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Radical Abandon: In-Between Agency and Self-Attenuation in Israel/Palestine

by

Ayelet Even-Nur

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Near Eastern Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Chana Kronfeld, Co-Chair

Professor Margaret Larkin, Co-Chair

Professor Judith Butler

Spring 2020

Radical Abandon:
In-Between Agency and Self-Attenuation in Israel/Palestine

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By Ayelet Even-Nur

Abstract

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Ayelet Even-Nur

Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Chana Kronfeld, Co-Chair

Professor Margaret Larkin, Co-Chair

This dissertation investigates aesthetic strategies of self-attenuation that Palestinian and Israeli writers and artists across the 20th and 21st centuries have mobilized to resist the foreclosure of a future comprising decolonization and equitable co-existence. In light of the current political impasse in Israel/Palestine, this project explores the vital importance of cultural production as a site of creative mediation, counter-history and survival, one that is itself constitutive of political fantasy and engagement. Using the rubric of what I term “aesthetic mechanisms of undoing,” I assemble a body of literary and artistic techniques that undermine and offset the forms of national, gender and religious identity undergirding the ethno-nationalist ideologies that have taken root in Israel/Palestine. Following the implicit poetics of the poets and artists examined in the ensuing chapters, I focus on the ways in which forms of weakened subjectivity enable innovative modes of otherwise inaccessible maneuverability—detailing how these makers locate creative force in the vulnerability, interruption, and mutability of self, rather than the advancement and expansion of power, self-knowledge or control.

Chapter 1 turns to two poets writing in Hebrew, tracing the impact of Rachel Bluwstein’s (1890-1931) poetics of exposure on Dahlia Ravikovitch’s (1936-2005) work. I track the composite poetic persona of Rachel (the poet and the biblical matriarch, traditionally figured as the mother of the nation) as she appears in several of Ravikovitch’s texts, arguing that she emerges as a site of matriarchal rewriting, through which the nation is transformed into a poetic collective that continually disassembles itself. Chapter 2 studies Palestinian artist Sliman Mansour (1947-) and his 1997 series of life-size mud reliefs “I, Ismail,” a piece that probes the demise of patriarchal forms of authority. Mansour’s mud objects are overlaid by networks of fissures that he reinforces rather than smooths away. Arguing that the aesthetic attributes of cracking become the focus of Mansour’s work, which mirror the Oslo Accord’s effects and aftermath in Palestine, I read his decision to buttress and preserve the cracks to be a technique for abiding in the interstice of tradition and reinvention, where processes of decomposition may generate their own modes of authority. Chapter 3 centers on Mahmoud Darwish’s (1941-2008) 1995 collection *Limādhā tarakta al-ḥiṣān waḥīdan?* (Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?), claiming that the diwan narrates the process through which disinheritance from structures of patriarchy and political subjugation leads to the emancipatory cultivation of interstitial forms. I detail how the poems orchestrate destabilizing encounters between diverse voices, genres and registers and emphasize how the aural aspects of

betweenness—echo, rhyme, rhythm—that Darwish privileges ultimately represent an alternative system of kinship and transmission. The introduction and final chapter offset the other sections' focus on biblical and Qur'anic figures by examining the work of contemporary installation artists. The introduction addresses Khalad Jarrar's (1976-) series "Upcycle the Wall," in which Jarrar cast molds of athletic equipment from the reconstituted cement that he chiseled from the West Bank Separation Barrier. Examining the ways in which Jarrar's work showcases the agentic capacity and constraints of cultural production in Israel/Palestine—from border wall qua artistic medium, to objects of collective interplay qua cement basketballs—I discuss relations between art, politics and practices of self-attenuation in Israel/Palestine. Chapter 4 places in conversation two artists and their creative mobilizations of autobiography—Palestinian Emily Jacir (1970-) and Etti Abergel (1960-), a Jewish-Israeli woman artist of Moroccan descent. I claim that both Jacir and Abergel demonstrate a material engagement with the artifacts and narratives of crisis that enables them to engineer elastic nodes of indeterminacy within the circumstances that their projects address—the 1972 assassination of Palestinian Wael Zuaiter in Jacir's case and the destruction and disjunctions of Nakba, Occupation and migration for Abergel. Taken together, these works illuminate a collective network of multimedia disruption that writers and artists in Israel/Palestine have embedded into their cultural imaginaries—a counter-imaginary of vulnerable and creative coexistence.

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Introduction

Scavenged Materials and Creative Mediations: The Terms of Cultural Production in Israel/Palestine



Figure 1-Khaled Jarrar, *Concrete*, Still from experimental film, 2013¹

This dissertation engages with the desire to change the systematic conditions and conditioning of injustice in situations of impasse. Dedicated to reading what lies beyond the debilitating binary of ‘Arab’/ ‘Jew,’ *Radical Abandon: In-Between Agency and Self-Attenuation in Israel/Palestine* considers the diverse cultural practices of Palestine and Israel together in non-reactionary relation, without placing one national body over another. Within this joint consideration, *Radical Abandon* aims to demonstrate how the cultural practices from a sphere of the world that is all too often relegated to model political determinism in western scholarship are crucially relevant to existing critical theory on agency, identity formation and the aesthetic renegotiation of political engagement. The following chapters study how varied literary and artistic practices produce their own theoretical formulations, rather than remaining peripheral examples of western thought. *Radical Abandon* makes the case that cultural production in Israel/Palestine functions as a simultaneously operative and constrained domain in which the transformative reformulation of oppressive circumstances remains at play. This possibility for agentic and creative mediation—and its circumscription—is depicted in the images above and below, in which Ramallah based artist Khaled Jarrar (b. 1976) salvages material from the Separation Barrier to make into concrete sculpture casts:

¹ Khaled Jarrar, *Concrete*, 2012, 20 June-3 August 2013, Ayyam Gallery, London. Image from: Khaled Jarrar, “Whole in the Wall,” Exhibition Catalogue, 20 June-3 August 2013, Ayyam Gallery, London.



Figure 2-Khaled Jarrar, Concrete, detail²



Figure 3-Khaled Jarrar, Volleyball, 2012³

Jarrar incorporates photography, film and performance into his art practice to interrogate the problematic of personal and political agency in Palestine. In varied ways, his pieces rework many of the key terms invoked in the region—home, belonging, conflict, nationality—recontextualizing symbols, materials and narratives to shift, literally, the terms and conditions of conflict. In his series titled “Upcycle the Wall,” Jarrar takes a hammer and chisel to the 8-meter-high Separation Barrier, chipping away fragments of cement that he uses as a base medium. He pulverizes these pieces of the wall into reconstituted cement, which he casts into various molds of athletic equipment such as basketballs, soccer balls, and volleyballs. Jarrar developed this series of works around the idea of team sports after a soccer field was destroyed due to the construction of the Separation Barrier. By creating molds of balls, cleats and ping pong paddles, he examines what he describes as the ability of particular objects to bring opposing teams together within the framework of a shared game.⁴ On the surface, then, Jarrar presents a cohesive narrative of transformation in his art practice, remaking an object of division into an object of unification. The objects themselves, however, tell another story: the sculpture of a well-used volleyball is frozen in concrete relief, hanging strings suspended in movement, the faintly visible marks of unknown hands impressed into its cement. It imparts sensations of bodily pain to viewers who imagine hitting it.

Continually passed around from team to team and hand to body, a ball is equal parts vehicle and desired object. The ball as such marks various points of intersection, holding tension between its disparate functions, opposing teams and, most interestingly for my purposes, linguistic and embodied signification. In every game of ball sports, the ball and its attendant set of rules are a given, much like the constitutive rules underlying communication as analyzed in speech act theory.⁵ Yet the narratives that emerge around it are open-ended. Within this structure of tethered discursive agency, the ball accrues the marks of its players on its surface, almost as if the limited nature of its signification is necessarily related to the excess of corporeal traces that collect on its exterior. As the pivot of exchange between intersubjective bodies, it carries both the limits of meaning making, and the marks of the bodies engaging with those lines.

² Ibid.

³ Khaled Jarrar, *Volleyball*, 2012, reconstituted cement from the Separation Barrier, 20 cm diameter, ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 50-2.

In this series of sculptures, every work Jarrar makes derives from the wall's transformation. He inscribes his resistance into the structure by literally chipping pieces off, leaving the marks of his opposition carved into it, an act of mediation that translates his resistance to the wall into its material destruction. His intervention physically appropriates the wall's concreteness, diminishing the solidity of both its structure and its symbolic power. In the exhibition catalogue published by the Ayyam Gallery in English (underscoring the global circulation and economy of anticolonial resistance art), Jarrar titles this an 'upcycling' of the wall.⁶ This title draws attention to both the cyclical transformation incumbent upon all materials, however permanent they project themselves to be, and the particular orientation selected to direct this process. Cycling the wall up rather than cycling it again ("re-"), the choice of the prefix "up" implies a moral trajectory that parodies the wall's own form and the certitude of its proponents. Serving as a political instrument to enable the expansion and de facto annexation of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Israel's construction of the Separation Barrier "...broke up contiguous Palestinian urban and rural blocs, severed inter-community ties that had been forged and cemented over the course of many generations, and abruptly imposed an arbitrary reconfiguration of space based on settlement boundaries and to suit the convenience of Israeli security forces."⁷ Jarrar's sculptures shift the Separation Barrier from a structure and symbol of physical immobility, colonial hegemony and segregationist politics into a material of transformative creation—transformations that are restricted but still operative. Jarrar concretely transforms the concrete into more concrete, a process of art making that remains conspicuously bound by the obduracy of his chosen material, as if to underline that the political circumstances of the wall and its lived effects are themselves material and unshakeable, even as he works to literally reshape the barrier and its impact. The pervasive reach of the political and its inextricable entanglement with cultural production is a recurring and inescapable characteristic of artistic and literary works made in Israel/Palestine, one that implicitly prevents culture from being perceived as the transcendent "other" of politics. In Jarrar's project, the concrete ball that can no longer function as a ball is effective as an artwork only insofar as it refers to the Separation Barrier itself. The wall's reconstituted cement endures in the new forms that Jarrar casts, imposing its material and political weight upon the sculptures even as they manage to effect shifts in conceptual and narrative terrain, marking the abstract and figurative in solid and substantial ways. No longer a pivot of exchange between players that accrues their traces, the ball of cement stands alone. Impossible to pass amongst players, the ball's concrete weight shows how cultural production in Israel/Palestine cannot transcend the political circumstances in which it is created; and how this bilateral entrenchment makes cultural production into a crucial site of political engagement.

I begin with this concrete example because Jarrar's work shows the mechanics of practice in which this project will be immersed, starting with the arti/fact of asymmetry on the ground and examining the limited and nonetheless unpredictable ways in which it is reworked and contested. *Radical Abandon: In-Between Agency and Self-Attenuation in Israel/Palestine* explores diverse cultural practices in Palestine and Israel that engage with the signs and viscera of inequity in order to highlight the potency of poetic and artistic encounters with structures of oppression. Indeed, this dissertation uncovers the aesthetic strategies of self-diminishment that Palestinian and Israeli artists and writers from different periods within the 20th-21st centuries mobilize to maintain horizons of coexistence. Engaging with cultural production in Palestine and Israel through the lens of what I term "aesthetic mechanisms of undoing," *Radical Abandon* charts the multimedia modes of literary and artistic production that poets and artists unleash to extricate themselves and their audiences

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ B'tselem, "The Separation Barrier," B'tselem.org, November 11, 2017, https://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier, accessed April 4, 2020.

from debilitating forms of national, gender and religious identity; and from deadening positions of subjugation, passivity and powerlessness. My project asks what kinds of collective and creative life become possible when the secure acquisition of a stable future can no longer remain the guiding rubric; how literary practices of translation, multilingualism, and intertextuality destabilize the discursive and material codes through which dominant norms of identity become entrenched; how particular aesthetic forms and techniques occasion the expression of otherwise unimaginable modes of being, and vice versa; and how contemporary literary and art practices in Palestine and Israel incorporate elements of activism, interventionism, and socio-historical reconstruction, providing new takes on the political, social and ethical functions of literature and art.

Radical Abandon focalizes the forms of weakened subjectivity and agency that these makers privilege—detailing how they locate creative force in the vulnerability, interruption, attenuation and mutability of self, rather than the advancement and expansion of power, self-knowledge or control. Following the implicit poetics of the poets and artists that the following chapters examine, I look to how agency might be decoupled from personal and political sovereignty. This analysis engages with the theories of both Judith Butler, who draws links between resignifying practices and the potential that embodiments of vulnerability provide for modes of resistance,⁸ and Saba Mahmood, who broadens the scope of agency beyond trajectories of liberation from domination.⁹ Butler’s 2016 co-edited collection of essays *Vulnerability in Resistance*, for example, challenges the assumption that vulnerability and resistance are necessarily mutually oppositional, questioning the uncritical alliance of mastery and activity with agency and vulnerability with victimization.¹⁰ In her essay “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance,” Butler “...[theorizes] the human body as a certain kind of dependency on infrastructure, understood complexly as environment, social relations, and networks of support and sustenance.”¹¹ This ontological condition of vulnerability and susceptibility is precisely what enables various norms to act on us, Butler argues, but it is also what allows norms to be performed and inhabited in deviant ways. The subject’s capacity to both affect and be affected as such enables various mobilizations of vulnerability that implicitly contest a masculinist notion of individualistic agency as one that is premised upon the repression of physical and psychological exposure.¹²

In an alternative vein, Saba Mahmood’s work in *Politics of Piety* expands conceptions of what agency might include to encompass modes of being that are not centered on resistance: “...I question the overwhelming tendency within poststructuralist feminist scholarship to conceptualize agency in terms of subversion or resignification of social norms, to locate agency within those operations that resist the dominating and subjectivating modes of power.”¹³ Mahmood argues that modes of agency must be understood from within the contexts of particular historical trajectories and cultural mores. “Viewed in this way,” she writes,

What may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency—but one that can be understood only from within the discourse and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment. In

⁸ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004) and Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay, eds, *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁹ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay, 1.

¹¹ Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance” in *Vulnerability*, 21.

¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 14.

this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms.¹⁴

Mahmood's example and directive to look at agency in a non-liberal framework informs the way in which I understand notions of utility, efficacy or resistance in the particular situation of political impasse in Israel/Palestine. The writers and artists featured in this dissertation present strategies like silence (Rachel Bluwstein), withdrawal (Dahlia Ravikovitch), and self-surrender (Mahmoud Darwish) in their works; they experiment with patterns of decomposition (Sliman Mansour), self-substitution (Emily Jacir) and evasion (Etti Abergel). From a normative framework that views agency as an active operation meant to result in micro or macro effects of transformation or resistance, these stratagems might well register as the reverse of agency. Yet, after years of failed attempts by politicians, activists, intellectuals and ordinary people alike, how can one topple the walls of institutional power that shore up the protection of one national body through the overt dispossession and destruction of another? In light of this question, Jarrar's project above could be read to function as a parody of interventionist art, in which the tiny artist hacks away at a behemoth barricade, snatching inconsequential bits of its structure to make useless objects that have no impact upon the wall's continuing existence. Following Butler and Mahmood's suggestions, however, if we stop looking for successful instances of straightforward subversion, then Jarrar's work can just as easily be seen to model a continuing mode of creative and material engagement with structures of power, enabled by the artful inhabitation and mobilization of an inescapable position of vulnerability. "Upcycle the Wall" is indeed premised upon the exposure of Jarrar's person to injury; this personal precarity inaugurates the artwork and serves as a condition of possibility for its development (as well as underlying his everyday existence as a Palestinian living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank). Jarrar's unambiguous deployment of vulnerability to make art in the face of oppressive regimes of power models the ways in which the other writers and artists of *Radical Abandon* animate their work through the various forms of attenuation that they requisition. They do so, I argue, as a means of maintaining a plurality of different possible futures in an increasingly impossible present. In this sense, the creative modes of wielding incapacity that I track in the following chapters are strategies that aim for innovative maintenance rather than unequivocal achievement. Jarrar can no more bring back the soccer field that the Separation Barrier destroyed than he can demolish the architecture of the wall. He can, however, turn the materials constituting the wall into a sculptural medium that memorializes precisely what it eradicates. As Lauren Berlant argues in her article "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," "...[i]n the scene of slow death, a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life, agency can be an activity of maintenance, not making; fantasy, without grandiosity; sentience, without full intentionality; inconsistency, without shattering; embodying, alongside embodiment."¹⁵

Jarrar's work, I argue, performs as a material act of small but substantive transformation that illuminates the profound absence of other institutional vectors capable of enacting change. The twenty-five years since the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995 have shown the near fatal collapse of the

¹⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵ Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 33, no. 4 (Summer 2007), 759.

two-state model, betraying Israel's lack of commitment to the establishment of an actual Palestinian state. Despite the partitioning of the West Bank into Areas A, B and C to cede some civil governance to the Palestinian Authority, Israel has never transferred administration of the 60% of the West Bank that constitutes Area C, maintaining total military control over the territory. Though Israel withdrew all settlers from Gaza in 2005, it instituted a blockade in 2007, retaining control of all borders and airspace, imposing sweeping restrictions on human rights and economic prospects, and engaging in periodic air and ground operations in disproportionate response to Palestinian rocket attacks.¹⁶ Israel's settlement enterprise has ballooned in the intervening years: more than 460,000 Israelis live in settlements in the occupied West Bank and more than 220,000 live in Israeli annexed parts of East Jerusalem.¹⁷ Currently, settlements themselves comprise nearly 10% of West Bank land while their regional councils control three times as much territory. In total, 40% of the West Bank and 63% of Area C is under settlement authority and jurisdiction. For its part, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is beleaguered by continuing declines in international donor aid, beset by internal corruption, and paralyzed by the division between Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah-based government in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. There have not been elections for either the president or the legislature since 2005 and 2006 respectively and the legislature has not sat since 2007. As Abbas' position has grown weaker, his rule has become increasingly authoritarian, arresting critics and forcefully breaking up demonstrations that protest his policies.¹⁸ While the PA does provide basic services as well as jobs for about a quarter of the Palestinian workforce, half of the public view it as "a burden on the Palestinian people."¹⁹

Internal Israeli politics are even more fraught. As I write in late April 2020, Israel has voted in its third national election in a year and Benjamin Netanyahu has successfully negotiated a unity government with his chief rival Benny Gantz that enables him to remain prime minister for the time being, despite his formal indictment on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust.²⁰ An interim government with limited authority has been operating since the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) voted to dissolve itself in December 2018 in order to trigger early elections, and it lacks the ability to vote on

¹⁶ These include the Gaza War of 2008-09, in which 1,391 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed; and the 2014 Gaza War, in which 2,201 Palestinians and 71 Israelis were killed. For a detailed overview of more rounds of fighting and statistics, see B'tselem, "The Gaza Strip," Btselem.org, November 11, 2027, https://www.btselem.org/gaza_strip, accessed April 24, 2020.

¹⁷ B'tselem, "Settlements," Btselem.org, January 16, 2019, [btselem.org/settlements](https://www.btselem.org/settlements), accessed April 24, 2020 and PeaceNow, "Jerusalem," <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/jerusalem>, accessed April 24, 2020.

¹⁸ Amira Hass, "'Palestinian Authority is Tyrannical': Joint Gaza, West Bank Conference Amps Criticism of Abbas and Hamas," *Ha'aretz*, July 6, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/.premium-joint-gaza-west-bank-conference-amps-criticism-of-abbas-and-hamas-1.7451598>, accessed April 24, 2020; Amira Hass and Jack Khoury, "Journalists Beaten, Cameras Destroyed: Palestinian Police Forcefully Break Up anti-Abbas Protest in Ramallah," *Ha'aretz*, June 14, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/.premium-palestinian-forcefully-police-break-up-anti-abbas-protest-in-ramallah-1.6175290>, accessed April 24, 2020; Nidal al-Mughrabi and Ali Sawafta, "With New Decree, Palestinian Leader Tightens Grip," *Reuters*, April 11, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-abbas-court-idUSKCN0X816B>, accessed April 24, 2020.

¹⁹ Khalil Shikaki, "Public Opinion Poll, no. 75," Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, March 1, 2020, <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/799>, accessed April 24, 2020.

²⁰ David M. Halbfinger and Isabel Kershner, "Netanyahu's Power Extended as Rival Accepts Unity Government," *The New York Times*, April 20, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/20/world/middleeast/netanyahu-israel-government-gantz.html?action=click&module=News&pgtype=Homepage>, accessed April 24, 2020; Bernard Avishai, "In Israel, An Unprecedented Political Crisis is Compounded by the Coronavirus—and Netanyahu is Benefitting," *The New Yorker*, March 19, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/in-israel-an-unprecedented-political-crisis-is-compounded-by-the-coronavirus-and-netanyahu-is-benefitting>, accessed April 24, 2020.

a new budget for 2020.²¹ A constitutional crisis currently looms between the legislature and the Supreme Court: the speaker of the Knesset (a member of Netanyahu's party), Yuli Edelstein, is refusing to allow the customary vote for his replacement and ignoring a Supreme Court order to do so. In the midst of the global coronavirus pandemic, the Israeli secret service has begun to tail infected people with the same cell-phone surveillance that it uses to pursue terrorist cells.²² This collapse of democratic institutions and procedures follows a decade of governance under Prime Minister Netanyahu's nationalist right movement in which attacks on the court system and liberal institutions have proliferated, dissent has become increasingly delegitimized and media companies have been bribed for favorable coverage.²³ Since Netanyahu took office in 2009 for his second stretch, he and his party have passed literally dozens of discriminatory laws that erode the political rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel and other minorities.²⁴ The most infamous examples include the 2018 Nation-State Bill (חוק יסוד: ישראל—מדינת הלאום של העם היהודי) which declares the State of Israel to be the nation-state of the Jewish people committed to the advancement of Jewish settlement, and downgrades Arabic from an official language to a language with special status; a 2017 amendment to the Entry into Israel Law (חוק הכניסה לישראל) that prohibits entry to foreigners who support a boycott of Israel, and was famously used to deny entry to US members of Congress Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar; and a 2016 Expulsion of MKs law that allows a majority of Knesset members to expel a fellow member for the cynically named "incitement to racism," designed to enable the ousting of Palestinian Arab MKs.²⁵ The explicit nature of these racist bills and their surrounding rhetoric reflect and contribute to the clear rightward swing that mainstream Israeli society has undergone since the terror attacks of the Second Intifada, such that 42% of Israelis now support some form of West Bank annexation.²⁶ More alarmingly, the Occupation no longer registers as a matter of pressing concern to the Israeli electorate, who have cited Netanyahu's investigations, housing and the cost of living, as well as security as having the most impact on their voting decisions.²⁷ While political chaos reigns and autocracy grows on both sides of the Green Line, Israel

²¹ Reuters, "Election Turmoil Plunges Israel into a Budget Crisis," *Ha'aretz*, November 22, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/election-turmoil-plunges-israel-into-a-budget-crisis-1.8162318>, accessed April 24, 2020.

²² Bernard Avishai, "In Israel, An Unprecedented Political Crisis"; David M. Halbfinger, Isabel Kurshner and Ronen Bergman, "To Track Coronavirus, Israel Moves to Track Secret Trove of Cellphone Data," *The New York Times*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/16/world/middleeast/israel-coronavirus-cellphone-tracking.html>, accessed April 24, 2020.

²³ For a good overview, see Zack Beauchamp, "The War on Israeli Democracy," *Vox*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/2/27/21075868/israeli-democracy-war-netanyahu>, accessed April 24, 2020.

²⁴ See Adalah's database of these laws, "Discriminatory Laws in Israel," Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, <https://www.adalah.org/en/law/index>, accessed April 24, 2020.

²⁵ Mordechai Kremnitzer, "Jewish Nation-state Law Makes Discrimination in Israel Constitutional," *Ha'aretz*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-nation-state-law-makes-discrimination-in-israel-constitutional-1.6291906>, accessed April 24, 2020; Jonathon Lis, "Israel Bars Entry to Foreigners Who Call for Boycott of Settlements," *Ha'aretz*, March 7, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-israel-bars-entry-to-foreigners-who-call-for-boycott-of-settlements-1.5445566>, accessed April 24, 2020; "Expulsion of MKs" Law—Amendment no. 44 to Basic Law: Knesset," Adalah, <https://www.adalah.org/en/law/view/599>, accessed April 24, 2020.

²⁶ Dina Kraft, "Haaretz Poll: 42% of Israelis Back West Bank Annexation, Including Two-State Supporters," *Ha'aretz*, March 25, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israeli-palestinian-conflict-solutions/premium-42-of-israelis-back-west-bank-annexation-including-two-state-supporters-1.7047313>, accessed April 24, 2020.

²⁷ Tamar Hermann and Or Anabi, "Israeli Voice Index: Israelis Believe Netanyahu's Investigations Will Have the Greatest Impact on the Vote," The Israel Democracy Institute, February 3, 2020, <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/29689>, accessed April 24, 2020.

continues to assert military rule over some five million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to whom it denies basic civil, political and economic rights. It has perhaps never been clearer how vital of a role cultural production in Israel/Palestine plays as it deliberates upon the remaining possibilities for agency and social transformation, improvising modes of creative life in the midst of political impasse and structural oppression.

Following the work of scholars like Ted Swedenburg and Rebecca L. Stein to establish cultural production in Israel/Palestine as a field of study that is itself central to questions of power and the mobilization of new political relations, this dissertation looks to highlight the vital role that writers and artists play within societies negotiating crisis, producing work that exposes the prominence of culture as a locus of engagement, resistance and survival.²⁸ In this regard, my research joins in the increasing number of scholars who are dedicated to developing the field of Israel/Palestine cultural studies: Stein and Swedenburg as cited above, in addition to Joseph Massad, Maha Nassar, and Helga Tawil-Souri, and many others.²⁹ Like many of these scholars, I view cultural practices and production as sites of constraint as well as agency that are themselves constitutive of political participation and engagement rather than merely as secondary effects of political and economic forces.³⁰ At the same time, *Radical Abandon* operates on the premise that art cannot transcend the political conditions in which it is made. Jarrar's sculpture casts cannot escape—nor do they attempt to—the cement of the Separation Barrier that comprises its base medium. In different ways, the following chapters make the claim that writers and artists across national, religious, gender and class borders in Israel/Palestine fantasize about and fight for the different possible futures of decolonization—all predicated upon distinct practices of self-attenuation—that current policies would like to foreclose entirely; these fantasies both maintain horizons of equitable co-existence and chart some paths toward those imagined prospects.

In this sense, this dissertation is heavily indebted to the body of scholarship that actively undoes the binary relation of Arab and Jew. Gil Hochberg's influential study *In Spite of Partition* argues that contemporary Jewish and Arab literature displays complex configurations of identity that undermine the separatist imagination that divides Arab from Jew.³¹ Lital Levy's *Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine* poses a counter-history of literary works through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that exposes the entangled lives of the languages and literary heritages, showcasing how Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel alike disturb the identification of Jews with Hebrew and Palestinians with Arabic.³² Hella Bloom Cohen's *The Literary Imagination in*

²⁸ Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg, eds., *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 1-2, 6-9, 11.

²⁹ See, among others, Joseph Massad, "Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music," in *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds., 175-201; Joseph Massad, "Permission to Paint: Palestinian Art and the Colonial Encounter," *Art Journal* 66, no. 3 (2007): 126-33; Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg, eds., *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*; Helga Tawil-Souri, "The Necessary Politics of Palestinian Cultural Studies," in *Arab Cultural Studies: Mapping the Field*, ed. Tarik Sabry (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011); Ruba Salih and Sophie Richter Devroe, eds., "Special Issue: Cultures of Resistance," *The Arab Studies Journal* vol. 22, no. 1 (Spring 2014); Maha Nassar, "'My Struggle Embraces Every Struggle': Palestinians in Israel and Solidarity with Afro-Asian Liberation Movements," *The Arab Studies Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 1, "Special Issue: Cultures of Resistance," (Spring 2014): 74-101.

³⁰ For a brief summary of the role of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies in fomenting this view and its relation to Israel/Palestine, see Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg, "Introduction: Popular Culture, Transnationality and Radical History," *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*, 1-23.

³¹ Gil Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

³² Lital Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing Between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/ Palestine* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).

Israel/Palestine turns to tropes of miscegenation in Israeli and Palestinian literature to trace the emergence of racial and ethnic hybrids.³³ Anna Bernard's *Rhetorics of Belonging* proposes a relational literary history of both Israel and Palestine by exploring the national narration of both.³⁴ Other literary scholars like Ammiel Alcalay and Rachel Feldhay Brenner have argued that the literary and aesthetic productions that carve out spaces between the poles of Arab and Jew can be a means of transcending the political and social partitions that continue to reign on the ground.³⁵ *Radical Abandon* participates in the research undertaken by Hochberg and Levy, amongst others, to disrupt and oppose the radical separation of Arabs and Jews and Arabic and Hebrew literatures. This dissertation adds to their work by setting into play theoretically rich conversations between poets and artists from different sides of the geo-political and historical borders operative in Palestine and Israel over the 20th and 21st centuries—uniquely connecting works from different periods, languages and media, combining close readings, literary and historical contextualization and critical theory. In this multidisciplinary angle, I shift the focus from cultural production between the designations Arab and Jew/Arabic and Hebrew/Palestine and Israel towards a look at the relationship between aesthetic strategies and possibilities for ethical modes of engagement that emerge across national, religious and gender boundaries.

Perhaps most crucially, *Radical Abandon* investigates how aesthetic modes of undoing can be practiced as a methodology of research rather than merely its content or object. Indeed, my project contends that the space of the dissertation itself must become a creative arena for unexpected encounters, and as such, I have chosen to gather Israeli and Palestinian texts of diverse media from different periods within the 20th-21st centuries. I privilege non-teleological temporalities in my analysis in order to track complementary figures and metaphors questioning the premise that everything must lead ineluctably to the formation of a national state. Working against a linear and progressive conception of history and of national development, this dissertation looks instead to non-linear and diachronic intertextualities that highlight anachronisms and ties across chronological divides; and to non-nationalist formulations of collectivity.³⁶ This framework is informed by queer theory's critique of reproductive temporality and attendant focus on formulations of life that exist outside models of longevity and inheritance.³⁷ Thus, the choice to join primarily non-contemporaneous works from different cultural scenes across Palestine and Israel is both intentional and necessary: precisely because so many encounters are barred on the ground today, my project insists on cultivating a domain of unexpected interfaces and unconventional perspectives.

³³ Hella Bloom Cohen, *The Literary Imagination in Israel/Palestine* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

³⁴ Anna Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

³⁵ Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded: Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers Revisioning Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

³⁶ See Shaul Setter, "After the Fact: Potential Collectivities in Israel/Palestine" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2012).

³⁷ See for instance Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), which questions the "reproductive futurism" that the innocent figure of the child in need of protection represents (19, 117). Jack (Judith) Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) conceptualizes models of temporality that can emerge outside the frames of "bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (6). Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) introduces the notion of temporal drag, wherein drag becomes a temporal rather than a gender crossing, allowing old stories to be retold through new ones so that alternative futures can be re-accessed.

The first three chapters of *Radical Abandon* explore poets and artists such as Rachel Bluwstein, Dahlia Ravikovitch, Sliman Mansour and Mahmoud Darwish, who employ tropes of death and diminishment to reevaluate what selfhood, community and survival mean within the terms of foundational texts. Rather than the vibrant progenitors of distinct and enduring nations, they rewrite Abrahamic matriarchs and patriarchs into sites of indeterminacy that merge death with life, compelling a mode of national survival premised on the bequeathal of vulnerability and self-attenuation. The final chapter offsets the other sections' focus on biblical and Qur'anic figures by examining the work of contemporary installation artists Emily Jacir and Etti Abergel. In their varied art practices, I argue, they assume positions of precarity in which their own exposure both enables the transmission of alternative histories and activates creative mediations in the present. In my reading, these rewritings of self and collective endurance are not ends in themselves. Rather, their modes of self-attenuation function as the contentious grounds from which poets and artists are able to gesture towards an un-foreclosed future, in which an unguarded form of collectivity residing between multiple languages, races, ethnicities and religions is still imaginable. What might it mean, I ask, to mobilize the radical abandon of self-renunciation as a means of developing a diminished form of agency, one which privileges the interstices of self in order to keep the receding possible open?

Chapter 1, "Lyric Spasms and Prophetic Dissolutions: Writing, Death, and Agency in the Poetry of Rachel Bluwstein and Dahlia Ravikovitch," looks at two poets writing in Hebrew—Rachel Bluwstein (1890-1931), generally considered to be the "mother" or founding voice of Hebrew women's poetry, and traces her impact on Dahlia Ravikovitch's (1936-2005) work. The chapter begins by examining the way in which Bluwstein's literary aesthetics of minimalism and crafted immediacy is premised on modes of vulnerable subjectivity for reader and writer. Reading several of Bluwstein's essays and poems, I argue that she assumes and occasions various forms of motherhood to develop a nuanced theory and practice of intersubjective transformation. The chapter then moves to track the composite poetic persona of Rachel (the poet and biblical matriarch) as she appears in several of Ravikovitch's texts. While, traditionally, Rachel the matriarch is allegorized as the mother of the nation, I lay bare how Ravikovitch dismantles and reconstitutes the cipher of Rachel in a non-national way. As the layered figure of Rachel proliferates more clearly in Ravikovitch's corpus and reveals its intertextual networks, I explore how the very name becomes a site of matriarchal rewriting, in which the nation is transformed into a collective that continually disassembles itself. Ultimately, this chapter claims, "Rachel" comes to mark the literary loci where inclusive forms of togetherness are cultivated through the varying modes of attenuation operative in Bluwstein and Ravikovitch's work.

Chapter 2, "Decaying Fathers, Fraternal Scapegoats and Mimetic Relief: Sliman Mansour and 'I, Ismail,'" turns to Palestinian artist Sliman Mansour (1947-) and his 1997 series "I, Ismail," a piece that probes the demise of patriarchal forms of authority. Mansour's life-size mud reliefs of Ismail are overlaid by networks of cracks, producing the effect of a tombstone housing a figure who is neither completely dead nor quite alive. This chapter explores what possibilities for survival can be created when the concept of "the one who begets or redeems the many" is dismantled, contextualizing "I, Ismail" by turning towards the Qur'anic and biblical narratives and textual traditions surrounding Ismā'il/ Ishmael, Hājar/ Hagar, Ibrāhīm/ Abraham and Sarah. Tracing the various hermeneutical accounts of Ismā'il/ Ishmael's near-death experience in the desert, I emphasize the ways in which idolatry entangles itself in the heart of these narratives and its implications. The chapter then draws a

connection between the reiterating trope of idolatry and the fissuring of Mansour's sculptures. Investigating how the aesthetic attributes of cracking become the focus of Mansour's piece, which mirror the Oslo Accord's effects and aftermath in Palestine, I unpack how and why the artist reinforces the cracks that proliferate in his sculptures instead of smoothing them away. As the chapter argues, Mansour's decision to reinforce and underscore these channels of fragmentation become a technique for abiding in the interstice of tradition and reinvention, where processes of decomposition may generate their own modes of authority.

Chapter 3, "It Is Not Exile for My Me to Be You': Intervals of Restitution Between Text and Music in Mahmoud Darwish" focuses on Mahmoud Darwish's (1941-2008) 1995 collection *Limādhā tarakta al-ḥiṣān waḥīdan?* (Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?). Tracking Darwish's cultivation of the musical aspects of poetry, the chapter explores how the collection poetically attends to the effects of dispossession and displacement. I begin by looking at a series of poems that reference the near sacrifice of Abraham's son, in which, I claim, Darwish deliberately challenges the Abrahamic inheritance that links faith and survival to an ethical rupture. Rather than the construction of a nation that is enacted through the son's sacrifice as in the Hebrew Bible's version, Darwish reformulates the narrative to depict a *literary* mode of national recreation that comes about through the call for self-sacrifice and an attendant reengagement with the rich heritage of Arabic poetry. I then read this questioning of the Abrahamic order in relation to several other poems in the diwan's fourth section, *Ghurfa L'il Kalām Ma' al-Nafs* (A Room to Talk to Oneself), emphasizing how these poems explicitly privilege echo, meter and rhyme both formally and thematically. In my reading, these forms of reiterating sound that predominate in *Ghurfa* create auditory effects of betweenness, wherein an original utterance is displaced by its repetition, and a domain of generative resonance between source and its modified repetition is created. As I argue, these auditory effects of betweenness function as a means of disrupting the idea of a set and bounded identity with its displacement, such that an original identity is transformed into an interval of otherness. Ultimately, this chapter claims that the aural possibilities of displacement showcased in Darwish's work fundamentally assume the task of writing a non-sovereign form of identity, wherein unified norms of selfhood are continually dismantled through a repeated and willing submission to others and otherness.

Chapter 4, "Artists of History: Auto/biography, Translation and Repair in Emily Jacir and Etti Abergel," turns towards two contemporary installation artists whose engagement with history and the political present unfolds through their creative reworkings of autobiography—Palestinian Emily Jacir (1970-) and Etti Abergel (1960-), a Jewish-Israeli artist of Moroccan descent. I begin with two of Jacir's installations that highlight her mobilization of counter-interpellation and counter-history as artistic strategies. Jacir's 2005 project *Material for a Film*, for example, is a mixed-media installation and performance in photographs, letters, postcards, interviews and diary entries that showcases Jacir's collection of information regarding Wael Zuaier, a Palestinian intellectual who was assassinated by Mossad agents in Rome in 1972. In my reading of *Material*, I claim that Jacir operationalizes the technique of embedment, inserting herself into Zuaier's life and occasioning a space for viewers to embed themselves in her remediation of his life. In fascinating ways, this recalls the narrative technique of embedment made famous in *One Thousand and One Nights*, a book that Zuaier was translating from Arabic into Italian and had on his person at the time of his assassination. As I argue, Jacir's accentuation and material redeployment of embedment in her work creates interstitial spaces that insert loci of blankness within previously sealed and overdetermined accounts. Ultimately, Jacir sets in motion a multiform transmission of vanquished history that is simultaneously a story of the self's call to substitute the unknown fragments of others for oneself. Jacir's use of surrogacy as a mode of auto/biography that redeems lost histories provides an

illuminating perspective with which to approach the installations of Etti Abergel. Collecting useful and mundane objects, Abergel reworks them until their previous functions have been discharged of all utility: a plastic basket is threaded with twine, for instance, until it resembles a long-haired head. A new space is formed through her hybridization of disparate, reconfigured objects and made into a home as she builds her installations. The second part of this chapter focuses on her 2014 project, *Animism: An Installation in Three Parts* (2014), tracking the ways in which Abergel's autobiography exposes particularized fragments of destruction in place of the self whose memories are kept secret. In the press release for this exhibit, Abergel has described her mediation as a form of manual labor that recovers the specificity and value of the everyday objects, which would otherwise be destined to remain under the deadening relations of anonymous equivalence afforded by capitalist modes of interaction. She names this form of manual labor *tikkun*, invoking the central Kabbalistic symbol of restoration and redemption that refers to a process of cosmic repair enacted by human contemplative action and ethical practice. If Abergel's *tikkun* transpires through the arousal of the sensuous world's inanimate objects, then this reparative activity necessarily entails the disruption of nationalist assimilations of space, identity and history. Her *tikkun* fragments objects in order to animate them, thus summoning—via this fundamental Kabbalistic figure—the destruction and ruins of the Nakba as well as the disjunction between her family's own past in Morocco and her identity as a Mizrahi Israeli. My reading emphasizes how her acts of reanimation and restoration cannot transpire without a reckoning with the destruction and disjunctions of Nakba, Occupation and migration.

Radical Abandon pairs analyses of visual objects and installations with very close readings of poetic texts in order to create intersections amidst visual and textual domains that necessitate new synesthetic reading practices between the seen and the read. The dissonant congruity between these visual and textual formulations of the radical abandon of self-protectionism draw attention to what we miss when we approach our objects of analysis through just one manner of consumption—the textures of the text that cannot be read, but must be sensed otherwise; or the marks in an artist's work that cannot be properly seen, that demand other angles of perception. Thus, the silences and surprises that reconfigure Rachel Bluwstein's poems and the syncopating currents of Dahlia Ravikovitch's writing underscore the cracks that activate artist Sliman Mansour's mud reliefs; just as the intertextual echoes that Mahmoud Darwish weaves into a poetic homeland punctuate Etti Abergel's curations of reauthored objects into foundations of possibility. Taken together, these works illuminate a collective network of multimedia disruption that writers and artists in Israel/Palestine have embedded into their cultural imaginaries—a counter-imaginary of vulnerable and creative coexistence.

Chapter One

Lyric Spasms and Prophetic Dissolutions: Writing, Death, and Agency in the Poetry of Rachel Bluwstein and Dahlia Ravikovitch

I begin with a glance at two texts which, though superficially unrelated, both circle around the heart of this chapter's focus—gendered figures of life and death and the agency of poetic transformation. In the poem “*Shtikab*” (Silence), Rachel Bluwstein likens death to the silence that places poetic language in sharp relief, causing palpable figures of its materiality to emerge:

This burden of silence is crushing me into the earth,
This sword of silence is slicing my heart.
I am still here and waiting—I still am,
And the expelled blood of my poem still reddens around me.

זֶה נִטֵּל הַשְׁתִּיקָה לְאַרְצִי מִדְּכָאֲנִי,
זוֹ הָרֵב הַשְׁתִּיקָה גּוֹזְרָה אֶת לִבִּי.
אֲנִי עוֹדֵנִי פֹה וּמִמְתִּינָה – עוֹדֵנִי,
וְדָם שִׁירִי פְּלוּט עוֹד מְאָדִּים סְבִיבִי.

Death is silent and still, indeed we will all fall silent too
Like the ending, when the time comes, of the brief way;
But life has a voice and expression to it, and we
Moan for that expression and a clear and animated echo.

הַמָּוֶת הוּא דוֹמָם, אֲכֵן נָדָם כָּלֵנוּ
כְּתָם, כְּבוֹא הַיּוֹם, הָאֲרֶחַ הַקָּצֵר;
אֶף לַחַיִּים יֵשׁ קוֹל וְנִיב לָהֶם, וְלָנוּ
הַמָּוֶת לְנִיב הַזֶּה וְהַד צִלּוּל נֶעֱר.

It paralyzes me. It carries the terror of the grave.
Its crooked mouth it splits open immeasurably—
I am still here—still here—beyond—
Strike me with words! But please don't—don't be silent!³⁸

הִיא מְקַפֵּיֶּאָה אוֹתִי. עֲמָה אֵימַת הַקֶּבֶר
אֶת פִּיהָ הָעֵקֶם פּוֹעֶרֶת לְבִלִּי חֶק –
אֲנִי עוֹדֵנִי פֹה – – עוֹדֵנִי פֹה – – מְעַבֵּר –
הַכֵּנִי בְּמִלִּים! אֶף אַל נָא – אַל תִּשְׁתַּק! ³⁹

The first image in the poem is that of a heavy, oppressive and subjugating load. Then the blood takes over. Silence asserts its force with an agency that at once summons and produces death, stabbing the speaker dead and pushing her into an early grave, a performance of death that impels the poem's figuration as a dying body. Silence indeed pierces the speaker in penetrating alienation and causes her poem to spill its blood rather than her viscera. This textual blood then surrounds the speaker while she continues to wait, asserting an ongoing timeline in the face of the finitude that silence decrees. In the first line of the second stanza, death is then equated with a silent stillness (*domem*, which is also the technical word for “still life”) that is both pervasive and painfully particular—one that we will all encounter and that becomes directed specifically at her in the third stanza, administered by a notably absent addressee with whom the speaker pleads. The final line reads: “Strike me with words! But please don't—don't be silent!” To prevent herself from being stabbed with the sharpest of knives, the speaker begs her unresponsive male interlocutor to beat her with language—to make his words material and felt and protect herself from being irrevocably punctured by their absence. In the first wound, the speaker is stabbed but it is her poem that bodily registers the effect of silence; in this second portrayal of injury, the absent addressee's language is petitioned to act to allow the speaker to register the effect in a bodily way. The contact of his words

³⁸ Translation mine.

³⁹ Rachel Bluwstein, *Shirat Rachel* (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1989), 98.

striking her body must be an appeal for physical intimacy as well and elicits the images of communing bodies that are noticeably absent in the poem. With no interlocutor, it is thus her poetic text that takes on corporeal form and reflects her physical and psychological loneliness as it dies her death. An effect of the absent interlocutor's silence, the poetic text reflects the speaker's experience of proximate death, an encounter that allows her to mobilize the embodied materiality of language and generate an alternative mode of fellowship.

An alternative reading is possible as well. Since "death" (*mavet*) is a masculine noun in Hebrew, the poem could be read as moving from a third-person description to a second-person address to death in the final stanza. In this reading, the speaker begs death to enact the desired closeness rather than her absent interlocutor. "Silence" (*shtikah*), a feminine noun, paralyzes the speaker with terror as she/ it splits her crooked mouth open. In this arresting image, a mouth widens continually but emits no sound; the opening that could signal communication and communion becomes an inescapable, encompassing cavity of isolation that the speaker attempts to escape by means of penetrative, masculine contact. What does it mean for death to beat her with its/his words? What does it mean for there to be such slippage between an absent male partner and death, both appealed to for their aggression in relation to language? Notably, the speaker's desperation for intimacy leads her to solicit the relational contact of language from the gendered incursions of both life and death.

In "*Kitmey Or*" (Sparks of Light), Dahlia Ravikovitch attends to a similar nexus of revelatory corporeality, silence, union and death:

And this matter so dark is steeped in sparks of light And their voice is not heard, not even a murmuring sound And they are like myrrh flowing from a flask all night.	ובחמר הזה האפל נטבעו כתמים של אור ולא נשמע בהם קול ורחש בהם לא יעבר והם כמו שמן המור נגרים וזולפים מן הפך.
And like perfumes, they ooze, soft and serene they flow, And in this matter so dark they gather to a bubbling fount And in their comely delight they rise and overflow.	והם נגרים כבשמים ונרפה ושלונה תנועתם ובחמר הזה האפל הם נקוים למבוע קטן ויש בהם חן ותמדה שגואים ועוברים על גדותם.
And in this matter so dark there opens a mine of gold And this matter so dark reveals its depths profound And tender is the love between the dark and the gold.	ובחמר הזה האפל נבצה מכרה של זהב והחמר הזה האפל מגלה את מעמקיו ויש אהבה עננה בין האפל לבין הזהב.
And in silence and peace they embrace, and no wind blows, And the light keeps streaming and kissing the dark on the mouth And the dark makes its body a well for the sparks of gold.	והם תבוקים ושלווים ואין בהם קול ומשב והאור מנטף ונושק את החמר הזה בשפתיו והאפל הופך את גופו כבאר לכתמי הזהב.
This matter so dark is steeped in sparks of light And their voice is not heard, not even a murmuring sound, And they are like myrrh flowing from a flask all night. ⁴⁰	בחמר הזה האפל נטבעו כתמים של אור ולא נשמע בהם קול ורחש בהם לא יעבר והם כמו שמן המור נגרים וזולפים מן הפך. ⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch*, translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 67.

⁴¹ *Kol ha-shirim 'ad ko* (Collected Poems) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Ha-me'uchad, 1995), 33.

Sparks of light (*kitmey or*) are silently enmeshed in the darkness of matter (*chomer*) (both masculine nouns), effecting an entanglement of oppositions that shows itself in bodied and desiring form. This encounter of silence and stillness indeed puts the homo-erotic physicality of their meeting in relief as one that generates surprising juxtapositions. Ravikovitch uses the word “*kitmey*,” the genitive plural of “*ketem*” which literally means a stain or patch of color, and in biblical Hebrew refers to fine gold. The sparks of light engulfed in the darkness of matter elicit opposing images of profane blemishes and stains—dirty smudges of light—that contrast with the figures of rich, numinous gold which are also evoked. Masculine and feminine descriptors are similarly intertwined throughout the poem. The grammatically masculine sparks are portrayed in feminizing terms—they ooze, bubble and flow; likewise, the grammatically masculine matter, a premier symbol of universal femininity, reveals its hidden and concave depths. The spots of light are thus manifestly sensual and manifestly plural—masculine and feminine, sacred and profane, stained and golden. Sensuality, in this framework, is seemingly premised upon its variegation. In the third stanza, light streams—it flows in expressive motion—by kissing the dark on the mouth of its matter, and the darkness responds by transforming its body into a well to submerge the light. This dark matter immediately signals the fragments of shattered vessels that have trapped God’s emanations, worldly sites of power-laden oppression and adversity evoking mortality and suffering where, according to the Kabbalistic notion, sparks of divine life still subsist. The dark that makes its body a container in which to both hold and drown the flecks of light thus suggests that corporeality in transformative flux is the mode through which we may encounter this revelatory light, an expression of transcendence that takes poetic form through a language of diversifying and dissolving embodiment.

For Rachel silence is violent and deadly, but it ultimately yields forceful forms of poetic language on the edge of life that enable a fantasy of communion across disparate realms and states; for Ravikovitch, the silence and stillness that situate the sparks of light define their erotic love with the dark matter of mortality, foreshadowing the language of self-dissolution that her later writing more explicitly employs. It is no accident that these two poems, though unconnected and stylistically distinct, mobilize resonant figures of silence and poesis. Indeed, this chapter tracks the impact of Rachel Bluwstein’s writing on Dahlia Ravikovitch, distilling the forms of agency and attenuation that appear in each of their poetic projects. In what follows, I turn first to a series of Rachel Bluwstein’s poems and essays to examine the tropes of motherhood and infancy at work that evince a nuanced theory of intersubjective agency and relational poesis which, I claim, exert an important influence on Dahlia Ravikovitch’s own development. Reading Ravikovitch’s first published poem before I move to primarily focus on texts from her 1987 collection *True Love (Ahava Amitit)*, I next analyze the form of poetic-prophecy that undergirds her writing overall and show where it is phrased in ways that particularly reference and evoke Rachel’s project. In the final section, I track the composite poetic persona of Rachel as she appears in several of Ravikovitch’s texts, arguing that she emerges as a figure of writing who links together forms of mortally vulnerable authorship—modes of creation that affirm a practice of attenuation over and above the survival of self and nation.

The following analysis thus weaves its way through a diverse array of Rachel’s avatars: from biblical matriarch and symbolic vehicle of nation; to proper name of more than one actual poet and their roles as so-called mothers of women’s poetry in Hebrew; to sign of literary genealogy and poetic trope of non-sovereign and collective endurance. In this shifting between the biblical, rhetorical, literary, historical and political aspects of Rachel’s persona, coexisting forms of Rachel thus emerge through manifold conditions in varied dispossessions and reconfigurations, often oriented in opposing ways. This chapter tracks the circulation of Rachel’s composite and multiple figures as she/they materialize at the interface of various oppositions. Her avatars transform, proliferate and disperse themselves through the shifting and recasting of binary entrenchments—body/language, personal/collective transformation, poetic/material genesis,

sovereignty/interdependence, birth/death. From barren motherhood to life affirming death, the following discussion details how Rachel and Ravikovitch's theories of agency operate simultaneously on the largest and smallest of scales, renegotiating the register and scope of change.

I. "Still I'll Await": Barren Motherhood and Simple Expression

Barren	עקרה
If only I had a son! A little boy, black-curled and smart. To hold his hand and slowly stroll through garden paths. A little. Boy.	בן לו הנה לי! ילד קטן, שחור תלתלים ונבון. לאחוז בידו ולפסע לאט בשבילי הגן. ילד. קטן.
Uri I'd call him, Uri of mine! Soft and clear is this short name. A dew-drop of radiance. My dark-haired boy "Uri!" — I'd call!	אורי אקרא לו, אורי שלי! רך וצלול הוא השם הקצר. רסיס נהרה. לילדי השחור "אורי!" — אקרא!
Still I'm embittered like mother Rachel. Still I'm praying like Hannah at Shiloh. Still I'm awaiting Him.	עוד אתמרמר כרחל האם. עוד אתפלל כחנה בשילה. עוד אסכה לו. ⁴²

Rachel Bluwstein's 1928 poem "*Akarab*" is a work of surprising reversals, like so much of her writing. Masquerading as the straightforward and sentimental speech of a barren woman expressing her patient desire for a son, after slow reading, the poem reveals itself to reverberate with silent shadow texts. As with much of Rachel's writing, punctuation and form signify as much as the text's elliptical phrases and repeated words. Each stanza indeed begins with a complete sentence, as if fantasizing and embodying the fullness of pregnancy, only to swiftly diminish and conclude with a single word, what might seem to perform the contraction that barrenness commonly symbolizes. Yet, as this section will contend, the single word is the cornerstone of Rachel's literary aesthetics—a locus of resignifying agency mobilizing the surrounding space and silence it precedes and affords. As such, the barrenness that is figured here through the paradoxical vision of a very particular child becomes something much more animating and complex than its confessional dissembling.

"Black-curled" and designated in terms of spiritual or artistic luminescence, Uri is specified in details that evoke both the radiant redemption of Zion in the Book of Isaiah; the description of the Shulamite's lover in the Song of the Songs; and one of the protagonists of S.Y. Agnon's 1908 story "*Agunot*." Literally meaning "my fire" and associated with figures of light ("*or*" in Hebrew,

⁴² Rachel [Bluwstein], *Shirat Rachel* (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1989), 86, translation mine.

which shares the same linguistic root), “Uri” immediately signals the famous verse of Isaiah 60:1, where the divine restoration of God’s people is depicted through imagery of the breaking dawn:

1 Arise, shine [<i>“or”</i>], for your light [<i>“orekb”</i>] has come, and the glory of the Lord has shone upon you.⁴³	א קומי אורי, כי בא אורך; וכבוד יהוה, עליך זרח.
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The city of Jerusalem, a grammatically feminine noun, is explicitly identified as the addressee in verse 14 (“they shall call you ‘the city of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel’”). Here, in the first verse, she is called upon to arise and shine, and as God’s favor impels the city to gleam with morning splendor, she in turn becomes a light to other nations in darkness (Isaiah 60:3):

3 And nations shall go by your light [<i>“orekb”</i>] and kings by the brilliance of your shine.⁴⁴	ג והלכו גוים, לאורך; ומלכים, לננה זרחך.
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As Jacob Stromberg clarifies in his commentary on Isaiah, “Zion’s destiny is arguably the most pervasive theme in the book, and a key metaphor depicting it is ‘Zion as woman.’ In the book, this metaphor appears in a variety of forms: e.g. Zion as prostitute, as mother, as barren woman, as God’s wife.”⁴⁵ Indeed, several chapters earlier (Isaiah 54:1), a captive Zion exiled in Babylonia is likened to a barren woman who can now sing because of God’s promised redemption:

“Sing you barren woman who has not borne; burst out into song and jubilate, you who have not experienced birth pangs, for the children of the desolate one are more than the children of the married woman,” says the Lord.⁴⁶	רְגִי עֲקָרָה לֹא יָלְדָה פִּצְחִי רִנָּה וְצִחִלִי לֹא־חָלָה כִּי־רַבִּים בְּנֵי־שׁוֹמְמָה מִבְּנֵי בְעוּלָה אָמַר יְהוָה:
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Though Zion is barren—bereft of her “true” children who are inaccessible to her in Babylonian exile—God commands her to burst open in song because, as subsequent verses stipulate, her “...seed shall inherit nations and repeople desolate cities” (54:3).⁴⁷ As in other cultures of the lyric, song and poetry are intimately related in the Hebrew tradition, even sharing the same word (*shir*). In this verse of Isaiah, the divine directive to open up and break out into song analogizes and signals the opening in childbirth that Zion will do in the future. It is precisely this yoking of women’s aesthetic creation to the task and metaphor of national procreation that Rachel Bluwstien addresses and reverses in “*Akarab*” as she exploits the trope of barrenness. While the national use of “Uri” that Rachel activates is directly related to the linked concepts of light and sovereign restoration as mapped onto the metaphor of “Zion as (barren) woman” laid out in the verses above, her

⁴³ Translation from Chaim Potok, Nahum M. Sarna, Jacob Milgrom, and Jeffrey H. Tigay. *The JPS Torah Commentary: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New Jps Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989). Accessed Feb. 4, 2020, <https://www.sefaria.org/Isaiah.60?lang=bi>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Jacob Stromberg, *An Introduction to the Study of Isaiah* (New York: Bloomsbry, 2011), 62.

⁴⁶ *The JPS Torah Commentary: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New Jps Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989). Accessed Feb. 24, 2020, <https://www.sefaria.org/Isaiah.54?lang=bi>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

subsequent allusions to the Shulamite's lover in the Song of Songs in the poem's second stanza mobilize other critical contexts.

In the Shulamite's lucid dream, she sleeps but her heart awakens to the sound of her lover knocking on the door, seemingly to the rhythm of her own heartbeat, and he then beseeches her to let him in for his hair is "full with the dewdrops of night" (*resisey layla*).⁴⁸ Rachel summons the reverberation of this text in the poetic speaker's description of her son's soft, clear and short name as a "dewdrop of radiance" (*resis nebara*). The shifting that is effected in the poetic text between night and day, son and lover, and fantasy and desire imbues the first stanza's brief mention of garden paths with additional layers of meaning as well. After the Shulamite's lover compares her to a locked garden concealing orchards of precious fruits and all manner of spice, she responds with the following call:

16 Awake ('*uri*), O north wind; and come,
thou south; blow upon my garden, that the
spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved
come into his garden, and eat his precious
fruits.⁴⁹

טז עורי צפון ובואי תימן, הפיחי גני יגלו בשמי; יבא דודי
לגנו, ויאכל פרי מגדיו.

I believe this homophone, "'*uri*'" with an '*ayin*', is invoked in the name of the poetic speaker's imagined son in Rachel's poem, though it should be well-noted that the two '*uris*' would only have been homonyms in the new so-called Sephardi accent of Hebrew, which elided the difference between '*ayin*' and '*aleph*'. The evocation of the one in the other signals to the readers the gendered reversals Rachel undertakes throughout this poem and indeed in the entirety of her aesthetic project.

Uri, the quintessential pioneer name for the new Hebrew speaking laborer, recalls as well Bezalel ben Uri mentioned in Exodus, the artisan in the shadow of God, whose talent in all areas of craftsmanship was divinely attributed and was responsible for constructing the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. Ben Uri is also the name of the tragic ark builder in S.Y. Agnon's 1908 story "*Agunot*" ("Forsaken Wives"), an exceedingly talented craftsman who, like Rachel's Uri, is distinguished by his raven black curls.⁵⁰ "*Agunot*" tells the story of several failed marriages and matchings: Dinah is the daughter of a wealthy dignitary in Jerusalem and is betrothed to a promising Talmudist from Poland, but both fiancés are secretly in love with other people. Dinah's father commissions Ben Uri to build a Holy Ark for his synagogue and Dinah becomes infatuated with the artisan, but Ben Uri is so wedded to his own art that he is indifferent to her feelings: "As Ben Uri continued to work, he cleaved more and more to the work, until his eyes and heart were completely given over to the Holy Ark and no place was free of it. Memory of Dinah fled him; it was as though she did not exist."⁵¹ Rachel's Uri would seem to resist this model of artistic travail that ultimately empties the artist of his capacity to connect to humans and parallels the other central mismatches in Agnon's text: that of the disjuncture between the congregation of Israel and God on the one hand,

⁴⁸ ב אָני יִשְׁנָה, וְלִבִּי עֹר; קוֹל דּוֹדִי דּוֹפֵק, פֶּתַח־לִי אֲחֻזִּיתִי רֵעִיתִי יוֹנָתִי תִמְתִּי--שְׂרָאשִׁי נִמְלֵא-טָל, קוֹנְצוֹתִי רִסְסִי לִילָה.
"I was asleep but my heart stayed awake. Listen! My lover knocking: 'Open, my sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one! My hair is wet, drenched with the dew of night.'" *The Song of Songs* 5:2, translation from Ariel and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs* (New York: Random House, 1995), 83.

⁴⁹ The Song of Songs 4:16, *ibid.* 81.

⁵⁰ S.Y. Agnon, "*Agunot*," in *Elu ve-elu* (Jerusalem: 1964). Translated by Baruch Hochman in *A Book That Was Lost: Thirty-Five Stories*, Alan Mintz and Anne Golomb Hoffman (New Milford, CT: Toby Press, 2008).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 412.

and the disconnect between the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and the land of Palestine on the other.

While the masculine proper name “Uri” thus contains echoes of this rejected form of masculine and alienating artisanship as well as Isaiah’s calls for national redemption, Rachel, I claim, inhabits it with the feminine imperative— “*ur*” (awake) as in the Song of Songs 4:16 and “*or*” (shine) as in Isaiah 60:1. Rather than the enlightenment of the chosen nation whose symbolic system relies on the passive instrumentality of female procreation, and rather than male craftsmen who place their sacred artistic pursuits above the possibility for generative human partnership, Rachel’s Uri points to the fantasy of mutable relationality and feminine aesthetic creation. It is indeed notable that the poetic speaker in “*Akarab*” names her son “Uri” and not “Ben Uri” (literally, “the son of Uri”), following the other alluded-to Uris. It is as if the poetic speaker names the father in naming the imaginary son, even as she reverses the kinship metaphors undergirding the Song of Songs in which erotic love unfolds between a sister-bride (*achoti kala*) and an uncle (*dod*) or brother. Thus, in place of the infatuation that flourishes between different generations of siblings, Rachel’s metapoesis presents the feminine act of naming both fathers and sons—poetic creation *qua* erotic love.

From a name denoting the speaker’s own radiance to the command of wakefulness from the dark of sleep to the flora of daylight and desire, the image of mother and child walking down park lanes hand in hand becomes punctuated by the second stanza’s conditional calls. Thus, in hypothetical conditional form, *if only* the poetic speaker had a son, then she would be able to perform the act of naming she emphasizes, which is, as Ilana Pardes has noted, a central means of voice and characterization for women in Genesis.⁵² Addressing a tradition that grants women speech so long as it serves the process of procreation, the poetic speaker adopts the figure of barrenness to imagine, fantasize and speak towards other ends. Her words do not simply strive to earn her the right to become another pregnant vehicle for the nation carrying the body of its continuation—the smallest of words, *lu*, a counterfactual conditional—indeed indicates that her wish and its poetic articulation is formulated through an assumption of unreality. Rather, she cites the narrative conditions of her tradition, wherein the transgressive and resourceful speech of barren women is rewarded with God’s procreative power—in order to juxtapose this trope with her own modest act of poetic conception. “*Akarab*” explicitly and methodically rewrites the type-scene of the biblical hero’s barren mother, invoking the matriarch Rachel and Hannah as well as relevant passages in Second Isaiah as a means of envisioning an alternative model of female poesis, one that is premised on vulnerable modes of authorship and relationality—a point that will be clarified and reinforced through subsequent readings of Rachel’s poems.

Known for advocating a literary aesthetics that privileges the word over the intertextual phrase laden with the language of tradition, Rachel’s preference for minimalism in expression relates to her desire to loosen the binds of (patriarchal) lineage. One can perhaps read that request and demand in her adoption of “Rachel the poetess” as her signature, a patronym-less pen-name that situates herself with respect to the biblical Rachel, the quintessential mother.⁵³ And indeed, much of her poetry and prose is rife with ambiguous figures of motherhood, infants and sons that enact complex considerations of agency, poetic language and corporeal form, however modestly stated. In the example above, for instance, it is the impossibility for the poet-mother to carry and deliver a

⁵² *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), 41.

⁵³ This characterization comes mostly from midrashim based on Jeremiah 31:14: “Thus saith the LORD: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuseth to be comforted for her children, because they are not.” The image of Rachel as the protector of exiles merged with Rachel as the mother who so desired children that she considered herself dead without them (Gen. 30:1). See Susan Starr Sered, “A Tale of Three Rachels,” *Nashim* 1.1 (Winter 1998): 7-8.

leader of the nation that affords her the ability to name a poetic child—it is her barrenness that generates the fantasy of Uri, the light that seemingly brings the world into being for her. Exploring the role of Rachel as a literary mother and the multivalent trope of motherhood in her texts allows the details and implications of Rachel's poetics of embodied minimalism to come into full view. In a period of linguistic revival during which calls for the cultivation of a new, masculine and able-bodied corpus primed for national realization predominated, Rachel's poetry theorizes vulnerable forms of expression and relational modes of sociality. The alternative aesthetics and dispositions that she presents offer an implicit critique of the normalizing ethic of survival, labor, productivity and defense that surround healthy members of the collective—from new Jew to pioneer, sabra and soldier.⁵⁴

These formulations of corporeality, poetics and meaning-making appear forcefully in a series of poems from her first collection *Safiach* (*Aftergrowth*), published in 1927, perhaps most notably in her metapoetic piece “*Nin*.” The subject of this poem revolves around her poetics of embodied simplicity, a minimalism that is here an especially pointed resistance to generations of masculine *melitsah*, language weighted down with its biblical intertextuality of proliferating words.⁵⁵

Expression	גיב
I know many ornamental sayings, endless lofty phrases, which walk mincing as they go, Their glance is arrogant.	יודעת אני אמרי נוי למכביר, מליצות בלי סוף, ההלכות הלוח וטפוח, מבטן זהיר.
But my heart follows an expression as innocent as a baby and as modest as dust. I know numerous words— Therefore I keep silent.	אך לבי לגיב התמים כתינוק וענו קעפר. ידעתי מלים אין מספר על כן אשתק.
Can you hear even while silent my humble expression? Will you guard it as a friend, as a brother, as a mother at her breast? ⁵⁶	התקלט אונך אף מתוך שתיקה את גיבי השח? התנצרהו כרע, כאח, כאם בתיקה? ⁵⁷

⁵⁴ On this point, see especially Meira Weiss, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002).

⁵⁵ Michael Gluzman sees this as the style of “three generations of male writing...”: the Haskalah writers’ inflated use of *melitsah*/ biblical phrases in their texts, a mosaic of intertextuality that assumed the readerships’ intimate knowledge of the biblical text; Bialik’s more nuanced register (*nusach*) into which he interwove all manner of post-Biblical Hebrew, itself a rejection of the biblical-heavy *melitsah*; and Shlonsky’s iconoclastic return to biblical intertextuality in order to replace what he thought was Bialik’s overlaid language. *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 111-14.

⁵⁶ Translated in Gluzman, *Politics*, 122. Gluzman’s astute reading emphasizes the gender politics of address in this poem as well as Rachel’s “unseductive” poetics—the use of language that does not lead astray—in relation to the maximalist rhetoric she rejects (121-4). Gluzman notes as well a significant intertextual relation with A.Y. Gordon’s poem “*Le-mi ani amel?*” (For whom do I toil?) in which Gordon bemoans his diminishing audience’s ability to understand the religious registers of his language, explicitly declaring that women are incapable of appreciating his work because of their lack of traditional education (124).

⁵⁷ Rachel [Bluwstein], *Shirat Rachel*, 52.

In the first two of these three stark stanzas, the poetic speaker establishes a relationship between knowledge and silence, asserting her preference for speechlessness precisely because of her familiarity with the ornamental, biblical phrases that inundate the hegemonic model of Hebrew poetry: “Endless *melitsot*/which walk mincing as they go.” In this turn of phrase, Rachel likens the *melitsah* to a woman’s mincing step, a clear allusion to the Daughters of Zion in Isaiah 3:16, a passage that revolves around the central biblical metaphor of the nation of Israel as a woman whose collective sins are figured as her promiscuous or assertive behavior. The reference as such juxtaposes Isaiah’s prophecy that the Daughters of Zion will be punished for their infidelity by being stripped bare and sexually invaded with Rachel’s own intention to strip her poetic language of *melitsot* and other jargon; in this conjunction of physical and linguistic exposure, she shifts the metaphorical undressing away from the poetic speaker’s body towards the expression that she writes and seeks. The lofty phrases, thus, are disloyal to their intended signification because they communicate in calculated movements of ornate circuitry.⁵⁸ Against this betrayal of religious and hegemonic discourse, the speaker signals her adoption of an expression that is likened to a baby—a language of sincerity that conveys the bare innocence of body. Like an infant, this language must be cared for by someone attentive to its communicative movements—an interlocutor who will engage and understand the speaker’s silence, as Dana Olmert emphasizes in her analysis of the poem.⁵⁹ The poetic speaker, moreover, addresses a male interlocutor, calling for him to occupy the role of lover, friend and brother (both marked as masculine as well) before daring him to take on motherhood, as in “*Akarah*,” linking lover, sibling and child in one complex figure that bends and blends genders. Bearing in mind that *niv* can also mean “canine tooth,” as Michael Gluzman has noted in his reading of the poem, this metapoetic “humble expression” becomes a gesture of incisive silence on the edge of language that invites its readers to inhabit different identities and modes of association in relation to creative authority.

Rachel articulates a similar call in her literary manifesto “On the Sign of the Times,” published in the same year in the literary supplement to the newspaper *Davar*. She writes:

It is clear to me: The sign of the times in the art of poetry is simplicity of expression. Simple expression, that is: the expression of the first spasms of lyric emotion, immediate expression, before it manages to cover its nakedness with silk gowns and golden jewels; expression free of literariness, that touches the core with its human truth and restores the spirit with its freshness; that has in its power to be etched in memory, to accompany us in day-to-day life and to erupt in song from within us all of a sudden.⁶⁰

ברור לי: אות הזמן באמנות השירה הוא פשטות הביטוי. בטוי פשוט, לאמר: בטוי פרפוריה הראשונים של האמוציה הלירית, בטוי מידי, בטרם הספיקה לכסות על ערִיֶתה במחלצות משי ועדיי זהב; בטוי הנקי מספרותיות, הנוגע ללב באמתו האנושית, המשובב נפש ברעננותו; אשר יש בכוחו להחרת בזכרון, ללוותנו בחיי יום-יום ולרוץ מתוכנו לפתע.

In the most minimal of opening moves—only two words in Hebrew—she sets up her appeal to linguistic transparency as something, on the one hand, that reveals itself clearly to her and, on the other, as something that she must clearly declare and demonstrate. The space between revelation

⁵⁸ Gluzman, *Politics*, 124.

⁵⁹ Dana Olmert, *Bi-tenu 'at safah 'ikeshet: ketivah ve-ahavah be-shirat ha-meshorerot ha-'ivriyot ha-rishonot* (Tel Aviv: Hotsa'at ha-sefarim shel Universitat Chayfah, 2012), 58-9.

