

Retrospectivity as an Ethical Stance:  
Revisiting the Zionist Dream in Israeli Fiction and Film

by

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Abstract

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My dissertation engages with Israeli works of fiction and film whose plots return to the period from the pre-state *Yishuv* in Palestine till the first years of Israeli statehood. Through close reading and analysis of narrative strategies and cinematic techniques, I explore the ways in which this retrospective gaze presents an ethical critique of the Zionist enterprise. These works reexamine essential notions in Zionist ideology such as the ideal of the New Jew, the negation of the diaspora (*shlilat ha-galut*), the treatment of Middle-Eastern Jews, and the fate of the Palestinians. I argue that only through retrospective narration is it possible for these Israeli writers and filmmakers to propose a nuanced ethical critique that both depicts the experience of daily life in those heady ideological days and offers a historical reassessment of the values of that era. Throughout this dissertation, my theoretical framework remains grounded in narratology, as well as in conceptions of intertextuality as a bilateral cultural practice.

Part I of my dissertation is dedicated to S. Yizhar's autobiographical novel *Preliminaries* (1992). The novel tells the story of a Jewish family that settles in Palestine during the period of the *Yishuv*, the New Jewish Settlement in the 1920s, and is narrated through the dual perspective of the youngest child in the family and of the adult some sixty years later. The co-existence of the two narrators enables the complex message of the novel; it places the events in their human and historical context, and yet, through the point of view of the adult narrator, also acknowledges the short-sighted conception of the New Jew in a New Land. My narratological analysis reveals the complex point of view of the narrator, whose child-like position defamiliarizes and literalizes key concepts, while his retrospective position as an adult simultaneously approves of and

criticizes them. The intertextuality in *Preliminaries* serves as a critique of ideology while also revealing the return of the repressed Jewish cultural echo chamber of Talmud and Torah study.

In Part II I focus on the novel *Infiltration* by Yehoshua Kenaz (1986). It takes place in 1955 and depicts an IDF platoon whose soldiers have minor disabilities and are therefore deemed unfit for combat and subjected to their commanders' contempt and abuse. The soldiers internalize the disdain they encounter and perceive themselves and their fellow platoon soldiers as defective and unworthy. Like *Preliminaries*, *Infiltration* is an autobiographical novel which employs a dual lens: that of the soldier narrator who tells of the events at the time they occur, and that of the adult narrator, who returns to these events 30 years later. I analyze the narratological articulations of the soldiers' subjectification and loss of agency inherent in their submission to ideology. I show that the novel illustrates with exceptional precision all the features of interpellation discussed by Althusser. Intertextually, *Infiltration* models the death-like experience of the abject soldiers on Dante's *Inferno*, while echoing Ben-Gurion's account of the Israeli military experience as a purgatory of sorts.

In the epilogue to this dissertation, I examine the films *Kedma* (2002) by Amos Gitai and *Homeland* (2008) by Dani Rosenberg, whose cinematic projects enhance the retrospective point of view as a condition for ethical critique. Although different in plot and stylistics, both films tell the story of Holocaust survivors who immigrate to Palestine during the 1948 war and are recruited into the Israeli military. Gitai and Rosenberg give presence to the Palestinians and their catastrophe, the Nakba: In *Kedma*, this is done through their testimonials, while in *Homeland* it is done through an emphasis on their haunting absence. The two filmmakers produce an analogy between the Jewish refugees and the Palestinian refugees, portraying the experiences of loss and disaster as a common ground for both. Acknowledging the Palestinians' catastrophe indeed requires the Israeli audience to admit responsibility; yet the very recognition of the tragic connection between the two peoples, with the return of one people from exile creating the exile of the other, opens up a channel for communication and future reconciliation. I show how *Kedma's* radical intertextuality, by incorporating citations from the works of Palestinian writers Ghassan Kanafani and Tawfiq Zayyad, gives voice and presence to the Palestinian experience. I also argue that modeling *Homeland* on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* constructs the absurdity of mobilizing Holocaust survivors to the war against Palestinians. Both films—like the two novels—portray the catastrophic consequences of erasing Jewish and Palestinian cultural memory.

For my beloved parents Shlomo and Lia Zucker

Guy, love of my life

and

Yonatan and Naomi, my bright and shining stars

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## Introduction

In this study, I focus on the novels *Preliminaries* by S. Yizhar (1992) and *Infiltration* (1986) by Yehoshua Kenaz, as well as on the films *Kedma* (2002) by Amos Gitai and *Homeland* (2008) by Dani Rosenberg. What these literary and cinematic works have in common is the turn back in time, either to Mandatory Palestine in the time of the *Yishuv* or to the beginning of Israeli statehood; and an ethical critique which their retrospective view enables. Through close readings of these works, I examine central concepts in Zionist discourse of the time, in particular the negation of diaspora and the rejection or abjection of the European and Middle Eastern diasporic Old Jew. While the novels focus on the internal Jewish struggles in the *Yishuv* and early state, the two films depict the Jewish community's treatment of the Palestinian residents in the watershed moment of 1948. As both Gitai and Rosenberg show, Israeli society's rejection of the diasporic Jew is directly linked to its rejection of the Palestinians and allows for their continued ill treatment.

As I came to realize in the process of writing, this dissertation also marks a personal journey for me. When I'm exploring the authors' and filmmakers' retrospective stances on the Zionist project, I'm also revisiting the life stories of my own parents, who came from two separate worlds and yet tied their lives together. My father was five years old when World War Two broke out in his native Poland. By sheer miracle, he and his parents survived. Shortly before the war, they had left Warsaw temporarily, as his father was looking for a job in another region of the country. When the war began, that region was conquered by the Russians, who forbade my father's parents to return to their extended family in the part of Poland that was being occupied by the Nazis. In retrospect, this prohibition saved their lives. My father's childhood passed him by while he and his parents wandered from place to place in the Soviet Union. His skilled parents rented themselves out for local labor and in return received food and water to sustain themselves and their little boy. My father spent the long days by himself, a cloud of uncertainty about whether his parents would return at night always hovering over him. In April 1948, after spending two and a half years in displacement camps at the end of the war, my father and his parents took an illegal boat to Palestine. They moved from place to place around Haifa, and lived on minimal means while my grandfather worked as a carpenter. My father, who was 14 when they immigrated to Palestine, had to work as a delivery boy. His parents could not afford to send him to school. But when he was 16 he began attending an evening school, which he paid for

out of his own pocket. The children and neighbors called him *der palit* or *Ha-palit*, “the refugee” in Yiddish and Hebrew, respectively. He always felt that those around him saw him as being less worthy than the Sabra kids, and that the people in his social surroundings looked at him with condescension. He internalized this disdain and grew up with this psychological baggage, which shaped his personality to a large extent.

My mother was born on kibbutz Ein Harod to parents who had come to Palestine in the third wave of Jewish immigration (the third *Aliyah*). Her parents had met in the socialist Zionist Youth movement in Russia, a short time after the October Revolution. After being imprisoned by the Soviets for two years for his Zionist activity, my grandfather was banished to Palestine in 1923. My grandmother joined him in 1924. They gave birth to their four children in Ein Harod, and raised them there. My mother, who is much younger than her siblings, grew up as if she were an only child with much attention and love from her parents. Her father, who was sent by the kibbutz to work as the first secretary of the Workers’ Council (*mo’etzet ha-po’alim*), returned to Ein Harod only on weekends, and when my mother turned 16 she and her parents left the kibbutz. She remembers the kibbutz as a paradise on earth. She always says that she owes her self-confidence and her belief in herself to her parents’ love and to the kibbutz upbringing. She grew up with the notion that she, as a kibbutz member and an Ashkenazi native-born Israeli, embodies the salt of the earth.

In the narrative of socialist Zionism in Palestine and later in Israel, there were indeed no economic classes. Instead, the implicit but powerfully implemented social class system was based on the criteria of ethnic origin and seniority with respect to how long one had been living in Palestine/Israel, though the two criteria didn’t really cohere. Middle Eastern Jews, and Palestinian Arabs even more so, were seen as inferior, even though in many cases of the Jews from the Middle East, and in almost all cases of the Palestinian Arabs, they had been residents of the country for generations. Those who considered themselves “veterans” looked arrogantly down on the recent arrivals, creating the illusion that they—the veterans—had been there for generations, when actually they had only arrived a few years earlier. Propaganda and educational efforts promoting the negation of the diaspora had left their mark. In many ways, the most degrading position in Israeli society was that of Holocaust survivors. As people who had lost everything and came from a world that fell apart, they were seen as wretched, as if they were to blame for what had happened to them. The odds that my mother and father, each coming from an opposite background and social status, would get to know each other and choose to share their lives together, were thus very slim indeed. Their

meeting in a seminar taught by the poet Lea Goldberg in the Comparative Literature department at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (and their decision to get married at the end of that semester) symbolizes for me the power of literature to bridge ideologically constructed divides, to shed light on the strange and make it familiar, and to collapse the borders between self and other.

I chose to examine the formative periods of the Zionist project—the years of the New Jewish Settlement in Palestine and the first years of Israeli statehood through the artistic prism, and its potentiality for critique and alternative vision. I wished to learn what constituted the identity of the Sabra, what led to the wretched image Israeli society had of the new immigrants, and what ideological forces made possible the profound injustices inflicted on the Palestinians, injustices into which I was born and which have continued to escalate as I've been writing this dissertation. The retrospective stances of the novels *Preliminaries* and *Infiltration* and of the films *Kedma* and *Homeland* enable a glimpse into the lived existence of those years and yet also encapsulate a critical point of view on the events depicted, as the tragic aftermaths of those events were already known when these novels and films were coming into being, in the period between the 1980s and the 2000s.

In Part I, I focus on S. Yizhar's late magnum opus, the novel *Preliminaries*, which tells the events in the life of a Jewish family that settles in Palestine in the 1920s, as seen through the eyes of the youngest child.<sup>1</sup> This autobiographical novel is narrated through a double perspective, that of the child and of the adult narrator, and provides a multi-faceted point of view that both embraces the Zionist project and criticizes it profoundly. The child himself represents both the endurance of the Zionist vision and its lack of perfection; great hope and the fear of failure are in constant tension throughout and are also embodied in the fragility of the child, who almost dies at several different moments in the novel. His naïve point of view defamiliarizes well-known historical events and terms in Zionist discourse, causing the reader to rethink and reconsider them.

In Part II, I analyze Yehoshua Kenaz's *Infiltration*, widely considered his most important novel, which tells of the experiences of soldiers in basic training who, due to minor

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<sup>1</sup> S. Yizhar, *Mikdamot* (Tel Aviv: Zemora-Bitan, 1992).

S. Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, trans. Nicholas De Lange (New Milford and London: Toby Press, 2007).

disabilities, are recruited to serve in non-combat units.<sup>2</sup> During the 1950s, the time of the events in the fictional world of the novel, being unfit for combat was considered shameful, as is indeed reflected in the commanders' ill treatment of the recruits. The soldiers internalize their commanders' disdain for them and in turn treat their fellow platoon-mates in the same degrading fashion. Like *Preliminaries*, *Infiltration* is also an autobiographical novel that constructs a dual perspective: that of Melabes as a young soldier narrator, and that of him some thirty years later, when he revisits the events of his basic training.

In the Epilogue, I examine the films *Kedma* (2002) by Amos Gitai and *Homeland* (2008) by Dani Rosenberg.<sup>3</sup> Although different in their plot details and style, both films tell the story of new immigrants who arrive in Israel/Palestine during the 1948 war. *Kedma* follows a group of immigrants who come to Mandatory Palestine in an illegal boat, and who, after going through a crash course in operating a gun, are immediately sent to fight alongside Israeli soldiers in a battle against Palestinians. Following the battle, the Israeli soldiers capture a Palestinian villager who was passing by with his wife and his donkey. They confiscate his donkey and eventually release him. *Kedma* contains many monologues, of both Jewish and Palestinian refugees, which convey the loss and traumatic experiences each group underwent. The other film I examine, *Homeland*, portrays events in the life of Lolek, a Holocaust survivor who arrives in Israel with the hope of reuniting with his girlfriend who immigrated to Palestine before the outbreak of World War II. Instead, he is sent to a remote outpost where he is subjugated to the authority and whims of his commander, who is later revealed to be a Holocaust survivor as well. In his search for water, he comes across an empty Palestinian house where he finds the dead body of a young Palestinian man. In the film's last scene, Lolek wanders in the desert, where he sees an abandoned Palestinian house in the distance. He dreams, or perhaps hallucinates, that the inside of the house is in fact his parents' house in Eastern Europe, and that he is seeing his parents for the last time and saying goodbye to them. Both filmmakers produce an analogy between the Jewish and Palestinian refugees, drawing on their shared experiences of loss and displacement.

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<sup>2</sup> Yehoshua Kenaz, *Hitganvut Yechidim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1986).

Yehoshua Kenaz, *Infiltration*, trans. Dalya Bilu (South Royalton: Zoland Books, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> *Kedma*, directed by Amos Gitai (2002; Tel Aviv and Strasbourg: Agav Hafakot and Arte France Cinema, 2002), DVD.

*Homeland*, directed by Dani Rosenberg (2008; Tel Aviv: July August Productions, 2008), DVD.

The theoretical framework of this dissertation is intertextual and narratological. The intertextuality of the literary and cinematic works I analyze foregrounds a cultural memory that stands against denial and criticizes ideology.<sup>4</sup> Using Ziva Ben Porat's model of intertextuality and its development by Chana Kronfeld,<sup>5</sup> I show how the evoked intertexts in the novels and films convey the suppression in Israeli consciousness of traditional Jewish culture as well as the expulsion of Palestinian villages and towns during the 1948 war, and how these intertexts expose the imposition of national ideology in canonical Israeli culture. In *Preliminaries*, the narrator's father strives to do away with his traditional Jewish past, fiercely holding onto the belief in the New Jew and the negation of the diaspora. But this repressed identity surfaces in a moment of crisis, through a pastiche of biblical verses and Talmudic tales in his stream of consciousness, which he clings to almost as a personal supplication. Yizhar's use of intertextuality thus exposes the schism in the father's psyche between his past and present, as well as the abrupt and coerced severing from this past as dictated by his ideology. As Chana Kronfeld shows in her study of Yehuda Amichai's poetry, intertextuality is a bilateral process: The evoked text not only sheds light on the alluding text, the present moment in the text, but also allows its new reading.<sup>6</sup> Thus, when the Binding of Isaac is mapped onto the mundane experience of drinking soda that the child narrator and his father share, it not only serves as a critique of the high-brow seriousness of the "voluntary collectivism" of the Yishuv; it also illuminates the biblical text, as we view Abraham's faithful act (as it is considered in Jewish tradition) through the lens of the critique of ideology, thereby tracing the biblical narrator's hints at the irreparable breach in Abraham and Isaac's relationship and at the potentially hastened death of Sarah following the traumatic experience of the Akedah.

In *Infiltration*, direct and indirect allusions to Ben-Gurion's speeches and an invocation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* all serve to portray the military base as a purgatory,

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<sup>4</sup> I employ Michael Riffaterre's observations on what he defines as "vehicles of symbolism" (p. xvii), the means in a novel which increase its poetic function and bear a symbolic meaning in relation to the narrative. Michael Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Ziva Ben Porat, "Ha-koreh, Ha-text, Ve-haremiza Ha-sifrutit" [The reader, the text, and the literary allusion: aspects in the actualization of literary allusion], *Ha-Sifrut* 26 (April 1978): 1-25; Ziva Ben Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (January 1976), 105-28; Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), chap. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Chana Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), chap. 3 (titled "'I Want to Mix up the Bible': Intertextuality, Agency, and the Poetics of Radical Allusion").

literalizing the term “melting pot” and rendering tangible the coercion and violence in the national ideology. One of the soldiers, Micha the Fool, embodies the carnivalesque undermining of social orders to which Mikhail Bakhtin refers in his analysis of Rabelais’s *Pantagruel and Gargantua*.<sup>7</sup> Being “the Fool” (as he is called in the novel), Micha both performs the intertexts and ridicules them. His mimicry of Ben-Gurion’s Yiddish accent when parodically declaiming the latter’s speeches against the diaspora exposes Ben-Gurion’s own self-denial. Such subversive effect is also produced by Micha the Fool’s mock-solemn recitation of the poem “*Ha-re’ut*” (Camaraderie) about the fallen, which parodies Israeli Memorial Day ceremonies, and points up the poem’s appropriation by state institutions to sanctify death in war. In the case of Alon, the soldier who is also a kibbutz member, Kenaz’s use of national canonical texts as mediating Alon’s feelings and personal narrative illustrates the extent to which the individual is constituted by the appropriated collective texts in Israeli culture. Using Louis Althusser’s concepts of interpellation and subjectification, and the Russian Formalist concept of defamiliarization, I analyze the appearance of these well-known texts as intertexts that convey Alon’s consciousness.<sup>8</sup> These intertexts serve Alon as a projection of his personal grief onto the collective, reified commemoration. The new perceptibility this defamiliarization creates underscores the destructive influence of ideological interpellation on Alon and exposes the violence in the collective messages, a violence that remains latent when these texts appear in their automatized, clichéd cultural context.

In the films *Kedma* and *Homeland*, the intertextuality crosses cultural, diachronic, and media boundaries. Whereas all the evoked texts in *Preliminaries* and *Infiltration* are Hebrew texts taken from the Jewish and Israeli canons as well as from the Western canon,<sup>9</sup> the intertexts in the films are also in Yiddish (in *Homeland*) and in Arabic (in *Kedma*), the languages of the culturally rejected “other”. More importantly, the Arabic intertexts in *Kedma* evoke artistic achievements of Palestinian culture and represent a broad spectrum of that culture: Gitai’s includes canonical texts written by such prominent Palestinian writers as Ghassan Kanafani and Tawfiq Zayyad, alongside folkloric texts such as a woman’s lament. These texts make present the most excluded

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<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984), 1–60.

<sup>9</sup> With the exception of one text in Aramaic in *Preliminaries*, which is immediately followed by a Hebrew translation—a translation that appears as an organic part of the father’s stream of consciousness.

element in the Israeli consciousness—Palestinian culture. Gitai’s choice of Palestinian intertextuality thus defies the dehumanization of Palestinians in Israeli society; it points to the denial of another people’s culture as the source of this dehumanization, and it re-humanizes the Palestinians through the representation of their cultural texts. The intertextuality in *Kedma* is also conspicuous on the diachronic level: While the evoked texts in *Preliminaries* and *Infiltration* already existed in the diegetic time of the novels (whether ancient texts such as the biblical story of the Akedah or Elazar Ben-Yair’s speech from Josephus, or modernist Hebrew poetry and Israeli commemoration books published a few years before the events in *Infiltration* took place), some of the texts in *Kedma* are prospective in relation to diegetic time, rather than retrospective. In 1948, the time of the events depicted in *Kedma*, Ghassan Kanafani’s story “The Land of Sad Oranges,” from which the Palestinian refugee in the film recites his monologue, did not exist yet. The historical expulsions of Palestinian villages and towns in 1948 that are depicted in the film led Kanafani to write his story, which in turn made him an emblem of Palestinian culture and helped anchor the aspiration for liberation as the core of that culture. At the same time, the narrator of Kanafani’s story recalls the traumatic expulsion of Palestinians (including himself and his family) from his hometown of Acre, an expulsion that marked his childhood. In this sense, Kanafani’s text is retrospective in relation to 1963, when Kanafani wrote the story. And it is, of course, also retrospective in relation to 2002, when Gitai produced his film. Tawfiq Zayyad’s poem “Here We Will Remain,” also recited by the Palestinian refugee, is another prospective intertext in *Kedma*, as Zayyad wrote it long after the 1948 war. Yet it is prospective not only in relation to the events depicted in the film, but also with respect to the time it was written, as the poem is prophetic, foretelling the Palestinian people’s fate under the Israeli occupation. And by the time of the film’s making, the poem has become a dark prophecy that has already been realized. Thus, the varied layers of temporality in *Kedma* add a kaleidoscopic perspective through which the film can be seen. The films’ intertextuality is also cinematic: Both Gitai and Rosenberg’s cinematography are in dialogue with Ram Levi’s film *Khirbet Khizeh* (1978). They also, each in its own way, allude to S. Yizhar’s novella by that name, on which Levi’s film was based. In *Homeland*, which is also allegorical and at times surreal, some of the intertexts are fixed expressions and stock concepts in the Zionist discourse that are echoed and literalized in the dialogues of Lolek and his commander, as well as in their appearance and behavior.

In my narratological analysis, I employ Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of polyphony to show how it enables simultaneously diverse and conflictual stances in the novel.<sup>10</sup> In *Preliminaries*, this Bakhtinian polyphony is embodied in the narrator's dual stance throughout the novel, which both ratifies and critiques the Zionist enterprise. The consistent movement in narration from the child narrator's perspective to the adult narrator's point of view, with no determination or hierarchy between the two, enables Yizhar to include the two seemingly irreconcilable voices simultaneously. His stream-of-consciousness technique functions in a similar manner: While it seems to be the interior monologue of a single protagonist, it contains various focalizers, thus undermining any single value judgment. Such is in the case of the mother's negative thoughts about the Palestinian Arabs, where the adult narrator's perspective interferes with the mother's point of view and ironizes her self-determined stance.

In *Infiltration*, the broad array of protagonists who hail from diverse social backgrounds are all active participants in the plot. Their social-political positions and statuses, which are conveyed in their dialogues, often stand in contrast to one another and express conflicting stances that co-exist. Kenaz gives voice to all of them, thus maintaining the Bakhtinian indeterminacy of the numerous positions. The multiplicity of narrators throughout the novel allows for several focalized points of view.<sup>11</sup> Although Melabes, the soldier narrator, is the main focalizer in the novel, he is not portrayed as the center of the novel's consciousness; the various narrators delivering multiple focal points of view are equal in their share and hierarchy. This orchestra of voices, similar in terms of their weight and importance, conveys Kenaz's social ethics.

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<sup>10</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> For my narratological analysis of point of view, I use Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan's fundamental observations, as well as Robert Alter's study of the self-conscious novel. I also employ the Tel Aviv School of Poetics' definitions of temporality and its implications on the narrator's perspective. Additionally, I use Uri Margolin's and Michael Bamberg's definitions of the narrator and narration (respectively) in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1983); Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975); Alan Mintz, "On the Tel Aviv School of Poetics," *Prooftexts* 4 (1984): 215–35; Uri Margolin, "Narrator," in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Huhn (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2009), accessed January 12, 2016, <http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Narrator>; Michael Bamberg, "Identity and Narration," in Huhn, *Living Handbook*, accessed August 3, 2016, [http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Identity\\_and\\_Narration](http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Identity_and_Narration).

Gitai's *Kedma* conveys the perspectives of both the Jewish and the Palestinian refugees through the cinematographic choices of the film as well as through the multiplicity of languages voiced on the screen, which are the protagonists' authentic modes of expression. The Jewish and Palestinian refugees' monologues, depicting loss and displacement on both sides, are inherent to Gitai's message of acknowledging the other's suffering. And in *Homeland*, Rosenberg produces Bakhtinian polyphony through the film's composition, dividing the frame between the two contrasted characters, Lolek and his commander, who represent the two sides of a single contested consciousness. At a different point in the film, Rosenberg draws an analogy between Lolek and a dead Palestinian man, which conveys the equal weight of their respective points of view as the two stare into each other's eyes. Yet the empty stare of the dead young Palestinian is a statement in itself about the violent attempts to erase the Palestinians' presence and points of view—both by their expulsion in 1948, which is echoed in the film, and by their subsequent decades-long oppression. Lolek's dream/hallucination, in which the inside of the abandoned Palestinian house appears as his old Eastern European home, gives presence to the absent Palestinian point of view. Depicting the houses as compatible also invokes the interior of the other abandoned Palestinian house Lolek visited and the dead Palestinian young man found lying there. At the same time, the Palestinian family who used to live there is mirrored in Lolek's Eastern European family. Lolek's gaze in the mirror as he departs from his parents literalizes the very term "point of view."

As I've noted above, Louis Althusser's theory on the ideological state apparatus supports my analysis as well.<sup>12</sup> In its interpellation, the ideological system constitutes its individual members as subjects, as is well conveyed in *Infiltration* through Kenaz's stylistic and narratological choices. The seamless shifts in *Infiltration* from one narrator to the other illustrate the loss of agency and subjectification that the soldiers undergo in the military system, demonstrating Althusser's notion of the ideological apparatus as the great and elusive subjugator. Yet while Althusser views the interpellation as absolute, leaving no room for any agency on the part of its subjects, Judith Butler and Chana Kronfeld point to the narrow space for agency that the subject's repetition of the hegemonic words allows him/her—a repetition that always involves some kind of change, be it as slight as a change of voice or tone.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Kenaz reclaims the soldiers'

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<sup>12</sup> Althusser, "Ideological State Apparatuses," 1–60.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 129; Kronfeld, *Full Severity*, 160–63.

agency by re-appropriating the term “artist.” This word, *artist*, became a pejorative term in the Israeli discourse of the 1950s and 1960s, where it referred to an idle person who pretends to be sick to evade hard work. Throughout the novel, the commanders repeatedly call the noncombat soldiers “artists,” *artistim*. Kenaz’s choice to focus his novel on disabled noncombat soldiers not only destabilizes the relationship between the center and margins by putting the spotlight on the marginalized characters in Israeli society as performers on the national stage, but also fulfills the subversive power of art as a critique of society and its ideological systems. By presenting the artistic potential of each character, Kenaz reclaims the singularity of each individual in the platoon, going against basic training’s declared goal of producing a single obedient body of soldiers. In narrating the soldiers’ stories, Kenaz retrieves their lost agency, as well as the original meaning of the term “artist.” The very use of intertextuality, along with the stance of retrospectivity, allow the reclaiming of agency. This is because both of these methodologies are repetitive in nature. The use of an intertext necessarily changes it, as its appearance in a different context defamiliarizes it and charges it with a new meaning that ironizes, deflates, or criticizes its original signification. The new context enables one to reread the intertext in its original context as well, and this rereading changes that intertext. Similarly, in looking back and retelling the events in the novels and films, the retrospective position produces a change.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the narration of the events in *Preliminaries* and in *Infiltration* in their time of narration, 1992 and 1986 respectively, and the films’ depictions of the 1948 war in 2002 and 2008 respectively, are also acts of refusal against the ideology with which the historical events are suffused in the national narrative. In re-narrating and re-reproducing the events, all of these works change those events, thus creating space for the protagonists’ agency that was silenced and lost.

The figure of the artist also plays a major role in the ethical critique central to all four works. They all foreground the artist as a moral figure who employs his artistry to critique his social environment. The young narrators in *Preliminaries* and *Infiltration*, the child and the soldier, can be seen as representations of the budding artist, whose path through life is the subject of the *Künstlerroman*, a sub-genre of the *bildungsroman*. As in the *Künstlerroman*, which generally focuses on the development of the artist, the child

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<sup>14</sup> While Yizhar and Kenaz produce the change through intertextual and narratological strategies yet remain “loyal” to the historical events, Gitai and Rosenberg alter the historical narrative by creating direct encounters between Jewish and Palestinian refugees, and by prospective intertextuality (in *Kedma*) which was written only after the events depicted in the film took place yet is recited by a Palestinian refugee as an authentic monologue in front of the Jewish soldiers.

narrator and Melabes are surrounded by a hostile environment in which they are marked as different and are looked down on. Yet the very qualities for which these narrator-protagonists are criticized are those that enable their narration and their self-expression as artists. Their narration is a means of resistance against this pressure, and in their retrospective stance they can critique this collectivist environment and its development into a harsh and violent sphere, as is portrayed in *Infiltration*. In the films *Kedma* and *Homeland*, Gitai and Rosenberg employ the cinematic medium and retrospective stance to convey their ethical critique, drawing the portrait of the artist as a moral compass. In *Homeland*, Rosenberg gives voice to the denied Yiddish culture, symbolizing it in Itzik Manger's poem *Oyfn Veg Shteyt a Boym*, which appears as a song that Lolek the protagonist sings repeatedly, despite his commander's dislike of it.<sup>15</sup> Lolek also dares to enter the abandoned Palestinian house and face the disaster and death it encapsulates—in a very literal sense as well, as he lies next to the dead Palestinian man and stares at him. In doing so, Lolek performs the ethical role of the artist in Jewish tradition. He acknowledges the Palestinians' catastrophe while his commander, who in his appearance and behavior aspires to be a New Jew, warns him against entering the Palestinian houses where there are “ghosts,” the symbolic signification of the haunting memories Israeli society strives to suppress. In *Kedma*, Gitai directly relates to the Palestinian cultural tradition by incorporating intertexts by the writers Ghassan Kanafani and Tawfiq Zayyad. In the Jewish cultural tradition, the writer is often perceived as the watchman unto the house of Israel (*Ha-tzofe' Le-beyt Yisra'el*) who uses his writing to criticize the society that went astray and to call on it to amend its wrongdoings. This notion originates in Ezekiel 3:17: “Son of man, I have appointed thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; and when thou shalt hear a word at My mouth, thou shalt give them a warning from Me.”<sup>16</sup> Ironically, the watchmen unto the house of Israel in *Kedma* are the Palestinian writers Kanafani and Zayyad, who are quoted by the captured Palestinian refugee.<sup>17</sup> With this, Gitai expresses his view of

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<sup>15</sup> In one of the scenes, Lolek performs this song as if he were a singer in a klezmer band. His performance both reinforces his image as an artist and ties it to the suppression of Yiddish culture in Israeli society.

<sup>16</sup> The translation above is from the King James Version. Although I use Robert Alter's translation of the Hebrew Bible throughout this dissertation, I have chosen to quote from KJV as it preserves the term “watchman” from which the expression derives, while Alter translates the term as “lookout”: “Man, I have made you a lookout for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from My mouth, you shall warn them from Me.” Robert Alter, trans., *The Hebrew Bible* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> The image of the Palestinian refugee who quotes Tawfiq Zayyad's poem “Here We Will Remain,” which foretells the grim future of the Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation, directly invokes the

an Israeli society that has lost its moral legitimacy and ethical sight, and of a Palestinian society that has inherited the ethical high ground. Gitai and Rosenberg both present artists (Itzik Manger, Ghassan Kanafani, and Tawfiq Zayyad) as moral voices, but at the same time, being artists themselves, they too embody watchmen unto the house of Israel.

The Zionist dream is revisited in the novels and the films. The dreamers, the father in *Preliminaries* and Alon the kibbutznik soldier in *Infiltration*, are portrayed by both narrators, despite their irony, with deep empathy. The father and Alon are both wholeheartedly dedicated to socialist Zionism and are willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country and countrymen. But whereas the father is admired by the child narrator, Melabes delineates Alon as an embodiment of a Don Quixote, who is ridiculed by his fellow soldiers for his naiveté. In the thirty years that separate the events of *Preliminaries* from those of *Infiltration*, Israeli society became cynical and skeptical regarding socialist Zionist principles. The fate of both dreamers, the father and Alon, conveys Yizhar's and Kenaz's views of this dream. The father in *Preliminaries* sacrifices himself for the sake of socialist Zionism and ends up a broken, bitter man. Yizhar criticizes the system that failed to reward his father for his contribution and instead deserted him in a time of financial crisis, shirking its responsibility under the cover of a nameless collective agency. But Yizhar also criticizes his father, who completely gave himself up as an individual. The child narrator (who is also an embodiment of Yizhar), in his self-fulfillment as an artist, signifies the individual's resistance to the collective system. His artistry—his narration—enables him to express his criticism of his father and of the system. His narration also allows him to reverse the power relationship between the individual and the collective, as the collective system is dependent on him to narrate its story and bring it to life. In *Infiltration*, Alon is portrayed as a hopeless dreamer who loses his agency as a result of his obsessive reading of canonical national texts. He pours his personal narrative and his complicated relationship with his father (who died in the 1948 war) into this mixture of myths, poems, and stories. By delineating Alon's trajectory as tragic, Kenaz criticizes the Israeli leadership's cynical exploitation of texts that idolize death in war, pointing to their destructive effect on the individual's capacity to deal with grief. Alon dies a futile and unnecessary death, and the profound discrepancy between his own death and the mythic death of the characters in the texts that constituted him as a subject

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image of the biblical prophet who rebukes the community for its immoral behavior and prophesizes the dire end that it will come to unless it corrects its wrongdoings.

underscores the ideological screen with which Israeli society views its national existence.

In the films, however, the dream transforms from a mere idea into a literal dream, thereby fulfilling its (and the films') full fictional potential through digressions (both in *Kedma* and in *Homeland*) from historical events to alternative realities that contain the filmmakers' ethical comments and additions. In *Kedma*, the alternative reality is conveyed in delineating fictional encounters between Jewish and Palestinian refugees and by giving voice to the Palestinian people and to texts of the catastrophe that has come to constitute their cultural memory and identity. In *Homeland*, Rosenberg literalizes the Zionist dream through the hallucination of Lolek, wherein he relives his final moments with his parents before the outbreak of World War Two. But this can only take place in a Palestinian house, where both the Jewish and the Palestinian narratives of loss and displacement echo each other. In the films, the dreams become visions. Gitai and Rosenberg, in the connection they create between the Jewish and the Palestinian accounts, present an alternative narrative that draws a path forward by recognizing historical injustices, a path of dialogue and reconciliation based on compassion for the other's suffering, on moral accountability, and on recognizing the need for a just and collaborative political solution.

## Part I

### Socialist Zionism in Dual Perspective: Yizhar's Ambivalent *Preliminaries*

S. Yizhar, who wrote the autobiographical novel *Preliminaries*, is considered one of the clearest and most salient voices in modern Hebrew literature, a prolific writer who is constantly preoccupied with questions about the collective, the individual, and the social-national context. He was born Yizhar Smilanski in 1916 and was the son of Zionist settlers who immigrated to Palestine during the Second Aliyah, the wave of Zionist immigration between 1904 and 1914. Yizhar spent his first years in the experimental farm Chulda,<sup>18</sup> where his father tended the land. When he was four years old, the family moved to Jaffa, and later to the new Tel Nordau neighborhood in Tel Aviv. In 1926, financial difficulties forced them to move again, this time to the Rehovot colony. *Preliminaries* focuses on these early years in Yizhar's life.

His pen name, S. Yizhar, was given to him in 1938 by the poet Yitzchak Lamdan, who, as the editor of the literary journal *Gilyonot*, accepted Yizhar's story for publication in the journal. Yizhar was 22 years old, and his first published story immediately gained acclaim and appreciation among critics.<sup>19</sup> Almost all his stories (except his stories for children) revolve around the tension between the individual and the collective in a socialist and ideological society, as well as around ethics and war. During the 1948 war, he served as an intelligence officer, and his experiences during the war led to several novellas, the most famous of which is *Khirbet Khizeh*, which tells, from a critical point of view, how Israeli soldiers expelled residents from an Arab village. From 1949 to 1967,

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<sup>18</sup> The experimental farm Chulda was built in 1908, after the Jewish National Fund had purchased the land in 1905. Zionist immigrants who settled there manually labored and planted an olive grove, a vineyard, and an almond orchard. During the First World War, most of the workers were either expelled by the Ottomans or left of their own accord, and those who remained suffered from famine. The farm was eventually abandoned, and was resettled only in 1930 (first as a *kvutza* [a smaller version of *kibbutz*], and a year later as a *kibbutz*); notably, Amos Oz spent his early years in that *kibbutz*. Yizhar's family (his father, mother, and a brother who was five years older than him) lived in these harsh conditions until 1919.

<sup>19</sup> The details of Yizhar's life are taken from the comprehensive and fascinating monograph by Nitsa Ben-Ari, *S. Yizhar: Sipur Chayim* [S. Yizhar: A life story] (Ramat Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2013). Yizhar's first published story was *Ephraim Goes Back to Alfalfa* (Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 349).

Yizhar represented the centrist *Mapai* labor party as a member of the Israeli Parliament. He completed his PhD in education at the Hebrew University in 1980—a path he had started on in his youth in the Teachers College in Jerusalem, which led him to a career in teaching at various institutions, including the Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, and the Levinsky College for Education.

Chayim Nagid, who collected and summarized the literary criticism on Yizhar's stories until 1972, quotes critics who describe Yizhar as focusing on linguistic virtuosity and the protagonist's inner life at the expense of a broader plot.<sup>20</sup> Nagid also distinguishes between Yizhar's first reviewers, who concentrate on the aesthetic aspects of his writing, and later critics, who, from 1947 onward, judge Yizhar's texts through an ideological and social lens. During the 1950s, Yizhar published several novellas and short stories, such as "Khirbet Khizeh" and "Ha-shavuy" (The captive), which were then brought together in the collection *Arba'a Sipurim* (Four stories) in 1959. At the end of the fifties, Yizhar published the two-volume epic *Yemey Tziklag* (The days of Ziklag), which deals with a group of soldiers during the 1948 war, a novel for which he won the Israel Prize (the country's highest honor). His story collection *Sipurei Mishor* (Stories of the plain), which was published in 1963, encountered a negative reception. Nagid notes, in his 1972 introduction to the collection of critical essays on Yizhar's work, that Yizhar did not publish anything after *Sipurei Mishor*, and he ends by saying that the articles appearing in this selection will probably serve as guides to future critics, "but a new critique about Yizhar's creations must approach them in a different manner and length. This kind of critique will face challenges such as analyzing Yizhar's poetics . . . [and] interpreting it with greater accuracy and detail than what has been done so far on many [of his] stories."<sup>21</sup>

Nagid's call for a new approach to Yizhar's writings as well as the initiative to summarize the critical responses to his work create the impression that Nagid, and perhaps others too, may have assumed that Yizhar's literary career had ended. The book itself, which presents critical essays on Yizhar's writing, is part of a series that is mostly about writers whose oeuvre was completed. But to the surprise of many, after 30 years of silence, Yizhar published his novel *Preliminaries* in 1992, at the age of 76.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Chayim Nagid, ed. *S. Yizhar: Mivchar Ma'amarei Bikoret Al Yezirato* [S. Yizhar: A selection of critical essays on his writing] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1972).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Hebrew texts in this dissertation are my own.

<sup>22</sup> This inaugurated a storm of creativity and led to the writing of five more books over the next seven years.

The critic Baruch Kurzweil wrote the following in 1966 about Yizhar's *Yemei Tziklag*: "the lack of permanence in the existence of our time (*havaya ne'ederet hetmed*) is not congruent with epic writing."<sup>23</sup> According to Kurzweil, it is hard to write in such changing times, particularly when one is writing about events in the very recent past. Although *Preliminaries* is by no means an epic novel and revolves around chapters from Yizhar's own childhood, it does bear the trait of being written many years after the time of the narrated events. More than sixty years separate the child narrator experiencing the events in the narrated time from the adult narrator recalling them in the time of narration; and this distance enables the perspective that Kurzweil felt was missing. Nagid closes his introduction to his collection of essays about Yizhar's writing by stating: "And (what) deserves still more accurate and systematic analysis is Yizhar's style, an analysis that may shed new light on the Yizharic thematics, which has already been examined and defined to exhaustion."<sup>24</sup> Even though more than 40 years have passed since Nagid's call for deeper scrutiny, this void remains. I aim to fill this lacuna and illuminate Yizhar's highly complex stance towards his childhood world by looking closely into the syntax, allusions, repetitions, and mirror-like constructions in *Preliminaries*, arguing that meticulous analysis of these formal aspects does indeed reveal the essence of Yizhar's views. His ambivalent stance, which both ratifies and critiques the socialist Zionism of his childhood sphere, is conveyed in and is integral to his stylistics.

### ***Preliminaries* as an Autobiographical Novel**

The novel *Preliminaries* tells the story of a Jewish family that settles in Palestine in the period of the *Yishuv*, the new Jewish settlement in Palestine which comprised several ideological waves of immigration during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although S. Yizhar narrates the experiences of his own family and childhood in *Preliminaries*, the novel is not written as a straightforward autobiography, but rather told through a complex focalization<sup>25</sup>—delivered through the third-person point of view—in which the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>25</sup> "Focalization" refers to the prism through which the events in the story are seen (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*). Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes between the focal point ("who sees?") and narration ("who speaks / tells the story?"). Although Rimmon-Kenan uses the term "narrator-focalizer," which would seem adequate for an analysis of *Preliminaries*' form of narration, she differentiates between "external focalization" and "internal focalization": the former would usually be narrated in the third

focalizer is both the child in the narrative present (which I will henceforth be referring to as “the narrated time”) and the child as an adult, adding to and commenting on the events (which I will henceforth be referring to as “the time of narration”).<sup>26</sup> Thus, as Nitza Ben-Dov notes in her book *Chayim Ktuvim*, the work, as an autobiographical novel, combines two contradictory genres: authentic document and invented fiction. Ben-Dov claims that this hybridity allows the writer to both tell a factual story about himself and to recreate the self in order to improve, understand, and accept it.<sup>27</sup> The importance of the genre, as Ben-Dov rightly concludes, is not its documentary value but rather its artistic and literary aspects.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in this chapter I explore the fictional dimension of this autobiography, its literariness, as Yizhar employs stylistic and rhetorical strategies rather than direct narrative to convey the messages and the social critique embedded in *Preliminaries*. Through the dual lens of the child and the adult who used to be that child, S. Yizhar presents a complex view of the Zionist ideological project and the social community surrounding his family and his upbringing in Palestine in the 1920s.

Throughout the novel, a sustained analogy is formed between the fragile child who is also the narrator, and the fragility of the Zionist project; indeed, several critics, such as Nitsa Ben-Ari, Dan Miron, and Robert Alter, have addressed this pivotal theme. In her monograph on S. Yizhar, Nitsa Ben-Ari recognizes a parallel between the narrator’s family’s attempt to settle in the land and the child narrator’s “survival stories,” as she calls them.<sup>29</sup> Ben-Ari interprets the connection between the two as ironic, because of the contrast she finds between the heroic and ideological act of the family’s settling in the land, and the miserable child.<sup>30</sup> Ben-Ari argues that this dissonance expresses

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person and told from an outside position in relation to the events, while the latter would be narrated from the first person and its locus would be “inside the represented events” (74). But in the case of *Preliminaries*, these definitions are only partially valid, and merge with one another; the narrator, who is also the focalizer, uses third-person narration and yet plays an active role in the events (therefore, he is neither an external focalizer nor an internal one).

<sup>26</sup> I borrow these terms from the Tel Aviv School of Poetics and Semiotics’ narratological methodology. For more on the Tel Aviv School of Poetics and Semiotics’ narratology, see Mintz, “On the Tel Aviv School of Poetics,” 215–35.

<sup>27</sup> Nitza Ben-Dov, *Chayim Ktuvim: Al Otobiografyot Sifrutiyot Yisra’eliot* [Written lives: On Israeli literary autobiographies] (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2011), 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 125.

<sup>30</sup> Perhaps Ben-Ari’s view stems from the fact that she quotes the description of these events from another novel by Yizhar, *Tzalhabim*, which is focused on the later years of Yizhar’s youth. In *Tzalhabim*,

Yizhar's turning his back on the heroic Zionist epos. She locates this rejection in the doubts he raises toward the entire Zionist project through the shared consciousness of the narrator and his father, after the child is stung by a wasp (in the first chapter of the novel) and his father is guilt-stricken ("As though you are suddenly seized by a realization that maybe it was a fundamental mistake. That maybe this land doesn't want us at all").<sup>31</sup>

Dan Miron, in his essay about the novel which appeared as an introduction to the English translation when it was published in 2007, views *Preliminaries* as dealing with the question of place and of Palestine (and later on the state of Israel) as a homeland for the Jewish people.<sup>32</sup> The use of memory in this novel as a narrative model—a technique Yizhar ignored in previous works, according to Miron—creates different layers of narrative, one of which is "the vibrant reconstruction of memorable experiences and episodes . . . that to a certain extent . . . are the heart of the novel." Yet Miron claims that these episodes, narrated in the form of interior monologue, are "not necessarily the most significant."<sup>33</sup> He argues that the novel's deeper implications are conveyed through yet another use of memory, which is its narration in the future perfect tense.<sup>34</sup>

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these life-threatening situations that the child has faced are only briefly summarized, and the tone is indeed somewhat ironic. Yet Ben-Ari provides a quote from *Preliminaries* as evidence for Yizhar's rejection of the Zionist epos: "The insolence of strangers, coming here to pull down what has been completely fixed for a thousand, two thousand or three thousand years . . . this emptiness that is full to its end – as against the shattering of this whole at the hands of impatient, insolent, indecent people . . . dragging in all sorts of things that do not belong here, forcing them, to grow here and be built here, and change the place . . . compelling the place to come to an end." Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 87 in Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 74.

<sup>31</sup> Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 125. The English quotation is from Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 86.

<sup>32</sup> Dan Miron, "A Late New Beginning," introduction to *Preliminaries* by S. Yizhar (New Milford and London: Toby Press, 2007), 1–28.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Dan Miron locates "this narrative of future perfect modality" that points to the "immanent future" in various rhetorical strategies Yizhar employs. One of them is the adult narrator's interference with the father's train of thought while the father and his wife and sick son pass the Arab village of Mansoura on their way to the doctor: "Today there is no Mansoura and you won't find it, it has been wiped out . . . and in its place there is just a road . . . and some stone ruins" (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 64). Another rhetorical strategy that Miron views as demonstrating the "future perfect modality" is the "insertion of moments of prophetic knowledge." These include the reflections of the child narrator when he is sent by his neighbor, the farmer Yehuda, to drive his horse and cart to the vineyard: "suddenly he knows with certainty, without having any certainty . . . that soon . . . none of this will remain . . . because everything here is provisional . . . the vineyard that will be replaced by an orange grove, and the building plots that

The retrospective nature of the novel's narration includes the future in the depiction of the past, Miron claims, and is essential to the novel's message. If the story begins with the father's contemplations that "truth to tell, there is no place here yet,"<sup>35</sup> it continues with the child narrator's recognition, towards the end of the novel, that "everything that there is here is temporary and they are only pretending to be farmers, only temporary vineyards and temporary orange groves . . . nothing is solid here."<sup>36</sup> The changes in the landscape, from vineyards to orange groves and later to buildings, changes the adult narrator is aware of in the time of narration and that permeate the child narrator's awareness during the narrated time, express, in Miron's view, the exploitative relationship the descendants of the pioneers will have with the land, as he claims: "In less than two generations they will shed their idealist dream of a new rootedness . . . they never ceased to be the nomadic merchants they have always been."<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the child's internal monologue about the future changes is "a sudden prophetic intuition of the ultimate failure of Zionism to create an authentic Jewish place."<sup>38</sup>

In response to Miron's essay, Robert Alter directly addresses the question of whether Yizhar intended to express his personal views on Zionism itself. In his review of the novel, after the publication of the English translation in 2007, Alter asks, "Is *Preliminaries* in fact 'about' Zionism?" and references Miron's summary of the novel as "a great prose threnody for the dream that has faded away."<sup>39</sup> Alter agrees that there are elegiac elements that are inevitable, given that Yizhar's childhood landscape has changed profoundly. "Yet," Alter argues, "what needs to be observed is that the perspective of the novel . . . is not essentially political but existential, or one might even say cosmic. Yizhar does not speak of Palestinians, nor does he sentimentalize them as authentically belonging to the land; he speaks, rather, of the land itself." Alter refers to the child narrator's "enchantments with all that impinges on his senses: the contour of a hill, the explosive clattering rush of a passing train" and sees the center of the novel

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will replace the orange grove . . . and all the solidity of whatever seems solid here is just the ethereal solidity of existence here." (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 294–95; Miron, "Late New Beginning," 23–25).

<sup>35</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 73.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>37</sup> Miron, "Late New Beginning," 26.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Robert Alter, "The Flow," *The New Republic*, June 17, 2007, accessed May 7, 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/63363/the-flow>. All subsequent citations from Alter's article are from this same source.

in the child narrator's vivid form of delivery. Referring to Miron's reading of the novel as an allegory of the Zionist dream, he observes in *Preliminaries* "a gorgeous sensuousness of imagination – precisely the quality that slips through the broad grid of allegorical readings." The presence of Zionism is indeed an integral part of the story, Alter notes, but it is derived from the dualistic character of *Preliminaries* as an "intensely local novel, abounding in the social and cultural and material minutiae of Zionist life in Palestine during the 1920s . . . but it is at the same time a universal story. . . . If Yizhar's protagonist chafes at the notion that in his dull provincial surroundings populated by citrus growers nobody will do anything so riveting as to murder an old lady with an ax [the child's contemplations after reading Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, H.S.], the same sentiment could easily occur to a boy growing up in Iowa among cultivators of corn."

Ben-Ari rightly points out the connection between the child's fragility and the fragile experience of his family in their attempt to settle in the land. However, the connection between the two is not ironic, as Ben-Ari claims, but rather replete with suppressed emotions that resurface in moments of crisis—when the child is on the verge of loss or death. Those liminal moments of uncertainty as to the child's survival, oscillating between life and death, hope and despair, and indeed brimming with fears and doubts, allow suppressed feelings to surface and express the parents' anxiety and ambivalence regarding their choice to settle in this land. The relief following the child's recovery signals approval of their choice, but the occasional events on the brink of losing the child demonstrate the daily challenge of living up to the Zionist dream. Yizhar's choice to create a parallelism between the child's misfortunes and the settlement of his family enables him to both express the immense hardships in their daily life and, at the same time, to approve of their ideological decision. As for Ben-Ari's claim that Yizhar is turning his back on the heroic Zionist epic, the analogy he creates between the child and the family's settlement dismantles the myth by vividly illustrating the human beings behind the epic, with their struggles and doubts.

Miron's understanding of the retrospective element in *Preliminaries* as a key to unlocking the novel's meaning is fundamental; indeed, narrating the story in a manner that includes knowledge of the future enables the narrator to examine the formation of the new Jewish society in Palestine and to explore a period that was the precursor to the Israeli state. By describing this reality through the focalized point of view of a child, Yizhar provides a direct and unmediated snapshot of the people and events without political and ideological statements, a snapshot that is characteristic of the childlike

gaze. Yizhar's choice to narrate the story through the non-judgmental perspective of the child is a principled one. When critique is implied through the stylistic construction of a passage, it is not a poisonous critique that condemns and bites, but rather one that allows the person who is being critiqued to be looked at with empathy, eliciting simultaneous understanding and criticism.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, Alter and Miron's readings of the novel complement each other. Alter is correct in rejecting Miron's argument that *Preliminaries* is an allegory for the failing Zionist dream; firstly, because the Zionist project is not necessarily delineated as a failure, and secondly, because reducing *Preliminaries* to a mere allegory for the Zionist project does an injustice to this complex and extraordinary novel. Yizhar's recognition of the father's deep commitment to the land and to his socialist ideals attests to his acknowledgment of the value inherent in the settlers' attempt to realize the Zionist vision. Yet *Preliminaries*' attachment to the Zionist dream is much more than just the background for the narrator's childhood, as Alter argues. This child's specific fears and images embody anxieties and ideas that are inherent to the ideological reality surrounding him. Through them, Yizhar both criticizes and approves, in a subtle yet profound manner, the social sphere in which he grew up. Contrary to Alter's claim, Yizhar does speak of Palestinians, albeit without any idealizing sentimentality. He does so indirectly, when describing the land and interpreting its resistance to cultivation as its rejection of the new immigrants: "As though suddenly you are seized by the realization . . . that maybe this land doesn't want us at all . . . only perhaps a few flocks of sheep here and there or herds of goats there scattered unnoticed . . . or perhaps also a low-built Arab village, that changes nothing in it and does not compel it to change in any way."<sup>41</sup> Yizhar also speaks of the Palestinians more explicitly, in a chapter that takes place during the Jaffa Riots (*Me'ora'ot Tarpa*) in 1921,<sup>42</sup> as well as when he describes Uncle Moshe's business of exporting oranges to England later in the novel.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> As in the case of the father who is criticized for turning his back on his past in the chapter about the child stung by the wasp, and of the mother who is criticized for her prejudiced stance towards her Arab neighbors in the second chapter. An exception to this rule is the case of the father's crisis, where the critique is directed against the system rather than a specific person.

<sup>41</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 86. In delineating the flocks of sheep, the herds of goats, and the Arab village as being integral to the land, Yizhar presents the land as metonymic to its inhabitants rather than to the new Zionist settlers. I thank Chana Kronfeld for helping me clarify this.

<sup>42</sup> "And even when nothing happened between the Jews and the Arabs, all the time something was happening that they tried to hide and not tell the truth about and not to admit that something was not turning out right. Wasn't this our place? Wasn't it their place? Were we intruders? Were they intruders?" (116). "Or if these riots will never end but will turn into endless wars . . . and there are two nations, two

They would invest and Uncle Moshe would be their agent, purchasing the land . . . one near Qubeibeh that he had bought from his friend the great effendi . . . namely Abderrahman Beg al-Taji, whose palace and harem on a high hill eventually became a mental health utility for some of those who had immigrated and settled all his properties free of charge as abandoned property after he had managed to escape with nothing but his sack of gold among the other refugees who had nothing.<sup>44</sup>

These lines are a prolepsis of the adult narrator describing the grim future of the great effendi and his poor farmers, when they will be driven away from their homes by Israeli soldiers over the course of the 1948 War. The combination of the present time in the narrated time (of Uncle Moshe's deal with Abderrahman Beg al-Taji) and the

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peoples confronting each other here, and it's either us or them, and there will never be calm here, there will never be peace, they can't stand each other, there's only a thin skin barely covering the mouth of the raging volcano. Go, the earth cries here, get out of here shouts the place, go away, scream the streets, off with you, screech the alleys, away with the lot of you, and *Allahu akbar*" (125). In the first quote, the child narrator describes his suspicions of the adults who are hiding the real state of the events from him, and his awareness of the growing tension between his Jewish surroundings and the Arabs. In the second quote, the focal point here is mostly that of the adult narrator—who writes from the perspective of seventy years in the future, aware of the incessant conflict between Jews and Arabs. The streets and alleys that scream "go away" are a metonymy for the Arab residents of Jaffa who claim their precedence on the land. That precedence is embodied in the Jaffa surroundings "siding" with the Arabs: their long history of dwelling there has made them one with their environment. Yet, in the adult narrator's perspective there is also an echo to the child's focal point of view, but this nuanced focalization is lost in the English translation. The last words of the passage that are in Arabic and indeed mean "God is mighty" are translated as *Allahu akbar*, which is the transliteration of the Arabic expression to which the narrator refers. But in the Hebrew novel, the words are אֱלֹהֵי הוּא אֲכַבֵּר: three words, the first and last of which are in Arabic while the middle one is in Hebrew and here means "is" (הוּא). The word *allahu* in Arabic contains the case ending *u* (and case endings are usually pronounced in Koranic Arabic), and its last syllable is phonetically identical with the Hebrew word הוּא (*hu*). The syllable *hu* is therefore perceived as the Hebrew word for "is" in the ears of the child narrator. The combined focalization of the two narrators is conveyed by incorporating the child narrator's perception of the muezzin's call into the adult's perspective. The addition of הוּא, which the translator chose not to translate as it derives from the child's "mistaken" interpretation, emphasizes the narrator's presence in mediating the streets' cries against the Jewish settlers. I thank Kareem Abu-Zeid for explaining the grammatical form of the Arabic expression to me, which helped me recognize Yizhar's narratological use of the child narrator's "mistaken" understanding.

<sup>43</sup> Uncle Moshe is the father's uncle, to whom the father will turn when he loses his job in the great crisis in Palestine in the 1920s.

<sup>44</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 257–58.

present time in the time of narration (of the adult narrator who knows the war's aftermath in this Arab village, among many others) intensifies the injustice that began with Uncle Moshe and the effendi's business, which impoverished the farmers, leaving them with no land to cultivate and no way to earn their bread, and that ended with both the rich effendi and the poor farmers having to run for their lives and become refugees. Typical of Yizhar's manner of writing, this description appears as a subordinate clause, as if this were only trivial information added to the main clause of the main event: Uncle Moshe's enterprise. As in the rest of the novel, Yizhar's critique is implicit, which is precisely what makes it so powerful and profound.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, as Alter sensitively defines it (and titles his article accordingly), the flow, the fluent musical rhythm that characterizes the narration, runs through the whole novel. Yet the seemingly unassuming narrative style should not cause us to overlook the serious message Yizhar expresses between the lines. Unlike Alter's claim, this child could never have grown up in Iowa. All his experiences, indeed conveyed in a "gorgeous sensuousness of imagination," are related to his Zionist and ideological sphere, whether these are his fears of the abandoned factory embodying the primeval fear of failure, or his isolation from the children in the colony who despise him and dismiss him as useless, or his encounters with music. This is because the fear of failure appears to be inseparable from the Zionist dreamers' detachment from reality: the child narrator's image among his classmates as useless is related to a key Zionist concept that views productiveness, physical strength, and the carrying out of manual labor as essential characteristics of "the new Jew." The child narrator's experiences with music touch upon questions of the aesthetic vs. the practical, the collective vs. the individual, and the appropriateness of leisure time in a socialist society. This story is indeed universal, at times even cosmic, but its specific events narrated in the sensual and strongly emotive manner of the child present first and foremost the human aspiration behind Zionist life in Palestine as manifested in the great hopes and massive disappointments of the child narrator's family.

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<sup>45</sup> Uncle Moshe's project is mentioned in the part that describes the father's crisis; the father who loses his job at the Tel Aviv municipality has to turn to Uncle Moshe for help and accept the job offer of being a supervisor of the workers in Uncle Moshe's enterprise. The father is miserable, as this work profoundly contradicts his strong socialist values and beliefs, and the whole section has an elegiac tone. This elegiac style creates an analogy between the father and the Arab farmers, both of whom lose their jobs and are dependent on opportunistic employers (the farmers are dependent on the rich effendi, while the father is dependent on Uncle Moshe).

The analogy Yizhar creates between the child and the Zionist project offers a view of both as fragile and imperfect, yet lovingly conceived. Thus, the Zionist enterprise appears in *Preliminaries* neither as a success story nor as a failure, but rather as a human endeavor which is necessarily imbued with all possibilities of the human experience. Yizhar defies the tradition of mythologizing the era of the *Yishuv*, and instead presents the people who lived during that time, such as his father and his mother, as human beings, idealistic and honorable, yet not without their faults, doubts, and regrets. Understanding their aspirations and their errors as part of the diverse arc of human experience allows the reader to view the period of the *Yishuv* in its historical context, not as the realization of a messianic prophecy—as many adherents of Zionism often interpreted it—but rather as a real historical period, despite the extraordinary historical developments it contained.

Yizhar's point of view, placing the events in their human and historical context, reflects a profoundly ethical stance. It acknowledges the mistaken and short-sighted conception of the New Jew in a New Land, yet does so without harsh judgment, as these human errors are contained within an understanding of the persecutions and suffering that propelled them. It acknowledges the Jewish settlers' inability to see the future tragedy of the Palestinians, the adverse ramifications of the negation of the diaspora, and the destructive implications of embracing physical power and productivity as their highest values. The coexistence of two narrators, one who takes part in the events and who exists within the narrated time (the child), and the other who views these events from a distant point of time, from the time of narration (the adult), is the narratological means that enables this nuanced ethical perspective on the events; it enables an examination of these events as they are happening, events that are imbued with great hope and excitement, as well as with disillusionment and disappointment; it also enables examining these events from afar, when the tragic implications of worshipping the New Jew as the strong sabra, and of ignoring the Palestinians' existence are fully known.

### **The Two Narrators and the Self-Conscious Novel**

The first lines of the novel delineate an image of an orange-colored cloth or a tent; it is deliberately unclear, as would be expected from what is portrayed as the first recollection of the child narrator who is supposedly two years old at the time of this

event.<sup>46</sup> Amos Oz reads these lines as a mantic oath, an attempt to enchant memory to pull hidden treasures from the abyss of oblivion.<sup>47</sup> In his sensitive analysis, Oz also recognizes an exposition here, not the standard one, but an exposition that illustrates two voices. The first one, the main voice, strives to touch the naked, primordial feelings, while the second one interrupts the first voice by asking questions and casting doubts. At the end of this opening passage, Oz points out, the growing tension between the two voices is reconciled “when the first one remembers ‘Mummy carrying on her breast, with Mummy’s smell’, and the second voice gives up its doubts and approves, in one short statement, all that was described in the very long sentence that preceded its words (and says): ‘This was the first place.’”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, Oz too locates, in the novel’s opening, the two narrators with their two distinct voices, which will be inseparable and will accompany the story until its end. One narrator does not exclude the other, and the two are equally necessary for the narration of the events. The immediate impressions of the child are vivid and powerful and render the sense of authenticity, while the backward view of the adult narrator broadens and deepens (by means of irony, rhetorical figures, and allusions) the perspective on the occurrences.

The ironic gap maintained throughout the novel between the child narrator, the reader, and the adult narrator attests to the quality of *Preliminaries*, which Robert Alter lists as one example of a self-conscious novel, in his book on the topic. Alter defines the self-conscious novel as follows:

A fully self-conscious novel . . . is one in which from beginning to end, through the style, the handling of narrative viewpoint, the names and words imposed on the characters, the patterning of the narration, the nature of the characters and what befalls them, there is a consistent effort to convey to us a sense of the

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<sup>46</sup> Nitzza Ben-Dov, in her book *Chayim Ktuvim*, mistakenly interprets the scene at the orange-colored tent as the child’s birth (Ben-Dov, *Chayim Ktuvim*, 27 and 55), but a careful reading of the text of *Preliminaries* provides the answer to the question of the child’s age at that time: “and how could he have been there unless he had been carried in his mother’s arms, on her breast, perhaps at the age of two?” (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 36).

<sup>47</sup> Amos Oz, “Ha-Chom Ve-Hayom Ve-Haru’ach,” in *Devarim Le-Yizhar*, ed. Nitsa Ben-Ari (Or Yehuda: Zemora-Bitan, 1996), 77–83.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 79. Amos Oz quotes from Yizhar, *Mikdamot*, 8. In the English version (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*), it is p. 36.

fictional world as an authorial construct set up against a background of literary tradition and convention.<sup>49</sup>

From the beginning of the novel, the presence of the adult narrator is noticed, thereby illustrating the difference between the time of narration and the narrated time, and creating an awareness of the story's fictionality. "The sense of the fictional world as an authorial construct" is strongly felt in the myriad symbolic meanings derived from the novel's manner of narration. The consciousness of both the father and the mother are mediated through the narrator, and his presence in the textual design of their thoughts, through charged intertextualities, symbolic images, and irony, constantly reminds the reader of the fictional frame of this autobiography. This is even more pronounced in the moments in the novel where the adult narrator intervenes directly in the narrative present by means of prolepsis.<sup>50</sup> But before we locate the literary tradition and convention against which Yizhar designs his novel as self-conscious, we

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<sup>49</sup> Alter, *Partial Magic*, xi.

<sup>50</sup> There are several examples of the narrator directly intervening in the narrated time by commenting on the events and foretelling their aftermath. We find one such example in the first chapter, when the parents are on their way to the doctor with their unconscious child, who was stung by a wasp: "If Daddy has read what this redactor has found and read of medical research on the wasp and its sting (e.g. M. Seyfers, 'General reactions to bee and wasp stings', *Harefuah*, vol. 56 no. 12, June 1959; or A. Kessler, 'Bee and wasp stings', *Harefuah*, vol. 89 no. 12, December 1975 . . .), he would have been appalled and he would not have understood much . . . who in the summer of 1918 had any of these things?" (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 80-81); "Or would he have been relieved to learn that the reaction of someone who has been stung as many as twenty times is still only classified as 'extensive local reaction' which is not terrible . . . and that all sorts of rashes, wheals, swellings and dizziness will all clear up of their own accord, thank God" (ibid., 81-82). We find another example in the second chapter in the courtyard in Jaffa, where Mummy is waiting anxiously with other neighbors for Daddy and others to return during *Me'ora'ot Tarpa* (the Jaffa riots): "Lucky is the man who is already in the evening hours now, and can look back and see us now in the afternoon not knowing anything of what he knows. . . . He knows how it ends, and he knows what happens to Daddy, and how and when he will return home. If only that man who knows already would reveal what he knows, so that this terrible pressure in the tummy would go away. And God, too, knows, because after all everything happens according to His word. And nothing will happen to Daddy, he will come back . . . I promise you" (ibid., 138). Here Yizhar makes playful use of the ironic gap between the adult narrator who "knows how it ends" and the child narrator who feels "that terrible pressure in the tummy," a pressure that could stop "if only that man who knows already would reveal what he knows." The narrator produces a parallelism between him and God, presenting them both as those "who know," as creators; while God is the creator of the world outside the fiction, the narrator is the creator of the world inside this novel.

should perhaps first examine what the self-conscious novel's writing pattern makes possible.

The consistent awareness of *Preliminaries* as a fiction, mainly achieved by means of irony, enables the reader to view the events critically. The ongoing emphasis on the gap between the time of narration and the narrated time reminds us of the memory involved in the process of narration and its subjectivity. Therefore, we are made aware that the narrated events are filtered through the narrator's prism, from a time distance of seventy years, where we, like the narrator, maintain an ironic gap of knowledge in relation to the novel's protagonists. The changes in the landscape, industry, and the power-relations between Jews and Arabs that evolved in the country throughout the years and of which both the narrator and the readers are aware, place the plot in a temporal and historical context. Yizhar here joins many other writers in writing about the time of the *Yishuv* from a personal perspective and a temporal distance. The retrospective national narrative aggrandizes this era and its people. Yizhar consciously writes his novel against this tradition of sentimentalizing and mythologizing the time and the people. The longings for those times are inevitable, as Yizhar himself admits, and in a long section dedicated to the remembrance of the past, the adult narrator laments his childhood landscape that has been completely erased with the years. But at the same time, he is aware of his nostalgia and employs self-irony that subverts the nostalgic descriptions.<sup>51</sup> Importantly, this lament for the past appears right after the long description of the father's crisis and of his devastating disappointment in the Zionist dream (where he has to work as a supervisor of workers, a job that profoundly contradicts his socialist values). By juxtaposing the father's catastrophe with this sentimentalist view of the past, and by mentioning his broken father in the midst of this memory, the narrator dismantles the very possibility of mythologizing that time.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "But all that sounds superfluous today, like exaggerated sentimentalism of a glory that is gone, or like trying to delay something that is doomed to vanish, or boasting before the new comers that were not here then . . . and one way or another there's not much patience with all that, we are not the Society for the Preservation of Nature, nor are we the Society for the Protection of the Land . . . and that house of his [of Uncle Moshe] with those cool floor tiles, and the eucalyptus tree . . . with the wise rooks' nests in its topmost boughs, and neither they nor it can imagine what is going to befall them a few years later, when they will attack that tree . . . and not rest until . . . there is no sign that it ever existed, and nothing remains of it but the housing development that was built on the place where it once stood, unaware on the site of what it stands." (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 263).

<sup>52</sup> "As for Uncle Moshe's trips to the new orange groves, that has already been written about too, as well as his venerable carriage which was replaced, with the passage of the years and changing times, by that Studebaker with the chauffer Gross, and how Daddy, very faded, wandered around among all the

In presenting the subjective nature of nostalgia, where a sweet childhood recollection for the adult narrator is an unbearable reality for his father, Yizhar exposes the unreliability of nostalgia as a lens onto past events. Thus, the only place in the novel where nostalgia is allowed in is as proof of a lament for the lost world of uncompromised socialist values.

In addition to the central thread of the child's growth and his family's story of settlement, I explore in the rest of this chapter the stylistic and narrative strategies through which Yizhar conveys his complex stance toward the ideological sphere of his childhood and his critique of Zionist mores. I will examine two examples of intertextuality, as well as intratextuality and repetition through close readings of distinct sections of the novel. I will close with a discussion of the aesthetic experiences of the child narrator, as they offer a mode of resistance to the ideological sphere and shape the future artist in the child. I will also examine Yizhar's text through Michael Riffaterre's theory of the novel in his book *Fictional Truth*.

Michael Riffaterre distinguishes between two levels of the novelistic text: the narrative itself, i.e., the chain of events that creates the effect of verisimilitude in the story and moves the plot forward, and the meta-textual level, where the story's symbols are found, embodied in stylistic and literary devices such as metaphors, lyric language, and intertexts. There is a gap between these two textual levels, and "what accounts for the bridging of the gap . . . is the presence of subtexts, texts within the texts that are neither subplots nor themes but diegetic pieces whose sole function is to be vehicles of symbolism. They offer a rereading of the plot that points to its significance in a discourse closer to poetry than to narrative."<sup>53</sup> Therefore, what mediates between the level of narrative and the level of symbolism is the meaning derived from the literary devices in the novel that are embodied in the text itself and create its symbolic meaning.

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innovations and all the successful citrus plantations, all green and lush and promising a good return." (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 264). It is hard to ignore the narrator's ironizing description of Uncle Moshe as a capitalist boss who enjoys the luxury of a chauffeur and a new car and examines with satisfaction (his thoughts are insinuated in the narration) the potential profit of the blossoming oranges. This description too undermines the nostalgia as it reminds us of the change that had already started then, from a socialist economy and society to a capitalist one.

<sup>53</sup> Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, xvii.

## The Analogy between the Child Narrator and the Zionist Settlement

### i. The Creation of the World in Genesis and Its Recreation in *Preliminaries*

The book opens with a description that seems as if it is delivered from a toddler's point of view. There is something very preliminary (hence the novel's title) in the way the sights are registered in the focalizer's view. By beginning the story with a two-year-old's impressions of his surroundings and leaving the story's narration in that child's hands, Yizhar produces an analogy between his young life, begun not long ago, and the social world recreated in this novel, through the father's work on the land, and the family's settlement in this land.

The initial image of the orange-colored tent that opens the book and is defined as the first site ("This was the first place")<sup>54</sup> is followed by a portrayal of the skyline that delineates the hills, distinguishing them from the sky:

And then? Then there were the hills. Not the body of the hills and their mass but the line of sky tracing the edge of their spine with that calm, necessary motion. Separating the density of the soil of the hills from the emptiness of the sky.<sup>55</sup>

This picture brings to mind the tale of creation in Genesis ("And God made the vault and it divided the water beneath the vault from the water above the vault, and so it was," Genesis 1:7).<sup>56</sup> Indeed, in Genesis it is God who divides the waters into the sky above and the seas below; here, in the story, it is the skyline that delineates the hilltops and separates the solidity of the soil from the emptiness of the sky. God is absent here as the initiator of the world's creation, and this clear atheistic statement reflects the value system of the child's social sphere.<sup>57</sup> Yet, the proximity of the statement "This

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<sup>54</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 36.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> I use Robert Alter's translation of *The Hebrew Bible* (in this case, Genesis) whenever possible, because in most cases it is closer to the Hebrew than the King James Version. In this case, however, the biblical word *raki'a* (רקיע) used in Yizhar's Hebrew original usually translates as "firmament" ("And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so," Genesis 1:7, King James Version). Alter explains his decision to translate it as "vault" because of the semantic field of the Hebrew word *raki'a*, that "suggests a hammered-out slab, not necessarily arched, but the English architectural term with its celestial associations created by poetic tradition is otherwise appropriate." Robert Alter, trans., *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 17.

<sup>57</sup> I thank Chana Kronfeld for this observation.

was the first place,” the use of the biblical Hebrew term for “sky” (רַקִּיעַ=*raki’a*) to describe the skyline (קו הרקיע), and the descriptions of both texts of separation (*Genesis*) and delineation (*Preliminaries*)—all these produce an implicit comparison between the creation of the world in *Genesis* and its creation here, both physically, by the father working the land, and metaphorically, through the story unfolding in the novel. The link between the two creations is formed at the very beginning of the book, and remains valid throughout the text, reflecting Yizhar’s view of the importance of building a new life and a new land in this region, as well as the ideological connection of this attempt in the consciousness of the Yishuv settlers to the biblical past. At the same time, the fundamental difference between the two beginnings is the role of “Daddy”—as the child narrator refers to his father—who replaces God in creating a new world, relying ideologically on the biblical myth yet emptying it of any religious content.

A clear dissimilarity emerges between the biblical and the novelistic texts in the disharmony that Yizhar marks in the relationship between heaven and earth. The skyline that separates the sky above from the land below is

touching and tracing the roundness of the earth of the fields dividing them from the extent of that haughty sky . . . while the earth was spread out below, so low, only up to the ankles, lost beneath all that height that cared nothing for it or its being.<sup>58</sup>

Unlike heaven and earth in *Genesis*, which are both subjected to God’s will to divide them into the sky above and the waters below, here the sky is given personified agency, as it looks down (literally and idiomatically) on the land below. The feminized land itself is depicted as helpless and lost (“the low compact edge that as always remained lying forgotten there below”).<sup>59</sup>

The affinity with the biblical text, as well as the conspicuous disharmony between the sky and earth, point to the hardship embodied in the great effort to create a new life on this land. The description of the land as “low” and “lying forgotten” could be a metonymy for the inner feelings of the father who is toiling to plough the soil and is often frustrated by its stubbornness. The dissimilarity between the two texts resists the common ideological harnessing of biblical texts to the reality of the new Jewish settlement in Palestine thousands of years later, and stands against any attempt to

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<sup>58</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 37.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

depict this reality as being idyllic. This contradictory move, namely of approving of the act of Zionist settlement and criticizing it at the same time, is typical of the narration of *Preliminaries* and conveys Yizhar's complex stance toward the Zionist project.

