

Hegemony inside and out: Nathan Alterman and the Israeli Arabs

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This article examines the political protest expressed by Nathan Alterman over the years in poems published in the newspapers. It argues that this criticism identifies with the hegemonic political values rather than articulate alternative ones, in an attempt to nurture self-criticism on the part of the government regarding its failures and mistakes. This type of criticism seeks to preserve the reigning hegemony from within and to ensure that it projects an image of moral rectitude.

Keywords: Nathan Alterman; Israel; poetry; Israeli Arabs; state of emergency; criticism of violence; humanitarianism

Throughout his long career Nathan Alterman remained consistent in his attitude to Israel's wars. He was the leading poet of his time and during the War of Independence wrote many poems describing it as the finest hour of a people regaining sovereignty in the Land of Israel.¹ The ethos of sacrifice that Alterman shaped in his work beginning in the early 1940s set the standard for an entire generation of younger poets.² The 1956 Sinai Campaign inspired him to write elegies to Israel's victory and to its renewed connection with Mount Sinai.³ The 1967 Six Day War inspired similar work. Dan Laor argues that Alterman's post-1967 lexicon and rhetoric in support of the idea of a 'Greater Israel' are consistent in both style and content with his earlier poetry that spoke of 'great Zionism' in the name of Jewish history and its messianic destiny.⁴ His unswerving faith in the justice of the War of Independence and its historical importance for the establishment of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel places Alterman squarely within the hegemonic discourse of the time, blinding him to the Palestinian Arab tragedy – in contrast to his contemporary S. Yizhar, whose novella *Khirbet Khizeh* became a template for criticism of the justice of the war and a powerful literary model that influenced Yizhar's peers for years.⁵

Political protest in wartime

Unlike Yizhar, Alterman expressed no criticism of the expulsion of Arabs during the War of Independence. Even in *Ir Hayona* (City of the Dove), a collection of

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poems written in the mid-1950s, he described the abandonment of Jaffa by its inhabitants in a way that absolved the IDF and the political leadership of any moral responsibility, referring to it as an outcome of the war to which the Jews were not even a contributing factor: 'From the East she will dream of a theft lying in wait / and in the sea lurks the anxiety of her escape. / Because she is forbidden the sky and the sea'.⁶ By observing that Jaffa's Arabs were dreaming of theft and planning violence against the Jewish Yishuv at the very moment of escape in ships, he laid responsibility for their bitter fate on the shoulders of the Arabs themselves. The ending of the poem even entrusted the fate of the refugees to the sea and sky, rather than to any people, especially not to the war's victors. The Arabs' flight was similarly neutralized in the following lines: 'because in fire a settled plot of land exchanges / owner, in the whirligigs of time'.⁷

Alterman did exert his critical authority in exceptional situations, when the war exposed an unnecessary use of violence. One such example is his poem 'About This', written after Israel's occupation of the village of Dweima, in the south Hebron hills, during which tens of Arabs were killed – an event that caused an uproar in political and military circles.⁸ The poem began with a description of the killing and went on to describe it as a war crime:

He crossed the occupied town in a Jeep –
 A strong armed lad, a brave young soldier!
 And in that particular street were an old man and a woman
 They shrank from him against the wall ...
 And the lad smiled a milky toothed smile
 'I'll give my machine gun a try' and he tried it out!
 The old man could only cover his eyes with his hands
 And his blood covered the wall...
 Because those bearing weapons, and we together with them
 Whether actively
 Or through acquiescence
 Are pushed to the realm of war criminals
 by murmurs of 'necessity' or 'vengeance'.