⁶⁰ *Shirat Rachel*, 325, translation mine.

and representation sets up a lingering tension in her poetics of immediacy wherein the *effect* of exposed bareness that she performs and promotes is something that can only come about through an embodied sensitivity to the mediated crafting of language, a point to which I will return at the end of this section. Her opening performance of candor and directness then occasions a certain discharge following the initial colon, and the description of simple expression that follows rushes out in ebbs and flows of linked clauses and metaphors. Yet there is a spasticity that shows itself as well, nodes where language seemingly gestures its movement through difference, which in Hebrew are marked by fluctuations in gender. Thus: the sign (m) of the time (m) in the art (f) of poetry (f) is simplicity (f) of expression (m). Simple expression (m), that is: the expression (m) of the first spasms (m. pl.) of lyric emotion (f), immediate expression (m), before its nakedness (f—the bareness of lyric emotion) manages to be covered by gowns (f. pl.) of silk (m) and golden jewels (m. pl.) and etc. The unadorned economy of language that Rachel seeks presents itself as linked to a movement propelled by shifts in gender in which related figures or signs reappear in a series of linked metaphors. Simple expression is figured as the primal quivering of lyric emotion, which is itself metaphorized as an unclothed female body that strives to remain free from the frivolity of dress and jewels (and the male attempts to cover her up), which are themselves an analogy for literariness. Simplicity as this composite figure—a nude female body anchored in the vibrations of primal and lyric emotion—is that which touches a human internality and leaves a mnemonic trace. Significantly, the poetic spasms that serve as the ground for simple expression suggest both the quivers of a living body and the throes of a dying one (*pirpurey gsisá*), such that the bare body that represents the most potent of expressions is positioned either after birth or before death. In her drive to expose the female body of the word, moreover, Rachel implicitly revives the land-as-woman metaphor so prevalent in the Hebrew Bible, revealing how the femininity of the corpus of the word mirrors the material and female substrate of the nation in the collective imaginary—and silently underscoring that she is precluded from speaking for this nation.

As Dana Olmert indicates in her study, Rachel's piece is written in dialogue with H.N. Bialik's essay "Revelment and Concealment in Language" (*Gilluy ve-khissuy ba-lashon*), in which Bialik posits that language conceals rather than reveals reality.⁶¹ Through a diverse array of figures ranging from the Genesis creation myth to kabbalah and, not least, Nietzschean terminology,⁶² Bialik claims that language is a barrier that man necessarily constructs to protect himself from the void of metaphysical chaos:

For it is clear that language with all its associations does not introduce us at all into the inner area, the essence of things, but that, on the contrary, language itself stands as a barrier before them. On the other side of the barrier of language, behind its curtain, stripped of its husk of speech, the spirit of man wanders ceaselessly. There is no speech and there are no words, but only a perpetual search, an eternal "what?" frozen on man's lips... If, nevertheless, man does achieve speech and with it contentment, it is only because of the extent of his fear at remaining alone for one moment with that dark "void," face to face with the "nothingness," with no barrier between them.⁶³

⁶¹ "Avdut va-oneg," 55.

⁶² For a fascinating overview of Bialik's engagement with Nietzsche's "On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense" in "*Gilluy ve-khissuy ba-lashon*," see Azzan Yadin, "A Web of Chaos: Bialik and Nietzsche on Language, Truth, and the Death of God," *Prooftexts*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Spring 2001): 179-203.

⁶³ Translated by Jacob Sloan in *Modern Hebrew Literature*, ed. Robert Alter (West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, Inc., 1975), 132.

הרי הדבר ברור, שהלשון לכל צרופיה אינה מכניסה אותנו כלל למחיצתם הפנימית, למהותם הגמורה של דברים, אלא אדרבה, היא עצמה חוצצת בפניהם. מחוץ למחיצת הלשון, מאחורי הפרגוד שלה, רוחו של האדם המעורטלת מקליפתה הדבורית, אינה אלא תוהה ותוהה תמיד. אין אמר ואין דברים, אלא תהיה עולמית; “מה” נצחי קפוא על השפתים... אם בכל זאת הגיע האדם לידי דבור ודעתו מתקררת בו, אין זה אלא מגודל פחדו להשאר רגע אחד עם אותו ה”תהו” האפל, עם אותה ה”בלימה” פנים אל פנים בלי חציצה.⁶⁴

In Olmert’s analysis, Rachel’s essay is a response to Bialik’s narrative in which she demonstrates that language’s barriers and concealments are inherently gendered: “In *melitsah*, [Rachel] saw a male attempt to cover and conceal pre-verbal existence through allusive congestion, thus deepening the disconnect between a pre-linguistic experiential layer and existence within the symbolic order of language and syntax” (היא ראתה במליצה ניסיון גברי לכסות ולהסתיר את הקיום הטרומ-מילולי באמצעות גודש) (אֶרְמִי, ובכך להעמיק את הנתק בין רובד חווייתי קדם-לשוני לבין הקיום בתוך הסדר הסימבולי של השפה אֶרְמִי, ובכך להעמיק את הנתק בין רובד חווייתי קדם-לשוני לבין הקיום בתוך הסדר הסימבולי של השפה).⁶⁵ While Olmert’s instructive investigation focuses on the dissonance between Bialik and Rachel’s notions of covering and exposure, I want to draw attention to another term that Rachel adopts and adapts from him, recasting its import through her attentiveness to its gendered positioning—that of fluttering (*pirpur*). As we have seen in “On the Sign of the Times,” Rachel defines simple expression as the first spasms or flutters of lyric emotion (*bituy pirpureyha ha-rishonim shel ha-emotsia ha-lirit*) that manifest before its bareness can be covered. These flutters, it transpires, appear late in Bialik’s essay as well, when he draws a distinction between the masters of prose and the masters of poetry, arguing that, unlike their counterparts, poets use language innovatively to recreate the experience of chaos from which we ordinarily strive to shield ourselves, thus rousing the Adamic vitality of names and words:

Therefore, the latter [the masters of allegory and poetry] are forced to flee all that is fixed and inert in language, all that is opposed to their goal of the vital and mobile in language. On the contrary, using their unique keys, they themselves are obliged to introduce into language at every opportunity—never-ending motion, new combinations and expressions. *The words flutter under their hands*; they are extinguished and lit again, flash on and off like the engravings of the signet in the stones of the High Priest’s breast-plate, grow empty and become full, take off a soul and put on a soul. By this process there takes place, in the material of language, a changing of the guards and relocations: one mark, a small change [in the calligraphic ornament of the letter *yod*], and the old word shines with a new light.⁶⁶

ולפיכך מוכרחים הללו לברוח מן הקבוע והדומם בלשון, המתנגד למטרתם, אל החי והמתנועע שבה. אדרבה, הם עצמם מחויבים להכניס בה כל רגע – על פי מפתחות מסורות בידיהם – תנועה בלתי פוסקת, הרכבות וצרופים חדשים. **המלים מפרפרות תחת ידיהם:** כבות ונדלקות, שוקעות וזורחות כפתוחי החותם באבני החשן, מתרוקנות ומתמלאות, פושטות נשמה ולובשות נשמה. בחמר הלשון בא על ידי כך חלופי משמרות והעתק מקומות. תג אחד, קוצו של יו”ד – והמלה הישנה זורחת באור חדש.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Hayim Nahman Bialik, “Gilluy ve-khissuy ba-lashon,” *Kol kitvei H. N. Bialik* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1948), 191-93, <https://benyehuda.org/read/6049/read>, accessed 3/4/2020.

⁶⁵ Olmert, “Avdut va-oneg,” 55, translation mine.

⁶⁶ Translated (with some alterations on my part) by Jacob Sloan, *Modern Hebrew Literature*, 136-37, emphasis mine.

⁶⁷ Bialik, “Gilluy ve-khissuy ba-lashon,” <https://benyehuda.org/read/6049/read>, accessed 3/4/2020, emphasis mine.

The linguistic innovation that Bialik champions here is highly sexualized, premised upon a view of creative force as the intentional action of an external agent directed towards an inert substance.⁶⁸ In order to keep language (a grammatically feminine noun in Hebrew, which has traditionally been personified as a woman) alive and in motion, Bialik says that poets must continually insert into it/her the endless movement of new linguistic formulations by means of “keys that are passed down to them” (*maftehot masurot be-yideyhem*). Within the terms of this conception, then, language is a passive, female and material substrate that awaits the active machinations of masculine creators to become alive herself. The words flutter under the hands of the poets (*ha-milim meparperot tachat yideyhem*), Bialik writes, as they remake and revive them, thus enabling the chaos of the world to generatively condition poetic praxis; as Azzan Yadin describes it, “by rejecting the fixed order of words, ... the poet re-creates—even if only partially—a state of Chaos, thus providing a linguistic and ontological space in which a more autonomous formulation of new words can be undertaken...”⁶⁹ In the fluttering that Bialik describes, thus, the words (again, a grammatically feminine noun) are seemingly held captive in the hands of their proprietors, compelled to transform by a dominant outside force, to flash like the gems of the priestly breastplates that serve as the filter through which divine guidance shines.⁷⁰ For Bialik, these words are always a supremely material vehicle whose metamorphosis is exacted by means of penetration, custody and externalization—to paraphrase one of his more striking collocations, they are the bodies that poets dress and undress in new and old souls.

While Bialik’s flutters draw attention to the power-laden ways in which words may be covered and adorned with ornamentalized forms of new life, Rachel’s flutters signify an immediacy of expression that she desires to be transmitted before “its nakedness can be covered.” Here, Rachel employs a variation of a biblical expression, *le-chasot ‘emah* (cover the nakedness), that is sometimes used in relation to the land, as in Genesis 42:9, when Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies who have come to “see the nakedness of land” and spot its sites of vulnerability; and, as in the phrase “uncovering nakedness,” sometimes refers to illicit sexual activity with relatives, as in the book of Leviticus. Perhaps most relevantly for this passage, the expression is also used to describe the nation of Israel’s bareness prior to her union with God, as in Ezekiel 16:8, when God “covers Israel’s nakedness” by metaphorically marrying her. In this context, Rachel declares that the bare, gestural flutters of lyric emotion are themselves the motor of proper poetic speech, as opposed to the linguistic attire that male poets use to constrain their writhing medium. Specifying that this simple expression must be relayed before its nakedness is mantled, she synthesizes the ways in which the metaphorically female substrate of the land, nation and word are covered through the domineering actions of masculine creators—both divine and human. Seen in this light, Rachel’s adherence to the “beautiful clarity” of Russian Acmeist poetics is a performance of protection for the female body, undertaken to enable the fantasy of a mode of non-dualist aesthetic genesis, in which the agency of the maker need not be premised upon the passivity of the object as externalized surface.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Note, however, that Bialik has a complex understanding and theory of how healthy, vital language systems must develop through the routine usage of formulaic and fixed expressions in order to prosper, as laid out in his essay “*Chevley lashon*” (Language Pangs), *Kol kitvey Bialik*, 197-201. Here, I focus only on the positioning of language within his description of poetic creation. For added discussion and analysis of the former essay, see especially Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*, 81-91.

⁶⁹ Yadin, “Bialik and Nietzsche,” 197.

⁷⁰ See Mishneh Torah, Hil. Klei Hamikdash 10:11–12; Nachmanides, [Exodus 28:30](#), where it describes how it was possible to receive divine answers to difficult questions by means of the jewels in the breastplate.

⁷¹ See Justin Doherty, *The Acmeist Movement in Russian Poetry: Culture and the Word* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

The signifying work that Rachel's poetic incisor performs in "Niv" also maps on to the model laid out in her manifesto, though in this case, the gendering is reversed: the male addressee of the poem is challenged to become a mother to the masculine expression (*niv*), rather than the feminine *melitsah*/licentious woman. Simplicity of expression—a bare body whose (metaphorical) source is the fluctuation of lyric emotion—materializes in this poem as the act of silence that allows the poetic speaker to affectively trace the raw, communicative movement of a newborn. Her abstention from language (conveyed, of course, in language and its interstices) produces a bare body of moving expression for a (male) interlocutor to grasp, as long as this partner enacts an affective shift in subjectivity. Following the spasms in her manifesto, the poetry of intersubjective relations in "Niv" is likewise propelled by attendant shifts in gendered norms, whereby the violent undressing that is associated with those in dominant power becomes a different kind of undressing altogether; where the maternal desire to guard and nourish becomes a way of reading texts; where infidelity and betrayal veers from the sexual to the lexical; where knowledge becomes a type of holding power—that which affords one the ability to refrain from overuse and misdirection. Gender is less a grammatical or socio-cultural designation of identity than it is a means of generative inversion and reversal—a channel through which to craft the effect of surprise.

Rachel addresses the role of suddenness in her aesthetics in the concluding paragraph of her manifesto, weaving together themes of immediacy and linguistic skill with the lines of deceit, familial strife and national realization that orient the patriarchal narratives of Jewish tradition:

Simplicity of expression is not always paired with [the writer's] expressive skill, although it always compensates for lack of skill (as, for example, in the poetry of Elisheva).⁷² But ability sometimes fails due to a lack of simplicity, but this is unforgivable. Indeed, the path of simplicity is difficult. Prosaicness lies in ambush from here and coquetry from there. Simplicity turns all of our normal conceptions [of poetic style] upside down. Recognizing the justness of its way comes to us unmediated, from the cry of surprise following in the heels of our forefather Jacob: "Surely the glory of new expression is in this place and I did not know!"

פשטות הביטוי לא תמיד מזווגת עם יכולת הביטוי, הגם שהיא תמיד מכפרת על מיעוט היכולת (למשל, בשירי אלישבע). ואף היכולת יש אשר תיכשל באי פשטות. וזה לא יכופר. אמנם קשה דרכה של פשטות. מכאן אורבת לה פרוזאיות ומכאן – גנדרנות. הופכת היא את כל השגותינו הרגילות על פיהן. הכרת צדקתה באה

⁷² A literal translation of this sentence would read: "Simplicity of expression is not always sexually partnered with the capability of expression, although it always atones for the diminution of its power (as for example in the poetry of Elisheva)." In the previous two paragraphs, Rachel has been discussing Avraham Shlonsky's work, and she characterizes him as a poet whose expressive skill and linguistic virtuosity do indeed convey the spirit or sign of the times. According to Rachel, he produces a kind of lucky poetry, born of his talent, that succeeds in channeling modernist expression despite his adherence to maximalist forms of rhetoric. In that sense, his expressive capability is not alloyed with simplicity per se, but that may be forgiven, she says. His metaphors are pardoned because they are natural and effective, not an artifice, and thus retain the immediacy she desires. Elisheva, we may understand from Rachel's words, does write with a simplicity of expression but without the same capability—which is also acceptable in Rachel's terms. But the other way around—were a writer's expressive skill to stumble into a non-simplicity that is not appropriate to the times—this is unforgivable. The point (the one that I am interested in at least) is that simplicity has the power to surprise and subvert, infusing even the densest of poetic language. For a fuller discussion of this essay in terms of literary criticism and the literary affiliations that Rachel signals, see Naomi Brenner, "Gendering Hebrew Modernism: Rachel Bluvstien and Avraham Shlonsky on the Pages of *Musaf Davar*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101.3: (2011), 383-405.

לנו בלי אמצעי, מתוך קריאת-הפתעה בעקבות יעקב אבינו: "אכן, יש תפארת בטוי חדשה במקום הזה ואנכי לא ידעתי!"

Intimating that the linguistic agency of simplicity operates through inversions and surprises, Rachel notes that while simplicity may itself be suddenly ambushed and veer off into something unforgivable, it may equally emerge from the most unexpected of places. It has the power to turn things on their head (in Hebrew, the expression “to turn over on its mouth” is even more suggestive for her argument). Simplicity must in a sense surprise itself, shift within itself in the process of articulation, if it is to produce the effect of an unmediated state, a movement Rachel performs in the concluding two lines. The recognition that simplicity of expression is in fact just, she says, is something that must emerge from within us, from a cry of surprise that emulates Jacob’s own startled remark in Genesis 28:16:

And Jacob awoke from his sleep and he said, “Indeed, the LORD is in this place, and I did not know.”⁷³

וַיִּקֶּץ יַעֲקֹב, מִשְׁנָתוֹ, וַיֹּאמֶר, אָכֵן יְהוָה בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה; וְאֲנֹכִי, לֹא יָדַעְתִּי.

Though our cry of surprise follows Jacob’s words (*be-’iqvot Ya’qov*), it significantly alters them. Rachel is playing here on the root ‘a-q-b, which means “to follow on the heels of” (in the *pa’al* form) and “to circumvent, overreach and trick” (in *pi’el*). ‘Jacob’ is so named in Genesis 25:26 because he was born holding the heel of his brother, a premonition of fraternal competition and the overturn of primogeniture that is a running theme of Genesis 12-36. In experiencing the transformative recognition of simplicity, we, the addressed readers, follow the wily lead of Jacob and supplant his words with Rachel’s. Accordingly, rather than the Lord who saturates the place, it is the bewildering wonder of expression that circumvents and overwhelms. Ironically, Rachel achieves this feat of simple expression by using biblical intertextuality herself, turning the biblical phrase (her version of *melitshah*) into a site of expressive simplicity (*pashtut ba-bituy*).

Mimicking the role of trickster traditionally attributed to Jacob, the incisive modesty of Rachel’s own linguistic maneuver reasserts in turn the material-discursive force she garners through her work with gendered movements. This chapter of Genesis tells the story of Jacob at an initially unknown place, where he pauses for the night on his way to Haran to find a wife from among the daughters of his maternal uncle, Laban, in accordance with his father’s instructions. Upon falling asleep, he dreams of what will later be termed ‘Jacob’s ladder,’ a ramp to the sky on which messengers of God ascend and descend. God, standing above him on the ramp addresses him in confirmation of Abraham and Isaac’s blessing and promises to remain with Jacob until He returns him to Canaan, upon which Jacob awakens, utters his words of surprise and renames the place Bethel (Beit-el, House of God). The transformation of an ordinary place into a sacred site thus marks the site where opposing attributes interface: celestial and earthly; mundane and divine; unknown and named; exilic and domestic; past and future; dream and waking. This place of indeterminacy both conveys an anonymity of meaning and allows for the intersection of heterogeneous zones—it is the scene of revelation or, in Rachel’s reformulation, the power of simplicity’s glorious surprise that allows for the place’s immediate and overwhelming particularity to materialize.

⁷³ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 149.

And yet, the cry of surprise she describes here is not at all unforeseen—it is a concisely though complexly engineered bit of prose that directs its readers in turn to express a particular kind of wonder or shock. On the one hand, thus, Rachel adopts and espouses an attitude of effort to allow for the bare materialization of heterogeneous movement, as in “*Niv*.” Maintaining a type of anonymity, a kind of abstention from language and a form of detachment from self-knowledge—these to me appear as related exercises training those invested in Rachel’s poetics. On the other hand, as her poem “*Akarab*” suggests, this bare materialization continues to be unattainable precisely because of the space between revelation and representation that her aesthetics cannot render minimalist, regardless of its exertions. Whereas her manifesto and “*Niv*” strive to produce an effect of linguistic immediacy by developing gender-shifting images of bodies and babies, “*Akarab*” imagines an impossible child to authorize a hypothetical act of metapoetic naming. The name “Uri” both enables the poetic speaker to fantasize about a feminine mode of poetic creation and awakens her desire for it, even as its imaginative status remains intractable. The final stanza of “*Akarab*” indeed expresses a poetics of resignation to the conditions of fantasy that frame her metapoetic act.⁷⁴ While continuing to emulate the transgressive speech of the biblical Rachel and the silent supplication of Hannah, the speaker declares that she will wait for Uri, echoing the Rambam’s words of resolve in regards to the coming of the Messiah: “I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though he may tarry, still I await him every day.”⁷⁵ Replacing the figure of political and spiritual redemption for the Jewish people with the fantasy of a fictional child through whom she claims the authority to name and poetically create, Rachel’s poetics of simplicity commits itself to wait for and lay claim to a non-redemptive model of writing—precisely by virtue of the promise of enduring messianic and filial absence. Moreover, this aesthetic radiance/deferral that she requisitions is declared to be resolutely hers: “Uri” as “*ba-ur sheli*,” literally “my fire,” is a light that she marks through grammatical possession as unquestionably her domain. Her fictive son is thus not, as in Hannah’s narrative, a child she promises to give to God in return for divine assistance in overcoming barrenness.

In eleven words, then, this final stanza rewrites the biblical type-scene of the barren mother, which, as Robert Alter has clarified, generally unfolds in a tripartite structure: the initial barrenness, divine intervention and annunciation of conception and the son’s birth.⁷⁶ Having explicitly invoked the embitterment of the matriarch Rachel and the prayer of Hannah—two clear examples of this type-scene—the poetic speaker declares her own intention to wait for a son/act of poesis who was only ever a fantasy. Thus, there will be neither divine intervention nor an eventual son and, indeed, the poetic speaker takes it upon herself to announce with her own voice that she will await this absence; ultimately, the poetic speaker claims barrenness as her aesthetic enablement rather than the son and promise of national redemption. Rachel Bluwstein’s choice of matriarchal allusions are also instructive. The poetic speaker proclaims that she will be embittered like the matriarch Rachel, summoning her famous words of rebuke to Jacob, “Give me sons or else I’m a dead woman” (Genesis 30:1).⁷⁷ These words—the matriarch Rachel’s first lines of speech in the Bible—link expressive agency, (pro)creative desire and death in one concise statement, a confluence of factors that are crucial for Rachel Bluwstein’s poetics.⁷⁸ Hannah at Shilo is mentioned in regards to her prayer, which, we will recall, is a supplication that is conducted in silence:

⁷⁴ This point was clarified to me by Chana Kronfeld.

⁷⁵ This is the 12th of Maimonides’ 13 Principles of Faith (“Shlosa-‘asar ‘Ikarim”), contained in his introduction to the tenth chapter of Talmud Sanhedrin.

⁷⁶ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 69, 108.

⁷⁷ Alter, *Five Books*, 158.

⁷⁸ For more on this, see the introduction in Olmert, *Bi-tenu ‘at safah ‘ikeshet*.

10. And she was deeply embittered, and she prayed to the LORD, weeping all the while. 11. And she vowed a vow and said, “LORD of Hosts, if You really will look on Your servant’s woe and remember me, and forget not Your servant and give Your servant male seed, I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.” 12. And it happened as she went on with her prayer before the LORD, with Eli watching her mouth, 13. as Hannah was speaking in her heart, her lips alone moving and her voice was not heard, Eli thought she was drunk (1 Samuel 1: 10-14).⁷⁹

Hannah’s silent prayer manifests in her heart, which in the Hebrew tradition is the seat of knowing and thinking as well as feeling, so as she thinks the prayer to herself, her lips move in a silent indication of her process. This act of expressive and ultimately efficacious silence is perceived and immediately misunderstood by the male figure of religious authority—and it is seemingly this junction of silence and masculine misapprehension that Rachel Bluwstein claims as part of her non-redemptive poetics, over and against the son that Hannah ultimately yields to God.⁸⁰

Positing the efficacy of poetry through the linguistic figuration of a bare and exposed body, Rachel seeks to create the experience and effect of immediacy through the crafting of gendered surprise. In these tricks and stratagems of her own, the gathering of heterogeneous components allows for a disarticulation and attendant reformulation of the body wherein an utterance or image or figure is made to change in the course of its delivery, creating a sense of surprise as it brings about a pause of suspense in which the thing cannot be totally known or immediately recognized. This lag of unknowability is, I believe, the closest Rachel can approach the bare unscripted character of poetic creation about which she fantasizes, which is aptly figured in the temporality of continual waiting. This is, then, an unremitting anticipation of the impossible—a type of barren motherhood—whose very unattainability she claims in order to develop and enact a new mode of relational poesis. Her writing models an aesthetics of attentiveness and protection for the body of the word which analogizes the exposed corpus of subjugated people. This set of artistic and ethical principles indeed is skillfully posed in the poem “*Niv*” through its image of the reader’s lap (*cheyke*), where a book might rest while its pages are turned, as a mother’s bosom (also *cheyke*). Thus, in the final stanza, the masculine reader who is asked to guard the poetic speaker’s silent expression the way a mother might suckle her infant becomes another instance of barren motherhood, where caring for the vulnerable body of poetic expression turns into a means of waiting for the poetic language that will not ensue. The male reader turned barren mother becomes like the poetic speaker in “*Akarah*,” who will wait for and fantasize about a non-redemptive model of writing, because ultimately it is that non-teleological mode of poesis that enables a democratic form of creative agency, one that aspires beyond the binary relation of active artist to passive surface.

Rachel’s mediations thus demand an attentiveness to the vulnerable body in its expressive alterations and intervals of inscrutability. Read against the able-bodied new Jew and the ideology of corporeal self-fashioning that undergirds the pioneers’ (*halutzim*) narratives of the Second and Third Aliyot, Rachel writes about an alternative body of regeneration that operates according to a personal and poetic rhythm of intersubjective transformation and creative redirection that is not necessarily in the service of Zionist instrumentality. This recognition of the non-continuities constitutive of a generative survival which seeks life for more than just one kind of body prefigures the foundations

⁷⁹ Translation from Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 105.

⁸⁰ For background on Rachel Bluwstein’s relationship to silence and the role of silence in her oeuvre, again see Olmert, *Bi-tenu‘at safah ‘ikeshet*.

of Dahlia Ravikovitch's theories. As an intention to await the impossible in all conditions, barren motherhood describes a mode of literary and social participation in which artists and interlocutors must cultivate their own silences and detachment from self-assuredness in order to create together. Only through these abeyances may Rachel's simulations of bare unscriptedness unfold from within the collective movements of disarticulation and reconfiguration that her poetry proposes. Writing as her own health fails, her poems in *Safiach* consider what may be gleaned from the spasms of a dying body, what growth may arise after and outside the period of productive germination, in a poetics that complicates the linearity between life and death.

II. "Flesh for the Teeth": Ingested Incorporation and Invasive Disintegration

I believe that Rachel's identification of solicitous restraint and continual deferral with the production of a kind of democratic poesis that both imagines and enables processes of social transformation proved to be especially provocative for a poet who is not often read alongside her—Dahlia Ravikovitch (1936-2005). Considered to be a peripheral yet paramount member of the Statehood Generation Poets (*dor ha-medinah*),⁸¹ Ravikovitch is remembered for her poetry of nuance, a poetry that subtly probes the human psyche as it negotiates conditions of vulnerability. Ravikovitch is indeed credited with the regeneration of political or engaged poetry within Israel, a move that she made explicit in her fifth collection of poetry, *Ahava Amitit* (*True Love*), published in 1987.⁸² The book opens with the poem "*Tchilat ha-shekel*" ("The Beginning of Silence"), which evokes both Rachel's minimalism and Nathan Zach's aesthetics of individualism as it makes its own metapoetic statement regarding the role of poet and poetry. And indeed, the name Rachel is one that appears throughout Ravikovitch's corpus—in texts like the short story "Uri and Rachel," the poems "Like Rachel," "Rough Draft," "But She Had a Son," and "Lullaby," Rachel the Poet and her namesakes (the biblical Rachel from Genesis, Jeremiah and her reiterations in rabbinic literature; the 19th century Italian-Hebrew poet Rachel Morpurgo; and Rachel Melamed-Eitan, an Israeli woman who began writing poems following the death of her son during his military service in 1985) are invoked

⁸¹ The Statehood Generation poets were young writers in the early 50's and 60's who emerged from the literary collective *Likrat* ("towards"), writing in favor of new stylistic evolution in Hebrew poetry as the state of Israel was being established. Advocating a focus on the individual and the mundane, they adopted free verse, simple language and internal rhyme and many of them wrote explicitly against the dominant symbolist poetics of the their predecessors in the 1940's. As Hamutal Tsamir and Gluzman have detailed, though Ravikovitch was immediately accepted into the Hebrew cannon, her position was always peripheral just as her poetics were never quite completely in line with those of her contemporaries. Tsamir explains her borderline status as one emanating primarily from the gendered politics of representation in that Ravikovitch could never be a spokesperson for the collective because she could not be a "gender-less man" who would serve as a metonymic spokesperson for the collective. Gluzman adds that Ravikovitch significantly never viewed her writing and creative evolution as one born of rebellion and struggle with previous poets, contrary to Zach. See Hamutal Tsamir, "Jewish-Israeli Poetry, Dahlia Ravikovitch, and the Gender of Representation," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 14.3 (2008): 85-125, esp. 89; See also Michael Gluzman, "'To Endow Suffering with Elegance': Dahlia Ravikovitch and the Poetry of the Statehood Generation," *Prooftexts* 28.3 (2008): 282-389, esp. 285-6.

⁸² Note too that Tsamir has shown the political and collective undertones of Ravikovitch's earlier poetry, which has often been read along personal and biographical lines. See *Be-shem ha-nof: Le'umiyut, subyektiviyut u-migdar be-shirat dor ha-medinah* (In the name of the land: Nationalism, subjectivity, and gender in Israeli poetry of the Statehood Generation) (Jerusalem: Keter; Be'er Sheva: Heksherim, 2006), 140, 149-76.

and evoked to varying degrees of explicitness.⁸³ Beginning with a close examination of Ravikovitch's poetics and its apparent and hidden links to Rachel Bluwstein, the rest of this chapter will follow this recurring figure in Ravikovitch's work, tracking the entangled networks of creative agency and self-attenuation that these textual Rachels signal and circulate.

Though Rachel Bluwstein does not always appear in name, her presence may be sensed in many of Ravikovitch's texts. As the composite figure of Rachel proliferates more clearly in her corpus and reveals its intertextual networks, the very name becomes a site where poets struggle to generate another poetics of nation, one that develops through movements of withdrawal and self-sacrifice that dismantle the prevailing appropriation of Rachel as a metaphor for the nation-as-mother. Bluwstein's barren motherhood as such links to chains of other Rachels who perform other disruptions of nation as they reveal alternative formulations of regeneration and survival. Rachel becomes then a palimpsest, a figure who overlays and entangles narratives of symbolic patriarchy with the lives and works of real poets while circulating as a literary sign of textual allusion. For Ravikovitch more specifically, this chapter ultimately contends, Rachel's effects of generative disruption emerge through her relation to death as an embodied act of agency. In this shift from death as an involuntary end towards death as a form of power and movement, the dying body of the persona Rachel becomes the willing substrate for a form of disintegrative writing that affirms the inversions of textual flux over and above the coherence of self and nation. My analysis highlights how Ravikovitch's poetics of self and national interruption transpire differently than Rachel Bluwstein's. Indeed, if the logic of creative agency that is articulated in Rachel the Poet's oeuvre is one that rests on a movement directed *outwards* towards an imagined interlocutor, then Ravikovitch would seem to theorize poesis from the inverse direction, as a boundary-imploding movement of drawing inside to the most interior of alterities. It is this type of materialization—that which emerges from within a writing practice of self-annihilation or self-dispossession—which occasions the new mode of prophecy that surfaces in Ravikovitch's work, an approach that reconceives the traditional role of poet in Israeli society.⁸⁴

⁸³ "Uri and Rachel" is a short story published in Ravikovitch's first collection of stories, *Mavet ba-mishpachah* (Death in the Family) (1976), and details the fraught relations between classmates Uri and Rachel in a prose style that relentlessly shifts back and forth between mad speech and narrative sensibility. "Like Rachel" and "Rough Draft" were published in *Tehom Koreh* (Deep Callee) (1976) and *Ahavah Amitit* (True Love) (1987) respectively and both deal with the space of agency that is afforded in the act of dying. These two poems will be explored in detail in later sections of this chapter. "But She Had a Son" and "Lullaby" were both published in *Ima 'im Yeled* (Mother and Child) (1992). The first is dedicated to Rachel Melamed Eitan, the working class mother whose son was killed as noted above, and shifts the figure of Rachel from an abstract symbol of the Jewish nation to "the [Rachel] that had a son," an actual mother whose loss does not allow her to be comforted. In "Lullaby," as Kronfeld and Bloch note in their introduction to their translation, "Ravikovitch puts Jeremiah's verse into the mouths of Palestinian mothers and grandmothers keening for their lost men" (28).

⁸⁴ Dan Miron's influential characterization of the prophetic mode in modern Hebrew poetry takes its name from Ezekiel 3:15-17 and 33:1-7 and the work of 19th century satirist Yitzhak Erter (1791-1851): "*ha-tsofeh le-veyt yisrael*" (The Watchman unto the House of Israel). The prophetic genre, Miron contends, developed as a kind of replacement for waning rabbinic authority and as a substitute for Hassidic leadership. It began to evolve during the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) but particularly thrived in the poetry of H.N. Bialik, who was himself influenced by European and Russian Romanticism and Symbolism. According to this formula, poet-prophets assume the role of "watchers over Israel," serving as representatives who both express the collective's experience through their own personal account and watch over the nation from a position that is above and separate. Though Statehood Generation poets distanced themselves from this model, calling for a deflation of the prophetic 'I,' as Tsamir notes, it was often preserved and rearticulated in its very negation. Tsamir indeed argues that Ravikovitch assumed a new kind gendered prophecy as a poet-prophet who watched the collective from within, rather than above. See Dan Miron,

Many critics and literary scholars have discussed the various forms of internalization and subversion from within the patriarchal code of Jewish Israeli masculinism and the Hebrew textual tradition that are at play in Ravikovitch's work.⁸⁵ The mechanism of taking in and interiorizing that which destroys, as many have noted, is signaled in the poem that begins Ravikovitch's first collection, both titled "The Love of an Orange" ("Abavat Tapu'ach Ha-Zahav"). The poem is a parable of sorts that first presents the orange's love for the one who consumes him and then relates the advice and recriminations offered to him by his companions—a citron and a cedar tree. While the cedar and citron counsel the orange against the masochistic enjoyment of his flogging and ingestion, the final three stanzas reaffirm his pleasure and reveal the power he wields in his decomposition:

...An orange did love With life and limb The man who ate it, The man who flayed it.	תפוח זהב אהב את אוכלו, אהב את מכהו בכל אבריו.
An orange did love The man who ate it, To its flayer it brought Flesh for the teeth.	תפוח זהב אהב את אוכלו, הלך אל מכהו ברות לשניו
An orange, consumed By the man who ate it, Invaded his skin To the flesh beneath. ⁸⁶	תפוח זהב נבלע באוכלו, פא פעררהו, אף בבשריו. ⁸⁷

The modern Hebrew word for orange, *tapu'ach*, is an acronym for the compound word *tapu'ach zahav*, literally a golden apple, which Ravikovitch uses here. While grammatically masculine, the orange/golden apple is situated in the text in ways that summon femininized or homo-erotic associations, as the passive object that is voyeuristically used and consumed in a variety of ways. As a convoluted object of desire, as in Giambatiste Bastille's 17th century fairy tale *The Love for Three Oranges* or Sergei Prokofiev's surrealist comic opera by the same name, where the fruits contain fairies who must be given water immediately in order to survive, the orange evokes here as well the forbidden fruit of temptation, unnamed in the Hebrew tradition.⁸⁸ Carefully chosen words in previous stanzas (*tovu*, *mar'av* and *ma'achalehu*) reinforce the Edenic valence, the carnal knowledge it introduced and the system of pleasure, sin and power articulated in that scene and thereafter, in addition to eliciting the erotic dynamics of The Song of Songs.⁸⁹

H.N. Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Literature (New York: Toby Press, 2010), 10-15; Tsamir, "Jewish-Israeli Poetry," 101-2.

⁸⁵ See for instance Tamar Hess, "Poetica shel ets te'anin: panim feministititoyot be-shiratah ha-mukdemem shel Dahlia Ravikovitch" (Fig tree poetics: The feminist interiority in the early poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch) in *Kitmey Or* (Sparks of Light) (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me'uchad, 2010), 23-47.

⁸⁶ Bloch and Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude*, 49.

⁸⁷ *Kol ha-shirim*, 11.

⁸⁸ These myriad allusions have been studiously noted by all who have written on the poem. See particularly Tamar Hess' catalogue and Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld's notes to their translation: Hess, "Poetica shel ets te'anin," 251-4 and Bloch and Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude*, 49-50.

⁸⁹ See Genesis 3:6 and Song of Songs 4:10.

Yet as Tamar Hess notes in her reading of the poem, the text exhaustively probes sites of conversion between passivity and activity.⁹⁰ The orange's beloved oppressor exists only as a noun defined by the fruit's grammatical possession—its eater or its beater, a premonition of the orange's operative force. Indeed, though the poem seemingly describes what some critics have read as the ultimate act of submission in the search for totalizing union with the beloved⁹¹ (in my view, an incomplete interpretation of the text), the orange is the active agent of every verb that follows it in the poem, save one, which this discussion will detail shortly. The orange loved, brought and invaded—in determinedly seeking various forms of contact with its other, the flayer and consumer who is equal parts lover and beloved, oppressive subject and vulnerable body, agent and object of action, the orange methodically sets fluxes and dynamic shifts in motion between broker and recipient of action and power. The orange reveals its pleasure not in straightforward submission, but in a form of being dominated that is indelibly linked with the capacity to shift relations between dominator and dominated. These complexities of pleasure and power are indeed signaled in the subjective and objective genitive of the poem's title, using the ambiguity of *smikbut* in Hebrew: *ahavat tapu'ach ha-zhav* conveys both the love that the orange possesses of or for some other (he who is carefully identified in the poems' stanzas) as well as love of the orange that someone else possesses. The necessary relationality between subject and object and its affective currents of power and pleasure that Ravikovitch exploits to explode coercive patterns is prefigured in her choice of the title's first word: "the love of" (in Hebrew, these three words are all one).

What is most telling for my purposes is the pronounced bodily register of Ravikovitch's vocabulary and imagery in this inquiry into the corporeal agency of powerlessness—an emphasis on the expressive force of vulnerable bodies that, albeit indirectly, recalls Rachel Bluwstein's adherence to simple expression "as innocent as a baby."⁹² Using a poetic style that echoes the archaic language of the piyyut tradition in order to address the most contemporary of issues, Ravikovitch engineers a slippage between the positions of active subject and passive object, instabilities that are tightly packaged in formal, rhyming stanzas that contain the echoes of liturgical monorhyme. These heterogeneous components of form, linguistic register, destabilizing techniques, tradition, and contemporaneity are brought together and couched in a pointed vocabulary of body that is at once material, carnal, and violent. The orange "loved his flayer/ with all of his limbs": this metaphor personifies the orange through the acquisition of human body parts ("*eyvarim*" in Hebrew refers to all body parts), yet that corporeal inheritance would seem to pass through the orange's ambivalent relationship with his dominator. The (ultimately destructive) love of an orange for his flayer—he who uses his limbs to strike at his subordinate—is what mobilizes the transference of limbs and organs to the orange. In this Hegelian movement, the orange's body is thus a seeming reflection of his dominator, a dense figuring of violence, vulnerability, incorporation and corporeality that becomes more explicit in the next stanza.⁹³ The orange who loved his flayer brought "flesh to his teeth" or "*barot le-shinav*." *Barot* literally means "food" and is a hapax legomenon in the Bible, occurring in Lamentations 4:10,⁹⁴ a chapter that laments the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple while rationalizing its ruin on the basis of Israel's sins. A previous verse in the same chapter declares that "the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness," who, as the medieval commentator Rashi notes, place their own hunger and needs before their

⁹⁰ Hess, "Poetica shel ets te'anim," 251-4.

⁹¹ See for example Laura Wiseman, "Lamentations of a Lovelorn Soul: Self-Portraits in the Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch" (University of Toronto: Phd Diss, 2010), 92-7.

⁹² Quoted from "Niv," see footnote 14.

⁹³ See the end of the master-slave dialectic in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller, trans. (Oxford University Press, 1977), ¶ 185-96.

⁹⁴ Bloch and Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude*, 50.

children's.⁹⁵ The alluded to verse follows from this dynamic:

10. The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children; they have become their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people.	י יְדֵי נָשִׁים רַחֲמָנִיּוֹת בָּשְׁלוּ יִלְדֵיהֶן הָיוּ לְבָרוֹת לְמוֹ בָּשָׂר בַּת עַמִּי:
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With the single word “*barot*,” thus, Ravikovitch activates a network of overlapping semantic fields: loss, destruction and siege; women as the metaphorical vehicle for the nation of Israel and particularly its sins; Israel’s constant position of vulnerability in relation to God’s presence and absence within the textual tradition; consumption as a grisly act of survival that entails the utmost violence and desperation; and an unholy attachment to personal survival over death that motivates the most compassionate to murder and ingest their own children. Rather than passively awaiting death or aggressively staving it off through the slaying of innocents, then, the orange here offers itself as food and flesh to its master’s teeth, affirming a practice of self-annihilation in place of self-extension. Most compellingly for the purposes of this project, Ravikovitch’s alternative of self-annihilation is one that expresses itself (at least initially) in corporeal terms, emerging through affective exchanges of body and material reconfigurations of agency. The final stanza contains the only passive action undertaken by the golden apple: “An orange/ (who was) swallowed by the one who ate it,/penetrated through to his skin,/even to his flesh.” The orange is swallowed, taken in and ingested—indeed, only when completely assimilated into and rearticulated by the body of the lover-dominator, does the orange’s acquiescence become invasive. The orange consumed by the one who ate it is the orange that is able to reorient the vector of agentic force and penetrate its counterpart from the inside out, permeating pores of skin and fascia of flesh. While Hess reads this stanza as one that signals the reversal and disruption of gendered roles in sexual-erotic norms, I am more interested in the corporeal logic of contact, correspondence and reconfiguration that Ravikovitch evinces here. The circularity between the orange who is modified and circumscribed by the one who consumes it and the orange’s dominating counterpart who is known to the reader only through his or her genitive relation to the orange takes place through a loop of reference in which the two depend upon each other for definition. The positing of this dependence already shifts the dynamics of power between orange and orange’s consumer, in that the one who eats it—metonymically, the phallogocentric system of social-sexual relations and significations—does not exist unilaterally. Rather, from Ravikovitch’s first published poem, it is specified as an oppressive system that vulnerable subjects possess and indeed have a hold over in their embodiment as its subsumed objects. It is from within an attentiveness to that position of ingested incorporation, and in a mode of perseverance that disturbs the life-death binary that they are able to erode and transubstantiate the exposed body of power, desire and tradition that defines them. Endurance here issues from the continuance that occurs through a resistant mode of bodily disintegration, a formulation of survival that prefigures her later critique of nationalist cohesion. This relation between border dissolution, internalization and embodiment is one that Ravikovitch continues to reformulate in her work, and the multiply inhabited figure of Rachel is one site where these reconfigurations develop and emerge.

Indeed, a similar dynamic of drawing in that which will implode binaries through the mechanism of referential loops appears in her poem “*Tchilat Ha-shekel*” (“The Beginning of Silence”), a text that links modes of interiorization and self-attenuation explicitly to prophecy. The poem’s title quietly mobilizes Rachel Bluwstein’s poetic project, subtly recalling the language of silence that grounds her work. This is the opening piece to her 1987 collection *Abava Amitit* (*True*

⁹⁵ Rashi, Lamentations 4:3.

Love), the volume that marks a clear change in her poetics for many critics. Ariel Hirschfield notes for instance that the classical and formal aspects of her aesthetics give way in this collection to a subtle kind of textual development that he calls “interior,” which emerges through a diverse range of poetic registers and strategies.⁹⁶ Simple language, stream-of-consciousness monologues, and explicit pieces that speak to political crises are juxtaposed with complexly engineered texts; poems with a narrow lens that position the reader in close proximity to the poetic scene at hand neighbor other poems that experiment with different techniques of distancing; vernacular phrasings and details of the mundane world are collated with intricate allusions and meta-poetic statements about the ethical demands of art.⁹⁷ In this context, the decision to open the collection with the figure of silence is particularly telling, alerting the reader to its role in prefacing and eliciting the texts to follow.

“*Tchilat Ha-sheket*” begins with the poetic speaker’s anticipation of a silence that is unambiguously likened to prophetic revelation:

The Beginning of Silence	תחילת השקט
I am waiting for the silence, waiting for the silence to come. It’s beginning to swarm in the corners. Now it’s about to pounce like a whirlwind. Now it’s already touching the red scarf, now it’s touching the far corner of the table, it cometh nigh. Tissues in a rainbow box, the odd-colored chairs here and there around the table.	אני מחכה לשקט. עכשיו אני מחכה לשקט שיבוא. הוא מתחיל לרחוש בפנות הנה הוא עומד להתנפל כמו סופה. הנה נגע כבר בצעיף האדום הנה נגע בפאת השולחן הוא קרב ובא. קופסת ממחטות צבועה בצבעי הקשת. הכיסאות בצבעים משונים פזורים מסביב לשולחן.
Now the silence descends like a mighty hand enfolding the room in a bolt of linen, enfolding the sea, enfolding the land. The red scarf is the beginning of all things, beside it—the green chair, a towel draped over it.	הנה השקט יורד כמו יד גדולה עוטף את החדר ביריעת בד עוטף את הים עוטף את היבשה. הצעיף האדום הוא ראשית דבר על ידו הכסא הירוק מגבת עליו פרושה.
And the silence shrieks inside me and I shriek inside it. And I look, and behold: opening, revolving, entire worlds within the room, within the wide beam of light	והשקט צווח בי ואני צווחת בו ואני מביטה ואני רואה נפתחים ומתגלגלים עולמות בתוך החדר, בתוך אלומת האור הרחבה

⁹⁶ “*Ravikovitch acharey asor*” (Ravikovitch After a Decade), *Kitmey Or*, 67-70.

⁹⁷ Compare the consideration of distancing in “*Rechifah be-govah namukh*” (Hovering at a Low Altitude) for instance with the intimate poetic scene in “*Ido mit’orer*” (Ido Awakes) or “*Rikmah meduyeket*” (No Stitchery More Precise); The straightforward language of “*Tyutah*” (Rough Draft) or “*Ha-chalon*” (The Window) and the monologue of “*Sof sof ani medaberet*” (Finally I’m Talking) with the intertextual intricacies of “*Al ha-yachas li-yeladim be-‘itot milchamah*” (On the Attitude toward Children in Times of War).

Evoking the Chariot Vision of Ezekiel in several places, the poem overhauls the prophetic scene such that the speaker's confrontation with silence takes the place of Ezekiel's revelatory encounter with God.¹⁰⁰ This is a moving, shrieking, generative and messianic silence that materializes in the corners of domestic chambers, exposing the infinite that is framed in the mundane, linking poetic speech to an internal and intimate speechlessness in a reflective and destabilizing loop. A harbinger of oppositional forces, Ravikovitch's silence unsettles the order of temporal sequencing, the calmness of the calm and the identity of the speaking "I": silence is both something to await expectedly and something that has already begun, indeed that continually performs beginning; silence moves and swarms, conquering external expanses and invading interior selves, producing calmness in the poetic speaker only through the incorporation of an agitating transcendence; silence is hedged on both sides by the "I" that begins and ends the poem, yet it inhabits the speaker in forms of overpowering disruption.

Conversing subtly with Rachel Bluwstein's relational silences of attentive restraint, Ravikovitch's silence also summons the silence that begins Nathan Zach's early collection: "One moment of silence please/Please, I want to say something."¹⁰¹ This act of silence-making has been read by many as the emblem of Zach's mission to assert the will and objectives of the individual "I" over and above the inhibiting force of the collective through the voice of a poetic speaker who parodies the prophetic tones associated with Hebrew verse from the beginnings of its traditions. As Hamutal Tsamir points out in a nuanced analysis, the individual's attempt to say something is premised in Zach's text on the silencing of the collective, such that the speech act demanding quiet becomes that which distinguishes the single speaker from the plural audience. This charge to be both differentiated and heard situates the new Israeli subject as one who emerges through a dissociation from the collective and the collective's past by means of an estrangement from particular pieces of his own self.¹⁰² Gluzman, in a slightly different mode, diagnoses "the innate failure of the prophetic mode in Zach's poem" in his reading. "The poem implodes," he writes, "unable to address a community, thereby resorting to self-reflexivity, to *ars poetica*. This renunciation of the poem's communicability turns its language into a form of traumatic speech imbued with mourning and melancholia."¹⁰³ If, for Zach, silence is thus that which marks both the failure of prophetic communicability and the self-reflexive poetry of traumatic speech; that which inaugurates the construction of a new national subject through an act of estrangement and amnesia, silence for Ravikovitch signifies quite differently. An index of the cornerstone and condition of her poetic

⁹⁸ Bloch and Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude*, 161.

⁹⁹ *Kol ha-shirim*, 161.

¹⁰⁰ Though the vocabulary is not precise and the alluding images are scattered in Ravikovitch's text, the prophetic text surfaces through the evocation of several of its conspicuous figures. The tempest that announces God's presence, the swoop and descent of God's hand, the appearance of rainbow colors, the boundless movement of the chariot and the centrality of light and fire indeed are all conjured in her rendition of the prophetic scene. See Ezekiel 1:3-4, 1:20, 1:28.

¹⁰¹ *Shirim Shonim* (Miscellaneous Poems) (Tel Aviv: Alef, 1965), 1, translation mine. Note that the literal translation is "a moment's quiet please": "רגע אחד שקט בבקשה".

¹⁰² "The Israeli Statehood Generation and Women's Poetry in the Fifties and Sixties: Poetry, Gender and the Nation-State" (UC Berkeley: PhD diss., 2000), 52.

¹⁰³ "Sovereignty and Melancholia: Israeli Poetry after 1948," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 18.3 (Spring/Summer 2012): 176.

project, the figure of silence indicates a variant form of prophetic communicability that is engineered through the incorporation of alterities and the destabilization of ego-identification. A force that continually gestures to the agency garnered through the act and performance of beginning, Ravikovitch's silence in this poem is introduced as an active stimulus that begins, a dynamism that commences "swarm[ing] in the corners." The remainder of the poem indeed continues to signal the origination of different actions through the reiteration of the deictic marker *hineh*, or "here," (Bloch and Kronfeld have translated it as "now"): "Now it's about to pounce...", "now it's already touching...", "now the silence descends..." *Hineh* is often used in prophetic accounts in the Bible to announce and mark the divine presence (as in the archaic translation "behold"). Yet here, its repetition gestures to silence's accumulating and expansive momentum, heralding the various points where it re-amasses and begins a new action, one that is both a continuation and a re-articulation of its previous movement. Through the poem, thus, beginnings shift into contingent points of reference that link and displace former signposts in what ultimately becomes a referential loop that destabilizes rather than coheres its supposed single point of origin.

In the concluding lines, silence returns to a movement of swarming sound, yet in inverted fashion. Screaming inside the poetic speaker, silence performs its opposing action. This act of inversion seemingly generates the poetic speaker's echoing response: silence shrieks inside of her and she shrieks inside of it. The shrieking interface between silence and the poetic speaker thus occasions the circuit of an interiorizing mirror of expression in which every sound emitted is reiterated in an invasive echo that impels itself inside rather than out. The poem's formulation of revelatory encounter indeed references the traditional prophetic mode of Hebrew scripture, in which the prophet is given his prophecy as a scroll that he is commanded to eat (Ezekiel 2:8). Within the interpretive terms of this ritual code, the prophet takes in and digests the word of God, is filled and satiated by his message. Carrying the words of God in his own body, the prophet literally incorporates what he will then proclaim. The prophetic words are thus ingested in order to generate their full embodiment and successful transmission in externalized communication to the wayward collective.

Ravikovitch's poem lays bare an alternative strategy of internalization for the purposes of prophecy: the mirroring of linked oppositions into a self-referential loop of interiorization ultimately displaces the poetic speaker and generates a vision of expansive transcendence within the lamplight of the mundane. Silence screams—it speaks by asserting its inverse. This gesture of self-articulation through the figure of oxymoron is effected in the invasion and total inhabitation of the speaker who has devotedly awaited it and catalogued its progress, to the point where she can only replicate its shrieks in a reverberation that returns her screams to the purview of silence. In this expression of referential reflexivity, the technique of drawing inside that which will dispossess so deftly laid out in "The Love of an Orange" reappears in a variant vein. The poem indeed makes almost every component of the text interior: poetic speaker and silence are positioned within the walls and corners of the room; as the silence spreads, it enfolds and incorporates all that it conquers; the shrieks of poetic speaker and silence are contained within their respective interiors; even the cosmic glimpse of the opening unknown occurs within the wide beam of domestic light. This is, then, less a strategy of drawing in a yielding substrate than a dynamic technique of making interior, of relentlessly inducing processes of internalization. Rather than an incorporation of the text of revelation in which the prophet actively eats while the text is passively ingested, here the silence that takes the place of divine speech drives its way inside the poetic speaker through the expressive dynamism of inversion. The ensuing shrieks are thus precisely not screams of verbal import—instead, they cause the poetic speaker to encounter the expansive unknown from within another perceptual sense: "And I look, and behold:/opening, revolving,/entire worlds within the room,/within the wide beam of light/cast be the lamp." The prophecy of silence is as much seen as it is

heard, as much a vision of unfurling exposure in motion as it is an audible movement of drawing in, of containment and incorporation. Fluctuating between the aural and the kinetic, the internal and the open, silence conveys itself through expansive and invasive movements inflected by diverse registers of sensory stimulation. Its spread thus transpires through a dynamism powered by the expressive force of antithesis and it is this agency of inversion that ultimately exposes the proximate unknown.

As a poetic strategy and a means of approaching the collection's other poems, thus, silence materializes in the implosive reflexivity of inverting expression that necessitates shifts in sensory and identificatory modes. The poem's final line hammers this point home: "And I am quiet and I am calm." Penetrated by the encapsulating reach of silence's expressive scope, the poetic speaker is inhabited by silence's screams. She who awaited the imminent arrival and beginning of silence's revelatory exposition now embodies its attribute—she is silent and calm herself. The incorporation of a dynamic and overwhelming transcendence transforms its disruptive force into a property of her own, such that silence becomes part of her voice, a quality that materializes in the vacillations of her poetic speech. The meaning of each word consequently becomes unhinged and unsettled in the final line: she is silent as she screams and calm in the midst of a shrieking storm. The juxtaposition of these opposing effects destabilizes the coherence of each discrete thing, linking poetic speech to a mode of speechless expression that shows rather than utters; positioning silence as an attribute of the subject "I" in speech rather than an agency of revelation; introducing calmness as that which emerges through the incorporation of an agitating alterity rather than the identification with self-unity. Transformed into a poetic-prophetic bearer of silence, the poetic-speaker is ultimately dispossessed by its expressive force.

Ravikovitch's poem thus reveals itself to be written in clear contradistinction to Zach's "One Moment." Indeed, for Zach, a moment of quiet is used to differentiate himself from his unspecified audience and the noise that surrounds them. The speaker invokes the formulaic opening of a public event with a poet or speaker at a podium, ostensibly intending to say something of import, but what follows in the poem is fragmented and unclear: "He went/by me. I could have touched/the hem of his gown. I did not touch it./Who could have/know what then I did not know."¹⁰⁴ The rest of the poem performs both the failure of poetic language to convey what could have been a revelatory encounter and the breakdown of the prophetic occasion itself, describing an incomplete and incoherent interchange between a father figure (who evokes, variously, the prophet Elijah, Jesus and God) and son.¹⁰⁵ In contrast to the speaker's request for a bounded moment of quiet—a silence that inaugurates his jumbled message and the disjointed description of an ineffable encounter with an overdetermined father figure—Ravikovitch's speaker declares that she is anticipating the prophetic-like silence to come. She waits and does not demand, the beginning of her quiet (as in the poem's title) is an open-ended period of time and her description of the revelatory silence's materialization occurs in a domestic interior, all in marked contrast to Zach's public speech event. This opposition of private to public space corresponds, of course, to the gendered norms of patriarchal nationalism, wherein the national, public and universal are represented by masculine models and the private, domestic, personal and particular are identified with feminine ones. Thus, in situating the speaker's prophecy of silence inside a room, Ravikovitch subverts the standard formulation of poet-prophet as a male speaker who addresses and represents a collective audience, positioned, explicitly or not, in

¹⁰⁴ *Shirim Shonim*, 1, translation mine.

¹⁰⁵ For more analysis of the poem and the place of Christianity and the New Testament in Zach's poetry see R. Kartun-Blum, "Ma atem hoshvim – she'ani elohim? Beyn shirato shel Natan Zach la-brit ha-khadasha" (What Do You Think – That I am God? Natan Zach's poetry and the New Testament), *Keshet ha-khadasha* 3 (Spring 2003): pp. 22-37.

public. Yet, interestingly, her poem does not proclaim the collapse of the prophetic mode; rather, it enacts a new one. Tsamir has described Ravikovitch's mode of poetic prophecy as one that is defined by interiority: "Ravikovitch is the new, Israeli version of the 'watcher of Israel,' but she watches it from the inside, from the depths of her 'feminine' being—the nation's internal Other..."¹⁰⁶

This is made that much more explicit and poignant in Ravikovitch's poem "*Dyokan Yehudi*" (A Jewish Portrait), where she links prophecy as a form of revelation emanating from the internal other specifically to the Palestinians, in effect declaring that prophecy in the context of the Occupation issues from (an identification with) Zionism's victims. Rather than using silence as a means of distinguishing oneself from one's audience and collective in order to highlight the failure of prophetic communicability, as in Zach's request of silence, Ravikovitch's poetic speaker *becomes silent herself*, persisting through the expression of self-disruption or abeyance. A form of agency that remains with the powerless in the absence of any other action, this embodiment of silence recasts prophetic speech into the only transmission available: transference through an interiorization of difference, which materializes and shows itself in antithetical forms of expression and diverse registers of sensory stimulation.

The beginning of silence is thus itself the initiation of poetic speech (rather than its constitutive background, as in Zach's quiet moment, "*rega ehad shekel*"), a formulation that evokes Rachel Bluwstein's aesthetics and experiments in striking ways, albeit subtly. Earlier sections of this chapter detailed the role of silence (*shtikah*) in eliciting the simplicity of expression that Rachel espouses. In "*Niv*," the poetic speaker's abstention from language produces the effect of immediacy—a bare body of moving expression (likened to the communicative movement of an infant child) that is extended to an interlocutor to grasp, as long as this partner enacts an attendant shift in her affective and subjective position. The reader is thus tasked to engage with the speaker's silence in a relation that is premised on mutual forbearance and vulnerability. Rachel mobilizes these forms of attentive restraint through a language of silence, drawing attention to the unexpected, to intervals of indeterminacy wherein a figure is reformulated in the course of its delivery. In Rachel's project, then, silence refers to a poetic mode of relationality that is on the edge of language, revealing the embodiment of expression as an externalization of gendered flux.

This is not the only meaning or work undertaken by silence in Rachel's oeuvre, which is, as Dana Olmert has demonstrated, utterly preoccupied with various forms of muteness, speechlessness, quietude, stillness and reserve throughout. Olmert indeed frames Rachel's writing as a poetry that both separates from and mourns the silent and silenced feminine persona as it negotiates the right to write and publish within the masculine confines of a developing language and culture.¹⁰⁷ The decision to write at all was not a simple one for Rachel. From anecdotes that relate her conversations with friends, and from the poetic texts themselves, it is clear that she identified her commitment to the writing of poetry with the state of her failing health. In Olmert's words,

The question 'to be or not to be a poet,' to write or be silent, was for Rachel both very real and existential and its echoes can be heard in the poems themselves... Her dialogue with the continuing temptation to be silent is thus linked to her distancing from the forms of activity and productive embodiment privileged in Zionist labor ideology.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ "Jewish-Israeli Poetry," 112.

¹⁰⁷ "*'Avdut va-oneg: 'al ars-poetica u-mazokizm be-shirat Rachel*" (Subjection and Pleasure: On the Intersection of Ars-Poetica and Masochism in the Writings of Rachel Bluwstein), *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 22 (Literature and Revolt, 2008): 34. See also Dana Olmert, *Bi-tenu'at safah 'ikeshet*, 1-25.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 38, translation mine.

The recurring moments when her poetry speaks of silence or points to what its words do not say thus betray the quintessential tension that lingers in her work: the fluctuation between a desire to speak and be heard precisely as an unproductive feminine body whose voice had been muted within Hebrew literary culture and a desire for a type of substantial intimacy and material revelation that is beyond the bounds of language.¹⁰⁹

Rachel and Ravikovitch's silences are thus both profoundly related and markedly distinct. For Rachel, silence is a condition in both of its senses (a status and a premise) as well as a tool that may be used to externalize new forms of expressive embodiment within an openly vulnerable community—it is that which generates and surrounds the exposed body of what she theorizes as properly poetic speech. For Ravikovitch, silence is itself the inception of poetic language—it is the force that overwhelms and invades, impelling itself inside and necessitating an incorporation of alterity. Note that, unlike Rachel, Ravikovitch's prophetic silence does not entail a minimalist poetics. It is as if the destabilization of national, political and symbolic identifying categories that her writing pursues necessitates, in fact, more language, such that the shrieking speaker who is invaded by the quiet in "The Beginning of Silence" can only remain calm in the storm by means of her raging speech. While a revelatory immediacy of expression emerges in Rachel's poetics when language conveys the unexpected or impossible in a figure that is compelled to shift in the course of its externalized articulation, prophecy and poetic cogency materializes in Ravikovitch's texts when language is used in ways that destabilize identity relations and experiences of subjectivity—when poetic speech generates an interiorization of otherness and, as this discussion will demonstrate in the coming section, an attendant dialogue with death and dying.¹¹⁰

III. "Like Rachel": Emulations of Others' Deaths

This new form of prophecy—the use of linguistic strategies to subvert normative modes of identification—appears forcefully in the fourth poem of this collection, "Rough Draft" (*Tyutah*), which is also the first poem in which the figure of Rachel is explicitly evoked. As the title intimates, the poem describes how *not* to arrive at any kind of final expression. Set in the rhythm of litotes, the first half of the poem lists a catalogue of images that initially conjure up specific details of bourgeois accrual and roosting, each line negating its sign of settlement in a sparse clause that links into pointedly incomplete sentences:

Not to leave footprints	לא להשאיר עקבות
not to leave a trail of signs	לא לפזר סימנים
anyways I'm not going to stay in this place.	אני במקום הזה ממילא אינני נשארת.
Not to write letters,	לא לכתוב מכתבים
not to collect souvenirs,	לא לאסוף מזכרות,
photographs,	תצלומים,
not to arrange them in an album in marching order.	לא לסדר אותם בשלשות באלבומים.

¹⁰⁹ Following Olmert, "'Avdut va-oneg," 45.

¹¹⁰ Silence for Ravikovitch is thus akin to using the tools of language to hover within a state of otherness for ethical and political reasons, a subject that is explicitly dealt with in later poems of this same collection—most notably in "Hovering at a Low Altitude" (*Rechifa be-gova namukh*) and "A Jewish Portrait" (*Dyokan yehudi*), both of which are powerfully politically inflected.

Not to collect documents,
not to gather in summer
not whitewash, not remodel,
not settle down, not be a settler.¹¹¹

לא לאסוף מסמכים,
לא לאגד בקיץ
לא לסייד, לא לשפץ
לא להתנחל.¹¹²

Addressed to an unknown listener, or perhaps to the mostly effaced poetic-speaker herself, this litany of negated acts operates on several intersecting fields, superimposing impressions of body, memory, military, bureaucratic state, political ideology and domesticity. Ravikovitch begins with the injunction against leaving footprints, which is perhaps her most unambiguous evocation of the body in the poem. Positioned as the first act to be rejected, its introductory role is telling, the more so if it is read as literally as some of her later prohibitions (for instance, not writing letters or collecting souvenirs—acts from which it is simple enough to abstain). To not leave behind the marks of one's body in its surrounding environment means thus either to erase those signs of gravity bearing upon body in situated place or not to settle at all—neither into a fixed embodied form nor into the surrounding support of the body's environment. In either of the above scenarios, what the poetic speaker asserts is a refusal of a type of corporeal memory that shores up the notion and narrative of one's past and enduring identity. Maayan Harel notes in her reading of the poem that while the injunctions initially appear to set themselves up against forms of self-establishment and rooting down, much of the list can also be interpreted to indicate the signs of wandering as well—footprints of moving from place to place, sending letters to loved ones while on a journey, collecting photos and souvenirs.¹¹³ Whether itinerant or stationary, what seems most common among the list, in my reading, is the eschewal of a certain kind of memory—a holding on to body and changing environment by means of records and collection. Indeed, according to the poem's logic, this gathering and storage of recollections is the precursor to an ideological kind of obedience, domesticity and settlement premised upon a dangerous form of identitarian memory that the text definitively impugns. Thus, taking pictures leads to arranging them in threes in photo albums (*shlashot*), a term which commonly refers to the arrangement of soldiers in lines of three, often for the purposes of a military parade (aptly signaled in Bloch and Kronfeld's translation as “in marching order”). The signs of one's past in this formulation are set to a particular purpose, placed in marching order towards ends commanded by figures of authority, and the speaker declares her refusal of this mobilization. This particular mode of remembrance—in which footprints are consciously left behind, souvenirs are collected and photos are organized, all to signal and reestablish the fact of one's presence—may thus be employed to produce a type of adherence (to identity, whether national, religious, political, personal, corporeal or any intersectionality thereof) that yields violent consequences. The examples that the poetic speaker lists, moreover, contrast the military metaphor with domestic forms of commemoration, and expose how her refusal to accumulate and remember apply to both the public and private domains of life. This criticism of integration by means of reductive techniques is surely directed towards the teleological bent of Zionist historical reconstruction and its instrumentalization of selective biblical narratives in the fashioning of a new Jewish and national identity. Positioning the Bible as the foundation of its claim for the settlement of Palestine, its redemptive discourse manipulated historical memory into directive narratives that wrote of a messianic return to Zion, where Jewish life could be renewed and remade from the

¹¹¹ Bloch and Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude*, 164.

¹¹² *Kol Hashirim*, 166.

¹¹³ “Eyn li tsorekh le-hagi’a: Ha-yetsi’a le-masa’ be-shirata shel Dahlia Ravikovitch” (‘I have no need to arrive’: Journey taking in the poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch), *Kitmey Or*, 412-13.

trauma of the exilic past.¹¹⁴ In this revisionist production of a Jewish national progression, that which was left behind is re-produced or re-serviced and gathered into the marching order of national settlement at the cost of countless others and their histories—Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews of Arab origins and any individual whose narrative clashes with state discourse. Crucially, the poetic speaker signals that these larger forces of collection—memory reconstruction in the service of identity reformulation along national or other binding lines—are informed by much more unassuming modes of gathering that enter domestic spaces: the accumulation of self into a fixed embodied form that takes stock of itself through the marks it makes and leaves.

The poetic speaker's injunction against these militarized modes of identity archiving and sedimentation hinges into the next sentence of negated mandates, which introduce new forms of gathering suggestive of state bureaucracy, bourgeois accrual and political ideology: "Not to collect documents,/not to gather in summer/not whitewash, not remodel,/not settle down, not be a settler." Gathering these records at once registers, consolidates and recirculates one's identity within a governmental framework and is thus a means of regulatory representation, evoking Israel's mandatory military service and the general bureaucratic life of dwelling in a state. They also hint at the documents necessary for buying a house in general and more specifically for procuring a state-subsidized home in the settlements of occupied Palestine (as the final negation, "*lo le-bitnachel*," implies), suggesting as well the passing down of inheritance. A metapoetic statement about the kind of writing the speaker refuses and the kind she is able to write via refusal, this abstention from collecting documents signals a form of composition that endures by not reclaiming its traces, a point that I will detail later in this discussion.

This nod to the accumulation and transmission of property via family lines resurfaces in the next line, with the allusion to the Proverbs of Solomon (10:5):

An intelligent son gathers in the summer,
whereas an embarrassing son sleeps soundly
during the harvest.

אִגֵּר בְּקִיץ בֶּן מְשֻׁכֵּל נִרְדָּם בְּקָצִיר בֶּן מְבִישׁ:

Gathering the fruits of one's labor in the summer is a mark of efficient righteousness according to the formulas of Jewish precepts, a commonplace of pragmatic foresight that the speaker refuses. In this rejection of the boilerplate norms of prosperous survival, it is fitting that Ravkiovitch embeds an allusion to the Book of Proverbs in particular, which is, to borrow Robert Alter's words, "an anthology of anthologies," comprised of six discrete sections that collect different instructive aphorisms on the subjects of wisdom and virtue. Alter notes that, while many of the verses express moral platitudes, the second verset of the two-halved line typically heightens or focuses some aspect of it, which in Proverbs often takes the form of a satirical explanation.¹¹⁵ This is seemingly the case here—for the intelligence that compels a wise son to diligently gather during the appropriate time is set against the humiliation that the laziness of an embarrassing son causes for his family, rather than the ignorance that makes him unable to provide for the most basic of his needs. The adherence to convention as a means of perpetuating familial fortune and prosperity protects against a humiliating loss of social face as much as it stores up material supplies and goods. In this rationale, continuity

¹¹⁴ See Ella Shohat, "Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews" in *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 331; *The Shaping of Israeli Identity, Myth, Memory and Trauma*, eds. Robert Wistrich and David Ohana (London: Frank Cass, 1995), XI; and Nur Masalha, *The Zionist Bible: Biblical Precedent, Colonialism and the Erasure of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹¹⁵ Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (New York: Norton and Co., 2010), 183, 187-88.

and survival proceed through the protection garnered by observance of propriety and orthodoxy, an advancement and renewal that the speaker eschews and which is reiterated in the edict against whitewashing and home renovation. The refusal of this mode of perpetuation is indeed realized through a string of negations that operate on multiple levels, traversing the domestic and familial, personal and political, psychological and mundanely physical. This is most manifest in the final injunction: “not to settle, not to be a settler.” As Chana Kronfeld and Chana Bloch note in the preface to their translation, Ravikovitvh made ample use of Hebrew linguistic registers, exploiting the archaic echoes of older significations in contemporary expressions. Thus, in biblical Hebrew the verb “*le-hitnachel*” means “to inherit” or “to settle down [into the land].” In contemporary Hebrew however, it means “to reside in a settlement in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.”¹¹⁶ The identitarian forms of memory that the poem laid aside in previous verses now map fully onto these dangerous modes of domestic establishment: the gathering and storage of recollections leads to a kind of identity formulation along binding and binary lines, which is in turn reinforced by modes of protectionist perpetuation that preserve through conformity, which may ultimately occasion the rise of red roofed colonies that house and safeguard one national body through the dispossession and destruction of another. All of these consequential forces of collection are implicated in the poem’s initial refusal: the amassing of self into a coherent and fixed corporeal form that writes itself through the signs it makes and leaves behind.

Against the streamlined sedimentation of protectionist accrual, the poetic speaker offers other vectors and orientations of movement and registration. In the midst of this counter motion, the figure of Rachel surfaces:

In the dark to withdraw from the moving caravan	בְּחֹשֶׁךְ לִפְרֹשׁ מִן הַשִּׁירָה הַעוֹבֶרֶת
perhaps after a grave illness	אוּלֵי אַחֲרֵי מַחְלָה קָשָׁה
like Rachel. This business	כְּמוֹ רָחֵל.
has no dignity, no importance:	הָעֵנִין הַזֶּה לֹא חָשׁוּב וְלֹא נִכְבָּד
dust on the roads	אַבֶּק דְּרָכִים
rising up to the sky.	מִתְמַר לְרָקִיעַ.
I have no need to arrive.	אֵין לִי צָרָה לְהִגִּיעַ.

The first positive assertion in “Rough Draft” is thus an authoritative desire to retreat and disengage. Rachel is offered as this affirmative and active form of retraction—an alternative mode of memory and collection. A composite figure, Rachel here equally recalls the biblical matriarch and her death and burial on the way to Bethlehem (Genesis 35: 16-20) as well as the modernist poet Rachel Bluwstein and her battle with tuberculosis leading to her death at age 40; she also evokes the poet Rachel Morpurgo, the 19th century poet who was the first woman to compose verse in modern Hebrew, and her writings on death as a means of escaping a domestic life that left no room for poetry.¹¹⁷ More than an operative act of withdrawal, thus, these Rachels perform different kinds of death, such that this avowal of Rachel becomes a statement about dying as both an expression of agency and a practice of writing.

