religious order. As we saw in the anonymous work from 1846, the idea that Islam was a threat to colonial rule was not new. However, unlike that text, Gourgeot maintained that the Islamic traditions and laws needed to be understood and respected, including those of collective punishment. [51] Such a policy would allow France to promote colonization in safety while insuring the prosperity of the native Muslims.

Regarding the Jews, Gourgeot saw their naturalization as a disaster that led to their domination and caused Muslim insurrections, which he saw as an expression of their protest over Jews being mixed in with "our political affairs." According to Gourgeot "the indigenous" recognize that they will be dominated as a result of the

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[48] F. Gourgeot, *La domination juive en Algérie* (Alger: Pierre Fontana et Co., 1894), 164, 168 cited in Dermenjian, *La crise anti-juive,* 142, n. 49.

[49] F. Gourgeot, *Situation politique de l'Algérie* (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1881), 1, accessed June 5, 2023, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5788592b.

[50] Gourgeot, *Situation politique,* 171-172.

[51] Gourgeot, *Situation politique,* 137, 177 and 185.

conquest, but they reject being dominated by an inferior people such as the Jews.[52] Gourgeot further developed this theme of contempt that he ascribed to the "indigenous" in his *La Domination juive* (1894), describing the patron client relation between Jews and Muslims in traditional North African society as one of master to slave.[53] To this he added the disdain of the French against Jews, not because of "their religion," but because of their supposed worship of the golden calf in the Bible and supposedly engaging in a cult of conspiracy to oppress Catholics.[54] Such images were part of the repertoire of nineteenth century French antisemitism, first developed by the utopian socialists and by Catholic antisemitic newspapers such as *L'Univers* and *La Croix*, and later by Drumont, showing a continuity of accusations in both colonial Algeria and France, despite religious and political differences. These images reprised similar themes of classic Christian antisemitic stereotypes of Jews as worshipers of gold, as usurers and traitors, along with the notion that the very name "Jew" was synonymous with these evil traits.[55] Alongside the military, the Catholic Church was a major institution in colonial Algeria. Until the 1860s, its efforts at evangelizing Muslims were resisted by the authorities, even though it had benefited from the confiscation of mosques that were turned into churches. The colonial government permitted the Church to provide medical services and other works of charity to the Muslim population,

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[52] Ibid., 87 and 97.

[53] Gourgeot, *La domination juive en Algérie*, 52-53.

[54] Ibid., 21: "Ils mettent sur la paille des milliers de familles, ils les détestent, enfin, parce qu'ils sont Juifs et que ce nom seul comporte en soi tous les attributs impurs qui caractérisent leur maudite race!"

[55] Drumont *La France juive*, 4, 34 and 67; Alphonse Toussenel, *Les Juifs, rois de l'époque: histoire de la féodalité financière*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion 1886), xx. Toussenel's work was first published in 1847. See also F. Picard, "Les Juifs," *La Croix*, February, 1882, 723-726 https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k503606z/f3.item; Denis Durocher, "Variétés Le juif contemporain," *L'Univers*, October 14, 1884, n. p. [5, col. 6-6, col. 1] https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k704986b/f3.item; Louis Veuillot, "Les Juifs," *L'Univers*, November 12, 1869, n. p. [1, col. 1], https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k698197n/f1.item; Pierre Sorlin, *"La Croix" et les Juifs : (1880-1899), contribution à l'histoire de l'antisémitisme contemporain* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1967); Auguste Chirac, *Les Rois de la République: Histoire des juiveries. Synthèse historique & monographies*, 3 vols (Paris: P. Arnould, 1883-1889); Marc Angenot, "«Un juif trahira »: La préfiguration de l'Affaire Dreyfus (1886-1894)," *Romantisme* 87 (1995): 87-114; Sharon Vance, "Antisemitism and Socialist Strategy 1880-1917: France and colonial Algeria," *Patterns of Prejudice* 51, no. 3-4 (2017): 292-317; See "*juif*," in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, 9th ed., http://atilf.atilf.fr/academie9.htm. Links accessed June 5, 2023,

relieving it from having to invest resources in their welfare. This continued under successive French republican governments despite the policies of anticlericalism (*laïcité*), which were never implemented overseas, where these same governments saw the Catholic orders advancing the French language and French colonial interest.[56] *Laïcité* was not for export.

One important Church official in the early years of the conquest was Antoine-Adolphe Dupuch (1809-1856), who served as the first bishop of Algiers authorized by the government in 1838. In addition to his duties to the Church and its congregation, he also intervened on behalf of French soldiers and civilians held in captivity by the Emir Abd al-Qadir.[57] After the Emir was defeated in 1846 and imprisoned, in violation of the terms of his surrender, Dupuch wrote an appeal on his behalf. This was part of a campaign to persuade the French government to honor its commitment by engaging the French public, including religious Catholics, to get him released. One way of doing this was to show the Emir's high regard for Christianity, particularly in comparison to Judaism, which, according to Dupuch, the Emir dismissed as a rude and terrible religion. In this appeal Abd al-Qadir praised Christianity as sweeter, as granting of indulgence and enjoying the bounty of God.[58] The text reminds French readers of Abd al-Qadir's humane treatment of French prisoners under his authority, in contrast to the brutality of French forces under General Bugeaud's command. Dupuch alluded to this while giving an obfuscated appraisal of the "humanity" of General Bugeaud. He stated that the Emir reacted to the attacks against the indigenous civilian population with red faced silence.[59] The appeal on the Emir's behalf ends with his solemn oath to be a loyal helper to France and not engage in any activity contrary to French or Christian interests.[60] It included a promise to serve the French and Christians from his new home of exile. Once again Arab Muslims function in this discourse as auxiliaries and helpers to French overseas ambitions, and in the process of

[56] Pierre Vermeren, *La France en terre d'islam: Empire colonial et religions, XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Belin, 2016), 33.

[57] Faucon and Trumelet, *Le Livre d'or de l'Algérie,* 240-241.

[58] Antoine-Adolphe Dupuch, *Abd-el-Kader au château d'Amboise: Dédié à M. Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte* (Bordeaux: Impr. de H. Faye, 1848), 33, accessed June 5, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5740408g.

[59] Ibid., 60-61.

[60] Ibid., 6, Abd-el-Kader, Letter to Dupuch, n.d., translated by M. l'abbé J. Roth, à Bordeaux.

consummating this relationship, Judaism and Jews are invoked disparagingly by contrast, as if the love of one necessitated the hatred of the other. The Emir was eventually released after a number of his family members died in French captivity and made his home in Syria.

Attempts at proselytizing Muslims, along with contempt for Judaism, continued in the writings of a number of Church officials in colonial Algeria, including: the second Archbishop of Algiers, Louis-Antoine Pavy, who served two decades in that role starting in 1846; an anonymous former priest from Laghouat; and an 1875 address of the Archbishop of Algiers, Charles Lavigerie, at a religious service for the army.[61] In addition to encouraging the conversion of Muslims, all of these Church officials denounced the official French colonial tolerance of Islam, which they felt was a major insurrectionary agent. They also had universal disdain for Judaism and were convinced that Muslims shared this, including an indictment of Jewish supposed attempted deicide.[62] Added to this charge was the accusation that Algerian Jews were destabilizing the French conquest.

Louis-Antoine Pavy was the second Archbishop of Algiers, serving two decades in that role starting in 1846.[63] One of his published works that treated the subject of Jews, Arabs and Muslims was his *Histoire critique du culte de la sainte Vierge en Afrique, depuis le commencement du christianisme jusqu'à nos jours*, published in 1858. According to Pavy, there was an active cult of the Virgin Mary in North Africa, but the Arab "invasion" led to its destruction and that of Christian buildings, along with many martyrs and weak apostates.[64] His treatment of Muslims is mostly negative, stating that they engage in absurd polemics in the

[61] Gérard Grimaud, *Les catholiques d'Algérie et leur église: histoire et tragédie : 1830-1954* (Paris: Harmattan, 2012), 366; Louis Antoine Augustin Pavy, *Histoire critique du culte de la Sainte Vierge en Afrique depuis le commencement du christianisme jusqu' à nos jours* (Alger: Bastide, 1858), https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5806799b; *Les Arabes et L'Occupation Restreinte en Algérie par un Ancien Curé de Laghouat* (Paris: Challamel Libraire-Éditeur, 1866), https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5788849c?rk=21459; [Charles Martial Allemand Lavigerie], *L'Armée et la mission de la France en Afrique: discours prononcé dans la cathédrale d'Alger le 25 avril 1875 pour l'inauguration du service religieux dans l'Armée d'Afrique* (Alger: Librairie A. Jourdan, Éditeur (Ancienne Maison Bastide), 1875), https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1037691n. Links accessed June 5, 2023,

[62] Pavy, *Histoire critique du culte*, 41.

[63] Grimaud, *Les catholiques d'Algérie,* 366.

[64] Pavy, *Histoire critique du culte*, 49; Addi, "Colonial Mythologies," 103.

defense of their religion, are intolerant, fanatic and persecute Christians. However, they are also curious about Christian processions,[65] prompting the idea that open affirmation of the religious truth of Catholicism is better than dissimilitude. The work ends with a celebratory summary of the building of churches, cathedrals, seminaries, and hymns devoted to Saint Mary. No such ambivalence exists regarding the Archbishop's appraisal of Jews they are the enemies of Christ and according to the Quran, they tried to crucify him, but God substituted him with Judas.[66] During times of draught when the Jews pray for rain, they make matters worse with their noisy confused litanies.[67]

A more severe rebuke of Jews attributed to Arabs and Muslims was published in 1866 by an anonymous former priest from Laghouat, to which was amended a letter from Abbé Sauve on the Quran, and a collection of various anti-Jewish folklore attributed to Arab and Spanish sources.[68] The main text provides a historical overview of the condition of the Jews of Algeria starting with their situation prior to the French conquest and stating that in the beginning they were happy with the arrival of the French because the Muslims attacked them violently. However, by the time of this publication they were lording it over the Muslims because the French treated them as equals, using them as intermediaries. France was doing this despite the Jews' attempt to kill Christ, according to the Muslims, and their defeat by Muhammad.[69] Now Muslims had contempt for the French and were preparing a holy war due to their pact with the Jews.[70] They tolerated minor abuses of the administration, but they would not accept an affront to their religion.[71] Despite this seeming concern for supposed Muslim feelings, particularly as expressed in deicidal accusations, this former priest stated that the Quran was the most implacable enemy in Algeria and its teaching should be proscribed.[72] In addition, he was against the policy of a limited occupation. Instead, he advocated

[65] Ibid., 89.
[66] Ibid., 41.
[67] Ibid., 79.
[68] *Les Arabes et L'Occupation Restreinte*.
[69] Ibid., 38-39.
[70] Ibid., 39.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 63.

the closing of Quranic schools and opening of Christian schools in their place.[73] When the government officials attempted to support the Muslim cult by repairing mosques, but refrained from entering Catholic houses of worship, the Muslims concluded that the French are godless. In order to counter this the Catholic Church and the activity of its priests should be vigorously supported, not suppressed in colonial Algeria.[74] As was the case with the nameless military officer, we see the advocacy of evangelizing Muslims promoted anonymously. Alongside this is the consistent claim that France's reliance on Jews and supposed granting equality to them was provoking the anger of the Muslims. It should be noted that in 1866 at the time of this publication, while French Jews were full citizens of France, Algerian Jews were not. The assumption was that Muslim anti-Jewish hatred and contempt along with indignation over their supposed elevation was arousing Muslim anger, and not the colonization itself, nor the violent actions of the army, nor the attitude of its representatives and of Church officials.

The final clerical statement I will consider is a public pronouncement by the Archbishop of Algiers Charles Lavigerie in 1875 on the occasion of the inauguration of religious service for the army. His statement emphasized the merging of French patriotism and the Catholic Church. According to Lavigerie, France's conquest of Algeria was a crusade, Christianity would provide just rule for the indigenous, and the Church should proselytize among the Kabyles, who were supposedly former Christians and closer to the French than they were to the Arabs. This was part of the French colonial rhetoric that helped justify the conquest.[75]

Regarding the Jews, the Archbishop claimed that they promoted Abd al-Qader's revolt with their gold.[76] Lavigerie had prior encounters with Jews growing up in France. In his youth he forcibly led young Jews to the baptismal fount.[77] The

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[73] Ibid., 51.

[74] Ibid., 41-45.

[75] [Lavigerie], *L'armée et la mission*, 25 and 28-29. See Karima Dirèche, "Les écoles catholiques dans la Kabylie du XIXe siècle," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 75 (2008): 1-13; on the Kabyle myth see Patricia M. E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995).

[76] Ibid., 32.

[77] Claude Thiébaut, "Les Manifestations Pour Le Centenaire De La Naissance Du Cardinal Lavigerie (Rome, Alger, Tunis Et Paris, 1925)," *Revue Historique* 291, no. 2 (1994): 361-399. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40955760.

evangelizing he promoted in Algeria vis a vis the Kabyle Muslims had its source in this aggressive proselytizing of French Jews. Lavigerie gave a more expansive treatment of Jews in his history of the Church of Saint Anne in Jerusalem. He admitted that the early Church consisted of Jews, but this does not mean that he held them in high esteem. He quoted a devotional hymn describing Saint Anne as a rose among thorns, that is to say the Jews, in case the reader missed the metaphor.[78] He claimed that during the reign of Caliph Hakim it was the Jews who instigated the bloody attacks against Christians.[79] He admitted that Salah al-Din, according to Arab historians, turned the Church of Saint Anne into a madrassah,[80] but also stated that these historians provided precious records on the Church and Saint Anne's tomb.[81] Later its abandonment to Islam over the centuries left it devasted, but the interior was not hurt because the Muslims were afraid to enter and pillage it.[82] Finally, it was snatched from the "infidels" by a Frenchman in 1861.[83] While Muslim conduct varied over time, in this account the supposed animosity and hatred of the Jews was constant, including their hatred of Christian holy places, despite their knowledge of them.[84] Their thorny, debased state and their hatred is contrasted against the Mother of God from whom would be born the Lamb of God, who will erase sin from the world, and the place of her birth should be restored to the Catholic Church for its glory and the glory of France.[85] When looking at both works it is apparent that Lavigerie's attitudes towards Algerian Jews are intertwined with his attitudes towards Jews and Judaism in general.

In both the published works of the highest-ranking military officers and the officials of the Catholic Church in Algeria there is a consistent theme of uniform contempt and disdain for Jews and Judaism, often placed in the mouth of Muslims and Arabs, who are assumed to have even greater, violent, disgust as expressed in

[78] Charles Martial Allemand Lavigerie, *Sainte Anne de Jérusalem et sainte Anne d'Auray, lettre à Mgr l'évêque de Vannes par l'archevêque d'Alger [Mgr Lavigerie]* (Saint-Cloud: Belin, 1879), 14, accessed June 5, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5777408g.

[79] Ibid., 47.

[80] Ibid., 60-61.

[81] Ibid., 40.

[82] Ibid., 76-78.

