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Publication Date

2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Contemporary Mizrahi Authors and the
Limits of the Postsecular “*Masorti*” Response
to Jewish National Sovereignty

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

by

Noa Bar

2018

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2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Contemporary Mizrahi Authors and the
Limits of the Postsecular “*Masorti*” Response
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by

Noa Bar

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Gil Hochberg, Co-Chair

Professor David W. MacFadyen, Co-Chair

This dissertation demonstrates how the work of three contemporary Mizrahi authors (Haviva Pedaya, Albert Swissa, and Dvir Tzur) challenges the postsecular framing of Mizrahi Jewish practice as *masortiyut* (“traditionism”), which refers to the flexible form of Jewish observance associated with Arab-Jews in Israel/Palestine. Postsecular critics have mobilized this position to challenge the terms of Jewish national sovereignty. This study claims that, while these writers refuse “*masortiyut*” as a coherent subject position, they extend certain of its challenges by reconsidering the interaction of the secular and the theological within the nationalist narrative of *Shivat Tzion* (“the return to Zion”). By means of an allusive engagement with mystical texts, these

authors reconceive of exile as a reparative condition rather than as a defective state. They replace a notion of static “return” with a “Wandering East” which opens up possibilities to reorient Jewish presence in the Middle East away from a relationship of strict identity with the geopolitical territory of Israel.

The dissertation of Noa Bar is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2018

For my aunt, Shoshana Gabay

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for their thoughtful suggestions and guidance.

My co-advisors Gil Hochberg and David MacFadyen assisted me greatly in developing the broader relevance of this project. I thank Ra'anana Boustan for emphasizing the distinction between curation and criticism. I am grateful to Daniel Boyarin for his guidance in Rabbinic texts and insightful comments.

I extend a sincere thank you to Jessika Herrera and Sandy Richmond for their tremendous administrative support.

I have been extremely lucky to have the support by the following friends, colleagues, and teachers throughout this process: Michelle Lee, Myrna Douzjian, Ben Lempert, Simon Porzak, Eyal Bassan, Kfir Cohen, Callie Maidhof, Julie Napolin, Jerilyn Sambrooke, Shaul Setter, Raphael Magarik, Yosefa Raz, Hanna Tzucker-Seltzer, Yael Segalovitz, Taylor Johnson, Oren Wilkins Yirmiya, Ella Ben-Hagai, Ana Raquel Minian, Rachel Napolin, Marilyn Heiss, Rachael Evans, Alan Freedman, Camille Imbert, Zoey McCloskey, Anthony Hernandez, Z. Jenerik, Jim Lively, and Aggie Ebrahimi-Bazaz.

Thank you to Dvir Tzur and Albert Swissa for their thoroughness in answering my many queries.

I thank Caroline Knapp for her superb editorial assistance.

I am grateful to Mike J. Moss for being there through every iteration.

I am especially grateful for the unflinching support of my parents, Miriam and Avraham.

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INTRODUCTION:

THE EXILE-WITHIN: ALBERT SWISSA, DVIR TZUR, HAVIVA PEDAYA

AND THE RECONSIDERATION OF “MIZRAHI TRADITION”

Masortiyut (or “traditionism”) is a postsecular framing of Mizrahi Jewish practice and outlook, initiated in the late 1990s. It is both a political initiative of the philosopher Meir Buzglo (called “Tikkun”) and a theoretical response to the consequences of Jewish national sovereignty in Israel/Palestine.^{1,2, 3} This dissertation examines the work of three contemporary Mizrahi Hebrew authors (Albert Swissa, Dvir Tzur, and Haviva Pedaya) in light of the claims of this postsecular articulation of *masortiyut* to subvert secular-nationalist constructs. My analysis will demonstrate how these authors complicate the subject position of the *masorti* (or traditionist) as an identity produced within secularist colonial processes.

-
1. “Mizrahi,” which means literally “the Eastern Ones” or “Orientals,” is a term coined by Zionist officials to describe Jews from the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of the Eastern Mediterranean. These disparate populations did not have a unified identity before the large-scale immigration of Jews from Arab lands and Mediterranean countries to Israel in the 1950s. Because of the European hegemony of Zionist culture and discourse, Mizrahim were underrepresented culturally (though this has shifted somewhat, as this study will discuss). There is considerable slippage between the terms “Mizrahim,” “Arab Jews,” and “Sephardim.” Though “Mizrahi” is an imperfect term, I have retained it because it is the most widely self-ascriptive one and avoids the potential anachronism of “Arab Jews” (for a discussion of the ahistorical issue with this term see Lital Levy, “Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the Mashriq,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 452–69). I occasionally use “Arab Jew” in the context of discussing the postcolonial theory which uses this term. I use “Sephardi” in instances which pertain to Sephardi custom and *nusah* (liturgical style).
 2. I use the construction “Israel/Palestine” to suggest an as yet unrealized binational option. At other points I use “Israel.” With this usage, I in no way intend to erase the memory, history, identity, and territorial claims of Palestinians. Rather, there are certain cultural trends or geopolitics which occur within a space which does not include a Palestinian presence. This is, in fact, an aspect of my critique.
 3. “*Masortiyut*” derives from “*masoret*,” the Hebrew word for “tradition.” This term has been accurately but somewhat clumsily translated by other scholars as “traditionism” and in some cases as “traditionalism.” I have retained the Hebrew throughout to avoid the awkwardness and potentially conservative connotations of these translations.

My readings of the contemporary Hebrew novels in the following chapters will show how these authors refuse postsecular “masortiyut” as a coherent subject position. Their work thereby rejects the interpellation of this stance within a Zionist framework, which constructs the “traditionist” as truncated from the Islamic world in which it developed. However, these writers nonetheless extend some of the claims of *masortiyut* to challenge Jewish national sovereignty. In particular, their narratives suggest the ongoing persistence of the theological within an only apparently secularized Zionist nationalism.

Postcolonial scholars such as Ella Shohat, Yehouda Shenhav, Hannan Hever largely conceive of tradition as a symptom of the colonial encounter. While in no way contesting the production of a Mizrahi religious identity as an effect of colonialism, the narratives of Swissa, Tzur, and Pedaya demonstrate that expressions of tradition can be a generative basis for critique. Their work suggests two trains of thought in line with this broader questioning of secularism: First, they emphasize the theological origins of an allegedly secular nationalism and reveals the ambivalence of this nationalism towards theological concepts. Second, they reveal how Zionist nationalism uses these constructs as justification for territorial sovereignty.

Swissa, Tzur, and Pedaya are part of a larger group of contemporary Hebrew authors and poets who invoke themes associated with Mizrahi Jewish practice in ways which challenge secular-nationalist constructs. Others include Almog Behar, Shva Salhoov, and Yaacov Bitton. In suggesting this grouping, I in no way intend to reinforce existing stereotypes of Jews from Islamic lands as religiously and politically conservative.⁴ My intention is not to pigeonhole these authors into a fixed, essentialist category defined by a traditional outlook. Rather, I have chosen to focus on these particular authors because of the often melancholic ways in which their work preserves not only the continuity of the Jewish-Muslim interaction but its erasure. In this manner, they

refuse to suggest a traditional Jewish position cut off from cultural expressions which originated in the Muslim-Jewish symbiosis.

THE POSTSECULAR RECLAIMING OF *MASORTIYUT*

I rely on Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation to theorize the ways in which these authors interact with the postsecular framing of *masortiyut*.⁵ By articulating a Mizrahi Jewish position exclusively within the poles of Jewish-secular and Jewish-orthodox positions, Buzaglo effectively accedes to the "hail" of a Zionist framework which truncates Mizrahi Jewish culture and identity from its interaction with the Islamic in which it originated. The label *masorti* designates a relatively flexible form of Halakhic observance among some Mizrahim or Arab-Jews, which is only beginning to receive recognition within Israeli socio-political frameworks.^{6,7} *Masortiyut* is often seen as uncommitted with regard to orthodoxy or "primitive" in light of a more "enlightened" secular position. *Masortiyut* is not a "religious" identity per se; it describes,

-
4. Yali Hashash discusses the construction of this stereotype within the context of a comparison between Mizrahim and so-called American "white trash." Just liberal parties in the U.S. have ignored the needs of lower class American whites, Hashash argues that the left-wing Israeli Mapai party similarly marginalized Mizrahim. In contrast, the Israeli religious right wing helped Mizrahim materially by assisting them in buying homes in the West Bank in the 1980s and 1990s. This led to a perception of Mizrahim as politically right-wing. (Yali Hashash, *Kulanu Yehudim: Al "Zevul Lavan," Mizrahim V'Shuliyut Merubah B'toch Ha-hegemonia*, ["We are all Jews: On 'White Trash,' Mizrahim and the Margins within Hegemony"], *Theory and Criticism* 48, (Summer 2017): 249-264.
 5. In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," (1970) Althusser identifies the process of interpellation as the way ideology both constitutes and is constituted by the subject. His well-known example is the hail of the police officer, who calls "Hey, you there!" to a passing pedestrian who turns to meet the hail and thereby participates in her own subjection. In this act of hailing, the concrete individual becomes a subject and "re-cognizes" her own subjectivity within ideology.
 6. *Masorti* is the adjectival form of the noun *Masortiyut*. *Masorti'im* is the plural noun.
 7. The proverbial example of a person identified as *masorti* is one who attends synagogue on a Saturday morning and plays a game of soccer or lights a cigarette in the afternoon (both practices forbidden by a strict interpretation of Halakhah).

as sociologist Nissim Leon has noted, ties to a sense of “heritage” and “ethnic community,” more than strict adherence to Jewish law.⁸ *Masorti'im* practice parts of Jewish tradition, but not in a consistent or strictly Halakhic manner. The label has become a form of self-identification among *masorti'im* who, as sociologist Yaacov Yadgar explains, have reclaimed the identity.

Historian Yochi Fischer situates theories of *masortiyut* within the broader reconsideration of secularism prompted by the postsecular turn, and as part of a larger shift in the poles of Jewish-Israeli identity.^{9,10} Postsecularism, initiated in the 1990s and 2000s reconsiders the assumptions of the Weberian narrative of secularization, particularly with regard to the correlation between modernization and disenchantment. It recognizes the limits of secular reason, and refutes the complete disappearance of “religion”—as an institution—from the public sphere, despite its increasing shift into to the domain of the private.^{11,12,13} Talal Asad, responding to the postsecular turn, calls for an “anthropology of secularism.” His work examines the construction of secularism both as a political doctrine and as an epistemology of the “secular” as a concept. For Asad,

8. Nissim Leon, “The Secular Origins of Mizrahi Traditionalism,” *Israel Studies* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 22–42, 27.

9. Yochi Fischer, *Secularization and Secularism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (Jerusalem: Van Leer, HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2015) 12.

10. Fischer argues that though national-religious categories, which historically fall into a dichotomy of orthodox and secular, became more fluid in the early 2000s, their interaction nonetheless lead to a sharpening of the distinction between them.

11. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), Jürgen Habermas, “Notes on a Post-Secular Society,” *Signandsight.com* (2008), <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1714.html> (accessed August 21, 2018).

12. The prefix “post-” in “postsecular” can refer to societies in which ties to religion have lapsed considerably (as it does for Habermas, who ultimately refutes the notion of that this decline lessens the political influence of religion). “Post-” can also suggest an end to secularism as both a political doctrine and epistemology. Fischer relies largely on the work of Talal Asad, whose “anthropology of secularism” refutes this second interpretation of the “postsecular.”

secularism, as the political doctrine of the modern nation state, attempts to produce “religion” as a separate category from the “secular,” yet they remain imbricated.¹⁴

I follow Nissim Leon in viewing current articulations of *masortiyut* as truncated from the “Mizrahi Jewish practice” which arose in tandem with Islam. Jews from North Africa, the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean, and parts of Asia, designated “Mizrahim” (literally “Orientals,” or “Easterners”) by the Israeli state, arrived en masse to Israel in the 1950s, as part of what Zionist historiography refers to as the *Aliyah Ha-hamonit* (“mass immigration”).^{15,16} Their immigration to Israel severed this population from a variegated cultural life which developed in tandem with the Muslim world (though it should be noted that this was far from a harmonious or equitable “coexistence”).¹⁷ This severing marks a key distinction: that between the position of *masortiyut* as framed within a Zionist framework by Buzaglo, and the Mizrahi Jewish practice which came about in the interaction between Jews and Muslims. Drawing upon the seminal work of historian Shlomo Dov Goitein, Leon explains that Jews in Islamic countries shared folkways, juridico-theological practices, and aesthetic culture with Muslims. They also used Arabic as the “everyday

13. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 21.

14. Aamir Mufti, Bruce Robbins, and Stathis Gourgouris, who cite Said’s secular criticism, reject the postsecular paradigm and its subsequent reconsideration of secularism. Mufti contends that Weber’s account of modern disenchantment entailed a process of re-enchantment expressed through religious belief and practice (by means of what Weber termed “romantic irrationalism”). According to him, Talal Asad and proponents of his postsecular anthropological analysis of Islam erroneously view developments within Islam in isolation from the development of modernity and liberalism. They furthermore rely excessively upon Salafi revivalism and Sunni Islam in their work, leading to a false view of these movements as forms of “return” which have detached themselves from Western liberalism. Mufti argues instead that the interaction between Islam and modernity cannot be viewed in isolation, demonstrating that practices of European colonialism have always already been imbricated with Islamic juridico-theological practices and in the development of Shari’a.

15. Not all those who became “Mizrahim” arrived at this time. The migration of Yemenite Jews to Israel began in the 1880s, initially largely out of a traditional belief in *Shivat Tzion*, the notion of returning to Zion as part of a belief in divine redemption. This migration increased for economic and nationalist reasons in the 1910s and 20s, when Jews from Yemen were brought to Palestine to replace Arab *fellahin* (sharecroppers) as part of the Labor Zionist ideology of *Avodah Ivrit* (“Hebrew Labor”).

language of religious life.”^{18,19} Furthermore, explains Leon, the Jewish pattern of secularization in the Muslim world followed that of Islam, in which forms of religious practice and belief were not considered antithetical to modernization.

Similarly, as Haviva Pedaya explains, the range of Jewish practices and folkways which arose in the Muslim world comprised a continuum from secularized to pious. The constitution of this range of communal identities arose within Arab and Persian cultures:²⁰

[F]olk communities, educated-Rabbinic ones, educated-secularized ones with an affinity to local colonial culture; [all] participated in a cultural context anchored in a shared Arab-Jewish space, even if languages and related expressions varied within groups...this shared Arab-Jewish space is inseparable from the cultural context of several groups: religious, traditional, those with contact to colonialism, universalism, Communism.²¹

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16. An account of the conditions and reasons of this migration are beyond the purview of this study, but the nationalist myths around the *Aliyah Hamonit* should be noted. Ella Shohat refutes the notion of this migration as a “rescue phantasy” (“Sephardim In Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text*, No. 19/20 (Autumn, 1988):16) designed to save Arab-Jews from countries which were hostile to them. In actuality, she explains, this population was brought to Israel/Palestine to bolster the Jewish population of the nascent state.
 17. Shohat cautions against romanticizing the situation of Jews in Muslim lands: “[W]hile the situation of these Jews over fifteen centuries was undeniably better than in the Christian countries, the fact remains that the status of *dhimmi* applied to both Jews and Christians as ‘tolerated’ and ‘protected’ minorities was intrinsically inegalitarian...[However the] Sephardi communities, while retaining a strong collective identity, were generally well-integrated and indigenous to their countries of origin, forming an inseparable part of their social and cultural life.” (“Sephardim in Israel,” 9).
 18. This identity is one defined by its interactions with Islam for centuries, famously characterized by historian Shlomo Dov Goitein, as a “creative symbiosis.” Shlomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*. This notion of this interaction has been refuted by Steven Wasserstrom in *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
 19. Leon, “The Secular Origins of Mizrahi Traditionalism,” 35.

Migration to Israel/Palestine severed these groups from the environment in which this heterogeneity, rooted in Islamic culture, came about.

Both Pedaya and Leon describe this as a process of “Zionization” [*Tzionizatziyah*] which brought Mizrahi Jewish practice²² into contact, within asymmetric relations of power, with Western-Christian processes of Jewish nationalism and secularization:

[P]art of a historical moment in which the complexity of the Jewish-Muslim interaction unravels entirely. The Zionization [*Ha-tzionizatziyah*] of Mizrahi Masortiyut puts models of Judaism into contact which developed alongside two different religions [Christianity and Islam, respectively], and in the background of two processes. One is the difficult conflict between Zionism and Arabness; The second is the encounter, anchored in relations of power, with the dominance of Ashkenazi Judaism. With regard to the significance of the first process it can be said that the inclusion of tens and hundreds of thousands of Mizrahi Jews to the state of Israel in the first half of the fifties under conditions of conflict with the Arab Muslim world deepened the disconnect from signifiers of culture that served them as a container for hundreds of years.²³

20. Haviva Pedaya, one of the three writers primarily discussed in this study, is known largely as a poet, but is also a scholar of Jewish history and mysticism. I cite her here in the latter capacity.

21. Haviva Pedaya, *Return of the Lost Voice* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2016), 149. (my translation).

22. I distinguish between *masortiyut*, which is produced by the categorizations of Zionist officials, and the Jewish practices which arose in tandem with Islam. I have translated this phrase from Shenhav’s use of “*praktika datit mizrahit*.” In this construction, “Mizrahi” does not refer to the current Israeli political identity, but to the broad geographical region of the “East” or “Orient.”

Pedaya echoes postcolonial critics such as Ella Shohat, Yehouda Shenhav, and Hanan Hever, when she explains that Zionist nationalism produced Mizrahi identity in a manner truncated from its original Muslim environment. However, whereas Shohat emphasizes the erasure and “theft of history” of Arab-Jews, Pedaya indicates both an erasure and a continuity of this identity within a framework of Mizrahi Jewish practice. The range of identities she describes persists within customs and traditions originating in the Islamic world. Pedaya describes:

[L]ifestyles which could be considered secular and modern: coffee houses, clubs, books and movie theaters, which in the second group this space continues to occur in synagogues and actually the realization of traditional lifestyles, in patterns of dress and ritual, in ceremonial routines, and even in supernatural practices.²⁴

Pedaya calls for a broader politico-theological repositioning of the Jewish polity in the Middle East. Rather than the Christian-Protestant roots of Zionism, Pedaya reconstructs a Jewish presence within a “Wandering East,” reorienting Jewishness towards the Islamic world. For Pedaya, the current political incarnation of mizrahiyut is regrettably defined by this break: “I elaborated on the significance of the split (or break) (*hitukh*) of Jews from Islamic lands from its past, a break which is the origin of “Mizrahiyut,” as a negative label; simultaneously Mizrahiyut has become a project constructed in an essentialized manner by the dominant culture.”

While Pedaya, whose work will be explored further in the readings of her prose and poetry in Chapter 3, attempts to maintain the Arab and Islamic elements of this symbiosis, Buzaglo

23. Leon, “The Secular Origins of Mizrahi Traditionalism,” 37.

24. Haviva Pedaya, *Return of the Lost Voice*, 149 (my translation).

conceives of *masortiyut* solely within the framework of Zionism, regrettably, within exclusively Jewish terms. In line with the broader questioning of secularism, which undermines the dichotomy of the “religious” and “secular,” Buzaglo (who himself identifies as *masorti*)²⁵ frames *masortiyut* as a response to the processes of modernity and secularization entailed in the establishment of Jewish national sovereignty.²⁶ Buzaglo does not address the break from the shared Arab-Jewish space in the manner described by Pedaya and Leon. Instead, he relies solely on a notion of continuity. Buzaglo explains that the crux of *masortiyut* is *mesirah*, “transmission,” and *ne’emanut*, which translates to “loyalty,” but is also etymologically related to *niman*, which means “addressee,” naming the one to whom this transmission is intended.²⁷

By articulating *masortiyut* solely within statist frameworks of “secular” and “orthodox,” Buzaglo suggests a subject position interpellated by the Jewish monoculture of Zionism. He defines the *masorti* stance as one which subverts the entrenched dichotomy of secular and orthodox, the two main Jewish-Israeli responses to the Zionist demand to break with the traditional past. Buzaglo offers *masortiyut* as a solution to the fracture and relativism of the poles of secular and religious.²⁸

25. Buzaglo is the founder of a social movement called Tikkun and was previously involved with Sami Shalom Chetrit’s network of Kedma schools. He is the son of the well-known Moroccan *paytan* David Buzaglo, a figure who has been the source of great interest as part of the piyyut revival discussed below. A *paytan* is a composer and/or performer of piyyut, a form of liturgical poetry sung both in the synagogue and in a broader ritual contexts or communal gatherings).

26. Buzaglo does not explicitly insert himself in within the reconsideration of secular paradigms, but is positioned as such by both Fischer and Yaacov Yadgar.

27. Meir Buzaglo, *Safa la-ne’emanim: mach’shavot al masoret* [A Language for the Faithful: Reflections on Tradition] (Jerusalem: Keren Mandel, 2008), 12.

28. Ibid., 19.

Buzaglo is critical of the nationalization of Judaism only in so far as it gives rise to polar positions. His political goal is to legitimize the *masorti* position within the framework of Israeli institutions. For Buzaglo, the primary problem with Jewish national sovereignty is the creation of poles of Jewish identity. He states, “the reduction of Judaism to nationalism [and] the creation of the secular camp [followed by] the religious response, a response to the Zionist revolution, which created the poles of secular and religious. Neither of these two stances is a satisfying response to processes of secularization and modernity.”²⁹ The more urgent issue with the nationalization of Jewishness, and one which goes undiagnosed by Buzaglo, is that the Israeli state secularizes “Jewish” as a form of national identity privileged over other identities.

Sociologist Yaacov Yadgar interprets Buzaglo’s position in a more explicitly critical and postsecular vein, and challenges Jewish privilege within the construction of Israeli citizenship. Yadgar similarly positions *masorti`im* at the interstices of the entrenched dichotomy of Jewish orthodox and secular sectors within Israeli society. According to him, Zionism attempts to secularize Jewish identity in the modern world by designating the Israeli state as the carrier of Jewish identity. This process evacuates the category of Jewishness only to reconstruct it in the exclusive service of political sovereignty.³⁰ It thus creates a contradiction with regard to the Jewish state: it is predicated upon a Jewish identity but nonetheless fails to posit the content of this ethos, so that its secularity realized only in the sense of a privileged Jewish citizenship. Yadgar claims that “*masortiyut*” has a liminal, critical character which disrupts the Israeli state bifurcation between secular and orthodox institutions. For him, this polarity maintains Jewishness

29. Ibid., 12.

30. Yaacov Yadgar, *Sovereign Jews: Israeli, Zionism, and Judaism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 7.

as a privileged condition of citizenship through the status quo, the politics of accommodation between religious and secular parties.

MASORTIYUT AND THE UNFILLED “MULTICULTURALISM” OF THE PIYYUT WAVE

Buzaglo’s political initiative, Tikkun, coincides with what some observers of “Israel culture” have hyperbolically termed the “Piyyut Revolution” (*Maha ’pekhat Ha-piyyut*) or the “Piyyut Wave” (*Gal Ha-piyyut*), begun in the early 2000s, in Israel and in the Jewish diaspora.³¹ Both Buzaglo and Pedaya are major figures in this resurgence of interest in piyyut, which is a form of post-Biblical poetry developed in fifth-century Palestine.³² Around the turn of the millennium, major media outlets began broadcasting piyyut, which had previously been limited to synagogue services and lifecycle occasions. The group Kehillot Sharot (“singing communities”) founded by Yossi Ohana in 2002, organized a network of participatory communal performances of piyyutim. In 2009, Musician Berry Sakharof released an album called *The Red Lips (Adumei HaSephatot)*, in which he adapts the poems of medieval paytan and philosopher Ibn Gvirol to the genre of rock, and appeared in 2015 with the Moroccan-born payytan Haim Louk. In the same

31. Noam Ben-Zeev, “The Power of Song to Link Jewish World's East and West” <https://www.haaretz.com/the-power-of-song-to-link-jewish-world-s-east-and-west-1.5216793> (accessed June 4th, 2018).

32. Piyyut is a form of liturgical and poetry (though it is also sung outside of synagogue settings), which conveyed scriptural topics or themes pertaining to particular holy days. According to T. Carmi, “little is known of the origins of piyut.” Yose Ben Yose, who lived in either the 4th or 5th Century, is considered one of the first “payytanim” (composers of piyyut). His verse appropriates elements of the *targumim* (Aramaic Biblical paraphrases written during the end of the 2nd Century C.E.) and the *derasha* (the synagogue homilies which replaced the *targumim*). Piyyut also employed acrostic, epithets, and rhetorical devices found in Midrashic commentaries. The genre was not bound to a particular doctrine or dogma, but often weighed in on political themes, such as criticism of Byzantine authorities, challenges to Christian theology, social or proto-scientific topics. It preceded the standardization of the siddur (or prayerbook), giving Payytanim license to elaborate on political and social topics, and their poems often replaced sections of the service. It then flourished in the Spanish Golden age of Al-Andalus, when payytanim such as Dunash Ben Lavrat, Ibn Gvirol, and Yehouda HaLevi adapted conventions of Arabic genres such as the *Qasida* (an ode characterized by elaborate meter and monomrhyne) and the structure of *Shirat Ezer* (“girdle poem”).

year, vocal artist Viktoria Hanna sang the *bakasha* (a petitionary form of piyyut) of *Hosha'ana* (traditionally sung on holiday of Sukkoth) in a youtube video which went viral.³³

In a manner similar to Buzaglo's political and philosophical expressions of *masortiyut*, this trend initiated a move towards "inclusion" which it has yet to fulfill. Some scholars and commentators consider this trend "multicultural," in the sense that it bridges boundaries between "secular" and orthodox Jews, and between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. However, this movement is limited as a "site of resistance to secular Zionist ideology" in the manner claimed by musicologist Carmel Raz:

[P]iyyut rectifies the underrepresentation of Judaic culture, both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, which is barely on the periphery of Israel's Western-influenced popular music scene. [It] constitutes a site of resistance to the secular Zionist ideology that shaped Israeli cultural discourse during the first few decades of statehood... *piyyut* seeks to redress the previous erasure of immigrant cultures, particularly those of Asia and North Africa but also the traditional cultures of both Sephardi and Ashkenazi European Jewry.³⁴

This notion is problematic for two reasons. First, Zionist ideology is quite ambivalently and incompletely "secular." Second, the piyyut wave, in its current form is very restricted in restoring the Arabic and Islamic influences within the genre.³⁵

33. Viktoria Hanna, "The Aleph-Bet Song, (Hosha'ana), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B11epz3tSSA> (accessed October 5th, 2017).