The matriarch Rachel, we will recall, dies in childbirth as Jacob and his entire household return to Canaan after years of exile on God’s orders. Her final act before death is to name her second son *Ben-’oni*, “son of my vigor” or “son of my sorrow,” ironically disproving her previous

¹¹⁶ Bloch and Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude*, 37.

¹¹⁷ Morpurgo and her work will be treated in greater detail in the discussion of the poem “*Kmo Rachel*.”

demand to Jacob: “Give me sons or else I die” (30:1).¹¹⁸ After her passing, Jacob renames him *Ben-yamin* (Benjamin), which presents several possibilities of meaning: “son of my right hand,” “dweller in the south,” or “son of my old age.” As Robert Alter underscores, this is the only instance in the Bible in which both parents offer competing versions—or, to put it more baldly, in which a father re-appropriates a mother’s naming speech.¹¹⁹ Jacob’s choice wins of course and as such her death renders two of her speech acts in the narrative, infrequent as they are in the first place, ineffectual. Rabbinic interpretation understands her death on the basis of Jacob’s fatal curse, which he uttered in response to Laban’s accusation of theft: “With whomever you find your gods, that person shall not live” (31:32).¹²⁰ Ilana Pardes, in a pointed interpretation, reads this oath as “the expression of a desire to set limits to her plot,” a sequencing that comes too close to self-representation in which she is almost able to escape the subordinate storyline that merely mirrors Jacob’s much more profound narrative development.¹²¹ Like many other female characters, Rachel is denied narrative evolution and serves rather as a foil to male protagonists. Rachel’s appearance in the biblical plots operates according to her marriageability and the status of her sons.¹²² Her death and burial on the path to her destination indeed literalizes this peripheral and partial condition: denied access to the holy city and a spot in the Cave of the Patriarchs (*Me’arat ha-Makhpela* in the old city of Hebron, where all the other matriarchs and patriarchs of the Jewish tradition are entombed), she is also prevented from enacting the transformation that would allow her to prevail over her older sister Leah and her coveted status as mother of the first-born son. Even her final act of naming is wrested from her by her operative counterpart. Dying before she arrives, she cannot escape the limits placed around her story’s development and is thus prohibited from having it unfold outside the tracks of patriarchal narration.

The burial of her physical body on the peripheries in this way both underscores and contrasts with the streamlining of her persona through religious and cultural parameters, deactivating those potential narratives that might disturb their authority. This contrast between her physical placement on the outside and her rhetorical appropriation to safeguard the center is perhaps most evident in Jeremiah 31:14, in which Rachel’s performance of grief elicits the divine promise that all of the Israelites will return from Babylonian exile to Canaan and God’s favor:

Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not [here]. Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your acts shall be rewarded, says the Lord; and they shall come back again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for your future, says the Lord, and your children shall come back again to their own border (31:14-16).

¹¹⁸ Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 72.

¹¹⁹ *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1996), 199.

¹²⁰ Alter’s translation, *ibid.*, 171.

¹²¹ Pardes, *Countertraditions*, 73. Jacob’s grand narrative of personal and collective transformation culminates when he reconciles with his brother after wrestling with the angel, where he is given a new name that registers this central shift: from *Ya’akov* (a derivation of *’akv*), meaning “to follow” or “to deceive” to *Yisrael*, (containing a verb derived from *serarah*), meaning “to rule, prevail or lord over.” For a detailed discussion of how Rachel and Leah’s narratives function as subplots that mirror Jacob and Esau’s development, see 60-71 as well as J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 123-96.

¹²² Pardes, *Countertraditions*, 74-5.

The rabbinic commentators in *Genesis Rabbah* 82:10 explain that Jacob chose Rachel's burial place on the way to Efrat precisely because he anticipated that Jerusalem's future exiles would have to walk that road and he predicted that she would advocate for their redemption as they passed by on their way to banishment.¹²³ Yet her role as a supportive intermediary for the Israelites hinges on her demobilization to a certain extent—she is able to exercise this agency precisely because in this rhetorical move, she is expanded into the nation's quintessential mother who intercedes for all through a universalizing process that empties her of particular substance and disruptive potential. A figure whose voice rises from the dead to plead for exiles who would be banished to peripheral status as well, she never quite settles into the vacuum of death and complete erasure. Notwithstanding this capacity to bridge realms, her persona is used in order to help the nation return, to further the myth of its arrival even as her own was denied.

Ravikovitch's appeal to the biblical Rachel as one stratum of an alternative mode of memory, collection and writing thus points to the matriarch's attribute of sweeping compassion. She at once highlights the way this empathy occasions Rachel's ability to traverse celestial, earthly and textual realms of life and afterlife and simultaneously reveals how and where these possibilities are foreclosed within the tradition. As much as this Rachel collects and re-members collective bodies by identifying with the suffering and humanity of all Israelites, she also embodies the seamlines of the narratives and traditions in which she is embedded, exposing the joints that strive to maintain internal consolidation and integrative support and the shortcomings of their reductive articulation.

Rachel Bluwstein also died after a literal journey, though in her case it was her battle with the "grave illness" of tuberculosis that occasioned her death. Born in Saratov, Russia, she grew up in Poltova, Ukraine. At 19, she and her sister visited Palestine en route to Italy and they decided instead to remain on as pioneers and farm. Rachel eventually settled in the farming community by the Sea of Galilee/Lake Tiberias, Havat Kinneret, where she studied Hebrew, worked in an agricultural school and met A.D. Gordon, spiritual leader and founder of Labor Zionism. On his advice she traveled to France in 1913 to study agronomy and painting but found herself stranded in Europe following the outbreak of WWI and was forced to return to Russia. There she suffered harsh conditions, teaching Jewish refugee children and ultimately contracting tuberculosis. She returned to Palestine in 1919 and followed her former collective to Degania, though she was unable to farm because of her health. She taught children for a while but was expelled from the community once her diagnosis was discovered for fear of contagion and was thus forced to spend the rest of her life itinerant, moving around to find work until she ultimately settled in a sanatorium in Gadera. She wrote almost all of her poems during her final years of exile from Degania.¹²⁴

In an essay published as the introduction to her posthumously collected works, her nephew Uri Milstein detailed the last hours of her life, sentimentally weaving together an assemblage of memories and anecdotes from several different voices. This description of her death and funeral is the way in which Milstein commences the recounting of her life story, underscoring Rachel's association with death and disease in popular culture and its critical influence upon her work. He begins with the narrative his mother told him: "In the spring of 1931, her friends, the leaders of the Labor movement, sent her to a private hospital in Gadera. One of those hospitals that nobody leaves alive."¹²⁵ Milstein goes on to transcribe the notes she sent to her friend Bracha Chabas begging for help to escape what she termed the "House of Death" in the weeks leading up to the

¹²³ Ellen Haskell, "The Death of Rachel and the Kingdom of Heaven," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 38.1 (2012): 17-18.

¹²⁴ See Uri Milstein, ed., *Rachel* (Tel Aviv: Zmora, Bitan, 1985), 25-7; and Susan Starr Sered, "A Tale of Three Rachels," 19-24.

¹²⁵ Milstein, *Rachel*, 25, translation mine.

final journey that his aunt took. Her disease having taken a turn, she was moved to the Hadasa hospital in Tel Aviv and traveled there in a horse drawn-wagon, accompanied by her doctor and nurse. Her companions returned to Gedera and she was left alone. Milstein reports that her moans of pain caused the nurse on duty to offer her a shot of pain killer but Rachel refused, saying “I don’t need it. I want to feel.” The transmission of these anecdotes points to her characterization as one known for deviating from the common path, in terms of both her literary aesthetics and life experiences. It is her proximity to death that perhaps accounts for the divergence of both her poetics and her activities from the expected thoroughfares of her times and indeed, as noted in the story above, that affords her the ability to feel in a particular and visceral way. As has been detailed in previous sections of this chapter, many of Rachel’s literary works seek out this immediacy and inexorability of sensation and, upon encountering their mediated interruptions, engineer simulations of unmediated expression. The physicality of sensation that is so central to her poetics emerges here in relation to the looming presence of death as much as the aesthetic devotion to birth and infant gesturing, a presence that is marked throughout her oeuvre. As she writes in her late poem “*Metay*” (My Dead), “...At the turn of the path, at the close of day/ They silently surround me, silently accompany me/ A true pact is ours, a binding tie that is not severed/ Only that which I have lost—is mine forever.”¹²⁶ For Rachel, death, like silence, has an activating and actualizing force that materializes a stable sense of possession and companionship, consolidating the ephemeral specifically under conditions of loss.

The biblical Rachel invoked in this poem traverses death to identify with the plight of every [Jewish] man. If she gathers and joins the collective body together through her designation as ‘national mother’ while also revealing the shortcomings of this consolidating mode, Rachel the Poet discloses an altogether different means of association. Rather than writing in a manner that collects, centralizes and coalesces, her poetics is one of ongoing reconfiguration. Writing as a suffering body exiled from the life she wanted to lead but always in proximity to her death and the mortality of others, her work describes the transformative processes through which communities and forms of companionship may arise in material conversation with the dead. These collectivities do not return to a consolidated position of favor or power or identity—rather, they articulate themselves explicitly through and with loss. Death and silence thus generate the physicality of sensation and immediacy of expression that her poetics locates specifically in conditions of loss, deprivations that affirm and necessitate the reconfiguration of new forms of collective life. Together, then, these different Rachels merge and dispossess, collect and reconfigure in tandem with death and loss. Withdrawing from the moving caravan, she becomes a composite figure who collects by means of life-affirming dispossession, who associates with death both as an act of embodied agency and as a practice of material writing.

In the poem “*Rough Draft*,” the Rachels are set in opposition to the moving caravan, which itself exemplifies the normative narrative of heroic death in nationalist terms, referring to Natan Yonatan’s 1948 poem “*Shayarah shelanu*” (Our convoy). The poem is dedicated to the poet’s friend Aharon Agassi who was killed during the 1948 Arab Israeli war while driving a convoy of supplies back from Jerusalem to the coastal plain.¹²⁷ It describes convoys transporting goods on their way to the blockaded city and parallels their course with the symbolic fate of a song’s transformations. Modeled on the symbolist preoccupation with music as a transcendent means of universalist expression, the poem builds off of Nathan Alterman’s “*’Od chozer ha-nigun she-zanachta la-shav*” (The tune you abandoned in vain still returns), and Chaim Guri’s “*Bab al Wad*” as it plays on the

¹²⁶ *Shirat Rachel*, 158, translation mine.

¹²⁷ Harel, “*Eyn li tsorekh*,” 413.

consonance and slippage between *shir* (song) and *shayarah* (convoy, caravan).¹²⁸ It was set to music and popularized by Ya'akov Sagi during the 1950s:

Once again the song embarks on its way, There where our days go and cry. Convoy, where are you headed? Convoy, it's sad on the road. ...	שוב יוצא הנמר אל הדרך, שם הולכים ימינו ובוכים. שיירה, אל אנה את עוברת? שיירה, עצוב על הדרך. ...
Here the light's fading on your armor, And the song's heart is opened in love. My convoy, this is the beginning of the tune, And I do not know its end...	הנה האור דועך על שריוניך, גם לב השיר נפתח באהבה. שיירה שלי, ראשית המנגינה היא, ואיני יודע את סופה... ...
With them [the roads], bristled with steel, you'll carry Stubbornness, steel and daily bread. My convoy, if you fall, My song will fall far with you too. ... ¹²⁹	עמקן תשאי סמורת הפלד, עקשנות, פלדה ולחם-חק. שיירה שלי, אם את נופלת, גם יפל עמך רחוק. שירי יפל עמך רחוק. ... ¹³⁰

The moving convoy of war that coherently carries the fate of collective song is disrupted in Ravikovitch's text: her "*shayarah*" gathers together images of refugees, exile, desert caravans and military trucks in the same way that "Rachel" collects different narratives of counter movement, death and resistance. In the context of the 1948 war, Jerusalem was separated from the rest of newly created state of Israel and the only way to deliver food supplies was to force through the blockade using armored cars in order for the remaining inhabitants of Jerusalem to survive. By means of Rachel, thus, Ravikovitch reverses and dismantles this trajectory. Rather than joining a moving caravan of supplies for the zero-sum perseverance of the collective en route to Jerusalem, the imagined center of all Zionist perceptions of reality, the speaker advocates a withdrawal to the side and an encounter with death.

Written in August 1983 (the date is pointedly included at the end of the text), the month that Israel withdrew from Beirut after its June 1982 invasion, the poem clearly directs itself towards the First Lebanon War as well, a war which was widely criticized by the Israeli public. Seen to be a "war of choice" rather than a "war of necessity," it generated large anti-war protests made up of participants angered by the misinformation circulated by their military and government officials.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Dan Miron, *Mul ha-ach ha-shotek* (Before the Silent Brother: Studies in the Poetry of the War of Independence) (Jerusalem: Open University and Keter, 1992), 257-65. See also Hannan Hever, *Suddenly the Sight of War: Violence and Nationalism in Hebrew Poetry in the 1940s* (Stanford: SUP, 2016), 215-16.

¹²⁹ Translation mine.

¹³⁰ *Shviley 'afar* (Dusty Paths) (Mehavia: Sifriat Ha-po'alim, 1951), 16-17.

¹³¹ Then Defense Minister Ariel Sharon launched an invasion of Lebanon under Operation Peace for Galilee, later called the 1982 Lebanon War. Ze'ev Maoz recounts that the goals of the war as developed by Sharon were as follows: "1) Destroy the PLO infrastructure in Lebanon, including the PLO headquarters in Beirut... 2) Drive Syrian forces out of Lebanon... 3) Install a Christian-dominated government in Lebanon, with Bashir Gemayel as President... 4) Sign a peace treaty with the Lebanese government that would solidify the informal Israeli-Christian alliance and convert it into a binding agreement." See *Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel's National Security and Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 181. Sharon's long term plan in destroying PLO infrastructure was to pressure Palestinians out of the West Bank to allow for Israel to seize territory. The war is primarily remembered for the Sabra and Shatila Massacre in September 1982, in which between

Yet by allowing the various convoys of various wars to reference and reconfigure each other, Ravikovitch unsettles their differentiation, hinting at the implication of the one in the other. In the Israeli context, this comparison of the 1948 war—the premier war of necessity in the public imaginary—to the First Lebanon War is a radical move. Rather than facing death in a moving caravan of convoys waging war for the (necessary or manipulated to masquerade as such) survival of a nation, Ravikovitch advocates meeting death as one is stepping away from the pull of teleological coherence. “This business,” she says, is neither dignified nor important. “Business” is intentionally unspecified and in the context of this discussion would seem to equally indicate death and the allure of transcendent survival. Death is no dignified affair, nor is the march to fight for land and country. Nor should one’s death be imagined to be an honorable sacrifice for this ideal: the poem specifies that it is the mundane dust of trodden roads that ascends to the sky, rather than the smoke rising from an altar of sacrificial offering.¹³² The final two lines of the poem are the only ones that rhyme, coupling the image of dust floating to the sky with the speaker’s assertion that she has no need to arrive. Her eschewal of accession applies thus in life as well as death—dying as an agentic act cannot, in these terms, be translated into the dogmas of nationalism or religion that would interpret it as the offering up of oneself in surrendering return to the endurance of God or country. The speaker offers, rather, an alternative conception of endurance and death that is based on the kind of memory and collection thematized throughout the text, in which signifying name and embodied identity become an occasion for dispossession rather than absolute protection. The two Rachels disrupt, displace and reconfigure one another under the same roof, as do several of the poem’s other key words (*shayarah*, the wars to which it alludes), as does almost any word that is poetically employed. These collections that continually disassemble themselves become then a metapoetic statement about writing materially through and as dis-integration. This mode of expression emerges through a body that leaves neither sign nor footprint, that withdraws from the moving caravan of war and instrumentalized identity (like Rachel), that writes itself continuously in rough draft form—always a preparation in process for no end, always not the finished effect. Set against Rachel’s conceptualization of the revelatory immediacy of language as a vulnerable body made over and over again through the reconfigurations of intersubjective speech, Ravikovitch writes of and through a corpus that forms only as it dies for no end other than the ongoing interiorization of difference; both of these visions are powerful alternatives to the Zionist body that accrues in streamlined modes of survival at all moral costs.

The line in the poem that introduces this alternative model of disintegration and highlights its conversation with death alludes to another of her poems by the same name, “*Kmo Rachel*” (Like Rachel). Appearing in Ravikovitch’s previous collection of poems, *Tebom Koreh* (*Deep Calleth*), published in 1976, this poem orients itself around Rachel’s death as well. The first line indeed specifies that the almost effaced speaker is interested in *dying* like Rachel, as opposed to any other

762 and 3,500 Palestinian and Lebanese Shiite civilians were murdered by Phalange militias in tacit cooperation with IDF forces, who blocked exits from the Shatila refugee camp and provided logistical support (201). The 1982 Israeli governmental Kahan Commission found that Ariel Sharon approved of the mission and bore personal responsibility for failing to prevent civilian deaths. Outrage at Israel’s role in the massacre and popular disillusionment with the war led to a gradual withdrawal from Beirut. See also Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari, *Israel’s Lebanon War*, Ina Friedman, ed and trans. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).

¹³² See Avot de Rabbi Natan A Chapter 35: “‘And wind prevailed not,’ etc. And when the pillar of smoke went up from the sacrificial altar, the smoke went up straight as a staff until it reached the clouds; but the pillar of the incense went up from the golden altar in the direction of the Holy of Holies.”

"ולא נצחה הרוח בעמוד העשן. ובזמן שעמוד עשן יוצא ממזבח העולה היה מתמר ועולה כמקל עד שמגיע לרקיע."

qualities or actions she might want to cultivate like her. The poem references the biblical Rachel of course, like the text discussed above, in addition to invoking other poems written about her by two earlier poets, significantly named Rachel as well—Rachel Morpurgo (1790-1871) and Rachel Bluwstein. The first woman to compose verse in modern Hebrew, Rachel Morpurgo was one of the rare women in her generation to have gained access to the education afforded to her male counterparts. Instructed by relatives and private tutors, her studies included the Bible, Talmud and medieval Hebrew literature, in addition to Italian literature and mathematics. Writing in 19th century Italy in Hebrew, a language that was then overwhelmingly restricted to men, her work negotiates the sexual politics of composing poetry in an unrecognized voice and lays bare the impact of this elision on herself and her verse. Tova Cohen indeed notes that her poems of personal contemplation reflect the convoluted intricacies of her position through their incorporation and reassignment of reigning poetic conventions—namely, the complex use of allusions to display her broad knowledge of the Hebrew canon—to express her suffering and subordination.¹³³ Married to Jacob Morpurgo at the comparatively late age of twenty-nine, she raised four children with no domestic help and was left with little time to study or write. The untenability of her status as a relatively unrecognized poet whose domestic cares took precedence over her writing manifest in the various signatures that she assigned to her poems: “Wife of Jacob Morpurgo, stillborn” and “Rachel Morpurgo, the little one” which she abbreviated to RMH, the Hebrew word for “worm” (*rimah*).¹³⁴

Many of these gendered dynamics resurface in Rachel Bluwstein’s pioneering work half a century later. Ravikovitch’s appeal to these poetic mothers through the cipher of the quintessential matriarch thus shows her continuing engagement with their arbitrations of subjection and silence, agency and authorship, reproduction and reformulation. “*Kmo Rachel*” showcases her response to this nexus: the cultivation of a gendered agency of death. Marking the instrumentalization of women as the symbolic vehicle of the nation’s survival and continuation at violent cost to both themselves and all of those outside of the collective’s imagined borders, the poem shifts reproductivity and endurance away from the nation’s ongoing life. Instead, it reconfigures survival into an agentic practice that develops through emulations of others’ deaths, double dispossessions of self that reiterate through the particles heralding comparison and imitation, *kmo* and *ke* (“like”):

To die like Rachel when the soul shivers like a bird, wants to break free. Behind the tent, in fear and dread, Jacob and Joseph speak of her, a-tremble. All the days of her life turn head over heels inside her like a baby that wants to be born.	לָמוֹת כְּמוֹ רָחֵל כְּשֶׁהַנֶּפֶשׁ רוֹעֵדָה כְּצִפּוֹר רוֹצָה לְהִמָּלֵט. מֵעֵבֶר לָאֹהֶל עֲמָדוֹ נִבְהָלִים יַעֲקֹב וְיוֹסֵף, דְּבָרוֹ בָּהּ רִתֵּת. כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהָ מִתְהַפְּכִים בָּהּ. כַּתִּינוּק הָרוֹצָה לְהִנָּלֵד.
How grueling. How Jacob’s love ate away at her with a greedy mouth. As the soul takes leave now,	כִּמָּה קָשָׁה. אֲהָבַת יַעֲקֹב אָכְלָה בָּהּ בְּכָל פֶּה. כִּמָּה קָשָׁה.

¹³³ Tova Cohen, *Ugav ne’elam: chayeha vi-yetsiratah shel ha-meshoreret ha-‘Ivriyah-Italkiyah Rachel Morpurgo* (A silenced harp: The life and works of the Italian-Hebrew poetess Rachel Morpurgo) (Jerusalem: Karmel, 2016).

¹³⁴ *‘Ugav Rachel: Sefer kolel shirim ve-agadot u-mikhtavim shonim* (Rachel’s Harp: Collected Writings) (Krakow, 1890). See “Ve- ela divei Rachel,” 54.

she has no use for any of that.

עָנְשׁוּ כְּשֶׁהִנָּפֵשׁ יוֹצֵאת
אִין לָהּ חֶפֶץ בְּכָל זֶה.

Suddenly the baby screeches—
Jacob comes into the tent—
but Rachel does not even sense it.
Rapture washes over her face,
her head.

לִפְתָּע צוֹחַ הַתִּינוּק
וּבֹא יַעֲקֹב אֶל הָאֹהֶל
אֲךָ רָחֵל אֵינָה מְרַגֶּשֶׁה
עֲדָנָה שׁוֹטֶפֶת אֶת פָּנֶיהָ
וְרֹאשָׁהּ.

The did a great repose descend upon her.
The breath of her nostrils would not stir a
feather.
They laid her down among mountain stones
and made her no lament.
To die like Rachel.
That's what I want.¹³⁵

מְנוּחָה גְּדוֹלָה יֵרֶדָה עָלֶיהָ.
נִשְׁמַת אָפָה שׁוֹב לֹא תִרְעִיד נוֹצָה.
הִנִּיחוּ אוֹתָהּ בֵּין אֲבָנֵי הָרִים
וְלֹא הִסְפִּידוּהָ.
לְמוֹת כְּמוֹ רָחֵל
אֲנִי רוֹצָה.¹³⁶

While Ravikovitch's predecessors Rachel Morpurgo and Rachel Bluvstein have broadly emphasized the resignification of the biblical Rachel's voice in their own work, Ravikovitch here dwells on rewriting and reworking her death. The previous Rachels, albeit in very different ways, affirm the biblical matriarch as a figure of regeneration and redemption. In Morpurgo's work, Rachel often appears as a figure that allows her to fuse personal with national redemption and indeed enables her to write. This union and tradeoff of the individual with the collective is complex in Morpurgo's work—sometimes it would seem wholeheartedly accepted and sometimes it is clearly much more ambivalent. In the poem "*Kol ba-ramah nishma*" (A Voice from Ramah is Heard), for instance, Morpurgo uses the passage from Jeremiah 31 to occupy the biblical Rachel's voice and plead for the success of Jewish settlement in Palestine. The usage of this trope and the ensuing collaboration with the biblical matriarch's mission then affords the poetic speaker the ability to write again in a recharged and reinhabited voice: "And in new song Rachel shall celebrate."¹³⁷ Deliberately allowing the biblical matriarch to comingle with the poetic persona (who seemingly invokes Morpurgo herself) in this populated name, her appearance heralds the possibility of a new song. In the same way that the biblical Rachel defends the children of Israel from a life of exile in Jeremiah, thus, she redeems Morpurgo's poetry and poetic project, providing the speaker with a monikered space of indeterminacy in which she may slide between national and poetic regeneration.

At the same time, in the poem "*Mah kochi ki a'yachei?*" (What Is My Strength That I Should Wait?)—the text that seems most explicitly evoked in Ravikovitch's poem—the poetic speaker uses a wide variety of canonical allusions to express two experiences. On the one hand, she writes of the desire to surrender her poetry and endure as a worm who lies in the dust, half alive and half dead; on the other hand, she reveals the way in which this miserable condition is attenuated and mediated by narratives of national redemption. The first stanza is as follows:

What is my strength that I should wait

מה-כחי כי אֵיכָל

¹³⁵ Kronfeld and Bloch, *Hovering at a Low Altitude*, 156-7.

¹³⁶ *Kol ha-shirim*, 155.

¹³⁷ Rachel Morpurgo, *Ugav Rachel*, 70.

I will lie in the dust like a vermin
Or be silent like Rachel
There is no use for me in poetry: ¹³⁸

אשכן עפר כזוחל
או דומיה כרחל
אין בי חפץ בשירה: ¹³⁹

Though the poem goes on to describe how the speaker will begin to sing anew of national redemption through her entreaties to God, she signs the text as “Worm I am in life, and all the more so in death,” alluding to a passage originally found in Berachot 17a in the Talmud and used in the Yom Kippur liturgy:

My God, before I was formed I was of no worth, and now that I have been formed it is as if I have not been formed. Dust I am in life, and all the more so in death. In thy sight, I am like an object filled with shame and disgrace...¹⁴⁰

Morpurgo replaces the word “dust” with “worm” (*rimah*), an acronym for “Rachel Morpurgo the little one” that recalls her position as a subaltern and often unrecognized poet. Though writing of national redemption in the guise of Rachel the biblical matriarch offers the poet a delimited voice, when writing of personal pain, Rachel becomes a placeholder of silence and despair. Yet at the same time, these appeals to names of diminution are also techniques that cultivate and claim an identity of resistance. When the speaker writes “silent like Rachel,” and occupies the name of worm, she both showcases her despair and endures in resistance, weaving the story of her pain through the narrative of national redemption that gives her a voice. She remains a self-proclaimed worm who lays herself in the dust in order to write about what allows her to write—this half death is both a technique and a figure for writing.

Like with so many of her other poems, Rachel Bluwstein’s usage of Rachel the matriarch initially appears in simple, direct and unassuming terms. Her famous poem “Rachel” masquerades as a straightforward affirmation of the matriarch’s regenerative capabilities, in which the poetic speaker declares a continuity between matriarch and poet, emphasizing the poet’s ability to rematerialize the matriarch’s most renowned aspects:

Surely her blood flows in my blood,
Surely her voice sings in mine—
Rachel, the shepherdess of Laban’s flock,
Rachel—mother of mothers.

הן דמה בְּדָמִי זֹרֵם,
הן קוֹלָהּ בִּי רֵן—
רַחֵל הַרֹעֶה צֹאן לָבָן,
רַחֵל – אִם הָאִם.

Therefore, the house is narrow to me
and the city — strange,
for her scarf once fluttered
to the desert winds;

וְעַל כֵּן הַבַּיִת לִי צָר
וְהָעִיר – זָרָה,
כִּי הִנֵּה מִתְנוּפֵף סוּדָרָה
לְרוּחוֹת הַמִּדְבָּר;

and therefore, I shall grab onto my path
with such assurance,
because preserved in my feet are memories

וְעַל כֵּן אֶת דְּרָכֵי אִמִּי
בְּבִטָּחָה כְּזֹאת,
כִּי שְׁמוֹרִים בְּרַגְלֵי זְכֵרֹנוֹת

¹³⁸ Translation mine.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁴⁰ It comes at the end of the Amidah during Yom Kippur services.

Upon closer inspection, however, the poem's uncomplicated demeanor reveals a morphology of disruption that unsettles the poetic speaker's identity as much as it reinforces it, generating a metapoetic practice of inhabitation and a counter-history of the matriarch's narrative. Indeed, Rachel the poet engineers a slippage between poetic speaker and matriarch through their comingling blood, voices and names, and she uses this coalescence as an occasion to rewrite the matriarch's biblical account, omitting Jacob entirely and selectively presenting particular details associated with the matriarch's story. Her blood recalls Genesis 31:19, when Rachel steals her father's household gods as she, Leah and the rest of Jacob's entourage prepare to leave Laban's house and return to Canaan. When Laban, having pursued them to find his stolen property, searches Rachel's tent for them, she manages to out-manuever her father by sitting on a camel's saddle under which the statues are concealed and telling him that she is menstruating and thus cannot rise (31:35). The menstrual blood signals her performance of agency in the face of her father, but, according to rabbinic legend, her actions ultimately lead to her death.¹⁴³ Her voice refers primarily to the Jeremiah passage discussed above (31:15), in which Rachel's weeping and lamentation stir God to take pity on his subjects in exile; in the poem, this scene of national reconsolidation shifts into an opportunity to sing and compose poetry. Rachel the poet writes, in short, a poem in which the poetic speaker is inhabited by another's pulsing blood and ringing voice; in which the speaker's (poetic) feet preserve the memory of another's history and its prosody. This haunting enables the biblical account of the matriarch to realign around the matriarch's acts of power, which cannot be disentangled from her death. All of this—corporeal disruption and agentic dying—informs the kind of poetry and national affiliation that the speaker claims as her own in the second stanza: the minimalism of a narrow house/poetic stanza (*bayit*) that alienates her from Zionist notions of country, such that she refuses urban conquests and constructions over the expanse of the desert and its winds.

While death lurks beneath the surface in Rachel Bluwstein's account, it is explicit in Ravikovitch's text—she writes of a poetic speaker who only wants to recall Rachel in the act of dying. Rather than asserting a disruptive coalescence of vital signs and corporeal expression as a means of materializing an alternative form of writing and national identity as Rachel Bluwstein does, Ravikovitch's speaker begins with the desire to imitate Rachel's death. Ravikovitch's appeal to her as such calls attention to the ways in which her figure is interrupted in the poem. The poem begins not with "Rachel," but with a semblance of her persona ("like Rachel") and immediately asserts that its focus is on *dying* like Rachel, rather than reclaiming or rediscovering her famed attributes, which creates a lingering tension between the title and first line. "Dying like Rachel" (a phrase that signifies the ultimate disruption) is itself immediately mediated by its likening to a soul that quivers like a bird trying to escape, a phrase that evokes a dense array of allusions and semantic fields. Primarily alluding to Psalms 124:7, a poem of thanksgiving to God for protecting the Israelites from their enemies and allowing them to escape the way a bird breaks free from the snare of fowlers, Ravikovitch's rewriting shifts the orientation of escape and the casting of enemy:

6 Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us
as a prey to their teeth.

ו בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה שֶׁלֹא נִתְּנָנוּ טֶרֶף לְשֹׁנֵיהֶם.

¹⁴¹ Translation mine.

¹⁴² *Shirat Rachel*, 56.

¹⁴³ See footnote 82.

7 Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare
of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we are
escaped.

ז נַפְשֵׁנוּ צָפוּר נִמְלֶטָה מִפֶּה יוֹקְשִׁים:
הַפֶּה נִשְׁבַּר וְנַאֲנִיחוּנוּ נִמְלֶטָנוּ.

Rather than escaping from the trap of her enemies, then, this Rachel breaks free from the snare that is her life—the tangle of marriage and motherhood, acquisition and inheritance, symbolization and instrumentalization in which she is bound. In this context, Jacob plays the role of enemy hunter whose kinship system traps her with a nearly inescapable task: to bear the weight of the nation's survival as both symbolic vehicle and intermediary. Jacob's adversarial bent is indeed reiterated in the next stanza, in which his love for Rachel is described in terms of devouring oppression—it “ate away at her/with a greedy mouth,” a turn of phrase that alludes to the prophecy of Isaiah which predicts how the enemies of Israel will devour her “with open mouth” (*be-khol peh*).¹⁴⁴ The ravenous force of Jacob's love recalls thus the consuming violence of enemies bent on his nation's destruction, an assault that is directed towards Rachel's body. This image of sexual violence recalls the sadomasochistic relations of Ravikovitch's earlier poem, “*Ahavat tapu'ach ha-zahav*” (“The Love of an Orange”); yet here, the dominated object of desire is the one who is devoured and invaded and she displays no pleasure in her subjugation. As this discussion will highlight below, the agency that Ravikovitch explores in relation to the poetic speaker in “*Kmo Rachel*,” in marked contrast to “*Ahavat tapu'ach ha-zahav*” and its attention to the corporeal reach of the powerless, articulates itself through figures of disembodiment and textualization.

As a channel of communication between God and his exiled subjects, Rachel's intercessions echo traditional portrayals of both souls and birds as feminine figures that bridge disparate realms, allowing the celestial and earthly to interface.¹⁴⁵ Birds (*tsipurim*) also surface through the Hebrew literary tradition as representations of freedom and escape from exile, drawn from the Andalusian Hebrew poetry of medieval Spain. The most notable example of this symbology can be found in H.N. Bialik's renowned poem “*El ha-tsipor*” (“To a Bird”), in which the poetic-speaker appeals to a bird (grammatically feminine in Hebrew) who has returned from her winter migrations in Palestine and is at liberty to fly there again, in contrast to the speaker who is trapped in the agony of exile in Eastern Europe.¹⁴⁶ Birds in Bialik's poems often invoke the kabbalist concept of the *shekhinah*, literally meaning “indwelling,” referring to the feminine principle of God acting in the world. In rabbinic literature, indeed, the *shekhinah* is sometimes characterized as God's wings, leading to the popular image of the *shekhinah* as a bird or dove whose wings protect her people.¹⁴⁷ Read along neo-platonic lines, the bird who wants to break free in this poem would desire to escape her exile from God and return skyward. Paralleled with the earthbound worm and dust of Rachel Morpurgo's

¹⁴⁴ Isaiah 9:11: “The Arameans on the east, and the Philistines on the west; and they devour Israel with open mouth. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.”

”אָרַם מְקַדֵּם, וּפְלִשְׁתִּים מֵאַחֲזֹר, וַיֹּאכְלוּ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּכָל-פֶּה; בְּכָל-זֹאת לֹא-שָׁב אָפוֹ, וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה.”

¹⁴⁵ Tova Rosen notes that Psalms 42:2-3, 63:2, 84:3, 103:1, 2, 22, 104:1, and 35 portray the soul as a woman, thirsting for the Lord. See “Poor Soul, Pure Soul: The Soul as Woman,” in *Unveiling Eve: Reading Gender in Medieval Hebrew Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 183-202, 83-5. In Psalm 11:1, for example, the soul is compared to a bird that flies through the air and approaches the heavens of God: In the Lord have I taken refuge; how say ye to my soul: ‘Flee as a bird to your mountain!’

¹⁴⁶ Hayyim Nahman Bialik, *Shirim* 659-694 (Poems 1899-1934), ed. Dan Miron, Zivah Shamir, et al (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1990), 129.

¹⁴⁷ Bernard Janowski, Gottfried Reeg, Joseph Dan, and Jürgen Moltmann, “Shekhinah,” *Religion Past and Present*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1877-5888_rpp_COM_024843 (accessed August 28, 2017).

poem or the corporeal continuity of Rachel Bluwstein's circumscribed rendition, the death that Ravikovitch ascribes to Rachel in the opening stanza is one of aerial freedom, in which mediating similes and chains of signifying images eclipse her, allowing her figure to escape unbound into a fantasy of disembodiment. This flight affords her the ability to leave her claimed and snared body behind—bearing the tumbling days of her life and devoured by the proliferating mouths of Jacob's love, this corporeal entrapment is overcome in her liberatory withdrawal into the writing of dying. Released from the narrative of agency and instrumentality, she takes no active action in this poem—her deeds are either described negatively, or she is the object and recipient of actions. Indeed, as the poem proceeds, her physical form becomes an impermeable surface on which different projections are screened, much like a white page: "Rapture washes over her face, /her head." In the textual bent of escape, her body becomes thus a surface and a cipher whose blankness generates more writing.

While the first few lines attend to her death figuratively, the next line shifts towards a narrative tone to depict the biblical scene, Joseph and Jacob beside her tent in dread, speaking of her "a-tremble." *Retet* is a hapax legomenon occurring *Hosea* 13:1, a verse that considers the embodied effects of power-laden speech in tandem with the biblical objective to present monotheistic devotion over and against idolatry:

1 When Ephraim spoke, tremblingly, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he became guilty through Baal, he died.	כְּדָבָר אֶפְרַיִם רָתַת, וְנָשָׂא הוּא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל; וַיֵּאֲשֶׁם בְּבַעַל, וַיָּמָת.
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Retet, or "tremblingly" is ambiguous in the biblical texts—it has been interpreted to modify both how tribe members of Ephraim spoke and the effect their speech produced. That is, Ephraim as the most powerful tribe of Israel was exalted when it spoke of God in fear and trembling but was slain when it committed idolatry; or Ephraim produced trembling in those nations that heard its members speak because of their relationship to God, yet when they worshipped idols, they were killed.¹⁴⁸ The poem thus sets Rachel as the object of this speech in place of God; it also aligns Jacob and Joseph with idolaters doomed to disloyalty and justified death. Their inevitable death indeed lingers as a shadow text, to use C.D. Blanton's term, a fatality that lurks in the shadows of the alluded-to text but remains concealed in the poem.¹⁴⁹ The unmentioned future demise of Jacob and Joseph contrasts with the details conveyed of Rachel's present death, both of which offset the strange birth that appears in the final line. Similarly, the motion of their trembling speech references the shuddering of the bird that conveys the soul's dying throes and places the movement of the next line in relief: all the days of her life turn upside-down inside of her like a baby who wants to be born. These different palpitations underscore the entanglement of life and death that surrounds Rachel's expiration. This baby who wants to be born recalls of course the childbirth that precipitated the

¹⁴⁸ Rashi renders: "'When Ephraim spoke with trembling': When Jeroboam showed zeal for the Omnipresent and spoke harshly against Solomon, and tremblingly, for Solomon was a great king; 'He became exalted in Israel': Thence he merited to be elevated to the king over Israel; 'When he became guilty through Baal': As soon as he assumed greatness and became guilty with Baal; 'He died': i.e., Jeroboam's dynasty was terminated, and so was Ahab's dynasty. Jonathan renders: When one of the house of Ephraim would speak, fear would seize the nations. They were great among Israel, but when they sinned by worshipping idols, they were slain." Rashi, *Hosea* 13:1 (DH- "When Ephraim").

¹⁴⁹ C.D. Blanton's term "shadow text" refers to the omitted parts of the intertextual weave that nonetheless play a crucial role in the deciphering of literary texts. See *Epic Negation: The Dialectical Poetics of Late Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

matriarch Rachel's death. Yet this birth has decided metapoetic connotations, wherein the poem associates the matriarch's liberatory death with the advent of literary creation—her death indeed yields the life of her poem. In this retelling of the matriarch's death, Ravikovitch links the resistance to violent forms of national survival with the valorization of death and the attendant possibility of poetic freedom; this intermingling of life with death points to the capacity for the interruption of self and nation to be channeled towards aesthetic genesis.

The poem thus situates Rachel as the ground and object of multiple inversions—her death is her escape, her husband is her enemy and the finished days of her life desire to be newborn. Perhaps most significantly, her dying presence is omnipotent, inducing the quivering oscillations (trembling speech, shudders, tumbling forms) that register and reflect the poem's inversions. In her blankness at the poem's epicenter, the dying matriarch generates reversals rather than extensions, such that the baby she carries is an infant of temporal inversion rather than the embodiment of national progression. The image of this baby who wants to be born indeed contrasts with the speaker who wants to die like Rachel when she is finally exposed, revealing the way in which Rachel's detachment from the volitions of life and death lets loose generative disruptions of authority and authorship; and disturb the forms of writing that secure their reproduction. The poetic speaker who appears in the poem's final line becomes known to the readers only through her wish to die like Rachel. This desire for a double displacement through which the poetic speaker's "I" makes itself known appears as belatedly as possible in the poem—the "I" is so deferred as to be almost entirely effaced. Indeed, the title is an excerpt of the poem's final sentence that reiterates this effacement in its omission of the poetic speaker's "I" and her subjective desire. In her emulation of Rachel's death, the speaker performs a radical attenuation of her subject position viz a viz her interlocutors, a deferral and diminishment of selfhood that yields a new kind of creative authority. Rather than a desire for death that is merely masochistic, the speaker desires Rachel's death as that which enables the life of the poem to transpire through reversals rather than extensions, a desire for creative life that she links to her own postponement and elision.

Referencing the consuming force of Jacob's adversarial love, the speaker reiterates, "As the soul takes leave now, she has no use for any of that." The escape that death poses for Rachel is represented thus as a haven from the necessity of survival, from living and carrying on for the sake of national endurance. This detachment from continuity is tied to a new form of writing, seemingly the precursor to writing in rough draft form through an ongoing encounter with the corporeal death of sovereignty as a structuring norm. To die like Rachel thus also signifies to *write* like Rachel and indeed accentuates the resonance of Rachel Morpurgo's meditation on subjection, authorship and surrender. In "What is My Strength," Morpurgo's speaker echoes Job's famous question, "What is my strength that I should wait and what is my end that I should endure?" before concluding that she would rather lay herself on the dust like the living-dead worm whose persona she adopts as a strategy of mourning and resistance. This strategy she links to another synonymous or possible alternative: "Or be silent like Rachel/ There's no use for me in poetry." As a negative means of expression, the silence of a writer renouncing her poetry is tantamount to writing through death and in fantasizing of this half-death, Morpurgo powerfully grounds her words in speechlessness and subjection. Ravikovitch's version replaces "poetry" with the more general "any of that" and reverses relations between subject and object ("she has no interest in any of that"); but in both scenarios, a type of agency is mobilized through disavowal and detachment that recharges the scene of writing even as the authors' sovereignty and coherence is diminished. Dying and writing, these Rachels and those who emulate their life-affirming withdrawals from self thus enact a kind of expressive and corporeal escape. In the poem's narrative, Rachel escapes Jacob as well as the constrictions of nation and protectionist survival by disengaging from her body such that it becomes a blank surface for textual flux, mobilizing reversals and inversions. In the midst of this movement, the figure of Rachel

remains a kind of floating signifier who is mediated by similes and interrupted with poetic imagery, who passively registers and contains the embodied desires of others but is absent and bodiless herself. Through this lifeless blankness, she asserts a paradoxical kind of embodied agency, in which the writing of poetic disintegration takes place through a surrender of flesh and self-determination. Her retreat ultimately compels the poetic speaker to fantasize about her own withdrawal from self in the most extreme of terms, such that she would rather imitate the passing of another than die her own death. The poem's final statement is a powerful desire for ego-dissolution that entails a detachment from the corporeality of self-coherence and continuity. The dying body indeed becomes the willing ground for the generative inversions and reversals of textual circulation and literary flux, pointing towards a type of materiality that is unattached to egoic constraints. Ravikovitch's writing practice of poetic disintegration asks for the bounded body of self and nation to die so that poetic bodies of creative disruption can survive.

For Ravikovitch's Rachel, thus, death is the animating act of agency that commits the life of an instrumentalized body towards the ungovernable interactions of others' texts, yielding a new form of disintegrative writing that refuses to remain ensconced in normative notions of patriarchy, authorship or nationhood. Pushing stereotypical characterizations of femininity to their very edges, the poem shifts Rachel from a patriarchal symbol of national protection and serviceability into a metapoetic commentary on mortally vulnerable authorship and detached creation, such that feminine passivity unleashes and becomes a force of radical abandon that leaves familiar formulations of writing, death and agency behind.

Chapter Two

Decaying Fathers, Fraternal Scapegoats and Mimetic Relief: Sliman Mansour and “I, Ismail”¹⁵⁰



Figure 3- Sliman Mansour, *I Ismail*, 1997 and *Garden of Hope*, 2002.¹⁵¹

I. A Network of Decay

Sliman Mansour's 1997 series of life-size mud reliefs depict unsettling repetitions of Ismail's figure, his form cracked and distorted, hovering eerily in the very center of the large wooden panels that house him. An aesthetics of the uncanny comes to define the piece as a whole, in which, to begin with, the image's figure and background are not wholly distinguishable. Composed of the same fissured mud and clay, the only differentiation between them is that of surface protrusion. No lines distinguish ground from sky and in this visual space in which the rules of gravity appear loose at best, Ismail's suspension between various dimensions produces the effect of an upright tombstone housing a figure who is neither completely dead nor quite alive.

¹⁵⁰ Though the proper transliteration of the artist's name is Sulaymān Maṣṣūr, throughout this chapter I have elected to use the spelling most commonly found in English catalogues and online archives of his work, Sliman Mansour. The title of the piece in Arabic is “‘Anā ‘Ismā‘īl” which translates directly into “I, Ismail.”

¹⁵¹ Sliman Mansour, *I Ismail*, 1997, clay and mud on 6 wood panels, 6 x 78 ¾ x 31 ½ in and *Garden of Hope*, 2002, acrylic on clay and mud, 5 x 80 x 250 in. May 23-October 23, 2003, *Made in Palestine*, The Station Museum, Houston, TX. Accessed October, 30 2017. http://www.stationmuseum.com/Made_in_Palestine-Suleiman_Mansour/Made_in_Palestine-Suleiman_Mansour.htm

This quality of indistinction or indeterminability permeates the entire piece. Though named Ismail, the figures portrayed are curiously divested of personality or individual characteristics. Indeed, some are almost androgynous, even hermaphroditic, with protruding stomachs that evoke both pregnancy and the pot-bellies of corrupt leaders too attached to their status. Other panels privilege suggestive bulges in the groin, emphasizing the stereotypical emblem of masculinity. At the same time, the bodies of Ismail are concealed in baggy clothes whose various folds and creases provide the clearest distinction among them, ultimately revealing more about the clothing than the figures they enwrap. Hands, feet and faces are similarly ill-defined—mere protrusions indicating the laborious movement of swelling form rather than the delineation of formal boundaries. Ismail's faces push through the constricting weight of mud, scarred by the deep cracks that their thrusting seemingly caused. Deep set eyes offset noses with no nostrils (these figures seemingly cannot breathe), while their mouths are marked by the shadows of the gaps that separate upper from lower lips. It is the contrast between light and shadow caused by the depressions and protrusions of these topographic vistas, rather than the definition of identifying specificity, that produces the effect of Ismail's disquieting figure. The most unequivocal aspect of the piece, it follows from extended consideration, becomes the language of cracks that compose it—each cleft precisely its own combination of depth, width and orientation, yet all related to one another. One crack leads from and feeds off another, producing a web and network of decay that overtakes the figures themselves. This proliferation in turn recalls the repetition of figures made strange by their unification under one name—Ismail—and the singular yet indeterminable "I" who claims it. The uncanny aesthetics that pervade Mansour's piece thus oscillate continually between compulsive forms of reproduction and recursive appeals to ungraspable singularity.

"I, Ismail" recalls the opening sentence of Thomas Melville's *Moby Dick*, "Call me Ishmael," a directive that is as much an invitation as it is a demand. Called upon to refer to the narrator by the name of Ishmael for the course of his narration, whatever his real name might be, *Moby Dick's* reader is alerted to the plethora of other alter egos Ishmael might inhabit in alternative circumstances. "Ishmael" means "God hears," a name that in the Hebrew Bible attests to the divine protection of both outcasts and chosen people, following Hagar's initial flight into the desert and God's response to her suffering in Genesis 16. In the Muslim tradition, Ismā'īl means the same, but it references the pleas of Ibrāhīm and Sarah for a child that Allah hears (37:100); for both traditions, the name is premised on the procreative survival that God grants. Having already become the Pequod's sole survivor, Melville's narrator does not appeal to such divine salvation. In this inversion of biblical naming, rather than the act of designation performed by God or another biblical figure in regards to someone else, *Moby-Dick's* narrator invites the audience to name himself. Mansour's title presents a resonant act of self-naming, yet "I, Ismail" sounds a declaration more than a summons—an announcement of identity that names proliferating figures of survival in ongoing duress, even as it invokes the narrator's act of naming in *Moby-Dick* that frames his retrospective account of individual survival.¹⁵²

More crucially, the title, "I, Ismail," reclaims the Abrahamic narrative of Hājar/ Hagar and Ismā'īl/ Ishmael's exile and expulsion in the desert, told in secondary sources of the Qur'ān and Genesis 21.¹⁵³ The biblical version recounted in the Old Testament, as later sections of this chapter

¹⁵² For an informative account of *Moby-Dick* in relation to Holy Land travel literature and Ishmael as an exegetical guide see Ilana Pardes, *Melville's Bibles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); see also Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹⁵³ See Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands* (Albany: State University of New York press, 1990), 63-71 for its variations. The transliterations of these figures' names throughout the chapter will use Ibrāhīm, Hājar, Ismā'īl and

will detail, casts Abraham as the one who casts his firstborn son into exile along with his son's mother in a test of faith that prefigures the Binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. Of course, it also lays bare the divisions between Abraham's wives and sons in a tradition that bequeaths inheritance through the repudiation of one son over the other, divisions that portend the conflicts of nations to come. Revered as the ancestor of Arabs, Ismā'īl is believed to be the forefather of the Quraysh, the tribe of the prophet Muḥammad.¹⁵⁴ Yet Mansour ties the use of Ismail's name to contemporary circumstances. Read in context of the late 90's in Palestinian society, a period in which the full failure of the Oslo Accords and the continuing absence of Palestinian sovereignty loomed large, "I, Ismail" captures the parched stagnancy of national vision and public leadership that heightened popular frustration. This stasis materializes through the withered zombies that Mansour presents, forms whose name of Ismail overlays ancient and modern figures of patriarchy in a shared state of dehydrating inertia. The use of "I" in the title, moreover, foregrounds an identification with this state of desiccation and distortion, an ambivalent attachment to forms of self and their patriarchal models that orients this chapter's exploration of Mansour's decaying mud reliefs. As the following pages suggest, "I, Ismail" juxtaposes themes of land, identity and identification with their contingencies and distortions; submission to sacrifice with the enactment of self-sacrifice; religious and political father figures with their failure to ensure prosperous forms of national survival; an inability to fully distinguish life from death and vice versa; and, not least, the creative development of a tangible language of loss that unfolds through the material of contested land itself, expressions of disintegration that critically reflect surrounding conditions.

Exploring what possibilities for survival can be created when the concept of "the one who begets or redeems the many" is dismantled, I begin this chapter with a reading of Mansour's piece in its various exhibitions. Next, I turn to Mansour himself, presenting his artistic career and development as a seeming microcosm of the trajectory of Palestinian art as a whole, both of which have had to develop visual and creative languages from within the ongoing confines and realities of struggle and oppression. Following an overview of Mansour's career and his formative role within Palestinian art, I contextualize "I, Ismail" by turning towards the Qur'ānic and biblical narratives and textual traditions surrounding Ismā'īl/ Ishmael, Hājar/ Hagar, Ibrāhīm/ Abraham and Sarah. Tracing the various hermeneutical accounts of Ismā'īl/ Ishmael's near-death experience in the desert, I emphasize the ways in which idolatry entangles itself in the heart of these narratives and its implications. In this inquiry into Ismā'īl/ Ishmael's relationship to expulsion, idolatry and sacrifice in the Islamic and Jewish traditions and in "I, Ismail," I interrogate how particular models of collective survival have institutionalized forms of violence that are ritualized in forms of psyche, subjectivity and nationalism. The chapter's final section situates these discussions of survival and sacrifice with respect to René Girard's formulation of the scapegoat, reading the nuances of "I, Ismail" through the oppositional tension between threatening forms of replication and stabilizing modes of singularity that Girard theorizes.

Işhaq when referring to them in the Muslim tradition and Abraham, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac when discussing them in regards to the Jewish tradition. I maintain the spelling "Ismail" when discussing Mansour's piece because that is the spelling that is used for it in catalogues and in the press.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Tha'labī notes that 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the grandfather of Muḥammad, mentions him as his forefather. See al-Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ al-'anbiyā'* (Cairo 1954), 79–88, 91–5, 100–1, William M. Brinner, ed. and trans. (Leiden: Brill, 2002). See also Tottoli, Roberto, "Ishmael," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson, eds. Consulted online on 07 February 2018 <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_32559>

II. Still Standing

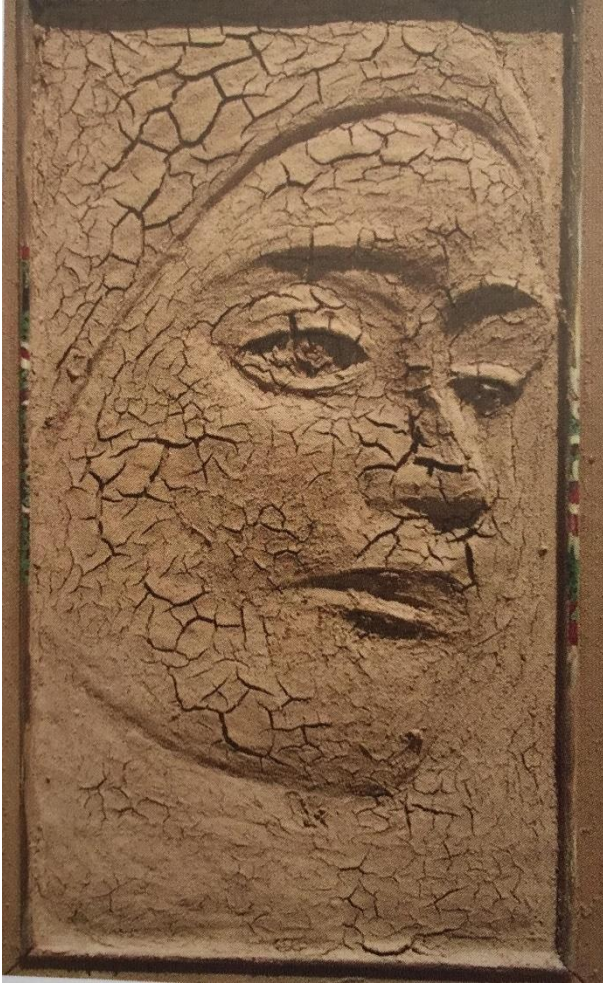


Figure 4- Sliman Mansour, *Hagar*, 1996

A face close-cropped by a mud-covered frame fixes its gaze beyond the borders that bound it, on some object or thought that is inaccessible to the viewer. Directed by the eyes' line of sight, the viewer is caught by the subtle remnants of color on the innermost frame—faded bits of red, green, black and white that stand in visual contrast to the saturated browns of the rest of the piece. Summoning the image of the Palestinian flag—a rectangle of three equal horizontal stripes in black, white and green, overlaid with a red triangle, these faint touches of color invoke the ethos of Pan-Arabism and pride in Arab heritage, not to mention nationalist aspirations. The Palestinian flag, like that of Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, are based on the Pan-Arab colors of black, white, green and red, each of which represents a particular Arab dynasty—black was the color of Muhammad's banner, his companions and the 'Abassid Caliphate, white was used by the Umayyad Caliphate, green represented the prophet's family and red the Khawarijis and Hashemites.¹⁵⁶ Yet these splotches of color adorning the frame simulate residues of destruction, indexing the

ruins of abandoned flags and their ideals of collective might and legacy. This gesture towards a flag's decomposition is indeed juxtaposed with Hagar's crumbling portrait, effectively calling into question the symbolic import of both. Hagar's features are overtaken by the cracks of mud that mimic lines of wrinkled skin, transforming her face into an abstract landscape of degeneration. All fissures, even her eyes are fractured, such that her vision towards that which lies beyond her frame is similarly split. Claustrophobically contained in a casing that is composed of the same material that she is, this portrait casts the matriarchal forbear of the Arab peoples as an icon of parched destitution who can escape neither the Abrahamic conditions of exile nor the political pretensions of nation-bearing that have enclosed her.

¹⁵⁵ Sliman Mansour, *Hagar*, 1996, mud on wood, 60 x 90 cm in *Ten Years in Mud*, 17. I will continue to use the same spelling of her name in the discussion of this piece, following what is used in the catalogue.

¹⁵⁶ The four colors are also said to derive from a verse by 14th century Iraqi poet Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Hillī (1278-1349): "بيضُ صنائِءِنا سودُ وقائعِنا خضرُ مراعينا مواضعينا"; "White are our acts, black our battles, green our fields, and red our swords." Pan-Arab colors were first combined in 1916 in the [flag of the Arab Revolt](#). See Elie Podeh, "The Symbolism of the Arab Flag in Modern Arab States: Between Commonality and Uniqueness," *Nations and Nationalism* 17 (2011): 421-5.

Mansour's use of land to mold the relief of Hagar's features complicates the customary mapping of national territory onto the female corpus, where the metaphoric representation of the nation as a woman conflates political control of land with the regulation of her body and the real policing of female reproduction. As, according to the standard model, the "motherland" is always in danger of violation by invading foreign armies, "man" is formulated as the warrior-hero in citizen guise who is invested with the mythological duty to safeguard the homeland. Constructions of women as the embodiment of the nation thus mark a continual disparity between the symbolic power of women's instrumentalization on the one hand and their inferior material socio-economic conditions on the other.¹⁵⁷ Generally this metaphor is used as a unificatory device of defense—the mobilization of an idealized female corpus that renders the woman as a figure of consolidation, the vehicle through which the nation's descendants are born and coordinated into its corresponding territory. Here, however, both woman and nation are decidedly disrupted. Indeed, the mud of the portrait's landscape has undergone a process of shrinkage as it has dried and its moisture has evaporated. Uneven rates of drying have created stresses in the mud, which has resulted in the labyrinth of cracks that marks the places where discrete portions of the earth have pulled away from each other. What remains is not a female body, not even the spaciousness with which to contemplate the nation's face. Rather, what remains is a shrinking land with interlacing lines of strain that signal its disjunctions: a riven national body composed of a territory in pieces and a matriarch in a cage.

Out of water for herself, her son, and their descendants, Hājar/Hagar's plight before God's intervention is allegorized here to depict the contemporary Palestinian existence of desiccating impasse, a predicament that no divine savior has emerged to solve. Yet, as in "I, Ismail," it is only the name contained in the title that links this portrait to Hagar. This imposition of verbal language and the narratives it entails indeed stands in contrast to the language of cracks in the piece which names it differently, marking it as an indeterminate face—distinct and affecting but unable to be discretely identified on its own. A tension persists between these two kinds of framing or specification: clear references to religious chronicles and their application to contemporary conditions within Palestine on the one hand and the piece's material language of mud and cracks that presents an alternative mode of temporality and differentiation on the other. Thus, rather than the arc of historical or narrative development, it is the time of drying and cracking that makes this face particular; rather than the name that designates the face to refer to Hagar, it is the web of cracks that calls upon the viewer to get to know the terrain of the face intimately without revealing who it is. This second mode of knowing that Mansour presents poses a new way of relating to Palestine, an alternative mode of building kinship structures and imagining political associations. Yet it is significant that Mansour places these types of designation together, ensuring that it is the interplay between them that creates the particular sensibility of his piece.

"Hagar" marks Mansour's return to figural forms after his foray into complete abstraction in the late 80's and early 90's, when he first began experimenting with mud. It also serves as the initiation to his series of Ismails, signifying a moment of transition in his career, in which his experimentation with alternative materials merges with aspects of his earlier work. Held to be a leading artist of the post-Nakba generation, Mansour is one of several pioneers in Palestinian abstract art whose diverse artistic production and cultural activism has made a lasting impact on the Palestinian art scene. The fourth son of six children, Mansour was born in Bir Zeit, a town north of Ramallah, in 1947. After the early death of his father, his mother moved the family to Jerusalem, where Mansour has lived ever since. Mansour attended the Evangelical Lutheran School and began

¹⁵⁷ See Spivak 1989, "Women in Difference"; Nash 1993, "Remapping and Renaming"; and Peterson 1994, "Gendered Nationalism."

to study with the German artist Felix Thesis, who became a major influence on his artistic development, introducing him to European and especially Renaissance era art. Upon graduation, Mansour applied and was accepted to the Art Institute of Chicago yet was forced to change plans after the 1967 Six Day War broke out and the Israeli army occupied the West Bank and Gaza. Concerned that the military occupation would prevent him from returning home, Mansour chose to remain in Jerusalem, ultimately attending the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in West Jerusalem where he studied European, American and Israeli art in addition to Arab and Islamic art and culture. For the next three years, Mansour commuted between East and West Jerusalem—the Palestinian and Israeli sides of the city.

This daily traversal of borders and witnessing of divisions became an early influence on his work, perhaps most notably in his famed 1973 painting “Camel of Hardships [جمال المحامل].” Depicting an aged Arab porter weighed down by the burden that he bears on his back—an almond-shaped eye that contains an image of Jerusalem with the Dome of the Rock centered as its pupil—this painting was the catalyst for Mansour’s subsequent and lasting popularity in local and international circles. Indeed, “Camel of Hardships” was widely reproduced and became an icon of the Palestinian experience—as Kamal Boullata notes, “color reproductions of it came to adorn the walls of modest homes, shops and offices.”¹⁵⁸ Its wide appeal is due to a variety of factors: with the porter as the painting’s protagonist, it emphasizes the role of the working class in bearing the weight of national struggle; it unites internal and external forms of displacement in a shared visual representation of exile, as both Palestinians inside and outside of Palestine shoulder the loss of Jerusalem; and, not least, it installs Jerusalem, the east side of which had been under Arab/ Jordanian rule until 1967, as a new symbol of the occupied Palestinian homeland, simultaneously a weight of loss that must be born and one’s most prized possession (a pairing that the porter’s eye-shaped burden suggests, following the Arabic idiom “the pupil of one’s eye,” which is roughly equivalent to the English saying “the apple of one’s eye”).¹⁵⁹



Sliman Mansour, *Jamal al-Mahamel* [*Camel of Hardships*], 1973, oil on canvas, 27.5 x 41 in., Mitwasi, *Sliman Mansour*, 48.

The 1970’s was a period in which Mansour intertwined activist work with enterprises to animate Palestine’s cultural institutions and reclaim the heritage of traditional Palestinian crafts while further developing his own visual language, establishing a set of common images that emblemized the Palestinian struggle.¹⁶⁰ Focusing on the Arab, Islamic, Christian, and folk roots of Palestinian

¹⁵⁸ Kamal Boullata, *Istihdār al-Makān* (Tunis: Al-Munazzamah al-‘Arabīyah lil-Tarbiyyah, 2000), 174.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.; Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 70-2; Faten Nastas Mitwasi, *Sliman Mansour: Steadfastness and Creativity* (Fulda, Germany: Fuldaer Verlagsanstalt, 2008), 24; “Al-fannān Sliman Mansour: Sirah dhātiyyah [The Artist Sliman Mansour: A Biography],” <<http://masterspalestinianart.com/index.php/ar-aa/2016-10-16-10-30-39/2016-10-18-17-22-30>> consulted 5/11/2018.

¹⁶⁰ See “Sliman Mansour: A Biography,” <<http://masterspalestinianart.com/index.php/ar-aa/2016-10-16-10-30-39/2016-10-18-17-22-30>>, which summarizes the contribution of his visual language to Palestinian art as follows (translation mine): “Mansour contributed since the 1970s to the establishment of visual symbols for the Palestinian struggle and helped to document the stages and transformations they have undergone over the years. Some common

culture, Mansour researched indigenous forms of embroidery, ceramics, architecture and archaeological sites and directed his efforts, as Gannit Ankori notes, “to salvage indigenous Palestinian culture from being destroyed, forgotten or appropriated by others; and to provide young artists with native ‘models’ that might become the components of their contemporary art.”¹⁶¹ A 1972 exhibit of the late artist Isam Badr in Jerusalem served as the opportunity for Palestinian artists from the West Bank and Gaza to encounter each other for the first time in many years—following the 1967 war, the Occupied Territories were declared closed military zones until 1972, when residents of the territories were finally able to move between Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.¹⁶² The artists continued to meet regularly, ultimately founding The League of Palestinian Artists in the Occupied Territories, which persisted in organizing exhibits through Palestine despite the Israeli Military Commander’s disapproval, censorship decrees and confiscation of artworks it deemed inappropriate. Mansour was elected chairman of the *Rābiṭah* (the League) for much of the 1980’s, during which time he oversaw its expansion and the development of new branches in Gaza, Hebron, al-Bireh and Ramallah.¹⁶³ Mansour was instrumental in securing the first permanent gallery space in Ramallah in 1979, along with colleagues Nabil Anani and Isam Badr. Called Gallery 79, it housed Mansour’s first solo exhibit there in 1980, only to have it summarily raided and closed by the Israeli army a few hours after the opening. “We were summoned by the occupation authorities, I, Nabil Anani, and Issam Badr, and they read us orders regarding Israeli taboos in relation to Palestinian art, including the prohibition of painting the colors of the Palestinian flag,” Mansour recounts. “We were also prevented from holding any exhibitions without a permit from the occupation censors, which invoked a law dating back to the era of the British Mandate over Palestine.”¹⁶⁴ His persistence in defying these orders resulted in his repeated arrest and imprisonment in the course of the early ‘80s. During this period, Mansour worked closely with members of the Israeli Communist Party and Israeli artists who he knew through his studies at Bezalel to coordinate solidarity visits to Palestinian artists in prison. These actions led to the organization of joint Palestinian-Israeli art exhibits titled “No to the Occupation,” which in turn resulted in international recognition for many of the previously unknown Palestinian artists. In these activities, Mansour played a central role, serving as the point of contact and spokesman for Palestinian artists both locally and internationally.¹⁶⁵ Continuing his work to develop Palestinian arts infrastructure, Mansour co-founded the al-Wasiti Art Center in East Jerusalem in 1992, designed to be a permanent gallery space for the League of Palestinian Artists, and served as its director until 1996. The Center was forced to shut down in 2004, following several Israeli raids and confiscations of computers and other equipment.¹⁶⁶

features of Mansour’s work in this period include the orange tree (considered to be a symbol of the 1948 Nakba), the olive tree, traditional patterns of Palestinian embroidery, daily village life, and the figure of the Palestinian woman who appears in many of his works.”

¹⁶¹ Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, 68. Mansour co-authored the book “Popular Palestinian Clothing” and “The Palestinian Embroidery Guide” issued by the Family Rehabilitation Society in Al-Bireh, and was a member of its board of directors.

¹⁶² For an overview of the 50+ year occupation, see Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁶³ Mitwasi, *Sliman Mansour*, 14.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in “Sliman Mansour: A Biography.”

¹⁶⁵ Samia Halaby, *Liberation Art of Palestine: Palestinian Painting and Sculpture in the Second Half of the 20th Century* (HTTB Pub., 2001), 32.

¹⁶⁶ Additionally, Mansour is a member of the Founding Board of Directors of the International Academy of Art Palestine, established in 2004 in Ramallah. He has taught at numerous cultural institutions and universities throughout the West Bank, including Al-Quds University in East Jerusalem. Also a professional cartoonist, Mansour published from 1981 to 1993 in Al-Fajr English Weekly, a Palestinian English weekly formerly published in

Mansour's artistic career has spanned multiple phases, transitioning from early classically realist portraits to figurative paintings that employed expressionist and symbolist techniques to craft visual narratives of Palestinian consciousness, portrayals of the Palestinian experience that vacillated between motifs of entrenchment and dislocation.¹⁶⁷ In paintings like "Salma," "Woman with a Dove" and "Olive Picking," Mansour translated traditional stories, customs and popular poetry into stylized images that won public acclaim and often became national icons.¹⁶⁸ Portraying *fellaheen* (peasant farmers) and scenes from traditional village life, these works combined modern and pre-modern sensibilities, emphasizing the entanglement of ancient and contemporary models. As Kamal Boullata emphasizes, "His figurative paintings were dominated by stylized figures and oversized bodies whose flexed muscles and wide shoulders emulated Canaanite sculptural models that the artist dressed in local peasant attire. In so doing, he sought to allude to continuity between the historical past and the Arab national present."¹⁶⁹ This aesthetic incorporation of a wide array of historical, cultural and religious sources is a constant in Mansour's work and indeed leads towards works of fragmentation and greater abstraction in the early 1980's. In a series of paintings depicting Jerusalem, Mansour references the Orientalist North African images that Paul Klee produced in the early 20th century, whilst incorporating "a Mamluk title with Arabic calligraphy, additional fragmented segments of Arab architecture,... [evoking] the icons of the Jerusalem school painter Nicola Sayigh, the Islamic decorations of Jamil Badran, the Greek Orthodox village church of Bir Zeit where Mansour's maternal grandfather served as priest and numerous other popular and indigenous artefacts..."¹⁷⁰ Displacing Klee's orientalist aesthetics in this amalgamation of diverse materials, Mansour cultivates his own language of disintegrating collection: forms of gathering and cohesion that can only coexist in disjointed states, prefiguring his work with mud and cracks in the coming years.

In 1987, Mansour and fellow artists Vera Tamari, Tayseer Barakat and Nabil Anani founded the "New Visions Group" in response to the events of the first Intifada (1987-93). Searching for local media of expression to replace western materials and techniques, members of "New Visions" boycotted all Israeli imported art supplies and began to work with the elements that surrounded

Jerusalem. He is the co-author of the 1998 publication, *Both Sides of Peace: Israeli and Palestinian Political Poster Art*.

¹⁶⁷ Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, 69. Ankori notes that this oscillation continued a dialectic established by two other Palestinian artists whose work informed Mansour's, Ibrahim Ghannam and Ismail Shammout.

¹⁶⁸ Mitwasi, *Sliman Mansour*, 22.

¹⁶⁹ Boullata, *Istihdār al-Makān*, 176.

¹⁷⁰ Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, 79.



Sliman Mansour, *Woman with a Dove*, 1984, oil on canvas, 43 x 31 in. Mitwasi, *Sliman Mansour*, 54.



Sliman Mansour, *Jerusalem*, 1981, tempera on wood. Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, 79.



Paul Klee, *Hammamet with its Mosque*, watercolor and graphite on paper mounted on cardboard, 9 3/8 x 8 3/4. The Berggruen Klee Collection.

them, creating innovative pieces with henna, straw, clay, coffee and natural dyes.¹⁷¹ Rather than the visual representation of the struggle in the social realist style—canvases of stone-throwing adolescents and burning tires that live television coverage rendered less compelling—these artists cultivated a new aesthetics from within the substance of place itself. In their work, thus, local media serve as an index of the materiality of Palestinian place and history amidst its constant threat of conquest and further loss. Shifting from the representative towards the performative mode, the New Visions’ artistic production assumes the status of an inherently political act, a reorientation that Mansour has recalled in terms of aesthetic liberation and individuation.¹⁷² Rather than the necessity to directly represent the struggle or the aspects of Palestinian culture and history in danger of disappearance, thus, the New Vision’s art-making articulates itself as an individual and processual practice of doing, one whose objects and images generate new ontological relationships between artist, materials and media used, created object and audience. In this shift, art production becomes an action whose commitment to a cause is implicit in the practice of engaging with surrounding material, yielding a particular form of agency, one that will be addressed in greater detail at this section’s close.¹⁷³



Figure 5- Sliman Mansour, *Archeological Site*, 1995

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Since this period, Mansour has continued to produce distinctive work in which he layers mud, natural pigments and found objects to mold three dimensional and relief forms, exploring the plastic potential of his material in pieces that have veered into non-figurative and non-narrative (literal) terrain. His cultivation of a local and individual mode of visual expression to present nuanced embodiments of Palestinian identity plays out on landscapes that he builds himself, in sheaths of sculpted mud that privilege surface tactility and richness of depth over explicit iconography. In his 1995 piece “*Archeological Site*,” pictured above, rich hues of pigmented earth give way to a diverse array of textures that issue from

Mansour’s collection of indeterminate archaeological and architectural elements. The repeating form of the square plots that both border and constitute the piece evoke the history of colonial and

¹⁷¹ See “Sliman Mansour: A Biography”; Tina Sherwell, *Sliman Mansour: Ten Years in Mud*, Khalil Tuma, trans. (Jerusalem: al-Wasiti Culture Center, 2000, Exhibition catalogue), 42; Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, 80.