This text was unprecedented in Hebrew poetry in its willingness to view the event as a war crime, even pointing out that it was not an isolated incident since 'there are even more daring ones! It is no secret'. Laor argues that the emphasis is on the "cruelty" with which what "had to be done" was carried out, rather than expulsion by order'.⁹ But Alterman was not interested in focusing on cruelty – to which he devoted the beginning of the poem – but rather on the absence of public response to it. Assuming that such unpremeditated cruelty could not be altogether avoided, though this instance was by no means isolated, Alterman above all condemned the forgiving response to it. He directed the reader's attention to the occult collaboration between war crimes and public discourse which tended to downplay the violence by means of linguistic laundering or by ignoring it altogether. The poet was not interested in the fate of murdered Arabs but rather in the fact that there was no public outcry about them. This absence of response was liable to breach the moral front of the war and the moral code of 'purity of arms'

by which he believed IDF soldiers to be bound. He embraced the standpoint of the national leadership regarding the war, its aims and conduct, seeing himself as responsible for developing a critical channel which he sees as the only guarantee of rectitude and innocence of wrongdoing on the part of the political establishment. David Ben-Gurion, who understood the cathartic potential of the poem and its tone of protest, overruled military censorship by ordering that it be printed on postcards and distributed to IDF soldiers. This catharsis enabled Alterman, even via this protest poem, to obligate the national consensus to grant the war full legitimacy since it was a 'war of the people, standing intrepidly / against the seven armies / of the kings of the East'.¹⁰ In a later version of the poem, published in the *Hatur Hashvi'i* collection, Alterman even included an introduction remarking on Ben-Gurion's decision to disseminate the poem: 'This act, uncommon in the war, is deserving of an elegy, both in terms of substance and of inner excellence and strength'.¹¹ Alterman's work did not therefore challenge hegemonic norms and values from within but rather served as an internal, critical tool with which to discern deviations from its own normative framework, and to demand their exclusion.

The permanent state of emergency and humanitarian criticism

At the height of the 1948 war, the provisional government declared a state of emergency that stayed in place until the abolition of military rule for the Arab sector in 1966. Carl Schmitt describes the ability to declare a state of emergency, thereby temporarily suspending the rule of law, as an expression of sovereign power. He identifies the source of sovereign authority not in broad-based agreement but in the forcible taking of power by the sovereign, thus voiding limits set on the use of force while pointing out the affinity between politics and theology. The ability of the sovereign power to suspend civil law and to declare a state of emergency is compared to the ability attributed to God to intervene in reality by suspending the laws of nature and carrying out miracles.¹² Contemporary thinkers, on the other hand, do not see the rule of law as opposing the state of emergency but rather as putting it into practice. Since Western democracies have had to deal constantly with the risk, both real and imagined, of terrorism of one sort or another they create a middle legal ground which is neither a conventional state of war nor of peace. The difference between emergency and normality is therefore liable to be blurred. If immediate circumstances permit unacceptable power to be used against terrorist suspects (to extract information from them about planned terrorist attacks for example), one may assume that 'present circumstance' is transformed into a reality indefinitely extended into the future, controlling not only the lives of the prisoners and the fate of constitutional and international law, but also the very ways in which the future may or may not be thought about.¹³ Following discussions held in the United States regarding the legality of torture, particularly in light of events at the Guantanamo Bay prison, Slavoj Žižek wrote that one stands at the edge of a period in which states of emergency will become the norm, lending

ever growing legitimacy to the suspension of civil liberties, because of a need to allow countries to exert their sovereign power without having to answer to the limits of the law. This, he argues, is a 'paradoxical' situation because of the blurring of the difference between peace and ongoing states of emergency.¹⁴

This paradox, apparent to all since 1990s, has also been the guiding principle in Israel's early years, when the rule of law applied to its Jewish citizens while its Arab citizens were subject (until 1966) to martial law. Even after the dismantling of military rule, the Arabs have not achieved full equal status. Legally, they are equal citizens but in effect they are discriminated against in administrative, legal and government spheres, and are still liable to become subject to emergency ordinances.

Alterman was one of the few writers who referred to the situation of Arabs as second-class citizens. He demanded that the state, and particularly the security forces, respect the Arabs' fundamental human rights, but did not challenge the negation of those rights under emergency ordinances or military rule. This separation of the humanitarian and the political, of human and civil rights, is typical of Alterman. Humanitarian organizations may identify people living a 'bare life', in Giorgio Agamben's terms, in need of help and protection. 'The sacred and inalienable rights of man', which were once the basis for civil rights, are increasingly viewed separately from the political imperatives that perpetuate a bare life repressed and removed to the margins of nation states. Refugees, a mass phenomenon of our times, are an example of what Agamben calls 'bare life' of individuals or groups whose protection under the law has been denied and who remain vulnerable to violent abuse on the part of the state.¹⁵