34. Ruth Davis, *Musical Exodus: Al-Andalus and its Jewish Diasporas* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 177.

Author and scholar Almog Behar rightly questions whether piyyut can be recreated within the monolingual Hebrew-Jewish framework in which it currently exists:

Is it possible to recreate piyyut? Without the original context in which piyyut and secular poetry (“*shirat ha-hol*”) developed, [namely that of] the Arab, Muslim, Ottoman environments, in a bi- and sometimes tri-lingual space, which fluctuates between a holy tongue, Hebrew and Aramaic, to a Jewish language and occasionally to the language of the majority culture; [without] the relation in which the cultural encounter took place between Jewishness and Arabness and with the rest of the surrounding cultures, and at times entailed a theological encounter between Judaism and Islam?”³⁶

Behar points out the unfulfilled potential of the “piyyut wave” in restoring a political and aesthetic interaction between Arabic and Hebrew. He notes that most of this cultural trend, instead, concerns Arabic musical styles and instruments, rather than the Arabic language. Behar explains that this resurgence occurs outside of the multilingual environment of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic in which piyyut developed.

35. The film *Shir Yedidot: A Song of Loves*, portrays this influence in the performances and compositions of Moroccan Payytan David Buzaglo (the father of Meir Buzaglo) set Hebrew words to popular Arab melodies of Oom Kolthoum, Abdul Wahab, and the Syrian-Egyptian singer Asmahan. The elder Buzaglo also and employed the bilingual Maghrebi technique of *Matruz*, which alternated verses of Arabic with Hebrew. (Rafael Balulu and Yair Qedar, *A Song of Loves: Rabbi David Buzaglo (2005)* [Video] Retrieved October 5th, 2017.

36. “We are the Payytanim: A Renewed Perspective on the Declaration of the “Piyyut Revolution,” <http://www.bac.org.il/music/article/anv-hapyytym-mbt-mhvdsh-aal-hakrztha-shl-mhapkt-pyvt>

The piyyut trend is at a crossroads: it adapts an aesthetic form which flourished in the shared Judeo-Arabic spaces of Andalusia and Morocco. It thus has the potential, as Behar points out, to import Islamic cultural elements and Arabic verse to the Hebrew-speaking world. However, the current piyyut movement confines itself to a Jewish setting in which a shared Arab-Jewish heritage is recalled within a mostly Hebrew-speaking Jewish-Israeli context. It thus follows the same pattern of interpellation as Buzaglo's *masortiyut*, in bridging ties only within Jewish sectors of society. The chapters below demonstrate similar tensions around memory and reclaiming with regard to the culture of the Muslim-Jewish symbiosis.

CHAPTER 1: ALBERT SWISSA'S *AQUD*: BLASPHEMING THE SECULAR STATE AND CHALLENGING "MASORTI" RECLAIMING

Chapter One demonstrates how Albert Swissa's novel *Aqud* (1990) suggests what political theorist James Martel calls "misinterpellation" with regard to a coherent *masorti* position, namely one which is articulated within a Zionist framework, cut off from Islamic ties. Swissa narrates the clash between two generations of Moroccan-Jewish immigrants to the slums of Jerusalem in the 1970s. His novel portrays their alienation and ambivalence with regard to the legacy of national-secular rituals established by Ben Gurion's policies of *mamlakhtiyut* (roughly translated as "statism,"). Established in the 1950s, this policy enshrined the secular hegemony of the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish settlement in Palestine) as a political doctrine. In *Aqud*, nationalist expressions of redemption take the form of school textbooks and public parades, which often clash with the worldview of the children's fathers.

The generation of the parents displays a range of attitudes toward Sephardi custom: from the pious Mr. Pazuelo to the criminal Mr. Sultan, a smuggler of cars who refuses to participate in a quorum necessary for a Jewish service. The adult protagonists' expectation of an escape from

galut (“exile”) is thwarted by the state’s demand that the immigrants venerate the nation itself as holy and that they sacrifice the memory of their past to the ideal of the New Jew. For Swissa, Israeli state “redemption,” in the form of Jewish Agency paternalism towards the Moroccan community leads only to a paradoxical situation of “exile in the Holy Land itself,” as the fathers of the group find themselves perplexed and alienated by the civic religion around them.

Swissa’s novel portrays the failure of the redemptive ideology of *mizug galuyot* (the blending of diasporas), a variant of *kibbutz galuyot* (the ingathering of exiles) entailed in *mamlachtiut*. The legacy of this policy was contradictory: it relied on traditional notions of return to a homeland, only to marginalize those who did not conform to either the mainstream secular or Orthodox camps. This alienation is encompassed in the lament of Mr. Pazuelo, a lay cantor who expresses his disdain at being in “exile in the Holy Land itself” and insists that he felt far more welcome among the Muslims in Morocco than among the Yiddish-speaking teachers in his son’s school, whom he considers the true exiles.³⁷

The chapter will argue that Swissa’s Mizrahi characters fail to assume the flexible but committed relationships to Halakhah within the framework of Zionism, in the manner suggested by postsecular approaches to *masortiyut*. By refusing a stable *masorti* subject position constructed from within Zionism, Swissa’s narrative suggests what Martel refers to as “misinterpellation.” Martel argues that insofar as for Althusser, interpellation works nine out of ten times, there remains one time out of 10 times that the policeman’s hail malfunctions in reaching the intended addressee. In this account, either the call towards a particular kind of subjectivity is misheard, or heard by an unintended person or party, thwarting the process of disciplinary subjection in unforeseen ways. In the case of *Aqud*, the dynamic of misinterpellation appears in the

37. Albert Swissa, *Aqud (The Bound)* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad, 1990), 14.

ambivalently blasphemous acts of the children. The strange, heretical acts of the youths suggest a rejection of the interpellation of *masortiyut*. The novel fails to produce Mizrahi subjects who carry out a flexible but committed relationships to Halakhah within the framework of Zionism. Instead, their ambivalence amounts to a kind of misinterpellation by both the civic religion of *mamlakhtiyut* and of the Sephardi customs and laws of the Moroccan-born parent generation.

The generation of child protagonists engage in acts that, while seemingly blasphemous, indicate a reaction to a state which functions as a failed political savior. The youths carry out carefully orchestrated turf wars within the decaying slums of *Ir-Ganim*. The leadership of the neighborhood gangs uncannily mirrors a model of political authority derived from scripture. In one of the climatic events in the novel's first section, David Ben-Shushan, the commander of one of the juvenile armies, punishes a boy who neglects his duties as a guard of the camp. Ben-Shushan commands the boy to drink by urine from his penis and Yochai, one of the main protagonists, will later be framed for this act. Ben-Shushan, a young theocrat, "draws his inspiration from the *Tanakh*," explaining to his underlings that his judgment is based on a commentary of Rashi's in which Eliezer takes hold of Abraham's penis. Other seemingly lewd acts of the children express a failure to perform selfhood in the no-man's-land between the degraded customs of their parents and a form of nationalism their parents consider profane. The single form of blasphemy available to the protagonists is an elemental one with which they assert themselves using the only means left to them: the bare life of their bodily fluids and biological movements. The children's fraught coming-of-age and their often tragic confusion between Sephardi custom and Zionist secular-nationalism refuses to conform to a *masorti* position truncated from the Muslim-Jewish symbiosis.

CHAPTER 2: DVIR TZUR AND THE FAILURE OF REDEMPTION BY TEXTILE

The second chapter will position Dvir Tzur (b. Jerusalem, 1977) as the most coherently *masorti* of the authors in this dissertation. Tzur draws upon mystical and messianic themes to portray exile as potentially reparative, rather than as a defective condition in need of repair or a consequence of punishment. Tzur's work interrogates tensions around secularity from within the framework of Jewish national sovereignty and through an allusive engagement with canonical modern Hebrew literature. Tzur bears witness to an attempt to "save" the Zionist project, though his protagonist's solution ultimately fails to do so.

His protagonist, Moshe-Efraim, is possibly a delusional sufferer of Jerusalem Syndrome, but may also be the inheritor of a messianic lineage which originates with the medieval Kurdish messianic claimant David Alroy. Moshe-Efraim and his companion, the Wandering Jew, undertake the project of a mystic, redemptive "weaving." Their fantastical project is based on simultaneously on the *kaporet* (the covering of the ark in the ancient Jerusalem Temple) and on the Labor Zionist settlement in Palestine. The construction of the ark covering requires the guidance of the Wandering Jew traveling through the time and space of the diaspora—though the novel leaves open the possibility that they may be moving only within Moshe's troubled mind. It also implies that Moshe may have been driven insane by the contradiction of existing as a mystical messiah after the attempted redemption of the negation of exile.

The main premises of the narrative embody the critical liminality that Yadgar associates with traditionism insofar as they involve connections to Jewish themes, texts, and practices that are excluded from the Zionist investment in the Bible as an allusive resource. These themes and modes, frequently mystical, operate against the grain of the nationalist Zionist version of redemption embodied by the Labor Zionist *chalutzim* (Jewish settlers), whom Moshe-Efraim

regards as “founders” of his weaving. Their program of *dat ha-avodah* (“the religion of labor”), a redemptive ideology in which the *chalutzim* redeem themselves through work on the land, is portrayed an unsustainable redemptive ideology with a legacy of catastrophe.

In *Inverted Letters*, the messianic metaphor appears in the aspect of apocalypse and catastrophe. The invocation of the *chalutz* characters opens up a chasm between a lofty vision and a punishing everyday reality, personified in Tzur’s text by an endlessly demanding earth. The novel explores the resulting legacy of disillusion among the subsequent generations of *chalutzim* as well as the erasure and denial that characterize the lives of those considered outsiders to this narrative, including both the Palestinian groundskeeper of the asylum in which the protagonist is housed and two elderly Holocaust survivors subject to intrusive investigations of horrifying memories.

The premise of the weaving, which aspires to be both a modern Jewish settlement and an ancient artifact associated with Judgement Day, evinces the hybrid political character associated with traditions. So too does the process of anagram suggested by the novel’s original Hebrew title, *Moshe B’Hipukh Otiot*³⁸ (Weaving and anagram are processes that the medieval kabbalist Joseph Gikatilla relates to medicine. Conceiving of the Biblical text and its exegetical material as a weaving, Gikatilla explains how combinations of letters act like a drug which leads the mystic to greater understanding. For Moshe-Efraim, Tzur’s narrator protagonist, *hipukhei otiot*, the inverted letters or anagrams of the book’s title, are as not as much a drug as symptoms of delusions of grandeur and of confusion, albeit productive ones. As discussed in the chapter, *hipukhei otiot* (or *sikulei otiot*) play different functions in Tzur’s text: the title implies the messianic claimant’s

38. This title is difficult to translate, but means something akin to “Moshe Anagrammed is Ha-shem.” “Ha-shem” means literally “the name” and is a veiled reference to the divine, in accordance with the traditional Jewish prohibition against writing God’s name.

possible delusion of grandeur. The chapter headings often contain wordplay. One which contains a metaphor of the Labor Zionist *chalutzim* as an unstoppable wave is titled “*shovrei chofim*” (“breakshore”) instead of *shover galim* (“breakwater”) suggesting the destruction wrought Labor Zionist settlers in their quest to recreate humanity. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Tzur’s allusive strategy as it relates to the theories of the Tel Aviv School of Poetics. It calls for expanding an understanding of allusion not limited to a bifurcation of a “secular” evoking text and a “sacred” alluding text.

CHAPTER 3: HAVIVA PEDAYA, “KABBALISTIC CULTURAL CRITICISMM” AND THE “WANDERING EAST”

Chapter three will demonstrate how Haviva Pedaya’s recourse to kabbalistic Jewish commentaries and Sephardi-Jewish historiography challenge the Eurocentric, allegedly secular norms of modern Hebrew literature. It will also show that the continuity Pedaya ascribes to *masortiyut* is partly reinvented from within the framework of Zionism. This chapter will demonstrate that though Pedaya challenges Eurocentric biases of modern Hebrew literature, she nonetheless portrays Arabic through tropes of loss and diminishment in a manner that occasionally limits the polyphonic qualities she champions.

Pedaya’s collection of autobiographical essays about living in the Negev city of Be’er Sheva, *B’Ayn Ha-khatul* (“The Eye of the Cat”; 2008) shows how the process of development of peripheral Israeli areas assumes the form of seeming progress which hides destruction. Pedaya, a poet and scholar of Kabbalah, shows how the Hebrew names given by the state to building projects in the Negev/Naqab desert, though they suggest the redemption of the land, connote a process of harmful development. She writes about her newfound ability to “see” the unofficial capital of the desert from the perspective of stray cats.

Pedaya's mother, whose family moved to Jerusalem from Baghdad in the 1920s, is descended from a long line of Iraqi-Jewish Kabbalists. Her father emigrated to Israel from Iraq as a young man, and she describes a deep attachment to the Arabic spoken in her home. According to Shaul Setter, Pedaya conceives of the Hebrew language as containing an Arabic unconscious and moreover, experiences two disparate versions of the tongue.³⁹ One is the Zoharic, mystical Hebrew of her late grandfather, the Kabbalist Yehuda Fetaya, and the other is a Hebrew "so full of the deposits and sediments of Zionism" ("*ma'le mishka'im tzioni'im*") that it imposes an excessive weight on the language. She describes a kind of secularization ("*chilun*") which is partial, but still contains the residual burden of theological charge which reverses the meaning of words.⁴⁰

For Pedaya, the process of wandering, embodied by the stray cats of Be'er Sheva, redeems through its capacity to reimagine the relationship between territory and the semiotics of place. Pedaya's text suggests that language itself is a terrain, and that cats speak this language of place in a way that allows them to wander within statically redeemed territory: "There is something unyielding in the cat since it is an animal of a place and not of a master. It is like a man who doesn't totally yield to his government and keeps himself as a stranger." For Pedaya, the autonomy of the cat runs counter to the notion of sovereignty over territory. In line with this displacement of sovereignty, she poses a question to the *rishonim*, the founders of the Yishuv, about why they even bothered coming: "Why have you come to profane/secularize the land of

39. Shaul Setter, "Modes of Transmission: Haviva Pedaya and the Future-Past of Exilic Collectives," from *The Departure from History: Writing at the Ends of Literature in Israel/Palestine*, Doctoral Dissertation, UC Berkeley, 2012.

40. Nurith Aviv, dir. *Leshon Kodesh, Sfat Chol* ("Holy Tongue, Language of Sand"), Israel and France, 2008. Film.

earth into a desert of man?" (*madua batem v't'challelu eretz adama l midbar adam?*). Her use of the word "*l'chalel*" implies both "to profane" and "to secularize" (the Hebrew *khilun*, or secularization, has the same root as *l'chalel*, or to profane). According to this view, redemption becomes a justification for carrying out destruction in the name of progress. Pedaya characterizes this false notion of progress as a linear history that sanctions the exploitation of the land, and thus violently interrupts the "cyclical perception" (*histaklut makhzorit*) of the traditional life of the Bedouins who lived on the land before development began.

Pedaya decries the rape of the natural landscape by the development of Be'er Sheva, built on an old Turkish market and Bedouin village. She laments the displacement of the native Bedouins, whose villages have been replaced with buildings, roads, and concrete and describes the city as a palimpsest made up of layers of colonial encounter. In her telling, the Ottoman sultan, influenced by Haussmann's construction of wide-open boulevards that allowed Napoleon to surveil the Parisian streets, tries to have such a design implemented in Be'er Sheva. However, the engineers and architects skew the streets to ensure that the mosque faces Mecca, thereby thwarting the sultan's plans.

This chapter also shows how Pedaya juxtaposes the Hebrew of Kabbalah and the Psalms with the secularized language used by Israeli state bureaucracy, demonstrating the reversal of progress hidden by state language: "The same way the creeks fill up in the winter can be dangerous so can be salvation" (10). To demonstrate the destruction committed in the name of progress, Pedaya recalls the traditional context of places and names in scripture, places that are being destroyed in the name of development. She quotes from the Psalms ("*shuva ha-shem et shivtaynu, k'afikim ba negev*") to point out the reversal between the vision of scripture and the actual outcome: a dried-up *afik*, or stream. Pedaya's narrator considers this state development of

the Negev to violate what she sees as the circular logic of nature and spirituality, noting that they “built a modern city that, in the name of secular progress, pushed out the native Bedouin in the Negev (15). Pedaya describes Kheria, a garbage dump in which trash is burned, as if it makes men into trash. This area of memory, *mikhzor mitparnes me avono*, is also an attempt to erase the past in order to instill a new memory, the past functioning like compost that enriches the present, implying that suffering is part of self-understanding. The state, she asserts, wants to forget the past rather than live in cycles. Pedaya thus uses traditional tropes and figures and allies herself with them to show irony, rather than deflating or reversing them in a manner that might be considered “secular.”

Pedaya describes the Negev in terms of mystical conceptions of territory, providing a foil for linear, statist conceptions of space that correspond to the rise of the free market and the decline of the Israeli welfare state (*medina revacha*). Pedaya describes the city of Be’er Sheva as “circles within circles like the layers of an onion,” mirroring medieval Spanish Talmudist Ya’akov Ben Sheshet’s description of the cosmos as the circular rings of onion. She speculates that he may have been influenced by the circular city of early modern Baghdad, also known as the City of Peace.

Pedaya recounts the Midrashic homily of Jeremiah comforting the mother of Zion who has lost all seven of her children, symbolic of the destruction of Jerusalem, a metaphor of the land of Zion as a grieving mother. But Pedaya does not invoke the problematic trope of the woman-as-land. Rather she juxtaposes a Biblical account of the destruction of Zion with an account of the present-day destruction of the Negev by development projects and the displacement of trash from the center of Israel to the periphery. She recalls a biblical account of the destruction of Zion and an attempt to remedy this destruction, a foil to *shlilat ha-galut* and the modern political return to Zion, enacting a wandering that questions territorial sovereignty as a means of redemption.

CHAPTER 1:

ALBERT SWISSA'S *AQUD*: BLASPHEMING THE SECULAR STATE AND CHALLENGING "MASORTI" RECLAIMING

Albert Swissa's groundbreaking, richly digressive, and grotesquely sensual novel *Aqud* [Bound] (1990) challenges recent postsecular framings of Mizrahi identity.⁴¹ The novel portrays the dissolution of Moroccan-Jewish communal life after its immigrant protagonists arrive in the peripheral slums of Jerusalem. This chapter will discuss how the paradoxical marginalization of these Jews in the "Jewish state" brings into relief contradictions underlying Zionist secular nationalism in the wake of David Ben-Gurion's policies of *Mamlakhtiyut* (roughly translated as "statism,") established in the 1950s. Swissa's narrative echoes the way in which Yaacov Yadgar, one of the theorists of postsecular Mizrahi *masortiyut* (traditionism), deploys the flexible, reflexive relationship of some Mizrahim towards tradition to criticize Jewish national sovereignty. However, in contrast to the positive reclaiming of identity described by Yadgar, Swissa's narrative refuses the interpellation of a *masorti* position after its dechirement from the Muslim environment.

Aqud retrospectively describes the collapse of the communal and inner lives of Moroccan Jewish immigrants in the 1970s, following their arrival in Ir-Ganim Gimmel (City of Gardens C), a neighborhood of crowded developments outside Jerusalem.⁴² Swissa's novel connects itself

41. Albert Swissa, *Aqud* [The bound] (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad, 1990). In this chapter, I use the translation of Ramon Stern, unpublished, by permission of the translator, as well as my own translations; the latter are indicated in the text. All page numbers are from the Hebrew edition.

42. Swissa himself was brought to Ir-Ganim Gimmel as a child from Tiznit, a village outside Casablanca, in 1962.

linguistically to Arabness through its occasional Judeo-Berber and Moroccan-Arabic dialogue. The work also captures the fleeting traces of a degraded Moroccan Muslim-Jewish symbiosis as they dissolve into what Baruch Kimmerling has called the “giant mincing machine” of the Zionist melting pot (*kur ha-hitukh*), one of the policies of Ben-Gurion’s statism.⁴³ Swissa reveals the myth of this ideology of assimilation, showing that it erased the last traces of a the Jewish practices which came about in the Islamic world. Nissim Leon, following Shelomo Dov Goitein, has described the interdependence between Jews and Islamic culture as far more comprehensive than shared “religious identity.” Rather, it comprised a holistic set of shared cultural norms, legal practices, customs, joint resistance against shared colonizers, and juridico-theological structures.

In capturing the last vestiges of a fading Muslim-Jewish symbiosis within its critique of Zionist secular nationalism, *Aqud* suggests the limitations of a postsecular form of *masorti* identity with regard to recovering the culture and memory associated with the Islamic-Jewish past in Morocco.⁴⁴ The novel seems, paradoxically, to capture the of erasure of the last vestiges of Muslim-Jewish symbiosis in a manner that momentarily preserves “traditionism” from being co-opted in the present.

While the so-called “transit camp literature” associated with the first-generation of Mizrahi authors such as Shimon Ballas and Sami Michael looked to the setting of the *ma’abarah*⁴⁵ as the site of a defiant communist struggle between Iraqi-Jewish immigrants and

43. Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society, and the Military* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 97.

44. As Lital Levy has pointed out, this is not a closed, transparent literary category, but one with a connection, established largely through language and memory, to the transnational Arab-Jewish past, which often challenges the monolingual, Eurocentric norms of modern Hebrew literature. [Lital Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing Between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 192].

45. This refers to the transit camps in which new immigrants to Israel were placed upon their arrival.

Israeli authorities, *Aqud* recounts the marginalized world of dingy B'nei Brak yeshivas and makeshift, bomb-shelter synagogues.⁴⁶ The form of marginalization portrayed by Swissa is not only economic and cultural, but also spiritual and existential. Rather than engage in outright protest in the manner of Ballas's and Michael's transit camp residents, Swissa's characters suffer abandonment, abuse, and implied suicide, calling into question how a Sephardi traditional life so degraded by the framework of secularist Zionism could be actively and productively revived.

In an excerpt from Ammiel Alcalay's anthology *Keys to the Garden*, Swissa has described how this gap between expectation and realization presented itself in the life of his own strictly observant father, who shares many features with Pazuelo (both were strictly observant of mitzvot and both had to give up careers as dentists upon arrival in Israel): "The word 'Zion' that my father knew had little in common and often much that was at odds with Zionism. Ideology, revolution, and policy, as the secular government of Israel then understood them, were essentially foreign to my parents."⁴⁷ Where Swissa's parents had anticipated migration as providing a longed-for end to exile, they instead faced the "devastating collapse of all that had been dear to them in life. All too soon my parents discovered that they and all their kind were pariahs, ostracized from the economic, social, cultural, and—worst of all—spiritual life of the nascent State of Israel."⁴⁸ Pazuelo's lament, like the ostracism Swissa describes his parents having experienced, speaks not only to the reversal of the poles of exile and homeland entailed in the linear Zionist narrative of return, but suggests a complete rift with the Jewish practices and outlooks which arose in tandem with Islam in Morocco. The novel portrays the tragic consequences of this disconnect in the lives

46. B'nei Brak is a Tel Aviv suburb with a large Orthodox population.

47. Swissa, "Escaping the Cauldron Unscathed," 188.

48. *Ibid.*, 188.

of its characters, conveying mutual hostility and confusion between the generation of Moroccan children and their parents. It also shows the disconnect between the Moroccan immigrants and the Ashkenazi-dominated culture in which they find themselves. The newcomers are often marginalized, frustrated, and alienated, and simultaneously perplexed by and disdainful of their new surroundings.

While the Israeli state demands that immigrants ally themselves with either a “modern,” secular stance or an Orthodox Ashkenazi one,⁴⁹ the Islamic context familiar to Moroccan Jews had allowed them to hold the traditional and modern in tandem. In light of such deracination, any expression of Moroccan Jewishness would be a kind of reclaiming within the framework of Zionism rather than a form of continuity in the manner suggested by Meir Buzaglo. *Aqud*, in part, highlights the loss of the Jewish-Muslim symbiosis familiar to these communities in their first “exile.” Nissim Leon draws a connection between “those described popularly as ‘secular Muslims’ and the Mizrahim who are described as ‘*masorti*.’”⁵⁰ As Leon has shown, the “traditionism” associated with Mizrahi Jews should not be considered as a failure to conform to European forms of modernity nor analyzed in terms of Western modes of secularization. Rather, what practices and outlooks among this population arose out of the distinctive process of secularization in the Muslim world, in which faith and secularization were not contradictory. As Leon details, modernization in the Islamic context does not entail a complete abandonment of the precepts of Islam. However, upon their arrival in Israel, Mizrahim found that any association with Muslim culture was designated by the Israeli state as part of the “culture of the enemy.” Mizrahim

49. According to Nissim Leon, the ultra-orthodox Shas movement, associated with orthodox Israeli Jews from Islamic lands, is a variant of European Orthodoxy.

50. Nissim Leon, “The Secular Origins of Mizrahi Traditionalism,” *Israel Studies* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 22–42, 37.

were forced either into religious or national-secular institutions, denying the hybrid position of a religious outlook that was neither Orthodox nor secular.

