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Translation and the
Colonial Encounter:
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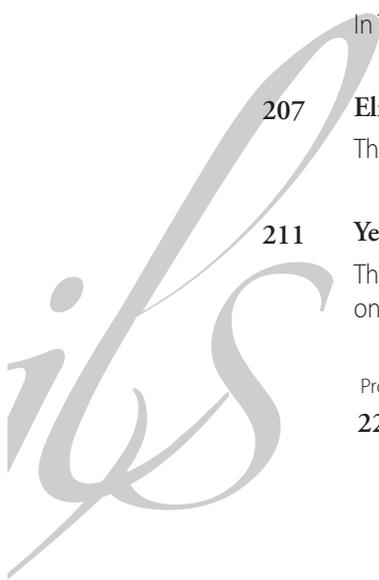
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From the Neoclassical to the Binational Model of Translation

Editors' Note

Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani and Yonatan Mendel

Literary translation—whether a branch within comparative literature, linguistics, hermeneutics, or elsewhere in the academic disciplinary maze—has grown and developed mainly in accordance with the European neoclassical tradition. The previous issue of *JLS* was dedicated to the critique of the neoclassical model's supposed transparency and impartial representation of the original source, allegedly trying to reach a “fluent” translation of the original. This critique—developed by, among others, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Lawrence Venuti, and Walter Benjamin—is further heightened in the framework of the colonial encounter. After all, modern translation was developed alongside the colonial European project that sought to understand the “Other's” primitive thought, to represent it, domesticate it, and speak on its behalf, to make it part of the occupier's knowledge system. Missionaries, anthropologists, orientalist, and many others have translated native texts into the image of the enslaved world that they claimed to civilize and educate.¹ Unsurprisingly, all colonial enterprises were accompanied by translation projects, including the translation of maps, art, newspapers, letters, travel diaries, novels, and poetry. These texts were compressed into the ostensibly harmonized logos of Western knowledge, but their terms of conditions and production were masked and ignored. European norms dominated literary translation, and in the context of the so-called “third world” literature, they constituted a form of violence, as they were never part of a dialogue and exchange of relations.²

In recent decades this understanding has been embedded and learned in all academic disciplines and has been articulated most succinctly in anthropology, where the ethnographic realism—that the ethnographer is supposedly an honest broker, devoid of interests, indifferent to whims—has been undermined. Criticism of classical ethnography revealed the pretense of anthropology and the fact that classical anthropologists such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard arrived at their research sites on the bayonets of the British Empire. Similar criticism is relevant to translation's workers—whether they are interpreters, copiers, dubbers, or linguistic intermediaries—who have no interest other than delivering the text intact.

Translation, as was highlighted in the last issue of *JLS*, is a reflexive process by which translators discover that they are political agents and not just professionals who have completed their work and await the next translation project.³ In every translation the translator's voice is always present on matters of war and peace, violence and amity, race and identity, terror and globalization. It is always the case that translators' strategies reflect the political context within which they are carried out, beyond the translators' good intentions. As such—just like the turn in linguistics, following which language was seen as not only a reflection of reality but also an element that takes an active role in shaping it—translation ceased to be viewed also as a source for studying the original text or the society that it translates; rather, it came to be viewed as a source of understanding the viewpoint, limitation, worldview, needs, and desires of the host society (and the host discourse).

For example, it is customary today for translation to replace the original source and take its place in monoglot form. The readers of a novel in the host language are not exposed to the original language or the gaps between source and target. Whereas in the modern European tradition “fluent translation” might be considered the most desirable, analyzing it in the colonial context and the struggle between languages argues that such a model can be easily perceived as an act of erasure. It requires recognition and sensitivity to the fact that every translation is anchored in historical time and mediates in social, cultural, and political contexts.

Literary translation in colonial contexts (whether postcolonial, post-colonial, neo-colonial, imperialist, etc.) is obviously also part of a broader framework that includes the economic and political doings of colonial and postcolonial regimes. It is no wonder that postcolonial theory—which rejected the boundary between literature and politics, aesthetics and violence—grew out of criticism of English literature and that Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, among others, were literary critics. They have shown that translation is not only a textual endeavor but also the living experience of people who experience colonial violence. Poetics, literature,

and politics are inseparable, as metaphor, figuration, narrative, irony, and allegory are not detached from the colonial context of writing, translation, and reading. Today, the violence—the erasure and appropriation of language under conditions of colonial power relations—cannot be exaggerated or ignored. For this reason some critics go as far as arguing that translation between Europe and the Third World should be banned.⁴

If we want to address the limitations of the neoclassical translation model in the context of political and verbal violence—as these issues suggest we must do—we need to move out of our comfort zone so that the translation model does not restore (by omission or commission) the colonial conditions that are paramount outside the translation room and that affect the very possibility of translation. Such a translation seeks to escape from the over-determination of linguistic, syntactic, and lexical concerns, as if they lack context. It also seeks to recognize that translation is not a one-way process; rather, it is a dialogue that cannot be completed in one round.⁵ It endeavors to create a third space, in which translation is part of ongoing communication, dialogue, and exchange. Ultimately, the differences in translation are not related only to individual differences; they also represent the political and social context within which they are conducted.⁶

In the case of translation from Arabic into Hebrew, this phenomenon is aggravated by the colonial conditions that exist today between the two languages in the Israeli-Palestinian context, demonstrated most clearly in the power relations between the two communities, in the Israeli Jewish perception of itself and of its Other—be it Arab or Eastern—or in its striving for territorial expansion while using a “modernizing” discourse. The translators are located on the seam line that is seen as transparent, yet separating between Jews and Arabs—but beneath them is a minefield of colonial enmity relations. To this we should add the polar theological-political distinction that denies binational existence because it is based on a complete separation between a friend and a foe, and a state of emergency that preserves the context of hostility. Linguist and Yiddish scholar Max Weinreich stated that “*a shprakh iz a dialekt mit an armey un flot*” (a language is a dialect with an army and navy).⁷ In this vein we can say that Hebrew was not only part and parcel of the overall Zionist project but also of the actual battles and war on the ground, both vis-à-vis the Palestinians (including the ongoing Nakba from 1948, via 1967, and up to the present day) and inter-Jewish relations (including the erasure of Semitic sounds and the adoption of Ashkenazi

Hebrew phonology). This process has been accompanied by the process of purging space of Arabic and turning the language into that of the enemy. The elimination of Arabic in Israel and its expropriation from Arabs and the Arab-Jews are an integral part of the establishment of sovereignty through the Hebrew language.

One of the most astounding phenomena in Israel is the illiteracy in and ignorance of Arabic. The percentage of Jews under the age of seventy who can read a book or newspaper in Arabic is negligible: less than 0.5%. This is despite the fact that Arabic is the mother tongue of 20% of Israel's population, the lingua franca of the region, the mother tongue of more than three hundred million Arabs living in the Middle East (and in the not-so-distant past, the mother language of 50% of the Jewish population), and an official language in British Mandate Palestine (1922–1948) and in Israel (1948–2018).⁸

Keeping in mind the power relations and social, political, and historical processes just mentioned, if we look at the population of Israel through the Arabic language, we notice three distinct colonial characteristics. First, whereas almost no Jews can speak Arabic, almost all Palestinians in Israel can speak Hebrew. To use Hegel's dialectics as a metaphor, Israeli Jews have sunk into decay, as they do not confront the growing alienation between the two languages and the distinct types of political thought they produce. This alienation produces what William Du Bois called the "double consciousness."⁹ He refers to the "transparency screen," the almost abstract, invisible line separating blacks and whites, and in our case Jews from Arabs. Second, there is a colonial fragmentation between the Arabic of the Palestinians and the Arabic of the Jews, as well as a fragmentation among the Palestinians themselves.¹⁰ Third, there is a strong fragmentation, based on ethnic and racial lines, among Israeli Jews in terms of their command of the Arabic language.

A study made by the Translators' Circle of Maktoob at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute shows that knowledge of the Arabic language among Jews in Israel is under the influence of conflicting forces that produce paradoxical results. On average, about 10% of Israeli Jews claim to have "good knowledge" of Arabic. This figure reflects an overestimation of aptitudes, such that a greater proportion of people brag about their knowledge of the language even if, owing mainly to a lack of social desirability, they do not master it. Yet when more concrete familiarity with Arabic—such as the ability to read a newspaper—was questioned, this number dropped dramatically to about 2.6%. Moreover, only about 0.4% of Jews are able to read a novel in literary Arabic.

The bias is higher among Arab Jews, who declared having good knowledge of Arabic even when it was superficial. Intergenerational analysis shows that the first generation of Arab Jews (Jews who immigrated to Israel from Arab countries) holds

more positive attitudes toward the Arabic language, while in the second and third generations (the immigrants' children and grandchildren) there is an increase in negative attitudes toward Arabic. Furthermore, a weighted measure of proficiency in Arabic indicates an even more dramatic decline when comparing between the generations. Among the first generation of Arab Jews, only 26% are proficient in Arabic even today. Among the second generation the percentage drops to 14%, and among the third generation, to a mere 1%.

In addition to these dismal findings regarding the proficiency of Israeli Jews in the Arabic language, the study reveals the colonial division of labor within the linguistic field itself. Evidently, there is an almost complete segregation between those whose knowledge of the language is sound-and-speech or hearing-and-talking related, and those whose familiarity with the language is related to texts only. This segregation is not accidental, since it is carried out along ethnic and class-based codes. There is a huge schism between speech and text, as two language domains are organized according to ethnic hierarchy: the Ashkenazim are the people of the texts, and those of the old generation of Mizrahi Jews are the people of speech and dialogue. Most of those who are proficient with texts cannot speak the language. Conversely, many of those who can speak the language are, to some extent, illiterate. Colonial fragmentation rests here on the material and political conditions that dictate language acquisition or abandonment.

The main institution that perpetuates this fragmentation is the educational system.¹¹ The findings show that a larger portion of Ashkenazim than Mizrahim (83% versus 68% respectively) acquire their knowledge of Arabic in elementary and high schools. Mizrahi students, whose parents'/grandparents' language was Arabic and who were exposed to Arabic at an early age and so had a better chance of absorbing the language (in terms of accent, pronunciation, intuitive understanding of syntax, etc.), learned Arabic in school at lower rates than Ashkenazi students, whose parents/grandparents spoke Russian, German, Polish, or Yiddish. This trend continues in higher education. The study shows the astounding finding that the percentage of Ashkenazi Jews who studied Arabic at a university is four times greater than that of Mizrahi Jews. More important, the number of Ashkenazi Jews who studied Arabic in the army was three times greater than that of Mizrahim who studied it while in the army.

These findings indicate the long-term erasure of Arabic and Arabness among the Mizrahim (or Arab Jews), who were subjected to intense de-Arabization, not necessarily by force.¹² As Antonio Gramsci demonstrated in analyzing the concept of hegemony, the objects of oppression were "co-operated" with the de-Arabization

process—because of the desire to belong, because of the institutional processes of co-optation, and especially because of the negative status of the Arabic language, considered an enemy language in Israeli Zionist culture.

Given this analysis of language as shaping population identity, the questions that interest us now are, what is the sociological portrait of the translation endeavor, and what is the national identity of the Arabic-to-Hebrew translators? The answers are extracted from Maktoob's *Indeks tirgumei ha-sifrut me-'Aravit le-'Ivrit* (The literature translation index from Arabic into Hebrew). The items were collected in painstaking work by Hannah Amit-Kochavi, who is a member of the Translators' Circle. The index, found on the Maktoob website (<http://maktoobooks.com/search-the-index>), contains over 5,000 items of Arabic-to-Hebrew translation produced during the last 150 years. The vast majority of these works are single items (for example, a poem in the literary section of a newspaper's weekend edition) and not whole books. The number of works in book form does not exceed two hundred.

Despite the meager number of translations from Arabic, we learn from table 1 that the rate of translation has increased over time. Between 1949 and 1967, the pace averaged 0.55 translations per year. From 1968 to 1975, the rate doubled to one item per year. Between 1975 and 2000, the rate tripled to three translations per year on average, and from 2000 to 2018, this rate was maintained (on average, 3.1 per year). The most dramatic increase occurred in the genre of novels, reaching about 50% of the literature translated since 2000.

Examining the translated literature according to the author's country of origin shows changes over time as well (table 2). Until 1974 Egyptian literature was the most frequently translated, but after 1967 the trend changed, and there was a significant decline in the rate of translation from Arabic in general, except for translations of Palestinian literature, the first of which was published that year. Contrary to the post-1967 trend, after 1975 the pace of translation increased dramatically, and since 2001, Palestinian literature has become the most commonly translated.

Reviewing the entire period, most of the translated literature is from Egypt (26% of all translations), Palestine (24.4%), Lebanon (20.6%), Syria (16.5%), and Iran (9.7%; Iranian literature is included in the analysis even though it is not Arabic literature). Literature from other regions is far less frequently translated—for example, 2.3% of the works translated are from North Africa and 0.4% are from Jordan. Most translations in book form are of novels (40.8%), poetry collections

(22.4%), and autobiographies (16.4%). As for the gender distribution (not presented in the table), men (63%) produced the vast majority of the translations of literature. Another element that needs to be mentioned is that according to a rough estimate, only about 2% of all texts translated from Arabic into Hebrew have received any attention or critique.¹³

As we have put the translators at the heart of our analysis, we move to the central questions: What is the national identity of the Arabic-to-Hebrew translators, and within what framework were they working? We learn that the translation model has been made in a radically asymmetrical state (chart 1). Of the total number of Arabic translations (N = 5,606), 89% were made by Jewish translators (70% of whom were male)—a total of 5,013 works translated by 213 Jewish translators. Only 11% of all Arabic translations were done by Arab translators, a total of 593 works translated by 43 Arab translators, some in mixed teams with Jews.

From chart 2 we learn that the vast majority of translations, about 89% of them, were done by a single translator. About 10% of the translations were done in pairs, and only 1% of the translations were made by teams of three translators (a total of 47 translations).

From chart 3 we learn that the highest proportion of Palestinian translators participated in the teams of three (out of the total number of works translated from Arabic). If we look at these teams, we find that there were only three and that they translated about fifty pieces over the years.

Chart 4 shows that until 1960, Palestinian Arabs did not participate in translation, and from 1960 to 1980 there was little participation of Arab translators (34 translations made by 10 Arab translators). Between 1980 and 2000, the rate of participation of Arab translators increased to 18% of all translators during this period (479 translations done by 30 Arab translators), which dropped back to 8% in the period of 2000 to 2018 (67 translations made by 14 Arab translators).

The limitations and biases of the neoclassical model presented in the previous issue of *JLS* explain a large part of this peculiar sociological structure. The findings show that most of the translations were done in a state of asymmetry, since most of them were done by individual Jewish translators, and it is unnecessary to emphasize that it was the textual, not the oral, dimension that was paramount in earlier centuries.

The sociological portrait of this translation enterprise reflects the colonial and theological context within which it is carried out, beyond the good will of each individual engaged in the craft. This model does not take into account the colonial relations between the languages themselves and assumes that the languages are

equivocal and their interactions are dyadic. However, translation from a major to a minor language differs from the translation in the opposite direction and reflects the violence in the translation enterprise's infrastructure. In addition neoclassical translations give up the oral option and remove native translators, whose partnership is desirable in binational translation under colonial conditions.

In a more political vein, it is inconceivable that under conditions of colonial relations between languages the practice of translation from Arabic to Hebrew would be carried out in individualistic models and as a monopoly of Jews only. The situation is similar to that of European anthropologists who study indigenous societies and report on them in the etic language, which represents "scientific" logic by claiming cultural neutrality, and ignoring the "emic"—that is, native—language, the object of ethnographic reporting. Modern neoclassical Western translation theory completely ignores the sound and speech of the native language. Instead, it relies on phonetics to produce the desired effects. However, every translator with experience in Arabic translation knows that these transliterations are problematic approximations and are not useful in producing the desired sound for dialogue and communication. Moreover, in order to point out these transliterations (for example, in the case of first names and place names, including the differentiation between the name in *fusha*—literary—Arabic or in colloquial Arabic), a native translator whose mother tongue is Arabic is desirable. This is not a critique of experienced and skilled individual translators who do their work loyally. This is a critique of the sociology and epistemology of today's widespread translation practice—not to mention the asymmetric situation in historical Palestine, as well as in the transition from Europe to the Middle East—and has broader theoretical implications.

To cope with translation from Arabic to Hebrew under the conditions of the present time, the Translators' Circle in Maktoob proposes a pragmatic model of translation that transcends the comfort zone and is open to negotiation and a dialogical process of movement and wrestling in a dynamic relationship of dialogue. Although the model is fraught with practical, economic, and empirical difficulties, and is not necessarily pragmatic, it relies on the philosophy of pragmatism, according to which translation is not only a textual achievement but also action in the real world, which seeks to overcome the elements of alienation and degeneration of the individual, nationalistic portrait of translation. The translation turns from a metatext, which is

placed behind the text and whose function is to explain and illuminate, into a social text, as a basis for communication and for expression of collective consciousness. In other words, and paraphrasing Ferdinand de Saussure's notion that language should be studied in and for itself, we argue that translation is not only a thing in and for and of itself but also a communication tool, a byproduct of a comprehensive political process. To this end it expands the concept of intertextuality from hermeneutics to sociology. That is, intertextuality is not just an encounter between textual units, as is commonly the case in the fields of hermeneutics, linguistics, and literature, but also an interactive sociological mechanism based on encounter and reciprocity between people.

This is a hybrid model in which Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs translate together through dialogue and speech, with linguistic flexibility and a multiplicity of versions intended to connect, instead of dividing the linguistic space and breaking the linear and delayed connection between source and translation. This model has the potential to get rid of the binary traps on which the modern theory of translation (accurate versus fluent, faithful versus unreliable, form versus content) is based. It is performative, generative, and open ended. The translation process does not seek to know the exact truth hidden in the text. It is a performative act in the real world that recognizes the multiple meanings of the text in a situation of linguistic conflict in colonial conditions.

This was the purpose of the establishment of the Translators' Circle and the Maktoob book series, in which literary texts are not only translated but they conduct a bilingual dialogue (undercutting the diglossic ideology that often restricts such dialogue) between Jews and Palestinians in real time in shared spaces. The model that has been formulated at Maktoob allows for the feudal translator's oath of allegiance, which casts a constant shadow of suspicion on every translator, in all genres and expressions.

Translation at Maktoob is conducted within a model of negotiation and dialogical struggle, in binational teams of Jews and Arabs. Negotiations are conducted orally and in writing, with the understanding that translation is not a substitute for the original and does not pretend to be the source. Sometimes there are several versions that indicate multiplicity (as opposed to unity), and other times there are a number of hybridized versions, like clones in biology, when disagreements and agreements are documented in a translation protocol. This model is not harmonized; it raises performance difficulties, raises objections from within and from without, and increases the cost of translations, but its purpose and ambition (even in the version of approximation only) is to try to return the translation to its "natural" place so as

to enable dialogue and communication between cultures and languages that are not foreign to each other and are crying out for dialogue.

This issue includes sixteen articles, dialogues, and a prose section of short stories translated according to the model developed by Maktoob. **Eyad Barghuthy's** "Palestinian Intellectuals Discuss Politics and Ethics of Translation" summarizes the panel discussion devoted to translation from Arabic into Hebrew as a form of resistance against the Orientalist conventions currently used in translation from Arabic. The conversation took place in Nazareth in June 2019 with a panel that included Eyad Barghuthy (moderator), Elias Khoury (on Skype), Raef Zreik, Huda Abu Much, Antwan Shulhut, and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury. Each of the participants addressed the following general questions: Can Hebrew be a Palestinian language too—a language that can represent the world of a Palestinian and act on his or her behalf? Can it be transformed from a hostile language to a language of grace as Anton Shammas has defined it? This conversation is essential today, given the complicated local political environment.

Hana Morgenstern's article, "What Is Anticolonial Translation? The Form and Content of Binational Resistance in Maktoob," examines translation as an anticolonial literary form in the context of contemporary translation. With a focus on Maktoob, she examines binational and bilingual translation as a collaborative form of work that combines content-based approaches with formal, linguistic, and structural innovations in translation processes. She shows how such a model can erode colonial effects, including Orientalism, cultural erasure, ethnoseparatism, literary theft, and the linguistic division between Arabic and Hebrew. Her paper demonstrates the continued influence of cultural decolonization on contemporary literary production and offers new insights into what this means for translation theory and practice.

In her article, "Gendered Temporality and Space: Women in Translation from Arabic into Hebrew," **Huda Abu Much** examines women's participation in the Arabic-to-Hebrew translation enterprise during the last 150 years. Focusing on the place, role, and position of women in the field of Arabic-to-Hebrew translation, Abu Much brings to the surface two crucial findings: first, the evident gender bias in the field, both in terms of female authors translated and female translators; second, the genres and types of literature chosen by female translators—this includes their focus on longer Arabic works, on Arab women's literary creations, and more specifically, on the Palestinian voice. All in all, Abu Much reveals a quiet yet prominent contribution hidden in the gender-oriented analysis of translations.

Nadeem Karkabi's "Arabic Language among Jews in Israel and the New Mizrahi Zionism: Between Active Knowledge and Performance" is centered on the research report "Yedi'at 'Aravit be-kerev Yehudim be-Yisrael" (Command of Arabic among Israeli Jews). Karkabi argues that while the report indeed reveals a low point in the command of Arabic among Jewish Israelis, as well as disturbing security-oriented connotations and motivations for the study of the language, a more nuanced analysis—viewed through the lens of Mizrahi music—can reveal other processes relating to Arabic language and culture. According to Karkabi, looking at a new wave of Jewish Israeli musicians who perform in Arabic, new patterns that challenge the depressed Arabic elements of the Mizrahim in Israel arise, and the alleged binaries such as Jewish/Arab and Hebrew/Arabic emerge. Yet this process does not exist in a vacuum, and as Karkabi highlights, it also has its own drawbacks while being appropriated by the Mizrahi Zionist discourse, making a 180-degree turn to play its role in the Israeli anti-Palestinian discourse.

In the article written on the occasion of the publication of *Shlumu al-Kurdi wa-ana wa-al-zaman* (Shlomo al-Kurdi, me and the time), by Samir Naqqash, **Yuval Evri** and **Almog Behar** point out its importance not only as a biographical tale of upheaval but also as a rare opportunity to reread the relationship between languages and literatures: Arabic and Hebrew, Jewish and Muslim, Iraqi and Israeli. Naqqash, the greatest Jewish Arab writer of the twentieth century, writes in a multitude of languages and dialects, constantly mixing what is, in the age of the nation-state, commonly used to separate and purify. They place the question of language and literature in the history of the Middle East, especially in its intellectual and literary history. Following their article is an excerpt from the novel (**Samir Naqqash**, "The Prophet Nahum's Prophecy of Doom to His Manservant Mordekhai-Hai in the Year 1941").

Tami Sarfatti's article deals with another of Maktoob's projects. In her article titled "Lost (and Gained) in Translation: Reflections on Translation and Translators of al-Jabarti's Chronicles of the French Occupation of Egypt," Sarfatti analyzes the Hebrew translation of Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti's chronicles of the 1798–1801 French occupation of Egypt, while returning to earlier works of translation of the original text published in Arabic. "Translations and translators," Sarfatti argues, are "never neutral but often under-reported in the historical account, [and] played an important role in shaping the events and how they were narrated and recorded at the time; they also shape the ways these are understood in the present." Looking at al-Jabarti's translations, Sarfatti demonstrates how acts of translation were also bound

with the acts of interpretation and exploitation of the text, which can certainly highlight the biased nature of the translations and the way they were able to blur the complexities and insights that existed only in the original.

Yonatan Mendel, Rawiya Burbara, and Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani's article, "Amputated Tongue: On the Potential of Change in a Political Act of Translation," is dedicated to one specific outcome of Maktoob. Titled בלשון כרותה / בלסן מבתורה (Amputated tongue), the book has been described as the epitome of the Maktoob project: it is a mosaic of seventy-three short stories, translated by forty-five teams of translators, each of which consisted of at least one Jewish Israeli and one Palestinian Arab working together on a Palestinian literary creation. Juxtaposing this book with other Palestinian prose collections published in Hebrew in the past, and analyzing it in light of the Zionist project toward the "redemption" and "revival" of the Hebrew language and the instrumental use of the Arabic language in that regard, Mendel, Burbara, and Shenhav-Shahrabani argue that this book is nothing less than an attempt to bring back, and reclaim, the Palestinian voice—in Hebrew.

Duygu Atlas, associate editor of *JLS*, took upon herself the task of photographing the Maktoob translators in action. The visual screen of her artistic portfolio provides a snapshot of the human composition of the translation teams and the ways in which they work in real time. On the day the photographs were taken, the issue at hand was the translation of al-Jabarti's book on the history of the French occupation of Egypt (The day on which the laws of nature have changed: The incredible chronicle of Napoleon in Egypt according to al-Jabarti), which will be published by Maktoob in mid-2020.

The Dossier "Where Did the Ghetto Come From?" includes essays (**Elias Khoury**, "This is al-Lydd/This is Palestine"; **Tawfiq Da'adli**, "In This Ghetto for Which We Have Gathered") on the event that took place in al-Lydd to mark the publication of *Yaldei ha-geto: Shmi Adam (My Name is Adam: Children of the Ghetto, Volume I)* in Hebrew. It includes "Thirst," an excerpt from *My Name Is Adam*, and "The Political Syntax of the Absentees: A Translator's Reflection on *Stella Maris*," an essay by **Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani**, the translator of the follow-up novel, *Stella Maris*.

We also include three short stories written by Palestinians, two of whom live within Israel (**Eyad Barghuthy** and **Rawiya Burbara**), and one who lives in the West Bank (**Fida Jiryis**). All three stories were translated according to the binational model developed by Maktoob, which includes mixed teams of Jews and Palestinians working together in a dialogical form.

Appendix to the Editors' Note

Table 1. Arabic literature translated into Hebrew between 1871-2018, according to genre.

	until 1948	1949- 1967	1968- 1974	1975- 2000	2001- 2018	Total
						(in %)
Autobiographies, diaries, memoirs	1	4	0	9	11	25
	4%	16%	0%	36%	44%	16.4%
	25%	40%	0%	12%	19.6%	
Short story collections and anthologies	0	2	3	10	4	19
	0%	10.5%	15.8%	52.6%	21%	12.5%
	0%	20%	42.8%	13.3%	7.1%	
Poetry collections and anthologies	2	1	2	19	10	34
	5.8%	2.9%	5.8%	55.9%	29.4%	22.4%
	50%	10%	28.6%	25.3%	17.8%	
Novellas	0	0	0	8	4	12
	0%	0%	0%	66.6%	33.3%	7.9%
	0%	0%	0%	10.6%	7.1%	
Novels	1	3	2	29	27	62
	1.6%	4.8%	3.2%	46.8%	43.5%	40.8%
	25%	30%	28.6%	38.6%	48.2%	
Total N=	4	10	7	75	56	152
(in %)	2.6%	6.6%	4.6%	49.3%	36.8%	100%

N = Number of books in each genre out of all items mentioned in the index

Table 2. Arabic literature translated into Hebrew between 1871-2018, according to authors' country of origin

	until 1948	1949- 1967	1968- 1974	1975- 2000	2001- 2018	Total (in %)
Palestine	0	8	45	341	257	651
	0%	1.2%	6.9%	52.4%	39.5%	24.4%
	0%	1.4%	22.5%	24.1%	53.3%	
Egypt	12	249	64	333	35	693
	1.7%	35.9%	9.2%	48%	5.1%	26%
	70.6%	44.9%	32%	23.6%	7.3%	
Lebanon	1	123	38	352	35	549
	0.2%	22.4%	6.9%	64.1%	6.4%	20.6%
	5.9%	22.2%	19%	24.9%	7.3%	
Syria	0	55	38	227	121	441
	0%	12.5%	8.6%	51.5%	27.4%	16.5%
	0%	9.9%	19%	16.1%	25.1%	
North Africa	0	16	5	21	19	61
	0%	26.2%	8.2%	34.4%	31.1%	2.3%
	0%	2.8%	2.5%	1.5%	3.9%	
Iran-Persia	4	104	6	136	10	260
	1.5%	40%	2.3%	52.3%	3.8%	9.7%
	23.5%	18.7%	3%	9.6%	2.1%	
Jordan	0	0	4	2	5	11
	0%	0%	36.4%	18.2%	45.4%	0.4%
	0%	0%	2%	0.1%	1%	
Total	17	555	200	1,412	482	2,666
(in %)	0.6%	20.8%	7.5%	53%	18.1%	100%

N = All the items in the translation index

Chart 1. Translations from Arabic by Jewish and Arab translators, in percentages (N=5,606)

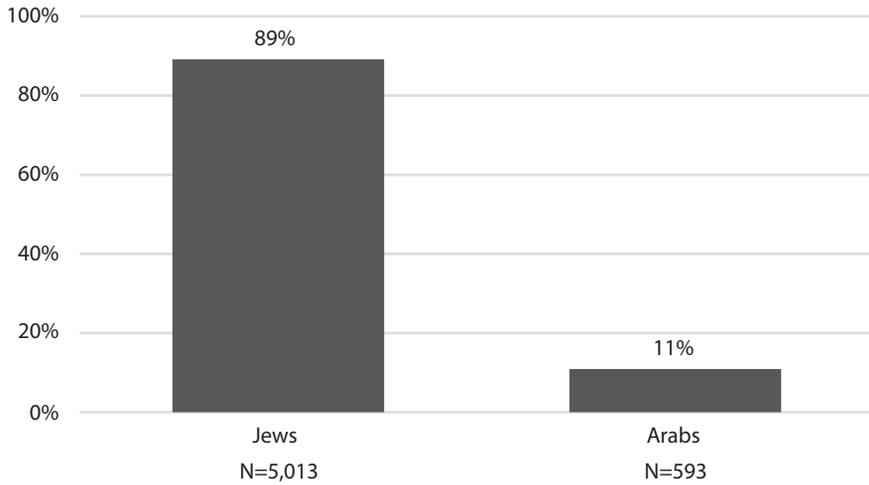


Chart 2. Percentage of works translated by a single translator, two translators, and three translators in all translated works (N=5,016)

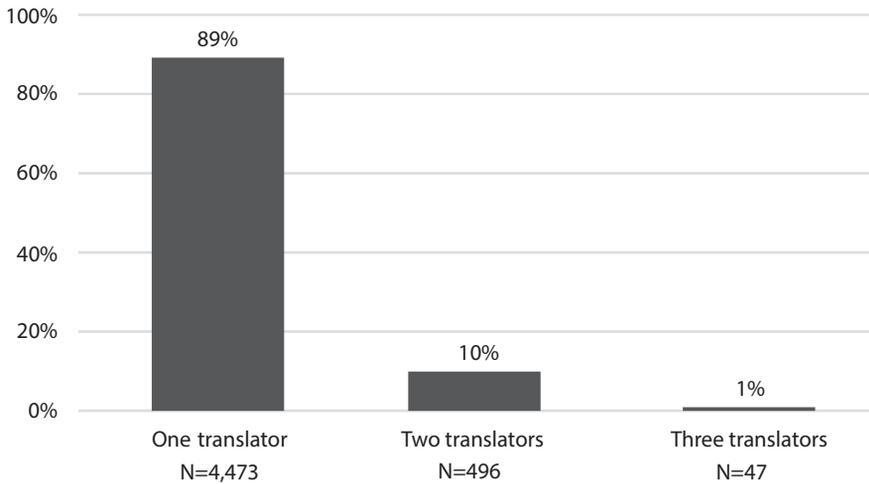


Chart 3. Percentage of Jewish and Arab translators in all translated works, according to number of translators per work (N=5,606)

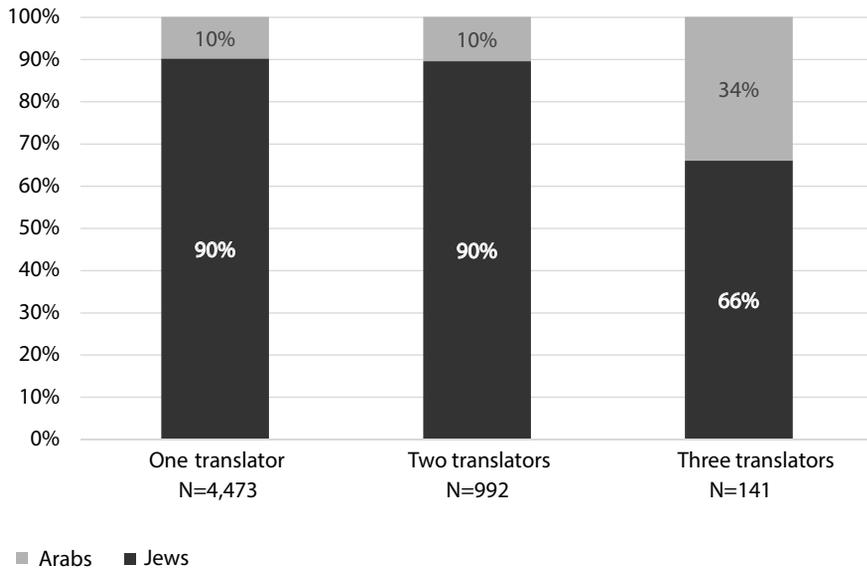
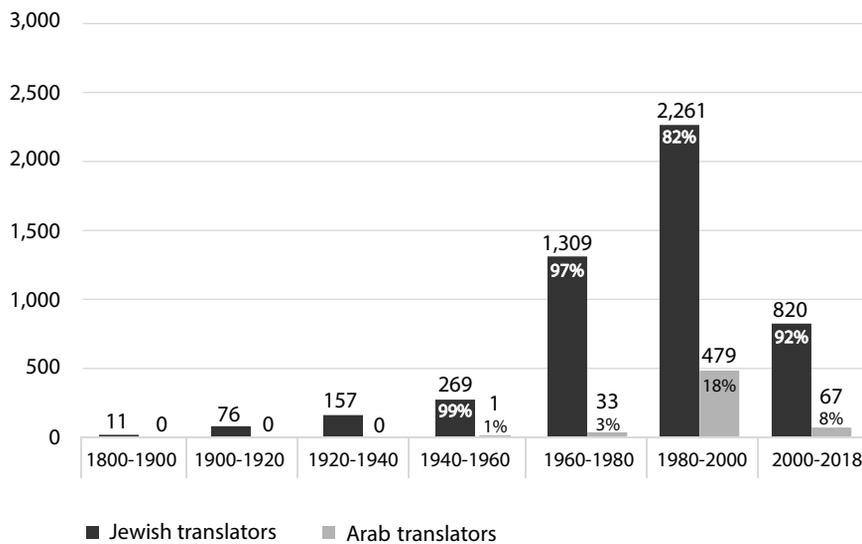


Chart 4. Number of translations from Arabic by Jewish and Arab translators of all translated works, according to years (N=5,483)



Notes

- 1 Niranjana Tersawini, *Sitting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
- 2 Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, *Post-colonial Translation* (London: Routledge, 1999).
- 3 Talal Asad, "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 141–164.
- 4 Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier, eds., *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).
- 5 Maria Tymoczko, "Translation, Ethics and Ideology in a Violent Globalizing World," in *Globalization, Political Violence and Translation*, ed. Esperanza Bielsa and Christopher W. Hughes (London: Palgrave, 2009), 171–194.
- 6 Esperanza Bielsa, "Globalization, Political Violence and Translation: An Introduction," in Bielsa and Hughes, *Globalization, Political Violence and Translation*.
- 7 Max Weinreich, "Der YIVO un di problemen fun undzer tsayt," *YIVO Bleter* 25, no. 1 (1945): 13.
- 8 Following the legislation of the "Jewish Nationality Bill," Arabic's formerly official status was rendered a "special status" that has yet to be defined by law.
- 9 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1994).
- 10 Ismail Nashif, *Aravit: Mesikha kolonialit* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press, Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2018).
- 11 For further reading on the securitization, Westernization, and Ashkenazation of the study of Arabic in the Jewish Israeli school system, see Yonatan Mendel, *The Creation of Israeli Arabic: Political and Security Considerations in the Making of Arabic Language Studies in Israel*, Palgrave Studies in Languages at War (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- 12 For further reading on processes of de-Arabization that were imposed on Mizrahi Jews before being "accepted" into the Jewish Israeli national collective, see Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).
- 13 Hannah Amit-Kochavi, "Ladaat u-lehakir et shaheneinu gam mi-tzad ze': Al tirgumei ha-sifrut ha-Aravit le-Ivrit, 1868-2002," *Ha-mizrah be-badash* 43 (2002): 209–227.



Palestinian Intellectuals Discuss Politics and Ethics of Translation

Speakers: Eyad Barghuthy, Antwan Shulhut, Elias Khoury, Raef Zreik,
Huda Abu Much, Areej Sabbagh-Khoury

Date: June 27, 2019

Place: Liwan Café, Nazareth

Edited by: Eyad Barghuthy

On a warm spring evening, a group of Arab and Palestinian intellectuals gathered in the old city of Nazareth. Invited by the Maktoob series, they discussed the issue of translating literary works from Arabic into Hebrew, while trying to provide answers to many questions that have long perplexed Palestinian authors particularly, as well as Arab authors in general. The Maktoob series seeks to deepen its understanding of this issue to develop its work method, as the questions mentioned relate to the political and cultural implications of the act of translation between these two languages, in the shadow of the continuing struggle and colonialism.

Historically, how were the policies of translation from Arabic to Hebrew formed? What efforts were made to go beyond these policies? Why did they stop? Is translating into Hebrew considered to be cultural normalization with Israel, or is it an Orientalist action? Could it be an act of resisting racism and colonialism? Is there a relationship between the previous question and what we translate and how we produce the translation?

Eyad Barghuthy: Translation as Resistance—Self and Other

Maktoob, founded in 2014, is a political project dedicated to translating Arabic literature into Hebrew. There were earlier Arabic literature translation projects in Israel, but Maktoob is based on new foundations derived from the principle that existence in the region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River is binational

in character. Maktoob's work is chiefly centered on binational Jewish-Palestinian teams gathering to work on translations together. This evening is dedicated to the understanding and analysis of the Maktoob project from a Palestinian point of view.

A few days ago at Tel Aviv University a discussion took place concerning the translation made by Yehouda Shenhav, Maktoob's chief editor, of Elias Khoury's novel *Stella Maris*. Participating in the discussion were Dr. Huda Abu Much—who read from the Arabic and Hebrew texts of the novel, of which she was the editor—and other members of the Maktoob team. The novel, which deals with the tragedy of the Nakba, not only focuses on the occupation and the expulsions of 1948 but also shows how the Nakba was not a one-time event but an ongoing process of dispossession of land, language, and the political realm. During the meeting we discussed translation dilemmas caused by the fact that the Lebanese author Khoury is writing about us without living in our region, and about the different means that can be used to express what is inexpressible using the accepted methods of orthodox translation theories. Among other things, we recited passages from the novel from memory, in order to restore the oral tradition to the textual tradition of translation. The feeling was that this was a project going against the grain, as the saying goes.

Literature does not exist only for itself—it has a function in the world. For example, literature was the excuse for that event, where Jews and Palestinians met and spoke Hebrew and Arabic simultaneously, pointing to what the sociologist Max Weber called objective possibilities in the world. Furthermore, literature has an important role to play in the balance of power: the victors possess archives and means of documentation that provide their acts of occupation with legitimization, while the defeated are left with nothing but prose and verse. Literature can rescue those who are trapped beneath the ruins of collective memory without an archive.

On the train on the way home to Haifa, surrounded by Israeli soldiers proudly carrying deadly weapons, I had many questions to ask myself: is Maktoob a bubble, a mere drop in the ocean, or a game-changing project? But first I toyed with preliminary questions connected to language: Can Hebrew be a Palestinian language too—a language that can represent the world of a Palestinian and act on his or her behalf? Can it change from an enemy language to one that is friendly and supportive? Anton Shammas already played with this question when he raised the idea of Hebrew as a language of grace, a language distinct from the Hebrew of ordinances, commands, and occupation. Eventually Shammas gave up and emigrated. Where does that leave me?

Through my participation in a project of writing Arabic literature in Hebrew, am I representing my own self and my identity, or am I cooperating in representing

myself as the “Other” via translation—because in the final analysis translation is “identity performance”? As a Hebrew-speaking Palestinian working on translation into Hebrew and as an assistant editor at Maktoob, am I within the language or outside it in symbolic and political terms?

These are a few of the questions that we will raise this evening in a discussion taking place among Palestinians living in Israel and speaking Hebrew. As is well known, Maktoob is not the first Arabic-to-Hebrew translation project. Most of its predecessors were colonialist projects aimed at the appropriation or even the cannibalization of Arabic. Two exceptions to the rule were the Mifras publishing house in the 1980s and Andalus at the beginning of the twenty-first century, but both of these disappeared within a few years. So what is our relationship to Hebrew? What is our linguistic policy, in terms of form and content, for writing Arabic prose in Hebrew?

In my humble opinion, we are launching a binational translation method unique in the world today, with far-reaching implications for translation in conflict zones elsewhere. The binational translation method comprises a correction of the modernist bias based on one translator from the target culture (in the vast majority of cases, a single Jewish translator) sitting alone at his or her desk with national dictionaries and lexicons, a bias that formed in the modern period along with the nation-states of Europe. Our method of working in binational teams pulls the rug out from under this method of translation, allowing translation to become a model for joint activity, one that is not based on simplistic formulae of coexistence but rather is a political model.

Most of the novels thus far translated by Maktoob are stories of modern Palestinian history, of the history of the Nakba, and Palestinian history from earlier periods that have been neglected. Examples of these are *Shnat ha-arbeh* (*Year of the Locust*, edited by Salim Tamari), the journal of Ihsan Turjman, a Palestinian soldier stationed in Jerusalem in 1915, before the unifying consolidation of Palestinian nationalism, and Ibrahim Nasrallah’s saga relating the history of one village over a period of a hundred years, *Zman ha-susim ha-levanim* (*Time of White Horses*). They place at center stage harsh descriptions of the expulsion and ghettoization of the Palestinians and make Palestinian voices heard polyphonically and bilingually. In these translations we have achieved a profound revision of both the translation method and the orthodox means of using language, such as radically changing the transliteration system invented by Orientalists working in translating Arabic literature. For example, that system wrote the definite article “al” as a separate word and altered the system of diacritics for the Arabic consonants in various ways, such as using a D (s) instead of S (š), to accommodate the Jewish ear.