[83] Ibid., 75-76.

[84] Ibid., 23.

[85] Ibid., 9-10, 18, 25, 72-73 and 75.

their folklore that portray Jews as sub-human. In these texts Muslims and Christians share this antipathy, universalizing it, and creating the conditions for mobilizing a united front of colons and indigenous against the Jews, a theme that would be taken up by the "anti-juive" crisis at the end of the nineteenth century.[86] The Church and the officer corps were not the only institutions disseminating these ideas. Journalists and politicians also propagated them. Pierre Pascal Duprat (1815-1885) was both. He was elected to the Chamber of Deputies and edited the journal *Revue Indépendante* and a number of other republican journals. He also served as a professor at the Lausanne Academy, later to become the University of Lausanne. [87] His *Essai Historique sur les Races anciennes et modernes de L'Afrique septentrionale* (1845) is a relatively early work whose 'racial' characterizations would be repeated later in the century. It describes both Jews and Arabs, with more attention on the latter. It contains the same themes we have seen so far in more detail. According to Duprat, Jews are a wandering people who never mingled with others and were vagabonds;[88] they were always dominated, but kept to themselves.[89] The Jews of North Africa do not look like Berbers or Arabs but are the same type as those of Europe with the same expression of calculation, defiance and ruse, due to persecution.[90] They have a desire for vengeance, with savage rude instincts, following the bloody tracks of the lions of the French army like jackals; they suffer from sick flesh and live in wetlands. [91] Thanks to the security and improvements in hygiene provided by the conquest, and the fecundity of their women, their population is growing, but they will not be able to dominate because they are a small portion of the total. Despite their resemblance to European Jews, African Jews are more corrupt due to Arab domination since antiquity. They are known to dissimulate due to persecution. Jews could be useful for France, but it is dangerous to associate with them. They

[86] Dermejian, *La Crise anti-juive*, 205; Abitbol, *Mi-Kremyeh le-Peṭen*, 45.
[87] Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 300; Pascal Duprat (1815-1885), accessed June 5, 2023, http://data.bnf.fr/14428722/pascal_duprat/.
[88] Pascal Duprat, *Essai Historique sur les Races anciennes et modernes de L'Afrique septentrionale* (Paris: Jules Labitte, Libraire-Éditeur, 1845), 215 and 232-233, accessed June 5, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1058849.
[89] Ibid., 253-254.
[90] Ibid., 259.
[91] Ibid., 261-262.

need to be kept in check, so they don't ruin the majesty of French power. They engage in shameful speculation, industrial abuse; behind private and public scandal is always the figure of the Jew. France's character suffers as a result of this alliance with Jews that corrupt its mores and life. The Turks and Arabs hold Jews in contempt. France will lose its authority should it associate with a people of such unworthy character who are not capable of marching with it.[92]

Duprat's treatment of Arabs is seemingly more laudatory. Unlike Jews who have always been dominated, Arabs had the highest civilization, thanks to the genius of Muhammad and his leadership.[93] Prior to this they lacked discipline, but he gave them religion, laws, and power, allowing them to conquer the world.[94] France needs to study the history and literature of the Arabs, because they were the former conquerors and the French, as the latest imperial power, are in need of their knowledge.[95] Arab geographers are the guides and masters of North Africa.[96] But Arabs cannot be treated as one treats European nations, they are a people of the desert, restless and on the move. France should not have made a pact with Abd al-Qadir, because prior to this the Arabs were divided and isolated, but in 1845, they are united and can rally around a religious fanatic marabout and rebel. They still have great power and France needs to be careful in dealing with them.[97] France instead should align with the Berbers rather than neglect and irritate them, as they are more ancient on this soil than the other peoples and they exercised more than once the greatest influence over the destiny of this territory. They are the race of the mountain whose "hymen" has never been "penetrated" and have a temperament of stone.[98]

Duprat subscribed to a racialized conception of humanity that was determined by geography and climate, which he assumed influences the character of these "races."[99] His description of Algeria consisted of a hierarchy of races, based on their supposed character, how useful they were to French interests, how they

[92] Ibid., 383-385.
[93] Ibid., v and 197.
[94] Ibid., 198.
[95] Ibid., viii.
[96] Ibid., 44.
[97] Ibid., 264, 289, 291 and 294.
[98] Ibid., 255 and 297; Surkis, *Sex, Law and Sovereignty,* 84.
[99] Ibid., 262.

responded to the conquest, and how amendable they were to accepting it. He drew on long standing stereotypes from a variety of sources, including classical Greek and Roman authors, along with translations of Arabic poetry. According to Duprat the French are the Greeks of modernity. [100] It is beyond the scope of this paper to trace the sources of these accumulated stereotypes. However, many of his ideas echo those of the military and clerical sources presented so far. In turn, his more detailed characterization, along with geographic and racial determinism, his distrust and admiration of Arabs and Arab civilization, and his complete disdain for Jews, all became an important source for ideas that were to follow, including those later developed by Gustave Le Bon.

Le Bon was one of the founders of social psychology and the author of the immensely successful book *The Crowd.* He also published works on Arabs and Jews, including a multivolume work entitled *La Civilisation des Arabes*, (1884), and an article published in 1888 in *Revue Scientifique* under the discipline of ethnography entitled "Rôle des Juifs dans l'histoire de la civilization," [101] and discussed Jews in his *Les Premières Civilisations* (1889). [102] In addition to reproducing the same racialized descriptions of Duprat, he also discussed French colonial rule in Algeria. While his work on Arab civilization is full of praise for Muslim architectural achievements, their establishing of a vast empire and their martial skills, he has nothing but contempt for Jews, placing them at the bottom of a hierarchy of civilizations.[103] Although he sees Jews and Arabs as "Semites" in his ethnography of the Jews, in his *Civilisation des Arabes*, he states that it seems

[100] Ibid., 54-55 and 262.

[101] Gustave Le Bon, *La civilisation des Arabes* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1884). At least one translation into Arabic was published recently: 'Ādil Zu'aytar and Gustave Le Bon, *Ḥaḍārat al-'Arab*, 2010, n. p. . A republication has also appeared in Algeria: Gustave Le Bon, *La civilisation des Arabes* (Alger: Casbah éditions, 2009); Le Bon, "Rôle des Juifs dans l'histoire de la civilisation," *Revue Scientifique* 25, no. 13 (1888): 386-93, accessed June 5, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2151111/f389.item.

[102] Gustave Le Bon, *Les premières civilisations* (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1889).

[103] Le Bon, "Rôle des Juifs dans l'histoire de la civilisation," 387, "... ce petit peuple juif, intolérant, égoïste, vaniteux et féroce, mais ils se greffèrent sur l'idée de monothéisme local vers laquelle a toujours plus ou moins penché l'esprit exclusif et simpliste des Sémites demi-barbares, tel que les Juifs et les Arabes."

insulting to associate the two peoples together and in a footnote claims that Arabs consider Jews less than human.[104]

When comparing Le Bon's treatment of Arabs and Jews often the same traits praised in the former are disparaged in the latter. One example is the trait of nomadism. In his ethnographic article he states that the origins of the Jews were an obscure tribe of ignorant nomads without culture whose beliefs have no scientific value. [105] Yet in his account of Arabs, their origins, and their environment, he describes the fierce and noble allure of the Arab nomads of the desert, which strikes all travelers. And while they are semi-savage and do not have the artifice of civilization, they are intelligent, and their life of freedom and independence in the desert has charm, and, according to Le Bon, is preferable to that of working in a stultifying factory for twelve hours a day.[106] The desert itself takes on different qualities depending on whether it is associated with Jews or Arabs. In his essay on "the Jews" he states that Semitic spirit suffers from its monotonous, vague, and grandiose horizons, apparently losing its charm as a result of this association.[107] As noted above, both Jews and Arabs are Semites according the Le Bon, and share a number of common traits and origins, such as nomadism and desert dwelling, charming among Arabs, but the source of ignorance and aridity among the Jews who, unlike them, contributed nothing positive to civilization.[108]

In all of these sources, Jews and Muslims are seen as fanatic, their religions as primitive. Yet Jews and Judaism are singled out for particular defamation. For Catholics they are treasonous and deicidal. For Le Bon the God of Israel is jealous, intolerant, and demanding of massacres, sacrifices, and holocausts, and the Old Testament, showing the real history of the Jews, is full of stories of adultery, incest, prostitution, and summary executions.[109] His appraisal is anything but original.

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[104] Le Bon, *Civilisation Arabe*, 3.

[105] Le Bon, "Rôle des Juifs dans l'histoire de la civilisation," 386 and 389.

[106] Le Bon, *Civilisation Arabe*, 42.

[107] Le Bon, "Rôle des Juifs dans l'histoire de la civilisation," 389. "Il ne précise rien, il n'enferme rien dans les formes nettes, arrêtées et multiples, si facilement créées par l'imagination aryenne. Aujourd'hui encore, malgré son islamisme apparent, le Bédouin du désert n'a qu'une religion bien vague et qui ne le préoccupe guère."

[108] Ibid., 386.

[109] Ibid., 387-388.

The French Communard Gustave Tridon claimed Jews committed cannibalism.[110] The Jews form part of the inferior races lacking in civilization, even constituting an obstacle it. Their malevolence goes back to Antiquity, as does their mercantile, vengeful, avaricious character. They were opposed to Greeks and Romans, Aryans who are conveyors of Western Civilization. Arabs, on the other hand, are noble Semites who built a great civilization under the genius of Muhammad, whose occupation as a merchant is downplayed or not mentioned at all. In contrast Jews are associated with exploitative merchants but are sometimes useful and necessary as middlemen. For Le Bon the traits shared by both "Semites" are positive when applied to Arabs, as long as they stay in their place as auxiliary helpers overseas, and negatively when applied to Jews, who also live in Europe but are neither European nor real French and can never assimilate into French society. Le Bon also excluded certain Muslims from his positive appraisal, particularly the Kabyle, who seemed to be amendable to evangelizing. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Le Bon, who demanded the complete separation of Occidentals from Orientals, had such contempt for the Kabyle.[111] This could also account for his hatred of Jews, who existed in both the East and the West, despite their "semitic race" and Asiatic origins.[112] Yet the claim that Jews constituted an inferior, non-Western race was not unique to him, or even nineteenth century writers associated with the political right. Socialists also made such claims.[113]

Le Bon also wrote a series of articles against the French Third Republic's colonial policy and in particular against its educational and assimilationist policies towards the Arabs. This was not due to an anti-imperialist stance per se, however. He praised the British for refraining from trying to change the mores and culture of the natives in India and stated that those who received a British education were demanding independence and that the same would occur in Algeria if the French government adopted such a policy.[114] For Le Bon the goal was not Algerian independence, but maintaining French control while keeping apart from the

[110] Gustave Tridon, *Du molochisme juif: études critiques et philosophiques* (Bruxelles: E. Maheu, 1884), 127-128, accessed June 5, 2023, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62073w.

[111] Gustave Le Bon, "L'Algérie et les idées régnantes en France en matière de colonisation," *Revue Scientifique (Revue Rose)* 24, no. 15 (1887): 449-457; 454, n. 1.

[112] Le Bon, "Rôle des Juifs dans l'histoire de la civilisation," 387 and 392.

[113] Vance, **"A**ntisemitism and Socialist Strategy."

[114] Le Bon, 'L'Algérie, 449, 451-452

indigenous population, following the British model of leaving the "natives alone" so they would be content with their lot. Finally, he invoked the precedent of Rome's collapse, saying it was caused by extending citizenship to the "barbarians." [115] Le Bon's ideas combined racial determinism, collective psychology, and the valorization of the irrational with an anti-modernist, aristocratic anti-republican admiration of the Arabs as the embodiment of traditions and virtues lost among the French due to the mercantile capitalist spirit embodied by the Jews.[116]

This association of Jews with capitalism is part of a larger nineteenth century antisemitic literature that often recycled the earlier myths (e.g., "Jewish usury"), and combined them with a reactionary, anti-modernist, anti-democratic political ideology. The idea that Jewish merchants and Jewish capitalists were uniquely powerful and could ruin national economies was accepted on both the French Left and the Right.[117] Algerian Jews were accused of impoverishing the native Muslim population. This claim was at first accepted by the French socialist and later Dreyfusard Jean Jaurès.[118] As we have seen, it also was voiced by an anonymous French military officer in 1846. What Le Bon admired in the Arabs was their global conquests, something equally admired by the French military officials discussed above, and their monumental architecture. It is curious that he was completely against "intermixing with conquered people" and downplayed it his discussion of Arab and Islamic civilization despite the fact that this intermixing was pervasive in the Arab conquest and expansion of Islam. Despite his apparent praise for Arab civilization Le Bon subscribed to the theory that the Orientals, which included the Arabs, were fundamentally different, and that they should not intermingle with the West.[119]

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[115] Ibid., 449, 454-457.

[116] Pierre Birnbaum, *La France aux Français: histoire des haines nationalistes* (Paris: Éditions du Seul, 1993), 268-271; Zeev Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire (1885-1914). Les origines françaises du fascisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978), 17, 148-149.

[117] Birnbaum, *La France aux Français*; Sternhell, *Ibid.*; Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, ed., *Antisémythes: l'image des Juifs entre culture et politique, 1848-1939* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2005); Vance, "Antisemitism and Socialist Strategy."

[118] Ibid., 295.

[119] Le Bon, "L'Algérie," 456-457.