Aqud is divided into three distinct sections with overlapping characters, mostly recent immigrants from Agadir and Casablanca, all taking place in the same peripheral but richly rendered slum. Each focuses on the aimless, often violent misadventures of four neighborhood children—Yochai, Beber, Yvonne, and Ayush—and alternates between accounts of scuffles between neighborhood gangs, incidents of incest and sexual violence, and the philosophical musings, confusions, and fears of these children during their deeply fraught coming-of-age.

In the failure of the child protagonists to maintain a separation between the sacred and the secular, *tahor* (pure) and *tameh* (impure), the pious and the blasphemous merge, as the characters can neither assimilate to the “merry mob of native-born” (83) children around them nor continue the laws and traditions of their parents. Their failure to assemble either form of subjectivity reflects the erasure of culture, language, and belief entailed in *kibbutz galuyot* (the ingathering of exiles) and *mizug galuyot* (the blending of exiles). Both of these concepts are transposed from messianic vocabulary into the national-secular idiom of Israeli state-building. These ideologies are portrayed by the novel not as promoting a melting pot, but rather as a form of eviscerating Muslim-Jewish symbiosis. Commenting upon the loss entailed in this supposed assimilation, Swissa notes: “In the cauldron of the generations that founded the state, whole cultures melted into oblivion, were eroded, vanished—life experiences, gestures, customs, sights, smells sounds, languages, people—all, among the creatures of my childhood, sank slowly into the sea of modernity before my eyes, nothing remaining of them but scant archival shards of folklore.”⁵¹

51. Albert Swissa, “Escaping the Cauldron Unscathed,” trans. Martha Weinstein, in *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writing*, ed. Ammiel Alcalay (San Francisco: City Lights, 1996), 188.

Aqud can be read as an unromantic attempt to capture fleeting traces of a communal life utterly rejected by new surroundings. Ironically, its protagonists are marginalized by a Jewish state which supports either Orthodox or national-secular institutions. Swissa is one generation older than Jerusalem-born Dvir Tzur (see chapter 2), who descends from several Jerusalem-born generations on his mother's side of the family; unlike Tzur, Swissa experienced immigration from the village of Tiznit, Morocco to Ir-Ganim as a child. His novel portrays the consequences of the break from the Muslim-Jewish symbiosis in Morocco through what literary scholar Ramon Stern has aptly called a "radical aesthetic experiment grounded in diasporic Arab migrant identity."⁵²

In Swissa's text, this rewriting of dominant collective memory reverses poles of exile and return, rejecting the notion of Israel as a natural homeland for the Mizrahi Jews it claimed to redeem.⁵³ Swissa unsentimentally commemorates the last vestiges of the Muslim-Jewish symbiosis in a way that challenges their recent, intra-Jewish reclaiming. The novel's fraught recuperation of the psychic and communal recollection echoes the rewriting of dominant narratives of memory entailed in what Svetlana Boym has called "reflective nostalgia." Boym distinguishes this dynamic longing for home from "restorative nostalgia," its nationalistic opposite. While restorative nostalgia suggests the acceptance of a ready-made narrative of collective memory, reflective nostalgia relinquishes a sense of homecoming, and instead:

thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—
wistfully, ironically, desperately. Suspended between past origin

52. Ramon Stern, "Geographies of Escape: Diasporic Difference and Arab Ethnicity Re-examined," PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013, p. 85.

53. Interestingly, Boym notes (7) that Israel is the only modern country in which nostalgia remains a medical diagnosis. It was originally a medical term coined by Johannes Hofer to diagnose distortions in longing for home among soldiers, sailors, and students.

and present destination, reflective nostalgia ... does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once ... this typology of nostalgia allows us to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory.⁵⁴

A LIMITED MULTICULTURALISM: MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE IN THE 1980s.

Aqud was published on the heels of a modest “multicultural” turn in Hebrew literature in the 1980s, spurred by the what is often called the “upheaval” (*ha-mahapakh*) of the 1977 Israeli election. This election—in which Menachem Begin was elected, largely because of support from Mizrahim—ended three continuous decades of rule by the Labor Party and was widely regarded as a consolidation of Mizrahi political power. Many critics of Hebrew literature, among them Hannan Hever, credit the (similarly limited) newfound political capital of Mizrahim with opening the literary canon to Arab and non-Ashkenazic voices. The 1980s saw the publication of Anton Shammas’s *Arabesques*, a multigenerational, transnational chronicle of a Palestinian-Christian family which, through a *mise-en-abyme* structure, denaturalized the relationship of identity of Hebrew with Jewishness. Though Iraqi authors Shimon Ballas and Sami Michael began publishing in Hebrew in the 1960s and 1970s after switching from Arabic, their writing received increased critical and scholarly attention in the 1980s. Nonetheless, there were restrictions to the development of multiculturalism in Hebrew literature in the 1980s. As literary critic Dror Mishani

54. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xviii.

notes, many major works of Hebrew literature in this period still displayed ethnic stereotypes. The persistence of these stereotypes bolsters Mishani's claim that their inclusion in the canon did not completely challenge Ashkenazi cultural hegemony.⁵⁵ Swissa, along with Uziel Hazzan, was one of the first published Moroccan-Jewish authors in Israel/Palestine. That his work was met with great consternation from critics arguably supports Mishani's argument that the supposed multicultural turn in 1980s Israeli literature was in fact quite restricted.

Aqud was widely criticized and misunderstood by the literary establishment, though Swissa received a Bernstein Prize for the novel (awarded to promising Hebrew fiction writers aged fifty and under). As Yerach Gover explains, the novel "was said to be sensationalistic, culturally irrelevant, and without significant context." Critics considered Swissa's style as "pretentious, imitative, even coquettish, and ... enveloped in an Amazonian flowery rhetoric."⁵⁶ Indeed, Swissa's lofty, highly descriptive Hebrew is the antithesis of *ivrit razah* (thin Hebrew) or the minimalist aesthetic of the *dal ha-chomer* style characteristic of much of Hebrew literature from the 1960s to the 1980s.⁵⁷ Most of the criticism pertained to the perceived incongruity between Swissa's use of rich, highly original prose and the environment the novel described, one generally considered too impoverished for such lofty treatment. Critical responses to this aspect of the novel were sometimes misguided and often offensive. The late *Ha'aretz* television and culture columnist Heda Boshes absurdly likened the "oriental richness" of Swissa's prose to the

55. Dror Mishani, *B'chol Ha-Inyan Ha-Mizrachi Yesh Ezech Absurd* [The ethnic unconscious] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006). Hannan Hever takes issue with Mishani's argument, explaining that appropriation is nonetheless a form of change, and one which did lead to a continuation of variegated voices within in Hebrew fiction. See Hannan Hever, "Ha-kol Ha-Mizrachi Hitbi'ah, B'chol zot, et Chotamo" [The Mizrahi voice made its mark, after all], *Ha'aretz*, March 22, 2006, www.haaretz.co.il/1.1093348.

56. Yerach Gover, *Zionism: The Limits of Moral Discourse in Israeli Hebrew Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 151.

57. Stern, "Geographies of Escape," 94.

rhetoric of Saddam Hussein, noting that both Swissa and Hussein use language in the manner of “those who do not recognize the value of the individual [and] clearly do not know the intricacies of the human soul.”⁵⁸

SUMMARY OF *AQUD*: THE ABYSS BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND ASSIMILATION

The first section of the novel, eponymously titled “Bound” revolves around Yochai, who takes the blame for forcing a boy in his gang to drink urine straight from the penis of their young ringleader (one of the many sacrifices referenced by the work’s title, which references the binding of Isaac).⁵⁹ Following the incident, Yochai’s father, Mr. Pazuelo, the venerable cantor of the community, transfers him from the Ashkenazi-run yeshiva in the prestigious Bayit Ve-gan neighborhood to a Sephardi school in the largely *haredi* town of B’nei Brak. Pazuelo, who was forced to relinquish his dentistry practice in the new land to become a *shohet* (a ritual slaughterer), disdains the Ashkenazi culture of his son’s special education yeshiva and was secretly pleased when its Yiddish-speaking headmasters failed to discipline the boy. Pazuelo bemoans his fellow immigrants when they fail to assert themselves either in front of their unruly children or in the face of the Ashkenazi religious institutions. But the Sephardi school also fails to “reform” Yochai. Signaling *Aqud*’s preoccupation with both abandonment and disturbing forms of sexuality, the section closes with Yochai escaping from the new yeshiva into the arms of a lecherous old Polish man who “likes brown boys” (17) and molests him in a movie theater.

58. Gil Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 106–7.

59. As will be elaborated later, Hochberg and Stern have both perceptively noted that *Aqud* ironizes its reference to the *akeidah* (the biblical binding of Isaac) by rewriting the dominant nationalist militaristic Israeli myth of the soldier-sons dying upon the altar of the nation.

In the second section of the novel, “Blessed Orphanhood,” the representation of parental authority intensifies. This part follows Beber, another neighborhood child, his pugnacious father, Mr. Sultan, and the orphaned Yvonne, whom Beber mistakenly believes is his orphaned cousin. Like Yochai, Beber also runs away, only to be brutally tortured by one of the neighborhood gangs as Sultan looks on, perversely glad to see his son take a beating. This constitutes yet another reversal of the sacrifice of Isaac alluded to by the novel’s title: rather than giving thanks for being saved from perpetrating violence on his son, the father approves of the son’s victimization. Beber and Yvonne’s incestuous encounters are interspersed with Sultan’s flashbacks to his checkered past in Agadir. It is revealed that Sultan fathered Yvonne out of wedlock with his wife’s sister, the “Black Olive of Agadir,” making Yvonne Beber’s half-sister. The text intimates that the Black Olive, Yvonne’s mother, may have died at Sultan’s hands (42). In the present, the car-smuggling Sultan is disillusioned, humiliated by his inability to make clean money in the Promised Land. Sultan, described as an “ancient neighborhood dweller covered in the dust of development projects” (35), feels greatly inferior to his visiting relatives who have emigrated from Morocco to France. The disappointment he feels when comparing himself to his French relatives poses one of the text’s many challenges to the myth of Israel as a natural, redemptive “homeland.”

Sultan—unlike Pazuelo and Monsanegor, the father in the final section—is an atrophied patriarch, defeated by the bureaucracy and nationalist sentiment of his new surroundings. This disillusion may be what drives him to sexually abuse Ayush, another of the neighborhood boys. The least pious of the fathers in the book, Sultan brawls with an Arab vendor rather than participate in the quorum for *minha* (the afternoon prayers). Swissa’s earlier training as a mime shows most clearly in this section through his careful attention to the mechanics of Sultan’s boxing, both real and imagined, and to the experimentation of Beber and Yvonne, who share an

incestuous encounter “like two wounded, panting wild animals” (79). The narrative then flashes forward four years, to 1978. Yvonne and Sultan, reunited, glimpse Beber engaged in criminal activity, and Sultan enigmatically blesses Beber’s state of “blessed orphanhood” (77). The section’s paradoxical title, “Blessed Orphanhood,” suggests the terrifying freedom of the children of Ir-Ganim Gimmel—their bizarre, sometimes violent rituals, and their explorations of sexuality.

As the novel progresses, it increasingly reads like a mystical inner monologue, an incoherent drift of events untouched by causality. The last and most ambiguous section, “The Deceitful Attempt of a Fading Memory,” takes place in the weeks leading up to the bar mitzvah of the fearful Ayush, in Fall 1974. The “fading memory” of the section’s title refers to Ayush’s recurring vision of his near kidnapping, in Morocco before his emigration, by his beloved Muslim nanny. The memory is evoked by one of the many disembodied cries of the text: the uncanny call of his Jewish mother in the Moroccan market square reverberates in the present, bustling streets of Ir Ganim, filled with neighborhood ice and soda water vendors, calling Ayush back to his identification with the Muslim boy he feels he almost became. Ayush cuts class, barter his bus fare for movie tickets, and romps naked with his sister Kati in the garden of a Holocaust survivor named Gersha, while slipping into hallucinations. In the book’s otherworldly, apocalyptic ending, Ayush appears to commit suicide by rolling himself in a cart down the slope of Costa Rica Street into kabbalistic infinity (this is also known as the *Ein-Sof*, which is the Zoharic name of the divine).

In her incisive reading of the novel, Gil Hochberg notes the ambiguity of its allusion, implicit in the title *Aqud*, to *akeidat Yitzhak*, the binding of Isaac. The novel’s treatment of the concept of sacrifice is deeply complicated by its suspensions and reversals of the biblical myth. Hochberg notes that the work refuses to reproduce the well-known nationalist allegory of the sons

willing to die on the altar of the nation.⁶⁰ Ramon Stern also addresses the nationalist trope of sacrifice, noting that the novel does not conform to the 1980s trend of alluding to the binding of Isaac as part of a counter-current of rebellion.⁶¹ Indeed, its use of the binding of Isaac is anything but a straightforward allegory. The terror of the possibility of sacrifice is conveyed through the panicked confusion of Yochai, Beber, and Ayush as they identify with the vulnerable figure of Isaac. In another rewriting of the dominant national myth of sacrifice (in which the nearly-slaughtered Isaac stands in for the sons on the altar of the nation) Ishmael is also, figuratively, a key source of identification in the story, particularly for Ayush.

DYNAMICS OF RESISTANCE VERSUS ABJECTION

Swissa's unfortunate lack of widespread acceptance may lie partly in his refusal to grant access to the inner lives of his characters in a coherent manner. Rather, as Hochberg has noted, he confronts readers with the abject material and social conditions of their world through obsession with their bodily fluids—excrement, urine, vomit, blood, filth—and their acts of violation, insanity, sexual abuse, and incest.

Gover characterizes the base acts of the children in the book as forms of resistance that reveal their underlying condition of oppression.⁶² For him, the bawdy hijinks of the child protagonists (defecating in forests, engaging in bloody neighborhood fights, and performing entire sequences of American western films in pantomime) constitute a kind of authentic bodily language that opposes dominant nationalist discourse: "It is precisely Swissa's refusal to treat the

60. Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition*, 98.

61. Stern, "Geographies of Escape," 85.

62. Gover, *Zionism*, 151.

victims as abject, as ‘on the brink of being animal’ that gives his novel its power to disturb even the Zionist liberal and to expose the racialism that lies at the heart of Israeli Zionism.”⁶³

In contrast, Hochberg argues that the child protagonists are not at all redeemed but perform their status as culturally and politically abject with regards to dominant Israeli culture. She provides a crucial corrective to Gover’s notion that the characters achieve some kind of resistance against the dominant order. According to her reading, *Aqud* deliberately alienates readers rather than conforms to a ready-made minority position. For her, Swissa’s narrative, by refusing coherence and legibility, “escapes the conventional representation of the so-called ethnic problem [by] animating the pervasive workings of (ethnic/racial) abjection that are involved in the production of both the legitimate national Israeli subject and his ‘failed counterpart’: the ethnically marked abject-being” (101). Rather than merely resist subjugation, Swissa’s text questions the underlying mechanisms that mark and police the boundary of hegemonic forms of political and social identity. Hochberg interprets Aqud’s preoccupation with bodily fluids, licentiousness, and insanity as a poetic strategy informed by Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection. Kristeva views the expulsion of the abject material as the act that marks the boundary between pure self and contaminated other. For Hochberg, the abject status of the immigrant characters confronts this dominance with its indecipherability and refuses to be either assimilated or expelled.

63. Ibid., 153.

“EXILE IN THE HOLY LAND ITSELF”: THE FAILURE OF INGATHERING AND THE RIFT WITH THE MUSLIM WORLD

The degraded world of Sephardi ritual represented in *Aqud* could hardly provide the seeds for an alternative Jewish political program in the manner proposed by Buzaglo and Yadgar. Rather than depict the continuity of transmission that Buzaglo ascribes to *masoret*, Swissa’s narrative suggests that the Israeli landscape produces a degraded Moroccan communal life shrouded in an aura of threatening vulgarity. In the novel, the Moroccan minyan meets underground, in a bomb-shelter converted to a synagogue, and the community lives in prefabricated asbestos shacks⁶⁴ built en masse in the 1950s and 60s, to accommodate the influx of immigrants from the large immigration wave of Mizrahim in the 1950s (the *Ha-alayah Ha-hamonit*). These impoverished spaces emphasize the disappointment entailed in the condition of internal exile described in the novel. In the book’s first section, Yochai recalls his father, Pazuelo, the lay cantor, faltering upon the momentous occasion of leading his congregation in the *piyyut* (liturgical poem) “Et Sha’arei Ratzon,” part of the Sephardi Rosh Hashana liturgy that recounts the binding of Isaac. Pazuelo finds himself inexplicably unable to continue after his “words are interrupted by sharp nasal twangs” (10, my translation), his unexplained crisis suggesting an interruption in the spiritual life of the community. At that moment, fear of his father’s occupation as a ritual slaughterer overtakes Yochai, who is gripped by a terrifying, literalistic identification with the biblical Isaac. Yochai glimpses the abyss of infinity, a mystical motif that runs throughout the novel; the abyss will later provide Ayush with his only escape from his fears of coming-of-age as a Jew.

As Pazuelo delights in being rid of the Ashkenazi rabbis who ran Yochai’s first yeshiva, he voices the unforeseen results of the collective desire to escape the condition of “exile”: “And we,

64. These are referred to in the text as “*tromiyim*,” an Israeli government neologism coined from the suffix *trom*, meaning “pre.”

he thought, a confounded mob innocent to the point of sickness, wanted, out of a stupidity both in our hearts and skulls and a blindness we could not grasp, to escape from exile, [and have found ourselves in] exile in the Holy Land itself” (14). The Ashkenazi rabbis of Yochai’s initial yeshiva speak among themselves in a Yiddish that is opaque to the learned Pazuelo, only one of the many indications of his condition of exile. The novel portrays the disjuncture between the aspiration of *shivat Tzion* (the return to Zion), and the political reality and its mapping of the traditional belief in redemption (which holds that the Jewish people will be returned to the Holy Land with the coming of the messiah) onto modern political territory.

Like Dvir Tzur’s *Inverted Letters*, the subject of the next chapter, Swissa’s text contains language, themes, and allusions drawn from the Mishna and kabbalah. But unlike Tzur, who has stated that any connection to Arabic for him would be actively and deliberately acquired, Swissa makes Berber lullabies, expressions, and proverbs in Moroccan Arabic, and phrases in French and Aramaic a prominent feature of the narrative as a means of recalling the ties of his characters to the Muslim world.⁶⁵ This polyglot world is yet another reminder of Morocco, where Arabic, Berber, and French are all official languages, and stands in contrast to the Hebrew monolingualism of most Israeli fiction. In accordance with Hochberg’s insight that much of the novel’s signification occurs in the Lacanian pre-verbal register of the Real, we should read the text’s many disembodied cries as yet another language represented by Swissa. As mentioned previously, Ayush recalls a memory in which he is called from the *mellah* (the Jewish quarter in Casablanca) to the *medina* (the public domain), in manner separate not only from its spatial origin, but also disoriented in time, creating the sense of a kind of Muslim uncanny.

65. Personal communication with Dvir Tzur.

Swissa narrates the clash between the Sephardi customs of the parent generation and the rites and values of the state of Israel, revealing the ideology of the *kur ha-hitukh* (melting pot) and its particular Israeli variant, *mizug galuyot* (the integration of exiles). The Israeli melting pot was not a soft cultural phenomenon, as it was in the United States, but an official government doctrine promulgated by David Ben-Gurion. It sought to preserve the ethos of the Jewish settlers in the Yishuv (pre-state Palestine) during the mass influx of immigrants following the establishment of statehood in 1948. According to Kimmerling, this creed sought to “firmly fix the original Yishuv culture as the only legitimate model within the collectivity and as a source of cultural capital ... [in order to] create a uniform new Israeli person and personality.”⁶⁶ The range of attitudes toward tradition held by the parent protagonists of the book clashes with this uniform cultural ethos, a representation of the political ideology of the selectively secularized New Jew. An example of the rift between traditionist outlook and secular ideology in the book occurs as Ayush’s father, Mr. Monsanegor, recites the Tikkun Chatzot, the “midnight rectification” prayer mourning the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, in order “to grant the whole of the People of Israel atonement while they had gone to sleep instead of learning Torah” (111).

In Israel, where “Zion” instills a separatist logic between Jews and Arabs, the traditional world of *Aqud*’s parent generation is degraded, confined to expression in makeshift synagogues in bomb shelters. The novel traces the legacy of this marginalization as it reemerges in the generation of the children, who have no ideal (religious or political) remaining to blaspheme against. The children are left to suffer the double failure of the parents’ impossible conversion to secular Judaism and the state’s revulsion towards the religious dimension of Sephardic Jewish

66. Kimmerling, *Invention and Decline*, 75.

practice, treating it with disgust as if it were the bloody chicken head pulled out of Eliyahu “the retard’s” pocket in synagogue, disturbing the sacredness of a democracy that aspires to be secular.

PERVERTING TRADITION AS A FAILURE OF SELFHOOD

The failure of redemption in the new land ruptures the continuity of the worldview and traditions of the community and makes assimilation impossible, resulting in a mixture of the sacred and the profane throughout the work. A mentally disturbed man flashes bloody chicken heads in front of a child, Yochai, while the father of the child leads prayers in synagogue. A girl in an orphanage strokes her groin beside a Torah open to the Song of Songs. A young neighborhood gang leader convinces another child to drink from his penis by invoking biblical commentary. These crude acts, however, are more ambivalent than outright blasphemous—transgressing the boundaries of Jewish law while attempting to partially uphold them. Take for one instance, the attitude of Ayush who, after retreating to the bathroom to masturbate, tries to sanctify his onanism:

Ayush fingered his pants and let go... Beyond the door he heard his father growling grievously at his mother for allowing his sons to shut themselves in the bathroom for excessive stays. Ayush got a hold of himself and nimbly buttoned his pants. He washed his hands alternately in accordance with the law [*s'ruvin k'din*], and upon emerging from the bathroom futilely recited [*birech l'batalah*] the Nekavim blessing in a fine and exaggerated voice.
(106, my translation)

Ayush, after overhearing his father's rebuke to his mother, quickly buttons up and washes his hands in an alternating manner to purify them in accordance with Halakhah (Jewish law). Ayush then recites the Asher Yatzar, the Jewish blessing thanking God for the proper working of the body following an act of excretion. He does this outside the bathroom, again conforming to the dictates of Halakhah. Stern has perceptively pointed out that Swissa's choice to refer to the Asher Yatzar as the "Nekavim" (from the Hebrew word for orifice) emphasizes the sensuality of anatomy rather than the will of the divine (as *asher yatzar*, meaning "that He created," implies).⁶⁷

We cannot read this scene as simply portraying a young boy's conflict between an act he enjoys and the religious laws to which he feels obligated, since the text refuses such a simple cause-and-effect portrayal of psychic conflict, of libidinal desire inhibited by social taboo. It omits any explicit mention of Ayush ejaculating, thereby withholding a moment of pleasure, rebellion, or affirmation that would make the experience meaningful or coherent. The act is not necessarily a sexual one, nor is it self-defining, in the manner of Proust's narrator ejaculating out a window in Combray or Janie Crawford's autoerotic experience under the pear tree in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Ayush possesses neither the clear subjectivity of a repentant sinner whose base desires momentarily overpower his true moral sense, nor that of a Sadeian blasphemer who is mindful of religious law precisely in order to profane it. Instead, the narrative suggests a contradiction in which Ayush's behavior crosses *ta'meh* and *tahor*, seen in the contrast between his washing his hands *k'din* (according to law) and his utterance of a *bracha levatala* (vain or futile blessing). The ambivalent status of the incident, both holy and debauched, reflects Ayush's inability either to conform to or carry out Halakhah, or to have the satisfaction of rebellion or sexual release.

67. Stern, "Geographies of Escape," 107.

The partially blasphemous acts of *Aqud* are not only transgressions of religious law and custom, but also violations of Zionist ideals of nationalism that, ironically, seem to be regarded by the state as holy. Against the backdrop of this nationalistic conception of impiety, the vulgar acts of the children, which involve Jewish texts, blessings, and customs, are only seemingly sacrilegious. The behavior of Yochai, Beber, Yvonne, Ayush, and their companions is not directed against religion per se, but arises from their struggles with the contradictions of the selective secularization of the Israel state. The novel situates the children's actions within the double bind of the immigrant parents and the new land: Both consider the other's root ideal to be bankrupt, thus leaving no ideal for the following generation. With no language in which to either transgress or conform, the child protagonists are bereft of any means to articulate or perform a coherent personal identity.

The children in *Aqud*, then, are left to fend for themselves in a no-man's-land between the religious rules of their parents and the demands of national institutions, both secular and religious, represented in the novel by schools and orphanages, which see them as alien and in need of reform. Their misadventures, like Ayush blessing the food he eats on the fast day of Yom Kippur, or a neighborhood gang enacting the traditional ritual of *kapparot* by swinging a bruised Beber, rather than a chicken, over their heads, reveal absurd reinterpretations of traditions that are at the same time futile attempts to perform religious or secular selfhood when most ideals, positive and negative, have been withheld. The children find themselves neglected in the concrete tenements of the City of Gardens, governed neither by the structures of their parents' religious practice nor by the state schools that attempt to discipline them.

The generation of the traditional parents considers Israeli culture at best inscrutable and at worst profane. The novel does not dwell on their expectations of Israel, but shows their disillusion

with an Israeli culture that has adapted Jewish ritual to reinforce the state itself as an object of worship. The ambivalent profanity of the children in *Aqud* reveals the “blasphemous,” endlessly iterated transgression that is the very origin and engine of Zionist secular nationalism. The ambivalent profanity of their acts reveals a doubled aspiration both to the strictures of holy law and to the licentiousness of secular liberalism. These ambivalent acts—part holy and part filthy—do not simply express a conflict between adolescent curiosity and tradition, but instead are symptomatic of the troubled position of these children, caught in a double imperative to base their subjectivity both on the politically marginalized world of the parents and on national rites and institutions.