These principles permit us to tell the story of the region from an Arabic point of view that deconstructs the Israeli hegemony's Orientalist historical approach. For example, in autumn 2019 we will be publishing the richest collection of Palestinian prose to appear in Hebrew, including about seventy-five stories by Palestinian writers from Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and the *shatat* (Palestinian diaspora), a selection crossing generational, historical, and gender boundaries. More than a hundred Palestinians and Jews worked on this project, and it serves as a showcase for our conception of the task of writing Palestinian prose in Hebrew. From our point of view, as mentioned above, this is a model for binationalism and shared sovereignty, not just a translation method.

Such are the issues I want to deal with today in Arabic, not in Hebrew, as part of an internal Palestinian discussion, in which we invite the Lebanese author to join us by Skype from Beirut.



From left to right: Eyad Barghuthy, Raef Zreik, Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, Huda Abu Much, and Antwan Shulhut. Elias Khoury appears on the screen.

Antwan Shulhut: The Policies and the Exceptions

In the following I will try to outline some illuminations and intellectual conclusions concerning what we have termed “translation policies” from Hebrew into Arabic. First, I must note that some of what I will mention regarding translation policies from Arabic into Hebrew applies 100 percent to translation policies from Hebrew into Arabic. However, since we are talking about translation from Arabic into Hebrew, I will focus only on this axis.

Naturally, when we speak about translation policies, we talk about two issues. The first issue relates to the question: What do we translate? The second relates to the question: How do we translate? I will not discuss the first question and will focus more on the second.

Eight years ago, a ceremony was held in celebration of seventy-five years since the establishment of the Bialik Institute. During this celebration, documents were presented regarding the translation process. Mordechai Naor, a well-known historian of what is called “history of the land of Israel,” was the person who volunteered to make this revelation. Naor has published some documents that show that David Ben-Gurion was directly involved in the issue of translation into Hebrew. When the Bialik Institute was founded, it belonged to the Jewish Agency, and Ben-Gurion was one of the Agency’s leaders. However, when he became the first Israeli prime minister, he was very much concerned with the issue of translation, and he formed a steering committee to discuss “what should be translated into Hebrew.” According to the revealed documents, in 1958 this committee included three professors: Martin Buber, Simon Halkin, and Aharon Katzir. It also included Zalman Aran, who was the Minister of Education at the time, as well as his predecessors—Zalman Shazar, Ben-Zion Dinur, and the poet and translator Reuven Avinoam—and the director of the Bialik Institute at the time, Moshe Gordon, as well as Ben-Gurion’s two close assistants: Teddy Kollek and Yitzhak Navon.

Mordechai Naor presented documents from this steering committee’s meetings. One particular meeting, held on January 21, 1958, caught my attention. According to the protocol of this meeting, Ben-Gurion affirmed that the Hebrew University should be responsible for the translation project and said, “At the moment, I suggest we prepare a list of no more than ten or twenty books,” but what followed is important, “provided that it presents the desired general picture and direction we are interested in.” This means that translation from Arabic into Hebrew, or translation into Hebrew in general, was being conducted according to a systematic plan. This is typical of the leaders of the Zionist Movement, who later on became the leaders of Israel, as has been revealed in recent research focusing on the cultural ramifications

of the 1948 Nakba—for example, what happened to the Palestinian libraries and archives—and in studies done by researchers such as Gish Amit, Ariella Azoulay, and Rona Sela. These studies elaborate on these practices, and some of them were translated into Arabic.

Protocols of other meetings on this issue show that Ben-Gurion presented a list of twenty books recommended by him, indicating that priority should be granted to Greek, Latin, Indian, Chinese, English, and American literature, and Persian or Arabic literature. This means that Ben-Gurion did not favor Arabic literature, but provided a choice between either Persian or Arabic literature, in addition to literary works written by Jews, such as Philo of Alexandria and Spinoza. Regarding Arabic literature, Ben-Gurion mentions the *Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldun, and indeed it was among the first books translated into Hebrew. To summarize, every translation effort into Hebrew from any language, and especially from Arabic, was conducted according to a systematic plan personally supervised by Ben-Gurion.

Naturally, for every rule there is an exception. The exceptions in the field of translation were the efforts to distance themselves from this previously mentioned systematic plan that Ben-Gurion and everyone who was involved in the translation project were consumed with. The Maktoob series is the pinnacle of these extraordinary, unusual efforts in the field of translation from Arabic into Hebrew. Maktoob was built on the rubble of another extraordinary effort that Mifras Publishing launched in the 1980s, through which literary works by Ghassan Kanafani, Emil Habibi, and others were translated into Hebrew. After Mifras came Andalus Publishing, established by Yael Lerer in 2000. Andalus published Hebrew translations of Arab poets and authors, most notably Mahmoud Darwish, Serene Hussein Shahid, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, and Taha Muhammad Ali from Palestine, as well as Elias Khoury and Hanan al-Shaykh from Lebanon, Muhammad Barada and Muhammad Shukri from Morocco, and Al-Tayeb Saleh from Sudan.

Although Andalus Publishing was very important, it no longer exists. If we wish to summarize its work, we can pay attention to what the owner of this publishing house said about the process of translation, when she said it “could not get rid of the weight of cultural normalization.” This meant that although the Israeli readers had accepted these translations, they thought that this project must abide by the cultural normalization policy between Israel and the Arab world.

In this context it is important to mention the conclusions that Mahmoud Darwish spoke about when he was asked about his view of the Hebrew translations of his works. Are his works translated into Hebrew solely for being literature or because they were composed by Mahmoud Darwish, the “national poet” of the

Palestinian people? Darwish answered that he is of no interest to Israeli readers, thus they do not want to read his works. They may tolerate him as a metaphoric poet, but not as a direct poet who speaks about the Palestinian issue. The best proof for this conclusion is what was written in the literary magazine *Hadarim*, which intended to publish a special issue on Darwish in 1988 but decided eventually to censor many poems because of the poem “‘Aabiroon fi kalamen ‘aaber” (“Those Who Pass between Fleeting Words”). The editors of the magazine wrote:

The following pages were supposed to present five new poems written by Mahmoud Darwish between 1977 and 1987 and translated into Hebrew by Yuval Snir. However, the last poem Darwish wrote invites us [the Jews] to rise, youth and elderly, carrying our dead and memories and to go away from here, from our land, our sea, our everything. This poem prevents us from adding more poems to this issue. In this poem, Darwish expressed the open gap between the researcher and the fighter poet and the hustle of words. This is not a political poem or an important stand, no matter how brave or bitter it is, it is hate speech and incitement.

Elias Khoury: An Act of Resistance Lies in This Translation (via Skype)

I was reading in the newspapers today about what has happened in Bahrain [the American Economic Workshop about the so-called “Deal of the Century”] and thought that literary works such as mine should be translated into Arabic as well! We suffer from a dire problem, because despite all the efforts, Palestine was, and unfortunately still is, wrapped in silence. Of course, there is a kind of silence that we constantly talk about, which is the silence of the victim. However, there is another type of silence imposed by the executioners and the robbers, in which they impose their narrative and story. They impose them by using force and impose them on international alliances and the balance of forces on the ground, and so on.

The first of my novels to be translated into Hebrew was *Bab al-Shams*. I met Yael Lerer [owner of Andalus Publishing] in Paris and thought that whoever translates *Bab al-Shams* must have a strategy contrary to the strategy of the authority that decides what is translated and what is excluded. I am not talking about political authority only, as Antwan Shulhut has mentioned, and his historical review is correct. I am talking about all authorities, especially cultural and social ones.

I think that the strategy of translating this kind of book is an act of opposition and resistance, especially nowadays, when the fascist and racist right reigns in Israel. When an author writes a novel, he does not necessarily commit an act of resistance. He writes a novel because he must write. He writes to express his experience, which he must feel inside himself. The way of reading the book and its classification begins

with publication. In the shadow of the current reality in Israel, translating a book into Hebrew can only be described as resisting the pervasive racism in Israeli society, and the entire world. It is the role of literature, as it always has been, to be a cry for freedom and justice. Otherwise, it does not make sense.

The project of translating my novels into Hebrew, which started with the novels *Bab al-Shams* in 2003 and *Yalo* in 2005, has taken another form with Maktoob, and with my friend Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, who translated a few of my novels. Among them were the two volumes of my novel *Awlad al-Ghetto* (*Children of the Ghetto*): the first is titled *Esmi Adam* (*My Name is Adam*), and the second is titled *Stella Maris*. I consider Maktoob to be an antifascist and antiracist project in Israel and in general. Because I know the translator and am familiar with his political, intellectual, and cultural views, I know how he reads literature, and that he considers translation to be an act of resistance, as do I.

I remember that once, after one of my novels was published in Hebrew, a campaign was held in Egypt against translating the novel. I remember a wonderful article that Edward Said wrote in response to this campaign that silenced these voices, as he considered translation to be a cultural and intellectual action, as well as an act of resistance. We should look at the [Palestinian] cause from this perspective. If my books were translated into Hebrew and read only by my critical intellectual friends, such as Ilan Pape, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, and others like them, I would be happy. They are indeed marginalized in Israeli society; however, we should think about how to resist colonialism, racism, settlement, and fascist thought.

Huda Abu Much: From an Oriental View to Binational Translation

I will touch on two approaches relating to translation from Arabic into Hebrew. The first relies on an Orientalist approach and the second on a binational translation approach.

Last year Resling published a book titled *Hurriyah* (*Freedom*) that includes more than forty literary works written by more than forty female writers in the Arab world, with the theme “the Arab Spring.” At first one may consider this step an important and blessed step, especially since Arab female writers are usually not translated into Hebrew. What has been translated into Hebrew so far are mostly works written by Arab male writers. Khulud Khamis, a Haifa based writer, reviewed the book when Resling asked her to participate in a seminar on it. Khulud approached the writers to examine whether they had approved the publication of their works and found that more than a third of the writers had not. The seminar was therefore canceled, and there followed a scandal in the Arab world, causing Resling to withdraw the book

from their website and from all the bookstores where it was sold.

The scandal this book caused and its withdrawal from the bookstores are not typical of all translations from Arabic into Hebrew. However, the Orientalist approach regarding this book is indeed typical of the translations from Arabic into Hebrew in modern times. Since such translations were initiated in 1876 (coinciding with the establishment of the Zionist Movement), they were looked upon from an Orientalist point of view. Such a view is still very prominent. What do we mean by an Orientalist outlook in this context? First, it means the infringement of copyrights, and second, the strengthening of a negative stereotype about Arabic culture by focusing on specific components of this culture and describing them as intrinsic and distinguishing it from other cultures. For example, portraying Arabic culture as oppressing women. There is no doubt that women are oppressed in the Arab world, and this is unacceptable. However, women are oppressed in every culture and society. A concrete example of this issue in the book *Hurriyah* is the subject of religious clothing. For example, to explain the clothing worn by protesting female writers in Midan al-Tahrir (Al-Tahrir square in Cairo), nonreligious clothing was interpreted as rebellion against oppressive Eastern cultural standards, while denying, through an Orientalist view, the simple truth that women may wear a head covering simply because they are believers! Resling declared that they aimed to give a voice to the female writers, but in effect they forced them to express themselves against their will, which in itself is a violent and arrogant act.

As for copyrights, the writers connected the infringement of their copyrights in the book *Hurriyah* with the stealing of land. One of the writers said that a country that has stolen land also typically steals that land's ideas and stories. The infringement of copyrights is also related to the refusal of Arab writers to publish their works in Hebrew, which is a manifestation of their political conviction to reject normalization with Israel. Therefore, what Resling did in this regard was to exercise force and impose a point of view, as it knew that the female writers would not apply to an Israeli court, also because of their refusal of normalization.

The issue of copyrights is not a financial issue. It is not about financial revenue but rather about political revenue. Therefore, copyright infringement is a hostile political action against the original culture, in this case, Arabic culture.

The example of *Hurriyah* is an example of the remnants of the Orientalist approach. Even if it entailed a liberal approach, it was incapable of escaping the shell in which it lies.

There is, however, another approach, represented by the Maktoob model—a model of translation that did not exist before Maktoob's establishment. First, this

approach relies on the necessity of acquiring copyrights. In other words, it refuses to publish novels and books for which it does not hold the copyrights for their translation into Hebrew. Second, it relies on a model of binational translation. According to this model, translation is not limited to one translator who translates a text into his/her language, which in this case is Hebrew. Translation is a project in which the translation is forwarded to an editor, who usually is a member of the original Arabic culture. I speak about this model following my own experience in working with Maktoob, as I was a coeditor in the translation of novels by Elias Khoury: *My Name Is Adam: Children of the Ghetto, Volume I*, and *Stella Maris* (a beautiful novel, which I therefore finished working on in a short time!). Practically, this model assures that the original culture is present throughout the process of translation. This creates a big difference in translation, and it is not limited to the translator and the translation editor, as Jewish and Arab translators participate in several meetings about the translation of the novel to discuss the translation and to create a dialogue about it. This is an unprecedented model that is constantly evolving.

Raef Zreik

When we talk about translation as political and cultural actions, the implications in the case of translation from Hebrew into Arabic, and from Arabic into Hebrew, differ, and different questions are posed. The problematics of translation from Hebrew into Arabic raise greater sensitivity among Arab readers because such translations evoke Jewish or Zionist discourse in an Arab land. This is more difficult than the problematics of translating from Arabic into Hebrew, which involves a symbolic linguistic intrusion of Arabic into the Hebrew language, leaving a Jewish audience no longer able to ignore an Arab writer and his/her texts. So, the question should be: who is intervening in the cultural setting of whom, and who influences whom?

Translations from Hebrew into Arabic raise other types of normalization sensitivities because there is gradation between understanding, comprehension, and judgment. Arabs consider Zionism a racist settlement movement. This means that when an Arab talks about Hebrew, the starting point is judgmental. Any regression from moral judgment that includes starting to read the other is an invitation to understanding that may lead to comprehension. When comprehension is complete, judgment is constructed. If one checks the background of a criminal, even a serial killer, returning to his childhood, his historical sequence, his socialization, his psychological complexity, and so on, at a certain point one may find oneself incapable of judging. Judgment assumes that there is a specific moment in the sequence of time in causation law, a critical moment, in which sequence is stopped, and understanding

is also stopped, thus postponing comprehension. Consequently, translation from Hebrew into Arabic is sensitive, as there is a fear of losing the political moral compass as more comprehension takes place, which means that judgment is postponed and a stage of intimacy between the colonizer and the colonized begins, and anger is deleted.

Translation from Arabic into Hebrew is a different thing. First, we must talk about what is translated. There is a difference between translating topics that reproduce the prevailing intellectual dominance and translating a literary work that rattles the system of contentment and dominance of a hegemonic thought in Hebrew. Translation of a literary work becomes a big stone thrown in stagnant waters, shaking basic concepts that help the Jewish society to produce its intellectual hegemony, while introducing the Palestinians to the Jewish consciousness. The content makes all the difference.

However, despite the content, an important question must not be overlooked: when you approve of the translation of your works, you, as a writer, assume that the dialogue continues, and assume that there is a continuation of speech, even if you do not speak. There is a saying by Ghassan Kanafani written in his novel *Returning to Haifa*, when Sa' id (the protagonist) enters the house (from which he was displaced) and says to the current resident (the Israeli man who lives in his house): "I did not come to convince you to get out of the house; this is another issue that requires a war." This means that Sa' id cannot convince the man who expelled him from his house, and who lives in it, to leave. Thus, accepting translation means accepting entering into a state of dialogue, which requires a certain perception of the nature of the relations between the two peoples and the assumption that there is a struggle, but it is not a struggle until death. It assumes that the struggle is with an enemy; it entails possibilities of winning or losing but excludes the idea of extermination or displacement. This is a political position. I think that anyone who believes that the struggle with the Israelis, as Kanafani thought, can be solved only by war will face difficulty with the process of translation. However, anyone who thinks that cultural, intellectual, and political debates are part of the struggle and that there is a difference between the struggle and the solution will not face any problem.

I think that Zionism finds debate and dialogue to be problematic. Zionism appeared with the aim of normalizing Jewish existence in the world based on the idea of non-normalization with the Middle East. Zionism cannot entail any peace project, because as soon as peace is realized, its existence is no longer justified. Consequently, the ideology upon which Zionism relies is antagonism, constantly searching for enemies and clashing with Palestinian rejection. It means that the

Palestinian rejection is not a phenomenon added to the Zionist ideology. The moral justification behind Zionism can be neither formulated nor valid without rejection. If Palestinian or Arab rejection were absent, Zionism would have to constantly lure the Palestinians into some state of refusal in order to justify its existence. Israel cannot tolerate a state of dialogue: it needs to constantly and forever create enemies. Consequently, I think that in the end, the Israeli institution is the one that fears dialogue.

Areej Sabbagh-Khoury: The Maktoob Model as a Different Sovereign System

Maktoob indeed represents a new and different translation model, one that constitutes a dialogue not only between text and translator but among the translators themselves—that is, Palestinian and Jewish translators living in Israel. The bilingual interaction creates a difference in the nature of the process of translation, as well as in the cultural and political relationships and production. How can we look at this model from the point of view of social studies, especially that of the settler colonialist ideological paradigm?

There is a return, led by Palestinian academics through their social and human studies, to the colonial paradigm that considers Israel to be a colonial project. It describes how colonial groups travel to other countries as immigrants and settle to replace the indigenous people, and it is therefore called settler colonialism. This ideological paradigm existed before: the Palestinian Liberation Organization and other Palestinian leaderships viewed Zionist colonialism in Palestine as related to this ideological paradigm. Although it disappeared for many years, for reasons too complicated to discuss here, in recent years it has returned to become the political and ideological center, especially following the failure of the two-state solution and the return of the option of the one-state solution.

Why does this concern me when I discuss Maktoob in this context? Because Maktoob is a new model for translation that is working in the framework of a different sovereign system, in which the colonizers waive their privileges. The Maktoob project would not be possible under an ideological framework other than that of removing settler colonialism.

Regarding translation into Hebrew, the Palestinians in Israel are part of a group that was born and lived in Palestine after the Nakba. This group became acquainted with the enemy, his language and culture, and decided to use this newly acquired knowledge to be part of the paradigm that calls for removing colonialism. I am not talking about removing the colonizer physically, nor via physical violence, but removing his coloniality. After a Palestinian is acquainted with the Jewish people, he

presents a new project from a position of power, a position of the mediator, and says, “I am here in this space. I am the owner of this place; I am an indigenous person, and I participate in a translation project in which Arabic texts are translated into Hebrew.” The content of these texts tells the story of the Palestinians’ catastrophe, which took place here, and translates it into Hebrew.

Literature is the archive of peoples who have lost their archives. The colonizer, or any dominating group, is privileged to say, “This literature is not an archive; these are not facts that we can rely on.” However, this conception has been shaken ever since history and social studies have been written. Novels are our archive. In my work as a researcher, I use literature as part of the Palestinian archive. One may consider the author Salman Natour, one of the founders of Maktoob, as the first Palestinian historian, because he went to Palestinian villages and to refugees to interview them, and thus archived the Nakba. Salman Natour said to me during an interview I conducted with him: “I interviewed people who were displaced from their villages in 1948, but we could not publish these interviews in *Al-Ittihad* newspaper because the newspaper was subjected to military censorship. I published it in *Al-Jadid* magazine for literature.” Literature is a tool in the hands of the colonized for archiving.

Therefore, Maktoob is partly transferring the Nakba archive from Arabic into Hebrew. We, the Palestinians in Israel who read and master Hebrew, are a partner group in this project. We must resist not only by reading the translation about the experience of injustice but by translating the actions we were subjected to by the colonizer into his language, to renarrate our history from a position of power. We put this project on the table as part of the sovereignty in which the Jews are liberated from their coloniality, and the Palestinians are returned to Palestine, in which they live.



What Is Anticolonial Translation? The Form and Content of Binational Resistance in Maktoob

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Introduction

Published in the early 1960s, Frantz Fanon's essay "On National Literature" is a meditation on the processes involved in the formation of anticolonial art and literature under colonial rule, appealing directly to the generation of writers and artists who struggled to define the shape of a liberatory culture in the era of decolonization.¹ How can the poet imagine anticolonial poetry in a society that has been largely constituted through colonial institutions and power structures? Does an anticolonial practice come from precolonial models, languages, and heritage, or is it more directly accessed by narrating the stories of collective liberation? How should the writer or translator address the colonial erasure of regional, local, and indigenous languages and their replacement with English, French, or German? Should they write in French or English, Arabic or Swahili? Over half a century after the first wave of global decolonization, related questions occupy the first Palestinian-Jewish translators' collective in Israel/Palestine. Maktoob, which houses over fifty translators, among them writers, academics, and public intellectuals, is structured into teams of Palestinian and Israeli Jewish translators who work in binational and bilingual groups to translate Arabic literature into Hebrew, with a specific focus on undoing processes of social, cultural, and linguistic colonialism.

In July 2019 the collective took part in a roundtable of Palestinian authors, translators, and scholars including Elias Khoury, Raef Zreik, Huda Abu Much,

Eyad Barghuthy, Antwan Shulhut, and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, who assembled in Nazareth to discuss the conditions of Arabic-to-Hebrew translation within the Israeli colonial system (see pp. 23-35). The gathering was critical, as it represented a rare opportunity for Palestinian intellectuals and cultural producers to define the terms of an anticolonial translation practice in the current climate. Speakers discussed the historical and political range of translation practices from 1948 till the present day, from the Oriental and racist translation projects led by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to the progressive directions taken by presses and magazines that translated and circulated important works of Palestinian literature. Echoing other speakers, Palestinian scholar Sabbagh-Khoury framed Maktoob's binational model as a new paradigm of translation, remarking that the binational translation functions according to a shared sovereign framework in the context of which the "colonizer relinquishes his/her privileges." Moreover, she asserts that such a model "could not be possible under an ideological framework other than that of the elimination of settler colonialism (*izalat al-isti'mar al-istitani*)."²

Can translation contribute to the elimination of colonial structures in Israel/Palestine? How might we define an anticolonial framework and its literary and linguistic dimensions? Following Sabbagh-Khoury's analysis, this essay looks at the ways in which Arabic-to-Hebrew translation has been posited and utilized as a means of political resistance to racism, occupation, and colonialism. Analyzing the impact of colonial paradigms on language, culture, and translation between Hebrew and Arabic, I reflect on the long history of activist translation practices that have aspired to democratize the Israeli cultural sphere. As I argue, Maktoob's unique contribution to this tradition emerges from its commitment to a systemic decolonization, and thus transformation, of the processes surrounding translation. Binational, bilingual translation (*tirgum du leumi, du leshoni*), the collective's work model, combines content-based approaches with formal, linguistic, and structural innovations in translation. The explicit aim of these is to erode colonial effects such as Orientalism, translational erasure, ethnoseparatism, literary theft, and the linguistic division between Arabic and Hebrew, as well as to establish a model that promotes democratic cultural participation among Jews and Palestinians. The essay demonstrates the continued influence of cultural decolonization on contemporary literatures and offers new insights into what this means for translation theory and practice.

Situating Cultural Anticolonialism in Israel/Palestine

Any understanding of cultural decolonization in literature, art, or translation must begin with the history and framework of cultural and linguistic colonialism in Palestine/Israel. This history will also help us to identify the connections between various communities that feel the effects of colonial structures and attitudes but who are products of different colonial histories and unequal status under Israeli rule. These include Jewish descendants of communities from the Middle East and North Africa, Palestinian citizens of Israel, and Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza. What links these groups is the fact that the colonial structures of the ethno-separatist state play a major role in defining their positioning within the social, economic, and political hierarchy. The European legacy of colonization, Orientalism, and racial differentiation created a set of models that supported the Zionist settler colonial project in Palestine, an ethno-separatist, territory-centered project based on both the denial and intended elimination of the indigenous Palestinian presence on the land.³ Related colonial logic shaped the structure of racial discrimination against Mizrahi and other non-European Jews and the establishment of systemic social, economic, and cultural inequalities that placed them on the lower rungs of Israeli Jewish society.⁴ Likewise, in order to perpetuate and justify Jewish ethnonationalism, the state built upon the French and British colonial legacies of dividing Arabs and Jews in the MENA region.

In Israel separation was achieved by segregating Jewish and Palestinian communities, constituting the Arab as the enemy, and eliminating Arabic culture, language, and identity within Jewish communities of the Arab world, as well as within the state at large.⁵ As Lital Levy has shown, in the early years of the state, the physical partition of Palestinians and Jews was enforced by an ethnonational ideology and a wartime logic that drove the erasure of the Arabic language and Arab culture from Jewish life.⁶ As in other colonial contexts, the civilizing mission called for immigrants from the MENA region to abandon their native Arabic culture and language and espouse the Hebrew language and secular European Jewish culture of the new Israeli state.⁷ Yet as Levy also notes, this treatment was not applied exclusively to the Arab Jewish immigrants: “The Zionist ethos demanded a total replacement of the old with the new. All new immigrants, be they Ashkenazim, Sephardim, or Arab Jews, were expected to repudiate their erstwhile identities and adopt the singular language and culture of the state, emulating the ‘pioneers’ from the earlier waves of immigration.”⁸ However, she shows that Arabic was specifically designated as an enemy language, while Hebrew was constituted as the language of the Jews and of the State of Israel. In addition to its broader colonial character, the dominance of

Hebrew and the erasure of Arabic also corresponded directly to the establishment of settler colonial sovereignty on Palestinian land. According to Zionist principles, Jewish sovereignty corresponded to three pillars: land, language, and labor. Thus, Hebraizing the public sphere became a supplement to the usurpation of land and the elimination of the Palestinian collective from the public space.

These cumulative developments led to the erasure of Arabic, the destruction of Arabic-based Jewish culture, challenges to Arabic culture in the Palestinian community, and the forced separation of the Arabic and Hebrew cultures in Israel.⁹ Thus, the separation of the Arab and the Jew, which in practice meant the erasure of Arabic language and culture and the de-Arabization of Jews from the Arab world, was a key aspect of the establishment of a modern ethnoseparatist state. Today only 2 percent of Israeli Jews have a working knowledge of written Arabic, despite the fact that Arabic was once the mother tongue of 50 percent of the state's Jewish population and is the spoken language of Israel's Palestinian citizens and occupied population, as well as the language of all the surrounding countries.¹⁰

Throughout this essay, I examine cultural anticolonialism as a set of translational and literary practices that resist and offer alternatives to the colonial systems described above. In contrast to the discourses of the postcolonial or the decolonial, the term "anticolonial" is used to refer more directly to movements of political and cultural resistance active in the historical period before and directly after territorial decolonization. Thus, this term brings attention to an important distinction between cultural resistance in Israel/Palestine, the last settlement that retains structures of classical colonial rule in the Middle East, and cultural resistance in the postcolonial and neocolonial states. While many artists continue to combat the legacies and vestiges of colonialism, and its continuation in neocolonial systems throughout the world, anticolonial writers, artists, and translators in Palestine/Israel are up against an existing system of colonial rule that touches all aspects of social, political, and economic life. As I will show, these conditions shape translation practices in unique ways. This term is also raised to bring attention to the similarity between these producers and the work of anticolonial artists and movements of the twentieth century.

Global anticolonial cultures included deep engagement with the question of indigenous and regional languages as well as with other indigenous, classical, oral, or folkloric sources as potential alternatives to the colonial linguistic and literary sources that dominated education and culture. Examples include the interest in African and Caribbean folkloric traditions within the Negritude movement and the Marxist interpretations of classical Arabic heritage (*turath*) undertaken by popular

Communist journals and Arab intellectuals like Husayn Murruwah and Mahdi Amil.¹¹ Of even greater relevance to this essay are the experiments of writers involved in the bilingual Arabic and French Moroccan journal *Souffle-Anfas*. Their practices included the use of bilingual translation and experimental literary practices in multiple Semitic and ancient languages as a challenge to the dominance of French. Likewise, multilingual practices were deployed to resist the binary separation of the Arab and the Jew established by colonial discourses. As Olivia Harrison notes, Edmond El Maleh, a central figure in the journal, created a literary “plurilanguage, interrupting French with fragments of Judeo-Arabic, Haketia, Hebrew, Arabic, Tasselhit.. in order to undermine the colonizing impulse of language and the identitarian myths epitomized in French colonial and Zionist/Israeli discourses.”¹²

Similarly, many translators and writers who engage with Arabic culture and Arabic and Hebrew in Israel/Palestine have been invested in ways of accessing alternative sources of Arab-Jewish coexistence and cultural exchange that predate the advent of colonial rule in 1948 and the separation of the two languages. These include elements from the rich histories of Jewish habitation in the Arab world and, perhaps most prominently, the Andalusian Golden Age, during which time Muslims and Jews were deeply engaged in a shared cultural renaissance. As we shall see in what follows, these histories have provided the inspiration for a number of translation projects. Finally, Palestinian literary production is the largest source of anticolonial culture in Israel/Palestine, with its deep commitment to the preservation of Arabic, and Palestinian history, narrative, folkloric, and oral sources, and its deep engagement with the question of coloniality. For Maktoob these two legacies—of ancient Andalusia and contemporary Palestine/Israel—have inspired a multilingual collective translation model practiced during the Middle Ages that has the potential to challenge many linguistic and cultural translation practices that have been shaped by Israeli colonialism.

Translation under Colonialism

As a number of scholars have established, translation was a central discursive technology in the colonial and imperial era, shaping the representation of the non-Western subject and indeed the entire epistemology by which the West made the non-West known to itself.¹³ Tejaswini Niranjana notes that the very practice and methodology of translation

shapes and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism. What is at stake here is the representation of the colonized, who need to be produced in such a manner to justify colonial domination. . . . In forming a certain

kind of subject, in presenting particular versions of the colonized, translation brings into being overarching concepts of reality and representation. These concepts, and what they allow us to assume, completely occlude the violence that accompanies the construction of the colonial subject.¹⁴

Thus, the colonized society was represented and constituted to the West through colonial translation, a text that occluded the parallel erasure of the history and culture of the colonized. Simultaneously, translation of the colonized into the colonizer's logic and languages encouraged the marginalization and erasure of native languages and brought about the reeducation of the native population, who were taught to view themselves anew through the distorted lens that colonial translation provided.¹⁵

The practice of Arabic-to-Hebrew translation in Palestine/Israel rests on similar foundations. As Meron Benvenisti discusses, one of the first major translation projects undertaken by the new State of Israel was to translate the Palestinian Arabic place-names into the Hebrew names that would replace them on official maps, road signs, and history books.¹⁶ A name is not translatable, as such, at least in the sense that its translation is not a linguistic transmission of meaning. This can be illustrated by the fact that city or country names are not usually translated from the original, but rather spelled phonetically or according to their fixed names within target languages. To translate the Arabic name of the city of Nablus into the Biblical Hebrew name of the city, Shechem, to cite one example, is an act of replacing one untranslatable cultural and linguistic marker with another, a territorial and representational claim made through translation. It is a rupture in the historical and geographical continuity of places, which in this case worked in tandem with a colonial settlement ideology that aimed to erase and replace traces of Palestinian habitation.

These translation dynamics can be understood, and potentially challenged, through an understanding of how translation practices are circumscribed by the political, cultural, and trans-historical relationship between Hebrew and Arabic. This relationship begins with the colonial history and position of Arabic as the language of the enemy, as described above. But it is also shaped by the deep linguistic and historical connections between Hebrew and Arabic as ancient, Semitic, theological Near Eastern languages, as well as by Arabic's position as the historic language of Jewish communities in the Arab world. These histories are juxtaposed by Hebrew's modernization, secularization, and nationalization as the language of the dominant majority in Israel. Further, the Israeli military has developed vocabulary and linguistic approaches to Hebrew and Arabic such that both languages can be deployed to support Israel's occupation and its military industrial complex. As Yonatan Mendel

has also shown, Arabic has been rendered a textually bound, “dead language” in Israeli academe, where Arabic teaching and research is geared toward military purposes, and spoken communication in Arabic is discouraged.¹⁷

Generally speaking, mainstream translation practices of Arabic into Hebrew have been dominated by Orientalist approaches. These include factors such as a negative bias toward Arabic culture rendered through textual omission, mistranslation, Orientalist explanations, translation of cultural terms or names into their Hebrew equivalent (e.g., al-Quds becomes Yerushalayim), or the presentation of Arabic-to-Hebrew translation as a means of “knowing the enemy.” Another related problem in both conservative and progressive translation endeavors has been the publication of Arabic texts without authorial permission. As Huda Abu Much discusses, in a recent anthology of Arabic literary works on the Arab Spring published by Riesling, the failure of the press to obtain copyrights from many authors was likened to the colonial theft of land.¹⁸ Such practices continue the tradition of translation as colonial protection and projection.

This weighted zone between Hebrew and Arabic also means that the trope and the practice of Arabic-to-Hebrew translation are prominent in cultural resistance efforts against racism, Orientalism, and colonialism in Palestine/Israel. Yet the translator’s position and capacity to intervene within a colonial system are complex and challenging. One reflection that illuminates the translator’s position in this context comes from Maria Tymoczko, who points to the inaccuracy of the long-standing critical notion that translators work “in between” the source and the target language. Rather, she notes that

in the act of translation, when a translator interrogates a source text on the basis of a target language, the translator transcends the source language as a formal system, without simply switching to the target language as a formal system. Conversely, when the target language is interrogated using the source text as the basis of the examination, the translator transcends the target language as formal system without simply reverting to the system of the source language. The transcendence of both linguistic codes in fact puts the translator into a formal system that encompasses *both* languages, rather than being restricted to either. How large such an encompassing system will be has to do with the closeness of the two languages and two cultures in question, the breadth of the linguistic purview of the materials translated, and so forth. Whatever the extent of these parameters, however, the translator doesn’t altogether leave the system of language *per se*, nor does the translator strictly speaking leave the domain of either or both languages. That is, one must conceptualize the translator not as operating *between* languages, but as operating... in a system inclusive of both.¹⁹

Given what we know about the relationship between modern Arabic and Hebrew, we might reflect on this passage by considering the myriad factors translators must account for when mapping a formal system that encompasses both languages. The possibility of such a procedure is further complicated by Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, who mounts an even broader critique of the way we conceive of the position of the translator in the contemporary colonial context. He shows how our current translation model, developed during the Renaissance, is based on a rationalist, individualist mode that stipulates that translators work alone, charting the system between the source and the target language in a disconnect from the social or cultural spheres. Unlike the collective translation systems that came before the fifteenth century, this model eliminates dialogue and multilingualism, “[dictating] a forward-moving unidirectional formula of translation that usurps the original text and occupies its place.”²⁰ This system thus continues to reproduce the same structural problems that plagued European colonial translation and is particularly detrimental to translation projects within a colonial state because it recreates “the very same asymmetry that typifies the exterior conditions and the power relations between the languages.”²¹

On a small scale, progressive Arabic-to-Hebrew and Hebrew-to-Arabic translation initiatives have been active throughout the history of the state. However, only some of these projects have put forth an analysis of colonialism, and even the most politically committed among them have focused on content-based as opposed to formal interventions. When structural analysis has played a role in these endeavors, it was in the deliberate establishment of relationships between Palestinian and Israeli Jewish practitioners, not in the more direct imbrication of collective work with the theory and practice of translation. During the establishment of the state in the 1940s and 1950s, the most ambitious campaign for cultural decolonization came under the auspices of the Israeli Communist Party (ICP), when a group of Palestinians and Jews from the Arab world wrote, translated, and published anti-Zionist, socialist literature and criticism in the party organs, *Al-Ittihad* (Arabic), *Al-Jadid* (Arabic), and *Kol HaAm* (Hebrew). While most of their joint activity was focused on cultural production in Arabic, they considered literary translation an important educational and political vehicle, especially in the struggle against racism and for the preservation of Arabic culture. Their cultural and literary magazine, *Al-Jadid*, featured regular translations of socialist Hebrew poetry and essays; likewise, *Kol HaAm* featured regular Hebrew translations of Arabic literature and essays by Arab and Palestinian writers. Their central innovation was in their joint activity as a group of Arab Marxists of Arab Jewish and Palestinian origin—including important writers and translators such as Shimon Ballas, Emile Touma, Emile Habibi, Hanna Abu Hanna, David Semah, Hanna Ibrahim,

Sasson Somekh, Sami Michael, and Mahmoud Darwish—who offered an anti-Zionist vision of a common Arab-Jewish space as the historical basis for a common culture and who imagined the narratives of Palestinians and Arab Jews in Arabic as a central part of the collective story of Palestine/Israel.²²

The first collection of Palestinian literature in Hebrew was edited and translated by the Iraqi Jewish writer and scholar Shimon Ballas, previously a writer for *Al-Jadid* and *Kol HaAm*. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, many writers were involved in the creation of bilingual magazines or special issues devoted to Arabic-to-Hebrew translation, including magazines such as *Kesbet*, *Iton 77*, and *Liqaa-Mifgash*, an entirely bilingual magazine dedicated to conversation and translation of literature between Arabic and Hebrew. The two largest translation and book publication projects in Israel, Andalus Publishing and the Mifras publishing project, collectively published the lion's share of Arabic literature that was translated into Hebrew before 2010. While both were committed to exposing the Israeli public to works of Palestinian anticolonial literary resistance, Andalus inserted an explicitly political analysis into the translation and publication process, and invoked Muslim-Jewish collaboration of Andalusia as its inspiration.²³ Critically, Andalus obtained explicit permission from Arab and Palestinian writers before beginning the translations. Another important part of Andalus's practice was its explicit politicization of translation through its curatorial practices. The editors affiliated themselves with Arab left culture, selecting critical Palestinian antioccupation literature and art, such as works by Emile Habibi, Elias Khoury, and Sahar Khalifeh, as well as novels by feminist writers such as Hanan al-Shaykh.

In recent years Gerila Tarbut (Guerilla Culture), an ad hoc circle including Israeli and Palestinian poets, began publishing collections of bilingual zines and chapbooks that came out of bilingual poetry readings organized at protests and strikes in collaboration with human rights, labor, and Palestinian rights organizations. One illustrative example of their publications is an Arabic-and-Hebrew poetry collection titled *Shira mefareket homa* (Wall-breaking poetry), which included original and translated poems in Hebrew and Arabic by all the participating poets. The postscript of *Shira mefareket homa*, which functions as a kind of manifesto to the collection, begins by characterizing the reading and publication as “a protest against one of the most severe symbols of human rights violation in the last century, the Separation Wall,” and goes on to provide analysis of the structural effects and human rights violations that the wall and the occupation inflict upon the Palestinian population. The text then discusses coexistence (*du kiyum*) as the antidote to this political reality, beginning with a reference to the history of Arab-Jewish coexistence in the Middle

East and Andalusia: “The Mizrahi culture in the Middle East showed that Jews and Arabs are capable of creating, writing, praying, and striving together; Israel needs to strive for an Arab-Jewish cultural horizon that draws from a diverse past toward a future that will allow for coexistence, cooperation, and neighborliness.”²⁴ While the group did not publish on major platforms, preferring chapbooks and online editions, it included many important writers and reflected continued interest in precolonial models of Arab-Jewish cooperation and an understanding of Arabic-to-Hebrew translation as an alternative political practice.

The Structure, Form, and Content of Anticolonial Translation in Maktoob

While Maktoob has much in common with the translation projects that came before it, it is the first initiative to work systemically to restructure form, organizational structure, and content in translation. In this section I focus on the relationship between these elements and what has already been discussed in terms of colonial models of translation, anticolonial translation practices, and the attendant history of translation practices in Palestine/Israel. I weave this discussion into an examination of how the translation collective handles two interconnected issues: First, I look at the question of structural and formal innovation and how these manifest in Maktoob’s binational, bilingual translation model. Second, I look at how these formal innovations shape literary networks and catalyze new forms of literary expression.

Like other anticolonial interventions, the binational translation model was born of a critique of existing translation practices. I have outlined part of this critique, put forth by Maktoob’s chief editor Yehouda Shenhav, in the section above. Shenhav has written on the severe drawbacks of the neoclassical model of translation, constituted in the fifteenth century. The neoclassical model emerged from the rationalist ideals of the Enlightenment and was particularly well suited to the consolidation of national languages and political power, contributing “to political unification by hindering language diversity and different interpretive positions.”²⁵ The fifteenth century also marks the advent of Europe’s imperial and colonial adventures, when national consolidation led to the consolidation of empire. With its focus on linguistic replacement in the absence of dialogue, the new model was equally well suited to the pursuit of the linguistic and epistemological dominance through which European nations ruled their colonies. Within Israel/Palestine this translation model often has the effect of reproducing the existing colonial dynamics that have been established between Arabic and Hebrew.