From all of these works a number of repetitive themes become apparent. Arabs and Muslims detest Jews and see them as sub-human. The clergy added that Muslims prefer Christianity to Judaism and that Muslims revere Jesus and believe Jews tried to kill him, but God saved him. These themes were articulated by military and religious officials, as well as by politicians such as Duprat, before Drumont published his influential *La France juive* (1886). They were repeated afterwards. For the military and intellectuals such as Duprat, and Le Bon, as well as the more well-known leaders of the antisemitic movement such as Édouard Drumont and Georges Meynié, one of Drumont's disciples in Algeria and author of the derivatively titled *L'Algérie Juive* (1887), their supposed character made them unworthy of association with the French. For all of these writers, both religious and secular, the Arabs are brave, fierce, and important role models due to their world conquest and martial skills. For the colonial agents in Algeria, once conquered, the Arabs would be loyal to France and willing to die for it in its hour of need.[120] For Drumont, the Arabs did their duty as soldiers in the Franco-Prussian war, scaring the Prussians, like tigers rushing into the front and "black devils," with their savage cries.[121] These heroic Arabs, after fighting the French for so long defended them in their hour of need.[122] While Arabs fought for France, Jews, according to Drumont, applauded their defeat with the most indecent cynicism.[123] Indigenous Jews are incapable of being soldiers; in case of an Arab insurrection they would not be able to march with the real French and they would provide a bad example. Drumont had been the instigator of the Dreyfus Affair, which tore France apart after Captain Dreyfus was falsely accused of spying for Germany.[124] Their presence in French ranks would endanger the fidelity of the Muslim auxiliaries.[125] Drumont repeated the antisemitic claims that Jews are also

[120] Drumont, *La France juive*, vol. 2, 11; Meynié, *L'Algérie Juive*, 54 and 159.
[121] Drumont, *La France juive*, vol. 2, 12, "Ces 'diables noirs,' comme les appelaient les Prussiens, qui bondissaient sous la mitraille, avaient émerveillé l'ennemi à Wissembourg et à Woerth. Albert Duruy, qui, pour aller de suite au feu, s'était engagé parmi ces tirailleurs algériens, m'a raconté maintes fois l'effet presque fantastique qu'ils produisaient avec leurs cris sauvages, leur joie en entendant parler la poudre, leur façon de se ruer en avant comme des tigres. Pour ce camarade, qu'ils nommaient 'le fils du vizir,' ces farouches avaient à la fois du respect et de l'affection."
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid., 17.
[124] Eric Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics* (London: Longman, 1966), 10.
[125] Drumont, *La France juive*, vol. 2, 25.

responsible for the impoverishment and exploitation of the Arabs after their lands were expropriated.[126] All these themes were taken up and expanded upon by G. Meynié, in his *L'Algérie juive,* including stereotypes about "fanatic Arabs," the 'pitiful' state of the Jews before the French conquest, and their engagement in shameful commerce under the protection of France.[127] Once again Arabs are praised for their martial skills, which could be mobilized for France if it did not continue to protect the supposedly exploitative Jews at their expense. He also accused "the Jews" of exploiting European colonists.[128]

All of these writers shifted responsibility for Muslim discontent from the effects of the colonial regime onto the Jews, using reported Arabs and Muslim statements of contempt and dehumanization. According to accounts published after 1870 Muslims revolted because of the Crémieux Decree; Arabs were supposedly upset over Jewish involvement in French metropole and colonial politics. For the military and intellectuals such as Duprat, and Le Bon, and publicists such as Drumont and Meynié, Arabs will eventually accept colonial occupation and even their inferior status under it, but not the equality of the Jews as French citizens. According to them, Jews are universally despised. Sources published before and after 1870 make the same claims. Jews were saved by France from a humiliating existence under Muslim rule. They are not trustworthy and not worthy of French citizenship. Their nature is to be avaricious, vengeful, and greedy exploiters of both colons and Muslims; Jews are the enemy of both by nature.

Given the intense antipathy of this antisemitic rhetoric it should not be surprising to learn that it led to real violence against Jews, which exploded throughout colonial Algeria during the Dreyfus Affair. However, there were incidents prior to this, including in the 1880s, seemingly provoked by objections to Algerian Jewish soldiers attending dances for military recruits, and after elections when the losing political party blamed "the Jews" for their defeat.[129] In 1897 and 1898 antisemites in Algeria, calling themselves antijuifs, organized politically, establishing

[126] Ibid. 39.
[127] Meynié, *L'Algérie Juive,* 3-4 and 10.
[128] Ibid., 35 and 139.
[129] Zosa Szajkowski, "Socialists and Radicals in the Development of Antisemitism in Algeria (1884-1900)," *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 3 (1948): 257-280; Fernand Grégoire, *La juiverie algérienne* (Alger: impr. Torrent, 1888); Meynié, *L'Algérie juive* (Paris: A. Savine, 1887).

newspapers and printing election paraphernalia that vilified and dehumanized Jews.[130] Many won their elections in Oran, Algiers, and other cities in colonial Algeria, taking over municipalities and excluding Jews from public sector employment, from vital municipal services such as schools and hospitals and even from the public space, threatening to expel them from Algeria.[131] In those two years there were violent riots throughout Algeria. These were not put down until the French government, motivated by the antijuifs' threatens of succession, arrested the leadership, and imposed martial law, leading to the weakening of their movement. Yet antisemitism lived on among colonial administrators and the general population and resurfaced during the Vichy regime.[132]

Attempts at mobilizing Muslims and Arabs in the violence at the end of the nineteenth century overall failed. Although individuals from these communities took part in the riots, their leadership warned against collaborating with the colonists, given the ongoing structural inequality and violence of the colonial regime.[133] The twentieth century would see more violence, including violence directed against Algerian Jews and would eventually lead to their mass exodus in 1962 when Algeria achieved its independence.[134] The antisemitic rhetoric

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[130] Dermenjian, *La crise anti-juive*, 126-130, 132 and 143-144; Dermenjian, "La Caricature comme élément du discours antisémite européen en Algérie (1830-1939)," in *Antisémythes*, ed. Matard-Bonucci, 395-410; Sharon Vance, "Antisemitism in Colonial Algeria and France in the 19th & early 20th centuries," (Paper Presented at the International Workshop and Conference Jewish Historical Writing: 140 years to Heinrich Graetz's "History of the Jewish People," 9-11 March 2015, Western Galilee College, Akko, Israel); Vance, "Antisemitism and Socialist Strategy," discusses the history of antisemitic rhetoric in both France and colonial Algeria, and the connections between them, along with its expression in violence in colonial Algeria, particularly among those who self-identified as socialists. For an example of a particularly violent cartoon see E. Herzig, *Supplément Illustré de L'Antijuif Algérien*, April 3, 1898, 1.

[131] Abitbol, *Mi-Kremyeh le-Peṭen,* 45; Dermenjian, *La crise anti-juive,* 142.

[132] Abitbol, *Mi-Kremyeh le-Peṭen*; Pierre Birnbaum, *The Antisemitic Moment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011 [1998]); Dermenjian, *La crise anti-juive*; Michael M. Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Henri Msellati, *Les juifs d'Algérie sous le régime de Vichy: 10 juillet 1940-3 novembre 1943* (Paris: Harmatta, 1999).

[133] Ageron, "Une révolution manquée: la crise anti-juive," in *Les Algériens musulmans*, vol. I (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), 583-606; Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*.

[134] Richard Ayoun and Bernard Cohen, *Les Juifs d'Algérie 2000 ans d'histoire* (Paris: J. C. Lattès, 1982)

incessantly repeated throughout the nineteenth century helped pave the way for this violence.

Accompanying this rhetoric were seeming complements paid to Arabs and to a lesser extent to Muslims in general. However, the compliments by these antisemitic writers, including Le Bon, were backhanded and reinforced colonial discourse and power relations. Yet even this was not extended to Jews, who were threatened with expulsion.

It has been claimed that antisemitism among some Arabs today is the same as the old European antisemitism.[135] To what extent these generals, bishops, politicians, journalists and publicists and their attitudes towards Jews influenced and still influence the ongoing spread of antisemitic discourse in France and in the Arab and Muslim world in later decades needs to be studied, and the focus needs to be on an analysis of the content, its means of transmission and distribution, and its possible impact on violence and antisemitic hate crimes.[136] When considering antisemitism among Muslims it is important to remember that these nineteenth century works are not the only sources for the animosity, and that there are also Islamic texts disparaging Jews, yet if such stereotypes and this rhetoric sound familiar, these nineteenth century texts from colonial Algeria are some of their sources.

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[135] Saïd Ben Saïd, "L'antisémitisme des Arabes aujourd'hui est le même que le vieil antisémitisme européen," *Le Monde*, November 6, 2017. Accessed June 5, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/11/06/said-ben-said-l-antisemitisme-des-arabes-aujourd-hui-est-le-meme-que-le-vieil-antisemitisme-europeen_5210836_3232.html.

[136] An example of such research is Monika Hübscher and Sabine Von Mering, "A Snapshot of Antisemitism on Social Media in 2021," in *Antisemitism on social media,* eds. Monika Hübscher and Sabine Von Mering (London: Routledge, 2022), 1-16; Navras J. Aafreedi, "Antisemitic Rhetoric in Urdu on YouTube: An Analysis," in *Antisemitism on social media,* 114-128; Service de Protection de la Communauté Juif, "2017 Rapport sur l'antisémitisme en France," accessed June 5, 2023, https://www.antisemitisme.fr/dl/2017-FR.

Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. Some of her publications include: *The Martyrdom of a Moroccan Jewish Saint* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); "Conversione, apostasia e martirio: Il caso di Sol Hatchuel," *Genesis. Rivista della Società Italiana della Storiche* 6, no,2 (2007), 75-100, (trans. Giovanni Campolo); "Sol Hatchuel, 'heroine of the 19th Century:' Gender, the Jewish Question, and Colonial Discourse," in *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*, eds. Emily Benichou Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011); "Hatchuel, Sol (Lalla Solika)," in *Encyclopedia Of Jews In The Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); "Judeo-Arabic," *Cambridge Dictionary of Jewish History, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Judith R. Baskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and "Antisemitism and Socialist Strategy 1880-1917: France and colonial Algeria," *Patterns of Prejudice* 51, no. 3-4 (2017): 292-317.

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Hillel Kieval, *Blood Inscriptions: Science, Modernity, and Ritual Murder in Europe's Fin de Siècle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), pp. 312.

by *Robert Weinberg*

The accusation that Jews engage in the murder of gentile children for a variety of ritual purposes stretches back a millennium and has been at times part of the antisemitic arsenal over the centuries. Originating in England in the twelfth century, the accusation, commonly referred to as the blood libel, emerged as an allegation that Jews killed Christians to mock the Passion of Christ and desecrate the Host. It also claimed that Jewish men consumed non-Jewish blood in order to replenish the blood they lost during menstruation. But it was the unfounded belief that Jews needed gentile blood in order to bake matzo that became the mainstay of the blood libel and characterized most ritual murder accusations from the fourteenth century to the twentieth century.

The blood libel spread from England to the continent, finding a home in German-speaking Europe by the fifteenth century. The blood libel could have deadly consequences for Jews: Jews suspected of ritual murder were arrested, tortured, and sometimes executed. It provided the rationale for burning at the stake fifteen Jewish men in the city of Trent for the murder of a two-year-old boy named Simon in 1475. From Protestant and Catholic Central Europe, the accusation then spread further eastward, taking root in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and, by the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire where it found a receptive audience among Orthodox Christians.

Despite its spread to Central and Eastern Europe, lands where most European Jews lived, the accusation was not a constant feature of Jewish life. The Vatican actually challenged blood libel allegations in papal bulls. Moreover, by the mid-sixteenth century authorities in Western and Central Europe[1] rejected efforts to prosecute Jews on the basis of the accusation. By the end of the eighteenth-century officials

[1] One exception was the Damascus Affair in 1840 when Christians in Damascus accused a group of Jews of murdering a monk and his Muslim servant for the purpose of using their blood for the baking of matzo. The French consul supported the interrogation and torture of the accused, who were imprisoned, tortured, and then released by the Ottoman rulers of Syria.

in Poland and Hungary stopped putting Jews on trial for ritual murder. But the blood libel enjoyed a renascence in the quarter century before the outbreak of World War I. It was very much alive at the turn of the twentieth century: dozens of ritual murder accusations left their traces in newspapers, parliamentary proceedings, and trials in Imperial Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and tsarist Russia. Many Jews found themselves under suspicion for crimes they did not commit, became the focus of public debates and government concern, and in some cases attracted the attention of Jews and governments outside Europe and became *causes célèbres*. Violence against Jewish communities erupted in the aftermath of accusations, especially in small towns and villages. Historians are unsure whether the number of accusations actually increased toward the end of the nineteenth century or simply represented the reporting of newspapers and periodicals that proliferated during the second half of the 1800s and became the mainstay of public life. It contributed to the emergence of a politically informed and engaged citizenry throughout Europe.[2]

In *Blood Inscriptions: Science, Modernity, and Ritual Murder in Europe's Fin de Siècle*, Hillel Kieval focuses on four ritual murder trials that occurred in Imperial Germany (Xanten in the early 1890s and Konitz in the early 1900s and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Tiszaeszlár in the early 1880s and Polná at the end of the 1890s). The book reads like a police procedural on television by offering in-depth and nuanced accounts of how the ritual murder accusations played out in each case study and exploring the different dynamics that characterized the modern blood libel and its earlier incarnations. *Blood Inscriptions* explores the social, cultural, and political undercurrents of each trial and reveals the inner workings of judicial systems. It also uncovers the forces that rent the social fabric at the end of the nineteenth century.

Kieval uses the four case studies to illuminate how and why educated Europeans beholden to Enlightenment thought and rationality, and modern science, medicine, and jurisprudence would embrace a canard rooted in medieval religious prejudice and superstition. He writes:

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[2] As Magda Teter writes, "Anti-Jewish libels did not cease at the end of the eighteenth century." Magda Teter, "On the Continuities and Discontinuities of Anti-Jewish Libels," *Antisemitism Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2021): 383.

> What, for example, are the means by which *disreputable* knowledge can become reputable, recapturing the imagination of social elites? How is it possible that state officials at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whose ethos was built on a commitment to bureaucratic rationality and scientific method, should commit huge amounts of time, energy, and prestige to such criminal investigations and prosecutions? What would have made the accusation of Jewish ritual murder *meaningful* to self-consciously "modern" individuals? (p. 6).

He challenges the argument that the blood libel in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Europe was nothing more than a continuation of pre-Enlightenment religious prejudices and popular superstition. For Kieval, the blood libel was in fact a consequence of modernity and found sustenance in modern science, medicine, and forensic criminology. Antisemitism in general and the ritual murder myth are not, according to Kieval, static phenomena but are historically contingent. They may stem from a long intellectual and political lineage, but their manifestations, motivations, and justifications may change over time. *Blood Inscriptions* offers a roadmap to understanding the social, cultural, intellectual, and political underpinnings of conspiracy theories in our contemporary discourse.

One would expect that secularization and Enlightenment thought, along with the decline of superstition and rise of modern science, urbanization, and industrialization, would have led to the disappearance of blood libel canard. But the ritual murder accusation retained its hold on both educated and uneducated Christians, and did not disappear from the historical stage. Kieval notes that

> the argument for the cultural backwardness—the atavism—of the modern ritual murder trials either presumes a regrettable continuity between the medieval accusation and its modern variant—underscoring the incompleteness of Enlightenment education—or suggests that it was precisely the irrational element in the blood libel that its modern protagonists found to be so appealing (p. 20).

According to Kieval, accusations lodged against Jews for murdering Christian youths in order to consume their blood are not explained by the persistence of irrationalism and superstition. Rather, historians need to uncover reasons why educated professionals, government servitors, politicians, and journalists embraced a preposterous conspiratorial theory in quintessentially modern terms. After all, many defense attorneys, criminologists, medical examiners, and government ministers subscribed to ritual murder accusations. By1900 reliance on torture to extract confessions had been replaced by the rules of evidence demanded by modern jurisprudence.[3] Rather than turn to religion on which to base their arguments, proponents and detractors relied upon late nineteenth-century science and medicine, two quintessentially modern fields of knowledge.

Kieval wrestles with the question of why the modern ritual murder trial emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and ended on the eve of World War I, a period limited to thirty-five years. Ritual murder accusations clearly had not gone away: they just hibernated until they were awoken in 1870s with the weaponization of antisemitism as a political movement. In the words of Kieval, ritual murder discourse at the end of nineteenth century "tied the imagery of the modern ritual murder accusation to the programmatic concerns of political antisemitism" (p. 107).