Alterman's humanism is actually only humanitarianism which to all intents and purposes collaborates with the sovereign state and its exclusion of Arabs from the political sphere, despite their participation in parliamentary life in Israel, including representation in the Knesset. The few instances he relates to are liable to reify the Arabs' 'bare life'. In a piece titled 'The Necessities of Security' published on 14 July 1950, for example, he talks about the search of Arab villages in the Galilee by security forces which provoked anger among the Arab community, as well as harsh responses by Arab Knesset Members because of the violent and inconsiderate behaviour of the searchers:

The word of the regime
Is intrepidly insistent:
'It's a necessity of security!' – End of argument.
Children were torn from their mothers with rifle butts
So now we're all more secure.¹⁶

In another poem, published on 7 September 1951, Alterman remarked sarcastically on the arrest of a suspect:

One person looked suspicious
to an IDF soldier from Bnei Yehuda
and he ordered him to 'Stop!' –
and an order is an order.¹⁷

He also spoke out on 9 January 1953 against the notion of 'military secrets' when used to avoid bringing soldiers who had murdered Arabs to trial: 'Even the Knesset, having debated the matter, stated in an obfuscated statement that they too were silent accomplices to a crime, and that there had been 'disproportionate use of force'.¹⁸ In a poem on 12 August 1949, Alterman referred ironically to public opinion which approved soldiers' attack on Arabs sitting at a café with a Jewish girl:

It's a healthy instinct, it's glorious rootedness
 It's the feeling of a man who has fought
 And been victorious
 Who has conquered the Homeland.¹⁹

The poems protesting the state of emergency regarding Israeli Arabs reported not only the denial of their civil but also of their human rights through the use of excessive violence. They repeatedly suggested limiting the state of emergency as far as possible to make it optimally transparent, rational and subject to oversight. Any spontaneous expression of the principle of national separation, such as outbreaks of violence against Arabs both physically and through the press, was, he argued, liable to fracture the moral, non-conflictual image of the state Alterman was anxious to project. The political engagement of his poetry may be read as an attempt on his part to deny the fact that the relations between the State of Israel and its Arab citizens had always constituted a state of emergency, both during the War of Independence and afterwards. His pragmatic, didactic turn did not make the reader aware of the looming threat embodied in the defenceless lives of the country's Arab citizens, but did suggest a way of dealing with it. One way was to bring wrongdoers to trial; another was public outcry. This strategy of repairing the rift repeatedly elided the presence of the state of emergency, rendering it invisible, and as such incapable of contaminating the sovereign majority, of corrupting its actions or seducing it into exercising its sovereign power indiscriminately and amorally.

With regard to military necessity, as with the necessary expulsion of Arabs during the War of Independence, Alterman did not disagree with the principles guiding Israeli policy but rather accepted them as a necessary evil. The poet's identification with power and violence wielded by the state and its representatives evoke Derrida's remarks on parliaments:

The parliaments live in forgetfulness of the violence from which they are born. This amnesic degeneration is not a psychological weakness, it is their *statut* and their structure . . . they practice the political hypocrisy of compromise, the denegation of open violence, the recourse to dissimulated violence belong to the 'spirit of violence' (*Mentalität der Gewalt*) . . . at the same time [they say] to themselves with the sigh of the parliamentarian that this certainly isn't ideal, that, no doubt, this would have been better otherwise but that, precisely, one couldn't do otherwise. Parliamentarism then, is in violence and the renunciation of the ideal. It fails to resolve political conflicts by non-violent speech, discussion, deliberation, in short by putting liberal democracy to work.²⁰

Derrida sharpens the dissonance between the pragmatism of the ruling authority and liberal democracy. Such an ideal is illusory in the context of the State of Israel during the first decade of its existence. But Alterman saw himself as bound to reinforce this illusion. His criticism is directed precisely at that *Mentalität der Gewalt* despite his unequivocal support of the defence policies regarding Israel's Arab population. He would even hold forth in his poems against liberal voices that challenged the morality of the military government, arguing its supposedly necessary evils: 'You can't build a state with kid gloves, / the task is not always clean and liberal minded',²¹ 'The Defence Minister was right when he said that in any case where a weapon is stolen, / there had been and would be a search / despite the ire of the self-righteous and those seeking to find favour!'²² In 1958 Alterman wrote in support of the military government, describing this apparatus as imperative:

And we also knew this: necessity and obligation carry restrictions and shackles.
 Anyone seeking to remove these in protest threatens to uproot the foundations of security. He seeks the good but not for the best ...
 For example: even if it's decided to abolish the military government,
 I'm not sure that any of us may get up one day and demand utter freedom of movement for Arabs in the Jewish towns ...
 Who will dare say 'I'll take responsibility' ... actual, not lip service to responsibility.²³

Alterman's version of a liberal approach involves reducing obvious violence to the minimum required to rule over another people. The critical tone of his poems is directed at those rare occasions on which violence was exposed, since overt violence is a luxury affordable only by totalitarian regimes having no regard for a liberal image. He argues that preserving purity of arms does not necessarily contradict a policy of achieving optimum security.²⁴ But he cannot elide the presence of weapons in civilian space in the State of Israel just as he cannot deny the military state of emergency subsisting within this parliamentary democracy. Such deplorable episodes range from hate speech directed against Arabs in the Knesset and to the murder of civilians such as the 1956 killings in Kfar Kassem.

Rhetoric of equivocation

Alterman's description of this event is usually accompanied by the argument that although on the face of things it is trivial, to be silently passed over, it involves that which exposes an essentially wrong-minded position which ought to be reformed. Typically, the critical stance of the *Tur* poems entailed a constant tension between viewing the event as isolated, at worst a localized problem, and seeing it as casting a blight on the entire governmental apparatus, and thereby requiring a profound soul-searching. This tension, expressed in his equivocating rhetoric, reflected the gap between Alterman's liberal, humanitarian approach and his ideological commitment to the state and its mechanisms. On an ostensive, declarative level, the poem registered shock: 'with conjecture, fury, acute discomfort, a stubborn and exacting sense of oppression, / I read'.²⁵

Sometimes the emotional position of the speaker was expressed by the urgency he felt to write about a particular event suspending all other matters.²⁶ The poems did not, however, describe or concretize the acts of violence, their serious consequences or the point of view of their Arab victims and their vulnerability. A non-empathic, abstract description of the victims was meant to deflect readers' attention from the Arab victim towards Alterman's main focus: catharsis of the Israeli ruling apparatus. The killing of Kfar Qassem villagers, who unwittingly violated a night curfew on the first day of the October 1956 Sinai Campaign, is therefore described in shrouded emotional terms:

As the details of that terrible deed gradually become clear,
Once you discover its darkness and scope which are exposed like a monument, . . .
As details of that terrible deed become clear,
Details which no one lifts a finger to report in writing and not only because of
compulsory censorship.²⁷

Alterman deployed similar rhetoric when referring to less fateful events, such as searches of Arabs' homes. The reader's attention is not directed to the event itself or its victims but to the perpetrator and the political question raised by the poem regarding the way the establishment hid behind a legal proceeding and the lack of appropriate response from Knesset members or other relevant institutions. Alterman's main focus of protest was the fact that the murder of Arabs did not disturb the politicians, does not lead to resignations or the taking of personal and institutional responsibility; did not even evoke an apology. The cover up and denial of excessive violence was the focus of the poem, whose explicit rhetoric always offered a way out of the impossible clash between open violence towards its Arab citizens and the illusion of a liberal, law-abiding regime. Thus the question marks became exclamation marks, prescribing the expected response. When referring to searching for infiltrators from the Arab states, for example, the poem called for the searchers of Galilee villages to curb their violence. When the case in point is of a woman who crossed illegally into the country in order to live with her family, the poem asked to consider the human story, and to relax the principle whereby all infiltrators were deported, regardless of the circumstances. Where soldiers murdered Arabs, he demanded that they be brought to trial in front of a civilian court, and not to hide behind claims of 'military secrets'. He also demanded that censorship of news published in the press should be relaxed so that it would not become a tool with which to cover up crimes. A more urgent demand was that the public be allowed to be cleansed of crimes both great and small. Alterman saw himself as bound to ensure that this public purification took place. His poetry portrayed a healthy society as maintaining moral sensibilities, as recognizing that besides security considerations there were 'other principles, no less important',²⁸ which if upheld can shape a self-image of a civilized society. The violence of ruling an ethnic minority should be balanced by careful respect of elementary human rights and restraint. Thus the *Tur* demanded a 'healthy security policy',²⁹ including restraint during states of emergency. As Alterman wrote after the Kfar Qassem killings:

There can be no human society, no conscious public, not outraged by an event like this and which will not ask (without need of preachers)

How what happened did happen and how what happened could happen

And how and what they must do so that such a thing will not happen again tomorrow.

There cannot be a human society whom such an event will not terrify like a nightmare ...

or not stir up deeply embedded beliefs and not summon commanders and leaders to action or not provoke them to a reckoning and to shoulder responsibility, besides the punishment imposed on the imprisoned perpetrators of the atrocity ...

Because only thus may it be told and determined that this people does not share the guilt of it.³⁰

The circumlocution and disrupted sentences express how difficult it was for Alterman to define those beliefs that should be challenged or where this soul searching was likely to lead. His obfuscation on the ideological, political level was somewhat balanced by the clarity of his emotional rhetoric, constructed around a series of verbs expressing revulsion. This gap between the political and the emotional once again signalled the paradox within which Alterman was ensnared. Instead of abrogating violence and the emergency ordinances backed by law, or alternatively relinquishing the appearance of liberal morality he would like to attribute to the state and its army, Alterman attempted to sustain both. He therefore laid sole responsibility for the crime at the feet of the perpetrators themselves, as did the military court that sentenced them to short prison terms (which were in turn commuted to merely symbolic punishments). He thereby differentiated between the 'criminals' and the public. This demarcation facilitated the conscious catharsis of that public, affirming its morality and the decency of the military government and its laws.³¹

The equivocation typical of Alterman's political poetry was, then, expressed in the combination of his statements of commitment to the national consensus with sharp criticism of events seen as casting a shadow over the rectitude of the political apparatus. This was not radical criticism likely to undermine the consensus, or to challenge the ruling hegemony; on the contrary, it was meant to shore up the consensus and to ensure its integrity. Declarations of reformatory intent recurred in almost all of his poems, attempting to persuade the addressee that even the Israeli army's integrity needed to be taken care of: 'IDF, the notary of your honour / and health demands: interrogate and pick through me! / If I have a blemish, you must fight it at source'.³² At the same time, the demand to activate the legal system as well as to express 'revulsion and anger'³³ were intended to facilitate the public's sublimation of guilt. All these contributed to the creation of a liberal national image which was in fact inconsistent with the power relations operating within Israel. The creation and nurturing of this image during the first decade of the state's existence constituted Alterman's major contribution to public opinion and to the ruling Mapai party leadership. They go towards explaining the public reception of his critical poetry and the iconic national standing he was awarded at that time.

Outside the limits of hegemonic discourse

Hatur Hashvi'i poems sketching out principles of critical sensibility regarding the Arabs in Israel required intellectual, ideological backup as opposed to universal humanitarian articulations. Empathy with the downtrodden, with the mother infiltrating the border with her children, with a murdered child and killed civilians, as well as identification with the persecuted people stripped of their rights and with the victim of indifference and prejudice, only became powerful once Alterman made a subversive analogy between collective Jewish memory of exile, pogroms, flight and suffering, and the Palestinian experience in the State of Israel. 'Two Modes of Defence', published on 31 July 1953, described a previously deported Arab woman, imprisoned after infiltrating the border and returning to her village. A similar fate suffered by Jews, expelled and condemned to wander with no country of their own, was recalled here as the poet lingered over the 'mentality of violence' inflicted on the victims:

Perhaps this country which is bound
by a kind of thread to a specifically Jewish history
and therefore, despite accepted practice and right
may be repelled by certain things and moved to leave off
the endless pursuit of a woman with no ID.³⁴