## ii. A Rhetoric of Smallness

The rhetorical strategy of opening the story with the first conscious moments of the child as a sentient being, and capturing the landscape in these moments, creates an inseparable tie between the child and the land.<sup>60</sup> And indeed, the child's survival and the fulfillment or failure of the Zionist dream are constantly paralleled through stylistic and syntactic means:

He is so tiny in the cosmos, that without paying any particular attention you might overlook his tiny being, his lack of space in this world . . . your indifferent gaze sweeps onwards without being held up by anything, because there is truly nothing to hold it up, certainly not his insignificance, so at once your gaze moves on, it does not even linger on this patch of land that is being ploughed, because there is nothing to linger on, it is just a speck of nothing on the slope of some rocky hillside with a few shrubs, nothing at all.<sup>61</sup>

This all-encompassing gaze ties the child and the tilled plot of land together both visually, by including them in the same glimpse, and syntactically, by containing the two in the same sentence, connecting them with commas and through diction that

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<sup>60</sup> Another description that attests to the direct link between the child and the land (here almost as an assimilation of the child into the wild screw-beans) is the second paragraph of the first chapter: "And anyone who does not need to know that he (the child) is there in the shade of the dusty carob tree . . . will ignore him and the hundreds of little things that are unseen and almost indistinguishable from the screw-beans that are scattered around, so dusty that anyone who does not know what they are might think that they are merely more stunted acacias, as he sits there with his tiny legs tucked in, dressed in white, with his cloth shirt, trousers and hat." (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 45). Here, one could almost fail to distinguish between the little child and the young screw-beans. What is translated as "hundreds of little things" is in the Hebrew text *me'ot ha-ktanim* (מאות הקטנים), which could also be translated as "hundreds of little kids," since in Hebrew *Ha-ktanim* can be a noun too (*katan* is little [adjective], or little one [noun]; *ktanim* is the plural form), and therefore in the original text the conflation of the young child and hundreds of little ones like him and the little screw-beans is more direct. Later in the sentence, it is unclear whether the description of those that are "dusty" and seem like "stunted acacias" refers to the "little ones" or to the scattered screw-beans. This confusion, in my view, is precisely what demonstrates the explicit and organic authorial connection between the child and the crops of the land.

<sup>61</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 44.

conveys a sense of immediacy and continuation (“so at once your gaze moves on, it does not even linger on this patch of land that is being ploughed”).

The gaze, encompassing both the child and the land, is portrayed in the original Hebrew as an impersonal action through agentless verbs (“You might overlook his tiny being . . . your indifferent gaze sweeps onward” is in Hebrew: "עד שבלי שימת לב פוסחים ומתעלמים... ומחליקים...").<sup>62</sup> The impersonal is used in Hebrew to convey facts and habitual or common maxims, as it takes the form of a plural verb with no personal pronoun. Here, it assigns the power of general truth and authority to the collective gaze, which purportedly reinforces the worthlessness of both the toddler and the ploughed land being described.<sup>63</sup> But the authority of the gaze, as well as the superfluous, hyperbolic “nothingness” of the child and the small plot of land, is strongly negated by their very detailed description in the flanking passages. Although the gaze is described as indifferent, because “there is truly nothing at all to hold it [the gaze] up,” it is likely that the gaze pauses on the child and the land; otherwise it would not have needed to “move on.”<sup>64</sup> This oxymoronic pattern is vividly articulated in the passage below, the opening paragraph of the first chapter, which offers an exposition of the plot:

In the huge world, with the two poles, the equator, the five great continents . . . and also within the crumbly clods of the nearby field, in an infinitesimal point among these hills, here at the edge of this plot in this field, he sits quietly . . . this infant . . . while he [the father] walks pressing down with all his strength on the handles of the iron plough . . . because the compacted surface of this stubborn soil has not been touched for thousands of years . . . because there is no land that can be dismissed as not worth this effort, after the two thousands dunams that have finally been purchased, thanks to the tireless efforts of the Anglo-Palestine Company, and now the experiment of setting the farm, as an

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<sup>62</sup> Yizhar, *Mikdamot*, 14. Since the impersonal form does not exist in English, it has been translated to “you” or “your,” plus verb.

<sup>63</sup> The all-encompassing gaze and its embodiment through the plural impersonal form recall Michel Foucault’s theory of Panopticism in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, ed. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). Foucault’s concept illuminates our context because the all-encompassing gaze seems to represent some kind of “institutional” authority, which holds the power to decide what is worthwhile for the “common good” and what is not, and which would probably dismiss something as minor as this toddler, or something as small as a tiny plot of tilled land.

<sup>64</sup> The obsessive repetition of the “nothing to hold it [the gaze] up” subverts its content and sounds like an attempt at self-persuasion.

example of conquest by Hebrew labour, is gradually being accomplished, in the most difficult of conditions . . . after all these troublesome toings and froings . . . and now we are hammering in a post, as they say, actually redeeming another strip of land, unrecognizable for the time being, and indistinguishable from all this endless expanse . . . and suddenly something, for all that, is about to begin here and to change the eternal order – despite everything.<sup>65</sup>

By the end of the paragraph, the reader may experience an almost physical sense of dizziness and breathlessness. The dialectical structure of these lines, where one part of the sentence may raise hope only for it to be annulled in the second part and then reborn in the third part, creates a sense of oscillation, as if those who had to go through what is portrayed here (and those who accompany them in reading about it) are tied to a pendulum, swinging back and forth. The whole passage is comprised of a single sentence, separated only by commas and dashes. This run-on sentence supports the feeling of a hectic, unceasing movement.

The dialectics are present in the photographic movement of the passage as well. Opening with a description of the larger world that includes the North and South Poles and the five continents, and then zeroing in on the little boy who sits “in an infinitesimal point,” simulates the movement of the focus of a camera: from the wide long shot of planet earth, the lens zooms in on the toddler who plays with the dirt clods, and on his father who ploughs the soil. By the end of this passage, the focus reopens to a wider frame (“from here as far as those hills”) until it returns to a cosmic shot (“and suddenly something, for all that, is about to begin here and to change the eternal order [*sid’rei olam*] – despite everything”).

The next paragraph integrates the two perspectives, the big wide world with the little child: “He is so tiny in the cosmos” and goes on to describe the insignificance of the child (and his smallness as an evidence of it) through the impersonal sentence discussed above. But the previous paragraph that narrowed its focus until it reached the tiny boy helps to expose the rhetoric camouflaged in the apologetics of “nothingness.” The results of the change in focus from the big world to the little child who is said to sit in an “infinitesimal point” within it reverse the relationship between small and large. To borrow terms from the cinematic field to describe narrative technique, the tiny child fills the whole frame, which expresses, in cinematic language, his importance. Capturing planet earth in a long shot, on the other hand, dwarfs its

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<sup>65</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 43–44.

immensity by displaying even its most colossal components as microscopic particles. The implications of the change in focus subvert the collective, impersonal statements about the land and the child's "nothingness." Although the small plot that was cultivated is hardly distinguishable, it is nonetheless still very much there, and is about "to change the eternal order." In the same manner, the child, who is completely helpless and is seen several times throughout his childhood on the verge of loss or death, ultimately recovers, survives, and continues to mature. Hence the "rhetoric of smallness": presenting the child—and the plot of land—as ultimately insignificant, in danger of fading into nothingness at any moment, reveals the wonder of their endurance and growth. The use of this rhetoric positions their very existence as miracles: against all odds – they persist.

The change in focus in the passages above visually thematizes the narratologically unfixed and complex focalizer in *Preliminaries*. In the opening of the first chapter, the focus is opened to become as wide as planet earth and then narrows to observe the father, the child, and the land surrounding them. This complex focalization includes the adult narrator, the child narrator, and the father. Through a shared consciousness, embodied in free indirect discourse that is "the co-presence of two voices but also that of the narrator's voice and a character's pre-level perception or feeling,"<sup>66</sup> the narrator can express himself—both as the child and as the adult—and the father simultaneously. I will discuss the complex focalization and shared consciousness later on, in my analysis of intertextuality in *Preliminaries*.

The contrast between the apologetics embedded in the descriptions of the child and their excessiveness accord with Riffaterre's notion of the symbol:

The symbol rests on an equivalence, on a transition, so to speak, that disproportionately amplifies descriptive details and incidents in the chain of events . . . the trope selected for the translation, for the reference to the story as a whole serves as a sign that the story . . . is but an example, an illustration of something else, of an ideological telos . . . the resulting significance is the perspective, almost in the anamorphosis.<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, the child embodies a symbol that is "an ideological telos," to use Riffaterre's precise term. The child's fragility and his parents' anxiety about losing him are

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<sup>66</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 110–11.

<sup>67</sup> Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, 68–69.

intertwined throughout the novel and embody the fragility of the Zionist dream and the fear of failure by those who toil to fulfill it. Nevertheless, he does not lose his naïve, childlike nature even for a moment, nor does he ever become a mere symbolic expression or an abstract concept. His powerful narration, filled with the emotive use of repetition and with vernacular simplicity, as Robert Alter aptly observes, vividly illustrates his childlike consciousness.<sup>68</sup> The symbolic value coexists with the unique fabric of concrete life.

## Intertextuality

### i. Traditional Texts as the Expression of the Suppressed in the Father's Consciousness

One of the central rhetorical strategies in *Preliminaries* is intertextuality. Michael Riffaterre defines it as an “ungrammaticality” in the body of the text, not necessarily in the sense of incorrect grammar, but rather as the sign of a textual unit from another text: “As for ungrammaticalities, they signal that the subtext’s meaning does not derive from the chain of events surrounding narrative, but from references to an intertext.”<sup>69</sup> Ziva Ben Porat, who developed a theory of intertextuality and allusion in a series of studies from the 1980s, claims that “the actualization of literary allusion is a process in which the reader construes elements of two texts, an alluding text and an evoked text, into units that become meaningful literary patterns in the alluding text.”<sup>70</sup> Riffaterre’s ungrammaticality is for her a marker in the alluding text that leads the reader to the evoked text: “The marker is always identifiable as an element or pattern belonging to another independent text.”<sup>71</sup> While both the alluding and evoked texts have independent meanings, their combination (as a result of our attentiveness to the marker) creates a third meaning that enriches—through critique, irony, or intensification—the meaning of both texts. This triggers a back-and-forth interaction between the texts and their contexts, with each one being modified by the other. Ben Porat concentrates mostly on the effect of the evoked text on the alluding text, but does not negate the influence of the former on the latter. Riffaterre, on the other hand, sees the intertext, or the evoked text, as an unchanging essence, in contrast with the dynamic alluding text: “These ungrammaticalities are most effective . . . because in a

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<sup>68</sup> Alter, “The Flow.”

<sup>69</sup> Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, xviii.

<sup>70</sup> Ben Porat, “*Ha-koreh, Ha-text.*”

<sup>71</sup> Ben Porat, “Poetics of Literary Allusion.”

time-oriented context they focus on an unchanging intertextuality, deriving their significance from their reference to a text that has no past, no future, no temporality.”<sup>72</sup> In her extensive research on marginalized modernist Hebrew poets and on Yehuda Amichai’s poetry, Chana Kronfeld refutes Riffaterre’s notion of the evoked text as static, demonstrating how the amalgamation of the two texts—the alluding text and the evoked text—modifies our interpretation of the evoked text, which in modern Hebrew literature often includes the biblical text.<sup>73</sup> Kronfeld’s understanding of the mutual modification of the alluding text and the evoked text is truly innovative, allowing new ways of reading ancient and mythological texts, thereby reviving them.

My first example of intertextuality in *Preliminaries* is taken from the first chapter, titled “Wasp.” In this scene, the father is tilling the land after setting the child down within his sight. Suddenly, he hears a cry, runs to his son, and finds that he has been stung by a wasp (or perhaps by several of them, as we find out later). The father picks up the child and hurries to his wife, they harness a pair of mules and rush (to the extent that mules can rush) to the nearest doctor, who is three hours away, the child having fainted in the meantime. Throughout this long ride, we enter the stream of consciousness of the anxious, guilt-stricken father. As happens in moments of crisis, the father’s self-control is loosened, making room for suppressed thoughts and emotions to surface. Riffaterre ties intertextuality with the unconscious, arguing that

[T]he unconscious of a text . . . has to be intertextual, the intertext being the analogon or reverse face of the text and thus a text or series of texts selected as referents by the text we are reading. Furthermore, this intertext must be identifiable from elements of the verbal sequence we are trying to interpret. . . . The intertext is hidden like the psychological unconscious and, like the unconscious, it is hidden in such way that we cannot help finding out.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, xviii.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Kronfeld’s analysis of David Fogel’s poem “At the End of Day” and her demonstration of the way Fogel’s use of allusions to the Song of Songs illuminates and revives the metaphors’ literal meaning of kinship, which “has been largely forgotten through the automatization of routine use over centuries,” or her interpretation of Amichai’s poem “Jacob and the Angel,” where she points out how this poem engenders a reexamination of the encounter between God and man as an erotic moment. Kronfeld, *Margins of Modernism*, 102 and 112. See also her analyses of Yehuda Amichai’s poems in *The Full Severity of Compassion*, especially chapter 3.

<sup>74</sup> Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, 86.

And indeed, it seems that the texts that flood the father's mind are texts he had toiled for years to suppress. In a complex focalization, which includes both the father and the adult narrator, the father is depicted as a secular socialist Zionist who left his parents' home at the age of sixteen and immigrated to Palestine in order to participate in the building of a "new" land and a "new" nation. Now, tormented by guilt and fear, he is overflowing with quotations from prayers, Bible verses, and Midrashic tales, all of which he remembers perfectly from his religious past. Meta-intertextuality is thus as important as the content of this collage of quotations: the fact that his consciousness is still filled with excerpts from the Jewish bookcase—and the traditional methodology of accessing it—undermines his attempted rupture with his Jewish past:

What is the wasp anyway, what do we know about it, it is written in the Torah 'And I shall send my hornet before me',<sup>75</sup> and it says 'none of your sting, none of your honey', in *Midrash Rabbah*, apparently, who knows anymore about the wasp . . . what did he do to them, this invader, what was he capable of doing to them, he put in his hand by the hole, and suddenly Daddy recalls the tale of the maiden of Sodom who gave bread to a poor man and when the act became known they spread honey upon her and exposed her on the wall, and the wasps came and ate her – is it in *Tractate Sanhedrin*? – that is it, apparently, Daddy has not forgotten, good God, the wasps came and ate her, as simple as that, what more does a man know about the wasp, the hornet, a tale of two wasps that the Holy One, blessed be he, coupled and they both planted their venom in a man's eye and the eye burst and he fell from a height and died, where is it, Daddy doesn't recall, maybe in *Tanhuma*, with the torn mottled cover, never mind.<sup>76</sup>

The passage above is only a brief example of the father's interior monologue, which is filled with allusions to Jewish religious texts. These texts, essential to his life in the past and the life of the traditional Jewish community to which he belonged, were an integral part of the traditional education he received in the *Cheyder* and *Yeshiva*. His shaken emotional state evokes in his memory sacred texts and culture of textual study from his

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<sup>75</sup> The translation differs from the original Hebrew of *Mikdamot*: "And I shall send the hornet before me" (*ve-shalachti et ha-tzir'a lefanai*), which in itself is different from the biblical verse in Exodus 23:28: "And I shall send the hornet before you" (*ve-shalachti et ha-tzir'a le-fanekha*). Alter, *Five Books*, 453. While the change of the verse in the original Hebrew novel is done by the narrator and therefore may be meaningful, the change in the English translation (from "the hornet" in the Hebrew to "my hornet" in the English version) seems unnecessary and misleading.

<sup>76</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 66–67. Henceforth, all page citations from *Preliminaries* will refer to the English translation of the text, unless otherwise noted.

past, a past he allegedly cast away in favor of a new way of life, sanctified in and dominated by secular socialist Zionist texts. But the compulsion to recall the Jewish religious texts with their incessant flow of quotations, and the urgent desire to remember them and their exact source fully illustrate that he has not truly shed his old Jewish skin.<sup>77</sup>

In the passage above, there is a mixture of quotations, markers to various evoked religious texts that all relate to the wasp, creating a pastiche of allusions, a deconstructed traditional *shibutz*.<sup>78</sup> Each of these evoked texts elucidates the alluding text in a different manner and produces a distinct meaning when integrated into the context of the alluding text in general and into this moment of crisis in the plot in particular. The passage opens with a general question: “What is this wasp anyway, what do we know about it,” and is immediately followed by “it is written in the Torah.” The formulation of the question and answer, and especially the use of first-person plural speech (“what do we know about it”), sound didactic, as if taken from a lesson in the classroom. It seems that the father, to cope with the uncertainty regarding the effect of the wasp’s sting on his child, practices the method of inquiry that is most familiar to

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<sup>77</sup> Here, I am of course alluding to the notion of the “New Jew,” which was central to Zionist ideology of the time and which is also explicitly evoked in the novel on several occasions: “if you just let them this hillside and the next rise will remain as they have been from time immemorial, if the whole man does not marshal all his resources against them, *and all the more so the new Jew in the new Land*” (46, my emphasis); “first of all how can he know that he is actually sitting here inside a theatre, that tiny theatre in which the greatest show on earth is being performed, the spectacle of *the birth of the new Jew in the new Land*” (50, my emphasis). Both excerpts are taken from the father’s thoughts as he ploughs the land, minutes before his child is stung by a wasp.

<sup>78</sup> *Shibutz* is the traditional term for a textual allusion to the sacred texts. *Shibutz* (שיבוץ) literally means “embedding” and derives from the aesthetic norms of the Hebrew poetry in Al-Andalus in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which itself was influenced by the classical Arabic poetry of the time (as can be learned from Moshe Ibn Ezra’s writings about the poetics of the Hebrew Poetry of the Golden Age in Spain. Moshe Ibn Ezra, *Sefer Ha-diyunim Ve-ha’iyunim*, trans. Avraham Shlomo Halkin (Jerusalem: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1975)). *Shibutz* was a popular practice by poets of that time, who inserted biblical verses into poems to decorate them (*le-tiferet ha-melitza*) and to increase their aesthetic value and authority. David Yellin, the renowned scholar of medieval Hebrew poetry, coined the Hebrew term *shibutz* to refer to this practice. I thank my father Shlomo Zucker for the observation about David Yellin. For more on *shibutz*, see David Yellin, *Torat Ha-shir Ha-sfaradit* [The poetics of the Sephardic poems] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978), 118–49; Dan Pagis, *Shirat Ha-chol Ve-torat Ha-shir Le-moshe Ibn Ezra U-bney Doro* [The secular poetry and poetics of Moshe Ibn Ezra and his generation] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik Press, 1970); and others.

him: the communal learning in the *Yeshiva*.<sup>79</sup> He recruits all his textual knowledge, hoping to find relevant information in it. Ironically, it is the religious texts to which he turns to seek an answer. In a moment of crisis, he returns to the traditional texts from his past and they serve for him both as a source of knowledge and as a structural comfort (the obsessive citational mode has a therapeutic function for him as well).<sup>80</sup> His exact recall stresses the vividness and viability of the evoked texts (and the culture they represent) in his inner world.

The first quotation “and I shall send my hornet before me” is a marker of the evoked text of Exodus: “and I shall send the hornet before you and it will drive out the Hivite and the Canaanite and the Hittite, from before you.” (Exodus 23:28).<sup>81</sup> This verse is part of Moses’ speech to the Israelites, after descending from Mount Sinai, where he has just received the Ten Commandments from God. First, it is interesting to note the slight but significant change the biblical evoked text undergoes in the alluding text, i.e., in the father’s stream of consciousness: In the biblical verse, the hornet is to be sent before “you”—the Israelites who are the audience of this speech—in order to protect them and expel the other dwellers of the land. But the father’s personal experience, and perhaps his feelings of guilt as well, lead him to misquote this verse as “I shall send the hornet before *me*.” In the biblical context, God promises the Israelites to send the hornet in order to drive away the native nations who dwell in the land promised by God to the Israelites.<sup>82</sup> The native nations are described in ancient Hebrew cultural memory as

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<sup>79</sup> The plural verb form and the stylistic evocation of the *Yeshiva*, where learning is in the collective form of *chavrutah* with his peers, underscore the father’s loneliness in the present situation.

<sup>80</sup> Later on, the father cites fragments of verses from Psalms: “So long as, so long as, God, so long as, I lift up my eyes, whence my help, out of the depth I cry to you O lord hear my voice, let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication . . . and only from unremembered place that was remembered, mumbling, Hide not Thy face from me in the day of mine affliction.” (69–71). Citing Psalms is a traditional Jewish practice common in situations of crisis and catastrophe, perhaps because the very structure of the psalm provides both expression and resolution. A typical psalm starts by calling for God’s help and laying out the speaker’s complaint in the opening verses, then going on to praise him and his ability to save the worshiper, and closes with thanks for the Lord’s help. The very utterance of Psalms is meant to be therapeutic, and therefore the expressions of gratitude at its end also reflect the worshiper’s sense of relief. But here, the father is “stuck” on the opening verses; his severe anxiety and his feelings of guilt not only about his son but also regarding the Jewish past he has rejected do not allow him to enjoy the worshiper’s relief.

<sup>81</sup> Alter, *Five Books*, 453. Nicholas De Lange, the translator of *Preliminaries*, relies on the King James Version.

<sup>82</sup> The Hebrew word *Tzir’ah* denotes both a wasp and a hornet; Nicholas De Lange, the translator of *Preliminaries*, chooses to render it “wasp.” The difference between “hornet” and “wasp” lies in the

powerful giants, both in the story of the twelve spies that Moses sends to Canaan (“But mighty is the people that dwells in the land, and the towns are fortified and very big, and also the offspring of the giant we saw there” (Numbers 13:28))<sup>83</sup> and in the prophecy of Amos (“Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks” (Amos 2:9)). Whereas in the evoked text the hornet is sent to expel powerful peoples in favor of the Israelites, in *Preliminaries* it attacks a small and helpless toddler. The integration of the evoked text into our alluding text produces an ironic meaning in which the contrast between the small and singular boy and the gigantic nations is striking. It also well expresses the father’s sense of injustice; unlike the biblical hornets that pick on a worthy rival, here a group of angry hornets assaults an innocent child. The irony derives also from the inversion that takes place here: the hornet, which in the evoked text is said to attack the local Amorite giants in order to defend the Israelites who enter the land of Canaan, here, in the alluding text, attacks the Israelites’ descendant and not the local nations.<sup>84</sup> This inversion may point to the feelings the father expresses later on in this chapter: “As though you are suddenly seized by a realization . . . that maybe this land doesn’t want us at all, really” (86).<sup>85</sup>

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specific characteristics of the two species—hornets live in groups, and since the boy was allegedly attacked by several of them, perhaps “hornet” would have been a better translational choice. Another reason to prefer “hornet” is that it would have created a closer link between the alluding text and the evoked texts, as in all of them the English translation of *Tzir’ah* is hornet. As for the evoked biblical texts, both the translation of the King James Version and that of Robert Alter use the word “hornet.” To strengthen the link between the alluding text and the evoked texts (since this is, after all, what we are dealing with), I will use the word “hornet” wherever I can.

<sup>83</sup> Alter, *Five Books*, 747.

<sup>84</sup> If we follow the allusion’s logic, it is the Zionist settlers who should be driven out from the land. I thank Chana Kronfeld for this nuanced comment.

<sup>85</sup> In this context, another biblical text is evoked in the father’s mind: “Who asked this of you, to trample My courts? saith the Lord, in Isaiah. The insolence of strangers, coming here to pull down what has been completely fixed for a thousand . . . years” (87). In the evoked text, from Isaiah 1:12, the prophet rebukes the worshipers who observe the sacrificial rituals but fail to achieve social justice, which precedes religious observance in God’s judgment. Since the father is a fervent socialist, we would expect him to be the modern embodiment of the ideal man according to Isaiah. But the prophet’s words in the alluding text serve to scold the father and his colleagues for their attempts to change the landscape, and, following their purchasing the land from the rich effendis, for their uprooting of the Palestinian villagers. The Hebrew Bible, often appropriated by Zionism to project the new Jewish settlement in Palestine onto the forefathers’ settlement in Canaan, here “turns against” the Zionist movement by

The second allusion, marked by the words “none of your sting, none of your honey,” refers to the Midrashic tale about the biblical story of Balaam, the diviner who was asked by Balak, the Moabite king, to curse the Israelites, and who was forbidden by God to do so: “And God said to Balaam, ‘You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for it is blessed’” (Numbers 22:12).<sup>86</sup> The Midrashic tale appears in both *Midrash Tanhuma* and *Midrash Rabbah*; the difference between the two texts lies only in the language of the proverb that Daddy quotes (“none of your sting, none of your honey”). While in *Midrash Rabbah* the proverb is in Aramaic, in *Tanhuma*, at least in the Warsaw edition, it is in Hebrew. The father makes a correct guess about the source of the tale (“in *Midrash Rabbah*, apparently”), though later on, when trying to trace the sources of the texts evoked in his mind, he recalls the actual book of *Midrash Tanhuma* (“where is it, Daddy does not recall, maybe in *Tanhuma*, with the torn mottled cover”). This “dual remembrance” of both sources in which this Midrashic tale appears reinforces the reliability of the memory process. Interestingly, the father misplaces the word order of the proverb; it is rather “none of your honey, none of your sting” in both *Midrash Tanhuma* and *Midrash Rabbah* (and not “none of your sting, none of your honey,” as the father “mistakenly” quotes). Indeed, the word order in the Midrashic text makes more sense; the proverb refers to the wasp (to which Balaam is likened) and means: Let me neither enjoy your honey nor suffer your sting. But the father, who is tortured by feelings of guilt, concentrates on the experience of the sting, as reflected in his “mistaken memory.”<sup>87</sup> In the evoked text of the Midrash, it is told that Balaam, when forbidden to curse the Israelites, offered God to bless them, and God replied to him that there was no need for his blessing since they were already blessed, “as it said to the

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positioning the socialist Zionists as the sinners against whom Isaiah preaches, and the temple courts as the lands in Palestine.

<sup>86</sup> Alter, *Five Books*, 797–98.

<sup>87</sup> The Midrashic tale appears in *Midrash Rabbah* (Vilna: Ram Publishers, 1887), 168 (Balak Portion, Paragraph 10), and in *Midrash Tanhuma* (Warsaw: N. S. Suessberg, 1875), 84 (Balak Portion, Paragraph 6). The father probably remembers the Warsaw edition and not Solomon Buber’s edition, as Buber translated the Midrashic proverbs into Aramaic, which was their original language and reflected their status in popular culture of the Talmud era, when Aramaic was the vernacular. In the Warsaw edition, which was most common edition when the father was growing up, the Midrashic proverbs appear in Hebrew; even though Hebrew was not the vernacular in the father’s childhood surroundings, it was nevertheless familiar to the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe due to its religious function. Aramaic, on the other hand, had not been in use for centuries, and therefore at the time of the father’s childhood, in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the common edition of *Midrash Tanhuma* was comprised mostly of Hebrew text rather than Aramaic.

hornet: ‘none of your sting, none of your honey.’”<sup>88</sup> Combining the image of Balaam with the hornet adds an ominous quality to the hornet’s sting. Although Balaam’s function in the Hebrew Bible is satirical, the father’s stress and anxiety expressed in these passages rule out the possibility of comic relief.<sup>89</sup>

The next marker in our alluding text is “He put in his hand by the hole.” Unfortunately, the English translation is dull and does not render the direct quotation of the biblical text. In the Hebrew novel, the marker and the words in the evoked text, Isaiah 11:8, are identical: *gamul yado hada*, which literally means “the weaned child (shall) put his hand.” The full verse in Isaiah from which this phrase was taken is: “And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk’s den.”<sup>90</sup> The context of the evoked text is a consolation prophecy that envisions the utopian days of the Messiah. In those days, the prophecy foretells, a child will be able to put his hand on a serpent’s hole without being injured. When integrated into the story’s context, the pathos of the evoked text turns to bathos: the reality of the young settlement in Palestine, where a work-weary father rushes his child, unconscious from the sting of a local hornet, to the doctor, is extremely distant from the idyllic picture delineated in the prophet’s vision. The scene in our story is different in its essence: here, the little hand of the toddler that plunged into the hole in the ground is exactly what brought this misfortune on him. There is a sharp contrast between the harmless serpent in Isaiah and the aggressive hornet in our story. The difference between the two texts is especially charged because in the Zionist vision, the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> After Balaam is forbidden to curse the Israelites and explicitly tells this to the Moabite king, the latter adheres to his original initiative, and his attempt to realize this initiative produces a series of comic situations, from a talking ass to hyperbolic praise of the Israelites and their God, exactly the opposite of Balak’s intention (Numbers 22–24).

<sup>90</sup> As Robert Alter shows in his book *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 1985), ancient biblical poetry is characterized by doublets of parallelistic versets. A typical verse would contain two parts that parallel and complete each other in rhythm and meaning, with the second part further developing the image the two parts share. In our case, although the marker is verbally taken from the second part of the verse (the last three words: *gamul yado hada*), the allusion to Isaiah 11:8 is built on both parts of the verse. The hole, which is the word that completes the phrase in the alluding text, *gamul yado hada ba-chor* (*ba-chor* = in the hole), appears in the first part of the verse, and its attachment in *Preliminaries* to the three consecutive words from the second part of the verse creates a literalized reversal of the idyllic description in Isaiah.

immigration to Palestine and its settlement were often depicted as the fulfillment of God's biblical promises, and as the secular fulfillment of messianic prophecies.<sup>91</sup>

The next allusions are both taken from the Babylonian Talmud; Yizhar's evocation of the Talmud in the father's mind is extremely subversive, because of its (lack of) place and status in Zionist ideology. The Babylonian Talmud was composed in a deterritorialized, diasporic context and in a Jewish vernacular other than Hebrew; its purpose was to interpret the *Mishna*, which is mostly a book of laws, some of which aimed to serve as a substitute for the rituals performed in the Second Temple, which was destroyed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Indeed, later on, still on the way to the doctor and still rendered through the father's stream of consciousness, the words of A.D. Gordon cross Daddy's mind: "Give us individuals, wrote Aaron David Gordon, give us desperate individuals . . . people who do not expect redemption to come to them, but are themselves the redeemers" (79). A.D. Gordon, who immigrated to Palestine in the second Aliyah, was a philosopher whose "labor religion" (*dat ha-avodah*) influenced many young Jewish people. Some saw him as an embodiment of a modern prophet. The quotation above is part of a letter that A.D. Gordon wrote to Y.C. Brenner, a writer and pivotal Zionist figure of the time who is also mentioned in the same string of Daddy's thoughts. Gordon's letter was written to Brenner in response to Brenner's article, which in turn was written as a reaction to a polemic between labor magazine editor Yosef Aaronovich and the leaders of the *Rishon Le-Zion* colony. In Daddy's thoughts, all three—Gordon, Brenner, and Aaronovich—are mentioned ("Aaron David Gordon competes with Yosef Haim Brenner, while he competes with Jacob Aaronovich to see who is the most truly desperate" (78)), and it is probable that he read the articles of the three in *Ha-poel Ha-tzair*, Aaronovich's magazine. These articles appear in Daddy's mind as part of his internal debate about the hope to establish life on this land and the desperation and feelings of guilt over what has just befallen his child. The oscillation between hope and despair, as I noted earlier, is an essential element in the family's life, especially in Daddy's, and characterizes—both in practice and as a philosophy—the discourse around the fulfillment of Zionism. Words like "redemption," "belief," "secret," and "mystery" appear frequently in this discourse. Given the fact that most of those involved in this discourse shared a religious past, their philosophy and expression were profoundly influenced by traditional Jewish views of divine redemption and the Messiah. For more on Gordon, Brenner, and Aaronovich, see: Israel Bartal, Ze'ev Tzachor, and Yehoshua Kni'el, eds., *Ha-aliyah Ha-shniya*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzchak Ben Tzvi, 1997) (all three volumes include relevant information about these figures). For more on the Zionist movement as a messianic movement, see: Anita Shapira, *Ha-halikhah Al Kav Ha-ofek* [Visions in conflict] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1988).

<sup>92</sup> However, some tractates in the Mishna are devoted to Tort-law and to non-religious subjects. For more on the background to the creation of the Babylonian Talmud and the cultural sphere in which it was created, see Yesha'ayahu Gafni, *Yehudey Bavel Bi-tkufat Ha-talmud; Chayey Ha-chevra Ve-ha-ru'ach* [The Babylonian Jews in the Talmudic period: Their social and spiritual life] (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1990).

The dominant trend within the Zionist movement was essentially secular and aspired to create a new Jewish nation that speaks a modern Hebrew but sustains itself on the land of its biblical forefathers and foremothers. Telling the national narrative of the Israelites and containing prophecies that envision the return of the Hebrew nation to its ancestors' land, the Hebrew Bible enjoyed a unique status in Zionism. The tales of the Hebrew kingdoms in the land of Canaan were conceived as a model to which the Jewish people are now returning, a model for a territorialized Jewish sovereignty. As can be inferred from his book's title, *Be-ma'avak Dorot shel Am Yisra'el al Artzo Mi-churban Beitar ad Tkumat Yisra'el* (Generations' Fight of the Jewish People over their Land from Beitar's Destruction until the Revival of the Jewish People / Israel),<sup>93</sup> the historian Ben-Zion Dinur delineates a historical narrative in which a Jewish settlement was sustained on the land of Israel throughout the centuries and had national aspirations that came true in the form of a new Jewish settlement in Palestine and culminated in Israeli statehood in 1948. Interestingly, even when Dinur explores the post-Roman Empire eras, when the majority of Jewish communities were spread out outside the land of Israel and where only a meager Jewish community dwelled within that land, he concentrates on this small group to show the continuity of Jewish settlement in this region. In the opening of his book, Dinur declares: "The renewed hold of the Jewish people (*Yisrael*) on their land is nothing but a direct continuation, under new conditions, of the generations-long fight of the Jewish people (*Yisrael*) in their land and over their land, a fight that has not ceased since the days of *Beitar*'s destruction."<sup>94</sup> Dinur concludes his book with chapters dedicated to the "Revival of Israel" ("*Im Tkumat Yisrael*," 271–95), and in one of these chapters he emphasizes the negation of the diaspora (*shlilat ha-galut*) as fundamental to securing the Jewish people's future.<sup>95</sup> Although Dinur was a secular scholar (with a religious upbringing), he quotes God's

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<sup>93</sup> Benzion Dinur, *Be-ma'avak Dorot* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1973). One might assume, as I first did, that the term "Israel's Revival" (*Tkumat Yisrael*) refers to the foundation of the Israeli state, but in the opening chapter of this unit Dinur declares: "I do not mean by that only the national revival . . . the revival derives from a different fact which is the formation of a large Jewish settlement on the land, a settlement that settled the land, built an economy based on the land's natural resources, founded a new and united Jewish society, revived its language and created foundations of renewed national culture, and displayed ability to organize its life and protect itself from enemies" (271). Dinur is clearly referring to the first immigration waves in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that formed the new Jewish settlement in Palestine.

<sup>94</sup> Dinur, *Be-ma'avak Dorot*, 7. *Beitar* was a fortified city where the rebel Bar-Kochva and his followers held out until the city was conquered by the Romans in 135 CE.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, in a chapter titled "The Rebellion against the Diaspora is the Essence," 284–90.

words to Abraham from the Book of Genesis: “Go forth from your land and your birthplace and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great” (Genesis 12:1–2). “This is the blessing,” argues Dinur, “that determined the beginning of the (Jewish) nation, and it contains the nation’s national uniqueness, its religious destiny, and its birthright on the land [*hanchalat ha-aretz*].”<sup>96</sup> Reading Dinur’s writings, one cannot ignore the ideological fervor and views that shaped his research and conclusions. Ben-Zion Dinur (1884–1973) was an influential figure in the cultural and political sphere of early Israeli society. After immigrating to Palestine in 1921 and becoming a teacher (and later a principal) in the Teachers College in Jerusalem, Dinur became a Professor of Jewish History at the Hebrew University. He then became a member of the first Israeli Parliament and the minister of education. He was twice awarded the Israel Prize for his achievements in the realms of Jewish studies and education. Hence, it is not implausible to assume that Dinur influenced and shaped the views of many, youth and adults alike. But perhaps more significant is the fact that Dinur was Yizhar’s admired teacher during Yizhar’s years in the Jerusalem Teachers College, according to Nitsa Ben-Ari’s monograph.<sup>97</sup> Summoning the Talmudic texts and their diasporic echoes might be Yizhar’s response, decades later, to Dinur’s opinions, which were conveyed in his charismatic lectures to his students.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>97</sup> Nitsa Ben-Ari dedicates a sub-chapter to Dinur, who at that time was still Ben-Zion Dinburg (Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 206–12). “There was no teacher that left a stronger impression on Yizhar and shaped Yizhar’s character more than Dinburg,” Ben-Ari declares (206). Ben-Ari cites Yizhar’s description of Dinburg, written in response to a journalist’s question to Yizhar about a teacher that greatly influenced him: “he was a storm. He caught a quiet kid from the sleepy colony and dropped him from the cliff’s top to the sea, swim if you want to live, he showed that there’s more in the world, things higher and more interesting and richer . . . he made a breeze come to our desert . . . and was completely devoted to calling out to him: come young man . . . and now spread your wings, yes, you can, and let’s fly, you’ll see how wonderful the world is” (209–10). Ben-Ari addresses Dinur’s explicit ideological tendency in his writings: “Years after his passing in 1973, Dinur was accused by post-Zionist historians of taking part in ‘inventing the national Jewish narrative’. If Dinburg was an enlisted historian [*historyon meguyas*], it was out of awareness and a sense of mission: writing the national history was part of the historical and national act in which he took part” (210). Ben-Ari introduces Gershon Scholem’s distinction between “the summarizing historians” and “the awakening historians”—those who summarize history and view their research subject with professional distance, and those who see historical research as a tool to reshape modern Jewish awareness. “According to Scholem, Dinburg would have undoubtedly been considered an awakening historian” (210).

More about how the negation of the diaspora in the time of *Preliminaries* takes place can be learnt from Shmuel Almog's study of the self-image of the Second Aliyah.<sup>98</sup> Almog illustrates how the word "Hebrew," not only as a noun that denotes the language's name but even more so as an adjective, was in common use at the time and "meant to signify the innovative character of the Israeli creation, standing in contrast with diasporic Judaism and the Jews of the past."<sup>99</sup> Almog adds that in literature, as well as in political and philosophical texts of the time, an atmosphere of extreme negation of the diaspora and a harsh critique of Judaism prevailed. In an article about the formation of the educational system in Palestine during the Second Aliyah period, Rachel Alboym-Dror notes that schools emphasized the connection with the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Israelites.<sup>100</sup> Alboym-Dror quotes from a poem by Ya'akov Cahan written in 1912, *The New Hebrew (Ha-Ivri He-Chadash)*: "He strides and comes forth . . . the new Hebrew / . . . / Proud and strong he will stride as the ancient Hebrew. . . . / We have unloaded from ourselves the burden of tradition's reign and became free masters on the [inherited] land [*nachala*] of our forefathers."<sup>101</sup> The Zionist settlers then preferred to focus on stories of life in the ancient land of Israel, rather than on exilic texts that deal, among other things, with the crisis of the loss of the Second Temple, and that echo the diasporic sphere in which they were created. Hence, there was a strong cultural preference for the Bible over the Talmud and later rabbinic texts.

The following allusion—one whose source is remembered correctly by the father this time—is first marked thematically, that is, through the story told in the evoked text in Aramaic, which is retold in the alluding text in Hebrew. But then the Aramaic words of the evoked text (Tractate Sanhedrin p. 109, A in Babylonian Talmud) appear as a direct quotation in the alluding text.<sup>102</sup> It seems as if the father gradually experiences total recall, which is marked by a temporary detachment from Hebrew; the evoked text brings forth the memories of his distant childhood in a diasporic environment, where the spoken Jewish language was not Hebrew, just as Aramaic, and not Hebrew, was the spoken Jewish language at the time and place of the Babylonian Talmud's composition.

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<sup>98</sup> Shmuel Almog, "*Ha-alayah Ha-shniya Be-eyney Atzma U-ve-eyneynu*" [The Second Aliyah in its own view and in ours], in Bartal, Tzachor, and Kni'el, *Ha-alayah Ha-shniya*, vol. 1, 38–59.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>100</sup> Rachel Alboym-Dror, "*Yetzirat Ha-merkaz Ha-chinukhi Be-eretz Yisrael*" [The Creation of the educational center in the land of Israel], in Bartal, Tzachor, and Kni'el, *Ha-alayah Ha-shniya*, vol. 1, 386–405.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately, as can be seen above, the English translation does not include the Aramaic words, and therefore fails to render the meaningful move back and forth of the alluding text and the evoked text.

The evoked Talmudic story tells of the young woman in Sodom who gave bread to a poor man and was punished for it by the vicious Sodomites: She was smeared with honey, laid out bound on the ground, and died as a result of the hornets' stings. This story conveys, in its horror, the father's fear that his son might die: "good God, the wasps came and ate her, as simple as that." The Talmudic Midrash, which is part of the sages' project of animating the ancient biblical stories and which was known to the father from his childhood, receives a painful literalization and acute relevance in the present traumatic experience, as if it is mocking the father's great sorrow.

Last in the catalogue of allusions included in the passage above is again a "horror story" which expresses the father's state of mind. The marker is the quotation "a tale of two wasps that the Holy One, blessed be He, coupled and they both planted their venom in a man's eye and the eye burst and he fell from a height and died."<sup>103</sup> This passage evokes the text of the Midrashic anthology *Ba-midbar Rabbah* (section Korah, 18), where it is brought apropos the Amorite nation, whose image in collective Jewish memory is of mythological giants. The sages wish to demonstrate how God can employ a creature as small as the wasp to destroy giants as immense as the Amorite men. Ironically, whereas the rabbinic storytellers intended to calm their readers' anxiety via allegory concerning the contemporary nations among which they lived, here, in the context of the alluding text, the literalized story only augments the father's fear of the fatal effect of the wasp's venom on his child—and by extension, his fear for the fate of the Zionist project itself.

The sequence of markers to associatively linked evoked texts illustrates well the concatenation typical of stream of consciousness. The verse from Exodus ("And I shall send the hornet before you") that appeared in the first allusion is also present in the evoked text from *Ba-midbar Rabbah*, a few lines before the tale about the wasps' venom and its effect on the Amorite's eye. However, the marker in the alluding text to *Ba-midbar Rabbah* is the story about the wasps and the Amorites. The verse from Exodus is *not* part of the marker of *Ba-midbar Rabbah*. Therefore, it seems that the father's photographic recollection of the Midrash is what stands behind the appearance of this last allusion: The father's remembrance of the verse from Exodus at the beginning of his stream of associations—the first allusion in the above passage in the novel—evoked a recollection, perhaps a visual image, of the actual page where the Exodus verse and

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<sup>103</sup> Here, as well as in the previous marker taken from the Talmud, the translation for *tzir'ah* is "wasp" and not "hornet."

the tale of the wasps' venom appear together.<sup>104</sup> This impression is reinforced by the next words in the passage: "where is it, Daddy does not recall, maybe in *Tanhuma*, with the torn mottled cover." The recollection of the actual book, the reconstruction of its physical appearance, emphasizes the visual memory in which the learning is embedded. This reveals something of the effect of this obsessive citation; it allows the father to submerge himself in the reality to which these religious texts relate, the reality of his old home, where his parents, his childhood memories, his mother tongue, and his old town resided. Right after this flood of memorized texts, the father says to himself: "never mind, what does it matter now."<sup>105</sup> But in the next passage of the novel, he returns to this compulsive act of citation, submitting to the emotional need to recall his suppressed past, clinging to the texts as a therapeutic means to overcome his stress and anxiety. The first chapter, which is primarily devoted to the rushed journey to the doctor, is full of such allusions; and additional quotations appear later on: From the Jerusalem Talmud,<sup>106</sup> from the biblical story of David crying over the loss of his son

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<sup>104</sup> The verse from Exodus about the hornet and the midrashic tale about the wasps' venom and their lethal effect on the Amorite giants appear both in *Midrash Ba-midbar Rabbah* and in *Midrash Tanhuma*. This duplication reinforces the reliability of the memory process in the father's mind. His confusion between the two books (regarding another midrashic tale about Balaam, which indeed appears in *Midrash Tanhuma*, and not in *Ba-midbar Rabbah*, as the father mistakenly remembers) is even more valid since they do both contain part of the texts that are evoked in the father's stream of consciousness. It seems that the existence of the Exodus verse and the Midrashic tale about the wasps' venom in both texts is part of the father's conflation of *Midrash Tanhuma* and *Midrash Ba-midbar Rabbah*. The relevant verses are from *Midrash Ba-midbar Rabbah*, section Korah, 22: "Sometimes God accomplishes His purpose by means of the hornet; as it says, I will send the hornet (Exodus 23:28). Our Rabbis said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, sent the hornet before Israel to slay the Amorites. . . . It would enter into a person's right eye and distil its poison, and the man would burst and drop dead." Judah J. Slotki, trans., *Ba-midbar Rabbah* (London: Soncino Press, 1939). The same midrash appears in *Midrash Tanhuma*, S. Buber Recension, Section Mishpatim, 6.12 Exodus: "The Holy One said to him [to Moses]: By your life, even though I will not send an angel before you, I will send the hornet before you, as stated (in Exodus 23:28): I will send the hornet. . . . How did the Amorites die? R. Levi said: He wedded two hornets to each and every one of them. Then when each and every hornet poured out its venom right into an Amorite's eyes, he died immediately." John T. Townsend, trans., *Tanhuma Buber* (Hoboken NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1997).

<sup>105</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 67.

<sup>106</sup> "that it is permitted to kill a wasp even on the Sabbath, there are five things you can kill on the Sabbath, the fly in Egypt and the wasp in Nineveh, the mad dog anywhere, and the scorpion is there too" (ibid.). The allusion is to the Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Shabbat, p. 74 B chapter 14, Halacha A. The evoked text here deals with geographical areas in the physical environment of the Jerusalem Talmud that are populated with harmful animals and therefore the permission is granted to kill these animals even on the Sabbath. This leads the father to contemplate the land of Israel as one of these places, a thought that ties again to the depiction of this place as hostile, rejecting the Zionist pioneers and their

Absalom,<sup>107</sup> from Psalms,<sup>108</sup> and many more allusions to traditional Jewish texts that psychologically and allegorically highlight the present crisis. This flood of citations vividly expresses the father's plight. Taken together, they construct a kind of personal supplication that illustrates how strongly the father is still tied to his religious past, and how that past remains an inseparable part of his identity.

Concerning the intertext and the unconscious, Riffaterre observes the following:

It should be clear . . . that the intertext of the narrative acts as the unconscious of fiction and that the readers recover or discover that intertext because the narrative itself contains clues leading back to it. . . . It must also be clear that the narrative is produced by repressing and displacing the intertext, and that the visible sign of this repression or displacement at the surface of the fictional text is the loss of narrativity.<sup>109</sup>

If we regard the markers in the story as signs of a “loss of narrativity” (in the sense that they create “breaks” in the sequence of events by referring us to texts outside the story and making us stop and contemplate their context and connection to our text), then

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initiative to settle the land: “and the serpent in the land of Israel, that may be killed anywhere, a place of snakes, always, and scorpions . . . a place lacking place, and a child that grows up in a place lacking place” (ibid.).

<sup>107</sup> “would that I might take your place, my son” (ibid.). In the original Hebrew novel, the marker to king David's lament over his son Absalom is clear, as Daddy's words are almost identical to David's words (*mi yiten moti ani tachtecha Avshalom bni*), but unfortunately the translator missed the biblical dictum and translated these words literally (he also did not follow the King James Version: “would I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son”). Robert Alter's translation of verse 1 in chapter 19, 2 Samuel succeeds in capturing the sense of a father's utter sorrow and grief over his son's death: “Would that I had died in your stead! Absalom, my son, my son!” (Robert Alter, trans., *Ancient Israel: The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 541). The single word in David's lament that is omitted from Daddy's inner lament is *moti* (literally, “my death”). The absence of this word derives from the difference between the biblical scene, in which Absalom's death is certain, with a sorrowful David expressing his hypothetical wish to have died instead of his son, and the scene in the novel, in which the child is severely hurt but not dead, with his father wishing he could have been stung instead of his son. But the very allusion to David's lament illustrates Daddy's profound fear of losing his child. The fact that the word signifying death is not uttered here does not necessarily indicate Daddy's certainty that his son is still alive, but rather highlights his fear of the possibility of his son's death.

<sup>108</sup> “Give ear to my prayer that goes not out of my lips. . . . Incline Your ear to me . . . guard him as the apple of Your eye . . . in the shadow of Your wings” (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 93). These markers evoke Psalms 17, as is noted explicitly in the text itself (“Daddy says, adapting for the need of the moment the words of Psalm 17”). Despite this direct reference, the translator does not follow the text as it appears in Psalm 17.

<sup>109</sup> Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, 91.

these “displacements”—including parts of evoked texts, markers that lack full context—are exactly what produce the narrative and the working of the protagonist’s unconscious, as we just witnessed in interpreting the above Talmudic allusions. However, there is an inherent problem with Riffaterre’s supposition. Riffaterre views the text as a separate and autonomous entity, as if it produces itself, and therefore the intertexts embedded in it reveal the text’s unconscious. Riffaterre does not address the role of the narrator—or the author—as directing the text and manipulating it, in which case the character-narrator not only produces the text (by simply narrating it) but controls the intertexts too. If the character-narrator is indeed involved in the creation of the story—as in the case of *Preliminaries*, where the narrator makes direct references to his awareness of the story as a work of fiction and to his part in creating it—then what Riffaterre defines as “the unconscious of fiction” is in fact conscious, as the narrator declares his involvement in producing the story, which includes all the novel’s parts, both texts and intertexts.

As Robert Alter explains in his study of the self-conscious novel, these texts expose their fictionality by commenting on the very form in which they are contained:

These fictional materials, we are told in effect, however lifelike, however absorbing, have been assembled in the imagination of the writer, who is free to reassemble them in any number of ways, or to put them aside and tell his own story directly, and the fictional materials have no existence without the writer.<sup>110</sup>

Following Alter’s observation, both the mimetic parts of the novel and the parts that invite symbolic interpretation are the fruit of the writer’s imagination—here presented self-consciously as the creation of adult narrator. This fact holds true with regard to realist novels as well as self-conscious modernist ones; the only difference between the two is the exposure of the contrivance in the novel itself, as is the case in the self-conscious novel. In *Preliminaries*, it is the intertextual stream of consciousness that expresses the father’s unconscious rather than the text itself.

## **ii. The Father-Son Relationship in *Preliminaries* and in the *Binding of Isaac* as a Critique on Ideology**

Let me now move to an examination of intertextuality in the second chapter of the novel, where the family is located, temporarily, in an apartment on Montefiore Street

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<sup>110</sup> Alter, *Partial Magic*, 17.

in Tel Aviv.<sup>111</sup> The scene below, which describes a special experience that the child and his father share, contains an allusion to an experience of another father and son, namely, Abraham and Isaac in the story of the Binding of Isaac (Genesis, 22: 1–19).

After saying goodbye to guests who visited them and whom they walked home,<sup>112</sup> the child and his father head back toward the apartment:

And Daddy does not reach out to hold the youngster's hand and the youngster does not reach out to hold Daddy's but both their hands reach out and they hold each other's hand, because of the silence in the dark. . . . Hand in hand Daddy and the youngster reach the corner of Nahalat Binyamin and Montefiore . . . and just when it seems as though Daddy has seen enough and is about to press lightly on the little hand that is in his big, dry one . . . and suggest . . . to go to sleep . . . Daddy says something that it's hard to believe he would say. . . . Would you like a glass of soda? Goodness gracious, what did he just say, that Daddy? . . . and already they are inside . . . the youngster whose hand is in his Daddy's and

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<sup>111</sup> As Nitsa Ben-Ari describes in her monograph, after several hard years at the experimental farm in Chulda (where the wasp event takes place), the family moves to some of the new neighborhoods in Tel Aviv. They initially lived in Neve Shalom, where the father worked as a secretary at the Teachers College, before moving to an apartment on Montefiore Street. While all this is happening, the father manages to save up some money and takes a loan out from the bank, and in 1924 he starts building a small house in the Tel Nordoy neighborhood in Tel Aviv. Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 109.

<sup>112</sup> The guests, i.e., the father's old friend and that man's girlfriend, "set off for their neighborhood of the homeless, far away in the desert of sand dunes . . . while the two of them, Daddy and the youngster, turn and head for home in Nahalat Binyamin" (162). This description echoes the reality of the first decades in Tel Aviv, a town that was still being built in the novel's narrative present, with parts of it still sand dunes. Yet the sharp contrast between the name of the friend's neighborhood (the neighborhood of the homeless) and the name of Daddy and the child's neighborhood (Nachalat Binyamin) defamiliarizes the actual referential meaning of this street name, and brings to mind its biblical connotations and origins. *Nachala* (נַחֲלָה, ancestral land) is the biblical noun denoting the lot that each of the 12 Israelite tribes received when they settled in Canaan. As for the name of the neighborhood, Nachalat Binyamin, Binyamin was Jacob's second son from his beloved wife Rachel, who died while giving birth to him, and he was the youngest son among his brothers. After losing Joseph (due to the jealousy of Joseph's brothers), his first and favored son from Rachel, Jacob finds ultimate comfort in Binyamin (I thank Chana Kronfeld for her comment about the biblical charge of the neighborhood's name). These connotations revive the biblical past and make it present—if only as an ironic contrast—in the scene depicting what is happening now between the child and his father. The translator chose to translate the neighborhood's name as "Nahalat Binyamin," omitting the "c" which resonates the guttural sound in the Hebrew name (נַחֲלַת בְּנִימִין). Therefore, wherever I use the neighborhood's name, I will write it with a c: Nachalat Binyamin.

the Daddy with the youngster's hand in his . . . and the man who is always smiling bows and says straight to Daddy: And what will it be for you sir? . . . Daddy for a moment does not know what . . . he should answer . . . and instead he bends over and puts his hands under the armpits of the youngster . . . and lifts him up so that his chin, his head and most of him are above the marble . . . and then. . . The loudspeaker bursts into a noisy blast . . . and an incredible shriek, that your shoulders instantly begin to move with . . . and both Daddy who is lifting and the youngster who is lifted catch themselves and resist the movement that is carrying them away and suddenly they grin at each other like two naughty boys who have been caught.<sup>113</sup>

In *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Robert Alter develops an account of key words that “become thematic ideas through their recurrence at different junctures.”<sup>114</sup> Alter adds that “this kind of word-motif . . . is one of the most common features of the narrative art of the Bible.”<sup>115</sup> Alter’s key word concept is modelled on Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig’s preface to their German translation of the Bible in which they coin in the term *Leitwort*:

A *Leitwort* is a word or a word-root that recurs significantly in a text, in a continuum of texts, or in a configuration of texts: by following these repetitions, one is able to decipher or grasp a meaning of the text. . . . The repetition . . . need not be merely of the word itself, but also of the word-root; in fact, the very difference of words can often intensify the dynamic action of the repetition. . . . The measured repetition that matches the inner rhythm of the text, or rather, that wells up from it, is one of the most powerful means for conveying meaning without expressing it.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 162–64.

<sup>114</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 116.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. Alter quotes from: Martin Buber, *Werke*, vol. 2, *Schriften zur Bibel* (Munich: Lambert Schneider, 1964). The translation is Alter’s. Indeed, Buber and Rosenzweig coined the term *Leitwort* (or “key word”) in relation to the biblical text, and Alter’s explanation of the function of key words is part of his analysis of the Hebrew Bible. But, as Alter himself has noted, the role of key words is not limited to the biblical text. Moreover, later on in my reading of the above passage from *Preliminaries*, I will look at the biblical story of The Binding of Isaac and will explore the *Leitwörter* that appear in that text and their meanings.

In the passage from *Preliminaries* cited above, the hand is one such expressive *Leitwort*. There is almost no dialogue here; instead, the hands of father and son speak on their behalf. The walking of father and son (“while the two of them Daddy and the youngster, turn and head for home”) is followed immediately by insistent repetition of the key word “hand” (*yad*): “And Daddy does not reach out to hold the youngster’s hand and the youngster does not reach out to hold Daddy’s but both their hands reach out and they hold each other’s hand.” In the Hebrew text, the repetition is more salient, through the chiasmic, symmetrical syntax of the sentences: ואבא לא שולח ידו אל יד הבחור והבחור לא שולח יד אל ידו של אבא אבל ידי שניהם נשלחות והם אוחזים זה בידי זה<sup>117</sup>. The mirror effect created in the Hebrew text, where the first appearance of the hands is visually opposite to the second appearance (*yado el yad = yad el yado*), enhances the reciprocity both syntactically and phonetically. The conjoined sentence, written in the plural form and describing both hands reaching out, is structured as a question (*yedey?*) and an answer (*yedey*). The question and answer accompany the hands’ movements; first, both hands reach out as if hesitating, questioning, and then both hands hold each other, affirming the mutuality and father-son connection.

Here, I would argue that this passage evokes the charged biblical scene of Abraham and Isaac walking side by side on their way to the mountain where the sacrifice is to take place (“and the two of them went together” (Genesis 22:6, 8). In the biblical story, Abraham puts the wood for the offering on Isaac’s back and takes in his own hand the fire source and the knife, and the two of them walk together: “And Abraham took the wood for the offering and put it on Isaac his son and he took in his hand the fire and the cleaver, and the two of them went together” (v. 6). The silence between them is violated only by Isaac’s question about the sheep for the offering. Abraham’s answer is: “God will see to the sheep for the offering, my son” (v. 8). The walking together occurs twice in the biblical text, both in verse 6 and in verse 8, “and the two of them went together,” the repetition punctuating and intensifying the burdensome silence and the ironic gap of knowledge between them. In our paragraph, there is also silence (“because of the silence in the dark”), but in this silence the hands of both Daddy and son are reaching out to each other.

If we return to Buber and Rosenzweig’s definition of *Leitwort*, then the repetition can be manifested not only in the word itself, but in the word-root as well. Moreover, the variations of the word, the different appearances of the root, “intensify the dynamic

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<sup>117</sup> Yizhar, *Mikdamot*, 112.

action of the repetition,” Buber and Rosenzweig note. The verb that describes the father and son’s hands reaching out is *sh.l.ch* (ש.ל.ח), which is another key word (*Leitwort*) in the biblical story (and variations of it appear throughout this biblical unit, as we shall see). But in the Abraham and Isaac story, Abraham is the only one reaching out his hand, and he does so in order to take the knife to slay his son, for the purpose of obeying God’s command: “And Abraham reached out his hand, and took the cleaver to slaughter his son” (v. 10). The verb *sh.l.ch* is repeated at the climax of the story of the Binding of Isaac, when the angel of God stops Abraham a split second before he slays his son, and when Abraham’s hand is already holding the knife: “do not reach out (*al tishlach*) your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him” (v. 12).<sup>118</sup>

Why is the Binding of Isaac narrative, with its tragic irony and near mythical significance in Jewish culture, mapped onto the mundane scene of a father taking his son out for a soda?<sup>119</sup>

The stylistic features of Yizhar’s story again contain the clue as to the role of this intertextual mapping. In our story, the depiction of the father and son’s hands reaching out to each other is preformed through litotes, namely describing something by negating its opposite: “And Daddy *does not* reach out to hold the youngster’s hand and the youngster *does not* reach out to hold Daddy’s but both their hands reach out and

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<sup>118</sup> As I have mentioned previously, I use Alter’s translation of the Hebrew Bible, which aptly follows the nuances of the Hebrew. As Alter himself says in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*: “The operation of the *Leitwort*, of course, will not be so evident in translation as in the original . . . unfortunately, most modern English translators go to the opposite extreme, constantly translating the same word with different English equivalents for the sake of fluency and supposed precision” (117). Nevertheless, Alter adds, one can still follow the key words in the biblical text, “especially if one uses the King James Version” (*ibid.*). However, in the King James Version, Genesis 22, the translation of the verb *sh.l.ch* is varied (in verse 10 it is “And Abraham stretched forth his hand”; and in verse 12 it is “Lay not thy hand upon the lad”), thereby missing the meaningful repetition in the Hebrew text. Alter’s translation, on the other hand, uses the same wording where the key words appear, thereby preserving the repetition in the original Hebrew. Alter, *Five Books*, 110 and 111, respectively.

<sup>119</sup> The disproportion lies also in the traditional reception of the evoked text itself; our cultural memory involves the Akeda as a topos for Jewish martyrology and is predicated on forgetting that Isaac was not actually sacrificed. For more on the Binding of Isaac as a model for Jewish martyrology in Judaism, see Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as Sacrifice*, trans. Judah Goldin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967). And see also Chaim Guri’s poem “Yerusha” (“Heritage”), translated by T. Carmi: “Isaac, as the story goes, was not sacrificed. / He lived for many years, / saw what pleasure had to offer, until his eyesight dimmed. / But he bequeathed that hour to his offspring. / They are born / with a knife in their hearts.” In T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 565.

they hold each other's hand" (my emphasis). The choice to use this double negation is extremely fruitful for its intertextual implications. The use of litotes in the alluding text underscores Yizhar's negation of the violence embodied in the charged language of the evoked text, a violence metonymically focused on the father's hand: "And Abraham *reached out his hand* and took the cleaver to slaughter his son," "Do not reach out your hand against the lad" (my emphasis). As I noted earlier, in Hebrew the same phrase recurs (with a slight change from the third-person to the second-person form), using the verb *sh.l.ch*:

"אל תשלח ירך אל הנער", "וישלח אברהם את ידו"

In our paragraph, no hand is reaching out—neither the father's nor the son's, thereby canceling out the hand's potential violence in Genesis. But immediately after the negation of the violent implications, both hands reach out to each other in a completely different manner and purpose. In this action, which serves as an alternative model to the biblical one for a father-son relationship, the hands meet each other in a hold that metonymically expresses loving, intimate support. Unlike the biblical scene, where Isaac is an agentless victim and Abraham is the perpetrator, here the mutuality is underlined. In Hebrew, the form of the verb *sh.l.ch* used in our story is an agentless plural—*nishlachot* (נשלחות)—both hands are reached out, of their own accord, as if by the change in verb pattern from the active *kal* (קל) in the Binding of Isaac to the agentless *nifal* (נפעל) the narrator wishes to suggest a different model for the connection between a father and his son, that of a natural, self-generated reciprocity and intimacy.

Nonetheless, the negation that constructs the litotes has yet another use; it corresponds with the words of the angel of God that are also articulated through negation: "Do not reach your hand against the lad," "אל תשלח ירך אל הנער". *Al* is the imperative form of a prohibition in Hebrew (as demonstrated in its letters ל, א, the letters for the word "no", לא, in Hebrew). Echoing intertextually the words of the angel of God, the father in our story reinforces this prohibition to reach out a hand against one's son in order to hurt him. Hence, the paragraph opens with this specific order: "And Daddy *does not* reach out to hold the youngster's hand." Opening with the "and" could also sound as a continuation of the argument against the problematic model of the relationship of father and son presented in Genesis, but it also mirrors the use of the complex conjunction "ו" (and) in biblical narrative. The use of "ו" (vav, or Wāw, in Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar*) in biblical Hebrew can indicate contrast, and therefore the structure "And Daddy" can signify "But Daddy," as if to say: "By contrast to the well-

known Genesis story of father and son.”<sup>120</sup> Yizhar thus employs a biblical narrative device in responding to the sacrificial trial depicted in Genesis by offering a different model.

The markers that link both texts lead us to contemplate the circumstances of both stories, and here too we can find commonalities whose comparison reveals important differences. Abraham almost sacrifices his son to God out of his monotheistic commitment to obey God at any price and without questioning. In the scene portrayed in *Preliminaries*, father and son are also facing an ideological trial, though reduced to mundane, post-theological proportions, when they come across the café at the intersection of Nachalat Binyamin and Montefiore Streets on their way home. The story then unfolds with the depiction of the hands: “Hand in hand Daddy and the youngster reach the corner of Nahalat Binyamin and Montefiore.” They stand and watch “the place” from afar and then, unlike what the child expects to happen and to his great joy, the father offers to buy him a soda. They cross the street and reach the coffee shop, “and already they are inside . . . the youngster whose hand is in his Daddy’s and the Daddy with the youngster’s hand in his”; and in order to allow the child to choose his soda on his own, Daddy “bends over and puts his hands under the armpits of the youngster . . . and lifts him up” (what is translated here as “armpits” appears in Hebrew as a two-compound word, which again includes “hands”—אצילות ידי—). The father and the son buy the long-lusted-for glass of soda to the sounds of the foreign music that is blaring on the gramophone, and sit at a corner table, where the child drinks his soda (and lets Daddy try it too). Obeying the anti-consumerist socialist ideology according to which they live would require them to go home, as the child is afraid would happen, instead of crossing the street and going to the café. And indeed, they are described as culprits, an image that probably reflects their guilty feelings about enjoying the soda and the bourgeois dance music associated with it—both forbidden by the secular religion of socialist Zionism:

The loudspeaker outside bursts into a noisy blast . . . that your shoulders instantly begin to move with . . . and both Daddy who is lifting and the youngster who is lifted catch themselves and resist the movement that is carrying them away and suddenly they grin to each other like two naughty boys who have been caught. (164)

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<sup>120</sup> “Frequently, the language employs merely the simple connexion by *Wāw*, even to introduce an anthitesis.” In: Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley (New York: Dover Publications, 2006), 485.

They carry this sense of having violated an article of faith with them, as they return home, and see Mummy standing there and waiting for them: “and they feel guilty, sinful and unfaithful.”<sup>121</sup> Yet this moment brings them together, and their portrayal as two naughty boys breaks down the hierarchy governing father-son relationship and instead situates them as equals.<sup>122</sup>

The father-son relationship depicted here seems to transcend verbal communication. When the two of them stop to look at the coffee shop and the child assumes that they will soon go home, he imagines how his father will convey that:

And just when it seems as though Daddy has seen enough and is about to press lightly on the little hand that is in his big, dry one . . . and suggest . . . to go to sleep . . . Daddy says something that it’s hard to believe he would say.

Even the possibility of returning home is expressed here through a gentle hand gesture that precedes the use of words. Unlike the difficult silence between Abraham and Isaac, here the silence prevails because words are redundant, because the intimate communication between father and son is beyond the need for words.

The mother, representing the official ideology, condemns buying soda in the café and listening to foreign music that originates in capitalist America, which is at odds with the ideologically approved “folk” songs.<sup>123</sup> The culture of leisure and individualism

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<sup>121</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 166.

<sup>122</sup> The mutuality is yet again emphasized in the description of their reciprocating postures: “and both Daddy who is lifting and the youngster who is lifted.”

<sup>123</sup> In her monograph, Nitsa Ben-Ari notes that Miriam, Yizhar’s mother, immigrated to Palestine in 1908 and defined this date as her date of birth, to symbolize her break with her previous life in the diaspora. She also asked that this date be marked as her birthdate on her gravestone. Ben-Ari explains that Yizhar’s mother was not the only one who did this: “many of the Second Aliyah pioneers did so . . . it was a rebirth for them, the peak of the pioneering process of negating the diaspora” (Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 29). This act can attest to Miriam’s tendency to extremism. We also know that Hebrew folk songs were an inseparable part of her fervent Zionist education, from a passage in the novel I discuss below that describes her life prior to her immigration to Palestine: “and in the midst of the constant discussions, lectures and arguments back there in the Volhynian forest on the bank of the River Styr, which flowed slowly . . . and received quietly and almost indifferently the most powerful of the songs of the homeland . . . although actually there were wild shrubs in the songs, and these very shrubs, so they sang, we would uproot when we returned to our land and tilled our fields, well-watered Zionist dream” (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 107). As for the music, it is clearly American: “and the sound comes from the records brought by the man from the Kiosk . . . no one can understand the words because they are in

contradicted the collectivist, anti-materialist value system of labor Zionism. In her book *Babel in Zion*, Liora R. Halperin dedicates a chapter to the connection between leisure time and the loosening of ideological decrees, and argues that in the period of the *Yishuv* there was “a common pro-Hebrew perspective about the nature of cultural revival: relaxation . . . was not a form of freedom but a dangerous retreat into chaos. These poles of meaning – structure versus laziness, construction versus chaos – defined the sphere of leisure in the *Yishuv*.”<sup>124</sup> Although Halperin examines the social atmosphere of the *Yishuv* through the lens of language coercion, her conclusions illuminate the pervasive ideologist climate of that time. Halperin draws on research about totalitarian regimes that “are particularly distinguished by their attempts to intervene fully in leisure practices,” and specifically the example of the Soviet Union. Clearly, she differentiates between the state coercion of the Soviet Union and the “voluntary collectivism” of the *Yishuv*, but nevertheless notes: “This kind of ideological volunteerism correlated with strong collective censure of individual behaviors that seemed to transgress social norms.”<sup>125</sup>

Indeed, this censure is evident in the description of *gazoz*, the new, magical liquid—delivered through the combined perspectives of the enthusiastic child-narrator and the ironic adult narrator, who portrays the man pouring the soda as the “high priest.” The reactions of the passers-by record that public censure:

who pause for half a moment with an embarrassed snicker . . . and immediately find the courage to announce that they are not happy at all, because it begins like this, but it’s the thin end of the wedge, just see what will become of our young people from now on, what a dissolute degenerate generation will emerge.<sup>126</sup>

The social atmosphere of the *Yishuv* denounced, at least explicitly, such phenomena as the café with its foreign music and beverages. Interestingly, the mother who embodies here the social ideology is described only one page earlier—through the narratological

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English” (158); “and the man is beaming, It’s the Charleston, he announces excitedly. . . . Yes, sir, yes my baby, sing the man and the loudspeaker” (164).

<sup>124</sup> Liora R. Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920–1948* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 26–61. I am grateful to Naomi Seidman for bringing this book to my attention.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>126</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 150. The description of the passers-by is suffused with the humorous irony of the adult narrator, exposing the lip service that it embodies.

technique of shared consciousness that *Preliminaries'* narrator frequently employs—as calculating their family's future plans:

The desert, she thinks, is behind her now, and the next step will be to build a new home of their own . . . in a place called Tel Nordau. . . . Although Daddy's work in the municipality will only help with the arrangements and the loan from the Development Center, where a good friend of theirs . . . works, and he knows that the Center is soon going to become the great national construction company *Solel Boneh*, just as Mummy knows that it is going to be a neighborhood of teachers, writers and white-collar workers and therefore civilization will flourish there and transform the sand dunes into a cultural and artistic festival . . . not exposing the children's souls to the this vulgar kiosk or to the picture house where they put this spectacle of lights, so she heard . . . of very doubtful cultural value.<sup>127</sup>

It is hard to ignore the irony this passage is imbued with. It depicts the mother as a woman who knows very well how to take care of her own interests, and who conceals her aspirations to live a bourgeois life in the guise of worrying about the “children's souls.”

On the other hand, the father is portrayed throughout the novel as a true idealist who is willing to do any kind of job that may serve the Zionist idea and the new Jewish society that is being formed in Palestine.<sup>128</sup> Very differently from the ironic tone he uses in the description of Mummy above, the narrator, through the same technique of shared consciousness, describes Daddy's thoughts after working all day tilling the land and writing articles at night: “And it really is almost morning, and time to get up, go out, get ready, fetch, put, take, arrange . . . with a vague weight of guilt always. . . . Always doubts: what are you in fact, a peasant tilling the soil, or a bookworm of a writer, building the Land with a hoe in your hand or with your pen studying humanity and society” (54–55).<sup>129</sup> Politically, Daddy is affiliated with the centrist labor *Ha-po'el Ha-*

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 160–61.

<sup>128</sup> “What is it like to be the child of a settler? To be the baby of someone who decided to make the idea a reality with his own body?” (52). “Doing every kind of work where the Hebrew worker needed to prove himself, a tiller of the soil, a blacksmith and a farrier, a kindergarten teacher and a teacher of workers” (256). I will return to this last excerpt and to the personal price that the father pays for his innocent idealism.