The team translation model was dominant through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and was in place during the renaissance of Arab-Jewish cultural

cooperation in Andalusia. Teams might include multiple translators, as well as scholars with different language proficiencies, whose practices included discussion, writing, and reading aloud, alongside simultaneous translation. In place of this, Maktoob has assembled a contemporary version of the precolonial model of team translation, based on bilingual working teams of both Israeli Jewish and Palestinian translators and editors. Of necessity their translations of prose and poetry are formed on the basis of ongoing debates on Arabic and Hebrew, as well as on the Jewish, Israeli, Arab, and Palestinian cultures and histories that inform the texts and their translations.²⁶

As a working model for binational collaboration, Maktoob's system introduces anticolonial formal innovation and a shift in structural inequalities, promoting joint democratic leadership, representation, and collaboration with Palestinian cultural producers, and the visibility of Palestinian collective narratives. This is reinforced by Maktoob's commitment to obtain explicit translation and publication permission from all of its authors. The social fabric of trust, community, and movement building that is constituted through these structures makes possible a conversation between Israeli Jewish, Arab, and Palestinian translators and cultural producers that was impossible in other contexts. Conversations take place in multiple formats and are an integral part of the textual commentary and events surrounding the books themselves.²⁷

Within these collective translation teams, Maktoob pursues linguistic strategies aimed at combatting Orientalism, the separation of Arabic and Hebrew, Hebrew monolingualism, and ethnoseparatism.²⁸ In the afterword to a recent publication, we are invited to imagine "translators sitting together in a collective, compiling Arabic roots and incorporating them into the Hebrew language... a different order, in which the job of the translator is to widen the areas of correspondence between the two languages, and alongside them, the possibility of dialogue."²⁹ Establishing such linguistic interdependence is a central mission of the group translation process: each translated book strives to widen the linguistic, syntactical, and narrative capacities of both languages. The choices are felt in the texture of the translated Hebrew, which steers away from military lingo and Anglicized and media Hebrew, and toward Arabic roots, as well as a biblical parlance that Anton Shammas describes as the "language of grace," which he drew on in order to bring Hebrew closer to its Semitic roots.³⁰ Translation teams work in a milieu informed by the multiple linguistic and interpretive possibilities that the literary text offers, resisting the traditional aspiration of the faithful or accurate translations: "[The] translator does not seek to find the precise interpretation hidden inside the text, but rather to constitute a performative

action that recognizes the multiple meanings inherent in a text that is in a state of linguistic conflict within colonial conditions.”³¹ Thus, collective translation resists linguistic and racial separatism by imbuing the literary work with the dynamic political, linguistic, cultural, and social discourse that arises from a democratic assembly of Palestinian and Israeli Jewish cultural producers.

Cracks in the Wall: Literary Networks, Archival Transmissions, and Bilingual Practices

How do these formal and structural innovations ultimately shape the books that Maktoob publishes? In what follows, I examine three important literary dynamics that are developed in Maktoob’s products. The first is the establishment of new networks and important conversations between Jewish Israeli, Arab, and Palestinian cultural producers. The interaction between the *form* and the *content* begins with Maktoob’s bilingual model, as well as with its refusal to reenact the colonial dynamics of theft and coercion that result from publishing translations without authorial permission. This latter choice limits Maktoob’s content—authors will only consent if they are aligned with the project—in that authors see Maktoob’s Arabic-to-Hebrew translations as a form of political resistance and not as a normalization of relations with the Israeli state. It also slows down the production of translation because the context requires trust building and the establishment of political intent. This building is also the starting point for new networks that erode the impasse between Jewish Israelis and the Arab world. The second innovation relates to the transmission of various aspects of the Palestinian cultural and historical archive into Israeli literature through translation. Such literary transmissions erode blocks that stand in the way of dialogue and mutual understanding, and they bring the Palestinian narrative into the Israeli public sphere. The third is the practice of bringing about innovation in literary Hebrew by bringing it in closer proximity to spoken and literary Arabic, as well as precolonial ancient Hebrew. This practice is enhanced by the transmission of Palestinian linguistics, syntax, and narrative into Hebrew, allowing Hebrew literature to expand to contain an anticolonial undercurrent.

While Maktoob is a young organization, its small library highlights some clear patterns. Like the progressive press Andalus Publishing, over half of Maktoob’s books thus far are Palestinian literary works; while all are aligned with anticolonialism, they span various forms and styles, and the writers hail from within Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and the diaspora. The remainder are mostly works of contemporary Arabic literature affiliated with leftist literary traditions. Notable among these is *Zikaron ha-guf* (Memory of the flesh) by Algerian writer Ahlam Mosteghanemi, one of the most important anticolonial novels of the period, which explores the national

struggle leading up to Algerian Independence. *Pka'at shel sodot* (An entanglement of secrets), by the Lebanese writer Elias Khoury, explores another affair in the annals of Arab postcolonial history—the Lebanese Civil War—from the perspective of Beirut's most marginal denizens. In addition 2014 saw the publication of *Ein be-ba'aluti davar milvad ha-balomot* (I own nothing but my dreams: A bilingual anthology of Yazidi poetry in the wake of genocide, 2014–2016), a major literary event, which harnesses poetry as a vehicle for the cultural preservation of a communal archive after genocide. The collection, translated and introduced by Idan Barir, encourages readers to reflect upon the practices of mass political violence and collective elimination that haunt Israel/Palestine and the contemporary Middle East, and raises questions about collective archiving in the face of such violence. In 2019, Maktoob will publish *Shlomo ha-Kurdi* (Shlomo the Kurd) by the Iraqi Jewish writer Samir Naqqash, who is famous for his determination to continue writing Arabic literature throughout his life in Israel, even as the remainder of his Iraqi Jewish literary peers turned to Hebrew. The contours of these first literary seeds suggest a collection that will explore the modern Arab world from an antiauthoritarian, anticolonial, pluralistic, and politically critical perspective, forming thematic and narrative links for Maktoob's central commitment, the translation of Palestinian literature into Hebrew.

Amputated tongue / בלשון כרותה / بلسان ميتورة

It is in the realm of its translation of Palestinian literature that Maktoob has made the greatest strides in breaking barriers between regional intellectuals and writers, forging connections that both open up the literary canons and advance philosophical and political dialogues. In this regard one critical publication is *Be-lashon kruta* (Amputated tongue), the most comprehensive anthology of Palestinian prose in the Hebrew language to date, which includes seventy-three stories by fifty-seven Palestinian residents of Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, and the Palestinian diaspora, translated by thirty-six Israeli Jewish and Palestinian translators working in bilingual and binational teams.³² As Shenhav notes in his afterword, the title is a phrase from *Mul ha-ye'arot* (Facing the forests), a 1968 story by the Israeli writer A. B. Yehoshua.³³ The story centers on an Israeli intergenerational conflict, in which a side character, a mute Palestinian worker whose tongue has been cut out, burns down a forest that covers a ruined Palestinian village.³⁴ Nearly twenty years later, Anton Shammas took up this trope in his Hebrew-language novel *Arabeskot* (Arabesques), in which he satirizes A. B. Yehoshua and other Israeli writers who used Palestinian characters as literary pawns for a one-sided exploration of war, exoticism, and the Arab-Jewish

conflict, among other themes.³⁵ While Shamma returns the tongue to circulation, by turning a mirror on the Israeli literary scene, *Be-lashon kruta* brings the trope full circle by negating the notion that an amputated tongue is equal to the end of language or of communication. In the Palestinian context, the destruction of language and culture create the necessity for new forms of literature and communication. These were shaped both by the silence that arose after the colonial amputation of the expressive apparatus and by a new language that emerged to adapt to and overcome linguistic and cultural severance.

Literary language under colonization is one of the main themes of Ghassan Kanafani's 1968 study and literary reader *Adab al-muqawama fi Filastin al-muhtala, 1948–1966* (Literature of resistance in occupied Palestine), in which he introduces the Arab world to the anticolonial writing that Palestinian authors produced inside Israel during the 1950s and 1960s.³⁶ In this groundbreaking volume he discusses the way that the violence and pressure of colonization created the conditions for the emergence of new Palestinian literary forms. As the Palestinian poet Samih al-Qasim renders it in poetic language:

I would have liked to tell you
The story of a nightingale who died
I would have liked to tell you
The story . . .
Had they not slit my lips³⁷

The poem provides us with a pithy illustration of the ways in which bodily and collective violence shift the poem from the romantic form into something new: the poetics of the split lip, the amputated tongue. Such dynamics can be found in the opening story of *Be-lashon kruta*, a short chronicle of the life of a woman resisting repeated sexual violence in her marriage.³⁸ The story's title, "*Lo!*" (No!), is akin to the sound of the amputated tongue, less a title than a refusal that evokes the truncation and physicalization of language as a response to violence.

Located in Acre, "Pasport" (Passport) tells the story of a Palestinian citizen of Israel who attempts to have his passport renewed during the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, so that he can embark on his English book tour. The story's language regularly shifts between slogans, headlines and sociolects, as the alienated protagonist negotiates between the news, the sirens, the state bureaucracies, and the state of emergency produced by an ongoing war. In the following scene the protagonist attempts to retrieve his passport from the Ministry of the Interior:

“Hello, hi, can I speak to Shula?”
“There’s no one working today. The Ministry of the Interior is closed.”
“Closed? But it’s a Tuesday.”
“We’re at war.”
“But the war is in Lebanon and in Kiryat Shmona.”
“And here too. Where do you live? Haven’t you heard about the missiles that fell on Haifa and on the suburbs yesterday?”
“What do we have to do with suburbs? We’re in Acre.”
“All the Northern government offices are closed.”
“What about you? I thought you said everything’s closed?”
“I’m the security guard.”
“But the building’s locked.”
“That doesn’t matter. It can’t be left unguarded.”
“So, what am I supposed to do now?”
“About what?”
“My passport. I need to renew it.”
“Wait for the war to end. No one’s here to help you today. Now, if you’ll excuse me—”
“But what should I do? When will the war end?”
“Sir, please, no one can say—”
“One day? Two days?”³⁹

The confounding conversation with the employee at the state department, the ongoing state of emergency, the anxious banter produced by air raid sirens, and later the chants of the Palestinian antiwar protest that the protagonist ambivalently joins enact a maze of tragedy, fear, and absurdity. Brought about by conflicting political pressures, this depiction is highly satirical and brings shape to a situation in which the representation of events is fundamentally disconnected from the lived reality of the Palestinian protagonist.

Reading this story and others in Hebrew translation under the title *Be-lashon kruta* allows us to imagine Palestinian literature coming full circle: it travels from its position as mute within Hebrew to its position as innovator of the Arabic literary language and collective imaginary, and reenters Hebrew literature as an anticolonial undercurrent through translation and bilingualism.

My Name Is Adam: Children of the Ghetto / ילדי הגטו – שמי אדם / اولاد الغيتو - اسمي ادم

Another critical aspect of the Maktoob library is its collection of literary texts that explore the Nakba and Palestinian history. This raises the question of the transmission of the Palestinian archive, alongside Palestinian narratives and styles, into the Hebrew language and Israeli society. The Arabs have historically referred to their poetry as *diwan al-ʿArab* (the register of the Arabs), highlighting the central role of poetry—the primary form of literature—as an archive of cultural heritage, collective history, and Arab identity. This metaphor took on even greater weight in Palestinian society, where major parts of the archive have been lost or at least catastrophically dispersed. In response to this, many writers approached literature as a critical depository for the Palestinian historical and cultural record. In addition to oral history, literature thus took on the function of being the first supplement to the official history produced by Israel. As the Palestinian scholar Areej Sabbagh-Khoury notes, “Literature is the archive of peoples who have lost their archives.”⁴⁰ And indeed, as Maha Nassar has shown, in the absence of established historiographical or media institutions to chronicle the experiences of these groups, early Arabic-language magazines such as *Al-Jadid* emerged as a counterinstitution through which the history of the margins were chronicled and preserved.⁴¹ If Palestinian literature constituted a historical and cultural archive, then its translation into Hebrew is undoubtedly a process of archival transmission that has the potential to transform aspects of the Hebrew language and collective narrative.

Maktoob has published two books—Ibrahim Nasrallah’s *Zman ha-susim ha-levanim* (*Time of White Horses*), and Ihsan Turjman’s *Shmat ha-arbeh* (*Year of the Locust*)—that take up aspects of pre-1948 Palestinian history and thereby challenge the Zionist historiography that denies this history. But its most important examination of post-1948 Palestinian history thus far comes in the form of the translation *Yaldei ha-geto: Shmi Adam* (*My Name Is Adam: Children of the Ghetto*), by Elias Khoury.⁴² Among other things, the novel excavates explicit histories of the Nakba, while examining the relationship between the Nakba and the Jewish ghetto and the Holocaust. *Yaldei ha-geto* is both a personal and collective narrative surrounding the life of Adam Danoun, a Palestinian citizen of Israel who grows up in the al-Lydd ghetto, which was established when Palestinians who were not expelled from the country during the war were placed under Israeli military rule. As an adult he devotes himself to a life as a Hebrew literary scholar, but he flees to New York later in life, exhausted by the Israeli reality. The story is a poetic, genre-bending saga that shifts between myth, fiction, confession, historical narration, and autobiography, in an ostensible working through of Adam’s

memories and the papers that remain after his sudden death, a sprawling archive of reflections, criticism, notes, and literary sketches.

As a child of unknown parentage and place of birth, Adam believes that his true father was a Palestinian fighter who died in the war, and his adoptive father was a Warsaw Ghetto survivor who passed away during the 1948 Battle of Haifa. These imaginaries reflect Adam's position between the Palestinian and Jewish worlds within Palestine/Israel. In this way Adam's identification with the Warsaw Ghetto is tied back to his harrowing experiences as a child in the ghetto of al-Lydd, where the population was terrorized by the Israeli militias during the war and ultimately confined to the barbered wire of the ghetto from the late 1940s until 1967. Adam reflects:

When I was asked at Haifa University where I was from, I'd always reply with a single word – the ghetto – thinking my colleagues, male and female, would look at me with pity as the son of a Warsaw Ghetto survivor.

I wasn't lying. I know the stories of the Warsaw Ghetto as well as I know the stories of the ghetto of Lydda. Such stories resemble each other, like the dead. The stories of the first I read innumerable times, till they were engraved on my memory, and those of the second were like a brand stamped on my soul – stories I read and stories I heard, not just with my ears but with my body, on which my mother's words were traced.⁴³

Like most citizens of Israel, Adam grows up absorbing and being forced to reckon with the terrifying chronicles of genocide perpetrated in the Holocaust, which he organically links to his own experiences of confinement, persecution, and collective violence. He is able to claim the Warsaw Ghetto, which is recognized and memorialized in the Israeli national imaginary, in order to mourn the unrecognized, unmentionable Palestinian ghetto in al-Lydd. The overlap between these two, the former pressed upon his collective memory, the latter upon his nervous system, exposes the fallacy in which the Holocaust cancels out the Nakba. The story draws the reader into a haunted hall of mirrors in which each event echoes aspects of the other.

The translation into Hebrew—which Shenhav executed in dialogue with Elias Khoury—multiplies these reflections, reaching beyond the original to open channels of discourse that would not have been available in Arabic alone. Indeed, shifting the story into Hebrew illuminates a whole network of intertextual conversations that Khoury engages in with Jewish history, Hebrew literature, and the bilingual matrix that shapes the lives of Palestinian citizens of Israel outside of the novel. But

the translation into Hebrew also functions as a negative that exposes the aspects of the Nakba that took place in Hebrew, attributing the execution of that event to the Hebrew language and to Israeli Jewish history. This dynamic can be gleaned from the linguistic strategies employed in the writing of the following scene, in which the terrified residents of al-Lydd are being rounded up and confined to the mosque square by Israeli soldiers:

The Israeli officer's orders were strict: "*Lo rotseh lishmo'a milah*," which one of the soldiers, shouting, translated as "Not a word! Not a sound! Got it?" Silence reigned over the men and women who had gathered in the square in front of the mosque. Nothing cracked the wall of silence that surrounded the people standing there until a baby burst out crying, quickly joined by a group of other children, who turned the place into an orgy of weeping.⁴⁴

In the English translation, the Israeli officer's command, in Hebrew transliteration, has the effect of rendering the speech foreign, and therefore frightening and dislocating, as it is for the Palestinian listeners in the story. This is how it appears in the Arabic original—the Hebrew is transliterated, while the translation appears in the familiar Arabic. However, in the Hebrew translation, the officer's orders appear in the original Hebrew, while the translation is transliterated into Arabic. Thus, the Hebrew reader experiences the officer's speech as the familiar, and the Arabic speech as foreign. This dynamic creates the possibility for the Hebrew reader to step into the history of the Nakba as a perpetrator and contend with that history in Hebrew. At the same time, the exploration of the Warsaw and al-Lydd ghettos blurs the boundaries between the two places, reminding the reader that, as the book tells us, the term "ghetto" was brought to Palestine by European Jewish soldiers.

The narrative gesture of flipping between two aspects of a photograph—the Nakba in Hebrew, the Nakba in Arabic—is fundamental to the structure of the novel, especially in its development of a poetics of comparison between the Holocaust and the Nakba. Refqa Abu-Remaileh discusses this movement as a function of Edward Said's notion of point and counterpoint, which she translates as *tibaq* in Arabic. Juxtaposing Khoury's work with a scene from Jean-Luc Godard's *Notre Musique*, she notes:

The viewers are brought in at the juncture where Godard is explaining the concept of shot/reverse-shot. "The shot and reverse-shot are basics of film grammar," we hear him say. As he juxtaposes two photographic frames we hear him continue: "For example, two photos of the same moment in history. Then you see the truth has two faces." He

goes on: “For example, in 1948 the Israelites walked in the water to reach the Holy Land. The Palestinians walked in the water to drown. Shot and reverse-shot. Shot and reverse-shot.”

The visual effect of two similar but different photos of two peoples walking into the water is perhaps the best way to capture how 1948 becomes a moment of *tibaq*. It is a contrapuntal moment that will define the relationship between Palestinians and Israelis, and it brings together the Holocaust and the Nakba.⁴⁵

The contrapuntal gesture, or the possibility of holding “simultaneous irreconcilables,” which Abu-Remaileh describes here, defines and develops the relationship between the Arabic original and the Hebrew translation. Thus, we may see the translation as a continuation and expansion of the novelistic project, which opens a window onto the coexistence of multiple narratives, languages, and collectives, through which we might come to terms with the historical cycles of violence that fundamentally shape the region.

Walking on winds / הולך על הרוח / ماش على الريح

In addition to translation strategies, the culture of Arabic-to-Hebrew translation draws on and supports a relatively new culture of bilingual writing, which deploys Arabic to democratize Hebrew in a slightly different way than translation. This is the literature of Palestinian citizens of Israel who work in both Hebrew and Arabic and sometimes perform simultaneous translations of their work. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari note that “the minor designates . . . the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature.”⁴⁶ We might reflect on this work as a form of minor literature that shapes Hebrew literature by imbuing it with a radical linguistic and thematic undercurrent that is complemented by translation.

I would like to conclude this essay with an examination of the work of one such figure, the Palestinian writer and translator and cofounder of Maktoob, Salman Natour. His book *Holekh al ha-ruah* (Walking on winds) was largely a collaboration between the author and its translator, Yonatan Mendel, who compiled sections that were translated by himself, Natour, and Yehouda Shenhav.⁴⁷ The four sections of the book are woven together with an abundance of threads that reflect upon the existential melancholia, irony, and torment of apartheid politics in Israel and the West Bank and their reverberations in the Palestinian diaspora. Yet the focus of the book is not on politicians and headlines but rather on the everyday experience of working-class

Palestinians, as well as Jews—in Haifa, Ramallah, and Beit Shean—living in, surviving, and trying to make sense of politics, identity, and memory under the current regime.

In the central section of the book, the writer travels as a journalist to Beit Shean, a heavily working class and Mizrahi area that has been stereotyped as Arab hating in the media. He interviews Jews and Palestinians from all walks of life, attentive to both their daily struggles and their views on racism and the political conflict. Amid the chaos of protests and local politics, he finds time to meditate on the philosophical implications of his situation:

I've heard various theories on racism from friends, intellectuals, and wrathful prophets. Everyone is convinced that every person has a tiny racist that lives inside them, that racism is a natural phenomenon no one can overcome. But I wonder if the opposite was the case: if in every loud, violent, annoying racist there is, lives, a tiny human being? And maybe our job is to find that human being in the racist and nurture them? To grow this human being, give them light, sun, and air so they develop, strengthen, and ultimately light their own soul and overcome Satan.⁴⁸

This passage is one pivot around which Natour builds a collective story about Beit Shean, one in which its inhabitants, Jews and Palestinians, are both implicated in and subject to the dictates of racism, classism, and colonial division. Part of what structures this interweaving of families, individuals, and communities—who would otherwise be marked out by ethnicity and nationality—into a common story is the bilingual blending of the Hebrew and Arabic expressions and syntax that structure the text. Mendel notes in the afterword, regarding the process of translation:

There were almost no uncrossable semantic gaps in the folds of passage between languages. These gaps are typical in the passage between languages, cultures, and nations, but they were almost nonexistent in his writing. This is related to the nature of Natour's writing, his thought and personality. For Natour did not write in Arabic for the Arab reader only, and he did not write about the reality of Palestinian life for the Palestinian reader alone. Natour wrote in Arabic, but he always saw before him both Arabs and Jews; he wrote about the Palestinians, but asked to speak to Israelis.⁴⁹

The text offers an inspiring blend of linguistic and social multiplicity. Yet Natour's style is not defined by his political vision alone but also by his experience developing as a writer and intellectual in two languages. The combination of the two shapes a Hebrew that crosses the folds of languages, cultures, and nations and contains the

points and counterpoints, irreconcilable opposites, and multiplicities. The language activates Arabic and Hebrew in relation to each other, reshaping both in a missive to the past and the future. It is a Hebrew that holds the promise of moving beyond its monolingual and ethnoseparatist roots, embracing a different set of sounds and stories. All of Maktoob's writers and translators are bilingual, as are many Palestinian writers living in Israel. From the point of view of cultural production, this is perhaps the most resonant modality of Hebrew and Arabic literary multiplicity and communication, the evolution of a new cultural form.

Conclusion

Although Maktoob does not publicly advocate a specific system of political governance, the *binational* model clearly suggests an alternative to the *mononational* Jewish state model. Politically speaking, the mandate of binationalism upends the Zionist notion that Jews have the exclusive right to territorial, religious, and linguistic sovereignty in Israel/Palestine, and introduces the possibility of a shared sovereignty in its place. As a political imaginary, such a proposition aspires to the end of the colonial regime and its replacement with a democratic government. While it is unlikely that a group of translators will revolutionize the existing system, this imaginary has been enacted as a new form of community and new social relations between the translators, editors, and authors themselves. Thus, one of the conclusions we might draw from this study is that anticolonial forms emerge by necessity from new relationalities and forms of imagined anticolonial community. Like the collective imaginaries they come out of, new artistic forms come out of a need to restructure culture, sociality, and epistemology. Thus, another important aspect of anticolonial translation is the understanding that colonial cultural epistemologies must be dismantled and that new systems must be created to replace them. As I discuss in the introduction, locating these new artistic sources and systems was a central concern of anticolonial thinkers throughout the twentieth century, and indeed, the proliferation of cultural and artistic forms is a critical legacy of this period. In a similar respect, Maktoob's commitment to an anticolonial imaginary has allowed it to go beyond political content or intent, to the creation of the networks, literary relationships, linguistic patterns, and social visions that shape the very conditions of new literary and political formation.

Notes

- 1 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005).
- 2 Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, “The Model Creates the Meaning: Palestinian Sessions Regarding Policies and Work Models for Translation from Arabic into Hebrew, from Ben-Gurion till Maktoob,” panel discussion at Café Liwan, Nazareth, July 2019. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Arabic and Hebrew are my own.
- 3 For a comparative account of settler colonialism, see Patrick Wolfe, introduction to *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016). For an account of Israeli settler colonialism, see Shira Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel’s Liberal Settler State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).
- 4 For a cultural and sociological account of colonial attitudes toward Jews of the Arab world, see Ella Shohat, *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements: Selected Writings* (London: Pluto Press, 2017). For a literary and cultural account, see Gil Z. Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). For an account of the colonial attitudes of the establishment in the transit camps, see Deborah Bernstein, “Immigrant Transit Camps—The Formation of Dependent Relations in Israeli Society,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4, no. 1 (1981): 26–43.
- 5 Shohat, introduction to *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements*.
- 6 Lital Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 28. See also Yonatan Mendel, *The Creation of Israeli Arabic: Security and Politics in Arabic Studies in Israel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- 7 Levy, *Poetic Trespass*, 39.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid., 28.
- 10 Yehouda Shenhav, Maisalon Dallashi, Rami Avnimelech, Nissim Mizrachi, Yonatan Mendel, *Yediat Aravit be-kerev Yehudim be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2015), 3–4.
- 11 For a review of the anticolonial aesthetics in the Negritude movement, see Gary Wilder, introduction to *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). For an account of Muruwah’s Marxist interpretations of Arabic classical heritage, see Yoav Di-Capua, “Homeward Bound: Ḥusayn Muruwah’s Integrative Quest for Authenticity,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 44, no. 1 (2013): 21–52.
- 12 Olivia Harrison, *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 129.
- 13 Susan Basnett and Harish Trivedi, introduction to *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2012).

- 14 Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 2.
- 15 Basnett and Trivedi, introduction to *Postcolonial Translation*.
- 16 Meron Benvenisti, "Ha-mapa ha-Ivrit," *Theory and Criticism* 11 (Winter 1997): 7–29.
- 17 Yonatan Mendel, "The Philological Revolution and the Latinization of Arabic," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 9, no. 1 (2019): 135–156. See also, Yonatan Mendel, *The Creation of Israeli Arabic*.
- 18 Huda Abu Much, "The Model Creates the Meaning."
- 19 Maria Tymoczko, "Ideology and the Position of the Translator: In What Sense Is the Translator 'In Between?'," in *Apropos of Ideology: Translation Studies on Ideology-Ideologies in Translation Studies*, ed. Maria Calzada-Perez (Manchester, UK: St Jerome Publishers, 2002), 196. My emphasis.
- 20 Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, "The Neoclassical Bias in Translation," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 9, no. 1 (Summer 2019): 5.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 For an account of *Al-Jadid's* cultural program, see Emile Habibi, "Al-insan hadaf al-adab wa-mawdu'uh," *Al-Jadid* 1, no. 3 (1954): 38–45.
- 23 Yael Lerer, "The Andalus Test: Reflections on the Attempt to Publish Arabic Literature in Hebrew," *Jadaliyya*, May 16, 2012, accessed November 21, 2019, www.jadaliyya.com/Details/25954/The-Andalus-Test-Reflections-on-the-Attempt-to-Publish-Arabic-Literature-in-Hebrew.
- 24 Gerila Tarbut Collective, *Shira mefareket homa* (Haifa: Gerila Tarbut, 2012), 80.
- 25 Shenhav-Shahrabani, "The Neoclassical Bias in Translation," 10.
- 26 This assessment was based on a series of interviews with Maktoob translators: Eyad Barghuthy, interviewed by the author, Haifa, November 1, 2019. Yehouda Shenhav, interviewed by the author, Tel Aviv, November 3, 2019. Kifah Abdul Halim, interviewed by the author, Haifa, November 4, 2019. Rawiya Burbara, interviewed by the author, Haifa, November 7, 2019.
- 27 Interview with Rawiya Burbara.
- 28 See Maktoob's work model, *Maktoobooks*, "About Us," accessed November 29, 2019, <http://maktoobooks.com/en/about-us/>.
- 29 Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, "Al ha-historia, ha-sotziyologia ve ha-politika shel ha-tirgum," in *Be-lashon kruta: Proza Palestinit be-Ivrit*, ed. Rawiya Burbara (Jerusalem: Maktoob Books, Yediot Ahronot, 2019), 373.
- 30 See Anton Shammas, *Arabeskot* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1986), 82.
- 31 Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, *Poalim bi-tirgum: Mi-tirgum individuali le-tirgum du-leumi*, (forthcoming), 75.
- 32 Rawiya Burbara, ed., *Be-lashon kruta* (Jerusalem: Maktoob Books, Yediot Ahronot, 2019).
- 33 Shenhav-Shahrabani, "Al ha-historia, ha-sotziyologia ve-ha-politika shel ha-tirgum," 368–369.
- 34 A. B. Yehoshua, "Mul ha-ye'arot," in *Kol ha-sipurim* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1993), 99–127.

- 35 Anton Shammās, *Arabeskot*.
- 36 See Ghassan Kanafani, *Adab al-muqawama fi Falistin al-muhtala, 1948–1966* (Limassol: Rimal Books, 2015).
- 37 Samih al-Qasim, quoted in Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 1.
- 38 Sama Hasan, “Lo!,” in Barbara, *Be-lashon kruta*, 11–13.
- 39 Ala Khlikhal, “Pasport,” in Barbara, *Be-lashon kruta*, 189–208.
- 40 Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, “The Model Creates the Meaning.”
- 41 Maha Nassar, “The Marginal as Central: *Al-Jadid* and the Development of a Palestinian Public Sphere,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 3, no. 3 (2010): 333–351.
- 42 Elias Khoury, *Yaldei ha-geto: Shmi Adam*, trans. Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani (Jerusalem: Maktoob, New World Press, and the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2018).
- 43 Elias Khoury, *My Name Is Adam: Children of the Ghetto, Volume 1*, trans. Humphrey Davies (London: MacLehose Press, 2016), Kindle edition, 1455–1459.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 2428–2431.
- 45 Refqa Abu-Remaileh, “Novel as Contrapuntal Reading: Elias Khoury’s *Children of the Ghetto: My Name Is Adam*,” in *The Holocaust and the Nakba*, ed. Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), Kindle edition, 7979–7987.
- 46 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 18.
- 47 Salman Natour, *Holekh al ha-ruah*, trans. Yonatan Mendel (Jerusalem: Maktoob and Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2017).
- 48 *Ibid.*, 64.
- 49 Yonatan Mendel, afterword to *ibid.*, 240–241.

Gendered Temporality and Space: Women in Translation from Arabic into Hebrew

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Introduction

In this article I examine women's participation in the enterprise of translation of texts from Arabic into Hebrew in the years 1876–2018 and the ways in which that enterprise was gendered.¹ The research literature on translation from Arabic into Hebrew has neglected the gender issue in favor of other aspects, such as those related to politics and style.² But research on translation between languages in other cultures indicates the importance of gender in determining the nature of any translation enterprise. Translation research from a feminist perspective, which began in the 1980s, established the contribution of translation to the perpetuation of gender representations and stereotypes, the exclusion of women from the literary arena, and the establishment of male hegemony.³ Study of the gender structure of the translation field therefore seeks to reveal the ways in which translation contributed to perpetuating society's patriarchal underpinnings and the ideologies at its basis.⁴ At the same time, feminist researchers have sought to encourage translations that offer positive representations of women and that amplify women's voices in the translation field.⁵ They have also sought to establish practical strategies for creating gender awareness in translation, while using appropriate gender representations.⁶

The exclusion of women from the field of translation in many languages is also reflected in the low rate of women in the field, both as translators and as authors.⁷ Furthermore, a dichotomous division has taken hold, identifying men with the

source and women with the translation.⁸ This dichotomy places men in a position of control and originality, and positions women as inferior copies of the source.⁹ These figures raise a series of questions: How does women's gender impact their activity in the field of translation? Does their numerical marginality necessarily condemn them to a marginal position, or does the nature of their involvement have the capacity to call into question the masculine nature of the translation enterprise? In other words, does women's activity in the field of translation have a subversive potential, and to what extent and in which ways is that potential realized? Answering these questions requires a critical reading of the translation field: a reading that questions the concept of translation as a pure linguistic transmission from one language and culture to another, and reveals the ideological considerations behind it.¹⁰ The feminist perspective is the optimal way to observe translation enterprises.

These issues have not yet been discussed in the context of translation from Arabic into Hebrew, which grants this article greater importance: it offers a deep observation of the enterprise of translation from Arabic into Hebrew from a gender perspective and examines the impact of the translator's gender on shaping the nature of the translation enterprise.

In the first section of this article I present the methodology used and the three variables that I used to examine the impact of women on the field of translation: genre, women's literature, and Palestinian literature. In the second section I address the national element of the identity of the translators and examine that element's significance and impact on the Arabic into Hebrew translation enterprise. In that section I also review the historic and political arena in which the translators operate—the social status of Jewish and Palestinian women in Israel, as well as the attitude of Zionism toward women and its impact on the involvement of women in the translation enterprise. In the third section I present and analyze the research findings, which indicate that despite the significant gender bias, reflected by the low rate of women in the translation field under discussion, women have managed to contest the exclusive male and Jewish identity of the translation enterprise and have taken part in establishing and engendering important changes therein. The last section contains a summary of the discussion and conclusions.

Methodology

The figures related to the patterns of women's participation that appear in this article are taken from Maktoob's *Indeks tirgumei ha-sifrut me-'Aravit le-'Ivrit* (The literature translation index from Arabic into Hebrew), composed by translation researcher and translator Hannah Amit-Kochavi, based on her doctoral thesis.¹¹ The index includes

data about most of the translations from Arabic into Hebrew from 1876 to the present, the time period examined in this article. The index continues to be updated regularly, and at the time of the writing of this article includes 5,332 entries, most of which are works written by Arab authors. The vast majority of these works were written in Arabic and translated into Hebrew from the Arabic; less than 1% of these works were translated into Hebrew from other languages into which they had been translated, and a handful of other works were written by Arab writers in languages other than Arabic.¹² The index provides a series of figures about each work: the name of the work in Hebrew, the author's name, gender, and origin, the name of the publisher of the translation, translations by year of publication, the name and gender of the translator, and the genre of the work.

Research Variables and Instruments

To extract the translation field from the binary structure through which it is exclusively ruled by men, I refined the instruments of analysis and observed different hybrids that portray a more complex picture. To do so I examined the impact of women on the translation enterprise through three categories: genre, women's literature, and Palestinian literature. As we shall see, the number of translations varies from one category to another because some of the data in the database are incomplete. For example, out of a total of 5,332 items in the database, only 4,888 items include information on the category of genre. In addition the discussion of the changes that occurred in three variables over the dimension of time is based on a division into two time periods: from 1876 through 1977 and from 1978 onward. Although there are other possible divisions, I argue that this division is most relevant to my discussion and analysis, both because of the socio-political-cultural rationale and because of the findings that will be discussed later.¹³ This division views 1977 and the previous years as a period during which the process of the demise of national and male domination of the translation enterprise took place. The most salient expressions of that process are the cancellation of the military administration in 1966, the rise of the Likud to power in 1977, and the consequent intensification of the rift between the political and literary establishments.¹⁴ The rise to power of the hitherto opposition Likud party in Israel in 1977 paved the way for the rise of Arab, women, and Mizrahi writers, and contributed to establishing the status of the Palestinian narrative in the Hebrew literary arena with the translation for the first time of three long Palestinian works: two novellas by the Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani—*Gvarim ba-shemesh: Ma she-notar lakhem* (*Men in the Sun: All That's Left to You*), published together in one

collection—and the novel *Ha-tzabar* (*Wild Thorns*), by the Palestinian author Sahar Khalifeh.¹⁵

Gender by genre: The participation of women in the translation enterprise varies from one genre to another. The data show that the rate of women's involvement is higher in prose translations, as well as in the translation of longer works such as novels, novellas, autobiographies, and diaries, as opposed to shorter works such as poems, short stories, and nonfiction.

To assess the gender variable by genre, the data selected were related to translations from genres having at least ten items in the database. This yielded 4,888 translations for this variable. The genres that were reviewed—novels, autobiographies and memoirs, plays, short stories, poems, hadith, proverbs, sayings, and nonfiction—were sorted into three categories: poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. The works from this range of genres were published in books, short story collections, poetry collections, anthologies, magazines, newspapers, and nonfiction books. In addition, some of the data refer to only partial translations, for example translations of segments of a novel. For this study I checked how many works from each genre were translated into Hebrew, how many were translated by men and how many by women, and how women's activity in translation is reflected by genre.

Gender and women's literature: I use the term "women's literature" to refer to works written by women. It is important to distinguish between women's literature—a definition based on the gender of the author—and feminist literature, which includes any work concerned with women's rights and equality between the sexes and which presents women's social status critically. This article is about women's literature rather than feminist literature. The choice made by women translators to introduce the literary works of Arab women into the Hebrew domain is a choice to give voice to the women's stories and voices that had been excluded by the male translators.

To evaluate this variable, 4,893 translations for which the gender of the author of the original appeared were selected from the index. I checked how many works were written by women and how many by men, how many of the works written by women were translated by women and how many by men, and what changes occurred in the translations of women's literature before 1978 as compared to during and after 1978. I also checked the influence of female translators on the translation of women's literature and on shaping the nature of the translation enterprise.

Gender and Palestinian literature: Palestinian literature is one of the branches of Arabic literature. Arabic literature researcher Ami Elad-Bouskila proposed dividing Palestinian literature into three branches, according to the location of the author: literature written in Israel, literature written in the West Bank and Gaza, and

literature written in exile.¹⁶ Palestinian researcher Adil al-Usta is not satisfied with the Palestinian origin of the authors or their parents for determining whether or not literature is Palestinian.¹⁷ In his view Palestinian literature is literature that is also committed to the Palestinian narrative. In this article the term “Palestinian literature” includes any work written by writers of Palestinian origin, regardless of their place of residence—Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, or the diaspora—or the degree of their commitment to the Palestinian narrative. Despite that general definition, it is important to note the centrality of political content in Palestinian writing.¹⁸ The contribution of women translators to introducing Palestinian literature into the Hebrew domain is not measured by the number of works they translated but by the change of which they were part: the translation of long works about the Palestinian narrative. This change constituted a subversive challenge to the exclusivity of the male Zionist narrative.

To evaluate this variable 2,116 translations of works written by authors whose origin was defined as Palestinian or Israeli were selected from the index. As in the discussion about the translation of women’s literature, here too I checked how many works were written by women and how many by men, how many of these works were translated by women and how many by men, and what changes occurred between pre- and post-1978 in the translations of Palestinian literature. I also checked the contribution of women translators to shaping the nature of the translation enterprise and their impact on the translation of Palestinian literature. In addition I checked the impact of the national identity of the translator on the choice to translate Palestinian literature.

Two deliberations arose during the review of the inventory. The first was whether to treat collections of stories, poems, and anthologies as a single unit, or to divide them according to the pieces included in them. Ultimately, the second option was chosen—to review stories and poems included in collections separately, because collections of stories and poems and anthologies are not considered a genre in its own right but rather a platform combining different genres. Another reason for that decision was that such collections often include works translated by different translators.

The second deliberation was whether to include works originally written in Arabic but translated into Hebrew from other languages. Since the purpose of this article is not to make a stylistic comparison of translations compared to the source, I decided to include them.

Gender and Nationality in Translation

Alongside the gender element, there is also an obvious national element in the identity of the translators. Therefore, before I make a deep analysis of the gender aspect according to the three categories—genre, women’s literature, and Palestinian literature—I would like to present data related to the rates of Arab and Jewish women and men who have translated from Arabic into Hebrew and examine the impact of the national element on the translation enterprise.

A gender analysis of the translations from Arabic into Hebrew in general, from the end of the nineteenth century to the present, finds that of a total of 257 translators who operated throughout that time period, 177 were men (69%) and 80 were women (31%). To this I add another category, nationality, and examine the number and rates of male and female, Jewish and Arab translators. Of the 257 translators who operated in this field, 218 were Jews (85%); of the total number of translators, 145 were Jewish men (56.5%) and 73 were Jewish women (28.5%). The rest of the translators, 39 (15%), were Arab; of the total number of translators, 32 were Arab men (12.5%) and 7 were Arab women (2.5%). This examination illustrates the double exclusion of Arab women translators from the translation enterprise, on the basis of both nationality and gender. It raises questions: What causes this exclusion? And (most relevant for me) have Arab women translators had an influence on the nature of the translation field from Arabic into Hebrew, despite that exclusion?

A review of the translation activity of the Arab women translators paints a bleak picture as to the degree of their impact on the translation enterprise. First, that the number of translations in which Arab women participated was small is evident. Out of a total of 5,332 translations created from 1876 to the present, female Arab translators were involved in only 1%, and in most of these translations they were not the only translators but were part of a mixed-gender team. Second, Arab women started entering the translation enterprise at a relatively late stage, and this offset their degree of influence on it. Whereas the first translation by an Arab translator was published in the mid-1950s, just like the first translation by a Jewish woman translator, the first translation by an Arab female translator was published in 1988.¹⁹ This translation, by Arab poet Siham Daoud, was of the most debated poem by Mahmoud Darwish, “Ha-ovrim ba-dibur ha-over” (“Those Who Pass between Fleeting Words”).²⁰ Third, Arab female translators tended to focus on the translation of poems, short stories, and short nonfiction texts, as opposed to Jewish women translators, who tended to focus on the translation of long texts. Yet despite these debilitating factors, there are two salient characteristics in the translations by Arab

women: out of a total of 62 pieces translated by Arab female translators, 38% are works by women authors, and 92% are of Palestinian literature—of which 93% are translations of works by Palestinian authors who are citizens of Israel, and 7% are works written by Palestinians from the West Bank and the diaspora. However, since works from these genres—women’s literature and Palestinian literature—had been introduced into the Hebrew domain by the male translators who preceded them, the choices made by the Arab female translators did not receive the status of novelty.

A more optimistic picture arises from the activity of Arab male translators, as compared to Arab female translators. Despite their lower rate among translators from Arabic into Hebrew, several factors made them influential: they began their activity in the 1950s, contributed to introducing Palestinian literature and women’s literature into the Hebrew literary arena as early as the 1960s, worked mostly as individual translators, and translated long works.²¹ In addition, some of the translators, such as Anton Shammas, are considered important figures in the Hebrew cultural landscape because of their involvement in that scene as writers in Hebrew as well.²²

To understand the difference in the numbers of Arab male and Arab female translators, a separate study is needed. Here I offer two possible explanations: The first is women’s inferior status in Arab society, about which much has been written.²³ The second explanation is that the space in which the activity of translation from Arabic into Hebrew occurs—a politically charged space that is based on asymmetric power relations—may deter women, as well as many men, from joining it.²⁴

The purpose of this article is to examine how women translators impacted the translation from Arabic into Hebrew enterprise in the years 1976–2018. Given the minor impact of Arab female translators, the discussion will focus on Jewish female translators. I will refer to the national identity of the translator only in cases where that element is relevant to the discussion.