¹⁷² Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, 80; Sherwell, *Ten Years in Mud*, 42.

¹⁷³ There is a wide literature regarding new conceptualizations of art and imagery as materially rooted processes that, though bound in the social practices and relations in which they are situated, are themselves socially productive as well. See for example Barrett and Bolt, *Carnal Knowledge*, 2013; Alberti et. al., *Archaeology after Interpretation*, 2013; Back Danielsson et. al., *Encountering Imagery: Materialities, Perceptions, Relations*, 2012; and Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 1994.

¹⁷⁴ Sliman Mansour, *Archeological Site*, 1995, mud and mixed media on wood, 43 x 47 in. Sherwell, *Ten Years in Mud*, 20.

contemporary archaeological exploration in Palestine, which has emphasized biblical sites in order to connect the present Israeli state to the ancient Israelites (eliding the Jews' diasporic history and the presence of Muslim, Arab and other civilizations). Yet, these plots also infuse his contemporary work with the presence of bygone civilizations who inhabited the region over the past millennia, leaving their own impressions in the depths of the soil.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, as the viewer's eye traverses the cyan rises and peaks of the pigmented earth in the central square, it hones in on the coexisting assortment of buried and revealed artifacts and decomposed objects' impressions: an old house key slightly above center, a symbol of Palestinian claims to homes destroyed or confiscated in the Nakba, leads on to diamond and triangular imprints, bits of screen and dotted punctures, all reminiscent of various civilizations' building components. The intense blue pigments that highlight this conjunction of traces from ancient and contemporary peoples are offset by the comparative dullness of the orderly square plots to the sides, seeming attempts to order and compose the land's heterogenous history. Mansour's tactile engagement with the mud of his surroundings becomes thus a material meditation on history making, one that rewrites hegemonic narratives via the molding of terrain. As an archaeological site, then, the recovery of history here is the production of a new place formed from the contested land that Mansour inhabits, configured via the topographic interplay of color and texture that Mansour mobilizes.

Mansour's interest in the plastic capacity of mud issues from his own family's history. His maternal grandmother, Salma, was a potter and mud artist in her own right and Mansour adopted many of the techniques that she used to build, among other things, bee hives, chicken coops, and *jirār* (earthenware jars) from a mixture of mud and straw, which he acquired from his observations of her as a child. His works in mud have undergone several phases: the abstract landscapes of mud in the early 90's gave way to figural forms fissured by the temporality of drying in the mid to late 90's. As in "Hagar" and "I, Ismail," during this period, his work with mud evolved into a prolonged consideration of material temporality, impermanence and transformation. Commenting on this shift, Mansour notes in a recent interview,

At the beginning, when the mud would crack, I mended the cracks and would work hard on them. Yet later, I began to see the beauty of the cracks, so much so that they themselves became the main subject matter - cracks, especially after Oslo and the dissection of Palestine's map into areas A B and C, map onto each other. I began drawing natural scenes, but instead of drawing the land, I painted *with* the land – with the actual earth. I put together on the one hand conceptual thought, time and the Intifada. I believe that art, as compared to other cultural fields, succeeded in this way in [both] simulating the Intifada and reflecting its image.¹⁷⁶

The aesthetic attributes of cracking that become the focus of his work oppose classical and idealist conceptions of beauty as the embodiment of perfectly coordinated proportions and unified coherence, indeed exposing the repressive violence of beauty's normalizing or 'smoothing' tendencies. Mansour's emphasis on the cracks themselves rather than the fragments they entail is notable—he comments that they mark the disjunctions that emerge through time, mirroring the Oslo Accord's effects and its aftermath in Palestine. Rather than seeking a synthesis of pieces or a

¹⁷⁵ For a detailed history of archaeological exploration in Palestine and its place in the Israeli historical imagination, see Nadia Abu El Haj, *Facts on the Ground*, 2001 and Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape*, 2002.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in "Ḥiwār ma' Sliman Mansour [A Conversation with Sliman Mansour]," translation mine, <<http://masterspalestinianart.com/index.php/ar-aa/2016-10-16-10-30-39/2016-10-18-17-24-20>>, consulted 5/11/18.

transfer of scale towards the singularity of the shard, then, this aesthetic is underpinned by the drive to expose relational networks of discontinuities, which, as this chapter will detail in the following section, disrupt normative notions of life, death, patriarchy and agency.

Mansour made several discrete versions of “I, Ismail” and each rendition has been exhibited. The first was shown at the Seventh Cairo Biennale in 1998, for which he won the Nile Award, as well as in the 2000 retrospective of Mansour’s later work, “Ten Years in Mud.” In this installation, a mud bas-relief of Ismail on an old wooden door is laid on the ground and encircled with stones, emphasizing the coffin-like appearance of the board on which the drying body of Ismail lies.

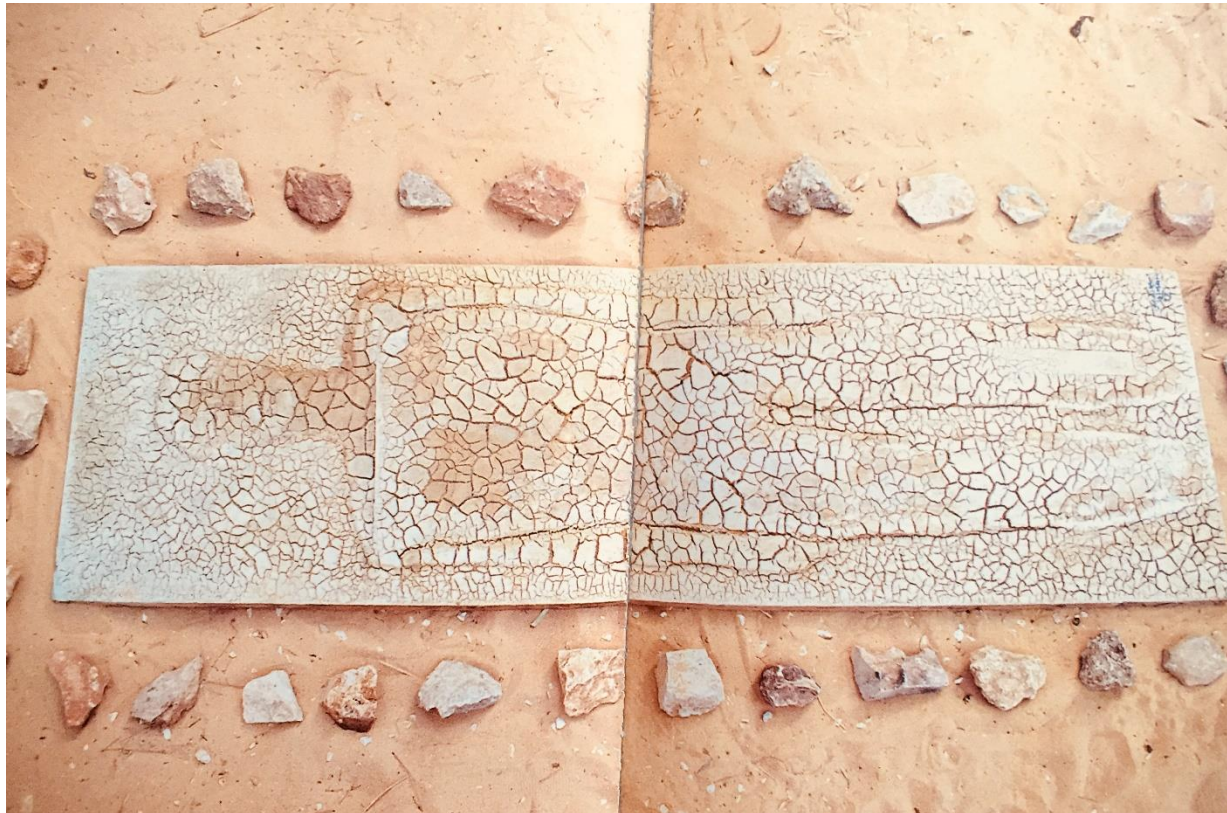


Figure 6- Sliman Mansour, *I Ismail*, 1997-8 ¹⁷⁷

In her overview of Mansour’s career, Gannit Ankori reports that this panel was the first to be completed, followed by “a dozen additional mud figures, all painstakingly created by the artist in his own image.” In a later version popularized in the 2003 travelling exhibit “Made in Palestine,” examined in this chapter’s introduction, six panels depicting Ismail in mud-relief stand upright as he is suspended in the middle of them, simultaneously buoyant and earth-ridden. Directly below the panels lies another of Mansour’s pieces entitled “Garden of Hope,” which consists of a 7’ x 21’ slab of mud and clay, painted with an evenly stenciled pattern of roses in acrylic red. Roses are commonly used symbols for martyrs and here stand for the two thousand civilian Palestinians killed

¹⁷⁷ Sliman Mansour, *I Ismail*, 1997-8, mud on wood, 75 x 94 in. and stones from Tina Sherwell, *Ten Years in Mud*, 14-5.

during the Al-Aqsa Intifada.¹⁷⁸ In their stenciled pattern, moreover, the roses' status as an indistinguishable repetition is heightened, echoing the iterations of Ismail's six panels and intensifying the oscillation between reproduction and singularity that orients Mansour's perspective on sacrifice and victimhood in its ancient and contemporary manifestations. Linking all versions in the series is the slippage between life and death that undergirds each figure of Ismail. His fissured forms and obscure faces indeed reveal how life under occupation with decaying leadership approaches death and how death in turn becomes an alternative source for a new form of life.

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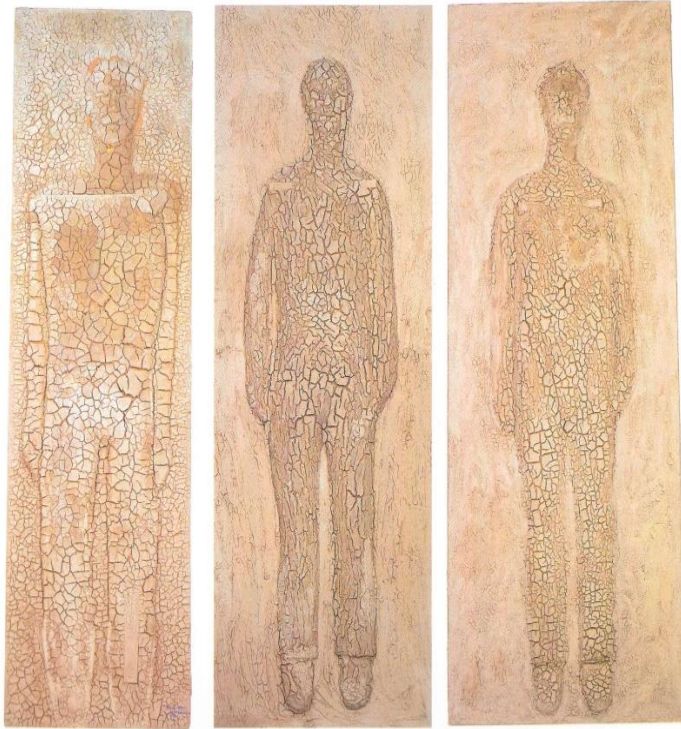


Figure 7- Sliman Mansour, *I Ismail*, 1997

Are these duplicate figures in the artist's image, as Ankori declares and the title "I, Ismail" would seem to suggest? The first versions exhibited (figures 6 and 7) are the most two-dimensional, presenting forms that are the closest to death and decay with the least identifying features. A close look at the six standing panels in figure 1, however, show a progression of Ismails which play with the notion of development—as if, from right to left, each successive Ismail is revealed in more detailed, or higher-contrast relief. Yet the piece remains ambiguous as this evolution of detail consistently breaks down, causing viewers to critically examine the status of the "I" in the title. Thus, rather than confirming a biographically-based and untroubled identification between the artist and figures portrayed, the "I" intercedes. On the one hand, the "I" designates precisely "not I"—not the source of the utterance/ title, but rather

her/his qualification as Ismail. The "I" is immediately mediated by the name assigned and all of the contexts that this name evokes. Moreover, this "I"-as-Ismail is visually amorphous, as if unable to clearly define itself, contradicting how the "I" would normally be apprehended as the clear deictic origin of an assertion. Rather than a forceful marker of self, then, the title "I, Ismail" discloses an identification with a crippled or weakened form of "I," one whose vulnerable indeterminateness allows for its endurance in multiple permutations. The "I" in "I, Ismail" is an I who survives, albeit in cracked and interrupted form.

This simultaneously attenuated and abiding "I" references forms of self in contemporary Palestinian life as well as formative patriarchal figures, both of which become overtaken by their

¹⁷⁸ K. Luisa Gandolfo, "Representations of Conflict: Images of War, Resistance and Identity in Palestinian Art," *Radical History Review* 106 (Winter 2010): 47 and Attila Kovacs, "Martyrdom and Visual Representations of the Palestinian Islamic Movements," *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 9.2 (2010): 182.

¹⁷⁹ Sliman Mansour, *I Ismail*, 1997, mud on wood, 75 x 31 in. from Tina Sherwell, *Ten Years in Mud*, 18.

material disintegration in mud. As Mansour writes in his artist statement to the exhibit “Ten Years of Mud,”

I cover my objects with layers of mud, like masks that separate them from reality until they lose their dominant presence and are overwhelmed by earth and its dry, cracked texture which becomes the central and prevailing image. They become emblems of decay, gazing with mud and glass eyes into eternity, waiting their ultimate return into earth.¹⁸⁰

In the same interview, Mansour continues, “It is true that the exhibition ‘I, Ismail,’ for example, symbolizes the rot, collapse and death of the Arab man who stands like an idol but remains standing. The mud looks fragile, but when I work on it, I strengthen it so that it appears to be solid [holding together] but also fractured.”¹⁸¹ In Mansour’s explanation, the weakened “I” of “I, Ismail” who subsists by means of its attenuation parallels the objects whose dominant presences are overtaken by their enclosure and shrouding in mud. These masked objects shift into figures of anticipation who continue to wait for their ultimate decomposition, a disintegration that is also a return. This entanglement of diminishment or decay with the possibility of survival thus links the “I” of Mansour’s title, the material “emblems of decay” that he crafts and the interpretation that he offers of the Arab man as a dying yet reinforced idol. As he emphasizes, his enshrouded figures whose cracked casings surpass their cores appear more fragile than they actually are, having been consolidated through the work of Mansour’s hands. In this sense, the collapsing Arab man is able to remain standing like an idol—indeed, his cracks have been augmented.

Idols and idolatry are thorny terms to claim in the context of Palestine and Israel. All three Abrahamic religions prohibit the worship of any creature or object as though they were God, as laid out in the second commandment:

You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall make no carved likeness and no image of what is in the heavens above or what is on the earth beneath or what is in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not bow down to them and you shall not worship them, for I am the Lord Your God, a jealous God, reckoning the crime of fathers with sons, with the third generation and with the fourth, for My foes, and doing kindness to the thousandth generation for My friends and for those who keep My commands (Exodus 20:3-6).¹⁸²

The Hebrew Bible yokes the injunction against graven images of God to His jealousy and prolonged vengeance, presenting an ethic of reprisal that holds sons responsible for their fathers’ actions. This might seem to victimize sons for their fathers’ sins—yet, perhaps unexpectedly, this culpability confers upon them a wider berth of agency. In Islam, idolatry is considered to be an expression of *shirk* (literally, “attributing partners to God”), which is often translated as polytheism; or of *kufr*

¹⁸⁰ *Ten Years in Mud*, 38.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2004), 428. The division of the commandments varies according to religion and sect—the Jewish tradition varies in its division of verses from the Protestant version, which differs from the Lutheran, Anglican and Roman Catholic organization of the commandments. See Joseph P. Hester, *The Ten Commandments: A Handbook of Religious, Legal, Social Issues* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2003), 13-20. The prohibition against idolatry is established in Exodus 20:3–6, Deuteronomy 4:12–19 and 5:6–9, and Leviticus 26:1; emphasized in the episode of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32; and appears in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 10:20-21.

(“disbelief”).¹⁸³ Ibrāhīm (Abraham), regarded as the first Muslim prophet, is recognized to be the first Muslim opponent of idolatry and serves as Muḥammad’s model—indeed, one of Muḥammad’s first acts after the conquest of Mecca (10/ 632) was to destroy and remove hundreds of idols from the Ka’ba, just as Ibrāhīm had done.¹⁸⁴ All three religions of the book position idolatry in direct opposition to monotheist precepts, just as, in the Christian tradition, the idol is the bad image or false representation of an object or figure of religious veneration that contrasts with the good icon, its proper image. Merely base matter, idols embody poor and delusory replications of a transcendent God whose worshippers—the idolaters—are too ignorant to distinguish between. Indeed, as both W.J.T. Mitchell and Jamal Elias emphasize, idolatry is most often mobilized to distinguish a cultural other.¹⁸⁵ Despite Islam’s extreme iconoclasm, medieval European Christians, for instance, viewed Muslims as polytheistic idolaters just as “...al-Qaeda’s attack on the World Trade Center was clearly aimed at an iconic monument that they regarded as a symbol of Western idolatry.”¹⁸⁶ Yet, for all that, Mansour’s characterization of “I, Ismail” as an embodiment of the dying Arab man who maintains his stance as an idol lays an unexpected claim to the concept.

III. Graven Images and Tests of Faith

As its defining and oppositional other, idolatry lies at the heart of monotheism and, more significantly for this chapter’s discussion, the Ibrāhīm, Hājar and Ismā’īl saga.¹⁸⁷ Though the narrative of Hājar, Sarah, Ismā’īl and Ishāq does not occur in the Qur’ān itself (indeed, neither Hājar nor Sarah are mentioned by name even once in the Qur’ānic text), it appears widely in Islamic exegetical literature. All versions of the story shift Hājar and Ismā’īl from a biblical to an Arabian context, linking their trajectories with qur’ānic descriptions of Ibrāhīm in Mecca.¹⁸⁸ Following the paradigmatic Ibn ‘Abbās version, after Sarah becomes jealous of Hājar due to the birth of Ismā’īl, Ibrāhīm personally takes them both to Mecca and leaves them with only one skin of water before returning to Syria. Hājar initially follows him to protest, but after ascertaining that God has instructed him to leave them there, she is satisfied. Once their water runs out, Hājar cannot bear to

¹⁸³ As Jamal J. Elias notes, “The Quranic terms more accurately translated as “idol”—*ṣanam* (pl. *aṣnam*) and *wathan* (pl. *awthan*)—are normally not used to refer to the idols of the Meccan environment of Muhammad’s time, but to those of a bygone era, such as the time of Abraham and the story of Moses delivering the Israelites from Egypt.” Idol worship and its forbiddance takes many perspectives in the Quran. See among others 6:19, 10:18, 16:20-1, 18:42-4, and 18:102. Jamal J. Elias, *Aisha’s Cushion: Religious Art, Perception and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 101-2.

¹⁸⁴ See Heribert Busse, “Abraham”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 07 February 2018 <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0165>

¹⁸⁵ Elias, *Aisha’s Cushion*, 44. See also “Idolatry: Nietzsche, Blake, Poussin,” chapter four of W.J.T. Mitchell’s *Seeing Through Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012): “When race becomes an idol, it demands human sacrifice, murder, and genocide. Ethnic cleansing, justified by the imputation of idolatry, is the washing machine of racial purity... But idolatry is clearly the most virulent form of iconic power and affect. Idols are images to kill and die for. They provide the objects in which holy war and race war converge” (149).

¹⁸⁶ Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race*, 150. See also Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

¹⁸⁷ See Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, 63-71 for its variations.

¹⁸⁸ Reuven Firestone, “Patriarchy, Primogeniture and Polemic in the Exegetical Traditions of Judaism and Islam” in *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange*, Natalie B. Dohrmann and David Stern, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 118.

see her son die and in desperation she climbs the nearby hills of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa to search for more water and runs between them seven times, thus setting the precedent for the “running ritual” (sa’y) of the ḥajj, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. In some versions of the narrative, Hājar hears the angel Gabriel scratching the ground with the tip of his wing, while in other versions, Ismā’il scratches the ground with his heel and water gushes forth (*tanfajir*). This spring is now known as the famous Zamzam Well, a site that is visited by millions of pilgrims each year to drink from the miraculous water from God that saved Ismā’il and his mother. According to tradition and recounted in various versions of this Meccan sequence, ‘Ibrāhīm and Ismā’il rebuilt the House of God (*bayt Allah*), originally established by Adam, close to the site of the well. Known as the Ka’ba, Muslims around the world orient themselves towards it in prayer. Although the Ka’ba was established by ‘Ibrāhīm and his son as a bedrock of monotheism, over time the Ka’ba became the opposite—idols were installed and worshipped inside and around it until Muḥammad’s actions restored its status.¹⁸⁹

Baghdadi scholar Hishām Ibn al-Kalbī (737-819), author of *The Book of Idols* (*Kitāb al-Aṣnām*), a text that describes and decries the gods and rites of pre-Islamic Arabs, begins his account by noting that the worship of images and stones is indeed linked to ‘Ibrāhīm and Ismā’il’s progeny:

I was informed by my father and others, and I personally checked and ascertained their report, that when Ishmael, the son of Abraham, settled in Mecca, he begot many children. [Their descendants] multiplied so much that they crowded the city and supplanted its original inhabitants, the Amalekites. Later on, Mecca became overcrowded with them, and dissension and strife arose among them, causing them to fight among themselves and consequently be dispersed throughout the land where they roamed seeking a livelihood. The reason which led them to the worship of images and stones was the following: No one left Mecca without carrying away with him a stone from the stones of the Sacred House (al-Haram) as a token of reverence to it, and as a sign of deep affection to Mecca. Wherever he settled he would erect that stone and circumambulate it in the same manner he used to circumambulate the Ka'bah [before his departure from Mecca], seeking thereby its blessing and affirming his deep affection for the Sacred House...In time this led them to the worship of whatever took their fancy, and caused them to forget their former worship. They exchanged the religion of Abraham and Ishmael for another. Consequently, they took to the worship of images, becoming like the nations before them.¹⁹⁰

Ibn al-Kalbī’s account emphasizes that the lineage through which monotheism is established is also the lineage through which idolatry abounds. The advent of idolatry in the Arabian Peninsula is moreover entangled in conditions of dispersal, disintegration and attachment to homeland, prefiguring the internal and external exiles of Mansour and his contemporaries in 20th century Palestine and beyond. The narrative that Ismā’il’s warring descendants, when forced to find a new place of settlement, each took a stone of the Ka’ba with them in order to maintain their identities and connections to it speaks of the relationship between territory, landmarks and idolism.

¹⁸⁹ See Gerald R. Hawting, “Ka’ba”, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 04 April 2018
<http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00102>

¹⁹⁰ Hishām Ibn al-Kalbī, *The Book of Idols*, Nabith Amin Faris, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 4. Note that other accounts of idolatry’s introduction into the Arabian Peninsula link it to ‘Amr ibn Luḥayy, who lived in Mecca three centuries before Muḥammad and travelled to Syria for medical assistance, where he encountered Syrian inhabitants worshipping idols. He reportedly asked for and received one himself, returned to Mecca and erected it inside the Ka’ba (ibid., 7).

In his essay “Holy Landscape,” W.J.T. Mitchell theorizes this geographical exultation explicitly, noting that although landscape and its revered sites might be assumed to be free from idolatry and the figurative representations associated with it, it can easily become an idol in its own right, “...not just in some modern, extended sense—as ideology, for instance—but in the very terms by which idolatry is defined in the Bible—a false god that displaces the true one with a material image, and leads inexorably to the violation of every commandment, not just the prohibition on idolatry.”¹⁹¹ Mitchell defines holy landscape, especially in the context of Palestine and Israel, as a particular kind of material representation, a dynamic image that has a life of its own. Rather than presenting a carved likeness of God, the land that is associated with Him acts a metonymic substitution for Him, concretizing the place where He has appeared and may appear again.¹⁹² Mitchell’s analysis refers primarily to the ways in which Jewish religious extremists have naturalized the Israeli state’s expansionist policies at the Palestinians’ expense. Nevertheless, the distinction between the Zionist idolism of “biblical Israel” that Mitchell lays bare and Mansour’s privileging of Palestinian land in his piece is illuminating. Indeed, Mansour’s aesthetic investment in the Palestinian land can be read as a counterpoint to the territorial idol-worship of pro-Occupation forces: it is the occupied and contested land of Palestine that is the medium through which the idols of collapsing Arab masculinity continue to stand. Mansour does not seek to smash these idols. Rather, he reinforces them, allowing their cracks to remain their identifying features even as the figures remain upright and at attention.

Mansour’s curious presentation of the replicating figures of Ismail as idols of dying Arab masculinity who are maintained through the dismemberment of land—idols who are to be preserved rather than destroyed—would seem to echo the non-violent attack of Friedrich Nietzsche on the “idols” of hollow beliefs in his 1888 polemic *Twilight of the Idols*. A thoroughgoing crusade against all philosophical values and unexamined prejudices uncritically accepted by the masses in order to subvert established hierarchies, Nietzsche prefaces his work with the following words:

This little essay is a great declaration of war; and regarding the sounding out of idols, this time they are not just idols of the age, but eternal idols, which are here touched with a hammer as with a tuning fork: there are no idols that are older, more assured, more puffed-up — and none more hollow. That does not prevent them from being those in which people have the most faith; nor does one ever say “idol,” especially not in the most distinguished instance.¹⁹³

As Mitchell notes in “Holy Landscape,” Nietzsche opts for an alternative approach than that of the iconoclastic eradication of false gods or convictions. The eternal idols are to be sounded out rather than smashed, “touched with a hammer as a tuning fork.” This aesthetic technique is seemingly more effective in instituting the reevaluation of societal norms than the crude pummeling of the hammer. The precise touch that turns a tool of wreckage into an instrument of music is, for Nietzsche, a recuperative means of inquiry: “Another mode of convalescence...is sounding out idols...to pose questions with a hammer, and sometimes to hear as a reply that famous hollow sound that can only come from bloated entrails.”¹⁹⁴ The questions that the hammer asks as it finds

¹⁹¹ “Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine and the American Wilderness,” *Critical Inquiry* 26.2 (Winter 2000): 193-223, (197-8).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 198, 215.

¹⁹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, trans. by Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3. For Mitchell’s analysis, see “Holy Landscape,” 157.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

the precise point of gentle contact that will make its objects ring are channels of disclosure that aesthetically reveal the idols' viscerally rotting cores and joyously depose them. Nietzsche weaves a form of art practice into his reevaluation of philosophical and popular beliefs, one that is restorative for the author himself. *Twilight* has widely been understood to be the end of a period of writer's block.

It is in this vein that I read Mansour's choice not to destroy the collapsing male image, but to strengthen his diminished form instead. Fortifying the cracks of the drying process that mimic and reiterate the disjuncture of his land, history and people, he externalizes the hollowness of the Arab man, who is crumbling from within but remains standing. Rather than combatively demanding that he die, Mansour hammers as with a tuning fork to produce a variant of the artistic attack (a war by means of music) that Nietzsche declares. Indeed, the replicas of Ismail that Mansour places together in "I, Ismail" mobilize the tension between the repetitions of representation on the one hand and singularity on the other, approaching the issue of idolatry from perhaps a unique perspective. The work proclaims that the artist himself and his audience worship the false leaders and patriarchs who are consolidated through land, conceding the complicity of the Palestinians themselves rather than their others, as idolatry is so often used. "I, Ismail" accentuates the cracks of land that reinforce and overcome the idolatrous figures of Ismail, laying bare the way in which it is the land that integrates them rather than the idols which safeguard the territory. If Mitchell's essay shows the techniques through which Israeli narratives have made the territory outlined in the Hebrew Bible into a centralization of God as a justification for violent and racist state policies—then Mansour's pieces show the cracked endurance of the land and its localized idols. Through his gentle hammer, the wounded territory stares back, gazing through the figures of decaying patriarchy that grant the land the ability to look. This art practice not only reveals the hollowness of the figures, then, but uses their shells as a vehicle to imbue the land with embodied faculties, inlaying a force of degenerative fortitude in the territory that has been so rent asunder.

Idolatry is also woven into the Hagar and Ishmael saga in the Jewish exegetical tradition. The biblical version recounted in Genesis 16 and 21 relays a series of births, exiles and tests in narratives that recall and repeat one another. In Genesis 16, Abram's barren wife Sarai (God changes their names to Abraham and Sarah in the next chapter after the covenant of circumcision is introduced) offers her slave Hagar to Abraham as a second wife in the hopes that she might conceive a child. In some of the few lines of dialogue Sarai is afforded in the Hebrew Bible, she notes, "Perhaps I shall be built up through her [Hagar]," using a verb for "to be built (*'ibaneh*)" that puns on the word for "son (*ben*)."¹⁹⁵ As Robert Alter stresses, the notion of being built up through Hagar's surrogate maternity is literally spelled out in her words, alternately meaning "I will be sonned though her."¹⁹⁵ Once Hagar gives birth to Ishmael, Sarai becomes incensed with what she perceives to be Hagar's insubordination and, receiving Abram's permission to deal with her as she sees fit, harasses Hagar until she flees. After Hagar is reassured by a messenger of God that she will be the matriarch of countless descendants, she is persuaded to return to her mistress' abuse.

This scenario repeats itself in Genesis 21 when Sarah, now a nonagenarian mother of Isaac, sees Ishmael laughing at his weaning and immediately takes offense. Wanting to ensure Isaac's inheritance and status over Ishmael who is first-born, she demands that Abraham drive her and her son out. Though initially unwilling, Abraham acquiesces after God's intercession: "And the thing seemed evil in Abraham's eyes because of his son. And God said to Abraham, 'Let it not seem evil in your eyes on account of the lad and on account of your slavegirl. Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her voice, for through Isaac shall your seed be acclaimed. But the slavegirl's son, too, I will

¹⁹⁵ Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 77.

make a nation, for he is your seed” (21:11-13).¹⁹⁶ Rabbinic exegesis expounded on the reasons for Ishmael and Hagar’s rejection and expulsion in an attempt to provide a more persuasive pretext for their harsh treatment. Their analysis centered around Ishmael’s activity in verse 21:9 which prompted Sarah’s immediate reaction: “And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had born to Abraham, laughing (*metsabeq*).”¹⁹⁷ Various translations as “laughing, mocking, making sport” or “playing with,” the verb derives from the same root as Isaac’s name, which itself means “he laughs.” Early exegetes offered several suggestions as to the distinct meaning of Ishmael’s deed, ranging from sexual molestation and other illicit sexual behavior to violence, deception and claims over his inheritance. The interpretation offered in Tractate *Sotah* 6:6 of the Talmud understands *metsabeq* on the basis of idolatry, connecting the verb to its occurrence in Exodus 32:6, a verse that describes the Israelites “getting up to play” while feasting in celebration of the golden calf. Various other exegetical and Targumic accounts link both Ishmael and Hagar to idolatrous behavior, in clear endeavors to discredit Ishmael’s claim to any inheritance.¹⁹⁸

The narrative of Hagar and Ishmael’s displacement continues in a series of verses that self-consciously prefigure the Binding of Isaac which will transpire in the following chapter, Genesis 22. In both accounts, Abraham rises early in the morning to depart on his way with his sons and wife (21:14, 22:3). In the story of Hagar and Ishmael’s expulsion, he gives her some bread and a skin of water which is quickly depleted. She sets her son down under a tree so as to not have to watch him die of dehydration and weeps, only to hear the angel of God assuring her once again that her son will be the patriarch of a great nation. She opens her eyes and discovers a well. In this expulsion narrative, as in the Binding of Isaac, each son is exposed to possible death in the wilderness—Ishmael in his mother’s company and Isaac in his father’s. In both accounts, the angel of God intervenes to prevent the sons’ deaths and each son is subsequently promised that he will become the progenitor of a great nation.¹⁹⁹ Rabbinic commentators understand Ishmael and Hagar’s exile in Genesis 21 to be one of a series of ten tests with which Abraham is tasked, culminating in the final and most difficult trial—the sacrifice of his (other) son.²⁰⁰ The text of these linked stories thus draws

¹⁹⁶ Translated by Robert Alter in *The Five Books of Moses*, 103.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁹⁸ For a full account, see Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters Between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 250-3; and Reuven Firestone, “Patriarchy, Primogeniture and Polemic.”

¹⁹⁹ Note also the occurrence of same the word “na’ar” or “lad” in both chapters to refer to both Ishmael and Isaac. See Mishael M. Caspi, “The Binding of Isaac Between Two Traditions” in *Unbinding the Binding of Isaac*, Mishael M. Caspi and John T. Greene, eds. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 79.

²⁰⁰ This clear parallelism between Ishmael’s expulsion and Isaac’s near sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible does not hold in the Muslim tradition. In the Qur’ānic version of the episode (37:100-110), Ibrāhīm asked for and was granted a righteous son and, when his son had reached the age of running, Ibrāhīm had a vision that he was sacrificing him. Ibrāhīm relayed what he saw to his son, who immediately agreed to submit his will to God’s commandment in the vision. When both father and son were thus prepared for the sacrifice, God replaced the son with a ram. The Qur’ān does not designate which of Ibrāhīm’s sons were to be sacrificed and various commentators have offered differing reports, though popular consensus sides with Ismā’īl over Ishāq. Several Muslim exegetes and compilers of the Tales of the Prophets (*Qīṣaṣ al-‘anbiyā’*, hagiographic compendia of the stories and narratives of those who became known as prophets in Islam despite their light or non-existent presence in the Qur’ān) situate the near-sacrifice of Ibrāhīm’s son after their transfer to Mecca (See Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, 117 for a catalogue). However, Firestone notes that there is little agreement among Muslim sources as to the chronology of the Sacrifice in relation to the entire Ibrāhīm cycle of episodes. Some sources note that Ibrāhīm would periodically visit Hājar and Ismā’īl by riding to see them in Mecca from Syria, where he lived. He continued these intermittent trips until his son “reached the age of running with him,” whereupon Ibrāhīm’s vision descends upon him and he takes Ismā’īl to be sacrificed. Others, however, do not include the Sacrifice in the Ibrāhīm cycle and place it in its own distinct section (Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, 144).

attention to its own insistence on narrative techniques of replication and the thematic significance of multiplication. Indeed, the various paths that lead to becoming the progenitor of a thriving nation link all of these echoing accounts, and begin with Sarah's telling words: "Perhaps I shall be built up through a line of sons by Hagar." Hagar's surrogacy thus underscores the tension that the Hebrew Bible maintains between the anticipation of a proliferating nation—one which is repeatedly promised by God and which appears formally in the text's narrative reiterations—and its strict adherence to the absolute singularity of one nation and one God.

The depth of Ismail's association with idolatry, exile, sacrifice and the tension between one and many in the Abrahamic triangle of religions forms a rich background from which to view "I, Ismail." In the Muslim textual tradition, Ismail is simultaneously the forbear of the Arab people, the ancestor of Muhammad and the line of descent through which idolatry in Arabia proliferates on the eve of their own exile. According to Jewish sources, he is the spurned son accused of idolatry himself—the scapegoated other whose rejection and expulsion offsets Isaac's chosen status as heir and patriarch succeeding Abraham. In both traditions, the possibility of death that his relocation to the desert poses figures as a kind of preliminary trial that precedes his redemption and guaranteed status as the one who begets the many through divine ordinance. Moreover, both narrative accounts evince an uneasy determination of the relationship between the singular patriarch and his one line of progeny which imitate the absolute singularity of God on the one hand and the various forms of proliferation that threaten to disturb this singleness on the other. In the Islamic tradition, this discomfort appears in Ismail's double status as the defender of monotheism and the ancestral source of polytheistic descendants. Jewish religious texts reveal a similar tension in Ishmael's positioning as the illegitimate cast-out son who must remain outside the chosen lineage in order to ensure the Israelite nation's endurance. Mansour's citation of Ismail juxtaposes the exegetical traditions of warring brother religions with the contemporary scene of Palestine, its crumbling leadership, desiccated and fracturing land and unsustainable relationship with its aggressive neighbor. In the congruency between ancient and contemporary contexts that the work accentuates, the oppositional tension between threatening forms of replication and stabilizing modes of singular particularity surfaces on multiple planes: in the relations between monotheism and idolatry; in the causal ties between the endurance of one collective and the expulsion, exclusion or sacrifice of the other; in the simultaneous fragmentation of Palestinian land and consolidation of Israeli territory; and in the reiterating and ambivalent attachment to collapsing figures of patriarchy that "I, Ismail" presents. In the final section of this chapter, I use René Girard's formulation of the reproductive/ singular bind as a framework through which to view the nuances of "I, Ismail" 's approach to this relation.

IV. Mimetic Relief

René Girard's lifelong critical project indeed devoted itself to examining precisely this tension, theorizing the affiliation between the destructiveness inherent in mimetic reproduction and the occluded violence that structures unifying strategies of realignment. For Girard, indeed, it is the dynamics of mimetic desire that fuel the inevitable rise of violence and underpin the necessary development of entrenched cultural models of restraint, which are themselves savage. His formulation of mimetic desire posits that desire is learned through the imitation of others and as such is not immediately directed towards a coveted object. Rather, it is fundamentally aimed at the other, the person who has already desired and laid claim to it. This model subject serves as the

mediator of one's desire who one strives to emulate; according to Girard, in short, all desire is "the desire of the other."²⁰¹ While the mediator causes us to desire what he himself possesses, he ultimately becomes an obstacle in our own attempt to acquire his property. The desire of the other thus inexorably results in a "double bind" of emulation and rivalry between imitator and imitated.²⁰² Girard further proposes that the incessant unfolding of mimetic desire within any collective body almost always leads to social crisis, as replicating desires intensify to a level of violent rivalry that threatens to destroy the community. This recurring phenomenon of violent competition is a structural predicament that human societies across millennia have had to face, and for that reason appears as a prevalent theme in many mythical traditions.

The solution to this recurrent proclivity for self-destruction identified by Girard is the mechanism of scapegoating, wherein a single member of the collective is isolated and compelled to assume the role of target-victim for the community's ire. The reciprocal and contagious violence that community members' mimetic desire has generated thus reorients itself around this alienated victim, such that an act of collective violence against her/ him unifies and recalibrates the group. As its self-destruction is exteriorized and diverted to an object who is determined to be outside of its borders, the collective regains its peaceful and cohesive status.²⁰³ This prior event—the founding murder or expulsion of the scapegoat—provides the basis for the establishment of religio-political institutions and symbolic rituals of sacrifice, reinforced through cultural mechanisms of taboo and prohibition. These systemic rites and societal injunctions regenerate the stabilizing effects of the inaugural event of collective violence. As Burton Mack notes in his analysis, Girard's anthropological theory of religion unexpectedly derives from the discerning reading of a wide array of literary texts, ranging from Greek and Western classics to the modern novel: "Here the major thesis and argumentation derive from an analysis of literary texts not normally understood to be religious documents, and where appeal is made to religious phenomena and texts familiar to the historian of religions, they are treated no differently than other literatures."²⁰⁴ This literary approach to the phenomenon of scapegoating is nowhere more evident than in Girard's treatment of Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*.

Indeed, the mimetic desire that necessitates the mechanism of scapegoating is, as Mack emphasizes, a reformulation or an abstraction of Freud's Oedipus complex. Instead of the father, any model-rival may occupy the role of mediating other; instead of the mother any desired object suffices. Rather than a foundational desire for the object that would lead to competition with the mediating model as in the Oedipus complex, Girard proposes an imitation of the model-rival that results in desire for the object.²⁰⁵ This inversion and generalization of Freud's kinship-based construct amounts, in one critic's estimation, to the unbinding of Oedipus from particular trajectories and his reinvestment with an indeterminable force of desire that can be applied to any imitator-imitated-object triad.²⁰⁶ In "Symmetry and Dissymmetry," Girard turns to *Oedipus Rex* to uncover and disentangle the structure of imitation, rivalry and scapegoating that forms the play and founding myth. The essay begins by exposing the contagious nature of violence in its ability to obscure distinctions and engender symmetrical proliferation. Using the example of Tiresias and

²⁰¹ René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 16.

²⁰² René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London: Athlone Press, 1995), 145-9.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁰⁴ Burton Mack, "Introduction: Religion and Ritual" in *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 11.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁰⁶ See Mark R. Anspach, "Editor's Introduction," in René Girard, *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), xxxvii.

Oedipus' fierce verbal exchange in the play, in which they accuse each other of Laius' death, Girard calls attention to their hidden correspondence, noting the way in which the allegations and anger of one produce the ire and censure of the other. After Tiresias initially refuses to disclose the identity of Laius' murderer, he invites Oedipus' rage:

TIRESIAS:

I'll say no more, so freely rant and rage
against my words. Let's see your finest wrath!

OEDIPUS:

My anger's such at least that I will not
refrain from stating what I think, which is:
you planned and all but did the fatal deed.
In fact, if you had any way to see
I'd call the murder yours and yours alone!

TIRESIAS:

You'd do so truly? I suggest that you
obey your own decree and starting now
converse with neither these good men nor me,
since *you're* unholy. *You* pollute the land.²⁰⁷

For Girard, the mimetically contagious anger that surges after Tiresias' initial challenge to Oedipus, rebounding in increasing intensity between the pair, is what catalyzes the spread of violence in the play, which results in Jocasta's suicide, Oedipus' self-inflicted blindness, his expulsion and the downfall of his lineage. Girard further establishes the increasing resemblances that materialize between Tiresias and Oedipus as the play progresses: most notably, Oedipus' blindness at the end of play imitates Tiresias' sightlessness. Strikingly, it emerges that their shared loss of vision arises from similar circumstances, as a punishment each received for misusing their eyes to take pleasure in the nudity of their respective mothers.²⁰⁸ The communicable spread of violence between the two thus eclipses and negates their distinctions and entails their parallel unfolding. Driven by the same desire and propensity to indict the other, Oedipus ultimately adopts and accepts Tiresias' accusation of incest and patricide. As the murderer of Laius and son-husband of his mother-bride, Oedipus embodies the entanglement of mimetic desire with violence and the tragic end towards which the course of non-differentiation leads. Obscuring the distinctions between father and son, mother and wife, brothers and children, he assumes responsibility for the contagious disease that indiscriminately infects Thebans, which is itself symptomatic of the destructiveness of desire's mimetic spread.²⁰⁹ Surrendering to the role of scapegoat, Oedipus' exile and isolation beyond the city's borders restores order to the collective's chaotic loss of distinction. Yet this palliative act of expulsion is, for Girard, an occlusion of the truth which obscures the fundamental symmetry that plagues all collectives of desiring subjects.

²⁰⁷ Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, trans. David Mulroy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), lines 343-53.

²⁰⁸ Mark R. Anspach, in Rene Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, xii.

²⁰⁹ Rene Girard, *ibid.*, 84.

Following this logic, Girard notes that the interactions between Tiresias and Oedipus situate them in powerful concert with each other. Together, they direct themselves towards the truth of the nullity of the father: “If there is no longer any difference between men, that is because in truth there never was. The truth of the myth is absolute symmetry. There is no true father, and that indeed is the knowledge that the expulsion of the scapegoat obscures.”²¹⁰ For Girard, forms of sacrifice that identify a victim scapegoat like Oedipus are what reinstate difference and differentiation, reinstalling social order in what would otherwise be the undifferentiated chaos of reciprocal violence. This sacrificial expulsion installs a dissymmetry that conceals the contagious spread of mimetic violence, obscuring the symmetrical structure of destruction that remains latent in social bodies. Girard’s solution to overcome and dismantle the dissimulations of the scapegoat mechanism is to defuse its potency by revealing the mechanics of its operation. One phenomenon that does this self-consciously is that of self-sacrifice—those religious and cultural figures who willingly assume the role of scapegoat and victim, calling attention to their stabilizing reorientation of social order. As he writes,

Any demand for reciprocal recognition leads to reciprocal violence. The only way to escape the bad kind of reciprocity is to stop demanding the good kind. But to do that means putting one’s life on the line, it means accepting the role of victim. Indeed, only the consenting victim is pure of any participation in the expulsion of the scapegoat...If there is a place from which the truth of the structure is revealed, it is not the one occupied by the sacrifice. All that remains therefore is the victim’s.²¹¹

The potential to cultivate patterns outside of the reciprocal violence/ scapegoat binary that mimetic desire generates rests with this transition from sacrifice of the other to the perspective of self-sacrifice—implying a shift in narrative or aesthetic perspective from that of the accusers and scapegoaters towards that of the victim. This shift is itself linked to the capacity for models of desire to exist that are not tied to self-preservation, or, as Girard phrases it in *I See Satan*, that are not idolatrous: “The conflicts resulting from this double idolatry of self and other are the principal source of human violence. When we are devoted to adoring our neighbor, this adoration can easily turn to hatred because we seek desperately to adore ourselves, and we fall.”²¹²

For Girard, thus, the rivalrous and idolatrous imitation of the neighbor hides an idolization of the self, in that the self who desire her neighbor’s seemingly autonomous being is a self that desires her own autonomous being. The other as neighbor models a form of ontological self-sufficiency that mimics God, to whose fullness of being the self aspires, which fuels the patterns of mimetic desire that necessitate the mechanism of scapegoating. Girard’s turn towards self-sacrifice

²¹⁰ Ibid., 78.

²¹¹ Ibid., 86.

²¹² *Satan*, 11. For Girard, Christ plays a formative role as the willing victim who reveals he is a scapegoat. See Grant Kaplan, *René Girard, Unlikely Apologist: Mimetic Theory and Fundamental Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016). Kaplan specifies the development and shifts of Girard’s thought on the topic of Christianity. Kaplan notes that Girard theorizes Christianity to be a demythifying unmasking of religion that reveals the scapegoat mechanism for what it is (117-19). Yet Kaplan also notes that Girard identifies a structural similarity and continuity between archaic religions and Christianity: “It is not the case that Christianity merely unveils the true nature of archaic religion. The archaic, in leading humanity to solid footing, prepares the way for its own undoing...This same logic is at work in the Catholic Church’s liturgical calendar, when the second Sunday of Lent juxtaposes the binding of Isaac (Gen. 22) with Romans 8:31–34. In the first story, it is God who demands a sacrifice, only to withdraw this demand, whereas in the reading from Romans, Paul reminds his audience that God ‘did not spare his own son but handed him over for us all.’ The aborted sacrifice of Isaac prepares hearers to receive the self-sacrificial love of Jesus” (120).

presents a positionality that reveals the truth of the scapegoating mechanism and exposes the patriarchal void at its heart. I believe that a nuanced rearticulation of this disposition surfaces in “I, Ismail,” one whose stance towards idolatry is more capacious than that of Girard. If, for Girard, an idolatrous form of religion or cultural alignment that is itself based on an idolatrous attachment to a fully sovereign form of self is the source of the societal violence we cannot escape—for Mansour, an aesthetic engagement with idolatry resists and exposes the violence that is at the heart of pretensions to singularity. Indeed, Mansour’s formulation of Ismail in his piece recuperates Ismā‘īl/ Ishmael and the idolatry that is situated in relation to him from both traditions. Redeeming Ismail as the scapegoated father/ brother, he reclaims the proliferating decay of idolatry. Mansour finds a way to make the collapse of Ismail’s idolatrous figures useful, almost productive—he causes the hollowness that their cracking exteriorizes to voice something else, rather than remain an end in itself. The hypocrisy of patriarchy in both its traditional and contemporary guises of religious and political leadership rings through the figures’ networks of disjunctions and expresses the escalating destruction of the Palestinian territory itself, providing the scene through which the land can look back and demand recognition for itself and its condition. Mansour’s work thus artistically creates the conditions through which the patriarchal scapegoat yields to the land, such that the one inhabits the other as they stare back in an uncanny oscillation between life and death; it crafts the aesthetics that both idolize and reinforce this scapegoat while revealing and externalizing its decaying, contingent core.

“I, Ismail” presents, in effect, a sculptural interpretation of Girard’s declaration that “brotherhood is the truth of fatherhood.” As Girard suggests through his analysis of Oedipus, the truth of the patriarchal void that is obscured in the scapegoating mechanism shifts the myth of the father into the tragedy of enemy brothers: “The slide from [the paternal to the fraternal relationship] signifies nothing else but the loss of difference.”²¹³ “I, Ismail” indeed embodies the slippage between the paternal and the fraternal—Ismail is simultaneously father to the Arab nation, ancestral source of the Arabian peninsula’s idolatrous fraternities, and outcast brother of Islam’s sibling religion. In Mansour’s piece, the replication of Ismail’s patriarchal figure in different yet similar versions of mud-relief deprives him of the father’s singular status, sliding the paternal into the fraternal. Yet the dying, scapegoated, and idolized patriarch does not completely dissolve in the brothers’ replicating loss of difference. For one thing, the various versions of Ismail contain subtle but significant distinctions. For another, the collapsing patriarch continues to peek through his fraternal replicas and cracks of mud, much like the two languages of specification that Mansour presents in his work continue to stare through each other: the title of his work, its reference to religious narratives and application to political circumstances offsets the material language of cracking earth, each granting the other a force they would not have themselves. The patriarch scapegoat who is in truth a fraternal idol gazes back as dismembered land in sculptural and emotional relief, caught between life and death. “I, Ismail” locates a possible mode of survival in the capacity to grant the scapegoated land a raised platform through which it may look back at the warring brothers who continue to sacrifice it, in an encounter that may bring some relief.

²¹³ Ibid., 78.

Chapter Three

“It Is Not Exile for My Me to Be You”: Intervals of Restitution Between Text and Music in Mahmoud Darwish

I. “We Have a Country of Words”

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) is the reason I began to study literary Arabic. Though I first encountered his poems in English translation, the power of his verse hit me even through the mediating veil of his translator’s rendering—a mark of great literature (as well as a great translation), I believe. At the time that I first read his words, I knew little about the occupation and plight of the Palestinians other than its injustice. Nevertheless, something about the tangible potency of his texts drew me in and convinced me to devote long years of study to the language that had become his home in the absence of the one taken from him. In my considerations of agency and transformation in the context of Palestinian and Israeli literary and material culture, I have never forgotten the impact of Darwish’s words on me and my intellectual trajectories. They began a process that has not yet ended, one that has involved the destabilization and reformulation of my own identity and critical perspectives. When plagued by doubts as to the efficacy of academic work in times of crisis, I recall the transformative force of his language on me and am soothed. I am reassured by the ability of words to take physical effect, by the capacity of poetry to move people in material ways so that they ultimately engage in the dangerously linked processes of undoing and remaking self and world.

Perhaps no Palestinian poet has been as dangerous with his poetry as Mahmoud Darwish. Revered as Palestine’s national poet since the late 60s, a position he has both relished and resented, he is the Arab world’s best-selling poet, drawing crowds of 25,000 to a 2002 poetry recital in Beirut.²¹⁴ Credited with the renewal of Arab lyrical poetry and the writing of Palestinian identity and homeland, Darwish used his literary project throughout his career to sustain Palestine as a space of exile by means of an increasingly complex discourse of memory, myth, and depictions of the land itself. As he writes in “*Nusāfiru kal-nās*” (We travel like all people) (1986): “We travel like other people, but we return to nowhere. As if travelling/Is the way of the clouds /...We have a country of words. Speak speak so I can put my road/on the stone of a stone. /We have a country of words. Speak speak so we may know the end of/this travel.”²¹⁵ This surrender to the exile of language is rearticulated suggestively in his later collections of poetry. In the Palestinian Declaration of Statehood, written by Darwish and translated to English by Edward Said in 1988, this marriage of nation, discourse and exile is canonized: “The State of Palestine is the state of Palestinians wherever they may be. The state is for them to enjoy in their collective national and cultural identity, theirs to pursue in a complete equality of rights.”²¹⁶ When, during the Israeli siege of Ramallah in 2002 at the start of the Second Intifada, Darwish learned that the Sakakini Cultural Centre had been ransacked, the manuscripts of his literary review *al-Karmel* destroyed, he commented, “I know they’re strong and can invade and kill anyone. But they can’t break or occupy my words.”²¹⁷ Through Darwish’s

²¹⁴ Maya Jaggi, “Poet of the Arab World,” *The Guardian* 8 June 2002. Accessed November 29, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/jun/08/featuresreviews.guardianreview19>.

²¹⁵ *Victims of a Map: A Bilingual Anthology of Arabic Poetry*, trans. Abdullah al-Udhari (London: Saqi Books, 2005), 31.

²¹⁶ Mahmoud Darwish, “Palestinian Declaration of Independence,” trans. Edward Said (November 15, 1988). *Declaration Project*, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://www.declarationproject.org/?p=397>.

²¹⁷ Jaggi, “Poet of the Arab World.”

reformulation of material loss to the unconquerable circulations of language, Palestinian identity and collectivity have been sustained, preserved in the elusory transit of words that may neither be occupied nor destroyed. Yet Darwish's tactical turn towards poetic language in the service of national and personal regeneration maintains a tension between its discursive sites of survival and restitution, and the absence of physically substantive redress, an incommensurability that the following pages explore.

This chapter centers on Darwish's 1995 collection *Limādbā tarakta al-ḥiṣān waḥīdan?* (Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?), a volume that incorporates and dismantles elements of autobiography into, as he has described it, the writing of a mythical epic poem.²¹⁸ Following the 1993-5 failure of the Oslo Accords to account for the Palestinian experience and the increasing weakness of Palestinian leadership in Oslo's wake, the diwan²¹⁹ (the Arabic word for collection of poetry) develops a unique epic that strives to safeguard Palestinian history and presence from erasure. The collection indeed advances a nuanced form of temporality, in which past and present expose themselves to each other anew. Throughout the work, Darwish revisits religious, biographical, political and poetic forefathers, reworking the patriarchal narratives that have shaped Arab, Muslim and Palestinian identities through patterns of authority, submission, exclusion and absence. Within this framework, a series of poems reference the near sacrifice of Abraham's son, known in the Qur'ān as the *dhabīḥ* and as *'aqeda Yitzḥaq*, the Binding of Isaac, in the Hebrew Bible. This chapter begins with a close look at the poem from which the collection's title emerges, "*ʿAbadu al-Ṣubbar*" (The Eternity of Cactus). Beginning with a veiled allusion to the near sacrifice, the poem deliberately challenges the Abrahamic inheritance that links faith and survival to an ethical rupture. I read this questioning of the Abrahamic order in relation to several other poems in the collection in which Darwish turns to the rich poetic heritage of Arabic as a site of regeneration for both collective and personal narratives and an alternative mode of ancestry. Rather than the construction of a nation that is enacted through the son's sacrifice as in the Hebrew Bible's version, Darwish reformulates the narrative to depict a *literary* mode of national recreation that comes about through the call for self-sacrifice. In this literary re-inheritance, repetition, citation and other cyclical forms of temporality innate to the practice of writing prove to be a crucial alternative to the linear conceptions of survival propagated by the patriarchal logic of the Abrahamic religions.

As this chapter details, what begins as a turn towards the citational foundation of literature as another means of national regeneration and survival gradually becomes performative, as subsequent poems in the diwan privilege echo and rhyme as the texts' formal and thematic structures. Indeed, Darwish emphasizes the musical and rhythmic elements of poetry, using the poems' meter and sonorousness to thematize a form of poetic animism that transcends the boundaries of text.²²⁰ I argue that the collection mobilizes the theme of self-sacrifice to isolate the

²¹⁸ Interview with Abbas Beydoun, "Qui impose son récit hérite la terre du récit," in *La Palestine comme métaphore* (Paris: Sindbad/ Actes Sud, 1997), 28.

²¹⁹ The correct transliteration is *diwān*, but throughout the chapter I will use the widely accepted English spelling "diwan." It means "a register [of accounts]" as well as "a collection of poetry" and is widely associated with the saying *al-sh 'ir diwān al-'arab* (Poetry is the register of the Arabs). See Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863), 945; Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad ibn Mukarram, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Qum, Iran: Adab al-Hawzah, 1232-1311 or 1312), 1461.

²²⁰ See Jeremy Wallach, "The Poetics of Electrosonic Presence: Recorded Music and the Materiality of Sound," *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 15.1 (2003): 34-64 for a summary of research, particularly pp. 42-3. See also Rey Chow on the potential for musical perspectives to redefine concepts of embodiment, "Listening Otherwise, Music Miniaturized: A Different Type of Question About Revolution," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1993), 392. Wallach describes music in terms of audiotactility, in that its impact literally

interval between a life in crisis and death's potentially regenerative effects. The diwan maps the possibility for change that lies in that interstice between life and death onto the lacunae between poetic text and musical sensuousness, locating Palestinian restitution in the ability to reside in the interstitial spaces of self-evacuation that literature affords. The material registers of possibility that his language encounters in this gap, I contend, become an alternative site for destabilized forms of identity and creative transformation, one that replaces the ensnaring limitations of mother, father, and nation. In what follows, I turn to two poems early in the collection that highlight Darwish's rewriting of sacrifice before focusing on several more in the diwan's fourth section, *Ghurfa L'il Kalām Ma' al-Nafs* (A Room to Talk to Oneself). Tracking how the lyric epic of the collection narrates the process through which voluntary divestment from structures of patriarchy and political subjugation occasions the development of poetic forms of interstitiality, I detail the formal and thematic modes of between-ness that Darwish cultivates in order to sustain a cacophony of diverse voices from across the Arabic literary heritage. In this orchestration of multivocality, as I underscore, he locates the possibility for transformation precisely within voluntary disposessions of self, nation and language.

Darwish was born in 1942 in the British Mandate for Palestine in al-Birwa, a small village in the upper Galilee to a land-owning family.²²¹ During the Nakba—the Arabic word for “disaster” that refers to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War—his family escaped to Lebanon, returning a year later to find al-Birwa one of 400 Arab villages razed and rebuilt as kibbutzim or moshavim for new Jewish immigrants. Because they were absent during the state's first census, when they returned a year later, they were denied Israeli nationality and instead classified as “infiltrators” and “present-absentee aliens,” along with about 35,000 other Palestinians.²²² Though Israel's 1952 Citizenship Law conferred citizenship upon internally displaced Palestinians who remained within Israel, Darwish and his family were considered residents rather than citizens, eventually granted ID cards but never passports.²²³ The Galilee village in which Darwish was born, al-Birwa, was conquered and destroyed by the IDF, and in 1949 and 1950 the Israeli kibbutz Yas'ur and moshav Ahihud were established on its grounds. His family lost everything. They moved to Deir-al-Assad ultimately settled in the village of al-Jadida in the western Galilee, where his father worked as an agricultural laborer. “My grandfather chose to live on a hill overlooking his land,” Darwish recounted. “Until he died he would watch [Jewish] immigrants from Yemen living in his place, which he was unable even to visit.”²²⁴

Though Darwish's mother was illiterate, he was taught to read by his grandfather and began writing poetry at the age of seven. He attended high school in Kafr Qasim where he excelled in his Hebrew studies, a language that gave him access during the ban on Arab print to the poetry of Pablo Neruda and Federico Garcia Lorca, the emerging literature of new Israeli writers and the Torah.²²⁵ Darwish became part of a group of emerging new “poet-warriors” in Palestine, including Salem Jubran, Samih al-Qasim, Rashid Hussein and Tawfiq Zayyad. He participated in his first poetry

moves the listener (43); this is indeed one understanding of *tarab*. See A.J. Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²²¹ Robyn Creswell, “Unbeliever in the Impossible: The Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish,” *Harper's Magazine*, Feb. 2009: 69-74, p. 70.

²²² Mahmoud Darwish, “*Ha-galut kol kakh hazaka bi-tokhi, 'ulay 'avi 'otah 'artsa*” (Exile Is So Strong Within Me, I May Bring It to the Land), interview by Hilit Yeshurun, *Eykh 'asita et zeh?* (How Did You Do That?) (Ha-sifriya ha-hadasha, 2016), 322.

²²³ Jaggi, “Poet of the Arab World.”

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

festival himself in the summer of 1958 in Acre and soon became a main attraction, reciting poetry from his earliest collections—*Wingless Birds* (1960), *Leaves of the Olive Tree* (1964), *A Lover from Palestine* (1966) and *End of the Night* (1967)—diwans that expressed different modes of Palestinian resistance to Israeli rule.²²⁶

In the early 60s, he moved to Acre for two years (1959-61) and then Haifa. In Haifa, he joined the Israeli Communist Party (*Maki*), working for its Arabic newspaper, *Al-Ittihad*, as a journalist and editor for the ensuing ten years.²²⁷ During this period, Darwish was arrested and imprisoned five times, in addition to long stints of home arrest—generally under administrative detentions with no indictments—for traveling without a permit and on various suspicions of hostile activity which were never proven.²²⁸ As Darwish describes, his young-adult life in Israel was more incarceration than not: “Ten years trapped in Haifa, of which three I spent imprisoned in my house. Every year one or two times in prison...”²²⁹ This, along with the 1965 Maki-Rakah split, in which Palestinian-Israeli members left the Israeli Communist party and formed the *New Communist List* (*Rakah*), influenced Darwish’s decision to leave Israel and assume a life of external exile.²³⁰ Denied higher education in Israel, he went to study political economy at the University of Moscow in 1970, but left, disillusioned, after a year.²³¹ In 1971, he moved to Cairo and publicly announced his decision not to return to Israel, a choice that was finalized after he joined the PLO in 1973 and was banned by Israel from reentering. He lived in Beirut through part of the civil war and, in 1982, fled to exile again, moving from Syria to Cairo to Tunis and finally Paris. It was in Paris that Darwish composed some of his most critically acclaimed work, including *Memory for Forgetfulness* (1986), a poem in prose commemorating the siege of Beirut, *Eleven Planets* (1992), a lyric epic engaging 1492, the year that saw both the destruction of the Native American world and the Arab expulsion from Andalusia commence, and his poetic autobiography *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?* (1995). Darwish was a member of the PLO Executive Committee throughout the 80s, but resigned from the PLO entirely to protest the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords without a guarantee from Israel to stop settlement construction.²³² Oslo did allow Darwish to return to Palestine—he settled in Ramallah in 1996 and divided his time between Ramallah and Amman, writing among several others the celebrated pieces *Mural* (2000)—a book-length poem recounting his near-death experience following heart problems—and *State of Siege* (2002)—a response to the siege of Ramallah at the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. He lived there until his death in 2008, following complications from open-heart surgery.

Darwish’s poetic oeuvre has spanned genre and style. His earliest poetry is traditional in form but by the 60s it became populist and directly political, a premonition of his skill in marrying modern written Arabic and traditional language and poetic forms. Even as his later poetry clearly moves away from the straightforwardness of his earlier constructions, many of his critics continue to disregard this shift.²³³ He has publicly protested the limitations placed on his poetry by political

²²⁶ Peter Clark, “Mahmoud Darwish,” *The Guardian*. August 11, 2008. Accessed November 29, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/aug/11/poetry.israelandthepalestinians>.

²²⁷ Muna Abu Eid, *Mahmoud Darwish: Literature and the Politics of Palestinian Identity* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 28-30.

²²⁸ Rajā’ al-Naqqāsh, *Mahmoud Darwish: Shā’ir al-Ard al-Muḥtallāh* (Poet of the Occupied Land) (Al-Mu’assasah al-‘Arabiyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 1972), 110-13.

²²⁹ Aryeh Dayan, “*Ha-mishorer ha-li’umi*” (The National Poet), *Iton Ha’ir*, 23 June 1989, 13.

²³⁰ Abu Eid, *Mahmoud Darwish*, 34.

²³¹ Jaggi, “Poet of the Arab World.”

²³² Creswell, “Unbeliever in the Impossible,” 74.

²³³ Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman, “Introduction” in *Mahmoud Darwish, Exile’s Poet: Critical Essays*, ed. Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman (Northampton, Mass.: Olive Branch Press, 2008), 2.

subject matter, demanding to be judged as a poet participating in the advancement of Arabic poetry rather than as a resistance poet addressing local conditions: “In the beginning my poetry contributed to the development of the Palestinian identity...but my main concern is the extent to which my poetry contributes to the development of Arabic poetry.”²³⁴ In his years of exile, his work reformulated the land and history of Palestine as the product of millennia, influenced by the Canaanites, Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Ottoman Turks and British. After Oslo, his later writing shifted focus from external to internal forms of exile—exploring the complex dispossessions of self from cohesive forms of identity.²³⁵ Ultimately, his oeuvre posits personal and national survival via the ability to surrender to the exile of language. As Angelika Neuwirth phrases it, “similar to the Islamic mystic who considers the entire existence on earth to be an ‘exile of the soul’ [*ghurba*] and similar to the religious Jew who views ‘the entire world to be in exile’ [*galut*], the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish perceives his world as an exile-home, “a land of words,” *baladun min kalām...*”²³⁶

Darwish’s collection *Limādhā tarakta al-ḥiṣān waḥīdan?* (Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?) was written in Paris before his return to Palestine after the Oslo Accords. Combining elements from collective Palestinian history with narratives from Near Eastern and Greek myths, the Qur’an, as well as the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, this volume revisits his family’s 1948 flight to Lebanon and their 1949 return to the new state of Israel. Darwish himself refers to it as “an autobiography that is both personal and poetic”: ²³⁷ “It not only retraces the dispersal of self from loss to place of exile, but it also performs the poetic development of the poet, from influences to changing techniques.”²³⁸ The volume is divided into six sections that could be taken to represent stages in Darwish’s life, even as they write a new form of epic that strives to safeguard Palestinian history and presence from erasure. In Fakhri Salih’s analysis of the collection, for instance, “Icons of the Place’s Crystal” depicts the post-Nakba exile and return of early childhood; “Abel’s Space” joins the memories of destruction that underlie the fragmented present with both the regenerative capacity of music and Abrahamic narratives of primordial murder; and “Chaos at Resurrection’s Gate” showcases a mobile poetic speaker who, consigned to the ongoing scene of waiting, synthesizes history, myth, and the mundane with personal recollection.²³⁹ This sense of waiting leads to the fourth section, *Ghurfa l’il kalām ma’ al-nafs* (A Room to Talk to Oneself), which is the main focus of this chapter, wherein the memory of prison cells shifts into a site of aesthetic engagement with language and literary heritage.

Interweaving the mythic and historical into the personal and mundane details of daily life, the poems in this section orchestrate destabilizing encounters among diverse voices, genres and registers that occasion scenes of self-dispossession for the poetic speaker. Through a discussion of these poems, this chapter will trace how Darwish defines poetry through thematic figures and auditory effects of betweenness. For Darwish, this entails disrupting the idea of a set and bounded identity with its displacement, such that an original identity is transformed into an interval of otherness that is nevertheless claimed as that which is not exile. In this sense, Darwish writes the historical condition of 1948 Palestinians into the very sound of his poetry. Indeed, in this section,

²³⁴ Quoted in Raja Shehadeh, “Mahmoud Darwish,” *Bomb* 81 (2002): 54-9, p. 57.

²³⁵ Nassar and Rahman, “Introduction,” 4.

²³⁶ Angelika Neuwirth, “Hebrew Bible and Arabic Poetry: Mahmoud Darwish’s Palestine—from Paradise Lost to a Homeland of Made of Words,” in *Mahmoud Darwish: Exile’s Poet*, ed. Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman, 183.

²³⁷ Beydoun, “Qui impose,” 59, translated in Najat Rahman, *Literary Disinheritance: The Writing of Home in the Work of Mahmoud Darwish and Assia Djebar* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 86.

²³⁸ Rahman, *Literary Disinheritance*, 86.

²³⁹ Fakhri Salih, “Qirā’āt fi limādhā tarakta al-ḥiṣān waḥīdān,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7.25 (Winter 1996): 175-183, pp. 178-81.

poetry is delineated by aural aspects of betweenness, surfacing as echoes, rhythm and rhymes—forms of reiterating sound that displace the original source and create a domain of generative resonance between source and its modified repetition. The sound of the in-between that Darwish composes in these poems is reinforced by his choice of meter. Darwish's aural links the recovery of Palestine to a displaced notion of both text and self, a prosody of displacement that also serves as a figure for future attentiveness, for the capacity of his poems to resonate on to Jewish Israeli readers reading him in translation or in acquired Arabic. Ultimately, this chapter claims that the aural possibilities of displacement showcased in Darwish's work fundamentally assume the task of writing a non-sovereign form of identity, wherein unified norms of selfhood are dismantled through a willing submission to others and otherness.

II. "Sacrifice Me Upon All That's Been Lost": The Restitution of Disinheritance

Mahmoud Darwish's poem "*Ābadu al-Ṣubbār*" (The Eternity of Cactus) is a poetic deconstruction and retelling of a narrative based in autobiography—Darwish and his family's flight to Lebanon during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. In the poem, an unspecified father and an anonymous son flee gunfire and soldiers for mountains in the north, as the father repeatedly entreats his son to be steadfast and remember the details of the terrain they are temporarily leaving. Specifying spots of historical and personal import, both the poetic speaker and the father call attention to the particular sites where Jesus, the Janissaries, Yehoshua ben Nun and the father himself inscribed themselves into the land. Four sets of questions and responses between father and son flank each stanza, guiding how readers may approach and follow this proffered narrative:

— Where are you taking me, father?
— Where the wind takes us, my son...

-إلى أين تأخذني يا أبي؟
-إلى جهة الريح يا ولدي...

...As the two were leaving the plain where
Bonaparte's soldiers surveyed
the shadows on the old wall of Acre —
a father said to his son: Don't be afraid. Don't
be afraid of the drone of bullets! Stay close
to the ground so you'll survive! We'll survive and climb
a mountain in the north and return when
the soldiers return to their distant families

...وَهُمَا يَخْرُجَانِ مِنَ السَّهْلِ، حَيْثُ
أَقَامَ جُنُودُ بُونَابَرْتِ تَلًّا لِرَاصِدِ
الظَّلَالِ عَلَى سُورِ عَكَّا الْقَدِيمِ—
يَقُولُ أَبٌ لِابْنِهِ: لَا تَخَفْ. لَا
تَخَفْ مِنْ أَرْزِ الرِّصَاصِ! الْتَصِقْ
بِالتُّرَابِ لَتَتَجَوَّ! سَنَجُودُ وَنَعْلُو عَلَى
جَبَلٍ فِي الشَّمَالِ، وَنَرْجِعُ حِينَ
يَعُودُ الْجُنُودُ إِلَى أَهْلِهِمْ فِي الْبَعِيدِ

— Who will live in the house after us,
father?
— It will remain as it is, as it has always been,
my son!