Kieval points to several factors that account for the emergence of the blood libel in modern Europe. One was the recent granting of Jews civil and political rights in Imperial Germany and the Habsburg Empire, the two states in which the four case studies took place. Opponents of the changes brought about by modernity turned to the political arena to promote their agenda, which aimed to limit if not undo the enfranchisement of Jews, which was seen as a by-product of democratization. Unlike England and France, German-speaking Europe was less welcoming to liberalism and therefore Jewish emancipation, and easily became a testing ground for conservative and nationalist activists who felt threatened by rapid socio-economic and political changes.

World War I marked the end of trials accusing Jews of ritual murder, and Kieval posits that perhaps the trauma of the war and the revolutions and civil wars that

[3] As Kieval writes, "These were people who were convinced that they occupied a radically different historical situation than that which had existed two or three centuries earlier" (p. 226).

followed in its wake overshadowed the ritual murder accusation. As he notes, even the Nazis did not put Jews on trial for ritual murder. Or maybe the emergence of nation-states and constitutional rule that emerged in the debris of the failed Russian, Habsburg, German, and Ottoman empires militated against state-directed persecution of Jews, notwithstanding the fragile foundations of the new political order and the continued intensity of antisemitism. Kieval offers a compelling explanation when he argues that the "structure of plausibility" (p. 6) and discursive universe that fostered the willingness to countenance the blood libel collapsed under its own weight. The language and institutions that justified the accusations were "always inherently unstable and at risk of coming apart" (p. 223).

It bears keeping in mind that belief in the accusation was not monolithic and the governments' cases fell apart: none of the defendants brought to trial in the cases studied by Kieval were found guilty of murder. At times government prosecutors undermined their cases by raising doubts about the veracity of the charges. At other times medical professionals and criminologists challenged the conclusions drawn by proponents of the blood libel. In addition, politicians and civil servants were prone to reject the premises of the ritual murder myth.

Unlike Kieval, I hesitate to dismiss religious prejudice as one underlying cause of the modern ritual murder accusation. To be sure, prosecutors, lawyers, and medical professional who supported the ritual murder allegation sought to base their cases on what they believed to be demonstrably rational, scientific evidence, thereby distancing themselves from arguments rooted in religious prejudice. They also tended to refrain from injecting Judaism into the proceedings and did not embrace the emerging racialist thinking that set Jews biologically distinct from Christians. But many educated Europeans who embraced the reality of Jewish ritual murder "pointed precisely to religion, religious, texts, and religious fanaticism as the sources of a most dangerous expression of Jewish difference" (p. 224).

Kieval is indeed correct that blood libel trials at the end of the nineteenth century were prompted, not by religious prejudice and animosity, but by the social and political dislocation caused by modernization. But anti-Judaism lurked beneath the social fabric and explained why, when a Christian youth turned up dead, all eyes turned toward Jews as the culprits. There would be no ritual murder

accusation without the existence of Judaism whose texts were twisted and misinterpreted to lend credence to the claim that Jews needed the blood of gentiles for Jewish rituals and practices.

The 1913 trial of Mendel Beilis, a Kyivan Jew accused of murdering a gentile youth, speaks to the persistence of the religious foundations of the blood libel. The prosecutor called witnesses who insisted, based on erroneous and uninformed readings of Judaic texts such as the Talmud, that Jews were religiously obliged by Judaism to use the blood of gentile youths. Even though the jury did not find Beilis guilty of murder, it did agree with the prosecution that the murder had the hallmarks of a ritual murder.[4] It is also important to acknowledge that the transition from pre-modern to modern forms of knowledge was incomplete. As one proponent of the blood libel asserted in connection to the trial of Mendel Beilis, Beilis's legal team did not permit itself to believe that there "could be ritual murders in the century of airplanes and trams."[5] Finally, it merits mentioning that Beilis was the last Jew to stand trial for ritual murder in Europe.

Kieval is not the first historian to write about these trials, but *Blood Inscriptions* is a superb contribution to the growing literature on the blood libel in Europe in the modern era. The book is a tour de force of historical research and reasoning that leaves no stone unturned and merits a wide audience. It will join classic accounts by Helmut Walser Smith, Magda Teter, and others as a testament to exemplary historical research and analysis on the subject.[6] Kieval's analysis sheds light on the inner workings of the conspiratorial mindset and demonstrates how people may not believe in cabals but nonetheless find them politically expedient.

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[4] See Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013).

[5] Robert Weinberg, "Connecting the Dots: Jewish Mysticism, Ritual Murder, and the Trial of Mendel Beilis," in *Word and Image in Russian History. Essays in Honor of Gary Marker*, eds. Daniel Kaiser, Valerie Kivelson, and Maria di Salvo (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2015), 240.

[6] Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003); Magda Teter, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of An Antisemitic Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Eugene Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chen, and Robert Weinberg, eds., *Ritual Murder in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Beyond: New Histories of an Old Accusation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017); Eugene Avrutin, *The Velizh Affair: Blood Libel in a Russian Town* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Edward Berenson, *The Accusation: Blood Libel in an American Town* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2019).

This is, of course, small consolation in today's world in which conspiratorial thinking suffuses all forms of media.

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Hillel Kieval, *Blood Inscriptions: Science, Modernity, and Ritual Murder in Europe's Fin de Siècle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), pp. 312.

by *Michal Frankl*

This book is full of gruesome details: knife cuts on the neck, dismembered bodies and blood, a lot—or too little—of it. But this provoking content is not for nothing: Hillel Kieval's touches upon one of the most basic and, at the same time, most difficult questions in the history of modern antisemitism. How was this possible, asked contemporaries and later commentators, journalists or scholars, that an outdated, "medieval," religious and irrational accusation took hold in the period considered by many as modern, enlightened and scientific. The author re-read many reports of brutal murders, tragic deaths and narratives drowned in blood which disrupted cohabitation, in those places where the criminal cases occurred and beyond, and examined how there emerged the "knowledge" of a specifically Jewish crime. The book is an outcome of Kieval's decades' long interest in the accusation of ritual murder, one in which he took inspiration from his research on Czech-Jewish history in the long nineteenth century. While facing nationalism and integrating into a changing society, Czech Jews were also confronted with rumors, trials and violence that referred to alleged Jewish crimes and the removal of blood from bodies in Kolín, Polná and many other places.[1]

[1] Hillel J. Kieval, "Death and the Nation: Ritual Murder as Political Discourse in the Czech Lands," in *Allemands, Juifs Et Tcheques a Prague - Deutsche, Juden Und Tschechen in Prag, 1890-1924*, eds. Maurice Godé, Jacques Le Rider, and Francoise Mayer (Montpellier: Université Paul-Valéry, 1996), 83-99; Hillel J. Kieval, "Antisémitisme Ou Savoir Social? Sur La Genese Du Proces Moderne Pour Meurtre Rituel," *Annales* 49, no. 5 (1994): 1091-1105; Hillel J. Kieval, "Representation and Knowledge in Medieval and Modern Accounts of Jewish Ritual Murder," *Jewish Social Studies* 1, no. 1 (1994): 52-72; Hillel J. Kieval, "Middleman Minorities and Blood: Is There a Natural Economy of the Ritual Murder Accusation in Europe?" in *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, eds. Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid (Seattle-London: University of Washington Press, 1997), 208-233; Hillel J. Kieval, "The Importance of Place: Comparative Aspects of the Ritual Murder Trial in Modern Central Europe," in *Comparing Jewish Societies*, ed. Todd M. Endelman (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 135-165; Hillel J. Kieval, "The Rules of the Game: Forensic Medicine and the Language of Science in the Structuring of Modern Ritual Murder Trials," *Jewish History* 26, no. 3-4 (2013): 287-307.

To establish what made such modern accusations distinct, Kieval focuses on four out of the six ritual murder trials that took place between the late 1870s and the First World War (for a quick overview, see table on p. 15). All had in common the disappearance and/or murder of a Christian child, girl or young man, an investigation which confronted local knowledge and social ties with modern criminology, and eventually exposed them in court trial(s). In the case of Tiszaeszlár from 1882-83, a group of Jews from a Hungarian village was accused of killing a fourteen years old Christian girl. In the context of rising Hungarian antisemitism, this case, which the local investigator steered towards a Jewish religious crime, was eventually decided in a court trial which acquitted the defendants.[2] A small town in Germany, Xanten, in 1891 became a stage for a similarly polarized investigation following a murder of a five years old Christian boy. It took a year for the investigation and the jury to acquit the local Jewish butcher.[3] After Anežka Hrůzová, 19 years old, was found dead close to the town Polná in Bohemia in 1899, and in the context of a broader antisemitic mobilization, a poor and mostly unemployed local Jew was put on trial for allegedly being an accomplice to her killing, in which the blood was drained from the body of the deceased. In 1899 and again in 1900, following an appeal and in what proved to be an exception, Leopold Hilsner was sentenced for a crime that rested on the imagination of a Jewish ritual murder.[4] Finally, the brutal murder

[2] Among previously published studies on this subject, especially Andrew Handler, *Blood Libel at Tiszaeszlar* (New York: Boulder, 1980).

[3] Julius H. Schöps, "Ritualmordbeschuldigung und Blutaberglaube. Die Affäre Buschhoff im niederrheinischn Xanten," in *Köln und das rheinische Judentum*, eds. Jutta Bohnke-Kollwitz et al. (Köln: J. P. Bachem, 1984), 286-300; Jürgen Lange, "Der Xantener Ritualmordprozeß von 1892 und die Staatsanwaltschaft," in *Rheinische Justiz. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, eds. Dieter Laum, Adolf Klein, and Dieter Strauch (Köln: Verlag Dr. Otto Schmidt, 1994), 565-623; Bernd Kölling, "Blutige Illusionen. Ritualmorddiskurse und Antisemitismus im niederrheinischen Xanten am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Agrarische Verfassung und politische Struktur. Studein zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte Preußens*, eds. Wolfgang Neugebauer and Ralf Pröve (Berlin: Berlin Verlag Arno Spitz, 1998), 349-382; Willi Faehrmann, "Die Buschhoff Affäre in Xanten," in *Das Bild Des Juden in Der Volks- Und Jugendliteratur Vom 18. Jahrhundert Bis 1945*, ed. Heinrich Pleticha (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1985), 127-139.

[4] Bohumil Černý, *Vražda v Polné* (Praha: Vydavatelství časopisů MNO, 1968); Jiří Kovtun, *Tajuplná vražda. Případ Leopolda Hilsnera* (Praha: Sefer, 1994).

and dismembering of the body of a Christian young man in Konitz in Germany in 1900 triggered multiple accusations and investigations.[5]

While these cases have attracted not only popular, but also scholarly attention before, a comparative study was still missing. In this respect, the research on modern accusations lagged behind that on the blood libels of the medieval and early modern periods[6] and Kieval's work can be read as a strong companion to recent study of Magda Teter.[7] Without any doubt, this book will become an authoritative study on ritual murders as discourse and trials in the late 19th and early 20th century. The approach of this author—inspired by the sociology of knowledge, in his exploration of the mutual influence and confrontation of scientific languages with local societies and economies—rewrites the history of the formation and effects of these accusations. Kieval demonstrates to be a careful and attentive reader paying attention to detail and location, terminology and tone. Exactly because he unearths the details of scenes and narratives, the book has a differentiated pace and is somewhat selective, no doubt to avoid repetitions stemming from the similarity of many details of these "bloody" cases, but also to advance Kieval's particular interpretation. For instance, Leopold Hilsner's confession after his first trial, a central moment in all other histories of the Polná case, is not discussed here at all, which shows how, for Kieval, Hilsner remained an outlier in the modern discourses on ritual murder.

Even though the motive of an alleged Jewish blood ritual might have been persistent, the series of trials examined in the book is distinct, according to Kieval. The accusations follow a gap of two or three centuries which separate them from the medieval and early modern trials, the demise of which coincided with the arrival of modern criminal justice and banning of torture as a legitimate investigative practice. Kieval focuses on the few accusations, out of the dozens or

[5] Christoph Nonn, "Zwischenfall in Konitz. Antisemitismus und Nationalismus im preussischen Osten um 1900," *Historische Zeitschrift* 266, no. 1 (1998): 387-418; Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale. Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town* (New York-London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002).

[6] R. Po-chia Hsia, *Trent 1475. Stories of a Ritual Murder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[7] Magda Teter, *Blood libel. On the trail of an antisemitic myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); see also discussions by Diego Quaglioni and Kenneth Stow, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 19 (June 2021), https://doi.org/10.48248/issn.2037-741X/12547 and https://doi.org/10.48248/issn.2037-741X/12762.

hundreds that were circulating in the press and beyond, because they developed into court trials. The indictment and legal arguments in these cases could no longer "be articulated [...] in pre-Reformation language and symbols" (p. 136). Re-emerging in the late 19th century, the image of the ritual murder was stripped of its deep religious meanings. Now, "sacrifice has been transmuted into slaughter, the altar into the cutting block" (p. 160).

Kieval challenges the simple binary opposition between the accusations of ritual murder as a primitive, old and prejudicial phenomenon on the one hand, and the progress and modernity which also underpinned the ideas of Jewish integration in societies on the other hand. In reevaluating his own assumptions at the start of his work, he came to the conclusion "that obsessive attention to the apparent irrationality of the blood libel simply does not work well as an analytical lens" (p. 18). Kieval confronts the usual liberal responses which viewed the blood libel as a matter of the past—an expression of medieval superstition and irrationality. Such reactions, says the author, were—and sometimes continue to be—based on a serious misunderstanding of the nature of such cases.

These trials, he argues, "constituted a *new phenomenon* in the long history of the blood libel" by following modern criminal codes and rules and by the application of "modern forensic science and criminology" (p. 4, emphasis in original). In re-reading and re-contextualizing these cases of ritual murder accusation, Kieval specifically pays attention to the new epistemology of medical science and criminology in supporting or refuting the mostly inherited knowledge about Jews and their alleged deeds. Reflecting on impulses from the sociology of knowledge allows him to ask what made these accusations work by making this knowledge "meaningful" to modern, educated social actors. It was experts and practitioners of science who now "defined the boundaries—linguistic and conceptual—of plausible argument" (p. 136). Out of the large corpuses of text that these investigations, trials and the press coverage left behind, the medical reports and autopsies are the material which especially attracted Kieval's attention, providing the language and scientific legitimacy to the old accusation. In the post-Enlightenment context, only this knowledge and authority could move the State to act, investigate and put on trial.

