

“How Bound the Arab Is to His Land”:

The House of Rajani and the Limits of Zionist Discourse

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*This article examines the ways in which Alon Hilu undermines conventional literary representations of the Arab in *The House of Rajani*, offering alternative possibilities for contact and communication between Jews and Arabs. The division of the text between two narrators, each of whom reflects a distinct viewpoint, represents the contrast between the Zionist world of the First Aliyah and the Arab world of people who had dwelled in Palestine for generations. Hilu returns to Palestinian history in order to situate the experience of Arab exile center stage. Not only does Hilu read national history and the place of the Arab within it anew, but he signals the instability of national categories, their tendency to merge and thereby to create an intermediate space. The Arab in Hilu's novel is immeasurably more complex and interesting than the familiar Arab as imagined by Hebrew and Israeli fiction in the past. He is understood through a lens of post-colonialism inconsistent with the dominant Israeli historiography and his human and collective experiences are presented with unprecedented power.*

A RETURN TO PALESTINIAN HISTORY?

The many novels about Arabs and Jews published in Hebrew since the Oslo Accords (1993) demonstrate an ever increasing awareness of the need to acknowledge the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the major political questions arising in the wake of the stalled peace process. The Palestinian refugees' right of return and Israel's responsibility for the aftermath of the War of Independence have become the stuff of Israeli fiction in recent years, more than five decades

after the Palestinian Naqbah. Recent Israeli novels demand that we adopt a new understanding of time that is neither Zionist, Jewish, nor Israeli, but Palestinian time, ranging between the national past of expulsion and the ongoing Palestinian refugee experience, as well as an imagined future of personal and collective return.

Most of these literary experiments share a tendency to present an ostensibly a-Zionist view, which casts doubt on existing ideologies rather than attempting to suggest alternative ones. Texts such as Smadar Hertzfeld's *Inta omri*,¹ A. B. Yehoshua's *Hakalah hameshaheret*,² Yitzhak Laor's *Hinei adam*,³ Sami Michael's *Yonim beTrafalgar*,⁴ Eli Amir's *Yasmin*,⁵ and Michal Govrin's *Hevzekim*,⁶ among others, tend to represent the Palestinians as Other. Furthermore, although they recognize the importance of the refugee problem, they treat it schematically as a largely abstract, political concept, lacking real, experiential substance. Jewish authors usually avoid writing about the expulsion and the refugee problem⁷ since their work is anchored in an Israeli narrative disinclined to look at these issues from a Palestinian point of view. Canonic literary fiction, while attempting to return to an historical context, also tends to play down these issues, in a dialectic move that contains subversive positions within the hegemonic ideology.⁸ In keeping with this complementary relationship between the subversive and the conventional, changes in relations between fiction and history since the Oslo Accords generate the evident level of the text, the explicit statements of the narrators, the positions of the major characters, and the evolution of the plot that may appear subversive. But on a more subtle level, most texts have stayed within the hegemonic limits of Israeli fiction since the establishment of the State of Israel. These works are still immersed in Orientalist values and imagery, and typically involve plots centered around the unbridgeable gap between Arab and Jew.

This article examines the ways in which Alon Hilu undermines conventional literary representations of the Arab in *The House of Rajani*,⁹ negotiating alternative possibilities for contact and communication between Jews and Arabs. Hilu is a second-generation descendant of immigrants from an Arab country (his parents were Syrian) and is familiar with Arabic language and culture. His personal history is, therefore, not only Zionist but also colored by the affinity between Jews and Arabs over many generations. Hence, it is possible to read his novel as a challenge to the hegemonic Israeli position regarding Arab identity and language as well as Arab

history and culture, and we are presented with a lucid alternative. Hilu substitutes the national viewpoint for a critical one, facilitating a focus on what the dominant culture has at best marked as foreign and Other, more often ignoring it completely.

PARODYING THE ORIENTALIST, ZIONIST NARRATIVE

Hilu’s attempt to break free from traditional, Israeli, literary narratives regarding the Arabs centers around one of the earliest of these, dating from the First Aliyah. He provides us with a fictional portrait of the historical figure Haim Margalioṭ Kalvarisky, an agronomist who immigrated to Palestine from Poland with his wife in 1895. Kalvarisky settled near Jaffa and was involved in the purchase of land on behalf of the Hovevei Zion movement. He attempted to purchase a large, flourishing estate belonging to the Deg’ani family, but the asking price was too high. One year after settling in Jaffa, the couple moved to the Rosh Pina area, where Kalvarisky managed to purchase many stretches of land marked out for the establishment of future Jewish towns. He was known not only for extensive land purchases but also for his close relationships with Arabs and his vocal support of their interests. He set up a school for Arab children living in the Rosh Pina area and in time became a founding member of the Brit Shalom (peace treaty) movement. He kept a detailed journal of his experiences in Eretz Israel, which was never published but which survives as a manuscript on which his character in the novel (Jacques Luminsky in the English translation) is based.

Hilu is keenly aware of the cultural-political viewpoint from which most Hebrew literature is written. In an essay on Agnon’s *Tmol shilshom* he demonstrates his explicit adherence to early post-colonial thinking as set out by Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha. He points out elements of the Zionist narrative prevalent in Agnon’s work—as they generally were in Hebrew fiction of the pre-State Yishuv—particularly in his representations of Arabs. But besides its analytic and literary dialogue with Zionist discourse, *The House of Rajani* confronts the Zionist self-image emerging from the First Aliyah. Hilu also sets about an alternative representation of Arabs, diverging from previous, hegemonic portrayals.

Hilu’s double agenda of deconstructing hegemonic representation and the establishment of an alternative is reflected in the division of the novel into passages

of a journal written by Luminsky with others written by Salah Rajani, a thirteen-year-old boy living with his mother, Afifa, on the family estate. The division of the text between two narrators, each of whom reflects a distinct viewpoint, sharpens the contrast between the Zionist world of the First Aliyah and the Arab world of people who had dwelled in Palestine for generations.