-وَمَنْ يَسْكُنُ الْبَيْتَ مِنْ بَعْدِنَا
يَا أَبِي؟
-سَيَبْقَى عَلَى حَالِهِ مِثْلَمَا كَانَ
يَا وَلَدِي!

He felt for his key the way he would feel for
his limbs and was reassured. He said
:as they climbed through a fence of thorns
Remember, my son, here the British crucified
your father on the thorns of a cactus for two nights

تَحَسَّسَ مِفْتَاحَهُ مِثْلَمَا يَتَحَسَّسُ
أَعْضَاءَهُ، وَأَاطَمَأَنَّ. وَقَالَ لَهُ
وَهُمَا يَعْبِرَانِ سِيَاجًا مِنَ الشُّوكِ:
يَا ابْنِي تَذَكَّرْ! هُنَا صَلَّبَ الْإِنْجِلِيزُ
أَبَاكَ عَلَى شَوْكِ صُبَّارَةٍ لَيْلَتَيْنِ،

and he didn't confess. You will grow up,
my son, and tell those who inherit their guns
the story of the blood upon the iron...

— Why did you leave the horse alone?
— To keep the house company, my son
Houses die when their inhabitants are gone...

Eternity opens its gates from a distance
to the traffic on night. The wolves of the wilderness
howl at a frightened moon. And a father
says to his son: Be strong like your grandfather!
Climb with me the last hill of oaks,
my son, and remember! Here the janissary fell
from the mule of war. So be steadfast with me
and we'll return

— When, father?
— Tomorrow. Perhaps in two days, my son!

A reckless tomorrow chewed at the wind
behind them through the long nights of winter
The soldiers of Yeshua ben Nun built
their citadel from the stones of their house. Out of breath
on the path to Qana: Here
Jesus passed one day. Here
he turned water into wine and said
many things about love. My son, remember
tomorrow. Remember crusader citadels
gnawed at by April weeds after
the soldiers' departure...²⁴⁰

ولم يعترف أبداً. سوف تكبر يا
ابني، وتروي لمن يرثون بنادقهم
سيرة الدم فوق الحديد...

لماذا تركت الحصان وحيداً؟
لكي يُؤنس البيت، يا ولدي،
فالبیوت تموت إذ غاب سكّانها...

تفتُح الأبديّة أبوابها، من بعيد،
لسيّارة الليل. تعوي ذئاب
البراري على قمر خائف. ويقول
أب لابنه: كن قوياً كجدك!
وأصعد معي تلّة السديان الأخيرة
يا ابني، تذكر: هنا وقع الانكسار
عن بغلة الحرب، فاصمّد معي
لنعود

متى يا أبي؟
- غداً. ربما بعد يومين يا ابني!

وكان غدّ طائشٌ يمضغ الرياح
خلفهما في ليالي الشتاء الطويلة.
وكان جنوداً يُهوشع بن نون بينون
فلعنّهم من حجارة بيتهما. وهما
يلهتان على درب "قانا": هنا
مرّ سيّدنا ذات يوم. هنا
جعل الماء خمرًا. وقال كلاماً
كثيراً عن الحب، يا ابني تذكر
غداً. وتذكر قلاعاً صليبيّة
قضمتها حشائش نيسان بعد
رحيل الجنود²⁴¹...

The poem's initial question indeed frames the rest of the narrative with a veiled reference to the near sacrifice of Abraham's son, known in the Qur'ān as the *dhabiḥ* and as *'aqedat Yitzḥaq*, the Binding of Isaac, in the Hebrew Bible. In the Quranic version of the episode (37:100-110), Ibrāhīm asked for and was granted a righteous son and, when his son had reached the age of running, had a vision that he was sacrificing him. Ibrāhīm relayed what he saw to his son, who immediately agreed to submit his will to God's commandment in the vision. When both father and son were thus prepared for the sacrifice, God replaced the son with a ram. The Qur'ān does not designate which of Ibrāhīm's sons were to be sacrificed and various commentators have offered differing reports, though popular

²⁴⁰ Mahmoud Darwish, *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?* Jeffrey Sacks, trans. (Brooklyn: Archipelgo Books, 2006), 28-31.

²⁴¹ Mahmoud Darwish, *Al- 'Ā' amāl al-shi 'iriyya al-kāmila al-mujallid al-thāniy* (Collected Works Volume 2), (Amman: Dār al-Nāshr, 2014), 510-13.

consensus sides with Ismāʿīl over Ishāq (Ishmael over Isaac).²⁴² In the Hebrew Bible, Abraham follows God's command and takes Isaac to Mount Moriah where he prepares to offer him as sacrifice. Only after he places the knife at Isaac's throat does God yield and send a ram as a substitute (Genesis 22:1-14).²⁴³ In neither version of the narrative is the son afforded the voice or the perspective to question the conditions of his father's renunciatory motives. In the Qur'ānic account, the son indeed acquiesces immediately to his father's vision, replying, "Oh my father, do as you are commanded. If God wills, you will find me patient and enduring" (37:102). In the Old Testament, the only question Isaac poses to Abraham is one of naïveté. Having seen the fire and the wood and not understanding who or what was to be sacrificed, he asks his father where the lamb is for a burnt-offering, and Abraham responds obliquely: "God will see for himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Genesis 22:7-8).²⁴⁴ The poem begins thus by reversing the code of the Abrahamic order, installing the son as the text's catalyst and gesturing towards the dismantling of patriarchal forms in which the collection at large engages. The initial query—"Where are you taking me, my father?"—is indeed a kind of meta question that resets the code as it emphasizes exactly what was not allowed to be challenged in the central Abrahamic narrative of father and son—the asymmetrical relations between both God and father and father and son that solidify Abraham's commitment to God only as they shatter his obligation to his son.²⁴⁵ The poem's introductory question deliberately challenges the Abrahamic inheritance that links faith and survival to an ethical breach and accordingly places the father in a position of accountability "not to condemn him, as Najat Rahman notes, "but to open the register of events to reinvent the outcome."²⁴⁶ In this way, the son's questions structure the poem's form and flow, eliciting the father's responses in ways that break up his entreaties for particular modes of remembrance and commitment.

242 See The Encyclopedia of Islam: "There are differences in the Islamic sources about this. Some mention Isaac (Ibn Qutayba, 35, 36, narrating from Ibn al-ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd and Masrūq) whilst others refer to Ishmael (al-Ṭūsī, 8/518; al-Rāzī, 26/154; for different reports see al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, 1/289–301; Tafsīr, 23/49–55)." Sajjadi, Sadeq and Negahban, Farzin, "Abraham," in: Encyclopaedia Islamica, Editors-in-Chief: Wilferd Madelung and, Farhad Daftary. Consulted online on 17 April 2017 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-9831_isla_COM_0028 First published online: 2008. See also Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ismael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

243 Various *midrashim* (exegesis of biblical scripture in Jewish tradition) and *Qiṣaṣ al-ʿAnbiyāʾ* (Stories of the Prophets) relay slightly different accounts, in which, notably, Abraham does kill Isaac, who is then sent to heal and revive in Eden before returning. See for example Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, 107-114 and *Yalkut Shmoneh* 101 (Var. II.1.C.1-2); *midrash ha-gadol* (Var. II.1.C.3).

244 The idiomatic meaning is "God will provide," but there is an emphasis on seeing and a thematic of vision throughout the chapter. See Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1996), 105. Rashi, the 11th century Torah commentator, says "he will see and choose for himself the lamb," *Rashi Gen. 22:8 (DH- And Abraham said)*.

245 This follows the thrust of Jacques Derrida's analysis and interpretation of the sacrifice, in which he calls attention to the "absolute dissymmetry" that structures the ethical relationship of Abraham to God. Abraham is answerable to the unknowable will of God; yet in order to maintain his ethical relationship to God, he is not accountable to his son and thus betrays the moral code among humans. However, at the same time, Abraham's absolute and singular duty to God at the expense of the son who he loves and his own personal desires reveals the impossibility of ethical behavior in general: "I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others." Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 67-9, 91. It should be noted, however, that the forms of agency afforded to the sons in the Qurʾān and the Old Testament are distinct. While Isaac in the Genesis account obeys his father blindly, unknowingly following Abraham to his own near death, the unspecified son in the Qurʾān consciously and intentionally cedes his life to God's will as implemented by his father.

246 Rahman, *Literary Disinheritance*, 11.

While each stanza orients itself around their journey and the historical sites of conquests and defeats from various ages and empires that they encounter as they flee, each question that the son poses to his father returns the poem to the scene of their departure—their abandoned home in the midst of destruction. This cyclical movement back to the beginning signals a form of circular time that is emphasized in the collection's first several sections, only to be broken later in the diwan. As Darwish writes in "*Qāfiyah min 'ajli al-mu'allqāt*" (A Rhyme for the Odes), a poem that will be examined in the final section of this chapter, "So I'll lift my ode so that circular time will break / and beautiful days will be reborn!"²⁴⁷ The Arabic marks a difference between circular time (*al-ḡamān al-dā'ir*) and beautiful time (*al-waqt al-jamīl*), a division that evokes Ibn 'Arabī, the 12th century Sufi and scholar, and his philosophy of time. Briefly, Ibn 'Arabī argues that God is Himself everlasting time (*dahr*), an eternity that has neither beginning nor end. Man, too, is rather than possesses time, yet his time (*waqt*) is momentary, the present state that is a mere reflection of God's eternity. God's eternal time manifests itself anew every day. Every day, He manifests the world by creating the totality of events that ensue—a cycle of constant recreation that mirrors His own enduring singularity. Against the cyclical temporal expanse of God, human time is, in Gerhard Böwering's words "a dot without duration. Caught between these two modes, the divine everlastingness and the human momentariness, we humans entertain a notion of time, *ḡamān*, that is imaginary and subjective, though inspired by the real and objective time of *dahr* and *waqt*."²⁴⁸ Darwish's beautiful time is reborn thus by causing the divine expanse of circular time to break open in poetic revelation—by lifting the ode, the poetic speaker realizes the mere moment of present existence that man is accorded to be a real encounter and point of interaction with the continual recreations of eternity. I will argue later that this temporal shift is related to the theory of creative agency that Darwish practices and performs. For now, I wish to underline the strong current and effect of cyclical time in the poem.

Najat Rahman, following Abdallah al-Samti, has insightfully noted that "the turn to circular time in his later works is a turn to the temporality of writing itself," a movement that is born out explicitly in this poem.²⁴⁹ The son's questions resolutely return the text to the beginning and end of their journey, while the father's directives evoke different memories that the land holds which resurface with each new cycle of conquest and occupation—his own interrogation by the British; the Janissaries, Ottoman infantry units, and their defeat; the transformation of water into wine by Jesus during the Wedding at Qana, his first public miracle; and the Crusaders' citadels. The narrative voice of the poetic speaker mentions Napoleon Bonaparte and his 1799 Palestine campaign, which marked the beginning of a renewed interest in Palestine by Western powers, as well as Yehoshua ben Nun, the leader of the Israelites following Moses' death who led the brutal conquest of Canaan and the elimination of its inhabitants. Both the father and the poetic speaker thus emphasize the palimpsests of history that undermine the Israeli soldiers' positions of power, as merely another force whose deeds will be inscribed in the land when the next authority rules. The son, however, returns the poem to the remains of his house and village following the war, revisiting the *aṭlāl* (ruins) that are the quintessential beginning of the pre-Islamic and classical Arabic ode. Every *qaṣīda* commences at the site of destruction where the poetic speaker visits the ruins and ashes of past encampments, bemoaning the departure and loss of his beloved.²⁵⁰ The topos of the *aṭlāl* signify

²⁴⁷ Darwish, *Limādhā tarakta*, 132.

²⁴⁸ Gerhard Böwering, "Ibn 'Arabī's Concept of Time" *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 3 (2012): 108-123. See p. 122.

²⁴⁹ Rahman, *Literary Disinheritance*, 101.

²⁵⁰ As Jaroslav Stetkevych notes, the *aṭlāl* "stand as the anchoring point of the poet's recollection." See *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 20,

thus both an accrual and a particularization of lamentation and loss in that each poet crafts his own rendition of the convention by showcasing his ability to express the singularity of his suffering amidst the repetition of his tradition. This paradox between citation and innovation is aptly signaled in the famous opening verse of ‘Antarah ibn Shaddād’s *mu‘allaqa*.²⁵¹ A pre-Islamic poet in the 6th century, he writes:

Have the poets left anywhere in need of patching?
Or did you, after imaginings, recognize her abode?²⁵²

هَلْ غَادَرَ الشُّعْرَاءُ مَنْ مَتَرَدًّا
أَمْ هَلْ عَرَفْتَ الدَّارَ بَعْدَ تَوَهُمٍ

Already in the 6th century, thus, ‘Antarah articulated the anxiety surrounding the poet whose task was to write on top of all that had already been written—to reconstruct the ruins that countless previous poets had covered so well they needed no more patching. Though the remaining seventy-four lines of the poem nevertheless go on to perform their own singularity, describing the poet-hero’s journey and ultimate death in the war between his and his beloved’s tribe, the verses are rife with references to twins and full of grammatical dual forms. As Abedelfattah Kilito glosses in his essay about classical Arabic culture, “At the beginning of the poem—or rather, at the beginning of poetry itself—we find a concern for repetition and imitation.”²⁵³ With his questions, the son thus turns to the beginning of an entire poetic tradition, both occupying and questioning the elegiac stance of pre-modern Arab poets before real or imagined ruins of desert habitations and encampments. The son’s repetition of this stance is his own citation of his tradition and variation of *atṭāl*, which is given seemingly as an alternative to his father’s journey and the Abrahamic inheritance of memory and violence that he offers.

In the third set of dialogues, the son asks his father: “Why did you leave the horse alone? - To keep the house company, my son. Houses die when their inhabitants are gone...” Horses in pre-Islamic and classical Arabic poetry are commonly symbols of masculinity, sexuality and power. Used as mounts in war, they evoke themes of pride and survival in tribal society as well as embodying a form of identity—the breed and lineage of one’s horse in Bedouin culture is a mark of one’s own social distinction. In this sense, then, to leave one’s horse behind is a form of surrender and the son’s question accordingly carries an accusatory tone—why did you leave our identity behind, give up our prestige and forfeit our ability to win? Why did you make us flee the site of our loss without the consolation and comfort of our horse who might have allowed us to regain a semblance of self

24; See also J. Stetkevych, “Toward an Arabic Elegiac Lexicon: The Seven Words of the *Nasīb*” in *Reorientations/ Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 58-61.

²⁵¹ The *mu‘allaqāt* are 7-10 of the most famous and revered pre-Islamic odes that, as legend has it, were transcribed in gold and suspended from the Ka’ba in Mecca during the holy months of peace, in which no wars were permitted between tribes and the annual market of ‘Ukaz was held. At this famous market, tribal poets competed with each other and the authors of the *mu‘allaqāt* recited their odes. The *mu‘allaqāt* are among the earliest examples of the *qaṣīda* (polythematic ode), a poem which can run up to and over 100 lines long and is distinguished by its quantitative meter, single end-rhyme and mandatory division of each verse into 2 rhythmically equal hemistichs. Generally speaking, it contains three movements, as described by the 9th century writer Ibn Qutaybah in *Kitāb al-shi’r w’al-shu’ara’* (The Book of Poetry and Poets): the *nasīb*, the erotic prelude in which the poetic speaker reflects on the passage of his beloved and her caravan; the *raḥīl* or travel section, in which the poetic speaker journeys away from the site of the ruins; and the final section which can take several forms, the two most salient of which are *fakhr* (boasting of the tribe) and, after the spread of Islam, *madīḥ* (praise of a ruler and/ or patron).

²⁵² Translated by Michael Sells, in *Desert Tracings: Six Classical Arabian Odes* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 48.

²⁵³ Abdelfattah Kilito, *The Author and His Doubles: Essays on Classical Arabic Cultures*, trans. Michael Cooperson (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 10.

during the journey? Yet, in another sense, populating the ruins of their house with their horse is a strategic claim to what they must flee, a means of leaving oneself behind and thus a refusal to recuperate after the devastation of loss. As Suneela Mubayi notes, the horse becomes “the living element of the ruin that keeps it from being effaced forever” rather than maintaining its symbolic status of tribal distinction and masculine prowess.²⁵⁴ An act of resistance that is contingent upon a movement of self-surrender, leaving the horse behind marks the animating force that may be garnered by means of self-dispossession. Losing one’s mount—the sign and vehicle of one’s identity—entails living on in interrupted form and it is this ongoing performance of loss that reanimates the ruins and rouses their operative force. Significantly, it is the opening that the son’s question generates for the father’s response that allows for this understanding to surface. The animating force that may be cultivated by leaving behind signs of self is thus marked as issuing from a retrospective exchange of language, one that is initiated by the son.²⁵⁵

As in other Semitic languages, the word for house, *bayt*, also signifies a verse of poetry and here the plural, *buyūt*, rhymes with the following verb, *tamūt* (die). In the reverberation that this internal rhyme sounds, the metapoetic implications of the exchange between father and son begin to show themselves. When poetic iterations of loss (*al-buyūt*) are no longer inhabited by their inheritors, their forms perish and can no longer guard against the effacement of what they had housed. The father and son’s poetic dwelling remains animate and alive so long as it is kept company by the horse of identity and tradition who is untacked from for its owners and the frameworks they impose—the horse who is specifically marked as remaining alone. Kept company by the power of a poetic tradition unleashed from the intentions of its authors and fathers, these structures of loss (*al-buyūt*) survive through attenuated forms of authority that bequeath their tradition by leaving behind signs and mechanisms of self. The son returns to the site of destruction and reopens the register of the Arabs (*diwān al-‘Arab*), using the beginning of poetry—the repetition of repetition—to reanimate relations between fathers and sons through the performance of poetic inheritance. Rather than a bequest of land inscribed with co-constitutive forms of conquest and defeat, one which can only be recovered in memory, the interchange that the son elicits presents another mode of acquisition—that of citation.²⁵⁶ Inverting a legacy that would be obtained through the assumption of patriarchal

²⁵⁴ Suneela Mubayi, “‘My Body is My Language’: A Selective Study of the Traces of Imru’ Qays in Modern Arabic Poetry,” *Al-Abhath* 60-61 (2012-13): 153.

²⁵⁵ Najat Rahman notes that “The horse becomes a way of resisting absence, not only for the father but also for the son in his poetic endeavor (Hamoudeh 1995: 52). Through the dialogue with the father, the son who only recognized the departure sees how home inhabits a paternal heritage, a paternal failing, and cannot be dissociated from the question and the words between father and son,” *Literary Disinheritance*, 89. Though inspired by this reading, I am more interested in how the horse is positioned in relation to the junction of death and houses/ verses of poetry that Darwish sets up, a subject this next paragraph addresses more specifically. While Rahman reads in home a paternal failing, I read in home a strategy of resistance through voluntary attenuation.

²⁵⁶ Jeffrey Sacks’ book *Iterations of Loss: Mutilation and Aesthetic Form, Al-Shidyaq to Darwish*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015) is premised on a similar understanding: “Already bereaved, loss disrupts the privileging of figures of sovereignty and autonomy in language, to gesture to a temporal excess where language, in order to be itself, becomes something other than what it is” (1). The temporal excess that Sacks names here would seem to reference the theories of iterability and citationality made famous by Derrida in his reading of JLR Austin in his essay “Signature, Event, Context,” in *Limited Inc*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988). The basic premise undergirding these theories issues from the inextricable entanglement of two modes of time in language—the singular event and the necessary repeatability that conditions every event. Although what is happening right now is its own unique instantiation of “now,” the fact that this moment resembles every other “now” past and future renders it an iteration of an event, containing all that has passed away and is no longer present and that which may come and is also not present. This present “now” is thus always already mediated by non-presence. This is precisely why, for Derrida, all forms of communication are a species of writing, which pervades all events of speech, including performative utterances: “the possibility of extraction and citational grafting which belongs to the

norms of continuity, the exchange between father and son offers a practice of citation in place of passive inheritance, in which the authority and precedence of repetition reanimates the site of their particular loss. The son's continual orientation towards the primal scene of Arabic poetry, his practice of citation, becomes a mechanism of survival that reimbues his inheritance of loss with a resistance born of non-sovereign agency.

This strategy of citation that the poem provides is not restricted to literature, but it emerges in the text in allusions to religious narratives, historical events and poetic figures. Previous verses in the poem reference the Hijrah, Muḥammad's nighttime journey from Mecca to Medina with his companion Abu Bakr. Hiding in a cave from their pursuers, Muḥammad tells Abu Bakr, "Don't fear. Allah is with us [لا تخاف. إن الله معنا], a phrase which is invoked at several points in the poem when the father reassures his son: "Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid! Stay close to the ground in order to survive" (Qur'ān 9:40). The father's citation would seem to cast the land in the protective role of God, and, indeed, as the poem continually shifts between the Qur'ān, Torah and registers of classical poetry, it resituates relations between father and son by rewriting founding narratives and myths about the land. The end of the poem references the Crusades and the Book of Joshua, overlaying different occupations and conquests and pointing to the ideological machinations of all three Abrahamic religions. This allusive work is all enacted under the suggestive title "*Ābadu al-Ṣubbār*" (The Eternity of Cactus), a name that foregrounds the potency of cactus as a contested and polyvalent sign in the Palestinian and Israeli context. Once used to delineate village boundaries, lines of overgrown prickly pear cacti now remain to mark the sites of 400 villages that were depopulated and destroyed during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. To this day, they mark the boundaries of pre-1948 Palestinian agricultural plots even as Israeli cities have developed over and around them.²⁵⁷ Yet the same word in Hebrew also refers to a new subjectivity cultivated by the Zionist project—a native born Israeli who is prickly on the outside and sweet on the inside. The designation *tẓabar* uses an indigenous fruit to describe a new generation of Jews in Palestine in order to infer that they are the rightful heirs to the land. A resident of the new state that stripped him and his family of their possessions and claims to their past, leally regarded as a "present-absentee alien," Darwish received an Israeli education through high school and was well versed in both Israeli culture and Hebrew literature. The rebound between the shared etymological roots of both languages, though perhaps under-researched, is undoubtedly an operative acoustic in his work and sounds here in a distinct key. Allowing the trace of one language to surface in its sister tongue, he uses the repercussions between *ṣubbār* and *tẓabar* to reference the textual transit of different and conflicting loci of indigenosity, territorial boundaries and violence in Palestine and Israel. The eternity of cactus emerges thus as this double-edged conglomerate of shifting signifiers and narratives on which his father is crucified: "Remember, my son, here the British crucified/your father on the thorns of a cactus for two nights/ and he didn't confess. You will grow up, /my son, and tell those who inherit their guns/the story of the blood upon the iron..." The son's questions interrogate both the limits and capabilities of that directive, placing the father, flight, exile, sacrifice, conquest, occupation and competing textual traditions together.

structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark as writing even before and outside every horizon of semio-linguistic communication" (12). The "iterability of the mark" applies to the recognizable forms of signatures as much as it does to speech acts. Though both of these forms supposedly herald the presence of an authentic event, their iterability conditions the possibilities for infelicitous copies that veer away from the original intention behind them. Sacks' temporal excess is this repeatability and reiteration of non-presence in language.

²⁵⁷ Carol Bardenstein, "Of Trees, Oranges and the Prickly-Pear Cactus: Reading Landscapes of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory and Identity," *Edebiyyat: The Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures*, 8.1 (1998): 1-36, p. 3.

Darwish's prosodic choices reveal themselves to be central to the meaning of the poetic text; indeed, the auditory effects that he cultivates not only perform the poem's implication, but also emphasize an underlying and salient component of its content. Darwish has distinguished himself through his continued engagement with free verse, which in Arabic poetry entails the free repetition of a single metrical foot (*taf'īlah*) in lines of varying length. These poetic feet are taken from the sixteen meters of classical Arabic poetry that were codified in the eighth century. The poem "The Eternity of Cactus" is written in the *mutaqarib* meter, which literally means "drawing near together," and is named as such because similar structural units of its metrical feet are kept close together.²⁵⁸ The poem thematizes this prosodic adjacency in many ways—in the proximity between the poet's autobiographical experiences and his poetic rewriting of them; in the intimacy of father and son, and the contiguity of personal history and literary inheritance; in the connection between the life of poetic heritage and the diminishment of traditional forms of authority; and, not the least, in the juxtaposition and entanglement of Palestinian and Israeli narratives and signifiers. Drawing together many and varied aspects—the memory of the Nakba and its aftermath, the poetic ruins (*aṭlal*) of the Arabic literary tradition, attenuated forms of authority and of self—the poem's meter and internal rhyme present this encounter between disparate and interrelated elements as the middle zone that is the eternal endurance of cactus.

The network of horse, father, citational time and self-attenuation reappears in "Ismā'īl's 'Oūd," the first poem of the diwān's next section, *Faḍa' Hābil* (Abel's Space), though the poem articulates the animating force of iteration differently. Probing the relation between loss and recreation, the poem writes of a material form of remaking that it locates in the encounter between music and poetry. As a reformulation in a sense of "*Ābadu al-Ṣubbār*" and its redirection of relations between father and son, "Ismā'īl's 'Oūd" reimagines the Abrahamic narrative of sacrifice in relation to the 'oūd around which the poem is centered. In this rewriting, the poem explicitly ties the materiality of recreation to forms of self-effacement:

A mare dances on two strings—that's how
Ismael's fingers listen to his blood. The villages scatter
like poppies in the rhythm. There's neither
night there nor day. Divine *ṭarab*
touches us. All points rush towards
the elemental
Hallelujah,
Hallelujah,
Everything will begin anew

فَرَسٌ عَلَى وَتَرَيْنِ تَرْقُصُ — هَكَذَا
تُصْغِي أَصَابِعُهُ إِلَى دَمِهِ ، وَتَنْتَشِرُ الْقُرَى
كَشَفَانِقِ النِّعْمَانِ فِي الْإِيْقَاعِ . لَا
لَيْلٌ هُنَاكَ وَلَا نَهَارٌ . مَسَّنَا
طَرَبٌ سَمَاوِيٌّ ، وَهَزُولَتِ الْجِهَاتُ إِلَى
الْهَيْوَلِي
هَلِّلُويا،
هَلِّلُويا،
كُلُّ شَيْءٍ سَوْفَ يَبْدَأُ مِنْ جَدِيدٍ

He owns the old 'oūd, our neighbor
in the oak forest. He carries his time disguised
in the clothes of a singing madman. The war had ended
and the ashes of our village disappeared on a black cloud
on which the phoenix had not yet been born, as
we'd expected. The night's blood had not dried on
the shirts of our dead. Plants hadn't grown,
as forgetfulness had expected,
in the soldiers' helmets.

هُوَ صَاحِبُ الْعُودِ الْقَدِيمِ ، وَجَارُنَا
فِي غَابَةِ الْبَلُوطِ . يَحْمِلُ وَقْتَهُ مُتَخَفِيًا
فِي زِيٍّ مَجْنُونٍ بُغْيِي . كَانَتِ الْحَرْبُ انْتَهَتْ
وَرَمَادُ قَرِينَتِنَا اخْتَفَى بِسَحَابَةِ سُودَاءَ لَمْ
يُولَدْ عَلَيْهَا طَائِرُ الْفِينِيْقِ بَعْدُ ، كَمَا
تَوَقَّعْنَا ، وَلَمْ تَنْشَفْ دِمَاءُ اللَّيْلِ فِي
قُمُصَانِ مَوْتَانَا . وَلَمْ تَطْلُعْ نَبَاتَاتٌ ، كَمَا
يَتَوَقَّعُ النِّسْيَانُ ، فِي خُوْدِ الْجُنُودِ
هَلِّلُويا

²⁵⁸ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2567; Ibn Manẓūr, ibn Mukarram, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 3568.

Hallelujah,
Hallelujah,
Everything will begin anew

Like the remains of the desert, space recedes from time
a distance that allows the poem to explode. Ismael
descends to us, at night, and sings: Oh stranger
I am the stranger, and you are from me, oh stranger! The
desert departs in his words. His words disregard the force
of things: Oh 'oud...bring back what's been lost and
sacrifice me upon it. From one distance to another
Hallelujah,
Hallelujah,
Everything will begin anew

Meaning displaces us...so we fly from the foot of one
marble mountain to another. And we run between two
blue abysses.
Our dreams do not awaken, nor do the guards of the place
leave the space of Ismael. There's neither earth there nor
sky. A collective *tarab* touches us, before
the two-string isthmus. Sing for us, Ismael
so that everything will become possible, near existence
Hallelujah,
Hallelujah,
Everything will begin anew

In Ismael's 'oud the Sumerian wedding rises up
to the ends of the sword. There's neither existence there
nor nothingness. A lust for creation touches us:
From one string water flows. From two strings flame
ignites. From three, woman/ being/ revelation
radiate. Sing, Ismael, to meaning, and a bird will hover
over Athens between two histories at sunset...
Sing a requiem on a feast day!
Hallelujah,
Hallelujah,
Everything will begin anew

Beneath the poem: The foreign horses pass. Carts
pass over the prisoners' shoulders. Forgetfulness and
Hyksos pass beneath them. The masters of time
and the philosophers and Imru' al-Qays, mourning a
tomorrow tossed upon the gates of Caesar, pass. They all
pass beneath the poem. The contemporary past, like
Tamurlane, passes beneath it. The prophets pass there also
and listen to the voice of Ismael, singing: Oh stranger,

هَلِّلُويا،
كُلُّ شَيْءٍ سَوْفَ يَبْدَأُ مِنْ جَدِيدٍ

كَبَقِيَّةِ الصَّحْرَاءِ ، يُنَحْسِرُ الْفَضَاءُ عَنِ الزَّمَانِ
مَسَافَةً تَكْفِي لِتَنْفَجَرِ الْقَصِيدَةِ . كَانَ إِسْمَاعِيلُ
يَهْبِطُ بَيْنَنَا ، لَيْلًا ، وَيُنَشِّدُ: يَا غَرِيبُ ،
أَنَا الْغَرِيبُ ، وَأَنْتَ مَعِي يَا غَرِيبُ! فَتَرْحَلُ
الصَّحْرَاءُ فِي الْكَلِمَاتِ . وَالْكَلِمَاتُ تُهْمِلُ قُوَّةَ
الْأَشْيَاءِ عُدًّا يَا عُودُ ... بِالْمَفْقُودِ، وَادْبَحْنِي
عَلَيْهِ ، مِنَ الْبَعِيدِ إِلَى الْبَعِيدِ
هَلِّلُويا
هَلِّلُويا،
كُلُّ شَيْءٍ سَوْفَ يَبْدَأُ مِنْ جَدِيدٍ

يَتَحَرَّكُ الْمَعْنَى بِنَا ... فَنَطِيرُ مِنْ سَفْحٍ إِلَى
سَفْحٍ رُخَامِي . وَنَرْكُضُ بَيْنَ هَاوِيَّتَيْنِ
زَرْقَاوَيْنِ.
لَا أَحْلَامُنَا تَصْحُو ، وَلَا حَرَسُ الْمَكَانِ
يَغَادِرُونَ فَضَاءَ إِسْمَاعِيلِ . لَا أَرْضُ هُنَاكَ
وَلَا سَمَاءٌ. مَسْنَا طَرِبَ جَمَاعِي أَمَامَ
الْبَرْزَخِ الْمَصْنُوعِ مِنْ وَتَرَيْنِ . إِسْمَاعِيلُ ...
غَنَ
لَنَا ، لِيَصْبِحَ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مُمَكِّنًا قُرْبَ الْوُجُودِ
هَلِّلُويا
هَلِّلُويا،
كُلُّ شَيْءٍ سَوْفَ يَبْدَأُ مِنْ جَدِيدٍ

فِي عُودِ إِسْمَاعِيلِ يَرْتَفِعُ الزَّفَافُ السُّومَرِيُّ
إِلَى أَقْصَايِ السَّيْفِ. لَا عَدَمٌ هُنَاكَ
وَلَا وَجُودٌ. مَسْنَا شَبَقٌ إِلَى التَّكْوِينِ:
مِنْ وَتَرٍ يَسِيلُ الْمَاءُ. مِنْ وَتَرَيْنِ يَنْدَلِجُ
الْلهِيبُ. وَمِنْ ثَلَاثَتِهِمْ تَشْعُ الْمَرْأَةُ / الْكُونِ/
التَّجَلِّي . غَنَ إِسْمَاعِيلُ لِلْمَغْنَى يُحْلِقُ طَائِرٌ
عِنْدَ الْغُرُوبِ عَلَى أَثْنَيْنَا بَيْنَ تَارِيخَيْنِ...
غَنَ جَنَازَةً فِي يَوْمِ عِيدٍ!
هَلِّلُويا
هَلِّلُويا،
كُلُّ شَيْءٍ سَوْفَ يَبْدَأُ مِنْ جَدِيدٍ

تَحْتَ الْقَصِيدَةِ: تَعْبُرُ الْخَيْلُ الْغَرِيبَةُ. تَعْبُرُ
الْعَرَبَاتُ فَوْقَ كَوَاهِلِ الْأَسْرَى. وَيَعْبُرُ تَحْتَهَا
النَّسَبَانُ وَالْهَكْسُوسُ. يَعْبرُ سَادَةُ الْوَقْتِ،
الْفَلَاسِفَةُ، أَمْرُو الْقَيْسِ الْحَزِينُ عَلَى غَدٍ
مُلْقَى عَلَى أَبْوَابِ قَيْصَرَ. يَعْبرُونَ جَمِيعُهُمْ

I am the stranger, and you are like me oh out-of-place
stranger,
Oh *‘ūd*...bring back what’s been lost and sacrifice me
upon you
From one vein to another
Hallelujah,
Hallelujah,
Everything will begin anew ²⁵⁹

تحت
القصيدِ. يعبرُ الماضي المُعاصِرُ مثل
تيمورُناك
يعبرُ تحتها. والأنبياءُ هناك أيضاً يعبرون
ويُصَيِّتون لصوتِ إسماعيلَ يُنْشِدُ: يا غريبُ،
أنا الغريبُ، وأنت مثلي يا غريبَ الدارِ،
عُدْ ... يا عودُ بالمفقودِ ، واذبحني عَلَيْكَ
من الوريدِ إلى الوريدِ
هَلِّلُويا
هَلِّلُويا،
كُلُّ شَيْءٍ سوف يبدأ من جديدٍ ²⁶⁰

The poem overlays registers of cosmology with broad Abrahamic themes and the particular context of al-Birwa, the village where Darwish was born,²⁶¹ following its destruction in the 1948 war. This layering of broad and local frameworks generates a complex interface within which the narrative of creation is both reenacted and rewritten. The animism that yields this new genesis issues from music—the poem is indeed rife with musical figures and images and is itself incredibly musical, metered in a way that draws attention to the balance and flow of its sound. It is pointedly written in the *kāmil* meter, a meter that is so named, according to its definition in the medieval dictionary *Lisān al-‘Arab*, because “it completes its origin in a circle [أصله متفاعِلن ست مرات، سمي كاملاً لأنه استكمل على]”²⁶² The poem’s metered stanzas thus rhythmically thematize the refrain that “everything will begin anew,” explicitly locating the force of transformative recreation in the musical and metrical components of poetic language. This poem is the first one to appear in the diwan’s second section, “Abel’s Space,” which overall is engaged in replacing or substituting the fragmented present with song, perhaps most clearly in this poem. In Fakhri Salih’s formulation, this exchange is engineered in order to “return [time] to the very beginning through song, to the first footsteps and the first creation.”²⁶³ The recourse to song is indeed addressed explicitly in the third stanza, when the poetic speaker comments on the lyrics sung by Ismā‘īl: “His words overlook the force of things.” Ismā‘īl’s words, says the speaker, remain indifferent to the material force of objects and their visceral absence. Something else is needed, then, to return all that has been lost and the poem locates that restitutive potential in the musical—in the song’s ability to recalibrate relations between the discursive trails of words and the material weight of world.

The poem begins the search for this musical reformation with an arresting image conveyed through analogy: the way a mare dances on two strings is the way his fingers listen to his blood. In the next stanza we ascertain that the pronoun refers to Ismā‘īl, the speaker’s neighbor, but of course the name also invokes the iconic son of ‘Ibrāhīm and Hājar/Hagar who is held to be the ancestral father of Arabs. This layering of the most grandiose with the most local, the narrative and mythological with the personal, becomes vital to the processes of restitutive recreation that the poem enacts and its significance is as such signaled early on. The two strings on which the mare dances clearly belong to the *‘ūd* of the poem’s title, an ellipsis that perhaps evokes the traditional horse dance of Arab weddings. As in “*Ābadu al-Ṣubbār*,” horses play a central role in this poem,

²⁵⁹ Darwish, trans. Sacks, *Horse*, 42-6.

²⁶⁰ Darwish, *Al-‘Ā‘amāl al-kāmila* (Collected Works Volume 2), 523-7.

²⁶¹ The oak forest in the second stanza signals it, though the town is unnamed.

²⁶² Ibn Manzūr, Ibn Mukarram, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 3930.

²⁶³ Salih, “Qirā‘āt,” 178. Translation mine.

though a different kind horse is indicated here: *faras*, a mare, from the verb *farasa*, “to break or crush,” so called because it crushes and breaks the ground with its hooves.²⁶⁴ This choice of word already in a sense foreshadows the image of a dancing horse that initiates the poem and is set up as backbone. “*Ābadu al-Ṣubbār*” in contrast uses the word *ḥiṣān*, “a stallion or generous, high-bred horse,” so called because he preserves his rider or because his back is like a fortress to his rider, a choice that makes particular sense in the context of the poem and the horse’s role in it.²⁶⁵ The image of the mare whose dancing breaks the ground beneath its hooves thus conveys the creative power of the ‘*ūd* player whose fingers are able to listen to his blood, hear and convey the pulsing of his own life force. His playing inaugurates the cosmic scene of rapture, wherein divine *ṭarab* touches the poetic speaker and all those who hear the movement of life that sounds in the ‘*ūd*’s music.

Signifying intense grief or joy as well as motion, *ṭarab* refers to the emotional transformation that ensues when one is literally affected and moved by the vibrations of divinely inspired music. Like its mystical equivalent, *wajd*, the scene of *ṭarab* involves an experience of ecstatic transcendence wherein the listener is transported by the music that envelops her to such an extent that her own condition is tangibly transformed.²⁶⁶ In the poem, thus, with this moment of musical intoxication everything will begin anew, inaugurating the realignment of primordial matter into a new formulation.

While the second stanza anchors the poem in the post-war devastation of al-Birwa, the third verse weaves the motifs of the previous stanzas together, orchestrating cosmogonic images, Abrahamic narratives and local memories of destruction. The verse begins with another striking image: “Like the remains of a desert, space recedes from time/a distance that allows the poem to explode.” The music of Ismā‘īl’s ‘*ūd*, the subject and occasion of the present poem, generates intervals or incongruities between space and time. This trope would seem to indicate both memory as a retention of something past that reappears, regardless of time’s progression, and the potential for new matrices that diverge from linear trajectories of development to emerge. This space between time and space that signals the material possibility for both memory and future permutation, aptly figured in the remains of the desert, is what allows the poem to “explode.” Darwish chooses an exacting verb to express a particular kind of eruption: *tanfajir*, an explosive outpouring that is associated with water. *Fajara* means “to cleave or break up ground the way water would” and *tanfajir* means “water flows out as though impelled.” This single verb exerts considerable force on this verse, evoking the saga of ‘Ibrāhīm, Hājar, Ismā‘īl and the narrative of the Zamzam well, told only in secondary sources of Quran.²⁶⁷ Following the paradigmatic Ibn ‘Abbas version, after Sarah becomes jealous of Hājar due to the birth of Ismā‘īl, ‘Ibrāhīm personally takes them both to Mecca and leaves them with only one skin of water before returning to Syria. Hājar initially follows him to protest, but after ascertaining that God has instructed him to leave them there, she is satisfied. Once their water runs out, Hājar cannot bear to see her son die and in desperation she climbs the nearby hills of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa to search for more and runs between them seven times, thus setting the precedent for the “running ritual” (sa‘y) of the ḥajj, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. In some versions of the narrative, Hājar hears the angel Gabriel scratching the ground with the tip of his wing, while in other versions, Ismā‘īl scratches the ground with his heel and water gushes forth (*tanfajir*). This spring is now known as the famous Zamzam Well, a site that is visited by millions of pilgrims each year to drink from the miraculous water from God that saved Ismā‘īl and his mother. According to tradition and recounted in various versions of this Meccan sequence, ‘Ibrāhīm and

²⁶⁴ Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2421.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 590.

²⁶⁶ For more on the subject of *ṭarab*, see Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World*.

²⁶⁷ See Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, 63-71 for its variations.

Ismā'īl rebuilt the House of God (*bayt Allāh*), originally established by Adam, close to the site of the well. Known as the Ka'ba, Muslims around the world orient themselves towards it in prayer.

The stanza thus evokes the Qur'anic and Abrahamic context of Ismā'īl, specifically recalling the force of embodiment that elicits the surge of the Zamzam spring, wherein the touch of his heel is the stimulus for this aquatic explosion. To add perhaps even more richness to this constellation, it should be noted that there is a fundamental metaphor in Arabic literature, based on the two meanings of the verb *r-w-y*, signifying both “to relate or tell” and “to slake one's thirst, to give water to others.” In this metaphor, thus, relating the tales, anecdotes and poetry of others to someone else is likened to either the quenching of one's own thirst or drawing water for one's family, thus instilling the analogy between literary transmission and survival. In the context of this poem and Darwish's animation of these subtexts, we might then view the recreations inherent in literary transmission as an alternative basis for survival.

The gap between space and time is where the ode springs forth, like the healing water of survival that Ismā'īl's heel impelled. This scriptural, cosmic layering of images is coupled with the image of Ismā'īl, the *'ūd* playing neighbor of the poetic speaker in al-Birwa, who would come and stay with them at night, singing words that express a shared form of existential alienation and exile: “Oh stranger/I am the stranger, and you are from me, oh stranger!” Ismā'īl's lyrics convey a paradoxical experience of collective estrangement, a subtext that regularly reappears in Darwish's later work.²⁶⁸ This marked text within the poetic text proclaims the ubiquity of exile in its varied forms, a pronouncement that causes the desert and the sense of lost heritage that is associated with it to disappear. The poem offers a hint as to the reason for this Saharan departure, declaring that words neutralize and are indeed indifferent to the power of material things. These abstracted words would seem to refer to the lyrics that Ismā'īl sings, but must also indicate the poem's words and the poetic speaker's tropes. Following this admission of ambivalence as to the effectivity of poetic language, the speaker uses these same equivocal words to mobilize a turn towards music: “Oh *'ūd*...bring back what's been lost and sacrifice me/ upon it.” Locating a more visceral and communicative register in the musical, the speaker indeed commands the *'ūd* to return all that has been lost—al-Birwa, identity, possessions, history, future—and sacrifice him on this instrument of restitution. With this powerful directive, yet another discourse opens: the allusions to 'Ibrāhīm, Ishāq and Ismā'īl, equal parts stranger and kin, and the divinely mandated sacrifice that links faith and survival to an ethical rupture. In this chapter's previous section, I argue that the poem “*ʿAbadu al-Ṣubbār*” reverses the Abrahamic code, allowing the son to question his father's decisions and

²⁶⁸ See for instance, his 1998 collection of love poetry entitled *Sarīr al-gharība* (The Stranger's Bed). Continuing his preoccupation with the attempt to place himself in the other, whoever that might be, the *dīwān* establishes a relationship between love and exile, wherein the extension towards the beloved implies a necessary displacement of self. This dislocation of self implicitly evokes its corollary, political exile, the phenomenon that perhaps most identifies Darwish and his poetry. *Sarīr al-gharība* was the first collection Darwish wrote and published from Palestine after his twenty-six years of exile. Alienating readers who expected poetry of praise for the new Palestinian state, Darwish instead released a *dīwān* of love poems in which love is staged as a personal exile. In love poems that superimpose multiple exiles of multiple peoples in multiple times (the post-Nakba Palestinian exile, the Jewish and Arab exile from al-Andalus in 1492, Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's exile from Iraq, to name but a few), the historical and political borders of time and space are explicitly disregarded. In this suspension, territorial exile becomes but an aspect of the exile of existence, the expanse of which renders spatio-temporal boundaries fluid, curiously reducing the gravity of territorial dislocation throughout history. Surrendering to the condition of displacement that is human existence, dwelling in the stranger's bed locates the liberation of self through the experience of proximity to the beloved other. Darwish's language seemingly performs the displacement of self that is sought after and produced through these poems, as he makes explicit in the collection's first sonnet: “And my song needs to breathe: poetry isn't poetry/and prose isn't prose...”

dispute the logic of sacrifice to which his father subscribes. This poem appropriates the narrative of sacrifice even more explicitly. “*Abadu al-Ṣubbar*” establishes the son as an animating force of return through the mobilization of literary heritage that he offers in response to his father’s flight, thus replacing sacrifice with a form of writing that privileges the prior iterations of loss that sound in the present text as a means of evacuating the authorial voice. “*ʿOūd Ismāʿīl*” in contradistinction premises its subversion of sacrifice on the capacity of the musical register to redefine relations between the material and the discursive. The *ʿoūd*’s songs enter its listeners’ ears and effect an emotional transformation that literally moves them. The movement of sound and sign in and with body that this music incites figures a restitution of loss born of cosmic recreation that enables tangible forms of transmission to unfold. The poem connects this rhythmic realignment of words and world to voluntary appeals for self-sacrifice, indeed placing the speaker’s demand for both recovery and sacrifice together on the lute.²⁶⁹ A radicalization of “*Abadu al-Ṣubbar*”’s thrust, the *ʿoūd*’s music occasions an animating interval between time and space, enabling a restorative kind of recreation that manifests through a simultaneous oblation of self.

The next stanza continues to elicit this musical realignment of self and world, extending the narrative from the previous stanza. The *ṭarab* of Ismāʿīl’s *ʿoūd* causes the meaning to move in those who hear its music and carries them, so they may fly from mountain to mountain. Hājar’s running from al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa is seemingly invoked again, as the speaker and his community take her place in the search for water, flying from the foot of one marble mountain to another and running between two blue abysses. The next phrases in the stanza—“our dreams do not awaken” and “the guards of the place”—would seem to return the scene to al-Birwa and the post-war context, yet the remainder of the verse immediately reinvokes cosmic and biblical contexts. In this heteroglossic passage, the soldiers patrolling the village do not leave “the space of Ismāʿīl,” the expanse that his music creates, in which time recedes from space as his foot incites both water and the poem to surge forth explosively. This space recalls the name of the section in which the poem is placed, as perhaps an alternative to Abel’s space, an arena evoking signs of primordial murder and its concealment. In Ismāʿīl’s space, the poem continues, “there’s neither earth there/nor sky. A collective *ṭarab* touches us, before/the two-string isthmus.” The expanse depicted is not a physical or geographical territory. Shifting the basis of materiality from the support and symbology of land to the experience of embodiment, the speaker declares that the space is instead a place of collective *ṭarab*, a state of emotional transformation that physically impresses itself on them. The two-string isthmus recalls the Palestinian *ʿoūd*, perhaps also evoking the Isthmus of Suez (the strip of land that lies between the Mediterranean and Red Seas, joining the continents of Africa and Asia). In either case, the instrument that creates music conspicuously replaces land and territory. Indeed, what we might imagine to be a priori forms of sense-perception and proprioception—space, time, earth and sky—are rendered as secondary to the music’s generative force: when Ismāʿīl sings, he brings things closer to real existence, makes everything possible again. This musically-induced space of material possibility in transformative flux is the site from which everything will begin again.

The fifth stanza studies the theme of recreation by referencing the slippage between creation stories that predate the canonical Abrahamic narratives ensconced in scripture. Presenting a re-telling of creation via music within this proliferation of myth, Darwish alludes to the Sacred Sumerian Wedding, Egyptian ancient cosmology as well as the Greek goddess Athena and her owl of Minerva. The final stanza moves from *ʿoūd* to ode, from gods to kings, and from myths to the fraught political histories of foreign and nomadic empires. Evoking Hyksos (the 15th dynasty of Palestinian immigrants that ruled northern Egypt) and Tamulane (the tartar successor to Genghis

²⁶⁹ See footnote 6.

Khan, considered to be the last great nomad power), the stanza ultimately culminates in the tragedy of the poet-king Imrū' al-Qays and the evocation of Qays' final words in Ismā'īl's mouth. A renowned pre-Islamic poet of the 6th century, Imrū' al-Qays is considered by some to be the proverbial father of Arabic literature. His *mu'allaqa* is generally regarded to be the magnum opus of classical Arabic poetry. This literary fame inspired the redaction of a wealth of anecdotes regarding his misadventures, such that his legacy is constituted through a mix of his poetry and the anecdotal framework that serves as a form of creative interpretation.²⁷⁰ According to these accounts, he was the son of one of the last Hindite kings, Ḥujr, who disapproved of Qays' poetry writing and frivolous lifestyle and banished him from his kingdom. After his exile, Imrū' al-Qays persisted in the behavior that had enraged his father—drinking, hunting, gambling, etc.—but when he heard of his father's murder by the Banū 'Asad, he renounced wine and women, uttering the memorable words, “I will neither be sober today nor drunk tomorrow...wine today and business tomorrow.” He spent the rest of his life wandering throughout the Arabian Peninsula to avenge his father's death. Ultimately unsuccessful in his quest, he traveled to Constantinople to request aid from the Roman emperor Justinian in a last bid. Though he was initially met with support, a member of the Banū 'Asad whose brother Imrū' al-Qays had killed infiltrated Justinian's court and convinced the emperor that Imrū' al-Qays was carrying on with his daughter. Upon this report, the emperor sent him a golden robe laced with poison, which killed him. Qays' last words were reportedly, “O my neighbor, indeed we are strangers in this very place/and every stranger to a stranger is kin,” words that appear to have had a profound effect on Darwish, surfacing throughout his corpus in various rearticulations.²⁷¹

A poet-king who battled authority and lost his inheritance, Imrū' al-Qays is requisitioned here to distill structures of patriarchy and come to terms with the relationship between inheritance and dispossession. Clarifying the logic of vengeance that causes these two terms to ultimately signify the same, Suzanne Stetkevych writes, “There is a mythopoetically telling irony at work in Imru' al-Qays's exaggerated quest for vengeance. For if to avenge is to inherit, then the relentless pursuit of unshakable vengeance can lead only to dispossession. Indeed, Imru' al Qays ultimately abandons his patrimony.”²⁷² Moving from an ethos of vengeance to an ethic of sacrifice, Darwish ends with the reverberation of Qays' final words in Ismā'īl's mouth, crafting a patriarchal legacy that mingles the literary father with the Abrahamic ancestor—in effect, claiming this patrimony of dispossession. In the midst of his mesmerizing music of cosmic possibility Ismā'īl sings, “You are like me, oh out-of-place stranger,” words that signal the dynamic effects of an identification with dispossession and exile. Indeed, this recognition that all strangers partake in the pervasive experience of alienation and self-loss allows for an identification with all by means of de-identifying with one's own egoic structure. The final stanza showcases Ismā'īl as a father-figure who re-associates literary and Abrahamic heritage at the same time that he maintains his persona as an *'oud*-playing neighbor, occupying no position of patriarchy. If, then, claiming a patrimony of dispossession yields a matrix of possibility that is garnered by a simultaneous detachment from self and adherence to collective

²⁷⁰ For an illuminating overview of the relation between poetic and anecdotal texts and their gender dynamics, see Marlé Hammond's “Reading the Frame” in *Beyond Elegy: Classical Arabic Women's Poetry in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁷¹ See Mubayi, “‘My Body is My Language,’” 147-51; Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 247-50; Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, ed. I. 'Abbās, B. 'Abbās and I. al-Sa'āfin (Beirut: Dār Šādir, 2002), 9:59-77; Ibn Sallām al-Jumāḥī, *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shu'arā'*, ed. M. Shākir (Jeddah: Maṭba'at al-Madanī, 1974), 5163; Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī, *al-Shi'r wa-l-shu'arā' aw Ṭabaqāt al-shu'arā'*, eds. M. Qamīḥa and M. Ḍinnāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), 41-60.

²⁷² Stetkevych, *Mute Immortals*, 248.

forms of estrangement—the structure of patriarchy that grants that dis/inheritance would be one that divests itself of patriarchal status. These proliferating forms of self-effacement serve as the background for the speaker's final call for sacrifice upon the *'ūd*. “*Min al ba'id 'ila al ba'id*,” “from one distance to another,” a clause from the third stanza that conveys the restitutive powers of Ismā'il's music, rings in the culminating phrase, “*min al-warid 'ila al warid*,” “from one vein to another.” The sacrifice on the *'ūd* thus rewrites the Abrahamic narrative of sacrifice such that the materiality of recreation is tied explicitly to the dispossession of self. This architecture of effacement is maintained by structures of patriarchy that divest themselves of power and bequeath the material potentialities unleashed through disinheritance.

The poem at large and this final stanza in particular revisit past empires along with religious and poetic forefathers, reconceptualizing this literary and political history in the service of an interstitial form of agency. In this register of between-ness, maneuverability emerges from the dynamism maintained between the deep past and present; different narratives of cosmological creation and historical instances of destruction; cultural and literary structures of transmission; and the affective capacities of text and music. All of this is alluded to as that which passes underneath the poem, “*taḥt al qaṣīda*,” as if the poem were the sky and this orchestra of reconfigured history and materiality were its moving ground. If the poem is what surges forth from the rift in space and time that Ismā'il's music of regenerative estrangement impels—then according to the text of this poem, the ode secures a spatialized locus of possibility and maneuverability, one that creates and extends interstitial arenas. As “*'ūd Ismā'il*” attests, these registers of between-ness that the poem manifests are enacted through an ongoing practice of self-attenuation.

III. “The Poem is Between My Hands”: Echoes, Exile and Other Interstices

The diwan's epic thus narrates the process through which disinheritance from structures of patriarchy and associated forms of political subjugation (those conditioning architectures of subject formation that battle loss instead of allowing oneself to be remade by it) leads to the emancipatory cultivation of different forms of between-ness. In these intervals of liberating estrangement, the poems orchestrate destabilizing encounters between diverse voices, genres and registers that occasion various scenes of self-dispossession for the poetic speaker. This journey from the annals of historic, religious and literary forefathers and their sites of defeat towards poetic loci of disinheritance and voluntary self-loss showcases the unique conceptualization of maneuverability and transformation that Darwish develops in the writing of this mythical epic poem. I term his formulation “interstitial agency”—the force that emerges from an on-going surrender to the liberating estrangement of self-loss and ongoing-transformation. Darwish's privileging of interstitiality is most clear in the diwan's fourth section, *Ghurfa L'il Kalām Ma' al-Nafs* (A Room to Talk to Oneself), in which the poem becomes defined explicitly by aural aspects of between-ness, surfacing as an echo in the section's second poem, “From the Byzantine Odes of Abu Firas al-Hamdani” and as rhyme in “A Rhyme for the Odes,” the penultimate poem of the section. This section of the chapter traces these forms of between-ness in *A Room to Talk to Oneself*, looking at how these linguistic figures of interstitial agency serve to represent an alternative system of kinship and transmission, ultimately replacing structures of patriarchy entirely. For instance, when the poetic speaker declares emblematically, “I was born of my language” in “A Rhyme for the Odes,” he claims this language of generative alienation as his forebear, such that language supplants normative models

of parentage as a source of life and death. In what follows, I investigate how Darwish engineers that unseating and explore the restorative intervals of dispossession that he cultivates in poetic registers of possibility that circulate between textual and musical ambits. Probing how the collection's epic ties literary occasions of disinheritance to poetic mechanisms of aural relationality (echoes and rhyme), I distill the potentialities for transformative movement that the diwan presents.

The section's first poem, "*Tadabir Shi'riyya*" (Poetic Arrangements) establishes the centrality of between-ness to Darwish's notions of both poetry and agency, laying bare how interstitiality relates to both what the poem encompasses and what it can do:

The planets did nothing
except
teach me to read:
I have a language in the sky
and a language on the earth
Who am I? Who am I?

لم يكن للكواكب دور،
سوى أنها
علمتني القراءة:
لي لغة في السماء
وعلى الأرض لي لغة
من أنا؟ من أنا؟

I don't want to reply here
Perhaps a star will fall upon its image
Perhaps the forest of chestnut trees will lift
me towards the galaxy at night
and say: You stay here!

لا أريد الجواب هنا
ربما وقعت نجمة فوق صورتها
ربما ارتفعت غابة الكستنا
بي نحو المجرة، ليلاً،
وقالت: ستبقى هنا!

The poem is above. It is able
To teach me what it wants
Like how to open a window
Or put my household affairs in order
among myths. It is able
to wed me to itself...in time.

أقصيدة فوق، وفي وسعها
أن تعلمني ما تشاء
كأن أفتح النافذة
وأدير تدابير المنزلية
بين الأساطير. في وسعها
أن تزوجني نفسها ... زمناً

My father is below, carrying a thousand-year-old
olive tree
It's neither eastern
nor western
Perhaps he'll take a rest from the conquerors,
And touch me tenderly
And gather lilies for me

وأبي تحت، يحمل زيتونة
عمرها ألف عام،
فلا هي شرقية
ولا هي غربية.
ربما يستريح من الفاتحين،
ويحنو على قليلاً،
ويجمع لي سوسناً

The poem draws away from me
It enters a port of sailors who love wine
and don't return to the same woman twice
and don't feel nostalgia for anything,
nor sorrow!

أقصيدة تبعد عني،
وتدخل ميناء بحارة يعشقون النبيذ
ولا يرجعون إلى امرأة مرتين،
ولا يحملون حنيناً إلى أي شيء
ولا شجناً!

I haven't died of love, yet
But a mother who notices the glances of her son
at a carnation fears for the vase, for her wound
Then she weeps to ward off an accident

لم أمت بعد حباً
ولكن أمّاً ترى نظرات ابنها

before it arrives
Then she weeps to pull me back from the perilous path
alive, to be here

The poem is what lies between a between. It is able
to illuminate the night with the breasts of a young woman
It is able to illuminate, with an apple, two bodies
It is able to restore
with the cry of a gardenia, a homeland!

The poem is in my hands. It is able
to arrange the affairs of myths
with the work of hands. But I
when I found the poem, dispossessed my self
and I asked it:
Who am I?
Who am I?²⁷³

في القرنفل تخشى على المزهريّة من جرحها،
ثم تبكي لتبعد حادثة
قبل أن تصل الحادثة
ثم تبكي لترجعني من طريق المصائد
حيّاً، لأحيا هنا

ألقصيدة ما بين بين، وفي وسعها
أن تضئ الليلالي بنهدي فتاة،
وفي وسعها أن تضئ بتفاحة جسدين،
وفي وسعها أن تعيد،
بصرخة غاردينيا، وطننا!

ألقصيدة بين يدي، وفي وسعها
أن تدير شؤون الأساطير،
بالعمل اليدوي، ولكنني
مذ وجدت القصيدة شردت نفسي
وساءلتها:
من أنا
من أنا؟²⁷⁴

The poem begins with a scene of celestial instruction—the speaker declares that the planets taught him a mode of reading premised upon a duality of languages, a binary that does not allow for a stable sense of identity. Like in the previous poem discussed, “‘*Oūd Ismā‘il*,” the speaker locates the poem “above” or “*fawq*,” a spatialization that indicates the poem’s ability to establish and safeguard conditions of possibility. Rather than merely aligning the poem with celestial language, the poem is above and beyond, encompassing both heavenly and terrestrial registers of expression. Because of this comprehensive scope, thus, the poem is able to teach the speaker how to secure a middle ground between mythical and domestic domains, “like how to open a window/or put household affairs in order among myths.” Again, like in “‘*Oūd Ismā‘il*,” the imbuing of grandiose and mythological symbology with personal and ordinary import is vital to the poem’s theorization of restitutive recreation. The poem indeed teaches how to do exactly that, which it equates or relates to opening a window. This opening evokes the section’s title— “A Room to Talk to Oneself,” a heading that summons images of prison cells on the one hand and creative freedom on the other as it recalls Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. The duality between these interpretations, which is perhaps echoed in this text’s pairing of celestial language with terrestrial, is borne out explicitly through other poems in the section.

The poem is increasingly spatialized and materialized as its capabilities are delineated, which indeed the title indicates. “*Tadabir*” means “steps,” “measures” or “arrangements,” but its singular form “*tadbir*” signifies housekeeping or household management. Thus, the poetic measures of housekeeping entail the handiwork that makes mythical registers of meaning material, palpably present and part of the ordinary rhythm of domestic life. Once these measures are taken, the windows of restrictive spaces can open. The poem is “*mā bayna bayn*” (“what is between a between”), embodying that potential to find more space between walls or any other entities that the conjunction

²⁷³ Darwish, trans. Sacks, *Horse*, 108-12.

²⁷⁴ Darwish, *Al-‘Ā‘amāl al-kāmila* (Collected Works Volume 2), 577-80.

“between” puts into relation. As the poem reaches its conclusion, the sound of the in-between emerges in repeating diphthongs, the *ay* of *bayna* that also marks the endings of dual nouns: “*nahday fatah*” (“the two breasts of a young woman”), “*jasadayn*” (“two bodies”) and, in the final stanza, “*bayna yaday*” (“between my two hands”). As the penultimate stanza focuses on the centrality of between-ness to what poetry is and can do, it summons hints of Eden and the Song of Songs—the poem “illuminates the night with the breasts of a young woman” and illuminates “with an apple, two bodies.” That which incites or excites desire, a portrayal that casts the poetic between as an interstice between bodies, is that which can return a homeland with the cry of a gardenia. In this smooth pivot towards the political context that saturates Darwish’s work, poetry, exile, restitution and between-ness are juxtaposed and acquire new valences of meaning in relation to one another. Thus, exile becomes the interval between a seized homeland that one must not relinquish and the present spatio-temporal location outside the territorial homeland of the past; the restitution of homeland becomes the ability to reside in that space of between-ness; and poetry, that which lies between a between, is that technique which makes the ongoing between a space in which to dwell, as if this between-ness suddenly acquires walls, floor and ceiling through the artfulness of poetic creation.

The final stanza re-concretizes the relation between poetry and between-ness. Poetry, the potentially transformative space that lurks between pairs of binaries, is now itself placed between the speaker’s hands. As the scale and scope of this text expands and contracts, the poem’s embodiment of interstitiality takes on an explicitly material form—this *qaṣīda* now becomes a tangible object that the speaker holds, touches and grasps. Rather than the ethereal activity of a wordsmith with pen and paper, poetry-writing is figured as a craftsman’s physical engagement with the material object he transforms. Indeed, it is from within this corporeality of poetic action that poetry’s interstitial dynamism is able to function. Thus, while the *qaṣīda* is between the speaker’s hands, it is able to set in motion and conduct the affairs of myths with the manual labor of creative and ordinary life. This physical, concrete and effectual form of poetry is capable of redirecting mythical narratives the way one may rearrange household matters.

The figurative language that is used to impart the corporeal realness of what the poet understands poetry to be signals a theoretical precarity. For of course, this text remains textual and discursively bound even as it aspires to transform world and self in physically felt and materially evident ways. In the tropes of tactility and corporeality that this poem emphasizes as well as its insistence on the semantic and conceptual flexibility that the preposition “between”²⁷⁵ yields, Darwish reveals the scope and extent of poetic language. Because words, no matter how skillfully employed, cannot literally manifest an occupied homeland. They can and do, however, mark the absence of the material entities they reference and as such, they maintain a chiasmic relationship between themselves and their elusive objects, a relationality that Judith Butler has theorized perhaps most cogently in her essay on Descartes’s *Meditations*. In “‘How Can I Deny that these Hands are Mine?’” she traces the spectral figures of the body that populate Descartes’s *Meditations*, even as he endeavors to deny his own body’s reality. In her words,

To say that the body is figured chiasmically is to say that the following logical relations hold simultaneously: the body is given through language, but is not, for that reason, reducible to

²⁷⁵ In Arabic grammar, “*bayna*” is considered to be a *zarf mikān* or a *zarf zamān*, a preposition or adverb that describes spatial or temporal location whose precise meaning is determined (or literally conditioned, as of the meanings of the noun “*zarf*” signifies circumstances or conditions) by surrounding content and context. Lisan al ‘Arab notes that it is one of the *adḍaḍ*, words that contain opposing meanings, as “*bayna*” signifies both joining and separation.

language. The language through which the body emerges helps to form and establish that body in its knowability, but the language that forms the body does not fully or exclusively form it.²⁷⁶

In this relationship between discourse and matter, thus, the material becomes knowable through the discursive expressions that its own physical possibilities exceed. Though representations of physical matter in language cannot claim to provide unmediated access to their referents, they can mark the intersections and elusions of their encounters and transpositions. Indeed, the corporeal metaphors and emphasis on intervals in “Poetic Arrangements” accentuate the trace of absent materiality in the text itself. By means of this emphasis, Darwish thematizes the poem’s content, embodying the between-ness the poem both describes and is described as. In this enactment, it conjures the interval between the real effect it desires and the figurative language it employs to impart that result, from which it cannot escape. The poem acts in the only way it can, writing a form of interstitial agency that shows the passage between words and world that it cannot quite cross.

This interstitial agency has profound implications for notions of self-sovereignty. Encountering the material-discursive between-ness that the poem summons and performs indeed causes the speaker to question his own ontological condition, culminating in the final stanza: “The poem is in my hands./It is able/to arrange the affairs of myths/with the work of hands./But I/when I found the poem, dispossessed my self/and I asked it:/Who am I?/Who am I?” The verb *ṣarrda*, meaning “to frighten, drive away, make homeless or dispossess” indicates here the active destabilization of self that is crucial to Darwish’s notion of transformation: I drove my self away and made myself homeless, echoing the conceptually broad state of exile imposed on Palestinians. I dispossessed myself of my identity and any stable sense of being, asking my estranged self, “Who am I?” In this open-ended interrogative, one which recalls the window of the poem’s earlier formulation, the ‘I’ is skillfully prevented from acquiring a stable reference. As such, the ‘I,’ the linguistic placeholder of self, is made to remain between its pointing reference and its absent contextual referent, to occupy the indeterminate space of possibility in between, to enact and experience the interstitial agency of poetry.

The poem sets the dynamism of this indeterminacy in contrast to the tethers of both mother and father. The speaker’s father is moored below in earthly language, bearing a thousand-year-old olive tree that recalls the cross that Christ bore on the way to his crucifixion. The symbol of Palestinian rootedness, steadfastness and unyielding resistance that he carries binds him to his conquerors in suicidal ways that prevent him from establishing the depth of relationship with his son that the speaker would seem to desire. The mother is initially described in indefinite terms (a mother and her son) before she is eventually portrayed as the speaker’s constant caretaker, using her tears to anchor him in situated life. Prefiguring this section’s exploration of alternative forms of kinship, the speaker reorients himself away from the bonds of mother and father, returning to the scene of between-ness that the poem establishes and to the dynamic effect of release it achieves in him.

This between of poetic language that “*Tadābir Shi’riyya*” names explicitly reformulates the musical thematization of “‘*Oūd Ismā’il*,” where the metrical, rhythmic and other aural aspects of

²⁷⁶ Judith Butler, “How Can I Deny that these Hands are Mine?” in *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 17-35 (21). Ultimately, the essay details how the body confounds the very tropes it engenders: “If the body is what inaugurates the process of its own spectralization through writing, then it is and is not determined by the discourse it produces. If there is a materiality of the body that escapes from the figures it conditions and by which it is corroded and haunted, then this body is neither a surface nor a substance, but the linguistic occasion of the body’s separation from itself, one that eludes its capture by the figure it compels” (35). Butler shows how this functions even in conditions of corporeal denial.

poetic language produce the scene of musical intoxication from which everything begins anew. In accentuating the musical aspects of language that create affectively palpable effects in listeners, “‘*Oūd Ismā‘īl*” poses the interval between text and non-text that Darwish’s poetry continually frequents. Music indeed signals the extra-linguistic effects of poetic language, which Darwish theorizes to be central to modes of creative transformation via self-effacement. In “*Tadābir Shi‘riyya*,” even as the poetic language he uses is unable to extend beyond the discursive register, Darwish again offers the interstice between the text and that which exceeds the text yet remains untranslatable in textual expression. The materiality that he makes his language encounter in this gap, I contend, is set up here as an alternative site of identity and source of creative transformation, one that replaces the different entrapments of mother and father. While in “*Tadābir Shi‘riyya*,” the musical edge of language is rephrased as a between, in the section’s next poem, the interval resurfaces in a different auditory form, that of an echo.

Indeed, “*Min Rūmiyyāt Abī Firās al-Ḥamdānī*” (From the Byzantine Odes of Abu Firās al-Hamdani) begins with the echoing of echoes, an echo that repeats: “An echo returning. A wide street in the echo.” The first verse’s auditory image previews the rest of the poem’s topic: an original noise or utterance has traveled, rebounded and traveled back, a trajectory that seemingly traces the walls of a prison cell even as it contains the spread of wide streets. In this introductory verse, thus, the echo is figured as that auditory excess of language that both transcends and escapes the confines of cells. The rest of the poem is as follows:

An echo returning. A wide street in the echo
Steps exchange the rattle of a cough, approach
the door, little by little, and draw
away. Family will visit tomorrow
Their Thursday visit. There’s our shadow
in the hallway and our sun in the basket
of fruit. There’s a mother scolding our jailer:
Why did you pour out our coffee on
the grass, you criminal? There’s salt rising from the sea
There’s sea rising from the salt. My cell
expanded an inch from the voice of the dove. Fly
to Aleppo, oh dove, fly with my ode
and carry a greeting to my cousin!
An echo
in the echo. The echo has its metal staircase, its
transparence, its dew
ringing with those who climb to their dawn...and those
who descend to their graves through punctures in the
horizon...
Take me with you to my language! I said:
what’s useful lingers in the words of the ode
which rise, like foam, to the surface of the skin of the
drums
And in the echo, my cell opens, a balcony
like the dress of the young woman who accompanied
me in vain
to the train window. My father doesn’t like you,

صدى راجع. شارع واسع في الصدى
خطى تتبادل صوت السعال، وتدنو
من الباب، شيئاً فشيئاً، وتأتى
عن الباب. ثمة أهل يزوروننا
غداً، في خميس الزيارات. ثمة ظل
لنا في الممر. وشمس لنا في سلال
الفواكه. ثمة أم تعاتب سجاننا:
لماذا أرقّت على العشب قهوتنا يا
شقي؟ وثمة ملح يهب من البحر،
ثمة بحر يهب من الملح. زنزانتى
اتسعت سنتمتراً لصوت الحمامة: طيري
إلى حلب، يا حمامة، طيري بروميّتي
واحملني لابن عمي سلامي!
صدى
للصدى. للصدى سلم معدني، شفافية، وندى
يعج بمن يصعدون إلى فجرهم... وبمن
ينزلون إلى قبرهم من ثقب المدى...
خذوني إلى لغتي معكم! قلت:
ما ينفع الناس يمكث في كلمات القصيد
وأما الطبول فتطفو على جلدّها زبداً
وزنزانتى اتسعت، في الصدى، شرفة
كثوب الفتاة التي رافقتني سدى
إلى شرفات القطار، وقالت: أباي
لا يحبك. أباي تحبك. فاحذر سدوم غدا
ولا تنتظرني. صباح الخميس،
أنا لا أحب الكثافة حين تُخبى في سجنها

she said. My mother does. So beware of tomorrow's
 Sodom
 Don't wait for me Thursday morning. I don't
 like thickness when it hides the movements of meaning
 within its walls, and leaves me, a solitary body,
 to remember its forest...The echo has a room
 like my cell: a room to talk to itself
 My cell is my image. I haven't found anyone around it
 to share my morning coffee with,
 Nor a bench to share my isolation with in the evening.
 Nor a scene
 to share my perplexity with to reach the right path
 So I'll be what the horses bid during the raids!
 a prince
 a prisoner
 or a corpse!
 My cell opened wider, a street or two. This echo
 is an echo. To the left and right, I'll leave my walls
 a master, like a free ghost leaves itself,
 and will walk to Aleppo. Oh dove, fly
 with my ode. Carry to my cousin
 the dew's greeting!²⁷⁷

حركات المعاني، وتتركني جسداً
 يتذكر غاباته وحده ... للصدى عرفة
 كنز انتي هذه: غرفة للكلام مع النفس،
 كنز انتي صورتني لم أجد حولها أحداً
 يشاركني قهوتي في الصباح، ولا مقعداً
 يشاركني عزلتي في المساء، ولا مشهداً
 أشاركه حيرتي لبلوغ الهدى.
 فلاكن ما تريد لي الخيل في الغزوات:
 فلما أميراً
 وإما أسيراً
 وإما الردي!
 وكنز انتي اتسعت شارعاً شارعين. وهذا
 الصدى
 صدى، بارحاً سانحاً، سوف أخرج من حائطي
 كما يخرج الشبح الحر من نفسه سيداً
 وأمشي إلى حلب. يا حمامة طيري
 بروميتي، واحملي لابن عمي
 سلام الندى!²⁷⁸

The sound of the *'ayin* (ع) dominates the echoes of the first verse and its own pharyngeal reverberation is amplified by the -un sound of the *tamwīn al-damm* (د), the diacritical suffix that signals the presence of an indefinite subject in the nominative case, known in English as nominative nunation. Thus, the first line in transliteration reads as follows: *Ṣadan rāji'un. Shari'un wāsi'un fis Ṣada*. Darwish, with his characteristic sensitivity to the poetry of sound, makes his language enact and achieve the resonance he describes.