Kieval's approach differs from that of Daniel Vyleta who, tracing "Jewish" crimes in contemporary criminology and press, focused on the process of discursive

making of the cunning and modern Jewish criminal and on the notion of suggestive power of a master criminal.[8] In contrast, the analysis of Kieval revolves around the production of knowledge accumulated through the investigation and the public discussion of these crimes. This requires the readers to familiarize themselves with medical expert knowledge. For instance, in the Tiszaeszlár case, where the proceedings depended on the identification of the body of a drowned girl, Kieval guides the reader through complex medical terminology such as the production of "adipocere" (corpse wax) or "endochondral ossification" (p. 78). The volume of blood in the body and its alleged absence on the crime scene played a central role in the report of local physicians in Polná which, according to Kieval, "constitutes one of the seminal documents in the turn-of-the-century struggle to establish proper scientific procedures in forensic medicine" (p. 156). These opinions written in the language of modern science and building on observations made possible by the state-of-the-art technology both supported, but also tamed the epistemological making and sustaining of the accusations of ritual murder. Eventually, Kieval argues, sometime before the First World War their instability became apparent, and these epistemologies collapsed, no longer resulting in court trials. Even though the accusations of ritual murder continued (and still continue) to be present in antisemitic discourses, their real impact remained limited.

For Kieval, the history of modern antisemitism as ideology and practice offers little clue to explain the relative success of ritual murder accusations of the period under examination. In contrast, the book "attempts to disengage the modern ritual murder trial [...] from *antisemitism* as an explanatory construct" (p. 27). Antisemitic propaganda and violence was an important aspect of all four cases, Kieval recognizes; however, he seems reluctant to derive their emergence and impact from the national political movements which developed and spread antisemitic discourses. Leaning on the research of Robert Nemes about Hungarian provinces,[9] he can claim that "it wasn't antisemitism that produced the Tiszaeszlár affair but, rather, Tiszaeszlár that helped to galvanize modern antisemitism" (p. 107). Instead, Kieval locates the history of ritual murder cases in

[8] Daniel M. Vyleta, *Crime, Jews and News. Vienna 1895-1914* (New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).

[9] Robert Nemes, "Hungary's Antisemitic Provinces: Violence and Ritual Murder in the 1880s," *Slavic Review* 66, no. 1 (2007): 20-44.

the context of what he calls "cultural geography of place" (p. 27), a close reading of the social and cultural settings in Tiszaeszlár, Xanten, Polná and Konitz. He shows multi-layered relationships between Jews and Christians and Jewish integration into local societies which cannot be easily subsumed to any history of antisemitism. As he stresses, "Jewish residents [...] were rooted in their communities, had a strong sense of place, and felt entitled to the protection of the state" (p. 59). On the other hand, with Jews and Christians living in proximity and interaction, it was the accusation of ritual murder which disrupted the daily cohabitation, triggered social exclusion and migration from these communities.

Rather than antisemitism, it was this locally constructed knowledge of Jewish criminality which made up the recipe in the accusations of ritual murder. Kieval acknowledges the impact of local views and prejudice on the building up of medical knowledge. In the case of Xanten, for instance, "the closer the medical practitioners themselves were physically to the social and cultural universe of the town [...], the more susceptible their analyses were to the cultural assumptions that supported accusations of Jewish ritual murder" (p. 137). In Polná, he similarly recognizes the mutual influence of the "[s]ymbolic language, received tradition, rumor, and forensic medicine" (p. 154). Starting with Tiszaeszlár, the local was essential for the construction of knowledge about Jewish criminality and "blood libel." For instance, Kieval shows how the "transportable images" (p. 124) of the butcher and ritual slaughterer, easily identifiable locally in the villages and small towns like the four examined in the book, played a central role in the construction of the storylines of several accusations.

Still, while persuasive and highly inspiring, the book could have been taken further to refine the argument with regard to the relationship to modern antisemitism, beyond the negative boundaries which Kieval draws. As a result, the history of antisemitism remains more a scenery to his interpretation. It appears to me that this is based on a narrow understanding of themes and methods in antisemitism research, as if it only explored continuities and ruptures of anti-Jewish ideas and practices. Arguably, the interest in the history of antisemitism in the 19th and early 20th century lessened after the 1990s, when it expanded geographically, especially with respect to Eastern Europe, and thematically. Yet, in striking similarity to the development of Holocaust Studies, it opened new approaches, be it through the lenses of gender, language, or—most significantly in this context—local history.

Kieval's new perspective on ritual murder trials fits well with this vision of the history of antisemitism as a broad category.

While antisemitism in the narrow sense of the word alone does not offer an ultimate explanation, the success of the cases that were examined in this volume would have been unthinkable without the mobilization and the legitimization it provided. In particular, one wonders how the discussions of the crime, its sites and actors, relate to the contemporaneous modernization of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and structurally fits the widespread ideas about a coordinated action of Jews against non-Jews. Similarly to the accusations of ritual murder, the narratives of Jewish conspiracy on global or local scales constructed knowledge that seemed meaningful to its authors and recipients—it's irrationality notwithstanding. In a parallel to Kieval's interpretation, antisemitism—while not (always) scientific—offered a new language which claimed to disengage from traditional anti-Judaism with its baggage of prejudice and hatred. In the very own words of antisemites, their arguments against Jews were supposed to be rooted in the analysis of economy and society, and thus in fact and science. That's why at least some economists and sociologists experimented with antisemitic arguments. Thomas Masaryk himself, before becoming a staunch opponent of the Polná blood libel, flirted with antisemitism as a language that described the ills of the modern society scientifically. Like the epistemologies of the modern ritual trial, their entanglements with antisemitism were temporary and perhaps transitional.

Hence, the logics and languages underpinning the investigations and trials examined by Kieval might be more significant to the study of modern antisemitism than the author himself acknowledges. In conclusion, rather than reading the book in separation from research on modern antisemitism, it can be studied as an enrichment and as an inspiration for future research in this field.

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David J. Kertzer, *Un Papa in guerra. La storia segreta di Mussolini, Hitler e Pio XII* (Milano: Garzanti, 2022), pp. 720.

by *Liliana Picciotto*

Kertzer's volume offers what the title honestly proclaims: *A Pope at War. The secret history of Mussolini, Hitler and Pius XII*. This is the chronicle, rich in documentation, of papal politics, from the years of the election to the papal throne of Pius XII in March 1939 to the end of the Second World War. The events discussed by Kertzer are those on stage and also those in the background, on the basis of a long research that has involved not only the Vatican archives, but also the archives of the Foreign Ministries of various States involved in the Second World War: Italy, Germany, France, United States and Great Britain.

In addition to describing the various official diplomatic positions, the book abundantly describes secret meetings, important and less important talks, rumors, opinions and moods circulating in the corridors of power, in this way revealing intrigues, antipathies and double-crossing between various characters, even including the private chats between Mussolini and his beloved Claretta Petacci. This over-abundance of documents on the one hand reveals interesting internal mechanisms of the international diplomacy of the time, on the other risks confusing the reader and making him lose the thread of some themes, especially since everything is narrated in a rigidly chronological order and not according to the different topics.

Despite these difficulties, I will try here to point out some passages of this important, even though not definitive, book. We must first of all keep in mind that very little time has passed between the opening, brought forward by a few years at Pope Francis's behest, of the four Vatican archives that can now be investigated and their closure due to the pandemic. The underlying thesis, already known but amply verified here, is that Pope Pacelli, finding himself at the time of his election, in March 1939, on the eve of the most frightening conflict of the modern age, unleashed by a state ready to do anything to win and expand his own ideology, did nothing to counter it even in the face of the blatant atrocities it perpetrated, and on which Pacelli always had precise information.

The best way, according to Pope Pius XII as soon as he ascended the papal throne, to coexist with Nazi Germany, in the hope that it would eventually repent, was to flatter Hitler, to try not to irritate him and to seek his favor to obtain that Catholic schools and seminaries were not closed in Germany, that no books were published that attacked the Church, that the cut of public funds in favor of the Church in Austria was reviewed. He was also concerned that, after the German annexation of Austria and part of Czechoslovakia, forty million Catholics now lived in the Reich and, consequently, he did not want to do anything that would jeopardize their situation. Another thought worried him: the fear that denouncing the Nazis would alienate, within the territories of the Reich, loyal citizens who were both Catholics and Nazis, thereby risking causing a schism.

Hitler had sensed the change of perspective towards Nazi Germany taking place in the Vatican. In previous years, being Pope Achille Ratti-Pius XI, he had received from him clear disapproval of the Nazi ideology in its form of "new pagan religion" and even ostracism towards its racist policy, with various initiatives, even striking ones, which I will not be repeating here. Now Hitler was willing to open a dialogue with the new Pope even outside the official diplomatic channels, using as an intermediary the pro-Nazi German prince Philip of Hesse, husband of the unfortunate (she was later arrested and deported) Princess Mafalda of Savoy, daughter of King Victor Emmanuel. The secret meetings between Philip of Hesse, very close to Hitler, and the Pope are one of the new pieces of data discussed in Kertzer's book.

A first meeting took place on 19 May 1939 and started off a relaxing phase in relations between Nazism and the Vatican. Another took place on August 26, 1939, in Castel Gandolfo, in which the prince of Hesse reported to the Pope that Hitler wished to confirm his most fervent desire to restore peace with the Church. He believed that there were two major issues that needed to be resolved if an agreement were to be reached: the "racial question," and what the Führer regarded as clerical interference in Germany's internal politics. Hitler thought that the first of these obstacles, the "racial question," could possibly be "evaded," Kertzer says, by continuing the new Pope's policy of not speaking out on the matter. What was therefore necessary to conclude an agreement on was the role of the German Catholic clergy.

Despite the fact that meetings between the Prince of Hesse and the Pope lasted until March 1941, nothing came of the religious peace between the Vatican and the Reich, given the war in progress and Hitler's lack of aspiration to submit to any request, but these talks are the premonitory sign of the Pope's stubborn attitude of non-pronouncement on any subsequent question presented to his consideration.

In fact, the Pope remained silent for many years, out of convenience and out of fear, following the idea that it was better never to pronounce himself and in the conviction that Europe would be subjugated by Nazism everywhere in the near future. The silence covered many events: the murder of the Jews of Europe, the persecution of the clergy in Poland after the attack of September 1941, the harassment of the Catholic Church in Germany, the massacre of the Fosse Ardeatine, the roundup of the Jews of Rome, the treacherous invasion of territories, the unchallenged use of absolute violence. All missed opportunities to affirm the moral strength of the Church, letting instead diplomatic considerations linked to the Vatican's state of neutrality prevail. Conversely, let us not forget that the moral influence of the Church was, at the material time and throughout the world, incomparably superior to today's and the Pope's words were listened to with devotion and respect everywhere. The Pope's silence, supported if not often induced by his advisers, the Secretary of State Cardinal Luigi Maglione, the two Deputy Secretaries of State Domenico Tardini and Giovanni Battista Montini, perplexed not only the diplomats of the nations hostile to Nazi Germany and stationed in the Vatican, such as Francis d'Arcy Osborne representative of Great Britain; Myron Taylor personal representative of US President Roosevelt and his successor, Harold Tittmann; François Charles Roux and then Vladimir d'Ormesson, until even France was overwhelmed by German armies; but even German military themselves.

In two years, Nazi Germany captured much of Western Europe and pushed back British forces in North Africa, while Japan, the third Axis partner together with Italy, captured a large territory in Asia and Oceania. The Pope, like everyone by now, was convinced that the future of the world was Nazified. As we know, Mussolini had thrown himself on the side of the conquerors and had not hesitated to throw Italy into a war for which the country was not prepared. Interesting and new in the book is the close examination of Mussolini's attitude towards the Pope

and the influence he systematically tried to exert over him by making him accept his alliance with Hitler and trying to induce him to make pro-German statements. The Church and Mussolini needed each other to establish popular consensus in Italy and the Pope tried not to displease a person he basically trusted. Mussolini guaranteed him the respect due to the national religion and this was no small thing for a Pope attacked from various sides. Furthermore, Kertzer reminds us, we are talking about an Italian Pope (as was the tradition) and a predominantly Italian clergy, educated in the fascist mentality, convinced that the best protection for the Church was precisely its close bond with Mussolini and the fascist government.

On the occasion of Italy's entry into the war with the attack on France, *L'Osservatore Romano*, urged to be cautious by Monsignor Montini himself, made no pronouncement, but the Catholic press went wild in favor of Mussolini's declaration of war shouted by the Duce himself from his balcony in Piazza Venezia on 10 June 1940. *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, the country's main Catholic newspaper, carried the headline "Winning!" and others followed. It emerges from Kertzer's study that the Pope's main concern was to save the institutional structure of the Catholic Church and, for this, he considered that Mussolini was a good guarantor. The result was that the clergy supported the Axis war by urging good Catholics to side with Hitler despite their embarrassment towards the Nazi regime. It was a kind of vicious circle: the clergy supported fascism which, in turn, held on to the alliance with Hitler and, consequently, the clergy themselves never publicly criticized Nazism. Pius XII's interest in maintaining friendly relations with Mussolini was also motivated by his assessment that he was a useful intercessor for the Vatican with the Führer.

The surprise German attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 aroused a certain enthusiasm in the Catholic press which fueled the idea of the Axis cause as a Christian crusade against Bolshevism. However, also in this case, the Pope personally did not allow himself to be persuaded to make a declaration condemning communism, although he was under pressure in this sense especially from the fascist government. In this, it must be admitted, he maintained a behavior consistent with his principles of non-intervention, being continually solicited by the parties involved to condemn something or approve something else. His moral pronouncements, throughout the war period, would concern only the opposition to the Allied bombings on Italian cities—which intensified in the

second half of October 1942, with the aim of weakening fascist Italy and inducing the population to rebel against the regime.

On September 1942, shortly before returning to the United States, Taylor visited the Pope and handed his Secretary of State a long memorandum which contained reports of the incessant massacre of Polish Jews, outlining a picture of appalling violence. The Pope, according to the recently unearthed documents found by the author, read it immediately. In the meantime, precisely in that month, news of horrendous massacres and of the policy of extermination of the Jewish population reached the Vatican from various parts. The Holy See took nineteen days to respond to the American memorandum, through Cardinal Maglione: the declaration, unsigned, acknowledged that stories of "serious measures taken against non-Arians had also reached the Holy See from other sources, but that so far it was not possible to verify their accuracy" (p. 289). From a *memorandum* from Monsignor Dell'Acqua of the Vatican Secretariat of State dated the previous 2 October, Kertzer deduces that the Pope accepted the advice not to give confirmation to the Allies of the Nazi genocide of the Jews of Europe, risking that the Vatican would be called into question. "In fact," said Dell'Acqua, "better not to use the word 'Jews' at all" (p. 290).

Two months later, information about the ongoing massacres spread with even more certainty, especially from the Polish government in exile in London: "December 10: The Polish government addresses a new circular to all governments concerning the massacre of Jews by the Germans. In Poland, one million Jews out of three have already been exterminated" (p. 302). It was just one of several memorandums that reached Western chancelleries and reflected the fact that 1942 was precisely the year in which the extermination policy flared up most violently from eastern to western Europe. On 18 December, Osborne, the English appointee, had a conversation on this subject with Tardini and the Polish representative did the same, and asked the Pope to "firmly and clearly condemn these and other German crimes the extent of which is unprecedented in history" (p. 303).