These two worlds are distinguished first of all in the novel by a linguistic choice. Luminsky writes his journal in Hebrew typical of the late nineteenth century, and includes many foreign expressions for which no Hebrew equivalent had yet been invented (*addrisa* for address, *influenza*, *hotel*, and *posta*, as well as many professional agricultural and medical terms) and his punctuation is heavily influenced by Yiddish. There are also acronyms typical of journals and letters written in classical Hebrew, for such common phrases as “the Holy Land,” “at any rate,” “God forbid,” and “at present.” Hilu deliberately employs anachronistic grammatical forms and syntax that modern Israeli Hebrew has long since pushed to the margins. There is archaic usage of verbs and nouns, possessives, and other syntactic curiosities, and most particularly, use of the direct article, which in modern Hebrew is usually conflated. Salah, for his part, writes his diaries and stories in Arabic represented by Hebrew that reads like a translation of *A Thousand and One Nights*, from which the lad draws inspiration. The Salah passages consist of extended, arabesque sentences, with paragraphs sometimes stretching over more than a page, always concluded by a single, shorter sentence. The sprawling sentences and exceptionally rich vocabulary create a text that seems foreign to the late nineteenth century as well as to contemporary modern Hebrew. As Hilu remarked with regard to his first novel, *Death of a Monk*,¹⁰ his style is a hybrid of Hebrew and Arabic:

When I wrote the book, I imagined I wasn't actually writing it but rather translating it from Arabic—not especially well, as a rookie translator would—creating a hybrid language with syntactical and linguistic characteristics retained from the original. . . . Authentic sayings in Arabic were retained in their original form, albeit translated into the target language. The long and meandering sentences deliberately mimic Arabic arabesques, in which fine nuances of the same motif recur again and again.¹¹

These remarks are equally applicable to *The House of Rajani*, which includes quotations from the Koran and revels in a pastiche of archaic legend preserving a long-winded arabesque syntax and traditional Muslim images of the Jew:

The start of the devastation would be the loss of our land to our oppressors, the Jews scattered among the nations of the world, from among whom leaders and philosophers would soon rise to lead their people in conquering our homeland, not, as would be expected, by might and the trumpets of warfare (indeed, that nation is not known for its battle skills or its strength) but rather through acts of chicanery, subterfuge and deception . . . the Jews will already have conquered much of the land, and they will have sunk in their talons and seated themselves on their hind haunches smeared with excrement, and the land will become contaminated with their filthy skin and their ugly souls, that Jewish soul despised among one and all that has been expelled and banished from place to place. (161–62)

The two cultures represented in the novel form a kind of double pastiche—period-spoken Hebrew and elaborate Arabic evocative of ancient legend, translated into Hebrew—and are clearly distanced from the Hebrew of modern Israeli literature. Fredric Jameson defines *pastiche* as an imitation of a unique style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speaking in a dead language “devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody.”¹² Jameson identifies a passionate nostalgia in the postmodern tendency to use dead styles. Pastiche is a dominant cultural phenomenon that creates a “pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of esthetic styles displaces ‘real’ history.”¹³ Unlike Jameson’s view of parody in pastiche as empty and devoid of critical political value, Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodern parody is not nostalgic but rather critical, not a-historical and not guilty of removing ancient art forms from their original, historical context:

Parody signals how present representations come from past ones, and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and

difference. . . . I would want to argue that postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations.¹⁴

Hutcheon distinguishes between parody and pastiche, but for our purposes her claim that citation of “dead speech” is politically significant is important, as it exposes the affinity between images, narratives and ways of speaking, and the historical context in which they came into being as a political force. Hilu’s novel similarly puts the development of Israeli discourse about Arabs in its historical context: Orientalist, Zionist discourse in the late nineteenth century. He does not restrict himself to Zionist phrases, but instead also enables the reader to configure a Palestinian speech never before represented in Hebrew literature. Although this speech also contains traces of a dead language (if one thinks of the language of the Koran and the Kalila and Dimna stories as such), he uses these to generate a political discourse about the Palestinian expulsion. The fact that this speech is conjured by an Israeli writer and not a Palestinian one writing in Arabic reinforces its fictiveness but does not annul its narrative significance, nor its political-historical importance. Hilu’s intellectual interest here is directed not toward nostalgia, but rather toward history, in all its terrifying reality.

Besides the dual language, reflecting two opposing national points of view, the novel sets up a double story, Jewish and Arab, set in the nineteenth century. Salah is a lad haunted by prophetic visions who has grown up with almost no fatherly presence and has been isolated from other boys his own age. He meets and is drawn to the European Luminsky, sensing that the European foreigner might cure his “illness.” Luminsky’s wife avoids all physical contact with her husband, and he is attracted to Salah’s beautiful mother Afifa. Even more than to Afifa herself, however, Luminsky is attracted to her flourishing estate, which he would dearly like to purchase in order to set up a Jewish agricultural colony. He succeeds in seducing Afifa while her husband is away on business, but fails to purchase the estate. Following Afifa’s husband’s mysterious death, Luminsky tries to force her to hand over the deeds to the estate and threatens with ever increasing aggression to expose her adultery. Salah, who has secretly observed his mother’s erotic encounters with her Jewish lover and later their violent confrontations, decides to murder Luminsky,

whom he suspects of having murdered his father. He also has a prophetic vision that the Jews are destined to conquer the entire country and to drive out its Arab inhabitants, which only strengthens his resolve to prevent the sale of the estate. Ultimately, Salah commits suicide, while his mother, haunted by the furious ghost of her dead husband, goes mad. Luminsky manages to get hold of the deeds to the estate and even cruelly evicts its tenant farmers, but feels that the ghosts and demons of the place are haunting him and driving him insane. He eventually abandons the estate altogether, leaving his home near Jaffa and moving to Rosh Pina, like the historical Kalvarisky on whom the character of Luminsky is based.

In *The House of Rajani*, Hilu reconstructs the Zionist narrative of the First Aliyah which tells of the purchase of land from rich effendi and the eviction of their tenants, with or without the aid of the Turkish police. Such a story, told repeatedly in different versions (in Moshe Smilansky's work for example) tends to foreground the legality of the purchase and the legal innocence of the settlers wishing to evict the tenant farmers. Earlier incarnations of the story stress the fact that the landowners saw the land as an investment and a rich source of income. The workers on the land were viewed as merely hired laborers who had been exploited for many years. This narrative is part of a broader rhetoric about the greater affinity of the pioneers with the land than that of the Arabs (even without employing the argument about returning to the Land of the Fathers and the Jews' historical right to return to their Land) since they were legal purchasers, making the desert bloom and residing on the land at the same time.¹⁵

The House of Rajani, which traces the disinheritance of the owners of the Rajani estate and the exile of its “foreign” tenant farmers, subverts the conventional Zionist story and exposes its blind spots. Luminsky's diary reads with hindsight, not only as testimony to the determination of members of the First Aliyah who had to deal with discomfort and crises that are hinted at only indirectly (such as the shortage of jobs which forced many young people to leave for Russia or America), but also as a text saturated with European colonial culture and constructed according to its narrative. The terms *colonists* and *colonies* that appear in the diary, as in letters of the period, accurately reflect the pioneers' view of themselves as part of a European project of conquest of the East, undertaken in order to bring Western achievements and civilization to the natives. This Orientalist¹⁶

worldview appears innocently enough in Luminsky's journal, without any critical awareness.