The next few verses more clearly indicate the poem's prison-like setting—footsteps approach and leave the door and family visit days are anticipated. The poem's title indeed immediately cues the four-year imprisonment of the great 10th century poet Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī, cousin to the renowned ruler of the Emirate of Aleppo (present day northern Syria) Sayf al-Dawlah. Famed for his conquests against the enemies of Islam, Sayf al-Dawlah is equally remembered for the artistic grandeur of his court. His palace evoked the splendor of the Abbasid Caliphate's early days with its patronage of scholars, philosophers and poets alike, including al-Fārābī, al-Mutannabī and Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī.²⁷⁹ In addition to serving as court poet for Sayf al-Dawlah, al-Ḥamdānī also fought actively in his cousin's battles against the Byzantine Empire. In 962, he was captured by the Byzantines and subsequently spent four years as a prisoner in Constantinople, where he wrote what is widely considered to be his best poetry, collected under the title *Al-Rūmiyyat* (The Byzantine [Poems]). While this is the first imprisonment to be referenced, the poem's following verses invoke a more contemporary and local scene—Palestinians imprisoned in Israeli jail cells, awaiting Thursday

²⁷⁷ Darwish, *Al- 'Ā' amāl al-kāmila* (Collected Works Volume 2), 581-3.

²⁷⁸ Darwish, trans. Sacks, *Horse*, 114-17.

²⁷⁹ Abdullah El Tayib, "Abū Firās al Ḥamdānī" in *'Abbasid Belles Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 315-27), 317.

family visits. Later verses make this scenario more explicit, evoking Darwish's own periods of incarceration in Israeli prisons. Before Darwish decided to leave in Israel in 1970, he was imprisoned five times and placed under house arrest for long periods, during which he was forced to register at a Haifa police station every day. The reason for these repeated spells of incarceration? His poetry.²⁸⁰

Both contexts and experiences of detention then echo each other—echoes which indeed widen the prison cell, as the poetic speaker's declaration attests: "my cell grew an inch from the voice of the dove." This reverberating dove references a short poem of al-Ḥamdānī's, in which the poetic speaker addresses a dove who coos plaintively next to him and beseeches it to share his grief:

I say to a dove, mournfully cooing nearby, Neighbor, is your condition indeed mine? Love forbid! You've not tasted the pang of separation, anxieties have never entered your mind. Can a burdened heart be borne aloft by your pinions, or to a topmost distant branch? Neighbor, fate has not dealt justly between us; come, let me give you a share of my distresses. ²⁸¹	أقول وقد ناحت بقربي حمامة أيا جارتا هل تشعرين بحالي؟ معاذ الهوى ما ذقت طارقة النوى ولا خطرت منك الهموم ببالي أتحمل محزون الفؤاد قوادم على غصن نائي المسافة عالي أيا جارتا ما أنصف الدهر بيننا تعالى أقاسمك الهموم، تعالى ²⁸²
...	...

Darwish's poetic speaker asks the dove to carry a greeting to his cousin, echoing al-Ḥamdānī's many letters and poems imploring Sayf al-Dawla to secure his release. In the dual context of both prison scenes, the speaker's cousin may perhaps be understood to signify his Israeli jailors as well. Even more slyly, it evokes Tamar Ben-Ami, Darwish's first lover, a Jewish Israeli woman he met at a political rally for the Israeli Communist Party when he was 22, who formed the basis for a series of love poems he wrote that were addressed to "Rita."²⁸³ Tamar's surname in Hebrew, *Ben 'ami*, literally meaning "son of my nation," is a complete cognate with the Arabic word for "my cousin," *ibn 'ammi*.²⁸⁴ The echo of Tamar/ Rita (whose presence will become more explicit a few verses later) thus rings in the speaker's adoption of al-Ḥamdānī's calls to his cousin. This principle is then distilled in the next verse: "An echo/in the echo. The echo has its metal staircase, its transparenence, its dew/ringing with those who climb to their dawn.../and those who descend to their graves.../ Take me with you to my language!" One echo contains another, a rebounding regress which the poem spatializes into a tiered expanse that transcends life and in which poetic language may be found. The poem's meter emphasizes the apposition of this echo-chamber—the *mutaqarib* meter, literally meaning "drawn near to each other," indeed enacts the way in which disparate voices and contexts are brought together by the poetic text.

²⁸⁰ Khaled Mattawa, *Mahmoud Darwish: The Poet's Art and His Nation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 14.

²⁸¹ Trans. by El Tayib, "Abū Firās al Ḥamdānī," 325.

²⁸² Abū Firās al Ḥamdānī, *Diwān Abū Firās al Ḥamdānī* (Beirut: Beirut Maktabat al-Sharq, 1910), 325.

²⁸³ Suleiman Jubran, "Rita al-wāq' wa-l qinā' (Rita Real and Masked)" *Al-ḥiwār al-mutamaddin*, October 14, 2016, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://m.ahewar.org/s.asp?aid=534601> and Mira Sucharov, "Are Love and Politics Mutually Exclusive in Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" *Ha'aretz*, July 10, 2015, accessed December 1, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/blogs/the-fifth-question/premium-1.665384>.

²⁸⁴ Ernst Klein notes that the Semitic root 'a-m-m is kinsman most likely originally meant "those united" or "those related to." See Ernest Klein and Baruch Sarel, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1987), 474.

This echo that resonates back and forth amongst exiled poets writing in various forms of captivity swells through the reverberations of Arabic literary tradition. It reappears in virtually every verse of the poem, translated into a different image—the sound of “what’s useful,” lingering in the words of the *qaṣīda*”; the echoing expanse in which the speaker’s cell widens into a balcony,²⁸⁵ “like the dress of a girl who accompanied [him] in vain to the train window.” The echo then shifts into the girl’s warning to the speaker. “Beware of tomorrow’s Sodom,” she says, a statement that recalls another poem written by Darwish, titled “A Beautiful Woman from Sodom.” This poem is one of a group of love poems addressed to “Rita,” who was later revealed to be a Jewish-Israeli woman named Tamar Ben-Ami, Darwish’s first lover. “The one I love,” writes Darwish in this poem, “has two faces:/ one outside of existence/and one inside ancient Sodom/and I am in between them/ searching for the face of truth.”²⁸⁶ The persona of Rita returns with an almost haunting presence in Darwish’s oeuvre. Robyn Creswell has detailed how Rita’s recurring figure embodies many of the normative characteristics of the classical beloved in Arabic poetry, not least her status as hailing from a warring tribe.²⁸⁷ In “A Beautiful Woman from Sodom,” Darwish classifies the speaker’s lover as half a being of complete transcendence and half a creature of ultimate destruction, a characterization that clearly relates to her status as both a beloved and an Israeli participant in the ongoing occupation of Palestine. Indeed, in real life, Darwish and Ben Ami’s relationship ends when she joins the army. Notably, this representation of the lover slyly reverses the biblical narrative that places Abraham and Lot on the other side of Sodom’s sinners, as those whose virtue guaranteed their survival and safe-keeping by God (Genesis 19). Hailing from Sodom, the evoked lover is labeled as sinful oppressor and unattainable desired in equal measure. In the present poem, an echo of this lover cautions the poetic speaker to beware of tomorrow’s Sodom, as she accompanies him in vain to the train and announces she will no longer visit him on Thursday morning. Though she alerts him to imminent upheaval, her counsel comes with the announcement of her departure. A reformulation of the cycle of Rita poems, the lover’s reappearance here thus reiterates their ultimate separation amidst the polarity of her two faces and the impossibility of their connection.

The next line in the poem is ambiguously voiced—either this figure of Rita/ Ben Ami and/ or the poetic speaker could be its source. Significantly, it is the ‘I’ in middle voice that maintains this indefinite referentiality: “I don’t/like thickness when it hides the movements of meaning/within its prison, and leaves me, a solitary body,/to remember its forest...” The echoes and middle registers of the poem that circulate the lyrics of exiled and imprisoned poets are contrasted with the content of this line, in which the dense walls of a prison cell conceal the movements of meaning and leave (either the speaker or the girl) as a body, alone. This solitary body, either hers or his, is contrasted with the echo that always has an echo, the echo that has a room to talk to oneself in, like the cell that is the speaker’s image.

²⁸⁵ Balconies reappear throughout the collection. The diwan begins with the poem “أرى شبحي قادما من بعيد” (I See My Ghost Coming from a Distance). The poem uses the unusual metaphor of a speaker looking out over all that he wants like a balcony (“أطل كشرفة بيت على ما أريد”), a simile that disturbs the binary of inside and out as a balcony manages to straddle both. Balkis al-Karaki classifies this in a Heideggerian vein, noting that through the balcony, subject and world must encounter each other ““through their mutual participation in or as an opening”” (230, translation mine). This mental state of opening and mutual disclosure parallels the temporality of the poem, and perhaps the rest of diwan, in which past and present expose themselves to each other anew and the past is leant material weight though its emergence into the concrete details of everyday life. The image of the balcony opens the diwan thus with a kind of temporalized space that cannot separate conclusively between in/ out; past/ present; self/ other, underscoring the subjective disjunctions and dissociations that the following writing necessarily produces and cultivates. See Fakhri Salih, “Qirā’āt.”

²⁸⁶ Darwish, *Al-‘Ā‘amāl al-kāmila* (Collected Works Volume 1), 290-4.

²⁸⁷ Creswell, “Unbeliever in the Impossible,” 72-3.

This solitariness that is afforded by the prison of impossible love allows for a polyphony of poetry and poetic voices transcending spatial and historical borders. It propels the speaker to proclaim that he'll choose to become one of the options offered to him by the horses in a raid: either a prince, a prisoner or a corpse. This selection of possible ends recalls another array of voices. It initially rings with the echo of one of Abu Firās' most famed *qaṣīdas* from the *Rūmīyyāt* in which he artfully angles to persuade both his readers and his cousin-ruler Sayf al-Dawla how valuable his release would be. Describing the scene of his capture, the speaker declares:

My closest comrades said, 'Flee or die!';
 What a choice I replied. Even the sweeter one is bitter.
 'I would rather take the blameless path and fight;
 I'll take my chances and either be killed or better captured.'
 They say to me, 'You have sold safety for death!';
 'By God,' I replied, 'I have not lost in the exchange.'
 For even if I can escape captivity and harm;
 How long can I escape death?
 Death is inevitable, so choose what will augment your fame;
 For a man does not die as long as his fame still lives.²⁸⁸

This staging of choices returns towards the poem's close. In the concluding section of Abu Firās' poem, the poetic speaker addresses his tribe, the Banū Ḥamdān, in the third person. Offering them verses of boastful praise that were presumably intended to produce a sentiment of tribal loyalty and remind them of their obligation towards him, he writes: "We are men for whom there is no middle ground; We are either on the front line, before all other men, or in the grave." As Suzanne Stetkevych elucidates in her compelling analysis of the poem, though it would seem that the poet sets out to provide a justification for his capture, he actually encodes a logical error: "Capture is surely nobler than fleeing, but fighting to the death is nobler to surrender and capture...eternal glory—that is death in battle—is preferable to life, but it seems that Abu Firās has preferred the eternal fame secured by poetry over that achieved by death in battle."²⁸⁹ Though the poetic speaker stages these choices, he does himself occupy a middle ground that is neither fighting nor dying—in the poetry of imprisonment (or the imprisonment of poetry) he achieves a lasting fame which is preferable to all other forms of extinction.

Yet Darwish's list of options also rings with the words of a more modern poet, 'Abd al Raheem Mahmoud, a Palestinian poet who fought against the British Mandate and was killed in battle during the 1948 Arab Israeli War.²⁹⁰ Known for penning fiery calls to action, his 1937 poem "The Martyr" is a premier example:

I shall carry my soul in the palm of my hand,
 And throw it into the cavern of death!
 Either a life to gladden the hearts of friends
 Or a death to torture the hearts of foes!

²⁸⁸ Suzanne Stetkevych, "Performative Poetics in 'Abbāsīd Poetry: A Re-Reading of Abū Firās al Ḥamdānī's Rā'iyyah," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle Eastern Studies* 29.2 (2013): 107-44, p.116.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 134-5.

²⁹⁰ Many thanks to colleague Linda Istanbuli for sharing this intertext with me!

An honorable man's spirit has two aims:
To die fighting or achieve victory.²⁹¹

In this echo-chamber, the choices that al-Ḥamdānī stages to situate his own practice of poetry while imprisoned are inhabited by Mahmoud's categorical calls for resistance to the death. All of these voices and their assorted alternatives blur and subvert the distinctions presented—which must of course be the point. Because, ultimately, the impossible beloved becomes indistinguishable from the cousin-ruler, s/he who is both the cause of continued imprisonment and the only possibility for freedom. And as this text lays bare, liberation can only be occasioned by and in the echo-writing of poetry's middle ground—through the reverberating circulation of voices that both resonate and clash with each other, disturbing clear categorizations of authority, authorship, and agential choice.

IV. "I Was Born of My Language": The Rhythm of Literary Genesis

The material between that surfaces as an echo in the previous poem shifts into yet another figure of aurality in the section's subsequent poems, becoming the rhythm that allows words to register materially. As the speaker declares in "*Qāl al-Musāfir l'il Musāfir: Lan Na 'ūd Kamā...*" (One Traveler Said to Another: We Won't Return As...): "I feel the pulse of the alphabet in the echo." The formulations of interstitiality throughout *A Room to Talk to Oneself* integrate in the rebound of this verse—the echo, the extra-textual between that is the medium through which the speaker's cell opens into a balcony, cannot be registered fully unless it is experienced as handiwork, when its pulses are born out in the body. As the rest of the verses lay bare, the poem is that material interval between echo and rhythm, "a window looking out in both directions," that catalyzes a process of forgetting and de-identification, ultimately resulting in a liberatory surrender to the exile of self-dispossession. The poem in full is as follows:

I don't know the desert	لا أعرف الصحراء،
But I planted words at its edges...	لكني نبت على جوانبها كلاماً...
The words said what they said, and I left	قال الكلام كلامه، ومضيت
like a divorced woman, like her broken husband	كأمرأة مطلقه مضيت كزوجها المكسور،
I kept nothing but the rhythm	لم أحفظ سوى الإيقاع
I hear it	أسمعه
and follow it	وأتيه
and lift it, doves	وأرفعه يمama
on the path to the sky	في الطريق إلى السماء،
the sky of my song	سماء أغنيتي،
I am a son of the Syrian plain	أنا ابن الساحل السوري،
I live there, traveling or residing	أسكنه رحيلاً أو مقاما
among the people of the sea	بين أهل البحر،
But the mirage presses me eastward	لكن السراب يشدني شرفاً
to the ancient Bedouin	إلى البدو القدامى،

²⁹¹ Translated in *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 209.

I lead the beautiful horses to water
 I feel the pulse of the alphabet in the echo
 I return a window looking out in two directions...
 I forget who I am so that I can be
 plural in singular and in time
 with the praises of the foreign soldiers under my windows,
 so that I can be the warring parties' letter to their families:
 We won't return as we went
 We won't return...even secretly!
 I don't know the desert
 however often I've visited its thoughts²⁹²
 In the desert absence said to me:
 Write!
 I said: There is another writing on the mirage
 It said: Write and the mirage will become green
 I said: I lack absence
 I said: I still haven't learned the words
 It said to me: Write and you'll know them
 and know where you were, and where you are
 and how you came, and who you will be tomorrow
 Put your name in my hand and write
 so you'll know who I am and will go, a cloud
 into the open...
 So I wrote: Whoever writes his story will inherit
 the land of words, and possess meaning entirely!
 I don't know the desert
 but I bid it farewell: Peace
 to the tribe east of my song: Peace
 to the descendants, in their plurality, upon the sword: Peace
 to my mother's son under his palm tree: Peace
 to the ode that preserved our planets: Peace
 to the passing peoples, a memory for my memory: Peace
 to "peace be upon me," between two poems:
 one that has been written
 and another whose poet died of passion!
 Am I me?
 Am I there...or here?
 In each you, me
 I am you, the second person. It is not exile
 for me to be you. It is not exile
 for my me to be you. And it is not exile
 for the sea and the desert to be
 The song of the traveler to the traveler:
 I won't return, as I went,
 I won't return...even secretly!²⁹³

أورد الخيل الجميلة ماءها،
 وأجس نبض الأبجدية في الصدى،
 وأعود نافذة على جهتين...
 أنسى من أكون لكي أكون
 جماعة في واحد، ومعاصراً
 لمدايح البحارة الغرباء تحت نوافذي،
 ورسالة المتحاربين إلى ذويهم:
 لن نعود كما ذهبنا
 لن نعود ... ولو لمأماً!
 لا أعرف الصحراء،
 مهما زرت هاجسها،
 وفي الصحراء قال الغيب لي:
 أكتب!
 فقلت: على السراب كتابة أخرى
 فقال: أكتب ليخضر السراب
 فقلت: ينقصني الغياب
 وقلت: لم أتعلم الكلمات بعد
 فقال لي: أكتب لتعرفها
 وتعرف أين كنت، وأين أنت
 وكيف جئت، ومن تكون غداً،
 ضع اسمك في يدي واكتب
 لتعرف من أنا، واذهب غمماً
 في المدى...
 فكتبت: من يكتب حكايته يرث
 أرض الكلام، ويملك المعنى تماماً!
 لا أعرف الصحراء،
 لكني أودعها: سلاماً
 للقبيلة شرق أغنيتي: سلاماً
 للسلالة في تعددها على سيف: سلاماً
 لابن أُمي تحت نخلته: سلاماً
 للمعلقة التي حفظت كواكبنا: سلاماً
 للشعوب تمر ذاكرة لذاكرتي: سلاماً
 للسلام عليّ بين قصيدتين:
 قصيدة كُتبت
 وأخرى مات شاعرها غراماً!
 أنا أنا؟
 أنا هنالك ... أم هنا؟
 في كل "أنت" أنا،
 أنا أنت المخاطب، ليس منفي
 أن أكونك. ليس منفي
 أن تكون أناي أنت. وليس منفي
 أن يكون البحر والصحراء
 أغنية المسافرين للمسافر:

²⁹² I have replaced Sack's looser translation ("however often it's haunted me) with a more literal version of this line.

²⁹³ Darwish, trans. Sacks, *Horse*, 124-28.

The colon appears compulsively throughout the poem as a kind of grammatical between, registering crucial moments of dialogue and exchange. Translating echo into a missive of affective rhythm, the poem begins with the desert as its source—the symbolic and real placeholder of literary heritage. The poetic speaker cannot know it entirely as its vastness is unknowable, so he plants words at its edges. This act reads metapoetically, as seemingly the beginning of what a poem is, words scattered on the edge of an inspirational unknown. Like a plant or seed of primordial matter, these words are alive, activating themselves in speech and causing the poet who planted them to leave them behind as both sides of a separated couple. From these words that he buries and is compelled to abandon, he preserves nothing but their rhythm, which he lifts as a dove to the sky of his song. The rhythm—*al-īqā*—rings through the poetic speaker's actions, echoing in the sound of the three rhyming verbs that follow: “*asma’ubū/wa-atba’ubū/wa-arfa’ubū...*” (“I hear it/ and follow it/ and lift it...”).

Though he is a son of the Syrian plain, the mirage presses him east towards the ancient Bedouin of the desert, allowing him to tangibly access the richness of his literary heritage. Facing eastwards, the speaker feels the pulse of the alphabet in the echo, an incorporation of linguistic legacy that allows him to return as a window with two faces, looking out in both directions. This simile of mediation and transience signals an ongoing circuit of not-knowing, transformation and betweenness: the speaker's embodied experience of a tradition he cannot know entirely is nonetheless the source and impetus of his own planted words. These words sown at the edge of his heritage compel him to journey forth and undergo a transformative experience of disintegration, a dissolution that leads him to return as this ultimate image of interstitiality—as a poetic figure himself. Both the poem's title and first line—“We Won't Return As...” and “I don't know the desert”—reappear throughout the text, serving as refrain and rhythmic reiteration of this relationality between not knowing and disintegration.

The event of becoming poetic language induces a process of forgetting and self-evacuation for the speaker that the poem goes on to describe. He forgets who he is so he may be plural in singular and present in time to the letters of fighters to their families which repeat the title of this poem: “we will not return as we left.” The first-person plural of this declaration (“we”) performs the speaker's desire for plural singularity, articulating his particular experience in inclusive terms. Having planted his words and begun his poem, he will also not return as he left. Rather than a son of the Syrian plain following the rhythm of his poetry, merely a persona acting out a part of the poem, he returns as an image of poetic relationality, one that enables him to forget himself and surrender to the incompleteness of his knowledge. His abandonment of self in pursuance of literary interdependence yields a profound exchange with the poetry of absence, one which begins with the injunction to write. This inaugural decree echoes the first prophetic words revealed to Muḥammad and recorded in Sūrat al-‘Alaq (96:1-2):

اقرأ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ (١) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ (٢)
Recite in the name of your Lord who created- (1)
Created man from a clinging substance. (2)²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Darwish, *Al-‘Ā‘amāl al-kāmila* (Collected Works Volume 2), 588-92.

²⁹⁵ Translation from *The Noble Quran*, accessed December 4, 2017, <https://quran.com/96>. “‘Alaq” is also often translated as a “clot” or “embryo.”

Usually translated as "recite," this initiatory imperative also means to "rehearse aloud" or to "read," commanding the prophet to recite the Quranic message to his people and proclaim the path of Islam. In a related hadith narrated to 'Ā'ishah, one of Muḥammad's wives, the angel Gabriel visits the prophet while he has secluded himself in meditation in a cave. Gabriel commands him to recite but Muḥammad responds that he lacks the skill. The angel reacts by squeezing him forcefully before releasing him, a sequence that is repeated three times in total. The third time after being released, Muḥammad recites the first three verses of Sūrat al-'Alaq.²⁹⁶

Referencing the first event of revelation, Darwish replaces the injunction to read or recite with an imperative to write. In this rewriting of divine interchange, prophecy becomes a form of transmission that unfolds via an act of creative genesis, rather than a passive recounting of an other's message. If, as in "Ismā'īl's 'Oūd," poetry is the material between in which the music of language can tangibly recreate worlds, then the revelation of those worlds comes about by means of writing rather than recitation. In place of the angel Gabriel, the messenger of God, it is the desert's absence that delivers the command, a figure that evokes the famed absence of the *nasīb*—the amatory prelude in pre-Islamic and classical poetry. Each ode begins with the beloved's departure and the abandoned site of her tribe's camp in the desert, such that this recurring scene of arid absence has been conceptualized to embody the founding site of Arabic poetry. The conversation that ensues between poetry's activator (absence) and the poetic speaker echoes the hadith of Muḥammad's first revelation, in which he protests that he lacks the knowledge to recite. Undeterred, the desert's absence tells the poetic speaker to write in order to know: "Put your name in my hand and write/so you'll know who I am and go, a cloud/into the open..." In this arresting exchange, the speaker's name takes the place of his hand, such that name/language is formulated to be an extension of body. This linguistic form of corporeality is then commanded to be placed in the corpus of the poetic tradition's founding absence's, a joining of language and body that yields a new experience of knowledge and convinces the poetic speaker to write his own prophetic words.

The verse he finally composes is one of wide-reaching import: "So I wrote: Whoever writes his story will inherit/the land of words and possess meaning, entirely!" This is not the first place that a territory of language appears in Darwish's work. As this chapter's introduction references, "a homeland of words, *baladun min kalām*," is a central and recurring image in his collections. Yet Darwish's reformulation of the image in this poem is distinct from its previous expressions—here, he uses *'ard* (land, country, region) rather than *balad* (country, province, territory) or *waṭan* (homeland), which expands this figure from a purely Palestinian or political context. At the same time, the cognate of *'ard* in Hebrew is *'aretz* (land, country, earth) and, when paired with the definite article, *ha-'aretz* ("the country"), it refers to Israel. To inherit the land of words and possess meaning entirely is a cosmic scheme that aims at something broader than the reclamation of the effaced Palestinian narrative, though of course it is a part. Yet in this more sweeping prophecy, anyone writing her story in the interdependent terms of poetic circulation is afforded access to the land of words. *'Ard al-kalām* becomes thus the inclusive world that may be created and preserved via the ungovernable circulations of bodily-registered language—an elastic domain that transcends the nationalist imagination and its nomenclature. The power of this material genesis in language constitutes the entire possession of meaning. Its transmission, moreover, ensues as a kind of inheritance that is determined by the practice of writing rather than the biology of blood ties. This

²⁹⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* vol. 1, book 1, ḥadīth 3.

alternative prophecy proclaimed by the speaker offers a radically open vision of inheritance and by extension kinship that compels him to bid farewells to everything ranging from his literary heritage to his own person. These acts of renunciation then occasion the ultimate destabilization of language, as the speaker asks himself, “Am ‘I’ I?/Am I there... or here?/In each you, me/I am you, the second person.” In this final section of questions and prophetic responses, though the pronouns and deictic expressions have no fixed reference point whatsoever, the indeterminate boundlessness of relationality that unfolds is labeled as that which is precisely not exile.

The compass of this language resoundingly evokes the texts of *Husayn Ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj*, a 10th century Sufi mystic, teacher and poet whose famous words “I am the truth,” which many saw as a claim to divinity, led to his execution and death. Born in Persia in 859, he began studying with various Sufi masters at the age of fourteen. After travelling and preaching throughout the Middle East and Southeast Asia, he performed the ḥajj and then settled in Baghdad, gaining a wide following of students. In addition to the disfavor that his expressions of unity with God curried, al-Ḥallāj became caught in the midst of power struggles in the ‘Abbasid court. As a result, he was excommunicated, arrested, jailed and ultimately killed on the religious charge of blasphemy in 922.²⁹⁷ While his preaching initially emphasized the innate capacity of believers to find God within their own heart, his final years in Baghdad were characterized by his public proclamations and written poems, which testified to his desire for annihilation and divine unification as shown in the following two examples:

Between you and me is an I-ness interfering
with me; Take away with your I-ness my I-ness
from between us!²⁹⁸

بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ إِنِّي يُزْجِمُنِي
فَارْفَعْ بَيْنَكَ إِنِّي مِنَ الْبَيْنِ²⁹⁹

Did you let me come close to you so that I thought you
were me? Did you efface me in you so that I
disappeared in the finding of you?³⁰⁰

أَدْنَيْتَنِي مِنْكَ حَتَّى ظَنَنْتُ أَنَّكَ أَنِّي
وَعَبْتُ فِي الْوَجْدِ حَتَّى أَفْنَيْتَنِي بِكَ عَنِّي³⁰¹

This quest for egoic death is articulated even more radically in the poem below:

Oh righteous people! Kill me for I shall live by dying;
My life is in my death and my death is in my life.
To me, the effacement of my being is the noblest of all

أَقْتُلُونِي يَا ثِقَاتِي إِنَّ فِي قَتْلِي حَيَاتِي
وَمَمَاتِي فِي حَيَاتِي وَحَيَاتِي فِي مَمَاتِي
أَنْ عِنْدِي مَخْوَ ذَاتِي مِنْ أَجْلِ الْمَكْرَمَاتِ
وَبَقَائِي فِي صِفَاتِي مِنْ قَبِيحِ السَّيِّئَاتِ³⁰³

297 L. Massignon and L. Gardet, “al-Ḥallāj”, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, accessed September 8, 2017, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0256

²⁹⁸ Mansur al-Hallaj, *I am the Truth: Diwan of Mansur al-Hallaj*, trans. Paul Smith (Victoria, Australia: New Humanity Books, 2012).

²⁹⁹ *Husayn Ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Al-‘Ā‘amāl al-kāmila* (Collected Works), ed. Qasim Muhammad ‘Abbas (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2002), 324-5.

³⁰⁰ al-Hallaj, trans. Paul Smith.

³⁰¹ al-Hallāj, *Al-‘Ā‘amāl al-kāmila* (Collected Works), 325.

³⁰³ al-Hallāj, *Al-‘Ā‘amāl al-kāmila* (Collected Works), 294.

acts; and remaining in my attributes is the vilest of offenses.³⁰²

Darwish clearly echoes al-Ḥallāj even as he bids farewell to his text (the poem written by the poet who died of passion). Yet he tempers al-Ḥallāj's rebound with his use of exile in this last section, declaring that "It is not exile/for my me to be you. And it is not exile/for the sea and the desert to be/the song of the traveler to the traveler: I won't return as I went..." An articulation of home as that which is not exile within alterity, the song of the traveler to the traveler expresses an inability for the speaker and his collective to return to an identity of sameness. This poem of dialogue and exchange searches for a form of encounter and junction between entities and interlocutors that differs from al-Ḥallāj's extreme formulations—not, thus, the annihilation that allows God to speak through the individual, so that 'I' becomes the voice of God, as in his infamous declaration, "I am the truth." Rather, the poem's inability to return to sameness proclaims an identity of interstitiality that leaves one in the middle of known and unknown, in a between that is precisely not exile. This interval of possibility and survival is the definition and inheritance of poetry, a meditation that leads seamlessly into the diwan's following poem, "*Qāfiyah min 'ajli al-Mu'allqāt*" (A Rhyme for the Odes).

The poem begins in striking fashion, with a multivalent sentence in enjambment that continues the dialogue with al-Ḥallāj and the interrogation of poetic language, highlighting its promise and its limits:

No one guided me to myself. I am the guide, the guide to
myself between the sea and the desert.

ما دلني أحد علي. أنا الدليل, أنا الدليل
إلي بين البحر والصحراء.

Read in sequence with the diwan's preceding texts, "no one led me to myself" takes on an even stronger force, as the previous poem has made clear that the "I" for Darwish is no longer an automatic reference. Indeed, the final few verses of "*Qāl al-musāfir*" pose a form of redemption via the self's exile in otherness through a play of sounds that, as Rahman has shown, overlays and disrupts *enā* (I) in the reverberation of its rhyme with *hunā* (here) and *menfa* (exile). Even as the sound of the "I" appears in these other words, it becomes unsettled by their meanings.³⁰⁴ In "*Qāfiyah*," the "I" that is no longer a sedimented form of identity shifts into the revelatory sign of language that indicates itself in repetition—*dalil* has a particularly wide semantic berth, meaning "sign, mark, evidence, indicator, proof, testimony, index" and "reference" in addition to "guide." This first verse of clearly engages al-Ḥallāj again, specifically evoking the following text:

Between me and the Truth, there is no longer explanation;
or proof, or signs to convince me.
This is revealed by the rising flame of truth;
a light that has blossomed in radiance in power.
God is the proof, from God, in God, for God;
Only one who has witnessed the Truth God knows
the explanation.

لم يبق بيني وبين الحق تبييني
ولا دليل ولا آيات برهان
هذا تجلّى طلوع الحق نائرة
قد أزهّرت في تلالها بسلطان
كان الدليل له منه إليه به
من شاهد الحق بل علماً بتبينان
كان الدليل له منه به و له

³⁰² al-Hallaj, trans. Paul Smith.

³⁰⁴ Najat Rahman, *Literary Disinheritance*, 105. Rahman's comment is in reference to the rhyme of "Poetic Arrangements" but it also applies to the poem in question.

God is the proof, from God, in God, for God;
 In Truth we found It, in the revelation of the Qur'an.
 One cannot be guided to God by his work and creation;
 For you take place in mundane time.
 This is my existence, my clarity, and my belief;
 this is the singularity of God's Unity and my belief!
 This is the expression of those who are secluded in God;
 Those who know Him openly and secretly.
 This is the discovery of divine presence for those who find it;
 These kin are my friends and companions.

حقاً وجدناه في تنزيل فرقان
 لا يستدلُّ على الباري بصنعتِه
 وأنَّكُمْ حَدَّثْتُ يُنْبِي بِأَزمان
 هذا وجودي و تصرّحي ومعتّدي
 هذا تَوَحُّدُ توحيدِي وإيماني
 هذا عبارة أهل الانفراد به
 ذوي المعارف في سرّ وإعلان
 هذا وجودُ وجودِ الواجدين له
 بني التجانس أصحابي وخُلّاني³⁰⁵

When Darwish's speaker occupies the prophetic voice to proclaim that he is the guide of and to himself, he references al-Ḥallāj's doctrine that the signs and proofs of God's presence are revealed everywhere. God indicates Himself in Himself, which is everything. Yet for Darwish, the creative power that language possesses translates the immanence of divine presence into a mechanism of triumphant survival, one whose poetic, political and existential valences cannot be entirely distinguished. Poetic language, Palestine and selfhood have linked futures according to the trajectory of this text, prospects that hinge on the emergence of a new form of temporality which breaks away from the circular time of writing even as the logic of ongoing departure continues to dominate. The poem in full is as follows:

No one guided me to myself. I am the guide, the guide to
 myself between the sea and the desert. I was born of my
 language
 on the road of India tucked between two small tribes. Above
 them was
 the ancient religion's moon and the impossible peace
 They had to grasp the astrology of their neighbor Persia
 and the great anxiety of the Romans so that burdened time
 would release itself over the Arab tent. Who am I? This
 is the others' question. It doesn't have an answer. I am my
 own language
 I am an ode, two odes, ten. This is my language
 I am my language. I am words said:
 Be
 my body. So I was a body for their voice. I am what
 I said to the words: Be the crosswords between my body
 and the eternal desert. Be so that I will be as I say!
 There is no land to carry me above the earth so my speech
 carries me,
 a bird spreading out from me. It builds the nest of its journey
 before me
 In my debris, in the debris of the magical world that
 surrounds me,

ما دلّني أحد عليّ. أنا الدليل، أنا الدليل
 إليّ بين البحر والصحراء. من لغتي ولدت
 على طريق الهند بين قبيلتين صغيرتين
 عليهما
 قمر الديانات القديمة، والسلام المستحيل
 وعليهما أن تحفظا فلك الجوار الفارسي
 وهاجس الروم الكبير، ليهبط الزمن الثقيل
 عن خيمة العربي أكثر. من أنا؟ هذا
 سؤال الآخرين ولا جواب له. أنا لغتي أنا
 وأنا معلقة... معلقتان... عشر، هذه لغتي
 أنا لغتي. أنا ما قالت الكلمات
 كن
 جسدي، فكنت لنبرها جسداً. أنا ما
 قلت للكلمات: كوني ملتقي جسدي مع
 الأبدية الصحراء. كوني كي أكون كما أقول
 لا أرض فوق الأرض تحملني، فيحملني
 كلامي
 طائراً متفرعاً مني، ويبني عش رحلته
 أمامي
 في حطامي، في حطام العالم السحري من
 حولي.
 على ريح وقفت. وطال بي ليلي الطويل
 ...هذه لغتي قلاند من نجوم حول أعناق

³⁰⁵ al-Ḥallāj, *Al- 'Ā'amāl al-kāmila* (Collected Works), 323-4, translation mine with help from Hadeel Daraz.

upon a wind, I rose. My long night took its time
 ...This is my language, collars of stars around the necks
 of lovers: they left
 they took place and left
 they took time and left
 they took their scent from the clay pots
 and the short grass and left
 They took the words and the bruised heart left
 with them. Does the echo, this echo,
 this white, sound mirage, allow for a name whose hoarseness
 fills the unknown, that departure fills, divinely?
 The sky places me in a window, so I look
 I see no one but myself...
 I find myself inside-out,
 a double of myself. And my visions
 Are not far from the desert
 My steps are wind and sand
 My world is my body and what my hands possess
 I am the traveler and the path
 Gods reveal themselves to me, and then go. We don't draw
 out
 our conversation about what is to come. There is no
 tomorrow
 in this desert but what we saw yesterday
 So I'll lift my ode so that cyclical time will break
 and beautiful days will be born!
 All that has past will come tomorrow
 I leave myself to itself, having taken its fill of the present
 The departure empties me
 of temples. The sky has its peoples and its wars
 As for me, I have a gazelle as a wife, and palms
 as odes in the book of sand. A past is what I see
 Man possesses the kingdom of dust and its crown. My
 language
 will triumph over time—the enemy, over my progeny,
 over me, over my father, and an end that doesn't end
 This is my language and my miracle. My magical wand.³⁰⁶
 Gardens are my Babylon and my obelisk, my first identity,
 my polished metal
 The sacred of the Arab in the desert
 worship what flows from rhymes like stars on his cloak,
 and worship what he says

Prose, then, is inevitable.

A divine prose, so the Prophet will triumph...³⁰⁷

الأحبة: هاجروا
 أخذوا المكان وهاجروا
 أخذوا الزمان وهاجروا
 أخذوا روائعهم عن الفخار
 والكأ الشحيح، وهاجروا
 أخذوا الكلام وهاجر القلب القليل
 معهم. أيتسع الصدى، هذا الصدى
 هذا السراب الأبيض الصوتي لاسم تملأ
 المجهول بحته، ويملاء الرحيل ألوهة؟
 تضع السماء علي نافذة فأنظر: لا
 أرى أحداً سواي
 وجدت نفسي عند خارجها
 كما كانت معي، ورواي
 لا تتأى عن الصحراء
 من ريح ومن رمل خطاي
 وعالمي جسدي وما ملكت يداي
 أنا المسافر والسبيل
 يطل آلهة على ويذهبون، ولا نطيل
 حديثنا عما سيأتي. لا غد في
 هذه الصحراء إلا ما رأينا أمس
 فلأرفع معلقتي لينكسر الزمان الدائري
 ويولد الوقت الجميل!
 ما أكثر الماضي يجيء غداً
 تركت لنفسها نفسي التي امتلأت بحاضرها
 وأفرغني الرحيل
 من المعابد. للسماء شعوبها وحروبها
 أما أنا، فلي الغزاة زوجة، ولي النخيل
 معلقات في كتاب الرمل. ماضٍ ما أرى
 للمرء مملكة الغبار وتاجه. فلتنصّر
 لغتي على الدهر العدو، على شلالاتي
 على، على أبي، وعلى زوال لا يزول
 هذه لغتي ومعجزتي. عصا سحري
 حقائق بابلي ومسلتي، وهويتي الأولى
 ومعدني الصقيل
 ومقدس العربي في الصحراء
 يعبد ما يسيل
 من القوافي كالنجوم على عباءته
 ويعبد ما يقول

³⁰⁶ Sacks (I believe) mistranslates this as, "My magic disobeys."

³⁰⁷ Darwish, trans. Sacks, *Horse*, 130-4.

The poem begins with a self-referential sign, *al-dalīl*, a reflexive index whose infinite regress metonymizes the systemic circulations of language upon which the text prevails. The speaker proclaims that he is this analogue of language, one who is located specifically between sea (*baḥr*) and desert—two geographical figures that evoke the meters (*buḥūr*) and source of the Arabic poetic heritage. As poetic topoi replace the physical foundations of earth and ocean, language supplants parental lines of decent and conventional conceptions of kinship: “From my language I was born...” Designated thus to be an alternative source of life and death, language is that which enables the speaker to guide himself to himself and embody divine immanence. Its ungovernable force of dynamism is set in contrast to imaginative details of historical development (the route of India, the ancient religions’ moon, the impossible peace, Persian astrology and Roman anxiety) and traditional systems of genealogy and classification that categorize the origins of the Arab people and their poetry (the speaker’s birth between two tribes and that his assertion that he is “an ode...two odes...ten.”) The two ancient tribes likely reference the two ancestors of the Arab people, ‘Adnān and Qaḥṭān, patriarchs of the northern and southern Arabs respectively. Said to descend from Ismā‘īl, the ‘Adnāni Arabs are known as the Arabized Arabs, non-indigenous tribes who became Arabized after migrating into the Arabian Peninsula. According to Islamic tradition, the Quraysh tribe, from whom the prophet Muḥammad derived, descended from the ‘Adnāni Arabs. Their counterparts, the Qaḥṭāni Arabs, are identified in contrast as the true or pure Arabs originally from Yemen, associated with the ancient tribes of ‘Ad and Thamūd among others, most of whom disappeared before the dawn of Islam.³⁰⁹ Fittingly, the speaker discloses that he was born between these two ancient groupings, in language’s sway of indeterminacy, a force that exceeds the accepted binary classification of origins.

Between these two tribes, the speaker’s identity cannot be specified in a simple or resolute manner: “Who am I? This /is the others’ question. It doesn’t have an answer. I am my own language/I am an ode...two odes...ten.” Unable to be designated as an individual with particular attributes or a distinguishing past, the speaker can only align himself with his language and its exemption from categorization. He is an ode (*mu‘allaqa*) that immediately and repeatedly multiplies, an unpredictable movement of expansion which unsettles the mechanics of precision and order associated with the compilation of the *mu‘allaqāt* in the legends of Arabic literary history. Literally meaning “hanging” or “suspended [odes],” the *mu‘allaqāt* are traditionally held to be the seven (though both the number and the included authors have several variants) finest examples of Pre-Islamic *qaṣīdas*, selected, transcribed in gold, and hung on the curtains that covered the Ka‘ba.³¹⁰ Evoking the Arabic tradition’s first form of anthology and the earliest basis for verifying the eloquence of classical Arabic grammar, lexicon and style, the speaker’s characterization of his language (and thus himself) as a proliferating body of *mu‘allaqāt* is devious. Disturbing the stability

³⁰⁸ Darwish, *Al-‘Ā‘amāl al-kāmila* (Collected Works Volume 2), 593-6.

³⁰⁹ Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, 72.

³¹⁰ See Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd* (The Unique Necklace) (Būlāq: al-Maṭba‘ah al-‘Āmirah, 1293), vol. iii, p. 116. This traditional explanation has been questioned by many scholars and is generally held to be nothing more than legend. For a detailed history of the *mu‘allaqāt* and their compilation, see M. J. Kister, “The Seven Odes: Some Notes on the Compilation of the Mu‘allaqāt,” *Revista degli studi orientali* 44 (1968): 27–36.

of the literary canon's ground of standardized criteria, this redefinition of *mu'allaqāt* into an open field of language and an avatar of the speaker himself gives precedence rather to the capacity of language to subvert any and all systems of codification.

This notion of language as that which resists or eludes regulatory order is reinforced in the next few verses, in which the speaker proclaims in prophetic tones that he is what the words said: "Be / my body. So I was a body for their voice [literally, 'for their accentuation']. I am/what I said to the words: Be the crossroads between my body/and the eternal desert." Appropriating the creative agency of God, the speaker's declarations echo the Qur'anic verses that testify to His absolute omnipotence and powers of generation, as in, for example, Sūrat al-Baqarah (2:117):

Originator of the heavens and the earth. When
He decrees a matter, He only says to it, "Be,"
and it is.³¹¹

يَبْدِئُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ
فَيَكُونُ -

In Darwish's text, the capacity to be that is authorized by God's voice is shifted to the words of the speaker's language themselves and the dialectical relationship they maintain with the speaker and his material surroundings. They command him to be, so he becomes a body in order to accent their voice, a corporealization which then allows the speaker to direct the words himself. He calls upon them to be the recurring point of encounter between his embodied self and the literary heritage symbolized by the desert, to be that which allows him to exist through his own speech. The language in this poem is so effectual, able to so fully occupy the position of divinity that is routinely evoked and repurposed, because it is not just "language" in its indefinite autonomy. Rather, it is *his* language, repeatedly modified by the possessive suffix which reaffixes that ungovernable force of language to the speaker. Indeed, that which resists codification is what the speaker claims as his own, allowing him to materialize as his own speech bids.

This speech is a channel of unconquerable redemption for the speaker, figured in the next several verses as a phoenix-like bird who builds the nest of his journey on the speaker's rubble and the remains of the magical world that surrounds him. Summoning images and echoes of the *aṭṭāl*, the inaugural scene of abandoned campsites and absent lovers at which each poetic speaker pauses in the classical odes of Arabic poetic tradition, the speaker in this text halts on a wind, hovering above the debris of an enchanted world. This magical realm clearly denotes the sphere of literary heritage, as the next series of images lays bare, calling forth seminal poems of both Imrū' al-Qays, al-Ma'arrī and others. Sitting astride the immortal bird of ungovernable language, the speaker surveys the ruins that initiate the journeys and exiles of other poets, even as they incorporate themselves into his own text. These begin with the following sentence—"My long night grew longer in me"—words that lay claim to the familiar trope of the sleepless night that does not end, disturbed by longing for all that has passed away. In the classical ode, these nights generally precede the journey the speaker then takes through the desert to recover from the site of his beloved's ruins. In Imrū' al-Qays' *mu'allaqa*, for example, the ode that is widely considered to be one of the greatest in Arabic literature, the poet writes, "Alas, long night, will you not dispel, revealing dawn; Though the dawn of day will be no better for me."³¹² Qays' poetic speaker is tortured by a care-filled night that causes

³¹¹ Translation from *The Noble Quran*, accessed December 13, 2017, <https://quran.com/2> . See also 3:59 and 16:40 among others.

³¹² Translation from Stetkevych, *Mute Immortals*, 254.

time to stop “as if its stars; Were all bound by tight-twisted ropes to Mount Yadhbul” and the Pleiades were secured to a stone, halted in mid-course.³¹³ This sleepless night of anxiety recurring in Qays and others grows even longer within the speaker and leads to the following image, in which his language is figured as necklaces of stars that hangs around necks. *Qalā'id*, the word for necklaces, can also mean exquisite poems and evokes a verse from another renowned poet, the 10th century ascetic al-Ma'arrī, in which the speaker implores his two companions not to leave him alone amidst the long dark night. Al-Ma'arrī writes, “This night of mine is a black bride wearing necklaces of pearls.”³¹⁴

All of these other voices preface and inhabit the migrations of Darwish's poem, cuing the lovers who leave their time, place, words and wounds and flee. In her reading of the poem, Najat Rahman emphasizes that language emerges as the only certainty remaining for the self and, as such, the poetic speaker strives to “create his own time, space and being through poetic language.”³¹⁵ Rahman's analysis reads a tension between language and presence in the poem, in which language enacts its own being on the speaker such that his poetic voice is one that can only encounter the infinite in retreat, in a fluctuation between “being present and being emptied by travel.”³¹⁶ Yet it seems to me that the emptiness issuing from these evacuations is precisely what allows for the echoes and affects of other voices to register and rebound. The immanence of language resides thus in the speaker's retreat from self-security into actions that generate emptiness—the act of receding from aspirations to presence creates the interval in which the voices of others may reverberate. Rather than a fluctuation between binary states, I read an encounter that shifts the polarity between emptiness and immanence into a moment of shared reformulation, wherein each becomes redefined by the other. Following the lovers' flight, the speaker is indeed moved to ask, “Does the echo, this echo, /the white sound mirage, expand to allow for a name whose hoarseness/fills the unknown, that departure fills, divinely?” The name spoken so often that it has become marked by throatiness permeates the unknown and departure occupies both the name and the obscure expanse it fills in a mode of divinity. According to the speaker's question, then, departure cannot be equated with emptiness—rather, it is exactly that which saturates both the particular name of longing and the nameless domain of difference, providing the opening and occasion for modes of divinity to surface.

The lovers' departures are also that which situate the speaker in a window, evoking the image of interstitiality from “*Qāl al-musāfir*” and offering another embodiment of poetic language's middle register that leads him to experience the exteriorization of self as process of tangible discovery. The speaker looks outside the window into which he has been placed and sees “no one but myself... /I find myself on the outside of itself/as it was with me.” This externalizing duplication of self allows for the environment that he inhabits to take shape in tangibly immediate ways, for his steps to unfold in wind and sand and his world to materialize in the proximate anatomy of his body. This cultivation of immediacy—in which the act of self-exteriorization allows for his surroundings to reemerge in physically felt ways—would seem to encompass a strange form of temporality according to the poem's verses, a circular movement of time that neglects the present: “There is no tomorrow/in this desert but what we saw yesterday.” Yet even as the speaker proclaims this timeframe, he hails its collapse and calls for cyclical time to break amidst the ode's ascendance. In this demand, arguably the diwan's climatic deed thus far, the reiterative temporality of writing that has governed the collection until this point yields to a new stretch of beautiful days in which the broken form of circular time appears in saturated redefinition. “How much of the past

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Abū al-‘Alā' al Ma'arrī, *Shurūh Saqt al-Zand* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Misrīyah, 1945), 429.

³¹⁵ *Literary Disinheritance*, 98.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 99-100.

will come tomorrow,” the text says, as opposed to its former articulation, “there is no tomorrow/in this desert but what we saw yesterday.” No longer restricted to the first person, the past has become boundless in this affirmative resignification and its advent is heralded in prophetic tones. Though it seems that the present is still left out of this passage, it surfaces in the following verse, in which the speaker specifies that he leaves himself to its self which had filled up on its present. *Nafs*, meaning “self, soul, spirit” and “mind,” is grammatically feminine and, accordingly, this surrender of self through which the present materializes is also the means through which the speaker emerges in gendered difference.

Darwish’s beautiful time is born by breaking open the circular time of writing with the poetic revelation of temporal immanence. By lifting the ode and relinquishing his claim to a form of selfhood based on cohesive notions of interiority, the speaker allows for the constraining frameworks that structure man’s existence to yield, exposing the infinite expanse that permeates them from all angles. This temporal shift in poetic language afforded by self-surrender vanquishes the logic of patriarchy and associated forms of political subjugation, ultimately occasioning a new mode of writing. “My language/will triumph over the enemy time, over my progeny/over me, over my father, and over an end that doesn’t end,” the speaker declares, establishing the temporality of blood lines as the adversary over which his language of effusion prevails. Barred from accessing the future in prophetic mode, the poetic self sees salvation in the ability of language to prevail over time and identity—yet the language that is named is not poetic. As Rahman notes, “Prose in its dissemination is that which will guard against absence, as the other writing of poetry. Poetry as *Ḍiḡān al-‘Arab* (Register of the Arabs) is connected to the ancient prophets and to a paternal heritage. This new age demands new prophets and new languages.”³¹⁷ This prose issues from the abundant overflow of rhyme—the extra textual between in which freedom and restitution remain possible, yet only when interiorizing structures of self-stability yield to that which lays outside of them, time and time again. An alternative to the precluding restrictions that paternal lines of descent pose, the cascading possibilities that flow from rhyme inaugurate an encounter with a new form of time saturated with interstitial potentiality and summon the prosaic mode of writing that must accompany this temporal revolution.

V. “I Won’t Return as I Went”

This chapter has detailed the route through which dispossession from structures of patriarchy, colonial power, nationalist fantasies and self-protectionism lead to the cultivation of different forms of betweenness, which is where the possibilities for both transformation and restitution lie for Darwish. As the diwan progresses, it becomes increasingly focused on and defined by the aural aspects of poetic language that enact the interstitial dynamics of transformative redress. Language is both the means and end of this epic—its own forms of betweenness (music, echo, rhythm and rhyme) form the path towards the liberatory wielding of meaning and existence in the “land of words.” Frequenting the gap between textual and material domains, the collection performs and develops new modes of language (music, prose, prophecy) to compel an encounter with what cannot be precisely said or spoken back to life. This extra-textual realm is where creative possibilities lie for Darwish and is what he offers as an alternative site of identity and form of kinship, one that is inherited through a practice of writing in which any and all may participate.

³¹⁷ *Literary Disinheritances*, 100.

The registers of betweenness in which creative transformation and redress become possible necessarily and crucially implicate the self. Indeed, the interstitial agency that the diwan develops is premised on an ongoing surrender to the liberating estrangement of self-loss and ceaseless transformation—a gift of death one gives to oneself and by extension to others. The unrestricted music of language—what flows from rhyme, the rebound of multivocal echoes, the bodily registered pulse of the alphabet—is where both the immanence of language and the detachment from self-identification reside, in a temporality of saturated potentialities.

Chapter Four

Artists of History: Auto/biography, Translation and Repair in Emily Jacir and Etti Abergel

This chapter turns towards two contemporary installation artists whose engagement with history and the political present unfolds through their creative reworkings of autobiography—Palestinian Emily Jacir (1970-) and Etti Abergel (1960-), an Israeli artist of Moroccan descent. I begin with two of Jacir's projects—her 2010-12 project titled *ex libris* and her 2004 work *Material for a Film*, both of which showcase Jacir's strategies of counter-interpellation and transmission. *Material*, for example, is a mixed media installation and performance in photographs, letters, postcards, interviews and diary entries that showcases Jacir's part in an ongoing process of collecting information about Wael Zuaier—a Palestinian intellectual who was assassinated by Mossad agents in Rome in 1972. In my reading of *Material*, I claim that Jacir operationalizes the technique of embedment—inserting herself into Zuaier's life and occasioning a space for viewers to embed themselves in her remediation of his life. In fascinating ways, this recalls the narrative technique of embedment made famous in *One Thousand and One Nights*, a book that Zuaier was translating from Arabic into Italian and had on his person at the time of his assassination. As I argue, Jacir's accentuation and material redeployment of embedment in her work creates interstitial spaces that insert loci of blankness within previously sealed and overdetermined accounts. These performative sites of effacement mark the possibility of translational openings into unknown accounts, stories of life merged with death whose proliferation cannot be constrained. Ultimately, Jacir sets in motion a multiform transmission of vanquished history that is simultaneously a story of the self's call to substitute the unknown fragments of others for oneself. Her work reveals the story of the Palestinians telling their story, through a form of proxy aesthetics that transpires by virtue of the ongoing and ungovernable disruption of the transmitter and her transmitted material.

Jacir's use of surrogacy as a mode of auto/biography that redeems lost histories provides an illuminating perspective with which to approach the installations of Etti Abergel, which she describes as a linked series of autobiographical chapters. Collecting useful and mundane objects that have personal significance, Abergel reworks them until their previous functions have been discharged of all utility: a plastic basket is threaded with twine, for instance, until it resembles a long-haired head. A new space is formed through her hybridization of disparate, reconfigured objects and made into a home as she builds her installations. The second part of this chapter focuses on her 2014 project, *Animism: An Installation in Three Parts*, tracking the manner in which Abergel's autobiography exposes particularized fragments of destruction in place of the self whose memories are kept secret. In the press release for this exhibit, Abergel has described her mediation as a form of manual labor that recovers the specificity and value of the everyday objects, which would otherwise be destined to remain under the deadening relations of anonymous equivalence afforded by capitalist modes of interaction. She further notes that this process of sculptural assemblage is "accompanied by *tikkun* by repairing and joining together, with faith in the power of the inanimate object to act within a world of meaning."³¹⁸ As I argue, if Abergel's *tikkun* takes place through the arousal of the sensuous world's inanimate objects, then this reparative activity necessarily entails the disruption of nationalist assimilations of space, identity and history. Her *tikkun* fragments objects in order to

³¹⁸ Etti Abergel. *Animism: An Installation in Three Chapters*, 2014, http://galeriemezzanin.com/exhibitions/etti-abergel/press_release/, accessed November, 8 2017.

animate them; as Ayelet Zohar has written, the shard in Israel cannot be read without eliciting the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.³¹⁹ The fractured objects that anchor her installations index the destruction and ruins of the Nakba as well as the disjunction between her family's own past in Morocco and her identity as a Mizrahi Israeli. My analysis emphasizes the ways in which Abergel uses a destabilized form of autobiography to conceive of reanimation and restoration through a reckoning with the destruction and disjunctions of Nakba, occupation and migration. Thus, I claim that both Jacir and Abergel demonstrate a material engagement with the artifacts and narratives of crisis that responds to the conditions of emergency with which they are preoccupied, striving not to transcend these circumstances, but to translate (Jacir) or reanimate (Abergel) them—to practice the art of history making that enables them to maintain horizons of possibility in the most ossified of conflicts.

Yet there is a noteworthy difference in the forms of autobiography that they mobilize, which this chapter seeks to explore. While Jacir inscribes herself into her works as a means of reanimating archives and remaking archival forms of transmission, Abergel absents herself from her work in order to reanimate the potential of the object as a fragment of vanquished history in the present. One writes an autobiography of the self's willing disruption by the remnants of lost and fellow others; the other sculpts an autobiography of the self's absence in which her replacement by the artifacts of destruction entails a form of retreat, perhaps in both of its senses. Both artists, I argue, use the form of autobiography to engineer elastic nodes of indeterminacy within the historical narratives that situate their projects, but they do so in opposing ways which are politically inflected: Jacir, a Palestinian, emphasizes her own role as a means of reinforcing the historical presence of Palestinians while Abergel, an Israeli, minimizes her presence in her work as a means of highlighting the fragment, the result of Israeli policies. In my juxtaposition of both, then, I hope to draw attention to the cultural particularities of an artist's role and reach within the socio-historical context of her specific circumstances.

I. Archiving Disruption

The work of Palestinian artist and filmmaker Emily Jacir reflects the unsettled character of her upbringing. Born in Bethlehem in 1973, she grew up in Saudi Arabia, spent her high school years in Rome, studied extensively in the United States and has received artist's residencies and exhibited her work throughout Europe and America. She currently divides her time between Rome and Ramallah. A professor at the vanguard International Academy of Art in Ramallah, Jacir has been instrumental in the development of Ramallah's art scene, spearheading projects like the Birzeit Virtual Art Gallery and the first International Video Festival in Ramallah in 2002. Through a diverse range of media, including film, photography, installation, performance and video, Jacir's practice explores recurrent themes that surface in her experience as a Palestinian international—silenced historical narratives, resistance, movement, translation and exchange. Her work compulsively attends to the imbricated conditions of migration and immobility, as T.J. Demos notes, zeroing in on the places where fantasies of unrestricted circulation break down: "People, not things, are denied entry into certain territories or nations, regimented in ways that are politically instrumental to maintaining political bodies, economic groupings, and ethnic identities."³²⁰ Her 2000 piece *My America (I am still*

³¹⁹ Ayelet Zohar, *Smashing!: Fragility, Deconstruction and Fragments in Contemporary Ceramic Arts* (Tel Aviv: Benyamini Contemporary Ceramics Center, 2012), Exhibition catalogue, p. 43.

³²⁰ T.J. Demos, "Desire in Diaspora: Emily Jacir," *Art Journal* 62, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 75.

here), for example, highlights how commodities in place of people are able to move freely. As part of the work, Jacir purchased a variety of goods manufactured around the globe at the World Trade Center mall and later returned them. She exhibited photographs of the purchases along with receipts of the refunds, gesturing to the unlimited mobility between cash and objects that opposes the steadfastness of the artist's presence and the impossibility of her own return to Palestine—the objects can be returned, but she herself cannot. This nexus is reformulated in her 2001-2003 project *Where We Come From*, in which Jacir, who holds an American passport, asked more than thirty Palestinians living inside the Occupied Territories and abroad the question, "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" The ensuing exhibit showcased panels of text describing the requests and photographic documentation of Jacir's wish-fulfillment. Munir in Bethlehem, for instance, asks Jacir to visit his mother's grave in Jerusalem on her birthday (as a West Bank resident, he is prevented from entering Jerusalem, a city which is less than 10 km away); the corresponding photograph shows Jacir's shadow over her gravestone. As a proxy for her fellow Palestinians, Jacir functions as the artist-mediator whose powers of movement allow her to intervene and work in service of their desires, however incompletely. At the same time, however, the exchange between the artist, the Palestinian residents and diasporic interlocutors whom she represents, and her viewing audience is far from transparent or equivalent. Indeed, Jacir's own freedom of movement is enabled by her comparative privilege arising from her family's money, which has afforded her the ability to work and study around the world, while the majority of Palestinians cannot even leave for a short visit, a disparity that has garnered Jacir some internal criticism within Palestine.³²¹ Jacir's elite status raises the issue of the history of elitism in art more generally, a topic that will be addressed in greater detail in the next section.

Beyond the thematic of exchange and movement, it is the logic of the archive that haunts Jacir's oeuvre. Her 2001 *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied by Israeli in 1948* is indeed emblematic of her drive to reference, animate and remake Palestine's archival registers. Working from Walid Khalidi's book *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Jacir erected a refugee tent in her New York studio and invited friends and colleagues to embroider the names of the villages that Khalidi researched.

³²¹ Personal correspondence with Gil Hochberg, May 16, 2019.



Figure 8- Emily Jacir, *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages which were Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied by Israel in 1948*, 2001³²²

In Jacir's practice, the archive becomes a domain of entangled textuality and corporeality, one that is spatialized and presented in modes that emphasize its multimedia materiality. Laced in handstitched residues of intermingling body and text—a comingling that emerges in the names of destroyed villages containing the imperfections and idiosyncrasies of the more than 143 participating sewers' embroidery—the refugee tent in *Memorial* became a site where community gathered to create a historical document in concert. As such, it models how, when the archive is compelled to function as a dynamic space of multimodal engagement, it becomes an actual refuge: a transforming and transformative place of collective dwelling.

³²² Emily Jacir, *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages which were Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied by Israel in 1948*, 2001, refugee tent, embroidery thread, record book, dimensions variable, Collection National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens (EMST), Emily Jacir, eds. Roland Wäspe and Andreas Baur (Nürnberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2008), 28-29.



Figure 9- The Making of Emily Jacir's Memorial Tent, *PS1*, April 30 2001 ³²³

Indeed, her work conceives of the archive as a register that must be actively and continually reformulated in order to address the colonialist attempt to preserve a certain kind of Palestinian archive for the colonizers' ends. Like the artists designated by Hal Foster's influential "archival impulse"—contemporary artists who make lost historical information palpably present in creative and unexpected ways—Jacir's archive does not assume a coherent public sphere. Rather, she uses the disruptions that form the basis of exilic existence as sites from which new forms of archive can take shape.³²⁴ As Derrida exposes in *Archive Fever*, Jacir's archive is intimately linked to the death drive and the desire to preserve that which has been both destroyed and denied.³²⁵ Her practice documents the forgotten lives of the defeated, striving to counter the corrosive effects of death on memory as much as it protests the power dynamics of history writing. Indeed, this chapter will go on to detail the ways in which, for both Jacir and Abergel, writing the history of the vanquished in Walter Benjamin's sense becomes an art form that transpires through creative modes of transmission, translation and repair.³²⁶ In almost all of its instantiations, Jacir's work incorporates

³²³ Johnny, *The Making of Emily Jacir's Memorial Tent for 418 Palestinian Villages Destroyed-Depopulated and Occupied by Israel in 1948*, *PS1*, April 30 2001, photograph, <https://oznik.com/art/010501.html>, accessed October 11, 2019.

³²⁴ Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 3-5. See also Marc James Léger, "Dialectics of the Real," *Third Text* 30, nos. 5-6 (2016): 318-19.

³²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995).

³²⁶ In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin criticizes the modern understanding of history as progress (one which had sanctioned and enabled the rise of fascism) that preserves only the victors in its unyielding march towards future deliverance. Theorizing how to write a history of and from the vanquished, Benjamin offers a perspective and practice of disjunction that insists on what he terms "a Messianic cessation of happening" (thesis XVII). In section III of this chapter, I explore the essay in greater detail. See Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the

elements of activism, interventionism, and socio-historical reconstruction, compelling her viewers to reconsider the roles of artists and intellectuals in order to ask how they can intervene in public life. In this regard, she follows the politicized wing of conceptual art, perhaps most specifically in her tactical use of materials—a strategic relation to medium that stands in opposition to modernism’s supposedly apolitical stance on medium specificity.³²⁷ Within the Palestinian art scene, Jacir is the most prominent of a group of mid-career artists who similarly critique the Israeli occupation in their work, like Ayreen Anastas, Taysir Batniji and Khalil Rabah.³²⁸

In Jacir’s penetrating inquiry into the unrealized dynamism that lies in both mundane and remarkable nodes of encounter between body and text, she cultivates the artist’s body as a conduit of historical and psychological recovery. This capacity to engender clandestine modes of retrieval and remediation—one that oscillates between the modes of becoming effectual as an agent and becoming undone as an individual subject—directs my discussion of her work. Embedding herself into the overlooked and overlaid circumstances of historical narratives, Jacir calls upon herself as artist to reopen the distinction between self, collective and history—to ask how the blurring of “I” and “we” can be mobilized to reset cultural memory. I borrow and adjust this notion of counter-interpellation from Jean Fisher’s analysis: “...in Jacir’s gathering and translation of oral testimonies, the unremarked fragments of history and the minutiae of everyday acts into a repertoire of affects open to viewer interpretation..., she interpolates herself into each ‘story,’ acknowledging responsibility for the telling.”³²⁹ While Fisher sees Jacir inserting herself into each episode that she researches (“interpolation” as the introduction of something in between other items), I understand Jacir’s strategy to be a resistant form of address and identification (“interpellation” in the Althusserian vein, as the process through which ideological apparatuses and institutions hail and constitute individuals into concrete subjects).³³⁰ Althusser presents interpellation as an inescapable and closed system through which individuals are always already hailed as subjects by a state apparatus who ultimately performs a kind of theological authority: “the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection. . . . There are no subjects except by and for their subjection.”³³¹ While Althusserian interpellation purports to show how all subjects are necessarily hailed into an all-encompassing structure of recognition and subjection that comes about through the reciprocal operation of sovereign and derivative power, scholars have challenged its totalizing nature. Critiques by Judith Butler and James Martel have analyzed Althusser’s account to lay bare how subjects may indeed resist the power of ideology and ideological structures. In “Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All,” Butler lays out how the “unelaborated” formation of conscience at the heart of Althusser’s theory of interpellation functions as a means of binding guilty subjects to the names and subject positions that the law confers upon them. In response to this predicament, Butler

Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257-58.

³²⁷ T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 106.

³²⁸ *Ibid.* 104.

³²⁹ Jean Fisher, “Visual Poems and Silent Songs,” *Emily Jacir: Europa*, eds. Emily Jacir and Omar Kholeif (London, Munich, New York: Prestel Publishing, 2015), 31.

³³⁰ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 115-18.

³³¹ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 123. See especially Judith Butler’s charge that Althusser’s use of “a complicated set of theological metaphors” amounts to “an ideological sanctification of religious authority” in “Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All: Althusser’s Subjection,” *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 109, 114.

describes a two-fold process of desubjectivization and resignification that enables subjects to, first, counter the “lure of ... identity” provided by the law and, second, exert their own forms of qualified agency within a circumscribed set of preexisting norms and conditions.³³² This second point is argued in *Excitable Speech*, where she details how the texts and codes of authority can be critically reappropriated through their subversive reiteration because of the open-ended nature of the speech act’s iterability: “The interval between instances of utterance not only makes the repetition and resignification of the utterance possible, but shows how words might, through time, become disjoined from their power to injure and recontextualized in more affirmative modes.”³³³ In this reading, thus, the interpellated subject becomes an agent precisely through her interpellation, because it is the very imposition of pre-conditioned limitations that enables their subversion.³³⁴

In *The Misinterpellated Subject*, James Martel extends Butler’s reconsideration of interpellation by shifting the perspective to, in Althusser’s own estimation, the one time out of ten that the addressed individual declines to heed the law’s call.³³⁵ Martel examines the radical potential of these interpellative misfires, which he claims is intrinsic to the structure of every call:

...every moment of interpellation— that is, every time a political subject answers a call, acquiesces to authority, and becomes a ‘proper’ subject—is, simultaneously, a moment of misinterpellation. I will reject the idea that the law or the state— or whatever other authorizing body I may be discussing— ever “knows” who it is calling or that there is a direct and absolute connection between the intentions of the powerful (those who put out the call) and the subjects that are produced in response to that power.³³⁶

Focusing on the “uninvited subjects” of interpellation, the people to whom the call was not intended but who reply anyway, Martel tracks how the actions of the misinterpellated disrupt the authority of the addressing body, as when Haitian revolutionaries responded to the proclamation of universality hailing from the French Declaration of the Rights of Man.³³⁷ The misinterpellation that is internal to any social and political proceeding, Martel argues, shows how resistance is always already possible and indeed occurs through the actions of ordinary people in ordinary times.

Following the work of these critical analyses to reconceptualize the interpellative process into an open-ended chain of identity expression that is a recurring and quotidian opportunity for creative resistance, I read Jacir’s practice to be one that parodies and complicates the mechanism of interpellation. Mimicking the artist as “sovereign creator” who hails a reflection of himself into existence—the Subject to whom all subjects are subjected even as they become legible and “free”— Jacir embeds representations of herself into her work to disrupt and unsettle domineering formulations of self-governed artistry and the mode of history that goes along with it. As I will

³³² Ibid., 109, 130.

³³³ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 15. For the full argument see, *ibid.*, 1-41, 127-63. For fascinating reading of the ways in which Butler’s arguments for the reappropriation of canonical texts of authority are congruent with Jewish textual traditions, see Chana Kronfeld, “‘I Want to Mix Up the Bible’: Intertextuality, Agency and the Poetics of Radical Allusion” in *The Full Severity of Compassion: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015): “In fact, I argue that Judith Butler’s analysis of the resistance to interpellation, an analysis that is entirely structured on the tension between iterability and change, is, not coincidentally, modeled on precisely this type of [a Jewish] intertextual tradition” (160).