Everyone knew that the Pope would, with Christmas just around the corner, make a public speech and that is why pressures multiplied precisely in that December of 1942. As Kertzer points out, on the twenty-fourth page of the Pope's text there were words that the defenders of Pius XII would later quote in an attempt to

present the speech as a blatant denunciation of the massacre of the Jews of Europe. Even if the Pope never mentioned either Nazis or Jews, in that well-hidden passage, he did pity "the hundreds of thousands of people who, without any fault of their own, sometimes only for reasons of nationality or race, are destined to die or to a progressive physical deterioration" (p. 306). The diplomats of the nations involved were disappointed and did not fail to send their impressions to their respective governments. As usual, the speech had been of an exaggerated length and enveloped in an unstoppable flow of oratory.

But the ambiguity of the Pope's position, expressed in his speeches, as Kertzer well underlines, had one characteristic: it set amid rivers of rhetoric pearls that both parties to the conflict could have defined as proofs of support for their cause.

To give just one following example of a speech after that of Christmas 1942, his address on the radio on 2 June 1943, on the occasion of his name day, was so unclear that Osborne, emphasizing the passage in which the Pope expressed closeness to the persecuted due to their ancestry and for the Polish people, described his address as "the most forthright speech he has given since the outbreak of war" (p. 327). Galeazzo Ciano, however, as a consummate diplomat, preparing the report to Mussolini, underlined how Pius XII, combining the theme of concern for the peoples of the occupied nations, with regret for the cruelty of the air war, had come almost to equally distribute burdens and responsibility to the two belligerent groups and thus underline the universality and impartiality of the action of the Holy See (pp. 327-328).

Pius XII used the same method in the aftermath of the terrible roundup of the Jews of Rome, which took place on 16 October 1943, a few hundred meters away from his headquarters. After a mellifluous and completely useless dialogue that took place between the German ambassador to the Holy See, Ernst von Weiszäcker and the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Maglione, the same afternoon as the raid, the German diplomat was very fearful of a public declaration of condemnation from the Pope.

And instead, against the same German expectations, the only official reaction of the Holy See was a bland editorial that appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano* of 25-26 October 1943, entitled "The charity of the Holy Father," with extremely vague references to the deportation of Roman Jews, the majority having being already murdered two days earlier in Auschwitz: "The Holy Father continues to hear,

more than ever, the insistent and pitiful echo of the disasters that the current conflict, with its prolongation, continues to accumulate. The August Pontiff, as is well known, after having worked in vain to avert the outbreak of war, trying to dissuade the rulers of the peoples from resorting to the force of arms, so tremendous today, did not desist for a single moment from implementing all the means in His power to alleviate the sufferings that in any way are the consequence of the immense conflagration. With the increase of so many evils, the universally paternal charity of the Supreme Pontiff has become, one might say, almost more industrious, which does not stop in front of any border neither of nationality, nor of religion, nor of race. This multifaceted and incessant action of Pius XII in recent times has also intensified, due to the increased suffering of so many unhappy people. May this beneficial activity, especially for the prayers of the faithful throughout the world, who with unanimous consent and burning fervor do not cease from raising it to Heaven, achieve even greater results in the future, and hasten the day when on earth it will return to shine the iris of peace; and men, having laid down their arms, extinguished all discord and rancor and found themselves brothers, will finally collaborate loyally for the common well-being."[1]
The German ambassador Weiszäcker himself, on 28 October 1943, was able to write to his boss, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, the following reassuring words, already known to the general public because they were presented at the Nuremberg trial with the text of the article in *L'Osservatore Romano* attached: "Despite having been implored to do so by several fronts, the Pope has refrained from making any overt comment on the deportation of Jews from Rome. Although he certainly expects to be criticized for this for a long time by our enemies, and that Protestant circles in Anglo-Saxon countries exploit this for propaganda purposes, even on this matter he has done everything possible not to undermine relations with the German government and the German authorities in Rome."[2]

[1] From Weizsäcker to Berlin, October 28, 1943, with attached text of the article "L'atteggiamento caritatevole del Santo Padre," *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 25-26, 1943, in *Nuremberg*, Doc. NG-5027; the same text is in *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts*, PAAA, Inland II g.193, *Juden in Italien* 1943-1944.
[2] Ibid.

As amply underlined by many other historians, the Pope had done nothing to stop the murderous intentions of the Germans in Rome on 16 October 1943 and, not even in Kertzer's research, nothing new seems to emerge in this regard: the arrested were, according to the report from Kappler to Wolff, one thousand two hundred fifty-nine, the prisoners released in the following hours, from 1.30 pm on 16 October until the morning of the 18th were, according to accredited calculations, two hundred forty-two. The merit of the releases, I add, should not be attributed so much to the intervention of the Vatican as for the Nazi policy which at that time did not provide for the deportation of Jewish spouses living in mixed marriage, nor that of children of mixed marriage, as well as the safeguarding of those Jews belonging to a neutral state or one not invaded by Nazi Germany. In reality, the Vatican sent the German authorities a list of baptized Jews, but, I venture to say that it was not that which led the Nazis to release them. It was only the victims' ability to prove their status (and some actually didn't succeed, like Clara Sereno).[3] Furthermore, according to new documents found by Kertzer, the lists of non-Aryan Catholics (i.e. baptized Jews) bear the dates 19, 21 and 23 October, the latter the same day as the arrival of the one thousand twenty deportees (not one thousand seven) to Auschwitz: too late for any intervention. However, the fact that the Vatican worked in some way to specifically protect only baptized people and that it made some attempts in the days following the deportation to get them released does not speak in favor of the morality of the Church at the time. With regard to "non-Arian Catholics," I would like to highlight a small internal contradiction in some Vatican documents, already known because they were published in the series *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège Relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* with which Kertzer also deals. In a note dated 26 October 1943, Father Tacchi Venturi sent Cardinal Maglione a question from Rosy Gattico on the disappearance of her husband, Count Vittorio Cantoni Della Rovere, and of his mother, Irma Finzi, after being taken from their villa in Arona the previous 15 September[4] (the count and his mother, as mentioned

[3] Liliana Picciotto, *Salvarsi. Gli Ebrei sfuggiti alla Shoah 1943-1945* (Torino: Einaudi, 2017), 257-261.
[4] From Padre Tacchi Venturi to Cardinal Maglione, Rome, October 26, 1943, in *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde guerre mondiale*, vol. 9, "Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre," Janvier-Dècembre 1943 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), 527.

in my *Il libro della memoria*,[5] were in fact victims of the massacre of Jews which took place around 15 September 1943 on Lake Maggiore). Following this request, which concerned two people who had long since become Catholics, Maglione took a step with the German embassy in the Vatican on 29 October, in so doing, though, he reported the data in an amazingly wrong way: "it is recommended to the benevolent interest of the most excellent German Embassy at the Holy See so that they may be released free, Count Victor Cantoni and his mother, who from Rome where they lived, were deported by German troops to an unknown location."[6] The error of the circumstance and place of the arrest of the Cantonis would not be so serious in itself, if it did not highlight a certain tiredness and inattention in pleading cases already considered lost by Vatican officials themselves.

In the book, strangely, the question of the shelter found in many religious houses by Roman Jews terrified for themselves and their families is not addressed. First of all, I must recall that the reception by Catholic religious houses was, yes, wide and generous (the number so far proposed by the historian Renzo De Felice is four thousand cases that I myself, together with the historian Sister Grazia Loparco, are trying to verify)[7] but this acceptance was generally granted upon request, through acquaintances or recommendations. There are no known cases of spontaneous offers of opening and help. It should also be remembered that Rome, after 8 September 1943, was hit by a flood of refugees from the South, the homeless, the destitute, young people who refused to enlist, leaders of anti-fascist parties, officers of the dissolved army. In this context, the reception of a few thousand Jews was not specific, but included in this work. The aid to the Jews, as amply demonstrated in my book *Salvarsi*,[8] took place in a broader context of aid activities to the civilian population left homeless, the disadvantaged and those wanted by the fascist and Nazi authorities. The surviving lists of people rescued by parishes and religious houses show that the guests were almost never only Jews in danger, but included

[5] Liliana Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria. Gli ebrei deportati dall'Italia 1943-1945. Ricerca della Fondazione CDEC* (Milano: Mursia, 2002).

[6] From Segretario di Stato to Ambasciata tedesca, Vaticano, October 29, 1943, in *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde guerre mondiale*, vol. 9, "Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre, Janvier-Dècembre 1943 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), 532.

[7] Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1972), 610-614.

[8] Picciotto, *Salvarsi.*

also many other refugees. The lists of the guests of the Pontifical Roman Major Seminary in Lateran, of the boys hosted at the Pius XI Salesian College, of the refugees in the house of the Augustinian Oblates of *Santa Maria dei Sette Dolori* in Via Garibaldi, of the wanted men accommodated in monasteries, even cloistered ones, by the apostolic visitor Father Giovanni da San Giovanni in Persiceto, of those hosted at the *Istituto Dermopatico dell'Immacolata*, directed by Father Emanuele Stablum, show an indistinct generosity and respect for the principle of the right to asylum, practiced towards all wanted and persecuted people.

One of the paragraphs of the book is devoted, very appropriately, to the supposition that Hitler was planning to kidnap the Pope, an issue often cited by Pius XII's defenders to explain his prudence, but which was non-existent, the fruit of Allied propaganda. The war not fought, but carried out through news circulated on purpose—that was already in common use during the Second World War. The "fake news" that Hitler wanted to kidnap the Pope was accompanied by reports that the Germans were mistreating the clergy in Rome. This was not true and had the opposite result to the desired one: it led the Pope to much prefer the German occupiers who maintained cordial and respectful relations with him, to the Allies who bombed the civilian population from the skies of the cities, including the Romans. In fact, the Pope, in this regard, expressed several times his opposition and underlined how it was not really the Germans who bombed the city, but the British and Americans.

Finally, I point out that the author, in a vigorous epilogue, reminds us that, after the war, the official interpretation of the events of the recent past was distorted by a series of actors, among which the main one was the Catholic Church itself, who hastened to the first possible opportunity, on 2 June 1945, to speak of its relations with National Socialism, defending the Concordat of the Church with Hitler's Germany as the lesser of possible evils. It highlighted the suffering experienced by Catholics and the Church during the conflict and portrayed Catholics in Germany as victims of the Nazis. It didn't even make the vaguest hint to the extermination of the Jews of Europe. He made no mention of Italy's part in the Axis cause, much less insinuated any Italian responsibility for the catastrophes that had befallen Europe. In his Christmas speech of 1945, with the war now over thanks to the intervention of the Allies, he finally spoke of totalitarian states as bloodthirsty and

tyrannical, of the Italian people portrayed as victims, of the German clergy who opposed the Nazi regime, something which, by the way, was denied in 2020 by the German bishops who admitted that they had done little or nothing against the extermination of the Jews.

The Pope was not the only one who wanted to cancel his moral responsibilities linked to his silence. Everything was rewritten and folded to the convenience of the moment which was, in fact, to turn the page and make all forget the evil distributed with both hands. Thus the vulgate was that the fault of the anti-Jewish persecutions fell exclusively on the Germans, Italy having only adapted to the Nazi requests; most of the population had helped Jews in danger, there hadn't been a whole band of Italians who had thrived in the practice of informing (about Jews, murdered in Auschwitz, but also about anti-fascists and partisans, tortured and put to death); Mussolini had not been a popular hero acclaimed and respected in all of his decisions; the papacy had not tried to agree with the worst dictatorships in order to keep its institutions alive; the fascist anti-Jewish laws enacted starting in September 1938 had been mild and very little applied; the Concordat, signed by the Church with the fascist regime in 1929, was not an implicit approval of the Church towards fascism; the subsequent Concordat signed with the Nazi regime, least of all; Italians redeemed themselves from the approval of fascism through the Resistance, to which all the people had given a hand. Even the Jews of Italy adapted to these false beliefs: they represented a psychological blanket that was supposed to protect them from the shock suffered and help them save something from their surrounding world. You can't survive thinking that everyone hates you to such an extent that they will hunt you down like an animal, hand you over to the assassins, will not organize any rescue network as was instead done for the allied military, prisoners of war, that were helped to escape, helped themselves to survive, and then were brought to safety in Switzerland or in the South of Italy. Jews in Italy, as in the rest of Europe, were left alone to face the worst, but this fact was too difficult to swallow for people who wanted to gradually heal their wounds and start a new life. After the war, Jewish delegations even went to the Pope to thank him for his "interventions on their behalf." As Kertzer says: "not only has the Pope helped to reconstruct the history of the collaboration of the Italian Church with the Mussolini regime and that of his support for the war, he has also contributed

to rewriting the history of Italy and Germany. Far from sharing responsibility for the conflict, Italians were now portrayed as victims" (p. 524).

An indisputable fact emerges powerfully from this book: the vaunted "heroism" of Pius XII lies in his having managed, for as long as World War II lasted, never to pronounce himself in favor or against any side in the conflict, despite the enormous pressure to which he was subjected. And despite the mass murder of the Jewish population of Europe and the persecutions and injustices against the Catholic clergy and their institutions in Germany, Poland and the occupied or annexed territories taking place before his eyes. Kertzer presents us with a Pope who, in times of war, protected, yes, the institutional interests of the Church, but sacrificing his moral leadership.

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Laurent Joly, *La falsification de l'histoire. Éric Zemmour, l'extrême droite, Vichy et les Juifs* (Paris: Grasset, 2022), pp. 136.

by *Valeria Galimi*

Published in the weeks leading up to last May's French presidential election campaign, Laurent Joly's volume focuses on the most prominent figure in the cultural landscape of the French (extreme) right, Éric Zemmour. The son of Algerian Jews, Zemmour is a columnist for the conservative daily *Le Figaro*, a publicist and the star of a highly successful TV show. He was already known for his sexist views in his book *Le premier sexe* (2006) and for the volumes *Le suicide français*, published in 2014, and *Destins français*—A reinterpretation of the history of France—in 2018.

A paperback edition of the book *La falsification de l'histoire* was published in January 2023 with a new preface by the author that takes into account his election results as candidate, about seven percent below what was expected given Zemmour's media ubiquity in the campaign. Beyond the election results, what deserves attention here is the re-construction and revising of the public discourse on the past that the journalist of the daily *Le Figaro* has been carrying out for some time now, in order to promote his racist, Islamophobic and anti-immigration agenda, as well as the circulation and distribution of these buzzwords in French public opinion.

Laurent Joly, a specialist on Vichy's anti-Jewish policies and the French right,[1] analyzes Zemmour's choice to use distorted interpretations of the past, in particular regarding the memory of Vichy, the figure of Pétain, and State antisemitism. He convincingly argues, that "never, in a hundred and fifty years, in our Republic, on the eve of significant elections, has the far right seemed so strong, made so much noise. Rarely in a period of peace has the national political system appeared so fragile" (p. 9). It should also be noted that in 2022, five years after the elections that first pitted Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen against each other, the latter's victory seemed possible for the first time.