<sup>129</sup> The following example beautifully illustrates the narrator's subtle move and change of tone when describing first the father's unfulfilled dreams and then the mother's ambitions: “Daddy never says

*tza'ir*, as we learn from the many times it is mentioned in the novel (including the background to the current event, in which Daddy accompanies his friend home: “Daddy belongs to Hapo’el Hatza’ir and the friend is from Po’alei Tzion and nevertheless they are friends and happy to be together,” 160). Nitsa Ben-Ari’s study corroborates this biographically.<sup>130</sup> *Ha-po’el Ha-tza’ir* is described in Zeev Tzachor’s article about the political movements in the period of the *Yishuv* as a very diverse group of people: “it included Marxists, religious people, pacifists . . . anarchists, adherents of manual labor and ‘supervisors.’”<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, Tzachor adds that “despite the pluralism in thought and the large geographical spread . . . the party was a small and closed group . . . that demanded from its members very high and strict standards of personal behavior.”<sup>132</sup> This duality, between pluralism on the one hand and strict demands from the individual on the other hand, may shed light on the father’s choice to buy a soda for his son. It might illuminate something of Daddy’s inner struggle, and yet explain his decision not to adhere to dogmas. At the moment of choice, when the father offers his son a soda instead of going home, he chooses to resist the collectivist value system and to sanctify these special moments with his child. Through the use of the hand as a recurring motif that moves the scene forward and expresses the subtle and warm relationship of father and son, Yizhar supports this resistance to the strictures of ideology, showing the true values of egalitarianism are to be found in the non-hierarchical mutual closeness between father and son.<sup>133</sup> At the same time, modeling

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anything. Daddy always gives in. . . . Work comes first, Mummy comes first, the children come first, and the land comes first . . . after he gave in . . . and didn’t join his comrades who went off to build Nahalal, that he had spoken and written so much about . . . they could almost have had their own field and their own plantation and their own cowshed . . . and would have not have to pull up his roots and wander every year or two from one place to another . . . but settle down finally with his sons on their own land . . . under the giant mulberry trees that Mummy didn’t want because they attract flies and filth, just as Mummy didn’t want Nahalal and she’d had enough of living in the desert, or bringing up children like little Arabs, not seeing people or going to lectures or going to hear the baritone Har-Melekh accompanied on the piano by Hopenko . . . and at the Hebrew theater they were putting on *Hasia the Orphan Girl*, which apparently had some good moments, and in Jaffa opposite the Kaminitz Hotel Mrs. Atlas had just opened her ladies fashion shop” (139–40).

<sup>130</sup> Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 90.

<sup>131</sup> Zeev Tzachor, “*Tzmichat Ha-zramim Ha-politivyim Ve’ir’gu’ney Ha’po’a’lim*” [The development of the political movements and the worker organizations], in Bartal, Tzachor, and Kni’el, *Ha-alayah Ha-shniya*, vol. 1, 226.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>133</sup> Another example of the mother’s complaints about the kiosk and her dogmatism and of the father’s critical thinking can be seen in the following passage from *Preliminaries*: “and when Mummy complained to Daddy yesterday about how vulgar that noisy place was and that there was nothing cultured about it

the father's inner struggle about whether or not to buy a glass of soda for his son on the story of Abraham and Isaac's ordeal of the Akeda also creates a humorous comparison, enabling Yizhar to expose the grotesque and highbrow seriousness of the Yishuv's "voluntary collectivism."

I would like to return now to the story of the Binding of Isaac, following Chana Kronfeld's model of careful attention to the effect of the alluding text on the evoked text.<sup>134</sup> As a result of the great emphasis that Yizhar's narrator places on the hand, the alluding text triggers a critical rereading of the evoked text, calling into question, through the contrasting model of the loving father's resistance to ideology, Abraham's obedience and blind faith. The great forefather was willing to obey his Lord even at the price of sacrificing his son. But his absolute loyalty to his ideology, and to God, led to an irreparable breach with his son, as I will show, and maybe even with Sarah, as the biblical text suggests. When God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son to him, he says: "Take, pray, your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac, and go forth to the land of the Moriah and offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I shall say to you" (Genesis 22:2). But after the event, when Abraham is holding the knife in his hand, ready to slaughter his son, and the angel of God emerges and prevents him from doing so, the angel says to him: "for now I know that you fear God and you have not held back your son, your only one, from me" (Genesis 22:12).

As Robert Alter explains in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, the dialogues in the biblical text are very concise; therefore, repetitions in dialogue are particularly meaningful, as are omissions.<sup>135</sup> When the angel of God repeats almost verbatim the words God used at the beginning of the chapter to describe Isaac, he omits the words "whom you love." Rereading Genesis 22 through Yizhar's critical intertextuality, it seems to me that this may be the biblical narrator's way of gently pointing out the change in Abraham and Isaac's relationship after the ordeal of the Akeda. Immediately after this event, which is narrated in Genesis 22, we are told of Sarah's passing, in Genesis 23. The opening verse

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and nothing that would arouse deep thoughts in a person, and that song that she couldn't repeat and she wasn't sorry she couldn't, what educational value did it have, Daddy, who always agrees with Mummy and says nothing . . . this time replied with a question, not without a secret little smile under his mustache, what was so deep about *Rejoice O Maccabees, valiant in the fight / Be glad and happy day and night? [Gilu Ha'makabim Giborey Ha'chyl / Sisuvsim'chu yomam va'layil]* At which Mummy was very surprised, because that was one of our national songs, whereas this was totally foreign, *goyish* song, and just you see how it will uproot our youth and make them look abroad, it was just frivolous entertainment" (177).

<sup>134</sup> Kronfeld, *Full Severity*, 130, 135, 144, 158.

<sup>135</sup> Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, especially chapter 5, "The Techniques of Repetition" (111-41).

informs us about it, summarizing her life years: “And Sarah’s life was a hundred and twenty-seven years, the years of Sarah’s life” (Genesis 23:1).<sup>136</sup> The biblical redactors seem to be suggesting that this ordeal might have been what hastened the death of Isaac’s mother.<sup>137</sup> Whereas the mother in *Preliminaries* represents the near religious

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<sup>136</sup> Robert Alter comments on the untypical repetition on the phrase “Sarah’s life” in verse 1 (ויהיו חיי שרה) (“the same device of stylistic emphasis is used in the obituary notices of Abraham and Ishmael” (*Five Books*, 113). Nonetheless, the harsh experience that Isaac’s mother underwent in the previous chapter lurks in the background of her passing and charges this information with it. The repetition, as I read it, conveys a sense of the suddenness, as if the biblical narrator himself finds it hard to accept Sarah’s death. In Hebrew, this impression is intensified by the syntactic fragmentation that characterizes this verse, as well as the punctuation of two dashes (--) that cut the sentence in two, as if to hint to the traumatic event that changed Sarah’s life and brought her death upon her.

<sup>137</sup> The medieval commentator *Rashi* (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki), in his commentary on verse 2 of Genesis 23 (“And Sarah died in Kiriath-Arba, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn Sarah and to keen for her.”) says: “Sarah’s passing was adjacent to the Akeda because when she heard that her son was brought to slaughter and was almost not slaughtered, her soul left her.” In: Jacob Ben Haim Ibn Adonia, ed., *Biblia Rabbinica* [Mikra’ot Gdolot; Torah, Nevi’im Uktuvim, a Reprint of the 1525 Venice Edition] (Jerusalem: Makor, 1972), 56. *Siftey Chakhamim* (Sages’ lips), which was written by Shabbetahi Bass and is the commentary on Rashi’s commentary, addresses Rashi’s words and explains that one should read “was almost slaughtered” (rather than Rashi’s phrasing, that Sarah died after hearing that her son “was almost not slaughtered”). “A messenger came from Moriah mountain and told her the story of the Akeda, and began to tell her that her son was brought to the slaughter, and he was late to tell her that Isaac was saved and was not slaughtered . . . therefore she was so startled by his words that her breath and soul left her,” in: Abraham Isaac Friedman, ed., *Mikra’ot Gdolot Chamisha Chumshey Torah* (New York: Avraham Yitzchak Fridman Press, 1971), 266. Rashi adapted a rare and marginal version of Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* that appears on behalf of Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* in *Yalkut Shimoni* (an aggadic compilation on the books of the Hebrew Bible, collected by Rabi Shimon Ashkenazi from Frankfurt). The commentary there is on the words in verse 2: “And Abraham came to mourn Sarah”: “From where did he come? Rabi Levi said: (Abraham came) from the burial of Terah [Abraham’s father according to the Hebrew Bible] to bury Sarah. Answered to him Rabi Yosi: But Terah’s burial preceded Sarah’s by two years. Therefore, (Abraham didn’t come from Terah’s burial, but) he came from Moriah mountain, and Sarah died from that sorrow. This is the reason for placing the Akeda next to (the verse) ‘And Sarah’s life was.’” In *Yalkut Shimoni: Osef Midrashey Chazal Le’esrim Ve-arba’a Sifrey Torah, Nevi’im, Ktuvim* [A collection of our sages’ Midrashic tales to twenty-four books of Torah, Nevi’im, and Ktuvim] (Jerusalem: Betzalel Landau, 1960), 60. Perhaps the most beautiful Midrashic tale about this topic is found in *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, a Midrashic collection of Palestinian Amoras (Talmudic sages) in which there is a direct dialogue between Sarah and Isaac her son: “and since he came to his mother, she asked him: ‘my son, what has your father done to you?’ he replied: ‘Father took me, brought me up mountains and brought me down hills, and took me up to the top of a mountain, and built an altar and arranged the wood on the altar, and took the knife in his hand to slaughter me. If it were not for the Holy One Blessed Be He who said – Do not reach out your hand against the lad, I would have already been slaughtered.’”

fervor of socialist Zionist ideology,<sup>138</sup> in the biblical narrative Sarah represents the emotional toll exacted by obedience to an uncompromising belief system.

In *Preliminaries*, Daddy consciously disobeys an ideological decree, but his refusal to act according to the system of values that dictates most of his life is precisely what makes the unique experience he shares with his son possible. The very comparison between the divine decree of the Akeda and the unwritten prohibition on drinking soda in a café underscores the grotesque aspects in the dogmatic values of socialist Zionism and exposes their extremism by likening them to religious decrees. Therefore, the passage above is moving and ironic at the same time, both full of pathos and humorous. The dialectical move which characterizes the passage, that of ironizing the scene yet portraying it in a genuine loving view, is typical of *Preliminaries*. By including the father's act of refusal alongside the novel's numerous expressions of his devotion to the socialist Zionist dream and his willingness to make painful personal sacrifices for that cause, Yizhar profoundly illustrates his own ambivalence toward ideology.<sup>139</sup>

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(Sarah) said to him: 'Woe to you my son, if it were not for the Holy One Blessed Be He who said – Do not reach out your hand against the lad, you would have already been slaughtered.' Before she even finished saying that, her soul had already left her." Bernard Mandelbaum, ed., *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962), 390.

<sup>138</sup> In her book *Ha-halikhah Al Kav Ha-ofek* (Visions in conflict), which aims to trace the revolutionary force in the central current of Zionism, Anita Shapira analyzes the connection between Zionism and national messianism. Shapira maintains that although the Zionist movement was pluralistic, in the sense that it was comprised of diverse people and beliefs that sometimes contradicted each other, it was revolutionary in nature. As such, it claimed to offer an all-encompassing solution to the Jewish plight and saw the use of force and coercion as inevitable at times. "Subjugating the individual and the collective to the main cause – fulfilment of Zionism, in our case – was a highly creative factor in building a national home. On the other hand, it brought with it an instrumental attitude that lacked compassion for the individual and his happiness." Shapira, *Ha-halikhah Al Kav Ha-ofek*, 9.

<sup>139</sup> In her monograph, Nitsa Ben-Ari hints at the possibility that the father's hesitation to cross the street to buy a soda is a result of financial plight, and relates this to the fact that there are not many photographs of Yizhar from his childhood, because "poor people, for whom the purchase of a glass of soda was a hard decision, did not go to the photographer" (Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 27). On the other hand, throughout her manuscript, Ben-Ari repeatedly mentions Yizhar's perfect mastery of the Hebrew Bible (she notes, for example, his custom of quoting full chapters from the Bible to his students and family members, 213), and in a brief analysis of a passage from *Preliminaries* where she points to the biblical allusions, she says that "Yizhar was too knowledgeable to accidentally include the analogy [to the biblical text]," 54.

## Intratextuality as Blurring the Borders between the Self and the Other

As Riffaterre points out, specific words in the narrative, or figures such as metaphors, can, by deviating or digressing from the direct function of carrying the narrative forward, act as markers that direct the reader to other texts (as in the case of intertextuality).<sup>140</sup> Riffaterre rightly connects these “generators,” as he calls them, to the narrator (although in the case of *Preliminaries* the narrator is also the main character), who uses them to produce meta-textual narrative and meaning. The next few passages I will examine include such “generators,” which carry symbolic meaning, and which I will consider as intra-texts, or textual units (whether a sentence, a passage, a phrase, or a story) that repeat themselves (in different variations) in a given text, thereby extending the definition of intra-textuality to include the repetition of an idea or a motif. This recurrence can then act as a counter-force to the content it carries, altering the overall meaning and creating a new meaning that subverts the immediate and direct interpretation of the text.

In this sense, Riffaterre’s observation of the generators as sequences that “develop into subtexts that mirror the whole text in which they are embedded” is very apt, and I will use the specific term he employs, “mirror,” in my analysis below.<sup>141</sup> I will examine sections of the second chapter that chronologically precede the passage discussed above in the context of intertextuality and the shared experience of father and son when buying a soda.<sup>142</sup> The following texts take place in Jaffa, where the family stayed before moving to Tel Aviv. From the scattered details throughout the chapter (“The only worry is that now in 1921 nothing may be left of the things Mr. Salzman had in his blessed store in 1913” (128)), we find out that the events in this chapter all occur on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1921, the second day of the five-day Jaffa Riots (*Me’ora’ot Tarpa*), which involved violent clashes between Arabs and Jews.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, 21.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. “Mirroring” is of course a central concept in psychoanalytic criticism. Riffaterre, however, does not provide a definition for the term, nor does he indicate if he is using it in the psychoanalytic sense.

<sup>142</sup> However, while Riffaterre explains the mirroring effect of the subtext as supportive of the main text (“The subtext . . . is a mini-narrative encapsulating the narrative that contains it,” 22), I will demonstrate how the use of an intratext that mirrors the main text undermines the direct verbal content of the text: the linguistic and visual mirroring that Yizhar produces between the Arabs and Mummy’s family reverses the direct meaning of Mummy’s thoughts about the Arabs.

<sup>143</sup> The “events” (*me’ora’ot*) erupted on May 1<sup>st</sup>, the International Worker’s Day, when two Jewish groups marched from Jaffa to Tel Aviv to commemorate the day. These groups were the Jewish Communist Party and their socialist rivals, *Achdut Ha-avoda*. When they encountered each other, the two groups started to

The exposition to the chapter is expressed through the child narrator's focalized point of view, which will later expand to include the adult narrator's and the mother's points of view. One can understand from the child's descriptions, despite the partial perspective they afford, that his mother and a group of neighbors have locked themselves inside the shared courtyard, shielding themselves and their children from an unclear danger that threatens to break in. Being five years old, the child's understanding of the event is limited, and he can therefore be considered an unreliable narrator. According to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, "the main sources of unreliability are the narrator's limited knowledge." She notes that "a young narrator would be a clear case of limited knowledge (and understanding),"<sup>144</sup> and indeed the child repeats several times that "nothing is clear" (97) and "They don't know, they simply don't know and all day long they simply don't know" (138). The elliptical syntax he employs here (rendering the childish form of thought and speech) adds to the sense of unclarity. The adults, from the child's focalized point of view, are seen as a monolithic and authoritative group and therefore are described in the impersonal plural masculine form idiosyncratic to Hebrew ("ve-rak makshivim"; it is translated into the third-person plural in English, a language that lacks this grammatical form: "They only listen").<sup>145</sup> But at the same time, his unusual way of viewing things defamiliarizes his surroundings, creating new and original metaphors that illuminate, in this case, the connections between Mummy's past and present, thereby contributing to the

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fight. The British police intervened, trying to disperse the protestors with the help of Arab and Christian neighbors, and havoc soon ensued. Arabs from Jaffa, who heard the fighting and believed that their Arab neighbors were under attack, went on the offensive. According to the historian Tom Segev in his book *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), British, Arab, and Jewish witnesses reported seeing Arab men bearing clubs, knives, swords, and a few pistols break into buildings where Jews lived, kill their inhabitants, and loot the houses. The riots resulted in the death of 47 Jews and 48 Arabs, and the wounding of 146 Jews and 73 Arabs. One of the riots' victims was the writer Yosef Chaim Brenner, whom I mentioned earlier as an important figure in the Second Aliyah and as a source of influence and admiration for the father in *Preliminaries*. We know the exact day in which the occurrences of this chapter take place because of its ending, when Daddy returns and in a broken voice tells Mummy that Brenner was killed: "And suddenly Daddy too comes in . . . and something trembles in his face . . . and Brenner too, Daddy says now . . . and his voice breaks, he cannot, Brenner too, says Daddy, oh Brenner, says Daddy" (145).

<sup>144</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative fiction*, 100.

<sup>145</sup> Yizhar, *Mikdamot*, 59; Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 97. The impersonal Hebrew form creates the sense of an authorial gaze, the adults' gaze that examines its surroundings and embodies a position of control over those it observes (see my footnote 51 regarding Foucault's Panopticism). This description accords with the child's view of the adults, hence his feeling of powerlessness and helplessness.

mirroring between Mummy's family and her Arab neighbors. The child does not know the facts ("what have we done to them? Why are they angry with us? Have we taken something away from them?" (98)),<sup>146</sup> but feels, intuitively, the common fear, and in his imagination the looming danger receives the concrete form of a forest:

No one says anything. But it's clear that it's coming from Jaffa. And that Jaffa now is a big black forest that is getting closer, and now it is actually here.<sup>147</sup>

Several paragraphs later, when the child narrator looks out over the courtyard and the surrounding apartments, his gaze brings him to his kitchen and the pictures of Mummy's family members hanging on the wall:

Unease between the columns of the arcade that surrounds the courtyard, shading the apartments beneath it, one door for the two rooms and another for the little kitchen, with the paraffin stoves . . . and the table covered with flower-patterned oil-cloth, where Mummy sings as she works, all sorts of *With joyful heart I sing of flowers in the spring*, or Yiddish effusions that are incomprehensible apart from soulful longing . . . and on the walls pictures of her father and mother and brother and sisters (Duvid, Hinde, and Dvoirenyu) . . . all sitting calmly, with the forest behind them, the one, real, famous, serene forest, the heavy black forest.<sup>148</sup>

While the child examines the courtyard with his eyes, the focalized point of view moves from the child narrator to the adult narrator who observes the kitchen in his mind's eye. We can infer the change in focalization from the subtle irony embedded in the narrator's description of Mummy singing "Yiddish effusions that are incomprehensible

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<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, his genuinely innocent questions ironically raise the ethical political questions which the adults are not able to raise because of ideology or fear.

<sup>147</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 97. Yizhar might be alluding here to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* ("till Birnham forest come to Dunsinane"). When the "forest" finally comes to Dunsinane, we know that *Macbeth's* doom is at hand. In *Macbeth*, the "forest" is the enemy's army, which has used branches to disguise itself. Since Jaffa was a predominantly Arab town at the time *Preliminaries* takes place (and until 1948), the "big black forest that is getting closer, and now it is actually here" signifies the Arabs, seen in the eyes of the child narrator and his surroundings as "the enemy." The allusion to *Macbeth* strengthens the atmosphere of ominous danger, which the child narrator senses, and foreshadows the clashes between Arabs and Jews and the disaster revealed at the end of the chapter, of Brenner's death. I am grateful to Kareem Abu-Zeid for pointing out to me this important connection to Shakespeare's play. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Shane Weller (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1993).

<sup>148</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 99.

apart from soulful longing,” as well as from the mention of Mummy’s siblings’ names in Yiddish, reconstructing Mummy’s speech style.<sup>149</sup> But along with the irony, the depiction of her longing for her previous life and family (conveyed through the description of her Yiddish singing and the endearing Yiddish nicknames of her siblings) generates empathy for her and allows us to enter her mind, as Mummy’s speech is an indirect free discourse that combines both her voice and that of the adult narrator.

While Jaffa is described earlier as “a big black forest,” the Volhynian forest is “the one, real, famous, serene forest, the heavy black forest.” Jaffa is therefore only an image of a forest, a representation, while the Volhynian forest is *the* forest, the original one. The metaphor of Jaffa as a forest is threatening, while that of Volhyn is serene and majestic, serving as the appropriate background for “the most respected members of the family” (99). Nonetheless, the image of Jaffa as a forest relates it to the Volhynian one and presents the Arab city as a mirror of the Volhynian past. Accordingly, a very subtle analogy is formed between the Arabs and those family members left behind. Interestingly, both the metaphorical forest (Jaffa) and the literal forest (Volhyn) are delineated in spatial terms that are diametrically opposed to one another: while the image of Jaffa as a forest is one “that is getting closer and now is actually here” (97), the Volhynian forest is seen *behind* Mummy’s family members. It is as if Mummy’s consciousness were a canvas in which the Jaffa forest becomes the foreground, while the Volhynian forest moves to the background, yet both forests occupy her “mental space.”<sup>150</sup> By juxtaposing Jaffa and the Volhynian forest as mirroring each other, an

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<sup>149</sup> In the Hebrew novel, Mummy’s style of speech is even more salient; in a line that was not translated into English (immediately after “the heavy black forest” in the passage above), the narrator describes the way his mother pronounced the Hebrew word “forest” (*ya’ar*) in her Russian accent: “היער השחור והכבד ...” שאי אפשר לומר את מיוחדותו בלי לאמור ‘היהר’ ולא להסתפק ב’היער’” (עמ’ 61) “the heavy black forest whose uniqueness cannot be expressed without saying ‘*ha-yahar*’ [the pronunciation of the Hebrew word ‘forest’ with a Russian or Yiddish accent], one simply cannot just be content with ‘*ha-ya’ar*’ [the Israeli pronunciation of the Hebrew word ‘forest’]” (99). Here, the narrator’s irony is intensified by his comment on his mother’s foreign accent, presenting it not as an inevitable part of her way of speaking (since Hebrew was a foreign language for her), but as an intended emphasis, as if the accent lends the neutral Hebrew word the splendor of the Volhynian forest and echoes its cultural context and significance, as well as its superiority over their current surroundings.

<sup>150</sup> This mental picture exposes Mummy’s view of her past as being culturally superior to her present. This reveals a contradiction in her declared ideology of negating her diasporic life and viewing her Zionist choice of immigrating to Palestine as the ideal way of life. The syntax is another detail that reinforces the connection between “there” (the Volhynian forest, as seen in the family’s picture) and “here” (Jaffa): the move from the picture’s description back to the current location in the courtyard is fluid and for a moment it is unclear if the next words relate to the family members in the picture or to

analogy has been shaped between the most psychologically distant and other, i.e., the Arabs, and the closest and most familiar, i.e., the family.

Indeed, the image of Jaffa as a forest is created alternately by the child narrator and the adult narrator. But the narrator is also the one through whom Mummy's consciousness is mediated. As Uri Margolin notes, the image of a narrator is based, among other things, on his attitude towards the narrated (straightforward, ironic, sympathetic, etc.).<sup>151</sup> The narrator in *Preliminaries* uses the same technique of free indirect discourse when entering, in two different cases, into his parents' consciousness. But in the first chapter, when sharing his father's thoughts (which are a mixture of quotations from religious texts and feelings of guilt), the narrator serves mostly as a channel for these feelings, and when the narrator's presence is felt, his descriptions and comments project an appreciative and sympathetic view of his father.<sup>152</sup> Here, when accompanying the mother in her thoughts and recollections, the narrator's mediation is much more present by means of irony, rhetoric, and syntax (although not without sympathy). These discursive strategies, as well as the juxtaposition of textual units, undermine Mummy's direct statements and turn them into powerful suggestions about the connection between self and other.

Mummy never liked Jaffa anyway, ever since she arrived in July 1908 with her brother Joseph, when they landed excitedly from the boat . . . amidst the shouting and the crowds. . . . And even before we managed to grasp that here we were in the land of our ancestors, and that this was our homeland, the longed-for Land, and that those were our brothers who cherished the soil of our Land, we were already surrounded by the jostling and shouting, the stench and the filth . . . already in a hurry to escape . . . to the vineyard of Rehovot . . . freed from all these frightening Arabs, their crowds, their din, their filth, even though

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the neighbors in the courtyard: "with the most respected members of the family sitting of course in the front row . . . some with hats and long beards . . . one hand tucked into the front of their buttoned-up coat, and now everyone is outside in this arcade, waiting, crowded together, uneasy" (99–100).

<sup>151</sup> Margolin, "Narrator."

<sup>152</sup> One such example is when the narrator intervenes directly, by means of prolepsis, in trying to assure Daddy that his worst fears will be proven wrong and that the child will survive. Referring to himself as a redactor mediating medical information, he muses: "If Daddy had read what this redactor has found and read of medical research on the wasp and its sting (e.g. M. Seyfers, 'General reactions to bee and wasp stings' . . . June 1959; or A. Kesler, 'Bee and wasp stings' . . . December 1975 . . .) . . . would he have been relieved to learn that the reaction of someone who has been stung as many as twenty times is still only classified as 'extensive local reaction', which is not terrible" (80–81).

every morning it was they who filled the young settlement . . . to leave each evening and return to their homes, out of bounds, far away, and we had no contact with them, until the morning when they come back again in their crowds to the market and return to the courtyards of the houses crying their wares in Arabic Yiddish, their vegetables, their fruit and their eggs, you had to bargain with them firmly . . . and you had to beat the price down to a quarter if not to an eighth, because you can't believe a word an Arab says, least of all when they swear – the only language they understand is deceit, and after they pushed themselves and left no place for Jewish labourers to work, one fine day they suddenly got together in their masses and attacked the settlement . . . because who knew about the Arabs where she came from . . . they, the Arabs, were never there, in any place or any argument, in any considerations and certainly not in any songs, they simply did not exist.<sup>153</sup>

When the mother arrives in Palestine, there is an extreme discrepancy between her imagined ideal land and the actual place she encounters. The beautiful and utopian descriptions of the Land of Israel, taken from the Zionist songs and speeches Mummy sang and heard in her hometown, stand in sharp contrast to the immediate sights and smells Mummy and her brother Joseph encounter when coming ashore. This gap between the imagined and the real is demonstrated in the grammar of the sentences above. The passage begins with Mummy's impressions, narrated in the third-person singular form (through the shared consciousness of the adult narrator and of Mummy). Then the grammar switches to first-person plural narration: "before we even managed to grasp that here we are in the land of our ancestors."<sup>154</sup> The collective language echoes and characterizes ideological songs that were popular at the time, such as the song *Birkat Am* (The Blessing of the People) written by Chaim Nachman Bialik, which became the Socialist Zionist anthem, and whose first line is embedded in the sentences

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<sup>153</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 106–07.

<sup>154</sup> In the Hebrew novel, the grammatical move from the third-person singular form to the first-person plural is more gradual. What is translated as "before we even managed to grasp" is expressed in Hebrew in the present tense and in an impersonal construction ("ועוד לפני שמספיקים לתפוס") that is unique to the Hebrew language. This part of speech accurately mimics the shift in consciousness from an individual perception to an agentless plural—expressed in the impersonal form—and then to a collective and ideological state of mind that Mummy and her brother feel coerced to accept, even if unconsciously, to reconcile their expectations with the reality they find. As Chana Kronfeld pointed out to me, the first plural form carries a dual meaning; it refers both to Mummy and her brother Joseph, and to the national collective. The mental transition is from Mummy and Joseph as individuals to a collective consciousness.

above.<sup>155</sup> But the collective language also expresses the erasure of individual agency, along with its capacity for critical thinking and moral judgment. In order to reconcile her personal impressions with the ideological indoctrination she absorbed in her education, Mummy, as depicted linguistically, adopts the ideological collective discourse, and this manner of collectivity characterizes her thoughts regarding the Arabs throughout the chapter.

Uri Margolin explains that “The relation between the tone or manner of telling and its subject matter can itself serve as the basis for second-order characterization of the

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<sup>155</sup> “And even before we managed to grasp . . . that those were our brothers who cherished the soil of our Land.” The first line of Bialik’s poem, “*Birkat Am*,” embedded here is: “May the hands of all our brothers who cherish the soil of our land be strengthened” (my translation). In the Hebrew novel, the words in which the marker appears are: “ועוד לפני שמספיקים לתפוש שכבר הגענו... ושאלה כבר אחינו המהוננים עפרות ארצנו...” The song, which was sung at the conclusion of workers’ gatherings during the period of the *Yishuv* and after it, became known by its first word “*Techezakna*.” The song’s new name (*Techezakna*) signified its appropriation by the workers’ class and was an inseparable part of the child’s reality. It was an expression of the dual allegiance of the *Yishuv* to the “nation and the class” (הלואם והמעמד). I thank Chana Kronfeld for this observation.

The first line of Bialik’s poem is: “תחזקנה ידי כל אחינו המהוננים עפרות ארצנו באשר הם שם”

The well-known poet Chaim Nachman Bialik, who is considered the national Hebrew poet, wrote the poem “*Birkat Am*” in 1894, in the midst of the Jewish national awakening and a few years before the First Zionist Congress (1897). The poem is written in a collective voice (“we”) that represents the Zionist supporters (“we count your wanderings” (הן סופרים אנהנו את נודכם) and addresses another collective group (“our brothers” (אחינו) who are the young idealists that immigrated to Palestine. The combination of the alluding text (the passage describing Mummy and her brother’s arrival in Palestine) and the evoked text (“*Birkat Am*”) exposes the poem’s detachment from the reality it presumes to portray. The poem goes on to describe, in a hagiographic manner, the pioneers’ sweat and tears, as well as the speaker’s sweeping call to immigrate to Palestine: “we count your wanderings and love your tear drops and the sweat of your brow that descend like dew on Israel and make his weary soul rejoice” (my translation). In the Hebrew original: “הן סופרים אנהנו את נודכם וחובבים את נטפי הדמעות וזעת האף, היורדים כטל לישראל ומשובבים נפשו הנלאה, השומה בכף”

“And why, oh you who arrive late, have your strides so tarried?” (my translation). In the Hebrew original: “ולמה המפגרים פעמיכם כה התבוששו?” (here, of course, one can find an allusion to the messiah’s arrival embodied in the Hebrew word *pe’amekhem* (your strides) evoking the expression *pe’amey mashi’ach* – the messiah’s strides). The profound discrepancy between the poem’s clean and synthetic words and the reality their writer describes also bears stylistic critique: Although intended to create a mimetic picture of the pioneers’ labor, which includes the bodily fluids, the words of Bialik’s poem remain in the realm of the idyll, ignoring the realistic implications of the sweat and tears, their disturbing smells and sounds, and the human suffering they embody. By alluding to “*Birkat Am*,” Yizhar criticizes the moral implications of modelling Zionist aspirations on the genre of the idyll, as implied in Bialik’s poem.

speaker.”<sup>156</sup> As for the narrator’s view of the characters, Margolin invokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s study of Dostoevsky’s poetics, which “showed the myriad ways in which a character’s perspective can be incorporated into the narrator’s discourse, ranging from harmony up to sharp internal dissonance and parodic inversion.”<sup>157</sup> And indeed, since the mother’s inner world is mediated through the narrator, his critique is embedded in the construction of the syntax and the image of the Arabs through Mummy’s eyes. Mummy and her brother Joseph leave for the colony Rehovot to escape “from all these frightening Arabs, their crowds, their din, their filth,” but in the morning the Arabs reappear in the colony as peddlers. The very description of the Arabs as people who arrive at the Jewish settlement every morning and return to their homes every evening “out of bounds, far away, and we had no contact with them until the morning when they come back” brings to mind the Jewish peddlers in Russia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Jews were restricted to the Pale of Settlement, that is תחום המושב (in Yiddish: *tchum hamoyshav*, in Hebrew: *tchum ha-moshav*, literally: the range of settlement). The Arabs’ disappearance to their homes at nights, translated as “out of bounds,” is described in the Hebrew novel as *michutz la-tchum* (מחוץ לתחום), alluding directly to *tkhum hamoshav* (תחום המושב) of the Russian Jews in tsarist Russia. In their stories, writers like S. Y. Abramovitz and Sholem Aleichem depicted the wretchedness and misery that were the lot of these Jews, as well as the anti-Semitism that was routine in the encounters with their non-Jewish neighbors.<sup>158</sup> Depicting the Palestinian Arabs as a mirror image of the Jewish peddlers in Russia—Mummy’s country of origin—produces a parallelism between these two groups as the abject other, and casts the mother in the role of the non-Jew, the anti-Semite.<sup>159</sup> The allusion is subtle, but the critique implied by it is powerful; situating Mummy in the role of the anti-Semite presents the tragic results of the Zionist immigrants’ denial of their past, and

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<sup>156</sup> Margolin, “Narrator.”

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. See also: Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky’s Poetics*.

<sup>158</sup> See, for example, “*Sefer Ha-Kabtzanim*” (Fishke the cripple), or “*Mas’ot Binyamin Hashlishi*” (The travels of Benjamin the 3<sup>rd</sup>) in S. Y. Abramovitz, *Kol Kitvey Mendeley Mocher Sfarim* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1966), 55–142.

<sup>159</sup> The similarity of the Arabs to the Jewish peddlers is reinforced linguistically. In their attempts to turn to their Jewish neighbors, the Arab peddlers adopt Yiddish words to announce their merchandise: “until the morning when they come back again in their crowds to the market and return to the courtyards of the houses crying their wares in Arabic Yiddish.”

foreshadows the catastrophic implications of this denial for the future attitude of Israelis both toward holocaust survivors and Palestinians.<sup>160</sup>

Viewing Mummy in this light presents her bargaining with the Arab peddlers even more negatively (“and you had to beat the price down to a quarter if not to an eighth”). She is completely indifferent to their poverty and is taking advantage of it, and mouths anti-Arab stereotypes (“because you can’t believe a word an Arab says, least of all when they swear – the only language they understand is deceit”) that resonate ironically given how firmly she is bargaining, and echo anti-Semitic sayings about Jews and their dishonesty. Following Mummy’s state of mind and the narrator’s irony that is intertwined in it, it is not hard to note his critique embedded in Mummy’s view of the Arab uprising (“after they pushed themselves and left no place for Jewish labourers to work, one fine day they suddenly got together in their masses and attacked the settlement”). In an inverted view of the reality surrounding them that expresses an ideological position, Mummy reverses the historical facts. In her account, it is not the Zionist immigrants whose arrival threatened the limited resources of the Arab inhabitants who had dwelled there for centuries, but instead it is the Arabs who had taken over the scarce opportunities for work and started a fight with their Jewish neighbors for no good reason. Yet, in a typical move, Yizhar sheds light on Mummy’s attitude, explaining the psychology behind her reactions and generating empathy, or at least understanding, towards her. The absence of Arabs from the idyllic descriptions of Palestine in Mummy’s youth explains her fear and reluctance to encounter the unknown, as well as her view of the Arabs as one homogeneous group. The Arabs were never part of the ideological indoctrination she absorbed as a young girl: “because who knew about the Arabs where she came from . . . they, the Arabs, were never there, in any place or any argument, in any considerations and certainly not in any songs, they simply did not exist.”<sup>161</sup>

But later on, when Mummy recalls her son’s illness, she uses similar expressions to describe him in his former state:

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<sup>160</sup> Presenting Mummy as parallel to the non-Jew also criticizes the notion of the New Jew, the Zionist ideal of a Jew who is free and independent, physically strong, and who works in manual labor.

<sup>161</sup> Here the narrator addresses the well-known Zionist statement “A land without a people for a people without a land” that was in common use among Zionist ideologists at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. See Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948*, trans. William Templer (Oxford University Press: New York, 1992), 41.

More than once has Mummy repeated to him, in moments of despair, the story of how last summer when he had fallen seriously ill (dysentery?) . . . and there was nothing left of him but a little smell of his loose diarrhea, they took him to Jerusalem in the train . . . there in the middle of Ramleh station that was full of people jostling to get off or on . . . and Arab women dressed in black with masses of coins hanging on their faces and tearful children pressed to them, and a sickening smell of tobacco and unwashed stench, in the midst of all this he had disappeared . . . and the train would soon hoot and move off . . . until Daddy had a flash of inspiration and rushed over to the place where they were watering the engine . . . and at its feet unnoticed and wide-eyed the small child stood . . . and through all the bundles and pushing . . . Daddy pushed a way for them to Mummy in tears and all hugging each other being jostled and climbing up . . . and when they got to the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, Mummy told him, the doctors did not know what to tell her and the nurses would only nod, and they did not stroke the child's head because he was so horrible, so thin, so smelly, and he was nothing but eyes, and one day the head doctor said to her, Mummy said, Madame . . . you are still young, you can have more children, strong healthy ones, while this weakling . . . and she could not finish telling what the doctor said to her because she was already sobbing and stammering in her tears, and the story never ended . . . and now as she feeds him . . . she says to him 'swallow my little horror' and she is sorry she said horror so she says 'swallow my little *kvatchuk*' and she is sorry she said *kvatchuk*<sup>162</sup> . . . and even though she is sorry and regretful both words are swallowed up by him.<sup>163</sup>

Mummy's recollection of the diarrhea and smell of her sick child undermines her earlier statements about the Arabs' filth and stench as definitive markers of their otherness. The sharp contrast between her child's state (smelly and suffering from diarrhea) and her unconditional love towards him breaks the dichotomy between him and the Arabs. The mother repeatedly mentions stench and filth as typical traits of the Arabs, but the story about her son's dysentery, when he is so smelly and filthy that even the nurses avoided touching him, dismantles these traits as categorical and points out their relation to concrete circumstances. Mummy's descriptions—"there was

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<sup>162</sup> According to Harkavi's dictionary, the verb *Kvatchen* (קוואטשען) means "to squash," and the verb *Kvatchken* (קוואטשקען) means "to dirty." The form *kvatchuk* is the Yiddish nominalized adjective form with a Slavic ending. Whether it is *my squashed one* or *my dirty one*, the meaning is derogatory. Alexander Harkavy, *Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 450.

<sup>163</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 109–11.

nothing left of him but a little smell of his loose diarrhea,” and “was nothing but eyes”—dehumanize him, and in doing so subvert the earlier dehumanizing descriptions in the passage, namely, those of the Arabs. The story of the child’s disappearance on the train is juxtaposed with the description of the Arab women and their children on the train: Immediately after depicting the Arab women “and tearful children pressed to them,” we learn of the child’s disappearance and his recovery by his father. When they approach Mummy, who is “in tears,” they all hug each other in relief. Mummy’s tears and the tearful Arab children, as well as the Arab mothers who embrace their crying children and the family hug between Daddy, Mummy, and the child, all mirror each other, shattering the binary opposition between “us” and “them.” Mummy’s emotional description of the head doctor’s words not only presents her in an empathetic light as a compassionate mother, but also powerfully illustrates how her motherly feelings transcend her repulsion and rejection of the environment. The closeness and deep connection of mother and child cancel out physical aversion of smell and filth: conversely, othering and dehumanization (of the Jewish child or the Arabs) are the result of distance, of not knowing. The affectionate way in which the mother uses pejorative nouns to address her son (“my little horror,” “my little *Kvatchuk*”) discharges the negative meaning from these terms and neutralizes them. Via the analogy, this reversal of meaning also dismantles the negative charge of earlier derogatory expressions that Mummy used to describe the Arabs, and disrupts the boundaries between affection and aversion, self and other.

Another mirroring—here of Mummy and the Arabs—appears in the relationship of each with a foreign language. In an earlier passage quoted above, the Arabs are described coming to the young Jewish settlement “crying their wares in *Arabic Yiddish* [my emphasis], their vegetables, their fruit and their eggs.” In her attempts to persuade him to eat, Mummy tells her son all sorts of stories (one of which is about his sickness at a very young age). After reading aloud to him from a letter she wrote to her family, Mummy describes the geographical region to which this letter will travel:

And so that the child will not be cut off from what she has lost when she left behind the forest and the river she draws for him on the oilcloth on the empty kitchen table three clear dots that are the triangle at the heart of the world: here is Bromel, here is Lutsk, and here is Brestchke, Volhynia District, she tells him, all of them on the River Styr and its tributaries . . . members of her family

live in all of them and everyone she knew made a living from those wonderful, calm, sweet forests.<sup>164</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, in a sentence that was not translated into English, the narrator describes Mummy's actual pronunciation of the Hebrew words "forest" (יער) and "river" (נהר). The imitation of Mummy's Russian accent not only adds an ironic dimension to the adult narrator's delineation of her character, but more importantly sheds light on Mummy's relationship with Hebrew. It exposes the constant effort she has to make to speak this foreign language. The Arabic Yiddish the Arab peddlers taught themselves to speak thus mirrors the "Russian Hebrew" that Mummy utters, thereby destabilizing the superior position she claims to have over them.

A final mirroring in this passage is between the geographical space that the mother draws on the tablecloth from memory and the actual place in Jaffa in which she currently lives. The textual unit that focuses on Mummy in this chapter opens with a description of her and her brother arriving in Palestine, and the great incongruity between their impressions with the idyllic images of the Land they had in mind. The mother's view of Palestine as a utopia (at least until this view is confronted with reality) is nourished by Zionist songs and texts she was educated on, in which Palestine was portrayed as an idyllic place. Yet her description of "the triangle at the heart of the world" renders a place no less idyllic and wonderful. Unlike the utopian image of Palestine based mainly on texts, her description of her childhood landscape is tied to actual experiences and memories. The Zionist texts Mummy encountered in her youth, as we saw earlier in the allusion to Bialik and the labor movement anthem in describing her arrival in Palestine, are often phrased in a collective voice and express dreams and visions. But her portrayal of the geographical triangle where she was born and raised is individual and spontaneous. It is "at the heart of the world" because it is in the center of Mummy's consciousness and longing. Moreover, the ideological decision to immigrate to Palestine is explicitly expressed here as resulting in loss: "And so that the child will not be cut off from what she has lost when she left behind the forest and the river."<sup>165</sup> Here, in a move that returns to the comparison between Jaffa as a

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<sup>164</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 111.

"יכדי שלא יהיה הקטן הזה מנותק ממה שהפסידה כשהלכה משם מן היער (היהר) ומן הנהר (הנאר), הייתה מציירת לו אז על שעוונות שולחן המטבח... שלוש נקודות ברורות שהן המשולש שבלב העולם..." (יזר, *מקדמות*, עמוד 71).

<sup>165</sup> The forest and the river—both glaringly absent from the Palestinian landscape—are two main metaphors, almost myths, that embody the mother's longing for her past. They also serve as metonymies for the family members she left behind, who make their living from these two fundamental resources: "here is Bromel, here is Lutsk, and here is Brestchke, Volhynia District, she tells him, all of them on the

metaphorical forest and the literal Volhynian forest, the two switch places: When the mother, sparked by letters or pictures of her family, dives into her memories and longings, Jaffa, i.e., their actual surroundings, moves to the background while the Volhynian forest returns to the foreground.

## The Image of Failure

The fear of failure hovers over the entire novel, expressing both the hopes and the dread embodied in the pioneers' Zionist vision. Perhaps more than anything, the fear of failure represents the pioneers' detachment from reality, viewing it as some inexplicable mystical phenomenon. In delineating the fear of failure as ominous and constant and by giving it, through the child's sensitive imagination, a concrete presence in the form of an abandoned factory, Yizhar exposes the problematic thought process of idealists like his father who rely on dreams rather than on facts and figures. Failure appears as a clear and present danger that threatens to arbitrarily descend on the pioneers and destroy the delicate life tissue that has been created through enormous toil and effort. This is an almost perpetual mechanism of living on-the-brink-of failure: moments of crisis, embodied in catastrophes that befall the child (whose fragile existence, as discussed earlier, symbolizes the Zionist dream), flood his parents with intense feelings of doubt and remorse about their Zionist choice of settling in Palestine; the despair takes over,<sup>166</sup> and it seems that failure is imminent, driven by some deterministic force that is unrelated to the circumstances.<sup>167</sup> It is no wonder,

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River Styra and its tributaries . . . members of her family live in all of them and everyone she knew made a living from those wonderful, calm, sweet forests" (111).

<sup>166</sup> Daddy's thoughts, expressed in free indirect discourse, on the way to the doctor with Mummy and his wasp-stung child: "As for despair, it's hard to overcome it. You can only ignore it. This land is given to desperate people, said Gordon . . . and in the Land of Israel you cannot build anything frivolously or without romantic naiveté, but only from a desperate stand on the last frontier: the stand of the last camp, what a beautiful expression. . . . Give us individuals, wrote Aaron David Gordon, give us desperate individuals. Because desperate people make the best fighters . . . and here in the sand are Mummy and Daddy hurrying to the doctor, praying they will arrive while the child is still alive" (78–79). Daddy quotes Gordon in his stream of consciousness, and the adult narrator replies to these quotes with bitter irony, reflecting the implications derived from the choices of these desperate people.

<sup>167</sup> More of Daddy's thoughts on the way to the doctor: "Here is the eternal dread taking concrete form. No longer dread about what will happen, because it's already here, now it is all dread about what the doctor will say . . . and all the fear turns out to be well founded . . . the hand is powerless to hold, one hand of a little child . . . and Daddy's hands are slack now on the reins of the stubborn mules . . . and his

then, that failure becomes a trope in itself in the novel and receives a concrete embodiment in the form of a deserted factory.

Riffaterre discusses the role of the trope in novels, referring to its symbolic function:

Typically, the trope posits a parallelism, an equation between two readings of the same symbolic character, situation, or event. One is the mimetic reading, one the hermeneutic; or one is the supposedly objective version, one the version from a specific viewpoint such as the narrator's.<sup>168</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the child narrator's "unreliability," his limited knowledge of the events, is a powerful advantage in the artifice of narration. His ability to define known and abstract terms and feelings through fresh and unconventional images reveals much of the unstated psychological underpinnings that constitute key notions of his world. A case in point is the depiction of the deserted factory:

It was easy to skirt the disused factory, but it was not easy to ignore it, because it was horrible. . . . Three floors and lots of windows, all of them smashed . . . perhaps of their own accord, out of despair . . . shattered to sharp slivers, pointed like tearing claws . . . smashed ugly, without hope, to touch it is to be cut, a cut is incurable, urging you to run away . . . except that you were trapped and you couldn't run away . . . they would find you and trap you and wound you and give you a blood poisoning . . . something all finished yet persisted, that didn't care that it was finished and irritating, so that even a child could tell that it was a vision of failure . . . when not long ago the great factory was alive here, and people wandered around opening and closing windows . . . until one day

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feeling is like that of a falling man seeing the hard ground below rushing up to meet him for the bursting blow" (71). The text echoes the Hebrew expressions *kotzer yad* (קוצר יד) and *rifyon yadayim* (רפיון ידיים) which mean, respectively, the hand falls short (in acting out or assisting), and weakness (literally, "slacking hands"). Here, the metaphor becomes literal as it focuses on the child's hand that is indeed very short and small, again tying the fulfillment of the Zionist dream to the child. The expression of discouragement as a metaphorical weakening or shortening of the hands also receives a literalization in the physical feeling of Daddy's hands becoming slack on the mules' reins. And also: "and you remember suddenly, how hard is everything and how hard it is to keep hold, and specifically, why haven't they cut the thistles near the gate yet, and why haven't they fenced the gap near the gate yet . . . and so neglect dares to gain a foothold within, and in another stride or two will introduce the desert that we have worked so hard to banish . . . and the fear of failure that always lurks nearby, combining to become an explicit reproof, joining the fear that always sits here close to the gate, and the desert all ready to come inside" (ibid.).

<sup>168</sup> Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, 77.

failure fell . . . because one day they all went away never to return . . . and everything began to collapse, topple and break, from within and without . . . and all that was left was a memorial to failure . . . and from within arose an intolerable dreary emptiness . . . and despair could be heard scraping at the smashed panes like a gloomy ghost.<sup>169</sup>

The deserted factory—its smashed windows, its ugliness, and the horror it casts on the child—embodies in every detail the immense fear of failure that constantly hovers over the fragile reality of the parents and their social sphere. But beyond family psychology, it is a fear of the failure of the Zionist settlement project itself. The sensitive child absorbs the anxiety surrounding him, and in his creative imagination failure becomes a physical entity embodied in the abandoned factory. The windows are depicted as the organs of this body; previously they used to open and shut, signifying the body's living condition. Now they are smashed and their broken state, apart from the violence it encodes, takes the form of the living dead who might leap up and attack the passers-by.

The abandoned factory causes anxiety also because of the temptation it represents: the temptation to let go, to stop investing unceasing effort. This is expressed metaphorically in the strong urge the child feels to enter the building. The great danger that lies in the factory, its power, in the child's mind, to capture those who enter it, is the danger of sinking into the abyss of despair. And because despair is a constant presence in the child's surroundings and is always lurking at the door, it receives demonic dimensions and its effects are depicted as lethal.<sup>170</sup> Failure is described here as fate, and its essentially deterministic nature is part of the great threat

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<sup>169</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 119–21.

<sup>170</sup> More examples of the constant presence of the fear of failure and of failure itself can be found in the story of Uncle David, who “took the money he had made in foreign exile and divided it in two, half to make bottles in Tantura and half to make water pumps in Jaffa, two much-needed, well-founded and reliable industries . . . and he looked that they should bring forth grapes, until they both, alas! brought forth wild grapes, and went bankrupt, and he lost all his money” (156). See also Daddy's great worry (later realized) concerning going into debt to build the family's house in Tel Nordau: “But what really fills the house, more than anything else and all the time, is the anxiety whose weight is gradually breaking Daddy; he is always repeating annoying words like debts . . . deferred payment. . . . God Almighty where will I get . . . like someone who knows he has failed, who has betrayed his family, who has shown himself shamefully weak. What if the boy finds a treasure, what if he talks to Mr Dizengoff and asks him to help, what if he sells newspapers on the corner of the street?” (209).

it embodies.<sup>171</sup> It seems as if failure happens arbitrarily, from one day to the next, and that it lacks a logical chain of circumstances leading to it:

When Daddy told about what had been and how it had been, he sometimes told about such things that had begun and finished and always about failures, always . . . all these were great ideas based on well-worked-out calculations, all full of living, working Zionism, all of them giving great hopes to a poor nation that it would finally get itself a real foundation and a solid economy – yet all had failed. . . . And how about Zionism? And the forests of oil-giving olives? If every Jew bought the equivalent of a single tree then millions of trees would be planted and make mountains of fruit and rivers of oil . . . and they would have the choicest grapes that would make mountains of fruit and rivers of wine, that would only have to be collected in barrels and bottles, and they would cork them with the corks that would be all ready here . . . and everything was a hundred per cent OK and the barrel factory was already up and running, and the cork factory . . . and every one of the seventeen million Jews that there were in the world apparently . . . would be queuing every Friday to buy Jewish wine for Kiddush and Zionist oil for anointing . . . and all so solid and the future of Zionism so well based . . . only suddenly something went mad . . . went wrong, and suddenly there was failure. Total failure. And that was the end.<sup>172</sup>

The structure of the paragraph above vividly demonstrates the sequence of events that led to failure, as well as the way of thinking that views failure as arbitrary and independent of events and beliefs. The passage opens with the description of father telling about common failures as inevitable facts. Father describes the initiatives to open factories as well thought-out, but after several lines that seem to go back to the factories' planning stage, the grammatical form becomes hypothetical ("If every Jew bought the equivalent of a single tree") and the vast ramifications of this basic wishful assumption are all patterned on a counterfactual "would." In the Hebrew, the sentence that starts the concatenation ("If every Jew bought the equivalent of a single tree",

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<sup>171</sup> The failure's arbitrariness is expressed in the passage in the words "until one day failure fell" (*nafal ha'kishalon* נפל הכשלוֹן). The Hebrew wording brings to mind the idiom in Hebrew נפל הפור (*nafal ha-pur* = fate was cast), which derives from the Scroll of Esther, where Haman casts a Pur (a lot) to set a date for the extermination of the Jewish people. The Hebrew expression is used to describe situations that are irreversible, mostly in negative contexts. Thus, the combination "failure fell" resonates with the unique Hebrew expression *nafal hapur* (נפל הפור) and echoes its sense of a fateful outcome.

<sup>172</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 121–22.

"שְׁכַל יְהוּדֵי יִקְנֶה שׁוּוֹה עֵץ" opens with the *she* (ש' השעבוד) followed by a future-tense verb, signifying in Hebrew the jussive subjunctive (...הלוואי ש...). The elliptical form of the wish opens a series of wishes for a positive outcome ( ומליוני עצים יינטעו ויעשו הררי פרי ויעשו נהרי ) "ומליוני עצים יינטעו ויעשו הררי פרי ויעשו נהרי" "שמך, "then millions of trees would be planted and make mountains of fruit and rivers of oil"). The hypothetical syntax undermines the assumption of fact on which the series of outcomes relies and exposes the unrealistic nature of these dreams. But despite this hypothetical syntax, the next sentences in the Hebrew appear in present tense—as if the factories for barrels and corks that would spin off this “first phase” are already there, up and running. The syntax and grammar, along with the naïve belief that every Jew on earth would take part in the Zionist mission, expose the ironic gap between historical reality and the unrealistic expectations of the father and his colleagues on which they base their “calculations.”

The hyperbolic language that characterizes these plans (“millions of trees would be planted and make mountains of fruit and rivers of oil”) emphasizes the discrepancy between the statistics and the false suppositions behind them. But the ironic narration of the hypothetical assumptions also unfurls Yizhar’s critique of the father’s way of thinking; of his unconscious attempt to “translate” socialist Zionism into consumeristic capitalism by dreaming of industrial success in the midst of a vision of a proletarian and anti-materialist society.<sup>173</sup> Yizhar seeks to point out that it is here that the failure resides. The combined focalization of the child narrator, who expresses his earnest and deepest fears of the abandoned factory, and of the adult narrator, who utilizes syntax and hyperbole to expose the naiveté of the Zionist pioneers, produces a complex picture of the Zionist dream, of the enormous hopes and faith embedded in it along with the devastating failures it frequently engendered.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Daddy’s hypothetical calculations bring to mind Sholem Aleichem’s figment, Menachem Mendel, the poor merchant who aspires to become rich and makes detailed plans of how to pursue his dream, but whose plans fall apart over and over again in a comic series of events. The allusion to Menachem Mendel encapsulates Yizhar’s critique of the diasporic, anti-socialist thinking behind Daddy’s calculations, a thinking which undermines the socialist endeavor to which he is vehemently devoted. See Sholem Aleichem, *The Adventures of Menahem-Mendl*, trans. Tamara Kahana (Shelter Island: Sholom Aleichem Family Publications, 1969).

<sup>174</sup> The psychology behind the dialectics of blind faith and despair, of dreams and hopes and harsh disillusion, that characterizes Daddy and his counterparts is an important motif in *Preliminaries* and a central theme in itself. A passage that sheds some light on this complexity is found in the father’s stream of consciousness on the way to the doctor with his wasp-stung child: “In any case, aren’t they building a new world here. . . . Something that, if you believe in it, you don’t need any confirmation that it can really be done. Something where the trees that are not growing yet . . . are strengthening to become a

## Repetition and Excess as Expressions of Crisis

The discussion of failure serves as an appropriate backdrop to the father's personal disaster. If previous statements in the novel foretell Daddy's catastrophe,<sup>175</sup> here they all prove to be true. What differentiates the passages about the father's crisis from the rest of the novel is the exceptional amount of repetition, in various forms. These passages abound in rhetorical patterns and literary devices used to excess. Through them, Yizhar expresses his harsh critique of the Zionist leadership and system, which betrayed the socialist manifesto that was their credo and failed to provide a safety net for the financially collapsing father.

Riffaterre, examining the paradigm of symbolism in a literary text, illustrates the effect of repetition in carrying symbolic meaning:

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forest that will change the appearance of the place. Species of trees that this place has never dreamed of knowing, but they are now going to paint the place with their colours, pine, cypress . . . and all the old native species . . . and wasps too, will be unknown and will disappear from here, they will read about them in books, and in natural history classes, and if there is water, if they find water here, and they will find it if they look, and they will look if they have faith, and they will have faith if . . . and the ideas that are blowing around are so big that they muddle all the facts, and the passage towards the possible muddles the possible, and faith muddles the land, and the land muddles men, and when there is no more muddle – one is suddenly alarmed. As though some threat had fallen upon us and threatened everything. What is happening here. How do we keep going" (75). Through a consciousness shared by Daddy and the adult narrator, there is an attempt here (on the part of the narrator) to delineate Daddy's complicated psychology and beliefs regarding the Zionist dream. The narrator illustrates the constant state of confusion between the dreams and actual happenings that, despite its absurdity, enables daily survival in the harsh existence of the new Jewish settlement. This murkiness between the real and unreal functions as a screen and protection from the reality of the situation; looking at that reality "when there is no more muddle" is alarming because the bare facts are indeed alarming and discouraging. Yet by preceding Daddy's thoughts with a prolepsis of the future of the landscape and its species, the narrator confirms the future as one of survival and endurance. The combination of Daddy's profound uncertainty with the narrator's affirmation of Jewish existence in the land creates a complex portrayal of the events that refuses to present a simplistic picture of success or failure.

<sup>175</sup> "and all this since they moved here, to Tel Nordau . . . Daddy hasn't laughed since then, as he is totally embroiled in debts and demands for payment, he doesn't sleep at night, he struggles to find extra work, he gets up in the early hours to write an article to earn a few more pennies, rumours about pay cuts chase rumours about sackings" (201-02). "But what really fills the house, more than anything else and all the time, is the anxiety whose weight is gradually breaking Daddy; he is always repeating annoying words like debts . . . mortgages, interest, short term, where will I get, God Almighty where will I get, and so on and so forth, like someone who knows he has failed, who has betrayed his family, who has shown himself shamefully weak" (209).

Since the paradigm has the peculiarity of being repetitive and cumulative, the narrative patterned on the paradigm is accelerated . . . and the whole series is brought to a climax, both formal (humor, for instance), and semiotic (the symbolic content).<sup>176</sup>

Indeed, the passages describing the father's crisis are a climactic point (if not *the* climax) of *Preliminaries*. And, true to Riffaterre's claim, the climax is expressed both in the stylistic devices employed in the passages and in the symbolic content they carry—in this case, in the form of an elegy. One of the pivotal events in the novel is the father's heartbreak over the fact that he is forced to find a job at any price, after the family—during the depression in Palestine in the second half of 1920s—sell their house in Tel Nordau and move to a remote house in the Rehovot colony. Daddy, a fierce socialist who dedicated his life to the ideals of Zionism, has to accept a job as a manager, supervising manual laborers:

Because the crisis came in the end, despite the best effort of Uncle David . . . and despite the good will of Mr Dizengoff . . . Mr Dizengoff even tried to sweeten the bitter pill and promised that at the first opportunity . . . and that everyone appreciated, it was just the hard times we were going through . . . all the budgets were exhausted so they were dismissing releasing locking up . . . what else was there to do? Nothing, only to turn to Uncle Moshe, the angry-looking uncle who . . . sometimes spoke a harsh word . . . and even if it was . . . his own brother's son with whom he had undergone all those hard beginnings . . . one in his own way, as a farmer, a citrus grower, a public figure, a farmers' leader<sup>177</sup> . . . and the other in his own way, a worker among workers, more often by the roadside than on the road, doing every kind of work where the Hebrew worker needed to prove himself, a tiller of the soil, a blacksmith and a farrier, a

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<sup>176</sup> Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, 64.

<sup>177</sup> In her biography of S. Yizhar, Nitsa Ben-Ari provides a portrait of Moshe Smilanski, who was the uncle of S. Yizhar's father, Zeev. In her book, he is indeed described as a complex person full of charisma who believed in providing equal work opportunities for Arabs and Jews alike and supported manual labor, yet advanced capitalism and saw in it a necessary and legitimate system to progress the new Jewish settlement. Ben-Ari also describes the path Moshe and Zeev shared, after spending several years at the house of Moshe's parents and leaving together to immigrate to Palestine. Ben-Ari tells of the complicated and painful relationship Zeev had with his uncle Moshe, who was a successful farmer managing his own farm, and who was also a leader and a writer. Moshe was very self-confident, and was also a hard man, as the passage above implies. Ben-Ari notes that Yizhar's father felt like a failure next to his charismatic and successful uncle. Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 33–36, 39–57, 95–96, 112–14.

kindergarten teacher and a teacher of workers, spending his nights researching the economy of the Land in a comparative text, never talking in public, bottling it all up, refining it sevenfold and writing it down accurately, and eager to go with all the friends with whom he shared all the hard tests of friendship . . . and eager to start with Nahalal, precisely as he had always dreamed of finally doing . . . and when it didn't work out he had gone to Tel Aviv . . . and built a house in Mendele street that was beyond his means, and set up that statistical department that enjoyed such a great reputation . . . such a modest man who did everything on his own, so he was almost forgotten in his little corner, they had only remembered him in time to sack him . . . and the dark vision of those terrible sleepless nights finally came true, the city was hit by crisis, depression, shortages, hunger, emigration, suicide, lay-offs, public assistance, soup kitchens, sackings, sackings, sackings, coming home one day . . . empty-handed, with debts beyond all hope . . . they had to sell the house . . . and to look around quickly, if not for his sake, because he could have dropped everything and died, yes, but for the children, and he was a broken man of fifty-five, his body broken his frame broken his stature broken.<sup>178</sup>

This passage is conspicuous in its excessive use of repetition. As Riffaterre noted, the accumulation of repetition creates the effect of acceleration, which indeed intensifies the passage emotionally, building up toward the novel's climax. The passage has a cyclical structure; it opens with the crisis ("because the crisis came in the end") and returns to the crisis ("the city was hit by crisis"), thematizing the sense of a dead end, the inability to break through. When the passage begins, it is unclear whether it is an individual crisis or a collective one, because it is phrased as a general fact. A sentence later, we can infer that it is a financial crisis that led to Daddy's lay-off (and eventually to his personal crisis), but the language continues to be general and collective:<sup>179</sup> "Mr. Dizengoff even tried to sweeten the bitter pill and promised that at the first opportunity . . . and that everyone appreciated, it was just the hard times we were going through . . . all the budgets were exhausted so they were dismissing releasing locking up." In the Hebrew novel, the collective phrasing is even more salient, as the

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<sup>178</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 255–57.

<sup>179</sup> We first understand that Daddy was laid off because of the names of Uncle David and Mr. Dizengoff, whom we recognize from an earlier chapter in the context of Daddy's work in the municipality, but we can be certain that it is Daddy who was laid off only when he is described in comparison to Uncle Moshe (and even then it is without mentioning him directly): "a worker among workers, more often on the roadside than on the road."

sentences are phrased in agentless and impersonal forms ( ושכולם מעריכים מאד... ורק צוק ) (העתים... ונגמרו כל התקציבים וסוגרים ומפטרים ומשלחים ונועלים..."). The faceless collective phrasing has several functions here. First, it emphasizes the shirking of responsibility by Mr. Dizengoff (who was then the mayor of Tel Aviv, and decidedly bourgeois) and all the others who had a part in the decision to lay off Daddy. The use of the collective and impersonal language expresses the culture that allows one to lay a person off and yet to escape the moral implications of this act by blaming the “hard times” and the “exhausted budgets.” But the collective language also highlights the absence of the collective Mr. Dizengoff speaks for; the betrayal of the collective, of the Zionist leaders who proclaimed their vision of creating a socialist society that honors its responsibility to its members. Daddy is an idealist who reads and internalizes articles such as those by Brenner and Gordon about the necessity of self-sacrifice in fulfilling the Zionist vision of settling the land.<sup>180</sup> The choice to live and raise a family in hard conditions such as those in the experimental farm in Chulda, where his youngest son was stung by a wasp, exemplifies Daddy’s willingness of self-sacrifice for the sake of creating a new Jewish society in Palestine. But in moments of need, this collective to which Daddy has dedicated his life does not reciprocate; there is no social support net to help people like Daddy.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> In the first chapter about the wasp sting, when we are plunged into Daddy’s stream of consciousness, Daddy contemplates the following on the way to the doctor with his unconscious son: “As for despair, it’s hard to overcome it. This land is given to desperate people, said Gordon. . . . Because only desperate people really have hope. But the Jewish people is not cut out for despair, Brenner claims excitedly. . . . Because Brenner, after all the despair, has another magic word, mystery, he says . . . something that is beyond reason. . . . It is only because of mystery, because of what is not clear and not assured, that the whole account is still not settled” (78). The father quotes from Aaron David Gordon’s article *Michtav Galuy Le-Y.Ch. Brenner* (A direct letter to Y. Ch. Brenner), which Gordon wrote in response to an article by Brenner. Gordon’s article appears in a collection of his writings: A.D. Gordon, *Ktavim*, 1 (Tel Aviv: Hapoel Hatzair, 1925), 158–60. Brenner’s conception about the dialectics of despair and hope, reason and mystery, in connection to the fate of the Jewish people is central in his writing and is expressed in several of his texts. See his “*Mi-kan U-mikan*” in Y. C. Brenner, *Kol Kitvey Y.C. Brenner*, vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv: Dvir and Ha-kibbutz Ha-me’uchad Press, 1956), 369, 372; “*Mikhtav Arokh*” in *Kol Kitvey Y.C. Brenner*, vol. 2 (1960), 28–29; and “*Tziyunim*” in *Kol Kitvey Y.C. Brenner*, vol. 3 (1967), 478, among others.

<sup>181</sup> In her biography, Nitsa Ben-Ari notes that several years after his lay-off, in the thirties, Zeev Smilanski, Yizhar’s father, heard that the department of statistics at the Tel Aviv municipality was about to reopen and wrote a pleading letter with the hope to be rehired, but his request was denied. Zeev applied again for a job, this time with the help of his brother-in-law, but was again rejected. Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 115–16. When Yizhar reached the age of high school, Nitsa Ben-Ari explains, he was frustrated by the low level of the local schools. He wanted to study in Gimnasya Hertzelia, a prestigious

Another important function of the collective language is the thematization of Daddy's modesty, of his "invisibility." Daddy is described as a shy and introverted person, "more often by the roadside than on the road," "never talking in public," and "such a modest man who did everything on his own, so that he was almost forgotten in his little corner, they had only remembered him in time to sack him." Throughout the passage, Daddy is not mentioned directly; when Mr. Dizengoff talks to him, he does not address him but rather speaks in an indirect manner ("everyone appreciated" and not "everyone appreciated you"); his "name" in the novel, "Daddy," defines him as a function, not a subject, but even this descriptor is entirely absent from the passage above. We can infer his identity only from the descriptions of his actions and his dreams, descriptions that demonstrate the father's nobility but also bear the narrator's harsh critique of the collective for whom Daddy had toiled. Now that Daddy needs this collective to recognize him as an individual, to help him in his individual crisis, this collective ignores him. There is also a bitter irony in this thematization: Daddy's extreme modesty rendered his value unrecognized in his environment, just as the readers find it hard to recognize Daddy's identity in the first few sentences.

The catalogue of plights in the long sentence describing the crisis ("the city was hit by crisis, depression, shortages, hunger, emigration, suicide, lay-off") brings to mind the ten plagues in Exodus. In that story, God inflicted the plagues on the Egyptians to make their king Pharaoh release the enslaved Israelites, reinforcing the sense of the Egyptians' predetermined fate.<sup>182</sup> But unlike the biblical story, where God is responsible for the plagues, in this story human beings are the cause of the crisis (and indirectly, global capitalism, which is a "disturbance" in the novel). The immediate transition, syntactically, from Daddy's sleepless nights to the plights caused by the economic crisis ("and the dark vision of those terrible sleepless nights finally came true, the city was hit by crisis") displays Daddy's complete involvement in his society: in his world, there is no division between the individual and the collective.

The summary of the father's life course and the descriptions of his noble personality evoke elegiac and mourning texts. Evoking an elegy, the lyrical text blurs the border

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high school which his former friends from Tel Nordau attended, but his father could not afford that. Zeev wrote several letters to the school management in which he pleaded for a tuition discount, "letters that hold all the pain of a man who was from the pioneers, and gave all his heart and blood to this country and yet was unable to stand on his feet and provide for his family" (ibid., 181). The high school management, like the Tel Aviv municipality, rejected his pleas.

<sup>182</sup> Exodus, chapters 7-12.

between prose and poetry, but more importantly, its elegiac style allows the adult narrator to dedicate this part of the novel to his father as an individual, to distinguish him from the collective and through that to correct in the time of narration the injustice done to his father in the narrated time. Another characteristic of the elegy, the praise of the dead or defeated hero, is present here in the description of Daddy's life events. Daddy is portrayed as a protagonist of a Greek tragedy who is perfect in his personality and whose "tragic flaw" was his aspiration to build a house that was beyond his means. But unlike the prototypical Greek tragic protagonist, whose common sin is Hubris, which originally meant the intentional use of violence to humiliate or degrade,<sup>183</sup> Daddy's building of the house was not even a result of his own aspirations, as the passage insinuates; he was eager to go to the agricultural collective Nahalal with his friends and to build a communal village there, but "when it didn't work out he had gone to Tel Aviv."<sup>184</sup> Yet depicting Daddy as a protagonist of a Greek tragedy also enables Yizhar to point to the shortsightedness of the father and his fellow-dreamers, whose aspirations of flourishing industrialism for the sake of Zionism (as is conveyed in the section about failure) undermined the very vision of a just and socialist society to which Daddy had dedicated his life. Daddy is portrayed in a manner that brings to mind hagiographic texts, almost as a saint who devoted his life to fulfill the ideal of the Hebrew worker, intensifying the sense of his self-sacrifice. And indeed, Daddy is described as a person who died from within: "because he could have dropped everything and died, yes, but for the children, and he was a broken man of fifty-five, his body broken his frame broken his stature broken." The sense of fracture is thematized and amplified in the division of the last clause of the sentence into parts, along with the fragmentation of Daddy's body. The word "broken" appears as an adjective to describe

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<sup>183</sup> According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "the word's connotation changed over time, and Hubris came to be defined as overweening presumption that leads a person to disregard the divinely fixed limits of human action on an ordered cosmos." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Hubris," accessed January 20, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/hubris>. The father's character adheres to neither the classical Greek nor the contemporary meaning.

<sup>184</sup> The decision to move to Tel Aviv was his wife's, as we can infer from the text which renders the father's thoughts on the way to the doctor after the experience with the wasp: "And it seems Mummy won't let us stay here, and we'll have to move. She's had enough of raising children in the desert, she said. . . . And his silence is not a strong point in arguments, he is defeated almost from the outset" (89). Nitsa Ben-Ari reinforces this understanding: "The chance to return to the 'city' [Ben-Ari's quotation marks signify it was not a real city then, but more of an urban environment, as Tel Aviv had not even been founded at that point in time, H.S.] occurred at the end of the [First World] war, when the enterprise of the experimental farm failed. Ze'ev wished to fulfill his dream and to join his friends who were about to found Nahalal, but his young wife refused firmly." Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 108.

Daddy as a whole (“he was a broken man of fifty-five”), and then recurs when describing Daddy’s bodily traits. The use of “broken” as the single adjective for the four different nouns in this clause reiterates the sense of irreparable break.

Daddy is employed by his uncle Moshe, who seemingly saves him and his family, but Daddy pays a high price for this:

This is what Daddy learnt that day from Uncle Moshe . . . and it looked as though he had been saved at the eleventh hour, so why does Daddy look so glum as he tells Mummy all about it. . . . Because Daddy will suddenly become a supervisor, supervising the workmen . . . the workmen will work and he will supervise them, he will oppress them, he will be their exploiter’s man . . . the capitalist’s man, the man who represents the owner of the citrus grove, the one who converts labour into capital . . . the other side of the class barricade, the supervisor is the creation of the exploitative economy, he has no equivalent in the collective or the co-operative system . . . now he will have to supervise workmen, he who used to explain that a plantation belongs to the workers more than it does to the owners . . . how a man can fall, and all his smashed gods fall down upon him, how his faith caves in and everything that he had sacrificed himself for in the past, everything that was high above the hardships of this hard land, a worker, a Hebrew worker, a Hebrew worker in the Land of the Hebrews, a worker on the Land . . . workers’ settlement, workers’ party, workers’ newspaper, workers’ culture, workers’ library, workers’ theater, the worker, and now he will be supervising workers, so what is left to a man of all his faith, of the purity of his ideals, his hair, his moustache are white now, not grey, he is drooping, grey man, it’s no longer the crisis, the depression, the situation, the worries about the future, it’s see what he looks like now, see what is left of Daddy, the man who raised this hard land and suddenly it eludes him, the ground has fallen away under his feet, there is nothing underneath him now, there is no firm ground under his feet, why dwell on it, he gets up each morning, he goes to work each morning, taking the wicker basket with his lunch wrapped in a newspaper and his flask of lukewarm tea, and in the evening he comes home, he reads the paper, and he doesn’t sigh, sometimes he even smiles a twisted smile, at the boy. And that’s the way it is.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 259–61.