ELEMENTAL BLASPHEMY

In *Aqud*, traditional communal life, when transferred to the Israeli space, is permeated with silences, threats, and crises. The signifiers of tradition, both textual and ritualistic, are completely dictated by the subterranean environment.

In the opening of the book’s third and final section, which takes place in the month of Elul (September) of 1978, four years after the first section, traditional ritual is not silenced but placed underground. The narrative draws a contrast between the nationalistic ritual of visiting the graves of those slain in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the reciting of psalms during the High Holy Days: “In the coming days, from Yom Kippur on, people will go visit their dead from the last war. The elderly and the crazies will be the only ones who give this up in order to read psalms in the synagogues of the bomb shelters” (96, my translation). The national ritual of visiting these graves disciplines its subjects regarding sacrifice and loyalty to the state, conveying prestige upon the relatives of those who lost their lives for the sake of the country. Now defined in contrast to this

sanctioned public display of mourning, the elderly and insane, the only ones who bother to recite liturgy after the High Holy Days have passed, are disavowed, quarantined underground.

Such rituals glorifying the state seem to install the nation as an object of worship. In the final section of the book, Sultan attends an Independence Day parade. While there, he feels alienated from a jubilant crowd that appears hypnotized by patriotic sentiments, and is depressed by the difficulties of assimilating to Israeli culture after recalling its alienating, never-satisfied bureaucracy.⁶⁸ Sultan rejects the blind devotion on the part of those in his neighborhood who march in the parade and participate wholeheartedly in this sanctioned glorification of the state as their rescuer:

In the blue silence he saw all the elders from his village passing in this street strewn with national flags, smiling smugly and dumb from the warmth of the sun, as if they had just now arisen from the desert in a procession of Indian fakirs wearing rags and happy for no reason. Especially the beloved grandfathers and the pregnant young women, who passed on their flexible limbs with an amazing slowness, and would stay for one or two instants at a considerable height from the sidewalk asphalt, and their faces wore an expression of complete astonishment. Trivial things now won considerable attention. The tall lamps, egg-shaped, received most of the powers of mind of the strong young women and their tender Israeli tots, who jumped high-high as much as they could, in order

68. May 15 is also known in Arabic as Yawm an-Nakba (Day of the Catastrophe). I use the Hebrew “Independence Day” in accordance with the text’s use of Yom Ha-atzmaut.

to gather momentum for a butterfly-like lingering around the electric Hebrew light. (72, my translation)

Sultan sees his fellow immigrants as moths around a “Hebrew” flame, drawn instinctively to the beams emitted from a source dispersing “an electric Hebrew light” (or *khashmal ha-ivri*).⁶⁹ This kind of celebration seems to infuse the surroundings with Hebrewness, not unlike the way Hasidic sages like Reb Nachman of Breslav (one of Yochai’s heroes) discern a divine presence in nature. Hebrewness is portrayed as an ineffable, transcendental quality that has the ability to draw the uncritical, devoted masses towards it. The community’s fetishization of Zionism bestows a sense of uniqueness onto everyday objects, even the street lamps and the current that runs through them.

To Sultan, those around him who participate in the parade seem “happy for no apparent reason,” as if drugged or brainwashed. The narration describes them as dervishes and fakirs, impoverished beggars dressed in rags who shun the physical world for the spiritual one. Those marching seem to worship the state, praising the “Hebrew” streetlights and benches and the nation itself. The third-person perspective, identified with Sultan, disenchants the nationalist ritual by pointing out that this devotion amounts to an attention to “trivial things,” emphasizing that this adulation of a place is not about a transcendent ideal of peoplehood, or a communal spiritual “return,” but about simple infrastructure.

Sultan, Pazuelo, and Monsanegor consider the culture surrounding them not redemptive but rather blasphemous, in the traditional sense of violating religious tenets, because it uses the

69. The term used here, “*ivri*,” is a form of the adjective “Hebrew” that differs from the word for the Hebrew language itself (*ivrit*). Zionist culture used *ivri* to refer to the Jewish culture of the *yishuv* before the establishment of the state.

sacred language of Hebrew to praise nothing more than the physical infrastructure of the nation down to its roads and street lamps, and because it adopts Judaism as a national identity tied solely to territory. The state, for its part, also views the older Moroccan generation as blasphemous: not against religion, but against a state that uses religion for its own purposes and attempts to endow itself with a messianic, redemptive significance. These somewhat reciprocal blasphemies—that of the secular state’s violation of tenets of Judaism and of the Moroccan father’s inability to conform to the state’s bureaucracy—are seen in the dissonant (and humorous) reactions, respectively, of Ayush’s older Polish friend, Gersha, and of Ayush’s father towards the cover of Ayush’s *sefer moledet* (literally a “textbook of the homeland”), which recounts the history of the founding of the state. Gersha reacts to the book’s cover by disparaging Ayush’s father and the larger collective of Moroccan immigrants, explaining that they cannot possibly appreciate the sentiment of the cover because they know nothing of working the land, while Ayush’s father is bewildered by the profanity of Israeli culture, calling the book a “sefer hitzon,” literally an “external book,” an apocryphal volume rejected from the canon:

Even the same book in which pictures of people holding a scythe near a horse-drawn plow, and girls not properly covered blithely exuding joy on the back of a wagon loaded with sheaves and stabbed with pitchforks, Arab kaffiyas for their tanned necks, and underneath them a poem in small columns and columns, “Oh My Kinneret,” by Rachel the poetess⁷⁰ ... his father ... considered it a decidedly “apocryphal” book. These are the *Halutzim*, the pioneers

70. “Rachel the poetess” was Rachel Bluwstein, the first widely known female Hebrew poet in the Jewish settlement in Palestine.

who work the land, period, Gersha would, yes Gersha said once with a sinister dryness, like someone who casually sticks a pin into a child's balloon. Your father never worked the land ... and not just that but you Africans you don't have a thing more foreign to you than the land and working the land, and it's a little difficult to make a song like this stick with a cloth-and kettle merchant inside his booth at the Machane Yehudah market ... [but] Ayush was not ... upset by the mocking, perpetual slogans of his father, "Once! Today?" For instance, once they would compose songs for the Sabbath, to imaginary women, to God, for the Day of Judgment! Today? They compose songs for all kinds of simple laborers, to roads, and to wars. (148)

Though Pazuelo may be naïve in considering the history textbook apocryphal, his innocence also rightly suggests that the cover of the book encourages a kind of faithful devotion to Zionism by valorizing the connection to the land through what he sees as various forms of impiety—scantly clad young women (ideal, archetypal *sabras* in shorts, tan from working the land), songs of praise for “simple laborers, roads, and wars” instead of for “the Sabbath, imaginary women, God, and Judgment day,” all subordinating the traditional, holy, and divine to the everyday. Pazuelo is alienated by a national-secular mythology that he sees as having appropriated religion to praise territory. These disillusioned immigrants attempt to mount a simultaneously political and religious reaction to the way nationalist feeling has replaced the support of traditional Judaism.

The sharpest incident of this attempt is enacted in the first section by David Ben-Shoshan, the ringleader of a neighborhood gang with “Samson-like hair” who “receives his inspiration from the Tanakh” (11) and cites a Rashi commentary to convince another neighborhood boy to drink urine from his penis after the boy, a guard of the gang’s camp, fails in his duties and the camp is ransacked:

A secret trial was announced, in which it was agreed not to excommunicate Muicho, because there was no better communications officer than he, but decided that he must be punished and sworn in once again. Then David Ben-Shoshan announced, “Y’know, when Avraham Avinu swore in his servant Eliezer, do y’know that he told him to hold his penis when he swore?” Ben-Shoshan enthusiastically opened his eyes wide, “Chacham-Yaakov, my uncle, told me, okay, he didn’t say, but he pointed to an interpretation of Rashi’s where it’s written: that he held it for him.” He lifted his finger to the sky and paused for effect, “That’s how Muicho will be punished and swear on my dick.” (12, my translation)

After Ben-Shoshan carries out the plan, compelling Muicho to drink urine from his penis, Muicho falls ill, and the young ringleader lets Yochai, his second-in-command, take the fall. Swissa’s terse, grave, militaristic language (“border scuffles,” “communications officer,” “it was agreed [at the secret trial]”), collapse the worlds of serious combat and mere childhood games. The children’s role-playing absorbs the “official” adult language of judicial and political right,

ironically portraying both their immigrant parents and national-secular state institutions as irrelevant, inadequate authorities associated with bankrupt, ideological languages.

Though it of course does not literally force its citizens to imbibe urine, the state itself is often depicted in the novel as distorting scripture to support its own purposes and to reinforce its authority, much like the young Ben-Shoshan who favors, within the play world of the boys, a form of theocratic rule that has serious consequences. In their supposed blasphemy, the children parody a political culture that puts Judaism to very particular uses, all while avowing its secularity.

Because they have inherited a form of tradition degraded by the state and a form of nationalism their parents consider profane, the children lack a clear politico-theological authority to either adhere to or rebel against. The single form of blasphemy available to the protagonists is an elemental one with which they assert themselves using the only means left to them: the bare life of their bodily fluids and biological movements. In one such corporeal expression of ambivalence, Swissa describes Yvonne in the morning, curled up in an awkward position at the foot of her bed in the orphanage, masturbating, with her toes planted firmly on the cold, “scrubbed-clean” floor, “as if growing from the ground like a tender purplish stalk ... the heads of her buttocks crouched over an old, leather-bound Torah with a bronze tablet of the twelve flags of the Tribes of Israel.” The book is placed on blue silk cushion and open to the “Song of Songs.”⁷¹ Yvonne’s aunt gave her this Torah upon leaving her at the orphanage, explaining that her late mother (“God bless ‘er and may she watch over us”) used to read the Song of Songs from it every

71. The Song of Songs, a long love poem contained in the book of *Writings* and attributed to King Solomon, describes a disowned daughter who attempts to reunite with a missing lover; it is often interpreted by Jewish commentators as an allegory of the love between God and the Jewish people. Rife with imagery of plants, flowers, and spices, it is traditionally read in synagogue on the Sabbath that falls in during the Passover festival, to mark the coming of spring and commemorate the ancient harvest of the Israelites. It is hereafter referred to simply as the Song.

Friday afternoon in Morocco. Yvonne turns her face towards the sun, half-closes her eyes, and “completely destroys every materiality except the visions of her mind.” Continuing to stroke herself, she imagines the stern face of Mrs. Druckman, the headmistress of the orphanage, whose footfalls echo as she walks towards Yvonne down the disinfected hallway, “which induce[s] shivers from the chill of its cleanliness.”

Though masturbating in front of a Torah seems unmistakably blasphemous, Yvonne’s masturbatory act, like Ayush’s described above, is an ambivalent one—it simultaneously adheres to the precepts of Judaism while violating them. Yvonne respects the Sephardic custom, common in many Sephardic congregations, of reading the Song on the Sabbath. Also indicating a level of respect for the holy book, Yvonne has placed the Tanakh on a pillow, since traditional forbids a religious book to touch the floor.

However, Yvonne’s encounter with the Song evokes a dissonance between sensuality and religious custom. Swissa emphasizes this unlikely sensuality in his description of the surroundings, describing the sun with its “revealing light ... penetrating between the branches” in a manner “not suited to the modesty” of the grey orphanage. Swissa describes the orphanage floor as “coarse as if disinfected with the same harsh cleaning agents and severe proverbs” (53), associating physical cleanliness with harsh scriptural sayings. The face of the pious Mrs. Druckman, a Holocaust survivor like Gersha, is described as if an extension of Yvonne, “led by [her own] limbs to feel the pleasant coolness that flowed from the floor,” enjoys the sensation of the floor whose cleanliness nonetheless stands in sharp contrast to her “dirty” activity. Swissa uses the Hebrew verb *‘l’akhfof* to describe Yvonne rubbing her groin. The word can also mean to scrub with liquid, and it relates the scrubbing of the floor to Yvonne’s masturbation: purification and onanism are two facets of one ambiguous signifier. The chill of the clean hall

induces shivers, though Swissa leaves it unclear exactly in whose body this shaking takes root. Perhaps the “shivering” names Yvonne’s climax, suggesting that even her bodily pleasure is defined by this tension between tradition and blasphemy.

There is one further element of erotic ambivalence in Yvonne’s activity. Although she seemingly treats the Song as a kind of erotic artifact, Yvonne nonetheless does not conjure anything particularly enticing when she closes her eyes, only the features of the approaching Mrs. Druckman (“the tiny, energetic eyes ... and the decisive nose above pursed lips, and the reddish, shining earlobes, the only things sticking out of the kerchief pressed closely on her head”). If the poem itself celebrates desire for a vanished beloved, Yvonne’s missing beloved is her mother, and her deflected desire is directed toward the form of the all-too-present Mrs. Druckman, upon whose dour face “will not appear a smile nor a shadow of a smile mixed with a dash of compassion” (53). Because Mrs. Druckman will not show pity for the orphaned Yvonne, the girl feels reassured that her autonomy will be left intact. Mrs. Druckman is thus the desired substitute when both the religious and political mothers have failed. Yvonne desires her state of orphanhood because it means having neither a political nor a theological mother, and therefore allows for self-invention and a kind of freedom from politico-theological contradictions.

When not ambivalent like Yvonne and Ayush or deriving authority from commentaries like Ben-Shoshan, the child protagonists of *Aqud* articulate themselves in relationship to Jewish scripture by taking the scripture entirely literally in a manner that at times is playful and naïve, and at others invokes terror and dread. Yochai, for example, enjoys shitting in the woods while stroking himself and spitting out pieces of cucumber smothered in harissa, which he finds too spicy, and asks whether Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, a Hasidic leader who advocated a practice called *hitbodedut* enjoyed defecating in the woods the way Yochai himself does.⁷² Yochai’s

familial legacy has taught him that both the sociopolitical and religious foundations of *hitbodedut* are bankrupt, leaving him with no other way to triangulate his identity in relation to the practice than through the bodily fluids that he and Breslav share as human beings.

THE CRY OF STATIST HEBREW

Hearing yet another cry with no apparent origin, immediately after the parade scene described above, Sultan momentarily falls deaf, perceiving only a sound similar to dripping water:

Because someone, very close to his ears, spoke to him. Like a gang rape of a virgin girl he thought he heard the abandoned voices splitting the foul, shy embarrassment of those in his Maghrebi generation, who are so womanly and are so able, like women, to derive the same despicable enjoyment from self-humiliation. And according to this—Mr. Sultan opened his arms to the sides—what wonder that these most beastly voices that reached his ears actually burst forth from the mouth of the young woman herself! And what words! And from where did they, the Jews, get so many words? They established a state like all other states, and placed a dictionary in its service, and inside it they poured the words required of him as a new citizen, which call to him, to the new citizen, to the parent conference, to the parent-teacher association, to the service of the

72. *Hitbodedut* means “seclusion,” and entails communicating with the divine presence in a private setting, preferably in nature.

nation, to the police station, to the income tax, and to the war
against our enemies, God help us. (74, my translation).

Sultan's meandering inner monologue initially attributes the voice crying in his ear to either fellow immigrants or peers left behind in Morocco ("*bnei-doro ha-Mugrabim*"), but Sultan then realizes the cry he has heard, as if emerging from the "gang rape of a virgin girl . . . burst forth from the young woman herself." Through this hazy slippage from one possible source of the voice to the next, it seems that the cry consists of the language of "the Jews [who] established a state like all other states, and placed a dictionary in its service" and that it is likely the voice of Sultan's own daughter, with whom he attends the parade, and about whose nascent sexual experience he has been speculating, who speaks the modernized Hebrew of the new state, one "which call[s] to him, to the new citizen, to the parent conference, to the parent-teacher association, to the service of the nation, to the police station, to the income tax, and to the war against our enemies, God help us." Perhaps Sultan hears his daughter's secular Hebrew as a cry of violation, expressing her corruption by the national-secular ideal he abhors.

The depiction of Hebrew words themselves as corrupting and violating both the language and its speakers recalls Gershom Scholem's well-known letter to German Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, in which the former admits to Rosenzweig, a champion of Jewish life in the diaspora, that the process of Zionist secularization will be more fraught than he, Scholem, a committed Zionist, originally thought. In a letter written to Rosenzweig as part of a fortieth birthday *festschrift*, Scholem confesses his fear that the first generation for whom secular Hebrew was a native tongue would, through speaking a sacred language as an everyday tongue, constantly and unknowingly invoke a vengeful God. Scholem conceived of the distance between the secular signifiers and the holy language as the "abyss." Having no recourse to an originary sacred Hebrew

that could appease this unforgiving God, who reveals himself through a profaned Hebrew “pregnant with catastrophes,” the secular generation would ultimately be subject to divine retribution, conceived of as the eruption of a volcano from the abyss.⁷³ Scholem sees the sacred as a force oppressed by the secular, which tempts its own apocalyptic fate. According to this logic, the scream in this section of *Aqud*, whose content is secularized Hebrew, would be an expression of violation. Yet Sultan’s daughter is given only this same secularized Hebrew to express that violation. For Scholem, secular Hebrew is always profane because it blasphemes itself in being spoken, but it is also, paradoxically, violently, the only way to resurrect the holy by bringing about revelation.

In “The Eyes of Language,” Derrida argues that Scholem’s privileging of the sacred is an originary, logocentric discourse and shows that Scholem articulates the secular in much the same terms as the sacred, as a form of logocentric writing, but one that dismantles itself by unwittingly inviting the apocalypse. Pointing out that Scholem’s letter is written not in “profane” secular Hebrew but in German, Derrida then raises the possibility of a “secular” language that can comment on and articulate the sacred without either annihilating itself or taking part in the metaphysical.

Following Derrida, the cry in Sultan’s ear, indecipherable but expressing an inner corruption, represents both the possibility and the impossibility of a nontheological language. The source of the cry is never completely clear. Does Sultan really hear the voice or is he hallucinating? If he does hear the cry, is the virgin literally Sultan’s daughter or is she an abstract figure? By leaving these questions unanswered, the scream, in keeping with both the productive

73. Gershom Scholem, “A Confession about Our Language,” quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 227.

indecipherability of Swissa's prose and Sultan's uncomprehending astonishment at the secular world that rejects him, is left ambiguous within the text. It cries out instead for a world without these double foreclosures, free from the violation Zionism imposes upon both the sacred and the secular. The children of *Aqud* are sacrificed to a double imperative to be either completely sacred or completely secular but are not given a chance to do either. The figural cry of the virgin emerges from within this double foreclosure, calling out to a new audience that would not see either the sacred or secular as defining paradigms.

This chapter has demonstrated how Albert Swissa conveys a Moroccan-Jewish subjectivity that refuses interpellation by a *masortiyut* reclaimed within Zionism.⁷⁴ His eviscerated Sephardi subjects cannot be reimagined as part of an oppositional, liminal, non-Orthodox, nonsecular Jewish identity or epistemology in the manner suggested by Yadgar. The state of "exile-within" portrayed by the novel entails the communal and existential dissolution of its characters via an ambivalent, often erotically transgressive performance of Halakhic adherence and Sephardi rites. This perversion of "tradition" constitutes neither continuity with the Moroccan past (portrayed via unsentimental slippages of memory) nor outright defiance against the secularized nation state. The perversion of tradition in this narrative constitutes neither continuity with the Moroccan past (portrayed via unsentimental slippages of memory) nor outright defiance against the secularized nation state. Swissa's portrayal of cries without a clear origin express longing for the integrated Jewish-Muslim life of Morocco as they testify to its slipping away. Swissa's version of reflective nostalgia, challenges the exclusively Jewish terms of the masorti reinvention of a shared Muslim-Jewish memory.

74. I am indebted here to James Martel's theory of "misinterpellation," in which he examines the one time out of ten in Althusser's theory of disciplinary power, when the subject fails to heed the constitutive hail of the police officer. James Martel, *The Misinterpellated Subject* (Duke University Press, NC: Durham, 2017).

CHAPTER 2:

DVIR TZUR AND THE FAILURE OF REDEMPTION BY TEXTILE

While the previous chapter demonstrated how Albert Swissa gestures toward the impossibility of a reclaimed, critical *masortiyut*, this chapter positions Dvir Tzur (b. Jerusalem, 1977) as the most coherently *masorti* of the authors in this dissertation. Like Pedaya, who will be discussed in the following chapter, Tzur draws upon mystical and messianic themes to portray exile as potentially reparative, rather than as a defective condition in need of repair or a consequence of punishment. In contrast with Pedaya however, Tzur's work interrogates tensions around secularity from within the framework of Jewish national sovereignty and through an allusive engagement with canonical modern Hebrew literature. And unlike Pedaya, whose wandering symbolic space transcends Eurocentric Israeli territory, Tzur is committed to "saving" the Zionist project, though his protagonist's solution ultimately fails to do so.

Tzur is an author of Kurdish- and Bukharan-Jewish origins, one generation younger than both Swissa and Pedaya, who describes himself as "very traditional" ("*masorti me'od*").⁷⁵ This chapter discusses Tzur's *Inverted Letters* (*Moshe B'Hipukh Otiot*, 2008), a political allegory that subverts the messianic underpinnings of the Zionist ideology of the negation of exile (*sh'lilat ha-galut*), which sought to normalize modern Jewish existence by constructing a seeming continuity between modern Jewish territorial sovereignty in the Holy Land and the ancient biblical claim to it.⁷⁶ The narrative follows a young, possibly insane, Kurdish-Jewish protagonist named Moshe-Efraim, as he weaves a giant kaporet to save humanity in the End of Days, with the help of the

75. Email exchange with Dvir Tzur, March 4, 2016.

Wandering Jew.⁷⁷ Rather than attempt a negation of exile, Moshe-Efraim and his diasporic sidekick attempt a redemption by exile. This central “inversion” of *Inverted Letters* subverts other dichotomies central to Israeliness: exile and return, Arab and Jew, and redemption and catastrophe.

As a totalizing cultural, political, and historiographical program, the negation of exile sought to remedy what it considered a defective diasporic existence by constructing a seeming continuity between the promised land of the Bible and the modern territory of Ottoman Palestine. This ideology, the crux of the modern Jewish nationalism that originated in nineteenth-century Europe, aspired to a complete break with the traditional exilic Jewish past. It transposed concepts traditionally associated with the return of the Jews to the Holy Land in the messianic age, such as the return to Zion (*shivat Tzion*) and the ingathering of exiles (*kibbutz galuyot*), into concepts concentrated exclusively on territory.⁷⁸ Furthermore this myth conceived of the land of Palestine, both the means and object of its salvation, as an empty terrain, enabling mass expulsion, military occupation, and a political and cultural hegemony that negates the existence of the Arab other. In his seminal critique of the negation of exile, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin frames this ideology as a secularized form of redemption, referring to the *yehudi ha-ga'ul*, the “redeemed Jew,” saved from the powerless condition of exile.⁷⁹

76. Dvir Tzur, *Moshe B'Hipukh Otiot* [Inverted Letters] (Tel Aviv: Bavel Publishers, 2008). All translations are my own, as there is no English translation, and have been approved by the author. *Inverted Letters* is the publisher's rendering of the title, and I've retained it here, though it does not preserve the important meaning of “*hipukh otivot*,” anagram.

77. The *kaporet*, also called the *parochet*, or mercy seat, was the tapestry placed over the ark in the ancient Jerusalem Temple.

78. Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.

Tzur is part of the third generation of Mizrahi authors following the mass Arab-Jewish immigration of the 1950s. He situates himself (though ambivalently) as inheriting the modern Hebrew canon, rather rejecting it altogether. A scholar of Hebrew literature, Tzur has written on the history of the kibbutz and on the work of S. Yizhar, particularly Yizhar's *Khirbet Khizah* (1949), which describes a Jewish soldier's crisis of conscience after taking part in the Nakbah.⁸⁰ This engagement differentiates Tzur considerably from the third-generation poets of *Ars Poetica* (among them Adi Keissar, Tehila Hakimi, Royi Hasan, Shlomi Hatuka, and Israel Dadon), whose work is characterized by modes of protest.⁸¹ The speaker of Royi Hasan's poem "The State of Ashkenaz" ("Medinat Ashkenaz"), a Mizrahi poet, rages against being reduced to ethnic stereotypes. He directs his fury partly towards canonical writers: "I didn't grieve over Kaniuk / And I burned the books of Natan Zach" (לֹא הִתְאַבְּלִיתִי עַל קַנְיֹוֹק/וְשָׂרְפִיתִי אֶת הַסְּפָרִים שֶׁל נָתָן זַחַךְ). The speaker disavows any continuity with "Ashkenazi poetry and literature" (שִׁירָה וְסִפְרוּת אֲשֶׁכְנַזִּית), assuring us that he collects these works only to learn "how not to write" (כְּדִי לְדַעַת אֵיךְ לֹא לִכְתֹּב), in the manner of "an atheist reading holy writings" (כְּמוֹ אֲתֵאִיסֵט הַקּוֹרֵא בְּכַתְבֵּי קְדוּשִׁים).⁸²

In contrast to Hasan and many of the members of *Ars Poetica*, and in a manner that is surprising for a "Mizrahi author," Tzur is largely sympathetic to the consequences of the Zionist

79. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Galut B'toch Ribonut: L'vikoret Shlilat Ha-galut B'tarbut Ha-israelit," part 1, *Theoria U-Vikoret* 4 (1993): 24 [in Hebrew].

80. Dvir Tzur, *Between the House and the Field, between Person and Place: Space and Place in the Stories of S. Yizhar*, "Preliminaries" and "Illuminations."

81. The name of the group is a pun which replaces the letter "aleph" in פּוֹאֲטִיקָה אֲרָם with an "ayin." "Ars," עֲרֵס (which derives from the Arabic word for "pimp") is a derogatory name for a Mizrahi male that suggests low-brow cultural tastes, whereas אֲרָם in "Ars Poeti" means "metatextual," referring to the poets' sense of their subversion of the norms of Hebrew poetry.