[1] One may recall, among others, the volume *L'Etat contre les Juifs* (Paris: Grasset 2018), and the recent *La rafle du Vel d'Hiv* (Paris: Grasset, 2022)

Joly investigates the transformations of the French far right, and its xenophobic and sovereigntist identity content to which Zemmour contributed. He takes a long-term look starting from the history of right-wing cultures between the late 19th and 20th centuries; if Gérard Noirel has already pointed out the similarities with another late 19th century polemicist, Édouard Drumont, it is in the wake of the culture of Action Française and the "integral nationalism" advocated by its founder Charles Maurras that Zemmour fits in. Appropriately, the author points out that "curiously enough, this filiation with Maurrasian thought and strategy has often been ignored, belittled or misunderstood" (p. 13). The other aspect to be noted, typical of Zemmour's public discourse, is his abundant use of history, in continuity with the Maurrassian tradition; consider, for example, the success of *Enquête sur la monarchie* published in 1924, in which the founder of Action française interprets the history of France as destined toward an inexorable decline due to post-revolutionary "democratic and republican disorder." Indeed, the journalist of *Le Figaro* presents himself as a historical truth-seeker counteracting an instrumental and propagandistic reading of the past. While the themes he touches on in his speeches are varied—he has, for example, returned to the Dreyfus affair, advancing doubts about Dreyfus' innocence—Zemmour mostly focuses on Marshal Pétain's policy against Jews. In particular, he calls into question, and considers criminal, the choice—initiated with President Chirac's speech on July 16, 1995—to recognize the role of the French state in the Shoah. "Revisiting the history of the *années noires* is an indispensable element of the cultural revolution he intends to impose in order to have his program accepted," Joly notes (p. 37); the aim is to rewrite the history of Vichy primarily to reunite French right-wingers.

In the first chapter, the author quickly traces Zemmour's political and cultural references as the basis of his populism-tinged "ethnic nationalism," and then moves on in the second chapter to examine how Zemmour went to the source of the rupture between the Gaullists and the extreme right-wingers, namely the memory of collaboration and the Resistance, in other words, the Pétain-De Gaulle *querelle*. For several decades, the Gaullist-inspired conservative right had kept its distance from the French extreme right, embodied first by Jean-Marie Le Pen and then by his daughter Marina.

Zemmour defends Pétain's actions with arguments used by the Marshal himself during his trial in 1945, namely that of having used the choice of the armistice as "a

shield (*bouclier*) to protect the French people." This interpretation was later re-proposed by Robert Aron's well-known volume *Histoire de Vichy*, published in 1954, which corroborated the thesis that Pétain avoided the "Polonization" of the country with his choice of State collaboration. Aron proposed that the myth of the *bouclier*, represented by Pétain and the *épée*, on the other hand, was represented by De Gaulle: "both were equally necessary to France."[2] Zemmour, then, in his articles and television broadcasts, takes up Aron's thesis extensively, and indeed speaks of an intimate connivance between De Gaulle and Pétain.

The other argument taken up by Aron concerns the supposed choice to have sacrificed foreign Jews in order to protect French Jews, a thesis refuted by later historiography beginning with the volume by Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, published in 1981.[3] Joly also recalls an academic "forerunner," François-Georges Dreyfus, who in 1990 published a *History de Vichy* edited by Perrin, which reiterated the *bouclier* thesis represented by Pétain. Dreyfus, like Zemmour, took cover behind his Jewish origins in order to claim objectivity against Pétain and Vichy.

Calling into question the Vichy regime's responsibility regarding discrimination against foreigners and Jews who were considered "undesirables" ultimately leads to the normalization of the measures of exception and, therefore, to making the current policy proposals against immigration acceptable. To this end, Zemmour proposes a fierce critique of what he calls the Paxtonian *doxa*: that is, the recognition that the choice of the Vichy regimes to collaborate with Nazism was made in order to build an anti-democratic and illiberal "National Revolution." Such a view, now shared by historiography and public opinion finds its origins with the book of American historian Robert Paxton, published in France in 1972.[4] In particular, according to Zemmour, "Paxton's mistake is the general mistake today, which is to think that there is a connection between the anti-Semitic laws of October 1940 [...] and the final solution and the extermination of the Jews. Now this is false" (p. 93). However, the connections between the measures taken by Vichy and the deportation of French and foreign Jews have been established by scholars for more than three decades, as has the fact that about three quarters of

[2] Robert Aron, *Histoire de Vichy* (Paris: Fayard, 1954), 55.

[3] Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy et les Juifs* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1981).

[4] Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* 1940-44 (New York: A. Knopf, 1972).

them escaped arrest thanks to the partial help of the French population. Despite this, Zemmour proceeds systematically with falsifications, omissions and manipulations of sources.

The last point to emphasize is that, in France, falsifying history to refute the responsibility of Vichy in the Holocaust is a crime of negationism, punishable by the Gayssot law passed in 1990. Among the many criminal proceedings against Zemmour for racist and anti-Islamic expressions since February 2021, the 17th Chambre Correctionnelle in Paris acquitted the journalist in the first instance, while in 2023 the journalist will face eight court proceedings for racist pronouncements in previous years.

In conclusion, Joly's little book is a useful study of the tradition of French right-wing culture to which Zemmour belongs; for his success—beyond the election result—we must blame a media system that puts historians and polemicists on the same level, where knowledge and expertise is not recognized, but rather despised. "Zemmour's triumph", Joly tells us, "resides in a profound relativism, in the air of the times, which authorizes one to say everything, to contest everything, to make everything the same" (p. 126). On the other hand, he adds that there is a certain intellectual laziness that goes too far in the opposite direction towards simplification, as in the case of President Macron's latest speech, in which only the French seem to be responsible for the Holocaust, without Nazis being in the picture. To counter this danger of simplistic reductions of a very complex issue there remains—only and above all—the accuracy of historical research and its appropriate communication.

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Liora R. Halperin, *The Oldest Guard: Forging the Zionist Settler Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), pp. 368.

by *Yair Wallach*

In standard Zionist periodization, the "First Aliya" refers to the early period of Zionist migration and colonization, between 1882 and 1904. In sociological terms, the group associated with the "First Aliya" are Eastern European Jewish migrants, who established themselves as private farmers in the agricultural colonies, the Moshavot. This group and its legacy have attracted surprisingly little scholarly interest in English. In contrast, there is a considerable body of literature in Hebrew on the "First Aliya," primarily in the form of Zionist historiography and hagiography—in both scholarly and popular genres—as well as plenty of memoirs, commemoration books, and museums and memorials, dotted around the country. In Israel, this generation enjoys some nostalgic halo as the ones who laid the first foundations for the "new Jewish Yishuv," but ultimately their role during the British Mandate and the establishment of Israel is seen as a minor one, compared with the organized labor movement.

It is this public image—and its contradictions—which is the subject of Liora Halperin's excellent book, on the Zionist settler memory culture. In chronological terms, *The Oldest Guard* focuses on the British Mandate and the early decades of the state of Israel—during which members of "the First Aliya" were steadily relegated to the sidelines of Zionism. The Labour Zionist movement, which took over the Yishuv and Zionist institutions, was led by socialist Jews, who typically arrived in Palestine after 1904. The Labour movement was built on a model of communal settlements and cooperative economy, "Hebrew Labour" and the exclusion of Arab workers, and a staunch secularized version of Jewish nationalism. All these were in stark contrast with the First Aliya settlers, who were private landowners, employed Arab workers and rejected the principle of exclusive "Hebrew Labour." They were mostly religiously observant and hostile to "ideology," that is, to Zionist socialism.

Against the rising labor hegemony, key members of the Moshavot forged their image as "first settlers," to defend their role and legacy within the larger story of Zionism. This was a story that cast the first settlers as pragmatic farmers, rooted in

the soil; committed Zionist, yet "apolitical;" able to defend themselves against "the Arabs," but also to get along with them. Halperin follows this crafting of pioneer mythology through a dazzling wealth of sources, including documents from Moshavot archives, oral history collections, memoirs and press articles, museums and images—and even a commemorative brandy bottle. The book develops its analysis through an attentive reading of the writings of memory agents, colourful and idiosyncratic characters (all men) who include David Tidhar, the private investigator, detective story writer, as well as biographer, who published the 19-volume encyclopedia of "the founders and builders of Israel" (much of it dedicated to the First Aliya); the tireless self-promoter Menashe Meirovitch, a Rishon Lezion colonist who wrote for newspapers and the radio, and regularly lectured school pupils about his legacy; and, above all, the inimitable Avraham Shapira, the "Oldest Guard" from Petach Tikva, with his trademark moustache, walking stick, and Arabian horse. Shapira is a constant presence in the book, as the archetypical "first settler," who was routinely lauded and celebrated – including in the annual Tel Aviv Purim parade. Renowned for fending off attacks on Jewish colonies, but also for his Arabic proficiency and relations with Palestinians, Shapira provided a model for a settler in the "Oriental frontier," in close proximity to Palestine's natives: unstable and dangerous at times, but mostly peaceful, allowing settler hegemony without open war.

Indeed, a central part of the "First Aliya" mythology hinged on their relations with Palestinians, which involved, in virtually all narratives, an agonistic mix of coexistence and friendship alongside violence and confrontation. Emphasizing the unequal and settler-colonial nature of these relations, Halperin terms this "hierarchical co-existence," as clear relations of domination existed between Jewish farmers and their Arab workers or neighbors. The contradictions within this narrative come to the fore in the narratives around the Nakba. Through a careful reading of settlers' accounts of 1948, Halperin shows how the expulsion of Palestinians was presented both as a rupture in relations of "hierarchical co-existence," and at the same an inevitability due to a supposedly entrenched Arab hostility.

The 1948 expulsion made the "First Aliya" and its claim for hierarchical coexistence much less relevant. In 1960, for Shapira's 90th birthday, a forest was planted and named after him on the lands of the destroyed village of Qula.

Shapira, who had symbolized the idea of frontier "coexistence," had his name written onto a site of depopulation. Halperin reads these two narratives as complementary and successive forms of erasure: early settlers' hierarchical relations with Palestinians were based on colonial power and denial, very much like the subsequent narrative of a Jewish exclusive state, in which the Palestinian past was covered up by the forest. And yet, these two narratives may be more at odds than is allowed here. As Halperin finds out, the sign with Shapira's name has long been removed from the forest to another location. That is to say, the erasure, for which he had lent his name, ultimately erased also Shapira's own name. Unlike the fallen heroes of the "Second Aliya" (like Yoseph Trumpeldor) Shapira is hardly remembered today. It seems that the value of that early settler mythology of "coexistence" was ultimately limited.

The book does not deal with the history of the Moshavot under Ottoman rule, but rather with the memory of that period. However, cultural memory is produced not only through remembering but also through active forgetting. To understand what the settlers chose to forget, the Moshavot's Ottoman chapter is crucial and would reveal a more ambivalent and contradictory picture than is provided here. Many if not most settlers in the Moshavot naturalized as Ottoman citizens, in order to be allowed to own land. They became integrated, to varying degrees, into Ottoman state structures, with participation in elections and, after 1908, military service. This means that "hierarchical co-existence" has its limitations in describing the Moshavot during the Ottoman period. In relation to Ottoman state officials, military commanders, or the Arab urban elite of Palestine, Jewish colonists were not in a position of power, even if they could and did appeal to the intervention of European consuls. The Moshavot in Ottoman Palestine presented a hybrid model of European colonization, that, on the one hand, was unabashedly colonial, yet at the same time, integrated within a "native" state. Greater attention to the Ottoman period could help expose the contradictions within settler memory, which in other respects is characterized and analyzed so perceptively here.

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Luciano Allegra, *La povertà degli ebrei. Voci dal ghetto* (Turin: Silvio Zamorani Editore, 2021), pp. 343.

by *Davide Mano*

The Italian historian Luciano Allegra is a professor of early-modern history at the University of Turin and a renowned specialist of Italian Jewry during the dark period of the ghettos. Over the last thirty years, he has offered some of the most influential studies on this topic, introducing a social history approach that was tremendously missing in the field of Jewish historical studies. I will mention two of his major achievements: his socio-economic history of the ghetto of Turin during the eighteenth-century, published in 1996, a ground-breaking study that opened many new perspectives in Jewish social history, including a previously unknown attention to the role of women in Jewish family and society;[1] and, paired with this monograph, the important volume he edited in 2009, on the demography of Italian Jewry, including some critical investigations into Jewish mobilities, onomastics and socio-economic occupations, through the early-modern and modern periods.[2]

Allegra's most recent achievement, dealing with Jewish poverty in the Italian ghettos, can thus be seen as a coherent step on his peculiar social historical path of investigation. This new book, provocatively titled *The poverty of the Jews: Voices from the Ghetto*,[3] has the merit to be the first monograph to investigate the connection between ghettoization and pauperization in Jewish history. Though mostly based on sources produced by Jews of lower strata in the ghetto of Mantua during the first half of the eighteenth-century, this study can be considered as a work of scholarship relevant for other contexts of Jewish ghettoization and pauperization throughout the Italian peninsula, such as Venice, Rome or other minor towns and villages. It thus offers a significant contribution to the history of the Italian ghettos as a whole.

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[1] Luciano Allegra, *Identità in bilico. Il ghetto ebraico di Torino nel Settecento* (Turin: Silvio Zamorani Editore, 1996).

[2] Luciano Allegra, ed., *Una lunga presenza. Studi sulla popolazione ebraica in Italia* (Turin: Silvio Zamorani Editore, 2009).

[3] My translation.

This particular subject has attracted few historians. Allegra mentions only three major works that examined Jewish poverty in a social historical approach in other European and non-European contexts: the 2005 monograph by Mark Cohen dedicated to the Jewish poor in Medieval Egypt, the 2012 book by Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld on poverty and charity among Portuguese Jews in early modern Amsterdam, and the 2021 study by Debra Kaplan on Jewish charities' patrons in early modern Germany. These influential studies are presented very succinctly by Allegra (pp. 13-15), since the sources and their contexts are so different that also the respective analytical approaches are very different as well, to the extent of making any comparison impossible. Yet, some other important studies on Jewish poverty and charities in Europe and in the Mediterranean area, including some pieces of scholarship on Italian Jewry, are not mentioned in the bibliographical references, beginning from the pioneering work by Bracha Rivlin on Jewish confraternities in Venice and the recent work by Matthias Lehmann devoted to the emissaries from the Land of Israel.

The choice of the source material is central in Allegra's discussion. The author focuses his investigation on the Jewish community in Mantua in light of its impressive archival documentation, that has already attracted several scholars.[4] From among the internal sources of the community, Allegra chooses to examine a particular type, a body of more than 1600 petitions addressed by poor Jews to communal charity institutions between 1700 and 1750. He describes this body of sources as an "extraordinary unicum" (p. 16) in Jewish history in light of its particular nature: these are direct letters addressed by the poor to the chiefs of the communal charity without any notarial mediation or prescribed textual shaping. This is certainly a remarkable case from within the typology of petitions, otherwise a very common source in Jewish community archives, as much as in non-Jewish archives, such as town and state archives.