This worldview tended to view European Zionists as superior to Arabs in almost every sphere: their cultural and ethical traditions, national consciousness, and in the enlightenment of European social and economic concepts. Thus Luminsky the agronomist focuses on the neglect, ignorance, and passivity of the local Arab inhabitants, their backward, inefficient irrigation and farming methods, and especially their inability to exploit the huge economic potential of the estate's lands and orchards. The writer's unshakeable conviction of his European superiority compared with an Oriental "lack of culture" impervious to change or to capitalist logic enables him to express, at every given opportunity, his firmly held opinions about their dismal customs and rotten way of life, their miserable dress and food, so poorly suited to a European palate, their language that sounds like a collection of throaty growls, and their writing that looks like "flea droppings" (27). Most of all he reports their bestial appearance: "When they were nigh upon us one could see the ebony hue of their eyes, which sparkled like the skin of a moist black reptile" (*ibid.*).¹⁷ Similarly, he talks about the tendency of Arabs to subjugate their women or to marry pre-pubertal girls, utterly ignoring their psychological and physical needs (Luminsky himself, as a European lover, is the first to acquaint Afifa with an orgasm). The supposedly superior knowledge that creates an Orientalist, Zionist worldview regarding the Arabs sees the latter as a waning force belonging to the past, which has lost its influence on future historic events—that same history which the Zionists loved to return to in order to revise their exilic image. The Zionist understanding of gender is also linked to this: the view of the Zionist immigrants' masculinity as perfect and normal, compared with the lack of masculinity of the exilic Jew, as well as in comparison with the Arabs' defective masculinity. Thus, Salah is described as never having learned to swim or fight like a man (62), while his father, whom everyone fears and defers to as "Master," looks "like a woman: his expression was feminine and feeble, his eyes watery as a mad dog's, his fingers bejeweled and his neck bedecked with gold, and on his head sat a ridiculous tarboosh" (86). Even his voice is "detestable" and "feminine" (91). The Arabs are awash with superstition that sounds to the Zionist ear like the "idle chatter and mean-spirited nature of Arab simpletons" (45). The gendered metaphors defining the Arabs' lack of masculinity

(and their tendency toward homosexuality) exposes first and foremost the ideological biases of the Zionist narrative as they are parodied in the novel:

Slowly I have come to realize that love between men is a known phenomenon among Arab men. That is because this nation, at one time among the most fearless on earth, has grown weaker from generation to generation, entrapped in the flimsy, poisonous webs woven by its spidery women so that now its sons have lost all semblance of manliness, for the marrow of life has been sucked wholly from their bodies. (86)

Beyond parody of the well-known discourse of First Aliyah writers, the novel seeks to expose its blind spots, such as the Zionists' misogyny toward both Jewish and Arab women, viewing them as emotionally unstable and incapable of clear, orderly thinking. There is an even greater gap between the enlightened, cultured self-image of the Zionist male and his unethical, not to say corrupt, actions. Orientalist discourse gives him unchallenged cover for this. Here is one of those moments when this self-image is exposed as laughable ingenuousness:

This child playing his infantile games with me will come to see who Isaac Jacques Luminsky really is. In the future he will think twice and thrice before tangling with a man as superior and distinguished as I. . . .

Still, I have decided to exhibit at least a modicum of European graciousness and goodwill by giving him one last chance to improve his behaviour before I take action. In the end we are neither strangers nor bitter enemies to one another but, rather, two people who wish for the same outcome: to cause the two objects of our love and affection—the estate and its exalted mistress—to thrive and flourish. (177–78)

Luminsky writes this passage in his diary a while after his confrontation with the “exalted mistress,” during which he threatens that if she refuses to hand over the title deeds “he will cut off her hands and pull her through the orchards by her ears until they tear away from her body” (175–76), a threat that ultimately forces her to submit. Luminsky's journal writing here appears to be creating a false image rather

than a genuine self-reflection. This ingenuousness that is directed not only outwardly—for example, in his quarrels with the Arab characters¹⁸—but also and especially inwardly, casts the suspicion of blindness on the entire, supposedly confessional, journal. The blindness becomes more severe the more the events described contribute to the process of disinheritance and exile (or conquest of a wasteland, as the pioneers preferred to call it). This subtle parody of Zionist discourse—both the official public and intimate literary ones—enables one to read it anew, more than one hundred years later, as a discourse incapable of recognizing its own limits or its internal contradictions, especially between the enlightened European self-image of the settlers and the disinheritance of the Arab inhabitants of the country, which were inextricably intertwined.¹⁹

BREAKING DOWN NATIONAL DIFFERENCE

Hilu is quite familiar with ambivalence and the theoretical tendency to read colonialist texts as ambivalent. In his reading of Agnon's *Tmol shilshom*, he refers to this explicitly:

Following Edward Said, writers and thinkers have stressed the ambivalent, hybrid aspect created in the colonial encounter; the admiration and the hesitance which the subjugated [peoples] feel toward Europeans; their attempts to adopt the white man's code of conduct, and at the same time—the change taking place in the colonialist himself. Thus, as Homi Bhabha notes, a double consciousness is created from within a discourse of mimicry and “hybridity” in both the oppressed subject and the colonialist. This double consciousness contaminates the category of whiteness and establishes it in terms of a cultural crossbreed.²⁰

Unlike national narratives premised on absolute binaries between the Western and the Third Worlds, between settlers and natives, between the white man and the people of color, Homi Bhabha's post-colonialist thought suggests focusing on the instability of the borderline, on liminal situations, on sites where identity cannot sustain its own purity.²¹ Intermediate sites of this kind are almost entirely absent

from fiction of the Yishuv period, which, on the contrary, clearly enshrined national polarization.²² Hilu has chosen to return to the Zionist culture of the First Aliyah in order to rewrite it in a post-colonial mode, in a way that undermines the apparently stable binaries of Jew and Arab, West and East, and which creates ambivalent, intermediate situations in which the Jew takes on "Arab" characteristics as the plot thickens, while the Arab becomes "Westernized."

The distinctions between Western Jews and Oriental Arabs are blurred and undermined by, among other things, the rich imagery of the novel. Thus Hilu tends to use animal imagery not only when referring to Arabs but also when describing Jews. Jewish and Arab women are alike in their cunning and deceit (57); the old-time settlers with their "slothful gaze [are] reminiscent of the Asian water-buffalo that roams the swamps" (19), while the settlers themselves are, he thinks, "lazier than the red-buttocked monkeys that lie cradled in African tree branches" (18). The image of a mad dog is applied not only to the Arab estate owner, but also to Luminsky's own troubling thoughts that "circle one another like a mad dog frothing and foaming as he chases his own tail" (201).²³ The extension of bestial imagery applied universally, rather than nationally, becomes clearest when it is applied to the only cultural figure in the book, Naftali Hertz Imber, whom Luminsky calls "Mr. Wildebeest" (117), thus exposing the bestiality camouflaged behind his cultured persona.