The excessive repetition in this passage vividly illustrates Daddy's downfall and highlights its symbolic value in the novel. This is not only the father's individual crisis, but a crisis of the Zionist social system, one of the fundamental pillars of the socialist Zionist dream as it was viewed by many socialist leaders and writers.<sup>186</sup> Instead of being able to rely on the system to which he dedicated his life, Daddy has to fit into a capitalist system, as he himself contemplates (through his shared consciousness with his son, the adult narrator): "he will be . . . the capitalist's man . . . the supervisor is the creation of the exploitative economy, he has no equivalent in the collective or the co-operative system." The word "supervisor" is repeated in many forms ("Because Daddy will suddenly become a supervisor, supervising the workmen . . . the workmen will work and he will supervise them . . . the supervisor is the creation of the exploitative economy . . . now he will have to supervise workmen"). In the Hebrew the effect of repetition is even stronger, as the noun (supervisor) and the verb (supervising) are homophones – משגיח, *mashgi'ach* (משגיח על) "שאבא פתאום יהיה משגיח, משגיח על הפועלים, משגיח על" (עמ' 194) הפועלים שיעבדו, הוא משגיח עליהם הם עובדים והוא מעליהם, הפועלים עובדים והוא משגיח עליהם... זה המשגיח שהמשק הנצלני ברא אותו... וכעת יהיה למשגיח על הפועלים" (עמ' 194) The stylistic device used here, diacope, which is "the repetition of a word or phrase with only one or two words between the repeated words,"<sup>187</sup> stresses Daddy's difficulty in accepting his new job, which profoundly contradicts his values and beliefs. These thoughts about his new job bring Daddy to recall his past experiences as a worker, and here again diacope is employed, where the recurring word is "worker/s" ("a worker, a Hebrew worker . . . a worker of the land . . . workers' settlement, workers' party, workers' newspaper, workers' culture, workers' library, workers' theater, the worker"). The broad semantic field of the term "worker" with its various combinations illustrates the degree to which being a worker has defined Daddy's identity, and stands in sharp opposition to the

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<sup>186</sup> See Ya'akov Shavit, ed., *Ha-Historya Shel Eretz Yisra'el* [The history of the land of Israel], vol. 9, *Ha-mandat Ve-ha-bayit Ha-le'umi, 1917-1942* [The British Mandate and the national home, 1917-1947], ed. Yehoshua Porat and Ya'akov Shavit (Jerusalem: Keter and Yad Ben Tzvi Press, 1982), 183, 208, 210, and especially 186: "A fundamental assumption in the ideological agenda of the workers' parties was that the workers' class plays the major national part in the Zionist movement. . . . The purpose of Zionism . . . is to establish national home where a new Jewish society will be developed, a 'society of workers', which will be both the fulfillment of the socialist ideology and a revolution in the social structure of the Jewish people in the diaspora."

<sup>187</sup> "Diacope" comes from the Greek for 'to cut in two.' The famous line from Shakespeare's rendition of the St. Crispin's Day speech in *Henry V* is an example: 'we few, we happy few, we band of brothers.'" Cited from: *Literary Devices*, s.v. "Repetition," accessed on January 25, 2016, <http://www.literarydevices.com/repetition/>.

purpose of the supervisor, as well as revealing the father's sense of entrapment in and alienation from his new job. The shared stylistic device of diacope, used both in the description of Daddy's new job and his immersion in the workers' culture, renders palpable the sense of paradox and internal war in Daddy's mind. The diacope employed in both descriptions thematizes Daddy's contemplations about the supervisor as representing "the other side of the class barricade." It portrays the inner war that takes place in Daddy's mind and his sense of defeat when he has to accept the new job of a supervisor, summarized in the sentence that seals this sequence of diacopes: "and now he will be supervising workers." Daddy's acceptance of this job costs him his desire for life. He becomes an old man before his time: "his hair, his moustache are white now, not grey, he is drooping, grey man" (260).

The tone and style of elegy that characterized the previous passage are palpable in this passage as well. The sentences that open with the word "how" and the anaphoric use of the opening word ("how a man can fall and all his smashed gods fall down upon him,<sup>188</sup> how his faith caves in") echo in their cadence and use of the key word "fall" biblical laments such as King David's over Saul and his son Jonathan.<sup>189</sup> The narrator's grief over his father becomes a cry; now he intervenes directly, and what was so far a shared focalized point of view of father and son, an indirect free discourse expressing the father's crisis, turns into direct statement by the adult narrator, who blames the failing Zionist social system: "it's no longer the crisis, the depression, the situation, the worries about the future, it's see what he looks like now, see what is left of Daddy, the man who raised this hard land and suddenly it eludes him." The narrator creates a catalogue of abstract terms here that describe "the situation," echoing and responding to Mr. Dizengoff's elusive message of lay-offs to the father. By breaking the catalogue sequence using ungrammatical, expressive syntax that embeds dialogue as if it were a noun phrase ("it's no longer the crisis, the depression . . . it's see how he looks like now"), the narrator draws attention to his father's state in a direct apostrophe to the leaders of society. He points a blaming finger at them, expressing the direct and concrete effect of "the depression" and "the situation" on the individual who piously believed in collectivity and tied his fate to it.

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<sup>188</sup> The image of Daddy's ideals as smashed gods that fall down on him depicts these ideals as idols, as gods who have failed, and encapsulates the narrator's critique of these ideals too, as they led Daddy to his current situation.

<sup>189</sup> "The splendor, O Israel, on your heights lies slain, how have warriors fallen!" (2 Samuel, 1:19) Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 428.

In his book *Binyan Umah O Tikun Chevra?* (Nation-building or a new society?), Zeev Sternhell researches the social roots of the Zionist Labor Movement during the years 1904–40.<sup>190</sup> According to Sternhell, the leaders of the Zionist Labor Movement (the inclusive name of the workers' parties in Palestine during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) were more interested in achieving their national purposes than their social ones. Workers' rights were not the only thing that was sacrificed on the altar of national ambitions, claims Sternhell, but also the very goals of socialism as a general conception of a change in the relationship among human beings: "From its beginnings, all the aspirations, strength and energy of the labor movement were recruited for the national revival, and as a result, the movement lacked a true vision of social change."<sup>191</sup> Sternhell argues that when *Achdut Ha-avoda*, the workers' movements' umbrella organization, was founded in 1919, uniting the *Poaley Tzion* movement with other workers' organizations, it ended the influence of intellectual socialism, and soon Zionist socialism became a tool to realize national goals rather than a means for creating a new social order. "Here" Sternhell summarizes, "lies the explanation for the allegedly strange fact that during the twenties and thirties in the Land of Israel no serious efforts were made to constitute a society that was different in its essence from a normal materialistic society, or at least to build the society of that time as an equal society."<sup>192</sup> Sternhell's analysis and conclusions shed light on the socio-economic reality depicted in the novel, and sharpen the sense of the Zionist leadership's betrayal.

In view of these insights, it is no wonder that the father's only way to escape poverty and hunger is by turning to Uncle Moshe, whose project is based on a capitalist economy.

Daddy's existential sense of losing his grounding is embodied in the semantic repetition: "the ground has fallen away under his feet, there is nothing underneath him now, there is no firm ground under his feet, why dwell on it." Rephrasing the same content in three different ways conveys the attempt to put in words his sense of loss and pain and the failure to do so, summarized in the end of those attempts by "why dwell on it." And indeed, the description that follows, of Daddy's daily routine in his new job as a supervisor, seen through the child-narrator's eyes (but told now in the words of the adult narrator), no longer renders his inner thoughts but rather shows his

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<sup>190</sup> Zeev Sternhell, *Binyan Umah O Tikun Chevra?* [Nation-building or a new society?] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1995).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

physical actions: “he gets up each morning, he goes to work each morning, taking the wicker basket with his lunch wrapped in a newspaper and his flask of lukewarm tea, and in the evening he comes home, he reads the paper, and he doesn’t sigh, sometimes he even smiles a twisted smile, at the boy. And that’s the way it is.” This description is perhaps even more heartbreaking than those that preceded it, as it expresses that all that is left of the father is a mere functioning. If in previous chapters Daddy’s sighs are an integral part of him, expressing the sublimation of his need to take out his frustrations and suppressed desires, here he does not even sigh because even these needs have died in him. The twisted smile that he flashes at the boy from time to time seems mechanical. The last sentence, “And that’s the way it is” (in Hebrew *וככה זה*), indicates a return to the child narrator’s focalized point of view, rendering his sense of helplessness and lack of control while watching his fading father.

Although it seems that the adult narrator has concluded the account of Daddy’s crisis by saying “why dwell on it,” there is one more passage that closes this narrative unit: a dialogue between Daddy and Mummy about the current situation. The additional paragraph illustrates the narrator’s inability to resist dwelling on it, despite the futility of doing so, because it is so painful and tragic:

And Mummy in the kitchen, when he came home barely alive, How could Tel Aviv Municipality have treated you like that, and Daddy, just like everyone else, and Mummy, But you were bringing this land into being back in 1890, you of all people. . . . And Daddy, the situation, and Mummy, what do you mean the situation, they didn’t fire everyone. . . . And Daddy, the crisis, and Mummy, the crisis didn’t throw everyone out . . . You should have gone to Berl Katznelson,<sup>193</sup> you should have written about it in *Davar*, to let people know, and Daddy, everybody knows it all, and Mummy, aren’t they ashamed of themselves, look who they are throwing out, and Daddy, they threw everyone out . . . and Mummy, no, not everyone, plenty of people carried on working as normal . . . it’s just you, you shouldn’t keep quiet, you mustn’t keep quiet . . . and Daddy, that’s the way it is, and Mummy, what do you mean that’s the way it is, it shows

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<sup>193</sup> Berl Katznelson (1887–1944) was one of the main leaders of the centrist branch of the Labor movement. He wrote extensively and was publicly active in the affairs of socialist Zionism. Berl Katznelson was involved in founding the *Histadrut* in 1920, the Federation of Labor Unions in Palestine founded and led by the socialist parties in Palestine. Katznelson also founded the journal *Davar* in 1925, as the journal of the *Histadrut*. For more on Katznelson, see in Bartal, Tzachor, and Kni’el, *Ha-alayah Ha-shniya*, vol. 3, 222–34.

lack of respect, not just lack of respect for you, lack of respect for all the old timers, all the pioneers, all the founders of this land, and she was unable to continue, her shoulders were shaking, so they stopped talking. There's nothing more, that's the way it is, and Mummy can't be calm and can't find a place, and Daddy doesn't want to be. And that's the way it is.<sup>194</sup>

The passage above is conspicuous in its difference from the rest of the novel. In contrast to the broad and detailed descriptions of the interlocutors in previous and later sections of *Preliminaries*, where the actual discourse is delivered partially and the gaps are filled by the narrator's delineation, here the dialogue is brought in its entirety, devoid of descriptions of the speakers, their thoughts, expressions, or vignettes (except the opening description of Daddy's state when he returns from his work "barely alive"). This descriptive emptiness illustrates Daddy's existential state. He has lost his spark, is merely functioning, and therefore his verbal interactions are laconic. Moreover, he uses the same hollow and general answers he received when he was laid off from his job at the municipality ("And Daddy, the situation, and Mummy, what do you mean the situation, they didn't fire everyone. . . . And Daddy, the crisis"). He adopts the collective discourse and repeats it robotically. The extreme statements, such as "when he came home barely alive" and Daddy's laconic responses, reveal the struggle in his soul, the excruciating effort he must make to go on with his daily routine. Whereas in the translated novel the dialogue scene between Mummy and Daddy is depicted as a single occurrence, in the original Hebrew the scene is described in the form of the habitual past or the present tense rendered in the present tense ("כשהיה חוזר לא הי כמעט", "והיא ( "ואמא לא נרגעת ואבא לא מוצא מקום" )". The habitual form illustrates the ongoing situation on the one hand, and emphasizes its stagnancy on the other. In the dialogue between the two of them, Daddy replies in short answers while Mummy picks up his words and embeds them in sentences ("And Daddy, the situation, and Mummy, what do you mean the situation, they didn't fire everyone. . . . And Daddy, the crisis, and Mummy, the crisis didn't throw everyone out"). This form of discourse depicts Mummy as trying to bring Daddy back to life by desperately attempting to spark some kind of reaction in him, be it anger or resistance, and Daddy's indifference only intensifies his emotional death and Mummy's frustration and sorrow.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 261.

<sup>195</sup> Mummy may also be feeling guilty, because she was the one who insisted that the family move to Tel Aviv.

The genre of elegy traditionally combines three stages of mourning a loss, the third being consolation.<sup>196</sup> But in our case, the elegy for the father does not contain consolation. The final sentence describing his crisis depicts both Mummy and Daddy as inconsolable (“and she was unable to continue, her shoulders were shaking, so they stopped talking. There’s nothing more, that’s the way it is, and Mummy can’t be calm and can’t find a place, and Daddy doesn’t want to be. And that’s the way it is”). The break is irreparable. And precisely because Daddy is still alive physically yet dead within, Yizhar illustrates in his design of the passages Daddy’s inability to accept the betrayal of socialist Zionism. Given that *Preliminaries* was written more than sixty years after the event, meaning that the time of narration is decades removed from the narrated time, the vivid descriptions of Daddy’s fading illustrate the degree to which the father’s crisis had a traumatic and lasting impact on the family. Throughout the novel, the adult narrator intervenes directly only a few times. One of them is when Daddy and Mummy are on their way to the doctor with their child who has been stung, and another one is while nervously waiting for the father to return home during the Jaffa Riots. In both cases, the adult narrator intervenes to assure the reader that the outcome will be positive; the child will recover and Daddy will return. The adult narrator’s interference in the events signifies the importance of their “happy ending,” and conveys Yizhar’s positive view of these events as symbolically representing the success of the Zionist project. But by designing the textual units above as an elegy to the father and by allowing the narrator to interfere when describing his father’s state (“it’s no longer the crisis . . . it’s see what he looks like now”), Yizhar assigns no less importance and weight to his critique of the Zionist leadership. The irreparable break in the father cannot be separated from the overall picture. The Zionist dream may have come true in the end, but the price the individual paid was too heavy to endure.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> See, for example, the following online resource: *Literary Devices*, s.v. “Elegy,” accessed on January 30, 2016, <http://www.literarydevices.com/elegy/>.

<sup>197</sup> According to Nitsa Ben-Ari’s biography, Yizhar carried the sorrow for his father for many years. In an interview conducted with him when he was 83, Yizhar said the following about his father: “His heart was broken. He was a man that didn’t know how to fight for himself. He just got lost.” Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 104. Ben-Ari also describes how “the picture of his father, the broken and silent pioneer, haunted Yizhar all his life” (ibid., 116). When *Ha-poel Ha-tza’ir*, the centrist labor movement with which Yizhar’s father was affiliated, celebrated their journal’s fortieth year, Yizhar published his story *Bokro Shel Chalutz Zaken* (Morning of an Old Pioneer) in it as a protest against the treatment of his father, who was one of the founding editors of the journal. The story conveys the father’s stream of consciousness: “and so he is in the end, neglected . . . forgotten and considered dead . . . after all that, when he always gave in . . . always hurried to reach out a helping hand . . . and who will avenge the blood of the murdered? . . . who will

## “And That’s the Way It Is”: The Dual Meaning of Repetition

The expression “And that’s the way it is” (וככה זה) recurs numerous times throughout the novel, in various contexts and situations. It usually appears at the end of passages, and renders the sense of the present time of the narrated events, as an anchor that pulls the strands of thoughts back to the current time in the story.<sup>198</sup> In most cases, it renders the focalized point of view of the child narrator, and signifies both a summary and an acceptance of things as they are. This acceptance expresses the child narrator’s view of the events, his feeling of helplessness and inability to control the events in his reality, since he is dependent on the adults in his life. The future is unknown to him, unlike the adult narrator who views the events from a time distance and knows their aftermaths. As mentioned above, narratologically the child is an “unreliable narrator,” as “a young narrator would be a clear case of limited knowledge (and understanding).”<sup>199</sup> Interestingly, however, the expression “and that’s the way it is” also produces a sense of reliability, of delivering the events as they are, with no gap in knowledge or irony between the reader and the narrator who leads us through the story.

Later on, when we reach the novel’s last paragraph, which describes the child’s reaction to reading Dickens’ *The Pickwick Papers*, this expression receives a totally different meaning:

And that anyone who writes should write like Dickens, moving the act along not by hatred, but with perceptiveness and indulgence . . . but like here with a musical stream, with a stream of sentences happy to stream, a flow happy to flow, recounting all the details that it is a pleasure to narrate correctly, everything in movement everything boisterous everything coming more and more and full all the time, and it is beautiful to write like that, and so every

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hammer with his fist and cry: injustice! (who) will rise and roar in the face of the honored ones: you, who let a man fall like that . . . you neglected (him) . . . you killed, his blood is on your hands!” (Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 116–18.) Ben-Ari adds that Zeev Smilanski, Yizhar’s father, died from heartbreak, defined by his doctors as a stroke (ibid.).

<sup>198</sup> A depiction of a discussion about the future between the child-narrator and his friends in Tel Nordau: “and if you are a scholar, for instance, you don’t go to study, you work in the cattle shed if that’s where they send you, Binji says breathing heavily, and they all breathe with him, because it’s right, it’s all right. And that’s the way it is” (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 235). After moving to Rehovot and attending a new school where he has no friends, we read the following: “He is all alone and on his own, and even when they go to school . . . he is not with them or part of them. . . . And that’s the way it is” (252).

<sup>199</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 100.

evening he takes a sheaf of pages out of the shoe-box . . . to read and finding out how beautiful it is to narrate the spate of things that exist correctly and with enjoyment of putting one right colour next to another right colour, then taking two steps back and knowing, yes, that's right, that's exactly the way it is.<sup>200</sup>

When the child becomes acquainted with *The Pickwick Papers*, he admires Charles Dickens' writing style and is inspired by it.<sup>201</sup> *The Pickwick Papers* is portrayed as a formative book for the young narrator, who learns from it how to shape a story and what gives a story the right tone and pace.<sup>202</sup> The expression "that's the way it is" recurs, with the addition of one word, "exactly," reinforcing a meaning that conveys the opposite of helplessness. This assertion expresses approval, as the writer, who is compared to a painter, looks at his written creation with satisfaction, with appreciation for the polyphony he has skillfully orchestrated in his novel. The context of "that's the way it is" at the end of the novel presents the child as a future creative artist who is inspired by the book he reads, which he uses as a guide for his future writing. The act of reading appears as necessary preparation for writing;<sup>203</sup> Dickens' book, as well as Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (which is mentioned earlier in the novel), serve as guides for the young apprentice who contemplates their plot and their style and designs his own stylistics of writing. Here, when determining the style of his own writing, the adult narrator and the child narrator become one.

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<sup>200</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 301.

<sup>201</sup> The child receives this book from his only friend in Rehovot, Moka, whose father is a dealer of building materials and has plenty of books in his office: "Moka, one day, told him that in his father's house too there were endless books, always being added to, and yes, why not . . . he could look at whatever he liked . . . can I borrow it? And Moka, why not. . . . No one reads here anyway . . . not the kids, not the grown-ups" (Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 282).

<sup>202</sup> The Hebrew diction better illustrates Dickens' novel as a model for the young narrator: "ישאם אדם יהיה" 227 *מקדמות*, יזהר, "כותב פעם דברים יהיה כותב כמו דיקנס" יזהר, "מקדמות" 227. The description of Dickens' writing as "a flow happy to flow," "moving the act along not by hatred, but with perceptiveness and indulgence" is rather surprising given the well-known writer's signature novels, such as *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, which are dark and sarcastic and depict a corrupt social system. *The Pickwick Papers*, though, was Dickens' first published novel, a fact which might explain the novel's light and humorous writing style, for it was only after this, in his subsequent works, that Dickens shaped and conveyed his critical view of society.

<sup>203</sup> As Robert Alter points out in his review of *Preliminaries*: "This impulse to get things down in words is focused and directed after he becomes a reader." Robert Alter, *Flow*, 7.

## The Aesthetic Experience as Shaping the Future Artist: *Preliminaries* as a *Künstlerroman*

The different arts—and especially music—to which the child is exposed throughout the novel are described as opening a hidden emotional need in his soul, which later develops into his desire and talent for writing. As Robert Alter defines it, “this frail, virtually anorexic kid, followed in the novel from his third year to his thirteenth, is above all put forth as a portrait of the artist as a young boy.”<sup>204</sup> But these experiences with art stand in opposition to the values of the child’s social sphere, as they focus on the individual needs and are not considered useful for the collective. The contribution of these aesthetic experiences cannot be measured in terms of practicality, and they would therefore, in the ideological environment of the time, be considered unproductive and perhaps even damaging in their potential to divert from the collective mission.

The first such experience is the child’s exposure to the music at the coffee shop:

Only above everything the sound of the gramophone comes from downstairs beyond the corner . . . which blades and fades . . . as though it knows exactly what one is feeling . . . and that it makes you suddenly differently sensitive and attentive, so that you almost start to grasp something that you didn’t know before . . . those tunes . . . how they make their hearers, or at least one of them who as yet understands nothing about the world, about life, about music or about anything . . . just sensing blindly that this is the right thing. . . . And that really I am someone else . . . just like this unknown musical instrument that plays invisibly and is now wailing and going playing on its own . . . something that knows a lot of suffering, that doesn’t need any pity . . . only to get out and be . . . even if it’s hard, even if it has no name yet, but inside you know exactly what it is. And that’s how it is.<sup>205</sup>

The gramophone music awakens in the sensitive child an urge that he has yet no words to define but embodies the longing to “get out and be.” At the end of this unit, the expression “and that’s the way it is” appears, summarizing the present moment in the novel as seen through the child narrator’s focalization, of the yearning to give a

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<sup>204</sup> Robert Alter, *Flow*, 6.

<sup>205</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 174–78.

creative expression to his emotions, though he is “just sensing blindly” this yearning, and is still unable to mold it into words.

A similar experience for the child is that of watching a movie, an opportunity he gets when his big brother takes him along with him. The child eagerly awaits the screening: “he has to understand the magic that is going to happen here,” and then “you discover with astonishment but also with joy some impossible thing that has simply become possible” (183). The power of transformation that is embodied in the art of filmmaking enchants the young boy. These experiences sharpen his listening, and he begins to tune in to the conversations around him:

He does not hear every word nor does he always understand. . . . But, almost certainly, he can always hear the music of their words, when they are just words and when they are real . . . there is always something important left unknown and untouched . . . and it’s a shame, because apparently that must be the reason they meet and sit and talk to each other . . . when really it was simply to listen that they came, in case somebody knows how to speak properly and say what needs to be said the way it needs to be said so that the music of what is said will ring true. And that’s the way it is.<sup>206</sup>

The child again concludes the passage with the same expression, but it seems that a new sensitivity has developed in him, and that the feeling of being the chosen one, the one who has this ability to create a music of words that “will ring true,” is rising in him. Interestingly, what the child senses here is not the content but rather the manner (“music”) in which the words are expressed. This sensitivity to form is thematized in the design of *Preliminaries*, as well as other texts by Yizhar, in which the messages are conveyed in the stylistic means of the text rather than being expressed directly in the content.

The next artistic experience he has is listening to a choir of young boys, an unexpected encounter that takes place when he and his father go for an excursion to Sarona (a German colony near Jaffa that was founded by the Templers, the German settlers, in 1871):

And then suddenly it starts. Singing. Sudden singing. . . . Suddenly and that. Stunned. He is stunned. No, not he. There is no he. He is now only what enters him floods him fills him full. . . . He does not know it is a youth choir . . . and that

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 186–88.

it is accompanied by a harmonium . . . and that it is Schubert . . . only later he may begin to know . . . later perhaps memory will find words and he will know to tell it true, not now, like blue or green that exist on their own without words to say . . . now it is just the fulfilment, the knowledge of the fullness that is being filled . . . just opened up to be filled by this filling of abundance, for which he seems to have been waiting forever. . . . He never knew that such a thing existed or could exist. . . . After all, our singing is always a matter of *Hurry brothers hurry*, or *There in the land our fathers loved* . . . and deep inside he knew that this was not it, the real thing would come one day, and suddenly it has come . . . and suddenly in his innermost being, suddenly it exists, and it is beautiful, oh, so beautiful. . . . And suddenly there is a world.<sup>207</sup>

Here, the experience of listening to the choir is described from the shared focalization of the two narrators, the child and the adult. This joint perspective is principal, because at these very moments the transformation from a sensitive child to a writer is taking place. And indeed, the moments of listening are depicted as transformative. The broken sentences and the incorrect syntax illustrate the emotional turmoil the child is going through. The Schubert piece sung by the beautiful male voices of the young choir is described as transcendental; the child is first depicted as astonished, and then his very existence is negated (“He is stunned. No, not he. There is no he”) because “he is now only what enters him floods him fills him full.” All this renders a sense of his creative rebirth as an artist. The classical and harmonic music, along with the descriptions of his inner being emptying in order to be filled with “the abundance” of the aesthetic experience, bring to mind classic drawings in the Western-Christian culture of biblical figures touched by holiness, a moment of dedication and sanctification: the muse, inspiration, descends from above and enters the child-artist’s soul (“suddenly in his innermost being, suddenly it exists”). The opposition between the German choir singing Schubert and the Zionist ideological songs (“Hurry brothers hurry” and “There in the land our fathers loved”)<sup>208</sup> that dominate the child’s social sphere is not only because the Zionist songs are not an aesthetic experience whereas the choir singing is

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 193–95.

<sup>208</sup> In Hebrew: "פּה בארץ חמדת אבות", "חורשו אחים חורשו". Both songs were popular at the time, and their content is similar. “Hurry Brothers Hurry” encourages the immigration to Palestine (“Hurry brothers hurry to the land of our fathers”), and “There in the Land Our Fathers Loved” is about a life of freedom and hopes that will one day come true in the land of the fathers (the literal translation of the title would be “Here in the Land Our Fathers Loved,” as the song speaks of the reality of the pioneers in the land of the fathers).

purely aesthetic;<sup>209</sup> the opposition between the two, and the reason that the choir singing is “the real thing,” is also because the latter exists beyond the narrow socio-ideological sphere of the child. The piece of classical music represents the universal, the culture of the Western world, which is the realm of the artist who can see beyond his immediate surroundings.<sup>210</sup> The adult narrator notes that the child does not know the facts and details about the music and its source (“He does not know it is a youth choir . . . and that it is accompanied by a harmonium . . . and that it is Schubert”), but this is not what’s important. What is portrayed here as important is the intuition and the openness to the world and its stories. The adult narrator adds that “later perhaps memory will find words and he will know to tell it true,” yet at the time of narration, he chooses to give the primacy to the child’s experience; to the immediacy of his feelings at the narrated time. The authentic experience of the child narrator therefore appears as more “true” than a remote and correct description. All these experiences are milestones in the child’s gradual evolution toward becoming an artist.

In the last musical event that appears in the novel, when the child climbs a tree to listen to the piano playing of Michaela, a girl in his class whom he admires from afar (“Yes, it’s here, he exults . . . this is the sound of her piano and it’s her and it’s here” (243)), the music brings him to self-knowledge:

And you suddenly know how right, how accurate, and now when you are hanging here in the tree outside the window, but beyond everything that is here . . . you know clearly that I shall also, you’ll see that I shall also, I shall also do something great and beautiful like that . . . maybe not on the piano but saying it right just like the piano, something exactly as great as you feel it, and as true and fluid and singing.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> The musical piece is not religious, but rather Schubert’s melody composed in 1815 to Goethe’s poem written in 1771 (and published in 1799), as we learn from the end of the chapter: “Schubert? ‘Rose among the heather’? German folksongs? Chorals? In three voices, accompanied on the organ? Who knows. What difference does it make? Only that it should be full, that it should all flow . . . and suddenly there is a world” (195–96).

<sup>210</sup> To invoke Aristotle’s view of the poet (who embodies the artist in general) in *Poetics*: “It is evident . . . that it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen, what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity . . . poetry therefore is more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.” Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. S. H. Butcher (Edinburgh: R.R. Clark, 1907), accessed May 9, 2017, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.1.1.html>, Section 1, Part IX.

<sup>211</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 245–46.

What is translated as the second-person present tense (“And suddenly you know . . . now when you are hanging here . . . you know clearly”) appears in the Hebrew novel in the impersonal plural form ( "ופתאום יודעים עד כמה נכון... כעת כשתלויים פה על העץ... יודעים ) (ברור..."). The idiomatic impersonal form is crucial here because it accurately renders the moment of fusion between the two narrators. At this moment, when the child narrator recognizes his calling, both identities, that of the child narrator and the adult narrator, are melded into one. The impersonal form is appropriate also because of the authority it expresses: here, the authority is not that of an upward gaze upon the small child, or upon the land, but rather that of the two narrators, who use words, which are the musical notes of literature, to create the very story that we read. When the family is forced, out of financial hardship, to move to Rehovot, where the child finds himself lonely and utterly different from most of the kids in his new environment, one day he is invited to visit the library in the house of Mr. Miller (a resident of Rehovot and a friend of his father’s uncle, Uncle Moshe):

When suddenly, inside, it’s hard to say, because your breath suddenly stopped, because there, big and all round was the library with countless shelves. . . . O God, books up to the ceiling and books all round the walls, not in piles, not sloppily or casually . . . but warm books that were read by those who loved them . . . and suddenly in the wall there were also windows that faced west to judge by the sun and the tops of the palm trees. . . . Were the bookcases made of mahogany? He did not know what mahogany was . . . he was only a child in class 7 in the settlement school . . . but he knew that this was a separate kingdom from everything all around . . . made by Mr Miller the citrus grower because that was the way he wanted to live . . . and everyday despite all his work he sat in his rocking chair with books in his hands . . . reading for enjoyment here, leafing through another book for pleasure there, pulling down a third book for comparison over there . . . and it was so much precise and so necessary, and above all so beautiful, without the world having any need of the treasure he had laid up for himself . . . and which nonetheless made there to be in the world some sense that it actually was worthwhile, and even suddenly made there be a decision that books by him too would one day stand in this library, that he too would one day be among those admitted to these bookcases, and Mr Miller . . . would turn with his thin fingers the pages that he would bring into being, that

would be beautifully and necessarily written, no less beautifully and necessarily than all the other beautifully and necessarily books here.<sup>212</sup>

The visit to the library is first and foremost an aesthetic experience. The orderly books in their shelves, the windows through which palm trees and the sun are seen, and the image of Mr. Miller sitting on his rocking chair and reading his books—all these are part of the aesthetic and pleasurable experience that relates to books and reading. This is the connection between the visits to Mr. Miller's library<sup>213</sup> and the music and film experiences the child had in the past. All these experiences of art in its diverse forms open up the child's creative channels and allow him to realize his life ambition, and to state that ambition clearly, in language: "that books by him too would one day stand in this library." This realization brings the child narrator to another realization, that of what his father is unable to attain in his life:

And only when he went home somewhat shocked . . . realizing suddenly how unfair it was that Daddy . . . did not have such a library . . . after all Daddy had prepared himself . . . with hard work, with honest work . . . in fact he had spent his whole life preparing himself to get to Nahalal and he had never got there, he had only got to where all his life he had wanted not to get: to supervise workmen . . . and even without Nahalal he could surely have sat in this library, sat quietly and worked . . . and suddenly he could have returned to himself, and begun to flower again. . . . And now it was clear that Nahalal was not just an agricultural settlement, it was also a social order, that made a man feel confident that he would not be allowed to fall . . . and that things in the world only happened by chance, and that no will could force the world to behave like one expected, and that people only reached the place in the world that they reached, so that at best all they could do was to try to justify whatever they had produced . . . and suddenly it was hard to go on, better to stop and sit down.<sup>214</sup>

The child narrator's decision to become an author leads him to the thought about his father's unfulfilled life, thereby linking the act of writing with the ability to be sympathetic and presenting it as a fundamental trait in the art of narration. Similarly,

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<sup>212</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 277–80.

<sup>213</sup> There were more visits after the first one: "it was only after a while that they let him with a smile, and Mrs Miller was quiet and sweet . . . and even though he knew now what he was going to see when he opened that tall white door he entered on tiptoe and his heart was pounding again" (278).

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 280–81.

we also have the move from the thought about the father to contemplations about human beings in general, among whom Daddy is only one example among many of people who were unable to fulfill their life purpose—the ability to write beyond the immediate facts, about “what may happen,” is another essential characteristic of the writer.<sup>215</sup> Here again, though not expressed in the English translation, the impersonal form recurs (in the Hebrew novel: ויכעת גם מבינים... ועוד מבינים... ופתאום קשה ללכת "והלאה..."),<sup>216</sup> once more creating the impression that this form includes both the adult narrator and the child narrator, whose sympathy towards his father and his ability to generalize make him more mature and bridge the gap between him and the adult narrator. This might be the reason for the sudden need to sit down (“and suddenly it was hard to go on, better to stop and sit down”): the emotional burden that becomes too heavy to carry.

I wish to return now to the previous passage of the visit to Mr. Miller’s library. There is a recurring motif in the passage, namely, that of beauty and necessity. Although he is a busy citrus grower, Mr. Miller finds the time to read for enjoyment, “and it was so much precise and so necessary, and above all so beautiful.” The link between beauty and necessity recurs in the child narrator’s decision to write the books that will appear on Mr. Miller’s shelves: “Mr. Miller . . . would turn with his thin fingers the pages that he would bring into being, that would be beautifully and necessarily written, no less beautifully and necessarily than all the other beautifully and necessarily books here.” The narrator depicts necessity as an inseparable part of the aesthetic experience. But why does he link beauty with necessity, and why does he emphasize the connection between these two concepts?

When the child arrives in his new environment in Rehovot, we are told of the boys who are in his class:

most of whom are manly youths . . . and the three Binyamins are as strong as wrestlers that you see in the cinema . . . and they say that one of the Binyamins once grabbed a horse and lifted it up by its forelegs . . . and another of the Binyamins lifted the cart with his hands to take a wheel off to be repaired, and

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<sup>215</sup> As implied by Aristotle, whose *Poetics* I quoted above.

<sup>216</sup> The translation is misleading here, as the Hebrew words "ועוד מבינים" are translated as “that they understood.” Since this appears right after the description of Nahalal as a place where people support a man who is falling (“that people would support him in hard times”), it can be understood that the thought of the child “that things in the world only happened by chance” is of the people in Nahalal. Therefore, I simply omitted the English translation of these words from the quoted passage above.

one of the Binyamins, they say, demolished with one blow of his fist a thief who had broken into his father's vineyard . . . and they are bored most of the day and do not hide it, not only in class, except when playing football, or working in their fathers' orange groves . . . and an endless stream of stories follows them around . . . about each one of them and the daughters of the Arab guards in the citrus groves . . . or . . . how to secure cheaply with a little force forbidden but very attractive things . . . and for some reason they fall silent when he approaches . . . even though he is just a little worthless Dagon,<sup>217</sup> good for nothing except maybe to tell tales to some teacher . . . they care nothing about the *Carters' Jubilee*<sup>218</sup> that the teacher Bekhor Levi reads to them with excellent diction, or the tales of I.L. Peretz . . . and they find it hard to fill half a page when they are asked to write an essay . . . until the break comes and they can smoke cigarettes and talk freely . . . isolated words surrounded by impressive silences . . . so that to dismiss someone absolutely they will say contemptuously that he is 'absolutely useless, totally *binfa'esh*' which is the negative of the Arabic verb *nafa'a*, meaning to be useful, and the most dismissive expression imaginable, and this is the term they have decided to apply to that skinny runt Dagon, who is totally *binfa'esh*', were it not for his brother, the great football player . . . and on his account they lay off his useless younger brother, even

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<sup>217</sup> Dagon is the nickname the child narrator receives in the new place, Rehovot. It is one of several nicknames he receives from his environment (including from his family) in different stages throughout the novel. The way the child receives nicknames from others, which illustrates how his so-called agency is in fact constituted by others, along with the implications of these acts of naming, are fascinating topics which I cannot attend to here as they are beyond the scope of this chapter. Although Dagon was a Philistine god who is mentioned in the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel, the narrator emphasizes, through a sequence of negations, that the child's new nickname does not derive from any respectable source but rather the contrary: "So now he is called Dagon and that is what he is called at school, too, and not in honor of the Philistine who dwelt precisely here in olden times . . . to whom the Philistine burnt incense and before whom they danced and whirled with all their might . . . nor after the diminutive fish known as *dagon* . . . but once again because of a dog [his former nickname was Tsi, the name of a dog that belonged to one of the popular girls in his former neighborhood in Tel Aviv, H.S.] . . . another greyhound, belonging to a certain Tzila this time" (251–52).

<sup>218</sup> An idyll written by David Shimoni (Shimonovitz) (1886–1956), one of the first well-known writers in the *Yishuv*.

though the useful brother is in Mikve Yisrael<sup>219</sup> and only comes for the occasional weekend.<sup>220</sup>

In an ironic manner, the narrator describes the three Binyamins, who in their physical appearance and strength resemble the mythological giants who dwell in the land of Canaan and who are depicted as enormous in the eyes of the Israelite scouts in the Book of Numbers.<sup>221</sup> The three Binyamins mock any form of learning and reading, and their verbal expressive abilities are very limited to the degree that they need to borrow from other languages to express themselves. They call the child *binfa'esh*, “which is the negative of the Arabic verb *nafa'a*, meaning to be useful, and the most dismissive expression imaginable.” In contrast to the child narrator’s uselessness, his big brother is useful, both because of his athletic skills and because he is attending the agricultural school *Mikve Yisrael*. Although the narrator’s description of the three Binyamins is mockingly ironic, thereby presenting them almost as caricatures of themselves, the question of usefulness and productiveness is fundamental in the Zionist discourse. The aspiration and ability to engage in manual labor was pivotal in the ideological immigration to Palestine. The father in the novel is portrayed as a worker who did every kind of job that was useful to the workers’ economy. And physical labor also plays an important role in the biographies of key people in the *Yishuv*.<sup>222</sup> The challenge of

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<sup>219</sup> The first agricultural school built in Palestine. It was founded in 1870 to prepare the young generation for an agricultural life.

<sup>220</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 252–54.

<sup>221</sup> “But mighty is the people that dwells in the land” (Numbers 13:28). “And there did we see the Nephilim, sons of the giant from Nephilim, and we were in our eyes like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes” (Numbers 13:33). The allusion to the biblical text of Numbers expresses the narrator’s profound critique on the native generation growing up in the *Yishuv*; the extreme negation of the diasporic old Jew and of tradition (an integral part of which was learning and immersing oneself in religious texts) led to the rise of violent youths who despised any intellectual effort and only respected physical force. In their form and behavior, they resembled the image of the ignorant anti-Semite non-Jews who persecuted the Jews in the diaspora, as is depicted in the stories of many writers, such as S. Y. Abramovitz and Shalom Aleichem. Through the image of the scouts in Numbers, it can be said that Dagon is a grasshopper in their eyes.

<sup>222</sup> To name only two prominent individuals: A.D. Gordon, who saw a redeeming force in manual labor: “the big and fruitful work gives birth to big powers . . . we have sinned against our land and we should redeem ourselves in self-work, if we want to live a national life,” in Bartal, Tzachor, and Kni’el, *Ha-alayah Ha-shniya*, vol. 3, 124; and Berl Katznelson, who was one of the main leaders of the Labor movement and who was deeply frustrated by his lack of success as a worker: for years he was involved in various forms of physical labor, working as a farmer and as a woodchopper, for example, but the other workers

manual labor received literary expression in many stories, perhaps the most famous among them is that of Yoseph Chaim Brenner, who failed at physical labor and described his frustration in his novels, as well as the contempt and disbelief of his surroundings towards him because of that failure.<sup>223</sup> It is not hard to see the link between the conception of productiveness as a leading life principle according to which everything is measured and the lack of appreciation for aesthetic values. Since the practical value of an aesthetic experience is not as direct as that of physical labor, aesthetic experiences are virtually absent from the world of the child narrator. But these experiences are exactly the events that open the creative channels in his soul and transform him into the adult narrator, the creator of the novel.

The narrator's insistence on the connection between beauty and necessity is his critique of and response to the narrow view behind the conception of productivity as a measuring stick for everything that characterizes his social environment.<sup>224</sup> Mr. Miller finds the time to read books in his library because he appreciates their value, because he views reading as a necessary part of his daily routine.<sup>225</sup> And for the child narrator, the act of reading saves him from his loneliness and shapes in him the future writer he will be. Therefore, the aesthetic is no less necessary than the practical. But perhaps the best proof for the necessity of books and of reading is this novel itself: The narrator, who as a child is defined by his classmates as utterly useless, has produced the masterpiece that we read. His difference and his sensitivity, for which he is looked down on, are precisely the characteristics that made this novel possible. Indeed, as the reader knows, this child goes on to become one of the most prominent artist-writers in Hebrew literature, bringing his childhood world and the characters in it to life, seventy years later, and granting them a certain immortality.

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mocked and humiliated him, and he also suffered from despair and illness due to his inability to adjust himself to manual labor (ibid., vol. 3, 222–34).

<sup>223</sup> See his works (in Hebrew) “*Sh’chol Ve-kishalon*” and “*Atzabim*” in Y. C. Brenner, *Kol Kitvey*, vol. 1, 375–54 and 283–92, respectively.

<sup>224</sup> Throughout her biography of Yizhar, Nitsa Ben-Ari points out Yizhar's parents' critical view of his lack of focus in his studies, for they hope he will become a teacher. She quotes their letters, where they constantly, though subtly, compare the useless Yizhar with his productive older brother. Ben-Ari, *Sipur Chayim*, 190, 191, 277, 290, and more.

<sup>225</sup> Though one should not ignore the connection between leisure time, which allows for aesthetic experiences, and socio-economic means. Mr. Miller is depicted as an affluent man who has the means to build a beautiful library, and who can sit in it whenever he desires to do so. The father, in comparison, struggles to provide for his family, and although he would enjoy reading, as the child remarks, he cannot afford the time for it.

## Part II

### Training Base Four as Purgatory and Narration as Means of Resistance in Kenaz's *Infiltration*

Published in 1986, the novel *Infiltration* takes place in 1955 and tells the story of an IDF platoon whose soldiers have minor disabilities and are deemed unfit for combat.<sup>226</sup> The new recruits are designated *kaf-lamedim*, an acronym in Israeli military slang for *Kosher Lakuy*, “Defective Fitness,” a designation that is considered a social blemish.<sup>227</sup> The diverse group of soldiers representing the many sectors and facets of Israeli society spend several months together in basic training. To be unable to fight in war at that time was considered a disgrace in young Israeli society, and indeed the commanders in the novel treat their soldiers with deep contempt. The soldiers internalize the disdain and hatred they encounter and perceive themselves and their platoon-mates as defective and unworthy. Like Yizhar's *Preliminaries*, *Infiltration* is an autobiographical novel in which the author revisits past experiences from a time distance and creates a double perspective: that of the soldier narrator *Melabes*, who tells of the events at the time they were happening, in the narrated time; and that of the adult narrator, who returns to those same events 30 years later, in the time of narration.

Yehoshua Kenaz was born as Yehoshua Glass in the *Petach Tikva* colony in Mandatory Palestine in 1937. He enlisted in the IDF in August 1995 and was classified as a *kaf-lamed*, an experience which inspired him to write the novel *Infiltration*. Upon his recruitment,

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<sup>226</sup> The Israel Defense Forces (its acronym in Hebrew is *Tzahal*: *Tzva Ha-hagana Le-yisra'el*) is the military forces of the State of Israel. It was founded officially by prime minister David Ben Gurion in May 1948, a short time after the Israeli state was established. It was set up as a conscript army and therefore has been from its inception a compulsory national service for every boy and girl in Israel when they reach the age of 18. The novel *Hitganvut Yechidim* was translated into English by Dalya Bilu, first under the title *Heart Murmur* and in the next editions as *Infiltration* (which is not the direct translation of the Hebrew title; a more exact translation would be Individual Infiltration, or Man-by-Man Infiltration).

<sup>227</sup> Shortly before they are enlisted in military service, Israeli teenagers undergo a series of tests and interviews, the results of which determine their military profile (in Hebrew: *profil*, פרופיל). The military profile is a number they receive (21 to 97) based on their physical and emotional endurance. Those diagnosed with a low profile, Defective Fitness, are limited to low-prestige service jobs in the army.

Kenaz changed his family name from Glass to Kenaz.<sup>228</sup> After his military service, Kenaz traveled to Paris to study French Language and Culture at the Sorbonne. From there he sent his first story, “Yad Anoga” (Delicate hand), to Aharon Amir, a Canaanite-affiliated writer and editor of the literary journal *Keshet*, under the pen name Avi Othniel (“Othniel’s Father”).<sup>229</sup> Two years later Kenaz returned to Israel and studied philosophy and Romance languages at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He continued to publish in *Keshet*. Kenaz’s first novel, *Acharei Ha-chagim (After the Holidays)*,<sup>230</sup> published in 1964, was based on these short stories. His second novel, *Ha-isha Ha-gdola Min Ha-chalomot* (The great woman of The dreams) was published in 1973,<sup>231</sup> and his next book, published in 1980, was *Moment Musikali (Musical Moment and Other Stories)*,<sup>232</sup> a collection of novellas and short stories that follows, through various facets and story lines, the maturation of a child until he reaches his adolescent years. The last novella in the collection, “Beyn Layla U-veyn Shachar” (“Between Night and Dawn”), is about a group of teenagers in a paramilitary camp. Several literary scholars view the collection *Moment Musikali*, and in particular the novella “Beyn Layla U-veyn Shachar,” as a prelude to the novel *Infiltration*,<sup>233</sup> which indeed was the next book Kenaz published, in 1986. *Infiltration*

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<sup>228</sup> According to the Hebrew Bible, Kenaz was the father of Othniel, the first judge who led the Israelites after Joshua’s death (Book of Judges, 3:1–11). Many literary critics tend to believe that Kenaz’s motivation to change his name was inspired by the Canaanism, an ideological movement popular in the 1940s and 1950s which sought to draw a direct line between the ancient Israelites who lived in Canaan in the second millennium BCE and the New Jewish Settlement in Palestine. The Canaanites aimed to create a new Hebrew culture in Palestine and to detach it from the Jewish diasporic past, which they saw as degenerate and redundant. For more on the Canaanites see: David Ohana, *Lo Kena’anim, Lo Tzalbanim [Neither Canaanites, nor Crusaders]* (Jerusalem: The Shalom Hartman Institute, the Faculty of Law Bar-Ilan University, Keter Publishing House, 2008), chap. 5, and especially 244–51.

<sup>229</sup> As I noted, Kenaz was the father of Othniel, therefore Avi Othniel, which is literally “Father of Othniel,” means Kenaz.

<sup>230</sup> Yehoshua Kenaz, *Acharei Ha-chagim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1964). Yehoshua Kenaz, *After the Holidays*, trans. Dalya Bilu (San Diego: Harcourt, 1987).

<sup>231</sup> Yehoshua Kenaz, *Ha-isha Ha-gdola Min Ha-chalomot* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1973).

<sup>232</sup> Yehoshua Kenaz, *Moment Musikali* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1980). Yehoshua Kenaz, *Musical Moments and Other Stories*, trans. the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature (Hanover: Steerforth, 1995). Yehoshua Kenaz, *Musical Moments and Other Stories*, 2nd ed., trans. the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature (New Hampshire: Zoland Books, 1998).

<sup>233</sup> Noa Amit’s “*Le-hitbager Ze Li-vgod Ba-chalom*” (To mature is to betray the dream) deals with the connection between the novella *Beyn Layla U-veyn Shachar* and the novel *Infiltration*: Noa Amit, “*Le-hitbager Ze Li-vgod Ba-chalom*,” *Mi-bifnim* 49 (Summer 1987): 146–55. Hilo Glazer writes that Kenaz intended *Infiltration* as a short story to appear in the next edition of the collection *Moment Musikali*: Hilo Glazer, “*Ha-mtza’at Ha-bdidut: Masa Be-ikvot Yehoshua Kenaz*” [The invention of solitude: A journey in the footsteps

received much interest in the literary sphere, despite (or perhaps because of) its harsh critique of the IDF.<sup>234</sup> This novel helped establish Kenaz as one of the central novelists in contemporary Israel.

Although Kenaz embarked on his literary path in the 1960s, he gained recognition only in the 1980s. Nili Levi, seeking out reasons for Kenaz's unsuccessful beginnings, offers a few conjectures.<sup>235</sup> She points out that unlike Amos Oz and David Grossman, Kenaz avoids public appearances and does not publish opinion pieces in the press, and is thus not perceived as a public intellectual. Another possibility that Levi raises, which I find more fundamental, has to do with Kenaz's poetics. In her analysis of Kenaz's first three novels, Levi notes that they are all written in what she describes as a "poetics of dispersing the center" (*pizur ha'merkaz*).<sup>236</sup> In this kind of poetics there is no "center of consciousness"; rather, events are delivered through several different focalizers and concurrent plots.<sup>237</sup> Levi observes that the lack of hierarchy between primary and secondary protagonists in Kenaz's first novels, as well as the lack of a main plot, were unprecedented—a unique phenomenon in the landscape of Hebrew novels written at the time.<sup>238</sup> The analogies between the different sub-plots in Kenaz's texts are essential, and their accumulation intensifies each novel's meaning. Levi's attempts to explain Kenaz's late canonization on poetic grounds are important, but there are also extra-literary factors that concern social and political changes in Israeli society which have affected the reception of Kenaz's writing.

In her book about the changes in Hebrew literature's poetics during the 1980s, Hanna Herzig describes the move from a writing committed to Zionist ideology and its central

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of Yehoshua Kenaz], *Ma'ariv nrg*, March 2, 2012, accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/47/ART2/341/927.html>. See also Nili Levi's interview with Kenaz, where he corroborates this account: "*Infiltration* therefore was supposed to be a story describing coming of age in a later stage than the stages described in the four stories of *Moment Musikali*." Nili Levi, *Mi-rechov Ha-even El Ha-chatulim* [From the stone street to the cats], (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1997), 156.

<sup>234</sup> Nili Levi quotes from the many reviews written about *Infiltration* following its publication. Levi, *Mi-rechov Ha-even*, 210–12.

<sup>235</sup> Levi, *Mi-rechov Ha-even*, 201–09.

<sup>236</sup> Levi borrows the term from Meir Sternberg, who argues that the modern novel rebels against causative concatenation and linear patterns and instead creates simultaneous-spatial patterns which allow for parallel story lines. Levi, *Mi-rechov Ha-even*, 86–87.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> The lack of hierarchy in Kenaz's writing is inherent to his ethics and is part of his textual message, as I will show in this chapter.

problems in the 1960s to a writing that focuses on the private self.<sup>239</sup> In the 1960s the literary texts “attest to the still ongoing connection and commitment of the writers towards (Israeli) society and its ideological notions.”<sup>240</sup> The writers’ critique of these notions is from a standpoint of “belief in the possibility to recover the collapsing values.”<sup>241</sup> But in the 1970s crucial events took place in Israel, and their consequences brought far-reaching changes and the collapse of consensus in Israeli society. The 1973 War, which began with a surprise attack being launched on Israel by its neighboring countries on the Yom Kippur holiday, and in which there were many casualties, cracked Israeli society’s self-image of invincibility, an image that was created following Israel’s rapid victory in the Six-Day War in 1967.<sup>242</sup> The 1970s were also marked by increasing protests by the Mizrachim against the dominant Ashkenazi establishment associated with the Labor party.<sup>243</sup> The Mizrachi activists protested against the degrading treatment they had received from state institutions since their arrival in Israel, and discrimination against them in various aspects of Israeli life.<sup>244</sup> These events led to political upheaval, and in 1977 the Likud, the largest right-wing party, was elected to the government for the first time in the history of Israel. Several years later, during the First Lebanon War (1982), large demonstrations erupted in the wake of the Sabra and Shatila massacres.<sup>245</sup> All these events created a different atmosphere in Israel, which found expression in the literature of the time:

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<sup>239</sup> Hanna Herzig, *Ha-kol Ha-omer Ani: Megamot Ba-siporet Ha-yisra’elit Shel Shnot Ha-shmonim* [The voice saying I: Trends in Israeli prose fiction of the 1980’s] (Tel Aviv: Ha-universita Ha-petucha, 1998).

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> See Tom Segev, *Ha-milyon Ha-shvi’i: Ha-yisra’elim Ve-ha-sho’a* [The seventh million: The Israelis and the Holocaust] (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House and Domino Press, 1991), 368–69.

<sup>243</sup> The Mizrachim (plural form of Mizrachi) are Jews from Arab countries who immigrated to Israel following Israel’s establishment in 1948.

<sup>244</sup> See Moshe Lissak, *Ha-aliya Ha-gdola Bi-shnot Ha-chamishim: Kishlono shel Kur Ha-hitukh* [The mass immigration in the fifties: The failure of the melting pot policy] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1999); Danny Gutwain, “*Shlilat Ha-gola, Kur Hitukh Ve-rav-Tarbutiyut*” [Negation of the diaspora, the melting pot, and multi-culturalism], in *Ken Be-veyt Sifrenu: Kovetz Ma’amarim Al Chinukh Politi* [Yes in our school: A collection of articles about political education], ed. Nir Micha’eli (Israel: Hakibbutz Hame’uchad, 2014), 210–33 (and especially 221–22); Me’ir Buzaglo, “*Mizrachiyut, masoret, Kur Hitukh: Iyun Philosophi-Politi*” [Mizrachi identity, tradition, melting pot: A philosophic-political scrutiny], in *I-Shivyon Bachinukh* [Inequity in education], ed. Daphna Golan-Agnon (Tel Aviv: Babel, 2004), 209–35 (and especially 222–33); and many more.

<sup>245</sup> During 16–18 September, 1982, the Christian militia forces in Southern Lebanon massacred hundreds of residents of the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, while the IDF, which was laying siege during the

The move to writing about the private self (*ha-ani ha-prati*) reflects the changes in Israeli society . . . : the drastic change in the status of the national consensus that began after the Yom Kippur War and escalated in the First Lebanon War; the change in the status of the Mizrachim in Israeli culture and society; the absence of a center and of a consensual system of norms and values contributed to a move towards the margins of the private self, which are – in many cases – the margins of the ethnic self, or the social other.”<sup>246</sup>

*Infiltration*, written several years after these changes took place, echoes the fissures that became exposed in the 1980s. As Dror Mishani puts it:

This fissure is revealed in the novel through the “historical” tensions of the fifties, and also echoes the memories from the years in which the novel was written and published, the years in which the ethnic strife (*ha-metach ha-adati*) blew up the political-traditional structure of Israeli society.<sup>247</sup>

But despite the changes in Israeli society and their reflection in the literature of that time, in the mid-eighties the critics were still holding on to the reading mechanism of Hebrew literature that was dominant in previous years: “the reading mechanism of the national allegory.”<sup>248</sup> This mechanism’s function, as Hannan Hever notes, is “to suppress the conflict of the collective story of identity . . . and to blur, justify and even erase the traces of the violence derived from the constitution of national identity.”<sup>249</sup> Therefore, despite the concrete characters inhabiting the novel from across the social gamut of Israeli society—Holocaust survivors, new Mizrahi immigrants, a Haredi soldier, a kibbutz member—when *Infiltration* was published it was read as a universal novel, an existential story that deals with the relationship between the individual and the group beyond a specific historical and cultural context. An example for such general reading can be found in Gershon Shaked’s review of *Infiltration*: “The novel presents the question of how the individuals will infiltrate [*keytzad yit’ganvu ha-yechidim*] and maintain their uniqueness in a society that, because of its uniform

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Lebanon War, aided the Christian forces by encircling and illuminating the camps. See Rubik Rosenthal, *Levanon: Ha-milchama Ha-acheret* [Lebanon: The other war], (Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim Press, 1983).

<sup>246</sup> Herzig, *Ha-kol Ha-omer Ani*, 26.

<sup>247</sup> Dror Mishani, *Be-khol Ha-inyan Ha-mizrachi Yesh Eyze Absurd* [The ethnic unconscious: The emergence of ‘Mizrachiyut’ in the Hebrew literature of the eighties] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006), 42.

<sup>248</sup> As Mishani defines this mechanism. *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>249</sup> Hannan Hever, “Mapa Shel Chol: Mi-sifrut Ivrit Le-sifrut Yisra’elit” [A map of sand: From Hebrew literature to Israeli literature], *Te’orya U-bikoret* 20 (Spring 2002): 172.

character, prefers the group.”<sup>250</sup> Although Shaked does mention that the novel’s title is taken from a military drill in the IDF called *Hitganvut Yechidim* (which is man-by-man infiltration into a target to be conquered), he speaks of *Infiltration* in broad and universal terms. Accordingly, many critics did not appreciate the changes of focalization that take place in the novel from its second chapter onward. They interpreted these narratological changes as the narrator’s “lack of control” or “unreliability.”<sup>251</sup> Four years after the novel’s publication, Ariel Hirschfeld’s direct analysis of *Infiltration* marked a shift in the critical approaches to the work and its context.<sup>252</sup> Hirschfeld observes a dramatic change in Hebrew literature over the past decade: “Something is happening in this literature, something that brings to mind the possibility that, under the political chaos which has governed the country since 1977, a cultural renaissance is taking place.”<sup>253</sup> Hirschfeld refers directly to the fact that *Infiltration* is set in “the very heart of the Israeli military” and to the novel’s harsh and direct critique of the social disparity between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi soldiers, Sabras and new immigrants, as well as its critique of the military abuses of power: “The novel exposes the other side of Israeli state. Not only its reflection, its conflicts, its flaws and its ethnic and social injustices, but also its dark side; the pure power and evil.”<sup>254</sup> Examining Hirschfeld’s article, Mishani aptly defines it not only as the moment in which Hebrew literature allowed for other voices within it to be heard, but also as the moment when currents in Hebrew literary criticism began to look for other stories within the homogeneous national narrative and to explore its cracks and fissures, as well as its symbolic violence.<sup>255</sup>

Hirschfeld’s article was indeed groundbreaking in establishing *Infiltration* as a milestone in the history of modern Hebrew literature. Other reviews and articles followed suit, relating to the novel’s representation of the deep social and ethnic crises in Israeli society.<sup>256</sup> Even today, 27 years after their publication, Hirschfeld’s insights can serve as

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<sup>250</sup> Gershon Shaked, *Sifrut Az, Kan Ve-akhshav* [Literature then, here, and now] (Tel Aviv: Zemora Bitan, 1993), 169.

<sup>251</sup> Mishani, *Be-khol Ha-inyan*, 45. I will discuss the narratological changes in the novel and their essential meaning later in this chapter.

<sup>252</sup> Ariel Hirschfeld, “*Nigmeret Zehut Achat U-matchila Acheret*” [One identity ends and a new one begins], *Politika* 33 (1990): 48–54.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>255</sup> Mishani, *Be-khol Ha-inyan*, 49.

<sup>256</sup> Gershon Shaked, who initially viewed *Infiltration* as a universal novel, reread it in 1998 as a novel that deals with “the social tensions and dynamics in the micro-cosmos of Israeli society between rich

a legend for reading the social map of Israel as it is reflected in the novel *Infiltration*. I will return to his discussion throughout this chapter.

In her chapter about Kenaz's *Infiltration*, Herzig etches a broad and accurate picture of the novel's themes and structure.<sup>257</sup> Despite her comprehensive account of the novel, Herzig, like others, does not offer a close reading of the text itself, and her conclusions remain general and somewhat technical. Indeed, although many scholars have written about *Infiltration*, very few of them have provided a close and attentive reading of the text.<sup>258</sup> Such a reading is crucial, I argue, for a more nuanced understanding of this complex novel. My analysis will address the narratological changes in the novel, intertextuality and intra-textuality in their various forms, the thematics of the individual versus the collective, and ways that the genre of the *Künstlerroman* presents the image of the artist. Through these perspectives, I aim to lay bare Kenaz's critique of Israeli society, and in particular of the Israeli military system. The ideals of the New Jew and the negation of the diaspora, ideals which guided the father in *Preliminaries* and which created his child's negative image among his classmates, develop in Kenaz's work into the extremely hostile and violent attitude toward the noncombat soldiers, an attitude which the soldiers internalize and which is expressed in the way they treat one another. Through attentive construction of the scenes and protagonists, as well as of intertexts and narratological moves, Kenaz expresses his views concerning the destructive implications of Israeli society's adoption of these norms.

### **The Function of Art in *Infiltration***

If in *Preliminaries* the child-narrator is portrayed as a budding artist, here, in *Infiltration*, the narrator is a young artist who is enlisted in the Israeli army. The child has become a soldier whose artistry, the narration of the story, serves first and foremost as a tool to survive the harsh and violent reality surrounding him. When the child in *Preliminaries*

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Ashkenazis . . . and poor Mizrachim." Gershon Shaked, *Ha-siporet Ha-ivrit 1880-1980*, vol. 5 (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Keter, 1998), 292.

<sup>257</sup> Herzig, *Ha-kol Ha-omer Ani*, 177-216.

<sup>258</sup> For a recent study of the novel, which, however, doesn't get some of the plot's details right, see Rachel S. Harris, *An Ideological Death: Suicide in Israeli Literature* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014). See also Na'ama Tzal's study of Kenaz's poetics: Na'ama Tzal, *Hem Dibru Bi-lshonam: Ha-po'etica Shel Yehoshu'a Kenaz* [They spoke in their own language: The poetics of Yehoshua Kenaz] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2016).

encounters, toward the end of the novel, the grand and impressive library of Mr. Miller, this encounter brings him to the self-revelation of his calling as a future writer:

and even suddenly made there be a decision that books by him too would one day stand in this library . . . that would be beautifully and necessarily written, no less beautifully and necessarily than all the other beautifully and necessarily books here.<sup>259</sup>

For the child in *Preliminaries* aesthetics, represented by books and the art of writing, is a necessity, and the fact that Mr. Miller, the successful orange grower, nurtures such a library is nothing short of revolutionary for the child, as it affirms the necessity of aesthetics and the importance of art in a world of labor and productiveness. But for Melabes, the narrator in *Infiltration*, the art of writing is much more than an acknowledgement of the significance of aesthetics. For him, writing is an existential need, both functional and practical. Arik, an old high school friend who is also a *kaf-lamed* in a neighboring platoon, tells Melabes that in a few years he won't be able to remember "the ridiculous character(s)" and experiences that surround him in the army. Melabes replies: "Then I'll have to invent them, make up new memories from my imagination, instead of the ones that have disappeared, create a new past for myself" (*Infiltration*, 377). In Arik's view, the ability to forget this living hell of military existence is a blessing; their psyche will choose to wipe this traumatic experience from their memory. But Melabes insists on the link between trauma and the reinvention of experience through writing. For Melabes the narrator, the only way to resist the nightmarish reality surrounding him and not let it take over his soul is through an insistence on remembering. In the narrated time, Melabes hangs onto the strong feeling (that becomes knowledge at the time of narration) that he will revive the memories from this period, and this feeling enables him to survive the emotional ordeal of basic training. Melabes's need to narrate the events and describe the characters in his military base is likened throughout to that of a survivor who insists on returning from hell to tell about it.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Yizhar, *Preliminaries*, 280.

<sup>260</sup> Below I address the image of the Inferno in the novel, which comes up also in Arik and Melabes's conversation.

This urgent need for narration appears at the very beginning of the novel. In the opening scene, the soldiers are practicing a half-nelson drill in pairs.<sup>261</sup> The loss of consciousness that happens as a result of the drill allows the narrator a few unique moments of self-reflection:

In the last minute my life unfolded in front of my eyes. Like a movie or a bunch of slides flicking past with quick, jerky rhythm. Images in black and white, the quality rather poor, as if they had been slightly eroded by the passage of time. Or like a dream, only without the literary, sometimes baroque, ambience that accompanies dream images . . . it had a kind of dry, laconic, businesslike severity, like the burst of shots after a summary court-martial. And there was a strong sense of urgency in the speed with which they changed places, something nervous and hurried, almost frantic, something final, decisive, never to be repeated, as if the stripe of film in question would be automatically destroyed with this, its first and last use, by the very fact of its exposure. There was no sense of danger or longing, no fear, solemnity, pain, or surprise. Because everything had already happened before, somewhere on the frontiers of time.<sup>262</sup>

These moments of diving into the unconscious serve a dual function: the opening allows the adult narrator to reflect on the very act of writing, salvaging the memories and creating a narrative from them. But this description—as we later learn—is also connected to a concrete experience, the half-nelson drill that the soldier-narrator’s platoon is practicing. Later on, we understand the circumstances that accompany this passage, but since it appears at the opening of the book, it lacks any context and therefore enables the narrator to make a meta-narrative statement about the fragility of the attempt to hold onto the escaping memories, likened here to an old celluloid film, eroded by age. The narrator’s self-reflection about his dreams enhances the sense that it is the adult narrator who is speaking here; now, at the time of narration, he wishes to return to the past that this film represents. The last sentence in the passage affirms the meta-narrative meaning and the return from the time of narration to the narrated time: “Because everything had already happened before, somewhere on the frontiers of time.”

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<sup>261</sup> A half-nelson is a wrestling hold in which one arm is thrust under the corresponding arm of an opponent and the hand placed on the back of the opponent’s neck; the result is that the opponent faints. The Hebrew name for the drill is *horadat zakif*—literally, “taking down a sentry”—and it is part of the Israeli basic training.

<sup>262</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 3.

The strong sense of materiality in the description of the film (we can almost hear the sounds of the scratched-up celluloid in the screening machine) and the singularity of this event (“its first and last use”) recall Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”<sup>263</sup> Benjamin discusses the question of the value of art in a modern world in which almost every work can be reproduced. He resists the notion of a reproduction as a replacement of the original piece, arguing that every work of art is singular in its authenticity and has specific and unique circumstances in which it came to be, an essential characteristic that any reproduction will forever lack.<sup>264</sup> The sense of rarity and authenticity that Benjamin emphasizes is felt strongly in the depiction of the film strip described above, which is almost impossible to watch because of its fragile state, an object consumed by its very exposure to light. Kenaz’s use of this image in the opening of his work stands as a statement against the military mission to erase the individuality of its subjects, the soldiers, in order to break their resistance and construct a unified national populace. Reviving the clichéd metaphor that when one loses consciousness, life passes before one’s eyes “like a movie,” Kenaz stresses precisely the unique and “never to be repeated” aspects of the artist’s memories. By likening the view of art as commodity to the view of soldiers as human material that can be molded and used according to the system’s needs, Kenaz situates the novel as an account of resistance to the military-national project.

The soundtrack that accompanies the old film is “like the burst of shots after a summary court-martial,” adding a sonic dimension to the image of the old film. But the simile of shots of an execution following a court-martial also foreshadows the harsh and wrong judgment of the soldiers by their commanders, a behavior the recruits internalize and mimic, conducting and executing court-martials and cruel verdicts toward the most rejected soldiers in the platoon.

The pictures suddenly stopped and a white light came down like a curtain on my closed eyes . . . but until I opened my eyes my sense of time did not return in full and I wasn’t sure exactly who I was. The question suddenly became critical. I tried to clarify it with my eyes closed, without moving, for fear that if I change my position . . . something vital to my understanding would irretrievably be lost and I would never know the answer . . . some deprived, forgotten, nameless

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<sup>263</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 19–55.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

instinct urged me not to let myself be carried away on the returning stream of consciousness but to cling tenaciously to those images.<sup>265</sup>

The question of identity in this passage is tied to the pictures that the narrator views in his mind. The narration—the pictures that are the recollections from which the story is constructed—is crucial to the narrator’s definition of himself. In an environment that threatens to erase his individual traits, the soldier narrator’s clinging to the narration, wherein he observes his platoon-mates and surroundings and reflects on them, is his way to endure this difficult period of his life.

Later on, when Melabes is reminded of the first day in basic training, he describes the soldiers first getting to know one another:

The conversation took off, voices rose, but I didn’t want to talk to any of them . . . an inner voice told me that in rough times ahead I’d have to preserve all my strength . . . all my loyalty . . . I’d have to limit my contact with the outside world . . . live on the borderline.<sup>266</sup>

The loyalty to himself as a condition for his ability to survive the months of basic training depends on adopting the standpoint of an observer of the events who narrates them with no involvement, attempting to be as emotionally detached as possible from his surroundings.

In *Preliminaries*, the artistry of narration is enabled through the reconstruction of as many details as possible from the most distant past. Indeed, as we saw, the first scene in the novel is the child narrator’s earliest memory of being held by his mother in an orange tent. In *Infiltration*, by contrast, the artistry of narration is enabled through the narrator’s reflection on the meaning of remembrance itself. And indeed, Kenaz’s rhetorical strategy, and the accompanying philosophical and meta-narrative contemplation, is inherent to the protection narration provides for the soldier narrator. Reflective narration enables him to look at the events and characters without taking full part in them and without choosing sides.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 3.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>267</sup> The standpoint of not taking a standpoint has an essential ethical implication, as I will discuss later in this part.

## *Infiltration* as Bildungsroman

Melabes's need to remember the events in the narrative present so that he can narrate them in the future shapes the writer he grows up to be. Therefore, *Infiltration* can be seen as a *Künstlerroman*, a sub-genre of the novel of formation, the bildungsroman. In her book about Kenaz's poetics, Nili Levi discusses two of Kenaz's works, *Musical Moment* and *Infiltration*, in terms of the scholarship on the genre of the bildungsroman by Marianne Hirsch, Susan Wells, and David Miles.<sup>268</sup> Hirsch describes the bildungsroman's protagonist as hemmed in by an antagonistic environment: "The spirit and values of the social order emerge through the fate of one representative individual. Consequently, the novel of formation does not represent a panorama of society."<sup>269</sup> Susan Wells argues that the bildungsroman's protagonist is necessarily reflective, shaping himself both as an object and subject through an examination of his relationship with his surroundings. The subject-object relationships that are part of the protagonist's self-formation pertain to the place of memory in this kind of novel.<sup>270</sup> David Miles, who goes back to as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century, defining St. Augustine's *Confessions* as the "prime example of an early, psychological Bildungsroman," views memory as a central trait of this genre. Memory shapes the self, claims Miles, and rewrites Descartes's cogito as: "I recollect, therefore I am."<sup>271</sup>

These claims, accurate as they may be in relation to classical novels in the bildungsroman genre,<sup>272</sup> are only partially true with respect to *Infiltration*. Indeed, the soldier narrator's surroundings are antagonistic. But Hirsch's views of the values and social order as emerging through the fate of a representative individual do not accord with *Infiltration*, and neither does the lack of a panorama of society in the bildungsroman. There is no one representative individual in this novel, but rather a spectrum of different and unique characters through whom we learn of the values and social order of that time. Furthermore, *Infiltration* depicts a panorama of society, and this trait is essential to the novel's message. Susan Wells's claim about reflectiveness

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<sup>268</sup> Levi, *Mi-rechov Ha-even*, 130–34.

<sup>269</sup> Marianne Hirsch, "The Novel of Formation as Genre: Between Great Expectations and Lost Illusions," *Genre* 12 (Fall 1979): 297.

<sup>270</sup> Susan Wells, *The Dialectics of Representation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), chap. 4 ("The Hermeneutics of the Bildungsroman: The Interpretation of Typicality and Indeterminacy"), 133–64.

<sup>271</sup> David H. Miles, "The Picaro's Journey to the Confessional: The Changing Image of the Hero in the German Bildungsroman," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Association of America* 89 (October 1974): 980–92.

<sup>272</sup> Wells analyzes Dickens' *David Copperfield* and Miles examines Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.

holds true with regard to *Infiltration*, but the reflectiveness in this novel does not derive from the protagonist's experience of his relationships with his surroundings (subject-object relationships). First, because there is no one individual protagonist but many protagonists (the very use of the word "individual" is charged in the context of this novel, as I explain below), and because the possibility of a subject-object relationship is limited in the environment in which the story takes place. Perhaps the most applicable comment on *Infiltration* is Miles's observation regarding the importance of memory in the novel. In contrast, Levi, in her attempts to fit *Infiltration* into the bildungsroman genre, is caught up in minutia, such as when she examines Sandra Frieden's article about the female bildungsroman and notes that unlike in Frieden's argument, in which the protagonist in this genre finds his (or her) place in society when choosing a partner and a profession, the young men in *Infiltration* have to postpone their decisions about their future professions because of the uniqueness of Israeli adolescence, which includes military service. What Levi leaves out is a discussion of the military sphere presented in the novel as an arena for adolescent development and the transition into adulthood. She does not question the impact that the harsh and violent atmosphere—together with the degrading treatment the soldiers receive—has on the soldiers' psychological development and the construction of their masculinity. Can this environment foster a linear progress of maturation, or must it rather hurt, deform, and even create a regressive trajectory for the developing self? Because of the enclosed environment and the almost non-existent autonomy of the *kaf-lamedim*, basic training is more of a struggle for survival (in which some succeed and some do not) than a coming of age.