This poem indirectly made the claim that the adoption of nationalism and force, once the purview of the Jews' persecutors, was a symptom of repression of the Jewish experience of exile. This internalization of violence reflected a desire to cast off the exilic Jew within, and unconsciously to identify with the victimizer.³⁵ In these lines, Alterman dared to expose the repressed, traumatic infrastructure of the Israeli subject as key to understanding his mentality of violence, or what Baruch Kimmerling later called 'Israeli militarism'.³⁶ This exposure was so extreme that only in the 1980s, following the first Lebanon War, did it begin to be heard as part of the critical discourse. Hanoach Levin's play *The Patriot* (1982)³⁷ and Yitzhak Laor's *Ephraim Hozer Latzava* (Ephraim Goes Back to the Army; 1983)³⁸ were at first banned by the censor, signalling the start of a wave of protest alluding to the connection between the repressed trauma of the Holocaust and official policies towards the Palestinians.³⁹

Alterman, for his part, went beyond describing the destructive implications of 'negating exilic ideology' to suggesting that one should go back and examine the experience of exile as an essential curb on aggression, in order to prevent the sovereign state from becoming a 'corrupting tool'.⁴⁰ In the same vein, he criticized the security forces' policy of searches in Arab villages, addressing his criticism not at army personnel but rather at the politicians indifferent to those under their jurisdiction, who resisted any critical examination of the military government's procedures. Here, too, the addressee was asked to recall the exilic Jew within and to identify with him. The poem highlighted the points of similarity between the exilic Jews and the situation of Arab refugees forced to steal back into the country to return to their homes and villages:

How we voted to pass this agenda
 How did you learn this fundamental, all-encompassing principle
 You the Jew, passport forger for generations
 An infiltrator
 The son of an infiltrator's son.⁴¹

Conclusion

Alterman seemed to have the wisdom to discuss the discrimination of Arabs not only from an apologetic position intended to elide the clash between the policies of expulsion and violence and the rule of law and civil equality. He also adopted a subversive stance the moment he became interested in a memory that Israeli culture tended to repress: the memory of weakness. Alterman refused to content himself with the hegemonic narrative of the period viewing exile as a powerful motive for the creation of a different type of Jew, master of his own fate, reliant on his own strength, whose normal existence demanded territorial sovereignty, just as he no longer collaborated with the denial of exilic memory. From the moment sovereignty was established, that exilic memory functioned as an exacting moral principle which must not be neglected. After 1948, the repression of the exilic Jew began to be seen as politically significant since the state's Arab citizens were absorbed into Israeli consciousness as being like him. S. Yizhar activated this exilic memory in a critical fashion, when referring to the expulsion of Arabs during the War of Independence. Alterman later exploited that same memory to express humanitarian sensitivity to those whose lives became exposed because of the negation of their rights. But his approach was far from radical, holding back from acknowledging and taking an interest in the Palestinian national tragedy, or from demanding a reassessment of the status of Arabs as citizens within Israel.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. Hanan Hever, "Hatur Hashvi'i Umilhemet 1948," *Hamerhav Hatziburi* 3 (2009): 9–34.
2. Yochai Oppenheimer, *Hazechut Hagedola Lomar Lo: Shira Politit be-Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnus Press, 2003), 81–102.
3. Dan Laor, "Shirat Haekstaza shel Milhemet Sinai," *Haaretz*, October 6, 1995.
4. Dan Laor, *Hashofar Vehaherev: Masot al Nathan Alterman* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad and Tel Aviv University, 1984), 123–4.
5. War stories influenced by Yizhar's novella include Nathan Shaham's "Shiva Meihem" (1949); Aharon Amir's "Haboker Hahadash" (1949); Shraga Gafni's "Hashevach LeElohim" (1949); Dan Ben Amotz's "Sipur al Hagamal Vehanitza-hon" (1950); and Binyamin Tamuz's "Taharut Shiya" (1951).