The character of Luminsky himself is testimony to the collapse of these binaries. At the start of the novel, he appears to be a rational, practical man, who despises the Arabs' fear of ghosts and demons as typical of a backward culture, riddled with superstition. But by the end of the novel, this same Luminsky is haunted by Salah's ghost, who throws stones at him and injures him, while his Jewish workers refuse to continue working in the orchard because they are afraid of the demons who guard the estate. Thus, the initial divide between mentally stout Zionists and feeble-minded Arabs (especially Salah) who are immersed in an imaginary world of ghosts breaks down toward the end of the novel. Deconstruction of views of the West as superior in its rationality and economically astuteness is also expressed in the novel's recognition of the validity of Arab folklore of mythic powers that can neither be eliminated by force nor exorcised. Luminsky's descriptions would, of course, be impossible in contemporary First Aliyah literature or even in a later Hebrew literary framework since they do away entirely with the limits of Orientalist discourse:

This was a genie, the genie of pools and lakes that the peasant would warn about, that it strangled babes in their beds, and this genie bared its teeth at me and drew near to suck my blood, and its watery arms snaked around my neck, and as quickly as possible I rose to the surface and sprang to the pool, quickly as possible I rose to the surface and sprang from the pool, snatching up my clothes and dashing from there while I still could, and the genie's laughter echoed behind me, and the trees closed in on me from every angle and direction, and my eyes popped from their sockets in deep astonishment as the orchards lined up in whole battalions, their roots serving as legs and feet, their branches now hands for beating and lifting, and they chased after me in earnest, to bring about my demise, and it was as if the entire estate was bewitched, producing genies and spirits at every juncture and vomiting me out. (262)

Hilu further blurs the distinction between the rational Jew and the feeble-minded Arab by undoing the difference between Luminsky's prosaic style of writing in short sentences, and the legend-like, lyric, long-winded style of the Arab writer. Luminsky describes this encounter with ghosts, which shakes up the certainty of his enlightened world, in an arabesque style, quite different from his prose prior to this moment.

The novel sketches the upheaval taking place in the Zionist Jew's life as a result of coming into close contact with Arab landowners and his attempts to gain control of their estate. Not satisfied with a one-time encounter with ghosts and demons, terrifying as it is, Luminsky extends the scope of this experience. He begins to believe in Salah's prophecy about a future war between Jewish settlers and the Arab inhabitants of the Holy Land, seeing it all panning out in his mind's eye (275),²⁴ where previously he had dismissed such prophecies as evidence of the boy's mental instability.

Moreover, Luminsky is certain that he will never recover from the trauma of Salah's death: "My strength was gone, my blood drained, and sadness had completely poisoned my insides" (264). The trauma is felt even more profoundly as he stands before Salah's dead body: "To my horror his eyes, dead and glassy, were still wide open. . . . I pulled down the lids but could not bring myself to gaze into

the pupils for I feared that the piercing, heartbreaking look I would see there would not leave me until my dying day" (266). Luminsky's reactions at the end of the novel bring him closer to the pole of insanity at which the Arab characters find themselves. In this respect also, Hilu's writing differs from that of other writers who never imagined that beyond rational, ethical identification of Jews with Arabs, or else doomed love stories between them, there could be an entirely different possibility of a traumatic identification. The disinherited Arab utterly shatters the disinheritor, in a manner quite different from the kind of guilty conscience and doubt espoused by later writers.

The House of Rajani also lends the character of the settler unprecedented depth by introducing a tragic element. Luminsky's belated recognition of the existence of supernatural powers responsible for the preservation of the natural affinity between the Arab and his land, and of the iniquity of disinheriting the native dwellers of that land, constitutes a cathartic moment that interprets Zionist blindness regarding these forces as hubris. Eretz Israel is regarded by its Jewish settlers as an Eden but it ultimately vomits them out, just as Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden after the Fall. Acknowledging these fatal forces as well as his own sin of blindness, the tragic hero must be punished. He must "[remove himself] from the estate forever" and he also "[knows] that every night, to the end of [his] days, at the hour [he] would sink into bed and fall into the bosom of sleep, [the] image [of the dead boy] would visit [him]" (275). These punishments generate a tragic end ridden with the pathology of the Jewish-Arab relationship; this has never before in the history of Hebrew literature veered from its limits as an ethical, political problem.

Luminsky's sense of his own identity as a Western Zionist is undermined. At the same time, he increasingly views the Arab characters as more Western, so that their Oriental inferiority falls away. Salah himself seems to Luminsky "in some ways a Jew: in the seriousness of his discourse, in the paleness of his face, in his feeble hands" (106), albeit an exilic Jew rather than a new, manly Zionist Jew.²⁵ The tenant farmers on the estate also seem weak and backward to Luminsky at first, "expressing joy by loud hand-clapping and banging on the *darbooka* drums, and . . . expressing grief through uninhibited wailing of a nature unacceptable in my native land" (189-90). But then, precisely at the moment of their eviction, they surprise him: "To my great surprise, however, their custom this time rested on the foundations of nobility

and culture. The tearful women did not burst into mournful cries of lamentation, stifling their moans instead with silent tears.” The Arabs’ apparent coming to terms with their fate evokes sadness rather than contempt in this cultured, European observer. Their “songs of mourning and bad luck” are “heartbreaking” (190). Such empathy and appreciation of the subtlety of the evictees’ expressions of pain are unheard of in Yishuv literature. Hilu takes care to rewrite the many stories of eviction of tenant farmers in that literature while undoing Orientalist, national binaries, replacing them with a “third space”²⁶ in which each side loses its stable locus on the conventional binary system, becoming more complex as a result. The mutual grafting of these loci also shifts the plot of the conventional Zionist narrative. The catastrophe with which the novel ends is common to Jew and Arab alike, and the disinheritance is not destined to produce the expected national outcome: the establishment of a new, Jewish settlement. Thus Hilu completes his unraveling of the dominant Zionist narrative in Yishuv-period literature.

The House of Rajani does not attempt to confront stereotypes with historical truth; its *Rashomon*-like structure cancels a priori any authority or objectivity that is the preserve of the omniscient narrator. It encourages awareness in the reader of the relativity of any given position, of the possibility that opposing political and national views may contaminate each other, becoming inextricably intertwined. Salah’s journal entries also include turnarounds and transitions similar to those found in Kalvarisky’s diaries, and the juxtaposition of Luminsky and Salah’s prose reifies the cultural and political situation responsible for each of their points of view, ultimately highlighting the similarities rather than the differences between them. Where Luminsky notes the rude speech of the Arabs, Salah records that the Jews “spoke in loud voices, their language a stammering, jammering gibberish like the cackling of cranes” (80). He notes the “crude and chattering bare-armed women . . . [who] argued vociferously with the men while the men dressed in strange, long-sleeved garments and black hats, some with newspapers spread before them, read just as I do” (*ibid.*). Where Luminsky highlights the estate owner’s effeminacy, Salah admiringly records his sleeping father’s manliness: “his large feet stretched out on a small stool, his massive, muscled arms splayed across the pillows and mats, his grand moustache, black and dense, moving slightly with his snoring” (92).