³³⁴ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 129.

³³⁵ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 118.

³³⁶ James Martel, *The Misinterpellated Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 7.

³³⁷ Ibid., 63-64.

discuss in a following section, Abergel's work considers similar critiques of autocratic creation through a reappraisal of what 'animates' her art objects, rather than addressing the precise structure of interpellation. In proxy performances, Jacir implants herself into her projects as a surrogate for fellow Palestinians who are more constrained—for those Palestinians who cannot access crucial junctures of Palestine in *Where We Come From*; the owners of requisitioned books in *ex libris*; and Wael Zuaiter in *Material for a Film*. In my reading, Jacir calls upon herself to be an intermediary, an artist-agent both representing and repositioning others through a process that disrupts and reconfigures her own sense of self. I take her creative engagement with the potential uses of surrogacy to be a visionary adaptation of the proxies that are characteristic of the post-democratic political age in which we find ourselves, one that is saturated with insidious proxy networks, ranging from computer servers to puppet states and leaders to various kinds of communication relays.³³⁸ Jacir, I claim, embeds herself into her work as a means of activating networks of transmission and representation through the mobilization of different arenas of mediation: spaces of encounter, entanglement and reversal between text and body; archive and performance; crisis and art; counter-interpellation and self-estrangement; individual subject and collective multitude.

Additionally, I will argue that Jacir's multimedia process of intersubjective transmission through modes of counter-interpellation amounts to a form of auto/biography, telling the story of the replicating self through the Palestinian collective and vice versa. As Leigh Gilmore points out in her critical reassessment of the autobiographical genre, interpellation is also an account that the self relays about itself: "...what is interpellation, arguably Althusser's best-known concept, if not a trope of autobiography? For the self who comes into being as a subject at the moment of being hailed by an authority figure and signaling 'It is I' in response to the policeman's 'Hey, you' is structured in Althusser as a self-representational issue, a question of how the self knows itself."³³⁹ In Jacir's case, she tells the story of a historian-artist who cannot narrate what she is compelled to transmit of her people's disappearing archive unless she is embedded into her works in ways that necessitate her own interruption; her work indeed recounts how autobiography allows for a history of the vanquished through the disruption of the self. In what follows, I take a close look at two of her major pieces—*ex libris* (2010-12) and *Material for a Film* (2004-)—to tease out the different manners in which her work engineers and negotiates networks of transmission and representation that redeem lost artifacts of the Palestinian past through ethically productive diversions from the self.

³³⁸ See *Proxy Politics: Power and Subversion in a Networked Age*, eds. Research Center for Proxy Politics (Berlin: Archive Books, 2018).

³³⁹ Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 42-43.

II. Surrogate Translations

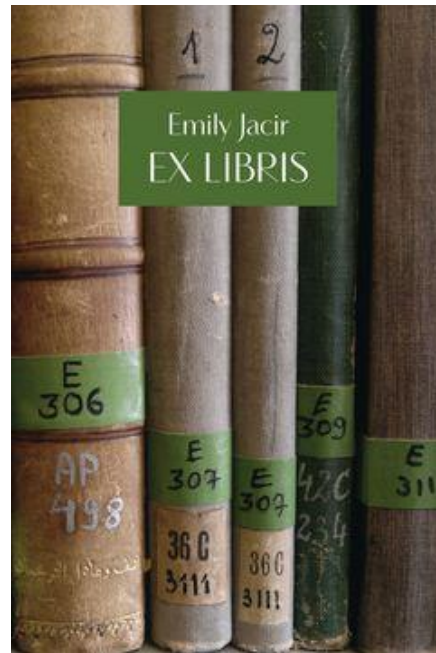


Figure 10- Emily Jacir, *ex libris*, 2010-12 ³⁴⁰

In her 2010-12 work titled *ex libris*, Jacir emphasizes and develops the somatic aspect of textual survival, or the manner in which the embodied traces of forgotten others determine her chosen forms of research and representation. *ex libris* addresses the looting and repatriation of books and was made for dOCUMENTA (13), an exhibition of modern and contemporary art that takes place every five years in the city of Kassel in the northern state of Hesse, Germany. Hesse is home to the Offenbach Archival Depot where the largest stolen book redistribution project in history occurred during the period when it belonged to the American zone of occupation following the end of World War II. Three million and two hundred thousand volumes were identified and returned or restituted, about half of which were of Jewish origin.³⁴¹ In this context, Jacir attends to the restitution of Palestinian property, an endeavor that was inspired by the doctoral research conducted by the Jewish-Israeli scholar Gish Amit in 2008. Then a doctoral candidate at Ben Gurion University, Amit investigated the history of books and manuscripts left behind by displaced Palestinians in the wake of the 1948 Nakba/ Arab-Israeli War. In an article published in the *Jerusalem Quarterly*, which Jacir has noted was the touch point for her own exploration, Amit summarizes his findings as follows:

Between May 1948 and the end of February 1949, in the course of the 1948 war, the staff of the Jewish National and University Library at Hebrew University collected some 30,000

³⁴⁰ Emily Jacir, *ex libris*, 2010-12. Installation and public project. Commissioned and produced by Documenta (13) with the support of Alexander and Bonin Gallery in New York and Alberto Peola Arte Contemporanea in Torino. *Ex Libris*, Exhibition Catalogue, Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König.

³⁴¹ Markus Kircchhof, "Looted Texts: Restituting Jewish Libraries" in *Restitution and Memory: Material Restoration in Europe*, Dan Diner and Gotthart Wunberg eds. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007) 161-88, (174-6).

books, manuscripts and newspapers that were left behind by the Palestinian residents of western Jerusalem. About 6,000 of those books were then ‘loaned’ to the National Library’s Eastern Studies department. Furthermore, in 1948 and the following years, the employees of the Custodian of Absentee Property gathered some 40,000-50,000 books from the cities of Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias, Nazareth and other places. Most of these books – largely textbooks found in the schools and warehouses of the British mandate – were later resold to Arab schools. Some 450 were handed over in 1954 to the National Library’s Eastern Studies Department. Around 26,000 books suffered a worse fate: in 1957, it was decided that they were “unsuitable for use in Arab schools in Israel, [because] some of them contained inciting materials against the State, and therefore their distribution or selling might cause damage to the State.” These texts were sold as paper waste.³⁴²

Over the course of many visits to the National Library of Israel—a department of the Hebrew University located on the Givat Ram campus in Jerusalem—Jacir used her cell phone to photograph the traces of the original owners that she found concealed and preserved in the books: notes, pressed flowers and inscriptions.

³⁴² Gish Amit, “Ownerless Objects? The Story of the Books Palestinians Left Behind in 1948,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 33 (2008): 7-8.



Figure 11- Emily Jacir, *ex libris*, AP 4561 ³⁴³

As Jacir describes in an interview about the work, “During the first visits I was focused on documenting inscriptions in the books, and in particular the names of the owners. But as I worked, I became more interested in the small traces left behind in the books...stains, scribbles, marginalia, scraps of paper.”³⁴⁴ This shift from a process oriented around the owners’ names and signatures to the more diffuse classification of the marks preserved in their texts strangely parallels the trajectory of the National Library’s cataloguing procedures. Following the testimonies of several library employees in the 50s and 60s, Amit notes that in the 1950s, every book was given a sequential number, under which was written an abbreviation of the owner’s name in English (SAK for Sakakini for example). By the 60s however, the owner’s names were removed and replaced with the generic

³⁴³ *ex libris*, Exhibition Catalogue, Koln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, AP 4561.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

designation AP (abandoned property, רכוש נטוש).³⁴⁵ This erasure of the Palestinian owners' particular material histories in exchange for the permanent presence of a generic archive has had the paradoxical result of a simultaneous preservation and destruction. Amit points out that the library's new notation system separated the Palestinians' books from the rest of the library's collections, thus reaffirming their status as Palestinian cultural assets while ensuring their continuing dissociation from the recovery and reformulation of Palestinian heritage.³⁴⁶

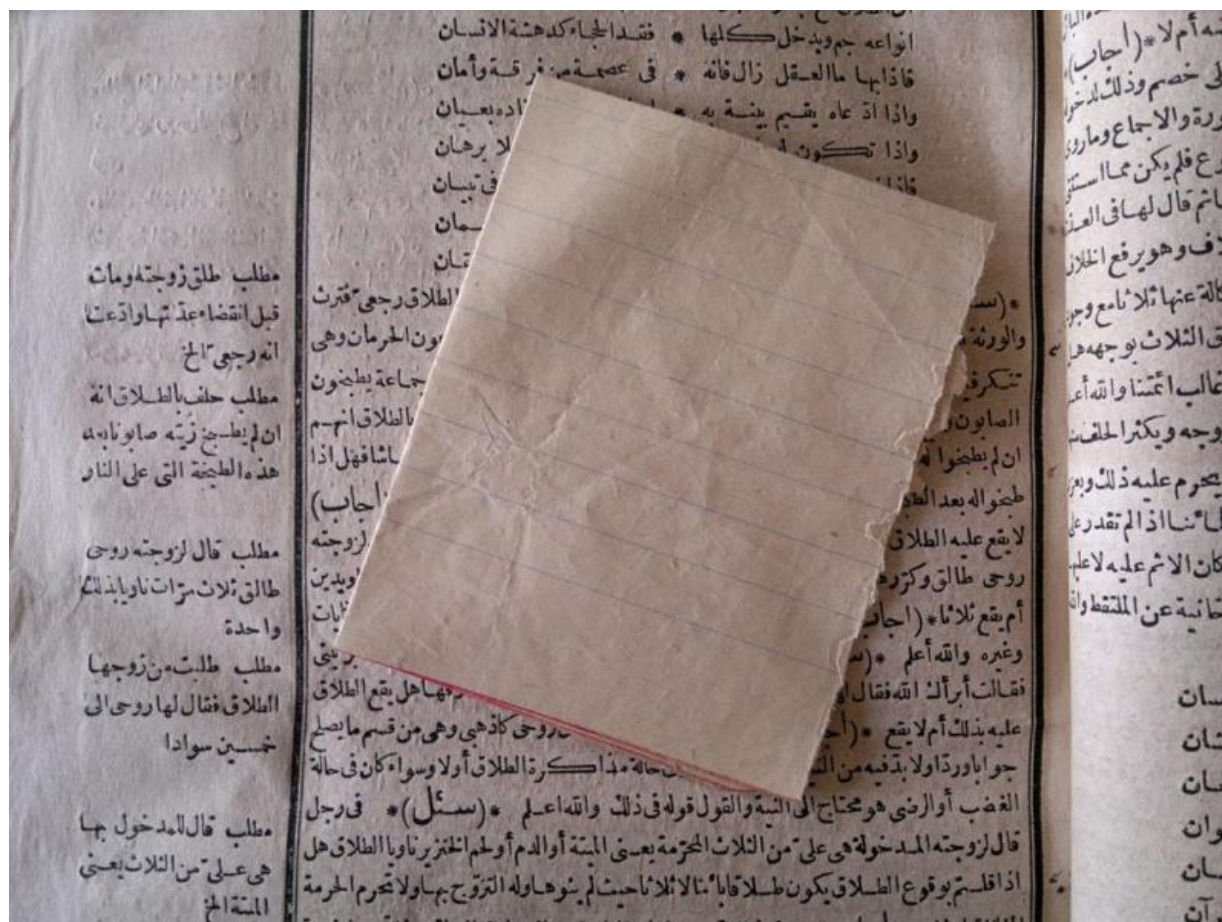


Figure 12- Emily Jacir, ex libris, AP 2356 ³⁴⁷

Jacir's attraction to the peripheral and historical traces of stains, tears, hidden notes, doodles and other marginalia draws her audience's eyes to precisely this ambiguity of particular and general; present and absent; identified and unknown; catalogued and clandestine—here all figured through the contrast between the text-filled and the blank page. These fragmentary photographs of the marks and details that exceed the texts attest to the books' material histories and contexts,

³⁴⁵ "Salvage or Plunder? Israel's "Collection" of Private Palestinian Libraries in West Jerusalem." *Journal of Palestine Studies*: 40.4 (Summer 2011), 6-23 (13-14).

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Jacir, *ex libris*, AP 2356.

highlighting our inability to uncover them completely. This incapacity to fully divulge the details of the books' histories is aptly figured in the photograph above: a piece of paper folded in quarters lies askance at the center of the image, obscuring the majority of the writing on the page. The contents of this paper are also concealed from the viewer—it could hold notes on the text, a list of things to do, or an empty page of faded blue lines. The network of topographical creases on the folded paper suggests that it might have been transferred from the book owner's pocket—but these are all conjectures without the possibility of confirmation. The snatches of text that are still legible from the photograph reveal the book to most likely be about shari'a law—Islamic canonical law derived from the Qur'an, ḥadīth and sunna—with this particular page focusing on the different types of divorce in Islam.

In almost all of the photographs of *ex libris*, the texts of the purloined books are obscured and decentered—the books' contents are presented as secondary to the extra-textual histories that the volumes contain. This is magnified, perhaps, by the fact that the Arabic is illegible to most of the exhibit's international audience. In the exhibition catalogue, Jacir translates some of the inscriptions she finds, but much else is left untranslated. As backdrops, the Arabic typescript that grounds the photographs of *ex libris* borders the line between text and design. Presented to a mostly unfamiliar audience unable to decipher the writing, the texts are left unread. They become a surface of ornament and texture that gestures towards orientalist misrepresentations of Arab cultural production. Attending to the crisis of the Arabic text in colonialist circulation, AP 2356 illustrates the dynamics of disclosure and concealment that unfold between the texts and their original readers. The central component of the photo's composition is an object that conceals text, which is itself a concealed text, one that conjures the phantom of the text's reader who presumably folded up her page of thoughts in the spine of her book. The plateau of Arabic typescript that offsets the foregrounded paper becomes a surface for the play of light and shadow, ultimately leading the eye to the top left corner where the imprint of the following page's text presses through the paper, entirely undecipherable. Jacir's discovery and exposure of the book owners' traces seemingly poses the actual text as a secret, a cipher of words rather than information on the page waiting to be processed and stored. Both semi-concealed and elusively visible, the texts become material vestiges of the owners' lived experience, part of the archive of their memory that is not able to be fully accessed, despite the artist's mediations. The text thus inscribes the absent body of both the books' owners and the artist herself, marking the inaccessible materiality of the body and signaling how the vanquished artifacts of the past can only be transmitted through a translation of mode.

In presenting the text as image, Jacir elicits the context of illumination and textual decoration in the Islamic and Arab tradition, even as they are mostly absent in the actual photographs she exhibits. Calligraphy is considered to be one of the highest art forms in the Islamic world, because it is through the writing of script that the word of God can be conveyed. The pen—the instrument of calligraphy—is intimately associated with God and his creative force, who is described in the Qur'an as he "Who taught by the pen" (96:4). The calligraphy of the Qur'an was often accompanied by decorative illumination of vegetal, geometric and other non-representational motifs which spread to secular manuscripts especially in Iran, Turkey and India, adding to an increasingly complex and rich art of the book in the Arab and Islamic world.³⁴⁸ While this register of textual art is activated in *ex libris*, it is evoked in its exclusion. The text that mostly goes unread, thus, performs as ornament even as the ornamental embellishment of book art in the Arab world is elicited in its absence.

Jacir coupled her studies with visits to the Murhard Library in Kassel and accompanying research into the Hesse region's book restitution project following World War II. The entanglement

³⁴⁸ Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006). See also Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

of World War II and Holocaust victims' looted books with the seizure and appropriation of Palestinian property is examined in Amit's work as well. In his 2014 book based on his dissertation, *Ex Libris: Chronicles of Theft, Preservation and Appropriation at the Jewish National Library* (ההיסטוריה של גזל, שימור וניכוס בספרייה הלאומית בירושלים), Amit argues that the consolidation of early Israeli national culture was executed in part through the variegated appropriation of spiritual and literary texts from Eastern European Jews, Palestinians and Yemenite Jews, a confiscation that was accompanied by the rejection and erasure of their respective legacies.³⁴⁹ The theme of the 13th edition of DOCUMENTA in which *ex libris* exhibited was collapse and recovery. Jacir, following Amit, chose to consider the unexpected parallels, intersections and divergences between different processes of recuperation. Embedding the chronicle of looted Palestinian texts within the larger frame of World War II textual restitution, Jacir engenders a nuanced juxtaposition that draws attention to the Palestinian tragedy while at the same time registering its place in global networks of war and seizure, in the discursive control of cultural memory and the problematic of repatriation. Her choice of title indeed gestures to this complex, however minimally. "Ex libris," literally meaning "out of the book or library (of someone)" and conventionally referring to an inscribed bookplate designating the book's owner, here stands on its own, such that the someone is both unidentified and unidentifiable. This omission of name signals an absence of origin that indicates instead the objects' place in a chain of unresolved transmission, whose very unknowability exceeds and escapes the occupier's classification. Jacir takes the "ex" in *ex libris* literally, as she herself would seem to reappropriate the title from Amit's 2014 book.



Figure 13- Emily Jacir, *ex libris*, 2010-2012, detail of billboards installed at Hauptbahnhof Kassel³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ Gish Amit, *Ex libris : hisṭoryah shel gezel, shimur ye-nikhush ba-Sifriyah ha-le'umit bi-Yerushalayim* [Ex Libris: Chronicles of Theft, Preservation and Appropriation at the Jewish National Library] (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2014), 9-10.

³⁵⁰ Emily Jacir, *ex libris*, 2010-2012, detail of billboards installed at Hauptbahnhof Kassel, dOCUMENTA 13, Kassel, <http://www.alexanderandbonin.com/artist/emily-jacir>.

While the photographs of the personal effects hidden in the Palestinian books are the bulk of the piece, Jacir also translated some of the inscriptions into German and English and turned several of them into large scale murals exhibited in public spaces throughout Kassel, Germany and in Manhattan as well. Equal parts salvager and scribe, thus, in *ex libris*, Jacir explores the entanglement of different publics with the personal—Jewish Israeli, Palestinian, German and American collectives have different modes of access to the objects and traces Jacir recovers and recirculates. In these public transcriptions, Jacir functions as the intermediary copyist who retrieves hermetic messages (the overlooked paratexts and marginalia of sequestered books) and interprets them through their replication in the public sphere—a process that would seem to evoke the structure of translation. Through this course of action, Jacir the artist-scribe assumes the identity of the inscriptions’ writers—indeed, it is Jacir as the author Aref il Aref (see figure 6) who becomes intelligible to the German passers-by reading her billboard. In this sense, she embeds herself into and is hailed in her work as precisely not herself, but as the composite persona of artist-scribe-author Jacir-il Aref who enables the transmission of the otherwise irretrievable inscription. It is this translational blurring of boundaries between author and artist that generates the productive interaction between private and public domains; and the assimilation of self into fellow that mobilizes the piece’s effect.

This intersubjective form of translation that Jacir puts into play is one that is intertwined with modes of history and history making. Aref il Aref (1892-1973) was a Palestinian journalist, historian and politician with a prolific career ranging from translation to research and documentation to satirical writing. He served as district officer of Jenin, Nablus, Baysan and Jaffa in the 1920s and mayor of East Jerusalem in the 1950s; and he published authoritative books of history on the Bedouin, Jerusalem, Gaza and the Nakba.³⁵¹ Literally meaning “the knower of the knower,” his name and personal biography attest to the social and epistemological disproportions of history production, begging the following set of questions: Who among the vanquished writes the history of the vanquished? Who becomes known and who recedes in popular memory? If the normative criticism of history as a positivist science posits that its narratives are formulated and told by the intellectual elite, according to their interests and needs and as an instrument of power, then how are the relations of authority, memory and voice reconfigured in the study of pasts outside of the western canon and “First World”?³⁵² The role of social power in formulating history, moreover, parallels the process of curation and circulation in artistic practice and the continuing perception of art as the provenance of high culture, produced and consumed by the elite. In this light, what begins as personal dedication from one elect historian to another becomes a large-scale public billboard associated with the preeminent artist Emily Jacir; but in the context of the silenced and disappearing Palestinian archives, it shows the chronicling of history from within Palestinian culture that was happening throughout the colonial occupations of both the British and the subsequent Israeli state—and its continuing rearchiving. It is the mediation of the artist that allows this course of Palestinian historiography to be shown, an intervention in which historian, author and artist become blurry categories of identification that cannot be easily disentangled. In effect, at least in this piece, Jacir is telling the story of the Palestinians telling their story. That she does this here through the

³⁵¹ See Mahdi Abdul Hadi, ed. *Palestinian Personalities: A Biographic Dictionary* 2nd ed., revised and updated (Jerusalem: Passia Publication, 2006); and Salim Tamari, “With God’s Camel in Siberia: The Russian Exile of an Ottoman Officer from Jerusalem,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 35 (2008): 31-50.

³⁵² See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), where Trouillot argues that every historical narrative is “a particular bundle of silences” (27) such that the ability to rescue history is contingent not only on the constitutive presence of silence (the unknown stories of the vanquished), but also on various knowledges of the past that were displaced by modern and western forms of historical culture.

structure of a translation is, I hope to show by recourse to Walter Benjamin's conception of it, a telling performance of the intimate connection between history and art.

For Benjamin, the act of translation is an act of history making, but one that operates according to the particular historicity of the work of art or literature, rather than the trajectory of "normal" historical time. As he describes in "The Task of the Translator," every work has its own mode of temporality, according to which some works call for ongoing life—for their ongoing survival through their translation.³⁵³ Benjamin calls this demand for ongoing life that some works have and some do not their "translatability," as the principle through which some texts move beyond themselves and assume a new identity: "Translatability is an essential component of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a special significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability."³⁵⁴ These translations that issue from the ongoing life of the text and engage in the historical process of linguistic circulation have nothing to do, for Benjamin, with the transmission of the text's message or meaning. Indeed, according to the conception of translation as an act of communication against which Benjamin writes, the translation should read as though it were written in its target language by the original author such that the translator herself is required to recede; in the history of translation theory and practice, fidelity to the source text entails to a large extent the effacement of the translator.³⁵⁵ Yet Benjamin titles his famous prologue "The Task of the Translator," reinstating the place and perspective of the translator in the process of translation—even as the rest of the essay ironically makes almost no more mention of the translator.³⁵⁶

The translator resurfaces, albeit in an unspoken manner, in the distortions that Benjamin counsels her to make in the target language—distortions that paradoxically enable the translation to be "transparent," and allow the "pure language" of the original to emerge all the more brightly. Benjamin writes,

A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax, which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator. For if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade.³⁵⁷

Translations, Benjamin insists, should not attempt to be bound to any trajectory of meaning making (one that would seem to ominously parallel the progressive notion of history that Benjamin associates with the ascendance of fascism). Rather, they must strive towards the encounter and integration of fragmentary languages that reveal "pure language"—a complex concept alluding to the Tower of Babel narrative and the original language in which Adam names the animals, which is characterized by a mystical and poetic accord between the signifying word and its signified object.

³⁵³ My reading is based on the thorough and helpful commentary by Antoine Berman in Antoine Berman, Isabelle Berman and Valentina Sommella, *The Age of Translation: A Commentary on Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'* trans. Chantal Wright (London, New York: Routledge, 2018).

³⁵⁴ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 71.

³⁵⁵ Berman, Berman and Sommella, *The Age of Translation*, 40-1. See also Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 1-35.

³⁵⁶ Berman points out that this absence parallels the lack of any mention of the translated text that the prologue was introducing—Baudelaire's *Fleur du Mal*. See Berman, Berman and Sommella, *The Age of Translation*, 41-43.

³⁵⁷ Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 79.

The task of the translator is “to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in a recreation of that work.” The translator, thus, redeems and frees a hidden being and alternative temporality from within the original text, which she does by emphasizing the literality of the source text at the level of the word, so that the syntactic materiality of the source language can emerge forcefully in the translation—like the flashing emanation of the past in the present that Benjamin describes in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

To bring this narrative of translative liberation to bear upon Jacir’s act of transmission, Jacir conveys a message that would otherwise be unknowable, transforming a personal dedication from one historian to another into a large-scale mural from artist to greater public. In this reversal, the dedication assumes a public identity of sorts, in which *the alternative life of history as art* is unleashed in the original. As in the photograph of AP2356, this aesthetic survival issues from the text’s simultaneously determinative and restricted condition as that which inscribes the corporeal past even as the language on the page can neither convey the actual content of the books nor transmit the full materiality of their context and tradition. Jacir’s work becomes the performative response to a need for transmission through surrogacies of person and medium, for the artist-historian to act as a translator-intermediary who redeems unknown others and unleashes unexplored forms of history-making through transformations of genre and mode.



Figure 14- Emily Jacir, *ex libris*, 2010-2012 ³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ Emily Jacir, *ex libris*, 2010-2012, 178 digital c-prints on Plexiglas (and dibond), dOCUMENTA 13, Kassel, photo: Roman März, <http://www.alexanderandbonin.com/artist/emily-jacir>.

In the DOCUMENTA exhibit of *ex libris*, the photographed details of the books were showcased in juxtaposed prints that were placed carefully on shelves, seemingly in accordance with a system not immediately recognizable to the viewer. This arrangement alludes as much to a library layout as to a graveyard: in place of a library holding's volumes (entire books encased in neat covers that stand spine to spine), there are glaring gaps of white wall spaced between photos. The prints reveal fragmentary and incoherent excerpts of texts alongside the marginalia that interrupt them. In interviews, Jacir has noted that one of the paths that led her to work with the confiscated books in the National Library of Israel was her research on the Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem, a Muslim cemetery dating from the 12th century.³⁵⁹ When, in 2004, Los Angeles based Rabbi Martin Hier and the Simon Wiesenthal Center embarked on a plan to build a Museum of Tolerance and Center for Human Dignity in Jerusalem in conjunction with then-finance minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Jerusalem Municipality offered the project 3.5 acres of land in the northern section of the cemetery where a parking lot had been built in 1964. In between 2008 and 2009, over 1,000 skeletons were removed from the site, disinterring four layers of graves.³⁶⁰ An extended controversy ensued, with opponents—including an international group of academics and archaeologists—calling for the immediate cessation of construction. In a letter penned to the SWC, the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israel Antiquities authority, Yale archaeologist Harvey Weiss declared that “[t]he bulldozing of historic cemeteries is the ultimate act of territorial aggrandizement: the erasure of prior residents.”³⁶¹ Though work has been stayed several times by the Israeli courts and the original architect of the project, Frank Gehry, resigned in 2010, construction has continued and the museum is still slated to open. Jacir’s installation of *ex libris*’ photographs would seem to evoke the cemetery’s disinterred graves: the images stand on the shelves together like differently-sized headstones. Interrupted by large gaps of blank space, they recall the plots of human remains that have been forcibly removed.

Entangled relations between books, bodies and corpses resurface in much of Jacir’s work, including *Material for a Film*. Her pieces present texts as materials that register the lives and effects of bodies, to the extent that they sometimes figure as corpses or corpses themselves—another performance of the absent body’s textualization. In the fluid relation between ruptured textuality and corporeality that Jacir examines, she serves as a mediator-artist who brings these books or texts back to fissured life, in a kind of life-in-death. Thus, the images of *ex libris* stand vertically rather than lying flat. Disinterred from the library’s holdings, the photos qua graves cannot be disposed of or even categorized into submission. As a mediator-artist, she acts as a proxy for the books’ original owners to reclaim and reanimate the requisitioned and buried texts. Paradoxically, she does this by performatively adapting the actions of the body or agent that she critiques, another strategy that we will see again in the discussion of *Material for a Film*. Here, she disinters Palestinian books from the Israeli National Library as a reversal and reformulation of the Mamilla Cemetery excavation, through which she is able to wrest some leverage over the narrative and reality of Israeli seizures and annexation of Palestinian land and remains. In this explicit reiteration of the occupier’s actions, she calls upon herself to impersonate the other as a means of representing the Palestinian book owners, making their traces visible and alive, which resets the micro-terms of cultural memory in the region. Crucially, I argue, it is this role with which she does not identify that becomes the grounds of her of

³⁵⁹ Eva Scahrer, “Abandoned Property,” Interview with Emily Jacir, *Mousse* 34 (June 2012), http://www.alexanderandbonin.com/sites/default/files/Scharrer%2C%20Mousse_June%202012.pdf.

³⁶⁰ Amy Goodman, Rashid Khalidi and Michael Ratner, “Palestinian Families Appeal to UN Over Israeli Construction of Museum of Tolerance ON Jerusalem’s Historic Mamilla Cemetery,” *Democracy Now*, December 10, 2010, https://www.democracynow.org/2010/2/10/palestinian_families_appeal_to_un_over.

³⁶¹ Quoted in Noam Dvir, “Grave Concerns,” *Ha’aretz*, October 25, 2011, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/1.5203282>.

surrogacy—the space in between “I” and “we” in which Jacir the artist and the Palestinian collective to whom her work attends reference, reflect, dismantle and rematerialize each other.

The translations of inscriptions that are broadcast on billboards in various cities enact an alternative process, alerting passers-by to the historical presence of a book that was in an individual’s particular possession. White pages are enlarged on the sides of city buildings and dispersed in disparate metropoli. The large print of these murals attests to the books in which they were inscribed even as it announces the books’ inaccessibility. Taken out of their books, the inscriptions and dedications execute their function through this extraction, performatively enacting the “ex” in “ex libris.”

In the shifting intersections of property and textual trace with the corporeal, the artist catalyzes and is transformed by a process of transmission that makes use of discontinuity—relaying fragmented paratexts in disjointed media. As is evident in these various photographic details, different languages, scripts, print type and handwritten lines interact with title pages and stamps of authority; the off-center composition of the photos draws the eye away from text and towards the secrets stored in the book creases:

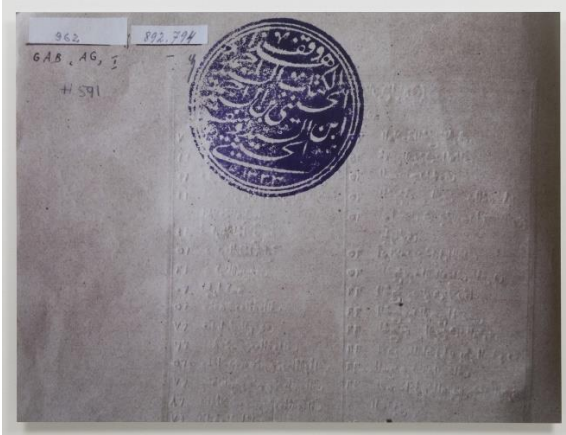


Figure 15-Emily Jacir, ex libris, H591 ³⁶²

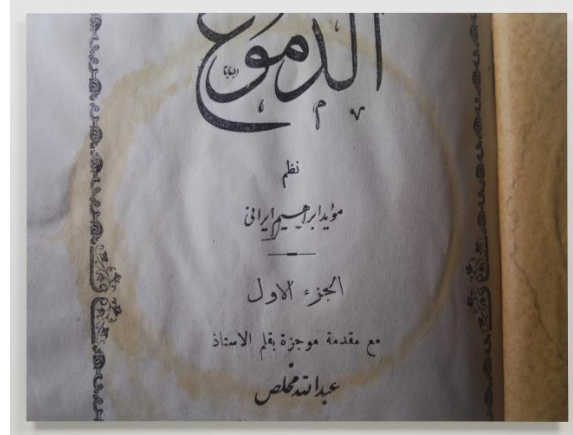


Figure 16- Emily Jacir, ex libris, AP 807 ³⁶³

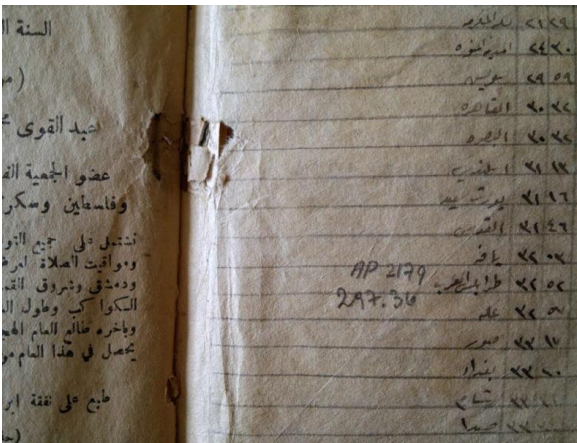


Figure 17- Emily Jacir, ex libris, AP 2179 ³⁶⁴

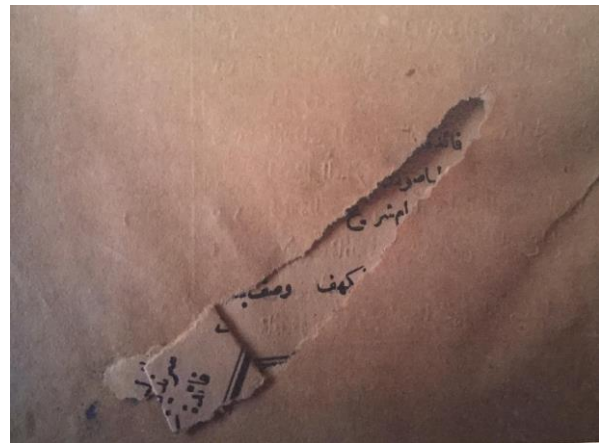


Figure 18- Jacir, ex libris, AP1213, 2010-2012 ³⁶⁵

The textual and non-textual interface in inventive and dynamic ways—I note here the folds on the page, wrinkled paper, tears and holes, the texture of type pressed into paper. Jacir draws our eyes to focus on the material grounds on which the text lies, gesturing to the links between books and land

³⁶² Jacir, *ex libris*, H591, 2010-2012. Jacir's caption reads: "al-Husseini waqf stamp/ seal (waqf: an Islamic endowment of property to be held in trust and used for a charitable or religious purpose)."

³⁶³ Emily Jacir, *ex libris*, AP 807, 2010-12, digital c-print on aluminum, 30 x 40 in/76 x 101.5 cm, photo: Joerg Lohse, <http://www.alexanderandbonin.com/artist/emily-jacir>. My translation of the title page is as follows: "Tears, Poems by Mu'ayyid Ibrāhīm Iranī, Part One, with a concise introduction by 'Abdullah Mukhlis."

³⁶⁴ Emily Jacir, *ex libris*, AP 2179, 2010-12, digital c-print on aluminum, 30 x 40 in/76.5 x 102 cm. Jacir's caption reads: "Al-Azhari index from astronomy book by astronomer Abed el Kawi Mohamed al-Zoughbi, 27/21 Jeddah, 29/21 Mecca, 30/24 Il Medina il Munawara, 59/29, Suez, 32/30 Cairo, 32/30 Al Basra, 13/31 Alexandria, 16/31 Port Said, 46/31 Jerusalem, 13/32 Jaffa, 54/ 32 West Tripoli, 57/32 Acre, 17/33 Tyre, 10/33 Baghdad, 31/33 Damascus, 34/33 Sidon, 54/33 Beirut."

³⁶⁵ Jacir, *ex libris*, AP1213, 2010-2012.

(both classified as abandoned property), while also allowing us to imagine who made these marks, to fantasize about the stories behind them.

The contested and appropriated land of Palestine reemerges through the very physicality of history impressed upon the page that Jacir captures and, in my reading, is analogized to the obstructed contexts that ground the restricted and disjointed texts, which in the case of these photographs relate to the multilingual and multicultural intellectual climate of Palestine. Indeed, all of the pictures above attest to the rich history of knowledge production and dissemination in Palestine. Figure 9 shows the title page from the first book of poetry of a polyglot writer and translator in 20th century Palestine: “*Tears*, Poems by Mu’ayyid Ibrāhīm Iranī, Part One, with a concise introduction by ‘Abdullah Mukhlis.” Mu’ayyid Ibrāhīm Iranī (1910-1987) was the municipal accountant of Haifa before becoming a full-time writer who composed and translated in seven languages, ranging from French, English, Russian and German to Hebrew, Arabic and Farsi. Figure 10, meanwhile, depicts the hand-written index of a book of astronomy, next to the first page of the book’s preface or introduction, which appears to give a biography of the author, ‘Abd al-Qawī Muḥammad al-Zughbī. The index contains a list of cities throughout the Middle East and North Africa, demonstrating al-Zughbī’s broad swath of investigation and alluding to the crucial contribution of Islamic scholarship to the western science of astronomy.³⁶⁶ At the same time, Jacir’s photos accentuate various disruptions of authority and knowledge transmission: prevented from reading Iranī’s poems, the viewer’s eyes are drawn instead to the circular stain left on the page, presumably by one of the book’s last readers. Similarly, the tantalizing index of figure 10 abuts the Israeli library’s call number, while the picture’s composition focalizes visually compelling holes in the book crease, as if to emphasize gaps in the book’s reception. Constrained from turning any pages, the reading viewer is confronted with a restriction of movement and apprehension that contrasts with the index’s broad geographical expanse. Perhaps most explicitly, figure 8 presents a *waqf* stamp that directly opposes the Israeli library’s notation. The *waqf* is an Islamic endowment of property that is held in trust and can no longer be bought or sold. Among many other things, it has been used extensively to establish libraries and bequeath books, as a means of protecting access to Islamic learning. This particular stamp reads, “This book is the *waqf* of al-Sayyid Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī bin al-Sayyid Aḥmad ibn al-Sayyid Yūsuf al-Ḥusaynī.” Al-Sayyid Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī (1854-1914) was an Egyptian lawyer, Shāfi‘ī jurist and the author of numerous books on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).³⁶⁷ Beyond this information, it is difficult to track the origins and status of this specific *waqf*, though one text notes that al-Sayyid Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī’s son, al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī, bequeathed a set of books to the Egyptian National Library.³⁶⁸ Without access to the details of this *waqf*, it nevertheless seems clear that it endowed a group of manuscripts and texts pertaining to Islamic jurisprudence to an unknown recipient. The aestheticized lettering of the stamp’s Arabic—with calligraphic strokes that emphasize the self-containment of the circular border—contrast with the Roman letters and numerals that juxtapose it to the left, illustrating how the *waqf*’s method of knowledge dissemination and bequeathal is disrupted by the Israeli library notation and its system of colonial acquisition.

³⁶⁶ See, for instance, Stephen P. Blake, *Astronomy and Astrology in the Islamic World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2016).

³⁶⁷ See *Mu‘jam al-Bābiṭ li-Shu‘arā al-‘Arabiyya* [Babtain Dictionary of Arab Poets], http://www.almoajam.org/poet_details.php?id=5542, accessed October 31, 2019.

³⁶⁸ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī ‘ilm uṣūl al-fiqh* [Yield in the Science of the Fundamentals of Jurisprudence] (Bayrūt : Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1992), 61.

To access and transmit these corporeal traces and textual marginalia, Jacir the artist called upon herself to physically embed herself in the books' purview—a self-insertion that is not part of the artwork itself, but constitutes its condition of possibility. While Jacir's ability to move and interact with the materials that she transmits situates her in a position of power vis a vis her subject and viewer,³⁶⁹ ultimately her work shows the breakdown of this hierarchy and the limits of a domineering manner of knowing, making and archiving. In the photos above, Jacir functions as the shooting eye of the camera that directs our gaze and access. Through this literal mode of supervision, she impersonates the occupier and his dominance to disinter segments of books and material history. Indeed, the photos emphasize these relations of power, zeroing in on disruptions of authority, transmission and multiplicity, and focalizing the places where viewers are blocked from exploring more. We see what Jacir allows us to see, but without her we would not be able to look at all. This is aptly illustrated in figure 11, where the viewer is afforded only a snatch of disjointed text through the tear of the page that simulates a kind of gaping window. In this framing of the frame, Jacir shows herself impeding our ability to read; in effect, rather than endeavoring to transmit the text of the text, she relays the syntax of these books' looting and censorship, compelling the curious observer to occupy the role of constrained viewer who is restricted in her ability to interact with her subject matter. And yet, through this enclosure of subject matter and viewer, Jacir does disrupt the occupiers' method of transmission, enabling these texts to assume a new kind of survival outside the walls of the library. At the same time, Jacir shows how the circumscription of the Palestinian elite's cultural production enables her own. Most significantly for my purposes here, her acts of encasement also show the limits of her own mediation and capacity to intervene: she offers us small peeks into the work, exposing half words and text in disarray and discontinuity. Both her ability to divulge and the limitations of her disclosures are thematized in the work as the frame that situates each photo's composition. In this sense, she demonstrates how the survival of these texts can only happen through their continued disruption.

What happens to the historian-artist who is compelled to dissect that which she wishes to relay? What becomes of the subject as historian when she is displaced or superseded by the only method—fragmentation—that is available to her? To intervene in the possible, Jacir ultimately becomes the subject of parataxis, presenting a visual list of objects in enduring disjunction that she as historian-artist is prevented from narrativizing, precisely in order to enable their survival and transmission.³⁷⁰ In effect, her impersonation of the occupier and his ability to construct a totalizing narrative of his past which is premised on the silencing of the vanquished leads to the breakdown of this method—and the endurance of a disruption that implicates both the transmitter and the transmitted. It is as if it is the method that can act, rather than the historian-artist.

These tactics of self-insertion into a set of inaccessible narratives thus proliferate compelling bodies of stories in discontinuous transmission—assemblages of historical, textual and corporeal traces that tell their stories in diverse registers and media by means of the artist's circumscribed interventions. Interpellating herself to occupy the role of intermediary-excavator whose embedment within the story expands and extends it even as her own capacity to act is diminished, Jacir's performances blur the boundaries between self and fellow, past and present, textual archive and dynamic unfolding, history and art, narrative and fragment. In the mobilization of these spaces of betweenness, the Palestinian collective is rearticulated. Thus, the proliferation of the Palestinian story happens through a network of transmission in which the agency of recovering and retelling is

³⁶⁹ My gratitude to Chana Kronfeld for bringing this point to my attention.

³⁷⁰ My claim is informed here by Dimitris Vardoulakis, "The Subject of History: The Temporality of Parataxis in Benjamin's Historiography," *Walter Benjamin and History*, Andrew E. Benjamin, ed. (London, New York: Continuum, 2006), 118-136.

premised upon the disruption and undoing of self and the activation of alternative trajectories in disjunction.

This nexus of aesthetic remediation, story-telling and survival appears powerfully in Jacir's 2005 project *Material for a Film*, for which she has won several prestigious awards, including the Golden Lion in 2007 at the Venice Biennale and the Hugo Boss Prize in 2008, administered through the Guggenheim museum and foundation. *Material for a Film* is a mixed media installation and performance in photographs, letters, postcards, interviews and diary entries that showcases Jacir's part in an ongoing process of collecting information about Wael Zuaiter, a Palestinian intellectual who was shot by Mossad agents in Rome in 1972.³⁷¹



Figure 19- Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film*, (detail) Wael with book³⁷²



Figure 20-Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film*, exhibition view³⁷³

Zuaiter was the first Palestinian to be assassinated as part of Israel's Operation Wrath of God, a campaign set in retaliation for the eleven Israeli athletes taken hostage and killed during the Munich Olympics. The Mossad accused him of heading Black September's activities in Rome, the group responsible for the offensive, and of organizing the Munich attack. The controversy surrounding Zuwaiter's role continues until today—while Israeli officials have never admitted mistakes in regards to his targeting, there is little concrete evidence proving his involvement. In his book on the Munich attack and its aftermath, Aaron Klein notes that "Uncorroborated and improperly cross-referenced intelligence information tied him to the support network of Black September in Rome."³⁷⁴ For their

³⁷¹ Emily Jacir, *Material for a film*, 2004— and *Material for a Film (performance)*, 2006. Multimedia installation, three sound pieces, video, texts, photographs, and archival material, dimensions variable. February 6-April 15, 2009 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

³⁷² Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film*, (detail) Wael with book, 2007, pigment print mounted on cintra, 34 1/2 X 34 1/2 in/ 88 x 88 cm, photo: Joerg Lohse, <http://www.alexanderandbonin.com/artist/emily-jacir>.

³⁷³ Ibid., <https://matterful.wordpress.com/tag/emily-jacir/>.

³⁷⁴ Aaron Klein, *Striking Back: The 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre and Israel's Deadly Response* (New York: Random House, 2005), 117-18.

part, Palestinians regard Zuwaiter as an artist and translator who was assassinated because of his role as a well-known public intellectual in Italian circles who spoke out in support of Palestinian rights.³⁷⁵

The title of Jacir's project refers to a planned film documentary that was never realized, an effort headed by Janet Venn-Brown, Zuaiter's companion for eight years. Van-Brown, a Sydney-born painter, wrote a book titled *For a Palestinian—A Memorial to Wael Zuaiter*. The third chapter consisted of a series of interviews conducted by the filmmakers Elio Petri and Ugo Pirro with people in Wael's life, and was to serve as the basis for a film about him, hence the chapter's title— "Material for a Film." As Jacir notes to Amy Goodman in an interview during the 2015 Venice Biennale, she envisions her project as nothing more than a continuation of Van-Brown, Petri and Pirro's work in which she gathers more material for a film and presents her personal itineraries of exploration and discovery—her encounter with the traces of Wael that were left behind. This process of inquiry and collection unfurled over the course of five years' collaboration with Van-Brown and her cache of personal archives. The installation, exhibited first in Venice and then at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, was laid out over a series of interlocking rooms and, in Jacir's description, was intended to be the spatial depiction of a cinematic experience.³⁷⁶



Figure 21-Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film*, 2006, photographs collected by the artist in Nablus while visiting Zuaiter's childhood home.³⁷⁷



Figure 22-Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film*, 2006, Zuaiter's book collection at the time of his death.³⁷⁸

Photographs that record Jacir's movements and accompanying journal entries are interspersed with letters, notes, pictures, prints of Zuaiter's book collection, magazine covers and excerpts, snatches of symphonies, and more. This analog serves as the filmstrip on which viewers tread at their own pace, disrupting the possibility of any one predominating narrative, as the audience is called upon to reassemble personal cinematic itineraries. As Guy Mannes-Abott notes, "one of *Material's* successes is the way its indeterminateness as an object, whereby more than one

³⁷⁵ Jesse Cox, "A Palestinian Poet, an Australian Painter and a Mossad-led Assassination in Italy," *ABC*, April 28, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/radiotonic/the-palestinian-poet-assassinated-by-israel's-mossad/6416658>.

³⁷⁶ Emily Jacir, "Artist Emily Jacir Brings the Palestinian Experience to the Venice Biennale," interview by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, August 12, 2015, https://www.democracynow.org/2015/8/12/artist_emily_jacir_brings_the_palestinian.

³⁷⁷ Jacir: *Europa*, 134.

³⁷⁸ Jacir: *Europa*, 132-33.

assemblage has been produced under its name, also defines our encounter with it.”³⁷⁹ The audience is neither given nor does it gather identical footage. In this multi-media platform of juxtaposed texts, images and objects, the status of active and passive voice, action or transformation is not clearly fixed—viewers are assimilated into a story through their embodied encounter with a complex of multi-genre fragments. Jacir, having embedded herself into the personal narrative of Van-Brown and Zuaiteir, invites her audience to do the same. This mechanism of inlaid personal narratives, stories that are lodged within the frames of other accounts and generate spin-offs themselves, calls attention to itself as a tactic for the dismantling of hegemonic histories. In fascinating ways, this strategy reveals itself to emerge from within the records of Zuaiteir’s own preoccupation and work.



Figure 23- Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film* (detail), 2007, Wael Zuaiteir's *A Thousand and One Nights*, with bullet hole from his assassination in book spine.³⁸⁰



Figure 24- Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film* (performance), 2006, 1,000 blank books shot by the artist.³⁸¹

Indeed, at the time that he was shot, Zuaiteir was working on a translation of *A Thousand and One Nights* into Italian and was carrying part two of the book in his pocket. Twelve bullets were shot at his head and chest at close range. The thirteenth bullet lodged in the spine of the edition of *A/*

³⁷⁹ “This is tomorrow: On Emily Jacir’s Art of Assembling Radically Generative Archives,” *Dissonant Archives*, Anthony Downey, ed. (London: IB Taurus, 2015), 116.

³⁸⁰ Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film* (detail) (Wael Zuaiteir's 1001 Nights), 2007, digital c-print and wall text, 13 3/4 x 21 in/ 35 x 53.3 cm, in *Jacir: Europa*, 117. The caption to the photo reads: “Wael Zuaiteir’s *A Thousand and One Nights*, volume II. Wael’s dream was to translate *A Thousand and One Nights* directly from Arabic into Italian. He had been working on this project since his arrival in Italy. To this day, an Italian translation from the Arabic does not exist, all the Italian translations are from other translations. The night Wael was killed, he had volume 2 of the book in his pocket. Twelve of the bullets entered his body but there was a thirteenth bullet that pierced through the book and got lodged in its spine.”

³⁸¹ Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film* (performance), 2006, 1,000 blank books shot by the artist with a .22 caliber gun, mixed media and photographs, “Zones of Contact”: 2006 Biennale of Sydney, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/material-film-performance-part-2/7053>.

Layla wa Layla. Jacir photographed and displayed the print of each page that the bullet pierced. In a related performance that was exhibited as part of the installation, she trained at a shooting center and learned to fire a .22 caliber pistol—the same gun the Mossad used in their assassinations of Palestinians in Europe. After her training, she shot 1,000 blank white books with the pistol and displayed them along shelves in a square room. In these translations and reversals between books and bodies, archivist and performer, marksman and marked, the thematic of storytelling for survival that so famously grounds *A Thousand and One Nights* surfaces compellingly.



Figure 25- Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film* (performance), 2006, 1,000 blank books shot by the artist.³⁸²



Figure 26- Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film* (performance), 2006, artist with a .22-caliber gun.³⁸³

As the famed tale goes, it is related that long ago, a king and his brother discovered the sexual betrayals of their respective wives. Terrified of their impotence in comparison to the boundless cunning of their wives, King Shahrayar resolves to marry a new girl and sleep with her every night, and then to kill her the next morning. These marriages and murders continue until Scheherazade, the vizier's educated daughter, hatches a plan to transform the king's desires and motivations through the powers of narrative. Installing her sister Dunyazade in the bedroom, she instructs her to ask for a story at an appointed time. Thus begins an endless complex of tales, one implanted in the other, in which, as Tzvetan Todorov has detailed in his essay "Narrative Men," every character signifies a renewal of narrative plot through the relating of their story. In this operation of embedded and proliferating chronicles, every narrative thus becomes the story of another narrative because above all, storytelling means life and survival while silence means death.³⁸⁴

This metaphorical equation is literalized within the text in "The Tale of King Yūnān and Sage Dūbān" (11th-17th night) ("حكاية الملك يونان والحكيم دوبان") when Dūbān avenges himself upon the King with a blank white book whose poisoned pages are stuck together. As the story goes, the king is afflicted with leprosy that no physician is able to cure until the sage Dūbān finally succeeds. Overjoyed, the king initially rewards Dūbān with money and favors but is soon turned against him by a vizier jealous of the sage's new status and orders his execution. Once Dūbān learns of his imminent decapitation, he persuades the king to allow him to retrieve one of his books entitled *The*

³⁸² Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film* (performance) in *Emily Jacir: Europa*, 120-21.

³⁸³ Ibid., 118-19.

³⁸⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, "Narrative-Men," *The Arabian Nights Reader*, Ulrich Marzolph, ed. (Detroit: Wayne St. University Press, 2006), 229-33.

Secret of Secrets, and promises him that, after his own death, if his Majesty “...opens the book on the sixth leaf, reads three lines from the left page and speaks to me, my head will speak and answer whatever question you have.”³⁸⁵ After using his moistened fingers to pry apart a few pages of the proffered book, the king says to Dūbān’s severed head: “Sage, I see nothing written in the book.’ The sage replied, ‘open more pages.’ The king opened some more pages but still found nothing, and while he was doing this, the drug spread through his body—for the book had been poisoned—and he began to heave, sway and twitch.”³⁸⁶ The blank book signals the end of narrative and of life, and it is the outcome of the king’s refusal to heed Dūbān’s warnings of commensurability: “Spare me and God will spare you. Destroy me and God will destroy you.”³⁸⁷ Poison thus infuses the pages of the book that tells no story and it contaminates the body of the one who will not allow himself to be changed via narrative, a central preoccupation of the *Nights*’ plot. Indeed, the matrix of textual propagation in *ʿAlf Layla* is oriented around the intention of transforming King Shahrayar’s pathological response to his own loss of narrative control. As Richard van Leeuwen notes in his study, *The Arabian Nights*’ embedded endlessness operates through the adaptations and changes it enacts and propels by means of the multiplicity of voices that are brought into Shahrayar’s intimate sphere thanks to Scheherazade’s ingenuity.³⁸⁸ The discourse of survival, thus, is a discourse of transformation through the interiorization of difference. Bringing these issues to bear on Palestinian endurance, Jacir clearly draws the analogy between the Mossad and King Yūnān, both of whom bring death and destruction upon themselves by attempting to arrest the life of the narrative and the dynamic effects of discursive multiplicity.³⁸⁹

With this context in mind, how then do we read the blank books on which Jacir opens fire? On the one hand, these white tomes would seem to represent Zuaier’s foreclosed project of translation, an absence of moving text which signifies death in its own right. His assassination and the wounded edition of *ʿAlf Layla* embody in strikingly clear images the assault on Palestinian memory and culture that Zionism enforces, as if to prevent Palestinian narratives from movement and transformation. More than books, then, under Jacir’s trigger, they become lifeless bodies that record the impact of gunfire, pointing to the ways in which the Israeli military apparatus attends to Palestinians, recognizing them as targets rather than as people. Methodically stacked on the shelves of a mausoleum-like room, these blank bodies evoke the tombs and silence of a graveyard, recalling the photographs of *ex libris* displayed as headstones. On the other hand, however, her Mossad mimicry enacts a reanimation and reworking of the historical scene, embedding herself in the chronicle of Zuaier’s assassination by means of multimedia reversals and materializations. Her gunshots indeed fire back, resisting the status of silent victimhood and inscribing textual vacancies with the bullet-marks of her narrative relating. In this sense, the empty books emerge as the blank canvases that exhibit her embedded agency of retelling most plainly.

³⁸⁵ *The Arabian Nights*, trans. Husain Haddaway (New York: Norton, 1990), 56.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

فقال ايها الحكيم ما ارا فيه مكتوب شيء. فقال افتح زاده. ففتح ولم يرى شيء. فما هو الا أن فعل ذلك حتى حاق فيه الوا – وكان الكتاب مسموم – فعندها ترحزح وماج ومال. 104

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 46.

³⁸⁸ Richard Van Leeuwen, *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel and Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2007), 128.

³⁸⁹ Yet another point brought to my attention by Chana Kronfeld!



For Jacir's performance to enable the reading I have just suggested, there is a necessary shift that must be made from the status of absented and silenced text to blank surface—the whiteness of a page that serves as the register for an image, impression or action. This presents an alternative analysis to traditional interpretations of the blank book in Scheherazade's fifth story as a symbol of narrative lack and imminent death or destruction. Following Elias Khoury's take, "[Scheherazade] found in the whiteness of pages a metaphor for the demise of power when it loses all logic and plunges into destroying knowledge."³⁹⁰ For Jacir, in contrast, the blankness becomes the possibility for a new form of logic to be seen—for the text of disappearing archives to materialize as a different medium, in performances that transmit alternative repertoires of knowledge, to use Diana Taylor's terms and conceptual framework.³⁹¹ Equal parts archivist, artist and performer, Jacir tells a new story through an inverse process of impersonation. Posing as a Mossad operative whose weapon is used to make art rather than assassinate enemy-

targets, she recasts Israel's military authority into the force of creative license, a remediation that enables different modes of expression to transmit previously unseen details and unintelligible accounts. In point of contrast to "The Tale of King Yūnān and Sage Dūbān," where the single blank book contains the poison that kills the king and thus becomes a form of weaponry itself, here, the blank books have proliferated. Though they stand as the blank bodies of target-victims, they wield their own form of power, serving as the loci of blankness within previously sealed and overdetermined accounts that mark the possibility of narrative reformulation and creative translation.

The artifacts from Jacir's performance exhibited in the installation thus sustain the movement from silenced text to victimized and objectified body to interstitial site of indeterminability. The one thousand white books that Jacir shoots reference Zuaier's incomplete translation project, which itself analogizes the millions of Palestinian stories that are unable to

³⁹⁰ Elias Khoury, "In Defense of Metaphor," *Belonging and Globalization: Critical Essays in Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Kamal Boullata (Saqi: London, 2008), 82.

³⁹¹ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

circulate; the dehumanization of Palestinians into targeted bodies; as well as the capacity to rearticulate historical trauma in a new medium and ensure its ongoing memory and ungovernable effect. The white books pose as translational openings into unknown accounts, stories of life merged with death whose generation cannot be constrained—each night indeed becomes its own complete book in Jacir’s performance. Inserting herself into this story as a proxy of the Palestinian collectivity whose life depends on the survival and retelling of this narrative, the Emily Jacir who appears in *Material* oscillates herself: she shifts between the artist who records her research and reactions to the chronicle of Zwaiter that she uncovers and the artist who impersonates the other in order to enact change. Mixing up the categories of bodies and books, representative and represented, self and other, narrative strategies and tactics of resistance until it is not clear where one ends and the other begins, Jacir reveals that her agency as an archiving activist and an embedding artist emerges most forcefully from within the slippage between these realms. Her engagement with Palestine’s disappearing archive points to places where survival in text breaks down, where histories and narratives are held in various forms of captive—stuck in state libraries or pierced by military logic. From these points of seeming stasis, Jacir develops multimedia modes of transmission through an attentiveness to the corporeal traces of others in disjunction and her own capacity to incite and invite intersubjective transformation.

III. Library of Absent Secrets

In Jacir’s works discussed thus far, the library becomes a form of presentation through which the mediating artist maintains the indeterminability of the Palestinian archive. The dOCUMENTA 13 exhibit of *ex libris* indeed displays the shift from the library as a warehouse of colonial and violent acquisition that bears an entangled resemblance to a cemetery to the library as an installation of recovered textual and somatic traces. In the performance of *Material for a Film*, the mausoleum-cum-library again figures as the exhibit structure through which the remediation of historical trauma is presented. If for Jacir the library inculcates a new mode of public access to the previously impenetrable, for Israeli artist Etti Abergel, the library performs what would initially seem to be a much more autobiographical task, serving as the holding space for a curated collection of personal objects, as in the first room of her 2014 installation, *Animism: An Installation in Three Parts*, which she titles “The Library.”



Figure 27- Etti Abergel, *Library*, 2014 ³⁹²

Following Lauren Berlant and Leigh Gilmore’s work to shift conventional understandings of the relations between personal and collective, I will argue however that Abergel’s autobiographical mode is precisely not personal, but rather an expression of decentralized identity that assimilates, critiques and reformulates the rhetorics and ideologies of the public sphere.³⁹³ This emphasis on the political valences of Abergel’s autobiographical installations perhaps goes against the grain of the artist’s own self-characterizations and explicit poetics; yet, as I hope to show, Abergel’s preoccupation with personal memory does not occasion the confession of an individual’s private knowledge. Rather, Abergel sculpts an autobiography of the self’s absence in which she gives herself over to the particularized artifact of nationalist violence. Indeed, I claim that she presents the life of the fragmented object in place of the self who is kept secret—a fragment that indexes the disjointedness of Arab-Jews from their pasts in Arab countries, the history of Mizrahi Jews’ racial and economic segregation in Israeli society and the ongoing destruction of Palestine. Abergel thus fashions the history of the vanquished, using a destabilized form of autobiography to necessitate a reckoning with

³⁹² Etti Abergel, *Library*, 2014, *Untitled*, 2005–2014, Each mixed media, dimensions variable, *Animism: An Installation in Three Parts*, January 3–22, 2014, Galerie Mezzanin, Vienna, <http://galeriemezzanin.com/exhibitions/etti-abergel/>. Accessed April 25, 2019.

³⁹³ Berlant notes in her preface to *The Female Complaint* that “...the autobiographical isn’t the personal... all sorts of narratives are read as autobiographies of collective experience. The personal is the general. Publics presume intimacy.” Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), vii. See also Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

the violence of the past in the present. In this sense, her practice bears an unexpected resemblance to Jacir's process. Jacir's work shows the emergence of auto/biography through a kind of counter-interpellation in which her impersonations and assumptions of the other's authority enable the multimedia and intersubjective transmission of the Palestinian story—a conveyance that transpires by virtue of the ongoing and ungovernable disruption of the transmitter and her transmitted material. Her own privilege and performance of power is ceded to the endurance of the story. Jacir's story thus becomes the account of her people's disjointed past and present that survives by means of her own interruption, as she is mediated and displaced by the fragments that she relays.

The daughter of Moroccan immigrants who moved to Israel in the 1950's, Abergel was born in 1960 in Tivon, a town in northern Israel. Abergel lives and works in Jerusalem, where she teaches drawing, sculpture and art education at the Kerem Institute and the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design. She received her BFA and MFA from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, but did not start exhibiting until the comparatively late age of thirty-six, because she spent the thirteen years after graduation working, as she puts it, “in a personal manner”: “Only after about a decade of avoiding the art world, a period of persistent work, did my installation language become formulated as an intermediate space linking the autobiographical and sculptural through the imagination.”³⁹⁴ Since that time, Abergel has participated in numerous one-person and group shows in Israel and around the world, as well as creating on-site installations at the Venice Biennale and the Biennale at l'Aquila, Italy. Among her awards are the Tel Aviv Museum of Art's Isracard Prize (2009) and the Israel Minister of Education and Culture Prize (2006). Abergel's work addresses recurring themes of personal memory and public disclosure, immigration and unassimilability, and the entanglement between drawing, sculpting and writing. For Abergel, each of her installations performs as “poetic documentation, a kind of visual diary of my conflict as a second-generation North African immigrant to Israel. Part of my work and my struggle deals with the crisis of transition from tradition (Islamic and Jewish) to modernism.”³⁹⁵ This tension between tradition and modernism is played out in Abergel's methodology: she is a contemporary site-specific installation artist who exhibits in established gallery and museum spaces as well as in more marginal spots, yet she refers to her work as a series of linked chapters, more akin to the conventions of written memoir. In a recent interview, she describes herself as follows:

I am a sculptor and installation artist who deals with questions of space and memory and in the tension between drawing and sculpture. I am preoccupied with the construction of a broad autobiographical saga that is composed of installation chapters. Every time I have the opportunity, I build another chapter. The current exhibit [*Sculpture*, 2018, Negev Museum, Israel] is another chapter in my infinite preoccupation with the experience of childhood and adolescence as an artist in the shadow of an immigration crisis and adaptation to the Israeli experience. Art is the best way for me to address personal questions and to say what I have to say inside the piece. In the work, I can be subversive and critical and even defiant as long

³⁹⁴ Quoted in Avi Ifergan, “Correspondence: Avi Ifergan in Conversation with Etti Abergel,” Cat. *Etti Abergel: Installation Diary*, trans. Yehudit Aplaton (Israel National Lottery Council and the Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2003), http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/texts/abergel_ifergan/. Accessed June 7, 2019. See also Etti Abergel, Lecture, Gordon Gallery, July 8, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2yJgLE7jQA>.

³⁹⁵ Quoted in Manon Slome, “Don't Look Back (A Three-Dimensional Walk), *Installation Diary*, http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/texts/abergel_ifergan/. Accessed June 7, 2019.

as I am preoccupied with poetics and researching my emotions because my need for [personal] expression is prior to any social or political statement...³⁹⁶

Though Abergel frames the relation between personal expression and political statement in oppositional terms, it is exactly the refraction of the one in the other—the way in which all kinds of personal disjunctions function as potentially productive snags in the social and political fabric of Israeli society—that I believe her work can highlight.

Abergel's 2014 show, *Animism—An Installation in Three Chapters*, is composed of three smaller installations that, as she writes in the press release, “[move] from sculptural codes to a personal language, between collective culture and the personal experience.”³⁹⁷ Abergel names the first room of the installation “The Library” and glosses it as an assemblage of sculptural moments that obliquely reference her past: “Additional objects’ form a library of small-scale sculptures creating a fragmented narrative, a lexicon without a source. Each object is a memory trace into my past work. The objects are arranged as a collection of moments.”³⁹⁸ What does it mean for sculptural objects to function as a fractured set of linguistic units whose wellspring of meaning is inaccessible, while simultaneously operating as the catalyzing remnants of lost time that enable the otherwise unattainable recollection of consciousness? Indeed, there is so much to unpack here—the reference to Freud’s formulation of mnemonic traces; Proust’s related notion of involuntary or unconscious memory; the staging of sculpture as a form of impenetrable writing; the delineation of the installation-library as a compilation of time-units—that it is difficult to know how to begin, other than with the objects themselves, juxtaposed in varying distances from each other, some arranged in small groupings, others standing apart.

³⁹⁶ Nava Dekel, “Teacher-Creative Artist,” Interview with Etti Abergel [Hebrew], *Kerem Institute*, 8/4/2018, <http://kerem.org.il/2018/04/08/מורה-יוצרת-אתי-אברגל/>. Accessed 6/5/2019. Translation mine. The Hebrew is as follows:

"אני פסלת ואמנית מיצב שעוסקת בשאלות של חלל וזיכרון ובמתח שבין רישום לפיסול. אני עסוקה בבנייה של סאגה אוטוביוגרפית רחבה שמורכבת מפרקי מיצב. בכל פעם שיש לי אפשרות אני בונה עוד פרק. התערוכה העכשווית היא עוד פרק בעיסוק האינסופי שלי בחווית הילדות וההתבגרות כאמנית בצל קונפליקט הגירה והסתגלות להוויה הישראלית. האמנות היא הדרך הטובה ביותר עבורי לטיפול בשאלות האישיות ולומר את מה שיש לי בתוך היצירה. ביצירה אני יכולה להיות חתרנית וביקורתית ואפילו מתריסה, כל עוד אני עסוקה בפואטיקה ובחקר הרגש שלי. כי הצורך שלי בהבעה ובביטוי קודם לכל אמירה חברתית או פוליטית."

³⁹⁷ Etti Abergel, “Animism—An Installation in Three Chapters: Press release,” http://galeriemezzanin.com/exhibitions/etti-abergel/press_release/. Accessed May 14, 2019.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.



Figure 28- Etti Abergel, *Library*, 2014 ⁴⁰⁰

Forms repeat themselves with small differences: the reiterating lines and angles of various objects draw the eye to make connections within the library of pieces. Transparent, white, green and black bottles stand as kinds of visual anchors that organize and orient the other objects between them. The bottles' verticality, the darkness of the black glass, and the wires and strings that emerge from them, drawn as lines in space, compel the eye to note corresponding details: the upright handles of knives and paintbrushes, the opaque forms of a tarnished cup, a shadowy sheaf of papers, and a closed box coated in dark paint.

Though these object-artifacts may seem simple, a kind of straightforward ready-made, they belie the complex process and dense theoretical framework that yields them.⁴⁰¹ Abergel begins by drawing ideas in notebooks and diaries in her home and then moves to her studio—what she calls her “laboratory for material experimentation”—to start sculpting, where she works on individual objects and builds preliminary models of her installations.⁴⁰² Some objects are wrapped in paper and gauze or coated in white gesso, others are blackened, threaded with twine, given the addition of an unlikely companion. Although they may give the impression of being haphazardly selected, the things themselves are either very carefully chosen or handmade—each glass or plastic bottle and every piece of mass-produced china is hand-picked and singled out. The utility of these mundane

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Indeed, Abergel has noted Marcel Duchamp explicitly as one among many of her influences. See “Correspondence: Avi Ifergan in Conversation with Etti Abergel,” *Installation Diary*, http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/texts/abergel_ifergan/. Accessed May 16, 2019.

⁴⁰² Quoted in David Stromberg, “A Visual Memoir,” *Installation Diary*, http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/texts/abergel_stromberg/. Accessed May 16, 2019.

goods is dismantled through Abergel's pointed and often very laborious handiwork so that their original function is displaced by the object's emergence as a sculptural artifact. As Irena Gordon has noted, Abergel's objects hold traces of the material and mnemonic contexts from which they are taken, reworking relations between fragment and whole, interior and exterior, past and present.⁴⁰³ Glass bottles and mugs contain the residues of factory, street, market, kitchen and studio; the twine that recurs in her installations indexes strands of women's hair as well as the weaving of her Moroccan grandmother, conjuring braids, fix-it shops, and pre-Zionist history, hinting at the Jewish aesthetic life in the Arab world that cannot be recovered within the sway of Jewish nationalism. In Abergel's words,

My search for the object is a Proustian process of remembering and seeking until the moment the object locates itself in my consciousness with a sculptural function. Such objects are usually basic tools, writing implements, kitchen utensils, containers, bowls and dishes of simple form, material and color – objects 'begging' for sculptural intervention. The object is transformed through numerous processing, wrapping, cutting, repeated deconstruction, assembly and hybridization with other objects. The object is dipped and washed; it tumbles and accumulates layers until I feel that it transmits conflict, tension or paradox between being built up and being used up. At the moment the object reveals itself to me, I instinctively stop the action. The spatial placement is also changed and shaken up until the object settles down and fixes itself in an unchangeable place. This is the moment at which I am unable to move it around in space any more, as it takes its place in the composition and becomes a narrative marker.⁴⁰⁴

Functionality here oscillates between the terms of sculpture and daily life, as if the voluntary and involuntary meditations of memory are what allow it to shift from the delineations of normal utility to the alternative scope of sculptural purpose. Abergel frames her sculptural process with regard to memory, referencing a Proustian form of recollection in which a lost memory is unexpectedly transported into consciousness by an uncanny sensory experience that triggers a forgotten feeling, enabling a fragment of lost time—an "involuntary memory" unadulterated by conscious effort—to be registered anew. The premier example of this "pure" form of memory is located in Marcel Proust's novel, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*), when the taste of a madeleine cake dipped in tea elicits an overwhelming emotion that leads the narrator to recollect previous childhood experiences that had been hitherto inaccessible.⁴⁰⁵ Proust's formulation of involuntary and voluntary memory as mutually exclusive realms of reminiscence, one based on a memory's uncontrollable emergence into consciousness and the other on an intellectual mode of retrieval, shares schema with Freud's conception of mnemonic traces and his own distinction between conscious and unconscious memory.⁴⁰⁶ Used throughout his work, Freud postulated his theory of the memory trace first in "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895) and later in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), positing a fundamental distinction between two strata of memory: the initial psychic

⁴⁰³ Irena Gordon, "On the Object: Conversations with Etti Abergel," *Installation Diary*, http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/texts/abergel_gordon/. Accessed May 16, 2019.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way: In Search of Lost Time, Vol. 1*, Lydia Davis, trans. (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

⁴⁰⁶ While Proust made it known that he had not read Freud's writings, Celine Surprenant details how both of their theories emerged out of a shared medical and scientific discourse from within the late nineteenth century. See "Sigmund Freud and Psychoanalysis," *Marcel Proust in Context*, Adam Watt, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 107-114.

inscription of a perceptual experience, which is an unconscious registration that creates a permanent though not unalterable mnemonic trace, and our apparatus of perception-consciousness that maintains a constant receptive capacity precisely by not retaining traces of these perceptions.⁴⁰⁷ While the mnemonic traces are unconscious, they can be revived in hallucinations, imagination and dreams or acted out in life; it is the memories of these traces and the emotions associated with them that are conscious. In her citation of both Freud and Proust, Abergel presents a somewhat circular relationship between sculpture and memory. The object, she says, situates itself in her consciousness through a kind of involuntary memory that allows it to appear as sculpture (for the mnemonic trace to be recollected consciously); and every sculptural object of “The Library” is a memory trace into her past work. As in Proust’s novel, it is the inanimate objects’ ability to catalyze a sensuous experience and generate an involuntary memory through its shift in function, affording access to the traces of the initial perceptual experiences, that is most salient for Abergel.