### **The Artist in *Infiltration***

In his article "The Portrait of the Artist as an Army Recruit," Yosef Oren classifies *Infiltration* as a *Künstlerroman*: "The novel is focused in a specific aspect of the formation—the formation of a young artist under the influence of the military service's special conditions" (*Hitchankhuto shel oman tza'ir be-hashpa'at ha-tna'im ha-meyuchadim shel ha-sherut ba-tzava*).<sup>273</sup> Oren argues that the reception of this book as a social novel that deals with the mosaic of the social contrasts in Israeli society goes to show that the writer succeeded in deceiving his readers. A careful reading, says Oren, will prove that

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<sup>273</sup> Yosef Oren, "Dyokano Shel Ha-oman Ke-tiron Ba-tzava" [The portrait of the artist as an army recruit] *Moznayim* 60 (January 1987): 76–78.

the real story here is of the artist's fight for his soul in the harsh conditions of the military reality.<sup>274</sup> Oren discusses the notions of beauty and ugliness, which are, in his view, key terms in the novel: "The artist, whose entire life is dedicated . . . to separating beauty from ugliness, has to be deeply involved in the reality in which there is much ugliness, so he can extract the rare and small beauty from it."<sup>275</sup> This is Melabes's quest, Oren claims, and therefore the basic training period is a metaphor for his apprenticeship as an artist. To exemplify his view, Oren chooses two instances of artistic expression in the novel. The first is the beauty embodied in Yossi Ressler's guitar playing, which Melabes describes to Avner during their shared guard duty:

When I stayed behind with Ressler tonight, he played a piece by Handel on his guitar . . . I felt that something wonderful was happening at those moments . . . beauty was born, a beauty so great it made you want to cry. I admired Ressler and I envied him terribly. I thought: maybe that's the true strength. It was like a declaration of war against the whole world.<sup>276</sup>

The second example, according to Oren, is of ugliness as it is expressed in the dancing of Rahamim Ben-Hamo, one of the Mizrachi soldiers:

And Rahamim glided toward them, stamping his feet and wagging his behind, with a provocative smile on his face . . . and wriggled his plump body in a kind of caricature of a belly dancer . . . He shook his body and swayed his shoulders in coy, ingratiating movements . . . suddenly a throttled cry escaped from his lips . . . and as his body went on writhing he stretched out his hand as if in a cry for help, as if the intensity of the pain or the pleasure that was producing one moan after the other from his mouth was too much for him to bear. The ugliness of the animal-like writhing and the moans that accompanied it . . . was so powerful, dark, and fascinating that it hardly seemed ugly at all.<sup>277</sup>

A passage such as the one above, Oren claims, demonstrates that while differentiating between beauty and ugliness is no easy task, the artist has the ability to do so.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 76–77.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 77

<sup>276</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 141.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 94–96.

<sup>278</sup> Oren, "Dyokano," 77.

Oren is right in locating beauty and ugliness as central concepts in *Infiltration*, and indeed, the distinction between them becomes blurred here, as it does in other places throughout the novel. But what Oren fails to see is that this merging of the two binaries, beauty and ugliness, is a principal part of the novel's ethical platform. The artist's mission is to find the beauty in the ugliness and the ugliness in the beauty, because both exist in both; because the definitions of what is ugly and what is beautiful are not categorical but rather contingent upon cultural contexts. Oren, like Melabes, is a captive of his Eurocentric point of view. But unlike Oren, Melabes's sensitivity enables him to realize, even if only intuitively, that the borders he draws between beauty and ugliness stem from his limited knowledge of and exposure to other cultures, and his biases against Middle Eastern aesthetic norms. The power in Ben-Hamo's dance penetrates the conditioned boundaries between beautiful and ugly and disrupts them. Melabes' instinctive response to the power and attraction in Ben-Hamo's dance conveys Kenaz's ethical stance, a stance that recognizes and points to the limited capacity of the Ashkenazi soldiers to appreciate the Mizrachi culture that is different and unfamiliar, in its association with excessive embodiment and sensuality.

Interestingly, Oren omits the build-up to the dance scene: On Friday after dinner, the platoon has free time and the Jerusalemite group, which is mostly Ashkenazi (except for Avner, the Sephardi), gathers spontaneously to sing.<sup>279</sup> The Mizrachi soldiers, who wish to revolt against what they interpret as hegemonic takeover (a feeling that the Ashkenazi group's reaction confirms), begin their circle of singing ("and before we came to the end of the first verse there was a long, loud moan from the other end of the room . . . Zackie had broken into an Arabic song and his friends responded with rhythmic clapping").<sup>280</sup> Hedgehog, as one of the Jerusalemites is nicknamed, yells at them: "Why do you have to spoil everything?" and a dispute erupts between the two

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<sup>279</sup> They begin with the African-American slaves' song "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," and continue with a favorite Israeli song, "*Li Kol Gal Nose Mazkeret*." Of course, these songs carry symbolic meanings. The slaves' song establishes the identification with their sense of captivity. *Li Kol Gal Nose Mazkeret* (Each wave carries a memento for me), also known as *Rutie*, tells about a sailor who longs for his beloved, Rutie, who is waiting for him on one of the shores. The song was written by the well-known song writer Haim Hefer in 1948 (and immediately became a big hit) for the naval arm of the Palmach, the military force which served as the army of the new Jewish settlement between 1941 and 1948 and was the foundation of the IDF. Like many other favorite songs of the time, its melody is that of a Russian folk song. The one who starts singing this song is Alon, the kibbutznik, which is no coincidence: *Shira Be-tzibur* (sing-along) was a typical activity in the kibbutzim, and was considered a way of strengthening the political and social identity of the group members.

<sup>280</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 90.

groups. Avner, who is socially positioned in between the two groups throughout the novel,<sup>281</sup> shares with the Ashkenazi group his experience in the military jail, where he was imprisoned after his rifle was taken from him when he fell asleep while on guard duty:

In jail there was one guy shut up in a cell by himself . . . he lay there all day in his cell and sang . . . and every song had a refrain, always the same, Oh, Mother! Come and take me away from here. They're eating my heart out, Oh, Mother! . . . I remember that I said to myself: Maybe there's something in it? Like folk songs, like the songs you were singing before, that the Negro slaves made up about their fate. . . . I said to myself: Don't sneer at it, maybe he knows things that you don't know, maybe he's been through things that you've never been through. Maybe all this is like a language that has to be translated for you to understand it. In the end I found myself singing with him: Oh, Mother! . . . I felt I was beginning to identify with him, beginning to understand the beauty of his song.<sup>282</sup>

Avner's story is followed immediately by the scene of Rahamim Ben-Hamo's dance. The song that Avner's prison-mate sings resembles in its crying out the Arabic song that Zackie sings ("a wail that increased in volume until it sounded like the muezzin calling . . . in a long drawn-out, throttled, sobbing tremolo").<sup>283</sup> Avner creates a parallel between the songs the Ashkenazi group sing and Zackie's song ("Maybe there's something in it? Like folk songs, like the songs you were singing before, that the Negro slaves made up about their fate"). And Kenaz, through Avner's self-rebuke ("I said to myself: Don't sneer at it, maybe he knows things that you don't know, maybe he's been through things that you've never been through"), criticizes the Ashkenazi soldiers for their condescending attitude toward Mizrachi culture and points to the cultural misreading that is the mother of all these negative feelings of one group toward the other ("Maybe all this is like a language that has to be translated for you to understand it"). The very act of sharing the other culture, as Avner eventually does by joining the

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<sup>281</sup> Being Sephardi, Avner does not belong to the Ashkenazi group. On the other hand, he was born and raised in Jerusalem, like the other Jerusalemites in the platoon, and is not a new immigrant—a trait which characterizes the soldiers in the Mizrachi group. He resents the Jerusalemites because of the socio-economic disparity between himself and them (his mother used to be a house-cleaner at Yossi Ressler's home), yet he does not develop relationships with the Mizrachi soldiers. He mostly befriends Melabes and maintains a connection with the Jerusalemites whom he knew long before basic training.

<sup>282</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 93.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

singing of his fellow inmate, allows one to identify with the other's cultural practices and to see their beauty. The fact that Avner's story immediately precedes Rahamim Ben-Hamo's dance is crucial to an understanding of the dance scene because it expresses exactly the opposite view to that of Yosef Oren's: Kenaz asks the reader to remain open to the different artistic performances and to try to find the beauty in both of them, just as Avner learned to do during his time in prison. Avner's liminal, mediating position in the platoon enables him to see the beauty of both cultures, while Melabes's Ashkenazi origin and culture generates in him an immediate aversion to the Mizrachi song and dance (although he feels its power as well). Oren adduces Melabes's aversion as evidence for the split between "low culture" and "high culture," and thus also as evidence for the dichotomy between "beautiful" and "ugly," but he completely overlooks Kenaz's stance on the cultural bias behind the notions.

Unlike Yosef Oren, who thinks that one has to choose whether *Infiltration* is about the social fissures in Israeli society or about the growth of the budding artist, Ariel Hirschfeld shows that this novel is actually about both:

The novel exposes the other side of the Israeli state. Not only its reflection, its conflicts, its flaws and its ethnic and social injustices, but also its dark side; the pure power and evil. And it is also a great novel about art that gently and powerfully senses the contacts between art and life and the connection between art and evil (it develops, almost to an absurd degree, the term "artist" in the military slang . . . which refers to those who evade participation in the war effort. The minor disabilities [*ha-kaf lamediyut*] of *Infiltration*'s protagonists took them out of their usual sphere . . . and made them all into artists of some kind. Some of them (the narrator Melabes, Ressler the musician, Ben-Hamo who dances, Alon the painter) are real artists, and some are metaphorical artists. Avner, the excited expression of the power of life, the complete opposite of "art" in the book,<sup>284</sup> is also an artist . . . who sculpts himself and makes his life an artistic creation. Similarly, Sami, Zackie, Nachum, Miller, and Zero-Zero are

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<sup>284</sup> Hirschfeld is probably referring to Avner's love-hate relationship with classical music. Avner used to work in a music shop in Jerusalem and fell in love with classical music, a love that brought him to attend free concerts at the YMCA and to listen nonstop to classical music records. But an ugly experience at which he hints when he tells Melabes about his past, as well as the condescending behavior of Yossi Ressler and his family when they meet him in the shop or at the concerts—all this has complicated his feelings toward music (especially when it is represented by Yossi Ressler's guitar playing in the platoon's barracks).

creating their own fictional plot and shaping it. The three military drills that are the cornerstones of the novel—half-nelson [*horadat zakif*], spear fight [*krav kidonim*], and man-by-man infiltration [*hitganvut yechidim*—are metaphors for the artistic act: They are fictional, they are designed, they require inspiration, concentration and—most of all—control of the evil, its taming, to perform a certain role. In those three practices the artistic act is tied to death.<sup>285</sup>

Hirschfeld convincingly identifies the connections between art and life and art and evil as structural principles in the novel. Both pairs, art and life, and art and evil, relate to the term “artist” that recurs in *Infiltration* and that represents much more than its contextual meanings. “Artist,” born in military discourse and common in the Israeli slang of the 1950s and 1960s, was a pejorative term referring to a person who pretends to be sick or incompetent in order to evade hard work.<sup>286</sup> It expresses a cultural rejection of physical weakness and of any lack of stamina and motivation, stereotypes associated with the new, post-1948 immigrants, especially Mizrahi immigrants and Holocaust survivors.

Zero-Zero and Miller, fellow soldiers in Melabes’s platoon, are depicted as Holocaust survivors. Miller, portrayed as a German intellectual,<sup>287</sup> suffers from epilepsy and has several seizures throughout the novel (the final seizure, during the infiltration training drills, brings about his death). Zero-Zero, the Romanian refugee whose appearance is frail and unhealthy, is constantly worried about dying or getting sick,<sup>288</sup> and complains

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<sup>285</sup> Hirschfeld, “*Nigmeret Zehut*,” 53.

<sup>286</sup> The negative sense of the term is encoded in several dictionaries, such as Even-Shoshan’s Dictionary: Artist (*artist*) - 1. An actor, performs on stage 2. Artist (*oman*), deals with art (as an occupation) 3. A pretender (especially to evade hard work). Avraham Even-Shoshan, ed., *Ha-milon Ha-ivri Ha-merukaz* [The concentrated Hebrew dictionary] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, Zmora-Bitan, and Kineret Press, 2000). See also the following online Hebrew dictionaries:

[https://milog.co.il/%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%98%D7%99%D7%A1%D7%98/e\\_64690/%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%9F-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99](https://milog.co.il/%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%98%D7%99%D7%A1%D7%98/e_64690/%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%9F-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99),

<http://www.morfix.co.il/en/%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%98%D7%99%D7%A1%D7%98>, and

<https://he.wiktionary.org/wiki/%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%98%D7%99%D7%A1%D7%98>.

<sup>287</sup> “Next to him, reading a book in a foreign language, sat Miller, a German speaker who was a few years older than the rest of us. His face was dark as old parchment and marked by suffering. . . . I sometimes saw him sitting up in bed with a little suitcase on his knees, writing a notebook.” Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 15.

<sup>288</sup> “He was thin, stooped and worn, with a long nose, his eyes and eyelids chronically inflamed, his face always wounded from shaving, and he never stopped complaining of queer pains in his heart.” *Ibid.*, 14. The description of Miller and Zero-Zero’s physical appearance evokes the anti-Semite stereotype of the Jew: Dark skin, long nose, poor and sickly look.

about the cruelty of the commanders and what he perceives as their “murderous intentions.”<sup>289</sup> Although one is completely the opposite of the other, Miller and Zero-Zero are both seen by their comrades as caricatures, and are often ridiculed for their underdog behavior and poor Hebrew. Zero-Zero is called “artist” on several occasions.<sup>290</sup> When he refuses to shower during shower time after the half-nelson drill, the narrator talks about him with his platoon-mate Micky: “‘Maybe there’s really something wrong with him?’ I said. ‘Rubbish,’ said Micky. ‘He’s a malingerer.’<sup>291</sup> There’s nothing wrong with him. He’s a dirty, stinking, lazy pig and he’s getting his excuse ready in case he’s caught” (30). Muallem, one of the platoon’s commanders, forces Zero-Zero into the shower while yelling, “The proper place for this piece of shit is the shithouse not the shower!” (ibid.) Later on, when Muallem sees Zero-Zero again, he says to him: “You’re a bloody malingerer (*ata artist*). You know what we do to malingerers (*artistim*) in the army?” Zero-Zero replies: “Sir, I wasn’t malingering, I swear I wasn’t. I’ve got a heart condition. I couldn’t breathe. . . . I thought I was going to die”<sup>292</sup> (32–33). It seems obvious that Zero-Zero has some mental health issues that cause his fear of showers—possibly even a traumatic association of the showers with the Nazi gas chambers. But the inability to follow certain orders because of mental and emotional difficulties is never even considered in the world of *Infiltration*. As Micky says during a conversation that takes place among the platoon-mates on their first day in basic training: “Over here anyone who’s weak or falls down on the job gets everyone in

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<sup>289</sup> Zero-Zero receives his nickname as a result of his reaction to the army serial number he gets in the induction center: “he’d drawn a number ending in two zeros, and he’d told everybody of his good luck, saying that it would make it easier for him to remember. And these two zeros immediately became his nickname” (14). Ironically, the numbers, which were supposed to help in remembering, bring the opposite result: No one remembers Zero-Zero’s real name any more. The nickname Zero-Zero enhances the wretchedness and degradation expressed in his physical appearance and in his platoon-mates’ and commanders’ behavior toward him (even the visual combination of these two digits conveys degradation as it signifies “restrooms”). The nickname Zero-Zero embodies total annulment and thematizes the negation of the diaspora. The fact that Zero-Zero is remembered by his comrades as a number and not by his personal name enhances his tragedy as a representative of the Holocaust survivors in Israeli society: the numbers that were tattooed on them in the extermination camps continue to accompany them for the rest of their lives, and they are not seen as human individuals but as archetypes.

<sup>290</sup> Unfortunately, Dalya Bilu chose to translate “artist” as “malingerer.” Wherever the word “malingerer” appears, it replaces the word “artist” in the original.

<sup>291</sup> This line in the original: “*shtuyot,*” *amar Micky,* “*hu artist*” (“Nonsense,” said Micky, “he’s an artist”).

<sup>292</sup> The translator modified Zero-Zero’s words, using the verb “malingering”; in the Hebrew, Zero-Zero repeats the word “artist”: (37) *המפקד, אני לא ארטיסט, בחיי אמת שלי!* (“קנו, התגנבות יחידים, 37”) (literally: “Sir, I am not an artist, I swear!”).

trouble, not only himself. Over here, being weak is like being a thief or a traitor” (10). Micky uses the words “over here,” but their deictic meaning expands the undefined space to include not only the military base, but the Israeli state and society as well. If in *Preliminaries* the child-narrator was looked down upon by his classmates because of his physical weakness and his sensitivity, in *Infiltration*, which recounts events that occur thirty years later, during which the 1948 war took place and the Israeli state was founded, being weak is considered a crime, for which the criminal should be punished. The consensus around labor and collectivity that was formed during the time of the new Jewish settlement has deepened in Israeli society and gained extreme and violent aspects. Society increasingly criticizes the artist—in the literal meaning of the word (i.e., a person who creates or performs art)—for being focused on himself and on his individual creations rather than on the collective and on the valorized physical labor (which represents a contribution to the collective socialist-Zionist project). This critique has escalated during the years between the narrated time of *Preliminaries* (the 1920s) and that of *Infiltration* (the 1950s), as the artist came to be seen as defying the collective values of Israeli society. No wonder the negative sense of the word was born in the military; the artist in his essence constitutes an immediate threat to the collective identity one is required to adopt when enlisting in military service. So are the values that art represents, those of freedom and choice, which stand in sharp contrast to the coercive and violent means through which military collectivity is achieved.

To return to the conversation among the *kaf-lamedim* on their first day in basic training, the first one to respond to Micky’s words (“Over here, being weak is like being a thief or a traitor”) is Yossi Ressler:

“Nobody chooses to be weak,” said one of the Jerusalemites, a boy with a long, austere face, whose tone made it easy to guess that he was speaking on his behalf. He had brought his guitar to the training camp with him, and he held the blue canvas case between his knees all the time. “Being weak isn’t something a person can change.”<sup>293</sup>

By choosing Yossi Ressler, who is depicted throughout the novel as an artist in the most direct meaning of the term (his guitar appears in the second sentence of his description, indicating his profound connection to it), to be the respondent to Micky’s statement, and by adding Melabes’s comment that he, Ressler, was speaking on his own

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<sup>293</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 11.

behalf, Kenaz produces an equation between the artist and the weak. Ressler's comment, "Being weak isn't something a person can change," addresses not only Micky; through Ressler's words, Kenaz criticizes the whole ideological sphere and value system on whose behalf the platoon commanders allegedly act. Ressler's words carry a double meaning: They can be understood as a defense against Micky's indirect accusation of the weak, as if Ressler is saying, "I cannot change the fact that I am weak" (or maybe, "I cannot change the fact that I am an artist, and therefore I cannot change the fact that I am weak"). But they can also convey another meaning, which defies the military's ambition to convert the artists and to mold them into a collective identity of strong and ordinary men: No one can prevent the artist from being an artist, not even the army.

The dismissive view of emotional difficulty and its interpretation in the military sphere as pretense is embodied in the saying that exists in the Israeli military to this very day: "There is no such thing as *cannot*; there is only *don't want to*" (*Eyn davar kaze lo yakhol, yesh rak lo rotze*). This expression is echoed in an occurrence during the half-nelson drill with one of the soldiers, whose nickname is Hedgehog (*Kipod*). Yossi Ressler and Hedgehog, who were paired to practice the drill together, are not performing it, as Hedgehog is evading Ressler's attempts to grab his hand:

After several repetitions of this childish romp, they both burst out laughing, bringing the instructor's wrath on their heads. He ordered Hedgehog to stand with his back to us and motioned Yossi to attack his friend. This time Yossi succeeded in seizing Hedgehog by the arm and forced him down without any trouble. . . . Yossi tightened his arm around Hedgehog's neck, and Hedgehog immediately fell on the ground, where he twitched a moment and then fell still, as if deep in sleep. The instructor rose, stepped softly over to the prone Hedgehog, and kicked him in the crotch. Hedgehog leaped up and opened his eyes in alarm. As soon as he opened them he realized his mistake. The instructor grabbed him by his bristling hair and pulled him to his feet. Hedgehog made a last, desperate attempt to extricate himself, muttering in a stupefied way: "Where am I . . . what happened?" The instructor landed a ringing slap on his cheek. Hedgehog recoiled and for a moment really was stunned. He put his hand to his head and sat down on the ground. "Get up!" yelled the instructor. Hedgehog stood swaying on his feet. "Now do you know where you are and what happened?" asked the instructor. "No you don't. Not yet you don't. Because a recruit who tries to make a fool of his instructor gets special treatment on this

base.” He called the squad to gather around him in circle. . . . Everyone gathered to watch Yossi Ressler, under the active supervision of the instructor, put a half nelson on Hedgehog. “I’m sorry,” said Hedgehog, “I’m sorry.” His voice trembled and broke. “I can’t, I really can’t.” . . . “Why can’t you?” bawled the instructor. “I don’t know, sir,” whispered Hedgehog. “I’m afraid.”<sup>294</sup>

In the scene depicted above, Hedgehog appears as an artist in both meanings, which are merged into one: As an actor on stage, he performs the role of a fainting person, and by that he also fulfils the negative sense of the word, faking his loss of consciousness to evade the effect of the actual drill. Hedgehog is punished severely for his deception and is humiliated by the instructor in front of the whole squad. The kicks in the crotch degrade Hedgehog’s masculinity (a recurring theme throughout the novel), and the slap on his face reduces Hedgehog to a disobedient child. The humiliation culminates in the public shaming, as the whole squad is ordered to gather around and witness his fear. The instructor, loyal to the military principle of “there is no such thing as cannot (do it),” forces Hedgehog into a half-nelson drill:

The gym shorts were very wide on his slender body. His white skinny legs emerged shyly and timidly, full of agitation. His body writhed and twitched on the ground, as if thousands of insects were stinging him. And when repose finally descended on his body, there was still an expression of terrible anger and accusation against all of us on his face. . . . Ordered to watch Hedgehog lying motionless at our feet, like a pale, emaciated, anonymous corpse, we stood glum and silent in a circle around him, our heads bowed. A few paces in front of us stood the instructor, like the official representative of another world, his arms crossed on his chest, his face expressionless. When Hedgehog regained consciousness and sat up to renew his acquaintance with the world around him, a smile of triumph spread gradually over his face, very different from the sly, inquisitive smile we were used to seeing there. He got up and stood next to the instructor. . . . I did not know Hedgehog well . . . but I did know that somewhere between the last moment of fear, hope of rescue, begging for forgiveness, and this proud, triumphant smile, he, like the rest of us, had just lost something of what was best in him.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–19.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–20.

The half-nelson scene with Hedgehog and the instructor could be seen as a symbolic drumhead court-martial that ends in an execution. The instructor's violent behavior, the drill that simulates temporary death through the loss of consciousness, the soldiers' gathering around the unconscious Hedgehog, and especially Kenaz's choice of words when describing Hedgehog "like a pale, emaciated, anonymous corpse" and the instructor "like the official representative of another world" (*shli'ach tzibur* in Hebrew, which is the idiomatic term for the prayer leader in religious services; the words "from another world" portray the instructor as a representative of the netherworld)—all these create the simulation of an execution followed by a funeral and burial ceremony. It is essential that the description of Hedgehog as slender, skinny, and pale appears right after his confession of his fear of death, and that following this description "his body writhed and twitched on the ground" until "repose finally descended on his body"; in his paleness and skinny body, as well as in his fear, Hedgehog embodies the stereotype of the Old Jew; the weak, fearful, and feminized man that Zionism strived to erase in order to create the New Jew.<sup>296</sup> Therefore, what was buried symbolically in the above scene is the archetypal Old Jew, as the description of Hedgehog as "a pale, emaciated, anonymous corpse" suggests. The instructor's gathering of the soldiers and their participation in a symbolic execution of their peer continues the pioneers' self-erasure of their past, their denial of their old Jewish tradition, which comprised an essential part of their identity. By denying part of themselves and forcing its annulment, these people who strove to become New Jews erased their ability to contain complexity, to tolerate difference, and to show compassion toward difficulty. In choosing the instructor who represents the military system to be the cruel and indifferent executor, Kenaz harshly criticizes the military institution and Israeli society.

When Hedgehog awakens, he seems to have gone through a metamorphosis. His smile looks different, proud and triumphant, and he gets up and stands next to the instructor. When the instructor announces Hedgehog and Ressler's punishment, Hedgehog replies with complete obedience, "and his voice sounded almost happy" (20). While forced to watch Hedgehog's fall and loss of consciousness, Melabes contemplates the military routine to which he and his peers have had to adjust in the last few weeks:

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<sup>296</sup> The instructor's view of Hedgehog as feminized and the negative baggage this quality carries in his eyes are conveyed explicitly when the instructor returns to the squad after break time: "Hedgehog bawled: 'Attenshun!' The instructor dismissed him with a disgusted wave of his hand: 'The cowardly cheating girl can step back into the ranks'" (28).

It almost seemed that there was nothing left to get excited about. . . . Like rites of humiliation, races in pursuit of illusionary goals . . . the unresolved riddles of an alien and capricious justice. Things that come to be taken for granted and lose their meaning in the end. Deep open wounds had healed with suspect speed; fear and desire and shame and disguise and pretense were growing ever duller with the sinking of the soul. Thus, it was possible to believe that this too would sink and be borne away, becoming one more signpost marking the retreat to a new line in the battle for the fading memory of our lost honor. And the lesson was clear: there will be no resurrection.<sup>297</sup>

Melabes's reflections can be conceived of as a requiem for Hedgehog, but they are more than that; they are a requiem for the whole group, as they lament what Hedgehog and his peers have lost during their new existence in basic training. Melabes's awareness of himself as an artist<sup>298</sup> enables him to look critically at the military reality and thus to recognize the deception that lies at its core. It seems as if the real purpose of the military orders is to interpellate the emotionally and ethically numb subjects the narrator and his platoon-mates feel themselves becoming. This interpellation is expressed in the next sentence: "Thus, it was possible to believe that this too would sink and be borne away, becoming one more signpost marking the retreat to a new line in the battle for the fading memory of our lost honor." The vocabulary evokes a semantic field of combat: "retreat," "new line," and of course "battle." But while the common image of a battle is of soldiers who rage on and advance forward, here the new line that the *kaf-lamedim* conquer, marked by a signpost, is achieved through a retreat; the movement is not forward but rather backward. Unlike the heroic image of soldiers who march forward, conquering new lines of territory, with some losing their lives on the battleground, the battlefield of the *kaf-lamedim*'s basic training is the human soul, and the battle is over the *kaf-lamedim*'s memory and honor. Alas, it is impossible to win this battle, as the absence of verbs in the sentence conveying the *kaf-lamedim*'s passivity attests, as do the adjective phrases "fading memory," "lost honor."<sup>299</sup> And indeed, Hedgehog's behavior when he wakes up illustrates his having lost his honor and sense of self in the battle. He does not protest over the instructor's violent and humiliating

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<sup>297</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 19–20.

<sup>298</sup> Even if in the narrative present his future as a narrator is only a feeling rather than certain knowledge.

<sup>299</sup> In a battle of course, there are two sides; if the *kaf-lamedim* are one side, then it is implied that the side against which they fight their lost battle is the military system. The IDF, which is embraced by Israeli society, here appears as the enemy of the soldiers' sense of self.

treatment, but instead internalizes his attack. If Hedgehog symbolically embodies the metamorphosis of the Old Jew into the New Israeli, then the price he pays is dear, as Melabes, who follows the change in Hedgehog, observes: “but I did know that somewhere between the last moment of fear, hope of rescue, begging for forgiveness, and this proud, triumphant smile, he, like the rest of us, had just lost something of what was best in him” (20). Therefore, as Melabes notes when he summarizes the results of the *kaf-lamedim*’s lost battle: “there will be no resurrection.” Here, as in many textual units throughout this novel, Kenaz’s diction constructs two levels of signification: Personally, there will be no resurrection for Hedgehog’s honor and the honor of his peers, as the humiliation and suffering they undergo in their basic training will scar them for life. Nationally, it asserts the failure of *techiya*, revival, translated here as “resurrection.” *Techiya* intersects with both the religious and the secular realms. In Judaism, it denotes the resurrection of the dead (*tehiyat ha-metim*), which relates traditionally to the Messianic end of days. Many prophets in the Hebrew Bible, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, describe this era, in which the Israelites will return to Zion after years of exile. Despite its declared secularism, Zionism embraced the biblical images of the Hebrew nation returning to Zion, and made use of the word *techiya* to signify the revival of the Jewish nation in Palestine, where the New Jew will be born and flourish. By employing this charged word, Kenaz evokes the symbolic images of the Old and New Jew contained in Hedgehog’s fall and awakening, only to declare: there will be no *techiya* if the path to it passes through denial, coercion, and violence. The failure of the national and military systems to create a New Jew is also reiterated later in the novel, in Arik’s words: “You believe all that crap . . . about how you shed your lousy skin here like a snake and emerge a new man, a hero ready to conquer the world. Believe me, there’s no resurrection from this death” (81). In the conclusion that “there will be no resurrection” (which also marks itself as a conclusion by opening the sentence with the words: “And the lesson was clear”), we can hear the two narrators: Melabes the soldier narrator, who watches Hedgehog at the time of the events, and the adult narrator who returns to these events thirty years later. At the time of narration, the 1980s, when the social fissures in Israeli society are surfacing and the consensus is collapsing, the adult narrator can speak of the lesson that indeed became clearer as the years went by.

## The Performative Aspect of Death

When Melabes stands with his peers in front of the unconscious Hedgehog and contemplates, he calls the half-nelson drill a “mysterious joke” (“Each of us had experienced both roles in this mysterious joke”) and defines the military orders as “rites of humiliation,” “races in pursuit of illusionary goals,” and “unresolved riddles of an alien and capricious justice.” What stands out as common to all these descriptions is the element of deception in them. As I mentioned previously, Melabes recognizes their function as means to bring about the submission of the soldiers’ free will and resistance. As this novel conveys, military orders are inherently *performative*—they are meant to create a show whose effect would be to harness the *kaf-lamedim* to the combat ethos in which they cannot take part because of their disabilities. The book opens with the narrator Melabes as he awakens from the half-nelson drill, which simulates and resembles death: “The sense of taste came back to my mouth with a stale, bitter smell . . . the smell of death” (4). Melabes then looks at his friends who, like him, are waking up from their temporary unconsciousness:

My waking friends gave back my reflection as in a mirror. How ugly this awakening was, how wretched the eye rolling, the limb jerking, the head shaking, the stupid, glassy looks from the frightened eyes, the grey faces, frozen in the terror of oblivion. After the beauty of the lost images, how degrading this sight was.<sup>300</sup>

The discrepancy between the ugly and realistic awakening and the beautiful pictures Melabes saw in his mind’s eye illustrates the gap between events as they appear in reality and events as they are reconstructed by memory and consciousness. As suggested above, Melabes’s mental images in this opening scene are visual traces of his memories, processed and recaptured in his consciousness. In contrast, the sight in front of him of his awakening friends marks the present as it is unfolding, without the mediation of memory. The soldiers’ convulsive, involuntary movements evoke a battle scene of soldiers in their actual moments of dying, a common sight whose details are rarely spelled out in the many works of literature and popular song devoted to Israel’s wars. This is not part of the web of visual images that Israeli society carried with it. In the commemorative texts, the soldiers remain eternally beautiful and flawless, which is how their loving families and friends and the rest of society want to remember them. But here death is presented as it is, ugly and meaningless, naked of all the performative

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<sup>300</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 5.

additions it receives through time, memory, and ideology. Of course, this is only an *as-if* death, experienced by *as-if* combat soldiers.

The whole direction of the *kaf-lamedim*'s basic training as portrayed in the novel runs counter to the structure of a combat unit's basic training: the reader begins to accompany Melabes and his friends as they come to from their loss of consciousness. Unlike a combat platoon, whose members first learn to adjust to each other and to consolidate a collective identity, then practice military drills, and then—possibly—go into battle, where they may die, here the process is reversed: first the (simulated) death, then the practice of the military drills that seem arbitrary and lacking direct purpose, and then the consolidation of the collective identity, achieved through violent means and requiring the submission of the soldiers' artistic, individual identities. This inverted movement underscores the performance inherent to the military system, enabling submission to it: the make-believe that is essential for maintaining its hierarchic structure and discipline. In the case of the *kaf-lamedim*'s basic training, there is nothing but performance, as the practice does not serve the purpose of learning how to fight. Rather, the declared purpose of their basic training is to make men of them, as their commander Benny states: "Corporal Benny is in charge of you now, and he's going to turn this scum into men, into soldiers" (161). The structure of the novel is designed to reflect a regressive process, and accordingly, the soldiers' self-definition is based on negation; they are non-combat, unheroic soldiers, neither real fighters nor real men. The series of negations and the illusory nature of the military performance expose the myths at the base of the Israeli masculinist ethos.

### **A Portrait of the Mizrachi Immigrant as an Artist**

In an article by Sagi Turgan about the encounter between Israeli native soldiers and new immigrants in the IDF during the 1950s, Turgan describes the Sabra soldiers' view of the immigrant soldiers as depicted in surveys and questionnaires found in the IDF archives.<sup>301</sup> Turgan quotes from reports (*doch da'ato shel ha-chayal*) that were taken by the IDF to learn about the interactions between new immigrants and native Israelis

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<sup>301</sup> Sagi Turgan, "Kur Ha-hitukh; Tzahal Ki-nekudat Ha-mifgash Beyn Migzarim, Olim Ve-edot Be-reshit Shnot Ha-chamishim" [The melting pot; The IDF as the meeting point between sectors, immigrants, and ethnicities at the beginning of the 1950s], in *Tashach Va-eylakh: Mechkarim Shel Ha-askola Ha-yerushalmit Al Milchama, Tzava Ve-chevra* [The 1948 war and after: War, the military, and society: The Jerusalem School], ed. Alon Kadish (Moshav Ben Shemen: Modan, 2015), 332–50.

during their military service. A native Israeli soldier wrote: “I would call this gathering of exiles [*kibutz galuyot*] a mob [*asafsuf*] . . . ignorance, dirtiness and malingering / malingery [*artistiyut*; the collective noun derives from the term “artist” in its military slang meaning, H.S.] and the general lack of education I encounter everywhere.”<sup>302</sup> An officer wrote that in his platoon “there are mostly new immigrants; these people are not educated enough, idle and dirty.”<sup>303</sup> In the testimonials gathered in Turgan’s chapter, many Israeli soldiers use the term “Kurds” (*kurdim*) as a generic pejorative name to describe Mizrahi soldiers (not necessarily of Kurdish background), and often link their origins to primitivism, dirtiness, and laziness: “Most of the people in my platoon are Kurds, criminals, I don’t know what to call them. . . . Artists [*artistim*] are not lacking in our platoon.”<sup>304</sup> These reports reflect the common derogatory use of the term “artist” during the time the novel takes place, but they also shed light on the socioeconomic stratum the Sabras associate with the stereotypical views of the new immigrants, especially of Mizrahi extraction. The internalization of these degrading views by the Mizrahi new immigrants is evident in the account by writer and scholar Lev Hakak, who immigrated to Israel from Iraq with his family when he was six years old and grew up in a transit camp, a *ma’abara* during the 1950s:<sup>305</sup> “The fear—because the environment engraved in me the sense that I am defective—a primitive man of primitive origin, a son to an ethnicity that is good for nothing, a man whose childhood was cut off by a ‘dirty, stupid, lost cause.’”<sup>306</sup> What is both shocking and fascinating in Hakak’s experience is the power of the environment’s rejection to generate in him a sense of an integral defect, as if the fact that he is from an Arab country labels him as categorically flawed. This internalization of the Israelis’ negative stereotypes is also embodied in the figure of Rahamim Ben-Hamo in the novel, who is a new immigrant from Morocco. As he tries to make conversation with Alon when both of them spend the Shabbat together

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<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>305</sup> The *ma’abarot* (singular: *ma’abara*, from the Hebrew word: *ma’avar*, transit) were tin shacks, built to provide temporary housing during the immense wave of immigration in the beginning of the 1950s. Although the original purpose of the *ma’abara* was to serve as a transitional home until their residents moved to permanent and more suitable housing, many immigrants were left “stuck” in the *ma’abarot*. The majority of the *ma’abarot* residents were immigrants from Arab countries. Lissak, *Ha-aliya Ha-gdola*, 26–27.

<sup>306</sup> Lev Hakak, *Ha-asufim* (Tel Aviv: Tamuz, 1977), 65, my emphasis. In the Hebrew original, the pejorative adjectives appear in plural form (*melukhlachim, metumtamim*), illustrating the negative collective view of Mizrahi new immigrants in Israeli society.

on the base, while the rest of the platoon get to go home, he talks about himself in the third person, as if dissociated: “If someone else’s stayed, some other trash like me, it would’ve been better for me. . . . Ben-Hamo is like shit under your shoe. Don’t think I don’t know my place nor yours neither” (243). Nonetheless, Ben-Hamo is also an artist in the literal sense of the word:<sup>307</sup> As I mentioned earlier, he performs a powerful dance in front of the whole platoon on the Friday night they spend at the military base. As Hirschfeld notes in his article, the novel pushes “the term ‘artist’ in the military slang” almost ad absurdum, with some characters clearly trying to find ways to be released from the draft.<sup>308</sup> This is certainly true for a character nicknamed Peretz-Mental-Case, as we learn from Melabes’s description:

I remember him from the induction center, chain-smoking and telling everyone he met about the poor state of his nerves. He was ready to support his claim with a letter (a short typewritten note, shabby and deeply creased, the paper sweaty and so worn with use that it was in imminent danger of separating into four equal sections), which he would whip out of his shirt pocket. He would scrutinize the reader’s face, and as soon as the reading was finished, he would fold the letter up again carefully . . . examining the other’s face once more to see if he had taken his story to heart. Then he would smile bitterly and mysteriously under his narrow mustache and nod his head as if to say: yes, yes, yes. (13)

The very nickname Peretz-Mental-Case (*Peretz-Se’if-Atzabim*) presents him as a caricature. The letter he received from the military is official proof of his condition, for which he is relieved of service in a combat unit. It seems that Peretz is content with the letter, which serves him well. But the very case (*se’if*) for which he is classified as *kaf-lamed* is his “nerves”; this perpetuates the stereotype of Moroccans in Israeli society<sup>309</sup> (and of the Mizrahi immigrants as *artistim*, artists in the negative sense). Peretz has internalized society’s negative stereotype of himself and of his ethnicity. Nevertheless, he uses this stereotype manipulatively and takes advantage of the letter to improve his situation. Therefore, Peretz-Mental-Case embodies the resistance to the system’s interpellation by harnessing it to his needs, as Judith Butler and Chana Kronfeld

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<sup>307</sup> And as we will learn later, when entering his stream of consciousness.

<sup>308</sup> Hirschfeld, “*Nigmeret Zehut*,” 53.

<sup>309</sup> Their collective derogatory image among Israeli society depicts them as losing their temper easily and tending to get involved in fights. One of the common derogative expressions used in regard to the Moroccans is *maroko-sakin* (literally, “Morocco-knife”). Lissak, *Ha-aliya Ha-gdola*, 61.

suggest.<sup>310</sup> In so doing, Peretz also extends the scope of the pejorative term *artist*: he creatively uses the trait for which he is judged as an artist.<sup>311</sup> The label “Mental-Case” calls into question the boundary that society and the military system insist on drawing between the physical and the mental, resonating with the scene of Hedgehog in the practice of the half-nelson drill. Miller, the epileptic soldier, is “approved” as having a disability because of the physical manifestations of his condition (epilepsy in Hebrew is the falling disease, *machalat ha-nefila*, and he is indeed plagued by frequent falls). But Zero-Zero, who tends to perform his disability by complaining about his heart and expressing his fear of death, is rebuked by his platoon-mates and commanders and is often called *artist*. Yet one night Melabes witnesses Zero-Zero’s condition first hand:

I saw his silhouette sitting up in bed, writhing about, curling up into a ball, his hands rhythmically beating the mattress . . . and suddenly a sharp little shriek rose from his bed, high and thin as a mouse’s squeak, and then another one, making a grating noise like the last turn of a tightening vise, one shrill squeal after the other in abrupt, excruciating succession. . . . ‘What’s wrong with you?’ I whispered. ‘Those two bastards’—he pointed to the door—‘. . . woke me up and now I can’t get back to sleep.’ . . . Suddenly he seized my hand and laid it on his chest. Through his sweat-soaked undershirt I could feel his heartbeat, rapid, rhythmic, and nervous. . . . ‘Yes,’ I whispered, ‘I see.’ . . . ‘I can’t go on like this,’ groaned Zero-Zero and his lips twisted. . . . He turned his head away, bent down, and buried his face in the mattress. And again the squeals of the tightening vise rose into the air. (197)

Here we can see how in the case of Zero-Zero the physical and the mental are intertwined. His agitation as a result of being awakened by the noise the guards made outside is a mental reaction that has physical manifestations as well, but ones Melabes can “see” only after he touches Zero-Zero’s chest.

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<sup>310</sup> See Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 129, and Kronfeld, *Full Severity*, 161–62.

<sup>311</sup> Yet, Peretz’s urge to draw out the letter each time and seek his interlocutor’s approval, as well as the description of the letter as being “in imminent danger of separating into four equal sections” illustrates the power of Israeli hegemony over him; the military officers at that time are mostly Ashkenazi and they are the ones to make the decisions concerning him. The use of the words “imminent danger” enhances the sense of his dependence on the system and the fragility and uncertainty of its approval. These words bear an ironic sense as well; taken from military discourse, the words “imminent danger” usually refer to an enemy attack or the like. Here, the danger is that there will no longer be a way for him to evade combat service. The danger to the individual, Peretz, is posed by the system, which is the enemy (rather than the Israeli collective threatened by an actual enemy). I thank Chana Kronfeld for this insight.

In his discussion of madness and intelligence in Kenaz's *Infiltration*, Itamar Ben-Yair refers to Foucault's account of the history of madness in the Western world. Foucault describes the labor camps in which people who were considered mad, as well as beggars and other unemployed, were locked up by the authorities during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>312</sup> According to Foucault, these camps failed to be productive, but their failure was insignificant, since their real purpose was to reeducate the inmates.<sup>313</sup> Hôpital Général, one of the first institutions of confinement, created in 1656 in France, "set itself the task of preventing mendicancy and idleness as the source of all disorders."<sup>314</sup> Mad people, then, were seen by society as idlers who were shirking hard work, and their mental disabilities were perceived as being curable through internment and forced labor. Western society's early notion of mental disability and the measures it took to deal with it resemble the military system's view and treatment of the *kaf-lamedim* as depicted in the novel. This is made explicit in commander Benny's words to the platoon: "the famous medical problems you think are going to protect you and make things soft for you and let you go on sniveling and whining and degenerating together. Forget it. It won't help you. It'll only make it harder to break you. Your only hope is to break as quickly as possible and to turn into soldiers" (162). The platoon-mates internalize this view of themselves as sick, defective, and cast out of society, but they also feel a paradoxical sense of power in the danger they are perceived as posing to society. This is subtly expressed in Melabes's reflections on the first day at the military base: "They had banished us from our homes, disguised our identities, and isolated us in quarantine, as if to hide the danger, localize it, and prevent it from spreading" (9). But mostly, the *kaf-lamedim*'s self-image as defective is expressed in the recurring motif of the weak children of Sparta, which Mickey brings up in one of the platoon's collective discussions:

In Sparta . . . they used to throw the sick, weak, crippled babies out onto some mountain, so that they would die of hunger or so that the wild animals would eat them. Because they wouldn't grow up to be good soldiers and only be a burden to society and weaken it. . . . In Israel, they invented Training Base Four for the same purpose. That's where they chuck all the invalids . . . they even

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<sup>312</sup> Itamar Ben-Yair, "Shiga'on U-tvuna Be-hitganvut Yechidim" [Madness and intelligence in *Infiltration*], *Moznayim* 87 (February 2013): 16–19.

<sup>313</sup> The focus of Ben-Yair's article is different from my scope of interest, as he explores the philosophical aspect of madness and intelligence. However, the connection Ben-Yair makes between Foucault's text and *Infiltration* is important.

<sup>314</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 47.

play soldiers with them,<sup>315</sup> to give them the illusion that they're worth something." (23)

In the analogy that Mickey draws between Sparta and the state of Israel, Kenaz criticizes Israeli society for its militarism, which resembles the strict and extreme militarism of ancient Spartan society. As Nitza Ben-Dov notes in her article about the notion of place in Kenaz's texts, "the comparison of Training Base Four to a mountain in Sparta conveys not only the inferior feelings of the *kaf-lamedim*, but also the general Israeli mentality which adheres to the spirit of combat and Puritanism."<sup>316</sup> Indeed, the image of the sick Spartan children is profoundly illustrative of the view Melabes and his friends have of themselves, and Melabes employs this image several times throughout the novel, such as when listening to his peers sleeping during his guard shift: "The stillness was broken only by the symphony of sounds coming from our sleeping squad. SnORES, murmurs, a cough, a groan, a sigh, and a sudden cry. Yes, something sickly emanated from that building like a foul miasma, the contagion of the flawed, rejected bodies of the lost children of Sparta, left out on the bleak mountain to die" (43).

## The Individual and the Group: Calling into Question the Space for Agency

The very decision to place the story of *Infiltration* in a training base during basic training in which the ultimate goal is to instill a new and collective identity within the recruits, establishes the relationship between the individual and the collective as a central theme in the novel.<sup>317</sup> Hanna Herzig describes *Infiltration's* structure in terms of

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<sup>315</sup> Here again the performative element in the *kaf-lamedim's* basic training is noted.

<sup>316</sup> Nitza Ben-Dov, "Sparta U-yeladeha Ha-avudim: Al Mekomo shel Ha-makom Be-kitvey Yehoshua Kenaz U-be-hitganvut Yechidim" [Sparta and its lost children: On the place of place in Yehoshua Kenaz's works and in *Infiltration*], *Aley-Si'ach* 33 (Fall 1993): 113–19. In her recent book *Chayey Milchama*, Ben-Dov dedicates a chapter to Kenaz's *Infiltration*. Nitza Ben-Dov, *Chayey Milchama: Al Tzava, Nekama, Shchol U-toda'at Hamilchama Ba-Proza Ha-yisra'elit* [War life: On the military, revenge, bereavement, and the notion of war], (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2016).

<sup>317</sup> This is of course articulated also in the Hebrew title of the novel, *Hitganvut Yechidim* (Man-by-man infiltration), which—beyond naming the military drill during which the most dramatic developments of the novel take place—literally means "the sneaking of the individuals," and invokes the individual soldiers whose stories and unique identities unfold in this novel. Through their narration (both by Melabes and through their own point of view) from the second chapter of the novel onward, they resist the pressure of collectivity that characterizes the military system.

centrifugal circles—each one surrounding a smaller one—from the innermost circle of the “pure self” to the largest one, the circle of Israeli society:

The definition and isolation of the “pure self” are enabled only through conflict with the other circles. . . . This constant conflict attests to the individual’s umbilical cord, which cannot be detached from either the individual’s surroundings or Israeli society at large, no matter how troubling, disappointing and treacherous the collective (or the personal) surroundings may be.<sup>318</sup>

If the “pure self” circle is of the soldier narrator, Melabes, then he indeed demarcates his internal world by resisting his surroundings, as can be gleaned from his thoughts on the first day in basic training, when initial banter ensues among the platoon-mates: “The conversation took off, voices rose, but I didn’t want to talk to any of them. . . . An inner voice told me that in rough times ahead I’d have to preserve all my strength . . . all my loyalty . . . keep a low profile, and curl up like a ball to minimize the parts vulnerable to harm” (8). Melabes’s reflections serve as an explanation to his unique narratological stance in this novel: On the one hand, he is a first-person narrator who is present and participates in the events as they happen, but unlike most first-person narrators, whose identity is revealed through the account of their experiences and interactions,<sup>319</sup> the reader knows almost nothing about Melabes’s background or even about his personality. As Michael Gluzman points out, Melabes conceals his body and becomes an eye, a camera.<sup>320</sup> “By concealing his body, he tries to evade the bio-politics of the military base,” Gluzman argues.<sup>321</sup> But Melabes conceals not only his body; he conceals his characteristics and his personal traits as well. The emerging collectivity

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<sup>318</sup> Herzig, *Ha-kol Ha-omer Ani*, 181.

<sup>319</sup> “Engaging in any activity requires acts of self-identification by relying on repertoires that identify and contextualize speakers/writers along varying socio-cultural categories.” Bamberg, “Identity and Narration.”

<sup>320</sup> Michael Gluzman, *Ha-guf Ha-tziyoni: Le’umiyut, Migdar U-miniyut Ba-sifrut Ha-ivrit Ha-chadasha* [The Zionist body: Nationalism, gender, and sexuality in modern Hebrew literature] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2007), 209–35. The section is titled: “*Ha-guf Shelkha Od Yehudi, Hu Od Lo Yode’a She-nihiyeta Yisra’eli: Al Gavriyut Kfuya Be-hitganvut Yechidim*” (Your body’s still Jewish, it doesn’t know you’ve become an Israeli: On coerced masculinity in *Infiltration* by Yehoshua Kenaz).

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 234. Gluzman perceives *Infiltration* as a location of bio-politics; the physical body is the site of meaning and since it is defective and abject (as it is conceived by Israeli society and the *kaf-lamedim* themselves), the basic training experience is supposed to change it into a healthy, strong, and masculine body. Although Gluzman’s theory is fascinating, I understand the theme of the body in the novel as extending beyond the physical body into the realms of the social and the psychological; the body is also metaphoric, signifying the collective group and agency.

that Melabes recognizes in his peers' conversation is an imminent threat to his individual identity. And indeed, the following months in the *kaf-lamedim*'s basic training embody the violent and consistent attempts of the military system to break the soldiers' spirits and resistance and to reshape their identities into a collective, normatively masculine identity. Melabes's tactic for resisting this collectivity and for salvaging his individuality is to go underground, which he performs by omitting himself as an active protagonist from the events he describes. Identity and agency go hand in hand, by definition: "When considering the emergence of identity, the narrating subject must be regarded . . . as the active and agentive locus of control."<sup>322</sup> Therefore, along with being a survival strategy, Melabes's self-concealment also expresses his lack of control; he can only observe the events and narrate them, but his narration does not grant him any power to change them. Kenaz's choice to situate his young narrator in a helpless position, denying the narrative abilities to maneuver the reality of the story, conveys his view of the military system as destructively powerful and deterministic—a system in which the individuals lose their identities and their personal agency.

## The Melting Pot

The IDF was formed shortly after the state of Israel was founded. Since these years were characterized by massive waves of immigration to Israel, the IDF was entrusted with the mission of adapting the soldiers who were new immigrants to the nascent Israeli culture. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister and minister of defense, saw the IDF as the central melting pot of Israeli society:<sup>323</sup> "The IDF should be one of the main forces to shape the nation's character and to melt the human dust of the new immigrants . . . in the melting pot [*kur ha-mitzraf*] of the renewing homeland," Ben-Gurion wrote.<sup>324</sup> "The IDF accepts people from different countries . . . who lack any education and culture,<sup>325</sup> immigrants from backwards countries . . . it should turn this mob into one national unit."<sup>326</sup> In these texts, Ben-Gurion uses expressions that served

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<sup>322</sup> Bamberg, "Identity and Narration."

<sup>323</sup> Lissak, *Ha-aliya Ha-gdola*, 83.

<sup>324</sup> David Ben-Gurion, *Mishnato Shel David Ben-Gurion* [David Ben-Gurion's theory], ed. Ya'akov Beker (Tel Aviv: Yavneh Press, 1958), 432.

<sup>325</sup> The word "culture" in Hebrew, *tarbut*, also means "civilization." Therefore, in this context, the new immigrants in Ben-Gurion's view are uncivilized and cultureless, rather than having a *different* culture.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

as code words to refer to the new immigrants in Israeli society. “Human dust” (*avak adam*), a term that was common regarding the Holocaust survivors, reflected the Israelis’ view of those human beings as people who had lost their humanity as a result of their suffering.<sup>327</sup> However, it also reflected the dehumanization with which the Holocaust survivors were treated in Israeli society, a treatment that stemmed from decades of negating the diaspora and the stereotype of the old and weak Jew. Ben-Gurion’s description of the uneducated immigrants who arrived from “primitive” countries referred to Jews from Arab countries, the *Mizrachim*, and reflected the typical stereotype of these immigrants in Israel, as I noted earlier. What is less commonly known is that Mizrahi immigrants from North Africa were also included in the category of human dust. The Israeli government and society disregarded the diverse cultural backgrounds and special emotional needs of both the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi immigrants, and expected their military experience to erase their former loyalties and experiences and to form in them a united new awareness of themselves as Israelis. The metaphor of the “melting pot” (*kur hitukh* in Hebrew) came to be the name for the official policy concerning the new immigrants during the 1950s and is still, to this very day, the official term in social studies to refer to the policy of that era. In *Infiltration*, Kenaz exposes the gap between the scientific-sounding technical use of the term and its horrifying literal meaning. He reveals the catastrophic implications of the “melting pot” policy by evoking the religious-literary source of the idiom, as well as its literal meaning. In the two conversations Melabes and his high school friend Arik have in the novel, Arik speaks about death, hell, and Dante. In their first conversation, Arik says: “Believe me, there’s no resurrection from this death” (81). Later in the dialogue, when Melabes notes that he has lost track of time, Arik replies: “I told you, it’s hell. In Dante, the souls in purgatory know what’s going to happen in the future but they have no idea what’s happening now” (*ibid.*). In their next conversation, when they talk about remembering the past, Arik says:

And now, you think there aren’t a couple of good guys in my platoon . . . whom I’m together with all the time, going through this hell with them—so what? After basic training each of us will go to his unit and there won’t be any contact between us. . . . Only the present gives things life. That’s why the damned in Dante’s *Inferno* don’t know what’s happening in the present, because they’re no longer alive. They only know the past and the future. (377)

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<sup>327</sup> Segev, *Ha-milyon Ha-shvi’i*, 161, 167.

Arik's use of the words "hell," "purgatory," "Inferno," and "Dante" ties these terms into a shared semantic intertextual field and produces an extended allusion to the *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri.<sup>328</sup> In *The Divine Comedy*, one of the foundational texts in Western literature, Dante portrays himself as a man who is lost in the woods and at the mercy of wild beasts, when the Roman poet Virgil comes to his aid. Virgil then takes him on a journey through the netherworld, where they visit the three kingdoms of the dead: *Inferno* (hell), *Purgatorio* (the purgatory, or the melting pot), and *Paradiso* (heaven).<sup>329</sup> When Dante and Virgil arrive at the gate of the Inferno, the inscription on the archway in front of them says: "Through me the way to the city of woe . . . abandon all hope, you who enter here."<sup>330</sup> As Hanna Herzig points out, the military base of the *kaf-lamedim* is likened to hell. And indeed, as Melabes says to his friend Avner: "If there are circles here like there are in hell, then we're in the lowest circle and Three Platoon is high above us" (372).<sup>331</sup> The military base is often described, through Melabes' contemplations, as a place in which the soul sinks (*shki'at ha-nefesh*), a site that resembles an eternal prison ("I looked at the gray barracks walls . . . the weak electric bulb . . . illuminating everything in . . . gloomy transience that was frozen . . . as if it were a reflection of eternity: this was how I always imagined a prison or a German POW camp" (66)). The *kaf-lamedim* are presented as eternally cursed, contaminated and condemned to isolation, similarly to the sinners who are condemned to hell.<sup>332</sup> They are

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<sup>328</sup> In her analysis of *Infiltration* as comprised of circles, Hanna Herzig points to the metaphysical circle, in which she recognizes a model taken from religious literature and in which the recruits appear as tortured characters who need to be purified of their guilt, and the military base is likened to hell. However, Herzig does not go beyond her general claims; she does not refer to the specific intertextuality, nor does she scrutinize these images for their specific implications for the *kaf-lamedim*. Herzig, *Ha-kol Ha-omer Ani*, 191–95.

<sup>329</sup> *The Divine Comedy* was written by Dante Alighieri between the years 1308–1320. Its view of the netherworld represents the medieval notion of life after death as it was developed in the Western church. Dante's work was revolutionary also in its linguistic aspect, as it was the first major literary work to be written in the vernacular rather than Latin. Its Tuscan dialect became the standardized Italian language. For more on this, see *The Literary Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Dante Alighieri: Divina Commedia," accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=5536>.

<sup>330</sup> *Princeton Dante Project*, Inferno III, lines 1–9, accessed August 12, 2016, [http://etcweb.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/dante/campuscgi/mpb/GetCantoSection.pl?INP\\_POEM=Inf&INP\\_SECT=3&INP\\_START=1&INP\\_LEN=200&LANG=2](http://etcweb.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/dante/campuscgi/mpb/GetCantoSection.pl?INP_POEM=Inf&INP_SECT=3&INP_START=1&INP_LEN=200&LANG=2).

<sup>331</sup> Herzig, *Ha-kol Ha-omer Ani*, 192.

<sup>332</sup> "They have banished us from our homes, disguised our identities, and isolated us in quarantine, as if to hide the danger, localize it, and prevent it from spreading" (Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 9). The analogy to German

compared directly to Dante's damned in Arik's words, when he connects Melabes's losing his sense of time to the eternal condition of the damned ("In Dante, the souls in purgatory . . . have no idea what's happening now"), and when he argues that Melabes will forget his current state, just like Dante's souls do ("That's why the damned in Dante's *Inferno* don't know what's happening in the present, because they're no longer alive"). If the military base is hell, and the *kaf-lamedim* are the sinners condemned to its circles—the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*—then what is their sin? Hanna Herzig claims that the *kaf-lamedim*'s lack of choice in their current situation in basic training and their suffering represent the arbitrariness of the divine authority, with the commanders embodying a merciless God ("the officers hiding up above like cruel gods," Melabes says on p. 495).<sup>333</sup> Unlike Herzig, who ties the punishment of being sent to hell to the arbitrariness of an evil God, I understand the *kaf-lamedim*'s "sin" to be their very existence as soldiers who are unable to fight. The god of Israeli society at that time is the god of war, and that god demands the constant sacrifice of young people's lives. The *kaf-lamedim*'s inability to fight is their treachery against the new god of the 1950s, the god of the state. Their lack of contribution to the general military effort is their great sin for which they are banished to hell.<sup>334</sup> But unlike those who are condemned to Purgatory and who will be taken to paradise after being cleansed of their sins, the *kaf-lamedim* are doomed to remain there forever because their sin is their inability to fight in war. By creating the intertextual connection to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Kenaz literalizes the metaphor in the common fixed expression of "the melting pot." In contextualizing it with Christian religious images of the underworld, Kenaz produces the literal and visual meanings of this allegedly neutral word combination and underscores the extreme violence and cruelty that this policy entails. Interestingly, the Hebrew expression Ben-Gurion employed when referring to the melting pot is *kur ha-mitzraf*, an unusual expression in modern Hebrew, which is the direct translation of the term "purgatory" as it appears in the Hebrew translation of the *Divine Comedy* by Immanuel Olsvanger. Since Olsvanger translated the *Divine Comedy* between the years 1943 and 1955, it is very plausible that Ben-Gurion knew this translation and perhaps was even inspired by it in his use of the Hebrew translation of "purgatory."<sup>335</sup> This

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POW camps and the allusion to the Nazi regime's policy of racial purge and "cleansing" are extremely radical for the time *Infiltration* was published. I thank Chana Kronfeld for this important observation.

<sup>333</sup> Herzig, *Ha-kol Ha-omer Ani*, 192–93.

<sup>334</sup> Their self-image as the sick children of Sparta supports the view of them as condemned and rejected by Israeli society.

<sup>335</sup> Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia Di Dante: Inferno*, trans. Immanuel Olsvanger (Jerusalem: Tarshish Books, 1956). Olsvanger, who immigrated to Palestine in 1933 and was a poet, a translator, and a

speculation is supported by Ben-Gurion's literalization of the purgatory image when describing the process of the new immigrants' acculturation: "The IDF should be one of the main forces to shape the nation's character and to *melt the human dust of the new immigrants . . . in the melting pot [kur ha-mitzraf]* of the renewing homeland" (my emphasis). Given the direct and accurate quotations of Ben-Gurion's speeches in the novel by the soldiers (especially by Micha the Fool), it is most likely that Kenaz was aware of Ben-Gurion's use of Olsvanger's translation. Mapping the recruits' military reality onto Dante's *Divine Comedy* and pointing to Ben-Gurion's use of Dante's image of purgatory enables Kenaz to expose and criticize the violence inherent in the ideological stance of Israeli leadership and in the new social norms of the time.<sup>336</sup>

## The State Apparatus and the Military System

In his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Louis Althusser describes the mechanism of ideology and how it redefines individuals into subjects who obey that ideology voluntarily (or at least are taught to believe so).<sup>337</sup> In its interpellation of the individual, the ideology constitutes him or her as a subject, be it a mother or a father (a subject of the family ideology), a citizen (a subject of the state ideology), a student (a subject of the educational ideology), etc. The ideology, embodied in the form of an idea or a system, needs its subjects no less than they need it; its existence depends on them.<sup>338</sup> Althusser uses religion to exemplify the relationships between ideology and its subjects, referring to God, who represents ideology, as the Subject (with a capital S), and to God's followers as subjects (with a lowercase s). Althusser points to their mirror-structure relationships in which they constitute each other (hence their mutual dependence), relationships that ensure "the absolute guarantee that everything is really so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right."<sup>339</sup> The subjects' failure to notice their

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folklorist, was also a Zionist activist; he maintained close connections with David Ben-Gurion. See: *Lexicon Ha-sifrut Ha-ivrit Ha-chdasha* [Lexicon of modern Hebrew literature], s.v. "Immanuel Olsvanger," accessed April 15, 2016, <https://library.osu.edu/projects/hebrew-lexicon/01141>.

<sup>336</sup> Ben-Gurion's borrowing of Olsvanger's translation to convey his view of the new immigrants as human dust that should be thrown into the purgatory is bitterly ironic: Olsvanger was also a Yiddishist who wrote books about Yiddish folklore and humor. I thank Chana Kronfeld for this observation.

<sup>337</sup> Althusser, "Ideological State Apparatuses," 1–60.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–54.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

interpellation by ideology, explains Althusser, is embodied in the double meaning of the word “subject,” which, on the one hand, signifies a free subjectivity (and thus the individuals conceived themselves as free in their minds), and on the other hand implies “a subjected being who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission.”<sup>340</sup>

As mentioned earlier, David Ben-Gurion, in his essays and speeches, stresses the primary role of the IDF in forming a collective identity of strong, brave, and healthy youth (“Our defense needs, as well as our nation-building needs, will not be fulfilled unless the military becomes the producer of a pioneering combat youth, healthy in its body and soul, . . . brave . . . and diligent, who will not be deterred by any hardship and danger”).<sup>341</sup> The military system was viewed by Ben-Gurion and normative Israeli society as an official representative and an executing body of Zionist ideology. And indeed, the military system attempts to interpellate the *kaf-lamedim* explicitly: The constant discourse of the commanders (who are the system’s representatives) about becoming soldiers and men follows Ben-Gurion’s declared objectives. Unlike other ideological systems, in which the subjectification of individuals is much vaguer, the subjectification in the military system is visible and total.<sup>342</sup>

A clear example of the soldiers’ total subjectification and the coercive collectivity of the military sphere can be seen in the following excerpt from the novel. In a scene that takes place in the third part of the novel, the commanders conduct a search of the *kaf-lamedim* following suspicions that one of them is a drug dealer. The soldiers are instructed to stand in two lines in front of their beds, and the commanders pass between them and search their bodies and belongings:

One MP joins each of the two instructors, who divide the rows of recruits between them. They work quietly and thoroughly . . . only the barked commands disturb the busy silence every couple of minutes as they pass from bed to bed, from suspect to suspect. ‘Did he give you anything?’ ‘No, sir.’ ‘Did anybody else give you anything?’ ‘No, sir.’ ‘Did you see him give anything to anybody else?’ ‘No, sir.’ ‘Get undressed!’ Suspect after suspect strips down to his underpants and bare feet. They shake his clothes, search his pockets, shake out

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>341</sup> Ben-Gurion, *Mishnato*, 435.

<sup>342</sup> The visual elements such as the uniform and the parades distinguish the military reality and illustrate its explicit ideological function.

his socks, shine a flashlight into his shoes. They search the bed and its surroundings. 'Empty your knapsack here!' Suspect after suspect empties the contents of his knapsack onto the floor in front of his bed. They pick up every article of clothing, every object, and pass it from hand to hand; they delve to the bottom of the knapsack in case anything has been left behind. They order lockers to be emptied, they shine their flashlights into the corners. They examine webbing, pouches, straps, canteens, they strip blankets from beds, shake them. . . . A roar of laughter erupts from those who have already been searched . . . and those who are still awaiting their turn. . . . Raffi Nagar [the CO] turns red and yells: 'Stop it!' A silence falls, in which it is still possible to sense the liberating tremor secretly flowing from man to man . . . as if the necessary violence has already been done, as if the sacrifice has already been made, as if their hearts have already been cleansed and purified. . . . After taking off my shoes and socks . . . I bend down to remove my trousers, and my eyes fall on Avner on my left. . . . The knowledge strikes me like a flash of lighting . . . He has not been caught. And immediately afterwards, like a thunderbolt: They'll find it on me. My body breaks out in perspiration and seems to me to be weeping. . . . There isn't a chance of convincing anyone. Nobody will believe me. . . . This time I'm the scapegoat, it's my turn now. . . . Maybe this is the way one identity is concluded and another one begins, detail added to detail, story after story . . . a new memory, a new will, a new dream. My clothes and possessions lying on the floor are passed from hand to hand and my heart denies them, glad of their humiliation. I'm being destroyed, I say to myself, without fear or hope, I'm being gradually destroyed.<sup>343</sup>

The extreme situation, in which the soldiers have to stand still and carefully obey the orders, emphasizes the ultimate subjectification of the soldiers as subjects of the military system. It is precisely the identical negative reply ("No, sir") of all soldiers to the same set of questions that illustrates their total obedience, answering exactly as expected of them. The subjectification is conveyed also on the linguistic level, through near verbatim repetition by the soldiers. The detailed description of the search as applying to every one of the *kaf-lamedim* with no exception or distinction presents the soldiers as identical, reproductions who have been entirely subjectified by the system and who have lost their individual agency in the process. The violent invasion into the *kaf-lamedim*'s bodies and personal belongings is metonymic to the penetration into

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<sup>343</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 389–92.

their minds and souls; this penetration violates and cancels their personal inner space and perpetuates their subjectification. Although the reason for the search is the pursuit of a suspect, the situation itself is depicted as a military ritual. Passive agentless sentences depict the soldiers' complete subjectification: "as if the necessary violence has already been done, as if the sacrifice has already been made, as if their hearts have already been cleansed and purified." The grammar here thematizes the soldiers' loss of individual agency, and portrays the violence as emanating from an impersonal, faceless system. The authoritative voice that the impersonal form lends to this description demonstrates the soldiers' internalization of the violence as necessary, a sacrifice that leads to a collective purification: "as if their hearts have already been cleansed and purified." In the Hebrew original, the word that was translated as "cleansed" is נִצְרָפוּ ("כִּאִילוֹ כִּבְרֵי נִצְרָפוּ הַלִּבּוֹת וְטוֹהָרוּ") (צ.ר.פ.) (*mitzraf*) in the expression כּוֹר הַמִּצְרָף (*kur hamitzraf*), in Ben-Gurion's Dantesque depiction of the army as a melting pot. Melabes, who saw Sammy push a small package into Avner's hands a moment before the commanders entered the barracks, now notices that Avner has not been caught and fears that Avner hid the package in his belongings. Melabes has already accepted his fate ("There isn't a chance of convincing anyone. Nobody will believe me") and contemplates, invoking the biblical notions of sacrifice [*korban*] and sacrificial surrogate [*sa'ir la-azazel*, scapegoat]: "This time I'm the scapegoat, it's my turn now." As I will show later in my discussion of the loss of moral agency in the process of the formation of a collective identity, there is always a scapegoat who pays the price regardless of his relation to the "crime" itself. Rahamim Ben-Hamo, as we will see, is the ultimate scapegoat and is punished over and over by the platoon and the commanders for crimes he did not commit just because he is a convenient target. Melabes believes that the same arbitrariness is being applied to him now, but this is not only because these are the rules of the game in the military sphere. Rather, there is something essential in the situation that enables the transitivity of identities. In the metonymic incursion into the most private spaces, the act of stripping the soldiers' clothes also strips them of their individual identities. The erasure of distinct agency enables its conversion to other agencies, to any of the *kaf-lamedim* who receive the same objectifying treatment. And indeed, Melabes reflects on his fate, which he views as already determined: "Maybe this is the way one identity is concluded and another one begins, detail added to detail, story after story . . . a new memory, a new will, a new dream." Therefore, Melabes' alienation from his belongings ("My clothes and possessions lying on the floor are passed from hand to hand and my heart denies them") and his sense of self-ruin derive from his feeling that he is now being

transformed into someone whose life is destroyed, who is seen as a criminal by his environment, and whose course in life is about to be utterly diverted. The repetition of the “I” in the last sentence of the paragraph (“I’m being destroyed, I say to myself, without fear or hope, I’m being gradually destroyed”) in various forms (I’m, I, myself) seems to be a desperate attempt to resist the erasure of individuality by calling out its grammatical formations. At the same time, Melabes’s desperate calling out of his agency’s grammatical names is also a confirmation of its loss, as the subjectification in these moments is total.

The *kaf-lamedim* fulfill the narrow space for action they have as subjects, which is, according to Althusser, the refusal to submit to a higher authority. They are “the exception,” “the ‘bad subjects’ who . . . provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the repressive State apparatus.”<sup>344</sup> Indeed, throughout the novel, the *kaf-lamedim* are marked as the exception—marginal, condemned by society, and cast out of it. Examining their marginality through an Althusserian lens enables us to notice the potential power in their low position: their ability, as *kaf-lamedim*, to expose the fault lines of the system and its imposed ideology. This ability stems from the very fact of their being in a basic training for noncombat soldiers, of which—unlike basic combat training—the main purpose is non-pragmatic. The drills, parades, and lessons are all for the sake of the vague goal of “turning [them] into men, into soldiers” rather than to acquire skills they can use as soldiers in the future. As such, the exercises, the commanders’ orders, and the parades are all only imitations of “the real thing”—basic combat training. And indeed, both the narrator Melabes and his platoon-mates refer to the performative aspect of their military experience, to their “playing at being soldiers.”<sup>345</sup> But, as Judith Butler points out, the parody of what is considered the original exposes the performance integral to the original itself, which in order to establish itself as what it claims to be has to employ performative means and in doing

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<sup>344</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideological State Apparatuses,” 55.

<sup>345</sup> Melabes points to the performativity surrounding him in various ways: For example, by contemplating the loss of authentic feelings and behavior: “As if we were reacting to the situation in the way it was expected of us, according to the rules of a folklore we were beginning to learn instead of feeling our real pain, our real anxieties. Even Miller’s fits now seemed less real and mysterious to us . . . like some funny, touchy marionette . . . like the part of the performance when the puppeteer lets go of the strings and the puppet drops crookedly and clownishly on the ground” (72–73). Arik says, referring to the commanders’ behavior: “What are they shouting about all the time. . . . And that famous sergeant major . . . you see a demented clown and no more. Look at their movements, that swaggering walk, all the ceremonies, the parades, the rules and regulations they invent” (81–82). Even Alon, who is devoted to the military system and ideology, is aware of the performativity: “Here it’s just a game. We’re playing at being soldiers” (51).

so exposes its lack of originality and its existence on a basis of imitation.<sup>346</sup> Therefore, the *kaf-lamedim* not only expose the futility of their own basic training, but also highlight the ideological interpellation and role-playing embedded in the military as an institution. The knowledge that Melabes the narrator is a literary reflection of Kenaz himself (who was a recruit in basic training for *kaf-lamedim* in the 1950s) presents the story's narration as a reproduction of the events as they happened thirty years prior to the time in which they were written. As Judith Butler and Chana Kronfeld argue, further developing Althusser's statement about the "bad subjects," the subject's repetition of the hegemonic words that constituted him or her, but with a change, even if slight, enables him or her to subvert his/her total subjection by the hegemony.<sup>347</sup> Focusing on the poetic subject and the function of intertextuality in Yehuda Amichai's poetry, Kronfeld shows how the repetition of an authoritative text, but with a change, allows the speaker some room for agency.<sup>348</sup> In the same manner, Kenaz reproduces the events by narrating them through Melabes's point of view, regaining through the process of narration some of the agency he lost at the narrated time. Employing rhetorical and narratological strategies (such as irony, defamiliarization, change of focal point, intertextuality), Kenaz entrusts his narrator with the control and reclamation of the past, and subverts the constitutive power of the Israeli military. Through his re-creation of the events, Kenaz retrieves them and—in his Bakhtinian polyphony with the abject soldiers—mends past injustices, if only retrospectively.

### **Formation of Collectivity: The Temptation of Power and the Loss of Moral Agency**

In his analysis of *Infiltration*, Michael Gluzman focuses on the physical and abject body of the *kaf-lamedim* as the embodiment of the Old Jew's physicality as it was perceived in Zionist ideology.<sup>349</sup> I would like to open my discussion of collective and individual identity by extending Gluzman's interpretation to include the symbolic meaning of the body as signifying a national and ideological collective, in which the whole "superorganism" is more important than the individuals that comprise it. This notion

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<sup>346</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 34, 43, 192.

<sup>347</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 129; Kronfeld, *Full Severity*, chap. 3, especially 160–63.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>349</sup> Gluzman, *Ha-guf Ha-tziyon*, 221–35.

of the body underscores the blind obedience to the system that controls the body, its subjectification to it.