82. Royi Hasan, "Medinat Ashkenaz," *Ha'arets*, Oct. 31, 2013, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/poetry/.premium-1.2151769>.

with regard to the descendants of the European-Jewish settlers. Though *Inverted Letters* shows how dominant historical narratives repress Mizrahi and Palestinian experience (to very different ends), it also describes the suffering of the founders of the kibbutzim and the despair of the generations that followed. And though its messianic premise reveals the failures of modern Jewish nationalism, it nonetheless suggests that Zionism offers something worth saving.

Though Tzur sees himself as an outlier with regard to contemporary Hebrew literature,⁸³ his style resembles that of Sderot-born poet and author Shimon Adaf (*Sunburnt Faces*, *Mox Nox*, *The Monologue of Icarus*, *Aviva-no*), who writes postmodern speculative fiction with metaphysical themes. Like Tzur, Adaf employs some Mishnaic Hebrew, and his work suggests a familiarity with rabbinic texts, Jewish mysticism, and Greek mythology. However, while Adaf tends more towards the abstract and universal, Tzur's work is more explicitly concerned with Arab-Jewish identity and history, particularly that of his grandparents' native Kurdistan. While the main metaphor of Tzur's *Inverted Letters* is the legibly Jewish (and early Christian) artifact of the mercy seat, Adaf's protagonist in *Mox Nox* encounters God through the quotidian object of the television. Similarly, while both authors subvert linear time, Tzur's imaginative universe is ultimately contained within the historical ambulation of the Wandering Jew.

Tzur thematizes the ambivalence around the "secular" identity of modern Hebrew literature through allusions to traditional forms of writing and wordplay, references to kabbalistic texts, and allusions to the oral messianic lore surrounding the twelfth-century Kurdish-Jewish messianic claimant David Alroy and other mystical messianic claimants such as Shlomo Molkho (a medieval Portuguese convert from Christianity, burned at the stake as a martyr during the Inquisition in 1530). *Inverted Letters* challenges notions of Zionism as a redemptive territorial

83. Email correspondence with Tzur, June 3, 2016.

return by relating repressed diasporic histories to the Labor Zionist program of *dat ha-avodah* (the religion of labor) and its legacy. Tzur portrays the messianic as an axis of cyclical time that stands in contrast to the linear, progressive time of the nation. The metatextual device of weaving evokes Tzur's own project: the production of a fabric of Jewish quotations that defamiliarizes the "secular," foundational Labor Zionist ethos by challenging the nationalist demand to break completely with the exilic past. This aspiration to repress diasporic existence through total rebellion was based in the European Enlightenment, rather than in the processes of modernization of the Islamic world.

Before elaborating on the ambivalent secularization of Hebrew literature with regard to *Inverted Letters*, I will briefly summarize the plot of the novel. In a flashback towards the beginning of the novel, Moshe-Efraim, almost thirty, recalls his heretical bar mitzvah, in which he hurled the Torah scroll on the ground after reading the *divrei tochecha* or "words of rebuke," a series of scathing curses from God to the Israelites. Though these words are traditionally chanted in a whisper, Moshe-Efraim yelled them. Disgraced by his blasphemy, Moshe-Efraim's parents send him to the Healing Oaks asylum (Alonei Marpeh), where he hatches a plan to convert generations of families into colored threads through a process resembling kabbalistic meditation.⁸⁴ To construct this golden ark covering (also known as a *parokhet*, or mercy seat), Moshe Efraim recruits the Wandering Jew and a living stuffed canary, who chants Psalms and chirps the names of the dead who are to be integrated in the weaving. The narrative is filtered largely through the thoughts of an unreliable narrator, alternately focalized as the Wandering Jew and as Moshe-Efraim, who explains, "my thoughts lack a clear course. The nectar of memory

84. For an account of the relationship of color to mystical practice, see Moshe Idel, *New Perspectives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 104–5.

oozes out from between my ears” (72). In one of the underlying ambiguities of the novel, the Wandering Jew may or may not be Moshe-Efraim’s hallucination, suggesting the possibility of a single protagonist with multiple identities; at other times Moshe-Efraim insists that he himself has two personalities, Moshe and Efraim. Further complicating matters, the text never clarifies whether the protagonists gather their chosen souls by traveling through time and space, or whether they move only within Moshe’s addled mind. The characters they encounter include a kibbutz founder named Malkiel Posner, together with his ancestors and descendants; the historical Labor Zionist authors A.D. Gordon and Y.H. Brenner; the hermeneutic mothers of tradition and writing (Em La-masoret and Em La-mikrah); and a mystical rabbi named Khouri who reveals to Moshe-Efraim that the young misanthrope may be a gilgul or reincarnation of the medieval Kurdish-Jewish messianic claimant David Alroy.

Moshe-Efraim shuttles back and forth between the “madhouse” (a name he insists on because he likes the sound of the combination of the letters), his parents’ home (which the text hazily suggests is in Jerusalem), and various historical and otherworldly stations involved in constructing the weaving. During the course of the novel, Moshe-Efraim suffers doubts concerning his mission and considers other alternative, mystical redemptive plans: merging with a Sephirotic tree and building a wall which, when smashed by a crowd with hammers, will bring on the apocalypse. He attempts to rebirth himself as a golem, only to eventually return to the original weaving. It remains fruitfully unclear whether Moshe-Efraim’s doubts and self-flagellation are the tribulations of a messianic figure or the self-injurious behavior of someone stricken with psychosis.

Towards the end of the novel, the protagonist’s two personalities, Moshe and Efraim, seem to separate into disparate selves. Moshe-Efraim begins to refer to himself in the third person:

“‘You won’t quit now. You are forbidden,’ I or another tells myself” (232). The protagonist’s insistence that “they [Moshe and Efraim] were really there” (231) seems only to underscore his tenuous grasp of reality. The distinction between the perspectives of the two narrators (the Wandering Jew and Moshe-Efraim) also collapses, highlighting the deepening confusion of the protagonist. From the outset, the Wandering Jew has expressed his belief in the eventual failure of Moshe-Efraim’s endeavor and, in their final confrontation, the eternal wanderer intensifies Moshe-Efraim’s doubts concerning the ability of his weaving to save souls. The narrative becomes increasingly less intelligible, stringing together seemingly random phrases like the thoughts of a someone of unsound mind: “A fish supermarket disguised in the dark. A piece of leather in the garbage, the sweet smell of sweat ... sale price, dancing all night, mango drips on your cheeks, a smelly fly, a difficult prophesy” (254). Finally, Moshe-Efraim returns to the asylum, abandoned by both the Wandering Jew and the canary. He is presumably cured of hallucinations through yet more pills and injections. He remains alone, asking God for answers, his breathlessness conveyed by the lack of punctuation between the bare clauses describing his failed efforts at redemption:

I came to declare the end without hydrogen clouds and nuclear acid.

I had a plan. I went in and went out and went in again I said and I returned and I came back and back and back. I went out and I’m new and I don’t have what to give. I’m emptied out I remain here until the next time. Until the end arrives. (256)

This anticlimactic finale leaves the protagonist suspended between attempts to encounter the divine and implies a futile cyclicity as he waits for “next time.” This unrealized potentiality recalls the novel’s first section, “Circles,” which describes Moshe-Efraim wandering alone in the

street before meeting his eternal companion. The story appears to leave Moshe-Efraim right where he began, suggesting a conception of messianism as a circular, nonteleological attempt at salvation. We are told from the outset by the Wandering Jew that Moshe-Efraim will fail and at the novel's end there has in fact been no redemption.

THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE “SECULAR” WITHIN MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE

While some critics frame the development of modern Hebrew literature as a process of secularization, others emphasize its underlying attachment to biblical origins. In discussing the social role of Maskilic writers of the Me'asef circle (1784–1811), Dan Miron espouses the first view. According to Miron, the Maskilic literature of the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment) aspired to the political function once held by holy texts, now that they no longer served as the political glue of Jewish communal life. He cites Yitshak Erter's oft-quoted book title, *The Watchman unto the House of Israel* (*Ha-tzofeh L'Beit Yisrael*, 1858), to describe the role of the poet-prophet as social and political conscience.⁸⁵ Miron relates this development to burgeoning Jewish nationalism during this period. He states that “the new literature involved the secularization of Hebrew and of the Bible ... in the sense of understanding them as realizable national assets that could be invested in new national projects.” He continues, further linking the secularization of language to nationalist aims: “the secularization of Hebrew ... inhered ... in its redefinition [of the language] as a usable national tool.”⁸⁶

85. Erter himself took the phrase “watchman unto the house of Israel” from Ezekiel 33:7.

86. Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 60.

In contrast, Hannan Hever is among critics who highlight the incompleteness of this secularization. Hever argues that despite its aspirations towards a secular culture, Zionism never fully detached itself from its theological origins. Because Zionism was the “incubator” of modern Hebrew literature, the latter shares this ambiguity with regard to the theological. Zionism never untangled the relationship between *dat* (religion) and *leom* (nationality).⁸⁷ *Inverted Letters* thematizes this contradiction around the idea of secularity through the meta-textual travails of its protagonist, also an author of a text-within-a-text.

Moshe-Efraim’s weaving echoes the etymological connection between “text” and the Latin *texere* (to weave) and recalls a literary tradition of references to writing as weaving (including those found in Plato, *The Odyssey*, and *Moby Dick*).⁸⁸ Though the Hebrew words for “text” and “weaving” do not directly reproduce this etymology, the Hebrew *masekhet* (מסכת), which means “Talmudic tractate,” “weaving,” and “context,” does evoke such a connection. Moshe-Efraim’s particular weaving-text is poised between the oral and written traditions of Jewish scripture and exegesis. The scroll he discards (itself metaphor for the rejection of the written law), is described as “black fire written on white fire,” a rabbinic saying that describes the tension between the authority of divine authorship (denoted by the “black fire” of the letters of the scroll that comprise the written law) and the polysemy of the biblical text and its commentaries (the blank spaces or “white fire”).⁸⁹

87. Hannan Hever, *B’Koa’h Ha-El* [With the Power of God] (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2013) [Hebrew], 8.

88. While this etymology is not valid in Hebrew, there are numerous moments in the novel that suggest this connection. In one such case, the Wandering Jew refers to Moshe-Efraim’s endeavor as “*ma’aseh ha-badim*,” which could mean either “the enterprise of the cloth” or “the enterprise of fiction.”

89. This phrase is found in various sources including Midrash Tan’huma (Genesis 1), Rashi on Deuteronomy 33:2, and Talmud Yerushalmi, Shekalim 6:1.

According to Betty Rojtman, the image “black fire written on white fire” represents the dependence of the oral law (rabbinic commentaries) on the subsequent interpretations of the unwritten absence of white fire.⁹⁰ The exegesis symbolized by white fire, explains Rojtman, is not a secondary copy of a primary revelation, but part and parcel of midrashic hermeneutics. Thus, Moshe-Efraim’s rebellion and the weaving process that follows attempt unsuccessfully to unify the authoritative, logocentric modes of “black fire” and the mystical, orally transmitted, and absent forms of “white fire.” The characters in the novel who are associated with mysticism lead the protagonists towards accounts that lie outside the “black fire” of the Labor Zionist narrative.

Like both Swissa and Pedaya, Tzur suggests that the “secularity” professed by Zionism is not free of theological significances, but rather confers a holy status onto the land itself. Malkiel Posner, a fictitious kibbutz founder, is the first of Moshe-Efraim’s “woven ones” because his “political prestige ... was necessary” (36) to cement the authority of the weaving. An archetypal “New Jew,” Posner is the only descendent of a European-Jewish family to “exchange his yarmulke for the hard work of the land” (44). This suggests the attempted secularization of Hebrew Labor (*Avodah Ivrit*), an ideology of the second wave of Jewish settlement in Palestine (1904–1914). This period is referred to in Zionist historiography as the Second Aliyah. The name itself intimates its messianic theopolitics: *aliyah* means “ascent” or “going up,” in implicit contrast to a neutral, horizontal immigration.

This period initiated the settlement projects of the kibbutzim, including the programs of *kibush ha-karkah* (conquest of land) and *kibush ha-avodah* (conquest of labor). These ambitions described the settlers’ attempt to remake themselves as “New Jews” by “redeeming” the land.

90. Betty Rojtman, *Black Fire on White Fire: An Essay on Jewish Hermeneutics, from Midrash to Kabbalah*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

Tzur depicts these as incompletely secularized redemptive ideologies: though the kibbutzim presented themselves as remaking the diasporic Jew into a muscular, land-working New Jew (a process referred to as *kibush atzmi*, “conquest of the self”), they nonetheless relied on Jewish themes and concepts and invested the territory itself with holiness: “Only the long hard hours of work remained that infused their bodies with the image of holiness. Consumed their lives with the work of the earth” (98).

The ideology of the settlers proclaimed a complete break with the past and an absolute rejection of the diasporic mentality. However, Tzur shows that this “secularization” merely transposed Jewish constructs into nationalist ones instead of rejecting them altogether. The initial subjects of Moshe-Efraim’s salvation, who are designated, like him, as messiahs destined to disappoint, are the architects of the second wave of settlement. Tzur portrays Malkiel Posner, the New Jew who is first to be incorporated into the weaving, as a false messiah akin to Moshe-Efraim, one “who wished for something new and failed” (35), suggesting the utopian aspiration of the settlers of this period and their total rebellion against the life of *galut*. Malkiel’s curse is not death at the hands of Gog and Magog, but that of “hard work which replaced the death which never came to be” (36). This suggests an absoluteness of redemptive vision accomplished solely and precariously through a connection to territory.

Malkiel initiates a salvation in which the nation and territory themselves become holy, to catastrophic effect. As Raz-Krakotzkin explains, the attempt to secularize the concept of redemption that underlies the negation of exile results in the state itself having a kind of holy status:

[A]ll attitudes based on ... “the negation of exile” enable a turn towards political reality only through terms of redemption, even if

this redemption has undergone secularization (*hilun*). ... Either the state is given a religious standing and validity, to the point of a holy status, or in the best case shifts complete redemption beyond history, or the state is described in religious terms that are removed from their context.⁹¹

By rendering the territory and the settlers as saviors, Tzur suggests that the secularization is not the absence of theological investment. Rather, the secularization of the messianic ideal amounted to investing both Jewish labor the land itself with holiness.

Malkiel is typical of the complete revolution and break with the past enacted by Labor Zionism. He disparages the European past, suggesting the repression of diasporic memory, as well as the identity of the Arab other entailed in the negation of exile. But the weaving process attempts to unite him with what he rejected. Ironically, Malkiel descends from Polish Jews who were avowedly non-Zionist. Following pogroms in Poland and Russia, the Posner ancestors flee to Palestine only because they couldn't reach America. In the *kaporet*, Malkiel is woven in pink, "the color of rebellion," because he is at the end of a branch that breaks away from the larger diasporic family:

[Posner's] family flourished and abundant shoots and branches emerged from it. They went this way and that, some of them to the rabbinate and some to be scholars of Jewish thought, and inside one of these shoots was a small branch, rebellious, that grew crookedly,

91. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Exile within Sovereignty: A Critique of the Concept 'Negation of Exile' in Israeli Culture," *Theory and Criticism* 4 (1993): 23–53, 33.

having a life and will of its own that drove it to betray the big tree
and plant itself in a new place. (44)

This revolt implies the attempt to reverse entirely the values of the diaspora. Chaim, Malkiel's son, recalls how his father sought to break away from the chain of past generations. In Chaim's view, by severing the exilic past, Malkiel represents a vision of *chalutzit* (the settlement project associated with the Second Aliyah) as that which attempts to redeem through a break with what has come before:

[My father] didn't understand that everything is a single line. He tried to go outside the line, and it's impossible to go outside the lines. ...He came here and thought he could create himself anew. But he was already alive. He is a line, and it's impossible to stop the line. Impossible. ... He thought that if he was strong enough he could vanquish the heavens. But you can't conquer the heavens.
(59–60)

Malkiel wants to go “outside the line,” in the sense of rebellion from the line of continuity, and so initiate the linear salvation of the nation. By uniting European diasporic ancestors with the Labor Zionist generations who a complete break with the exilic past, the weaving attempts to restore this sense of continuity and transmission, though it ultimately cannot. Chaim, a returnee to Jewish Orthodoxy, explains that his father “believed in his own lie” (60). As was typical of Labor Zionism, Malkiel celebrated only holidays which stressed the connection between the Jewish people and the territory of the Holy Land: “During Shavuot he would say that we were the high

priests who wave the *omer* [sheaves of wheat] before the altar, and that when he sees us he is grateful that we succeeded in redeeming the land” (60).⁹²

Moshe-Efraim’s particular yarn initially mirrors the “black fire” of his initial history of Labor Zionism. However, as the protagonists search for “the shards that disappeared from our eyes upon first glance” (97), they begin to chronicle diasporic histories marginalized by the negation of exile. Taken together, these underlying accounts challenge a nationalistic, linear view of the messianic, one which provides salvation by erasing both the exilic Jewish past and the claims to territory and memory of the Arab other. Tzur also portrays the despair resulting from the repression of diaspora. Devorah, a disillusioned descendant of Malkiel who isolates herself by the sea, narrates “another side of the story [through] words that scorch mercilessly” (97), in one of the novel’s incarnations of “white fire.” Devorah’s father, a writer named Eli Feld, was too weak to live up to the Zionist ideal of the muscled, land-working Jew and only wrote about the importance of physical labor, in lieu of actually performing it. Devorah recounts the suffering of the generations that followed the original Zionist *halutzim* (early Zionist settlers) as an experience of “waking from dreams” (103). She describes multiple generations of European-Jewish settlement, starting with their arrival in Israel/Palestine, presumably around 1881, when pogroms swept the Pale of Settlement and their “flesh had been finely ground” (103). The subsequent generations tired of the physical labor required to maintain this redemption of territory. Devorah recounts how the sense of mission that accompanied the first generation faded in the next, sunk by the backbreaking labor that was supposed to save them:

92. In *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), Oz Almog discusses how the participants of the Second Aliyah claimed to secularize agricultural holidays that pertained to the Jewish relationship to land, such as Sukkot and Shavuot.

Their children's children did not want to continue to assume the yoke. They didn't like the blazing heat, hated the hard work and didn't believe in the holiness. The second generation thought it was making progress, without understanding that it was progressing toward its end ... the depth of the dreams lessened, the work day lengthened and the sense of mission of their fathers disappeared. The stones of dreams were slowly consumed by the backbreaking day-to-day. The demanding earth did not allow one to sit idly by and to sail off into the domain of the imagination. (99)

Devorah's father, Eli Feld, is inspired by the historical Labor Zionist authors Yosef Haim Brenner and A.D. Gordon, the Romanticist champion of *dat ha-avodah* (the religion of labor).⁹³ Brenner and Gordon represent the poles of socialism and romanticism that animated the utopian ideologies of Labor Zionism.⁹⁴ Tzur presents Gordon's "religion of labor" as a political redemption that is totalizing in its ambition and leads to disappointment, failure, and catastrophe:

Their two patriarchs, Brenner and Gordon, called for a transformation of the work of the land into holy work, and considered the acquisition of it a commandment. Like Menachem-

93. For an analysis of utopian thought in the writings of A.D. Gordon, see Avraham Shapira, "A.D. Gordon and the Second Aliyah Realization of Utopia," in *Communal Life: An International Perspective*, edited by Yosef Gorni, Yaakov Oved, and Idit Paz, 130–41 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers, 1987).

94. The metatextual structure of *Inverted Letters* resembles Brenner's 1911 novel *From Here and There* (Yosef Chaim Brenner, *Mi-Kan U-Mi-Kan (From Here and There)* (Warsaw: Sifrut, 1911), the first Hebrew novel written in Palestine. Both are conscious of their own process of writing and both feature alienated protagonists. In Brenner's case, this is the journalist Oved Etzot (a name which means "helpless") who has uprooted himself to Palestine from Russia, only to find that he rejects the politics of the Yishuv. Brenner also renders A.D. Gordon in his text as Aryeh Lapidot.

David [referring to the Kurdish-Jewish messianic claimant David Alroy], each of them had two names, Yosef-Chaim and Aharon-David, and like him, their names also disappointed. (98–99)

The religion of labor requires unsustainable efforts and ideologies rejected by subsequent generations. After Moshe-Efraim identifies Malkiel as his founding follower, the Wandering Jew, circumventing time and space by means of his eternal memory, locates Malkiel's European ancestor, Reuven Posner, an "Old Jew" seemingly out of a Mendelian shtetl. Reuven's family has been killed in pogroms in the city of Poznan, in Poland, at an unspecified time. Like Moshe-Efraim, he spouts digressive anagrams ("Poznan anagrammed is 'No poze.' We don't pose any harm, but they still reprimanded us for our existence there," 40), and quotes the *maharal* of Prague while running from barn to barn seeking precarious cover.

While the negation of exile sought to replace the diasporic, weak Old Jew with the New Jew or the "redeemed Jew," the novel, in one of the reversals suggested by its title, attempts to save the New Jew Malkiel through restoring his connection to the repressed diaspora. This will prove impossible, leading to Moshe-Efraim's foretold failure. The weaving presents an alternate picture of a restoration of diaspora:

We conceived of weaving Malkiel together with his parents and his parents' parents. We began with Reuven. We split and divided the threads. We combined faraway names with nearby names, and so it was with places. Efraim made sure of the correct placement. ... We gathered together the pain, the anger, and the grotesquery. (45)

This project of restoration, in its ultimately failed aspiration to restore the connection between the exilic generations and that of Malkiel, cannot be fully realized.

ANAGRAM

The novel's Hebrew title, *Moshe B'Hipukh Otiot*, signals the text's engagement with mystical themes and elements. *Hipukh otiot* (like *sikul otiot*) means anagram in Hebrew. Wordplay and letter combinations were employed by exegetes of many traditions and are used throughout rabbinic literature. Jewish kabbalists made even greater use of letter inversions as a means of accessing esoteric realms, as did Neoplatonists more generally.⁹⁵ In Hebrew, *parokhet* (פרוכת) and *kaporet* (כפורת) are anagrams, so the process of wordplay described by the title applies directly to Moshe-Efraim's craft. Further, in Hebrew, Moshe (משה, Moses) spelled backwards is *Ha-shem* (השם, literally "the name"), which refers to the name of God that cannot be spoken out loud. The title doubly conceals the divine name: once through the word play of Moshe and *Ha-shem*, and again because *Ha-shem* itself only obliquely refers to the divine. The title's reversal of letters suggests the protagonist's god-like ambition in redeeming humanity, a quixotic aspiration which will be compared to that of Labor Zionist leaders, whose aspirations of political redemption would also eventually lead to disappointment and catastrophe.

The text's use of anagram and other forms of wordplay often subverts secular-nationalist slogans and concepts. A chapter in which Devorah, a descendent of Labor Zionist pioneers, describes the disillusionment of her generation with regard to nationalist ideals of working the land is titled "Shovre'i Chofim" ("Breakshore"). This is a play on *shover galim* (breakwater), and

95. Isaac Broyde, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Anagram." New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1450-anagram>, accessed October 30, 2017.

implies the destruction of the shore, the very thing a breakwater is meant to protect. Devorah describes the halutzim as a crashing wave fueled by the fervor of *dat ha-avodah*, destined to crash and destroy the shore, the very land that their zeal was meant to redeem.

THE SUFFERINGS OF A MESSIANIC CLAIMANT AFTER THE REDEMPTION OF EXILE

In the plainest sense, Moshe-Efraim is a mentally ill youth afflicted with schizophrenia or perhaps with Jerusalem Syndrome, a form of psychosis that can present as a delusional belief that one is the messiah. The narrative references several traumatic events that lend a plausible psychological etiology to Moshe-Efraim's condition: he believes he is born to illegitimate parentage, he's witnessed his father spying on his mother's childhood love, and he once befriended a fellow young misanthrope just before the latter slits his wrists in a bathtub. His mother separated him from his childhood best friend, an Arab Christian neighbor named Issa (also his messianic counterpart, since "Issa" is the Arabic name for "Jesus"); Moshe-Efraim carves a cross on his chest as a means of imitating Issa. He is similarly forbidden from seeing his childhood love, Noor, Issa's younger sister. These traumas could suggest that Moshe is psychotic and that his fractured psyche contains the split personalities of Efraim the messiah and the Wandering Jew. Similarly, his woven souls and the *kaporet* they create may only be hallucinations induced by the drugs administered at Healing Oaks.