The conventional differences in perception and later the similarities in viewpoint between the two writers are, however, less interesting than the dynamic splits within Salah's own character. He is imbued with a manly obligation to avenge his father's death in keeping with Muslim tradition, but at the same time is gripped by a feminine desire to take his own life, like the Arab girl who drowns herself in the river. This doubling includes an unstable sexual identity as well. Salah's choice to drown himself, and the fact that he dresses in his mother's wedding clothes to do it, resonate with his quasi-erotic attraction to his friend Luminsky. This lack of gender clarity contributes not only to the portrayal of a complex psyche, but also to the relativity of the concept of identity itself. Identity becomes flexible and multifaceted the moment it is no longer understood merely as a formation of traits, or as a fixed, a-historical longing but rather as a framework for action, as a process of identification in flux.²⁷ Instead of a stable structure of cultural and gender identity, the novel portrays a liminal state encompassing the relative and contradictory positions of each of the characters with regard to themselves and to the other.

MADNESS AND PROPHECY AS WESTERN CULTURAL MODELS

Hilu situates Salah in a twilight zone between realism and the fantasy of legend, and veers between belief in his visions and his own sense that he is mentally ill, a sense reinforced by those around him, including the Arab doctor who recommends committing him to a mental hospital. This constant questioning of Salah's mental state (by himself and others) puts his uncertainty about his own identity at the center of the novel. Hilu focuses more on Salah's angst than on his dire prophecies about the future Jewish takeover of the country and the expulsion of its Arab inhabitants. Although the twenty-first-century reader is ironically aware of the veracity of these prophecies, in the novel even Salah's fellow Arabs do not know what to make of them.

The way *The House of Rajani* depicts the Arabs' inner psychological world, laying the characters open so that the reader can trace in them the fine line between sanity and madness, constitutes a broadening of scope in Hebrew literature.²⁸ From the beginning of the twentieth century there have been many portrayals in Hebrew

literature of Jews going mad, and modernist writing is profoundly concerned with people's ability to deal with such psychological abysses, with Yosef Hayim Brenner and S. Y. Agnon as the most prominent examples. Treatment of Arab characters' inner workings, by contrast, has been consistently avoided. Arabs have always been pictured as believing in all sorts of ghosts and demons, but only in order to signal a cultural, anthropological trait of the foreign and backward Orient, rather than to teach anything about the multifaceted humanity of Arabs or the hollowness of simplistic, clear distinctions between different peoples or between West and East.

Hilu's narrative of the Arab, then, is far distanced from the Orientalist imagination, approximating more closely that most authoritative of Western narratives in which madness is portrayed as resulting from the insuperability of sin and guilt that cannot be successfully repressed. His somewhat excessive use of scenes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*²⁹ is intended to lend the Arab narrative a Western stamp alongside the explicit Muslim Arab cast deriving from its linguistic affinity to *A Thousand and One Nights*. The reader is liable to read the ghost of the father appearing to Salah in order to demand vengeance, haunting Salah because of his inability to carry out the revenge, as a typical Arab story because of the ghosts and demons in it, but the novel redirects his reader toward an entirely Western context. Echoes of Shakespeare resonate in the insanity that ultimately consumes the characters, reifying not their Arabness but their humanity, the vast suffering endured by people who have been disinherited.

Besides Shakespeare, the novel also acknowledges the important biblical tradition of the prophet, the spiritual man who is thought mad by those around him but who is, in fact, a truth-teller come before his time. Poetry of the Revival Period (in which the story is set) favored such characters, and most major writers from Bialik onward featured them as articulators of national values and critics of the public views to which they took exception. Hebrew prose fiction, by contrast, has not commonly featured the prophet as a character. The beggarly appearance of a figure corresponding with the poet Imber³⁰ in *The House of Rajani* confirms the marginal status, culturally and socially, of the seer, as he is called here.³¹ The popularity of the "Hatikva" poet among members of the First Aliyah derived from his being an entertainer, writing songs of "love and desire for the Land of Israel" in order to "[awaken] the emotions of every colonist who then opens his pockets and

gives generously," as well as "[to play] with the women" (Hilu, *Rajani*, 170). His nickname "Wildebeest" constitutes a parodic representation of the man of culture and of the actual spiritual poverty of the First Aliyah (138, 277).³² It is not the Jewish poet but Salah, the Arab boy, who ultimately plays the role of prophet in an original and authentic fashion, through a connection with higher powers that put words into his mouth, bringing social disdain upon him all the while. Like the prophecies of Mohammed which are considered authentic in Moslem tradition because they were written in fluent Arabic, a language which the Prophet never learned at that level but rather acquired through divine revelation, the boy's prophecies are an object of wonder: "The Arabic I spoke was pure and literary and flawless, as if Allah's verses were falling from heaven and landing straight on my tongue, and all the listeners were gripped by a holy spirit" (228).

S. Yizhar describes collective Arab protest in traditional Jewish terms in his story *Khirbet kbizeh* (1949) because of the prestige of the prophet in Hebrew culture and his legitimacy as national supporter but also critic. The story describes the occupation of an Arab village and the expulsion of its inhabitants during the War of Independence. The narrator is uncomfortable about the expulsion, although he cannot express his discomfort explicitly to his brothers-in-arms. But when he looks at the villagers who have been collected together by IDF soldiers before being loaded onto trucks, he thinks about the prophet who was likely to emerge from among them and raise his voice in anguish: "I wanted to discover if among all these people there was a single Jeremiah mourning and burning, forging a mouth of fury in his heart, crying out in stifled tones to the old God in Heaven, atop the trucks of exile."³³ Besides this remark, neither Yizhar's story nor later Hebrew texts confront the collective rage of the expelled Arabs. Hilu seems to be up for the challenge but only hints at it, utilizing instead a version of the Jewish prophet foreseeing the future of relations between Jews and Arabs in the Land of Israel. Nevertheless, Hilu's apocalyptic imagination largely overlooks political questions, focusing instead on an Arab boy whose prophetic truth lies in the shadow of his deeply sensitive and imaginative character, and who is himself not convinced of his own prophecy's validity. This ambivalence redeems the novel from ideological superficiality, managing to combine politics with cultural and psychological depth, thus elucidating the complexity of the interaction between Jews and Arabs.

NONZIONIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

Post-colonialist thought deals extensively with cartography as a means of colonialist control over subjects. Jose Rabasa argues that the atlas published in the West in the seventeenth century demonstrates that the Eurocentric organization of space institutionalized the systematic erasure of prior representations of space.³⁴ The Western assumption that a space prior to colonization was a blank page forces the native to view himself as Other. But this colonialist desire fails to stabilize itself; the certainty of the map is punctured by blind spots that expose its apparent universality and objectivity as merely the point of view of Western cartographers. These blind spots facilitate an alternative, non-European reading of a map aspiring to appear universal. In fact, it contains within it the deconstruction of Eurocentric positions, making present third world (or rest of the world) points of view.³⁵ Such critique of the internal contradictions of colonial cartography is consistent with Homi Bhabha's argument with respect to the ambivalence of any colonial discourse that entails its own annulment.³⁶

These positions serve to elucidate the representation of the Israeli/Palestinian map in the novel. The Arabic map whose names were erased or Hebraized during the twentieth century is restored here. Thus there is mention of Jaffa, Tiberias, Wadi Khanin (Nes Ziona), Zamarin (Zichron Yaacov), Wadi Musrara (Nahal Ayalon), Nablus (Shchem), Al Quds (Jerusalem), the El-Ouja river (Hayarkon), Sumeil (Tel Aviv), and Jemasin (Ramat Gan), among others. These names reconstruct the pre-Zionist, rural space in which the novel is set. For the first time in Hebrew literature, the late nineteenth-century Palestine represented here is not an empty, desolate land waiting for the occupiers but a country flourishing long before the interference of Zionist pioneers: "I could see the farmers working in their fields and the sun in the heavens shining powerfully and the trees with many deep roots, and all was in place and at peace for eternity" (214). A picture of stable landholding is intimated both by the Eden known as the Rajani estate and lately by the three Azrieli towers in Tel Aviv that appear to wipe out all evidence of any Arab past. This process of making two maps present simultaneously, the official versus the repressed (reflecting the repressed Arab collective), extends the limits of Israeli memory by acknowledging the relevance of the space of the Other—the Palestinian homeland. The cartographic

representation of space ceases to be self-explanatory and is exposed as a political position perpetuating national power relations.³⁷

The House of Rajani does not relate to what is thought of as the most significant watershed in the history of Jewish–Arab relations in the Land of Israel: the establishment of the State of Israel and the War of Independence in 1948. Instead, the novel explores the outset of this conflictual relationship, during the First Aliyah. Zionist historiography tends to see the First Aliyah period as a relatively innocent time, more or less as the pioneers themselves saw it. Conventionally, worsening of the national struggle is traced to later events: the Young Turk Revolution (1908) that led to the rise of Arab national consciousness viewing Jewish settlement as a threat;³⁸ the Balfour Declaration (1917), understood as the first international recognition of the Zionists’ intention to create a Jewish national home in Palestine; the Arab riots of 1929, perceived as a point of transition between local Arab resistance to country-wide military organization, and the Arab Revolt (1936–39), understood as a declaration of war on the British Mandate and especially on the Jewish settlement, and as a critical point in the settlers’ shift from a defensive to an offensive position.³⁹ Hilu’s novel, by contrast, traces the entire historical entanglement to its starting point, depicting what was to emerge as an archetype of what was to come, particularly the 1948 expulsion described in Salah’s prophecies about “the calamity of the Arab peoples” (168).⁴⁰ The future conflict is intimated also in Luminsky’s Zionist slips of the tongue: he threatens the tenant farmers that if they don’t work well enough, he will “have [them] evicted to another land” and “they [will have to] leave behind all that is dear to them, all of their dreams, and find themselves in a new land” (175, 190). The eviction of the farmers, effected by taking over the estate and burning their cabins so that they lose any hope of returning, is clearly a precursor of the expulsion of Arab villagers in 1948. Salah stands “at the edge of the now-abandoned village, holding his dark head in his hands and crying bitterly” (193). Similarly, future Zionist discourse of the 1930s features in Salah’s observation about the settlers that “they built themselves a wall and tower in which they reside, and they have banned the peasants . . . and who will rise up and fight off this gang of ruffians and their beastly leader?” (178). Especially pointed are descriptions of the expulsion itself, the burning of the village and the looting and rioting that evoke pogroms, while the “cloud of smoke [rising] and [billowing] upward from the scorched shacks and dying

embers (194) constitutes imagery clearly evocative of the Jewish Holocaust. This deliberate anachronism traces precursors of future historical periods back to an apparently innocent starting point. Thus, history is understood altogether to be an amplified reprise of the same primal story: the family's catastrophe becomes an allegory of the collective, national experience, while the specific disinheritance of the Rajani estate is understood as an archetype of the broader disinheritance of the Palestinian people. Luminsky's expression of sorrow at the sight of the peasants displaced from their lands ("they made me sad as well") (190) becomes the later Israeli "shoot-and-cry" narrative. Hilu rewrites Zionist history by demarking the fundamental structure that recurs in the relations of the two peoples. Even though in the end the novel takes care to make clear Luminsky's failure to reap the fruits of the Rajanis' expulsion by setting up a Jewish village on the estate lands, it is also clear that this did not stop him from becoming a prominent land purchaser of his time. From that period on, the histories of the Palestinian and Jewish peoples became inextricably tangled because the traumas of disinheritance and disinheritance alike were erased, thus failing to stop the process, or even to slow it down.

The integration of a new examination of Jewish historical memory from the First Aliyah and the awakening of Palestinian memory marks what Michael Rothberg calls "multidirectional memory," with differing national memories being understood as complementary rather than mutually exclusive:

The understanding of collective remembrance that I put forward in *Multidirectional Memory* challenges the basic tenets and assumptions of much current thinking on collective memory and group identity. Fundamental to the conception of competitive memory is a notion of the public sphere as a pre-given, limited space in which already-established groups engage in a life-and-death struggle. In contrast, pursuing memory's multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction. Equally fundamental to the conception of competitive memory is the notion that the boundaries of

memory parallel the boundaries of group identity. . . . As I struggle to achieve recognition of *my* memories and *my* identity, I necessarily exclude the memories and identities of others. Openness to memory’s multidirectionality puts this last assumption into question as well. Memories are not owned by groups—nor are groups “owned” by memories. . . . those who understand memory as a form of competition see only winners and losers in the struggle for collective articulation and recognition. But attention to memory’s multidirectionality suggests a more supple social logic. . . . the examples of multidirectional memory explored here are much too ambivalent and heterogeneous to reduce too quickly to questions of winning and losing.⁴¹

Rothberg articulates an alternative to a conception of collective memory as static and rooted in a static sense of identity. Instead, he suggests a dynamic understanding of memory and identity, so that a range of different memories may share a dialogic space. His discussion of Holocaust memorial extracts it from an exclusively Jewish purview and assigns it to a space shared by other national memories of other holocausts (such as African American slavery or the Armenian Holocaust). His commentary is relevant to less obvious calamities also, including the Palestinians’ loss of their homeland and other events of communal loss that Zionist memory has attempted to silence or obscure. The simultaneous presence of the two memories and their integration—thanks to their similarity but also because of the contradictions between them—constitutes the most significant contribution of the novel to Israeli discourse, not only about Palestinian identity but also about the historical conditions from which it emerged.