In the previous section, I dealt with Althusser's views of the ideological apparatus and its power over the individuals, a power to which they submit willingly. Althusser speaks of the mutual dependence of the subjects and the ideological system, but he does not address the source of this mutual need. What drives the subjects to willingly submit to their condition as subjects? What need does this submission satisfy? As I understand it, the subjection of the individuals to ideological systems in their lives, such as the family, the school, or work, fulfills the basic human need of belonging. In return for submitting to an ideological system, one gains the sense of being part of a community (even if, as Althusser might argue, it is a false community, a deceptive manipulation of the system), and his or her need for identity is met.<sup>350</sup> The characteristics of the collective in which the person is a member define that person, answering the existential question of "who am I?" This is Melabes's internal struggle—the struggle inherent in resisting the great temptation to join the collective—from the first day he spends in basic training with his platoon-mates: "The conversation took off . . . I didn't want to be part of them. . . . An inner voice told me that in rough times ahead I'd have to preserve all my strength" (8).<sup>351</sup> And indeed, there is an aesthetic and affective beauty in the power and harmony of the group, as Melabes attests when he marches on the parade ground with his platoon, and with the other platoons in their unit:

One by one the companies and platoons marched onto the parade ground and fell in around three of its sides . . . and the general movement advanced and diverged with a marvelous logic, uniform, economical, and spectacular . . . and I sensed a strange happiness taking hold of me and pride at being part of all this. . . . And in the silence that fell when the flag was raised, to the muffled beat

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<sup>350</sup> In viewing the relationship between the subjects and their ideology as characterized in mirror-structure, Althusser may imply a connection, that one is identical to the other, but he does not mention this as resolving the human psychological need for identity.

<sup>351</sup> In the Hebrew original, the link between the temptation to join the group and the struggle to resist it is clearer. The literal translation would be: "People connected to each other through the conversation and barriers fell." The key word Kenaz is using to describe the conversation is *hitkashra*, from *keshet*, "connection," which indeed expresses the human need for social connection, and therefore explains the allure of the collective for Melabes. Unfortunately, Dalya Bilu did not translate these words. "השיחה התקשרה, מחיצות נפלו... לא רציתי להיות חלק מהם. הקול הפנימי אמר לי שהמבחן יהיה קשה ועלי לשמור על כל כוחותיי... (קנו, התגנבות יחידים, עמ' 12)

of the drums, I could hear the breathing of the men standing next to me frozen, rigid and solemn as they presented their arms, and I knew that they were feeling the same thing I felt, and what had been up to now surrender and renunciation turned into love. It flowed among us like repressed weeping, contagious and electrifying and full of beauty.<sup>352</sup>

Melabes is taken by the beauty of the orderly marching and the solemnity of the large parade, yet Kenaz's choice of the mass parade as the situation that arouses Melabes's excitement and admiration conveys the critique implicit in the description. The focus on the military and national symbols (the flag, the drum, the weapon) and the description of the soldiers who are "standing . . . frozen, rigid and solemn as they presented their arms" are reminiscent of fascism's fascination with the military parade and evoke the potential threat of collective power when harnessed to ideology. Total uniformity is embodied not only in the soldiers' identical movements, but also in the shared emotion that Melabes describes with certainty ("and I knew that they were feeling the same thing I felt"). But the price of surrendering to the alluring beauty of the mass is dear, as the syntax of the next lines betrays. The disappearance of the syntactical subject ("I") from the rest of the sentence ("and what had been up to now surrender and renunciation turned into love") conveys the loss of the individual and of moral agency as a result of falling in love with the power of the group. The last sentence completes the sense of submission to the collective, as the use of a first-person plural object pronoun testifies ("it flowed among *us* like a repressed weeping"). The danger that lurks in giving in to the power of the mass is implied in the images Melabes uses to describe his and his friends' feeling: "repressed weeping," "contagious," "electrifying."<sup>353</sup> Indeed, the recurring expressions of collectivity in *Infiltration* are mostly negative and exemplify the corruptive power of the group. When the soldiers unite, it is

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<sup>352</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 67.

<sup>353</sup> The description of the military collectivity echoes Ben-Gurion's speeches about the role of Israeli youth in life and specifically in the military. Ben-Gurion emphasized the importance of the collective identity both in the content of his speeches (as I showed earlier in my discussion of the melting pot) and in their form; he employed collective nouns such as "generation" (*dor*) and "youth" (*no'ar*), which in Hebrew require the use of singular verbs and adjectives, thereby stressing his view of molding all identities into one identity of a strong brave Israeli as the ideal. His famous speech to high school seniors in 1954 referred to their role in national missions and uses the collective singular masculine noun *no'ar*, youth. This speech appears as an intertext twice in the novel, underscoring Kenaz's critique of the ideological control Ben-Gurion represents.

almost always to commit acts of degradation and violence against a weak individual who serves as a scapegoat, and on whom they take out their anger and frustration. Ben-Hamo, who is the most degraded soldier in Melabes's platoon, is abused both by his close circle of Mizrahi peers and by the larger circle of the platoon as a whole. The first instance of Ben-Hamo being falsely accused of something is when Peretz-Mental-Case accidentally scorches his (Peretz's) blanket with his cigarette. The group of Mizrahi soldiers bursts into laughter and one of them, Sammy, cries out: "Ben-Hamo, look what you did!" The accusation soon becomes serious and the entire group turns against Ben-Hamo, forcing him to take Peretz's scorched blanket and give Peretz his own blanket. The rest of the soldiers witness the event, as we can learn from Melabes's narration, but no one intervenes to defend Ben-Hamo's innocence. Since each soldier is responsible for the military equipment he has received and would be severely punished for damaging any of it, Ben-Hamo is sent to a military trial and is sentenced to stay the weekend in the military base while the rest of the platoon is released home. Ben-Hamo's being falsely accused by his peers, which results in an actual military trial and punishment, again evokes a drumhead court-martial, with its quick and unjust procedures. This relates back to the very opening of the novel, when Melabes describes his recollections passing in front of his closed eyes "like the burst of shots after a summary court-martial" (3). The image of shots in Melabes's description foreshadows the catastrophic implications that Ben-Hamo's ill treatment by those around him will have.

Later in the novel, Ben-Hamo is once again accused of a crime he did not commit: this time he is found guilty of ruining Ressler's guitar. And once again, the soldiers (this time, soldiers from the larger circle of the platoon) are united as a gang that blames Ben-Hamo and executes his punishment at night, as Melabes witnesses: "I saw the shadows rising and leaving the Jerusalemites' corner . . . they advanced on Rahamim's bed . . . and he was rolled up in his blanket, held immobile in their hands, and they were beating him" (450).<sup>354</sup> The image of the soldiers who gather at night to beat Ben-Hamo is of shadows, or ghosts, an image that dehumanizes them and enhances their loss of human agency, and at the same also associates them with the Dantesque netherworld. Importantly, Melabes himself learns during the events

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<sup>354</sup> The collective beating while the victim is rolled in a blanket (a punishment known in Hebrew as *smikha*) was a common form of punishment among soldiers or members of other group organizations who shared their living quarters (such as youth in the kibbutz), yet the very fact that Ben-Hamo was accused of and judged for burning a blanket, and later on is punished in a blanket perpetuates the sense of his stagnant situation and his inability to escape his constant stance as a scapegoat.

(but before the punishment is carried out) that Ben-Hamo is innocent, as Avner secretly tells him that he was the one who had crushed Ressler's guitar. Melabes's thoughts haunt him at night, and he even has an imaginary dialogue with Avner in which Avner asks him why he doesn't tell the truth to prevent the injustice. Instead, Melabes remains in his bed and watches silently as the soldiers take vengeance on Ben-Hamo. Even Melabes, the narrator who maneuvers the plot from the sidelines and who had taken cautionary measures against the collective, cannot evade the destructive effect of the collective. Even he is already infected.

The corruptive power of the collective is also embodied in the platoon's behavior toward Miller, the new immigrant from Germany who is older than the rest of the soldiers and suffers from epilepsy. Melabes describes Miller as a pathetic clown whose broken Hebrew and heavy German accent add to his ridiculous appearance in the eyes of his peers, who often make fun of him. When Miller returns to the barracks after a visit to the paramedic (he had collapsed during the parade), he learns that the weekend leave that was planned for the platoon has been canceled. Miller sits down helplessly on his bed, shaking his head in disappointment:

The laughter bubbling up inside us at the sight of Miller boiled over. Our eyes gleamed as we saw each other's gaze. Perhaps because Miller reflected our situation and its consequences to us in the form of a caricature: the heartbreak and disappointment and helplessness. And however genuine and pathetic these feelings were in the wretched figure and grotesque speech of Miller, they were nevertheless ridiculous, superficial, and unreal to us.<sup>355</sup>

In the Hebrew original, the last words of the excerpt above are (in literal translation): "וככל שרגשות אלה היו אמיתיים ופאטתיים בדמותו" ("and unreal in our reaction").<sup>355</sup> האומללה ובדיבורו הנלעג של מילר, כך היום מגוחכים, שטחיים, חסרי ממש בתגובתנו... (עמוד 75). The English translation fails to render the mirror-image that Melabes creates between Miller and the soldiers, a mirroring that highlights the contrast between the emotionally genuine heartbreak of Miller, who remains true to himself while being marginalized and ridiculed, and the superficial and unreal reactions of Melabes and his friends, who have lost, in their coercive and numbing collectivity, the ability to experience and convey true emotion. Indeed, Miller is the only person in the platoon who stands up for Ben-Hamo, and he intervenes several times when Ben-Hamo's close circle of friends, the Mizrachi soldiers, or other soldiers from the

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<sup>355</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 72.

platoon, are about to beat him.<sup>356</sup> Alon too is an exception: He intervenes in one of the pranks being played on Miller and stops it.<sup>357</sup>

It is no coincidence that both Miller and Alon end up tragically: They dare to take a stance and resist the corruptive social power of the collective, and their tragic ends serve as parables for the misfortune of those who attempt to openly defy the constitution of military collectivity. As the soldiers become a cohesive body in the process of their formation as subjects of the military system, they receive agency as a platoon, a collective identity of the kind Ben-Gurion holds up as an ideal in his speeches. But, as Kenaz shows in the novel's design, it is a hollow agency whose constitution destroys the moral agency of the individuals it is comprised of. The military system, which is the state's ideological representative, also has agency (it is the Subject, to borrow Althusser's lexicon), but as an institutional agency, it is formal and bureaucratic, devoid of human consideration. Nevertheless, its agency enables the hierarchic mechanism, in which there are subjugators and subjects, masters and slaves.<sup>358</sup> The hierarchy lends each subordinator the authority to oppress its subordinates, and at the same time, the subordinator's status is relative: He himself is subordinated to a higher authority and is subjected to its oppression. Each subject in the system holds a position of full power in relation to the subject beneath it, but is also devoid of any power as he is subordinated to the subject

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<sup>356</sup> Such as in the case where several soldiers of the platoon accuse Rahamim Ben-Hamo of crushing Yossi Ressler's guitar. After Micky punches Ben-Hamo in the stomach and is about to hit him again, Miller intervenes: "Suddenly Miller was standing there, a clown from a different comedy. He stationed himself between Micky and Rahamim and cried: 'Madmen! What gives here? Madmen! Why to hit Rahamim all the day?'" (447)

<sup>357</sup> "Miller opened his suitcase. . . . All eyes turned to him. . . . What had at first been accidental, because of the noise of the click, quickly turned, by means of winks and eye signals rapidly communicated from bed to bed, into a siege. . . . In the end he lifted his head from the notebook. . . and looked around him, and his brown, parchment-like face twisted in alarm. . . . He sat like this, afraid to raise his head from the notebook. . . when he finally decided to raise his head his face was trembling with terror and rage. . . . again the eyes closed in on him from all directions. . . . He must have imagined a ring tightening around him, for he suddenly thrust out his hands as a warning not to come any closer, closed his eyes, and uttered a brief, choked, animal cry: 'What is it?' Alon was suddenly on his feet in the aisle between the two rows of beds. For a moment he stood there looking distraught, and then he went up to Miller's bed and said to him: 'It's nothing. It's only a joke. Don't be frightened.' Then he surveyed us with narrowed eyes, from one end of the room to the other, and shouted: 'Stop it! Bastards! Bastards! Bastards!'" (85)

<sup>358</sup> Hanna Herzig addresses the relationship between the soldiers and commanders as a relationship between oppressors and oppressed, masters and slaves, in her analysis of *Infiltration*. See Herzig, *Ha-kol Ha-omer Ani*, 192.

above him. Benny the commander abuses and humiliates the *kaf-lamedim*, yet he himself was removed from his prestigious position as a commander in the paratroopers and was transferred to his current position as a commander of *kaf-lamedim*. The Ashkenazi *kaf-lamedim* oppress their Mizrachi peers, as can be seen in the condescending and hurtful attitude of Hedgehog, Micky, and Ressler toward the Mizrachi group of soldiers, and the Mizrachi soldiers in turn degrade Ben-Hamo. The platoon as a whole, as well as the commanders, mock and abuse the most marginalized and degraded soldiers—Ben-Hamo, Zero-Zero, and Miller. The hierarchic mechanism of oppression operates through the subjects' internalization of the degradation, and its release on other subjects who are in a lower position. The common quality around which the subjects in this system are united is negativity: emotions of hostility against the weak. And since Miller, Ben-Hamo and Zero-Zero embody the archetypal new immigrants, the resentment against them gives concrete expression to the negation of the diaspora that was central in Israeli society. Fostering negativity, the system's representatives oppress any expressions of solidarity, which could have been the positive outcome of collectivity. When Alon tries to be a spokesperson for his friends by conveying to commander Benny that the new running route is too difficult for most of the platoon,<sup>359</sup> Benny scolds and punishes him ("You said something that in the army is considered incitement to mutiny. . . . You miserable nonentity! . . . After parade you'll report to the CSM for latrine duty. You'll find everything you need to satisfy your interfering soul there" (160–61)).

Later in the novel, when Zero-Zero is paralyzed with fear while holding a live grenade during one of the drills, Alon grabs the grenade, throws it away, and saves Zero-Zero and the platoon a split second before the grenade explodes. But instead of praising him for his courage and initiative, Benny slaps Alon in the face. The only spontaneous expressions of friendship among the platoon's soldiers occur in liminal moments of time and space, when the *kaf-lamedim* come back from their weekend leave and meet each other at the gate of the military base. When they are still in between the two worlds, still close to the outside world in which they could temporarily retrieve their individual identities and their capacity for empathy, they express authentic joy at meeting again ("There was no reasonable explanation for the happiness we felt, the happiness of the return and reunion" (355)). And even

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<sup>359</sup> Alon himself was one of the few who ran with no difficulty, but his caring for his friends drove him to convey their complaints.

the old rivalry between the Ashkenazi and the Mizrahi groups seems to have faded away (“Zackie suddenly fell on Hedgehog, lifted him into the air, and slung him over his shoulder like a sack of flour. Hedgehog . . . choked with laughter and fear” (355)). But as they come closer to their barracks and back to their collective lives there, their spontaneous and positive feelings dissipate: “Soon we would be returning . . . to the sourish smell of the wooden barracks . . . the smell of the dried sweat on the fatigues we left in our knapsacks before we went on leave, and these smells would bring back the old resentments . . . and the moments of hatred and longing” (356).

Perhaps the character that exemplifies most profoundly Kenaz’s view of the military system as based on negativity and arbitrariness is Benny the commander, who appears in the novel a short time after the *kaf-lamedim* begin their basic training. Melabes remembers him from his childhood as a neglected and socially marginalized boy who failed in his studies and was expelled from school. Melabes tells Avner about his vivid memory of Benny:

He was a wretched child, neglected, lazy, dirty, and rather stupid. . . . He was in a class for a year or two. . . . At the end of the year he was told that the school would not be keeping him on. On the last day of school . . . we came to get our report cards. . . . When we walked into the classroom we saw that someone had shat on the teacher’s table, a big pile, with pieces of white paper next to it that the culprit had used to wipe himself with . . . our class teacher came into the room . . . when she approached the table a scream burst from her lips . . . the whole class was there, except for Benny . . . her eyes fell on the pieces of white paper. Then she stepped off the platform and went over to look at the map of Eretz Israel on the wall, and she shrieked: ‘The map! The map of our country! He used the map of Eretz Israel!’ . . . A few weeks later, I met him in the street and he asked me what the last day of school was like. . . . I told him about what had happened . . . and he showed a lot of interest in how it had gone over, what the reactions were. Like an artist. You know?<sup>360</sup>

In shitting on the map of the Land of Israel, Benny expressed his utter disrespect for the national and social values that the map of Eretz Israel stands for and marked himself as an outsider in relation to those values—Israeli society, Israeli land (which is also conveyed in the teacher’s cry: “the map of *our* country!”). When Melabes describes Benny’s interest in the class’s reactions, he refers to him as an artist in the

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<sup>360</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 187–88.

original sense, a performer who is curious to learn of his spectators' response. But the fact that Benny is the *kaf-lamedim*'s commander resonates with the slang meaning of the term *artist*, which the commanders often use against the recruits, and underscores that Benny is the embodiment of the *artist*, since the latter is seen as being completely dismissive of society's core principles and values. In fact, Benny's act is much more severe on the scale of "artistry" (*artistiyut*), as it did not even serve the practical purpose of evading hard work (as the "artists", *artistim*, are accused of), but was done for pure provocation. Much later in the novel, when Alon is being punished for idle shooting and is isolated from the platoon, Benny uses the opportunity to abuse him in the guise of a military drill:

"Enemy to the left! Enemy to the right! Up! Down! Up! Down!" The mud in this place smells like rust. His face is stuck in it, his body suddenly refuses to rise. Benny kicks his thigh: "Up! You miserable nut! Up! . . . What's the matter with you? . . . The fighter who's going to the paratroops, who's too good for training Base 4. Get Up!" Benny's boot pushes his face into the mud. . . . Benny's voice calls again: "Up! Up!" but the pressure on his head doesn't let up. . . . "That's enough, get up!" . . . He stands up.<sup>361</sup>

Benny orders Alon to wash his face and hair in the shower and then he talks with him:

"You could have been the outstanding student of the platoon. . . . Do you suffer from psychological problems?" . . . Alon said: "I don't have any more problems than anyone else." "If you don't want to be a jobnik, there are lots of things you can do in the army. . . . You can be an officer, an instructor, even right here on Training Base Four." "Sir, I wanted to be a fighter." "You wanted! . . . So what if you wanted? I wanted all kinds of things too. . . . If it's good enough for me, why isn't it good enough for you? Are you worth more than me? Why? Because you're a kibbutznik? . . . If you pull yourself together, you can go far. . . . You know what it means to be an instructor here on this base? You know how much power it gives you? I showed you that before, when you were lying in the mud. . . . I did it to make you feel the difference between us, the power they give an instructor here. . . . An instructor on a training base has more power than an

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<sup>361</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 433–34.

officer in a lot of other units. You control people, you can play with their lives however you like, you can decide their fate.”<sup>362</sup>

In the last two excerpts, one can discern Benny’s sadistic use of power. In his explanation to Alon about the reason for humiliating him, Benny exposes the inconsistency between the use of authority and the declared ideological goals that the use of authority is supposed to serve. As Arik, Melabes’s friend, states: “Here I discovered that . . . people who’ve been given power—in other words, the possibility of forcing other people to do whatever they feel like—enjoy the very fact that they can make others suffer . . . they can humiliate them and torment them, and be regarded as national heroes at the same time” (78). If we return to Althusser’s analysis of ideological systems, then the very fact that every representative of the ideological system is in himself a subject who is oppressed by a higher authority within the system is precisely what produces the destructive violence of ideological institutions. In his portrayal of Benny, Kenaz takes Althusser’s discourse out of the realms of theory and illustrates the concrete oppressive mechanism of the ideological system at work. Benny, who had been subjected and rejected by the educational system, was able to achieve a high status in the military system in which he can control other subjects. Although seemingly separate, both systems are sub-institutions within the ideological system of Israeli hegemony. The rejection and subjectification Benny has absorbed in his childhood days, as well as in his removal from the paratroopers corps, are channeled into the abusive treatment of his soldiers.

### **Narratological Shifts as Expressions of the Loss of Individual Agency**

Until the second part of the novel, the narration is mostly focalized on Melabes, the soldier narrator who takes part in the events (even if in a very passive role) and describes them through first-person narrative. Although his agency is limited, as we’ve seen, Melabes still fulfils most of the conventional parameters of a first-person character narrator, being both the narrator and the focalizer. But with the opening of Part II of *Infiltration*, in which the *kaf-lamedim* are released home on the occasion of Rosh Hashanah (except two of them who stay on the base for guard duty), the conflation of focalization and narration immediately falls apart and Melabes is no

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<sup>362</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 435.

longer present in all the events. In the first few passages of each chapter in Part II, the reader is unable to recognize the focalizer through whose agency the events are experienced. As mentioned earlier, many critics interpreted these narratological shifts as a sign of the author's weakness in controlling the story line. Only years later, following Ariel Hirschfeld's analysis of *Infiltration* as a ground-breaking novel that reflects the social and ethnic fissures in Israeli society, were the narratological moves reread by critics as a rhetorical strategy for sounding the many voices in Israeli society. Yet no close reading of these changes in agency has been attempted to date. Beyond the important but general conclusions about the polyphony these shifts express, no studies have looked in detail at the function of these innovative narratological moves, or that of the deferral of revealing the focalizers' identity to the reader. The following excerpts from the first two pages of Part II of *Infiltration* will help shed light on some of these moves:

"You're not going to meet your friends," asked his mother. She was standing at the entrance to the room . . . familiar smile on her face, the smile he could no longer bear to look at: worried, inquisitive, complacent, reproachful, apologetic, sarcastic, concealing more than it revealed. . . . His room was exactly as he had left it, and nevertheless he could not rid himself of the strange, disturbing feeling that something had been changed . . . why was he so disturbed by this feeling, nagging away like an unresolved riddle?

"Oded came this morning to ask if you were coming home for the holiday. . . ."

"Yes, you told me before. . . ." His textbooks were still standing on the bookcase by the desk. . . . On one of the shelves . . . stood a fairly recent photograph of the team. . . . He got out of bed and went over to the shelf, to examine the photo from close up and find himself in it. "Your father will get up soon and we'll have coffee." "I want to shower first." He examined the faces of the friends standing next to him, feeling no curiosity as to what they were doing now. . . . "We'll wait for you," his mother said and left the room.<sup>363</sup>

In these excerpts, we are introduced into the focalizer's stream of consciousness. We observe his mother's smile through his critical eyes, listen to their ongoing dialogue, and examine the photograph of him and his friends along with him. But despite the specific details of his room, his family, and his friends (we are even given the name of one of his friends), and despite having access to his intimate contemplations, we cannot

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<sup>363</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 215–16.

determine the focalizer's identity. In the Hebrew novel, it is not until the middle of the second page that we are able to identify him, through a detail that is given to us as if incidentally, while describing the mother's appearance.<sup>364</sup> In the English translation, the focalizer's identity is revealed to us even later, in his reply to his mother's words. "So you're not sorry now that they didn't take you to the paratroops," she wonders. The answer reveals his name: "It doesn't make any difference now,' said Micky" (216). The dissonance between the personal details revealed about the focalizer, including his answers in first-person singular form (the ultimate individual agency), and our inability to recognize his identity, produce a defamiliarization of conventional notions about what generates an individual identity, and points to the elusiveness and fragility of this identity. Micky's room becomes metonymic for his inner space, and therefore the disturbing feeling he has that his room was changed expresses his sense of the internal change he has undergone since he left home and joined the army. Through the confusion surrounding the focalizer's identity, a confusion that is constructed in narratological means but permeates the focalizer's consciousness, Kenaz has the reader share in the profoundly disorienting effect of basic training on the soldiers.

Both of the next two chapters continue to defamiliarize the agency of the characters whose point of view mediates events and experiences for the reader. The narration is comprised of a third-person singular form and a first-person singular form, which mostly conveys the focalizer's stream of consciousness. The third-person narration is conventionally interpreted as narrated by an omniscient narrator, but in the case of *Infiltration*, the omniscient narrator's presence is hardly felt, as he does not preserve any ironic distance from the focalizer, and the moves from first-person narration to third-person narration (and in a few cases, to second-person narration) are almost seamless and support the flow of the story. The chapter that follows Micky's return to

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<sup>364</sup> "פניה הרחבים עם האף הרחב, חריצי העיניים התכולים והגבות הבהירות, כל התוים הדומים כל כך לתוי פניו של מיקי, לא הראו שום סימני זיקנה" (*התגנבות יחידים*, עמ' 218, ההדגשה שלי).

In the English translation, this sentence does not reveal the focalizer's identity, since his name, Micky, is translated into a pronoun (his): "Her Broad face with its broad nose, slitty blue eyes, and fair eyebrows, all the features that so resembled *his own*, showed no sign of age" (Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 216, my emphasis). The translator's decision not to give away the focalizer's name bears narratological implications. In the Hebrew original, the exposure of the focalizer's identity brings in the narrator (not Melabes but an omniscient narrator, perhaps the adult narrator, who is privy to the events that take place outside Melabes's sphere) and merges his focalization with Micky's point of view. The English translation maintains Micky's focalization as the sole point of view. It is only later, when Micky answers his mother's statement about the service in the paratroopers, that the omniscient narrator and Micky's focalizations are merged.

his home opens with a letter that addresses a beloved woman, “Dearest Dafna.” But although many personal details about the letter writer are disclosed, his identity remains unknown. Only a page later do we recognize him as Alon: “Rahamim came inside. . . . Alon raised his eyes from his writing pad, looked at him for a moment, and then put the pad down on his bed” (239). So it is again in the following chapter, which begins in medias res with very concrete circumstances of place, time, and even the names of interlocutors. The as yet unnamed focalizer is walking in Jerusalem at the center of town at noon, and encounters Yaffa, his secret lover’s best friend, who refuses to deliver his discreet message to his lover. Again, despite this intimate information, the focalizer’s identity is not revealed until the fifth page, and again it is disclosed as if incidentally, in a poignant thought passing through his stream of consciousness about the secret meeting with his lover, which contains a third-person reference to himself: “I’ll go there and wait . . . slipping away in the middle of the service isn’t going to be passed over either. . . . All the arguments and quarrels and lies. For something that is perfectly natural . . . the minimum a man of my age needs. . . . Does someone up there ever feel sorry for Avner?”<sup>365</sup>

Interestingly, the focalizers complement one another on the axis of time. Micky’s chapter takes place from Friday afternoon until Friday night. The chapter about Alon and Rahamim Ben-Hamo (who stay on the base for guard duty) happens on Saturday morning, as we learn from Alon’s letter (“Ten o’clock in the morning—Sabbath, Rosh Hashana” (238)), and the chapters about Avner begin on Saturday at noon and end on Saturday night (these chapters close Part II; Part III takes place on the base, upon the *kaf-lamedim*’s return from their holiday). The fact that these chapters are not simultaneous but rather sequential in time creates a new sense of inter-subjectivity, as if Micky, Alon, and Avner complete each other, and their beings are interdependent, constructing together a collective identity. The continuing temporality illustrates the gradual loss of their individual agency: Even when they return to their personal environments,<sup>366</sup> they are still captives of the military reality that has taken over their existence. They have already been constituted as subjects of the military system and are in the process of developing a unified and collective identity, a process which is thematized through their shared temporality and is conveyed through the reader’s inability to recognize them as individuals at the opening of the chapters.

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<sup>365</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 255.

<sup>366</sup> In Alon’s case it is through the writing of his letter to his girlfriend.

In the first chapter of the fourth (and last) part of the novel, the *kaf-lamedim* are again released home for the weekend. As in Part II, the focalizer's identity is concealed in the opening of each unit, to be revealed much later, after we learn about the circumstances he is in, about his interlocutors, and about his thoughts and feelings. But unlike Part II, in Part IV everything is much quicker and much more condensed. The time off from the military base is compressed into a single chapter (whereas in Part II the weekend events are depicted over five chapters), and the transitions from one protagonist to the other are swift and immediate, with the change occurring from one paragraph to the next. The rapid pace of events and movements from one character to the other enhances the defamiliarization of the focalizer's agency; as if the continuous time the *kaf-lamedim* have shared in the military sphere since their last vacation has enhanced the imprint of a collective identity on them: Each individual agency has almost completely dissolved in the melting pot of basic training, the process of unifying their identities into one has almost been completed, and therefore the time and narrative dedicated to their separate personalities has been shortened.

The increased defamiliarization of the focalizing agency also evokes thoughts about the inherent qualities of the individual: What differentiates Micky from Rahamin, or Rahamim from Avner? Since each focalizer receives the right to navigate the story through his own point of view and we enter into that personal inner world, suddenly the differences between the characters disappear and we cannot recognize them categorically but only by external circumstances.<sup>367</sup> Our pressing need and constant attempt to determine the focalizer's identity so that we can see him through the lens of our earlier suppositions about him illustrate the unreliability of judgments based on a partial knowledge of the characters. By blurring the distinction between one person and another, Kenaz conveys his ethical stance, illustrating the hidden multidimensionality of each protagonist,<sup>368</sup> and therefore also illustrating the inherent injustice in the superficial collective figures they are coerced into becoming. The characters whose experiences are related in Part IV are the same ones as in Part II, but their narratological roles shift. Rahamim Ben-Hamo, whose agency until now has always been mediated through dialogues with and focalizations of other soldiers, becomes a focalizer for the first time:

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<sup>367</sup> For example, when the focalizer is greeted by Dafna, who asks him to wait for Alon (505), we assume it is Micky who has come to visit his friend on the kibbutz, but nothing in his thoughts or behavior necessarily fix his identity as Micky.

<sup>368</sup> Especially of Ben-Rahamim, who is for the first and last time a focalizer, allowing us to learn of his internal world, his sensitivity and his deep suffering.

He'll never get used to it. Not to the shrinking of fear, not to the choked cry of pain, not to the groan of relief and the inner melting, always unexpected, rising from his depths and spreading through all his limbs, swelling in his chest like a new breath, harsh as a sob, broad and even as sleep . . . sharpening the sense of the moment like a point of light . . . an incessant flickering of moments, strengthening their grip . . . with the heartbeats of pursuit and flight echoing from the earth and drumming in his temples: There's a long way still to go, there's a long way still to go, there's a long way still to go. His uncle pulls the blanket more tightly around his shoulders . . . in his eyes the embers of chastising fire are still smoldering. . . . Rahamim approaches him, sits at the foot of the bed, on the floor, his head downcast, his eyes red but dry, his face frozen, supposing that the hiding is over. When the hand swoops swiftly and hits him in the face, he falls flat on the ground with his hands protecting his cheeks. . . . The old man . . . tightens the blanket around his shoulders and . . . asks Rahamim if he will keep to the straight and narrow. Rahamim takes his hands off his face . . . and nods. The old man demands to hear him say it. Rahamim says he'll keep to the straight and narrow. The old man demands a promise that he will be a good soldier and obey his commanding officers. Rahamim promises. The old man sighs bitterly. . . . He rises slowly from his bed . . . and stares at Rahamim expectantly. Rahamim knows what's expected from him. He . . . turns in a semicircle with his face to the door . . . and his back to the uncle. The old man secludes himself in the corner with his pile of belongings . . . takes out a bill, folds it . . . places it in Rahamim's palm, and gives him a hefty push on the shoulder. Rahamim recoils a few steps backward, returns, takes the uncle's hand and kisses it. . . . After going out and shutting the door, he . . . turns away, heading slowly for the wadi. . . . Something has hardened inside him like a scab, like armor. When the idea first came to him, he was afraid. . . . But now his heart is full of quietness and confidence.<sup>369</sup>

The opening lines of the passage in the Hebrew are written as lyrical poetry, with insistent rhyme and repetition leading to a rhythmic crescendo: *u-maka be-tupey ha-raka: od ha-derekh aruka, od ha-derekh aruka, od ha-dereck aruka.*<sup>370</sup> The poetic structure of

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<sup>369</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 509–10.

<sup>370</sup> Kenaz, *Hitganvut Yechidim*, 513–14. In English (which does not translate the rhyming and rhythm): “drumming in his temples: There's a long way still to go, there's a long way still to go, there's a long way still to go.”

the paragraph's opening, delivered through the focalizer's consciousness, aestheticizes the pain and allows him—and us—some distance from the direct humiliating experience, at least for a while. The peak of the poetic structure, which rhymes and uses emphatic assonance in Hebrew in the repetition “There's a long way still to go, there's a long way still to go, there's a long way still to go” is followed by a literal slap in the face which brings him back to the direct pain and humiliation. This moment is also the moment in which the focalizer's identity is revealed to be Rahamim Ben-Hamo. The profound discrepancy between the beautiful poetic lines and the image of Rahamim Ben-Hamo in the novel reveals his inner self as an artist, beyond the performative manifestations (he is not only a dancer, but a poet as well). The text constructs an analogy between the victimization of this artistic character at home and in the army, exposing the level of Ben-Hamo's subjectification by the various authority systems surrounding him since he immigrated to Israel. In Part II, when he stays with Alon on guard duty during Rosh Hashana, he tells him about his harsh experiences at a boarding school on the kibbutz to which he was sent upon his arrival to Israel. In his most private sphere, his home, he is also degraded by his uncle, to whom he has to turn for money. If we examine the passage above through Althusserian-Marxist eyes, then the uncle, who holds the means of production within the family system, demands Ben-Hamo's total subjectification by explicitly hailing him as a subject of the military system: “The old man. . . asks Rahamim if he will keep to the straight and narrow. Rahamim . . . nods. The old man demands to hear him say it. Rahamim says he'll keep to the straight and narrow. The old man demands a promise that he will be a good soldier and obey his commanding officers. Rahamim promises.” By forcing Ben-Hamo to repeat his words, the uncle (who represents the family system) is of course also hailing him as his subject. Ben-Hamo's subjectification is so extreme that even though he is the focalizer in the scene above, his authentic voice is not heard. Even when he repeats his uncle's words verbatim, his utterance is conveyed in indirect speech (“Rahamim says he'll keep to the straight and narrow”; “Rahamim promises”). His agency, through which we get a glimpse into his consciousness, is enabled through the decision he reaches at the end of the paragraph. This decision, as we learn later, brings disaster upon Rahamim and his family, but it is his only way to break free from his intolerable subjectification:

To renounce everything and cling to the moment . . . as if it had all been done long ago and you were only going through the motions . . . like a dance. Without hope. In supreme necessity. In free will. The body knows the plan. This is the

secret of serenity. For the body is free and only the soul is bound in chains. A smile rises to Rahamim's lips.<sup>371</sup>

He waits a moment longer until he is sure that his mother is settled in at the neighbor's:

the old man . . . probably gone to bed . . . he can hear him snoring. He takes the newspaper parcel out of his shirt . . . opens it and begins walking around the shack, pouring the contents of the bottle . . . the corner where the bed is situated is well drenched. He . . . lights a match, holds it to the wet patch at the bottom of the wall, and waits for the flame to grow and spread. Everything is accomplished . . . in complete tranquility. To such an extent that he deviates from his original plan. Instead of running straight to the wadi . . . he stands and waits, watching the beginning of the fire, with no desire to run. . . . All at once his ears, his head, his chest, are invaded by the sounds of the shouts and commotion. . . . And his mother's face huge and terrible, screaming into his face, and he can't understand a word she says. As if the words are being spoken in a foreign language. . . . They seize him by the arms, they drag him . . . in a moment they'll tear him to pieces. He offers no resistance. . . . His body trembles. His body is afraid, his body weeps. His body dreams of his wholeness, of its freedom.<sup>372</sup>

In the passages above, Rahamim prepares and executes his plan: He burns down his family's hut to take revenge on his abusive uncle. His actions and his control of the situation are so rare and extraordinary to him that he lingers at the scene, standing and watching the flames, thereby allowing his family and neighbors to catch him and take their anger out on him. Earlier, when he contemplates the act he is about to commit, he smiles at the sense of freedom. But interestingly, although he reflects on the free will he will exercise in his deed, it is his body, and not his soul, which will be set free: "For the body is free and only the soul is bound in chains." Rahamim's subjectification is continuous and intense to the extent that his soul is an eternal prisoner of its oppressors, with no hope of being redeemed. Only his body, which has been degraded and abused both in the military sphere—by the soldiers who beat him—and in the supposedly closest environment of the family, by the uncle who hits him, can be released in this act of arson. But even the dream of the body's freedom stays in the

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<sup>371</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 526–27.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 532–33.

realm of fantasy: Rahamim is caught and his body is about to be torn apart in the people's wrath. The body itself, all that is left for Rahamim to save, is again a prisoner, and Kenaz's syntax thematizes Rahamim's dissociation and absence of consciousness: "His body trembles. His body is afraid, his body weeps. His body dreams of his wholeness, of its freedom." In the Hebrew, the sense of an absence of consciousness is much clearer, as there is no personal pronoun, and the body itself appears to be an independent noun. (הגוף רועד. הגוף פוחד, הגוף בוכה. הגוף חולם על שלמותו, על חירותו. עמ' 538). Therefore, while in his Samson-like act Rahamim has acquired momentary freedom, his violent capture by the angry crowd foreshadows the aftermath, in which he will be delivered to the authorities and become an actual prisoner of the hegemonic system, the remains of his individual agency to be lost forever.<sup>373</sup> Rahamim Ben-Hamo's subjectification by the system is so extreme that although he becomes a center of narration, his focalization is still limited; even in the passages that are delivered through his point of view, Ben-Hamo is not allowed to use direct speech, not even through dialogue. Unlike Avner, Alon, and Micky, who when they receive the reins of narration deliver it through a first-person point of view, Ben-Hamo's focalization is always delivered in the third person, mediated by the selective-omniscient narrator. Even the basic tool of human expression, language, becomes inaccessible for him: His mother tongue, literalized in the image of his mother who screams in his face, sounds strange and foreign to him. In Rahamim Ben-Hamo's character and the narrative strategies that depict him, Kenaz expresses his harsh critique of Israeli society and its institutions, which are responsible for Rahamim's tragic fate. Kenaz's depiction of Rahamim's abuse by his uncle similarly reflects the collapse of the family structure and the depression into which many new immigrants sank as a result of their abjection within Israeli culture and its institutions.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> As Chana Kronfeld notes in her analysis of Yehuda Amichai's poem "Ani Rotze La-mut Al Mitati" (I want to die in my bed) regarding the position of the poem's speaker, a position that is encapsulated in the poem's title: "Powerless about his own life, the subject . . . can fanaticize only about having the choice of how to die, since the choice of how to live has been irrevocably vitiated." Kronfeld, *Full Severity*, 42. Like the speaker in Amichai's poem, Rahamim Ben-Hamo is completely subjectified by all the authoritative systems in his life; the only freedom of choice left to him is the choice of how to end his life (if not in the physical sense, then certainly in the mental sense). The fact that he aborts his original plan to escape to the wadi and instead stays to watch the fire as it grows indeed attests to his decision to end his life as a free person (even if this freedom is very limited).

<sup>374</sup> For more on the new immigrants' crisis in the first years of Israeli statehood and their mistreatment by Israeli institutions, see: Lissak, *Ha-aliya Ha-gdola*; Gutwain, "Shlilat Ha-gola," 210–33, and especially 221–

## Between Micha and the Shakespearean Fool: Intertextuality and Speaking Truth to Power

Micha, one of the Jerusalemite soldiers, is called “Micha the Fool” by the narrator Melabes, in accordance with Micha’s nickname among his Jerusalemite friends in the platoon:

There was one who was called Micha, whom they introduced to everyone as Micha the Fool. Everything he said made them laugh uproariously, and they never stopped slapping him on the back and encouraging him to say the things they considered so idiotic. And he himself enjoyed their ostentatious, vociferous affection.<sup>375</sup>

Interestingly, when Melabes portrays the relationship between the Jerusalemite group and Micha, he does not refer to Micha’s spoken expressions as idiotic (a simpler and more direct manner to describe Micha’s expressions would have been “and they never stopped slapping him on the back and encouraging him to say *his idiotic things*”), but rather notes that it is Micha’s friends who consider his way of speaking as idiotic. It is also important to be aware of the difference here between the Hebrew and the translation: Although the translator uses one adjective for Micha’s nickname (fool) and a different one to describe the things he says (idiotic), in Hebrew both derive from the same root (ש.ט.פ.).<sup>376</sup> Although Micha is indeed depicted as a fool, obsessively quoting canonical texts from Western culture and Israeli culture that are stored in his archive-like head, Melabes nevertheless frequently refers to Micha’s comments on given situations, which are sentences taken from his internal archive. His liminal personality, his image among his friends as both a fool and a genius,<sup>377</sup> evokes the folkloric character of the fool, and more specifically the Shakespearean fool. The fool is of course a popular

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22; Me’ir Buzaglo, “*Mizrachiyut*.” For more on Israeli society’s view of the new Ashkenazi immigrants, especially Holocaust survivors, see: Segev, *Ha-milyon Ha-shvi’i*, 97, 106–07, 163–64.

<sup>375</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 8.

<sup>376</sup> "היה עמם בחור ושמו מיכה והם הציגו אותו לפני כל מי שהיה בקרבם כמיכה הטיפש. כל משפט שיצא מפיו עורר בהם צחוק גדול והם לא חדלו לטפוח על שכמו ולעודדו להוסיף לומר את דבריו הטיפשיים כל כך בעיניהם." קנז, *התגנבות יחידים*, עמ' 13. In Hebrew translations of Shakespearean plays, the word “fool” translates as שוטה (*shote*), but in an everyday colloquial register, “fool” is טיפש (*tipes*), as indeed Micha is called.

<sup>377</sup> When Benny the commander encounters Micha’s obsessive predilection for citation, he asks the rest of the platoon about him: “‘What’s wrong with him? Is he sick in the head? . . .’ ‘He’s a genius, sir,’ said Hanan. ‘We were in the same class at school.’ ‘A genius?’ sneered Benny. ‘What’s he a genius at?’ . . . ‘Mainly in mathematics,’ said Hanan, ‘and all the sciences. But also in history and everything else. He’s got fantastic memory and a mathematical mind’” (173–74).

character in many cultures, notably in popular plays and public fairs, and in his buffoonish and transgressive behavior he is known to be subversive of social distinctions and hierarchical orders.<sup>378</sup> In her study of the history of the fool, Sandra Billington discusses the two polar opposites characterizing the persona of the fool from the Middle Ages onward: on the one hand, a witless and innocent person who expresses his thoughts and feelings genuinely; and on the other hand, someone who pretends to be witless, but in truth uses his pretended folly to mock and criticize the church, the elite, and the dominant society.<sup>379</sup> Similarly, Enid Welsford notes the complexity embodied in the persona of the fool: “The genuine buffoon . . . breaks down the distinction both between folly and wisdom, and between life and art.”<sup>380</sup> The social marginality of the fool and his declared status as a buffoon grant him the freedom to be a social critic who exposes the hypocrisy and cunning of the dominant order, as in the case of the fool in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. While King Lear fails to see his older daughters’ scheme and the loyalty of his youngest daughter Cordelia, his fool, who is his companion (as was the convention in the Elizabethan era), points to the truth, though of course in a coded language masquerading as nonsensical jokes and humorous puns. King Lear’s fool pays a dear price for his devotion to the truth and to the king: He accompanies the king in his vagrancy in the cold and stormy night; and by the end of the play, King Lear, who is mourning the death of Cordelia, laments his fool too, crying “And my poor fool is hanged!”<sup>381</sup> In a similar manner, Micha’s remarks, although

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<sup>378</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin writes about the social potential of humor in his analysis of Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, where he discusses the carnivalesque mode of this novel and the special conditions of the carnival which allow social mobility. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*. In Judaism, the fool appears mostly in folkloric stories about the town of Chelm, which was known for the entertaining stupidity of its inhabitants, as well as in the figure of the *Badchen* (the jester), the Jewish comedian with scholarly knowledge who used to wander across Eastern Europe, arriving at Jewish communities and entertaining them in traditional ceremonies, especially weddings.

<sup>379</sup> Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).

<sup>380</sup> Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 27. But Welsford herself is captured by the misconception that there are “real,” authentic fools and those who only pretend to be fools.

<sup>381</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 5, scene 2, line 361, accessed August 20, 2016, [http://www.maximumedge.com/shakespeare/kinglear\\_act\\_V\\_scene\\_III.htm](http://www.maximumedge.com/shakespeare/kinglear_act_V_scene_III.htm). There are different interpretations of King Lear’s statement, however. While many understand it as referring to the king’s fool, who disappears from the play during act 3 (when the king and his small entourage are outside in the storm), some interpret this sentence as referring to Cordelia, whose dead body rests in King Lear’s arms. This is the interpretation of the Hebrew translator Dori Parnas, who translates King Lear’s cry to a feminine grammatical form (והשוטה המסכנה שלי תלוייה), see William Shakespeare, *King Lear* [Hebrew], trans. Dori Parnas, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://www.shakespeare.co.il/play.php?play=king-lear&text=240>.

seemingly disconnected from the situation at hand, bear a significance that illuminates the scene and sheds a critical light on the military system. There are many instances of Micha's intertextual commentary throughout the novel, but a few will suffice.

Let me first revisit an early scene from the novel, one that I've discussed above. After the half-nelson drill, when the *kaf-lamedim* are debating the necessity of that drill for non-combat soldiers, Micky compares the *kaf-lamedim* to Sparta's sick babies, and the basic training to the remote mountain where those babies were left to die. "In Sparta they were smarter,' said Micha the Fool. And he explained: 'That's a rhyme'" (23). Micky, like the rest of the platoon, ignores Micha's comment and continues with his analogy, but if we look closely at Micha's words, we can see their relevance to the novel. As we've seen, the story of Sparta, where people were divided into strong and weak, a division which sealed their fates, recurs numerous times throughout the novel and stands as a profound parable on Israeli society and its militant culture. By creating a rhyme and pointing it out, Micha underscores the importance of Micky's story as a leitmotif in the novel. It is even clearer in the Hebrew original, where Micha uses full rhyme (*al Sparta kvar siparta*) and refers to a specific literary device, paranomasia (*lashon nofel al lashon*) to explain the connection between *Sparta* and the narrative (*siparta*, meaning "you told"). Kenaz employs Micha to lay bare a meta-narrative device that illuminates the role of Sparta as a central intertext: Appearing here for the first time, close to the beginning of the novel, the story of Sparta will return to shed light on various scenes throughout *Infiltration*.

Another example of Micha's intertextual commentary occurs during an argument among the soldiers about the new immigrants, an argument that is ignited after Zackie complains to Hedgehog about his condescending behavior toward the Mizrahi soldiers: "What do you know about us anyway, to talk about us like we're shit? We're good enough to go to the army, but we're not good enough to sing our songs or to say what we think?" (104). Hedgehog tries to evade Zackie's protest, telling him to leave him alone, but after Zackie turns his back on Hedgehog, Avner asks Hedgehog why he is mad. Hedgehog replies:

"I love this lousy country, I want it to be a terrific place. . . . I don't want everything that was built up here to go down the bloody drain! Maybe that sounds like slogans and Zionist propaganda to you, but I'm thinking about myself, about the kids I'll have one day, I want this to be a . . . civilized place. . . ." "You know how many new immigrants were killed in the war of independence—the battle for Latrun, for example?" said Alon. . . . "Most of them

weren't Israelis according to our lights. . . . There were sabras and new immigrants there. Ashkenazis and Sephardis. . . . And the blood they shed was the same blood. There was no difference." "What kind of example is that?" asked Hedgehog. . . . "What's so inspiring about Latrun? The blood that was spilled in vain? . . . Every time you say the word blood, you sound as if it turns you on. . . . I'm not against wars; on the contrary, if something has to be done by force, then the quicker the better. . . . We have to be strong so we can live a normal life here, like in any other state in the world." "Love sanctified by blood, you will blossom between us again," Micha the Fool quoted solemnly.<sup>382</sup>

Hedgehog, who wishes to live in a "civilized place" (explaining by this his resentment towards the Mizrahi soldiers who are uncivilized in his view), criticizes Alon's admiration of war and blood, yet supports war if it serves his personal comfort and if it contributes to making Israel what he considers "a terrific place": "if something has to be done by force, then the quicker the better . . . so we can live a normal life here, like in any other state in the world." He chooses to ignore Alon's words in favor of the new immigrants, who fought alongside the Israelis in the 1948 war. Alon, although trying to speak on behalf of the Mizrahi soldiers and reiterating Zackie's protest ("We're good enough to go to the army, but we're not good enough to sing our songs or to say what we think?"), is nevertheless captivated by Israeli society's obsession with death in war. In response to Hedgehog and Alon's dialogue, Micha quotes from the well-known Israeli poem "*Ha-re'ut*" (Camaraderie), written by the poet Haim Gouri, who fought in the 1948 war and was inspired to write the poem a short while thereafter.<sup>383</sup> The poem deals with the remembrance of the fallen soldiers by their brothers in arms, as the refrain says: "And we will remember them all / the beautiful forelock and face / because such camaraderie will never let our hearts forget / Love sanctified by blood / you will blossom between us again."<sup>384</sup> Set to music, this poem was performed by the first IDF entertainment band (*lahaka tzva'it*) as well as by many other performers, and became the standard text in many commemoration ceremonies for fallen soldiers on Israel's Memorial Day (*Yom Ha-zikaron*). Micha's solemn manner of citing the line evokes not only the poem itself, but also its highly codified and institutionalized cultural

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<sup>382</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 105.

<sup>383</sup> Haim Gouri, *Ad A lot Ha-shachar* [Until the breaking of day] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2000), 147–48. The poem was first published in 1950.

<sup>384</sup> My translation, except for the last two lines, in which I use Dalya Bilu's translation.

context.<sup>385</sup> He points at the poem's appropriation (and that of other texts of this kind) and use by state institutions that harness authentic bereavement to perpetuate a conception of war as essential, and of the fallen soldiers as martyrs whose death was inevitable. This conception is the common ground between Hedgehog and Alon, and the source of their blindness. Hedgehog is an opportunist who views the war as vital to enable "normal life," yet he does not comprehend the internal contradiction in his position: The many wars are the very cause of the abnormal life, not the condition for normalcy. Alon, an idealist who wholeheartedly embraces the values of social equality and is the complete opposite of Hedgehog, is chained in the shackles of his admiration of heroism and of the soldiers' bravery, feelings that are evoked so well in the ceremonies of Israel's Memorial Day. The dissonance between Hedgehog and Alon's mundane argument and Micha's mock-solemnity as he quotes the lines from *Ha-re'ut* is analogous to the dissonance between the cynicism of the hegemony that institutionalized the commemoration ceremonies<sup>386</sup> and the naïve belief of most Israelis in the necessity of the war, a belief perpetuated through the appropriation and incessant reproduction of literary texts in those ceremonies. Micha's comment reflects the adult narrator's point of view. In the time of narration, the 1980s after the First Lebanon War, conscientious refusal to serve in the military became a wide phenomenon. As a result, the consensus in Israeli society around the necessity of war collapsed and criticism of the government's policy became more widespread. Micha the Fool, therefore, expresses this realization, and in this sense his remark bears a prophetic element.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> In the Hebrew original, the evocation of the context is more direct, as Micha recites as if he were performing in a commemoration ceremony: "אהבה מקודשת בדם, עוד תשובי בינינו לפרוה, דיקלם מיכה הטיפש, כמופיע במסכת חגיגית" (עמוד 108)

The *masekhet*, the tableau format of poetry recitations, is well known to Israeli readers from the commemoration ceremonies they were exposed to every year at school throughout their upbringing in the Israeli education system.

<sup>386</sup> In 1963, the Israeli government enacted the Memorial Day Law, which includes instructions as to how to mark the day: A siren is sounded by speakers around the country and all people are to stand silently throughout; cafes, restaurants and public entertainment places are to be closed (and are fined if found open); television and radio stations should broadcast programs in accordance with Memorial Day's content and atmosphere; all state institutions are to conduct commemoration ceremonies. See details in <http://oldgov.gov.il/FirstGov/TopNav/HolidayHP/HMemorialDay/HMDHistory/>.

<sup>387</sup> The sardonic tone of Micha's mock-recitation of the poem sheds critical light not only on Alon and Hedgehog's naïveté, but also on Hedgehog's words; Hedgehog presents himself as talking out of Zionist ideology ("Maybe that sounds like slogans and Zionist propaganda to you"), but he actually ties his

My final example of Micha's intertextual commentary is his quotation from David Ben-Gurion's speech. Ben-Gurion, who stepped down from his office as Israel's first Prime Minister shortly before giving that speech (only to return to office one year later), organized—with the help of the Ministry of Education—a gathering of high school students in Sheikh Munis in 1954.<sup>388</sup> In this conference, Ben-Gurion delivered a speech titled "Career or Mission?" in which he aimed to motivate the young attendees to contribute their time and efforts to the service of the state. Micha mentions this conference during a debate among the Ashkenazi soldiers about the Mizrahi soldiers' singing. A short time after the Ashkenazi soldiers gather to sing American and Israeli songs, accompanied by Yossi Ressler's guitar, the Mizrahi soldiers begin to sing songs in Arabic, countering the singing of their Ashkenazi peers. Although Hedgehog insists on continuing, Ressler refuses to keep on playing, and the singing of the Ashkenazi soldiers stops.

"The Army," said Alon, "is our only hope. Only the army can educate them, turn them into Israelis, until they're like us. . . . When they bring them to their new settlements, they don't want to get off the trucks. . . . The army has to educate them—at least the young ones because the old ones may as well be written off. . . ." "I wouldn't agree to go to these settlements either!" said Hedgehog. "Not everybody has to be a socialist!" "You see?" said Alon, "So why should they agree to go? . . . when they see that the veteran population don't want to do it and all they want is to live in town and make money and have careers." "Students of Israel!" cried Micha the Fool in an imitation of Ben-Gurion's shrill, jarring voice. "The history of the Jewish people in our time confronts you and all the youth of Israel with a fateful question: Career or Zionist Mission?" "When we were at the Sheik-Munis meeting with Ben-Gurion," said Micky, "I said to my classmates: In another year . . . he'll be back as prime minister. . . ." "I was watching Dayan," I said, "I saw him sitting there on the ground."<sup>389</sup>

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argument to pure opportunism ("I'm not against wars; on the contrary, if something has to be done by force, then the quicker the better . . . so we can live a normal life here").

<sup>388</sup> Sheikh Munis, also called Al-Shaykh Muwannis in Arabic, was an Arab village whose residents left during the 1948 war for fear of the Israeli soldiers. At the end of the war, Jewish new immigrants were settled in the village houses. Later on, the houses were demolished and prestigious Jewish neighborhoods were built upon the village lands, including the Tel Aviv University.

<sup>389</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 92.

Much later in the novel, Micha continues to quote from this speech. In this case, the catalyst for Micha is the platoon's excited conversation about the oil that was found in the Negev:

until the sound of footsteps came running toward us and Hedgehog burst in shouting: "They've found oil in the Negev! There's oil in the state of Israel!" . . . In the midst of the revival that greeted this news, Zackie's voice sounded. . . . "My uncle worked for an oil company abroad. . . ." "My friend," said Hedgehog, "nobody's interested in Iraqi methods here. . . ." "You don't know what you're talking about," retorted Zackie, "The oil company in Iraq is English." "Eenglish!" gloated Hedgehog, who never missed an opportunity to mimic Zackie's accent. . . . "The Eenglish don't count anymore." . . . Hanan said: "Now they'll start with all those ceremonies and pageants and speeches and songs about the first oil after two thousand years. . . ." Micha raised his head from the chessboard and barked in the shrill voice he kept for imitations of Ben-Gurion: "We expect you to serve as an example of a new generation of Jews, untainted by all the ills of the diaspora . . . courageously facing every enemy and foe, capable of mastering the elements of nature, making the desert bloom, conquering the sea and air, working and creating for the glory of the independence of Israel and molding a new Hebrew society, one that will not shame our past or disappoint the messianic yearning for redemption of the generations."<sup>390</sup>

Unfortunately, the central quality of Micha's imitation of Ben-Gurion, which is his heavy accent, exists only in the Hebrew version of *Infiltration* and is entirely absent in the novel's English translation.<sup>391</sup> Micha's mimicry of Ben-Gurion replicates not only the speech's content almost verbatim<sup>392</sup> but also, more importantly, the form and cadence in which the speech was delivered. It illustrates the absurdity and self-denial

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<sup>390</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 369–71.

<sup>391</sup> Here is Micha's imitation of Ben-Gurion, as it appears in the Hebrew original:

"תלמידי ישראל! צווח מיכה הטיפש בקול צורם ודק כקולו של בן-גוריון, 'ההיסטוריו היהודית בזמננו מציגה לכם ולכל הדור הצעיר בישראל שאלת גורל: קְרִירו או שליחות?' (קנו, *התגנבות יחידים*, עמ' 95).

And later on, when the *kaf-lamedim* discuss the discovery of oil in the Negev:

מיכה זקף את ראשו מלוח השחמט ונבח בקול הצווחני השמור עמו לחיקויי בן גוריון: 'עליכם לשמש דוגמו של דור יהודי חודש, חפשי מכל נגעי הגולות, של דור בן-חורן... עומד בגבורו בפני כל צר ואויב, יודע להשתלט על אֵיִתְנֵי הטבע, להפריח השממו, לכבוש הים ואנר, לעבוד וליצור למען הדרת עצמואות ישראל ולעצב קברו עברית חדשו, שלא תבייש עברנו ולא תכזיב כיסופי הגאולו המשיחיים של דורות... (קנו, *התגנבות יחידים*, עמ' 376).

<sup>392</sup> Ben-Gurion's speech in Sheikh Munis appears in David Ben-Gurion, *Medinat Yisrael Ha-mechudeshet* [The restored State of Israel], vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975), 453–56.

encapsulated in the speech embraced by the Ashkenazi soldiers in their mockery of the Mizrahi soldiers. Micha's imitation of Ben-Gurion's Ashkenazi accent betrays Ben-Gurion's diasporic origin, his own immigrant and "Old Jew" identity. The mimicry sheds light on the ideology-driven self-denial by Ben-Gurion and other leading Zionist figures, and helps us understand the psychological mechanism behind the fervent rejection of the diaspora as an attempt to erase that part of the new Israeli self. But Micha's mock-recitation also uses the accent to undermine and ridicule the content of Ben-Gurion's speech, as for example when he pronounces the following charged words with a Yiddish accent: "diaspora" (*galut*, pronounced *goluth*), "a free generation" (*dor ben-chorin*, pronounced *dor ben-choren*),<sup>393</sup> "independence" (*atzma'ut*, pronounced *atzmo'ut*), and "the redemption" (*ha-ge'ula*, pronounced *ha-ge'ulo*). When he speaks of youth that should be "untainted by the ills of the diaspora," he is performing some of the same "ills" that "taint" his own speech. This speech and others constituted the foundation of the deep rejection of the diaspora in Israeli society and nurtured the Sabras' hostility to the new immigrants. But Micky, Hedgehog, and the rest of the Ashkenazi and native-born Israelis in the platoon fail to recognize the inner contradiction between Ben-Gurion's form of speech and its content. Hedgehog, who mocks Zackie's foreign accent, does not notice Ben-Gurion's accent when it is accurately performed by Micha a few minutes later. Like the Shakespearean fool, Micha conveys a profound truth in his words, though one that is disguised through mimicry and humor. The uniqueness of Micha's intertexts lies in their independent appearance; it is not hidden and encrypted in the main narrative, but rather exposed and explicit. This special status of "bare" intertextuality enhances the dissonance between the intertext's appearance and the context in which it emerges, disturbing the continuity of the narrative; but it is precisely this "disturbance" that points to its poetic function and illustrates the meta-narrative significance of intertexts in *Infiltration*.

### **Intertextuality and Intratextuality in Alon's Story: A Critique of Myths and Canonical Texts as Constituting Consciousness**

The intertexts in Alon's story are essential for fathoming the intricacy of his psyche and the process he undergoes, a process that ends in catastrophe. These texts play a central role in Alon's consciousness and serve as mediators between Alon and the

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<sup>393</sup> The translator skipped this combination and did not translate it at all.

reality surrounding him, in much the same way that they constitute the father's consciousness in *Preliminaries*. In Alon's case, all the intertexts that appear throughout his story derive from his consciousness, unlike other intertexts in *Infiltration*, which, even when they're mentioned by one of the characters, recur and are developed by the narrator later on. Thus, for example, the story of Sparta's sick and abandoned children is introduced by Micky but reappears later and is offered by the narrator as a central image. Similarly, Dante's *Divine Comedy* is initially evoked by Arik in his conversation with Melabes but is then developed by Melabes throughout the novel. Alon's intertexts, by contrasts, become intratexts, and their repeated and modified recurrences through his interior point of view shed light on his mental state, tracing its tragic deterioration. Another unique characteristic of the intertextuality in Alon's story is the nature of the intertexts themselves: All of them are canonical texts or stories that exist independently, beyond the fictional sphere of the novel, and were appropriated by various Israeli institutions, such as the military and the kibbutz. This peculiar combination, of texts that are hegemonic and collective and yet function as a channel to express Alon's most personal feelings, enables Kenaz to illustrate the extent to which the individual's psyche is constituted—and ultimately dismantled—by the ratified, co-opted texts of the culture. By designing Alon's narrative as tragic, Kenaz points a blaming finger at the state institutions that make cynical use of these texts, ignoring the catastrophic potential of their appropriation.

The expression of “the Zionist dream” (*ha-chalom ha-tziyoni*) becomes a crucial shadow text for Alon's unquestioning acceptance of the official ideology. In a debate about the willingness to sacrifice for others, Alon says to Micky:

“But human beings sometimes sacrifice themselves, even for people they don't even know. That's the whole point. To help and suffer even for someone you don't like and don't owe anything to.” . . . Micky said to Alon: “I could agree with everything you said, if it had any connection to the real world we live in. But it's connected to a dream world.” “I've already told you,” said Alon, “everything begins with a dream.”<sup>394</sup>

Indeed, Alon, a kibbutznik who acts on his collectivist ideals in many instances throughout the novel,<sup>395</sup> is depicted as a naïve young man who is wholeheartedly

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<sup>394</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 120–21.

<sup>395</sup> He stands against the whole platoon, which laughs at Miller; he grabs an open grenade from Zero-Zero's hands when the latter is paralyzed with fear, and risking his life he saves Zero-Zero and the whole

devoted to the socialist-Zionist vision. For him, there is no distinction between the personal and the collective.<sup>396</sup> Therefore, his own dream, to be recruited to the paratroops and be a combat soldier, is completely merged with his social ideals, an inseparable part of his love of country and countrymen, and of his willingness (perhaps even his ambition) to sacrifice his life for them. So are his feelings for the land, which he describes in an intimate conversation with Micky when they are watching the first rains falling while on night guard duty. In this conversation, he invokes the foundational biblical metaphor of the Land as Woman, a metaphor which was reinterpreted agriculturally by socialist Zionism. Note that Land is feminine in Hebrew, and hence Alon's feelings towards "her" are as sensual and direct as feelings towards a beloved woman: "After the death of summer she comes to life, she breathes. Can't you feel the warmth of her breath, her marvelous smell. See how sweet it is, like the breath of the girl you love."<sup>397</sup> Since Alon has a girlfriend, Dafna, who appears in the novel too (and to whom Micky is introduced in the course of the novel), Alon's use of the conversation trope of the Land as Woman becomes concretized and sharpens the blend in Alon's mind between the personal and the collective, the symbolic and the real.<sup>398</sup>

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platoon; he volunteers to remain on the base for guard duty on the weekend so others can go home; and he helps his peers in the platoon on numerous occasions.

<sup>396</sup> In the course of his conversation with Micky while on night guard duty, Alon scoffs, "What, . . . is our soul divided into compartments then, one for private affairs, one for social affairs, one for national affairs, and so on? All these things constitute our private lives. There's no difference" (405).

<sup>397</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 399. I've changed "it" to "she" or "her" to indicate the personification of the Land as Woman Hebrew offers.

<sup>398</sup> The topos of the Land as Woman was prevalent in many literary texts during the formative years of the new Jewish settlement in Palestine and served as the masculine expression of the New Jew who conquers what was portrayed as "virgin soil," as well as his justification for it (the empty land likened to the biblical woman of Zion, who awaits her redemption by her champion). To name only a few texts: "Morning Song" (*Shir Boker*) by Natan Alterman, from the second and third stanzas: "From the slopes of the Lebanon to the Dead Sea / . . . / We will make you very beautiful / We will dress you in a gown of concrete and cement / and we will spread for you carpets of gardens." And especially Avraham Shlonsky's poem, "You are Hereby" (*Harey At*; the first stanza will suffice): "She is naked – steaming from mist and dung, / Demanding and puffing in her heat – / A field – and from nostrils: dew and vapor / – A bride – in a veil. An aroused woman." Both poems translated by Eric Zakim. For Alterman's "Morning Song" and its analysis, see Eric Zakim, *To Build and Be Built: Landscape, Literature, and the Construction of Zionist Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 170–75. For Shlonsky's poem and a brilliant analysis of it, see Kronfeld, *Margins*, 103–09. For more on the image of the Land as Woman, see Chanita Goodtblatte, "Mi Halakh Ko Ba-sadot? Shirat Eretz Yisra'el Bi-shnot Ha-esrim" [Who walked in the fields? Poetry of the land of Israel in the 1920s] and Chamutal Tzamer, "Ha-korban Ha-chalutzi, Ha-aretz Ha-kdoasha Ve-hofa'ata Shel Shirat Ha-nashim" [The pioneer sacrifice, the sacred land, and the emergence of

Alon's blurring of these spheres shows him as a hopeless dreamer, and his fervent social beliefs seem as an obsolete vision, detached from reality. If we compare the depiction of the dreamer in the two novels, as represented by Daddy in *Preliminaries* and by Alon in *Infiltration*, then while the father in *Preliminaries* is portrayed in a sympathetic and admiring, though subtly ironic, light, Alon in *Infiltration* is characterized as confused and bothersome, and is mocked by his platoon-mates for his naiveté and outdated ideals.<sup>399</sup> The treatment of Alon conveys the changes in atmosphere in Israeli society between the 1920s, when *Preliminaries* takes place, and the 1950s, the time of the events in *Infiltration*. While in the 1920s Alon's worldview was common and considered desirable, by the 1950s it is ridiculed as outdated detached from Israeli reality and its disillusionments.

The first part of Alon's story takes place when he and Micky share guard duty at night (and includes Alon's monologue, quoted above, about the rain); it serves as an exposition of Alon's narrative and the intertexts which constitute him. The next few passages that I will analyze below are all taken from this shared night guard duty.

Alon, who carries in his wallet a picture of his father, who died in the 1948 war when Alon was 10 years old, shows the picture to Micky: "Micky saw a young man, tall and thin, in short khaki pants, a submachine gun dangling from his shoulder, his mop of thick black hair blown sideways . . . his smile was broad, proud, demonstrative." The appearance of Alon's father adheres to the idealized image of the fallen in the poem "*Ha-re'ut*," which I discussed earlier as one of Micha's intertexts ("And we will remember them all / the beautiful forelock and face"). Although Alon was 10 when his father fell, he remembers him through this picture, where the father appears as a

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women's poetry], in Hannan Hever, ed., *Rega Shel Huledet: Mech'karim Be-sifrut Ivrit U-ve-sifrut Yidish Likhvod Dan Miron* [A moment of birth: Studies in Hebrew and Yiddish literatures in honor of Dan Miron] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007), 630–44 and 645–73 respectively.

<sup>399</sup> In an incident with one of the platoon soldiers named Sammy, who turns out to be a drug dealer and who attacks Avner with a knife, Alon, after forcefully taking Sammy's knife away, launches into a long monologue about the damage criminals like Sammy cause to Israeli society: "Everything's being ruined here . . . everything that was built here . . . for the sake of building a new nation, a new country. . . . Why is this happening to us, fellows? . . . We wanted to create a new culture here, a new, better society. . . ." The Jerusalemites could no longer restrain their laughter. . . . Avner could bear this speech no longer. . . . He said to Alon: 'Stop talking. Can't you see that you're making a fool of yourself? Can't you hear the way they're laughing over there? What are you, some senile old pioneer?'" (in Hebrew: *מה אתה, איזה זקן מהעליה* (השנייה)). Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 552–53.

soldier, rather than through personal childhood recollections. Alon tells Micky about the picture and his father:

This is the last picture we've got of him. Two weeks after it was taken he fell. When I look at it I sometimes get the feeling that I have an appointment to meet him one day. . . . His letters to my mother are in *Scrolls of Fire*. Once I knew them almost by heart. . . . I liked reading them in that book more than in the actual letters themselves, I don't know why. Over there they seemed more real, more relevant, more serious. . . . Afterward I started reading all the other things in *Scrolls of Fire*, by all the other fallen. Whenever I had a minute to spare, I would sit and read it. Instead of social activities in the group. They took it away from me. They locked it up somewhere. Because I really went too far, it began having a bad effect on me. It cut me off from reality. . . . The truth is that I'm still suffering from the ill effects to this day. . . . After they took the *Scrolls of Fire* from me and locked it up, I started reading and rereading "Friends Talk About Jimmy," the letters in *Native Son*, and all those books about the Hagana and the Palmach and the War of Independence—they were all in the kibbutz library and they couldn't lock them all away from me. . . . All the fallen took on one face—his face, that I could barely remember. Until I saw that snapshot for the first time—the one I just showed to you. It was only a few years ago. . . . I don't know why they hid it from me . . . in general they tried not to talk to me about it too much. They thought it gave me problems. But when I came across that picture accidentally in my mother's room and I looked at it . . . all the stories and the books about the fallen, and their letters and their diaries, suddenly didn't fit in with this particular person in the picture. He looks so arrogant here. He became one, private, not mine or anyone else's. Not even my mother's. Only his own.<sup>400</sup>

In this passage, we learn of the complicated and painful circumstances that brought Alon to develop his "collective" consciousness, a consciousness that is constantly mediated through ideology and texts. *Scrolls of Fire* (*Gviley Esh*) is a commemoration project that started in 1949, when a bereaved father who lost his son in the 1948 war turned to Ben-Gurion, then Prime Minister, with the initiative to publish a book in which letters, diaries, and other creative works of fallen soldiers would be gathered for the sake of their remembrance. Ben-Gurion embraced the idea and the first book was

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<sup>400</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 401–02.

published in 1952.<sup>401</sup> Alon says that he prefers to read his father's letters to his mother in their published, public form in *Scrolls of Fire*, rather than in their private, domestic form because "over there they seemed more real, more relevant, more serious." While their appearance in the commemoration book lends them solemnity and a mythical aura, it also distances them from their personal and familial context: The reified, ritualized collective representation has become "more real" than the unmediated, original texts. Alon says later on that he used to stare at his father's picture for hours in an attempt to understand what his father was trying to tell him:

I came to the conclusion that he wasn't trying to tell me anything. He didn't know me, just as I didn't know him. . . . I was a child of ten and he was a young man, a soldier. Time had blurred everything, cut off all the connections. I was sure that if there was one thing he wasn't thinking about, when he was standing there on that hill . . . it was me. Maybe he was thinking about my mother, but definitely not about me.<sup>402</sup>

This painful monologue, uttered as if in passing, reveals Alon's hurt over his father. Although Alon says that "time had blurred everything," given that he was already ten years old when his father died and given that only eight years have passed since then, if he had had meaningful memories from his father or special experiences they had shared as father and son, these would not have been wiped out. Therefore, it seems that it was not time that cut off the connection between Alon and his father, but rather that the connection never existed in the first place. This is probably the deeper psychological explanation of Alon's preference to read his father's letters in *Scrolls of Fire*: In the commemoration book they cease to be so personal, and the painful knowledge, that they were meant for his mother and not for him, becomes less poignant. Alon therefore assumes the collectively approved position of the bereaved son of a soldier; his father is no longer the individual man he was, but rather a hero who sacrificed his life for the nation. What enables Alon to make this transition, though, is the rigorous commemoration projects that became a cult in Israeli society during the 1950s and the 1960s. The most private texts, such as a man's love letters to his beloved, became public and exposed to all as part of the commemoration of the

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<sup>401</sup> This is probably the edition in which the letters of Alon's father appear, as the second book appeared only in 1958 (while the novel takes place in the summer and fall of 1955).

<sup>402</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 402.

fallen. The many texts that Alon mentions—*Friends Talk About Jimmy*,<sup>403</sup> the letters in *Native Son*,<sup>404</sup> and “all those books about the Hagana<sup>405</sup> and the Palmach<sup>406</sup> and the War of Independence”—were prevalent in Israeli society of the time. In these texts, lovingly compiled by friends and family, the fallen are all depicted as pure and innocent young men who gave their lives knowingly out of idealism and devotion to their homeland. In the process, the fallen lose their individual traits and become *tabulae rasae* on which everyone can project his/her notion of loss and personal pain, as Alon says: “All the fallen took on one face—his face, that I could barely remember.” Alon’s obsession stems from his grief, but the development of his reading of commemoration books into a pathology is possible because of the inflation of these collections in Israeli culture at that time, especially in the *kibbutzim* (and Alon is a *kibbutz* member), and because of their centrality in the education of the youth.<sup>407</sup> Israeli society’s admiration of death in war during those years is what allows and encourages Alon’s obsession. His compulsive

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<sup>403</sup> *Friends Talk About Jimmy* (*Chaverim Mesaprim Al Jimmy*) is a commemoration book about Aharon Shemi, nicknamed Jimmy. The commanding officer of the Har’el Division, he was killed in a battle on the Judean Mountains in 1948. In 1952, his parents published his letters, along with friend’s stories about him. The book is considered the first Israeli commemoration book; it had a fundamental influence on young boys and girls in the 1950s and 1960s and contributed profoundly to the formation of the myth of the idealist warrior Sabra. See Rivka Shemi and Menachem Shemi, eds., *Chaverim Mesaprim Al Jimmy* (Bney Brak: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1961).