To understand the involvement of Jewish women in the translation enterprise, it is important to note two social and political aspects that had a major impact on the (non-) participation of women in it. The first is the inferior social status of women in Jewish society in Israel. Despite the proclamations by Zionism from its inception as to the full equality between the sexes, the reality was very different.²⁵ The perception that women had full equality in Israel was widespread until the mid-1970s, when it began to crack as a result of both social changes in Israel and the influence of women’s liberation movements throughout the world.²⁶ This time period marks the beginning of both the change in the status of women in Israel and the establishment there of feminist theory.²⁷

Regarding the national element, the Jewish female translators, just like their male counterparts, are part of the hegemony in the framework of the asymmetrical power relations between Jews and Palestinians. On the other hand, within that hegemony they are considered a fringe group because of their gender. Their marginality contributed to their exclusion from many areas and to ongoing discrimination against them. Thus, the enterprise of translation from Arabic into Hebrew was considered the exclusive domain of men and was ruled mainly by representatives of the male hegemony; women were excluded from it both as translators and as authors whose works served as the sources of translations.

The second aspect that contributed to the absence of women from the field of translation from Arabic into Hebrew is the link between security constraints and men's co-optation of the translation field. Until the 1970s the translation enterprise was dominated mainly by men of Eastern European origin.²⁸ Initially, translation activity was characterized by an arrogant and disrespectful Orientalist approach toward Arabic works, as is evident with regard to several aspects: doubting the artistic value of the translated works, lack of faithfulness to the source, and far-reaching intervention in the translated text.²⁹ The leading figure of this approach to translation was Menahem Kapeliuk. Introduced by the political establishment, this approach sought to establish an asymmetric relationship between the two cultures that would emphasize the otherness of the Arab and his culture in the eyes of the Jewish reader.³⁰

The control of the translation enterprise by the male-dominated establishment began to crumble in the 1970s, following a series of transformations in Israeli society: the cancellation of the military administration accompanied by a reduction in establishment control of the Arab population; the collapse of the Ashkenazi hegemony of Mapai; and the rise of the Likud to power in 1977.³¹ These changes opened to female translators the possibility of establishing their status and involvement in that enterprise.

After noting the importance of the national element in the identity of the translators and its influence on the Arabic to Hebrew translation enterprise, we now turn to the study's findings and analyze the influence of women translators on that enterprise according to three variables: genre, women's literature, and Palestinian literature.

Findings

Until the 1970s the field of translation from Arabic into Hebrew was dominated and controlled by the Israeli establishment, led by the ruling party of the time.

That establishment instituted in the field of translation patriarchal norms expressed by the exclusion of women, both as translators and as writers. Indeed, a review of the translation inventory finds that out of 1,589 works that were translated in 1977, 1,458 (92%) were translated by men and only 130 (8%) were translated by women; one work was translated by a mixed-gender team. From 1978 onward a multifaceted change occurred in the development of the translation field: the number of translations rose significantly (3,306 works since 1978); change occurred in the gender structure of the translation enterprise—2,414 works (73%) were translated by men, which is a dramatic decline of about 20% in the number of translations, 477 (14%) were translated by women, and 415 (13%) were translated by mixed teams of women and men; and change began to occur in the guiding norms for the selection of works for translation, and consequently in the content of the translated works.³² The last change is directly related to the second change: women who joined the translation enterprise were pioneers in translating longer Palestinian works. Although these trends do not offset the gender bias that still pervades the field of translation from Arabic into Hebrew—the ratio of male to female translators throughout the time period included in the index is 5:1—two significant processes are nonetheless evident. First, the rate of women's participation in the field is on the rise, and second, a look at the translation enterprise by genre, gender, and national identity of the author of the source text indicates that despite their low rate of participation, women have managed to work from a position of power and to challenge the male and Jewish character of that enterprise. What follows is a discussion of each of the three criteria.

Gender by Genre

Of the 5,332 items that appear in the index, 4,888 items belong to genres that include at least 10 items. I divide these items into three main categories: poetry (2,901 items), prose and fiction (novels, autobiographies and memoirs, segments of novels, novellas, plays, short stories—1,923 items), and nonfiction (works that are not defined as poetry or fiction and prose, including hadith, contemplation, and philosophy—64 items). These works were published in different forums: journals, story collections, poetry collections, anthologies, and nonfiction books.

Table 1. Gender distribution of translators by genre in the years 1876–2018 (N=4,888 translations found from this period)

Genre		Men	Women	Mixed
Prose and Fiction	Novels (N=62)	36 (58%)	26 (42%)	0%
	Segments of novels (N=74)	36 (49%)	38 (51%)	0%
	Novellas (N=12)	7 (58%)	1 (9%)	4 (33%)
	Autobiographies and memoirs (N=20)	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	0%
	Plays (N=29)	22 (76%)	7 (24%)	0%
	Short stories (N=1,726)	1,329 (77%)	158 (9%)	239 (14%)
	Total prose and fiction (N=1,923)	1,445 (75%)	235 (12%)	243 (13%)
Nonfiction	N=64	43 (67%)	21 (33%)	0%
Poetry	N=2,901	2,403 (83%)	336 (11%)	162 (6%)

The findings indicate that women's participation is evident mainly in the translation of prose, whether as individual translators or as part of mixed teams. Whereas women were responsible for the translation of 17% of all of the poems, their participation rate rises to 25% when it comes to translating fiction, and 33% in the translation of nonfiction texts.

The findings also indicate that women tend to translate works in long genres such as novels, novellas, and autobiographies. Until 1978 women translated only short works—poems and short stories. Until 1977 only nine long works had been translated, all by men. Starting in 1978 we see a change: women began to translate long works. This trend began with the translation of the two Palestinian novellas—*Gvarim ba-shemesh* and *Ma she-notar lakhem* by Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani—by Jewish translator Daniela Brafman, together with the Greek priest Yanni Demianus.³³ Since then the trend has increased: of 61 long pieces translated from Arabic after 1978, women translated 26 (43%).

Of the genres in which the rate of women involved in translation was at least 25%, there are three genres of long works: novels (the rate of women's participation as translators in this genre is 42%), novellas (42%), and autobiographies (25%).

The data confirm the hypothesis raised above as to two trends in translation by genre. First, women tend to translate prose: their rate of participation in the translation of prose is relatively high, whereas their rate in the translation of poetry is low. Second, their preference for translating long genres indicates the establishment of their status in the field of translation specifically and in the cultural domain in general, because the translation of longer texts demands, naturally, more resources than the translation of a single poem or story and its publication in a magazine, newspaper, or book.

Gender and Women’s Literature

There are several trends related to the Arabic to Hebrew translation enterprise concerning women’s literature. The first is the noticeable scarcity of translations of works written by women. Out of an inventory of 4,893 items, information for which includes the gender of the author of the original work, only 397 works (8%) were written by women, whereas 4,496 (92%) were written by men.

The second trend is a constant rise in the translation of works by women over the time axis. Whereas of the 1,374 works translated from 1876–1977, only 58 (4%) were written by women, of the 3,372 works translated from 1978–2018, 324 (10%) were written by women (table 2).

Table 2. Gender of author by time period (N=4,746 translations found³⁴)

Author’s gender	Time period	
	1876–1977	1978–2018
Male (N=4,364)	1,316 (96%)	3,048 (90%)
Female (N=382)	58 (4%)	324 (10%)

Table 3. Author’s gender by translator’s gender (N=4,596 translations found)

Author’s gender	Translator’s gender		
	Male translators (N=3,561)	Female translators (N=623)	Mixed (N=412)
Male authors (N=4,241)	3,322 (78%)	512 (12%)	407 (10%)
Female authors (N=355)	239 (67%)	111 (31%)	5 (2%)

The third trend is the close association between the rise in the rate of women participating in translation and the rise in the translation of works authored by women (table 3). The number of items including information about both the translator's and the author's gender is 4,596. Whereas the percentage of works written by men and translated by women translators only (not as part of mixed teams) is 12%, when it comes to women's literature the picture changes. Out of 355 works authored by women, 111 (31%) were translated into Hebrew by women, 239 (67%) were translated by men, and 5 (2%) were translated by mixed teams.

The fourth trend is a clear preference for translating women's poetry. Most of the works by women that were translated into Hebrew are poems. Out of a total of 397 works written by women, 385 include information about the genre. Of those that included genre information, there were 320 poems (83%), compared to 65 works of prose (17%). This trend is consistent with the perception mentioned above that associates women with poetry.

The fifth trend is the preference of male translators for translating works written by men. Of the 3,561 works that were translated by men, 3,322 (93%) were written by men, and only 239 (7%) were written by women.

These figures paint a grim picture as to the status of Arab female authors in the translation field. It is evident that they are perceived as less relevant for translation, a perception reflected by the low rate of women's literature in the translation enterprise, as well as by the ongoing exclusion of such literature by male translators. In addition it is evident that female authors are identified with poetry, whereas prose is identified with men. But these findings also indicate that the gender of the translator has a significant impact on the translation enterprise and its basic values, as is evident by the relatively high rate of works written by women that were translated into Hebrew by women.

Gender and Palestinian Literature

Of all of the works that appear in the index, 2,116 were written by Palestinians; of those, the data on 2,058 include their year of publication. The first Palestinian work translated into Hebrew was the short story "Sha'ar Mandelbaum" ("Mandelbaum Gate") by author Emile Habibi; the story was published by the Communist newspaper *Kol HaAm* in 1954, translated by Sasson Somekh.³⁵ Between the years 1954 and 1977, 255 translations of Palestinian works were published, which is 12% of all of the Palestinian works translated by 2018. In the years 1978–2018 there was a substantial increase in the translation of Palestinian literature: 1,803 works

were published (88% of all Palestinian works translated throughout the entire period covered by the index).

A clear gender bias is evident in the translation of Palestinian literature. The inventory of translations that includes information about the translator's gender contains 1,914 works, the vast majority of which—1,591 (83%)—were translated by men; 231 (12%) were translated by women, and 92 (5%) were translated by a mixed-gender team.

As we have seen above, the sorting and examination of the translations by genre reveals a complex picture and exposes a position of power in the activity of women. In the context of Palestinian literature, women were the pioneers in the translation of extensive works dealing directly with the Palestinian narrative. Though they were involved in the translation of only 323 works (17%) out of the total number of Palestinian works (whether as single translators or as members of mixed teams), their rate is much higher when it comes to the translation of longer Palestinian works (novels, novellas, autobiographies, and memoirs). Of 21 longer Palestinian works translated in full, women were involved in the translation of six (29%)—a number that approaches the number of long pieces translated by Jewish men (8 pieces, 38%). This figure is consistent with the general trend among female translators, who prefer to translate long works of prose, as described in the discussion on gender and genre.

Table 4. The distribution of the translation of longer Palestinian works (novels, novellas, autobiographies, and memoirs) by the gender and nationality of the translator (N=21 translations found)

Gender and nationality of the translator	Works
Jewish females	6 (29%)
Jewish males	8 (38%)
Arab males	7 (33%)

The activity of women is not limited to the quantitative aspect; their activity expresses an act of power that contests the gender and national nature of the translation enterprise. Until 1977, under the influence of the Orientalist approach that ignored the existence of Palestinian culture, that enterprise completely disregarded long works written by Palestinians. In 1978 three long works by Palestinian authors were translated into Hebrew for the first time. These works are about the Palestinian narrative of the 1948 and 1967 wars. In the case of two of these works, Daniela Brafman, a Jewish woman, was involved in the translation; the third piece was

translated by a male Arab translator. On the other hand, among Jewish translators a different trend is evident: the first long Palestinian work was translated into Hebrew in 1990 by Gideon Shilo, a male Jewish translator, and the other seven were translated from 2001 onward. Previously, Jews who translated long works from Arabic into Hebrew had ignored the Palestinian authors and the Palestinian narrative.³⁶ This is an interesting figure because it reveals the importance and significance of the national and gender identity of the translator. Male Jewish translators' denial of Palestinian works confirms claims of the tight association between men and the national ethos, an association that has undergone a transformation since the 1990s. The marginal groups, Arabs and women, are those who introduced the first signs of change into the cultural arena by injecting the Palestinian narrative into Hebrew culture.

Table 5. Gender breakdown of Palestinian works by authors and translators

Author's gender	Translator's gender		
	Male	Female	Mixed team
Males (N=1,670)	1,425 (85%)	177 (11%)	68 (4%)
Females (N=234)	160 (68%)	54 (23%)	20 (9%)

Of the 2,116 translations of Palestinian literature for which we have information about the gender of their authors, 1,881 works (89%) were written by men, and 235 (11%) were written by women. Of these, we have information about the gender of both the author and the translator (table 5) for only 1,904. Of the 1,881 Palestinian works written by men, 1,670 also include information about the translator's gender: 1,425 (85%) were translated by men, 177 (11%) by women, and 68 (4%) by a mixed-gender team. Of the 235 Palestinian works authored by women, 234 include information about the gender of the translator: 54 (23%) were translated into Hebrew by women, 160 (68%) were translated by men, and 20 (9%) were translated by mixed teams. These figures show that the rate of women's involvement in the translation of works written by Palestinian women (32%) is higher than their involvement in the translation of works by Palestinian men (15%). These findings attest to the effort by women translators to introduce the Palestinian narrative into the Hebrew domain as it is voiced by the repressed voices of women, an action that challenges the national and gender values of the translation enterprise.

Summary

This article examines how female translators impacted the translation from Arabic into Hebrew enterprise in the years 1876–2018. Their involvement was explored along three variables: genre, women’s literature, and Palestinian literature. The findings indicate a significant gender bias expressed by the low rates of women among authors and translators. At the same time, from 1978 onward we see a steady rise in the involvement of women in translation. Closer examination, however, reveals a more nuanced picture. Women’s impact on the enterprise of translation from Arabic into Hebrew does not end with the quantitative aspect; their power is rooted in the attempt to question the hegemonic values of the translation enterprise by questioning the male/gender and Zionist/national exclusivity of that enterprise.

The rise in the presence of women in the field of translation introduces three new trends. First, the female translators’ preference for translating long works expresses their effort to position themselves in a central place in the translation enterprise. Second, the preference of female translators for translating works by Arab women is a conscious choice to raise the women’s voices, which are repressed in both cultures. However, the struggle to introduce women’s voices has not yet achieved its goals and is still perceived as marginal by male translators, and to a certain extent by the female translators themselves. Third, the female translators, along with the Arab translators, contributed both to the placement of the repressed Palestinian narrative at the center of the translation field and to that narrative’s inclusion in the agenda of the translation enterprise.

These three trends constitute a subversive movement that seeks to dismantle the patriarchal and national exclusivity of the field of translation. Yet it appears that a glass ceiling still limits the full integration of women in that field and maintains its patriarchal character. This is manifest by the clear preference for the encounter with the national “other” over the encounter with the female “other.”

Notes

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- 1 On the limits of the time period examined here, see the “Methodology” section of this article.
 - 2 For studies about the impact of the conflict between the two cultures on translation from Arabic into Hebrew see, for example, Hannah Amit-Kochavi, “Zarim ve-oyvim o shutafim le-otah kivrat erez? Al ha-tirgumim min ha-sifrut ha-Falastinit,” *Jamaa* 10 (2003); Yehouda Shenhav, “Ha-politika ve-ha-teologiya shel ha-tirgum: Ketzad metargemim Nakba me-Aravit le-Ivrit,” *Sotziologiya Yisraelit* 14, no. 1 (2012); Mahmoud Kayyal, “Tirgumei ha-sifrut ha-Aravit le-Ivrit: Me-orientalizm le-hitkablut,” *HaIvrit, Journal of the Hebrew Language* 61, no. 4 (2014); Amer Dahamshe, “Biglal ha-tirgum: ‘Ahtiya’ ve-tirgumo ha-Ivri ke-mashal le-tafkidei shemot ha-mekomiyot ve-dimuyei ha-makom ba-sifrut,” in *Merhav sifrut Aravi-Ivri*, ed. Hannan Hever and Mahmoud Kayyal (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2016); Huda Abu Much, “Al tafkid ha-tirgum me-Aravit le-Ivrit be-yitzug ha-tarbut ha-Aravit ve-ha-Falastinit be-einei ha-kore ha-Yehudi ba-shanim 1931–1993,” *Mehkarei Yerushalayim be-sifrut Ivrit* (in progress); Mahmoud Kayyal, “‘Arabs Dancing in a New Light of Arabesques’: Minor Hebrew Works of Palestinian Authors in the Eyes of Critics,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 11, no. 1 (2008). For studies on translation from the point of view of multisystem theory see, for example, Hannah Amit-Kochavi, “Tirgumei sifrut Aravit le-Ivrit, ha-reka ha-histori-tarbuti shelahem, meafyeneihem u-maamadam be-tarbut ha-matarah” (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 1999).
 - 3 On the exclusion of women, see Jean Delisle, *Portraits de traductrices* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2002). On the establishment of male hegemony, see Amparo Hurtado Albir, *Traducción y Traductología: Introducción a la Traductología* (España: Cátedra, 2001).
 - 4 The presence of misogyny and the exclusion of women from the field of translation is evident, among other things, in violent language and the use of vulgar images, such as “raping” the text in order to overcome it. See Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (London: Routledge, 1996).
 - 5 For example Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, *Re-Belle et Infidèle: La traduction comme pratique de réécriture au féminin / The Body Bilingual: Translation as a Re-Writing in the Feminine* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1991).
 - 6 Hala Kamal, “Muqadema: Al naqd al-adby al-nasawi we-al-targema al-nasaweya,” *Al naqd al-adby al-nasawi*, ed. Hala Kamal (Egypt: Women and Memory Forum, 2015); Luise von Flotow, “Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and Theories,” *Traduire la théorie* 4, no. 2 (1991).

- 7 Delisle, *Portraits*.
- 8 Simon, *Gender in Translation*; Lori Chamberlain, "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation," *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988).
- 9 Chamberlain, "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation."
- 10 Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from "The Tempest" to "Tarzan"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Douglas Robinson, *Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Theories Explained* (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 1997).
- 11 The index appears on Maktoob's "Index tirgumei ha-sifrut me-Aravit le-Ivrit" website, <http://maktoobooks.com/search-the-index/>. Her doctoral thesis is Amit-Kochavi, "Tirgumei sifrut."
- 12 The novel *Barid Bayrut* (Hebrew: *Beirut Blues*) by the Lebanese author Hanan al-Shaykh is an example of a work that was written in Arabic but translated to Hebrew from English. The novels of the Syrian author Rafik Schami are examples of works written in German and translated into Hebrew.
- 13 For further reading on the importance of the year 1977, see Yehouda Shenhav, *Beyond the Two-State Solution: A Jewish Political Essay* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2012).
- 14 Dan Miron, *Im lo tihyie Yerushalayim: Ha-sifrut ha-Ivrit be-heksher tarbuti politi* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1987).
- 15 See Ghassan Kanafani, *Gvarim ba-shemesh: Ma she-notar lakhem [Men in the Sun: All That's Left to You]* (Jerusalem: Mifras, 1978). Sahar Khalifeh, *Ha-tzabar [Wild Thorns]*, (Jerusalem: Galileo, 1976).
- 16 Ami Elad-Bouskila, *Sifrut Aravit be-levush Ivri* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1995), 38; Elad-Bouskila, *Moledet nilhemet, eretz avoda: Shisha prakim be-sifrut ha-Falastinit ha-hadasha* (Or Yehuda: Maariv Books, 2001), 20–21.
- 17 Adil al-Usta, *Shilet ha-zehut: Ha-Falastiniut shel ha-sifrut ve-shel ha-sofer* (Ramallah: Dar Al-Shorok, 2000).
- 18 Amit-Kochavi, "Zarim ve-oyvim."
- 19 The first work translated into Hebrew by an Arab was the poem "Yitzur she-lo nolad ani" (An unborn creature I) by Egyptian author Kamal Abdel Halim. The poem was translated in 1954 by communist historian Emile Touma and published in the Communist newspaper *Kol HaAm* on May 28, 1954. In the same year and using the same platform, the first work translated into Hebrew by a mixed team including a Jewish female translator was "Mikhtav me-av Mitzri el nasi Artzot ha-Brit" ("A Letter from an Egyptian father to the president of the United States of America"), by the Egyptian author Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi; it was translated by Chaya Kadmon and Salim Fatal and published in *Kol HaAm* on December 24, 1954. After a ten-year break, the activity of Arab male translators and Jewish female translators resumed in the middle of the 1960s and continues to this day.

- 20 Mahmoud Darwish, "Ha-ovrim ba-dibur ha-over" ["Those Who Pass between Fleeting Words"], *Maariv*, March 25, 1988. For an extensive discussion, see Huda Abu Much, "Tirgum ve-koah: Al ha-tirgum le-Ivrit shel ha-shir 'Ha-ovrim ba-dibur ha-over' me-et Mahmoud Darwish," in Hever and Kayyal, *Merhav sifrut Aravi-Ivri*; Abdel Rahman Mari, "Sifrut ve-politika: Al baayat shirav shel Mahmoud Darwish be-maarekhet ha-hinukh be-Yisrael," in Hever and Kayyal, *Merhav sifrut Aravi-Ivri*.
- 21 On the contribution of the Arab translators to introducing new norms into the translation field, see Kayyal, "Tirgumei ha-sifrut ha-Aravit le-Ivrit"; Abu Much, "Al tafkid ha-tirgum me-Aravit le-Ivrit."
- 22 Shammass wrote his famous novel *Arabeskot* in Hebrew: Anton Shammass, *Arabeskot* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1986). The novel received a wide range of reactions in the Hebrew literary arena, from acceptance to rejection. In addition he translated the works of Emile Habibi into Hebrew, which helped Habibi win the Israel Prize in Literature. For an extensive discussion, see Amit-Kochavi, "Tirgumei sifrut"; Kayyal, "Arabs Dancing."
- 23 For an extensive discussion on the status of Arab women, see Manar Hasan, "Ha-politika shel ha-kavod: Ha-patriyarkhya, ha-medina ve-retzah nashim be-shem kavod ha-mishpaha," in *Min, migdar, politika*, ed. Dafna Izraeli et al. (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001); Huneida Ghanem, *Emdot be-nogeya la-maamada ve-zkhuyoteya shel ha-isha ha-Falastinit be-Yisrael* (Nazareth: Women against Violence, 2005); Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder and Naomi Weiner-Levy, *Nashim Falastiniyot be-Yisrael: Zehut, yahasei koah ve-bitmodedut* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2010); Heba Yazbak and Liat Kozma, *Maamad ishi u-migdar: Nashim Falastiniyot be-Yisrael* (Haifa: Pardes Publishing, 2017).
- 24 For sources describing the difficulties facing authors and translators operating on the seam between cultures, see Sami Michael, "Ha-maavar me-safa le-safa," *Mifgash* 3, no. 7 (1986); Anton Shammass, "Ashmat ha-babushka," *Politika* 5-6, (1986); Mohammad Ghanaim, "Astuh thaqafeya sakhena," *Al-Carmel* 50 (1997). On the dispute around the activity of Arabs in the Hebrew domain, see Emile Habibi, "Shaar Mandelbaum," *Kol HaAm*, April 2, 1954; Hannan Hever, "Lehakot be-ekvo shel Akhilis," *Alpayim* 1 (1989); Hever, "Lashuv u-lehakot be-ekvo shel Akhilis," *Alpayim* 3 (1990); Reuven Snir, "Petz ehad me-ptzaav: Ha-sifrut ha-Aravit ha-Falastinit be-Yisrael," *Alpayim* 2 (1990); Snir, "Ha-akev shel Akhilis o ha-bevoah shel Narcissus?," *Alpayim* 4 (1991).
- 25 Rachel Elboim-Dror, "Ha-isha ha-Tziyonit ha-idialit," in *Ha-tishma koli? Yitzugim shel nashim be-tarbut ha-Yisraelit*, ed. Yael Atzmon (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001); Yael Feldman, *Lelo heder mi-shelachen: Migdar u-leumiyut be-yetziratan shel sofrot Yisraeliyot* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2002), 23.
- 26 Ariela Friedman, "Al feminizm, nashiyut ve-koah shel nashim be-Yisrael," in Izraeli et al., *Min, migdar, politika*.
- 27 Despite the improvement in the status of women, it is still difficult to speak of full equality. For an extensive discussion, see Dafna Izraeli et al., *Min, migdar, politika*.

- 28 Amit-Kochavi, “Tirgumei sifrut.”
- 29 Kayyal, “Tirgumei ha-sifrut ha-Aravit le-Ivrit”; Kayyal, “‘Ha-shuva le-Haifa’ shel Ghassan Kanafani be-Ivrit,” in Hever and Kayyal, *Merhav sifrut Aravi-Ivri*.
- 30 Abu Much, “Al tafkid ha-tirgum me-Aravit le-Ivrit.”
- 31 For a discussion of the 1977 “reversal” and its impact on Israeli society see, for example, Nissim Calderon, *Pluralistim be-al korham* (Haifa: Haifa University, 2000).
- 32 See, for example, Abu Much, “Al tafkid ha-tirgum me-Aravit le-Ivrit”; Amit-Kochavi, “Zarim ve-oyvim.”
- 33 In this study I treated each work as a translation in its own right, even if they came out in the same book. Kanafani, *Gvarim ba-shemesh: Ma she-notar lakhem*.
- 34 Of the 4,893 items including information about the gender of the author of the original work, only 4,746 also include information about the year of publication of the translation.
- 35 It is important to note that from 1876–1953 there were 294 translations, which means that only 5% of the translations were made during the first seventy years, while 95% of the translations were made in the second period of seventy years, 1954–2018.
- 36 The reference is to full translations only. Partial translations of novels and novellas can be found. A case in point is Shmuel Regulant’s translation of the last chapter of the novella *Aed ila Haifa* (Returning to Haifa) by Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani (written in 1969). The translation was published in 1972, but it was a partial translation and appeared alongside an article by Sasson Somekh that expressed a patronizing attitude toward the Arab community (see Ghassan Kanafani, “Ha-heftaah,” *Ofek: Le-sifrut, le-hagut u-le-vikoret* 2 (1972); Sasson Somekh, “Falastinai she-hitzitz u-lo nifga,” *Ofek: Le-sifrut, le-hagut u-le-vikoret* 2 (1972); Kayyal, “‘Ha-shuva le-Haifa’.”



Arabic Language among Jews in Israel and the New Mizrahi Zionism: Between Active Knowledge and Performance

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Throughout the last century in Israel, the Arabic language and its speakers—both Palestinian Arab and Jewish—have been studied by Jewish Israeli policy makers and academic circles. The Zionist leadership’s Orientalist attitude toward Arabic underwent a number of changes before Israel’s establishment: from the romanticized notion of Arab culture around the turn of the twentieth century, through its imitation and emulation in the 1920s and 1930s, to efforts to separate from the Arabic language and replace it with Hebrew when the national conflict erupted in the following decades.¹ Rejection of Arabic, which gradually increased after the establishment of the state, was the result of two parallel colonial processes. The first gave priority to Hebrew, including preference for the European (Ashkenazi) pronunciation of Hebrew over that which retained the guttural letters, as part of the European effort to settle Palestine. In the second process Arabic became the language of the indigenous “enemy” from which the Zionist Yishuv sought to differentiate itself, as well as a means of controlling that population.²

Even before the Nakba, the status of the Arabic language was established among Jewish Zionists as foreign, inferior, and threatening. This position took an even greater hold after the establishment of Israel, when the study and knowledge of Arabic were hitched to the defense and intelligence enterprises, and to the creation of close ties between the education and military systems.³ This instrumental relationship led to an artificial split in the identity of Jews in Israel; it also led to a gap between

the diminishing use of Arabic in the civil sphere and a rise in the study of Arabic as a passive language of reading, targeted for strategic purposes in the service of Israeli intelligence and for the control of the indigenous Arabic speakers.⁴ Thus, even though Arabic was recognized as an official language, it actually functioned as a “present-absent” entity, similar to the identity of the Palestinian refugees inside Israel whose lands and property were confiscated by the state.

The process of estrangement of Jews from Arabic in Israel did not spare the immigrants who came from Arab countries and spoke the language fluently in a rich array of dialects. Once Hebrew was made the marker of Israeli national identity and Arabic the marker of Palestinian Arab identity, the two languages were positioned as the basis of both national contrast between Israelis and Palestinians and of ethnic contrast between Jews and Arabs, as well as between Jews and Jews. Furthermore, “given the definition of Jewish sovereignty as having a monopoly over territory, population, and identity,” Arabic was disenfranchised from any claim to sovereignty, Jewish-Arab relations were no longer possible outside of the theological-political contrast between them, and the possibility of binational and bilingual existence was absolutely negated.⁵ The cultural Jewish Arab identity therefore became impossible in Israel, and the Arabic spoken by Jews from Arab countries also underwent a process of instrumentalization, through its recruitment to the Israeli military intelligence effort.⁶

On the other hand, as the result of long historical processes, the boundaries of Arab culture, or the Arabic-speaking world, expanded to contain exceptional diversity, so that the definition of Arabness had a linguistic basis that encompassed racial-ethnic and even religious differences.⁷ Thus, for example, in the Arab world we witness the inclusion of Arabic-speaking Sudanese, Copts, and Druze, as opposed to Kurds or Berbers, who do not command Arabic as a primary language. The historic Jewish communities in the Arab world spoke Arabic at different levels, either as a mother tongue alongside other languages or as a secondary language that was part of their linguistic repertoire. Therefore, they ranged at different times and in different regions from full inclusion in the Arabic cultural collective to distinction from it on a linguistic basis, which was usually also related to religion.⁸ A unique simultaneous process was forced on Arab Jews in Israel. They were culturally de-Arabized and ethnically Judaized. This enabled their inclusion in the national Israeli collective while simultaneously differentiating them from the Arab “enemy” and indigenous Palestinians.⁹ The framing of Arabic in Israel played a critical role in this process of fragmentation. While the connection of the Arab Jews to the Arabic language waned in the public sphere, it continued to exist in the private sphere through music, traditions, and family stories, with the language reverberating behind closed doors.

The renewed interest in the command and learning of Arabic among Israeli Jews comes as no surprise, because knowledge of the Arabic language may help repair cultural and political ties between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, as well as between Israeli Jews and other Arabs of the region. However, it seems that today the aforementioned colonial fragmentations related to the Arabic language in Israel are reaching new dimensions. Both command of Arabic and its status are weakening among Israeli Jews: this fact is consistent with the recent passing of “the nation-state law” by the Knesset, in which the Arabic language was reduced from being an official language to being one having a vague “special status.” At the same time, there is growing interest among Israeli Jews in Arab culture, which is especially expressed through interest in Arabic music.¹⁰ Although this began as a grassroots phenomenon (emerging from musicians and audiences), it has also become popular in institutional circles, whether commercial institutions and cultural events (nightclubs and festivals) or governmental ones (such as radio stations, or the Ministry of Culture and Sport, which underwrites events where these musicians perform).¹¹

In this article I wish to examine the contradiction between the decline in the command of Arabic versus the rise in singing and listening to Arabic music among Jews in Israel. How does this contradiction—between the drop in proficiency in the language and the rise in interest in Arab culture—affect the identity of young Mizrahim in Israel? Moreover, what are the consequences that performances by Jewish musicians in Arabic might have for the establishment of relations with regional Arab and local Palestinian audiences? Finally, how can the current governmental policy that lowers the status of Arabic while simultaneously funding performances by Jewish Israeli artists who sing in Arabic be explained?

To answer these questions, I first review the findings of the 2015 report *Command of Arabic among Israeli Jews* by Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani *et al.*¹² I then discuss the various contradictions that arise from the report in relation to the Arabic language in Israel today. In the second half of the article, I examine Arabic-language performances among Israeli musicians, to consider the possibilities of a cultural dialogue between Israeli musicians and local Palestinian, and regional Arab, audiences.

Review of the Report's Findings

The recently published report *Command of Arabic among Israeli Jews* is based on empirical research conducted via phone interviews with Jewish Israeli adults. Participants were asked to rate their command of Arabic, their positions toward the language, and the settings in which they learned it. The report examines the ways in which these findings vary by generation and in comparison between Jews from

Arab countries and other Jews—data that the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics intentionally blurs by obfuscating the country of origin of the second and third generations of Jews born in Israel to immigrant parents.¹³ The report provides a comprehensive picture of the state of Arabic among Israeli Jews and emphasizes the cultural, social, and political contradictions inherent in their ambivalent attitude toward the Arabic language.

The phrase “command of Arabic” holds many possibilities because Arabic is comprised of a number of layers, from the literary language (*fusha*) to the different regional dialects of the spoken language. This multiplicity of definitions of Arabic might initially seem to confuse the credibility of the answer regarding proficiency in the language, but it actually explains the noticeable disparity in the report’s findings between proficiency in speech and proficiency in writing. The report indicates that an absolute majority of the Jewish population in Israel neither speaks Arabic (90%) nor understands it (83%). When the authors examine the ability to read texts, an even more dramatic picture emerges: only 2.6% are able to read a newspaper in Arabic, and a mere 1% can read literature (and when deducting the generation born in Arab countries, it is no more than 0.1%). The immediate meaning is that most of the Jews who responded that they speak or understand Arabic were referring to the different dialects of spoken Arabic. They brought these dialects with them when they migrated from different parts of the Arab world, but they are able to communicate in them only with small communities of speakers in Israel. Others are people who learned some Arabic—at school or in the military—but who, though their vocabulary and ability to express themselves are limited, still feel that they can “understand Arabic.” However, the latter usually cannot use the literary language or other dialects actively, owing to insufficient knowledge of reading and writing in the literary language.

The report finds, unsurprisingly, that the Mizrahim are more proficient in Arabic, including all of its skills. However, an intergenerational examination finds significant differences that indicate loss of the language, so that the rate of proficiency in Arabic among members of the first generation (25.6%) is almost twice as high as that of members of the second generation (14%) and almost twenty times higher than that of third generation (1.3%). Although these figures of loss of mother tongue are similar among different migrants throughout the world, including for other languages in Israel, the loss of the Arabic language among Jews from Arab countries is still an exceptional case because this loss occurred despite the historic importance of the language to the Jews, despite its current existence in the local and regional spheres, and despite Arabic being a dynamic and, until recently, official language in the country.

Table 1: Command of Arabic (respondents who rated their knowledge level and proficiency in Arabic as high or very high, according to the subjects detailed in the table)¹⁴

Type of knowledge	Representative sample	Jews from Arab countries¹⁵	Originating from other countries including Israel
	N=500	N=500	N=261
Understanding speech when addressed to them or spoken near them	17.2%	30%	3.1%
Understanding lyrics of songs	10.4%	18.8%	0.8%
Speaking and holding a conversation	10%	17%	1.1%
Overall rating of level of knowledge of Arabic language	9.8%	15.8%	1.1%
Familiarity with the letters	6.8%	7.6%	3.1%
Reading (newspaper, news)	2.6%	3.8%	0.4%
Writing (email, letter)	1.4%	2.6%	0.4%
Reading literature (novel, nonfiction book)	1%	2.2%	--

Examining the settings in which teaching the language takes place enables us to see what led to the sad story of the Arabic language in Israel. The report's findings clearly show that the most significant space for Jews to learn Arabic in Israel is school, where 76.6% of all Israeli Jews studied the language, followed by the army (4.5%), university (3.4%), and private settings (3.0%). The compulsory study of Arabic in Israeli schools could indicate the importance of this setting for knowledge of Arabic. However, the obligation to learn the language in school is not indicative of

what happens in reality. First, only 3% of public schools actually taught Arabic as a compulsory subject in the seventh through tenth grades, and in 2014 then-Minister of Education Shai Piron cancelled the teaching of Arabic in the tenth grade.¹⁶ In addition, since 1959 middle schoolers could choose between French and Arabic, and many chose French.¹⁷ And, because Arabic is a non-prestigious elective with low symbolic capital, many students who began studying Arabic subsequently obtained exemptions from language studies.¹⁸ So the number of Arabic students in Israeli schools is actually much lower than the percentage of those claiming to be engaged in such studies would indicate, which further explains the small number of Arabic speakers among Jews in Israel.

It is important to take into account that the percentage of Jews who noted that they had learned Arabic in the army is actually considerably higher than 4.5%, because the Intelligence Corps has some of the largest units in the Israeli army, which has a critical impact on the field of Arabic studies. According to the authors of the report, those who studied Arabic both in school and in the army usually chose to mention the civilian rather than the military context of their studies. The report claims that one explanation for this phenomenon is the disinclination of respondents to discuss issues concerning the military in a phone survey. Another reason, according to the authors, is that the respondents perceive school as the main place they learned Arabic, whereas other places, such as the army, are perceived as places where they made professional use of the language after they had already learned it. Either way, most of the respondents who replied that they had learned Arabic at school had done so in a civilian setting, but their motivation was military—especially as a reason to join the Intelligence Corps.

The Arab Jews' loss of proficiency in the Arabic language in the second and third generations becomes clear when comparing the data based on origin. The report finds that among students of Arabic at school, university, and in the army, the number of Ashkenazim is higher than that of Mizrahim. It also emerges that for those who studied Arabic, school is a more significant place of learning for the Ashkenazim (82.9% of those who studied) than for the Mizrahim (67.7% of those who studied). Furthermore, the number of Ashkenazim who studied Arabic at university is more than four times higher than that of those from Arab countries; in the army the number is three times higher for Ashkenazim than for Mizrahim.

To understand these surprising discrepancies, the report's authors add findings that reflect the contradiction in the Israeli public's attitudes toward Arabic. It becomes clear from the report that a little more than half (57.8%) of the respondents think that knowledge of the Arabic language is important, and 50% think it is important that

Arabic be an official language in Israel. However, a larger majority (65.4%) believe that the importance of learning Arabic is related to security, as a way to “know thine enemy,” and only one third (33%) think Arabic is important as a heritage language.

The survey also shows the ambivalent attitude toward the Arabic language among Jews from Arab countries, which disturbingly increases from one generation to the next. For instance, 49% of those from Arab countries support the position that Arabic should be an official language, compared to 58% of those who are not from Arab countries. This is also remarkable with regard to the position that it is necessary to know Arabic in order to “know thine enemy”—74.2% of respondents from Arab countries support this position, compared to 60% of those who are not from Arab countries.

However, when it comes to a supposedly apolitical statement such as liking Arabic music, there is a distinct reversal of position, with the more positive attitude toward the language appearing among those from Arab countries. However, the percentage of those maintaining this positive attitude among respondents from Arab countries drops among university graduates, especially those from the second generation. Thus, among university graduates from Arab countries there was a lower level of support—compared to the total number of respondents from Arab countries—for the parameters of cultural affinity, such as liking Arabic music (19% of all respondents from Arab countries compared to 12% of the academics from that group) and the sense of comfort with speaking Arabic (29.4% of the total respondents from Arab countries compared to 24% of the university graduates). These findings indicate that Mizrahim turn to higher education, but away from Arabic language, for social mobility in Israel.

It also emerges that the attitude toward Arabic is most conflict-ridden among the second and third generations of Jews from Arab countries. The findings indicate that those answering the question “why don’t you feel comfortable speaking Arabic,” which was directed at those who answered that they did not feel comfortable speaking Arabic outside the home, presented a variety of reasons. Some 40% said that the reason was lack of proficiency or fluency in the language, with members of the third generation of Jews from Arab countries indicating their lack of fluency as the main barrier. Other barriers included the answer “I have nobody to talk to” (13.4%), the lack of need to use Arabic in Israel (9.7%), and shame (3%). The answer concerning shame was usually given by members of the first and second generations, but it is not clear whether this shame was related to lack of proficiency in the language or to cultural aversion. Finally, some respondents explained that their discomfort with using Arabic stemmed from their aversion to the Arabic language. Of second-

generation immigrants from Arab countries, 19.4% chose this answer, compared to 11.3% of the first generation and 7.7% of the third generation.

The report's findings reflect a dramatic state of affairs. The Arabic language—the language of the region and of the culture and heritage of many of the Mizrahi Jews, in which some of the most important Jewish philosophers and intellectuals wrote in the past—is presently in a state of extinguishment among the vast majority of Jews in Israel, who cannot speak, write, or create in it. This linguistic regression leads to the Jewish public in Israel retreating from being an integral partner in shaping the social and political reality in the region. Even though there is growing interest in Israel in Arab culture, it comes mostly from an ethnocentric Jewish point of view, as I will show below. Furthermore, this distance not only positions the Ashkenazi Israeli public as an alien transplant in an Arab environment but also brings Mizrahi Jews into the European colonial mindset that continuously resists equitable integration into the local region, instead preferring to act out of a state of perpetual hostility with its neighbors and itself.¹⁹ This state of internal discontent is an absurd expression of the contrasting and fragmented attitudes toward the Arabic language in Israel.

Contrasts and Fragmentation in a Colonial Reality

The picture that emerges from the report reflects two political processes related to the Israeli Jews' attitude toward Arabic. The first process is the “securitization” of the Arabic language, which began before the establishment of the state with the linguistic segregation on the basis of nationality, so that the Jews (including those of Arab origin) spoke Hebrew and the Arabs spoke Arabic.²⁰ This process marked Arabic as the language of the “Other” and delegated its use mainly to the colonial goals of control through intelligence collection and “ethnic”-based separation. Not surprisingly, Jews from Arab countries (especially from Iraq), who spoke the language, were recruited to the security organizations and academia. Toward the 1970s, however, when the children of the immigrants did not show interest in continuing their parents' role, the leaders of Israel and the army sought to recruit a new generation of Arabic-speaking Jews to their ranks from the “affluent communities.” Thus, knowledge of the Arabic language among Jews in Israel underwent an “Ashkenazification”: from being the purview of immigrants from Arab countries to that of those from European countries (the Ashkenazim).²¹

A second process, the “Latinization” of Arabic in Israel, stemmed from this. As mentioned in the report, this process has been discussed by a number of other scholars researching the Arabic language in Israel.²² These scholars emphasize that the philological method used in Israel for teaching and research of Arabic influenced the

Arabic that was ultimately developed in Jewish society and encouraged the national separation between Jews and Arabs in Israel. They argue that Arabic underwent a process of “Latinization”: it was turned into a “dead” language, a language without speakers, a language that needed to be deciphered and coded but not spoken and written. Thus, the activities of the Orientalist researchers in universities, the Arabic teachers in the schools, and members of military intelligence, most of whom are Ashkenazi, are limited to reading and understanding literary Arabic, but usually without being able to speak it.