But because the story is narrated only through the alternating perspectives of Moshe-Efraim and the Wandering Jew, there is no omniscient perch from which to verify whether the young man is ill or whether he may in fact be a misunderstood mystic. He may simply be attuned to a mystical dimension inherited from family tradition, an ability that appears to his parents and

doctors as madness, but is really a mysticism out of sync with modern times. He suggests Zygmunt Bauman's outsider poised within the tension of rationalism and tradition:

My grandparents lived in a world of ghosts. Ghosts you can see with your eyes. It's something you can easily ridicule, but they really saw the dead who returned. I think my grandfather was scared of me because he thought I was a reincarnated soul [*neshama megulgelet*]. It's impossible to know for sure whether there's really something like reincarnation or there isn't. It's a matter of belief [*emunah*], and you don't put someone in the madhouse because of belief." (246)

Thus in another reading of the text, Moshe-Efraim is not afflicted with Jerusalem Syndrome or schizophrenia, but is instead a *gilgul* or *neshama m'gulgelet*, a kabbalistic reincarnation of the Messiah Ben Yosef, David Alroy, and/or a string of other messianic claimants. He is a reincarnated messiah connected to the oral lore of his Kurdish family who suffers from the politics of erasure and partition. For her part, Moshe-Efraim's maternal grandmother, Basso, though suspicious of her grandson, does not consider him delusional. Referring to his "followers," she remarks: "'If he believes that they are there then they're there. You have to find them and let them escape.' She said you can see them on the edge of one's fingernails when pressing fingers together very tightly" (88). The novel suggests such an identification when it covertly gives the origin of Moshe-Efraim's second name, in a recollected moment in which he is left alone with his grandfather who reads out of an unspecified ancient book:

From behind the leather binding I heard him cry Efraim. From out of the letters, Efraim Efraim. Again and again. I didn't understand. I asked him who's Efraim and he answered out of his perpetual blurriness, "You. You are Efraim." A monumental fear seized me. He didn't pay attention and continued to mutter to himself, reading out of the book. "He is a messiah and his name is Efraim [the] righteous messiah." (87)

The book quoted by his grandfather is an exegetical text, *Pesikta Rabbati*. Chapters 34–37 of *Pesikta Rabbati* describe Efraim, also known as the Messiah Ben Yosef, whom Michael Fishbane has characterized as “the suffering Messiah, a complement to the traditional concept of the Messiah-King from the house of David.”⁹⁶ He will be slayed either by Armilus or Gog and Magog, only to be resurrected by the Messiah Ben David. In *Pesikta Rabbati*, Efraim dies in battle before the End of Days, and Tzur's narrative describes a similar possible fate for his own Efraim in a section called “The Opening of the Gates.”

Strengthening the reading of Moshe-Efraim as a mystic, the name of the asylum to which he repeatedly returns, Alonei Marpeh, is an echo metaphor or, to borrow a term from Chana Kronfeld, a “purposeful catachresis” or semantic misuse of Elonei Mamre, the terebinths of Mamre, where God appears to Abraham and where Abraham welcomes the three visitors (Genesis 18:1).⁹⁷ This suggests that the asylum may be the site of Moshe-Efraim's contact with

96. Michael Fishbane, “Midrash and Messianism: Some Theologies of Suffering and Salvation,” in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, edited by Peter Schafer and Mark R. Cohen, *Studies in the History of Religion*, 77 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 5.

97. Chana Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 135.

the divine, and that his messianic powers are simply misunderstood and pathologized. In *Sefer 'Arzei Levanon* (Book of the cedars of Lebanon) the medieval mystic Joseph Gikatilla, a student of Abraham Abulafia, demonstrates how letter combinations (*tzerufei otiot*) can facilitate prophetic experience. Using the metaphor of weaving-as-text, Gikatilla describes how combinations of letters act as a synthesis of “medications” that allow the mystic to contemplate hidden structures of language and meaning within the biblical text:

[T]he weaving of words out of letters ... is to be compared to a skilled physician who knows very well the nature of all kinds of medication ... after you know every single medication in its difference [from others], you will know how to combine two of them or three or four or even more, as many as you want to combine. ... The Holy One, blessed be He, knows the quality of every letter and its forms and its characters and its potencies and its activities, as He combines two or three or four or even more letters. When they are combined into a word, you build and establish its higher wisdom in the created worlds.⁹⁸

When Moshe-Efraim insists on the combination of the Hebrew letters *shin*, *mem*, and *gimmel* in “*beit meshugaim*” (madhouse) he evokes this medieval mystical connection between wordplay and medication. The many occasions on which he is administered shots and pills at Alonei Marpeh might then be understood as injections, so to speak, of letter combinations which allow him to access the mysteries of creation, after their nationalistic incorporation. Perhaps

98. Elke Morlok, *Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla's Hermeneutics*, Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism, 25 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 177.

Moshe is indeed a *gilgul* or incarnation of Efraim who arrived during a time that cannot accept him. In this reading, his suffering is the result of a connection to the oral lore of Kurdish Amadia, a connection which is pathologized by his parents and doctors.

Tzur's suggestion of the cyclical concept of reincarnation (the Hebrew *gilgul* literally means "a roll") transcends the linear time of the nation and the imposed forgetting of the negation of exile. This temporality of a continuous, potential messianism stands in opposition to the territorial redemption of the Labor Zionist figures. It echoes the potentiality of passive Jewish messianism, but also considers the foreclosure of this possibility after nationalist redemption.

Moshe-Efraim is confronted with unresolvable contradictions between these conflicting, disappointing forms of salvation. The fact that by the end of the novel all Moshe-Efraim's messianic efforts seem to have been for naught echoes what some scholars consider the violation of passive Jewish messianism by Zionism. The passive messianic approach holds that the end of Jewish exile will come about only by divine means. "The classic expression of messianic passivity is a Talmudic teaching pegged to the thrice-uttered oath [also known as the "three oaths"] from the Song of Songs (2:7, 3:5, 8:4), 'I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, not to stir, neither to awaken love, until it pleases.'"⁹⁹ A similar stance characterizes the traditional belief encompassed by Yeshayahu Leibowitz's statement that "the Messiah is he for whose coming we shall ever yearn. A messiah who actually comes is a false Messiah."¹⁰⁰ Moshe-Efraim attempts to redeem a version of salvation based solely on territory through recourse to cyclical models.

99. Jody Myers, "The Messianic Idea and Zionist Ideologies," *Jews and Messianism in the Modern Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4.

100. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, trans. Eliezer Goldman and Yoram Navon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 126.

THE WANDERING JEW AND REDEMPTION BY EXILE

Like Moshe-Efraim's *gilgulim*, the eternal wandering of the reclaimed Wandering Jew constitutes another form of nonlinear time in *Inverted Letters*—and reverses the poles of exile and return entailed in negation of exile and Labor Zionism. This eternal, nomadic figure, enlisted by Moshe-Efraim to guide him in his weaving of souls, transcends the limits of nationalist space and time through his exilic past, a history rejected by the ideology underlying the linear time of the secular nation. The alliance between the young redeemer and the eternal nomad interrupts the seemingly progressive time of the nation. For Tzur, the arrival of this figure can only signal an endless loop of failures and attempts at salvation.

In a manner characteristic of what Harel has called its “blurry coordinates,” the text does not directly name the Wandering Jew character as Ahasver.¹⁰¹ However, the title of the chapter in which the Wandering Jew describes his past is “*Ha-chash B’rosh*,” in another example of the text’s use of anagram. *Ha-chash b’rosh* is phonetically close to “Ahashuerus” (even more so in the Hebrew), and is a play on the Hebrew idiom *chash b’rosha* (“she has a headache”). The Wandering Jew may be “pain in the head”: the bothersome, even painful hallucination of a boy whose pathology takes the form of curiosity about a forbidden collective past that can be accessed through the eternal wanderer. The punishment of the Wandering Jew is eternal life, hence his attraction to Moshe-Efraim, who wanders among graves, looking for dead people to incorporate in his weaving. For the Wandering Jew, incorporation into Efraim’s weaving would mean the relief of ending his eternal existence. He even at one point proposes changing places with Moshe-Efraim if the latter fails in his mission.

101. Harel, “*Moshiach Moderni Menaseh L’hatzil et Ha-enoshut*” [A Modern Messiah Attempts to Save Humanity], Ha’aretz, July 25, 2008, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/1.1327236>.

As Galit Hasan-Rokem has noted, the legend of Wandering Jew, originally an anti-Semitic figure, first appeared in German chapbooks (*Volksbuecher*) beginning in 1602.¹⁰² These writings present him as a cobbler by the name of Ahasver, forced to wander Europe after Jesus curses him for refusing a resting place while he, Jesus, bore the cross. Tzur is among a wide-ranging group of Jewish writers, including Uri Zvi Greenberg, Edouard Roditi, and the Marxist theoretician Karl Kautsky, who have reclaimed the figure of the Wandering Jew from early unfavorable depictions.¹⁰³ Kautsky in particular viewed the figure as a symbol of Jewish emancipation, a wanderer brought to rest by the “second coming” of complete Jewish assimilation. Hasan-Rokem recounts several incarnations of the Wandering Jew, casting him as a “Jungian shadow figure [who] has been appropriated for a variety of ideological commitments.”¹⁰⁴ One of his functions is to map the world: “Incidentally, the cyclical nature of the appearance of the Wandering Jew is explicitly stated in many versions; this is the fulfillment of the redemptive prophecy of the Second Coming which will not be accomplished before the Wandering Jew has been in every single place on earth, thereby connecting the whole world in one communicative network.” Tzur’s version of this network is a map of the world that transcends the coordinates of space and time, one that Moshe-Efraim asks this eternal figure to sketch for him, despite the initial reluctance of the latter.

Tzur references several additional features associated with the Wandering Jew. His ancient man lives out the punishment of eternal wandering and is a prisoner of time, scapegoated as a supposed betrayer of Jesus and bearing the “mark of Cain,” traditional in anti-Semitic lore as a

102. Galit Hasan-Rokem, “The Wandering Jew: A Jewish Perspective,” *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Congress of Jewish Studies, 1986).

103. Hasan-Rokem, “The Wandering Jew.”

104. *Ibid.*, 192.

symbol which marks his killing of Christ. He is also a mirror: the text describes him as one who “exposes wrinkles” and reflects an undesirable reality, exposing a truth that people choose not to see. His own physicality is uncomfortably worn and scarred: Tzur describes him as having wrinkles around his mouth, a thick unibrow, a broken hip, and wearing worn sandals under swollen shins that ache in the cold; clearly eternal life is not treating him well.

Tzur’s Wandering Jew represents a kind of access to exilic pasts either rejected or entirely co-opted by the national project, histories this figure can evoke because of his eternal wandering. He breaches the boundaries of space and time and attempts to fill in the lacunae between exilic history and the repression of this history by the negation of exile. In this way, Tzur’s incarnation fulfills the classic function of the Wandering Jew of mirroring the undesirable: Zionism does not want to see itself reflected by or connected to the exilic past, but the Wandering Jew restores these connections by virtue of his perpetual memory. He is witness to a long view of history that Labor Zionism wanted to forget.

RECONSIDERING “SECULAR” THEORIES OF INTERTEXTUALITY¹⁰⁵

On a metatextual level, Moshe-Efraim’s throwing of the Torah scroll suggests Tzur’s rejection of the Hebrew Bible as a sole source of allusion. Tzur’s language works as a kind of fabric of quotations that brings together references from sources that are unexpected in modern Hebrew literature including *Sefer haBahir*, the story of the Kurdish medieval messianic David Alroy, and *Pesikta Rabbati*, a collection of Aggadic midrashim (nonlegalistic commentaries) from about 845 CE. Roland Barthes famously characterizes the literary text as a “a tissue [or fabric] of

105. I use “intertextuality” here in the specific, applied sense in which it is used by the Tel Aviv School of Poetics, rather than in the poststructural mode associated with Julia Kristeva, in which intertextuality is a general condition of signification and referentiality of all texts.

quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture,” a composite that displaces its author as the origin of meaning and invests the sign itself with significance.¹⁰⁶ For Tzur, this amalgam is a network of associations taken not only from the Bible but also from mystical sources. The device of the woven text-within-a-text not only displaces authorial intent, but also sidesteps the Bible as its main source of allusion.

Structural theories of intertextuality within modern Hebrew literature that arose in the 1960s and 1970s imply a distance between texts considered “secular” or even “iconoclastic,” and the traditional texts they evoke. In contrast, Tzur’s allusive weaving creates an effect of merging with its mystical and traditional allusions. The work of the Tel Aviv School of Poetics, a reader response theory associated with Benjamin Harshav and linguists Itamar Even-Zohar and Ziva Ben-Porat, outlines prescribed processes of allusion with regard to modernist Hebrew literature and poetry. This process consists of a four-step allusive interaction in which a linguistic marker within the evoking, modern text (*ha-tekst ha-me’orer*) activates an allusion in the evoked biblical or liturgical text (*ha-tekst ha-me’urar*), which then adapts the meaning of the evoking text.¹⁰⁷ In a chapter entitled “When Iconoclasts Evoke the Bible,” Kronfeld demonstrates that this allusive process operates in both directions: the meaning of the evoked, biblical text can also be adapted and altered within the bounds of a mutually allusive interaction.

Kronfeld shows how this bidirectional view of allusion operates “iconoclastically” in the work of Statehood Generation poets Natan Zach and Yehuda Amichai. In these cases, the alluding, modern poem reverses and deflates the accepted meaning of an evoked biblical source

106. Roland Barthes, “Death of the Author,” *Image-Text-Music*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146.

107. Chana Kronfeld, *Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

text. Kronfeld demonstrates how, in Amichai's poem "Be-khol Chumrat Ha-rachamim" ("The Full Severity of Compassion"), the biblical injunction "*mene otam*" (count them) activates a contradiction between, on the one hand, God's biblical promise to multiply the Jewish people and, on the other, the collective punishment meted out upon the people after David violates the injunction against counting Jews and numbers the soldiers of ancient Israel. Amichai's poem (the alluding text) reverses and deflates the message of God's promise in the Book of Samuel (the evoked text) to make Israel a mighty nation, by evoking a contradiction already present in the Bible between the divine promise to multiply and the Satanic curse to destroy, both of which involve the counting of people.

The contradiction of these evoked meanings, between being chosen and being cursed, deflates the biblical promise of plentitude and frames it as a promise to destroy, leading to the "rejection of the nationalist-religious idea of being chosen through doing battle with God."¹⁰⁸ Kronfeld's account of this mutually allusive intertextual interaction implicitly ascribes a secular identity to modern Hebrew literature in the midst of its dialogue with traditional sources. Discussing the broader social implications of Israeli theories of allusion, she states that "the need for a vindication of the Bible as a source for allusions in a secular, often antireligious society continues to be felt even today in the critical literature."¹⁰⁹ Kronfeld implies that it is the secular identity of the Israeli readership that activates the "system of associated commonplaces" (Kronfeld, quoting Max Black) of both the poets and the texts themselves, which are designated in several places as "secular/mundane texts."¹¹⁰

108. Kronfeld, *Margins of Modernism*, 125.

109. Kronfeld, *Margins of Modernism*, 118.

110. *Ibid.*, 114.

But how can we understand the allusive strategy of a text whose iconoclasm with regard to the imbrication of religion and nationalism cannot be defined so easily as secular? When Devorah recounts a rejection of the ideals of the religion of labor, the political vision she describes is not ironized or deflated. Rather than distance the national and the religious, Tzur suggests their conflation, just as the connection to territory appears grafted onto the very skin of settlers: “Only the long hard hours of work remained that infused their bodies with the image of holiness. Consumed their lives with the work of the earth” (98). Tzur’s weaving together of both traditional and political elements complicates the relationship Kronfeld describes between an alluding, secular text and an evoked biblical text. By collapsing the boundary between modern text and traditional referent, Tzur’s allusive strategy challenges the status of modern Hebrew literature as a secularized mode of Jewish texts, as a “watchman unto the house of Israel.” This challenge places Tzur within a growing group of poets and authors whose work suggests a fissure in the relationship of identity of between Hebrew literature, Jewish tradition, and Zionist territorial claims.

Criticism of Hebrew literature looks to the Hebrew Bible as a primary source of allusion. As historian Anita Shapira has shown, references to the Hebrew Bible pervaded the founding rhetoric of the Israeli state and the Israeli school curriculum until the 1970s.¹¹¹ The ideology of the negation of exile promotes a connection between the ancient battles described in the Bible and modern territorial sovereignty. Kronfeld, quoting Max Black, identifies the Hebrew Bible as the basis of the Israeli “system of associated commonplaces,” the reservoir of shared linguistic references of the readership. Robert Alter recounts the crucial turn to the Talmud by S.Y. Abramowitz (known by the pseudonym Mendele Mocher Sfarim), whom H.N. Bialik considered

111. Anita Shapira, “The Bible and Israeli Identity,” *AJS Review* 28, no. 1 (2004): 11–42.

the inventor of the Nusah style, for its elaborate grammar and wider vocabulary, breaking from the T'chiah (Hebrew Revival) authors who looked exclusively to the Bible to construct a modern Hebrew literature. However, Alter also explains that Mendele's engagement with the Talmud was on a syntactical, rather than thematic level, employing Talmudic grammar and vocabulary without engaging its content.¹¹²

Inverted Letters' engagement with mystical texts is particularly significant because these sources conceive of *galut* in ways that deviate from the outlook of the negation of exile. This aspect of the novel seems to have been invisible to some critics. Yoram Kaniuk, a recently deceased Dor Tashakh (1948 Generation) author and one of Tzur's teachers, appears to misunderstand Tzur's novel as depicting a perpetual search for a homeland. Kaniuk puzzlingly describes its portrayal of the messianic as entirely unfulfilled, despite the narrative's engagement with the political and territorial realization of messianism in the form of Malkiel's "messianic kingdom" of the kibbutz.¹¹³ Kaniuk states, "*Inverted Letters* expresses the fact that *Am Yisrael* (the people of Israel) always searched for the meaning of life instead of living it. And whoever is searching doesn't really have a homeland. He has a yearning." However, the novel chronicles the exact opposite: the hangover of territorial acquisition. Referring to the settlers of the second wave of Jewish settlement, the Wandering Jew recounts, "[t]heir two great fathers, Brenner and Gordon, asked to turn the work of the earth into something holy and its acquisition into a divine commandment" (98). Rather than portray the territorial aspirations of "*Am Yisrael*" in the abstract, romantic terms suggested by Kaniuk, *Inverted Letters* chronicles the crises that ensue

112. Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 30.

113. Yoram Kaniuk, "Toldot Am-Yisrael Hem Mizvadot" [The chronicles of the people of Israel are suitcases], Ynet, February 24, 2008, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3510441,00.html>. My translation.

following the fulfillment of this very desire and conveys the disappointment of subsequent generations who struggle to carry forward Malkiel Posner's uncompromising secularist vision.

In his review, Kaniuk cites the famous biblical phrase commanding Abraham to leave his home, "*Lech Lecha mi beit avicha*" ("go out from your father's home")—a phrase that is found nowhere in this allusively rich novel. Kaniuk describes this saying as "the foundation of relinquishment of this people," relating it to the kind of perpetual wandering he associates with *Inverted Letters*. Kaniuk unfortunately overlooks the citations to mysticism scripture that actually do appear in the novel, few of which deal with wandering and relinquishing a homeland. Rather, Tzur relates the messianic ideal of *Shivat Tzion* not to wandering, but to the perils of redemption through a connection to territory. He certainly does not portray the Jewish people solely as nomads, nor as wanderers without a homeland. Kaniuk notes that "Jewish messianism is after all paradoxical" but implies that its contradictions must remain in the realm of potential. What he misses is that Tzur engages them not as an abstract principle but as a political accomplishment realized through the utopian ideologies of Labor Zionism.

The weaving, like the program of *dat ha-avodah*, seeks to create the world anew. As the Wandering Jew recounts, "Every time come the same visionaries who want to establish their kingdom in a rocky, profaned place. Hoping that this time they'll have an eternity that will be entirely good" (99). Tzur splices these two sources, juxtaposing elements of creation mentioned in the *Sefer Yetzirah* (The book of creation), a proto-kabbalistic text, with an account of the generation of Brenner and Gordon.

Moshe-Efraim's initial vision of redemption, which he will subsequently revise several times, draws upon a Talmudic discussion concerning creation, from the *Tractate Chagigah*:

In the end, it will be ready. The picture of chaos and void [*tmunat tohu vavohu*]. Fiery stones in the depths [*avnei esh mefulamot ba-tehomot*], a sea on the hills and the winds of disorder [*ruakh ivim*] that seize the angels. And it all rises from the wreckage. After the completion of the weaving process, he will let [his followers] cover themselves. He will carry them wrapped on the thinnest of thin lines which surrounds the world entire. The line which removes the darkness. (10)

In Moshe-Efraim's plan, the *avnei bohu* are referred to using a quote from the *Sefer Yetzirah*, "*avnei esh mefulamot ba-tehomot*" ["אבני אש מפולמות בתהומות"], and provide a backdrop for the line of light. Both the weaving and this infinite line of light will encircle Moshe-Efraim's woven ones, protecting them from destruction during the End of Days.

Tzur draws not from the biblical story of creation, but from Talmudic and mystical sources. In the Hebrew Bible, *tohu va-vahu*, often translated as "chaos and void," refers to the initial state of emptiness and chaos preceding the creation of the universe.¹¹⁴ However, Moshe-Efraim's plan echoes the following passage from *Tractate Chagigah*: "Tohu is a green line that encircles the world and radiates darkness. Bohu are damp stones that are situated in the depths and emit water" ("*Elu Avanim Ha-mefulamot ha-mashkeot b'tehom, she me hen yotze mayim*").¹¹⁵ The word *mephulamot* in "*Avnei esh mephulamot b'tehomot*" ("stones of fire watered in the

114. There are a vast number of references in modern literature to the phrase "tohuva-vohu," from David Frischman's pamphlet of the same name criticizing Maskilic literature to Shlonsky's volume *Avnei Bohu*.

115. *Tractate Chagigah*, 12a.

depths”) is rare in modern Hebrew.¹¹⁶ It functions as a marker, signaling an connection to the kabbalistic account of creation.

The text also evokes the Lurianic concept of *shevirat ha-keilim*, the “breaking of the vessels.” The Wandering Jew cautions Moshe-Efraim to construct a weave sturdy enough not to break as it lifts his followers to safety in the End of Days: “Once, all of it broke. Such catastrophe should not be allowed to happen again” (10). The kabbalists regard the breaking of the vessels as a failure of the newly formed world to recuperate and contain these shards. Moshe-Efraim refers more specifically to these *tohu*, the first vessels, which were shattered, rather than the *bohu*, the vessels following their restoration. These containers are the origins of the kabbalistic system of *sefirot*. Many scholars, most prominently Scholem, understand the breaking of the vessels and the *tzimtum*, the state of contraction immediately prior to their shattering, which represents God’s withdrawal from history, as a theosophical analogy for exile.¹¹⁷ However, far from being an abnormal condition, this exilic shattering is part of the process of creation itself.¹¹⁸

In Scholem’s view, the Lurianic school regarded *galut* as an inner state as much as a historical-material one: the Lurianic kabbalah did not define redemption from exile in particularistic or nationalistic terms, as the negation of exile does, but rather conceived of it as the redemption of the world in its entirety.¹¹⁹ In Scholem’s description, the school of Luria regarded

116. In one of the few occurrences of *mephulamot* in modern Hebrew literature, H.N. Bialik describes the full (and apparently wet) stomachs (*keivot mephulamot*) of guests at a Sabbath feast in *Yom Ha-shishsi* (*The Sixth Day*).

117. In *Old Worlds, New Mirrors*, Moshe Idel, a student of Scholem’s, notes that his teacher’s account is a “selective reading” that overemphasizes the historical nature of kabbalistic symbolism (95). He argues that Scholem’s “exegetical attempts should be considered legitimate” as long as they are viewed as “hypothetical proposals” rather than “facts” (100). Moshe Idel, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

118. Shaul Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash: Myth, History, and the Interpretation of Scripture in Kabbalah* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 18–19.

this process of shattering and the subsequent restoration of these sparks (known as *tikkun*) as a process “not put to the test in the actual crucible of history,” and as such not as necessarily connected to territorial return. Scholem argues that the kabbalists raised messianism to the level of a supreme cosmic drama: the redemptive process was now no longer conceived of as simply a working-out of Israel’s temporal emancipation from the yoke of the Gentiles, but rather as a fundamental transformation of the entire Creation, affecting material and spiritual worlds alike ... stressing the spiritual side of redemption far more than its outward aspect ... gradually converted [the process of *tikkun* into] ... a symbol of purely spiritual processes and ends.¹²⁰

In this reading, the historical experience of *galut* is mediated through the individual one, emphasizing universal, rather than territorial aspects of redemption from exile. Similarly, Tzur portrays the second wave of Jewish settlement in Palestine through images of shattering and splintering, juxtaposing a notion of redemption based on territory with the more universal kabbalistic one. The novel suggests that this ambivalence around creation and destruction defines the modern political redemption of its Second Aliyah characters Malkiel, Brenner, and Gordon: their attempt at creation contains destruction within it.

119. I am citing Gershom Scholem very much against the grain of his own thought, which regarded Jewish mysticism as a source of nationalist mythos in ways that were later revised by students of his such as Moshe Idel and Yehuda Liebes.

120. Gershom Scholem, “Redemption through Sin,” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 87.

The narrative itself proceeds through shards and splinters, on both the formal level and that of the framed narrative of Moshe-Efraim's process of constructing the weaving-within-the-text. Referring to the disparate stories contained within the tangled threads of his weaving (and metatextually, to the novel itself), Moshe-Efraim declares that "there isn't one story, there is never one story, only shards of memory (*shivrei zichronot*)" (20). The narrative references its own splintering, the events of Moshe-Efraim's current messianic quest bleeding into moments of his past, presumably the shards of memory. The Wandering Jew also describes his work of collecting and locating generations using the analogy to shards: "The Posner family I met incidentally. I met everyone I know incidentally. ... I gather them, one by one. In them, you can see the shards (*shvirim*) that construct me" (36). The description of this exilic figure as containing shards of generations relates the Wandering Jew to the shards and diaspora entailed in the Lurianic concept. By contrast, Malkiel's generation attempted to create the world anew through a complete break with the past, denying the memory of exile and imagining a land that denied Arab and Arab-Jewish memory and identity.