<sup>404</sup> *Native Son* (*Ben Ha-aretz*) is another commemoration book published in 1946 in memory of Menachem Bergman, nicknamed Achem, and contains Bergman’s letters, poems, and diary. Bergman was a squad commander in the Palmach who was wounded during an invasion operation to the Palestinian village Al-Rihaniyya, and who later died from his wounds. See Menachem Bergman (Achem), *Ben Ha-aretz* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1947).

<sup>405</sup> The Haganah was the largest military organization in the period of the *Yishuv* and was active in the years 1920–1948. This organization was the basis on which the Israeli Defense Forces was founded. See Yehuda Wallach, ed., *Atlas Carta Le-toldot Ha-haganah* [The Carta Atlas to the chronicles of the Haganah] (Jerusalem: Carta Publishing House, 1991).

<sup>406</sup> The Palmach was the elite fighting force of the Haganah. It was established in 1941 as a reaction to the advance of Nazi Germany into the Mediterranean out of fear that it would invade Palestine. (Because of international law, the British Mandate government in Palestine was prevented from acting against the Nazi forces in the Mediterranean and therefore supported the establishment of the Palmach.) When the IDF was formed in 1948, the Palmach was merged into its brigades. See Meir Pa’il, *Palmach - Ha-ko’ach Hameguyas Shel Ha-haganah* [Palmach – The fighting force of the Haganah] (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Press, 1995).

<sup>407</sup> My mother Lia Zucker, who was born and raised on a *kibbutz* and was a teenager at the end of the 1950s, attests to the dominance of commemorative texts in her education, especially in her non-formal education, such as the youth movement (in her case, *Ha-no’ar Ha-oved Ve-ha-lomed*). I thank her for this insightful testimony.

reading portrays him as a kind of Don Quixote who has lost his sanity due to excessive reading of chivalric romances,<sup>408</sup> and Alon himself is aware of his reading's influence on him, admitting that "I'm still suffering from the ill effects to this day." Those who took the books away from him receive a collective impersonal depiction: "They took it away from me. They locked it up somewhere."<sup>409</sup> They are also those entrusted with Alon's mental safety ("in general they tried not to talk to me about it too much. They thought it gave me problems"). The authority granted to impersonal collectivity recalls the use of collective agency in *Preliminaries*, where the narrator describes his father's lay off, emphasizing the faceless collectivity which enables its participants to shirk any responsibility for the fate of the individual. Thus, Kenaz's choice to describe, through Alon's monologue, those who took away the books as an unidentified collective or familial agency offers a critical perspective on this group, who blatantly interfere in Alon's life but evade responsibility for his mental state.<sup>410</sup>

Since Alon's father becomes a mythical figure for him, one endowed with all the altruistic characteristics that appear in the commemoration books of the fallen, when Alon encounters his father's picture, it doesn't fit in: "He looks so arrogant here. He became one, private, not mine or anyone else's. Not even my mother's. Only his own." Alon had become so used to thinking of his father through the mediation of the commemoration books that when he sees a real picture of his father, he seems like a fallible human being, and therefore, paradoxically, he does not look like himself. In order for Alon's father to look like his father, he has to be expropriated from his private self to match his archetypal character in *Scrolls of Fire*. Alon's oxymoronic view is

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<sup>408</sup> There are also parallels between the noblemen in the chivalric genre and the descriptions of the fallen in the commemoration books. For more on the analogies between Alon and Don Quixote, see Chana Avira, "Hitganvut Yechidim Le-yehoshu'a Kenaz Ve-don Kishot" [Kenaz's Infiltration and Don Quixote], Ha-agaf Le-tikhnun U-fitu'ach Tokhniyot Limudim, Misrad Ha-chinukh [The unit for planning and developing school curricula, Israeli Ministry of Education], accessed September 10, 2016, [http://retro.education.gov.il/tochniyot\\_limudim/sifrut/asi17008.htm](http://retro.education.gov.il/tochniyot_limudim/sifrut/asi17008.htm).

Alon's image as Don Quixote also connects to the cynical attitude of his platoon-mates toward his ideals, which they view as ridiculous and obsolete, an attitude which reflects the general atmosphere in Israeli society at the time regarding socialist Zionism.

<sup>409</sup> In Hebrew it is even more salient, as the pronoun is absent and the sentence is conveyed in the impersonal form: "לקחו את זה ממני. סגרו באיזה מקום." קנו, התגנבות יחידים, עמ' 407

<sup>410</sup> In Alon's case, this group is probably comprised of the people supervising him on the kibbutz, such as his teachers, his managers, etc. Throughout the novel, we learn of his broken family: his mother collapsed mentally after Alon's father died and has a daughter from her new marriage with another man. Alon has no close circle of family.

expressed through an intertextual pastiche of collectively ratified texts, as the next paragraph demonstrates:

And once, at the Passover Seder, they read excerpts from Alterman's *Poems of the Plagues of Egypt*. I think they read it every year, but I never paid any attention. But that night, I suddenly heard a passage that rang in my ears like bells. I felt that my father's picture was speaking to me through those lines. I found the book and I read them over and over again. . . . They go like this: "My son, my first-born son, the darkness will not divide us, for bonds of darkness and rage, of blind, hot tears, bind father to son, bonds which were not woven here nor here will be undone. My father, into a great light as into a palace we will come. My son, a marvelous light will shine tomorrow on Amon. Amon is watching, Father, her eyes pierce like the light. Tomorrow is your night, my son, make ready for tomorrow night."<sup>411</sup>

Alon recites for Micky lines from the poem "Darkness" (*Choshekh*), which appear, as Alon notes, in Natan Alterman's book *Poems of the Plagues of Egypt*.<sup>412</sup> Like the rest of the texts in Alon's mind, this poem exists beyond the diegetic world and is canonical in Israeli culture. So is the scene in which Alon discovers this text: The secular kibbutzim used to conduct an alternative Seder, where they read from Alterman's *Poems of the Plagues of Egypt* as a replacement for the traditional Haggadah, as a religious diasporic text that needed to be replaced. Alterman's collection, published at the height of World War Two in Palestine, tells the story of the Egyptian city Amon, a city that is inflicted with ten plagues, identical to those which were inflicted on the Egyptians in Exodus. The ten poems—each dedicated to one of the plagues—describe the destruction of Amon as punishment for the city's sins and is part of a larger apocalypse inflicted upon the world. The uniqueness of this collection lies in its speakers, who are an Egyptian father and son (and not Israelite or Jewish, as the reader might have expected).<sup>413</sup> The

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<sup>411</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 402. Although the English translator Dalya Bilu managed to preserve internal rhyme, in Alterman's lines, quoted verbatim in the Hebrew original, the rhymes and rhythm are full and rich: בכורי, בכורי הבן, לא יפרידנו חושך / כי אב ובנו קשורים בעבותות של חושך / בעבותות הרון ובכי עינך וקם / אשר לא פה נטוו ולא בזה סופם. / אבי, אל אור גדול נבוא כאל ארמון. / בכורי, באור פלאות מחר תאזר אמוך. / אמוך צופה, אבי, נוקבות עינייה הר. / מחר לילך, בכורי, הפון לליל מחר. "נתן אלטרמן, מתוך "חושך", שירי מכות מצרים (תל אביב: הוצאת מחברות לספרות, 1944).

<sup>412</sup> Natan Alterman, *Shirey Makot Miztrayim* [Poems of the plagues of Egypt] (Tel Aviv: Machbarot Lesifrut, 1944).

<sup>413</sup> A fact which contributed to the enigma of the poems and to the challenge of their interpretation. Therefore, many scholars have understood the poems as mirror images of the biblical story in Exodus. For articles on Alterman's *Poems of the Plagues of Egypt*, see "Shirey Makot Miztrayim" [Poems of the

poems are built as dialogues between the father and his son, who watch their city being destroyed. “Darkness” precedes the last poem in the collection, “Firstborns” (*Bekhorot*), and is a prolepsis to it: In the last poem, the father prepares his son for their forthcoming death, the son dies, and then the father falls dead over his son’s body.

Just as the night is the time in which Alon’s personality and his dreams and secret wishes intersect, darkness is the time when the meeting and interaction with his father is possible. And indeed, Alon feels as if his father sends him a secret message through the poem’s words (“I suddenly heard a passage that rang in my ears like bells. I felt that my father’s picture was speaking to me through those lines”). Since Alon’s consciousness is constructed by collective texts and images, they become his intimate lexicon, through which he expresses concrete events and circumstances in his life. Instead of the canonical text backing a preceding, private event, the canonical text is what creates and enables the private occurrence; it compensates for the absence of an actual past connection between Alon and his father and produces for Alon an alternative channel of communication with the father, even if only a one-sided one. The message Alon imagines his father is sending to him is encrypted through the appropriated text; the poetic words of the Egyptian father to his son carry a meaning that is relevant for Alon and his father, bonding them together and foreshadowing Alon’s tragic end. It seems as if Alon, in longing for his father’s acknowledgement, embraces the poetic relationship drawn in the poem and adapts his life course to the tragic end of the Egyptian father-son as a surrogate form of intimacy, in death. Indeed, Alon tells Micky of his willingness to die for his country, tying his fate to his father’s:

I love this country. I really love it. A thousand times over I’m prepared to give everything for it—my blood, my life. . . . when we climbed the Arbel a few years ago I had to turn away to hide the tear of emotion, of love, that came into my eyes when I looked down at that landscape. They call that love of country [*ahavat moledet*]. . . . The Palmachniks didn’t like talking like that either. . . . But in their hearts they cried too when they stood on top of Masada and looked down on the dessert, and when they read Eleazar Ben-Yair’s speech in Josephus.

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plagues of Egypt], Natan Alterman’s website, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.alterman.org.il/%D7%9E%D7%90%D7%9E%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D.aspx>.

Believe me—they had to turn away too . . . in case anyone saw the tears in their eyes and made fun of them. (404)<sup>414</sup>

Alon's triangulation of land, blood, and his own life and death is fundamental to understanding his internal semantic field. So is the intertext he mentions here, the speech by Eleazar Ben-Yair, the leader of the zealots who were besieged in the Masada fort in 73 CE, during the First Jewish-Roman War, as described in Josephus's *The Jewish War*. Ben-Yair delivered a speech in which he aimed to convince his audience—the besieged group in Masada—to commit collective suicide so they would die as free people instead of becoming slaves to the Romans. Even though Alon mentions Eleazar Ben-Yair's speech almost in passing, it is central to his consciousness, as we learn soon thereafter. Another important detail is the analogy Alon draws between himself and the Palmachniks, the fighting force of the Haganah in 1948. The Palmach members had a mythological aura in Israeli society, especially due to their military actions in a time when the Jewish settlement in Palestine had no sovereignty over the land and no established military organization. By confessing the tears he shed on Mount Arbel and comparing them to the hidden tears of the Palmachniks at Masada, Alon expresses his wishful thinking—to be like these Palmach members, to be like his father, rather than a noncombat soldier. But his words also expose his difficulty in coping with his

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<sup>414</sup> Masada was adopted by the Zionist movement as a symbol of an unceasing striving for national liberation, and from the 1930s onwards the historical site was visited by many tourists and youth movements. Since the foundation of Israel in 1948, many military units have conducted the ceremony of swearing loyalty to the IDF and the State of Israel there, citing the line: "Masada will not fall again." This line is taken from the long poem "Masada" by Yizhak Lamdan, written in the 1920s. "Masada" intertwines Lamdan's personal story of his journey to Palestine with the historical narrative of the Jewish people from antiquity through the Zionist awakening and the Jewish immigration to Palestine in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The poem was embraced by the Jewish community in Palestine immediately following its publication and was read in public events and in festivities of the Zionist youth movements. It became part of the curriculum of the school system in the *Yishuv* and later in Israel and was therefore published in numerous editions throughout the years. All this serves as background for Alon's description of the Palmachniks' visit to Masada. For the historical site Masada as a Zionist myth, see: Molly Brog, "*Me-rosh Meztada Ad Lev Hageto: Ha-mitos Ke-historya*" [From the top of Masada to the heart of the ghetto: Myth as history], in *Mitos Ve-zikaron - Gilguleha Shel Ha-toda'a Ha-yisra'elit* [Myth and memory - The transformations of the Israeli consciousness], eds. David Ohana and Robert S. Vistrich (Jerusalem: Machon Van Lir, Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1996), 203-27; *Ha-sifriya Ha-virtualit Shel Matach* [The virtual library of the center for educational technology], s.v. "*Metzada - Ha-semel Ve-ha-mitos*" [Masada - the symbol and the myth], accessed September 30, 2016, <http://lib.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=13096>; Yitzhak Lamdan, *Masada* (Tel Aviv: Achdut, 1926). On the poem "Masada," see Dan Miron, *Ha-adam Eyno Ela* [Man is nothing but] (Zmora-Bitan: Tel Aviv, 1999).

sensitivity, a sensitivity that arouses his peers' mockery ("in case anyone saw the tears in their eyes and made fun of them") and that marks him as different, perhaps even as incapable of being a ruthless fighter. The last two intertexts that Alon mentions during his guard shift with Micky are the story of Jibli and the poem "The Cannons' Roar":

"Once Meir Har-Zion himself came to spend the weekend with us. And other guys from the unit came too. . . I sat in the corner, trying to make myself invisible . . . looking at them as if they were gods. . . . Anyway, the incident with Jibli happened last year, when they were all already in the paratroopers. I heard about it a month before my conscription, from someone on the kibbutz. . . . Last summer they went out one night on an operation in Azun. . . . They attacked a Jordanian camp and Jibli was badly wounded in the leg. They began to withdraw and Jibli was wounded again, this time in the neck. . . . Har-Zion took Jibli and began to carry him on his back. . . . Until they arrived at an olive grove, outside the range of enemy fire . . . They had another eight miles to walk to the border, over difficult mountain terrain full of enemy ambushes . . . And Jibli . . . almost unconscious from pain and loss of blood, began to kick them and shout at them to go! . . . He realized that he was a burden to them, that as long as they had to carry him they wouldn't be able to get through the ambushes and cross the border in safety. . . . For them it was a terrible decision to take . . . to leave a wounded comrade in the field, in enemy territory. . . . That same night, Jibli lay in the olive grove, wounded, suffering terrible pains. . . . Until day broke and a Legion platoon arrived . . . They took him prisoner and began to torture him, to make him give them information. . . . He didn't open his mouth. . . . Har-Zion and all his other friends suffered terribly. . . . They kept exerting pressure to go out on raids and capture Legionnaires, to exchange them for Jibli. And they went out and took four Jordanian prisoners. The Jordanians returned Jibli and got their men back. Dayan gave him a commendation for his behavior in captivity. . . . And not long afterward he was already going out on all their operations. . . . He told them about that night lying wounded in the olive grove, losing blood all the time. . . . He knew that if he fell asleep in the state he was in he would never get up again. So he did his best not to fall asleep, he concentrated all his remaining strength on singing to keep awake. He lay there wounded, losing blood, alone, in the dark, in enemy country, and sang 'The Cannons' Roar' over and over again. Do you know it?" Alon closed his eyes. In the shadow of his helmet Micky could see his face twisting in pain and intense emotion. He was lying alone in the dark, bleeding in enemy country, fighting for

his life, for his clarity of mind, waiting for day to break and his captors to arrive: “Silenced is the cannons’ roar / The field of slaughter is forsaken. / A solitary soldier wanders there / Singing with the clouds and wind. / From the hill a vulture rises / Then it falls upon the corpses.” In the stillness of the camp, in front of the armory door, opposite the clear sky . . . his hoarse, parched voice rose softly in the darkness, anxious not to break, struggling with the tune of the song in grim, stubborn solitude, like a man clinging to consciousness with the last remnants of his strength, as if his only hope of salvation lay in staying awake.<sup>415</sup>

Alon opens his story with a description of Meir Har-Zion and his friends from “the unit.” This was Unit 101, a commando unit that was founded in summer 1953 to perform retaliation operations in response to raids and infiltrations by Arab militants and non-militants. The unit was merged with the paratrooper forces several months later, as Alon notes. Like the rest of the intertexts in Alon’s story, Jibli’s story has existence beyond the novel’s world and is part of the military history of Israel. But unlike the previous texts that Alon mentioned, Jibli’s story is not a written text, but rather a tale, which while it sounds like a tall tale is nevertheless a true event. Because Jibli’s story was not written (at least, it had not yet been written at the time when Alon hears it) and was passed on orally, it is free to take different forms in different iterations. Thus, the manner in which Alon tells Jibli’s story—the expressions he uses, the details he chooses to underscore—reflect his own internal lexicon. As we shall see, they will reappear in coded form and will shed light on Alon’s mental state. Why is Alon so fascinated with the story of Jibli? Perhaps because it embodies the impossible that became possible, a true story that is a legend: Jibli, who was critically wounded and nearly died, survived against all odds. Another reason for Alon’s deep identification with Jibli might stem from the fact that Jibli was left alone wounded on enemy ground. Jibli’s vulnerable situation during that night speaks to Alon, expressing what he might feel in regard to his close environment, the kibbutz members, who—as is implied in his statements throughout the novel—exclude him and mark him as different and strange. Metaphorically, Jibli’s brothers in arms, who left him wounded in enemy territory, violating a fundamental principle in the IDF battle code (*moreshet krav*)—“one does not leave a wounded comrade behind” (*lo mash’irim patzu’a ba-shetach*)<sup>416</sup>—can be likened to

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<sup>415</sup> Kenaz, *Infiltration*, 408–10.

<sup>416</sup> This principle is part of the paramedic’s pledge in the IDF. It came to be a widespread expression in Israeli society of the ethical idea of collective responsibility to help your fellow man. For the Hebrew text

the kibbutz members who are supposed to care for each other, at least according to the socialist ideology on whose principles the kibbutz was founded, but instead ignore Alon's hardship and leave him to his own devices. Alon, who lives by the socialist ideology and is deeply committed to it, may feel abandoned by his collective, as a wounded soldier left on enemy ground. Therefore, perhaps Jibli's ultimate rescue by his comrades signifies for Alon the possibility of being recognized and appreciated by his own kibbutz (once he is transferred to a combat unit).

The narrator's repetition of the details in Alon's story when describing him singing the song Jibli sang reinforces the analogy between Alon and Jibli: "In the shadow of his helmet Micky could see his face twisting in pain and intense emotion. He was lying alone in the dark, bleeding in enemy country, fighting for his life."<sup>417</sup> The resemblance created by the narrator between Jibli and Alon illustrates the extent to which being recruited as a noncombat soldier is a disaster for Alon and presents his survival in this current position as a heroic struggle, likened—at least in Alon's mind—to Jibli's. Yet the narrator's detailed description of Alon's physical environment ("In the stillness of the camp, in front of the armory door, opposite the clear sky") enhances the dissonance between the fantasy to which Alon strives to cling and his actual state, highlighting both the pathetic and tragic elements in his character.

The intertexts that appeared in Alon's monologue will reappear, but their modification will illuminate Alon's dark moments, which are imminent. In a nighttime training exercise, Alon brings disaster upon himself when he independently fires at what seems to him to be "a suspicious armed figure," as he later claims in front of his commanders. Indeed, Alon's tendency to merge reality with dream overtakes him, but the

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of the paramedic's pledge, see The Israeli Medical Corps, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://www.refua.atal.idf.il/1176-he/Refuah.aspx>.

<sup>417</sup> There is a subtle, yet crucial, difference between the Hebrew original and the English translation here. The literal translation would be: "In the shadow of his helmet *one* could see his face twisting in pain and intense emotion" (בצל הקסדה היה אפשר לראות את פניו מתעוותים בכאב ובהתמכרות, עמוד 417)

Unfortunately, the incorrect translation bears implications on the narratological perspective of the sentence, since in the Hebrew it is not Micky who is the focalizer through which Alon is described, but rather the narrator, probably the adult narrator who also accompanies Alon in places Melabes is not present, though here it could be Melabes, who—as the reader has learned shortly before Micky and Alon's conversation—stands awake and breathes the clean air after the rain. This is important because later, when Micky is away for soccer practice, Alon's dramatic events are described through the same voice that is a combined focalization of the narrator and Alon. Also, the narrator's embracing of Alon's narration produces a subtle poetic statement, as if by repeating Alon's narration the narrator honors his pain and personal heroic struggle.

commanders themselves deliberately create an atmosphere during the night drill that blurs the borders between the real and the unreal, as Melabes indicates: “Everything was carried out with an air of tight-lipped gravity, it was all so real that . . . the strange suspicion stole into my heart that this time it was serious, like in the combat units, and I longed to enter into it wholeheartedly, with total identification” (415).<sup>418</sup> Such also are the commander Muallem’s directions to the soldiers: “‘This is no longer an exercise,’ he said. ‘From now on this is for real. This is a true combat operation. . . . Intelligence has received information that gangs of Fedayeen are prowling round here at night . . . they may arrive soon to take shelter in this ruin’” (416). Therefore, Alon is punished as severely as he is not only for his action, but also for exposing the inherent lie in the nighttime training exercise, as the narrator conveys, describing the moments after the shot is heard: “The game was over. The deception exposed. Someone else would pay the price of this awakening” (424).<sup>419</sup> After Alon admits he fired the shot, Raffy Nagar, the CO, scolds him harshly: “Are you the one who wants to apply for a transfer to the paratroops? . . . You’re nuts! You shouldn’t be allowed to carry a gun.” The shot, which should have been an integral part of the exercise, perhaps even its peak (as the soldiers have been told that this is an operation rather than an exercise, in which they need to put into practice all of the training they have had so far) is what ends the exercise, exposing the deception of it all. But those who are responsible for the deception are not accused of any wrongdoing, and instead it is Alon who is punished for getting carried away. The commanders take advantage of Alon’s motivation and use it to manipulate him and the platoon; but when Alon, who was assigned as the head of a detail and therefore was given more authority, uses his discretion and shoots, the CO immediately marginalizes him, calling him nuts and saying he should not be allowed to carry a weapon. Kenaz here critiques the system whose representatives can lie to their soldiers and yet be free of the consequences, imposing them on a gullible subject who is in a lower position. When Alon tries to apologize (“I know I made a mess of things, sir . . . but I’m ready to take whatever I’ve got coming at me”), Raffy Nagar answers him with sneer: “Who gives a damn if you’re ready or not ready? What do you think this is, a request program? Have you forgotten where you are?” (425) In view of Kenaz’s critique,

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<sup>418</sup> In the Hebrew original, there is no individual agent who longs “to enter into it wholeheartedly”; the grammar is impersonal, as if the effect of the night-training takes over the individual and deprives him of critical thinking: “הכל נעשה בחומרה עצורה, אמיתית כל כך... מתגנב גם הפעם אל הלב החשד המורר, שמא הפעם זה ברצינות, כמו ביחידות הקרביות, והנפש כלה לשחק את זה בכנות, מתוך הזדהות גמורה.” (עמוד 422)

<sup>419</sup> Although Melabes tells about the shot from his stance as a soldier in Zackie’s detail, this statement, representing the future knowledge of the forthcoming events, must be related to the adult narrator who knows the aftermath of Alon’s story.

Raffy Nagar's words to Alon ("Have you forgotten where you are?") are illuminated in an ironic light, as the whole purpose of the nighttime training exercise is to make the soldiers temporarily forget where they are.

Melabes watches Alon after this nighttime training exercise, when the platoon is getting ready for bed:

In the few minutes that were left until lights-out . . . Alon stood there, looking more lost and beaten than I had ever seen him . . . perhaps he was waiting desperately for the lights to go out, for the darkness to come and separate him from us. And he would return to the place where there was a real meaning to every act, every danger, every enthusiasm. Because here everything is based on a lie, on a game of let's-pretend. . . . None of them realizes the terrific power possessed by his hands holding a gun. . . . To remember that the game is a game and reality is reality. Not to allow yourself to be carried away by the real call of the dream, when the whole game is based on a lie. That's the biggest disgrace—to fall into the trap of the lie. (425–26)

Again, the time of night is Alon's chronotope.<sup>420</sup> It is both a time and a space which blurs the borders between the fantastic and the real and enables Alon's connection with his dream in its widest sense—the dream of becoming a paratrooper, the dream of connecting with the absent father, the dream of existence in a heroic sphere, the sphere of Unit 101, of Jibli and of his father, and the socialist-Zionist dream in general. In the last five sentences of the passage above, there is a gradual movement from Melabes's focalization to Alon's, after which the reader is entered into Alon's stream of consciousness. Melabes describes Alon's appearance as viewed by Melabes and the rest of the platoon, reflecting on Alon's desire for the lights to go out, so he, Alon, "would return to the place where there was a real meaning to every act, every danger, every enthusiasm." The next sentence lacks any agency or personal pronoun ("Because here everything is based on a lie, on a game of let's-pretend"), and thus allows for the transition from one focalizer (Melabes) to another (Alon). This is clear in the next sentence, in which the *kaf-lamedim*, who were earlier seen by Melabes through the first-

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<sup>420</sup> I am of course here borrowing Mikhail Bakhtin's term for the imaginary time-space of both the genre/s of a novel and its protagonists. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 84–258, and Mikhail Bakhtin, *Tzurot Ha-zman Ve-ha-chronotop Ba-roman* [Forms of time and chronotope in the novel], trans. Dina Markon (Or Yehuda: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir-Publishing House, and Heksherim Institute University of the Negev, 2007).

person plural point of view (“perhaps he was waiting . . . for the darkness to come and separate him from us”) appear, through Alon’s eyes, as “them” (“None of *them* realizes the terrific power possessed by his hands holding a gun”).<sup>421</sup> The fuzzy line between dream and reality in Alon’s mind is illustrated in the oxymoronic expression that arises in his thoughts—“the real call of the dream,” and the complexity of the sentence as a whole (“Not to allow yourself to be carried away by the real call of the dream, when the whole game is based on a lie”), renders palpable his confusion between the real and the fantastic.<sup>422</sup> Alon’s stream of consciousness consistently appears in third-person and second-person singular forms. Contrary to the normative form of a character’s inner thoughts, which are usually conveyed in the first-person singular, as in his earlier interior monologue in Part II of the novel,<sup>423</sup> here Alon speaks to himself as if from the outside, first in the third and then in the second person, exposing through this dissociation the crisis he is undergoing.

In the subsequent passages, Alon tries to process the events of the nighttime training exercise, and the recurrence of the intertexts, which are now intratexts, provides a window to his deteriorating mental state:

There are some situations in which only the individual himself . . . can find the way back to the starting point, reconcile himself to what he has done, acknowledge it. Like a scout returning alone from enemy territory, but along precisely the same route he used before, on his way in. He sees his footprints. . . .

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<sup>421</sup> Emphases added. This indeed verifies Melabes’s guess that Alon wished to be separated from his peers by the dark and hints at his role as a narrator; Alon in his mind separates himself from the rest of the platoon, referring to the other soldiers in the third-person plural.

<sup>422</sup> Yet Alon’s desperate clinging to the dream derives also from his feeling of meaninglessness in the *kaf-lamedim*’s military reality; the fact is that the night-training exercise is futile and will not be part of their future military service, as they are noncombat soldiers. Therefore, existing within the dream, in the heroic sphere, bears a sense of meaning that the military reality lacks, as Melabes described earlier (“he would return to the place where there was a real meaning to every act, every danger, every enthusiasm” (425)).

<sup>423</sup> In the second part of *Infiltration*, Alon, who volunteers to stay on base on guard duty during the holiday, tries to write a letter to his girlfriend Dafna. The reader is entered into his stream of consciousness: “This isn’t the letter I wanted to write to her. I wanted to write her a love letter, and something else came out instead. . . . Why did I stay here over the leave? Alone in this sad, empty building? . . . Instead of going home, seeing her, seeing my mother, the friends I love? Confronting them and being what I really am. . . . Between the truth and the pretense, I chose the pretense” (246–49). And later in his contemplations: “I have to listen to this inner call and not give in. If there’s one percent chance, the battle’s worth it” (250).

And suddenly it seems to him that he is like a tracker sent to discover his own tracks. To pursue himself, to catch himself. And he knows that if he flees from himself, he will become detached and lose his way. Only when he reaches the border and crosses back to our side will he be able to feel how all those little moments, all the thoughts of fear and danger, all the footprints that remained there and reattached themselves to him on his way back—are him. And what joins them together until they compose a particular man, and what attaches that particular person to him—isn't just the memory, but belief. . . . That he understood the significance of his actions, and identified with this significance with the full force of his love. . . . There was no suspicious figure in the citrus grove. There's no point in deceiving yourself. . . . You invented it. . . . Something tempted you to go to the limit, to cross it, to feel what it was like, to get inside the part, to live it. . . . To play let's-pretend like a baby. That's your weakness and you should know that. . . . When everything takes place within the game of let's-pretend, the truth comes to resemble a lie and the lie to resemble the truth. How can one navigate there at all? (426–27)

Ironically, Alon attempts to examine the night's events through a critical eye by embracing the image of a scout who returns from enemy territory, an image which recalls Jibli's story and illustrates Alon's inability to break from the realm of fantasy. The parable about the tracker who is sent "to pursue himself, to catch himself" embodies Alon's tragedy: It is a desperate wake-up call to himself, who feels he is mentally receding into hallucination, but at the same time it demonstrates Alon's split between his awareness and his fantasy, a split which he cannot overcome, as he prophesies: "And he knows that if he flees from himself, he will become detached and lose his way." Alon's description of the thoughts of fear and danger, the footprints that are joined together "until they compose a particular person" literalizes his sense of self-disintegration, which accords with his use of the second person and expresses his psychological state of dissociation.<sup>424</sup> A Dissociative Identity Disorder is defined in the psychological literature as "a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception of the environment."<sup>425</sup> This disorder usually manifests in people who have experienced traumatic childhood events,<sup>426</sup> as

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<sup>424</sup> I thank Chana Kronfeld, who pointed out to me the phenomenon of self-disintegration as a potential manifestation of the clinical state of dissociation.

<sup>425</sup> David H. Gleaves, Mary C. May, and Etzel Cardena, "An Examination of the Diagnostic Validity of Dissociative Identity Disorder," *Clinical Psychology Review* 21 (June 2001): 577–608.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*

indeed was the case with Alon, and is expressed in his deep identification with Jibli. When Alon contemplates the question of what makes him the individual he is, he gives preference to belief over memory (“And what joins them together until they compose a particular man, and what attaches that particular person to him—isn’t just the memory, *but belief*”). Memory, which comprises the aggregate of an individual’s private experiences, is in Alon’s mind secondary in significance to belief. In contrast to memory, *belief* characterizes a group of people (rather than a single person) who share the same ideology. The word *emuna* (belief) in the Hebrew,<sup>427</sup> which pertains also to the theological realm, underscores the religious fervor with which the ideology of the collective was conceived of in the kibbutzim, where Alon grew up. Through Alon’s extreme internalization of collectivity, Kenaz illustrates the degree to which Alon is constituted by the collective which, having been born and raised on a kibbutz, had a particularly powerful presence in his life—a presence that all but destroyed his personal agency.

Now you need a good sleep. And sleep shuns you like a leper. . . . You’re losing your belief in yourself. Like a body losing blood. They’ll cancel the application to the medical board. You can forget about your dream of transfer to the paratroops. . . . Something inside you is working against you. . . . The belief is draining out of you. *Sleep will provide you with the clearest proof of what I say. In sleep souls left to themselves and free from bodily distractions enjoy the most blissful repose and, consorting with god whose kin they are, they go wherever they will and foretell many of the things to come. Why, pray, should we fear death if we love to repose in sleep? And is it not absurd to run after the freedom of this life and begrudge ourselves the freedom of eternity? It might be expected that we, so carefully taught at home, would be an example to others of readiness to die.*

. . . Did he believe it himself, or was he just trying to rid them of the natural, physical, paralyzing fear of the deed? Funny you never thought of it before. It’s the way a politician talks. Choosing the easy . . . way. . . . How cheap their sacrifice becomes. It stops even being a sacrifice. . . . How terrible and beautiful the sacrifice is when it is performed in pain, in the love of life, in the relinquishing of it for the sake of a great cause, for the sake of others. Of a people. Of friends. . . . Flying in the face of self-interest. Under an olive tree, with the summer sky above you clear and deep, full of stars . . . on enemy

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<sup>427</sup> " . . . ומה שמחבר את האדם המסוים הזה אליו – זה לא סתם הזכרון, כי אם האמונה. " קנוז, *התגנבות יחידים*, עמ' 433, ההדגשה שלי.

territory full of the smells of an ancient, rural Canaan, you feel the blood of belief ceaselessly flowing out of you and soaking into the earth, returning to it after its wanderings, homeward bound. (427–28)

The image of belief as blood in Alon's mind ("You're losing your belief in yourself. Like a body losing blood," "The belief is draining out of you") reiterates the centrality of ideology to his personality and foreshadows his tragic fate. The paragraph in italics about the sleep of the souls is taken from Eleazar Ben-Yair's speech to his community at the Masada fort, a speech which Alon mentioned earlier in his conversation with Micky during their shared guard duty. The verbatim citation of a significant part of this speech attests to the numerous times Alon has read it and to its importance for him.<sup>428</sup> The content of the speech, in which Ben-Eleazar aims to convince his audience to commit mass suicide, and its emergence in Alon's train of thought following the reflections about the lost opportunity to become a paratrooper and the belief that "is draining out of" him express Alon's emotional plight, a plight that leads him to consider suicide. Here again, Alon channels his personal thoughts through an appropriated collective text. Moreover, he renders his own suicidal thoughts through reflections on the collective suicide of the Masada families, as though the very thought of committing suicide because of a personal crisis is too selfish, and has to be wrapped in a national story, of a sacrificial martyrdom for the sake of the Jewish people. Alon's shame about considering ending his life because of his misery leads him to mock Ben-Yair's "selfishness" ("Choosing the easy . . . way. . . . How cheap their sacrifice becomes.

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<sup>428</sup> It illuminates in a critical light the idealization of death that Ben-Yair represents and which Alon embraces. In detaching part of the famous speech from its whole and planting it in Alon's thoughts about his personal crisis, Kenaz defamiliarizes this text, allowing a direct and critical reading of it, which is usually known in Israeli society for the myth it represents and embraced as a symbol of national endurance. Ben-Yair's extremist position, calling on families to kill one another, appears here in naked fanaticism. At the same time, the content of the speech and its connection in Alon's mind to self-sacrifice reflects the extremism of Israeli society's relation to death in a national context; Ben-Yair, who convinced his community to commit mass suicide through rhetoric, is thus made analogous to the Israeli ideological cult of death in war. Ironically, when it seems that Alon is awakening from his ideological blindness, recognizing and criticizing Ben-Yair's political intentions ("Funny you never thought of it before. It's the way a politician talks"), it is only in order for the reader to find out that Alon is even more extreme ("How terrible and beautiful the sacrifice is when it is performed in pain, in the love of life, in the relinquishing of it for the sake of a great cause, for the sake of others. Of a people. Of friends"). Alon's words about sacrificing for the sake of a people and of friends, while impressive in their altruism, here expose a fascist element. The contrast Kenaz produces between Alon's naïve and kind character and his nationalist worship of the superorganism of the state is precisely the method Kenaz uses to convey his critique about the dangerous potential of ideology.

It stops even being a sacrifice”) and to compare it to Jibli’s devotion (“How terrible and beautiful the sacrifice is when it is performed in pain, in the love of life, in the relinquishing of it for the sake of a great cause, for the sake of others. Of a people. Of friends. . . . Flying in the face of self-interest”). In assuming Jibli’s position, which is evoked through coded descriptions (“Under an olive tree, with the summer sky above you clear and deep, full of stars”), Alon can detach himself from his personal suffering and see himself as Jibli, thus making his consideration of suicide nobler.<sup>429</sup> But now, as the descriptions of Jibli reappear, they are in the second-person singular (“you feel the blood of belief ceaselessly flowing out of you and soaking into the earth”) as an integral part of Alon’s dissociated interior monologue. The details support this ironic analogy: Jibli’s story, too, takes place at night; the hostile military environment, especially after the deed Alon had committed, is mapped onto the enemy territory in the Jibli narrative; and the belief, which earlier Alon described as “draining out of” him, here becomes “the blood of belief” that is flowing out of him, and is “soaking into the earth,” like the blood of the wounded Jibli. But the descriptive parts that Alon adds to Jibli’s narrative—of the land (“full of the smells of an ancient, rural Canaan”), of the blood that is spilt on the ground (“you feel the blood of belief ceaselessly flowing out of you and soaking into the earth, returning to it after its wanderings, homeward bound”)—underscore the influence of the texts Alon has read, and the dangerous and violent potential of ideology. Alon’s referral to the enemy territory as Canaan, the biblical name of the region that Zionism embraced as part of the narrative of return to the historic homeland (ignoring the two thousand years’ hiatus and the Palestinian inhabitants of the land), expresses a disregard for the present borders within which other people live and a view of the land through an eschatological prism.<sup>430</sup> His description of the blood (whether metaphorical or literal) as returning to the land embodies the admiration of death in war and its acceptance as a natural, even desired, consequence. The discrepancy between Alon’s generous and kind personality and his extreme views enables Kenaz to convey the problematic effects of ideology. In the next

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<sup>429</sup> The immediate transition from the general description of the “terrible and beautiful” sacrifice to the concrete portrayal of landscape and time (“Under an olive tree, with the summer sky above you clear and deep, full of stars”) illustrates the image of Jibli as the model of sacrifice Alon has in mind. These are all details from Jibli’s story as Alon narrated it to Micky.

<sup>430</sup> Earlier in the novel, during an argument with Hedgehog about the future of Israel, Alon says: “What’s been created here up to now . . . isn’t yet the state. It’s only the beginning. This whole country will be ours one day. And there’ll be more wars. And more blood spilled. Maybe it’ll take a hundred years, I don’t know how long. That’s the way normal states always came into being. Read history. You don’t understand. Something much bigger and grander than you imagine is being created here” (106).

passage, after digressing to another part of Eleazar Ben-Yair's speech and to Jibli's story, Alon reflects directly on the shooting event:

*For life is the calamity for man, not death. Death gives freedom to our souls and lets them depart to their own pure home where they will know nothing of any calamity; but while they are confined within a mortal body and share its miseries, in strict truth they are dead. . . . To lie on the ground at night and wait for morning to break and not to fall asleep, not to give in to the temptation, not to relinquish the suffering, not to make the sacrifice too easy, worth your while.<sup>431</sup> There was no figure. Peretz-Mental-Case was the only one who believed it. . . . You walked with them through that damned grove, cloaked in a mysterious silence, enjoying your status as head of the detail. . . . Their cynicism angers you more than their personal attitude toward you . . . because you know the truth. You know they're right. . . . But the need to shine is a struggle against despair, against futility. . . . Even in the dark you could see that it was a poor hungry mutt and not a real watchdog. . . . Now they started to get really scared. The two Jerusalemites were apparently not used to dogs . . . and Peretz-Mental-Case looked as if a devil disguised as a dog had suddenly loomed up . . . you approached it and held out your hands, trying to touch it. The other three stood there next to the tree silent and tense. You could feel their fear, their admiration. . . . Here something began pulling you toward the edge. The feeling that you were capable of far greater things. . . . You passed your hand over its body, you felt its damp, alien warmth. . . . The dog's whine burst into your ears, filled your head. Like a dialogue that had been interrupted a long time ago and unexpectedly renewed. It changed the route. There was pain in it. Perhaps the pain of love, the longing for the unattainable. . . . The dog suddenly detached itself from you . . . and began barking into the darkness opposite . . . you knew that the dog was . . . warning of some . . . presence over there. . . . Here the footsteps end. Somehow all the signs have been wiped and it is impossible to continue on the way back. The darkness refuses to give back the picture that flickered then for a second, clear, certain, stronger than any truth. Perhaps it was all worthwhile for the sake of that moment. . . . You stop and you don't know how to get back to your*

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<sup>431</sup> In the Hebrew original, the sentence is impersonal throughout: "לשכב על האדמה בלילה ולחכות עד שיאיר הבוקר ולא להירדם, לא להיכנע לפיתוי, לא לוותר על הסבל, לא לעשות את הקרבן קל מדי, כדאי." (קנז, התגנבות יחידים, עמוד 434)

According to the syntactic logic of the Hebrew, the translation should have been: "not to make the sacrifice too easy, worthwhile."

borders. . . . It's impossible to discover the footprints in the lost section of the road and get back to that moment, the moment of the flickering in the dark. Keep the memory of that moment alive in your heart. Perhaps it will strengthen you in the evil days to come. (428–31).

The cyclic pattern of Alon's thoughts—the reiterated citation of Eleazar Ben-Yair's speech and Jibli's narrative—generates his sense of being trapped in the present situation with no way out. The paragraph from Eleazar Ben-Yair's speech opens with the description of the souls that return to their “pure home,” continuing Alon's thoughts from the previous passage about the blood returning to its home—the land—and emphasizing the common thread between Ben-Yair and Alon of idealizing death. As in the rest of the intertexts in Alon's consciousness, the ancient speech that became a national myth bears a concrete and relevant significance to his own death wish. The recurring image of Jibli lying wounded on the ground immediately follows, but this time its contour lines are more abstract and are cast in a syntax that is devoid of human agency: Unlike in its previous occurrence (“on enemy territory full of the smells of an ancient, rural Canaan, you feel the blood of belief ceaselessly flowing out of you and soaking into the earth”), here the series of inflected infinitives are worded as a decree, or a wish: to lie, to wait, etc. The immediate transition Kenaz produces in Alon's stream of consciousness from the acceptance of death as ideology in the Masada speech to Jibli's description in impersonal sentences structurally and syntactically thematizes Alon's loss of individual agency as a result of his utter submission to ideology, and foreshadows the way in which Alon's constitution by these texts ultimately costs him his life.

Alon's confession to himself that “there was no figure” brings him back to retracing the night's events. The encounter with the dog serves as an opportunity for Alon, whose life on the kibbutz has made him familiar with animals, to have an advantage over his frightened friends and use it to impress them. The warmth of the dog's body when he strokes it, its whine, affect Alon deeply. The unexpected reciprocity, the affection that flows from him and the dog's reaction to it, along with his sense of power the encounter elicits, confuse Alon, and indeed, as he says, “it changed the route.” Right after recalling the contact with the dog that runs forward and begins to bark against the darkness, Alon concludes: “Here the footsteps end. Somehow all the signs have been wiped out and it is impossible to continue on the way back.” Earlier in his stream of consciousness Alon stated several times that “there was no suspicious figure in the citrus grove.” Yet, when trying to recollect the moment of shooting, he complains

against the darkness that “refuses to give back the picture that flickered then for a second, clear, certain, stronger than any truth.” Although Alon is aware of the picture’s existence in his mind’s eyes only, he admits the power of his feeling and dream as transcending reality. Later, when he is asked about his shooting, he will say he saw a suspicious armed figure. But here the picture does not necessarily appear as threatening. It is rather connected to “the longing for the unattainable” and recalls another picture that Alon holds dear: his father’s picture in his wallet. The dog serves as a channel for Alon’s feelings toward his father in the physical affection they share and in its barking in the dark as if warning about the haunting presence of the father. Alon’s shooting, therefore, is not an attempt to hit a specific, threatening target but rather a wish to prove his ability and worthiness, to attest to his belonging to the same echelon as his father and Jibli. And indeed, when returning to the moment of shooting, Alon reflects: “Perhaps it was all worthwhile for the sake of that moment.” This thought accords with Alon’s previous reflections about belief and memory: “and what attaches that particular person to him—isn’t just the memory, but belief. . . . That he understood the significance of his actions, and identified with this significance with the full force of his love” (426). Alon cannot reproduce the picture that flickered in front of his eyes, but he can recall the feelings of pain and love that accompanied it and charged him with strength, as he utters to himself: “Keep the memory of that moment alive in your heart. Perhaps it will strengthen you in the evil days to come.”

A key term in Alon’s contemplations during the night after the shooting event is the Hebrew word *gvul*, which is mostly translated as “border(s),” but also appears as “limit,” “boundary,” and “edge,” and which recurs 6 times throughout Alon’s reflections.<sup>432</sup> It is a central term in Alon’s inner lexicon and bears an extended and layered signification in his consciousness. It originates in the story of Jibli, who lay wounded across the border, on enemy territory, and it is related to Alon’s deep

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<sup>432</sup> “Only when he reaches the *border* and crosses back to our side will he be able to feel how all those little moments . . . are him” (426). “And thus, like a solitary scout returning after a mission, you have to travel that road alone . . . until you reach your *borders*” (ibid.); “something tempted you to go to the *limit*, cross it” (427). “When you try too hard to excel, you’re liable to overstep the *boundaries* of logic and to destroy everything” (429). “Here something began pulling you strongly toward the *edge*” (430). “You stop and you don’t know how to get back to your *borders*” (431). All emphases in English and Hebrew are mine. In Hebrew:

"רק כשיגיע אל הגבול ויגיע אל השטח שלנו, יוכל להרגיש איך כל הרגעים ההם... זה הוא" (עמ' 432), "וכך, כמו סייר בודד שחוזר אחרי פעולה, אתה צריך לעשות את הדרך הזאת לבדך... עד שתגיע אל גבולך." (עמ' 433), "משהו פיתה ללכת עד הגבול, לעבור אותו..." (עמ' 433), "כשאתה משתדל להצטיין יותר מדי, אתה עלול לשכוח את גבולות ההגיון ולהרוס את הכול." (עמ' 435), "פה התחיל משהו למשוך אותך בכוח אל הגבול." (עמ' 436), "אתה נעצר ואינך יודע איך לשוב אל גבולך." (עמ' 437)

involvement in national narratives and political discussions. But as the story progresses, the tale of Jibli becomes a metaphor for Alon's mental state, and the question of borders becomes even more intricate, extending from physical and geographical borders to the borders of Alon's inner self, the border between dream and reality, power and weakness, and between obedience and violation. The borders become a parable on the human soul: Alon is the tracker who is sent to bring himself back to the land where he supposedly belongs, "he reaches the border and crosses back to our side," but he loses his way, "a section of the road is lost" (431)—the very section in which the shooting incident occurred. The tracker cannot bring himself back from enemy territory and therefore is doomed to stay there, unable to cross back over the imagined border. The lost section of time and space that cannot be retrieved is comprised of the moments of heroism, of insistence on the dream, of pushing the limits/borders; and these are also the moments that Alon cherishes and urges himself to hold on to. Alon remains in enemy territory and his end is tragic, but in this territory he fulfills, even if for a flickering moment, his dream of heroism. In crossing the borders and violating the rules of the system, which he has so far always obeyed, he—for the first and only time—defies the system that subjectifies him and breaks free. For the first and last time—he does not return to "our side," but remains on the territory of his dream. As it happens, all along Alon's narrative, the movement is from the collective and national—the borders of the land—to the most personal and intimate—the borders of his soul. At the same time, remaining in the territory of his dream also implies departing from the dream of being at the center of the system, like the Palmachniks or the paratroopers. This is the tragic paradox in which Alon is imprisoned.<sup>433</sup>

Alon is punished for the shooting by having to stand close to the company offices from morning till night with a broomstick in his left hand as if it were his gun: "Occasionally one of the instructors with time on his hands volunteers to put him through the arms drill, accompanied by yells, curses, and abuse" (432). Benny the commander takes advantage of the situation and humiliates Alon, justifying it later as an attempt to show Alon the power given to instructors in basic training for *kaf-lamedim*.<sup>434</sup> Alon understands from Benny that he is willing to help him get into the Squad Commanders Course, but after Benny refuses him and Alon learns he is destined for service in the

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<sup>433</sup> I thank Chana Kronfeld for illuminating for me Alon's tragic paradox.

<sup>434</sup> I describe Benny's abuse of Alon earlier, in my discussion of "Formation of Collectivity: The Temptation of Power and Loss of Moral Agency."

military police, which at the time was one of the least prestigious posts in the IDF, he loses hope and sinks into depression:

Again he stared silently into the distance. . . . You're leaving yourself behind again, said a familiar voice, one of his many voices. You're going away again, and afterward you'll have to travel the same road back, retracing your footsteps, avoiding ambushes, overcoming fear, until you return to your borders. Why are you going away? The enemy is hiding inside you. The longings for the meeting are terrible, they are impossible to overcome. On the ground, in the shade of the olive tree, on a bed of earth that nothing can surpass, as dawn begins to break, and the cries of the hunters are not yet heard, life runs out, it runs out, the blood returns to its source, like the payment of a debt of love. Hard, hard, are the fathers to die, as the oak to be torn asunder. (555)

Here the image of the scout reappears, but this time Alon's voice wonders about the very need to embark on the journey: "Why are you going away? The enemy is hiding inside you." The road is always double ("You're going away again, and afterward you'll have to travel the same road back"), indicating Alon's dissociation. The ambushes and the fear he needs to overcome when retracing his path back might be the effort he has to make to reconcile the heroic fantasies and aspirations in his mind with the mundane and depressing existence as a *kaf-lamed*. Perhaps the question over the use of going away is a question about the use of his very existence, in which the gap between the dream and reality becomes unbearable. Setting off on the road may be an escape into fantasy (and the returning is the acknowledgment of reality), as if to chase after an enemy in the land of heroism. But here Alon's voice utters to him in the second person: the enemy you wish to capture, who makes you restless, is inside you. The absence of agency in the sentences that follow expresses Alon's emotional exhaustion and surrender, his loss of the strength to fight his internal enemy. The terrible longings for an encounter recall the moments before the shooting, portrayed in Alon's mind as a "longing for the unattainable." What was insinuated there is almost explicit here—the longings are for "the meeting," Alon's meeting with his father that will finally allow the longed-for dialogue between them, a dialogue that in the present can only take place over the lines of a poem. In the next sentences, Alon returns to Jibli's moments on the olive grove, and this time the abstraction is complete ("On the ground, in the shade of the olive tree, on a bed of earth that nothing can surpass, as dawn begins to break, and the cries of the hunters are not yet heard, life runs out"). The verbs in these sentences are not connected to the person who lies on the ground but rather to abstract

elements, creating a series of modernist fragments that mirror Alon's inner fragmentation. The descriptions are of time and space. Human agency, and even its residues, have entirely disappeared. Alon's sense of self has gone and his feeling that his fate is sealed is evident. Here, the focus is not on the hope for salvation, but rather on the experience of dying. And unlike the previous images, in which the body's fluid was belief, here the fluid is prolepsis of literal blood: "life runs out . . . the blood returns to its source." The description of the blood as returning to its source recalls the words that are said in funerals, "for dust you are and to dust shall you return," taken from Genesis and reinforcing the sense of departure from life in Alon's mind.<sup>435</sup> The return to the scene of Jibli enables Alon to design his own death in his mind and to erect it as a barrier between his imagination and the depressive state he is in. Although it seems that Alon's agency is completely lost in the description in which he foretells his last moments, his personal traces can still be identified. The statement about the ground as a "bed of earth that nothing can surpass" (*matza she'eyn tov mi-menu*), and the description of the blood that spills on the ground "like the payment of a debt of love," are linked to Alon's previous sayings about the land; his love and feeling of duty toward it: "I love this country. I really love it. A thousand times over I'm prepared to give everything for it—my blood, my life" (404). Ironically, as Kenaz shows us, Alon's self-expression, his own textuality, appears only when he relates to his utter devotion to his country, to his willingness to cancel himself out for the sake of the nation and the collective.

Alon's complicated relation with his father is invoked intertextually in the last sentence of the passage above, which consists of two lines from Natan Alterman's poem "Ketz Ha-av" (The father's end): "Hard, hard, are the fathers to die, as the oak to be torn asunder."<sup>436</sup> The poem appears in the collection *Simchat Aniyim* (Joy of the poor), published in 1941, which is a series of monologues by a dead father and husband,

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<sup>435</sup> ". . . for dust you are and to dust shall you return" (Genesis 3:19) (Alter, *Five Books*, 27). The full verse produces the context in which the statement is made (as part of Adam and Eve's punishment by God for eating from the forbidden fruit): "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread till you return to soil, for from there were you taken, for dust you are and to dust shall you return." When reading the verse in its entirety, the connection to the soil as a source from which the human being was made—and therefore the logic of returning to it—is more direct.

<sup>436</sup> In Hebrew: "קשים, קשים האבות למות, כאלון הקשה היקרע" מתוך: נתן אלטרמן, "קץ האב", *שמחת עניים* (הוצאת: תל אביב, 1941). Natan Alterman, *Simchat Aniyim* [Joy of the poor] (Tel Aviv: Machbarot Le-sifrut, 1941).

haunting his family members from beyond the grave.<sup>437</sup> Although the father addresses his daughter, still the relationship between the father and his child is the heart of the poem. If we connect this line with the one preceding it, in which Alon expresses his terrible longings for an encounter, it becomes clear that the longings are for a meeting with his father. Again, like the other intertexts in Alon's consciousness, Alterman's canonical poem bears an intimate message for Alon, as the Hebrew name of the oak tree mentioned in the second line ("as the oak to be torn asunder") is *alon*, which is of course Alon's name. Although the poem's lines are formulated as a general truth, about fathers, with no details as to their specific identity, they coin a statement that expresses a concrete meaning to Alon, as does the context of the larger *Poema* where the dead man performs a series of surrealist encounters with his living family. The word "as" creates a parallel between how hard it is for the fathers to die and the hardness of the oak tree and the difficulty to tear it asunder ("hard" and "difficult" are both *קשה* in Hebrew). But the analogy that is produced between fathers and the oak tree also ties their fates together: Because the father has died, the oak tree (*alon*) has been cut, a literalization of Alon's fate following his father's death. The poetic formulation, in which the article "the" is attached to the word "fathers" and by that presents them as the mythological fathers (*Avot* also means patriarchs, or forefathers), illustrates Alon's view of the fallen, the fathers who are as hard as trees and do not die easily, and their national mission: For him they are the founding forefathers of the state. The generalized phrasing also connects to the collective manner in which Alon thinks of his own father, as part of a tradition of heroism (as it is embodied in the commemoration books), a tradition to which Jibli belongs as well. Alterman's gothic lines form the climax of the passage, placing the wished-for encounter with father(s) hauntingly in the realm of the dead.

On what will turn out to be Alon's last night, he volunteers to stand guard. Avner, who shares the guard duty with Alon that night, recognizes something different in his face: "And again the new smile flickers in his eyes . . . giving rise to the suspicion that his generous candor has left him and he is beginning to plot something evil" (561).

"Halt! Password!" The voice was Alon's echoing in the darkness. Avner could see his silhouette at the edge of the ray of light shed by the lamp . . . moving to and fro in the attempt to identify the person coming toward him. When no answer was forthcoming, Alon called again: "Halt! Password!" The figure did not halt.

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<sup>437</sup> *Simchat Aniyim* (Joy of the poor) is a euphemism for *simchat metim* (joy of the dead), deriving from the expression: A poor man is as good as dead (*ani chashuv ka-met*), from Talmud Bavli, tractate Nedarim 64b.

Alon cocked his gun and aimed it at the shape looming out of the darkness. "Stop it nut! Stop showing off!" Benny's voice rose out of the darkness. "What are you aiming your weapon at me, are you mad?" Alon held his ground: "Password!" Benny gave him the password. Alon saluted. Benny did not return the salute. Instead he said: "Give me your weapon." "Why, sir?" "Give it to me! That's an order. I want to discharge the bullet you loaded into the barrel chamber. I don't trust you." Alon hesitantly gave him the gun . . . after the empty click was heard, he returned it to Alon. "Why did you aim the gun at me, you imbecile?" "Sir, I was obeying orders. You didn't give me the password." "Didn't you recognize me?" "It's impossible to be sure, sir." "Maybe you thought you were seeing some infiltrator, like you saw then on the night training . . . ?" "No, sir." "Why did you volunteer tonight for guard duty?" "No reason, sir. I don't mind." "You don't mind standing outside for hours at night, in the cold, like a dog, instead of sleeping?" "No, sir." . . . "I suppose you think you're better than everyone else. . . . when I was an instructor in the paratroopers, I had a lot of kibbutzniks, like you. I never understood why they were so full of themselves . . . besides, you've got quite a lot of screwballs too. What's wrong there, in the way you live, that produces so many nuts? You were supposed to produce the finest, the elite! The ideal Israeli. . . . What went wrong?" . . . "Sir, when we were in the series, I asked you to help me get into a Squad Commander Course so I could be an instructor on Training Base Four. I wanted to be there." "It was too late. By the time you came to your senses, you'd already been posted somewhere else. I know where you've been posted. You want to know?" Alon was silent. "You're going to the military police. Are you satisfied?" . . . "Sir," said Alon, barely able to suppress the trembling in his voice, "I'm not going to be in the military police." "I tell you that I know you've been posted there. You're going from here to a course for MPs. So you're telling me that you're not going there?" "Sir, I'm not going to be in the military police," insisted Alon. "Are you trying to make a fool of me?" asked Benny. "No, sir. I mean every word I say: I'm not going to be in the military police." "So where are you going to be, in your opinion?" Alon was silent. Benny shrugged and looked at Alon with a mixture of amusement, astonishment, and anger. Avner saw him standing and talking to Alon. From where he was standing he couldn't hear what they were saying. The conversation went on for a long time. In the end, he saw Benny leaving Alon, walking off and disappearing behind the bend in the fence. . . . And then came the sound of the shot. A brief, terrified scream escaped Avner's lips and he

sprang from his place in alarm. . . . And as if it were only a question of music, to distinguish the note particular to every shot, every catastrophe—the certainty flashed through his heart, cutting like a knife: I know that shot. I’ve heard it before. (562–65)

The scene begins with Avner’s focalization: “Avner could see his silhouette,” etc. We are thus first under the impression that Avner is a witness to Alon and Benny’s exchange. But at the peak of narrative suspense, after Benny leaves Alon, who has just announced he will not go into the Military Police, we learn that although Avner saw Alon and Benny talking, “from where he was standing he couldn’t hear what they were saying.” Kenaz deliberately creates this narratological confusion, planting in the reader the hope that Avner knows of Benny’s abuse of Alon, only to shatter it a moment before Alon’s catastrophic end is revealed. The narratological move of bringing us back to Avner’s focalization to learn of Alon’s suicide increases our sense of helplessness, as we are aware of the crucial gap of knowledge between us and Avner, a gap which stands in an opposite relation to Avner’s physical closeness to Alon and Benny. Kenaz thus underscores the fundamental injustice inherent in the military system: Benny verbally abuses Alon and shares responsibility in Alon’s suicide, and yet does not pay for his actions, indeed fulfilling what he told Alon earlier in the novel about the unlimited power of a commander at Training Base Four (“you control people, you can play with their lives however you like, you can decide their fate” (435)). Later on, Avner describes the night’s events to his platoon-mates:

Straight away I looked in Alon’s direction. . . . I was certain he was lying on the ground, wounded. . . . I wanted to fly there straight away . . . but I was afraid that that shit Benny was just waiting for me to move from my post so he could come and stick me on a charge. . . . In the end I took my courage in both hands and ran over there. And he really was lying on the ground. “Was he conscious?” asked Micky. “I’m sure he was. He knew me, he saw me. I called him: Alon! Alon! But he didn’t want to answer. As if he had something more important to do and I was disturbing him . . . and then I heard someone running. I knew it was Benny. . . . He came rushing back as if he were expecting this to happen. He began yelling at me: “What are you doing here? What do you leave your post for? You’ll pay for this! He was in a panic. I had the feeling he saw me as a danger. Maybe I was a witness to something he didn’t want known. And that made me feel sure he wouldn’t do anything to me. He examined Alon and bandaged him with his field dressing. Then he told me to stay there. And he ran

off somewhere. When I was left alone with Alon again, I suddenly heard him trying to sing. I heard a few words. About the vulture coming to eat the corpses. I think he was trying to scare me. I don't know. Anyhow, that's what he sang, you could hardly hear him, in a kind of whisper. How could he have the heart to sing?" "There really is a song like that," said Micky, "I know there is." "The Cannons' Roar," said Hanan. "It's a Russian song." "Ah!" said Avner, as if this answered all his questions. "It was terrible to hear him singing like that. . . . In the end Benny came back with another two guys, medics, I think. He yelled at me to go back to my post. . . . They'd taken him away." (566)

Ironically, Avner, whose focalization was limited in the critical moments of Alon's story, is the eye-witness who tells his friends of the night's occurrences. Again, Kenaz alludes to Avner's potential to point a blaming finger at Benny; Avner himself even feels it ("He was in a panic. I had the feeling he saw me as a danger. Maybe I was a witness to something he didn't want known"). But this feeling does not awaken in Avner a need to inquire further; it only reassures him that Benny will not harm him. His fear of Benny is so great that he hesitates to run to Alon after the shooting (and indeed he waits a few moments before he approaches him). The oppressive hierarchy in the military system, Kenaz shows us, diminishes basic humanity, and the fear it spreads among its subjects paralyzes their moral response.

The song Alon sings in his dying moments is "The Cannons' Roar," the song Jibli sang when he was lying wounded on Jordanian land. This was a popular song, translated from Russian into Hebrew by the poet Natan Yonatan. Its melodious tune probably blurred its harsh and violent lyrics.<sup>438</sup> Avner's lack of familiarity with the song produces a defamiliarization, which allows the lyrics to be perceptible anew. Since Avner does not know the song, he tries to convey to his friends the words he managed to recognize in Alon's quiet singing, and their crudeness is exposed without the mediation of the musical harmony. The reader, however, is familiar with the song, if only because Alon sang it in its entirety to Micky after telling him the story of Jibli. The novel, as a written text, enables us to come face to face with the lyrics, without the lulling effect of the Russian tune.<sup>439</sup> The sharp discrepancy between the two middle lines of the song ("A

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<sup>438</sup> The song's words (translated by Dalya Bilu) appear earlier when Alon sings it during the shared guard duty with Micky: "The field of slaughter is forsaken. / A solitary soldier wanders there / Singing with the clouds and wind. / From the hill a vulture rises / Then it falls upon the corpses" (410).

<sup>439</sup> Although Avner repeats the words he heard, it is only part of the whole song and repeated for the purpose of conveying them to his peers in order to locate their source (and indeed, when the words

solitary soldier wanders there / Singing with the clouds and wind”) and its first and last lines (“The field of slaughter is forsaken . . . / From the hill a vulture rises / Then it falls upon the corpses”) creates a dark and morbid atmosphere. The seeming serenity that takes over the battlefield after the cannons’ roar has quieted down is suddenly violated with the description of the vulture that rises from the hill and falls on the corpses.<sup>440</sup> Then it becomes clear that the battlefield is forsaken but not empty, and the soldier who wanders there is solitary because he is the only survivor, surrounded by the corpses of dead soldiers. The harsh, unintentional bathos in the picture of the vulture that hovers above the dead bodies to eat their flesh, and the use of the Hebrew term *pgarim*, literally “carcasses,” which highlights the dehumanizing corporeality of the death, stands in diametrical opposition to the heroic aura of the fallen, who are often depicted as martyrs or angels. The “carcasses” are in complete contrast to the abstract terms used in Israeli commemoration discourse to describe the war dead (*chalalim*, *noflim*). The fact that Alon sings this song in his dying moments continues the metaphorical connection between him and Jibli, as Alon’s refusal to accept his placement in the Military Police is a refusal to surrender to his emotional death, and an insistence on staying in the heroic sphere. But at the same time, “The Cannons’ Roar” is also a thematization of the futility of Alon’s death; of the dissonance between Alon’s image of the fallen as immortal, and death as definite and final. “The Cannons’ Roar” frames Alon’s story: He sings it on the night when he stands guard with Micky and he sings it again in his last moments. In both cases, he imagines himself to be Jibli, and the

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reappear, they are again accompanied by melody, when Micky asks Yossi Ressler to play and sing the song for him after Alon is taken to the hospital). Ironically, when Avner’s friends tell him it is the “Canons’ Roar,” Avner reacts as if the mystery of Alon’s suicide is solved (“‘Ah!’ said Avner, as if this answered all his questions”), but his reaction only emphasizes again his helplessness and limited knowledge. The soldiers’ limited knowledge and incompetency is highlighted further when they attempt to guess what Benny told Alon on that night; Micky even says to Avner that “Benny knows how to hurt people, how to humiliate them, make them despair” (568), yet they have no way nor any intention of bringing charges against Benny.

<sup>440</sup> In the Hebrew the contrasts are sharper and more surprising, making the song’s message harsher: שדה התותחים נדם / שדה הקטל נתייתם / בשדה חייל בודד ישוח / יזמר עם עננים ורוח / יעלה העיט מן ההרים / ויעוט על הפגרים. The superficiality of the serenity is already alluded to in the word נתייתם, “was orphaned.” The vulture that falls upon the corpses evokes Genesis 15, “Covenant of The Pieces”: After Abraham cleaves the animals, “carrion birds came down on the carcasses” (Genesis 15:11) (Alter, *Five Books*, 75). In the Hebrew, the words used to describe the carrion birds and the carcasses, עיט (*ayit*) and פגרים (*pgarim*), are the same as in the “Cannons’ Roar”: “יעלה העיט מן ההרים / ויעוט על הפגרים”. The allusion to Genesis underscores the contrast between the “positive” sacrifice of animals to signify God’s covenant with Abraham in the biblical text and the redundant sacrifice of human beings in wars. I thank Chana Kronfeld for this insightful observation.

second time, it seems as if he is closer than ever to Jibli's myth. By creating a parallel image of Alon and Jibli, of both lying on the ground and singing, Kenaz underscores the profound difference between the two: the redundancy of Alon's real death as he makes one desperate final attempt to resemble Jibli, while Jibli himself miraculously, almost fantastically, recovers and goes out to war again. Jibli's tale is as an embodiment of the myth of the living dead, a myth which Natan Alterman developed in his poetry and which has been embraced by Palmach Generation writers and by Israeli society at large. Alon is caught in this myth: He lives and he dies in his attempt to follow it.

The texts that constitute Alon's being—the commemoration books (*Gviley Esh, Chaverim Mesaprim Al Jimi, Ben Ha-aretz*), Jibli's story, Eleazar Ben-Yair's speech, the readings of Alterman's *Plagues of Egypt* in the Seder in the kibbutzim, and the gothic *Joy of the Poor*, which are all tangible and independent texts outside the sphere of the novel—demonstrate their centrality in Israeli culture and blur the boundaries between the fictional and the “real” world in which they were created. This fuzziness between the two worlds, and the confusion it generates in the Israeli reader for whom these texts are familiar from the collective culture, thematize Alon's state of confusion between reality and fantasy. The confusion that the Israeli reader experiences illustrates the centrality of national myths in Israeli culture and the reader's vulnerability to their violent penetration into his/her consciousness, just as they penetrated and constituted Alon's. His image as a Don Quixote who has lost his sanity due to obsessive reading is directly linked to the collective: Unlike Cervantes' cavalier, who obsessively reads all the chivalric books he has accumulated in his private library, Alon reads the commemoration books in the kibbutz's library. The collective and nameless agency of the adults who are in charge of him excludes him and abandons him. It is in this collective sphere that Micky, who visits Alon in the kibbutz during their last vacation in the novel, several days before Alon's suicide, contemplates:

And as he sits there, opposite the road leading to the gate of the kibbutz, it seems to him that he is beginning to come to terms with the sorrow of parting, with the certainty he will never see the Alon he has come to know and love . . . he feels a kind of hatred for the usurper of this identity, to the other Alon, shamelessly mad, setting out alone on a hopeless journey, a ridiculous adventure, to act out his sick fantasies, like some lousy Don Quixote, like a parody of Don Quixote, like a parody of a parody. (509)

Micky, of course, is referring to Alon's act of pretending to be an officer in the paratroops: He has just learned from Alon's girlfriend that Alon secretly took her

brother's paratroop officer uniforms and went to the center of town wearing them. But he connects Alon's "shameless madness" to his Quixotic nature. The usurper who takes over the Alon he loves is Don Quixote (or, more correctly, his parody). In becoming Don Quixote, through his obsessive reading of the commemoration books, Alon loses himself, becomes completely constituted by these texts which consume him, as Micky's reflections foretell. Similarly to the texts that Cervantes's protagonist reads, the texts that Alon internalizes are an integral part of the collective sphere. Indeed, they are dominant in Israeli society. By mapping the image of Don Quixote on the socialist Zionist kibbutznik, Kenaz points to the responsibility of the collective sphere—Alon's kibbutz, the military environment, and the Israeli leadership who harness these texts for political profit—for Alon's regression into hallucination and detachment from reality, and ultimately for his tragic end.

## Epilogue

### The Experience of Jewish and Palestinian Refugees: Common Ground and Communication Channel

In this epilogue, I would like to discuss the cinematic aspect of themes I dealt with in the first and second parts of this dissertation, as well as the point of view the visual allows for, through an examination of the films *Kedma* (2002) by Amos Gitai and *Homeland* (2006) by Dani Rosenberg.<sup>441</sup> I choose not to use the words “to conclude” or “to close,” as I think that the discussion of the cinematic perspective opens up a new horizon of scrutiny over these questions rather than closing anything down.<sup>442</sup> Both films return to the 1948 war and depict the circumstances of Holocaust survivors who arrive in Palestine/Israel in the midst of the war.<sup>443</sup> Alongside the narrative of the Jewish refugees, *Kedma* and *Homeland* deal with the Palestinian Nakba and create an analogy between the Jewish narrative and the Palestinian one, drawing on the displacement, loss, and death in the catastrophes of both peoples. By destabilizing the cinematic medium and yet exhausting its language, the two films use their retrospective gaze to convey the points of view of both the Jewish and Palestinian refugees and to offer an original and ethical interpretation of the connection between the two.

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<sup>441</sup> The Hebrew title of Rosenberg’s film, *Beit Avi*, literally translates to *My Father’s Home*.

<sup>442</sup> *Kedma* and *Homeland* do not summarize the fascinating relationship between the textual and cinematic mediums, nor do they resolve the complicated questions about the past from a retrospective point of view. Instead, they open up a broad horizon of research, particularly with regard to the following topics: the way in which Israeli and Palestinian cinemas carry on and modify the Jewish and Palestinian intertextual traditions, and the ethical implications of this continuation or modification; Gitai’s retrospective stance as a political and moral statement characterizing several of his films (such as *Berlin-Jerusalem* and *Kedma*); the use of foreign languages in recent Israeli films, at the expense of Hebrew, as a social and political statement; and much more.

<sup>443</sup> In the case of *Kedma*, the country is still under the rule of the British Mandate, as can be inferred from one of the first scenes in the movie: Jewish refugees who illegally arrive by boat in Palestine are coming ashore and are being helped by Israeli kibbutz members. British soldiers chase them, but they nonetheless manage to escape. In *Homeland*, the soldier who sends Lolek, the film’s protagonist, to the outpost at the beginning of the movie, demands that he take an oath of loyalty to the state of Israel, according to which we can understand that the film takes place sometime after Israel’s declaration of independence, but before the end of the 1948 war.

## Destabilizing Fiction in *Kedma*

The film *Kedma* tells the story of several men and women who arrive in Palestine after surviving the Second World War and the Holocaust, in which they lost all their friends and family. The spectator accompanies them from their last minutes on the illegal immigrant boat which brings them to Palestine, where young kibbutz members, native Israelis, await their arrival and assist them in disembarking. The Israelis, escaping gunfire from British soldiers, then take them to a temporary camp where they receive a crash course in operating a gun. Immediately after the quick lesson, gunshots are heard close by and the newcomers are sent to fight in a battle, alongside the Israelis, against Palestinian fighters. Many of the Jewish men who die in the battle are from the group of Holocaust survivors. The few Jewish men who remain alive capture a Palestinian villager who passes by with his wife and their donkey. Later, they set him free, but not before they take his donkey (and load one of the injured men on it). The movie ends when the Israeli fighters bring their injured and dead from the battlefield to the camp, where their names are registered and they are taken away on trucks for medical treatment or burial.