According to the author, this special body of sources from the Mantua community allows a comparative comprehension of both the struggle of the poor for survival and the charities' collective actions to help them survive. This is a central contribution in Allegra's study that shows great empathy toward the

[4] It is worth mentioning the essential work of Shlomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1977).

historical actors he describes. The author considers different social situations, from contingent and permanent poverty to misery (chapters 1 and 2); he connects them with infirmity and precariousness, as well as with communal conflicts and family breakups (chapters 2 and 3); he discusses the risky instability of dowries (chapter 4) and reconstructs Jewish struggles for a decent accommodation (chapter 5). In the process, Allegra bears particular attention to the narrative contents in the petitions, to the life stories emerging from them. In the last two chapters (chapters 6 and 7), he gives a quantitative image of Jewish poverty in the Italian ghettos, that he proposes to describe as a permanent, structural situation throughout the early-modern period. As regards Jewish charitable institutions, Allegra recalls the extremely pyramidal socio-economic stratification in the ghettos, as well as the Jewish traditional principle of redistribution, centered in the moral duty of *tzedakah* (alms). As already said, his study shows strong empathy toward the poor and their struggles for survival: in this sense, the book owes a debt to the celebrated *Fiction in the archives* by Nathalie Zemon Davis, while proposing a different reading of petitions that calls for further discussion.

Allegra's monograph is thus a remarkable study that puts together both individual and family biographies in order to reconstruct the social, collective, dialogical experience of poverty, such as it emerged within Italian ghetto societies. Allegra's book has also the merit to succeed in countering the stereotypical image of the Jew as a rich man, present in medieval and early-modern anti-Jewish polemics, as well as in antisemitic propaganda, up to its very contemporary variations.

A question remains to be raised about that particular association between poverty and minority status, socio-economic and socio-juridical poverties, inherent to the Jewish condition. What did it mean to be Jewish and poor? Such a condition of double dependence on both state tolerance and communal charity still needs further investigation.

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Alma Rachel Heckman, *The Sultan's Communists: Moroccan Jews and the Politics of Belonging* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), pp. 344.

by *Orit Ouaknine-Yekutieli*

The title Alma Heckman has chosen for her book "The Sultan's Communists" hints at the title *Tujjār as-Sultān*—"The Sultan's Merchants"—a group of Jewish traders who operated in the service of the sultan of Morocco and under his protection, mainly from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.[1] The intended allusion is that like those Jewish merchants had a special link and dependence on the monarch of Morocco, so the Jewish Moroccan communists—the protagonists of this book—acquired a similar status. The allegory seems odd at first, since the notion of monarchy represents almost the opposite of communism. Nevertheless, as Heckman demonstrates, the small group of Jewish Moroccan communists, who due to their political choice were pariahs of their country and community in the 1960s-1980s, became favorites of the Moroccan court at the turn of the twenty-first century, joining the circle of iconic national figures. Heckman's book seeks to explain the process that created this peculiar situation, setting it within a broader range of events.

The book is an outstanding study, which is based on intensive research of a wealth of information that the author gathered in archives, interviews, the contemporary press and scholarly books. She brings all these data together and analyzes it brilliantly. Accordingly, the book is an essential contribution to the historiography of Moroccan Jewry.

The volume includes an introduction, five chapters ordered chronologically from the interwar years to the present, and a conclusion. The choice of chapters' titles reflects Heckman's analytic perspective, which traces several stages in the history of Moroccan Jewish Communists and their broader milieus. The first chapter, "Choices," examines the political associations, including communism, that Moroccan Jews had access to under the French protectorate in Morocco during the interwar years. This period saw antisemitism and fascism rising in the

[1] Michel Abitbol, *Les Commerçants Du Roi: Tujjār Al-Sultan: Une Élite Économique Judéo-Marocaine Au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Maisonneuve-Larose, 1998); Daniel J. Schroeter, *The Sultan's Jew: Morocco and the Sephardi World* (Standford: Standford University Press, 2002).

metropole, and the consolidation of a liberation movement in Morocco. The second chapter, "Possibilities," focuses on the Second World War period. It analyzes how the French betrayal of Moroccan Jews during the Vichy period affected their belief in France as a protecting power, and their trust in the Moroccan King. The third chapter, "Tactics," concentrates on the actions of Jewish and Muslim members of the Communist Party during the struggle for Moroccan independence, and examines their strategies to create a space for inter-confessional national activity. The fourth chapter "Splinters" underlines the disappointments during the first years after independence, and the rise of the Moroccan authoritarian state. It discusses the oppression of the Communists as well as other leftist parties, and the simultaneous mass emigration of Moroccan Jews while in faraway Palestine the Arab-Israeli conflict reached its peak. The fifth chapter, "Co-optation," begins with the imprisonment and exile of the book's protagonists during the reign of Hassan II, and goes on to examine their subsequent release and return to Morocco under Mohamed VI. Within these settings, it analyzes their inclusion in the national narrative under the new King, and this inclusion's connection with Morocco's relationships with the USA, Israel, and some large Jewish organizations.

The book's approach is micro-historical and biographical, as it utilizes the life stories of five main individuals in order to discuss the overall history of Jews in the Moroccan Communist party, the history of the Moroccan Jewish community and its mass emigration, and the history of Morocco at large.

The main characters of the book are Léon Sultan, Simon Lévy, Abraham Serfaty, Edmond Amran al-Maleh, and Sion Assidon, with short references to some of their close family members and political associates. This small group matured in the Moroccan communist party and held key positions in its leadership. They all held anti-Zionist views and pledged their co-religionists to fully integrate into Moroccan social and political life. As time passed, and following the stages that Heckman delineates in her chapters, their political trajectories diverged. Each found a personal path within the larger body of Moroccan leftist movements, and each suffered special harassment, from imposed or self-exile, to torture and imprisonment due to resisting governmental policies they deemed unjust. In old age, their routes converged again when they returned to Morocco and became a symbol of Moroccan Jewish patriotism. Four of them lived into the twenty-first

century (Léon Sultan died in the Second World War), but as fate would have it, three of those four passed away over the course of one year—between November 2010 and December 2011. Serfaty was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Rabat, Lévy in the Jewish cemetery in Fes, and Elmaleh in the Jewish cemetery in Essaouira.

Heckman makes the point that although this was a very small group within the Jewish community, its members became some of the community's most well-known representatives in recent Moroccan discourse. This occurred as their current public depictions construct them as symbols of Moroccan patriotic inter-confessional diversity and coexistence, a feature which is often presented as part of the so-called "Moroccan exceptionalism."

The difference between the size of the group and the disproportionate attention to it appears also in Western historiography. This is due to their unique stand, on the one hand resisting Moroccan governmental policies in the 1960s-80s, and on the other rejecting the perspective of the greater part of their Jewish community, which chose Zionism and emigration over staying in Morocco. In this respect, those figures who preached for continued Jewish life in their home country were part of a larger phenomenon of communist Jews in Muslim countries who held the same views (e.g., in Iraq,[2] Egypt,[3] and Iran).[4] Some of the latter had very similar experiences to those of these Moroccan Jews; Henri Curiel in Egypt, for example, was arrested several times and sent into exile in France due to his activities, much like Heckman's protagonists. However, unlike them, the end of his life was much more unfortunate. Curiel was murdered in France in 1978 while he was involved from afar in political events in Egypt, as well as attempts to bring about Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.[5] All these Jewish communists struggled against colonialism during the colonial era; after decolonization, they fought for the rights of oppressed groups in their countries and made personal sacrifices for their struggle. Being at odds with the larger part of their Jewish communities that chose

[2] Orit Bashkin, "Red Baghdad: Iraqi Jews and the ICP, 1941–51," in *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2012), 141-182.

[3] Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There? : Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel 1948-1965* (London: Tauris, 1990).

[4] Lior B. Sternfeld, *Between Iran and Zion: Jewish Histories of Twentieth-Century Iran* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

[5] Gilles Perrault, *A Man Apart: The Life of Henri Curiel* (London: Zed Books, 1987); Curiel Henri, *On the Altar of Peace* (Tel-Aviv: Mifras, 1982) [In Hebrew].

to leave, they became a symbol of the politically outcast Jewish figure, the pariah in Arendt's terms,[6] which in the last few decades has been the object of considerable academic research within the realms of postcolonial and subaltern historiographies.

However, the pariah stage is over as regards the Moroccan group. The current commemoration of the Jewish communist leaders in Morocco is exceptional, as Heckman describes in her concluding chapter. The main intellectual depositories of the Moroccan state—the national archives, the national library, and the Mohamed V University—hold their personal archives and arrange events to commemorate them. This attitude has spread to other domains. For example, at its seventieth anniversary in 2013, the current reincarnation of the communist party, the PPS (Le Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme), launched a webpage that commemorated its founders. That webpage included Léon Sultan, his spouse Fortunée Sultan, Simon Lévy, and others.[7] Some of the group's members also appear in current Moroccan cultural production sites such as Muḥammad Saʿīd Aḥajjīūj's 2020 book *The Riddle of Edmond Amran El Maleh*, in which El Maleh's life story and literary production are the topic and inspiration.[8]

Reviewing and analyzing this unique group Heckman's book presents a very well-written and detailed history. Some special highlights in the volume include pamphlets of diasporic Moroccan students' organizations in France which demanded the release of political prisoners in Morocco and especially Abraham Serfaty, and banners of Simon Lévy from his election campaign for Casblanca's municipal council. On top of this rich data, Heckman also adds a personal touch to her writing, like describing the special atmosphere during her multiple interviews with Incarnation—Simon Lévy's widow. In this latter regard, it would have been excellent if more material and observations had been made on the

[6] Hannah Arendt and Ron H Feldman, *The Jew As Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York: Grove Press, 1978).

[7] "70 Sana fi Khidmat al-Waṭan wa-al-Shaʿab," Bayanealyaoume, accessed July 4, 2023, http://bayanealyaoume.press.ma/1943-2013-5/.html

[8] Muḥammad Saʿīd Aḥajjīūj, *Uḥjīyat Idmūn ʿUmrān al-māliḥ* (Bayrūt: Hāshīt Anṭwān, 2020).

women in this group, who also operated a unique women's movement,[9] but as Heckman notes, unfortunately, there is almost no record about them.

In summary, the book is very important, it adds a new perspective to scholarship about modern Jewish history in Morocco. It is an excellent resource for researchers, students, and laypersons interested in the history of Morocco and its Jewish community, and is certainly worth an in-depth reading.

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[9] Orit Ouaknine-Yekutieli, "Jewish Women in Intercommunal Political Movements in Colonial Morocco," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 18, no. 2 (2019): 227-244.

Chiara Becattini, *La memoria dei campi. La Risiera di San Sabba, Fossoli, Natzweiler-Struthof, Drancy* (Firenze: Giuntina, 2022), pp. 396.

by *Elena Pirazzoli*

In recent years the research on memory and trauma has been increasingly flanked by a new historical approach to the memorials built on the very same places where the events occurred. The analysis of these sites (thinking at Pierre Nora's definition of *lieu dé memoire*) means investigating several aspects: the stratification of different violent events and traumas, even in contrast to each other; the political choices aimed at preservation or oblivion; the architectural and artistic forms that shaped the memorial message.

In her book *La memoria dei campi. La Risiera di San Sabba, Fossoli, Natzweiler-Struthof, Drancy*, the historian, photographer and filmmaker Chiara Becattini analyses four cases, divided between Italy and France: two transit camps Drancy (near Paris) and Fossoli (near Carpi, in the Modena countryside between Bologna, Verona and Milan) and two concentration camps located in border regions, Risiera di San Sabba (in Trieste) and Le Struthof (in Alsace). If Drancy and Fossoli functioned as the main transit camps in the two countries, Struthof and Risiera carry the burden of difficult memories of territories divided for political and identity reasons.

After 1945, several places in Europe bore the scars not only of the war, but of the Nazi concentration camp system. This system was articulated in different branches and in complex hierarchies, the camps being devoted to specific functions: concentration, extermination, imprisonment, forced labor and transit. In some cases, these functions could coexist in the same camp or be delegated to specialized sub-camps. Moreover, different categories of prisoners were divided into camps according to the fate assigned by the Nazi ideology. Consequently, concentration and heavy labor camps were mainly destined to political opponents, while extermination camps mostly to racial deportees—such as Jews, Roma and Sinti—to be *liquidated*. However, this system of *organised horror* had porosities, overlaps, crossovers.

All these specificities have emerged gradually, thanks to testimonies and historical research. Immediately after the war, the camps were often reused for current

emergency functions (refugee shelter or internment of German prisoners or collaborators). In many places, the memorial process began in parallel with these uses, and developed over the following decades. Before the architectural memorial project, as Becattini clearly shows, the first commemorative signs have been placed by survivors or associations of victims' relatives. Humble and simple signs, like crosses or stones, installed in these sites of violence and trauma for the purpose of building memory, while life goes on all around them.

Thus a place appears as a "palimpsest" of events, functions and memories. Becattini borrows this term from André Corboz, historian of architecture and urban planning: disciplines that investigate territories in full awareness of their stratification of layers. Actually, the strength of Becattini's approach is to hold different disciplinary viewpoints together. The historical view of deportation is combined with the perspective of architectural history, particularly applied to memorial design. Moreover, Becattini has conducted exhaustive research in local archives, reconstructing political and administrative choices that had an important repercussion on the management of the places under study. When documents were not comprehensive or were not present at all, she sought alternative sources. In particular, the author conducted interviews with several protagonists (historians, architects, artists). Furthermore, due to her sensibility as a photographer, Becattini sees pictures as a documentary source. By using different perspectives, Becattini points out how some places became important elements to the national narrative while others remain on the edge. For example, Le Struthof was recognized as a French national monument in 1960 and all the initiatives on this site were organized by national institutions. Differently, the other three places taken into account in Becattini's work have been the subject of a local valorization. In 1975 Risiera di San Sabba was recognized as an Italian national monument too, but this acknowledgment has not led to greater national awareness of its historical importance. As Fossoli and Drancy, Risiera carries the burden of a difficult memory: collaborationism. These three places are the symbol of the Italian and French political collaboration and support to the Nazi occupation: here the violence was perpetrated not only by the German troops, but also by the collaborationist military and police forces. Consequently, the memory that takes shape in these places is inconvenient for the national unity that had to rebuild itself after the war.

Nevertheless, these four places of violence and trauma share one same condition: none of them is a central point for a national commemoration of deportation. Seeking a reason for this, Becattini attempts to set these four cases in the broader development of the European culture (and politics) of remembrance of the Shoah and deportation. Thus, a substantial difference emerges between the French and Italian cases: for example, the strong centrality of Paris (and of the French State) in the memorial national policies is unparalleled in Italy, where a local dimension to these projects is prevalent.

The conclusion of the book is devoted precisely to the differences among national memorial narratives and practices across Europe, intensified by the rising memory of communism after 1989. In some countries of Eastern European countries these memories seem to be in competition with those of nazism and the Shoah. As Becattini points out, the current challenge for all the places of memory of political and racial deportation and extermination is to find a way to create a European memory framework, both respectful of local peculiarities and of sovra-national common aspects.

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