THE REDEMPTION OF "WHITE FIRE"

The novel also indicates Moshe-Efraim's mystical lineage through his allegiance to the Em Ha-meshanenet, the marginalized mother of oral tradition. The Em Ha-meshanenet and the Em Ha-kotevet are Tzur's versions of the two mothers of hermeneutic interpretation, invoked in the Talmudic maxim "*Yesh Em La-masoret v Yesh Em La-mikrah*" ("There is a mother of tradition and a mother of writing"). The Em La-Masoret (in Tzur's text, Em Ha-meshanenet, the mother of recitation), the "mother of tradition," refers (perhaps counterintuitively) to scripture in its written form, symbolizing the authority of the consonantal text. In contrast, the Em La-mikrah

(whom Tzur dubs the “mother of writing”) represents scriptural authority as articulated in reading, sans diacritical vocalization. In Tzur’s rendering, the Meshanenet is the nurturing mother.¹²¹ The Kotevet, Tzur’s version of the logocentric mother of writing, raises children who write ceaselessly, proliferating words and signs in an ultimately unreadable, excessive stream:

It was as if the words pressed out on their own, piling up one on top of the next and sucking the children into the kingdom of imagination and the domain of the [spirit]. Every once in a while, they would remember the rejected mother who lost her birthright and her honor to one lesser than she. Remember and press on. (55)

In Tzur’s evocation, the Em Ha-meshanenet is the rejected mother, suggesting Moshe-Efraim’s tie to orally transmitted mysticism. Moshe-Efraim spots this matriarch among the congregation when he rolls the Torah scroll on the ground at his heretical rite of passage, implying that she inspired his physical, rebellious rejection of the written word. She then identifies him as an heir to her “hidden tradition”; when he later comes to make his weaving, he incorporates the Meshanenet, the marginalized and rejected mother who relinquishes her own power, within its fibers.

These oral lacunae within the weaving undercut the “black fire” of nationalistic modes of commemoration, which the novel conveys as traumatically invasive. Just as gaps within the warp and weft of a weaving are integral to its structure, so too do the protagonists restore silence in a situation in which the national narrative has instrumentalized traumatic memory. Esther and Hedva, elderly twins surrounded by an invisible “silencing stone maze of unfamiliar names”

121. Em Ha-meshanenet means something akin to “mother of what is read aloud.”

(131), describe a past to Moshe-Efraim in which a “cold broke out [and] parts disappeared under the ice and the white fog shrouding everything ... freezing with its vapor, threatening” (132). This pervasive, menacing cold force is the Nazi genocide, and the unfamiliar names are the victims, who, Hedva points out, are too numerous to be commemorated. Memory becomes destructive in the case of Hedva and Esther, who are constantly threatened by memories of their past. Their adopted collective takes an interest in them only on a day implied to be Holocaust Remembrance Day:

Esther and Hedva turned into showpieces. In both life and death, it became their duty to retain what was there in their bodies and their souls. Like goods stored away in case of emergency they were also taken out once a year on an appointed day, and cast out after their use. (136)

Over stale cookies and weak tea, Hedva explains that she had an excruciating choice to make with regard to her sister. The details of are not disclosed, though no one in the new place let her forget it once she arrived. She and her sister find that new homeland has “forced them to look in the mirror against their will” (136), in a violation by the very place that was supposed to offer her refuge: “They didn’t hold back any blame from her. Sometimes it even came to blows. Everywhere one went one could encounter someone put out of their right mind by hatred, taken over by fury. At times, all that was left was revenge” (137). The omissions of the weaving oppose forms of commemoration which violate these survivors. Efraim decides he can’t redeem the twins, neither from the trauma of their past, nor from those who surround them with “scorching closeness” (136).

However, far from a nostalgic or idealistic return to traditional messianism, Tzur employs an occult vocabulary to convey a deeply pessimistic political reality. The mystical symbol of the *ohr ein sof* (the infinite light) reappears in a fight between Moshe-Efraim and Musa, the groundskeeper of the mental ward, whose position suggests the indigenous connection of the Palestinians to the land. Musa laments, “It is your dream that made life bad for us” (170). Moshe-Efraim believes that his weaving contains a key within it that will unlock the gates of redemption on the final day of judgment. He appeals to Musa, who holds the keys to the rooms of the psychiatric ward, to help him unlock these gates. Musa and Moshe then begin to argue about a different set of keys: those retained by Palestinians expelled in the Nakbah. The text relates the earlier allusion to the rabbinic discussion of the *tohu va-vohu* to the Palestinian expulsion and frames the latter as a consequence of the absoluteness of the messianic vision of the Labor Zionism of Malkiel. Tzur never explicitly relates the “green line” of the *tohu* as described in the *Chagigah* to the contemporary Green Line, which demarcates the contested 1967 borders of Palestine and Israel, but Moshe-Efraim’s schizophrenic blend of mystical and political terms invites the association.

Moshe-Efraim also approaches the Palestinian Musa, his double in name (“Musa” is the Arabic form of the Hebrew “Moshe”), to include him in the weaving, but this emerges merely as a gesture of tokenism. Moshe-Efraim explains to him, “There is something in you all which is similar enough and different enough,” to which Musa dryly responds, “Who is ‘you all’?” (171). Moshe-Efraim can only integrate Musa in the weaving in a way that reproduces the separation between Jews and Arabs engendered by the dream of his messianic predecessors:

Moshe-Efraim weaves “You are not like us” in the colors green,
white, red, and black [the colors of the Palestinian flag]. He strung

the threads in a skilled manner, joining thread to thread, adding swirled ornamentations to them [presumably arabesques]. In between, he said “There is no need to look for the resemblance. It is actually important to focus on the difference.”

The circle and the line evoked from the *Chagigah* creation myth assume yet another place in the ark covering: “Because the keys and the arguments won’t help, the end will come as is. It will enter through the line, cut the circle and continue. We will give up split as we are” (174). Here, the line becomes part of the mathematical symbol of the empty set (?), which suggests the impossibility of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the form of an incompatibility between the respective views of history and memory held by Moshe and Musa, yet another failure of the messianic dream.

This failure to integrate Musa in the weaving speaks to the limits of a “*masorti*” position as a critique of Jewish national sovereignty.¹²² Without specifying a clear framework, Yadgar’s *masortiyut* proposes a politics which interrogates both tradition and modernity:

What we are required to do, in other words, is to articulate an independent Jewish political language, one that nourishes a meaningful familiarity and dialogue with Jewish traditions, accompanied by a critical reflection upon these traditions, as well as a critical correspondence with, and reflection upon, some of the dominant traditions today (such as the nation-state, capitalism, individualist liberalism, etc.).¹²³

122. As discussed in the introduction, the category of “*masorti*” was never officially recognized within state frameworks, and as such, for Yadgar, it subverts the dichotomy between secularity and Orthodoxy.

Yadgar recommends the *masorti* position as one such challenge to the existing Zionist “status quo.”¹²⁴ The question remains, however, whether a postsecular challenge to “religion” as a basic condition of citizenship would create equitable conditions for Palestinians. As Nissim Leon has shown, the current Israeli version of *masortiyut* was reinvented from within Zionism after Jewish nationalism severed “Arab-Jews” from the Islamic environment.¹²⁵ Accordingly, Tzur’s negotiation of modernity and tradition comes from within a perspective of Jewish nationalism. Even though it wrestles with the unsustainability of Zionism, its Jewish mystical idiom cannot imagine a narrative for Musa comparable to that of his Jewish double. This suggests that Yadgar’s exclusively “Jewish political language” would similarly fail to provide a framework for full Palestinian rights and self-determination.

123. Yaacov Yadgar, “Religion and Politics in Israel: The Mythology of Jewish Nationalism,” 972mag.com, Aug. 27, 2013, <http://972mag.com/religion-and-politics-in-israel-the-mythology-of-jewish-nationalism/77831/>.

124. This the perception of a politics of accommodation between secular and Orthodox Jewish political parties and sectors. According to Yadgar this accommodation is a kind of cover story: a democratic base must appease a religious fringe that imposes theocratic policies. For Yadgar, this is an alibi which obscures the theological framework underlying the state. Though the state of Israel is formally democratic and secular, it interprets “religion” as a form of nationality (*le’om*) or ethnic identity. In practice, “secularism” in Israel is not premised upon the absence of theological categories, but rather designates “religion” to be a basic condition of citizenship.

125. Nissim Leon, “The Secular Origins of Mizrahi Traditionalism,” *Israel Studies* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 35

CHAPTER 3:

HAVIVA PEDAYA AND THE LIMITS OF “KABBALISTIC CULTURAL CRITICISM”

Like Swissa and Tzur, Pedaya's recourse to mystical (kabbalistic) Jewish commentaries and Sephardi-Jewish historiography challenge the Eurocentric, allegedly secular norms of modern Hebrew literature. However, the continuity entailed in *masortiyut* as she constructs it is nonetheless reinvented from within the framework of Zionism. This chapter will demonstrate that though Pedaya challenges Eurocentric biases of modern Hebrew literature, she nonetheless portrays Arabic through tropes of loss and diminishment in a manner that occasionally limits the polyphonic qualities she champions.

This chapter will show how the interrelated themes of reinterpreting exile, challenging modern, Eurocentric authorship and forms of modernized statist Hebrew, and reconceiving the messianic as a theological potentiality pervade Pedaya's poetics and scholarship, constituting a challenge to the “secular” norms of Hebrew literature. As Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has shown, the aspiration towards a Jewish secularity in Israel/Palestine is not free of theological commitments, but instead constitutes a Jewish hegemony which prevents the development of truly democratic, binational frameworks.¹²⁶ Swissa's poetics of perversion, though not overtly defiant, reveal this pretense with regard to Israeli secular culture, both in the 1970s in which the narrative takes place and in the “discourse time” of its reception in the 1990s. Pedaya's poetry and prose also point to the ruse of the “secular” within the Zionist context via interrelated subversions of the spatial,

126. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile within Sovereignty: A Critique of the Concept ‘Negation of Exile’ in Israeli Culture” [in Hebrew], *Theory and Criticism* 4 (1993): 23–53, 24.

temporal, and linguistic. This chapter will show how these themes operate within a thread in Pedaya's work concerning the reparative aspects of exile. This train of thought begins with the long poem "*Ish Holekh*" ("A Man Walks," 1992), continues in her psycho-political study of practices of wandering, *Walking beyond Trauma*, and culminates in the hybrid reportage-fiction narrative of *The Eye of the Cat* (2008).¹²⁷

Pedaya initially established herself as a poet in the 1990s, publishing in the journal *Hadarim*, and to date has written five collections of poetry. As a scholar of Jewish thought and history, Pedaya found herself at odds with the dominant interpretations of kabbalah advanced by scholars such as Gershom Scholem, who ignored the centrality of the visual and aural dimensions of kabbalah.¹²⁸ Much of her scholarship, particularly the work *Ha-ma'reh Ve-ha-dibur*, attempts to remedy this logocentric bias.¹²⁹ Pedaya is active in the current revival of *piyyut* and Andalusian music in Israel, and established the Yonah Ensemble with her brother, the *paytan* Yehudah Petaya.¹³⁰

Pedaya's scholarly work straddles several theoretical approaches and scholarly fields: postcolonialism, the poststructural aesthetic theory of Paul Virilio and Michel de Certeau,

127. "Ish Holekh" was first published in a journal in 1994 and anthologized in Pedaya's 2009 collection *Dyo Adam* (Blood's ink). *Walking beyond Trauma* is a phenomenological and psychoanalytically informed study of exile as a collective means for coping with the trauma of the Spanish Expulsion. It examines the development of *tik-sei galut*, "ceremonies of exile," which originate with the biblical prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel and reappear in the generation after the Spanish Expulsion, with Moses Cordovero. Pedaya references the trauma theories of Kathy Caruth and Dominic LaCapra, but notes that movement and gesture are a human means of "working through" that predates psychoanalysis. These reparative rituals reconceive the modern Zionist understanding of exile as a defective condition in need of repair, which she sees as originating in the Jewish internalization of a Christian notion of wandering as punishment, particularly given the banishment of Cain for the murder of Abel and the Christian identification of the Jew with Cain.

128. Haviva Pedaya, "Merkaz Dahan, Kenes Yehudei Bavel: Zehut U-moreshet" [Dahan Center, Conference of the Jews of Babylon: Identity and heritage], video, 32:12, May 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4nbZAG2zEM&t=13s>.

129. Haviva Pedaya, *Vision and Speech: Models of Prophecy in Jewish Mysticism* [in Hebrew] (Los Angeles: Kerub, 2002).

psychoanalysis, and kabbalah studies. Whereas Ella Shohat uses the term “Arab Jew” to denote a political, cultural, and historical hybrid against the dictates of Zionist separatism, Pedaya foregrounds the theological aspect of Mizrahi identity, employing constructions such as “Jews from the Islamic World” and the “spiritual territory” of Islam.¹³¹ Like Shohat and other postcolonial theorists such as Yehouda Shenhav and Hanan Hever, Pedaya highlights the erasure of symbiotic connections to the Arab world by Israeli state institutions. Rather than view “Mizrahiyut” as an essentialized ethnicity, Pedaya considers the lost imaginary cultural space inhabited by an array of forms of life shared between Arabs and Jews. Her postcolonialism has a theological dimension in criticizing Zionism for having erased the Jewish historiography of the East. She proposes an alternative orientation grounded in the history and theology of Eastern European Hasidism and Kabbalah. Her intervention is similarly theological: her scholarship and prose reorient Zionism away from its Protestant Christian roots and frame it within the Jewish history of the Judeo-Islamic world. To this end, Pedaya’s criticism employs concepts from the tradition of kabbalah as theoretical tools, a method which will be elaborated below.

Pedaya also theorizes the psychic position of the colonizer. For her, the colonized exists within a temporal horizon which “weeps first but laughs last” (*Eye of the Cat*, 155), assuming a dynamic relationship to the psychic charge of collective trauma. The colonizer, in contrast, assumes the frozen position of the melancholic—one stuck in the process of acting out.¹³² Pedaya does not offer a simple formula for transcending colonialism. Instead, employing a Lacanian

130. Pedaya, currently a professor of Jewish history and mysticism at the University of Ben Gurion and head of the Elyachar Center for Sephardi Heritage, is the great-granddaughter of the Iraqi kabbalist Rabbi Yehouda Fetaya. Fetaya wrote several works of kabbalah including *Yayin Ha-reqa’h*, *Min’hat Yehuda*, and *Bet Le’hem Yehuda*, a commentary on Isaac Luria and Haim Vital’s *Sefer Etz Chaim*. He was regarded as an authority on amulets (*qame’ot*) and dream interpretation.

131. Haviva Pedaya, “Ha-Ir K’tkest V’ha-shula’im K’kol,” in *Shivato Shel Ha-Kol Ha-Goleh: Zehut Mizrahit: Poetika, Muzika, Merkhav* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2016), 148.

frame, she proposes a means of loosening the ties between the Symbolic and Real registers of space such that they do not assume a relation of complete identity with each other.

THE PROBLEM OF NATIONALIST REDEMPTION-AS-STASIS

Both Swissa and Pedaya reverse the poles of exile and “homeland” entailed in the nationalist narrative of *shivat Tzion* (the return to Zion). For Swissa, Moroccan immigration to Ir-Ganim leads to spiritual evisceration, embodied in the lament of his defeated protagonist Pazuelo: “exile in the Holy Land itself.” This communal annihilation constitutes a refusal to be subjected to ideology of the *kur ha-hitukh* (the melting pot). Pedaya similarly conceives of exile in terms of absence, but through a Lacanian framework, envisions this lack as a condition of desire and reparation. Pedaya’s work reconceives expulsion not as an absence to be remedied by means of the static conception of space entailed in modern territorial sovereignty, but as a means of “working through” collective trauma.

While the ideology of *shiliat ha-galut* (the negation of exile) conceives of statelessness as a condition in need of repair, Pedaya looks to exile, and its representation within ritual, as a means of rewriting the semiotics of space. In *Space and Place: An Essay on the Theological-Political Unconscious* (*Merkhav U-Makom: Masah Al Ha-lomudah Ha-teologi-politi*), Pedaya transposes the Lacanian registers of the subjective unconscious (the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary) into spatial ones that construct “reality” (*ha-metziut*).¹³³ Following Paul Virilio (the so-called “theorist of speed”), Pedaya holds that reality does not exist intrinsically, but can only be apprehended via the interplay of these spatialized registers. Pedaya differentiates between bare

132. Haviva Pedaya, “Historia Edutah Shel Mistikah V’Kolonialism” [The history of testimony of mysticism and colonialism], February 14, 2016, Elyachar Center for the Study of Spanish and Eastern Jewish Heritage, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, video, 1:08:56, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwXrFjtId5M&t=1154.

“place” and “space” as constructed through the Symbolic and Imaginary registers.¹³⁴ The Imaginary is the coherent, abstract identity of a space comprised of the regime of symbols and beliefs attributed to it via the Symbolic. In Pedaya’s framework, the Real (the undifferentiated presymbolic register in Lacan’s schema) describes the bare materiality of a given place, a kind of “naked place” (22), made accessible only through a shifting relationship between the other two registers. Pedaya notes that in the realm of myth and ritual, the Symbolic can completely subsume the Real, such that reality is fully expressed on a vertical, transcendental axis (32). This allows for a symbolic space not frozen with regard to the Real, but one with dynamism that can reconceive identity in the manner necessary for working through.

In *Walking beyond Trauma*, Pedaya describes the ritualistic wandering of the medieval kabbalists Moshe Cordovero and Isaac Luria, which she regards as a means of working through the collective pain of expulsion. Pedaya identifies three types of such ambulation: one represents a direct reaction to the trauma of acute exile, another performs ritualistic walking as means of “acting out,” and a third serves as means of “working through.” The third manner of ritual walking displaces the trauma of expulsion from place onto time by expressing loss along a transcendental, extraterritorial axis (219). In this third sense, kabbalistic practices of walking

133. Haviva Pedaya, *Merkhav U-Makom: Masah Al Ha-lo-mudah Ha-teologi-politi* [Expanses: An Essay on the Theological-Political Unconscious] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2011), 37. All translations of this work are my own. The publisher’s choice of “expanses” as a translation for this phrase does not preserve the specificity, respectively, of concrete place and abstract space as they apply to Pedaya’s theory. Hence, I use *Space and Place* as the translated title.

134. As is well known, the Lacanian Imaginary consists of the internalized, whole, ideal self, articulated in “the mirror stage” as the infant’s *méconnaissance* of the image of her coherent reflection (internalized as a unified image constructed outside the Self). The Symbolic register (closely related in Lacan’s thought to the *nom-du-père* and the “big other”) is what constitutes the subject through its entering into the language, rules, and laws that render it socially legible (or illegible, as Judith Butler has shown in the *The Psychic Life of Power*) within regimes of linguistic and cultural signification.

displace trauma away from territory, rather than “acting out” within the horizontal axis of place and society.

According to Pedaya’s model of space, modern Zionism sought to obsessively fill the absence of exile by means of stasis, arresting symbolic space by foreclosing access to the vertical axis. Pedaya situates this modern territorial “return” to Palestine at the “tragic intersection” of secular Enlightenment and Jewish nationalism in the nineteenth century. In this arresting of symbolic space, the territory of Palestine not only signifies theological restoration, it itself becomes the signified. In this manner, the Imaginary and Symbolic are reduced completely to the Real of territory (43) and the trauma of expulsion is “acted out” via displacement onto the Palestinian inhabitants of that land.

Pedaya differentiates use of the Symbolic from Lacan’s own, which emphasizes the sense of a social order. While Lacan theorized the Symbolic in continuity with the social, Pedaya allows for a relationship of dissonance or subversion between the social and the Symbolic. According to her, an unconscious Christian orientation leads Lacan to imply such a correspondence, assumed by Christianity because of its hegemonic position in medieval Europe.¹³⁵ By contrast, the Jewish population within Christian Europe, like all minority populations, posits a dissonance between the social and Symbolic orders (33). Pedaya asserts that Jewish medieval theology, while informed by medieval Catholic doctrine, nevertheless differs from it in expressing a dissonance between the concrete and the spiritual on a horizontal axis. Pedaya elaborates this disconnection between the

135. Pedaya identifies remnants of a medieval Christian theological unconscious in Lacan’s thought, noting that the three registers of the unconscious are secularized forms of medieval interpretation of holy texts. The understanding of the self by means of rendering symptoms consciously legible is thus akin to the revelation of divine meaning through Christian biblical hermeneutics. *Space and Place*, 29.

social and Symbolic as a means of resymbolizing territory from the horizontal axis onto a transcendental axis contained within the Symbolic.

In this manner, the Symbolic and social operate in accordance with the foundational doubling of the heavenly and earthly Jerusalem, a framework that was established in the so-called Axial Age (from roughly 500 BCE to the first century) and that continued through the early apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple period. Pedaya describes shifts in the relationship between the metaphysical and earthly incarnations of Jerusalem throughout history, together with various configurations of transcendental vision and the conception of the divine within the Real. During its inception in the Axial Age, the ancient mythological idea of the heavenly Jerusalem constituted a foundational doubling on a vertical axis. During states of destruction, the correspondence between the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem integrated the Real and the transcendental (34). These concepts were subsequently reoriented along the horizontal axis and became a means of representing oppositional, nonhegemonic forms of collective identity among early Christians and Jews (34). In medieval times, the relationship between heavenly and earthly city came to subvert relations of hegemony and minority between Jews and Christians. With the rise of Christian hegemony and the Crusades, it was directed once more towards the earthly, as can be seen in the Crusades. In response, Jewish theology envisions a destroyed city within the symbolic domain.

Pedaya conceives of the territorial return of modern Zionism as an excess of Symbolic meaning generated within the Imaginary, outside the territory of Palestine, that cannot be borne by the Real. At this point, the symbolic construction of space occurs primarily via texts, at a distance from the land itself. The territory represents the longed-for and lost place, a lack that desire seeks to fill. Initially, Eretz Yisrael is conceived entirely in terms of the Real.¹³⁶ It

symbolizes the place of exile following expulsion, “a place which never was and of a place that will be” (38). Representations of such a desired of fantasized “Real” sites exist on both the social (horizontal) and the transcendental (vertical) axes.

Pedaya describes the modern territorial “return” to Palestine as a “tragic intersection” between Enlightenment processes of secularization (which she defines as an emptying out of the transcendental) and modern Jewish nationalism. This intersection prompted a turn toward Eretz Yisrael as a resymbolization of the Real in entirely horizontal, territorial terms (*Space and Place*, 40). However, this turn towards the horizontal forecloses the possibility of working through. The vision of place it proposes gives rise to one of two problematic relationships between the registers of space. In the first, the Symbolic is imagined to be at a distance from the Real, only to impose semiotic excess upon it. The second comprises a fixed relationship between the Symbolic and the Real, blocking recourse to the Imaginary to reconceive the understanding of place.

Recalling Svetlana Boym’s categories of restorative and reflective nostalgia elaborated in chapter 1, these failures of spatial imagination proposed by Pedaya can be compared to this first, collective mode of memory, that which linearly ossifies commemorative tropes while claiming to restore them. Framed within Pedaya’s Lacanian schema, reflective nostalgia, in contrast, has the capacity to resymbolize the Real against nationalist directives to concretize memorial narratives teleologically. This gives rise to problematic notions of redemption-as-stasis, a frozen condition that lacks the dynamism necessary to reconceive the horizontal, social space on the vertical, transcendental axis in the manner made possible by the condition of exile.

Pedaya also regards this Zionist drive towards stasis as rooted in an attempt to negate the Jewish response to an internalized Christian idea of wandering as punishment. Pedaya

136. Eretz Yisrael was one of the Hebrew names of Mandatory Palestine in the pre-state Zionist cultural imaginary.

demonstrates similarities between Christian and Jewish conceptions of the Self in medieval Europe based respectively on self-punishment and punishment by society. Because the Jews internalized the Christian idea of the Jew as a Cain-like wanderer, Zionism formed its notion of redemption by negating this internalized Christian archetype of wandering, through establishing stasis in a sovereign land. The attempt to negate this internalized image also nullifies the use of walking as a practice that can resymbolize the traumas of expulsion and banishment (233). *Geula* (redemption) becomes equated with stasis and is situated exclusively on a horizontal axis. The dynamic of expeller and expelled is then imposed onto the Jewish-Muslim relation, and the Muslim is installed as the expelled (223).

A MONOLINGUAL “MODE OF TRANSMISSION”

Literary scholar and art critic Shaul Setter aptly characterizes Pedaya’s literary project as a “mode of transmission” which operates in contrast to the “rupture with tradition” at the origin of the Eurocentric canon of modern Hebrew literature.¹³⁷ He demonstrates how Pedaya’s writing challenges the monolingual, allegedly secular aesthetics of modern Hebrew literature, rooted in the European Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment). The Maskilic architects of the “secular” renewal of Hebrew rejected the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Mishna, too closely associated with the ethos of the “Old Jew.” Instead, they favored its biblical variant, which lent itself more readily to the grandeur of Romanticist narratives.¹³⁸ By fashioning a “modern” literature via (often turgid) biblical *shibbutzim* (inlaid quotations), the Maskilim, effecting the proverbial “rupture

137. As Setter points out, *masortiyut* is etymologically related to *mesirah* or “transmission” (just like the root of the English word “tradition” is *tradere*, meaning to “deliver”). For this and an excellent discussion of Pedaya’s critique of Zach and her interaction with the *piyyut* form, see Shaul Setter, “Modes of Transmission: Haviva Pedaya and the Future-Past of Exilic Collectives,” 151–82, in “The Departure from History: Writing at the Ends of Literature in Israel/Palestine,” Phd diss., UC Berkeley, 2012.

with the traditional past,” revived a form of Hebrew predicated upon the exclusion of all other Jewish languages (including, ironically, the same Yiddish spoken by the Maskilim themselves).