From its outset, *Kedma*'s medium as a fictional movie is disrupted. The film opens with a long tracking shot, a technique Gitai has perfected,<sup>444</sup> with no cuts, breaking our expectation of the fiction genre. This shot begins with a close-up of a woman's back as she takes off her corset and lies down next to a man whose upper body is naked too. They kiss passionately, then he suddenly breaks away from her, sits down, and puts his head in his hands. When he stands up, the frame expands and we notice that their bed is actually a bench on a ship, one of many benches on which people lie. As he reaches for his shirt and jacket, which are hanging on improvised clothes-lines, we can observe the men and women around him—some sitting, some lying down—as well as bags and shabby suitcases everywhere. The man climbs the metal ladder to the deck of the ship, where more people are sitting on the floor or leaning on the side railing. The man paces back and forth, and as he does so suitcases that people are picking up take over the frame, momentarily hiding the man. He eventually stands next to the side railing of the ship and stares at the water. The next shot is of the front side of the ship, which has the word *Kedma* written on it, after which we return to the deck. The camera lingers on one of the passengers, a young man who stands up and puts his bag on his back, then sits

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<sup>444</sup> See the ending of Gitai's *Berlin-Jerusalem* (1989), making *Kedma* in a sense a sequel. I thank Chana Kronfeld for pointing out to me the connection between these two films. *Berlin-Jerusalem*, directed by Amos Gitai (1989; Tel Aviv and Chicago: Agav Films and Facets Video, 2003), DVD.

down and takes off his bag. The woman sitting next to him wrings her hands restlessly. The camera then pans again on the passengers: an old woman rests a young girl on her lap; a man sits down next to a group of people. The camera stops on a man smoking a cigarette. Then it returns to the young man, who is now leaning against the side railing next to the same woman who was sitting beside him earlier. He bends over the side and vomits into the water while she gently rests her arm on his back. The camera then focuses on the woman with whom the film opened, now dressed and sitting against one of the ship's masts. And then it pans back to the man who appeared in the first shot, now sitting next to the man who was smoking earlier. During these long eight minutes, there is no dialogue and no music. The only sound is the monotonous noise of the ship's engines. The lack of conversation and music allows us to examine the appearance of the people—their tattered heavy clothes, ill-suited to the Palestinian climate, their worn-out suitcases, the worried expressions on their faces. But more importantly, it destabilizes the film's genre as a work of fiction, with the apparent lack of action and of a soundtrack, and the camera's seemingly random movement from one person to another creating the sense that it is a documentary.

Furthermore, this shifting focus on various people defamiliarizes the very notion of point of view: when the film opens, the viewers' expectations are that the point of view through which the events will be seen is that of the restless man who leaves the woman lying on the bench and goes up to the deck. But while we follow him, he disappears behind suitcases and other people filling the frame. Then the camera shifts its focus to other passengers, allowing us to examine them thoroughly. And since no one has spoken yet, we are lost among the many characters, attempting in vain to determine who the main character is, and from whose perspective the story will be told. This confusion enhances the sense of the film as a documentary, but also serves as a statement and an exposition of the complex and multifaceted perspective of the film; it does not convey one central point of view, but rather contains multiple points of view and provides a polyphony of voices and perspectives.<sup>445</sup> Yet the dedication of eight minutes of this film to minute details of the refugees' behavior, the focus on their anxious faces and their agitated movements, conveys their centrality in the film (and indeed many of the shots in the film are taken from angles that represent the refugees' point of view, rather than that of the native Israelis'). But it also shatters the Zionist

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<sup>445</sup> The defamiliarization of the notion of point of view also recalls the privilege implicit in having a point of view. The very existence of focalization assumes a connection between the focalizer and his/her consciousness, a fact that might be questioned in relation to the emotional state of the passengers.

myth, according to which the immigrants who arrived illegally in Mandatory Palestine were happy and excited;<sup>446</sup> here they seem depressed, traumatized by their catastrophic past, and afraid of the unknown. The film's first dialogue, between the man with whom the film began (whose name, as we later learn, is Yanush) and his interlocutor, thus revolves around the last time they saw their families or heard from them, a dialogue that poignantly conveys where their thoughts are.

## A Polyphony of Languages

The film's first dialogue is in Polish and Russian, a fact that thwarts the spectators' expectations, and in particular those of the Israeli audience, who probably expect a film by an Israeli director about Jewish immigrants arriving in Palestine in 1948 to be in Hebrew. But precisely this breaking of expectations defamiliarizes, for the spectators, the use of the Hebrew language as an unquestioned norm, and reveals the artificiality of its use in earlier Israeli films about new immigrants, as well as the ideological motivation behind this cinematic convention. The heavy Russian accent of Rosa, Yanush's lover (who, as we learn in this dialogue, was his student), emphasizes her ideological stance, as she insists on mostly speaking in Hebrew throughout the film. This stance is made even clearer by the song she sings, "*El Ha-tzipor*" (To the bird), known also by its first words, "*Shalom Rav Shuvekh*" ("very welcome is your return"). It was written by Chaim Nachman Bialik as a poem, and after being set to music it became very popular among members of the Zionist movement, as it depicts the Land of Israel as a legendary place of warmth and beauty.<sup>447</sup> Bialik's poem is an imagined dialogue between the speaker and a bird who returns to his window from the Land of Israel. He asks her questions (which remain unanswered) about the nature of this far-away land and expresses his longing for it (a sentiment he utters explicitly in the poem's last lines). Although this might seem to be Rosa's ideological statement, the very fact that she sings of the land that is "there" ("Are *there*, in the warm and beautiful land, also

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<sup>446</sup> See, for example, the film: *Exodus*, directed by Otto Preminger (1960; Los Angeles: United Artists/Metro-Goldwin-Meyer, 2002), DVD.

<sup>447</sup> "*El Ha-tzipor*" was Bialik's first published poem; it was published in 1891, when Bialik was 19 years old. For more on the poem and Bialik's biography, see, for example: Fischel Lachover, *Chaim Nachman Bialik: Chayav Ve-yetzirotav* [Chaim Nachman Bialik: His life and works] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1935); Avner Holzman, ed., *Ha-Shirim: Chaim Nachman Bialik, Ha-Mahadura Ha-mele'a Ve-hame'udkenet* [The poems: Chaim Nachman Bialik, the full and updated edition] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 2004).

troubles and suffering?”)<sup>448</sup> places her center of consciousness in the past, where the location at which she is arriving, the Land of Israel, is still “there” rather than *here*.<sup>449</sup> Rosa’s singing is heard in the background of the dialogue between Yanush and his interlocutor. The discrepancy between the idyllic images in Rosa’s singing and the content of the dialogue, in which the interlocutor tells Yanush about his family’s death in a concentration camp, sheds an ironizing light on the song.

The many languages present in *Kedma*—Polish, Russian, Yiddish, English, Arabic, and Hebrew—illustrate the diverse cultural space in which the Zionist project operated, a diversity (and complexity) that was often overlooked in depictions of the land in Zionist literature and art. Hebrew as a spoken language appears in the film only after the tales of the new immigrants about the loss of their families in Polish, Yiddish, and Russian, and after the training scene of the British soldiers (who communicate in English). The belated appearance of Hebrew supports the sense that the events are indeed conveyed through the point of view of the Jewish refugees. Hebrew is the language of the kibbutz members, who arrive to take the refugees from the ship. But while the purpose of the young Israelis is to help the newcomers, the difference of language marks the lack of communication between the two groups, and indeed the Sabras treat the Jewish refugees with condescension. They are alienated from the refugees’ culture and seem indifferent to the trauma and loss they went through.

## **Intertextuality as Common Ground between Jewish and Palestinian Refugees**

*Kedma* is full of confessions of loss. The first dialogue in the film is about the last contact Yanush and his interlocutor had with their families. Later, Rosa tells about leaving her own family, who urged her to jump on a train, an act that ultimately saved her life but separated her from her family forever. Mordechai, one of the other survivors, describes how he buried his father so the dogs would not eat him. In all these testimonials, one motif is recurring: the lack of opportunity to say goodbye and the belated realization that these were the last moments of connection with their families

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<sup>448</sup> "הגם שם בארץ בארץ החמה, היפה / ירבו הרעות, התלאות?"

<sup>449</sup> It also evokes the code term with which the Sabras referred to the origin of the Holocaust survivors—those who are from *there*—thereby marking the survivors as profoundly different.

and old lives. The world as they knew it now exists only in their thoughts and is constructed only from memories.

What makes *Kedma* unique is the fact that alongside the monologues of the Jewish refugees, Gitai presents monologues of Palestinian refugees who describe their expulsion and loss of home. The first monologue appears in the form of a lament. It is sung by a Palestinian woman who sits among a group of women and children; next to them is a group of men, one of whom accompanies the song on his flute. Donkeys stand opposite them, loaded with the people's belongings. The fluidity of the melody and the singing that goes along with it, as well as the repetition in the song's lyrics, all produce a sense of authenticity, as if this elegy were a spontaneous expression of grief that followed an oral tradition of Palestinian songs.<sup>450</sup> The woman sings: "I want to cry / I want my tears to reach the whole world / To cry over my fate and the fate of my people / Flow, O my tears, on those who left / Without even being able to say good-bye."<sup>451</sup>

The thread that runs through the stories of the Jewish new immigrants is explicitly expressed in the Palestinian elegy: the inability to say goodbye because of the harsh collective circumstances that turned them into refugees. The analogy between the Jewish refugees and the Palestinian ones is strengthened through the parallel editing the director, Amos Gitai, employs: the scene of the Palestinian lament appears in between two scenes that emphasize the portrayal of the Jewish new immigrants as refugees—it follows the scene in which the new immigrants are chased by British soldiers, and the scene immediately after the elegy consists of Rosa telling of her abrupt departure from her family. The connection between the Jewish and the Palestinian narratives is also supported visually: Several scenes later, one of the groups of Jewish newcomers encounters the Palestinian refugees who appeared in the elegy scene. After a potential clash between the two groups is averted by the old Israeli teacher in the Jewish group and the woman who had been singing in the Palestinian group, each group turns to continue on its way; the Jewish group heads upward (on the screen), while the Palestinian group heads downward. The opposite directions of the two

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<sup>450</sup> I could not find the source of the song, but scholars whom I consulted suggested it is a traditional Palestinian song and that the origins of such songs are usually traced back to pre-Islamic elegies performed by poetesses such as Al-Khansa. For more on Al-Khansa, see Abdullah al-Udhari, *Classical Poems by Arab Women* (London: Saqi Books, 1999), and Ferial Jabouri Ghazoul, *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide 1873–1999* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008). I thank Linda Istanbuli and Nathalie Khankan for their help and elaborative explanations concerning the origins of this elegy.

<sup>451</sup> The translation is taken from the film's English subtitles. Unfortunately, I could not track the source of the translation.

groups, which are well-captured by the long shot and by the composition of the frame, create a visual contrast between the two (the respective directions taken by the two groups carry symbolic significance, of course). At the same time, the movement upward literalizes the Hebrew name for Jewish immigration to Israel, *Aliya* (ascent).<sup>452</sup>

The second and third monologues are delivered by a Palestinian refugee whom the Israeli fighters capture immediately after the battle with Palestinian fighters. The refugee and his wife walk their donkey across the hill from which shots were heard. The Israelis run over to them, and while the head of the group, who ironically goes by the Arab name of Musa,<sup>453</sup> asks the refugee about the Palestinian force that fired shots earlier and has now disappeared, the other members of the Israeli force untie his donkey to take it with them. The Palestinian man protests and tries to retrieve his donkey, but in vain. Musa and his people eventually take the refugee to an empty Arab house nearby. In the house, Musa again tries to make the Palestinian man talk and grabs him roughly by the collar, asking him in both Hebrew and Arabic: “Where did they go? Where is their camp?” The Palestinian stares at Musa and replies with a long monologue:

The night of the big attack on my town, things became clearer. It was a terrible, cruel night, full of silent men and praying women. In the morning, there was a big truck in front of our house. People were throwing their bags and possessions onto it. We quickly got on the truck. It took off before we'd even got settled on it, and my beloved town disappeared in the distance behind the winding road leading to the border. The orange groves sped by, one after the other, and sadness took hold of us. Gunshots in the distance. . . . We left to the sound of gunshots. There was no other farewell.

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<sup>452</sup> I thank Chana Kronfeld for this insightful observation.

<sup>453</sup> The irony is doubled, as the actor who plays the role of Musa is Juliano Mer-Khamis, who was born to a Jewish mother, the human rights activist Arna Mer, and a Palestinian father, Saliva Khamis, who was a communist leader of the workers' movement in Nazareth. Mer himself was a prolific actor who appeared in many Israeli films and theater productions. He vehemently fought for human rights for Palestinians and founded a theater for youth and children in the Jenin refugee camp, where he lived until he was assassinated by a masked Palestinian gunman. The very fact that Mer plays the character of the Israeli leader and confronts the Palestinian villager, whose character is played by the Palestinian actor Yusuf Abu-Varda, adds another layer of intricacy to the film and comments on the complicated and tragic reality in which *Kedma* was made.

The monologue cited above is taken from Ghassan Kanafani's short story "The Land of Sad Oranges."<sup>454</sup> The story is based on the biographical experience of Kanafani, who was 12 years old when he and his family were forced to leave their town Acre in May 1948.<sup>455</sup> The narration is told from the perspective of a young man who returns in his mind to the night in which his family and other families were expelled from their town Acre. He was a child at the time of the events, and so the story contains a child's point of view, combined with the insights of an older narrator. He tells the story to his younger brother, who apparently was too young to remember the events.<sup>456</sup> In the story, the family resettles in a village in Lebanon on the outskirts of Sidon, but suffers from poverty and hunger. The emotional state of the father, who was irreparably wrecked on the night of the expulsion, deteriorates until he has a breakdown in which he threatens to kill himself and his children. The story ends with the narrator's reflections on the shriveled orange next to the father's bed, which symbolizes the oranges left behind in Palestine and serves as a parable for the fate of the father and the Palestinian people.

While the monologue indeed evokes Kanafani's story, Gitai modifies it, as evidenced by the following lines from Kanafani's "The Land of Sad Oranges":

. . . the picture gradually became clearer on the night of the great attack on Acre. That night passed, cruel and bitter, amidst the despondency of the men and the prayers of the women. In the morning . . . a big lorry was standing at the door of our house. A simple collection of bedding was being thrown into it . . . quickly and feverishly. . . . The lorry was already moving off before I had settled myself into a comfortable position. Beloved Acre was already disappearing behind the bends in the road going up to Raz Naqoura. . . . The groves of orange trees followed each other in succession along the side of the road. We were all eaten up with fear . . . and the sound of distant shots rang out like farewell.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Ghassan Kanafani, "The Land of Sad Oranges," in *Men in the Sun and Other Palestinians Stories*, trans. Hillary Kilpatrick (Washington D.C: Three Continents Press, 1978), 57–62.

<sup>455</sup> For more on Kanafani's life, see Mouin Rabbani, "Ghassan Kanafani," in *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians*, ed. Philip Mattar (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2005), 275–76.

<sup>456</sup> Interestingly, the narrator refers to the father as "your father." Although this may simply be a manner of speaking, it is also possible that the narrator's choice to refuse a direct connection to the father (by not referring to him as "our father") expresses his traumatic dissociation projection, revealing the hardship involved in recalling the deterioration of the father's emotional state as a result of the expulsion.

<sup>457</sup> Kanafani, "Sad Oranges," 57–58.

In *Kedma*, many of the more specific details are omitted, and the words thus become more symbolic, conveying an all-encompassing national narrative. The narrator's hometown, which in the story is described as "beloved Acre," becomes "my beloved town" in Gitai's film, and the specific Lebanese border, Raz Naqoura, becomes simply "the border." The refugee does not speak of a father, and neither does he talk to a younger sibling. Kanafani's text becomes a collective monologue here, containing countless stories of families that fell apart, of fathers who collapsed, and of children who lost their childhood. The focus of this monologue is therefore not the chronicles of a specific family, but rather the foundational scene of the expulsion—which was a source of tragedy for many Palestinian families, engraved in the memory of children who had to grow up before their time. And indeed, the cinematic monologue is based on the opening lines in the story, which portray the night of the expulsion, rather than on the rest of Kanafani's text. At the same time, the specific narrative of "The Land of Sad Oranges" resonates in the refugee's monologue.<sup>458</sup> Gitai thus creates a direct link between his Israeli, Jewish film and Palestinian literature, sharpening the film's retrospective point of view, which is also the narratological stance in Kanafani's story. The setting of the monologue intentionally breaks the cinematic medium and norms of verisimilitude: it is delivered by an actor on a stage, laying bare the performative, mediated nature of the scene including this Palestinian text in an Israeli film, and addressing the narrative of expulsion to the perpetrator.<sup>459</sup> At those moments, he is more than the Palestinian refugee who attempts to survive the situation with his donkey: he is also the child from Kanafani's text who grew up and knows the aftermath of the events of 1948; and he is the artist who uses a story and a theatrical monologue (and the film itself) to express the catastrophe of the Palestinians. This intertext is one of the central moments in *Kedma*. It encapsulates Gitai's ethical message in a twofold

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<sup>458</sup> The symbolic charge of the orange and its appropriation in the Zionist narrative is also significant here. See Eyal Sivan's documentary *Jaffa: The Orange's Clockwork* (2009), which examines the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the role and history of the well-known Jaffa orange. The orange as a Zionist symbol is an appropriation of the old and culturally sacred Palestinian symbol of the orange, as Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin explains in the film. I thank Chana Kronfeld who noted this to me. *Jaffa, the Oranges' Clockwork*, directed by Eyal Sivan (2009; Tel Aviv and Brussels: Trabelsi Productions, Luna Blue Film, and RTBF, 2010), DVD.

<sup>459</sup> The direct address is illustrated in a physical gesture: when the Palestinian villager speaks of the gunshots that rang out as they were leaving ("Gunshots in the distance. . . . We left to the sound of gunshots. There was no other farewell"), he turns to Musa and looks admonishingly at him, and the content of the monologue—Kanafani's text—receives a concrete meaning relating to the gunshots that were indeed heard prior to his captivity.

manner. First, by recognizing and including Palestinian literature as an inseparable part of the portrayal of the Palestinians in the film, Gitai acknowledges the Palestinian people as an organic national entity with cultural assets and builds into the cinematic text a recognition of the trauma that shaped their cultural memory.<sup>460</sup> Secondly, the various art forms—the literature (Kanafani’s story), the theater (the refugee’s words, which are delivered as a monologue in a play), and the film itself—provide an opportunity for an exchange between the two opposing sides, by opening a channel for dialogue.<sup>461</sup>

Another significant modification of Kanafani’s text can be found in the final lines of the monologue. While in “The Land of Sad Oranges” the gunshots are depicted as bells that toll goodbye as the residents of Acre depart (“and the sound of distant shots rang out like farewell”), in *Kedma* the gunshots signify the absence of the opportunity to say goodbye (“We left to the sound of gunshots. There was no other farewell”). This is another example of the recurring shared experiences of the Palestinian and Jewish refugees.

The third and final monologue is again delivered by the Palestinian refugee minutes after he is released by the Israelis, who take his donkey and load the injured man Mordechai on it. He runs after them, and as they walk away, ignoring him and not even turning around to look at him, he stops and shouts after them:

We’ll stay here in spite of you, like a wall! / We’ll wash dishes in bars! / We’ll fill glasses for the masters! / We’ll scrub your kitchen floors / to wrest bread for our youngsters from your blue clutches! / But we’ll stay here in spite of you, like a wall! / We’ll be hungry, we’ll be in rags, but we’ll defy you! / Here we will stay, in spite of you, like a wall! / We’ll write poems. / Our demonstrations will fill the streets! / We’ll fill the jails with our pride! / We’ll father generations of rebellious children! / We’ll remain here in spite of you, like a wall!

The anaphoric structure of the monologue hints at its poetic source, and indeed the text above is a poem by noted Palestinian poet Tawfiq Zayyad, “Here We Will

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<sup>460</sup> Gitai’s choice of Kanafani’s text in particular is meaningful, as Kanafani is very much a nationalist Palestinian writer who was assassinated by the Mossad, the national intelligence agency of Israel. I thank Kareem Abu-Zeid for this important observation.

<sup>461</sup> And indeed, Musa does not interrupt the Palestinian refugee when the latter delivers his monologue. Although Musa dismisses him in the end, he does so only after the refugee has finished his speech—namely, only after their symbolic interaction has taken place.

Remain.”<sup>462</sup> Zayyad was born in Nazareth in 1929 and was 19 years old during the 1948 war. An Israeli citizen, Zayyad was a member of the Knesset from the communist party from 1974 until his death in a car accident in 1994. He wrote innovative prose and poetry in which he protested the oppression of the Palestinian people and called for national resistance. He was renowned for his verbal art and unusual use of metaphor.<sup>463</sup> Here, even more than in the previous monologue, the retrospective stance of the film is underscored.<sup>464</sup> Zayyad’s text itself is written in the future tense, phrased as a prophecy about the gloomy future of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation.<sup>465</sup> The aftermath of the 1948 events, in which the Palestinians indeed became the biblical hewers of wood and drawers of water for Israeli society, contextualizes the poem within the film’s diegetic world as a prophecy. The Palestinian refugee appears here as a prophet who decries the catastrophe of the Palestinians and prophesizes the Palestinians’ subjection in Israeli society. He describes the tragedy of the Palestinian people in years to come—people who are financially dependent on the Israeli state and yet continue to desperately fight for their freedom and national pride. In his monologue, the refugee also foretells the growing national self-awareness and the resistance of the Palestinian people. The indifference of the Israelis toward the Palestinian man shouting these lines illustrates the prevalent dismissive attitude of Israeli Jews toward the Palestinians both at the narrated time and at the time of narration.

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<sup>462</sup> An English translation of Zayyad’s poem by Sharif Elmusa and Charles Doria appears in Fred Moramarco and Al Zolynas, eds., *The Poetry of Men’s Lives: An International Anthology* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), 234–35. However, the subtitles of the film which I follow here provide a similar yet more accurate and poetic translation.

<sup>463</sup> For more on Tawfiq Zayyad, see Efrat Ben-Ze’ev, *Remembering Palestine in 1948: Beyond National Narratives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 218.

<sup>464</sup> Gitai’s choice of Zayyad’s poem, in which the words “like a wall” repeat four times, reflects the reality of the times the film was made. Ehud Barak’s government approved the funding of the West Bank Wall (or Barrier) in 2000, and in 2002 Ariel Sharon’s government began building the main section of the wall (a much smaller section had been built in the 1990s). The wall re-entered the political debate with such force due to the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000. So Gitai is making *Kedma* at the very moment the wall is becoming a reality. His film thus turns Zayyad’s poem into a prophetic commentary on the present situation. Ironically, the wall is Israeli and not Palestinian. However, the Israeli government refused to call it a wall, and instead defined it as a “fence” or a “barrier.” Gitai’s choice of this poem, with its insistent refrain “like a wall,” is therefore a clear critique of the official line. The Palestinians indeed call it a wall, often in the combination “the apartheid wall” or “the separation wall” to denote the racist separation it constitutes. I thank Kareem Abu-Zeid for this important insight.

<sup>465</sup> Interestingly, the poem was written before the 1967 Six Days War, which deepened the occupation and made the poem even more accurate in foretelling the grim future of the Palestinians after the establishment of the Israeli settlements on the West Bank and Gaza.

By situating the Palestinian refugee as a poet who cries out at the apathetic Israelis, Gitai employs the image of the biblical prophet of wrath who rebukes the neighboring nations for their oppression of the Israelites (Cf. Isaiah's prophecy on Damascus, ch. 17). The roles are symmetrically switched here, with the Palestinian speaking for the oppressed Israelite community and the Israeli addressees as the morally corrupt oppressors. The territorial takeover—which has deepened by the time of the film's making, and which shapes Gitai's perspective—has brought about a loss of moral legitimacy, and therefore it is the Palestinian refugee who is the representative of moral authority. "We'll write poems," the villager calls out; and indeed, part of the fight against the occupation will be a fight over consciousness, waged through art and literature. Significantly, this was the traditional power of Jewish culture as textual culture.

### **Cinematic Intertextuality**

Beyond the allusions to literary and poetic texts, *Kedma* also alludes to the film *Khirbet Khizeh*, encapsulating in it an allusion to S. Yizhar's novella *Khirbet Khizeh* as well, as the film was an adaptation of Yizhar's story. The novella is based on the experience of the writer in the 1948 war and is told from the perspective of an Israeli soldier who participates in the expulsion of Palestinian Arabs from their village by Israeli troops during the war. In 1978, thirty years later, the Israeli director Ram Levi made a film for Israeli television titled *Khirbet Khizeh*, based on the story.<sup>466</sup> But while Yizhar's novella is still shocking in its honest and clear voice, describing in detail the cruel behavior of the soldiers toward the Arab villagers, Levi's film flattens the story's complexity. Although Levi aimed to preserve Yizhar's criticism, he perpetuates the consensual view of the moral Israeli soldier, portraying the protagonist (who represents the narrator in the story) as a kibbutz member who protests the expulsion to his peers and nobly attempts to bring water to the Palestinians who are loaded onto trucks (and are about to be sent across the border).<sup>467</sup> But while the film *Khirbet Khizeh* emphasizes the positive image of

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<sup>466</sup> *Khirbet Khizeh*, directed by Ram Levi (1978; Jerusalem: The Israel Broadcasting Authority, 2006), DVD.

<sup>467</sup> See my article (in Hebrew) comparing the novella and the film: Hanna Seltzer, "Khirbet Khizeh, Ha-tikva She-hit'pogega" [*Khirbet Khizeh*, the hope that faded away], in *Ha-nakba Ha-falastinit Ba-sifrut U-vakol'no'a Be-yisra'el* [The Nakba in Hebrew literature and Israeli film] (May 2012): 47–58, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://zochrot.org/uploads/uploads/164d96151d3400eaef42cc99277e0c9f.pdf>.

the kibbutz member, *Kedma* brings back Yizhar's critical point of view. Whereas the film *Khirbet Khizeh* is focused on the Israeli soldiers and depicts the Palestinians almost as mere extras on the scene (the few words they say in Arabic are not even translated into Hebrew for the Israeli audience), *Kedma* gives presence to the Palestinian human being and to the Palestinian narrative, voicing them through both Hebrew and Arabic literary and poetic intertexts. In a scene that references an analogous one in the film *Khirbet Khizeh*, the Israelis take the Palestinian refugee's donkey. In *Khirbet Khizeh* the man offers almost no resistance and quietly leaves the area, but in *Kedma* he tries to protest against the confiscation of his donkey and also protests against Musa's demand to tell him the location of the Palestinians who fired shots earlier. The Palestinian replies: "When the village was taken, they left to Jerusalem! They'd heard about the Jews! They were scared! They looked for a safe place. What do you want with us?" The camera then follows him as he attempts to go after the men who are walking away with his donkey, calling after them, "Give me back my donkey!" while all around him grenades are exploding. He watches the grenades but immediately refocuses on the donkey that's disappearing into the distance. His wife walks beside him and says the same sentences over and over in a quiet voice: "This is our land! Go away, you Jews!" Then the man turns to Musa again and argues: "What do you want from us? We're not trained like you, we're not organized. Our weapons are old and rusty. We all want to be leaders. Enough! I'm sick of all this." Musa once again forcefully grabs hold of him and asks about the whereabouts of his fellow Palestinians. The man replies: "On the road, they met some (Arab) soldiers. They begged them for help to get back home! The soldiers refused. 'Our orders are to help you get to Jericho and Ramallah!' So who ran away?" The man then looks angrily at Musa and yells: "Leave us alone!" Then he walks on, trying to retrieve his donkey. A fellow Israeli asks Musa in Hebrew, "What did he say?" and Musa replies: "Their leaders told them to flee. Not to stay and fight." This scene does a good job of portraying the chaos of war. Musa's pressure on the Palestinian man, the grenades that are going off all around him, and his determination to get back his donkey—all this presents in an almost grotesque manner the surreal nature of the war, while maintaining the focus – of camera and viewer alike – on the Palestinian as a human being who desperately tries to preserve his former life. It also militates against a monolithic view of the Palestinian reaction: While some believe in resistance and decide to fight (like those whose traces Musa attempts to track down), others leave, and the leaders (at least those who gave the orders to the Arab soldiers) encourage them to flee. Moreover, the very communication between Musa and the Palestinian – their ability to understand each other – models the possibility of interaction and mutual

understanding,<sup>468</sup> even if at this point in the film it is nothing more than an exchange about the events at hand.

This exchange between Musa and the refugee is important because it paves the way for the scene that follows, in which the Palestinian delivers his monologue about the night of the expulsion. When Musa looks at him as he describes that cruel night of fear and prayers, we know that Musa listens and understands. Even though the film “returns” to its fictional frame when the Palestinian finishes his monologue, with Musa pushing him away, the very existence of the refugee’s uninterrupted monologue and Musa’s listening still produces a channel of communication between the two opposing sides (and draws, through the retrospective reconstruction of the past, a potential future dialogue between them).

The last shot of *Kedma* consists of another reference to the film *Khirbet Khizeh*: The final scene in both films is a long shot of trucks driving away—either until they leave the frame (as in *Khirbet Khizeh*) or until they disappear in the distance (as in *Kedma*). While in *Khirbet Khizeh* the trucks are loaded with Palestinians who have been expelled from their homes and are being taken to the border, in *Kedma* the trucks are loaded with the injured and dead Israelis and new immigrants, the casualties of the battle depicted earlier in the film. The intertextually constructed analogy between the shots invites comparison, underscoring the futility and injustice of both events. An interesting difference, however, exists in the soundtrack: While a sentimental whistling accompanies the end of *Khirbet Khizeh*, in *Kedma* the music that accompanies the last shot (and continues into the subtitles at the end of the film) is ominous, foretelling imminent disaster.

In the last shot of *Khirbet Khizeh*, on a frame that is now emptied of trucks, the protagonist speaks in voice-over, quoting from the last paragraph of Yizhar’s novella:

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<sup>468</sup> This is in contrast to both the film *Khirbet Khizeh* and Yizhar’s novella. As I noted, in the film the villagers’ sentences in Arabic are not translated, and it seems that the soldiers too do not understand them. In the novella, Yizhar specifically addresses the inability of the soldiers (including the narrator himself) to understand the Palestinian villagers, which is part of the novella’s thematics: “suddenly from on top of the truck an Arab . . . turned to us and said: ‘Ya Khawaja. . . Ya khawajat’ he corrected himself to the plural ‘sirs,’ so to address us all, and he started speaking, reciting . . . but we couldn’t understand much of what he said and the harsh guttural consonants of his pronunciation seemed strange and almost exaggerated to us, like sounds in and of themselves.” S. Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, trans. Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2008), 96–97.

Everything was suddenly so open. So big. And we had all become so small and insignificant. . . . All around silence was falling, and very soon it would close upon the last circle. And when silence had closed in on everything and no man disturbed the stillness, which yearned noiselessly for what was beyond silence – then God would come forth and descend to roam the valley, and see whether all was according to the cry that had reached him.<sup>469</sup>

These lines in the novella of course allude to the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which God tells Abraham of his intent to descend to Sodom to see the extent of its evil: “Let Me go down and see whether as the outcry that has come to Me they have dealt destruction, and if not, I shall know” (Genesis 18:21).<sup>470</sup> Yizhar concludes the story with these lines to connect between the expulsion of Palestinians and the evil deeds of Sodom’s residents. Even though Levi’s decision to end the film with this quotation conveys his criticism of the expulsions, his portrayal of the protagonist as moral and conscientious turns this quotation into an act of purification, differentiating him from the other “bad” soldiers. By evoking the final shot of *Khirbet Khizeh*, Gitai alludes to Yizhar’s text, thus reinforcing the connection between the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the events of 1948. Gitai’s reference to the last shot of *Khirbet Khizeh* in which trucks loaded with Palestinian refugees are headed to the border also echoes Ghassan Kanafani’s story, which appears in the refugee’s monologue, producing an internal and circular chain of intertextual connections that resonate with each other.

## Jewish Intertextuality Tipped Over

In the last scene of *Kedma*, the injured and the dead are gathered and loaded up onto jeeps. Yanush—who was in Musa’s group, and who took part in the battle and was a witness to the refugee’s monologues—is standing to the side and crying. The old teacher, Klibanov, tries in vain to console him. Yanush, still in tears, then starts walking back and forth while delivering his own monologue:

We have no history. It’s a fact. I don’t know how to say it in Hebrew. But that’s it. The goyim made our history for us! We didn’t want to be like that. It wasn’t our way. They forced us, whether we wanted it or not. That’s why, I’m telling you, I’m against it! I don’t recognize it. . . . Try to think, what’s it made up of?

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<sup>469</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 112–13.

<sup>470</sup> Alter, *Five Books*, 88.

Oppression, slander, persecution, martyrdom. Deadly boring! Totally uninteresting! No glory, no action, no heroes, no conquerors! Just poor wretches pursued, moaning, crying, always begging for their lives. . . . Some find it heroic, the way we've endured our suffering. To hell with that heroism! It's the heroism of despair. . . . Suffering is what makes us Jews. It proves we're brave and heroic, more than any other people. . . . There's a meaning to it. It means: You'll never manage to break us. You won't be able to destroy us. No power on earth can do it. There are limits to power, but not to the power of suffering. . . . Shall we remain exiles for all eternity, waiting for heaven to send someone to come save us? I . . . I think . . . that Israel isn't a Jewish country anymore. Not now, even less in the future. Time will tell. That's it [*zehu-zeh*]. Everything's done for [*ha-kol avud*]. Finished [*nigmar*].

At this point, Musa lifts Yanush and loads him onto one of the jeeps. Then he lifts up Rosa, who was hugging Yanush, loads her onto the same jeep, and joins them. Yanush mumbles: "They're changing your names" (*meshanim et ha-shemot shelakhem*), and the jeep starts moving, driving away. The ominous music starts playing, the jeeps are seen in the distance, the screen turns black, and the credits begin to roll.

Yanush's monologue, which is also the last intertext in *Kedma*, is an allusion to and an adaptation of the text "The Sermon" (*Ha-drasha*) by Haim Hazaz. Hazaz, who was born in 1898 and immigrated to Palestine in 1931, wrote "The Sermon" in 1942 (it was included in a collection of his short stories in 1965).<sup>471</sup> The text became iconic in Israeli culture of the 1950s and 1960s and was even made part of the curriculum of the Israeli education system. While some interpreted it as a Zionist manifesto, others viewed it as a critique of Zionism.<sup>472</sup> Indeed Hazaz's text can be read as both. Yudke, who delivers the sermon, criticizes the "history of suffering" and the passivity of the Jews in the diaspora, who, instead of actively trying to extract themselves from their persecution, wait for eschatological redemption. And yet Yudke also makes the claim that Zionism is a break from Judaism, and that the Zionist movement denies its Jewish culture and

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<sup>471</sup> Haim Hazaz, *Avanim Rot'chot: Sipurim* [Burning stones: Stories] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1965). The English translation of the text appeared only in 2005: Haim Hazaz, "The Sermon," trans. Hillel Halkin, in *The Sermon & Other Stories*, various translators (London: Toby Press, 2005), 233–49.

<sup>472</sup> Dan Miron, *Haim Hazaz* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1959); Iris Parush and Brach Dalmatzki-Fischler, "Ma Anachnu Osim Kan? Od Kri'a Be-hadrasha" [What are we doing here? Another reading in The Sermon], *Iyunim Bi-tkumat Yisra'el* 16 (2006): 1–40; Michal Vozner, "Ze Ken La-protokol: Ha-drasha Me'et Haim Hazaz Ke-text Protokoli" [It is yes to the Protocol], *Mi-Kan* 9 (2008): 42–56.

past. Literary scholars have also dealt with the unique genre of this text—its title creates expectations of a cohesive and eloquent speech in the homiletical Jewish tradition of a *drasha* or *drash*, but instead the text is an emotional and disorganized monologue delivered by Yudke, whose stuttering Russian accent adds to the discrepancy between the text’s title and its performative articulation.<sup>473</sup> Gitai’s choice to put a modern and modified version of *The Sermon* in Yanush’s mouth, who in his foreignness and excitement resembles Yudke in Hazaz’s text, strengthens the link between the two texts. But precisely because of this link, the differences between the two contexts in which these “sermons” are delivered stand out. While Hazaz wrote his story before the state of Israel was founded and during the catastrophic events of World War Two, Gitai chose to incorporate it into his film in the reality of the 2000s, several decades after the founding of Israel, when the tragic aftermath of the events depicted in *Kedma* is already known. Thus, when Yanush delivers *The Sermon* as he walks among the jeeps loaded with the injured and dead, most of whom were new immigrants who had just arrived in Palestine, his words are charged by the circumstances and setting in which he finds himself, and this charge reverses and ironizes much of what he says. This effect of reversal, which derives from the interaction between the evoked text of Hazaz and the alluding cinematic text, is governed by the retrospective view of the filmmaker. Yanush paraphrases slightly Yudke’s words, saying that “the goyim made our history for us! It wasn’t our way. They forced us,” corresponds ironically to both Jewish and Palestinian recent history. Instead of referring, as Yudke does, to the perceived passivity of Jews in diaspora, Yanush’s tearful words express regret about the historic circumstances in which “we,” the Jews, have turned from victims to victimizers. Yanush rejects this part of history (“That’s why, I’m telling you, I’m against it!”), the part that he is witnessing right now. When Yanush talks about the lack of heroism in Jewish history (“No glory, no action, no heroes, no conquerors!”), this again takes on a reversed meaning that stems from the current circumstances surrounding him (of men who fought in the war, which would seem to indicate the opposite of “no action” and “no heroes”). But the effect of this reversed meaning is one of bathos: the men who moments ago fought actively, presumably for the great cause of nation and country, are now lying injured and dead. Here, Gitai reverses Hazaz’s text only to retrieve it later as a grim conclusion about the

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<sup>473</sup> Yudke delivers his speech in front of kibbutz members during a formal gathering. The story’s title alludes to the traditional Jewish genre of homiletics which was (and still is, to this day) usually delivered in the synagogue during the Shabbat as part of the service. The *drasha* is typically based on an exegesis of Jewish scripture that connects the sacred, ancient texts to the lived reality of the listeners.

futility of war. Indeed, there is neither glory nor heroism in war. His retrospective view conveys his critique of a militaristic Israeli society that idolizes heroism.

Through his retrospective stance, Gitai designs the scene and Yanush's monologue to comment both on the events of the 1948 war depicted in the film and on their aftermath, six decades later. The profound difference between Yudke's speech and Yanush's is the situation of the Jews at the time and place in which each speech is delivered. When Yanush refers to the Jewish people's ability to endure suffering ("It means: You'll never manage to break us. You won't be able to destroy us. No power on earth can do it. There are limits to power, but not to the power of suffering"), it creates a clear parallel to the poem by Tawfiq Zayyad ("Here We Will Remain") quoted by the Palestinian refugee, invoking the parallel between the Jewish refugees and the Palestinians, who by the time of the film's production have been living under Israeli occupation for half a century.

In "The Sermon," Yudke says that "Zionism begins with the destruction of Judaism . . . the real truth about Zionism has yet to be told," and that "Zionism . . . [is] an act of destruction, a negation of what's come before, an end."<sup>474</sup> In his paraphrase of Yudke's words, Yanush says that "Israel isn't a Jewish country anymore. Not now, even less in the future." While Yudke relates this to the ideology of Zionism in the pre-state *Yishuv*, Yanush speaks directly about the state of Israel, which is indeed the territorial realization of the Zionist vision. And whereas Yudke refers to the past of the Jewish people, describing Zionism as its end, Yanush prophesizes about the dark future of the Jewish people in the Israeli state. Here, as in other major points in *Kedma*, the retrospective view that governs the film is revealed. The Israeli state, which does not exist yet in the time depicted in the film,<sup>475</sup> is described by Yanush as a state that is no longer Jewish. Interestingly, while Yanush's words are translated in the English subtitles as "I think that Israel isn't a Jewish country anymore," the literal translation of his words would be: "I think that the Israeli state isn't Jewish anymore" ("*ani choshev she-medinat yisra'el eyna yehudit yoter*"). Thus, Gitai's comment on the realia surrounding *Kedma*'s production is much clearer and more direct than what is rendered in the English subtitles. From the perspective of Israel in the 2000s, Gitai expresses his critique of the Israeli state here, linking ethics to Judaism. Territorial control over

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<sup>474</sup> Hazaz, "The Sermon," 246, 247.

<sup>475</sup> This state of affairs is made particularly clear by the presence of the British soldiers who chase after the Israelis and the new immigrants, who have just come ashore. Ben-Gurion declares the Israeli state at the end of the British Mandate.

another people, Gitai suggests, has increasingly distanced Israelis from their Jewishness and made them forget their own past as a persecuted people.

The film ends as the state of Israel is about to be established. This, at least according to the dominant narrative within Zionism, is the realization of the Zionist vision and the optimistic beginning of a new era of Jewish independence. Ironically, however, Yanush concludes his monologue with words of despair: “That’s it [zehu-zeh]. Everything’s done for [ha-kol avud]. Finished [nigmar].” Since the ethical task has failed, as Yanush declared, the essence of the Jewish people as a moral collectivity is lost, as is indeed conveyed with the Hebrew *ha-kol avud*, which literally translates to “everything is lost.” Yanush mumbles the last sentence, “they change your names,” as Musa loads him onto the jeep. Yanush’s words correspond to Yudke’s in *The Sermon*, who describes the change of Jewish names into “Hebrew-sounding” names: “Haimovitz, you’ll admit, is . . . far too Jewish . . . whereas Avnieli . . . it sounds different, not Jewish, so they can feel proud of it.”<sup>476</sup> But the visual picture accompanying Yanush’s sentence adds a powerful subtext to his words. Musa’s action indeed thematizes the sense of submission and loss of agency that Yanush conveys in words,<sup>477</sup> but it also connects this to the iconic picture of Israeli soldiers loading Palestinians onto trucks during an expulsion that had been engraved in Ghassan Kanafani’s memory and in Yizhar’s, and is portrayed in the film *Khirbet Khizeh*. By casting Yanush, the refugee, as a prophet foretelling the grim future of Israel while being completely ignored by the Sabras around him, and by placing him in the same position as that of the Palestinians who were expelled from their homes, Gitai underscores the parallel between him and the Palestinian refugee, and between the Jewish and the Palestinian refugees: both are dismissed by the Israeli Sabras, and both have experienced persecution and suffering. The Sabras’ condescending behavior and lack of compassion toward the refugees on both sides represents the loss of Jewish ethics and does not bode well for Israel, as the ominous music concluding the film suggests.

Amos Gitai’s retrospective stance allows him to incorporate intertextually literary and cinematic allusions through which the spectators gain a multifaceted and temporally layered perspective on the Jewish and Palestinian narratives. The analogy between the two narratives, created through the film’s dense intertextuality, illustrates the tragic costs of ignoring these connections. Yet the film sketches out an alternative as well,

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<sup>476</sup> Hazaz, “The Sermon,” 248.

<sup>477</sup> This sense of submission and loss of agency is reinforced grammatically by the impersonal form in Yanush’s sentence: *meshanim lakhem et ha-shemot*.

through the road not taken: The shared experience of suffering, which can be drawn only from the distanced perspective of time, has the potentiality of bringing the two peoples together.

### **Homeland: Surrealizing the Zionist Dream**

The film *Homeland* (2006) by Dani Rosenberg portrays events in the life of Lolek, a holocaust survivor who immigrates to Palestine with the intention of finding his girlfriend Nina, who immigrated there just before the outbreak of World War Two. In what initially seems to be a comic sequence, Lolek is sent to a remote outpost in the middle of nowhere, where he is subjected to the authority and whims of a soldier, who presumes to be his commander and who is also the only other person at the site. The movie is focused on the complex and emotionally charged relationship between Lolek and his commander, which eventually leads Lolek to shoot his commander and flee the outpost. He then arrives at a nearby abandoned Palestinian house, where he either hallucinates or recalls the last dinner he had with his parents before the beginning of World War Two. The film ends when Lolek closes the door of the house after saying goodbye to his parents for the last time.

If *Kedma* blurs the distinctions between feature film and documentary, *Homeland* undermines the very foundations of the cinematic medium. This dense movie, which is only 37 minutes long, intensifies and sharpens the analogies and contrasts that appear in *Kedma*. The film's focus on the soldier Lolek and the military commander, who are the only characters in *Homeland* for almost the entire film, defamiliarizes the film-watching experience, to the point where it seems as if we are watching a play. The desolate environment and the unclear circumstances recalls Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: the only connection to their "here and now" is the Israeli flag hanging on a pole in their tiny outpost, and the radio equipment from which voices can occasionally be heard, adding to the surreal atmosphere.<sup>478</sup> The outpost itself is a small circle on a hill, marked by sandbags, and indeed resembles a stage or an arena. In this

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<sup>478</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954). Beckett's play is often interpreted as being a failed or endless waiting for God (God-ot) or for some kind of meaning to come into one's life. In the film's context, the allusion to *Waiting for Godot* can resonate with the expectations of the Zionist project at the time of the film's events and, as reflected through the retrospective stance, its disappointing outcome and lack of fulfilment. I'm grateful to Kareem Abu-Zeid for his insightful interpretation.

claustrophobic circle, the two characters talk, argue, sleep, and have nightmares. These extreme and surreal circumstances preserve an allegorical level that co-exists and is in tension with the mimetic fictional level of the film. The precise shooting and composition, in which every frame carries a symbolic meaning, support and underscore the allegorical and meta-cinematic aspect of *Homeland*. The harsh sun often appears in a frame of its own, shimmering like a branding iron and accompanied by atonal music that intensifies the sense of desolation and alienation.<sup>479</sup>

### Yiddish as a Signifier of Home and Homelessness

Although Dani Rosenberg is an Israeli director who made his film in Israel and whose actors are Israeli, with Itai Tiran as Lolek and Micky Leon as the abusive commander, the primary language of *Homeland* is Yiddish. Except for the first scene, in which Lolek, who is sitting in a military transport vehicle with other passengers, is called by an Israeli officer who sends him to the outpost, the entire film is in Yiddish.<sup>480</sup> When, after climbing the hill, Lolek finally arrives at the outpost, he encounters a shirtless man who is wearing only shorts. In Hebrew, the man orders him to salute. Lolek does not understand. The shirtless commander throws a small rock at him and repeats his demand. “What?” (*vus?*), Lolek asks in Yiddish. This time the commander orders him to salute in Yiddish (*salutn*), and Lolek, excited about the possibility of communicating,

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<sup>479</sup> This stands in opposition to *Kedma*, whose geographic environment is more realistic and verdant and does not create the strong sense of alienation that the sun in *Homeland* produces. Additionally, the Holocaust survivors’ clothes in *Kedma*, although different from those of their Israeli counterparts, are appropriate for the cold weather of their surroundings; in *Homeland*, however, Lolek’s wool vest and long shirt are utterly out of place, given the extremely hot weather, marking him as a European transplant.

<sup>480</sup> The hilariousness of this scene derives from the miscommunication between Lolek and the Sabra officer; the officer, who picks Lolek at random and asks him to get out of the vehicle, hurriedly reads him a series of complicated sentences in Hebrew concerning an oath of loyalty to the state of Israel and demands that he repeat out loud after him: “I swear” (*ani nishba*). Lolek replies: *ani le-Haifa* (“I’m going to Haifa”), a response which of course illustrates his complete lack of comprehension of the oath he is supposed to take now. After the Israeli officer makes Lolek repeat the word *nishba* (“swear”), he shows him the direction of the outpost and says: Haifa. The Sabra then gets back on the truck, which immediately sets off. Lolek runs after the truck, and the long shot that emphasizes the discrepancy between his appearance and the desert surrounding him, together with his Chaplinesque running and holding the gun as if it were a walking stick, creates a comic effect. But the atonal music disrupts this comic effect and brings the scene back to Lolek’s focalized point of view, expressing his sense of loss and despair.

replies with a smile: “Hello” (*sholem aleykhem*). The commander angrily responds in Yiddish: “I told you to salute!” Lolek, perplexed, raises his hand in a gesture that looks like surrender. The commander then enters the frame (which previously was a medium shot of Lolek seen from a side view), examines Lolek from head to toe, and then roughly grabs hold of Lolek’s hand and lifts it to Lolek’s temple. “Welcome to the land of the fathers,” the commander says in Hebrew, and then translates the sentence into Yiddish. Lolek asks: “And what about the mothers?” The commander looks at him silently and walks away. The Yiddish language, which for Lolek signifies home and familiarity, becomes, through the commander’s reactions, hostile and estranged. The entrance of the commander into Lolek’s frame represents the violent entrance of military existence and ideology into the individual’s consciousness. The demand to salute and its enforcement is precisely what defines the individual as a subject of the ideological system.<sup>481</sup> The Yiddish language, used to translate the Hebrew utterances, is subjected to the Hebrew; it is only secondary in importance, and functions merely as a channel to deliver the Hebrew, repeating it without any changes. It seems as if the Yiddish language can only exist in Palestine (or in Israel) if it accepts Hebrew’s authority and submits to it.<sup>482</sup> When Lolek asks about the mothers, he points to the patriarchal stance that indeed typifies the Zionist narrative and appears in the work of major poets,<sup>483</sup> but he also connects the Yiddish language to the feminine and the maternal.<sup>484</sup> Lolek’s question both evokes the stereotype of Yiddish in Zionist ideology as the diasporic language of the old and feminized Jew and recalls the suppressed image of the mother, which is indeed a central theme in *Homeland*.<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> See Louis Althusser, “Ideological State Apparatuses,” 11.

<sup>482</sup> Yet it is important to note the gap that was prevalent at the time *Homeland* takes place between the ideology promoting Hebrew speaking only and excluding Yiddish, and the reality during the first years of Israeli statehood in which many of the soldiers, including soldiers that weren’t new immigrants, spoke Yiddish as their mother tongue. Thus, what seems surreal here is actually realistic. I thank Chana Kronfeld for this important observation.

<sup>483</sup> See Part II, footnote 398, which briefly discusses the Land as Woman conquered in modernist Hebrew poetry.

<sup>484</sup> The commander’s quiet look when Lolek mentions the mothers expresses his personal loss (as we learn later in the film from his weeping and calling out to his mother during a nightmare), but also the painful relationship with his Jewish past, which is signified by the mother.

<sup>485</sup> The theme of the mother as signifying the diasporic old world and its loss following the Holocaust is expressed in Lolek’s recurring singing of “*Oyfn Veg Shteyt a Boym*” (On the road stands a tree), a poem written by Itzik Manger in 1938 and set to music in the 1940s, whereupon it became an iconic Yiddish song. The poem describes the complicated relationship between a son and his mother, whose love

At one point, Lolek takes out a picture of his friend Nina, whose address in Haifa appears on the back, and asks the commander where Haifa is. The commander replies: “There is no Haifa. Haifa doesn’t exist.” (“*Nishto is Haifa. Haifa is nishto.*”) The commander goes on insisting: “It was destroyed in the war. I didn’t want to tell you, but there’s nothing left of it.” “What about the people?” Lolek asks with worry. “They’re gone. The city has burned down. There’s no Haifa, there’s no girl.” The commander retires to a corner, absorbed in his own reflections. Lolek is shocked and refuses to believe what he’s just heard. “You’re lying!” he calls out, and then shouts in Hebrew: “There is Haifa [*yesh Haifa*]! I to Haifa [*ani le-Haifa*]! I swear Haifa [*ani nishba Haifa*]!” The very discourse in Yiddish, which seemingly refers to their actual surroundings during the 1948 war in Palestine/Israel, charges the dialogue with the context in which Yiddish was spoken—the old Jewish world that was destroyed in World War Two. Therefore, it seems that when the commander describes the destruction of the city and the people, he is referring to another city and people that are gone, and perhaps even to his own catastrophe and loss (later on we learn that he is a holocaust survivor too). Lolek, in an attempt to refute the commander’s words, shouts out all the few lexical combinations he knows in Hebrew. His move to Hebrew, therefore, can be understood as an attempt to separate the two different realities—those of the past and the present—in order to receive a more reliable answer about the true fate of Haifa and its people. It also seems that Lolek’s use of Hebrew lends his words more authority, unlike the low status of Yiddish in Zionist ideology, which makes messages conveyed in that language seem less valid. But even more than that: Yiddish represents the old Jewish world that was destroyed in the war, and therefore it seems that speaking in Yiddish about the loss of people and cities is part of its lexicon. The only way to extricate oneself from this dictionary of death and destruction is to switch languages, to start speaking in Hebrew.

### ***Homeland as Allegory and Literalization of a Metaphor***

The very layout of the outpost as a circle with a pole in the middle, on which the Israeli flag is flown, is of course significant. The pole divides the space into two halves,

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suffocates him and does not allow him to spread his wings and fulfil his aspirations. Lolek’s singing of the song in several scenes adds to his allegorical embodiment of the Old Jew and increases the tension between him and the commander, who suppresses and denies his own diasporic past. Itzik Manger, *Lid Un Ballade* [Song and ballade] (Tel Aviv: I.L. Peretz Publishing House, 1976), 369–70.

inviting a comparison between them. In many shots, Lolek stands in one half while the commander stands in the other. When the commander forces Lolek to salute him, the frame captures them as they stand one in front of the other: one is pale and wears a vest and warm pants, while his shirtless counterpart is tanned and wears only shorts. In the next scene, Lolek rolls up his sleeves and the commander, noticing the number tattooed on his forearm, holds his arm and examines it. The commander's grip on Lolek's arm exposes a number on his own arm as well, and the shot freezes on both arms. "You're also from there?" Lolek asks and grabs hold of the commander's arm, examining it. The commander pulls his arm back and replies: "A few days in the sun and no one will know where you came from."

The striking revelation that the commander is also a holocaust survivor explains much of his behavior. Lolek represents the past he wishes to forget, and their very communication in Yiddish, which signifies the old world, perpetuates this pain. At the same time, the sharp contrast between them also has allegorical implications: The commander who walks around shirtless evokes the image of the masculine New Jew, while Lolek, pale and slim, looks very much like the archetype of the old diaspora Jew. Many of the Zionist Jews who immigrated to Palestine strove to create a new Jewish man and wished to do away with their old world, which they considered wretched and hopeless. They suppressed their diasporic past and denied it,<sup>486</sup> hence their vehement antagonism toward everything that represents the old world and threatens their new identity. Similarly, the commander has ambivalent feelings toward Lolek: On the one hand, he guides and encourages him to do pull-ups on the pole – as he does – to improve his fitness, and on the other hand he abuses him.<sup>487</sup> The commander and Lolek, therefore, can also be seen as two halves of one consciousness, and the entire situation thus depicts a deep psychological split. The word Lolek uses, *there* (*dortn* in Yiddish), when he asks the commander about his origin ("You're also from *there*?"), served as a code name in Israeli society during the years following the Holocaust to refer to the nightmarish reality from which the Holocaust survivors arrived. The use of the deictic pronoun *there*, which bears no concrete or stable spatiotemporal reference, added to

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<sup>486</sup> This tendency can be seen in the narrator's father in *Preliminaries*, who suppresses his emotions concerning his traditional past. In Part I of this dissertation, I demonstrate how that novel's intertextuality reveals the father's suppressed emotions.

<sup>487</sup> Lolek's exercises on the pole on which the Israeli flag is flown carry symbolic meaning as well: They can be seen as an attempt by both Lolek and (especially) the commander to relate to and become part of Israeli society and culture, whose semiotic icon is the state flag. Additionally, the exercises on the pole highlight and give presence to the allegorical and national context of the film.

the dehumanized image of the Holocaust survivors: In their new social environment of Israel, they were often seen as being set apart from normal human existence. The commander's response ("A few days in the sun and no one will know where you came from") expresses his determination to erase the traces that betray his old identity, and expresses the well-known metaphor in Zionist ideology of shedding one's old skin in order to metamorphose and become a New Jew.

After he presses Lolek to take off his shirt, the commander taps Lolek's slim chest and says in Hebrew: "You've still got work to do." Once again, the Hebrew language grants authority to the words that are spoken. The resonance of the Hebrew word for "work"—*avoda*—is also significant here, as it also means "labor" and evokes a specific context in socialist-Zionist ideology: *avoda* embodied the ideals of productivity, self-sustainability and social justice. But in this context, the word refers to the work Lolek needs to do to overcome his physical weakness and lack of normative masculinity. It seems that his transformation into a New Jew is contingent on certain physical changes: strong muscles, a tanned skin, and other external characteristics deemed necessary markers of the new Zionist body. By associating *avoda* with Lolek's physical appearance, Rosenberg ironizes and exposes the exclusionary bias behind the discourse on labor and the New Jew in Zionism.<sup>488</sup>

Another scene with profound allegorical implications is one of the last scenes in *Homeland*. The sun is beating down harshly, and Lolek approaches the pole and stands underneath the flag to find some shade. The commander orders him to go back to his spot. Lolek goes back, but then returns and sits down, insisting on his desire for some shade. The commander then points his gun at him and repeats his demand: "Go back to your spot. Don't you want to be a soldier?" and Lolek answers: "What if I don't want to?" "Disgrace," scoffs the commander and turns his back. Lolek's gun enters the frame, pointed at the commander's back. "I'll report you," the commander says quietly, and Lolek replies: "Report. I'm going home." "You live here!" the commander says, and Lolek answers: "I'm going away from here." "Do you want to defect? Here, we kill war-time defectors." Lolek cocks his gun and the commander, who has his back turned to Lolek, straightens up tensely. The long shot frames the two of them: one on either side of the pole, with Lolek pointing his gun at the commander, and with the commander facing away from Lolek and moving slowly and anxiously. The commander then turns to Lolek, smiling and spreading his arms as if trying to de-escalate the situation:

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<sup>488</sup> See Michael Gluzman's fascinating analysis of bodily requirements of Zionism in texts by Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau: Gluzman, *Ha-guf Ha-tziyoni*, 11-33 (Introduction) and 34 -66 (chap. 1).

“Smarkatch” (“young nobody,” in Yiddish). He draws nearer to Lolek and laughs mockingly: “Do you even know how to shoot?” In a sudden move, he grabs the barrel and points it at his stomach, adding: “Schmatte” (a rag, in Yiddish, and figuratively: a soft-hearted person). He starts laughing and Lolek, who has stared at him sternly until now, joins in his laughter. Then they both become serious again and the commander steps backward while looking worriedly at Lolek. Lolek shoots, and the commander falls to the ground, blood spilling out of the wound in his stomach. Lolek leaves the outpost and runs down the hill.

This tense scene begins with Lolek’s insistence on standing (or sitting) under the flagpole. Lolek’s attempt to find shelter under the flag’s shade literalizes the Hebrew expression *la-chasot be-tzel*, which can be literally translated as “to find shelter under someone’s shade/shadow,” and which itself derives from the metaphor of a powerful and protective authority figure as a beneficial tree. Here, Lolek’s insistence on moving from the margins to the spot under the flag – if taken idiomatically – would express his will to become part of the national narrative and consensus, to benefit from its support and acceptance, while literally it empties this very symbol of its meaning – he’s simply looking for a shady spot, meagre as it is in the glaring sun. The commander who toils on his own to find acceptance at the center of Israeli society feels threatened by Lolek’s aspirations and reacts accordingly. The question that accompanies his pointing his gun at Lolek (“Don’t you want to be a soldier?”) contains a dual meaning: Being a good soldier is the way to enter the Israeli consensus, but being a good soldier also means obeying orders and accepting your marginal position in the national narrative. The long shot that captures both of them, as Lolek threatens the commander with his cocked gun, again evokes a comparison between them and allows for an allegorical interpretation of the two as representing the contested parts of one single consciousness. Lolek, the representative of the suppressed old world, defies the part that is trying to erase him. The commander, who is the representative of the New Jew as a thinly-veiled Old Jew who strives to overcome the diasporic survivor within him, mocks this other part of himself and tries to suppress it; but unlike *Preliminaries* and *Infiltration*, where the father and the new immigrants are ashamed of their diasporic past and suppress it,<sup>489</sup> here the suppressed identity revolts and defeats its suppressor, the new identity (conveyed by shooting the commander). Lolek, who is also the representative of diasporic identity, defects from the consensus in order to connect

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<sup>489</sup> Even though the Mizrahi soldiers sing songs from their past, they nevertheless express their conflicted identity and their feelings of inferiority as new immigrants throughout the novel.

with his metaphoric home (as Lolek states: “I’m going home”). As we shall see, the metaphoric home becomes an actual home, and its revival strengthens the connection forged in this film between the Jewish narrative and the Palestinian one.

### **Mirroring Narratives: Jewish and Palestinian**

Earlier in the film, when their water runs out, the commander orders Lolek to bring water from the nearby abandoned Palestinian village. The commander warns him not to enter the village houses: “Don’t go inside! Their ghosts are still in there!”<sup>490</sup> His warning produces an allusion to S. Yizhar’s novella *Khirbet Khizeh*, where the narrator describes the empty Palestinian villages whose residents were expelled:

These bare villages, the day was coming when they would begin to cry out. As you went through them . . . you find yourself silently followed by invisible eyes of walls, courtyards, and alleyways. . . . And suddenly, in the middle of the afternoon or at dusk . . . this large, sullen village, burst into a song of things whose soul left them . . . a song that brought tidings of sudden crushing calamity that had frozen and remained like a kind of curse . . . terrifying fear screams from there, and . . . a flash of revenge, a summons to fight, the God-of-Vengeance has shown himself!<sup>491</sup>

The allusion to Yizhar’s novella charges the commander’s warning with responsibility to these empty houses; it echoes the fear and destruction the Arab residents experienced before and during their expulsion by the Jewish soldiers, and it recalls the great injustice in the actions that led to the silent cry of these villages.<sup>492</sup>

Lolek disobeys the commander’s order and enters the house next to the water well. Various items are lying about in a disorderly fashion on the ground next to the

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<sup>490</sup> Interestingly, the commander’s very warning about ghosts (embodied in the Yiddish word *shaydim*, literally: “demons”) conveys the cultural world from which he originates and attests to his connection to it, despite his suppression of that world.

<sup>491</sup> Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, 26–27.

<sup>492</sup> Once again, as at the end of the novella, which I discussed above, the narrator mentions God as standing up to the injustice done to the Palestinians. And as at the end of the novella, which quotes from the Sodom and Gomorrah story, here too Yizhar employs biblical and liturgical texts while revoking their “Jewishness,” presenting God as turning against those who appropriated these texts and who are now using them as justifications for the injustices they perpetrate.

entrance: the broken glass of a framed picture, a book, a shoe, a pillow.<sup>493</sup> After drinking water from a small pot on a tray on the floor and looking around him, Lolek notices a person lying down. He draws closer and lies next to him; it is the body of a young man with a pale white face. Lolek stays where he is and stares at the dead man, who is now face-to-face with Lolek. The similar position of Lolek and the young Palestinian, their pale skin and similar ages, and their position lying on the ground facing one another—all this situates them as mirroring each other. The analogy Rosenberg produces between Lolek and the Palestinian man points up the suffering and loss they both experienced, as well as their shared social position in years to come. Both of them, the Palestinian and the Holocaust survivor, share a marginality in Israeli society, exclusion from the Jewish national narrative, and being subjected to condescending and dismissive behavior on part of the Sabras. At the same time, Lolek's lying next to the Palestinian man also literalizes the Hebrew ethical principle of *la-sim atzmecha bi-mkomo*, literally translated as “to put oneself in someone else's position,” the ability to empathize with the other. Rosenberg thus draws a path to reconciliation between the two peoples living in this land: Empathy for the catastrophe of the Palestinians and recognition of the responsibility for it, signified by Lolek's direct stare at the dead Palestinian, have the potential to lead to a future of communication and mutual understanding. The very depiction of a dead Palestinian man in visual terms that associate him with the “pale Jews” killed in Europe is a bold cinematic choice for Rosenberg, and takes the ethical critique a step forward from Gitai's analogy in *Kedma* between Jewish and Palestinian refugees.

In *Homeland*'s last scenes, Lolek, after shooting the commander, runs away into the strange hot desert surrounding the outpost. He cries out in despair and keeps on wandering, until he notices a stone house in the distance. The music, which up to this point was atonal, suddenly changes to sad and melodic music being played on a clarinet, the traditional instrument in klezmer bands. The melancholic clarinet music strengthens the sense that the house is seen from Lolek's point of view.<sup>494</sup> The melody also expresses Lolek's personal and warm feelings toward this house, and indicates his

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<sup>493</sup> The disorganized items attest to the rush and panic of the house's former residents and correspond to the lines in *Khirbet Khizeh*: “And suddenly, in the middle of the afternoon or at dusk . . . this large, sullen village, burst into a song of things whose soul left them.”

<sup>494</sup> This is true despite the fact that the shot is a long one. Similarly to the opening of the film, which captured Lolek in a long shot as he chased after the truck that was driving away, the music—which was atonal there and is melodic here—conveys Lolek's inner feelings. This is one of Rosenberg's many original cinematic choices, as point of view is usually conveyed by close-up or over-the-shoulder shots.

return, at least in his mind, to his old home in Europe (as we learn from the very next scene).

Lolek then runs excitedly to the stone house and, as if looking for something he already knows is there, blindly gropes for the key above the door. He finds it, inserts the key into the lock, and opens the door. The next shot is taken from inside the house: We watch Lolek as he enters the house, looking astonished. A dim lamp stands on a chest next to framed pictures of various people: those of a child, a couple, and a young boy and his mother. Lolek puts the key on the chest. The house has a European, lower middle-class air to it, and seems out of place in the desert surrounding it. "Lolek, where have you been?" a woman asks him in Yiddish, turning to him from where she was standing by the window, as if she had been keeping her eyes peeled for him. "The food's been waiting for two hours," she scolds him softly and gestures to the table. In another corner of the room, we see a man sitting on an armchair and reading a book. "I'm sorry mama," Lolek replies, "I won't be late again." "You know that it's dangerous for us now, just being outside. Don't make me worry." She strokes his head and asks him to wash his hands. When Lolek sits next to the table and is about to take a bite of the bread he sliced, his mother scolds him softly again. In response, he puts his hand above his head, in a symbolic gesture of covering his head, and says the traditional Jewish blessing on the bread. She serves him food and sits next to him, staring at him and smiling. Lolek eats hungrily, and when he notices her stare, he asks her: "What?" Her eyes tear up and she answers, wiping her eyes and trying to smile: "Can't I look at my own son?" Lolek smiles back and continues eating. When he finishes, he tells his mother he's going to meet Nina. "Are you crazy? It's late. Tomorrow is a school day," she responds. Lolek explains to her that Nina is waiting for him and that she will be leaving tomorrow morning. "Where to?" his mother asks. "To Haifa," Lolek replies. "Let the child be," the father calls from his corner, "he's in love." "Don't worry, mama. I won't be late again," Lolek says and gets up from his seat at the table. He approaches the mirror to comb his hair, but his hand freezes and he stares at his reflection, as if realizing something. His face takes on an expression of immense sadness. He turns to his father, bends over him, and kisses him on his forehead. Then he approaches his mother, who is standing with her back to him, collecting the dishes. Lolek puts his hand on her shoulder. She turns to him in surprise, and he gives her a long, warm embrace. Then he walks to the door, turns around to look at his parents again, and says: "I love you." The movie ends with a shot from inside the house of Lolek walking out and shutting the front door behind him.

These final scenes could be a memory, a hallucination, or most probably a combination of the two. The portrayal of Lolek's old home in Eastern Europe and his last moments with his parents actually take place in a Palestinian house. Lolek, who was on the verge of passing out prior to noticing the remote house, is temporarily recharged by this potentially hopeful sign and runs toward it. But as we can infer from his thirst and exhaustion, these are probably his dying moments, and therefore the scene inside the Palestinian home conveys Lolek's memories and hallucinations. Thus, this scene expresses both his desire to revisit his dead parents and simultaneously symbolizes his own fading away.

The complementary homes—a Jewish house in its interiority and a Palestinian house in its exteriority—mirror one another, calling for a close analogy between them, even a merging of the two. And indeed, the items in Lolek's parents' house recall those seen in the Palestinian house Lolek visited earlier in the film. The untouched pictures on the chest correspond to the shattered pictures on the ground next to the empty Palestinian house. The dishes on the table at the parents' house evoke the pots inside the Palestinian home. The parents' intact house and the empty Palestinian house with its broken items can be thought of as the “before” and “after” of the two homes struck by catastrophe: the Holocaust in Europe and the Nakba in Palestine. Rosenberg is, of course, *not* aiming to compare the atrocities of the Nazi regime to the Jewish soldiers' expulsion of Palestinians in the 1948 war. Instead, he highlights the individual's traumatic experiences of suffering and refugee status that provides both narratives, the Jewish and the Palestinian, with a common ground that—if recognized—can enable a humanization of the “enemy.” By mirroring the two houses in this way, Rosenberg renders the Palestinian catastrophe relatable for an Israeli audience, providing an unmediated perspective that makes the Palestinian experience an object of identification. Thus, for example, the key Lolek looks for and finds above the wooden door resembles the keys of the Palestinian houses that their residents were forced to abandon in 1948. These keys have since become iconic: They have come to symbolize their owners' right to their properties and their hope to return to those properties in the future, known as “the right of return” in the political discourse.<sup>495</sup> By employing this symbolic key to gain entry into Lolek's parental home, Rosenberg removes the term from its contested political context and literalizes it, delineating Lolek's imaginary return to his parents. The narratives of Lolek's dead family and of the

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<sup>495</sup> For more on the right of return, see Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

expelled Palestinian family are mapped onto one another, without equating, however, the Shoah and the Nakba.

When Lolek tells his mother that he is going to Nina to see her before she leaves for Haifa, we understand when this dinner actually took place: It happened, or could have happened, just before Lolek's world fell apart. Nina, who left for Haifa at what later turned out to be the last moment before the outbreak of the Second World War, survived, and she signifies the bridge between Lolek's lost world and his existence in Israel/Palestine. And indeed, when Lolek stands in front of the mirror to improve his appearance before going to meet his girlfriend, he stares at his reflection, as if the mirror were revealing the two axes of time, the two parallel chronotopes: the time of the scene at the dinner table with his parents, and the time that exists beyond the walls of this house, i.e., the time of his reality in Palestine/Israel in 1948. This understanding encapsulates the realization that this is the last time he will have seen his parents, and perhaps also suggests that these will be his last living moments. Struck by this understanding, he approaches each of them, saying goodbye in a deep and meaningful way. As in *Kedma*, the realization that the latest memory is also the *last* memory comes only after the fact. The theme of the inability to say goodbye to loved ones in the actual time of events, or to the house that is left behind, recurs in both films.

*Homeland* continues *Kedma* and complements it; the farewell that was impossible on the factual historical axis is enabled in the fantasy, through the explicit exposure of the retrospective gaze that is embodied in Lolek's staring in the mirror. This farewell, as an expression of closure and reconciliation with the past, can only take place in the abandoned Palestinian house. Only where the song of things whose soul has left them can be heard, where the disaster of the Palestinian family is echoed in the disaster of the Jewish family, can the scene of departure occur. The dead young Palestinian and Lolek, who were lying next to one another in an earlier scene, embody the tragic connection between the two narratives, the Jewish and the Palestinian. The revival of the Jewish people in Palestine led to the catastrophe of the Palestinian people.

Rosenberg exploits his retrospective point of view to create a film that constantly challenges its own norms. By literalizing and ironizing major concepts and metaphors in Israeli discourse and pushing them ad absurdum, and by boldly mapping the Jewish and Palestinian narratives of loss onto each other, Rosenberg conveys his ethical critique of the Zionist project. Gitai does not transgress the borders of the cinematic medium as Rosenberg does, but instead employs the blurring of document and fiction, as well as the retrospective stance to create direct encounters between the Palestinian

refugees, the Jewish refugees, and the Sabras. While Gitai gives voice to the outcry of the Palestinians and to the testimonials of the Jewish refugees, Rosenberg emphasizes the Palestinians' absence and the silencing of the Holocaust survivors: We see the abandoned Palestinian house, and we see a dead Palestinian, but the Palestinian never speaks; he/she has essentially been silenced in the dominant Israeli discourse (as represented, ironically, by the commander who is himself a survivor). Lolek, a refugee from the Shoah, is essentially silenced as well: His language is no longer the language that is spoken, and he too most likely dies in the end.<sup>496</sup>

Yet at the same time, in their very position of looking retrospectively at the formational period of Israeli statehood and the expulsion of the Palestinians, both Gitai and Rosenberg point to what may seem obvious but is nevertheless important to acknowledge: What has come to be known in the movies' time of production was unknown during the historical time of the events depicted in the films. The traumatic recent past of persecutions, and the naïve belief that in the new Jewish settlement a new and just society would flourish had blinded people like the narrator's father in *Preliminaries* and made them unaware of the catastrophic implications of their fierce ideology. Therefore, Gitai and Rosenberg do not wish to indict the participants in the historical events, but rather seek to stress the responsibility of those living in the present day to acknowledge the great injustices of the past and make amends. The two movies display unique uses of the cinematic medium to produce simultaneity, both on the textual and the filmic levels by integrating later texts and cinematic allusions into the movie. The cinematic temporality itself (such as in the last scene of *Homeland*) is exhausted in both films so as to convey this message of moral accountability. But this simultaneity also draws the outline of an alternative future, one of compassion and understanding. By embracing the viewpoints of Holocaust survivors and by giving presence to texts that trace the Palestinians' catastrophe and mark its centrality in constituting their national narrative, Rosenberg and Gitai express a perspective that is absent from the novels *Preliminaries* and *Infiltration*, the perspective of the Jewish and Palestinian refugees. In providing the point of view of the most marginalized communities in Israeli society, Gitai and Rosenberg create a link between past events and the current situation of Israeli society. The self-denial of the commander toward his own past in *Homeland* and the Sabras' dismissive behavior toward the Holocaust survivors in *Kedma* are portrayed as enabling the heartlessness of the dominant Israeli discourse toward the Palestinians. At the same time, by blurring the borders between

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<sup>496</sup> I thank Kareem Abu-Zeid, who helped me in conceptualizing this important notion.

self and other and by pointing to the shared experience of loss and suffering in the narratives of both peoples, Rosenberg and Gitai make powerful ethical statements and express the great potential for communication and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

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