To return to Palestinian history is to situate the experience of Arab exile center stage, in distinct contrast to the representation of Arabs in Hebrew literature before Hilu. Through analogies between the displacements of various characters—the genies from their realm as well as the Arabs from the Rajani estate and the imaginary characters whose stories Salah weaves (258)⁴²—the destructive import of exile is reinforced as a powerful representation of the Arabs’ fate.

Hilu’s portrayals of the Arab as introverted and restrained, and the development of a language to represent his inner world, do not come at the expense of a popular,

folklorist aspect, however. Hilu describes the suffering of a select, particularly sensitive few, which is of a part with the general suffering of the Arab people, expressed according to their tradition. The Arabs' parting ceremony before leaving their land for the north, where they will purportedly be given alternative lands, is accompanied by the singing of "an old song of a farmer separated from his land" (192). The strong impression left on Luminsky by this farewell ("[it] was then that I understood for the first time, with all my heart, just how bound the Arab is to his land") (190), which would accompany him his whole life, demonstrates just how meaningful Arabs' experience of exile was. Hilu's novel constitutes a significant response to the systematic erasure of this experience by Hebrew and Israeli literature in various periods, as part of a hegemonic narrative aspiring to silence all traces of Palestinian memory and history.

A LITERARY "THIRD SPACE"

In an article about the demarcation of a Mizrahi perspective, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin argues that writing Mizrahi history does not mean writing the history of the Mizrahim or including them in the hegemonic narrative, since that would subjugate them to the limits of colonial discourse. Instead, one must adopt an ambivalent perspective that merges the ruling colonists' view with that of their subjects, undoing the binary division between them. Such writing can function as a "counter-history" to the dominant Zionist history.⁴³

Even without assigning Hilu's work to the rubric of Mizrahi writing, this comment is apposite since it points to an ambivalence in his writing that does not directly replace the Zionist with the Palestinian national view. Instead, it undermines such a binary division, and is able to move freely between the two conflicting positions, blurring the supposedly stable and clearly demarcated borders between them. Bhabha coined the term *third space* to denote just this fluid alternative. He states emphatically that resistance, or any counter-narrative, is first of all expressed by introducing ambivalence that challenges common divisions, thus promoting the formation of hybrids rather than mutually exclusive positions.⁴⁴ In the kind of political-cultural context discussed here, literature and this novel in particular are able to contain and even undermine oppositional thinking, and this is the substance of its subversion, its radical quality.

Bhabha argues elsewhere that reconstructing history retroactively is important because it allows one to rewrite and thereby to reactivate, to resituate, the past, lending it new meaning. No less important is the fact that by rewriting history, we can understand it in terms of an ethic of survival, enabling us to deal with present reality. Such a reworking liberates us from deterministic repetition of an inevitable, unchanging history. It allows us to see that our image of the past is contingent upon a cultural and social context, so that it is also subject to change.⁴⁵ Thus we should also read Hilu's text as an attempt to write an alternative historiography, neither Zionist nor post-Zionist but rather critical, concerned with the same issues as the canonical one (itself critical in certain respects). This new writing occupies a literary “third space” in its digression from the existing national narrative. It is multidirectional in Rothberg's sense, in that it can represent both victim and victor's points of view as well as the relations between them. Hilu's historiography participates in the Jewish–Arab political reality it describes, despite being dissociated from power systems, as Walter Benjamin recommended for Marxist historians.⁴⁶ Such a historiography imagines the Palestinian point of view as equal in standing to the hegemonic, national one. Not only does Hilu read national history and the place of the Arab within it anew, but he signals the instability of national categories, their tendency to merge and thereby to create an intermediate space. The Arab in Hilu's novel is immeasurably more complex and interesting than the familiar Arab as imagined by Hebrew and Israeli fiction in the past, both because he is understood through a lens of post-colonialism inconsistent with the dominant Israeli historiography and because his human and collective experience are presented with unprecedented power.

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NOTES

- 1 Smadar Hertzfeld, *Inta omri* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 1994).
- 2 Abraham B. Yehoshua, *The Liberated Bride*, trans. Hillel Halkin (Orlando: Harcourt, 2003).
- 3 Yitzhak Laor, *Hinei adam* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me'uchad, 2002).

- 4 Sami Michael, *Yonim beTrafalgar* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006).
- 5 Eli Amir, *Yasmin*, trans. Yael Lotan (London: Halban, 2012).
- 6 Michal Govrin, *Hevzekim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2002).
- 7 Regarding the abundance of examples of literary representation of the experience of the Other: Ashkenazi representations of Mizrahim, Jews representing Christians or Muslims, men representing women and vice versa—this absent representation shows a consistent denial of the Palestinian perspective in Israeli literature.
- 8 These terms are Stephen Greenblatt's; he argues (in a paper on Shakespeare and the Renaissance) that the dominant cultural order can itself generate subversiveness and exploit it for its own ends. The binary division into containment and subversiveness implies two complementary processes, both of which are the product of the dominant order. See Stephen Jay Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 37.
- 9 Alon Hilu, *The House of Rajani*, trans. Evan Fallenberg (London: Harvill Secker, 2010), 192. In the original Hebrew text, the estate owner's name is Dag'ani, and the historical figure Kalvarisky's name is preserved, whereas in Fallenberg's translation the name is fictionalized to Luminsky.
- 10 Alon Hilu, *Death of a Monk*, trans. Evan Fallenberg (London: Harvill Secker, 2007).
- 11 From Alon Hilu's website, http://www.alonhilu.com/home_h.html (translation mine).
- 12 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 17.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 14 Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 93–94.
- 15 See in this context Yafa Berlovitch, *Lehamzi eretz, lehamzi am—sifrut ha'aliya harishona* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me'uchad, 1996); Yochai Oppenheimer, *Meiever lagader—yitsug haAravi basiporet haIvrit vebaYisraelit 1906–2005* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2008), 22–51.
- 16 The term is Said's. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
- 17 See also Fanon's comment: "At times this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly it turns him into an animal. In fact, the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms.

He speaks of the yellow man’s reptilian motions, of the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulations. When the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary.” Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965), 34.