This means that Arabic students and speakers among the Jews in Israel belong to two distinct groups. The first, mostly Ashkenazi, group consists of experts who have a superficial, instrumental proficiency in literary Arabic, driven by military intelligence, security, and Orientalist studies. The other group is made up of Jews from Arab countries who are culturally connected to Arabic as a mother tongue or heritage language but are not proficient in writing. Even if the contradictions in the attitude toward the Arabic language take different forms for each of the two groups, in both cases they result from distorted colonialist relations of rejecting the indigenous Palestinians while desiring Arab culture.

Ashkenazi society, whose European cultural roots are alien to the Middle East, has developed a typical colonial love-hate relationship with the Palestinian natives and their culture. This attitude, which began with the generation of *halutzim* (pioneers), continued later among the experts in the Arabic language—both the Orientalists in Israeli academia and the security experts in the military system.²³ This relationship is evident, as there is an effort to eradicate the existence of the Palestinian natives by their expulsion or by control of their resources, while simultaneously, there is a passion for their culture that developed out of an alien diaspora society’s efforts to establish an authentic connection to the place it claimed as home. This latter effort was reflected by the appropriation of the resources of the local Palestinian culture, such as food, clothing, and place names, and by its redefinition as part of Israeli colonial nationalism.²⁴ The Arabic language becomes another site where this ambivalence is expressed: Arabic is disconnected from daily life and becomes a sterile instrument outside of the time-space context, through which the native is controlled, yet the desire for Arab culture is expressed, notes the report, in a supposedly conciliatory attitude toward the Arabic language, since an Arabic-speaking Ashkenazi possesses cultural capital that never puts him under suspicion of being an Arab. There is also a conflict associated with the desire of Ashkenazi Jews to learn Arabic, between the motive of “knowing the enemy” and the liberal aspiration for “peace” with the native, as well as between the textual study of literary Arabic and the lack of proficiency

in the Palestinian Arabic dialect as an instrument of daily communication beyond academic or military research needs.²⁵

The relationship with the Arabic language among Jews from Arab countries is rooted in a different and more complex history. Since their command of the language waned over the years, out of the cultural-political necessity of assimilating into Israeli society, these Jews developed changing ambivalent attitudes toward Arabic language, culture, and identity from one generation to the next. Most of the members of the first generation, whose numbers are dwindling, understand and speak Arabic at various levels but cannot read or write it. Even though upon their immigration to Israel they were required to denounce their Arab identity, the report shows that they maintained a positive attitude toward the language, especially by consuming Arab culture in the domestic sphere through music or television.

Members of the second generation of Jews of Arab origin heard Arabic at home but barely speak the language, and therefore it was this generation that expressed a more strident position regarding Arabic as the language of the “enemy.” As the report reflects, their negative positions toward Arabic result both from their day-to-day disengagement from the language and from the need to assimilate while adopting the Israeli ethos and hostile institutional attitude toward Arabic language, culture, and identity. Extreme positions toward Arabs and their culture are an indication of what is considered normative in Israel. This illustrates the reasons that led the offspring of the Arab Jews to disengage from their own Arabness (and from other Arabs) in order to advance their acceptance and mobility in Israeli society. According to the report, these positions toward Arabic did not change among university graduates from that generation, because it was precisely their social mobility in Israel that moved them further away from the Arabic language and culture, at least in the public sphere.

Whereas members of the second generation of Mizrahim rejected Arabic, they retained an affection for their parents’ culture by consuming it in the private sphere. However, with their weak command of Arabic and the political negation of Arab identity, the cultural self-definition of this generation emerged by whitewashing Arab culture as an element within the broader Israeli Mizrahi identity or by adopting the concept of *‘eda*—Jewish traditions based on national sub-affiliations (such as Moroccan, Yemenite, or Iraqi Jews).²⁶ One way or another, the attitude toward the Arabic language led to a deep contradiction between sentimentality with regard to past traditions and hostility toward the language of the “enemy” in the present. This contradiction led to a deep linguistic split between affection for the familial Arabic dialect and the hatred of literary Arabic and the Palestinian Arabic dialect.

Surprisingly, the third generation, which may have lost all connection with the language, expresses less hostility toward Arabic than the second generation. There is an interesting finding in the report that did not receive much attention from its authors: among respondents from Arab countries who expressed aversion to the Arabic language, the percentage of members of the first generation was, as expected, the lowest (7.7%), but the percentage of members of the second generation (19.4%) was, unexpectedly, higher than that of members of the third generation (11.3%). This figure, which reflects only a slight improvement in attitudes toward Arabic among the third generation, and only by way of negation, can be seen as a basis for understanding the popularity of singing in Arabic among this generation. Focusing on this phenomenon can reveal interesting changes regarding Arab culture in Israeli society in recent years.

In the second half of the article, I outline the cultural roles that the performances in Arabic play among Jewish musicians and audiences in Israel. Following this, I refer to the cases of two Israeli musicians, Neta Elkayam and Ziv Yehezkel, who successfully connect with Arab audiences. Through them, I examine the political significance of these musical performances, both in the context of Mizrahi identity among the third generation and in relation to the local Palestinian and regional Arab audiences. In the last section, I explore the connection these performances have to the policy of the right-wing government in Israel and the rise of a new Mizrahi-Zionist discourse in relation to the Arabic language and culture. Finally, I point to the possible negative consequences for Palestinians of this cultural shift.

Jewish Israeli Musicians Singing in Arabic

As an integral part of the Arab world, Jews were active participants in the production and performance of music in the region.²⁷ The large migration of Arab Jews to Israel after 1948 included many musicians, who discovered that their musical styles and Arabic songs had no place in the Ashkenazi Israeli culture, which was based on European characteristics and advocated Hebrew as part of the “melting pot” policy. Thus, many of those musicians started singing in Hebrew, and others gave up and abandoned their profession altogether. A small group, however, maintained enclaves of Arabic musical culture at small community events, such as weddings, bar mitzvahs, and some religious festivities.²⁸

Toward the 1970s the second generation of those musicians underwent a process of “Mizrahification,” which was clearly reflected by the appearance of Mizrahi music, and later, Mediterranean music.²⁹ Although this music may have been characterized by cultural hybridity, combining Mizrahi traditions with popular Western styles of

rock, and even managed to reach a larger and more diverse Israeli audience, it was mostly sung in Hebrew.³⁰ However, the performance of covers of classical hits and contemporary pop in Arabic, such as “Inta ‘Omri” by Umm Kulthum, gained a place of honor in this musical scene because it expressed both the authenticity of and loyalty to the musical origins of the singers, as well as the audience’s longing for a lost past.

In the late 1980s renewed versions of songs from different Arab Jewish traditions began to receive international exposure as part of the rise of the Western commercial category of world music. Simultaneously, the Oslo Accords (1993) and the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan (1994) brought about the exposure of some Mizrahi singers to diverse regional Arab audiences.³¹ A handful of those singers, such as Zehava Ben, even performed in Arabic in the West Bank and Jordan.³² This reality did not last long and stopped completely with the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

Though in the following decade Jews did not sing in Arabic on the stage, the third generation of Mizrahim in Israel began seeking its Arabic cultural roots. Political movements that emerged in Israel, such as the Black Panthers, who appeared in the 1970s, and the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition, which has been operating since the late 1980s, led to this generation developing a more critical cultural and political awareness.³³ In the last decade, third-generation Mizrahi political activists and cultural producers began expressing themselves, mainly in Hebrew, including in cultural works such as poetry, literature, cinema, and art.³⁴

However, a prominent group of Israeli musicians sought to explore its unique connection with Arab and other Mizrahi cultures by singing in Arabic. These mostly third-generation Mizrahi musicians first emerged as independent initiatives and quickly received wide exposure in Israel by appearing on central commercial and institutional stages and radio stations, which led some to international careers. This musical prominence is expressed not only in numbers of performers but also in their stylistic musical variety: original pieces, new arrangements of classical Arabic works, songs from different Jewish Arab traditions, and even cover versions of English pop songs with a noticeable Arabic accent.³⁵ Since the vast majority of both the musicians and Jewish Israeli audiences do not speak Arabic, use of the Arabic language becomes a “postvernacular” expression, in which the use of Arabic shifts from linguistic semantic communication to symbolic, aesthetic, and sentimental communication that is particularly suitable for music.³⁶

Though it would be interesting to further elaborate on the meaning of these Arabic performances for Israeli and international audiences, I turn here to exploring

the meaning of these events for local Palestinian and regional Arab audiences. While a cultural dialogue may emerge from these linguistic performances, it should be noted that most of the Jewish musicians who sing in Arabic today do not seek out non-Jewish Arab audiences in Israel or abroad. There are two possible reasons: First, most of them do not speak Arabic and therefore do not succeed in breaking through the semantic communication barrier with native speakers of the language. Second, most of them cannot travel to Arab countries that do not have official diplomatic relations with Israel, so they cannot facilitate a direct relationship with an Arab audience. These barriers limit my focus to two singers, Neta Elkayam and Ziv Yehezkel, who not only speak and sing in fluent Arabic but also perform for Palestinian or regional Arab audiences. That said, Elkayam and Yehezkel did not acquire Arabic at home; they learned the language as adults, which poses great challenges to composing original songs in Arabic. Therefore, in my analysis I address these challenges of composition and the strategies used to cope with them, and I consider the performative representations that these musicians carry with them in constructing their relationships with Arab audiences.

Singing as Translation of Sentiment

Neta Elkayam is a singer from the third generation of Jewish immigrants from Morocco. Her musical repertoire is mostly comprised of the *sha'bi* music (popular nonreligious music) of mid-twentieth-century Jewish Maghribi musicians, whose work she revives with new arrangements. Born to a family that did not speak Arabic at home, her intimate childhood experience with the Moroccan Darija Arabic dialect was through her disjointed attempts at communication with her grandmother, who did not speak fluent Hebrew.³⁷ Thus, she grew up as a Hebrew speaker with knowledge of some basic words in Darija. Only after a visit to Morocco at the age of twenty-eight did she decide to proactively return to her cultural roots through language and music.³⁸ Through intensive study of Darija and Palestinian spoken Arabic, she managed to perform songs from the Judeo-Maghribi tradition with accurate diction and intonation, which granted her international exposure.

Elkayam is, however, aware of the shortcomings of singing nonoriginal material, and she therefore is trying to grapple with writing her own songs. In a conversation with her, she revealed the complicated process of writing original songs in Arabic, whereby she comes across the various challenges of translation and representation.³⁹ She begins by writing in Hebrew because that is the language she connects with intuitively; she then sits down with Reuven Abergel, a social activist and second-generation Moroccan migrant to Israel, who speaks Darija fluently, and together

they translate the song. She realizes, however, that the Darija that she and Reuven speak is a Moroccan Jewish subdialect that not all Moroccans understand, especially not the younger generation in Morocco today. She therefore sends the song to a Moroccan native Darija speaker and asks him to suggest further corrections to the text. Finally, she needs to take into account not only the rhyme and aesthetics of the words but also “whether I want to sing this as a Jew or want everybody [including the Moroccans of Morocco] to understand.”⁴⁰ For these reasons Elkayam has yet to produce her own album of original songs and has only a handful of such songs to her name.⁴¹

Third-generation musicians working with translators from the second generation of Jews who migrated to Israel from Arab countries is not unique to Neta Elkayam. For instance, Ravid Kahalani works with his father and with the musician Zion Golan; Dudu Tassa works with his cousin Shlomo Kuwaity and with the musician Yair Dalal. In both cases the “translation” does not focus on the semantic side of the language but on its expressive side, through accent and diction.

Elkayam manages to reconstruct a current version of the Maghribi Jewish tradition, but her translation from Hebrew to Darija requires a major effort involving both the linguistic reconstruction of her grandmother’s dialect and the updating of that dialect to contemporary Moroccan speech. This effort reflects a linguistic conflict between past and present and raises questions about the cultural route that third-generation Moroccan Jews in Israel must follow to reconnect with their grandparents’ homeland, given that the cultural bridges leading there are broken and a significant effort is required to rebuild them.

The case of Neta Elkayam is unique because she has also been successful in building direct ties with audiences in Morocco by performing there. This unusual situation exists because Morocco is one of the few Arab states that not only allows Israelis to visit but also warmly welcomes Israelis of Moroccan origin. In comparison, Ziv Yehezkel and Dudu Tassa cannot perform in Iraq using their Israeli passports, nor can Ravid Kahalani or the Haim sisters from the A-WA band travel to Yemen. In addition, Israeli singers, including those with origins in Arab countries, do not perform in Jordan or Egypt—although these countries are open to Israelis by virtue of the peace agreements with them—because they are not welcome there by local audiences, who widely support campaigns of “anti-normalization” with Israel.⁴²

Under such circumstances, Elkayam has a privilege that other Israeli musicians do not have. She manifests this privilege by performing frequently in Morocco and even officially representing Morocco at events in Europe and elsewhere.⁴³ This representation is interesting because it indicates a mutually beneficial relationship.

On the one hand, Elkayam is keen to strengthen her relationship with her country of origin, even referring to herself as a “Moroccan Jew,” while demoting her Israeli identity. On the other hand, the Moroccan state is undergoing many transformations in its identity politics, moving toward a multicultural model that aims to strengthen the country’s minorities, such as the various Berber, African, and Jewish communities.⁴⁴ Therefore, Neta Elkayam has become a Jewish representative of a new Morocco that emphasizes openness to cultural difference. In addition, by adopting her Moroccan identity, Elkayam expresses her discomfort with her Arab identity. Although her mother’s family is originally from Casablanca, with a French- and Arabic-speaking cultural background, her father’s family came from the Todra Gorge, from a Berber, Shulha-speaking background.⁴⁵ Adopting a Moroccan identity helps Elkayam contain the cultural complexity of Moroccan Jewry while representing the country’s contemporary identity politics.

Singing in Arabic with a Kippah

Ziv Yehezkel hails from an Iraqi Jewish family and performs songs that are mostly from the repertoire of Egyptian *tarab* music (and some from Greater Syria), with light musical arrangements of his own. Yehezkel may not be able to perform in Iraq, but he does perform frequently for Palestinians, including in the West Bank, as well as for Arab audiences in Europe and the United States. Yehezkel also often performs with Arab musicians, especially the Arab Orchestra of Nazareth, through which he received wide exposure as the “*haredi* [ultra-Orthodox Jewish] musician . . . who wears a black *kippah* [skullcap] and sings in accurate Arabic.” Surprisingly for the social-cultural reality in Israel, Yehezkel grew up in a *haredi* home, received a formal education, and maintains a strictly Orthodox lifestyle.⁴⁶

Whereas Neta Elkayam does not establish relations with Palestinian audiences—because she sings in the Moroccan Darija dialect, which is not generally understood by the Palestinian audience, and possibly because of her choice to adopt her Moroccan identity over an Arab one—Ziv Yehezkel realizes that one can be both Arab and Jewish, connect with a Palestinian audience in Nazareth or Ramallah, and even create pan-Arab relationships on the stage between Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Druze musicians. In the past, Zionist ideology dismissed the identity of Arab Jews on the basis of ethnic segregation; Yehezkel, however, wholeheartedly adopts his Arab identity as a cultural affiliation alongside his *haredi* lifestyle:⁴⁷ “What’s there to be afraid of? A Mizrahi Jew is a definition by way of elimination. Whoever is not Ashkenazi is Mizrahi. Bukharan Jews are Mizrahi Jews even though they are not from Arab roots. Why identify myself by way of elimination? I have a name: I am an Arab Jew.”⁴⁸

This statement drew enthusiastic reactions from the left-wing Israeli media. In an opinion piece, Sami Shalom Chetrit declared: “Seriously, without a drop of cynicism or irony: Ziv Yehezkel is my Messiah.”⁴⁹ Referring to the name of the biblical prophet Ezekiel (Yehezkel in Hebrew), Chetrit sees Yehezkel, the Jewish singer who sings in Arabic, as someone who offers

a real vision, a great vision, a vision that has prospects, one that we cannot even imagine. . . . The vision is Arab Jewish . . . because in the Arab Jewish vision the land will be Arab Jewish, because it was always Jewish and it was always Arab, and it will go back to being something different and new and thrilling: an Arab Jewish land. The land of its residents, who speak its languages.⁵⁰

Two weeks later, Gideon Levy joined the prophetic praises of the singer Yehezkel in his own opinion piece: “The single nation was born on Tuesday, in Tel Aviv. It was in Basel that the nation-state of the Jews was founded; and it was at the Tzavta club in Tel Aviv that ‘a nation of all its peoples’ was established. . . . I knew that the dream of one state is possible. One just has to write the right music and give it to Yehezkel to sing.”⁵¹

Yehezkel’s response to his coronation by the media was swift: “I am neither a prophet nor a messiah, nor do I understand why they are making such a big deal of it. To the contrary, it is the most natural thing possible. What’s so special about a person from Arabic roots who sings Arabic music? Why does it matter what he has on his head, a *kippah* or a burka?”⁵² Here, in the ambiguity hidden within the seemingly humble questions that Yehezkel poses, lies the paradox of religious difference in the multicultural politics of identity in today’s Israel.

Being secular yet drawing its legitimacy from the Bible, the originally European Zionist movement carries an inherent contradiction in relation to Jewish religion. In his book *The Arab Jews*, Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani shows how this contradiction was also evident in the case of Jews in Arab countries, particularly in Iraq.⁵³ He describes how the religious affiliation of the Arab Jews played a major role in the Zionist movement’s efforts to nationalize them by “ethnicizing” their Jewishness. Later, after their arrival in Israel, that same religious component of their identity served in their differentiation as culturally inferior, traditional, and not modern. For the Zionist movement, the Jewish religion was the only prism through which a Jewish population that looked Arab and spoke Arabic could be turned into part of the Israeli nation. In other words, the ticket for Arab Jews’ inclusion in the Israeli national collective, and in Jewish ethnicity, was through religion. However, the price was losing their Arabic language and culture.⁵⁴

It therefore comes as no surprise that Ziv Yehezkel's parents were not religious until they came to the Kiryat Ono *ma'bara* (transit camp) in the 1950s. They met and married at the camp and "became religious shortly after he was born."⁵⁵ Thus, he grew up in a *haredi* home and was sent to religious schools, first in Bnei Brak and then in Jerusalem, where he discovered the oud and classical Arabic music.⁵⁶ The statement that "all the doors were slammed in the face of the Mizrahim. Only the synagogue door was left ajar," or the testimony that "in order not to be mistaken for Arabs, not a few Arabized Jews wore Magen Davids (Shield of David—the Jewish six-pointed star), or 'Ḥai' around their neck, or a Kippah," was very true in the case of the Yehezkel family.⁵⁷ Thus, Yehezkel's parents had to distinguish between being Jewish or Arab, two ethnic identities created by the Zionist ideology to produce two national entities defined on primordial-biological grounds. However, Yehezkel makes a local correction to contain himself within the Arab community. Since entry to this community is not defined on an ethnic or religious basis, but rather on a linguistic-cultural basis, there is no conflict with his Jewish religious identity.

After three generations of Arab Jews in Israel, the Jewishness of the Mizrahim has apparently undergone a process of normalization. Insisting today on the ethnic component of Jewish identity has become less critical, whether in order to be admitted into the Israeli Zionist collective or to guarantee a Jewish majority within Israel's borders. Thus, Ziv Yehezkel discovers that he can adopt his Arab identity as a cultural or even ethnic component, but he will have to insist on being Jewish by religion in order to remain within the boundaries of the Israeli collective. For instance, this is what he says about his *kippah*: "It's my trademark, and I perform with it everywhere."⁵⁸

When the Arab culture of Ziv Yehezkel and the Palestinians is represented as similar, or even equal, the ethnic differentiation in Israel goes on to reproduce the power relations on the basis of religion, by distinguishing between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. As an observant Jew, Yehezkel is aware of the bitterness in the fact that he can connect with the Palestinians culturally but not politically: "There is really nothing that connects me with them as far as fate, because my fate is much better than theirs, unfortunately. Unjustly."⁵⁹ However, he repeatedly declares his choice not to get involved in politics, because the very next day he might find himself on the other side of the ethnic divide between Jews and Arabs in Israel. This leads him to the naïve conclusion that "as long as I am at peace with my Jewish religious identity and emphasize it, everything else becomes marginal. The fact that I manage to combine the Jewish and the Arab and do not make a sacrifice, means either that I am doing things right, or that we are not as extremist a society as we think."⁶⁰

Yehezkel may successfully evade the Zionist discourse of exclusive ethnicity, but by emphasizing his Jewishness he fails to challenge the Zionist discourse that grants privileges to Jews over non-Jews (especially Palestinian Arab Muslims and Christians). His lack of political involvement leads to Yehezkel grudgingly, and indirectly, contributing to the presentation of Arab culture in Israel in terms of cultural heritage. This culture becomes one of many other cultures in Israel, with the possible intention of it even becoming equal to them, but it is located under the Israeli national umbrella. Thus, Yehezkel and others open a window to an old-new identity politics that allows Zionist propaganda (*hasbara*) in Israel to claim legitimacy for racism under the guise of cosmopolitanism, coexistence, multiculturalism, and interfaith activities, with Jewish, Muslim, and Christian musicians being able to play Arabic music together.⁶¹ Furthermore, Yehezkel, and those who praise his prophecy in the media, can gush that in the performance of Arabic music on stage, equal cultural relations exist between the musicians among themselves and between them and the audience, without noticing how such identity politics eclipses national injustice and actually eliminates Palestinian national existence.

Thus, the proliferation of Arabic music performances in the last few years displays pan-Arab cultural relationships in Israel either through the international prism, as in the case of Elkayam's performance of Jewish Moroccan heritage, or through the multicultural and interfaith prism, as in the case of Ziv Yehezkel. In both cases, the lack of emphasis on the legitimacy and equity of the national difference between Israelis and Palestinians enables a Zionist framing of the cultural semblance while maintaining a single exclusive colonial nationality, which not only dispossesses the Other but also enjoys privileges at its expense.

The New Mizrahi Zionism and the Palestinians in Israel

The contradictions in institutionalized processes directed toward Arabic language and culture in Israel are becoming sharper today, especially with the expansion of right-wing Mizrahi populist politics in the country. Thus, Likud Minister of Culture and Sport Miri Regev—who is of Moroccan origin—says she wants to rectify the historic injustice and give representation to Mizrahi-Sephardi Jewish heritage from Arab and Islamic countries, but she supports canceling Arabic as an official language.⁶² She supports Mizrahi artistic initiatives (including Israeli musicians who sing in Arabic), but stopped government funding for the Arab al-Midan Theater in Haifa and opposes any expression of Palestinian culture in Israel, including the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish.⁶³ At the award ceremony

of the Society of Authors, Composers and Music Publishers (ACUM) in Israel, she said:

Singing in Arabic, *ahalan wa-sahalan* [welcome, in Arabic]. Darwish—no. . . . You want Arabic singing? You're welcome to it. It was I who increased the budget for Arab artists, more than ever before. Arabic music has something to offer Israeli culture, and it does: interesting trends and combinations, from Nasreen Qadri, Lina Makhoul [both are "Israeli-Arab" singers], through Jewish singers who honor their parents' countries of origin.⁶⁴

These stances adopted by Regev and other Mizrahi leaders on the Israeli right correspond with a new Mizrahi ideology, such as the *Tor Ha-Zahav – Achshav Toreinu* (The Golden Age – Now Is Our Turn) movement, which defines itself as "*masorati* [lit. traditional, i.e. religiously observant] Mizrahi Zionist."⁶⁵ The movement positions itself against "classical [Ashkenazi] Zionism [that] views the Jews as a foreign transplant in the [Middle Eastern] region." Instead, *Tor Ha-Zahav* perceives itself as "native," and its members "promote the understanding that Jews have been '*bnei ha-makom*' [people of the place, or natives, in Hebrew] and part of the region from time immemorial." Therefore, they declare themselves the "Zionism of the future," which seeks to "find the points of connection to the Middle Eastern region through the Arabic language and culture." However, the emphasis of the movement on being *masorati* offers a "connecting Judaism" that seeks to heal the inner Israeli rift between religious and secular Jews, and "find the golden path on questions of religion and state." Although the name of the movement, the Golden Age, is a reference to the Middle Ages in Andalusia, when Jews and Arabs lived together in mutual prosperity, its slogan, "now is our turn" (the Hebrew word *tor* means both "age" and "turn"), emphasizes the prominent place that the Mizrahi Jews' issues are given in the movement's platform. The lack of recognition of Palestinian nationhood and the reference instead to "building trust and repairing relationships between Jews and Arabs" whitewashes the indigenous national identity, even diluting it to a mere regional cultural identity. In this sense the new discourse of the "Zionism of the future" may recognize Arab culture, yet it does not offer a just political alternative to the Palestinians. Instead it continues to distinguish itself from the colonized indigenous population on the basis of religious difference in the Jewish state.

The emphasis on the *masorati*-religious element in this form of Mizrahi Zionism matches the "religification" process into which the Mizrahim were coerced by the

Zionist movement as early as the 1950s and increasingly after the Israeli conquests of 1967, whereby they had to emphasize their Jewishness in contrast with the Palestinians and other Arabs. Furthermore, it is consistent with the rise of religious Zionism and its advent at the center of Israeli politics, along with the turning of the Israeli regime from an ethnocracy to a theocracy. These transformations seem inevitable because only through the Jewish religious common denominator could the colonial project against indigenous non-Jews proceed.⁶⁶ Surprisingly, however, we are looking at a Mizrahi theological-Zionist model that establishes itself culturally as native Arab, versus the old European Ashkenazi secular Zionism. In this model, the colonial distinction is based not on an ethnic difference between Jews and Arabs but rather on a religious distinction between Jews and non-Jews. The dispossession, whether conscious or not, is not from the land but from the local Palestinian culture that is replaced by a pan-Arab regional culture carried by the Jews claiming indigeneity as justification for the privileges they maintain.

This new Israeli political platform might suggest that Miri Regev, Tor Ha-Zahav, and other Zionist Mizrahim are interested in promoting or even reconnecting with their Arab culture while simultaneously erasing Palestinian culture. To do so, Regev is willing to object to the official status of the Arabic language in Israel and replace it with Arab cultural representations disconnected from the language, which means disconnecting the Mizrahim from their Arab selves and from the semantics that sustain them. It is therefore no wonder that the vast majority of Jewish-Israeli musicians do not speak Arabic, and even if some do speak it, they usually perform in Arabic on stage but do not use it in daily life. This means that the Arabic language in Israel is turning into symbolic representations, whether as “heritage,” “style,” or “sound.”⁶⁷ As a result, it can easily be co-opted for hegemonic Zionist interests.

This process, which is still only in its early days, could have a destructive impact on the Palestinians, especially those who are citizens of Israel. With their growing disengagement from the Arabic language (especially the literary *fusha*), an actual affiliation with Arab culture could be rendered (as happened in the case of the Mizrahim) as a form of heritage, something from the past, whereas in the present, Hebrew has already replaced Arabic at the workplace, at academic institutions, and in other parts of the Israeli public sphere.⁶⁸ This process of rapprochement between Mizrahim and Palestinian citizens of Israel—through affiliation with Arab culture on the level of symbolic representation rather than daily practice—continues

the process of cultural distortion of the “Israeli Arabs” by canceling their national identity. Despite recognition of Arab culture in Israel, the citizenship of these “non-Jewish Arabs” will continue to be distinguished as inferior under Israeli domination because the discrimination against them is rooted in the essence of the colonial state mechanisms and institutions. Furthermore, the discourse of religious difference in Israel also underlines the internal fragmentation of the Palestinian religious communities, to undermine their national identity. This well-known colonial practice of fragmentation is revived by the Mizrahi-Zionist discourse of Miri Regev and her like. In the past, fragmentation of the Palestinians occurred by defining the Druze of the Galilee as a distinct community, not only religiously but also ethnically and even nationally.⁶⁹ Today there are renewed efforts to define some of the Christians as Aramaic rather than Arab, and even to recruit them to the Israeli army.⁷⁰ It is interesting that here too language plays an important role in the fragmentation efforts. For example, a school in the village of al-Jish in the upper Galilee has recently made Aramaic a compulsory subject for its Christian students.⁷¹

In summary, the partial transition in the Israeli discourse from Arabness as ethnicity to Arabness as culture allows the adoption of Jewish Arab identity, and even encourages pan-Arab cultural relations between the Mizrahim and the Palestinians and between the Mizrahim and other Arab national communities in the region (especially the Moroccans). However, the Zionist distinction of Judaism as an exclusive category proceeds through the religious differentiation, thus providing a performative illusion on the stage of supposedly egalitarian, multicultural, and interfaith coexistence in Israel. In the absence of ongoing daily social practice of the Arabic language among Jews in Israel, Arab identity becomes a co-optable cultural signifier, impoverished of active lingual semantics that are supposed to maintain its potency. Thus, the signification of Arab culture remains caught in an elusive political duality that allows the Israeli colonial culture to advance as locally rooted, at the cost of the fragmentation and elimination of Palestinian indigenous identity.

Notes

- 1 Yonatan Mendel, *The Creation of Israeli Arabic: Security and Politics in Arabic Studies in Israel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- 2 Esmail Nashif, *Arabic: The Story of a Colonial Mask* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press, 2017); Yehouda Shenhav, "Ha-politika ve-ha-teologia shel ha-targum: Ketzad metargemim Nakba mi-Aravit le-Ivrit?," *Sotziologia Yisraelit* 14, no. 1 (2012).
- 3 Mendel, *The Creation*.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Shenhav, "Ha-politika," 161. All translations are my own.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Atef Alshaer, "Language as Culture: The Question of Arabic," in *Arab Cultural Studies: Mapping the Field*, ed. Tarik Sabry (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012); Niloofar Haeri, "Form and Ideology: Arabic Sociolinguistics and Beyond," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (2000); Andrew Hammond, *Popular Culture in the Arab World: Arts, Politics, and the Media* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007).
- 8 It was not related to ethnicity or race, since according to a common belief, Jews and Muslims share the same ancestors.
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- 10 Oded Erez and Nadeem Karkabi, "Sounding Arabic: Postvernacular Modes of Performing the Arabic Language in Popular Music by Israeli Jews," *Popular Music* 38, no. 2 (2019).
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Yehouda Shenhav, Maisalon Dallashi, Rami Avnimelech, Nissim Mizrahi, and Yonatan Mendel, "Yediat Aravit be-kerev Yehudim be-Yisrael" [Command of Arabic among Israeli Jews] (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press, 2015). The report has not been published in English.
- 13 In this article, I use "first generation" to refer to the immigrants themselves, and "second and third generations" to refer to the children and grandchildren of immigrant parents.
- 14 Shenhav *et al.*, *Command of Arabic*.
- 15 The study is based on two samplings. One is a representative sampling of Israeli Jews, which allows for a comparison along ethnic and generational lines. The second is a stratified sampling, which

includes an oversampling of Arab Jews in order to increase the number of cases, and therefore allows for greater heterogeneity in terms of country of origin, age, and interaction between origin and age. Please note that all the Arab Jewish respondents in the representative sampling are included in the stratified sampling.

- 16 Yonatan Mendel, "Ha-safa ha-Aravit," *Mafte'akh* 9 (2016).
- 17 Roberta Kraemer and Elite Olshtain, "The Social Context of Second Language Learning in Israeli Schools," *Israeli Social Science Research* 9 (1994).
- 18 Mendel, "Ha-safa ha-Aravit," 36.
- 19 Yali Hashash, "Kulanu Yehudim: Al 'zevel lavan,' Mizrahim ve-shulit meruba betokh ha-hegemonia," *Theory and Criticism* 48 (2017).
- 20 Mendel, *The Creation*.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Muhammad Amara, "The Place of Arabic in Israel," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 158 (2002); Allon J. Uhlmann, "Policy Implications of Arabic Instruction in Israeli Jewish Schools," *Human Organization* 70, no. 1 (Spring 2011); Allon J. Uhlmann, "Arabic Instruction in Jewish Schools and in Universities in Israel: Contradictions, Subversion, and the Politics of Pedagogy," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 2 (2010).
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- 25 Mendel, *The Creation*, 224–227.
- 26 Inbal Perlson, *Simha gdola ha-layla: Muzika Yehudit-Aravit ve-zehut Mizrahit* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2006).
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- 28 Perlson, *Simha gdola*.
- 29 Regarding Mizrahi music, see Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). On Mediterranean music, see Amy Horowitz, *Mediterranean Israeli Music and the Politics of the Aesthetic* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010); Alexandra Nocke, "Israel and the Emergence of Mediterranean Identity: Expressions of Locality in Music and Literature," *Israel Studies* 11, no. 1 (2006).

- 30 Galit Saada-Ophir, "Borderland Pop: Arab Jewish Musicians and the Politics of Performance," *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 2 (2006).
- 31 Ted Swedenburg, "Saida Sultana/Danna International: Transgender Pop and the Polysemiotics of Sex, Nation, and Ethnicity on the Israeli-Egyptian Border," *Musical Quarterly* 81, no.1 (1997).
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- 33 Ariyeh Kizel, *Ha-narativ ha-Mizrahi ha-hadash be-Yisrael* (Tel-Aviv: Resling, 2014).
- 34 Lital Levy, "The Arab Jew Debates: Media, Culture, Politics, History," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 7, no. 1 (2017).
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Eyad Barghuthy
Between Two Neighborhoods

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Perhaps I should have answered them, “Yes, I’m Muslim, praise God,” with more confidence. With the look of vigor that the believers had in the film *Al-Risala – The Message*. Or maybe I should have gone back to where I came from when they blocked the end of the cinchona-shaded road with an index finger that pointed directly toward me: “There’s the Christian!”

That day, I was heading from our home in the Safafira neighborhood to my grandmother’s house in the nearby Greek Orthodox neighborhood. The two neighborhoods are adjacent and parallel, but they meet at the al-Hajj corner store alongside the al-Khanouq neighborhood. The first neighborhood was a refugee neighborhood at the edge of the city. It wasn’t called a refugee camp—not only because its inhabitants were too close to the village that they fled, actually a “heel’s rub,” or ten minutes of slow walking, but for other reasons as well. The second was an authentic mountain neighborhood flowing out of the heart of the city. Its inhabitants insist, despite all the world’s celebrations and fireworks on the 31st of December, that Christmas falls on the 7th of January and New Year’s Eve on the 14th. On these occasions, they barbeque meat on cold rooftops and tight balconies, and a satiated cloud of smoke covers the neighborhood on those nights. Once again, the Santa Clauses of the city have to work to deliver gifts to children who are proud to be Greek Orthodox. Once again, new years are celebrated with complete confidence and a bottle of arak.

Anyhow, I was going to my grandmother’s house. My hair was parted on the left, and maybe my mother had dressed me up in a white shirt that day, or that’s what I imagined, but I was certainly well dressed. I never left the house any other way. Behind our small family’s home there was a shortcut that passed by our neighbor’s vast garden, which had once belonged to the municipality. He cultivated it with

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the fruits of the world, released his dear and restless chickens in it, and surrounded its eastern side with giant cinchona trees. He may have brought the trees from the Solel Boneh company, where he worked at the outset of his life, or maybe Herbert Samuel, the High Commissioner, had gifted them to his father. I have no idea how those trees arrived in our neighborhood, but they made for an elegant and orderly path—just like the part in my hair—to the other side of the neighborhood. A road that took me closer to the al-Hajj corner store, and closer to my grandmother, who was undoubtedly waiting for me near her small window.

As usual, I relentlessly kicked a stone that ultimately accompanied me all along the way. I would leave it when I arrived at my grandmother's house, or at school. I never felt guilty about it at all. Those kicks took the stone to a different place—just like they did me. Then again, all the kicking ruined my shoes, so my parents accused me of being irresponsible. I was kicking the stone, and when I looked up, there was a group of five or six boys—I'm not sure now how many there were. They were a little older than me, and one of them was much taller than me. They turned toward me and stood in place, blocking both the exit of the cinchona-shaded road and my breath. "There's the Christian!" he yelled again. I stood firmly in place. They came toward me.

"That's him! That's definitely him! The Christian who scored a goal against us and made us lose!" The boy said it for the third time, happy with his grand discovery. As if I were the Antichrist himself. As if he were going to get 5,000 virtue points for catching me. They came closer. I didn't deny I was the one behind their loss. I wasn't going to deny that I was the one who scored that goal, even if they were to crucify me on the cinchona tree and torture me the way Umayyah ibn Khalaf ibn Jumahi of Quraish tortured Bilal ibn Rabah in *Al-Risala*. My admiration for Captain Majed and his twisted goals had reached unprecedented levels of identification and adulation. I was obsessed with anime series in general, or "The Mickey Mouse," as we called them for some reason. I waited for four o'clock impatiently. I would pray to God to finish the Qur'an segment quickly so I could find out what happened with Sebastian, Conan and Jimsy, Tom Sawyer, Sally, Sandy Belle, Cedric, Sasuke, and their other friends. The previous episode always ended in a decisive and exciting moment.

That day I wanted to be Captain Majed. I had begged my father to enroll me in a team. So he took my brother and me to a huge yard near the Frere building, which overlooked the Old Town. He handed us to Abu Pelé, the coach of the Souq team,

who tied back his long grey-streaked hair and whistled a lot. He didn't memorize my name the first time around, and he wasn't very impressed with how I received the ball, or with my strike, which was twisted (onto itself). I did get better with a little practice. I was good, but I was certainly no Maradona.

The Nazareth Club Tournament of 1989. Our first match was with The Citadel club, the Safafira neighborhood club. The match was in the stadium of the Arab Students Club, near the municipality's cultural center, and the crowd was forgiving. We, our team, would line up around Abu Pelé in the school corridor, wearing a simple uniform. Among the crowd were my uncle, who had immigrated to Germany, and his son, who was a year older than me. He videotaped the match from the other side of the stadium with a camera like no other in Nazareth. He would wave at me using the sign language that we developed at my grandmother's, to enter the stadium, and let's go!

I begged Abu Pelé to let me play in the match, "Let me play, coach! Let me play, coach!" So he did. The score was 1-1, the game was in its last minutes, a direct free kick. I asked for the opportunity to shoot it and they gave it to me. I kicked the ball. There were no nets to shake, but it pierced through the void and into the metal frame that was painted with black and white squares. Despite the goalie and his new gloves. They carried me on their shoulders. My cousin ran away from his dad and entered the field to film me. He raised the camera toward me and I looked into its eye from above, with the joy of Akakichi no Eleven. That day, I sang and danced under the hot shower at home.

They surrounded me. I knew nothing about martial arts. I didn't need them. At that moment, I wished I had been good at the art of disappearance, like Sasuke, or had the fierce punches of Horiguchi Genki. I didn't deny scoring the goal. How could I? But I did say that I wasn't Christian. They didn't believe me. "So you're trying to tell me that you're Muslim?" he asked me accusingly. I answered, "Yes, Muslim," with some hesitation—perhaps it was due to fear, or because my honesty was purer then. My grandmother, who was originally a Shiite from Bint Jbeil in Southern Lebanon, had made a vow to baptize her four children in the Greek Orthodox Church. When she was living in the Latin Quarter in the market and almost lost her eldest son, Our Lady Mary visited her and promised her to heal him and to bless her with three more children if she baptized them. So my father became a Christian and a Muslim at the same time. This gave me some room for sectarian maneuvering. In addition to my father being a communist and a nationalist, he answered my many questions, until I could no longer answer that simple question that day. My whole life I had been busy with the question of identity.

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“If you’re Muslim, read al-Fatiha!” When the tallest among them asked me to read al-Fatiha, I thought: sweet relief. I knew it by heart, and, of course, I recited it every time I passed with my father or grandmother near the cemetery, where mint grows over my grandfather’s grave, on our way to the crowded market.

“*Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim*,” I said, “In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise is only for Allah, the Lord of the Universe . . .” I hadn’t finished the verse before I received the nasty blow to my face. I didn’t turn the other cheek; I threw a stone at them, because I was truly without sin. I heard my father’s yelling.

I don’t know how he learned of the siege, and he doesn’t even remember that this incident actually took place. But I still remember him walking quickly toward them with the speed of an angry father, and that they ran away—that my childhood, until today, is still suspended somewhere between the two neighborhoods.

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About Eyad Barghuthy

Eyad Barghuthy, born in 1980 in Nazareth, lives in Haifa. He is an author, playwright, editor, and translator. Until recently, he served as the director of the Arab Culture Association in Haifa. He has published a collection of short stories, *Between the Houses* (Cairo, 2011), and a novel, *Burdaqana* (Beirut, 2014), both in Arabic.

Samir Naqqash and His Polyglot Literature in the Age of National Partition

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The issue of language comes up in every discussion about Samir Naqqash's literary work.¹ He is identified as a writer who insisted on writing in a language that had lost its speakers, its writers, and also, tragically, its readers. Naqqash is often portrayed as a remnant of a faded linguistic tradition, as the last representative of a ruined cultural world. He is viewed as one who dissented from the new cultural and literary world in which he operated, who was incompatible with his new linguistic and social reality after his emigration from Iraq, and as someone who chose to write in a language whose readership had dwindled and almost disappeared. Naqqash's literary work has repeatedly been identified as the nostalgic creation of a writer who insisted on preserving the Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic dialect of his community, family, and childhood, despite the emigration and disintegration of the community in Iraq and Israel. He has also been identified as the last of the Mohicans—the last Arab-Jewish author—and the last Jewish writer in literary Arabic.²

Beneath these descriptions and images we can sense the footprints of the monolingual national narrative and its perception of language as a monolithic construct with distinct boundaries that are often associated with rigid geographical, national, and political boundaries. This narrative also shaped the way we perceive the nature and boundaries of modern literature in general, and national literature in

particular, as well as the way in which we formulate and interpret translation works as points of intersection between separate, distinct languages. These perceptions were dominant in the formation of modern Hebrew and Arabic literature and had a crucial influence on the development of Naqqash's literary work.