Indeed, in Abergel’s telling, the objects “beg” to be engaged differently, to be used in another way. Extending vital and agential qualities to the object world, she presents them as equal participants in the sculptural process, alive and capable of advocating on behalf of their own unfolding. They passively accumulate a variety of the artist’s actions that have little to do with their original function, and then shift to an active mode of revealing, disclosing themselves to her so forcefully as to compel her to stop acting on them. The object, she says, determines its own unchangeable locus within the installation—once it finds this site, she is no longer able to move it. In her telling, when the object becomes a guide and signal of the installation’s narrative, it assumes independence from its maker. Though Abergel’s characterizations of the sculptural object may lend themselves towards a New Materialist reading, one that would emphasize how the active vibrancy of matter participates in and enables the effects of a human agency distributed over networks of actants and interacting forces, I believe that this vital materialism begs a more fundamental question, one which I will use to guide the following discussion: from where does the object’s capacity to act arise in the first place?

Animism, the title of this installation, would seem to pose the same question and, for Abergel, the answer emerges through an ongoing dialogue with the conventions and paradigms of European painting and sculpture. As she has noted, “My deep metaphor is linked to classical sculpture and its need to extract the anima from matter.”⁴⁰⁸ Though related to the animism of Greek sculpture, Abergel’s formulation of it is profoundly different. In the Classical Period (480-323 B.C.), following the end of the Persian wars, Greek aesthetics shifted to focus on man and his physical perfection. Greek sculptors created life-size sculptures that glorified the human body, instilling marble and bronzes figures with new forms of dynamism.⁴⁰⁹ This captivation with the living body is epitomized by the sculpture of Polykleitos of Argos, who used Pythagoras’ philosophy of harmonious numerical ratios to design the perfect statue, constructed according to the coordinated proportions of an

⁴⁰⁷ Sigmund Freud, “Project for a Scientific Psychology,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74), Vol. 1:281-397; *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 4; “A Note Upon the ‘Mystic-Pad,’” *Collected Papers*, vol. 5, *Miscellaneous Papers, 1888-1938*, ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 175-80. For a helpful overview, see Teckyoung Kwon, “The Materiality of Remembering: Freud’s Wolf Man and the Biological Dimensions of Memory,” *New Literary History*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Winter 2010): 213-232.

⁴⁰⁸ Gordon, “On the object,” http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/texts/abergel_gordon/. Accessed June 7, 2019.

⁴⁰⁹ Ruth Butler, *Western Sculpture: Definitions of Man* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), 33.

underlying mathematical formula.⁴¹⁰ Imposing order on human movement, Polykleitos employed a system of cross balance—the elaboration and intensification of contrapposto, a technique perfected in the late 5th century in which the human figure is sculpted with the weight resting on one leg rather than two—to organize the figure’s various subtle and gross parts. In his famed statue *Doryphoros* (*Spear-bearer*), for instance, straight arm and weight-bearing leg echo each other, balanced by the other flexed limbs, while in the sculpture overall, engaged and relaxed limbs oppose each other diagonally.⁴¹¹



Figure 29- Minneapolis *Doryphoros*, Original 450–440 B.C.E. Roman copy (marble) of Greek original (bronze)⁴¹²

Through this opposition, the entire figure is frozen in mid-movement, poised to take the next step in a kind of resting motion that is attained through the harmony of counterparts.

While in classical sculpture, this human-centered vitality is achieved through the imposition of proportional order, Abergel’s animism is catalyzed by an opening into anarchy—the chaos unleashed through the object world: “It is the disorder arising from the inner life of fetishistic, inanimate objects which appear throughout our daily life which animates the three stages.”⁴¹³ This inner life of the inanimate—a dynamism that gives rise to cathartic forms of disorder and memory—is generated through the artist’s psychosomatic engagement with the insentient objects, as she describes in her press release:

⁴¹⁰ Polykleitos wrote about this theory in a non-extant treatise titled the *Canon*. Jeffrey M. Hurwit, “The *Doryphoros*: Looking Backward,” *Polykleitos, Doryphoros, and Tradition*, Warren G. Moon, ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 11–14. See also John Boardman, *Greek Sculpture: The Classical Period: A Handbook* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985).

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Minneapolis *Doryphoros*, Original 450–440 B.C.E. Roman copy (marble) of Greek original (bronze), *ibid.*, 13.

⁴¹³ Abergel, “Animism,” http://galeriemezzanin.com/exhibitions/etti-abergel/press_release/. Accessed June 11, 2019.

I use the word “animism” to refer to the anthropological layer denoting faith and belief in the psychological power of the inanimate object, which becomes a personal subjective and specific sculpture.

In contrast to metaphysics, which engages in sublime areas far above ordinary life, beyond the body and the mundane, animistic sculpture attempts to breathe life into objects through transformative mental processes, to provide everyday functional objects with a sculptural and surrealistic status over and above the object itself, far beyond its original symbolic space. The animistic sculptural act arises from a vague yet concrete source originating in an emotional and autobiographical experience, the opposite of an abstract image.⁴¹⁴

In Abergel’s version of animism, objects become animated through a mode of autobiographical craftsmanship; to some extent, her animism is animated by the act of sculpting the personal. Indeed, “animism” quickly shifts into “animistic sculpture,” from its consequential status of grammatical subject and title into the more peripheral position of modifier. “Animism” redefined as “animistic sculpture” describes a mode of active making that transforms dead and mundane objects into living artifacts of autobiographical particularity, a process of revitalizing specification in which generative psychological practices “breathe life into the object.” Here, Abergel alludes to the scene of divine craftsmanship in Genesis 2:7, the second version of the creation story, when “the Lord God fashioned the human, humus from the soil, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life and the human became a living creature” (וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם, עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה, וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו, נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים; וַיְהִי) “וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-” [creating] the human in his image” (וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-) (הָאָדָם בְּצֶלְמוֹ) as in Genesis 1:27, in this retelling, God fashions man (*yatsar*, “he formed” or “fashioned,” instead of *bara*, “created”).⁴¹⁵ The emphasis on material artistry in this verse and chapter is reinforced through the subsequent detailing of the physical media that God uses to make the human—dust from the earth and corporeal breath—and, significantly, would seem to take the place of divine replication. This verse does not specify that God crafts the human in his image, because it would seem that the prominence of artisanship and material displaces that mode of narcissism. As with Jacir’s mode of counter-interpellation, the artistry of remaking shifts the replication and reflection of the sovereign artist/ Subject to the process of transmission itself.

The “living soul” (*nefesh hayyah*)⁴¹⁷ that the human becomes through God’s breath, or as rendered in the Latin Vulgate, “animam viventem,” links the animating principle of life to the physical practice of respiration, as indeed the common Hebrew words for “soul”—*nefesh* and *neshamah*—come from roots that also mean “to breathe.” Following the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation in rabbinic Judaism, the “anima” of Abergel’s vitalism—the Latin translation of the Hebrew *nefesh* (“soul” as opposed to “spirit”)—shows the catalyzing principle of life to reside in human formulations of the material and corporeal, rather than the spiritual. As Daniel Boyarin attests in *Carnal Israel*, “...rabbinic Judaism invested significance in the body which in the other formations was invested in the soul. That is, for rabbinic Jews, the human being was defined as a body... while for Hellenistic Jews...and Christians, the essence of a human being is a soul housed in

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996), 7-8.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ *Nefesh hayyah* is simply an idiom for “being” or “living creature” since *nefesh* in biblical Hebrew is a pre-dualist, embodied concept located in the throat.

a body.”⁴¹⁸ For Abergel, then, the anima cannot be extracted from matter, because the breath of life that is the soul is itself a physical effect, brought to vitality and buoyed through material practices. Indeed, it is through sustained engagement with the material that life can be reformulated—that life itself can be reanimated. Thus, objects are inflated with the dynamic inspiration of animistic sculpture, a form of psychosomatic labor that endows them with new functionality, life and status. Note that the artist does not take the place of God in Abergel’s process—this is not quite a human adaptation of divine creation. Instead, it is the act of sculpture—an activity rather than a source—that breathes life into the objects. More so than in the second Creation account of *Genesis*, the performance of craftsmanship here would seem to dislodge the maker from her position of origination and ownership. What, then, does this assumption of authority effected by the act of fashioning do to the “emotional and autobiographical experience” that anchors and concretizes the object as a personal, specific sculpture, according to Abergel? Or, put another way, what happens to autobiography when the life of art-making becomes the narrative’s subject in place of the artist?

⁴¹⁸ Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1993), 5.



Figure 30- Etti Abergel, *Circling*, 2014, Paintbrushes, fabric, gesso ⁴¹⁹

Standing (or seated?) in a corner of “The Library,” *Circling* is perhaps one of the most compelling personal sculptures of the collection, consisting of a large multitude of paintbrushes tied together with fabric that form a messy, three-dimensional circle, an imperfect sphere that is pierced by an off-center pole. The shaft repeats and recalls the long handles of the paintbrushes, which sets up a lingering tension between their straight lines and angles and the form that the title suggests and to which the assemblage seems to aspire. The piece articulates this relation between opposing counterparts in several ways, perhaps most notably in the encounter it stages between painting and sculpture. What is presented are the tools and components of painting, as both an activity and an object, yet these elements are situated in the inverse positions of their standard use: paintbrushes, laced with canvas and gesso, become the uneven plane on which a kind of three-dimensional drawing is enacted by the materials that are normally the surfaces themselves. The piece puts the issue of what a painting is into question, in addition to how painting is done, causing viewers to

⁴¹⁹ Etti Abergel, *Circling*, Paintbrushes, fabric, gesso, 132 x 52 x 59 cm, *Animism: An Installation in Three Parts*, January 3-22, 2014, Galerie Mezzanin, Vienna, <http://galeriemezzanin.com/exhibitions/etti-abergel/>. Accessed April 25, 2019.

ponder the entanglement between active and passive constituents. What happens when the yielding surface of representation—the tabula that compliantly holds and displays form or figure—rebels against its task and becomes an operative part of image making? Sculpture happens, the piece would seem to say. Indeed, later parts of the installation pursue the same inquiry with respect to negative space. In other words, if the space surrounding and offsetting Abergel’s sculptures is itself conceived of as a dynamic element of the installation, then how are relations of power between figure/ sculpture and ground/ space compelled to shift?

While the title might seem to address itself primarily to matters of form, it refers to the Jewish ritual of *hakafot*, literally “circlings,” which takes place during Simḥat Torah, the weddings of Ashkenazi Jews, and before burying the dead in some Mizrahi communities (*hakafot ha-niftar*). Encirclement is the climax of Simḥat Torah, a holiday that celebrates the end of the cycle of public Torah readings and marks the beginning of a new round. In evening and morning services, all of a synagogue’s Torah scrolls are taken out of the ark and carried around the *bimah*—the platform on which the Torah is read—and then the rest of the sanctuary in seven circles, replete with dancing and singing that often spreads into the streets.⁴²⁰ In Chabad Hasidic thought, circling allows worshippers to become the “feet” of the Torah, allowing the Torah to dance in celebration of its own renewal. The seven *hakafot* of Simḥat Torah are said to recall the siege of Jericho in *Joshua* 6, when God instructed Joshua to encircle the city once a day for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day, whereupon the walls of the city collapsed. In Ashkenazi wedding ceremonies, the bride often circles the groom seven (or sometimes three) times, as a means of creating a symbolic home for the two of them; and during some Jewish funerals, the bereft circuit the deceased body seven times as a way to ward off the evil eye.⁴²¹ Generally speaking, then, the ritual of encirclement functions as a commemoration of completion and re-instantiation; a means of creating and protecting (a male-centered and potentially oppressive form of) domesticity; a mode of conquering; and a physical and joyous form of celebration that allows the object, the living text of God, to move.

At the same time, as Abergel has made explicit in her writings and comments on the personal nature of her work, circling most likely references something specific for her to which I don’t have access. From my perspective as a persistent viewer from whom something is knowingly withheld, thus, the piece’s layers of crossing paintbrush handles begin to resemble a defensive structure—shields that impede my ability to approach the polygons of dark space alluringly peeking through. These black holes of negative space mark what I cannot touch, some imagined center or core around which the sculpture of painting and painting of sculpture circles, marking it as a refuge of privacy in a celebration that is also a kind of buffer. The paintbrushes appear to make a circular procession around the hidden interior, giving limbs to this negative space that is so often rendered inactive (in effect, shifting the celebrant from the Torah to the blank canvas, or the empty expanse in which a sculpture is situated).

Circling maintains what seems to be an expanding series of tensions—between exterior and interior, painting and sculpture, exhibition and impenetrability, revelry and armament, blank negativity and positive form and, not least, dormancy and dynamism. Curiously, the piece appears stagnant at first, heavily weighted and settled on the ground in marked contrast to the other objects

⁴²⁰ The number seven is one of the most important numbers in Judaism, representing totality and Creation. It recurs throughout the Hebrew Bible and in Jewish rituals. Among others, it is said to symbolize the seven lower *sefirot*—the attributes or emanations through which God presents himself in the world of action; and to recall the siege of Jericho in *Joshua* 6. See Casper Levias, “Numbers and Numerals, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11619-numbers-and-numerals> .

⁴²¹ Noson Gurary, *The Jewish Holy Days in Chasidic Philosophy*, ed. Binyomin Kaplan (North Vale, NJ : J. Aronson, 2000), 100-105.

of *Library* save one—it is a sculpture that can't fit on the shelves with the rest of the collection. Yet the more I look at it, the more I see the teeming energy inside, the shapes of empty space that cue both the artist's absence from the piece and my own epistemological limits. The long paintbrush handles now begin to resemble powerful painting strokes that intersect and overlay each other, defined, accentuated and held by the nucleus of blank space whose access they impede. If Abergel's animism is catalyzed by the act and process of autobiographical craftsmanship, then the fashioning and presentation of this autobiography is effected by reengaging the surrounding expanse of emptiness and absence, which in this piece emerges as its axis of negative space. While initially her sculpture seemed to address the activation of the generally passive background of painting and sculpture, it now appears to attend to the celebratory protection of particularity, to insist on a form of animism that transpires through a defensive obfuscation of self.

Circling indeed dramatizes the notion that we can never be completely transparent to ourselves or to others.⁴²² In my reading, Abergel presents her viewer with a sculpture that is a form of personal narrative, a relic of autobiographical craftsmanship, but she does so by withholding, or, perhaps more precisely, inverting the substantive content of its particularity. She becomes, to cite Adriana Cavarero, “The self that makes herself an other in order to be able to tell her own life story.”⁴²³ Cavarero's account of narration and subjectivity is instructive in relation to Abergel's work more broadly, and this piece in particular. Elaborating on Hannah Arendt's theory of action and narrative, Cavarero orients her work around the unique individuality of a person—*who* she is as opposed to *what* she is. For Cavarero, individuals appear to each other distinctly as unique existents “in their corporeal materiality...Put another way, the language of the existent assumes the bodily condition of ‘this and not another’ in all of its perceptible concreteness” (20-1). One can learn who their uniquely embodied interlocutor is through the narration of their singular life story; one hears what they are through philosophical expositions of human universality (13). In Cavarero's account, the self is narratable in the sense that she desires to hear her life story narrated by another and is indeed constituted through this wish — “the desire for the unity of the self in the form of a story” (40-41). The narratability of our unique life-stories is thus dependent upon the other to whom we are exposed from birth and with whom we interact, such that there can be no autobiography without biography. This necessary intercommunication and interdependence establishes narration as a political and collective act undertaken by narratable selves who are always already in relation to each other (56-57). Indeed, as she shows through her reading of Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*, our stories can never be disentangled from each other but are always reliant upon the accounts of others (86, 124). Though her philosophy is centered around the singularity of the individual, Cavarero cautions against hasty interpretations of narcissism. Rather, she emphasizes the exposed vulnerability of the self who is fundamentally displaced and entrusted to others:

...the uniqueness that exposes itself, in Arendt's sense, brings to the scene a fragile and unmasterable self. Both the exhibitionist self of action and the narratable self are completely given over to others. In this total giving-over there is therefore no identity that reserves for itself protected spaces or private rooms of impenetrable refuge for self-contemplation (84).

⁴²² See Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press), 2005. Reconsidering the grounds of ethical conduct on the basis of the subject's limits and disjunctions, Butler argues that the self is inherently dependent on others, and indeed emerges through a scene of address to others within linguistic situations and normative contexts that are beyond her control. These structures of relationality, addressivity and normativity establish a fundamental opacity of self that prevents her from giving or receiving a full or transparent account of herself and others.

⁴²³ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans., Paul A. Kottman (New York: Routledge, 2000), 84. Other page numbers will be cited in text.

To be totally given over to the other to whom one reciprocally appears is, for Cavarero, to be so totally exposed as to be entirely external and externalized. Individual existents consist, she says, in their constitutive and distinctive exposure to the other—this outside is who they are. They can lay no claim to hidden domains of interiority. This emphasis on the existent's "total exposition" is perhaps one way to approach Abergel's nucleus of absence in *Circling* (89).

Using Cavarero's conceptual framework then, I would argue that Abergel externalizes herself as this object she has made, exposing her individuality not as a unique corporeal being, but as a readymade she has transfigured—a mundane thing that she has sculpted to convey something specific and secret about herself, which imbues the artifact with its own life. She leaves me this form of crossing handles and holes, a sculpture that walks the line between self-definition and secrecy while manifesting the externalized self as a sculptural other. This externalized self, moreover, exposes herself through the exteriorization of the image's conventional surface—the canvas and gesso typically undergirding the figures and portraits of painting. At the same time, the sculpture encircles, protects and celebrates the emptiness inhabiting its form, the negative space at the object's core which I have claimed analogizes a domestic refuge for personal and confidential memory. What to make of these perplexing relations between interiority and externalization, positivity and absence, disclosure and reticence?

While discussing the public/ private relation in anthropology, Lenore Manderson et al argue that "breaking silence can serve a restorative function, providing a way of redressing gross power imbalances... Thus, private knowledge is inscribed and disseminated in public arenas to produce new understandings of the subject and to effect political change."⁴²⁴ Abergel, however, discloses the existence rather than the content of her private knowledge. Yet I agree that this act of divulgence performs a kind of agency that has potential political ramifications. As a viewer who represents the public sphere, I am called upon to enable Abergel's recalibrations, to attend to the way in which she defines herself through a mode of secrecy which presents the life of another object in place of the artist. This series of mediations makes me recognize what and who I cannot know, and as such, summons me in my epistemological incapacity. This, I believe, is part of the work's implicit politics—Abergel, like Rachel Bluwstein of my first chapter, not only demands but indeed creates a weakened audience-interlocutor. Cultivating the vulnerability of the Israeli public (those viewers most likely to be familiar with and encounter her work), she enjoins her viewer to not just accept their limits, but to reside in them, in order to interact with her work. As Michael Warner underscores, publics are convened "by virtue of being addressed."⁴²⁵

If Cavarero privileges the corporeal singularity of human existence that is exposed in reciprocal relationships, Abergel's piece presents the material uniqueness of an object she has curated, which is perforated by channels of emptiness that reiterate her own absence. She exposes herself, in corporeal absence and negative space, as she who is not there, whose emotional and autobiographical experience is accessible only in its transfiguration in the sculpture. Her vacancy and the inaccessibility of her unmediated narrative animate the sculptural object, which defends and celebrates her displaced distinctiveness even as the sculpture takes on its own life. Her piece and her viewer thus encounter one another in disjunction. My epistemological limits converge with her circumscribed ability to tell me variations of her story through the medium of another object, as both artist and viewer are displaced into sites of incapacity and sovereign absence. This exposure and exposition happen as a reversal and reformulation of relations between active and passive surfaces, forms and markings; and this contraposition unfolds through the ritual of circling—

⁴²⁴ Lenore Manderson, Mark Davis, Chip Colwell, and Tanja Ahlin, "On Secrecy, Disclosure, the Public, and the Private in Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 56.12 (December 2015): 185.

⁴²⁵ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14.1 (Winter 2002): 50.

creating, protecting, celebrating and re-instantiating a refuge for the irreducibility of the self *in absentia* as the activating background that animates creative life and labor.

IV. The Art of the Irreparable



Figure 31- Etti Abergel, *Animism: An Installation in Three Parts*, 2014, *Exhibition view*⁴²⁶

In the press release for this exhibit, Abergel has described her mediation as a form of physical labor that recovers the specificity and value of everyday objects, which would otherwise be destined to remain under the deadening relations of anonymous equivalence afforded by capitalist modes of interaction: “My ‘manual labor’ receives special emphasis in this exhibition...By using anonymous plastic and everyday objects, I invest them with extra added value through displacement of their function and intense handwork applied to them using organic materials, thus restoring their specificity and value.”⁴²⁷ She further notes that this process of sculptural assemblage is “accompanied by *tikkun* by repairing and joining together, with faith in the power of the inanimate object to act within a world of meaning.”⁴²⁸ Abergel’s account presents her intense handiwork—labor that restores the fullness of the material experience to both commodified objects and the

⁴²⁶ Etti Abergel, *Animism: An Installation in Three Parts*, Exhibition view, January 3-22, 2014, Galerie Mezzanin, Vienna, <http://galeriemezzanin.com/exhibitions/etti-abergel/>. Accessed April 25, 2019.

⁴²⁷ Abergel, “Animism,” http://galeriemezzanin.com/exhibitions/etti-abergel/press_release/. Accessed June 18, 2019.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

alienated subjects who produce and consume them—as a process that coincides with the act of repair (*tikkun*).

A central precept of contemporary Judaism, *tikkun* has a long and varied history of meaning. Originally appearing in the Mishnah and Gemara of the Babylonian Talmud (the central text of Rabbinic Judaism that deals with Jewish law and tradition), the phrase *mi-pnei tikkun ha-olam*, “for the sake of the improvement of society,” denotes the institution of changes in Jewish law in order to redress injustice through the use of a *takkanah*—“a legislative fiat intended for the public good.”⁴²⁹ The concept of *tikkun* disappears until the *Aleinu* prayer (written in the 3rd century and incorporated into Jewish liturgy in the 14th), where it assumes an inverse meaning: we pray that God will establish his dominion on earth, destroying all idolatry and false gods, so that *God* will fix the world through the universal recognition of his rule (“*le-taken olam be-malkhut Shaddai*”). The phrase drops out of sight again until the advent of Kabbalah in 13th century Spain, where *tikkun*, now meaning “repair,” “restoration” or “amendment,” becomes a pivotal tenet of the *Zohar*, the main text of the Kabbalistic discipline. Radically reinterpreting the Jewish tradition’s metaphor of creation to indicate a collaborative process in which God and humanity work together, the *Zohar* posits that human acts have cosmic repercussions—through their observance of mitzvot and participation in prayer and Torah study, individual people repair and restore the *sefirot*, the ten emanations of God that mediate between divine infinity and human reality. “Human actions in bringing about the *tikkun* in the supernal world,” Rosenthal writes in his genealogy of the concept, “cause the Divine effulgence to flow down to earth in what Scholem described as ‘draw-down theology.’”⁴³⁰ In mainline Kabbalah, then, *tikkun* effected by human acts of devotion is directed towards damage done in the divine world, a position that effectively reverses the rabbinic sages’ emphasis on *tikkun ha-olam*, repair of this world.

Following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the center of Jewish mysticism shifted to the Palestinian city of Safed, where Isaac Luria (1534–72), considered the greatest of the Safed Kabbalists, developed his theory of creation.⁴³¹ For Joseph Dan, “The most innovative concept that lies at the heart of Luria’s teaching is the imperfection of beginning. Existence does not begin with a perfect Creator bringing into existence an imperfect universe; rather, the existence of the universe is the result of an inherent flaw or crisis [the divine origin of evil] within the infinite Godhead and the purpose of creation is to correct it.”⁴³² In Lurianic Kabbalah, the emergence of the finite universe from divine infinity does not occur through the emanation of the *sefirot*; rather, Luria proposes that God withdrew into himself in order to make space for creation (*tzimtzum*). Gershon

⁴²⁹ See Gilbert S. Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” *The Journal of Religion* 85.2 (April 2005) for full account. Rosenthal notes that in Rabbinic literature, “...almost all the references are to be found in the fourth and fifth chapters of Tractate Gittin, which deals primarily with divorce laws. This leads me to conclude that the principle was originally devised to protect the rights of women in divorce cases and to shield them from unscrupulous, recalcitrant, and extortionist husbands... The principle of *tikkun ha-olam* was expanded into the economic and commercial realm as well” (217–18).

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 223, 225.

⁴³¹ Isaac (ben Solomon) Luria Ashkenazi (1534–72), known as “Ha-Ari” (The Lion) is considered the father of contemporary Kabbalah. Born in Jerusalem, Luria studied Jewish law and rabbinic literature in Egypt before focusing his studies on the *Zohar* and the works of the early Kabbalists. In 1569, Luria moved to Safed, which had become a center for Kabbalistic studies, in order to study with the renowned scholar Moses Kordovero until the latter’s death in 1570. After Kordovero’s death, Luria himself rose to teaching fame and became known for his innovation in interpreting creation and other metaphysical concepts. Though he wrote none of his teachings down, they were recorded and published by his students, most notably Rabbi Chayim Vital. For more on Luria’s life and work, see Lawrence Fine, *Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and his Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁴³² Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 74.

Scholem interprets this retreat as an analogy for the Jews' exile and expulsion—like his people, God becomes “an exile into Himself...banishing Himself from His totality into profound seclusion.”⁴³³ Scholem indeed understands Luria's conceptualization of creation more generally as a historical metaphor responding to the Jew's expulsion from Spain in 1492.⁴³⁴ God's act of divine contraction created a domain of emptiness (*tehiru*), in which the divine emanations of light took shape (*sefirot*). Yet the vessels could not contain the force of the divine light he poured inside them and the seven lower ones shattered (*shvirat ha-kelim*), scattering sparks of this light throughout the universe that became trapped in the vessels' broken shards, fragments that form our material world and the world of evil. In Luria's scheme, this rupture and dispersal are reiterated in the two-fold scattering of the Jewish people and the *shekhinah*, the immanent presence of God in the world (a figure that is grammatically and metaphorically feminine)—a point that will be reinterpreted along nationalist lines by some Zionist philosophers.⁴³⁵ *Tikkun* entails the repair and restoration of these shards (entailing the union of God and his consort, the *shekhinah*), a process of cosmic repair that must be enacted by human contemplative action and ethical practice. In Rosenthal's evaluation, “the great novelty of the Lurianic approach to *tikkun* is that it elevates the role of human beings far beyond that envisioned by the Talmudic sages who devised the concept. It is now within the hands of every man and woman to lift the sparks and redeem the supernal and lower worlds by our own actions.”⁴³⁶ Or, put in Scholem's more radical phrasing: “The process in which God conceives, brings forth and develops Himself does not reach its final conclusion in God...it is [man] who perfects the Maker of all things.”⁴³⁷ While Luria envisions messianic redemption as a process unfolding through the full partnership of God and human beings, Lurianic *tikkun* aims for a thorough transcendence of the physical world, separating what is divine from created existence to reunite the Godhead and ultimately end the material world (in Scholem's words, “The *Tikkun*, the path to the end of all things, is also the path to the beginning.”)⁴³⁸

The Hasidic movement translated Lurianic Kabbalah into psychological terms, shifting emphasis from the repair of God's broken vessels towards processes of self-restoration and redemption. *Tzimtzum*, *shvirah* and *tikkun* were interpreted as psychological phenomena, wherein God is concealed through structures of human consciousness that must be minimized by means of personal practices of transformation in order to enable encounters with the divine. Hasidic thought strives towards *bitul ha-yesh* (“the annihilation of selfhood”), a form of practice that seeks to transcend the ego and overcome the physical world for the sake of spiritual realization. As socialist and Marxists of the late nineteenth century would criticize, this mode of exercise valorizes spiritual practice over and above the impoverished economic conditions of Hasidism's often destitute practitioners. Indeed, Haskalah and later romantic writers like Y.L. Peretz, the renowned Polish

⁴³³ Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 261.

⁴³⁴ In *Major Trends*, Scholem writes, “After the catastrophe of the Spanish Expulsion, which so radically altered the outer aspect of the Kabbalah if not its innermost content, it also becomes possible to consider the return to the starting point of creation as the means of precipitating the final world catastrophe, which would come to pass when that return had been achieved by many individuals united in a desire for “the End”...The Kabbalah of Isaac Luria may be described as a mystical interpretation of Exile and redemption, or even as a great myth of Exile. Its substance reflects the deepest religious feelings of the Jews of that age” (245, 286).

⁴³⁵ The *shekhinah* is a widespread Kabbalistic symbol, originally conceived as the part of God that literally dwelt in the First and Second Temples, but who, according to Kabbalistic narratives, decided to go into exile with her children after the temples' destructions. She is the tenth vessel of God's emanations (*malkhut*), understood as the feminine aspect of God who is also identified as God's bride in several sections of the *Zohar* (1:120b, 3:74b, 3:296a). See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 260-75.

⁴³⁶ Rosenthal, “Tikkun ha-Olam,” 226.

⁴³⁷ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 273-74.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

bilingual Yiddish and Hebrew author who infused his stories and poems with portrayals of proletarian life, wrote satires of Hasidic religious hypocrisy that represented and addressed systems of economic exploitation, even as he used Hasidic motifs to appeal to mass audiences.⁴³⁹

Perhaps most relevant for our discussion here, A.D. Gordon's secular reinterpretation of Hasidic Kabbalah through the framework of Labor Zionism cast *tikkun olam* as a cosmic form of human praxis, aligning self-realization, messianic redemption, and agricultural manual labor with the establishment of proto-national collective life. Often referred to as the Labor Movement's founding mystic, Gordon oriented his philosophy around the diminished self that he understood man to have become—divided from the organic unity of nature and enslaved by his own drives towards domination and exploitation, which has degraded and debased the nature of the universe.⁴⁴⁰ As Avraham Shapira has demonstrated, this account—man's disastrous separation from nature and his call to mend the ruptures—is based on the reinterpretation of Genesis' creation narrative by Kabbalah and Hasidism.⁴⁴¹ Indeed, Gordon infused his writings with the vocabulary of Hasidic Kabbalah to describe his thought; he called the withdrawn and restricted condition of human consciousness that he diagnosed "*me'tsutsam*" (literally, "contracted"), deriving from the Lurianic notion of divine contraction and its Hasidic reframe as egoic individuation in tragic separation from God. For Gordon, the regeneration of the universe is dependent upon the reformation of individual people working together in conjunction with nature, and in the particular context of the Jewish people, this reconnection to the natural world could only occur through physical labor in and on Palestinian land. His theory was indeed nicknamed *dat ha-avodah*, "the religion of labor." Though I read Abergel's use of *tikkun* in direct opposition to Gordon's redemptive understanding, there are interesting parallels between the two. Gordon, like Abergel, emphasizes the small and overlooked deeds and details of life, wanting to revive the Jewish nation from its mechanistic and alienated stupor; but, unlike Abergel (as this discussion will lay bare below), he theorizes these particulars to be crucial to the entangled trajectories of self- and national realization. Gordon calls on man to live every moment of every day to its fullest potential with all of his might, to imbue each mundane act of little objective value with the immanence of complete specification.⁴⁴² "In all your ways, in all

⁴³⁹ Chana Kronfeld, "Hebrew and Yiddish Literary Modes for Kafka and Benjamin," The Kafka-Benjamin Symposium, UC Berkeley, January 2017. In this talk, Kronfeld argued that Benjamin—via Scholem's translations and communication—uses the socialist-inflected utopian view of *tikkun* mediated by Peretz; and a similarly inflected model of language mediated by Bialik. See particularly Peretz's short stories "If Not Higher" and "The Kabbalists" in *In A Hasidic Manner*, available in translation in *Classic Yiddish Stories of S. Y. Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and I. L. Peretz*, ed. Ken Frieden (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011); in the latter, a famous yeshiva has dwindled to one rabbi and one student who often go hungry for want of financial support and begin the study and practice of kabbalah because, "if one has to stay awake all night and go hungry all day, why not put this to some use? So be it: they would fast, mortify their flesh, and open all the gates of the universe—with its mysteries, spirits, and angels!" (147). In "If Not Higher," an anti-Hasidic Litvak is converted to Hasidism when, after following the Hasidic rabbi of Nemirov, he discovers that the great rebbe procures and delivers firewood to a sick woman rather than ascending to heaven. See also Adi Mahalel, "Weaving the Revolution: I.L. Peretz, The Social Protest Writer," *In Geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies* May 22, 2016, <https://ingeveb.org/articles/weaving-the-revolution-i-l-peretz-the-social-protest-writer>, where Mahalel argues that Peretz becomes "A literary agent of Jewish working class in Eastern Europe" in the 1890's, even and especially during his later shift to "neo-romantic Hasidic stories."

⁴⁴⁰ See especially chapter two of A.D. Gordon's *Ha-Adam ve-ha-Teva* [*Man and Nature*], "'Akirat Shorashei ha-Neshama me-ha-Teva,'" https://benyehuda.org/gordon_ad/haadam_vehateva_02.html.

⁴⁴¹ Avraham Shapira, *Or ha-Chayyim be-“Yom Ktanot: Mishnat A.D. Gordon u-Mekoroteha ba-Kabalah u-va-Chasidut* [*The Kabbalistic and Hasidic Sources of A.D. Gordon's Thought*] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996), 284.

⁴⁴² Ehud Fuehrer, "Chayyim shel Hitpahstut: Hagshama Atzmit, Le'umiyut, ve-Te'oryah Politit be-Haguto shel A.D. Gordon ["A Life of Expansion: Self-fulfillment, Nationalism and Political Theory in the Writings of A.D. Gordon"] (PhD Diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2014), 142. See also "Uma ve-'avoda" in Gordon's writings, *Kitvey A.D. Gordon*

your life,” states *Man and Nature*, “learn to be a partner in the labor of Creation.”⁴⁴³ This practice, he proclaims, leads to a life of expansion (*hitpashtut*), lived either in external extension towards nature or in internal inflation towards pre-consciousness. *Hitpashtut* is another term taken from Hasidism, referring to *hitpashtut ha-gashmiyut* (“the stripping away, or expansion of corporeality”), in which practitioners strive to abandon material concerns entirely so that their souls may ascend to the upward realm and return to God.⁴⁴⁴ For Gordon, the self-realization that leads to a life of expansion indicates both the creation of a singular life replete with unique experiences and the praxis of manual labor in nature as a means of manifesting the nation. His formulation of Labor Zionism positions the redemptive act of repair always in relation to the terrain of biblical Israel that it imbues with mystical qualities, bordering on the sacred—many *halutz* memoirs speak of the land as a materialization of the *shekhinah*.⁴⁴⁵ Physical work in nature thus becomes a reformulation of Lurianic *tikkun* with the socialist interpretation inherited from Peretz and Yiddish labor ideology that strives to realize selfhood, nationhood and through it, redemptive creation: “We can create the nation only when each one of us creates himself anew by means of work and natural living.”⁴⁴⁶ This philosophy is condensed into the slogan of Ha-shomer Ha’tzair, the Marxist-Zionist organization led by Meir Ya’ari and Ya’akov Hazan predicating liberation and actualization (*hagshamah*) for Jewish youth on their immigration to Palestine and settlement in kibbutzim: “*Tikkun adam-tikkun olam*” (“Repairing the Self-Repairing the world”).⁴⁴⁷ Crucially, as Edward Said, Meron Benvenisti and others have shown, this notion of land redemption mobilizes and reframes biblical narratives to buttress a new national imagination that conceives of the land of Palestine as being “returned” to her “original owners,” an account that steadfastly denies the Arab and Islamic history of the region and the rights of its Palestinian inhabitants.⁴⁴⁸

[Collected Works vol. 1], Shmuel Hugo Bergman and Eliezer Shohat, eds. (Jerusalem: Ha-sifriyah ha-tsiyonit, 1952), 98-100.

⁴⁴³ Chapter two of A.D. Gordon’s *Ha-Adam ve-ha-Teva’* [*Man and Nature*], “Akirat Shorashey ha-Neshamah me-ha-Teva,” https://benyehuda.org/gordon_ad/haadam_vehateva_02.html. The Hebrew is as follows: “ולקחת תורה מפי הטבע, תורת הבנייה והיצירה, ולמדת לעשות כמעשהו בכל אשר תבנה ובכל אשר תיצור. וכן בכל דרכיך ובכל חיך תלמד להיות שותף לו במעשה בראשית.”

⁴⁴⁴ Shapira, *Or ha-Chayyim*, 175-76. See Gordon, *Ha-Adam ve-ha-Teva’* [*Man and Nature*], “Le-virur Re’ayoneinu me-yesodo,” https://benyehuda.org/gordon_ad/berur_raayon_miyasodo.html.

⁴⁴⁵ On this point, see Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in the Halutzim* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 227-28.

⁴⁴⁶ “Me’at hitbonenut [“A Little Reflection”], Kitvey A.D. Gordon [Collected Works vol. 1], 87.

⁴⁴⁷ For more on the relationship between Gordon and Hashomer Ha’tzair, see Aviva Halamish, “The Dialectic Influence of A.D. Gordon on Hashomer Hatza’ir” (Hebrew) *Cathedra*, 114 (December 2004): p. 99-120, http://www.ybz.org.il/Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/Article_114.5.pdf.

⁴⁴⁸ See especially Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred History: The Buried Landscape of the Holy Land Since 1948*, trans. Maxine Kauffman-Lacusta (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel and Palestine* (London: Zed Books, 2007).



Figure 32- Etti Abergel, *Funnels*, 2013, Cord, plaster, funnels, Animism ⁴⁴⁹

Images of broken and replicating vessels descending down vertical columns that would seem to link the celestial and the earthly abound in Abergel's oeuvre, as the following selection of figures lays bare:

⁴⁴⁹ Etti Abergel, *Funnels*, 2013, Cord, plaster, funnels, 500 x 30 x 30 cm, *Animism: An Installation in Three Parts*, Exhibition view, January 3-22, 2014, Galerie Mezzanin, Vienna, <http://galeriemezzanin.com/exhibitions/etti-abergel/>. Accessed April 25, 2019.



Figure 33- Etti Abergel, *A Hundred Beats*, 2011, Industry porcelain, metal wires, plaster, gesso, plaster bandages, sticks⁴⁵⁰



Figure 34- Etti Abergel, *Concealment*, 2015-16, mixed-media installation⁴⁵¹



Figure 35- Etti Abergel, *A structure which happened or not*, 2012, mixed media, papers, gesso, strings⁴⁵²



Figure 36- Etti Abergel, *Sculpture*, 2018⁴⁵³

⁴⁵⁰ Etti Abergel, *A Hundred Beats*, 2011, Industry porcelain, metal wires, plaster, gesso, plaster bandages, sticks, dimensions variable, *The Absent Body, Body Imagery between Judaism and Christianity in the Works of Eight Israeli Artists*, Beit Hatfutzot, Tel Aviv, 2012, <http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/>, accessed 9/12/2019.

⁴⁵¹ Etti Abergel, *Concealment*, mixed-media installation, Artist Studios Gallery Tel Aviv, 2015-16, <http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/>, accessed 9/12/2019.

⁴⁵² Etti Abergel, *A structure which happened or not*, 2012, mixed media, papers, gesso, strings, dimensions variable. Installation view Herzliya Museum, 2012, <http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/>, accessed 9/12/2019.

⁴⁵³ Etti Abergel, *Sculpture*, 2018, Negev Museum, Israel. Installation view, courtesy of the artist, <http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/>, accessed 9/12/2019.

Yet Abergel's sculptural assemblages of cascading vessels translate the forms of divine emanations into unexpected and mundane objects whose cracks and imperfections are valorized rather than repaired. In the schemata of *tikkun* that she sculpts, the banality of these objects and their fissures multiply. Replicating gourd-like papier-mâché forms are riven, fractures that are emphasized by the contrast between black crevice and white substance. Plastic, mass-produced funnels accumulate and are interwoven into a chute of twine—strings indexing women's hair and the weaving of her grandmother in Morocco—in a feminizing re-crafting of the creation process that entangles memory into the art of repair. Several of the funnels are filled with white plaster that has dried in the act of descent, indeed embodying the significance of memory and particularity in Abergel's notion of *tikkun*. As Larry Abramson has noted, "...plaster is a medium of time: In its passage from liquid to solid it 'counts' the passing minutes, in its hardening it 'photographs' irretrievable moments in matter."⁴⁵⁴ The vision of repair that Abergel relays, thus, displaces notions of functionality and restoration with the recovery of material, temporal and historical particularity. This, in effect, rewrites the Lurianic *tikkun* of human participation in a creation process as a means of retiring to God. Abergel's *tikkun* returns rather to the timescape and context of the shard—a giving over, in Cavarero's sense, to the material singularity of the fragment entirely.

For Abergel to position reparative creation as the process through which the broken object is remade into an artifact of sculptural particularity—one which enables aesthetic and psychological actualization—is to challenge the status and meaning of *tikkun* in the political and historical context of Israel and Palestine. As Ayelet Zohar writes in the catalogue to *Smashing*, a 2012 show that she presented in which Abergel participated, "...living in Israel and curating an exhibition that questions the meaning and presence of debris and shards cannot be stripped away from the underlying, primary context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at the fundamental level of existence in this country."⁴⁵⁵ In this sense, Abergel and Zohar's focalization of the shard highlights how the *tikkun* of self- and national renewal in Israel and Palestine is premised on the colonization and settlement of Palestinian land and, as such, bears a convoluted relationship to the praxis of social justice to which rhetorics of *tikkun* in its modern incarnation generally aspire. Indeed, Gordon's labor of self-realization obscures the organicist ethno-national imagination that undergirds the colonial enterprise of Zionism. With the development of concepts like "Hebrew work" (*avoda ivrit*), "self-work" (*avoda atzmit*) and "the conquest of labor" (*kibbush ha-avoda*), early 20th century Zionist discourse articulated the necessity of productive, agricultural labor to recuperate diasporic Jews into modern, self-reliant subjects who claimed the land through their own cultivation of it, rather than through the exploitation of Arab workers.⁴⁵⁶ Jewish writers and leftist workers' movements of the time formulated *avoda ivrit* as the physical labor that would resolve the Jews' predicament through both the establishment of a national home in *Eretz Yisrael* and the ideology of an international Socialist solution. Undergirding the Second and Third Aliyas, the waves of mostly Russian-Jewish immigration to Palestine in the periods of 1904-14 and 1919-23, these discursive practices inscribed a pretension of social justice into the self-image of Hebrew pioneers and later Israelis that rigorously denied Zionism's involvement in a colonial venture. The resulting boycott of Arab labor, however,

⁴⁵⁴ Larry Abramson, "Etti Abergel's Living Space," from *Etti Abergel: Installation Diary*, trans. Yehudit Aplaton (Israel National Lottery Council and the Israel Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2009), http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/texts/abergel_abramson/, accessed November 8, 2017.

⁴⁵⁵ Ayelet Zohar, *Smashing!: Fragility, Deconstruction and Fragments in Contemporary Ceramic Arts* (Tel Aviv: Benyamini Contemporary Ceramics Center, 2012), Exhibition catalogue, p. 43.

⁴⁵⁶ See Yosef Gorny, "Ha-ideologiya shel kibbush ha-avoda" (*The ideology of the conquest of labor*), *Keshet*, nos. 37-38 (1967-68); and Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

caused a loss of employment for dispossessed Palestinian *fellahin*, who were replaced by Arab Jews from Yemen as sources for cheap labor.⁴⁵⁷

As Abergel's fixation with the fragment and the fragmented lays bare, *tikkun* as the praxis of reparative and restorative justice cannot be contemplated without the reality of the occupation, constriction and contraction of Palestine—the endangered remnants of appropriated Palestinian land, demolished homes and denied history that have no possibility for reassembly into an integrated whole. A recent special issue of the journal *Protocols* devoted to the topic forcefully articulates this necessary reframe of *tikkun*:

On May 3, 2019, a coalition of Palestinian activists from the local villages of Susiya, At-Tuwani, and Umm al-Kheir joined with the Center for Jewish Non-Violence and the All That's Left: Anti-Occupation Collective to repair a main access road that critically connects five Palestinian communities in the South Hebron Hills. The occupying Israeli Civil Administration had permitted the road to decay to such an extent that villagers must hire tractors to transport in some of the most basic life resources, such as water. By the end of the day on May 3, 15 activists (along with two Palestinian journalists) had been violently [arrested](#).

What can tikkun possibly mean in such a context? When acts of Palestinian, Jewish, and Israeli repair, even at the scale of road infrastructure, are violently foreclosed by the government and military of the so-called Jewish state? In the face of such violence, the utopian optimism that nearly always reigns over invocations of *tikkun*—reducing it to toothless platitudes, often strung together from the most superficial grazing of kabbalistic sources—only works to defer confronting the magnitude, specificity, and urgency of the damage.⁴⁵⁸

Ratskoff's words reverberate of their own accord, inducing more questions. How do we confront the singularity, enormity and depth of destruction in Palestine and Israel? Can we envision a kind of repair that would strive to maintain the remnants of catastrophe, locating the capacity for renewal and animism in the obduracy of ruins and the hidden lives of unvalued materials? What does it mean to insist upon the presence of these fragments of devastation in the midst of a society that understands itself through narratives of self- and national redemption, trajectories that belie and obscure its internal disjunctions and the violence of its relations with its neighbors?

These questions and their recourse to figures of mounting debris and impossible redemptions call to mind Walter Benjamin's famous reading of Paul Klee's monoprint in his 1940 essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

⁴⁵⁷ See Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Tamar Gozansky, *Hitpatchut ha-Kapitalizm be-Palestina* [The Formation of Capitalism in Palestine] (Haifa: Mifalim Universitit le'Hotza'a la-Or, 1986); and Youssef Meir, *Ha-tnu'ah ha-Tsionit yi-Yehudey Teyman: (Sheliḥuto shel Yavne'eli le-Teyman be-or ḥadash)* [The Zionist Movement and the Jews of Yemen] (Tel Aviv: Afrikim, 1983).

⁴⁵⁸ Ben Ratskoff, "Introducing TIKKUN/ REPAIR," *Protocols* 5 (summer 2019), <https://prtcls.com/editor-letter/introducing-tikkun-repair/>, emphasis mine.



Figure 37- Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920, oil transfer and watercolor on paper ⁴⁵⁹

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris in front of him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. ⁴⁶⁰

Criticizing the modern understanding of history as progress (one which had sanctioned and enabled the rise of fascism), Benjamin wrote his theses in 1940, while living as a refugee in German-occupied France, shortly before his failed attempt to escape to the United States via Spain, where, fearing Nazi capture, he committed suicide. Against the progressive notion of history that preserves only the victors in its unyielding march towards future deliverance, Benjamin offers a perspective and practice of disjunction that insists on what he terms “a Messianic cessation of happening” (thesis XVII). Indeed, he replaces a redemptive relation to the future with a redemptive relation to the past, one which transpires through the alternative practice of remembrance (*Eingedenken*) that, as he writes, “...seize[s] hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (thesis VI). For Benjamin, the true, visceral dynamism of history appears through an unexpected and singular encounter of the past with the present; he seeks to replace the empty, homogenous time undergirding the continual flow of history that supports fascist notions of advancement with a form of historical materialism that is guided by *Jetztzeit*, “time filled by the presence of the now” (thesis XIV). Crucially, this now-time materializes through the jolting arrest of movement and the attendant particularization of memory: “Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad” (thesis XVII). For Benjamin, then, the redemption of *tikkun* cannot come about through the integration of pieces into a streamlined-flow oriented towards future actualization. It arises, rather, from jolting breaks that emphasize and define the momentous particularity of the past’s impact upon the present juncture.

This now-time inaugurates a mode of attentiveness in which the full tangibility of crisis is materially registered, a form of continuous witnessing that the angel of history cannot escape. In a poignant reading of Benjamin’s ninth thesis, Stéphane Mosès underscores the use of the grammatical present in the angel’s description. The angel, he writes, is immobilized “...in the fossilization of an

⁴⁵⁹ Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920, oil transfer and watercolor on paper, 12.5” x 9.5”, Jerusalem, The Israel Museum, accessed September 19, 2019, <https://www.imj.org.il/collections/199799?itemNum=199799> .

⁴⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257-58.

ineluctable horror... 'His eyes *are* staring, his mouth *is* open, his wings *are* spread.'"⁴⁶¹ Visually, the ongoing nature of these ossified gestures appears in subtle but unmistakable ways: the sidelong gaze of the eyes that contrasts with the angel's centered posture and stance, a tension that is reinforced by the opposition between the controlled curves of the angel's hair, wingspan and tail feathers and the vertical lines of nose, jaw, teeth and neck. As the viewer's gaze is drawn towards the painting's striking lines and sections of augmented color, the angel's eyes lead his audience to that which we cannot see, inducing us back to the angel himself in a continuous cycle that mimics the angel's own impasse and the recurring course of temporal revolution. In Jewish Kabbalistic and messianic thought, the world and its potential redemption are recreated anew in each discrete and utterly unique moment of time.⁴⁶² Benjamin's reformulation of this Jewish messianism posits that the utopian capacity of this continual recreation comes through the visceral rematerialization of the past's catastrophes in the present's danger. The angel who has no option but to tarry with the accumulating pile of debris before him, and the viewer who can neither access nor extricate herself from the object of the angel's preoccupation show the historian-artist's mission and predicament.

Angels are a recurring figure in Benjamin's work. In 1921, Benjamin edited a journal he also named *Angelus Novus* "...because of the attempt to draw a connection between the artistic avant-garde of the period and the Talmudic legend about angels who are being constantly created and find an abode in the fragments of the present."⁴⁶³ In this light, Klee's painting pictures an angel who has found a temporary dwelling in a shard of the present, one which becomes distinct through an illuminating flash of the past that disrupts the now and dethrones the future. This angel is, variously, an avatar of Benjamin himself. As Susan Handelman notes, "Another part of Benjamin's vision of this angel was taken from a Jewish tradition he had discussed with Scholem, a tradition 'about the personal angel of each human being who represents the letter's secret self, and whose name nevertheless remains hidden from him'"⁴⁶⁴ And indeed, as Ronald Beiner has pointed out in his analysis, Benjamin occupies a similar position to the one that he posits for the angel—he himself is in arrested flight, driven away from a time of amassing catastrophe by the storm of progress and its murderous soldiers.⁴⁶⁵ If this angel of history can be read as the portrait of a hidden self that both inhabits a fragment of the catastrophic present and enables this scrap of *Jetztzeit* to be apprehended, then Klee's oil-transfer tracing method is a fitting translation of that simulacrum. In his technique, Klee essentially made his own carbon paper by coating one side of drawing paper with black oil paint or printer's ink, and sandwiched that between the bottom host sheet that would receive the image. On top of that, he placed a drawing that he retraced with an etching needle, such that the oil paint or ink was transferred to the bottom sheet, enhanced by the smudges of black pant registering the weave of the paper that the pressure of his tracing hand would leave. These smudges inscribed by the weight of the artist's hand are themselves augmented by the superimposed water-colored washes resisting them.⁴⁶⁶ The ensuing oil-transfer drawing of an etched original source thus bears the

⁴⁶¹ Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 120.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁶³ Avner Shapira, "Walter Benjamin's Berlin 120 Years On," *Ha'aretz*, July, 12 2012, accessed September 20, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/walter-benjamin-s-berlin-120-years-on-1.5266312> . For a fuller account of angels in Benjamin's work, see Susan Handelman, "Walter Benjamin and the Angel of History," *CrossCurrents* 41.3 (Fall 1991): pp. 344-352.

⁴⁶⁴ Handelman, "Walter Benjamin," 347. See Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, trans. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 213.

⁴⁶⁵ Ronald Beiner, "Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of History," *Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Aug., 1984): pp. 423-434. See p. 432.

⁴⁶⁶ See Annie Bourneuf, *Paul Klee: The Visible and the Legible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

traces of the artist himself—the weight of his hand tracing the fragment of the past that inhabits the new drawing, illuminated by the water-color washes of the now. For Benjamin to see one of his secret selves in this angel is to identify with an incarnation that carries the marks of another history-maker and their re-presentation of a past fragment. What I want to emphasize, thus, is that the angel of history demonstrates how the past flashes up in the present *through an identification with the creative mediation of another*, and it is in that mediation where fragments of redemptive re-membrance—directed towards the past rather than the future—are possible.

Bearing the smudged traces of Benjamin's mediated insights in mind, I return to Abergel's sculptural fragments and their reformulation of *tikkun*, facing the full force of the occupation and its amassing catastrophe. According to my reading of Benjamin, the possibility of *tikkun* arises from (a) jolting shocks that lay bare the particular and material import of the past's impact upon the present juncture and (b) identifications with aesthetic representations and accounts of the hidden selves who inhabit these particularized fragments of now-time. My account of Abergel refracted through Benjamin claims that her art practice shows how to actualize the destruction of the past in a fragment of the present, which first and foremost depends upon the ability to stay with and cede oneself to the remnants of destruction. Abergel gives herself over to the fragmented vestiges of destruction by staying with and engaging these relics. She both addresses and relinquishes herself to the pile of debris growing skyward, a mass of destruction caused by the progressive vision of Jewish nationalism that has instituted an irreparable disjuncture between her family's past belonging in Morocco and present identity in Israel; and driven the process of conquest, occupation and oppression towards the Palestinians. This giving over transpires through an enlivening form of manual labor that animates anonymous objects by recovering their specificity, as it writes a form of autobiography that presents her irreducibility in absentia through the new and independent life of the transfigured fragment. Maintaining a kinship with varying modes of secrecy, Abergel's *tikkun* performs a type of covert privacy as it presents the life of particularized object in place of the self who is made absent; this translative maneuver perhaps simulates the *tikkun* of Benjamin that discovers a secret self in another artist-historian's creative intervention, enabling the past to flash up in the present and allowing for a fragmentary re-collection that maintains the memory and life of the vanquished. And as Abergel's work demonstrates, these forms of secrecy that particularize and animate the independent artifact of catastrophic history demand and entail the disruption of nationalist conceptions of space.



Figure 38- Etti Abergel, Immigrant Tent, 2014, Plastic bags, plaster bandages, gesso, acrylic, thread ⁴⁶⁷



Figure 39-Detail of Immigrant Tent ⁴⁶⁸

Indeed, Abergel's resignification of *tikkun* has implications for both contemporary art practice in general and the local context of Israeli spatial imaginaries. In his interpretation of Abergel's pieces, well-known South-African born Israeli artist Larry Abramson notes that the last half of the 20th century has overwhelmingly seen the modernist movement in the visual arts distinguish sacred spaces of art from the un-curated chaos of mundane life. Following Brian O'Doherty's influential critique of modern exhibition, Abramson observes that the art gallery simulates a "white cube," a sterile space that seals it off from the external world."⁴⁶⁹ For Abramson, thus, the *tikkun* of Abergel's installations lays in the political re-domestication of the art world's sterile spaces. Not only does she transform the white cube into a personalized squat littered with the objects and residues of her activity, she also contextualizes the white cube's role in Zionist architecture under modernism's sway. The homogeneity of Israeli housing—from transit camp quarters to Jewish agency houses—demanded amnesiac blankness from its immigrant residents, compelling them to replace their native languages and cultures with the uniformity of their new

⁴⁶⁷ Etti Abergel, *Immigrant Tent*, 2014, Plastic bags, plaster bandages, gesso, acrylic, thread, 530 x 40 x 40 cm, *Animism: An Installation in Three Parts*, January 3-22, 2014, Galerie Mezzanin, Vienna, <http://galeriemezzanin.com/exhibitions/etti-abergel/>. Accessed April 25, 2019.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., detail.

⁴⁶⁹ Larry Abramson, "Etti Abergel's Living Space," http://galeriemezzanin.com/artists/etti-abergel/texts/abergel_abramson/, accessed November 8, 2018.

national identity.⁴⁷⁰ If Abergel's *tikkun* transpires through the animation of the artifacts of local destruction, then this reparative activity inevitably encompasses the fracturing of nationalist assimilations of space, identity and history, an act that is made explicit in the final piece this chapter will discuss, *Immigrant Tent*, pictured above.

In this work, Abergel turns the tent from a structure that houses into another cascade of fragments—torn ribbons shredded from the plastic tote bags that are associated with immigrants and refugees—again evoking a shower of broken vessels in need of extensive repair. In this case, however, the vessel as a receptacle that conveys divine light has been deflated into a two-dimensional rag, just as the waterfall of linked shards has been constricted and flattened into a skinny column, already putting the status of immigrant and tent into question. Undoubtedly, the immigrant tent has a contentious history in the early years of Israel's establishment, a period in which different perceived threats to the state's sovereignty were countered through varying housing policies. In architectural historian Yael Allweil's words,

The first threat to Israel's sovereignty was perceived to be Israel's "enemy" citizenry, Arab-Palestinians who had not been "swept away" during the 1948 war. Israel's first housing policy, geared to this threat, included harnessing pioneer immigrants to settle vacated Arab-Palestinian houses and lands in primarily agricultural border areas. The second perceived threat was posed by the Jewish Agency (JA) and Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose continued involvement in post-independence settlement threatened to create a state within a state and subject Israel to the sovereignty of world Jewry. This threat was addressed through the *ma'abara* [transit camp] housing policy, which removed immigrants from JA-controlled reception camps and settled them on the land in temporary single-family dwellings, with the goal of cementing their allegiance to state and country...⁴⁷¹

From 1948-1951, during Israel's first three years as a sovereign state, its population was doubled by the massive wave of immigration, which only increased throughout rest of the decade.⁴⁷² Initially, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion planned to settle some 150,000 immigrants from Germany, Cyprus and Bulgaria in seized Palestinian housing and in five hundred new agricultural settlements that were strategically situated along the border to aid in defense.⁴⁷³ This first group of the mass immigration were considered privileged to receive housing in the center of the country, relatively speaking, with accessible employment and education.⁴⁷⁴ An ongoing housing crisis ensued as Arab houses filled up by May 1949, and border agricultural settlements could only house a fraction of the some 700,000 immigrants arriving from Yemen, Tunisia, Turkey, Libya and Iraq between 1949 and 1952, many of whom had no desire to play the part of expendable soldier along the new border. The state and Jewish Agency responded by converting British Army camps into immigrant camps, housing as many as fifty people in barrack halls without divisions for families or gender. These camps were supposed to be temporary stops on the way to permanent residence in agricultural or work villages, yet rising tensions between the state and the Jewish Agency as well as the immigrants' unrest in response to their terrible living conditions compelled the government to erect *ma'abarot* (transit

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Yael Allweil, "Israeli Housing and Nation Building: Establishment of the State-Citizen Contract, 1948-1953," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 23.2 (Spring 2012): 52.

⁴⁷² Dvora Hachohen, *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and Its Repercussions in 1950s and After*, trans. Gila Brand (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 1.

⁴⁷³ Yael Allweil, "Israeli Housing," 53-54. See also Anita Shapira, "The Great Aliya: Mass Immigration," *Israel: A History*, trans. Anthony Berris (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 222-247.

⁴⁷⁴ Shapira, "Great Aliya," 222-23.

camps). The *ma'abarot* were intended to be an improvement, offering immigrants single-family temporary dwelling units in tents, wooden huts and tin shacks—and they housed as much as 25% of the Israeli population by 1952 (250,000 people).⁴⁷⁵ Yet many of these immigrants were forced to stay there for years, in conditions that were not much better than the initial refugee absorption camps: insufficient and degrading sanitary facilities, a lack of health services, and flooding during the winter months combined with food shortages and little opportunity for work made them into brutal living sites that made glaringly clear the distinction between the Jews from Arab and Muslim countries (*Mizrahim*, literally meaning “Easterners”) and veteran Israelis in the new country. This was underscored by later waves of immigration in the 1950s, when Moroccan immigrants arriving in 1954 and 1956 were put through the same process of absorption and settlement in the country’s peripheries, while Polish immigrants landing in 1958 were placed in the center of the country, in order to encourage any remaining Eastern European Jews to follow.⁴⁷⁶ These immigration settlement patterns have instituted racial and economic segregation within Israeli-Jewish society that continues to this day, as Mizrahi *ma'abarot* residents were overwhelmingly settled into mass housing units (referred to as *shikun*) in development towns in the north and south (the Galilee and the Negev), away from the economic and educational opportunities in the center of the country, and in housing that marked them as second-class citizens.⁴⁷⁷

Yet Abergel’s tent also evokes more contemporary events—namely, the international Occupy movement that used tents and encampments in public spaces to express seething opposition to widening social and economic disparity and the breakdown of democratic institutions across the world. In the Israeli context, the Occupy movement emerged as a result of the housing crisis in 2011 that spurred a massive protest movement during the summer months, in which record numbers of Israelis took to the streets to protest escalating housing prices, among other complaints. As part of the demonstrations, tent cities sprang up across the country. The biggest one was centered along Rothschild Boulevard, an affluent avenue in Tel Aviv, whose pedestrian pathway became strewn with pop-up tents and old furniture.⁴⁷⁸ In striking fashion, the 2011 “Social Justice Protest” was a broad-based social movement that cut across age, political affiliation, and religiousness and invoked the Israeli state’s promise to provide its citizens with access to housing within a homeland.⁴⁷⁹ Notably, this movement followed the protests of the Arab Spring, also in 2011, and borrowed chants, energy and social media strategy in one of the only examples of a social movement feeding from the Arab world into the Israeli arena.⁴⁸⁰ Following these demonstrations, thus, Abergel’s *Immigrant Tent* evokes qualities of claustrophobia, economic deprivation, democratic erosion and homelessness, as if to declare that there is no more space in Israel to house its citizens (nearly all of whom, it must be emphasized, descend from immigrants), only continuing dreams

⁴⁷⁵ Yael Allweil, “Israeli Housing,” 60 and Anita Shapira, “Great Aliya,” 226.

⁴⁷⁶ Anita Shapira, “Great Aliya,” 236.

⁴⁷⁷ For a fuller account of this discrimination, see Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text*, No. 19/20 (Autumn, 1988): 1-35.

⁴⁷⁸ See for example Jamie Levin, “Finally, Workers of the World Unite,” *Ha’aretz*, October 21, 2011, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/1.5201857>. Accessed October 5, 2019.

⁴⁷⁹ On the centrality of housing to Zionism, see Yael Allweil, *Homeland: Zionism as Housing Regime, 1860-2011* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁴⁸⁰ Like the anti-government movements across the Arab world which were fueled, among other factors, by extremely high levels of unemployment and government corruption, the 2011 Israeli social justice protests (תקצת תפוצת) were primarily a middle-class protest movement. In perhaps one of the clearest marks of crossover, the Israeli protest chant associated with the movement, *ha-am doresh tzedek hevrati* (“the people demand social justice”) borrowed the cadence and rhythm of the famous slogan of the Arab Spring, *al-sha ‘b yurīd isqāt al-nizām* (“the people want to bring down the regime”). This fascinating prosodic translation was brought to my attention by Professor Muhammad Siddiq in a private conversation.

about human and divine realization brought about through nationalist delusions. Indeed, Abergel's tent is in tatters, remade into a structure that does not strive to provide shelter at all but connects the celestial to the ground in a downward motion of disintegration rather than an upward flow of restoration. A skinny, vertical line, this immigrant tent evokes the architectural component of a pillar; yet here, the column does not support anything other than itself, collapsing function into something else entirely.

On the other hand, *Immigrant Tent* also elicits the dynamic energy of the people fueling resistance movements worldwide to re-possess and re-animate the social, economic and democratic institutions of public space and life. In this sense, Abergel's tent resists its functional duty to house those migrants created by the global system of socio-economic inequality. Or, perhaps more precisely, the only thing this tent purports to house is itself. As in *Circling*, this piece reverses relations between interior and exterior: the sculpture invites the viewer to walk around it, such that the viewer's circuit becomes the mobile walls within which the tent is centered. From this perspective, shelter can only be created through viewers' engagement with and exploration of the artwork. If housing in early Israeli society was wielded as a mechanism to distinguish European from North African, East from West and new Israeli from Arab as the state erected border towns and enclaves to secure its central territory, this tent refuses to support that trajectory, even as it summons the specifics of that history and context. Instead, it becomes something like the internal axis of aesthetic resistance and historical re-examination—an interior structure around which viewers move and consider.

Yet this interior beam is in disrepair. Strips of plastic bags are entangled and fall in knotted loops. White plaster coats the bottom third, making these scraps stronger and more durable, indeed evoking the image of broken limbs set in casts, in an ongoing process of healing. In this reading, the refugees' plastic bags that have been repurposed into a torn and tattered immigrant tent are now refashioned into layers of plaster bandages that might reset bones, the structural elements of human anatomy—or the architecture of a body politic. The sculpture does not show the bones themselves, but rather their reparative covering that has come undone: the bandages that do not bandage, that hang rather than wrap. Rather than a tent that houses those in need of shelter—but one that within the context of Israeli history has signaled the internal stigmatization and impoverishment of Jews from Arab lands—the piece invokes, first, a structural element that might support a dwelling, around which an engaged public convenes and reconsiders the scene and artifacts of history in the now and, second, the plaster dressings that reset the broken bones of self and collective. As the sculpture moves from immigrant tent to tatters, to a column that invokes the possibility of widespread popular resistance to a pillar of support in disrepair, to the gauze bandages that might be used to heal fractured bones, it unmistakably summons the practice and concept of *tikkun*. *Immigrant Tent* beckons the viewer to tarry with its narratives, trajectories and fragments; to imagine how the repair of Israeli nationalist structures might proceed through a collective and aesthetic reckoning with the violence of the past in the present.

V. Architects of History



Figure 40- Emily Jacir, Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages which were Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied by Israel in 1948, 2001

Let us open the house to the East
so that, at high morning,
into its bones
will enter
sun.⁴⁸¹

צריך לפתוח את הבית למזרח
שִׁכְנוֹס בְּצֶהְרִי הַבֶּקֶר, שְׁיָבוֹא
בְּעֲצֻמוֹת הַבַּיִת
שֶׁמֶשׁ.⁴⁸²

Abergel's sculpture directs our return to Emily Jacir, and her own tent, briefly mentioned in the discussion of her artist biography. The differences between these two shelters initially appear striking. Abergel presents an immigrant tent in tatters that obliquely references her own personal experience of the Israeli immigration crisis—in the pillar of ragged strips turned plaster bandages, whose bones are broken? Hers? The national body with which she is identified? The architectural frame of a tent that is present in name only? Once again, it is the fragmented object whose life takes the place of her own, as it summons the housing trauma of new Israeli citizens, the history of segregation between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews within Israel, and instances of cross-culture collective action. Through these evocations, we are left with a structure of fragmented possibilities that gestures away from Abergel's private memory and towards the broad historical contexts that

⁴⁸¹ Translation by Lital Levy, Lena Salaymeyer, Adriana Valencia, "Poetic Structures on Contested Space: The bayt/bayit of Siham Daoud and Shelley Elkayam," *Critical Sense* 9.1 (Winter 2001): 9.

⁴⁸² Shelley Elkayam, *Mi-toch shirat ha-arkhitekt: shirim ve-shirot* [From the Architect's Poetry: Masculine and Feminine Poems] (Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1987), 37

ground the ability to face the Nakba and continuing destruction Palestine, which has resulted in so many houses torn to shreds. Jacir's family-sized refugee tent, in visual contrast, is intact, adorned and open, inviting communities to mobilize inside of it. Her structure does not seek to permanently house, but rather to act as a site of gathering and memorialization. She assembles a canvas monument that is a celebration, testament and remembrance of a multiplicity of destruction, in which the self's remembrance is a reflection of collective upheaval. Under Jacir's hands and the hands of the participating embroiderers, the tent becomes a composite memory of many individual parts and pasts which are compelled to reconvene within one unbroken pavilion: hundreds of demolished villages and uncountable houses, the Palestinians who fled from them and had to inhabit countless refugee tents, their descendants taking part in Jacir's project. Many stories, histories and bodies converge into the one open shelter that beckons for more to come and enter.

I curate this final look at Jacir and Abergel's overlapping and contrasting structures through a concise text from the Israeli poet Shelly Elkayam. Elkayam is Sephardic—Jews whose ancestors originate from the Iberian Peninsula as opposed to Eastern European Askenazi Jews—and her work seeks to reincorporate the place, perspective and material history of the East within the socio-cultural discourse of Israel.⁴⁸³ Elkayam's "east" refers to both Mizrahi Jews of Arab origin as well as to Palestine and Palestinians and the Middle East more broadly; her "house" signifies both metapoetically and politically as a line or verse of poetry, as well as to *ha-bayit ha-le'umi*, the Jewish national home. The collection of poetry from which this is taken is called *The Architect's Poems* and in it she seems to posit that artists and writers—and the publics they convene—are the builders, or in Abergel's terms, the repairers of the corporeal, poetic and national house.

Using Elkayam's suggestive text, I close with the different houses, bones and openings that Jacir and Abergel present, for they too formulate the need to disrupt and expose the self to the other and the past to the present in architectural terms. Seen through the key-shaped form of Elkayam's poem, thus, the bones of Jacir's tent take shape through the hand stitched names of destroyed Palestinian villages, consigned to oblivion in the Israeli and, to some extent, the global imaginaries. Jacir uses her creative authority to assemble an unbroken structure that opens simultaneously towards past calamity and present action. Her tent memorializes the past through the mobilization of community that convenes in its canvas interior; though she initiates the project, she becomes one artist among many, in the same way that the many names of destroyed villages are stitched onto one site. The tent becomes a space where the "I" and "we" reposition and remake each other, just as art and history are made to dismantle and reflect one another in her work. Abergel's tent has no easy interior to locate—in place of the inside, there are channels of negative space. Its bones, as discussed, are indeterminate and absent, figured as the broken skeleton of the individual and collective body through the sculpture's plaster bandages. In a sense, her fragmented strips of plastered bags open the tent up to Elkayam's notion of east so dramatically that the shelter is entirely exteriorized. The "I" is turned outside towards the past in the present that she faces and, in her externalization, she becomes a different sculpture-object, with a new life of its own. Both architects of history, these artists have thus profoundly different methods of recovery and construction. One builds sites of historical and artistic transmission through the assumption of the occupier's authority, ceding individual license and cohesion to the proliferation of the collective; the other fashions nodules of exposure in which the artist's personal story is redirected by her reanimation of vanquished history as she gives herself over to particularized artifacts of nationalist violence. Both show how the reconceptualization of autobiography—a concrete remaking of what the story of the

⁴⁸³ For a fuller reading of the poem and more background on the poet, see Levy, Salaymey, and Valencia, "Poetic Structures on Contested Space."

self includes and entails—enables them to deeply engage with the discursive and material viscera of crisis, and to keep their houses open to the east.

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