6. Nathan Alterman, "Milhemet He'arim," in *Ir Hayona* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1972), 74. All translations of Alterman in this article are by Rebecca Gillis.
7. *Ibid.*, 79.
8. Nathan Alterman, *Hatur Hashvi'i*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1977), 149–51. Many scholars have attributed this poem to the conquest of Lydda in July 1948 despite the fact that it was written four months afterwards. Menahem Finkelstein raised the more likely possibility that the poem actually referred to the conquest of Dweima in November of that year: *Hatur Hashvi'i Vetohar Haneshek: Nathan Alterman al Bitahon, Musar Umishpat* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2011), 151–2.
9. Laor, "Shirat Haekstaza," 124.
10. Alterman, *Hatur Hashvi'i*, 1: 151. Dan Almagor did not discern this double standard when he heaped praise on Alterman for 'his amazing courage'. 'His high moral stance did not prevent him later from harshly criticizing the IDF – which he greatly admired – and its senior officers.' Dan Almagor, "Hatur Hashvi'i Vehaturim Letzido Uveikvotav," *Kesher* 18 (1995): 112–29.
11. *Ibid.*, 129.
12. Carl Schmitt, "Definition of Sovereignty," in *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (London: MIT Press, 1985), 5–15.
13. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 92.
14. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London and New York: Verso), 107.
15. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 131–3.
16. Alterman, *Hatur Hashvi'i*, 1: 279.
17. *Ibid.*, 281.
18. *Ibid.*, 287–8.
19. Nathan Alterman, "Upstanding," in *Hatur Hashvi'i*, vol. 3 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1981), 355.
20. Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," *Cardozo Law Review* 11, no. 5–6 (1990): 921–1045, 1017.
21. Alterman, *Hatur Hashvi'i*, 1: 280.
22. *Ibid.*, 284.
23. Nathan Alterman, *Hatur Hashvi'i*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1978), 368–9.
24. A document titled "The Spirit of the IDF" published by the secretariat of IDF's supreme command in 1994 and laying out the ethical code of conduct of the Israel Defence Forces, contained a similar assumption: 'the purity of arms in the IDF involves the restrained use of weapons and force, while carrying out tasks, only to the extent necessary to execute those tasks, without unnecessary injury to people's life, respect, or possessions, be they soldiers, civilians or especially the helpless in wartime and during routine security operations, during cease fires and in peacetime'. *Techelet: A Journal of Israeli Thought* 2 (1997): 53.
25. Alterman, *Hatur Hashvi'i*, 1: 284.
26. Nathan Alterman, "Thum Hameshulash," in *Hatur hashevi'i*, 2: 355.
27. Alterman, *Hatur hashevi'i*, 2: 355.
28. Alterman, *Hatur hashevi'i*, 1: 295.
29. *Ibid.*, 194.
30. *Hatur Hashvi'i*, 2: 357–8.

31. Ziva Shamir offers an alternative reading which does not see Alterman as ambivalent. She stresses the differences between the poet's position and that of Mapai members, thereby attributing to him an extremely critical stance. This article, on the other hand, argued that Alterman took the party line on board even while protesting deviations from correct procedure. His humanitarianism did not supersede his agreement with received party positions. Ziva Shamir, *Al Et Ve'al Atar: Poetica Upolitica Beyeztirat Alterman* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1999).
32. Alterman, *Hatur Hashvi'i*, 1: 286.
33. Alterman, *Hatur Hashvi'i*, 2: 356.
34. Alterman, *Hatur Hashvi'i*, 1: 294.
35. Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (New York: International Universities Press, 1946), 75–81.
36. Baruch Kimmerling, "Patterns of Militarism in Israel," *European Journal of Sociology* 34, no. 2 (1993), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003975600006640>.
37. Hanoch Levin, "Hapatrot," in *Ma Ichpat Latzipor: Ma'archonim Vepizmonim* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1993), 105–38.
38. Yitzhak Laor, *Ephraim Hozer Latzava: Mahazeh Be'ehad Asar Tmunot* (Tel Aviv: Timon, 1987).
39. See in this connection Yehuda Elkana, who argues that Israel's aggressive attitude to the Palestinians derives from deep existential anxiety rooted in 'interpretations of the lessons of the Holocaust, and the readiness to believe that the entire world is against us and that we constitute the eternal victim'. He sees the consequent violence which Israelis have difficulty freeing themselves of as 'Hitler's tragic victory' (Yehuda Elkana, "Bezhut Hashicheha," *Haaretz*, March 2, 1988).
40. Alterman, *Ir Hayona*, 146.
41. Alterman, *Hatur Hashvi'i*, 1: 279.