In many ways his literary work developed in response to these conceptions, and his work represents a complex intersected linguistic matrix that seeks to return to the moment before the linguistic and literary partitions were created by colonialism, nationalism, and secularization. His prose represents an alternative literary form that blurs national and linguistic boundaries.

Naqqash's work has for the most part been compared to the work of other Iraqi Jewish writers of his generation. His choice to write in Arabic was presented as a contrast to writers such as Shimon Ballas and Sami Michael, who shifted from writing in Arabic to writing in Hebrew.³ This transition was portrayed in the scholarly literature as a binary choice between two languages, between two conflicting cultures and identities: Hebrew versus Arabic, Jewish versus Arab, Iraqi versus Israeli. Moreover, even in relation to other Iraqi Jewish writers who continued to write in Arabic, Naqqash's writing represented an exceptional literary strategy: in contrast to "modern" writers who clung to literary Arabic, and "traditional" writers who wrote mostly in Judeo-Arabic (Arabic in Hebrew script), Naqqash combined the different linguistic and literary traditions. He integrated the spoken Jewish dialect with the other dialects of Baghdad as part of the literary language, interwove the oral and written Judeo-Arabic literary traditions with modern Arabic literature—which includes the Muslim Arabic oral and written literary traditions—and wove the religious and communal languages together with the formal and national language. In addition, he incorporated words and phrases from other languages—such as Persian, Turkish, Aramaic, Kurmanji, Hebrew, Hindi, and English—into Arabic, thus "infecting" the Arabic language and undermining its nationalistic imagination as a uniform and "pure" language.

Naqqash's linguistic literary style also raises the question of translation, not only translation between Arabic and Hebrew as two different languages, and not only translation between different literary and linguistic traditions, but translation as an integral part of writing (and speaking). The multitude of linguistic combinations in Naqqash's writing complicates and challenges the common separations between original and translation, and between the spoken and the written. Multiple translation spaces are thus created—some within the text itself—between the different spoken languages and written words that mix within the text and within the language or consciousness of the different speakers. Sometimes the translation

occurs at the intersection of a dialogue between two characters, and sometimes in the seam between the author and the text, and between the text and the reader, echoing the gap between speech and writing. In some stories the author Naqqash appears as translator—in footnotes to the text—mediating his polyglot linguistic style to the monolingual reader via self-translation of the spoken languages into literary Arabic. The translation in this case becomes a writing strategy—embodied in different ways within the “original” text—that is not external to the text. Naqqash’s works contain many translation strategies, and alongside self-translation into the standard literary language, we find places of nontranslation, translation that is part of the narrative, and translation that is part of the plot and the relationships between the characters, as well as mistranslations and misunderstandings. Sometimes there is an unwillingness of the characters in the text to perform code switching in a dialogue between them and their environment, perhaps as a parable of the writer himself.

Against the backdrop of the national and colonial era, the rise of the monolingual national literature, the intensifying national conflict between Jews and Arabs, and the separations between Arabic and Hebrew as enemy languages and cultures, this article explores the ways in which Naqqash’s work represents a subversive linguistic and poetic model that blends spoken and literary languages, transcending the religious and national divide while simultaneously intersecting different literary traditions from a wide geographical and cultural context, facing both East and West. This model challenges the monolingual Zionist national perspective on which modern hegemonic Hebrew literature was based; it also challenges the Arab national ethos of a pure and uniform monolingual culture on which modern hegemonic Arabic literature was based. It was precisely from his peripheral position that Samir Naqqash challenged fundamental conventions in the modern Arabic and Hebrew cultures and literatures.

This article investigates Naqqash’s writing as a case study of multilingual writing in a monolingual literary reality, where there is a sharp gap between the language of the text and the expectations of the readership and its language. Through an exploration of Naqqash’s literary work, the article focuses on questions of multilingualism, translation, and literature along the borderlands of the modern Hebrew and Arabic languages and literatures. It explores the ways in which Naqqash’s work crosses geographical, national, and linguistic boundaries, defying and resisting the dominant nationalistic and monolingual trend in Arabic and Hebrew literature, with its division between the written and spoken languages, Islamic and Jewish traditions, and language and religious or national identity.

The power of literature lies in the imagination, the possibility of reweaving languages, traditions, places, and memories that have been unknotted and separated, and melding them anew. Naqqash's literary works stimulate silenced voices and repressed languages, and place renewed attention on dialects that were exiled from the official national tongue. In his writings Naqqash intentionally diverges from the official literary Arabic (MSA) in which he wrote his first two books and instead moves toward a multivocal and heteroglossic linguistic style that emphasizes the multiplicity comprised in the spoken, living colloquial languages. Naqqash's literary language is always in a dialogue; it is dynamic, formed along movement in relation to social and human interaction. It exposes the polyphonies existing in language, in every language, particularly in Arabic, in the continuum from literary to colloquial Arabic.⁴ This movement is never binary but is part of the polyglottic texture in which multiple levels of language (related to social status, religion, and geographic region) appear, thus blending and crossing the borders that differentiate one language from another. Boundaries between languages, between the spoken and the written, and between language, community, and territory are blurred.

For Naqqash language is an arena that permits dialogue between communities and social classes via the movement between these intermixed and translated languages—though sometimes they are not translatable—and via the different dialects and accents of the same language. Every language embodies a complex variety of linguistic types and idioms, and Naqqash acts within this lingual seam, when his literature embodies internal translation processes, moving across the communal linguistic divide. His polyglot linguistic style is representative of what the Russian linguist and theorist Mikhail Bakhtin labeled as the heteroglossia that contains one of the central foundations of the novel:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour . . . this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. The novel orchestrates all its themes . . . by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions.⁵

Similarly, in Naqqash's prose the lingual stratification is interwoven in the complex structure of the plots with multiple speakers, narrators, and voices, and movement through time and space.

Naqqash seemingly preserves in his mind the Baghdad of the 1940s, with its plurality of tongues and types of languages: the dialects of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities; the various professional and social strata jargons; the dialects of immigrants from other places such as Kurdistan and Iran; and the dialect of his own emigration from Iraq to Israel, Turkey, Iran, India, Egypt, and Britain.⁶ His stories, along with his novellas and novels, are nourished by this rich diversity of language and the polyphony appearing repeatedly as a critical ingredient of the plot itself—the figures are all perfectly characterized by their language.⁷

Thus, linguistic intersection is an ideal in Samir Naqqash's work, even when the polyphony represents misunderstandings between the various characters.⁸ Likewise, the polyphony is sometimes internal for a specific character, when different types of language can represent a specific character within the different contexts—such as Judeo-Arabic in the dialogue within the Baghdadi Jewish community in Bombay, Hindi in the street, and Hebrew and Aramaic in the synagogue prayers—while the narration is in literary Arabic.⁹

In the novella *'Abūsi rab al-'alāmīn* (عبوسي رب العالمين, 'Abusi lord of the worlds), written in 1978, the Muslim protagonist 'Abusi, a medical student who has abandoned his studies following the death of his girlfriend, sits in a cafe in Baghdad where he does not just drink coffee and smoke cigarettes—he begins to hear voices, or to be more exact, "The Voice." He wanders the streets feeling that he is passing between heaven and earth and that he stands at the moment of judgement in the struggle between himself and God, in which he rebels against the evil deity and which he will win and be crowned as God. Surprisingly, in this novella 'Abusi's internal dialogue is presented in literary Arabic, whereas his dialogues with the heavenly voice are recorded in Muslim Baghdadi-Arabic. Is Naqqash attempting to strengthen the natural, familiar closeness in the conversation between 'Abusi and God? Or is he trying to hint that this conversation is an imaginary delusional discussion that takes place in 'Abusi's mind alone? The reader might expect that classical literary Arabic, Qur'anic Arabic, would be used when speaking to God and about God. But theologically God is everywhere: he is closest to man—that is, within man—and he understands all languages and is beyond language, so certainly it is possible to speak with him in spoken Arabic.¹⁰ In the Sufi tradition, as well as in the Judeo-Arabic tradition, we do find folk stories featuring the righteous, who speak with God in colloquial Arabic.

Midway through the novella *Shumel*, the Jewish owner of a chicken coop, whose large rooster attempted to poke out his eye, approaches ‘Abusi, the neighborhood bully, requesting a judgment and a determination of the punishment for the rooster. ‘Abusi sees this as a sign from heaven: here is someone who recognizes his authority, and now he, ‘Abusi, is entitled to perform a miracle and defeat God. However, the interaction between ‘Abusi and *Shumel* is rife with misunderstandings because, in contrast to the expected standard majority-minority relationship, *Shumel* does not code switch and does not move from the Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic dialect to the Muslim-Arabic dialect, as would be expected when he is speaking with someone who is not Jewish. He continues to speak to ‘Abusi in Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic dialect, and ‘Abusi, who is unable to understand the Hebrew words that are an integral part of Judeo-Arabic, tries unsuccessfully to interpret or translate them himself.

For example, *Shumel* uses the Judeo-Arabic words that originate from Hebrew sources, such as *evel* (עבל, mourning), *herem* (חרם, boycott/ban), *naval* (נבל, fool), *hakham* (חכם, wise), and *malakh mi-shamayim* (מלאך מן שמים, angel from heaven). The word *hakham* entered Judeo-Arabic from Hebrew to refer to a rabbi, but in this manner it also found its way into literary Arabic, and ‘Abusi understands it. The word *herem*, albeit similar to the Arabic word from the same root *ḥarām* (حَرَام), one of whose meanings is religious prohibition, is used by *Shumel* in the Judeo-Arabic context in the form of an oath: “I shall be banished by God” (*Walak, awqa ‘ abherem min ‘indo li-lah*, *وَلَاكْ اَوْقَعْ اَبْحِيرَمْ مِنْ عِنْدُو لَلِه*).¹¹ ‘Abusi, who does not understand the language, says this to himself in a literary Arabic monologue:

انا المالك لقدرة, وهو يحدثني بالالغاز. ما هذا؟.. استشطت عليه غضبا, مثلما هو استشاط على ديكه. كنت اريد ان افهم القضية حرفا حرفا. هذه مسئولية كبرى ولا بد من الالمام بحذاقيرها. وصرخت به.
Anā al-Mālik li-qadrihi, wa-huwa yuhaddithunī bi-al-ghāz. Mā badhā?.. istashattu ‘alayhi ghaḍbān, mithlmā huwa istashāta ‘alā dikihi. Kuntu uridu an afham al-qaḍīyya ḥarfān ḥarfān. Hadhibi mas’ūliyya Kubra wa-lā buda min al-ilmām bi-ḥadhāfirihā. Wā-ṣarakhtu bihi.

I am in control of his destiny and he speaks to me using hints—how can this be? I was furious with rage toward him, just as he was furious at the rooster. I wanted to understand the problem from beginning to end [literally: detail by detail, letter by letter]—this is a formidable responsibility, and the only option is to learn every nuanced detail. I reprimanded him.¹²

Then ‘Abusi turns to *Shumel* and says to him in Baghdadi Muslim-Arabic:

“لك لتحاكيني بلسان الجاج.. تكلم مثل لوادم. يعني شنو هذا شسمه.. الحيرم.. الميرم؟”

Lak [Walak] la-tuhāchīnī bi-lisān al-jāj.. takalam mithl l-wādam. Ya’anī shno hadhā shusmo... al-herem... al-mērem?

Alas, don't speak to me in chicken language. Speak like a human being. What does this mean banish smanish [“al-herem . . . al-merem”]?¹³

In other words, the Judeo-Arabic used by Shumel is interpreted in ‘Abusi’s ears as non-human language, a chicken squawk, and ‘Abusi ridicules Shumel. However, since according to Jewish and Muslim traditions King Solomon could understand the tweeting of birds, it is possible to understand that this also indicates a sign of unique mystical wisdom. Further on in the story, ‘Abusi starts to use some of the Judeo-Arabic words, giving them new and not always accurate meanings.¹⁴

The polyglottic structure, the multitude of linguistic layers and dialects as typified in this story, complicated the translation of Naqqash’s works. This was expressed by his sister, Ruth Naqqash, who was the first translator of his work into Hebrew. In the translator’s epilogue to the book *Yom she-tevel harta ve-hepila bo*, she describes the complexity of the translation process:

At first glance, the use of different layers of Hebrew is likely to be interpreted in the eyes of the reader as inconsistent and sometimes even slipping into incorrect language. This lack of unity stems, as stated, from the attempt to maintain loyalty to the original, in which the passage from the literary language or from a particular idiom to an alternative in these stories is sometimes done even within one sentence. The reader of the Arabic who is familiar with Iraqi dialects will learn from the wide use of them about the characters, their backgrounds, the social class to which they belong, their level of education and more, which cannot be translated accurately into Hebrew.¹⁵

Three decades after the first translation of a Naqqash book into Hebrew, a new Hebrew translation of his last novel, *Shlūmū al-Kurdī wa-anā wa-al-zaman* (شلومو الكردي وأنا والزمن, Shlomo the Kurd, me and the time) will soon be published (in 2020) by the Maktoob book series.¹⁶ In this book Naqqash reverts to literary Arabic but expands its geographical area and severs it from its familiar space and accepted nuances. The main character’s mother tongue and the language of his childhood are Kurmanji and Aramaic, not Arabic; most of the plot takes place in non-Arab settings or settings in which Arabic is not the language of the majority; and the main character only learns Arabic when he arrives in Baghdad as a refugee.¹⁷ This setting is the reason that this book, as opposed to most of Naqqash’s other books (those following his first two books), was written entirely in literary Arabic,

and there is no central presence of spoken Arabic with its various dialects—neither the Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic nor other dialects—because the protagonist, who is also one of the story’s narrators, does not speak Arabic. This is supposed to facilitate the reading of the book and make it accessible to a wider audience, which was not the case with his previous books.¹⁸ Despite this, within the literary Arabic in the book, words and expressions from other languages have a significant presence, and the movement in time and space in the novel is often connected to different languages.

The story’s protagonist, Shlomo Katani (also known as Shlomo the Kurd), has command of many languages but is not identified with any particular one. He acquires languages and moves between them like a merchant who shifts between his commodities. He speaks Kurmanji, Aramaic, and Persian; Hebrew is the language of prayer and tradition and is significant in his life; and during his trade journeys he also learns Russian and attains a basic level of Hindi. He learns spoken Arabic only after he escapes to Baghdad as a Kurdish refugee at the end of the First World War, but Israeli Hebrew has no discernable presence in the book, although the story begins in Ramat Gan, Israel, in 1985.

Throughout the novel, language has a symbolic role in the formation of the plot: it is variously the imperial language and that of the armed forces (the Ottoman Turks, the Germans, the Russians, and the British), the state language (Persian and Arabic), or the local language (Kurmanji, Aramaic, and Judeo-Arabic in Baghdad and among the Jewish Baghdadi diaspora in India). The status of language changes in relation to changes in time and place, and the location of the narrator. For example, when a Baghdadi Jewish refugee arrives at Shlomo’s synagogue in the city of Sablakh during the First World War, the linguistic setting changes:

Nanji Parizat. That was his name. I found him dressed in the clothes of a bedouin woman, leaning against the door of the synagogue, fighting for his final breaths. His hair was red and his face freckled, a boy of 16. I spoke with him in every language that I know, and he spoke with the pronunciation of a Baghdadi Jew. At the time, I did not know a word of Arabic. I opened the door of the synagogue and looked around, and since I did not see a stranger, I let him in. He gestured to me that he was hungry and thirsty, so I fed him and gave him a drink from what I found in the synagogue closet as the worshippers began to gather. Yona Agassi, who lived for a period of time in Baghdad and knew how to speak the Jewish language well, translated the words of the Baghdadi youth. The words were saddening, but behind the words there was a scent of hope.¹⁹

The translation itself—between Arabic and Kurmanji in this instance, and in other places between Hindi and Arabic, and Shlomo acting as the translator between the occupying Russians and the people of Sablakh—is also present as part of the plot throughout the last part of the novel, as a mediating tool between languages, people, and communities, even as a self-translation between a man and himself. When the Ottomans return to Sablakh during the First World War, this moment is described in the book as a linguistic moment, a blending of languages alongside the silence and muteness in the streets, in the Jewish community, and in the family:

I will not hide from you the grip of fear that is suffocating my soul. I was not afraid for myself, but for this house. I was afraid for Asmar and Esther, and for 'Azaria the silversmith and his daughter, and for the Hakham Nahum and his family, and for the Hakham's brother Mikhael; I feared for my brothers and Esther's family. I feared for all of the Jews of Sablakh and for her Christian inhabitants. I feared for its Muslims who joyously received the Ottomans. The ululations arrived from the distance together with the noise of gunfire and calls for help from unknown sources. The sound of the rattling metal ceased, but the thunderous gunfire continued, and outside the Eastern languages intermingled with the German, and inside there was a confusing fragile quiet, wordless, mute, and eyes silently exchanging expressions of fearful chatter.²⁰

The novel is built from bits of memories, fragments of stories mixed with events of that time and place, and the blend of languages enveloping them. The stories are strengthened by the abundance of languages and by the three different narrators: Shlomo the Kurd, "I" (Shlomo's friend in Teheran after the expulsion from Baghdad), and Time itself. The stories develop from within the multitude of voices and narrators, and fragments of the memories and traumas are revived, as described by one of the narrators, the same "I" who is not identified by name:

At night in my room, previously your room, your memories come to life and "Scheherazade of Sablakh" returns and tells her story. Around the oil heater "Salah al-Din," events of the past arise from their graves, the noise of the cannons awakens and the rifle sounds are thunderous; and the tumult grows with the influx of your garbled Arabic tongue: the Kurdish, the Aramaic, the Persian, the Russian, the Azeri, the Turkish, the German, and even the English. Love is intertwined with hate, the sweeping insanity of man with consideration for all of this, and it clogs my nose.²¹

Similar to the protagonist in *Shlūmū al-Kurdī wa-anā wa-al-zaman*, Naqqash's life was an intricate web of emigration, refuge, and trauma. He was born in Baghdad in 1938 and arrived at a transit camp in Petah Tikva, Israel, with his family in 1951, when he was twelve years old. While spending most of his adult life in Israel, Naqqash repeatedly set out to wander the world: at age fifteen, after his father died, he illegally crossed the border into Lebanon with his seventeen-year-old cousin after the foreign ministry of Israel refused to issue passports to his family. Naqqash and his cousin were caught by the Lebanese police, held in detention for several months, and then extradited to Israel where they were imprisoned for several more months before being released.

Naqqash was forced to abandon his studies in order to work, to help support his family after his father died. He later left Israel as a young adult and lived for several years in Iran, Turkey, and India, residing in Bombay among the large Baghdadi Jewish community. During this period, he learned Persian and some Hindi. In 1971, several years after his return to Israel, he self-published his first collection of stories in Arabic, titled *Al-khata'* (الخطأ, The mistake). The natural development for Naqqash as a writer would have been to adopt Hebrew as his literary language, as many of the older Iraqi Jewish writers did, but his dream to write in Arabic was an essential element in his life. At the age of twelve, he had translated *Hamlet* from English into Arabic, and he continued to cultivate Arabic and to read in Arabic throughout his lifetime in Israel.²²

After the publication of his first book, Naqqash quickly discovered that other than a few researchers of Arabic literature, some of them Iraqi Jews, the audience for Arabic literature written by Jewish Israeli writers had disappeared—among Jews, Arabs, Palestinians, and Iraqis. Sasson Somekh labeled the literature in Arabic by Jewish writers in Israel (and named Naqqash's works as the prototype) "literature without an audience":

Despite the richness and variety of the body of work being discussed here, it exists in a vacuum, essentially it is not directed toward a particular audience. It is possible to say in a somewhat exaggerated manner that this is the literature of writers without a reading audience . . . the numbers of readers of Jewish Arabic writers has shrunk and is disappearing. First, they lost the Palestinian audience, and afterward, the Jewish Arabic community itself, because the latter's interest in Arabic and literature written in Arabic diminished. Thus, the Jewish Arabic writer in Israel remains glaringly isolated.²³

The absence of an audience causes most writers to gradually refrain from writing, or at least from publishing. For Naqqash, who was acutely aware of his status as

“a writer without readers,” this brought about a significant change in his writing. His first two collections of stories were written in standard literary Arabic and maintained the clear separation in Arabic literature between the use of literary Arabic for writing and spoken Arabic for speaking. With his discovery that, in any case he did not have readers and was not a part of Arabic literature and its polemics regarding the proper language for literature, he began to radically blend in more and more spoken language, especially the Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic. Initially, he limited his use of the spoken language to dialogues, but eventually he went beyond that. And he did not restrict himself to Judeo-Arabic: Naqqash used all Baghdadi dialects, Muslim and Christian, as well as Hindi in a novella that takes place in Bombay, and so forth.

It is possible to situate Naqqash’s writing in this context thus: the first two generations of modern Iraqi Jewish writers of literature, such as Anwar Shā’ūl, Mīr Baṣrī, and Ya’qūb Balbūl, who adopted literary Arabic as the language of their writings and who occupied a central position in the development of Iraqi literary circles in the first half of the twentieth century, embraced the demand of the literary system for neutrality. They wrote exclusively in literary Arabic, made certain that their characters’ names were ethnically neutral and unidentifiable as Jewish, Muslim, or Christian, and took pains to be sure that no Judeo-Arabic words penetrated their general work. They adopted the principle of *Al-Nahḍa*, the Arab renaissance, according to which the Islamic sources are the cultural treasures of all Arabs—Muslims, Jews, and Christians.²⁴ Indeed, Samir Naqqash supported the *Al-Nahḍa* principle in relation to the Islamic sources, but his place on the periphery of the literary system enabled him to make significant use of the spoken languages in his writing. In doing so he created a new synthesis and style that blends the foundations of the Judeo-Arabic language and literature, from both folk stories and liturgy, together with the modern style of the new Arabic literature, while maintaining an attachment to the Arab Islamic tradition.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, Naqqash resumed his wandering. In 1991 he moved to Cairo for several months, hoping to find literary recognition, but he was disappointed. In contrast, Iraqi Muslims who were in exile because of the Ba’ath regime—and who had created communities in England and Germany, founded newspapers, and established publishing houses such as *Manshūrāt al-Jamal*—heard of Samir Naqqash who, though he had been exiled twenty years earlier than they, had continued to be faithful to Iraqi culture. They invited him to publish his books in their publishing house and to write for their newspapers.

At this stage his writing language and style were already extremely demanding for a monolingual Arabic reader or anyone who was not multilingual as he was—and Naqqash had no intention of changing his linguistic style or of limiting himself to

literary Arabic. Instead he added interpretations and explanations in long footnotes in which he translated the sections with different languages and dialects into literary Arabic. Naqqash migrated to Manchester, England, in 2001, living among the Iraqi Muslim exiles and writing for several Arabic newspapers. In 2003, with the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, the book and newspaper publishers, including some of the Muslim exiles, considered returning to Iraq. Samir Naqqash thought about returning to Baghdad as well. Ultimately, he chose not to do so, but he was left without the Iraqi exiles and their cultural and literary community. He returned to Petah Tikva, where he died shortly after his return to Israel. He is buried not far from where the tent had been, where his family had lived when they first arrived in the country.

After his death, a collection of his stories was published in Baghdad by Dār Mesopotamia, and articles about his works were written at the universities in Baghdad and Basra. His work received recognition as a part of twentieth-century Iraqi literature. In retrospect, it is possible to define him as the most important Jewish writer in Arabic in the second half of the twentieth century and as one of the most unique and interesting Arabic writers of this period, even though during most of those years he was in creative isolation, far from the centers of modern Arabic literature and its literary circles.

The translation of Naqqash's last book into Hebrew, in the framework of a series of books and translations produced by Maktoob, could be the beginning of a gradual change in Israel similar to the one that occurred in Iraq after his death—one that firmly positions Naqqash as a part of Jewish literature, Israeli literature, or part of a new bilingual Arabic-Hebrew literary space. Can this translation into Hebrew be a catalyst for a new readership of his works that would place him in new contexts, crossing the boundaries of nationalistic Arabic or Hebrew literatures?

It is important to position this new Hebrew translation of a work by Naqqash within the history of Arabic-to-Hebrew translation in Israel, which experienced many changes throughout the twentieth century. Translations from classical Arabic literature, created primarily in academic frameworks, were produced and published. Translations from modern Arabic literature, especially from Egyptian, Palestinian, and Lebanese literature, were also published by commercial publishing houses such as Andalus, the Jusur/Gesharim series, or Mifras, and currently the Maktoob series. Translations from the Judeo-Arabic tradition have also continued—some were academic publications, but some were also printed by community and religious publishers.

The fact that the Maktoob series includes works of a twentieth-century Arab Jewish writer is a symbolic manifestation of how Arabic literature can be imagined in Hebrew.

Samir Naqqash's literary and linguistic approaches resemble those of other borderland writers who resist the nationalistic separation of languages and literary traditions. Naqqash's resistance to the monolingual order and his refusal to adjust his writing to the literary Arabic canon resemble Chicana American feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa's resistance to being translated or to adapt her language to a monolingual reader or listener:

Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.²⁵

Anzaldúa reclaims the borderland identity and language by resisting the nationalistic hegemonic effort to correct or adapt her language and identity to the logic of the dominant monolingual culture (Spanish/Mexican, English/American). By resisting this effort to eliminate her culture, she creates a new literary and cultural space for her hybrid polyglot linguistic identity. She insists on writing in her own language, the language of the borderland: Spanglish.

Naqqash's literary work was perceived as exceptional even among Iraqi Jewish writers of his generation, and even those of the previous generation. Writers such as Shimon Ballas and Sami Michael who immigrated to Israel at an older age, who were more involved intellectually and literarily in the Iraqi Arabic scene, who began writing in Arabic in Iraq, and who continued writing in Arabic during their first decade in Israel, later decided to switch to writing in Hebrew.²⁶ Writers of the previous generation who continued to write in Arabic in Israel, such as Shalom Darwish and Yitzhak Bar Moshe, as well as those who continued to write in Arabic in Iraq, such as Anwar Saul and Mir Basri, wrote in a linguistic and literary style very different from that of Naqqash.²⁷

Some of the Iraqi Jewish writers of Naqqash's generation had a different approach to language and literature, mainly in regard to mixing spoken dialects with literary Arabic. These writers (as well as most Arabic writers) adopted the modernist

approach toward the split between the spoken and written Arabic.²⁸ In one of his essays, Sami Michael describes his transition from writing in Arabic to writing in Hebrew, stressing the linguistic differentiation between the languages:

I liked the simple word that clearly reflects the thought and does not enslave reality to magical formulas. And here, I found refuge in Modern Hebrew because today it is more like European languages than Arabic. However, the transition from Arabic to Hebrew was quite easy for a strange reason: no Arab poet and writer writes as he thinks or speaks. In the Arab countries, there is a huge gap between spoken and written language. From childhood, a person is destined to develop a kind of complex and intricate mechanism in his brain that deals with translation from spoken language to written language. The experienced reader develops a parallel mechanism that translates the written language into the spoken language in order to get the full enjoyment of the reading, and eventually communication between the writer and the reader is created. The victims of this form of communication are the characters who appear in the story. They ponder, struggle, rehearse, joke, and conduct dialogues in a strange, inflated, and usually ridiculous way.²⁹

In Arabic there is a gap between the spoken and literary language that forces the reader to translate from the written form to the different spoken dialects of the characters. Coming from a modernist point of view of the diglossic split between written and spoken Arabic, Michael argues that this gap cannot be bridged by Arab authors in the literary text. This approach also determined his reservations about Naqqash's linguistic mix of spoken and literary Arabic. In an interview with the researcher Nancy Berg, the Iraqi Jewish writer Yitzhak Bar Moshe stated that it is impossible to read or enjoy Naqqash's works, owing to the effort it requires of its readers.³⁰

Other Iraqi Jewish writers expressed similar views regarding the "unreadable" character of Naqqash's literature.³¹ It is interesting to examine Bar Moshe's statement, and those of others about Naqqash's writing, through the distinctions made by the editor Roland Barthes between the "readable text" and the "writable text." When the text is readable, it provides a familiar reality based on codes and norms common to both the creator and the reader. The writable text, however, unravels this connection and is oppositional to all automatic and agreed-upon meanings. This text does not have fixed indicators; rather it is built upon diffuse movement and multiple channels of cursors and understandings. Barthes emphasizes:

This text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signified; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one.³²

That being the case, “the writable text” causes the reader to leave his familiar safe zone and creates a crisis of representation in relation to the way the world is presented to him in “the readable text.”³³ Naqqash’s writing challenges the monolingual (Arabic or Hebrew) reader, forces him to leave his familiar linguistic and literary world, and confronts him with the unstable character of the world, life, language, and their literary representations, far from the world and literature to which the reader is accustomed.

Indeed, in an interview with the researcher and translator Ammiel Alcalay, Naqqash admitted to the depicted complexity in his written heteroglossic language, with its multiple levels of language that make his work “virtually unreadable.” In some of his books, Naqqash utilizes the strategy of self-translation in order to make the text more accessible to the average Arabic reader by translating the many levels of the spoken languages into literary Arabic.³⁴ In the same interview he explains his choice of continuing to use spoken language in his writings:

Spoken dialogue is much more trustworthy and exact than dialogue written in literary language. And this is one of the difficulties that makes some of my work virtually unreadable. So that I find myself forced to add translations below the dialogues. I myself don’t even know how I got to this point of being able to use the language of each character, regardless of their social standing. Apparently, I absorbed every word that I heard. As I said, our house was a kind of meeting place for many different kinds of women and men. My mother and aunt in their respective professions knew many Muslim women of all classes and they were always our guests so I had the opportunity to hear and absorb all of these different dialects and styles and I would listen to them and it sunk in.³⁵

It is not surprising, then, that when Naqqash was approached to translate Sami Michael’s novel *Victoria* from Hebrew into Arabic, he translated all of the dialogues in his own style, into spoken Arabic with all of its variations and levels, according to the community, religion, social standing, gender, and education of the characters.³⁶

In the tension between spoken and written language that is depicted in modern literature, Naqqash restores the spoken stratum of the language, drawing attention to the multiplicity of the writing and reading processes and bringing the listener together with the reader and the speaker together with the writer. Bakhtin emphasizes the importance of the utterance, the sound of the language, the spoken layer that exposes the lingual multiplicity, and he simultaneously exposes the place of the listener within the text:

Therefore his orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social “languages” come to interact with one another.³⁷

Barthes, who continues many aspects of Bakhtin’s approach to literary and textual analysis, speaks of the musicality of the text, of the traces of the sound and the expression in the written text:

The sounds of the language, *writing aloud* is not phonological but phonetic; . . . the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, . . . the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language.³⁸

The sounds of the spoken language are emphasized in Naqqash’s writing, highlighting the characters’ different accents and pronunciations, representing the diversity and richness of the language. Instead of the standard unified written language, Naqqash insists upon presenting the array of expressions of language as representations of its multiple speakers and its place in time and space.

By means of language, Naqqash sketches his characters’ movement in space, and he also redraws the imaginary geography of Jewish Iraqis, before the division and reduction into the nationalistic binary between Iraq and Israel, between Arabic and Hebrew, and between East and West. This fluid geographic imaginary is not just about Baghdad in relation to Israel; it positions Baghdad as the epicenter or the connecting thread between Bombay, Teheran, Istanbul, Azerbaijan, Moscow, Kurdistan, and Ramat Gan. This is exemplified in the novel (*Shlūmū al-Kurdī wa-anā wa-al-zaman*) in which the movement from Baghdad to Bombay resembles the movement in that space:

The thought of the day of judgement momentarily distracted me, and when I came back to my senses, I found us—Yehudah Bahr, the coachman, and myself—in the midst of the neighborhoods of Nakbara. There I heard the voices of Baghdad and smelled the scents of her cooked food. I saw myself pass from one Jewish Baghdadi neighborhood to another. Two wretched Baghdadi Jewish neighborhoods, with thousands of kilometers between them, but their body and soul are solidified into one concrete object.³⁹

In Naqqash’s novel we wander with Shlomo the Kurd forward and backward in time and from east to west in space during the latter part of the First World War in the city

of Sablakh in Iranian Kurdistan, via Teheran, Moscow, Baghdad, Basra, and Bombay to Ramat Gan. This journey in time and space is also a journey into the depths of language and linguistics, a voyage in which the boundaries between the languages collapse. In this capacity language and linguistics are the true main characters of the book, and like them, time is the center of attention and takes upon itself the task of the narrator.

To conclude, the historic and linguistic fracture and the literary isolation and severance that Naqqash experienced embody the cultural tragedy of the Arab Jews after 1948—after the uprooting from their lands and immigration to a country in which their language was perceived as the language of the enemy, an inferior language ridiculed from the colonial point of view, and a foreign language of the Diaspora.⁴⁰ This tragedy integrates within itself the Palestinian and Arab Jewish tragedies, within the colonial reality of the negation of Arabness and the East, and their being ridiculed. It is also the tragedy of Israeli Hebrew culture being built upon layers of denial and destruction of the local Arab Palestinian culture.

Naqqash is mostly known for his resistance to shifting from writing in Arabic to writing in Hebrew and to explicitly and implicitly strengthening the borderline and the division between those languages and literatures, marking them as separate, and at times opposing, cultural entities. A critical reading of Naqqash's work reveals a more complex story that problematizes the monolingual narrative of binary options between two separate languages. Such a reading reveals instead the ways in which his writing destabilizes the clear-cut separations between Hebrew and Arabic and challenges the perception of pure, unified national languages and literatures (whether Hebrew or Arabic), presenting a continuum of dialects and languages that stretch from multiple dialects of Arabic through Persian, Aramaic, and Hebrew, and undermining the ethos of the monolingual culture. Naqqash's polyglotism challenges the sharp national lingual matrix, undermining the link between language and national territory or religious identity.⁴¹

Exploring Samir Naqqash's literary work offers a unique angle on the history of Hebrew and Arabic linguistic and literary relations. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to examine these relations beyond the nationalistic linguistic imagined geography, transcending the disciplinary, cultural, and linguistic partitions that set the foundations for the distinctions between Hebrew and Arabic, between Judaism and Islam, between Jews and Muslims, and between spoken and written languages.⁴²

Facing this historical context, Naqqash's poetics provides alternative paths, not just because of his persistence in using Arabic but also because of the way in which it is phrased, designed, and placed within the historical context itself. It takes form in

the borderland, at the edge of languages and in the space between languages, across the different forms of Arabic. In relation to the contrasting process of reduction and the erasure of the language and history of Iraqi Jews—pushing them into narrow nationalistic categories (Iraq versus Israel, Arabic versus Hebrew, Arabs versus Jews, diaspora versus homeland)—Naqqash creates a polyglot, multilingual world and moves beyond geographical and cultural borders. In his stories there is great emphasis on temporal and spatial dimensions. The plot flows forward and backward in time, as well as across distances and between locations, placing the historic story of the Iraqi Jews beyond the Iraq/Israel dichotomy, or beyond pre- or post-1948, spanning a wide geographical region with a broad array of languages.

Furthermore, Naqqash's prose expands the geographic and linguistic range of Arabic in a way that resists the reduction to the Hebrew-Arabic binary matrix. Rather, it includes linguistic contact zones across national and communal borders and often overlaps Arabic with other languages. In this manner his writings challenge the rigid nationalistic approach of Arabic language and literature as a unified linguistic-cultural entity. In the context of Hebrew literature, this perspective rattles the binary perception of Hebrew and Arabic as two separate languages, belonging to different cultures and regions, and representing distinct religious, literary, and poetic traditions.

Notes

- 1 Samir Naqqash was born in Baghdad in 1938 and came with his family to Israel in 1951, when he was about twelve; initially, they lived in a transit camp in Petah Tikva. He continued to live in Petah Tikva but traveled around the world and lived for different periods in Iran, Turkey, India, Egypt, and Britain. In 1971 he published his first story collection, *Al-khata'* (The mistake). He published a total of five story collections, two novels, four novellas, and three plays. In many of his stories, he returns to Baghdad; other stories take place in India and Israel. His stories are soaked in layers of language, absurdity, and sometimes even madness. After his death in 2004, a collection of his stories was published in Baghdad for the first time, by Dār Mesopotamia, and articles about his work recognizing him as part of twentieth-century Iraqi literature were written in Iraq.
- 2 For selected works on Naqqash, see Nancy Berg, *Exile from Exile* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996); Reuven Snir, *Araviyut, Yahadut, Tsiyonut: Maavak zebuyot be-yetziratam shel Yehudei Irak* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 2005); Lital Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

- 3 Shimon Ballas (1930–2019) and Sami Michael (b. 1926) were born in Baghdad. They began writing in Arabic while still in Iraq, and they continued to do so until shifting to writing in Hebrew. For more on their transitions, see Berg, *Exile from Exile*; Snir, *Araviyut, Yahadut, Tsiyonut*.
- 4 On the spectrum of Arabic language, see Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003). On the differentiation between literary Arabic and Judeo-Arabic, and between the spoken language and the written language, particularly regarding the Baghdadi dialects, see Haim Blanc, *Communal Dialects in Baghdad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Benjamin Hary, *Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic: With an Edition, Translation and Grammatical Study of the Cairene Purim Scroll* (Leiden: Brill, 1992). For the different approach that Ella Shohat presents, see Ella Shohat, “The Question of Judeo-Arabic,” *Arab Studies Journal* 23, no.1 (2015); Ella Shohat, “The Invention of Judeo-Arabic: Nation, Partition and the Linguistic Imaginary,” *Interventions* 19, no. 2 (2017).
- 5 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 263.
- 6 For more on the historical context and the linguistic diversity of Baghdad in the first part of the twentieth century, see Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).
- 7 For discussion on the polyphony in his writing, see Berg, *Exile from Exile*; Levy, *Poetic Trespass*.
- 8 See Jacqueline Kahanoff’s essay “Childhood in Egypt,” in which she attempts to present the Levantine concept: “When I was a small child, it seemed natural that people understood each other although they spoke different languages, and were called by different names—Greek, Moslim [*sic*], Syrian, Jewish, Christian, Arab, Italian, Tunisian, Armenian.” Jacqueline Kahanoff, *Mongrels or Marvels: The Levantine Writings of Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff*, ed. Deborah Starr and Sasson Somekh (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1. However, Kahanoff, who wrote in English, presents the Jew born in the Arab world in the first half of the twentieth century as one who adopted the colonial languages, that is French and English, and had partial fluency in spoken Arabic but did not learn any literary Arabic. In this sense Kahanoff was not part of the dialogue with traditional Judeo-Arabic writing, nor with literary Arabic, and therefore, her place as a writer was different than that of Samir Naqqash. Naqqash’s Arabic was his primary spoken language, with its different dialects, Jewish and non-Jewish, and literary Arabic was his primary written language, with the addition of written Judeo-Arabic.
- 9 See, for example, Samir Naqqash, “Yom she-tevel harta ve-hepila bo,” from the collection of stories with the same name. Samir Naqqash, *Yom she-tevel harta ve-hepila bo*, trans. Ruth Naqqash (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1985).
- 10 Reuven Snir expands on this subject, *Araviyut, Yahadut, Tsiyonut*, 221.
- 11 Samir Naqqash, *Yaum ḥabalat wa-ajḥadāt al-dunyā: Qiṣaṣ ‘Irāqīyya*, 1980), 127. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are our own.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 128.

- 13 Ibid., 128.
- 14 The attempt of non-Jews in Baghdad to speak in Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic can be seen in the memoir of the Iraqi-Jewish writer Naim Kattan. In *Farewell, Babylon*, which was written in French, Kattan describes a conversation that took place in a cafe in Baghdad before his emigration. A group of young people of all ethnoreligious persuasions discuss their common future in Iraq. Surprisingly, and much to Kattan's embarrassment, a fellow Jew in the group speaks about that common future in Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic. To Kattan's astonishment, other members of the group who were not Jewish continued the conversation in the Jewish dialect, even if somewhat unsuccessfully. This afforded a level of legitimacy to the Jewish communal tongue, which was often ridiculed by general society because of its pronunciation, and acknowledged it as worthy for use in future intercommunity dialogues about the common political future of all Iraqis. See Naim Kattan, *Farewell Babylon* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976).
- 15 Naqqash, *Yom she-tevel harta*.
- 16 The Maktoob Translators' Circle and book series is a cultural and political initiative in which the presence and representation of the Arabic language in Hebrew is central and prominent.
- 17 See books by Salim Barakat, a Kurdish-Syrian writer who writes in literary Arabic, although his mother tongue is Kurmanji; he tends not to use colloquial Arabic in his novels.
- 18 See Reuven Snir, following his correspondence with Samir Naqqash in 2001, before his novel was published: "Naqqash wrote his last novel in response to allegations by academics that his works were unintelligible, and that he wrote only for himself; he was therefore willing to sacrifice literary quality in order to increase book distribution. The problem is that this novel is not any less clever than his previous works—it is more polished in language, structure, and character development." Snir, *Araviyut, Yahadut, Tsiyonut*, 244.
- 19 Samir Naqqash, *Shlūmū al-Kurdī wa-anā wa-al-zaman* (Riwāya, 2003), 290.
- 20 Ibid., 223.
- 21 Ibid., 72.
- 22 For further biographical details about Samir Naqqash, see Snir, *Araviyut, Yahadut, Tsiyonut*; see also Binyamin Rish, *Maagalei kiyum be-mivhan ha-metziyut be-sipureihem ha-ktzarim shel ha-sofrim ha-Yehudiyim yotzei Irak: Shalom Darwish ve-Samir Naqqash* (Jerusalem: Agudat Akadema'im Yotzei Irak be-Yisrael, 2009).
- 23 Sasson Somekh, "Sifrut lelo kahal: Sofrim Yehudiyim kotvei Aravit be-Yisrael," *Ha-kivun mizrah* 7 (2004): 10.
- 24 On the Al-Nahḍa movement and its linguistic and literary principles, see Tarek El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).
- 25 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 78.