- 18 “From the moment I set foot on the land of this estate you tried to take advantage of me, to strip me bare,” Luminsky complains to Afifa, and the reader understands that, in fact, the opposite is the case. Luminsky tended not only to undress Afifa and take her whenever he had the chance, and then to threaten that he would expose her adultery in public, but also and above all he worked to disinherit her of her estate. This reverse rhetoric is set in juxtaposition with his ingenuousness: “I have risen each time at the sound of your alarm and done what you have requested, and now, when this once I come to you to ask for something in return—a worthless piece of paper hidden somewhere among your treasures—at once you estrange yourself from me and wash your hands of me” (176).
- 19 The following is a further example of this: “For days and weeks I have toiled to cause the estate to flourish and be beautiful, to console the Arab woman on the loss of her husband, and even to bring goodness and benevolence to the citizens of the world. And what is my recompense?” (ibid., 150). Hiding the national substance behind apparently universal values is typical of the rhetoric of blindness embodied by Luminsky.
- 20 Alon Hilu, “‘Sipuro shel kelev shahid’: kria postcolonialit beTmol Shilshom me’eit S. Y. Agnon,” *Ho 4* (2006): 54–66 (translation mine).
- 21 See Homi Bhabha, “The Third Space,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutholry (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207–221.
- 22 Hemda Ben Yehuda does write the liminal in a refreshing, unprecedented manner, but among male writers it is marginal and generally operates externally, such as in the Jewish guard who looks, dresses, and behaves like an Arab. See Oppenheimer, *Meiver lagader*, 39–42.
- 23 In “Sipuro shel kelev shahid,” Hilu uses the description of a mad dog from Tractate Yoma of the Babylonian Talmud (83b): “His mouth is open and his saliva drips and his ears are pricked and his tail is down between his legs as he walks by the wayside.” The image in the novel recalls parodically Agnon’s description of the dog “Balak,” which derives from the same source.

- 24 Salah's prophecy (recalled on the same page) that Luminsky's as yet unborn daughter would die aged two, also troubles him deeply.
- 25 See Michael Gluzman, *Haguf haZioni: leumiut, migdar uminiut besifrut haIvrit habadasba* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me'uchad, 2007). The figure of an angel constitutes another transfer of imagery between Jew and Arab. At the start of their relationship, Salah sees his friend as an angel but then later on Salah's sensitive, introverted nature to the point of sickness, together with his alienation from the rude reality around him, lends him an angelic aspect in the eyes of the Jew.
- 26 Bhabha, "The Third Space."
- 27 See Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity?'" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and P. D. Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 1–17.
- 28 In *The Smile of the Lamb*, trans. Betsy Rosenberg (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990), David Grossman portrays a blind, old, and strange Arab storyteller named Khilmi. His unusualness is taken for insanity in his insulated village, whereas the idealistic soldier Uri finds sympathy with Khilmi's humanity and his political position, and certainly does not think he is insane. Until Hilu, Grossman was the only Hebrew writer to address such unusualness in the Arab's inner world.
- 29 Salah suspects that his father was poisoned by his mother and her Jewish lover in order that the latter might acquire the estate. The ghost of his dead father appears first to the tenant farmers working in the orchard, like the ghost of Old Hamlet who appears to the soldiers Marcellus and Bernardo and only later to Hamlet himself (*Hamlet* I.1 and 4). Salah's hesitations as to whether to murder the person he suspects of his father's murder recall those of Hamlet. The graveyard scene in Act V of *Hamlet*, in which Hamlet encounters the gravediggers and exchanges words with a skull held in his hand, is reprised here (235–36). Naima bint Naim, whose skull the gravedigger shows Salah, is a rewriting of the drowned Ophelia, conflated with Yorrick (*Hamlet* V.1). The plan to remove Salah to an institution recalls Claudius's attempt to remove Hamlet from the court of Denmark (III.3). Afifa, who betrayed her husband in life and is haunted by him after his death, is reminiscent of Hamlet's mother Gertrude. Her madness is touched with elements associated with Lady Macbeth who has plotted to murder the reigning King Duncan and who in her insanity after the act wrings her hands constantly, in an obsessive attempt to wash them clean of the "damned spot" of Duncan's innocent blood (*Macbeth* V.1.37). Luminsky's madness also recalls Macbeth, who is stunned by the fulfillment of the witches' catastrophic prophecy that his end will come when Birnam Wood marches to Dunsinane (V.6.33).

- 30 The name is absent from the English translation.
- 31 Here again, Shakespeare is ironically evoked in the figure of the Fool, the wise entertainer, truth teller, comforter of melancholy aristocrats and critical commentator on the action. (I would like to thank Dr. Rebecca Gillis for this idea.)
- 32 Imber is dubbed “the beggar poet” in the novel, and his consultations with others about his poems are described contemptuously. The most famous line of Imber’s most famous verses—the Israeli national anthem—“od lo avda tikvatenu” (“our hope has not yet vanished”) is written, so the novel would have it, not by Imber but by Luminsky (Hilu, *Rajani*, 138, 277).
- 33 S. Yizhar, *Khirbet khizeh*, trans. Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2008), 105.
- 34 Jose Rabasa, “Allegories of the Atlas,” in *Europe and Its Others*, vol. 2, ed. F. Barker et al. (Colchester: Essex University Press, 1985), 6.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 36 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85–91.
- 37 Hanan Hever draws our attention to Emil Habibi’s novel *Abtaye*, which “points to and insists on the remembrance, and thus the continued existence, of the Arabic name, repeatedly pointing to incommensurate histories, one in Hebrew and one in Arabic: ‘The street was called HeHalutz (The Pioneer) Street, *Tali* in Arabic. That is why we are not allowed, for historic reasons, to translate the name into Arabic. Unlike our Jewish brethren who took a lot of the old Arab street names in the city and translated or even changed them. Thus El-Natzra (Nazareth) Street became Israel Bar Yehuda Street; and King Faisal Square, in front of the Hijazi Train Station became Golani Brigade Street. But when they wrote the name in Arabic on the sign, like most signs in the country, they wrote it in bad Arabic spelling, so it came out H’atibat Julani, which means Julani’s fiancées. And I, before I had acquired the necessary military information, was of the impression that Julani was some Israeli Don Juan who had many mistresses and so as not to seem rude they were called ‘fiancées.’” Hanan Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 209, citing Emil Habibi, *Abataye*, 38.
- 38 Eliezer Be’eri, *Reshit hasichsuch Yisrael-arav 1882–1911* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, Haifa University Press, 1985).
- 39 Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force 1881–1948* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

- 40 Interestingly, the English translation avoids use of the word *holocaust* to translate *shoah*, the word used here in the original Hebrew text.
- 41 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 5–6.
- 42 Salah’s characters Leila and Rashid beg him “to finish their stories and give them closure and purpose, for without these they, too, will walk between worlds, from shadow to shadow and from darkness to darkness, like ghosts condemned to endless wandering, never to find their eternal resting place.” Hilu, *Rajani*, 258.
- 43 Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective,” in *Orientalism and the Jews*, ed. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press; Hanover N.H.: New England University Press, 2005), 162–81.
- 44 Bhabha, “The Third Space.”
- 45 Homi Bhabha, “Culture’s In-Between,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 53–60.
- 46 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations* (London: Fontana Books, 1992), 258–59.