With the rise of *Hibbat Tzion* and Jewish nationalism in Europe in the 1880s, the T’chiah (Revival) linked this modernized Hebrew to the territory of Palestine. As Anita Shapira has shown, modern Hebrew culture and literature sustained this direct mapping of the Hebrew Bible onto the territory of Israel/Palestine within the Zionist cultural imaginary.¹³⁹ In conceptualizing this “mode of transmission,” Setter shows how Pedaya’s scholarly and literary work engages a literary genealogy rooted in the East that subverts modern Hebrew literature’s foundational break with tradition. “The East” (*Ha-Mizrakh*), for Pedaya, is a purposefully general category that signifies a trajectory of Jewish texts marginalized by dominant canonization and historiography. According to Setter, it also marks a potential, imaginative space in which Jewish culture and textuality are reoriented towards this trajectory and away from Zionism. He outlines this textual genealogy to include the prophetic books of Isaiah and Ezekiel (the origins of the *Ma’aseh Merkavah* or “workings of the divine chariot”), the second-century and fifth-century literatures of the *Merkavah* and *Heikhalot* (“celestial palaces”), Hasidic legends, stories and concepts from Lurianic kabbalah, and forms of medieval Andalusian *piyyut*.¹⁴⁰ Where I take slight issue with

138. For an account of the development of the Hebrew of the Haskalah and T’chiah, see Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, June 1988), 17–30.

139. Anita Shapira, “The Bible and Israeli Identity,” *AJS Review* 28, no. 1 (2004): 11–42.

140. As Ra’an’an Boustán has shown in *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), this unstable, ideologically motivated, self-reflexive body of texts is less concerned with direct experience of the divine per se, but instead constitutes a “sophisticated exercise in literary adaptation” (6). *Piyyut* is a form of liturgical and extra-liturgical poetry born of the Muslim-Jewish symbiosis of Al-Andalus. For a comprehensive introduction to *piyyut*, see T. Carmi, ed., “The Poems: Part II: From the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century,” *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1981).

Setter's insights into Pedaya's writings is the "emphatically non-monolingual" nature he ascribes to her work.¹⁴¹ I will argue that one of the limitations of Pedaya's project is her tendency to represent Arabic (in Hebrew) via tropes of loss and diminishment, rather than simply employ Arabic in a manner that would enhance the polyphony she champions.

Though it stops short of subverting the primacy of Hebrew itself within symbolic space of Israel/Palestine, Pedaya's poetic output does challenge dominant romantic and lyric modes of Hebrew poetry. Pedaya's first collection, *Mi-teyyvah Stuma* (From a sealed ark), adapts the lyric to the structure of medieval *piyyut*, adopting its direct address to the divine and use of Arabic monorhyme. In her two-part manifesto *The Time Has Come to Say "I" Differently in Hebrew Poetry*, Pedaya explicitly articulates this expansion of aesthetic parameters.¹⁴² She claims that previous attempts to open "legitimate codes" to minority voices merely reinforced dominant conventions. Her criticism is directed mainly toward modernist poet Natan Zach (one of the leaders of the Likrat circle of the 1960s). Zach aspired to a fleeting subjectivity in his poetry that would dissolve the social codes of Natan Alterman and the previous generation, Dor HaMedina (the Statehood Generation). Pedaya claims, however, that Zach merely reinforced a universal, Eurocentric "I," marginalizing poetry associated with the immigrant experience, forms of religiosity, and what she terms the "Ethnic I" ("*Ha-Ani Ha-adati*"). Pedaya, referencing Edward Said's practice of contrapuntal reading, instead calls for a dismantling of this universalizing subjectivity in favor of a "polyphony [*rav-koliut*] within the individual poem."¹⁴³

141. Setter, "Modes of Transmission," 153.

142. Haviva Pedaya, "Higiah HaZman Lomar 'Ani' Acheret B'Sifrut Ha-Ivrit 1," *Ha'aretz*, May 1 2006, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/1.1102629>. The original wordplay of the title, lost in English translation, simultaneously denotes "'I' am different in Hebrew poetry" and "The time has come to say 'I' differently in Hebrew poetry."

Pedaya echoes both Said and Mikhael Bakhtin in her call for a poetics of polyphony, for the dismantling of a unified subjective voice in favor of a plurality of narrative points of view.¹⁴⁴ She proposes a formal subversion that will allow the “poetry of the East” to be evaluated by means of its own parameters, rather than according to “legitimate codes” of Hebrew poetry. This entails a shift from the abstraction, sparseness (*razon*), and minimalism of Likrat, towards figurative, concrete, expressive, and narrative styles. These modes, for Pedaya, are better suited to express both protest and the “mythic or mystical layers of consciousness” inhibited by the fixed codes of the universalizing “I.” Polyphony (which in Bakhtin’s writings is extended through the concepts of heteroglossia and diglossia) does not refer explicitly and literally to polylingualism (multiple languages), but to underlying narrative points-of-view, and to their interaction with the social world beyond the text, as well as to different languages within the language. And yet, in the case of Pedaya’s call to represent the “poetry of the East” against its erasure by “dominant codes,” the inclusion of Arabic is a means of challenging Hebrew monolingualism. In a manner that is symptomatic of the more general force of the Zionist erasure of Arabic, Pedaya seems to rely on tropes of exile from Arabic and represent its erasure in Hebrew, rather than insert Arabic into her prose as a means of expanding the range of voices within Israeli poetry.¹⁴⁵

143. Said introduces this concept of reading the colony within and against the grain of the metropole (e.g., reading *Mansfield Park* from the perspective of Antigua) in “Reflections on Exile” (1984) and elaborates it in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

144. Both Said (in the texts referenced above) and Bakhtin in “Polyphony in Dostoevsky’s Poetics” in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* rely on the notion of contrapuntal voices in a fugue as an analogy for dismantling a monologic narrative voice.

145. The state erasure of Arabic has been further entrenched in recent legislation with the passing of the Nation-State Law. The promoters of Arabic with regard to Mizrahi cultural production include the literary critic Ktzia Alon, who exhorts the younger generation of Jewish Israelis to “cease being in the Crusader fortress [and] learn Arabic and write in Arabic” (my translation). Ktzia Alon, “‘Mizrahim’: Go Learn to Read and Write in Arabic,” *Ynet*, April 2, 2016, <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4785637,00.html>. For a discussion of polyglossia in Israeli cinema see Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 263–64.

“ISH HOLEKH”: WHY DOES THE WANDERING EAST CRY OUT IN HEBREW?

The stasis Pedaya ascribes to Jewish sovereignty puts the categories of place and language in tension, such that the territorial “return” to Eretz Yisrael constitutes a linguistic exile from Arabic. Pedaya’s long poem “*Ish Holekh*” (“A Man Walks”) suggests that modern political attempts to end exile ironically prompt an expulsion from language, specifically, from the speaker’s own Arabic (ממנה סולקתי כדי להפדות), “From it I was expelled in order to be redeemed”). The poem portrays various *tiksei galut* (ceremonies of exile): biblical, abstract, political, and individual, all ambulations that undermine political salvation understood as stasis. These wanderings include that of the anonymous titular “man,” who walks from Damascus to Paris, followed by the movement of the Middle East itself (“Suddenly I saw that the East was wandering”), the preparations of the exiled prophet Ezekiel, Abraham’s walk to Moriah, and the speaker’s journey from Jerusalem to Be’er Sheva.¹⁴⁶

The wandering “ceremonies” of the poem undermine the fixed mapping of language and identity onto territory. This strict correspondence is embodied in the poem’s recall of the monolingual national-Zionist injunction “עברי דבר עברית” (“Hebrew, speak Hebrew”).¹⁴⁷ When this frozen symbolic space leaves the speaker faced with the choice between *ruakh* and *adama* (spirit and earth), she attempts to find a temporary refuge in speech, only to undermine her own attempt to find linguistic cover, due to the erasure of Arabic: “בינתיים אעדיף אמנם לשכון בתוך מלה/בית” (“In the meantime I prefer though to dwell within a word / another home does not

146. Setter proposes that the man in the poem’s title may be the Syrian literary critic and translator Subhi Hadidi, to whom the poem is dedicated, who currently lives in Paris.

147. *Ivri* refers to a “Hebrew person,” and was one of the monikers assigned to the “New Jew,” who was a “Hebrew” from whom traces of the European (and in this case, the Jewish-Arab) past had been expunged.

yet exist”).¹⁴⁸ However this linguistic refuge, like that of either solid ground or of salvation within sovereignty, is similarly not yet available: “שפתי נעות/ אך קולי אינו נשמע”) (“My lips move/ but my voice is not heard”). Language, specifically Arabic, has been expelled from both the territorial place of “Israel” and the symbolic space of the Israeli cultural imaginary. The Judeo-Arabic in which the *g’dolim* (the “great ones” or adults) “cursed and loved” (שכן זו השפה שבה קללו ואהבו) (“הגדולים”) has been muffled by the obsessive need to fill lack by means of a strict conformity between a singularly modern Hebrew cultural imaginary and the territory of the Holy Land.¹⁴⁹ The speaker doubts whether it still exists, “בתוך עברוטי עורוטי ערבוטי” (“Within my Hebrewness, my blindness, my Arabness”); the synesthesia of a “blinded” language further obscures the connection between Hebrew and Arabic.

The poem ends on a note of protest, as the East cries out “anyway” (“be-chol zot”) against the monolingual directive. This shout is the culmination of the trembling that begins halfway through the text (“פתאום הבנתי אדמה זו עד כמה זזה היא/ ורעדתה כמה לא נוכה”) (“Suddenly I understood just how much this earth moves / and just how uncomfortable is her trembling”). Arabic is often figured in Pedaya’s poetics through tropes of diminishment: echoes, shadows, blindness, forgetting, and bodily cuts. And yet these representation of remnants of Arabic foreclose opportunities for a bilingualism which would expand the polyphony Pedaya champions.

148. The double meaning of original Hebrew *bayit* is untranslatable. It signifies both “home” and “Temple” in the sense of the First, Second, and (potentially, to some) the Third Jerusalem Temples. The Third Temple is known in the prophets as Ezekiel’s Temple; the *bayit* that does not yet exist is likely that of Ezekiel, suggesting a dissonance between political and theological forms of salvation.

149. Setter convincingly interprets the *g’dolim* as both the Andalusian paytanim and the adults who spoke between them in Arabic to obscure meaning from the children. Arabic was the language spoken among the adults of Pedaya’s childhood home. Her mother, whose family moved to Jerusalem from Baghdad in the 1920s, is descended from a long line of Iraqi-Jewish kabbalists. Her father emigrated to Israel from Iraq as a young man. In Nurith Aviv’s film *Langue Sacrée, Langue Parlée* (2008), Pedaya describes feeling simultaneously deeply attached to and shut out from Arabic.

WANDERING PORTRAITS OF THE PERIPHERY

The Eye of the Cat (B'Ayn Ha-Chatul), Pedaya's first novel-length work, portrays the Israeli periphery (the *peripheria*), as a site where two competing conceptions of symbolic spaces arise: (1) territory as managed by city planners and government and colonial forces and (2) the wanderings which redirect these attempts at management and surveillance.¹⁵⁰ In keeping with her challenge to dominant modes of modern Hebrew authorship, Pedaya eschews the form of the modern European novel for the book.¹⁵¹ Instead, it consists of "shards of stories" ("*shivrei sipurim*," according to its back matter).¹⁵² The work begins with the narrator's move from the affluent Negev/Naqab suburb of Omer to the Old City of Be'er Sheva, where she learns to perceive the area from the nomadic perspective of the strays. These wanderings within the *peripheria* constitute a "working through" of static processes of nationalist redemption.¹⁵³

The book remains in consistent tension with its own desire for a kind of narrative and spatial polyphony. In line with Pedaya's rejection of a coherent "I" at the center of a text, it portrays various points of view within the social mosaic of Be'er Sheva, and yet is focalized

150. Haviva Pedaya, *B'Ayn Ha-Khatul* [The eye of the cat] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2008). In this chapter, I quote, with permission, from the Institute for Translation of Hebrew Literature's unpublished translation by Sara Daniels. I have occasionally supplemented my own translated phrases in brackets where I have disagreed with Daniels's own. All page numbers are from the original Hebrew edition. The short story collection *Khotamot* [Seals] is Pedaya's first prose work.

151. Since Avraham Mapu's *Ahavat Tzion* [Amnon, prince, and peasant] (1853), the novel has been the central vehicle for the "secularization" and "normalization" of modern Hebrew literature.

152. Pedaya's choice of narrative "shards" is also an attempt to represent, on a formal level, the concept of *shevirat ha-keilim* (the breaking of the vessels), the central creation myth of Lurianic kabbalah.

153. The term *peripheria* refers to the geographic and cultural features of an area in southern Israel, socially and economically isolated from the "central" cities of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Be'er Sheva, the unofficial capital of the region and of the Negev/Naqab desert, is about sixty kilometers from Gaza and 120 kilometers from Jerusalem. This is historically a Bedouin area and, after the establishment Israeli statehood, one in which Jews from Islamic lands were settled mostly in the 1950s. They were followed by Russian and Ethiopian Jews, and then by Eritrean refugees who were subsequently sent to Rwanda. Of course, even this relation of "margin" and "center" is within a Zionist, rather than Palestinian or binational, framework.

through a narrator who very much resembles Pedaya herself. Before elaborating these contradictions, I will outline ways in which Pedaya's recourse to notions of space rooted in kabbalah constitute significant subversions of literary form and of nationalistic modes of the management of space and memory.

For Pedaya, space is never solely "place," and the series of contrapuntal fragments of *The Eye of the Cat* portrays the deeply ironic semiotics of the desert town: an Israeli flag hung on the wall of resettled Palestinian informants (*meshtapim*, משתת"פים), the reversals of meanings of biblical Hebrew entailed in names such as Duda'im (the mandrakes Leah sold to Rachel for Jacob's love) for the overwhelming regional garbage dump, and copies of Middle Eastern buildings and marketplaces, imported back to Palestine by the Ottomans. This desert city emerges in Pedaya's writing as a kind of palimpsest of colonial forces, of which modern development is only the most recent power. Pedaya situates Be'er Sheva within a cosmopolitan constellation of cities—and outside of Israeli Symbolic space—highlighting its connections to Djerba and Djalal in Tunisia and to Baghdad, through shared dynamics of colonialism and shared architecture.

Pedaya is clearly influenced by de Certeau's tactics and strategies. From the colonial center of Ottoman Istanbul, to departments of the Israeli government, strategic actors impose static conceptions of space and linear forms of memory upon the margins. Native Bedouins are forced increasingly to the outskirts of the city by the development of malls and "parks," which consist entirely of plastic grass. The collaborators are moved to the outskirts of the city by the IDF, isolated both from the homes they left behind in Rafah and within their new surroundings. The municipal Authority for the Protection of Wildlife constantly rounds up animals for extermination, and attempts to strip a character named Rosa, who has given over her home to sixty rescued dogs, of her canine charges.

In line with Pedaya's valorization of exile discussed above, the nomadism of the margins resymbolizes space in the manner of the "proliferating illegitimacy" of de Certeau. He defines these tactics as:

The microbe-like, singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress, but ... far from being regulated or eliminated by panoptic administration [they] have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy, developed and insinuated themselves into the networks of surveillance ... to the point of constituting everyday regulations and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanisms and discourses of the observational organization. (96)

Such tactics, which disrupt the deliberate management of "panoptic" strategies by overwriting them as a matter of course, occur throughout *Eye of the Cat*. One instance of this "surreptitious creativity" occurs in Pedaya's account of native Arab engineers skewing the architectural plans of the Sultan during Ottoman rule:

[T]wo local Arab engineers, Sa'id Effendi al-Nashashiby and Ragheb Effendi al-Nashashiby, were only willing to compromise if the Mosque was facing diagonally towards Mecca, deliberately corrupting the blueprint. Together they lay the foundations of stick-straight colonialism, building everything in straight rows, warp and weft, a neat grid promising that when the Turkish ruler glanced out of his tower to the commercial streets, the marketplace and the

mosque, he would immediately be informed of all Bedouin coming and goings. All flat, open and transparent. But in the end, the streets curled and twisted like crowded poisonous snakes climbing over each other. (162)

Pedaya's scriptural allusions are biblical, Mishnaic, and kabbalistic. They construct a symbolic space that demonstrates how present-day territorial redemption violates scriptural vision, from which territorial claims draw their justification. Like Tzur, Pedaya does not negate or deflate the Zionist theological claim to the land. Instead, she shows its all-too-dangerous realization. While walking behind an empty lot behind a bakery, the narrator encounters a wadi, a *nakhal achzav* (literally a "disappointing" stream or river, a common term for a stream that fills in winter and is dry in summer, similar to a winterbourne). She recalls the well-known verse from Psalm 126 which compares the redemptive return to Zion to the filling up of a stream in the Negev ("Restore, O Lord, our fortunes / like freshets in the Negev").¹⁵⁴ Such a river can overflow in the winter, when the level of water becomes too much for the bank to bear. Similarly, the return of the "fortunes"—in this case, the nationalist semiotic modes that dominate the territory of Be'er Sheva—leads to the violation caused by symbolic excess.

In an example of Pedaya's "kabbalistic cultural criticism," she compares the rings of Be'er Sheva to those of Baghdad, known under Abbasid rule as the "circular city of Peace."¹⁵⁵ Under Abbasid rule in the sixth century, Baghdad was designed as a series of rings. In Pedaya's

154. Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 448.

155. The phrase "kabbalistic cultural criticism" is from Arik Glasner, "Arisat Ha-khatul," *Ma'ariv* (Tarbut supplement), December 5, 2008.

imaginary, Be'er Sheva is similarly made up of concentric circles, only these are toxic waste dumps and are a symbol of the city increasingly being built outward, so that new immigrants are pushed to the outside rings in a way that enforces hierarchy and separation. Thus, the Israeli version of the "circular city of Peace" reverses the intention of the original blueprint. These kabbalistic images of the cosmos (transcendental, vertical, celestial) and of the circular city of Baghdad are both images that wander, but that have landed statically in Be'er Sheva, where they are incarnated in the expulsion of Bedouins to shanties and in the construction of a toxic waste dump in its outermost layer. Thus this wandering kabbalistic image connects the space of Be'er Sheva to the East as well as to the circular, colonial process of destruction-as-construction. By using these images to describe the effects of colonialism, Pedaya employs an immanent, Eastern, mystical structure of knowledge to reorient the Real of Be'er Sheva onto a transcendental, vertical axis.

HEAVENLY JERUSALEM / EARTHLY BE'ER SHEVA: RECENTERING THE PERIPHERY

One of the principles Pedaya evokes to describe the terrain of Be'er Sheva is that of the "foundational doubling" (*kfilut yesodit*) of heavenly and earthly Jerusalem (Space and Place, 33).¹⁵⁶ The rabbis of the Talmud subscribed to the doctrine that the world above corresponded to the one below.¹⁵⁷ For Pedaya, this doubling is a means of integrating the Real on the horizontal axis with the transcendental on the vertical one. Processes of stasis and erasure lead to a

156. This doubling is discussed by Victor Aptowitz in "The Heavenly Temple in the Agada" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 2 (1930): 137–53. As Boustán points out in *From Martyr to Mystic*, Aptowitz's account is limited in its exclusively thematic and ahistorical approach but is nonetheless essential.

157. Boustán, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 167.

peripheral reclaiming of Heavenly Jerusalem within the Negev, as Pedaya recounts her attachment to her adopted city of Be'er Sheva:

Eventually, earthly Be'er Sheva branded heavenly Jerusalem within me, to the point that I no longer wish to return to earthly Jerusalem. For what is the heavenly city but a key to the earthly city? If not a refuge from reality. If not a dream. At times when people ruled over each other harshly, I grew sick of the bloated cities and the empty hungry cities became a dream. (58)

That is, while “heavenly Jerusalem hovers [“remains hidden” may be a more apt translation of *חבויה*] above every city in the Land but not above earthly Jerusalem; she is more easily found hovering over Nowheresville” (56). Earthly Be'er Sheva, for Pedaya, is ironically better situated to embody heavenly Jerusalem than is earthly Jerusalem, which is overwritten with the symbolism of stasis.

Heavenly Jerusalem is also understood as the transcendental Jerusalem, which for Pedaya has the ability to resymbolize space not in direct relation to territory. Pedaya does not simplistically imply that the potential unification of the heavenly Jerusalem and the earthly Be'er Sheva can transcend the problem of colonialism. Rather, she suggests a way in which the territory itself can be less saturated with symbolic meaning, a way of obviating the dangers of too close a correspondence between the ancient transcendental concept of heavenly Jerusalem and the present-day city.

LIMITS OF THE “EXILE-WITHIN”

In their call for lateral, transnational sites of comparison, Shu-Mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet emphasize horizontal connections between minority works rather than relationships of binary opposition between minority/majority, metropole/colony, periphery/center. These transnational connections work against the tendency of the often globalized discourse of postcolonialism to elide minority subject positions. In the vein of such minor transnationalism, I invoke a comparison between *Eye of the Cat* and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, which similarly conveys hybrid identity in a symbolic and physical space characterized by liminality.¹⁵⁸ While Anzaldúa’s memoir is fully bilingual, Pedaya’s stops short of fully integrating Arabic. While the text is peppered with Iraqi Arabic (e.g., her aunt’s designating the color television, “*masbora*,” which means both “television” and “color” in Iraqi dialect, as opposed to “*suda*,” dialect for a black-and-white television, 81), it serves mostly to highlight individual words of Judeo-Arabic dialect. However, Pedaya stops short of using Arabic in the more robustly bilingual manner with which, for example, Gloria Anzaldúa code-switches between Spanish and English.

There are several moments in *Eye of the Cat* in which Pedaya stops short of a more thoroughly polyphonic bilingualism. One instance occurs in a conversation between the narrator and her friend Ibrahim, an Arab taxi driver from Wadi Juz (a neighborhood in East Jerusalem) who regularly drives her from Jerusalem to Be’er Sheva. The narrator describes his speech as “Hebrew [that] rang with the rhythm and tone of Arabic and jangled with unique words, some euphemisms, some direct translations of Arabic” (150). Regardless of the language in which the conversation “truly” occurred, Pedaya does not insert Ibrahim’s Arabic as Arabic into her text.

158. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987).

Instead, his Hebrew is described as having a kind of Arabic unconscious, similar to the manner with which she characterizes her own relationship to the language.

By employing a Jewish mystical idiom to decry the destruction wrought by Israeli state “progress,” Pedaya undermines the Jewish theological justifications of state violence. Clearly, relying on non-Jewish mystical traditions, such as Sufism or Christian mysticism, would not effect the same kind of critical retrieval. And yet Pedaya’s aspiration towards polyphony is again limited, in this case by largely neglecting non-Jewish forms of mysticism and tradition. In one such instance, Pedaya describes a gathering at a local pub, a social cross-section unlikely to converge in a “central” city such as Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. Such a quotidian, convivial atmosphere is necessary for the narrator to hear the “delicate poetry” of the kabbalistic commentary.¹⁵⁹

We would all mingle there, shifting between the [the Zohar and the *Sefer Etz Chayim*¹⁶⁰] and conversations with Tzvika peppered with Iraqi Arabic and sayings, conversations with the Bedouins about politics and contracts, the good food and the strong coffee and thick clouds of cigarette smoke. All the [tumult] of the Tree of Knowledge [of Good and Evil] was there, the constant screen of living noise a necessary requirement to hear the [delicate poetry] of the *Etz Chayim*. (143)

159. Pedaya is illustrating the Lurianic principle of *atzilut*, in which the qualities of the Sefirot are brought into the world through everyday action. The gathering is a kind of bridge between the narrator’s study of mysticism and her daily life.

160. *Sefer Etz Chaim* one of the foundational works of Lurianic kabbalah by Hayyim Vital. Pedaya’s great-grandfather authored a definitive commentary on this work.

The Bedouins at the bar are marginalized even within this “peripheral” group as purely secular subjects who, amid the discussion of Lurianic commentary, discuss only “politics and contracts.” At other points in the text, Bedouins are slightly romanticized as nomads and farmers; they are only rarely portrayed in as connected to Muslim texts and practices.

In contrast to the Mexican-American border of Anzaldúa’s work, the *periphēria* does not constitute a porous line of demarcation, but a buffer zone between Israeli, Palestinian, and Egyptian territories. In describing this setting, Pedaya remains within Israeli geographic space and is often preoccupied with the relation between center (*ha-merkaz*) and margin (*ha-periphēria*) and less concerned with the major periphery-minor periphery relation of the Negev/Naqab region and Gaza. The text’s wanderings extend only to the former checkpoint of Kisufim Junction (Tzir Kisufim). While the narrator reveals the irony of its name (“a junction for some, and longing for others”), the single mention in the text of life just beyond the former checkpoint is the narrator’s imagining of a bombed-out home in Rafah, left behind by resettled informants. Pedaya also could have extended the ambulation of her text further in its modes of focalization. Its hybrid of reportage, memoir, and fiction suggests a conflation of the “actual” Pedaya with the narrator that limits the text’s imagination of other points of view.¹⁶¹ The narrative occasionally assumes the perspective of animals, taking on the voice of a cat or dog, but never speaks directly from the voice of a recent Ethiopian immigrant, or the Palestinian collaborators—rather, it centers the figure of the Mizrahi Hebrew poet. Expanding its range of narrative voices would have facilitated further contact between the city’s respective margins.

161. In the afterward, Pedaya notes that her book is “partly imagined,” but that parts of it “engage in documentation for its own sake” (365, my translation).

CONCLUSION

Pedaya's work engages Jewish mystical exilic practices and other forms of Arab-Jewish life and textuality erased by European Jewish nationalism. In contrast to Swissa's use of mystic texts, Pedaya's investment suggests the possibility of literary subversion to the canon of modern Hebrew literature from an "Jewish-Muslim" perspective. Like Tzur, while metatextually engaged with the aporias of secularity underlying modern Hebrew literature, she nonetheless stops short of imagining binational possibilities beyond these contradictions of the "secular." Far from performing a coherently subversive "transmission," Pedaya's literary masortiyut remains nonetheless, in certain ways, a product of the very erasure it critiques, particularly in its centering of Jewishness and its tendency to represent the Arabic language in Hebrew, in lieu of a more robust bilingual polyphony. As long as "Muslim-Jewishness" is engaged with a "secular center" rather than with spiritual and linguistic margins, it faces limits to imagining possibilities beyond the Zionist secular.

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