- 26 For more on Ballas and Michael, see Hannan Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Berg, *Exile from Exile*; Snir, *Araviyut, Yihadut, Tsiyonut*; Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- 27 For more on the Iraqi Jewish writers in Arabic and Hebrew in the twentieth century, see Berg, *Exile from Exile*; Snir, *Araviyut, Yihadut, Tsiyonut*.
- 28 For a critical discussion on the split between spoken and literary Arabic, see Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity*.
- 29 Sami Michael, "Lihiyot sofer mi-motza Iraki," *Moznaim* 3/4 (1983): 8–11, 10.
- 30 Berg, *Exile from Exile*, 55.
- 31 For more about the Iraqi literary circle's perception and reception of Naqqash's work, see Berg, *Exile from Exile*; Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, "Ha-lashon ha-ribonit ve-ribonut ha-lashon," *Theory and Criticism* 50 (2018): 129-150.
- 32 Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 5.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 34 See Naqqash's interview with Ammiel Alcalay: Ammiel Alcalay, ed., *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writing* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1996), 100–111; also Levy, *Poetic Trespass*.
- 35 Naqqash interview with Ammiel Alcalay, *Keys to the Garden*, 109.
- 36 When Sami Michael saw this translation of his novel into Arabic, he asked the editor to change the dialogues back to literary Arabic in order to make it readable throughout the Arab world, and not just for those who are proficient in the Iraqi and Judeo-Arabic dialects; the translation was published in Cairo in 1995.
- 37 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 282.
- 38 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 66–67.
- 39 Naqqash, *Sblūmū al-Kurdī*, 26.
- 40 For more on this process, see Ella Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 1 (1999); Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Yonatan Mendel, *The Creation of Israeli Arabic: Political and Security Considerations in the Making of Arabic Language Studies in Israel*, Palgrave Studies in Languages at War (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- 41 On the link between language, territory, and nationalism in the Hebrew-Zionist context, see Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon*.
- 42 Regarding this division, see Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim"; Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Gil Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).



Samir Naqqash

The Prophet Nahum's Prophecy of Doom to His Manservant Mordekhai-Hai in the Year 1941

Translation from the Arabic: Shoshana London Sappir

Literary editor: Loayy Wattad

Suddenly there appeared before him another shaykh, awesome, distinguished, of glorious countenance. The caretaker of the grave understood that the prophet Nahum had crossed the distance from heaven and come to him. He recognized his face because the prophet had already appeared before his servant in his dreams at unusual hours, stroked his servant's beard and head, and the servant would awaken to find all of the aches of old age gone from his body, and a health he remembered from his days of youth spreading through his organs. And now the prophet of God came to him fuming with rage, and the manservant strove to hide his bout of madness from the one who had come to him from the Lord's paradise. But to no avail! The tremor still shook his organs and froze a wretched muscle in his gaping mouth, and the blood remained in the lamps and oil bowls. Mordekhai-Hai pointed at them with his teeth chattering in a furious and constant rhythm he could not control. Finally, the terrified and stupified old man extracted his tongue from the hold of the monster of horror and wonder and said with widely spaced accents:

"I . . . beg . . . you . . . O prophet Nahum. . . Have I . . . dishonored you? Have I . . . committed . . . a sin . . . that is turning . . . this pure oil . . . into this blood?!"

He uttered these words and waited for the decree of the prophet Nahum! He believed his perdition or redemption depended on that decree.

But the time passed in silence. The prophet of God was sad. Mordekhai-Hai rubbed his eyes to make sure of what they were seeing. He saw the prophet Nahum crying. The old manservant fell into the grasp of another madness. The prophet

prose

Nahum was crying! The righteous Alqoshian, who lives in the heavens, shedding tears? Crossing the sky and appearing before him sad? While his lamps and oil bowls were burning blood and illuminating the grave with it! With blood instead of oil!

“I beg you, my lord and master! My mind cannot conceive what is happening. Does it make sense for the prophet of God to weep, and for the oil to turn into blood in these bowls?”

The unconscious old man Mordekhai-Hai saw his master Nahum the Alqoshian weep bitterly, and heard his sad voice echo in the depth of his waking dream:

“All of the prophets and righteous ones are saddened and crying because of the sentence my God and yours has passed on the Jews of the city of Baghdad.”

prose

Seized by a great terror Mordekhai asked:

“Is this the blood, then? Is this the blood of our relations in Baghdad who are about to be killed, my lord and master?”

In a hoarse voice, choking with tears, the prophet ordered him:

“Mordekhai, my faithful servant, raise your eyes toward Baghdad and look!”

The servant raised his eyes toward Baghdad and said:

“Yes, my lord and master.”

The prophet added:

“Now your eyes will take in all of the distances and Baghdad will come nearer to you, and you will see it as if it were in the palm of your hand. And you will witness everything that is happening there, O Mordekhai. Look!”

“I am looking, my lord!”

“And what do you see, Mordekhai-Hai?”

“I see women and men, old and young, being slaughtered like sheep. I see the houses being looted, the shops being emptied of their merchandise, the noble women being raped, the blood flowing like rivers, and the mob cheering and dancing on the bodies of the victims and waving bloody swords and daggers.”

Said the prophet Nahum:

“This is what is going to happen to our people over the two days of the holiday!”

The custodian of the grave wept and pleaded:

“If so, may my lord and master stand with his fellows and may they serve as advocates for these unfortunate innocents before their Lord, may he pity them and lift the decree.”

Said the prophet in a broken but firm voice:

“It will be to no avail, Mordekhai! We pleaded and begged but the sentence has already been given, and his sentence, may he be elevated and praised, cannot be turned back.”

Mordekhai-Hai wondered, trembling:

“Are the Jews of Baghdad going to be annihilated, my lord and master?”

“As I told you. . . . Their blood is going to flow over the two days of the holiday, and then my relations and yours will be redeemed by a righteous and God-fearing man and woman. Behold, my loyal servant!”

Mordekhai-Hai looked and saw a white-bearded elderly Baghdadi sitting on a chair, absorbed in the reading of the book of Psalms. Suddenly the whistle of a bullet cut off his sweet-sounding hum. A burst of fire and a blast of sound, followed by a stripe of blood bursting forth from the wrinkled forehead, spreading until its tip dropped on the book of Psalms, quickly becoming a red pool. The head of the Baghdadi Jew dropped onto the page of the book of Psalms he was holding, and his beard dipped into the pool of his blood.

Said the Alqoshian prophet to the custodian of his grave, the elderly Mordekhai-Hai who was wallowing in his grief, his astonishment, and his madness:

“Look again, Mordekhai-Hai!”

He obeyed again, and this time he saw an old woman wrapped in a black abaya, passing through the street, turning to her right and to her left as if she were crazed, fearful, terrified, and shouting words that reached his ears but that he barely made out. The woman was slapping her cheeks and scratching her face, and now a crowd of people surrounded her. A mob waving knives, daggers, and swords. An incited mob that was also shouting. The mob was shouting and the woman was shouting. The crowd surrounded her, pounced on her, and stabbed her with its knives. The woman fell in the middle of the street, drowning in her blood.

Alqosh. The grave again. Mordekhai-Hai returned from his journey of terrors and horrors colored in blood. Sweating despite the coolness of the high mountain, panting and terror-stricken. And Nahum the Alqoshian appeared before him and said:

“These two God-fearing people, the righteous old man and the woman of valor, will seal the convoys of victims of the Jews of Baghdad, and with their souls they will redeem the great massacre!”

Mordekhai-Hai awoke, his body dripping with sweat. Shivering with horror—filled with a tremendous, overwhelming grief. The lamps went out again. Their oil and water were replaced by blood, but the disaster was bigger than he imagined.

The Prophecy Comes True

At that hour Asmar was wrapped in her abaya and running like a madwoman toward the Bab al-Sharqi neighborhood. An elderly, righteous, and God-fearing Jew was sitting on a chair in his humble abode, tucked away in a simple, poor neighborhood of Baghdad. His white beard was almost touching his book of Psalms, and he was engrossed in his prayers, drowning in the Kingdom of God, trying with his prayers to assuage the Lord's rage. Shlomo Katani was in the home of the Hakham Mikhael, but his spirit and thoughts wandered to his home in al-Karada, wondering about Asmar. Asmar passed Bab al-Sharqi and headed toward “Cafe Arab” and from there to the Bab al-Shaykh neighborhood. Miriam was alone in her parents' house, confused and distraught, darkly predicting a definite catastrophe. And Tsion (Hebrew version of the name Zion), enveloped by his home, his wife, and his children, far from the stage of the events, waited patiently and hoped for good, while Salman, who was across the sea, gathered scraps of events without taking them too seriously.

Mordekhai-Hai, at the grave of the prophet Nahum the Alqoshian in the far away Alqosh, continued to pray, wishing for the events to end without knowing how they were proceeding. And a God-fearing old man in a modest home in Baghdad was reading the book of Psalms, and a woman of valor was running through the dangerous streets of Baghdad and crying: “Shlomo, Shlomo!” And the God-fearing old man and the woman of valor were about to redeem with their blood the unproscribed blood of the Jews of Baghdad, and thereby end the catastrophe. A group of murderers burst into the home of the righteous old man, and despite the commotion he continued praying, immersed in the Kingdom of God. He did not notice the shot, but his heart told him death was upon him. He stopped reading his Psalms and recited the “Shma Yisrael,” proclaiming the oneness of the Lord, and then he dropped onto his holy book, staining it with his blood and breathing his last. Asmar, wrapped in her abaya, crossed the neighborhood of Bab al-Shaykh and ran through Ghazi Street, which was crowded with murderers and murdered. She had lost her mind completely, and she

ran and shouted: “Shlomo! May I be your atonement, Shlomo!” Asmar no longer feared either fear or death and did not try to conceal her identity. She exposed it and shouted: “Woe to the Jews! Woe to Shlomo!” Inviting death to come. Inviting the murderers. Surrendering to God’s decree in order to redeem the rest of the Jews of Baghdad with the righteous old man.

Suddenly the murderers surrounded her. “Jewess! Jewess!” Their daggers sparkled in the sun and Asmar’s eyes sparkled with tears. She did not deny her Jewishness but declared it with crazy shouts. She received the first stab and shouted: “Shlomo!” She took the second one and shouted, “Shlomo!” When the third stab plunged into Asmar’s heart she cried: “Shl . . .” And before she finished, she sank into the abyss of death.

Notes

- * Published by courtesy of the Naqqash family. From Samir Naqqash, *Shlumu al-Kurdi wa-ana wa-al-zaman* [Shlomo al-Kurdi, me and the time] (Cologne: Manshurat al-Jamal, 2004), 48–51, 58–59.



Lost (and Gained) in Translation: Reflections on Translations and Translators of al-Jabarti's Chronicles of the French Occupation of Egypt

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In the summer of 1966, Emmanuel Koplewitz was chosen by the Hebrew University to prepare a Hebrew translation of the third section of Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti's chronicle *'Aja'ib al-athar fi'l-tarajim wa-'l-akhbar* (The marvelous compositions of biographies and chronicles, hereinafter, the *'Aja'ib*), a work that covered Egypt's history from 1688 to 1820/1 (though most thoroughly, the years after 1796). The third section, compiled by al-Jabarti in 1805–6, and most probably further reworked by him through the years, tells the story of the years of the French occupation of Egypt (1798–1801). It is a reedited and augmented version of two previous manuscripts by al-Jabarti that addressed the French occupation. The first of these manuscripts, *Tā'rikh muddat al-Faransis bi-Misr* (A history of the period of the French in Egypt; hereinafter, the *Muddat*) covered the first six months of the occupation. Copies of this manuscript circulated in Cairo in 1799, while the French were still present. The second work, *Mazhar al-taqdis bi-zawal dawlat al-Faransis* (The demonstration of piety in the demise of French government; hereinafter, the *Mazhar*), was dedicated to the Ottoman vizier Yusuf Pasha, who had entered Egypt after the departure of the French forces at the end of 1801. Though Koplewitz was not a professor at the Hebrew University, the choice was not surprising, for he had built his reputation as an excellent translator of historical texts from Arabic with the publication of his translation of *Al-Muqaddimah* (Introduction), the first volume of Ibn Khaldun's monumental work of world history.¹

The first draft of Koplewitz's translation of al-Jabarti was submitted to the university in August 1967; another draft that incorporated the comments Koplewitz had received from the editor was submitted the following year. However, the Hebrew translation was never published and, according to Koplewitz, the Hebrew University never stated the reason for this decision.² One may assume that the "politics of academia" provides a suitable explanation for the behind-the-scenes process of decision-making that had taken place. Today, more than fifty years after its initiation, Koplewitz's translation—edited by Eyad Barghuthy—is to be published in the Maktoob book series, a series produced by the Arabic-Hebrew Translators' Forum at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute.

Though a historian of modern France who had researched the occupation of Egypt from the French point of view, I was asked by the series editors to provide the Hebrew translation with an academic apparatus that would facilitate the readers' entrance into the early nineteenth-century world of the French and Egyptians described in al-Jabarti's text. Thus, somewhat unprepared, and with no knowledge of Arabic, I found myself entering the world of translation and translators, a world that played out on multiple levels, some more obvious than others. In what follows, this article will briefly address some of the challenges of and approaches to translation; it will then look closely at the training and career of Jean-Michel Venture de Paradis (1739–1799), a professional dragoman for the French consulates at the ports of the Levant before the Revolution and Napoleon's chief dragoman during the first year of the French occupation of Egypt. His life story and the changing character of his profession reveal aspects of continuity and change in France's colonial ventures as the state went through radical transformation, from being a monarchy to becoming a republic.

Questions of Translation

The work under consideration presented questions at the most obvious level of translation from Arabic into Hebrew. Some of the Hebrew expressions used by Koplewitz needed updating. This was related less to the need to "modernize" the Hebrew—to make an early nineteenth-century text more intelligible to today's readers—than to the need to update the translation so that it reflected modern research on eighteenth-century Egypt. This research has contested the national historiography of the period and has brought the Egyptian state and society back into the Ottoman orbit.³ One of the ways to address this was to compare Koplewitz's translation with one into English that was based on the same source. The English translation, published in 1994, was the product of the collective work of translators

and scholars of Ottoman Egypt.⁴ The comparison, at times, showed differences in understanding; it helped clarify historical expressions and relations, but it also demonstrated that the process of translation from Arabic into Hebrew is easier.

The past, so to speak, provoked questions about translation of a different nature and in different registers; it also brought to light the often underreported role played by translators during the French occupation of Egypt.

One set of questions is of an erudite nature and arises from the discussion of the different manuscripts of al-Jabarti's work.⁵ The Bulaq edition of 1879, which was the source for both Koplewitz's translation into Hebrew and the 1994 English translation, is contested. Professor Shmuel Moreh, who is considered to be the scholar most intimately acquainted with al-Jabarti's chronicles and their different manuscripts, has argued that after al-Jabarti's death, copyists of his work took the liberty of making changes to his style and grammatical usage. Sometimes they had abbreviated or even deleted passages or poems quoted by the author; other times they had added passages that were not present in earlier manuscripts. The Bulaq edition, according to Moreh, was compiled from these different manuscripts, which were in the possession of Bulaq Press, and possibly from others with which he was not familiar. The editor compiled a version from these manuscripts but also continued the practice of the previous copyists. Some village names used by al-Jabarti were changed and given the new administrative names from the time of Mehmet Ali's reign; the ranks of some officials to whom al-Jabarti gave the titles *effendi* and *bey* were given the higher ranks of *pasha* and *aga* in the Bulaq edition, possibly to reflect the passage of time.⁶ These "editorial liberties" bring to the fore questions regarding the distortion of historical texts in general, and about their translation in particular—about the ways to negotiate between the time in which the text was written and the effort to make it intelligible in a different cultural milieu. They also raise other, related questions. Style, names, and even grammatical usage may conduct us to the "original text"; they can also tell us something about the Ottoman Egypt in which al-Jabarti lived and wrote and about the ways the *ulama* of his time debated and competed for influence. These questions may offer insights and understanding that are beyond the views and facts expressed in the text. Shmuel Moreh believed that the manuscript approved by al-Jabarti with his signature, the one that best preserved the intention of the text, was the one at Cambridge. Accordingly, this was the one he used for his translation of the *'Aja'ib* in 2013.⁷

Lars Bjorneboe offered a slightly different view. His study focused on the *ulama* of Cairo, the group of scholars and religious leaders of which al-Jabarti was part.⁸ Bjorneboe tried to understand their political views regarding the French occupation

from a close examination of al-Jabarti's first account of it and from the ways in which he continuously reworked and later incorporated this first account into his later manuscripts. Bjorneboe's main argument is that the first text should be understood as part of a debate within this Egyptian group of scholars regarding the way they should respond to the French occupation. As the political context in which al-Jabarti wrote evolved and changed—as did his target readership—so did his emphases. An account dedicated to the Ottoman vizier after the occupation differs from one written during the occupation's first year, and from the one that was reworked and compiled in 1805–6 in a different political setting. Some events were left out in later versions; others were added. A report about an event could be placed differently in the narration, its length adjusted to its role in the overall argument, and at times it could be taken out of the chronicle section of the work and consigned to the biographical section, if it was retained at all. Bjorneboe did not refute Moreh's claims altogether but wrote that he believed that al-Jabarti continued to work on the manuscript of the *'Aja'ib* after 1805–6, when it was initially compiled and signed by him. He also believed that the Bulaq edition was based on manuscripts that reflected at least two additional phases of work that al-Jabarti undertook after he signed the Cambridge manuscript.⁹

It is beyond the intended focus of this paper, and certainly beyond my expertise, to further address this discussion. Shmuel Moreh's approach was in the tradition of philology set by the German classicist and philologist Karl Lachmann (1793–1851), and his goal was to try to get as close as possible to al-Jabarti's original text. Newer approaches, of a more discursive nature, see importance in examining what is called, "the fluidity of the text." These approaches see in the historical-cultural contexts that brought about the changes in the text an important field of inquiry that speaks to the meanings of the text, the history of its reception, and the contexts that brought about some of its changes.¹⁰

Another set of questions about translation arises from the written sources that al-Jabarti used for this part of the *'Aja'ib*. Many of the documents on which he based his chronicle of the occupation were proclamations and administrative orders issued by the French to the Egyptian public. Others were letters written by the French to the members of the diwan or dictated to the members of the diwan to be sent in their name.¹¹ Al-Jabarti also used protocols of the meetings of the diwan that were recorded by both French and Egyptian scribes, and the long account of the protocols of the investigation of General Jean-Baptiste Kleber's assassin and his collaborators and of their trial. This last was a translation of the French protocol that was distributed to the ulama at the time. The investigations and the trial that followed were events in

which interpreters were used.¹² Al-Jabarti's report provides an opportunity to see the creative use of the language barrier by the defendants during their investigation: they claimed that the interpreters misrepresented their testimonies or mistranslated the questions to them. However, the strategy did not alter the result of the trial.

Most of the above-mentioned documents, which were the creation of the French administration, were first written in French and only then translated into Arabic. The French original was often published in the French journal printed in Cairo, to be read by the army and civilians there.¹³ Sometimes the two versions differed: the intentions behind the document when it was originally written (in French) did not always match what later occurred. One such example can be found in the list of participants in the diwan that was first available in the French *ordre de jour* (agenda) of July 25, 1798, and reported in the *Courrier de l'Égypte*. The list was prepared by Napoleon Bonaparte or, more precisely, by his interpreter, Jean-Michel Venture de Paradis. It included the name of Shaykh al-Sadat, whose participation the French wanted but who had refused the invitation.¹⁴ At other times the differences between versions were a result of the way the translator perceived the target culture. The most famous example of this kind of difference between the French and Arabic versions can be seen in Bonaparte's proclamation to the Egyptian people.

The proclamation—in French and Arabic—was prepared by the army's chief interpreter and Bonaparte's close consultant, Venture de Paradis, before the landing in Alexandria. Both versions preserve what can be called an Ottoman-Egyptian genre of proclamation, a genre used to convey to a wide audience a set of instructions or news from a ruler or his representatives. Proclamations were written to be read at mosques and posted in the marketplace or other public places, thus reaching a wide audience. The differences between the two versions of Bonaparte's proclamation are telling. The French version uses revolutionary rhetoric, promises “peace to the huts and war to the castles,” portrays the Mamluk beys as a local version of the aristocracy of the ancien régime, and also carefully and deliberately lessens Bonaparte's respect for the Qur'an and the Prophet, and his sympathy with the Muslim religion. The Arabic version emphasizes the latter aspects, portraying the French (and their commander in chief) as true Muslims: “Wasn't it the French Army that destroyed the pope who had said war should be fought against the Muslims? Wasn't it the French Army that just destroyed the Knights of Malta because they believe God wants them to wage war on the Muslims? Haven't we always been friends of the sultan and enemy to his enemies?”¹⁵

The claims about Bonaparte's relationship with Islam and the Prophet are often quoted and ridiculed in scholarship and are seen both as one of many examples

of Bonaparte's propaganda and as an unpolished display of his megalomania. It is important, however, to understand the historical context in which the proclamation was written and read. By portraying the Mamluk beys as defying the Islamic order when they rebelled against the authority of its representative, the Ottoman sultan, and by emphasizing that the French were the sultan's allies, the proclamation framed the French invasion as a better version of an earlier expedition of 1786, one that was led on behalf of the sultan by Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Pasha Kapudan, an Ottoman admiral. Hasan Pasha had tried (and failed) to remove Murad Bey and Ibrahim Bey from power and to restore the authority of the sultan in Egypt, an important Ottoman province. Upon Hasan Pasha's arrival there, he distributed a proclamation in which he accused the beys of defying the Islamic order. Bonaparte's proclamation used language that was very similar to that used by Hasan Pasha only twelve years earlier; in 1798 Bonaparte's proclamation announced that his aim was to restore the Islamic just order that had been disrupted by the exploitation perpetrated by the very same Mamluk beys in 1786.

In the *Muddat* (1799), al-Jabarti deconstructs the proclamation, demonstrating its grammatical mistakes and misuse of idioms as proof of French deceit. As the *'Aja'ib* was written long after the evacuation of the French, there was no longer fear of the influence of the French claims, and the proclamation is presented without comment. It is interesting to note that Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838), the most esteemed Orientalist in France in the first half of the nineteenth century, used the Arabic version of the proclamation in the second edition of a book of Arabic texts that he compiled for the study of the language. Silvestre de Sacy, a monarchist in his political convictions, did not miss the opportunity to denounce Bonaparte. While ignoring problems of grammar and style raised by al-Jabarti, de Sacy explained in a long note in the second edition that for political reasons, he had not used the text in the first edition: a text in which Bonaparte boasts of having destroyed the pope might not be well received shortly after Bonaparte, “who changed his views according to his ambitions,” had signed the Concordat, wrote de Sacy. He now, however, “thought it my duty to restore, in this second edition, this piece that deserves by its singularity and by its haughty and derisory style, to be preserved for posterity.”¹⁶

As previously stated, the person who wrote Bonaparte's proclamation to the people of Egypt was Venture de Paradis, chief interpreter to the army of the Orient and Bonaparte's aid and most important consultant on all issues regarding the French administration of Egypt. As J. J. Marcel, the young Orientalist who operated the Arabic press under his guidance in Cairo, wrote of him, “He was not only first interpreter, but first minister to Napoleon Bonaparte.”¹⁷ A close look at his life, views,

and career sheds light on the role played by this group of cultural intermediators, who are often left out of the historical account.

Being a Dragoman

Jean-Michel Venture de Paradis was the son of a distinguished family from Marseille that had held prominent roles in the administration and armed forces of the region for some generations. His father, seemingly of a somewhat adventurous spirit, did not follow this family tradition. He sought an alternative career path using his family's connections with the Chamber of Commerce in Marseille.¹⁸ The father traveled around the Mediterranean ports of the Ottoman Empire, occasionally serving as dragoman in its consulates in Crete and Sidon; for a few years he served as consul to the king of Sweden in the Crimea (1741–1744). During his time in Crete he met a Greek woman, Catherine Marmora, and though he wanted to marry her, he was unable to receive his father's consent (as was required at the time). Charles Venture de Paradis viewed a marriage to a foreign woman as unsuitable for the family and its reputation. Thus, the two children born out of this relationship, one of whom was Jean-Michel Venture de Paradis, were baptized in Marseille as “children of unknown parents,” which was the custom in such cases. Only in 1749, close to the time of his death, did the grandfather, Charles Venture de Paradis, reluctantly give his consent to the marriage (he chose to leave his estate to his daughter). This consent enabled Jean-Michel to assume the family name, Venture de Paradis.¹⁹

For economic reasons, or possibly because of the family's history, Jean-Michel Venture de Paradis was sent to study at the “Armenian section” of the prestigious College de Louis le Grand in Paris, where he was trained to be a dragoman, loyal to the king and to France's interests in the ports of the Levant. His studies and necessities, like those of the other twelve boys in his class, were funded by a pension from the king. The Ecole des Jeunes de Langues, as the institution was called, was established by Jean-Baptiste Colbert at the end of the seventeenth century.²⁰ During the school's first years, its graduates did not achieve the level of knowledge that the profession required. Reforms were implemented, time and again, regarding the school's curriculum and its admission policies. From the late 1720s onward, admission was opened to the sons of French families in France and those of the king's subjects in the Levant. The curriculum was expanded to include a classical education—Latin, classical Greek, and rhetoric, provided by the college's Jesuit teachers—as well as Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. These last were taught by teachers from the College de Roi, some of them former dragomen who had lived in the Levant, and others whose linguistic skills were of a philological, manuscript-based

nature. Having achieved a satisfactory level of knowledge, the school's graduates were sent to a Capuchin convent in Pera, Istanbul, where they were expected to further improve their language skills by translating manuscripts; they were then sent as interns to French consulates in the Levant.

Jean-Michel Venture de Paradis entered the school in what was considered to be its golden age. He probably excelled in his studies, for he was able to leave for Pera in 1757, after just five years at the school, while most of the school's students took at least seven or eight years to graduate. After two years in Pera, during which he complained of the students' enforced seclusion from local society, he became a student-apprentice at the French embassy in Istanbul, at the time when Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes was the French ambassador.²¹ His next appointment was as second dragoman at the French consulate in Sidon (1764–1768), and in 1768, he was sent to the consulate in Cairo as second dragoman. Jean-Michel Venture de Paradis remained in Egypt for eight tumultuous years, the years of Ali Bey al-Kabir, Muhammad Bey Abu al-Dahab, and the struggles that followed the latter's death.

During the eighteenth century, France was the main commercial partner of the Ottoman Empire in the Levant, and the province of Egypt played the most important role in this enterprise. Three French consulates in Egypt—those in Cairo, Alexandria, and Rosetta—were where the commercial activity was organized and regulated in often tense collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce of Marseille. The consuls served on behalf of the king, and the merchants were accountable to the Chamber of Commerce, which dictated the number of commercial houses and French merchants allowed to practice in Egypt. The French, like other European consulates, were organized as a *nation* (all those, including foreigners, who chose to live under the authority of a certain consul), and most of them lived in a closed compound of apartments alongside the consul, a vice consul, a chancellor, the dragomen, a priest, and some French artisans. Some merchants chose to build their residences outside the compound but in its vicinity. Commercial regulations, prices, and competition between merchants were negotiated and decided upon in the assembly of the *nation*, where the merchants often held stronger influence on decisions than did the consul, who usually lacked knowledge or experience regarding the way commerce was negotiated with the local powers.²² Though much better paid and of higher social status than the merchants or his dragomen, the French consul was completely dependent on them, their language skills, and their wide-ranging experience. A new consul would have an initial ceremonial meeting with the Ottoman pasha, the governor of Egypt on behalf of the sultan, and would take part with other dignitaries of the *nation* in ceremonies held on special occasions. But the day-to-day activities

were conducted by the dragomen. They were the ones carrying out all interactions with those in power, and they were the ones constantly negotiating the interests of France and its merchants with the powerful Mamluk beys and the Ottoman pasha.

Venture de Paradis arrived in Cairo during the time that François-Sebastien de Martin d'Amirat was consul (1758–1774). He then served Martin d'Amirat's successor, Jean Baptiste Mure, whom Venture de Paradis described in a report to his superior at the Ministry of the Navy as “ill-suited to serve in this turbulent place” and lacking the expertise and the desire to secure the friendship of the local rulers.²³ It was during Mure's residency that the merchant Charles Magallon built his power within the *nation*. He was a textile merchant who had close ties to the Mamluk rulers of Egypt, ties that were strengthened through his wife's friendships with and her easy access to the women to whom he sold most of his wares.²⁴ Venture de Paradis's experiences in Egypt informed much of his writing about his profession, a profession he thought was under-appreciated and definitely underpaid: “The dragomen are the only organ at the disposal of the consuls and ambassadors. As much personal merit as these last are assumed to have, they have never really faced the people of the country, and do not have the wit, the sagacity, and the skill that their interpreters do.”²⁵

In the late 1770s, following the wars between the Ottoman Empire and Russia (1768–1774) that ended with Russian dominance of Crimea and major ports on the Black Sea, and with the growing power and independence of the Mamluk beys in Egypt, the ruling elite in France was reassessing its options regarding the Ottoman Empire in general and its Egyptian province in particular. Generally speaking, two positions competed for the king's approval. The first favored an invasion of Egypt: it originated with the Ministry of the Navy and its minister, Antoine de Sartine, who were responsible for the ports of the Levant. The second position argued that France's interests were best served through diplomacy in Istanbul rather than invasion, and this was articulated in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the former ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, the Comte de Vergennes was then minister.

As mentioned above, one of the requirements of Venture de Paradis's job was to write letters and reports about the situation in Egypt and about the Ottoman Empire. These documents were addressed to Jean Charles de Saint Didier, who was responsible for the Levant at the Ministry of the Navy, and were used in Saint Didier's reports to his minister. To further support his views about invasion, the minister, de Sartine, decided to send François Baron de Tott on a double mission to the Levant. The formal aspect of this mission, which was within his ministry's authority, was to inspect the situation of French commercial activities in these ports and to suggest ways to reform them. The informal aspect, which was not within his authority, was

to assess the possibility of invading Egypt. He attached Venture de Paradis to this mission as an expert, and the dragoman provided Baron de Tott with his research and information about Egypt. Thus, the views expressed in the two reports, that of Saint Didier and that of the Baron de Tott, unsurprisingly reinforced each other. However, Venture de Paradis's conviction, which was present in his original report, that Egypt could be easily conquered but would be difficult to hold on to, was left out of these two reports—most probably because it did not contribute to their overall goal.²⁶ It found its way, in the same wording, to the work of Constantin François de Chasseboeuf (Volney), who had traveled to Egypt and Syria in late 1782, returning to France in 1785. Volney was strongly opposed to the policy promoted by the Ministry of the Navy.²⁷ Venture de Paradis's reports about the reign of Ali Bey al-Kabir, as well as his reports about the political history of contemporary Syria, were also incorporated into Volney's travel account. The information about French diplomacy in the Orient was the source of much of Volney's *Considérations sur la guerre actuelle des Turcs*. Volney and Venture de Paradis met in Paris in 1788, frequenting similar salons, during the period in which Volney was writing his books. Though these unacknowledged uses, and sometimes misuses, of Venture de Paradis's reports should not be judged by present-day criteria, it is also possible that they were all the more acceptable because of his training and experience as dragoman—the man who does the research, provides the knowledge, and writes the reports but is not publicly acknowledged or rewarded as their author.

Venture de Paradis persistently expressed his frustration with the way his profession was under-rewarded. He wrote of the dragomen's long, difficult training and of the wide-ranging roles and responsibilities they had that went well beyond their translation work. He wrote of the ways in which they were exploited by their superiors in the diplomatic service, and of the lack of prospects they faced. While he had received an academic post at the College de Roi, these posts were very limited in number, and he thought the diplomatic service should be opened to his colleagues. With the Revolution, and especially after 1792, France's diplomatic service, previously based on families of the aristocracy, faced a shortage of candidates to fill the posts in its consulates. This was an opportunity for Venture de Paradis's views to be heard:

A good interpreter must add to the knowledge of languages several essential qualities: he needs to have a spirit of wisdom, conciliation, and firmness, an unalterable foundation of probity and righteousness. He needs to have a strong enough spirit to remain unoffended by the often unagreeable situations that the superior status of the Muslim religion within the Ottoman Empire presents. He must be able to put himself

above the humiliations to which he is frequently exposed and to consider only his usefulness to his country and to his compatriots.²⁸

He thought that opening a career path in diplomacy to these very qualified individuals would benefit all: “Our political relationship with the Ottoman sultan has been the envy of Europe. . . . We have consuls in almost all the ports of the Levant and of Barbary [the coasts of North Africa]. However, the consuls and ambassadors knew not a word in the local languages and could not interact with the local powers beyond the initial formalities.” Everything was dealt with by the interpreters, “the most useful and least paid agents of the state.” Venture de Paradis thought that a career path in diplomacy should be opened to those students who had invested so many years of their lives in studying languages, but he also thought that the study of languages could not be disconnected from the study of the culture and its lived experience. “The talents of the interpreters are being choked . . . [when] they cannot live with the local countrymen but are enclosed in the consulates.”²⁹ He was very enthusiastic about the decision of the Directory in 1795 to establish a school of Living Oriental Languages that would add to the study based on manuscripts, one that would better serve diplomacy and commerce. However, the establishment of the school did not fulfill these goals. Its orientation did not follow the ideas about studying languages within their cultural contexts; rather, there was a strong orientation toward philology, and study was mostly manuscript based. This was possibly owing to the dominant figure of Silvestre de Sacy. J. J. Marcel, one of the first graduates of the school, who was recruited to the 1798 campaign as an interpreter, wrote that upon landing in Egypt he had discovered that he was unable to understand or be understood when encountering the Egyptian population.³⁰

From Dragoman to the Creator of Colonial Policies

Venture de Paradis was not Bonaparte’s first choice for the role of first interpreter for the army, probably because he was almost sixty at the time. However, once recruited, Bonaparte did not let him leave his side. The proclamation to the Egyptians that Venture de Paradis prepared was the fiction by which the invasion was justified: the French army had come to Egypt, with the sultan’s consent, to deliver its population from the tyranny of the Mamluks. The document was composed and printed before the landing in Alexandria, and al-Jabarti described it as *al-maktub al-mankub* in the two accounts of the French occupation (in the *Muddat*, 1799, and the *Mazhar*, 1801). Shmuel Moreh translated the phrase as “this miserable letter,” a translation, as Lars Bjorneboe wrote, that points to the many errors and poor grammar it contained.

Bjorneboe thought that “a more fitting translation would be ‘this ill-fated letter,’ a translation that emphasised its unhappy consequences.”³¹ Some of the mistakes to which al-Jabarti pointed might well have been the result of the very poor abilities of the man chosen by Bonaparte to run the press at the beginning of the invasion, as their presence in French documents printed in the first few weeks in Egypt shows.³² Whatever the reason for the mistakes in the document, it is clear that it was not read by its target audiences as it is read today, as a somewhat ridiculous piece of propaganda.

Nicolas al-Turc (1763–1828), the Syrian-born scholar who wrote an account of the French occupation, wrote about the meeting at Qasr al-Ayni that took place after the fall of Alexandria. The aim of the meeting was to organize the resistance to the invasion. The Ottoman governor, the Mamluk beys, some of the leading ulama, and local merchants came together, having already received copies of the proclamation from messengers who had come from Alexandria. He described an atmosphere of distrust between the participants, who blamed each other for the calamity that had befallen Egypt. Shaykh al-Sadat blamed the invasion on Murad Bey’s abuse of the French merchants; he also held the beys responsible for the lack of preparation and the arrogance that brought about the quick fall of Alexandria to the French.³³ Murad Bey, possibly as a way to shift the blame away from himself, asked the Ottoman pasha whether the French were invading on behalf of the sultan and whether he had previous knowledge of it. Though the pasha dismissed the accusations immediately, this event does demonstrate that the arguments in the proclamation were received as intended, at least by some of those participating in the meeting. Cooperation between the French and the sultan against the Mamluk beys had a history and therefore seemed possible.³⁴ Bonaparte instructed his generals to circulate the proclamation widely. Édouard de Villiers du Terrage (1780–1855), a civil engineer who was part of the French force, noted his impressions in a diary entry on July 17, 1798: “Before the proclamation everyone wanted to kill the Europeans; after [the proclamation], all has changed.”³⁵

Venture de Paradis understood, but even more important was able to explain to Bonaparte, the cohesion of the Muslim world and the role of the Ottoman sultan as protector of that cohesion. Many of Bonaparte’s initial policies and orders were an expression of this understanding. He ordered religious celebrations to continue and offered French financial support to that end; he announced that prayers at the mosques should continue to mention the name of the Ottoman sultan; and he sent reassuring letters to the sharif of Mecca and to the sultan regarding French

intentions, to mention but a few examples of that influence that are reported by al-Jabarti. Letters from Bonaparte to the Directory in France and to Talleyrand, the foreign minister, constantly urge them to gain the sultan's support.³⁶

While most of Venture de Paradis's direct actions are absent from al-Jabarti's account, whose focus was not the actions of the French but the effect of the invasion on the population, some of his activities do enter the chronicle. He was the interpreter present when Bonaparte's present to the ulama—a shawl in the colors of the French flag—was angrily rejected by them. Venture de Paradis was able to dissolve tensions by first interpreting to the ulama the way in which Bonaparte's present should be interpreted: as a gesture of friendship, one that was intended to honor them as opposed to one that expressed control and domination. He did not translate the words shouted by the offended Bonaparte but suggested alternative measures (such as wearing the cocarde only at formal meetings). Most important, he suggested that they all reconvene to discuss the matter two weeks later, a strategy that allowed the idea to fade away altogether. Al-Jabarti describes how in the month of Rabi'a al-Thani, the interpreter was able to prevent bloodshed when he intentionally mistranslated the words shouted by a crowd gathered outside the residence of Shaykh al-Sadat, at the time of Bonaparte's visit there. The crowd was shouting the Surah al-Fatiha in defiance, wrote al-Jabarti. When Bonaparte asked the interpreter the meaning of the crowd's uproar, Venture de Paradis explained that the people were greeting him with enthusiasm. "Thus, the real threat of bloodshed was averted," writes al-Jabarti.³⁷

These are examples of the conciliatory character so important to being a good dragoman, which Venture de Paradis had written about in the past. But he made some glaring mistakes that one would not expect from a person of his experience. One of these was the nomination of Barthelemy, a Greek of Scio (Chios), to be the second in command of the police force, which scandalized and shocked the Egyptian population, as al-Jabarti wrote time and again. It was a political mistake that Venture de Paradis should have avoided, for he surely knew that giving a Christian the power to rule over the Muslim population, even before considering the qualities and brutality of this specific individual, would create enormous resentment. One can also detect a certain loss of humility, possibly even arrogance, on the part of Venture de Paradis in his opening discourse read at the convocation of the Grand Diwan in Cairo. Al-Jabarti conveys his view of that speech by first saying that he found only two short sentences in the very long speech that he thought were worth mentioning. But more important than the length of the speech, among the events

al-Jabarti reported that were happening on that same day (October 11, 1798) was the gathering of a large, furious crowd in front of Shaykh al-Bakri's residence. The French saw the convocation of the Grand Diwan as a success and reported it in the French press as if it had been the 1789 convocation of the Estates General that preceded the Revolution. Caught up in a mistaken sense of success and power, and possibly fueled by their own propaganda, they were oblivious to what was said on the streets and in the mosques, to the signs of fermentation, to the effects of the rumors coming in from Syria and Istanbul. On October 21, only ten days after the opening of the Grand Diwan, they were surprised by the revolt that broke out in Cairo and placed doubt upon Bonaparte and Venture de Paradis's policies regarding how to govern Egypt. Venture de Paradis had the ability to see these signs, had he looked in the right direction.

Venture de Paradis was no longer the dragoman of the ancien régime, whose role he had described so well: he no longer had to endure "unagreeable situations that the superior status of the Muslim religion within the Ottoman Empire presents" or be exposed to the frequent humiliations he mentioned. He was now one of the most powerful people in Cairo, with easy access to Bonaparte and influence on his policies. He was part of the occupying force that enjoyed an advantage derived from the power of arms and the legitimacy to use them—an advantage he shared with his compatriots. At the same time, he did not share their disadvantages, which were the result of operating in an unfamiliar environment. He knew the place, had lived in its climate, and had survived local disease and epidemics. He knew the language and understood the local society's codes of conduct: he knew the local habits, was familiar with the food, understood the social structures, and was acquainted with some of that society's prominent individuals. He was not merely the go-between—the interpreter or problem solver he had described when in Sidon—who tried, for the sake of French commerce, to "cultivate the good will of local leaders . . . without meddling with their ways of governing."³⁸ He was now the designer of Bonaparte's colonial policies, intervening and meddling in ways of governance, land ownership, and tax collection. It is possible that this new sense of power made him oblivious to the very limited success of the French administration.

Beyond being part of a larger historical process that changed French policies in the Levant, and despite the fact that his personal history was the very embodiment of the change, Venture de Paradis's personality did make some small differences. He was described by all as an amiable person, generous and conciliatory. He

preferred negotiating rather than promoting conflict, was empathetic, and had a genuine love of Egypt and Istanbul. One wonders whether Venture de Paradis was partially responsible for the favorable way the ulama spoke of Bonaparte after having met his successor, General Baptiste Kleber. While they found Kleber arrogant, condescending, and distant, they saw in Bonaparte “an approachable figure, a warm person with whom they could joke.”³⁹

“There is no occupation that is happy,” wrote André Raymond at the end of his book *Égyptiens et Français au Caire 1798-1801*—a sentence proven on almost every page of al-Jabarti’s chronicle, regardless of the French occupiers’ belief in their superior character and motives when compared to the Mamluks they had replaced and with whom al-Jabarti had no sympathy.⁴⁰ A moderate interpreter might, at times, modify the effects and consequences of an occupation but, it is important to emphasize, he can do this only at the margins; he could not change the overall violent aspects of the occupation and the resentment it generated. Jean-Michel Venture de Paradis died during the French army’s retreat from Acre, somewhere between Nazareth and Jaffa, at the age of sixty. Al-Jabarti wrote of his death and added: “He was the chief interpreter of Bonaparte; he was a knowledgeable man and a skilled negotiator; he had very good knowledge of many languages: Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Italian, and French.”⁴¹ This was the man whose Arabic, as expressed in Bonaparte’s proclamation, al-Jabarti had so famously ridiculed before. In 1805–6, as he was writing this version of his history of the occupation, the French were no longer seen as a threat to the Muslim community.

The French occupation of Egypt was an “occupation in translation,” so to speak, a more-often-than-not violent encounter between Europeans and Ottoman Egyptians who had no common language. While al-Jabarti’s chronicle was seen by historians as an important source for the study of the period, it inadvertently became entangled in the long historiographical debate about the significance of the occupation as an event that began the age of modernity in the region. Scholars from either side of the debate have recruited the text to reinforce their arguments and, on the way, have lost the nuance that the work offers to the historian. In al-Jabarti there are times in which the East-West lines are not so clearly drawn, and the empowered and the powerless are not the stable categories that the narratives suggest. Within these somewhat complicated realities, al-Jabarti describes how translations and translators played an important, multilayered, and not neutral role. Al-Jabarti’s work offers the careful reader a glimpse of these transparent figures, so often absent from the historical account.

Notes

- 1 Ibn Khaldun, *Akdamot le-mada ha-historiyah (al-Muqadimmah)*, ed., trans., and intro Emmanuel Koplewitz (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1966).
- 2 Interview conducted in Jerusalem in September 2018 by Dr. Yonatan Mendel. A summary of the interview was written by Mendel and incorporated into: Tamar Sarfatti, “Ha-historiah ha-madhimah shel Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti,” *Jama’a* 24 (2019): 85–86.
- 3 See, among other studies, Ehud Toledano, introduction to *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- 4 ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti’s History of Egypt: ‘Aja’ib al-athar fi’l-tarajim wa-’l-akhbar*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Moshe Perlman (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994).
- 5 For a thorough discussion of the available manuscripts and their differences, which is beyond the scope of this article, see Shmuel Moreh, “The Egyptian Historian ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti: His Life, Works, Autographs, Manuscripts and the Historical Sources of ‘Aja’ib al-Athar,” *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Supplement 32 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 55–171.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 60–62.
- 7 Shmuel Moreh, ed., *‘Aja’ib al-athar fi’l-tarajim wa-’l-akhbar / The Marvelous Chronicles: Biographies and Events* (Jerusalem: Max Schloessinger Memorial Foundation, Institute of Asian and African Studies, 2013). This new critical edition (4 vol. plus index volume, 2,780 pages), though available for purchase, is only found in a few libraries worldwide. The National Library in Jerusalem, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the British Library, London, and the Bodleian Library, Oxford, do not hold copies. I was unable to consult it.
- 8 Lars Bjerneboe, *In Search of the True Political Position of the ‘Ulama: An Analysis of the Aims and Perspectives of the Chronicles of Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press/Danish Institute in Damascus, 2007).
- 9 *Ibid.*, 235–236.
- 10 For a summary of this history of philology see, for example, Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug, eds., introduction to *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017). For the implications of the differences between the manuscripts for the historical interpretations and understandings of Ottoman Egypt, see Toledano, *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Egypt*.
- 11 The diwan (or divan) was a council of state officials and notables that was part of the governing body around the Ottoman pasha. With the French occupation, Bonaparte set up this body, mostly made of members of the ulama, using them as intermediators who would give his policies the appearance of Islamic consent.

- 12 General Jean Baptiste Kleber, who replaced Bonaparte as governor of Egypt in August 1799, was assassinated in May 1800. The protocols appear in al-Jabarti, *'Aja'ib al-atbar fi'l-tarajim wa-'l-akhbar*, May–June, 1800 (year 1215 in the Hijri calendar).
- 13 Two journals were published by the French printing press in Cairo: *Courrier de l'Égypte* (August 29, 1798–June 20, 1801) and *La Décade égyptienne* (October 1, 1798–March 31, 1800). The first was meant for the army and its morale; it was heavily influenced (and censored) by Bonaparte and his successors. The second was a scholarly journal that reported on the work of the scholars at the Cairo Institute and the papers read there.
- 14 André Raymond, *Égyptiens et Français au Caire 1798-1801* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1998), 99.
- 15 The Arabic version is in al-Jabarti; the French version is in Napoleon Bonaparte *Correspondance Générale* (Paris: Librairie Fayard, 2005), 2:191–192; see also Charles Roux, *Bonaparte, gouverneur d'Égypte* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1935). Unless otherwise indicated, translations from French are my own.
- 16 Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, *Chrestomathie arabe* (Paris, 1827), 3:368. The Concordat was the treaty signed between Napoleon Bonaparte—as ruler of France—and Pope Pius VII in July 1801.
- 17 J. J. Marcel, *Supplément à toutes les biographies. Souvenir de quelques amis d'Égypte* (Paris, 1834), 7.
- 18 This institution was established in 1699 to represent the merchants and protect French commercial interests in the ports of the Mediterranean.
- 19 For the biographical details about Venture de Paradis, I used: Jean Gaulmier, “Une grande figure oubliée: Venture de Paradis,” *Autour du Romantisme de Volney à J. P. Sartre* (Paris: Éditions Ophrys, 1977), 81–88; Attia Amer, *Venture de Paradis: orientaliste et voyageur 1739-1799* (PhD, Sorbonne, 1957).
- 20 At the beginning of the eighteenth century, children of non-Muslim families in the Levant were recruited to the school. Whether Copts, Greeks, Syrians, or Armenians, they were all grouped under the title Armenians, giving the name to that section of the school when it became part of the college. The name lasted well after the composition of its student body had changed. See: *Enfants de langue et drogmans*, Catalogue pour l'exposition, Palais de France, Istanbul, 25 mai–18 juin 1995.
- 21 Comte de Vergennes was ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1755 to 1768, when he was succeeded by the Comte de Saint Priest, who remained in office until 1785.
- 22 R. Clément, *Les français d'Égypte aux XVII et XVIII siècles* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1960). See especially parts 2 and 4.
- 23 Venture de Paradis, Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscrits français [hereinafter BN], manuscrits, NAF 9135 f. 17.
- 24 Charles Magallon, who sold to the beys on credit, was unable to recover his losses after the Ottoman expedition of 1786, an expedition that tried to rein in the beys and led to their escape to the south of the country.

- 25 Venture de Paradis, BN, manuscrits, NAF 9137, p. 4.
- 26 “L’Égypte pourrait être facile à conquérir mais elle sera difficile à conserver,” Venture de Paradis, BN, manuscrits, NAF 9135 f. 21.
- 27 Constantin François de Chasseboeuf (Volney), *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte pendant les années 1783, 1784 et 1785*, first ed. (Paris: Chez Volland and Desenne, 1787). Venture de Paradis’s notes were incorporated into the third edition. Constantin François de Chasseboeuf (Volney), *Considérations sur la guerre actuelle des Turcs* (Paris, 1788).
- 28 Venture de Paradis, BN, manuscrits, VAF 9137, folio 39.
- 29 Venture de Paradis, “Mémoire: nécessité d’encourager en France l’étude des langues Orientales; moyen sur et facile d’y parvenir; avantages réels qui en résulteraient pour nos relations politiques et commerciales avec les peuples Musulmans en Europe, en Afrique et en Asie,” BN, manuscrits, NAF 9137, volume IV, papiers de Venture de Paradis. The memoir, of which there are a few versions, is not dated; however, the reference to “les manuscrits de bibliothèque nationale” is evidence that it was written after the establishment of the Republic in 1792. Before that it was named the Bibliothèque du Roi.
- 30 J. J. Marcel’s text from 1837 is in the collection *Cent cinquantième de l’école des langues orientales, histoire, organisation et enseignements* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale de France, 1948), 104.
- 31 Bjorneboe, *In Search of the True Political Position of the ‘Ulama*, 123. This argument is part of his overall argument regarding the purpose of writing the *Muddat*.
- 32 Min Sami Wassef, *L’information et la presse officielle en Égypte jusqu’à la fin de l’occupation française* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1975).
- 33 Nicolas al-Turc, *Chronique d’Égypte 1798-1804*, ed. and trans. Gaston Wiet (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1950). Al-Jabarti’s biography of Shaykh al-Sadat provided a similar account of Shaykh al-Sadat’s claims. On the possible connection between al-Jabarti and Nicolas al-Turc and their chronicles, see Bjorneboe, *In Search of the True Political Position of the ‘Ulama*, 161n4.
- 34 R. Clément, *Les français d’Égypte aux XVII et XVIII siècle*, part 4.
- 35 Édouard de Villiers du Terrage, *Journal et Souvenirs sur l’Expédition d’Égypte (1798-1801)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1899).
- 36 See, for example, Bonaparte to Talleyrand, 4 prairial an VI, [25 mai 1798]; Bonaparte to Directory, 6 thermidor, an VI [24 juillet, 1798] in Napoléon Bonaparte, *Correspondance Générale*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Fayard, 2005).
- 37 Al-Jabarti, *Aja’ib*, 14 September 1798.
- 38 Quoted in Gaulmier, “Une Grande figure oubliée,” 82.
- 39 Al-Jabarti, *Aja’ib*, August 1799.
- 40 Raymond, *Égyptiens et Français au Caire 1798-1801*, conclusion.
- 41 Al-Jabarti, *Aja’ib*, June 1799.

Amputated Tongue: On the Potential for Change in a Political Act of Translation

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The Arab turns out to be old and mute. His tongue was cut out
during the war. By one of them or one of us? Does it matter?
Who knows what the last words were that stuck in his throat?¹

When A. B. Yehoshua wrote these words, the Palestinian's tongue was indeed cut out in Hebrew. Yehoshua was writing about the period of martial law, a period during which almost no Palestinian prose appeared in print in Hebrew translation. As we will see below, Jewish translators only discovered Palestinian prose following the 1967 War, and the first collection of Palestinian prose, edited and translated by Shimon Ballas, only appeared in 1970, when Israelis were still in denial concerning the very existence of Palestinians, let alone Palestinians in Israel. This was the first time that any attention was paid to Palestinian writing as a separate entity, rather than as a literature of "shreds and patches."² Ballas gave a voice in Hebrew to some of the

most important Palestinian writers of his period, including Ghassan Kanafani, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Hanna Ibrahim, Tawfiq Fayyad, and Samira Azzam. His translation was a pioneering project and a real-time counterclaim to the tongue amputation proclaimed by Yehoshua. But in some respects even this collection still showed signs of the amputated tongue: this appears in the choice of the title *Sippurim Peliṣṭiniyyim* (סיפורים פלשתיניים)—a spelling that reflects a Hebrew transcription bearing biblical connotations—rather than “Sippurim Faleṣṭiniyyim” (סיפורים פלסטיניים), an accurate transliteration of the Arabic that would have positioned the translation as part of a dialogue with the original.³ Nevertheless, for many years this was the most important, in fact the only, collection of Palestinian literature in Hebrew on bookshelves in Israel.

Forty-eight years after the publication of Ballas’s collection, a collection of Palestinian literature, *Be-lashon kruta* (Amputated tongue), has been published as part of the Maktoob series. As we will note below, during the intervening five decades, a number of collections and anthologies of Palestinian literature were published, but *Be-lashon kruta* is the richest in terms of the number of authors, and the most complex in terms of translation methodology. It is worth emphasizing that we are writing about this project as both onlookers and participants, with the objective of drawing a number of conclusions from our experience with the work process and its results and placing them in a literary, sociological, and political context.

Be-lashon kruta is the most comprehensive collection of Palestinian literature ever published in Hebrew, both in terms of quantity and in terms of the period covered. It gives a platform to fifty-seven Palestinian authors and includes seventy-three pieces: short stories, short-shorts, chapters, and fragments of memoirs. The number of authors is unprecedented, ranging from those born in the last years of the Ottoman Empire to those born on the eve of the third millennium, from authors known to the entire reading public to authors making their debut. About a quarter of them are young authors born since 1967, and about half are Palestinians living not in Israel but in Gaza, the West Bank, or the Palestinian diaspora. A quarter of the authors are women, in itself a small percentage but high relative to previously published collections of Palestinian literature in Hebrew.⁴ As for the translations, forty-two different translators worked on the collection, about a quarter of them Palestinians; this is also not a high percentage, but it breaks records for the number of Palestinians working on translation from Arabic to Hebrew.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the authors in terms of gender, age, and geographical region. Table 2 shows the distribution of the translators in terms of nationality, gender, and age. The picture that emerges from these tables is as follows:

One of every four authors translated for the book is a woman, and three of every four are men. This distribution is age-correlated because the average age of the men is twenty years higher than that of the women. Most of the authors are from Israel (66% on average), with the second-largest category being from the West Bank. Among the translators the gender gap is still high, since the number of male translators is double that of female translators. What is more, about 25% of the translators are Palestinian, mostly men. However, it should be borne in mind that the numbers are relatively small, and in such cases there are liable to be very wide swings in the statistics.

The fact that fifty-seven Palestinian writers are represented in the anthology is an achievement, but it should be noted that our choice was limited to work for which we received copyrights or permission directly from the writers or their representatives. This fact, which was effectively equivalent to a lack of freedom of literary choice, also lies behind our eventual decision to stress the fact that this is a collection or compilation rather than an anthology that would have implied that we had a free hand in selecting the items. The principle of receiving a copyright or permission from the writers should not be taken for granted. Over the years many texts from Arabic literature have been translated into Hebrew without a copyright or permission from the writer, and various legal excuses and justifications have been employed: the Arab-Israeli conflict, the claim that copyright is “widely ignored,” or the fact that Hebrew literature is also sometimes translated into Arabic without permission. Nevertheless, at Maktoob we adopted the principle of acquiring a copyright as a hard and fast rule soon after the launch of the series. The fact that it is a joint Jewish-Palestinian project at every level, up to and including the literary board, together with the fact that it is a series of books that also strives to promote a social and political agenda, emphatically brought home to us from the very first day that we are neither willing nor able to align ourselves with shameful practices such as breach of copyright or ignoring the intellectual property rights of the Arab writers whose works we wish to publish in Hebrew. We stated this clearly on Maktoob’s website, among other places.⁵ This has enabled us to convey a clear message to the Arab writers we contacted. For example, when the Palestinian-Jordanian writer Ibrahim Nasrallah, whose book *Zaman al-khuyūl al-baydā’* we translated and published in 2018 under the title *Zman ha-susim ha-levanim* (*Time of White Horses*), wrote about the question of Hebrew translation, he quoted his response to Palestinian youths in the Badawi and Mar Elias refugee camps in Lebanon:

I told them that my book *Prairies of Fever* had already been translated into Hebrew without my knowledge, about fifteen years earlier. It was published in a single volume with Ghassan Kanafani’s novel *The Return to Haifa* and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra’s *The Other Rooms*. I also told them that my novel *Time of White Horses* had also recently

been published in Hebrew [in the Maktoob series] but that this was owing to the diligence of the late Palestinian writer Salman Natour [one of the founders of the Maktoob series], who believed that it was particularly important to translate this novel, which embodies our story. After he passed away his work was continued by our dear friend Rawiya Burbara [editor of *Be-lashon kruta* and a member of the central board of the Maktoob series] together with other wonderful authors and writers who are part of the Palestinian people living in our Palestine, I mean the Galilee, Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, and other cities.⁶

As this article argues, the question of rights is a symptom of an Israeli patronizing and Orientalist attitude toward the Middle East and Arab culture, which is one lacuna in the field of Arabic-to-Hebrew translation out of a number to be analyzed herein. We first focus on the significance of *Be-lashon kruta*, looking at this collection's title as both a metaphor and an indication of a broader process and attitude in which the Palestinian voice was not heard and remained unspoken in Hebrew; we then deal with the challenges of asymmetry in translation generally and in the Arabic-to-Hebrew field more particularly; and we conclude with a survey of the Maktoob binational and bilingual model of translation as an answer to these ongoing lacunas.

Reclaiming the Palestinian Tongue

It is important to note that *Be-lashon kruta* is unique in terms of not only the selection of writers included but also the wide range of translators. This is the first project of its kind in which Palestinian literature translated into Hebrew has not been exclusively mediated by the Jewish voice. Rather, it is the result of a binational collective translation project, a joint effort by Jews and Palestinians conducting a textual and oral dialogue on the expressive possibilities of the language. The collection features forty-two translators of a wide range of ages (21 to 97) and experience (from first-time translators to some whose translation credits go into double figures). No less important, nearly half of the translators are women (18), and over a quarter are Palestinians (11).

With reference to the number of Palestinian translators, it is important to stress that in the context of relations between Jews and Palestinians and between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel we have here an inversion of the prevailing hierarchy. The process of developing “expertise” in Arabic is strewn with glaring examples of Orientalism, security considerations, and European philological influences, and these factors contribute to the low representation—and sometimes total absence—of

Palestinians in every area of the field within Jewish society. This includes interpreters, commentators, journalists, consultants, teachers, and pedagogists, as well as translators.⁷ So the fact that 27% of the Arabic-to-Hebrew translators of *Be-lashon kruta* are Palestinians whose mother tongue is Arabic is a milestone in Hebrew literary history and is part of a reflexive process aimed at conveying a political message concerning the position of Palestinians in every literary activity taking place between Hebrew and Arabic, and vice versa. This message is also reflected in the fact that, for the first time in the history of Hebrew literature, the book is edited by a Palestinian woman, Rawiya Burbara.

The richness of Palestinian creativity presented in *Be-lashon kruta*, crossing continents and periods, attitudes and viewpoints, counters the familiar metaphor of the amputated tongue that is also the source of the book's title, an allusion to the silencing of the Palestinian tongue in Hebrew. This aspect is echoed in the book's cover illustration, a work by the Palestinian artist Nasrin Abu Baker featuring both the motif of Palestinian silence and the motif of the key, its existence and its loss, as a symbol of the Palestinian Nakba.⁸

The metaphor of the tongue has many metonymic connotations in Hebrew and other languages: "lost his tongue," "the cat got her tongue," "hold one's tongue," "tongue in cheek," "a good tongue in your head," "give tongue," "speaking in tongues," "tongue-twister," "forked tongue," "mother tongue," and so on, and the English words "language" and "linguistics" are derived from the French and Latin words for "tongue." The tongue also has many functions in the human body: it is used not only for speech but also for swallowing, to protect the respiratory organs, and to distinguish tastes, to say nothing of its sexual function. It is no surprise that the first organ of the body that a doctor examines is the tongue. Nor is it surprising that when we examine the place of the Hebrew tongue in the national Zionist project, including the question of the "revival of Hebrew," we find that it is equal in importance to the most critical aspects of the project: the conquest of the Hebrew tongue stands on the same footing as the conquest of the Hebrew land and the conquest of Hebrew labor.⁹ The metaphor of the tongue within both the human body and the national body was clearly expressed by the poet David Shimonovitch (later Shimoni) in the first congress of members of the Hebrew Language Council in 1945:

Until our tongue was revived we were living in a world of frozen assets, with something separating us from life. The tongue is the symbol of rebirth and mental health. Doctors examine their patients' tongues—and so too a nation is tested through its tongue.¹⁰

At that time the Hebrew language had a “council” charged with looking after its health, its wholeness, and its vitality.¹¹ This council initiated a massive project of language revival and translation, a genuine philological revolution aimed at extending Hebrew, empowering the old-new Hebrew language to coin new words, and enabling a revolution of “revival” or “revitalization” of the language. At the same time, in discussions relating to pronunciation, the council expressed the following position concerning the origins and linguistic limitations of Ashkenazi Jews, a group that played a dominant role in this project, as it did in most areas of the Zionist movement in Israel, certainly in comparison to Mizrahi Arabic-speaking Jews.¹² Zeev Jabotinsky, for example, who played an active part in the discussions on the “revival” of Hebrew in Israel, explained that the Jews’ European character prevented them from adopting Mizrahi pronunciation:

There is no basis for the idea that the ancient pronunciation of the letters ן, װ, ױ and ם was the “Arabic” pronunciation. In our revived speech we must give these letters a sound that fits our musical taste, which is above all a European and not an Oriental taste.¹³

Other activists, the Language Council itself, and its successor, the Academy of the Hebrew Language, created Hebrew lexicons that included Arabic in their sources of reference, while they simultaneously strove to distinguish between Hebrew and Arabic and to distance Hebrew from Arabic. Among the ways in which they did this was by abandoning the Semitic pronunciation of the letters װ, ױ, and ם, which are also used in Arabic. We believe that Hebrew “swallowed” Arabic, since the concept of “redeeming” the land, the country, and labor, which also includes replacement and erasure, was present in the domain of the “revival” of the Hebrew language as well. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, for example, who is considered one of the leading players in the “language revival” project, writes:

Everybody knows how rich the vocabulary of Arabic is, and even if Aramaic is in fact closer to Hebrew, that is only true of grammatical forms. In terms of vocabulary there is almost no difference between all the different members of the Semitic family tree, and all the words in the Arabic lexicon are not only Arabic but Semitic, and accordingly, Hebrew too. Only someone who has examined and compared the words of both these languages for as long as I have is able to fully sense how tiny the difference between the two vocabularies is. One may state that every Hebrew root also exists in Arabic, if not in exactly its Hebrew form then in some other form. And from this the opposite follows too: most of the roots in the Arabic lexicon are also in the Hebrew lexicon, and all these roots are not foreign, or Arabic—they are our own long-lost property that we have rediscovered.¹⁴

Despite Ben-Yehuda's Jewish nationalist perspective reflected in this extract, which aims to portray Hebrew as the source and Arabic as an "imitation" enabling the source's reconstruction, we still believe that the following phraseology by Ben-Yehuda, later in the same piece, can be seen as a progressive manifesto for every act of translation from Arabic to Hebrew:

I propose therefore that the Language Council should make a kind of royal proclamation declaring that all the roots in the Arabic lexicon, with the exception of the non-Semitic roots, are also Hebrew! The Council should endeavor to glean from Arabic dictionaries the roots missing from our language and lay on the table at every meeting of the Council a list of roots with explanations of their meaning and uses in Arabic, and then discuss them and determine which ones are worth bringing into our linguistic fold.¹⁵

We maintain that an examination of the state of Hebrew and Arabic today does not permit us to even imagine translators sitting down together, gleaning Arabic roots, and reviving them in Hebrew. Such a possibility is inconceivable today, when a majority of Israeli Jews (65.4%) claim that Arabic is important for security purposes, on the basis of "knowing the enemy";¹⁶ when data reveal that fewer than 1% of Israeli Jews are able to read a book in Arabic;¹⁷ and when other statistics show that the initial two reactions by Israeli Jews to hearing Arabic spoken are fear (50% of respondents) and hatred (31% of respondents).¹⁸ So Ben-Yehuda's symbiosis could be suggested in 1912 but not today. The symbiosis that he proposed was based on the massive overlap between the two languages, formerly twin sisters but in his time already perceived as enemies. In science-fiction terms, one may imagine for a moment a parallel universe in which a translator's job description includes extending the overlap between the two languages along with the capability of dialogue between them, eventually arriving at a hypothetical point, before the tower of Babel as it were, where this job becomes unnecessary.

This possibility first emerged in Hebrew literature in *'Arabeskot (Arabesques)* by Anton Shammās, a Palestinian literary figure and translator (born in Fassuta in the Galilee) familiar with both languages, Arabic and Hebrew, who is considered one of the leading intellectuals active in the field of literature in Israel.¹⁹ It is important to note that Shammās did not wait for Jewish translators but wrote his novel *'Arabeskot* in Hebrew. About twenty years after Yehoshua wrote in *Mul ha-ye'arot (Facing the Forests)*, "His tongue was cut out. . . . Who knows what the last words were that stuck in his throat?" Shammās brought the viewpoint and the voice of the Palestinian with the severed tongue back to the very heart of Hebrew literature.²⁰ It was a different

age, when there was still hope for a project of territorial indigenesness and, in the spirit of Salman Rushdie's phrase "The Empire writes back," Shammas wrote directly within the majority literature.²¹ First he wrote into the novel *Mikhael sheli* (*My Michael*), by Amos Oz, "What do Arabs dream about? . . . What do they dream about? The twins Aziz and Khaleel after they appear in Hannah Gonen's nightmare."²² Later on he exposed the linguistic plots of the character of the Hebrew writer in the novel *Ha-me'avev* (*The Lover*), by A. B. Yehoshua, hidden behind the character of the author. He dragged the character of Yehoshua into his plot and grappled with the image he created. The author Yosh Bar-On tells Shammas, "I'm writing a new novel. With an educated Arab as its hero."²³ Shammas discusses Hebrew literature in Hebrew, in direct transmission with no need of translators, and turns the tables on it. If Yehoshua is conducting a dialogue with the biblical verse "The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off" (Proverbs 10:31, English Standard Version), Shammas in his turn identifies the "perverse tongue" with modern Hebrew, the ruling language, the language of ordinances and operations, in which the Palestinian will always be dumb. To the ruling language, Shammas opposes what Dante called the "language of Grace":

There has to be an Arab this time, as some sort of solution to some sort of silence. An Arab who speaks the language of Grace, as Dante once called it. Hebrew as the language of Grace, as opposed to the language of Confusion that swept over the world when the Tower of Babel collapsed.²⁴

The language of Grace is also the language of the righteous, which the Talmud calls "clean language," since other words are substituted for words better left unspoken. 'Arabeskot' aroused strong emotions within the literary community. Praise had been lavished on Shammas's translations into Hebrew, but now he had the audacity to challenge the accepted norms of radical linguistic separation between Jews and Arabs. In doing so he exposed the fragile borders of Hebrew literature and the barriers erected by it before the voice of Israeli-born Palestinians. Shammas (like writer Naim Araidi) opened the door to other Palestinians writing in Hebrew, including Sayed Kashua, Ayman Sikseck, and Al-Tayyeb Ghanayim, but they remained a minority, as if the amputation of the tongue was a decree of fate.

The aim of the collection *Be-lashon kruta* is to continue along the path mapped out by Shammas. It endeavors to restore the possibility of fluent writing in Hebrew by Palestinian authors, along with the possibility of polysemy and word play, to allow daring games with language and challenges to it—to stick out one's tongue, lick one's fingers, kiss passionately, and even curl up one's tongue and say "No," as in the

opening story of the collection, Sama Hasan's "Lo" (No). The nameless woman is unable to pronounce one two-letter word: "No." She is also unable to tell us her story in the first person. The writer comes to her aid and tells her story in Arabic in the third person. She passes the baton to Kifah Abdul Halim, also a Palestinian woman, who translated the story and made its cry of pain heard in Hebrew. This is translation acting as movement, passing the baton from a nameless woman to a narrator and from her to a translator and editor, all of this taking place in a dialogue without any decisive separation between the languages. The anonymous Gazan woman sometimes tries to whisper the word to herself—only when there is nobody near—but she succeeds only in emitting breath and foam from her mouth. But when the tongue is silent, the body steps up and speaks for her. Once, the nameless woman had the courage to clench her knees strongly together, but her husband "emitted a quiet groan and gave her a fierce look." An involuntary cry of pain escapes her mouth and she falls silent once more. As in vows and prayers, her lack of words is neither an absence of sound nor a total silence, but a fence surrounding abstinence (and wisdom).

Others in *Be-lashon kruta* are silent because conversation between people with the same views would be foolish ("Ha-kluv"/The cage, by Fida Jiryis); still others are silent because Allah, praised and magnified be he, created us with two eyes so that we would see more, two ears so that we would hear more, but only one mouth so that we would talk less ("Ha-bayit ha-aher"/The other house, Muhammad Ali Taha). The interpretations of the silent tongue's expression and splitting cover a wide range of possibilities in these stories: for example, the youth who had never spoken but suddenly lets out a huge scream or a terrifying series of ululations, rising and falling and splitting the air without once pausing for breath ("Kohanim mi-sheleg"/Snow priests, by Afif Shaliut). Some talk and talk, but the world is deaf to their speech, like the old woman whose tongue saws through space, but nobody hears her yelling "Mustafa" with an infinite number of phonetic articulations ("Ha-bayit ha-aher"/The other house, Muhammad Ali Taha); in another story some try not to hear ("Makhshir ha-shmi'ah"/Hearing aid, Eyad Barghuthy). Some want to be heard, but the old woman speaking in another story dams up her mouth and makes do with a maximum of three words per day ("Mekhirah pumbit"/Auction, Raji Bathish). In several stories speech is assigned not to human narrators but to animals—the cat holding a quill pen and swiftly writing ("Ha-ḥatulah she-katvah et kol ha-sfarim ba-'olam"/The cat who wrote all the books in the world, Ala Hlehel), the hen standing in the yard ("Gargir ḥiṭah"/Grain of wheat, Fareed Kassam Ghanem), or the donkey who wants to exercise the right to bray ("Ha-ḥamor she-lo mimesh et zekhut ha-ne'irah"/The donkey who did not exercise the right to bray, Omar

Hamash); some assign speech to the broken tongues of children, “Wahad, shtayim, drei, four, fünf, sechs, seven, acht, tis‘a, dyesyt, ahah esre, dvynatsat, thalatha‘ash” (“Śfat ha-neshamot ha-ḳṭanot”/Language of the little souls, Rawiya Burbara). There is also a tongue cut into a thousand tongues to deliver the message propagated by a hunchbacked, sharp-tongued old woman (“Ḳinat ha-alonim”/Lament of the oak trees, Muhammad Nafa), an outstanding example of a person with a big stubborn mouth that doesn’t recognize authority (“Peh”/Mouth, Majd Abu Ghosh); and there is a wicked cursing tongue like that of the Jahili poet Zuhair, of whom it is said that he bestowed choice curses on all his enemies and brought disaster on himself and lost every camel he owned (“Ha-ḳlalah”/The curse, Muhammad Ali Taha).

And so it goes on. The stories in the collection suggest many possible materials and appearances for the tongue. They are organized in sections with connections between them decided on by ear by the translation and editing teams in the course of the work. The order of the sections and the order of the selections in each section is not determined by strict criteria but as a consequence of many possible ways of reading. At the end of the day, the collection is rich in languages, echoing tongues, and forms of that tongue unfavorably called the “amputated tongue.”

Translation in Asymmetric Conditions

Any translation of literature from Arabic into Hebrew is created in the context of three disturbing facts. First, only 0.4% of Israeli Jews under the age of seventy are able to read the stories in this collection in the original language.²⁵ That fact is astonishing when one considers that for hundreds of years—until the establishment of the State of Israel—the majority of the country’s residents spoke Arabic, and in the early years of the state the first language of more than 50% of the Jewish population was Arabic. Second, the quantity of translations from Arabic is minimal. According to the National Library’s data, as of 2013 only 1.3% of all literature translated into Hebrew had been translated from Arabic, compared to English with 60% of the translations, French with 5%, German with 4%, and even Swedish outranking Arabic with 1.5%.²⁶ What is more, according to a rough estimate, only about 2% of Arabic texts translated into Hebrew are even noticed by critics.²⁷ Public discourse is also barely concerned with Arabic literature, and publishers reject proposed translations on the grounds that they have no commercial appeal.

Third, most translation projects of Arabic literature into Hebrew are conducted under radically asymmetrical conditions. A few exceptional cases aside, the translators, editors, publishers, and other links in the chain are all Jews. Of about 5,600 translations from Arabic into Hebrew appearing in the index of translations compiled by Hannah

Amit-Kochavi, around 90% were translated by Jewish translators.²⁸ Only about 10% of the translators were Palestinian. The first Palestinian to have translated a lengthy work appears to have been Salman Masalha, who translated Sahar Khalifeh's *Ha-tzabar* (*Wild Thorns*); the most prolific was Anton Shammās, who invested huge efforts in translating three novels by Emile Habibi: *Ha-opsimist* (*The Pessoptimist*, 1984), *Ekhṭayyeh* (1988), and *Saraya, bat ha-shed ha-ra'* (*Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter*, 1993). These translations have the status of works of literature in their own right, without any pretense of being a certified copy of the original. The cover of *Ha-opsimist*, for example, describes it as a "Hebrew version by Anton Shammās" rather than "translated by Anton Shammās."

The rate of translations from Arabic to Hebrew has varied over the years. Until 1967 the average was one item every two years—a very slow rate compared to translations from other languages. Most of the Arabic literature translated was from Egypt (26% of the total number of translations), Lebanon (21%), and Syria (17%). In the period from 1967 to 1974, there was a dramatic reduction in the number of translations from Arabic, and only after 1975 was there a sharp rise, reaching three items per year on average.

It is interesting to observe that after 1967, a period when translations from Arabic were at a nadir, there was an awakening of interest in Palestinian literature, and its proportion within translated Arabic literature rose gradually to 25%. Still, the total number of translations only reached a relatively small trickle. Of about 5,600 entries in the index of translations, almost 2,000 are translations of extracts and fragments by Palestinian authors, mostly published in the cultural supplements of daily newspapers and literary journals, about a third of them written by Palestinians from outside Israel.²⁹ For example, in 1970 the journal *Keshet* published a special issue containing Palestinian texts edited and translated by Sasson Somekh. In 1972 an extract from the novel *Hozer le-Haifa/Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani, translated by Shmuel Regulant, appeared in the journal *Ofek*. Further extracts from the novella were published over time in literary journals, in a translation that was the joint work of Fortuna Shapiro, Hannah Amit-Kochavi, and Meirav Hofi. The complete version was published only decades later in the collection *Ha-hadarim ha-aḥerim* (*The other rooms*), edited by Ami Elad-Bouskila and translated by Gideon Shilo.³⁰ The Hebrew translation was titled *Ha-shiva le-Haifa* (*The return to Haifa*), rather than a more literal "Shav le-Haifa" (*One who returned to Haifa*), a decision not without political implications.

Altogether, seventeen Palestinian novellas and novels have been published, mostly as a result of focused and concentrated efforts by publishers dedicated to translations from Arabic: Mifras, which was active from 1978 to 1993 and created

a revolution when it published nine titles translated from Arabic, seven of them by Palestinian authors (including Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* and *All that's Left For You*, Emil Habibi's *The Pessoptimist*, and Sahar Khalifeh's *The Sunflower*); the important Andalus publishing house, which published about twenty titles from Arabic, including three by Palestinians (Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *The First Well*, Serene Husseini Shahid's *Jerusalem Memories*, and Elias Khoury's *Gate of the Sun*); and the Maktoob series, which to date has published twelve titles, including six by Palestinians—Salman Natour's *Walking on Winds*, Elias Khoury's *Children of the Ghetto*, Ibrahim Nasrallah's *Time of White Horses*, Ihsan Turjman's *Year of the Locust*, *Be-lashon kruta*—edited by Rawiya Burbara, and Elias Khoury's *Stella Maris*. (Though not Palestinian himself, Khoury's works are part of Palestinian literature).

The charts in the appendix show the dynamics and characteristics of the works translated, as well as profiles of translators of Palestinian literature into Hebrew. Chart 1 illustrates the growth of such translations over time. As mentioned above, the few items published before 1970 were translated fragments, not translations of books. The chart shows clearly that in the 1990s there was a flourishing of translation from Arabic, but after 2000 there was a sharp downturn that lasted until 2012. Chart 2 presents collections of translations and complete books, not including single works: since 1942 forty-two books and collections of Palestinian poetry and literature have been published in Hebrew translation. The most prolific period in terms of the number of translations—seven per year on average—was from 1975 to 1985. Chart 3 shows that the percentage of women among the authors whose works have been translated is very low, only 11%. We have tried to correct this bias in *Be-lashon kruta* where, as mentioned above, 25% of the authors are women.

Since Shimon Ballas's pioneering collection *Sippurim Pelistinyyim* (Palestinian stories), published in 1970, six collections of stories or anthologies of Palestinian prose have appeared in Hebrew. Ballas's collection includes fourteen stories, among them works by Ghassan Kanafani ("The Land of Sad Oranges," "Far from the Border," "Arms in the Village"), Samira Azzam ("The Fanfares," "For Now," "Man and His Alarm Clock"), Hanna Ibrahim ("Holiday Eve"), and Tawfiq Fayyad ("The Dog Samur"). In 1974 Anton Shammas edited a binational anthology in which Palestinian and Hebrew literature coexist.³¹ Authors included in this collection are Yoram Kaniuk, Siham Daoud, Yitzhak Orpaz, Zaki Darwish, Hanoach Bartov, Ehud Ben-Ezer, Fahd Abu Khadra, Michel Haddad, Nazia Hir, Muhammad Ali Taha, Anton Shammas, Amos Oz, and others. In 1988 the collection *Hayalim shel mayim* (Soldiers of water), edited and translated by Naim Araid and Nabil Tannus, was published.³² The collection includes texts by Siham Daoud, Zaki Darwish,

Emil Habibi, Muhammad Ali Taha, and Naim Araidi. In 1997 the collection *Sippurim Falestiniyyim* appeared, edited and translated by Moshe Hacham.³³ It includes twenty-six stories by twenty-one prominent authors including Hanna Ibrahim, Ghassan Kanafani, Salman Natour, Muhammad Ali Taha, Riad Baidas, Issam Khoury, Muhammad Nafa, and Tawfiq Fayyad, as well as two women, Asia Shibli and Samira Azzam. Seventeen years later, in 2014, two more collections were published. The first, *Shtayim! Athnaan* (A bilingual anthology) was edited by Tamer Masalha, Tamar Weiss-Gabbay, and Almog Behar.³⁴ The second, *Nakba light ve-sippurim aherim*, edited by Al-Tayyeb Ghanayim and Yossi Granovski, contains short stories by young writers from the new generation, such as Eyad Barghuthy, Majd Kayyal, Raji Bathish, and Tamara Naser.³⁵

The task of translating Palestinian literature into Hebrew requires devoting special attention to the fact that the “foreign” Palestinian is not actually foreign but a native of the country. However, the task of translation is conducted in asymmetrical conditions in terms of power in the political sphere, and these asymmetrical conditions are reproduced in the balance of power between the two languages. In the vast majority of cases, the Palestinian author’s voice is mediated by the voice of a Jewish translator. From Chart 4 we see that 90% of texts from Palestinian literature that were translated into Hebrew were translated by a single translator (1,726 works); 188 texts were translated by two translators (141 works) or three translators (47 works). In Chart 5 we can see the distribution of translators by nationality. Of the works translated by a single translator, 20% were translated into Hebrew by Palestinian translators, and almost all were fragments rather than books. Of the translations by two translators (349 works), about 66% were translated by mixed Jewish-Arab teams. All of the translations performed by three translators—the vast majority fragmentary, in the form of a poem in a literary supplement or daily newspaper (140 works in total)—were translated by mixed teams.

The most prevalent translation model, then, is that of an individual Jewish translator. Although there are great differences between translators in terms of style and experience, the translation is usually performed within a dyadic model, where two elements are positioned opposite one another as mirror images: translator facing author, original facing translation, one language facing the other, texts in two facing columns, and so on. This dyadic structure reflects the hierarchical relationship and the asymmetry between the two languages. It is self-contained, and its model of selection blocks the possibility of examination taking place in the grey area between the opposite poles or outside the continuum. What is more, this is a neoclassical translation model, hallowing the “free” translation and striving for an individual translation by one

translator living in the target language with some knowledge of the original language.³⁶

In the early years mediation by Jewish translators was obtrusive and harshly dissonant. Some translators crammed their productions with footnotes and Orientalist translation choices reflecting the asymmetry between the two languages—for example, partial and often unnecessary linguistic clarifications.³⁷ In some cases the Orientalist footnotes doomed in advance any attempt to read Palestinian literature with new eyes. For example, the translator and editor Moshe Hacham wrote this in his introduction to the collection *Sippurim Falestiniyyim*, published by Yaron Golan in 1997:

The Arabic literature written in Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian diaspora is for the most part recruited literature. . . . Recruited literature [lit. *sifrut meguyeset*] by its nature attaches more importance to form than content, so the reader will observe that some of the stories in this collection are marred by superficiality and a lack of intellectual sophistication.³⁸

What is more, over many years a tradition became entrenched according to which obtaining the authors' permission to publish their stories was neither possible nor necessary. The publication of Ami Elad-Bouskila's collection *Ha-ḥadarim ha-aherim* (named after Jabra's novella *Al-ghuraf al-'ukhrā*) aroused angry responses because the translator had not requested permission from the authors. Ibrahim Nasrallah, whose novella *Barārī al-ḥummā* (*Prairies of Fever*) was included in the translation, wrote:

They kill us and translate us, following their orientation based on killing the victim and then grilling him and interrogating his desires; this translation is like bringing murder victims into the interrogation chamber to extract their confessions.³⁹

In *Be-lashon kruta* we address this criticism: stories were selected for the collection not only on the basis of the quality of their prose but also on the grounds of consent from the authors or their representatives. At this time, when most Arab authors are opposed to normalization of relations with Israel, the approvals and consent that we received are the product of a long process of dialogue and uncertainty, resulting in an inability to plan in advance the content of the collection and the variety of its content in generational, geographical, gender, and other respects. It is for this reason that we do not call *Be-lashon kruta* an “anthology.”

The Binational and Bilingual Model as an Answer

Our working methods in Maktoob in general and in *Be-lashon kruta* in particular challenge the traditional workflow of translation from Arabic to Hebrew. To escape

the polarized dyadic model, the translation work for the collection was based on introducing a “third” into the imaginary dyad—like the “analytic third” in psychoanalysis, the “thirdspace” in architecture, or the “Stranger” in sociology. In his collection of poems *West-East Divan* (1819), Goethe uses the expression *tertium quid*, which means “a third something,” derived from two remote opposites.⁴⁰ The “third” forces the dyad into a prolonged negotiation that creates new hybrids. The triad model of translation leaves the comfort zone and opens the translation to a dialogical process of movement and struggle in order to overcome the elements of alienation and degeneration in solo and mononational translation. Although the third is also a product of the binary division, it is not open to reduction of one of the parts of the dyadic structure. It represents disturbance, permits flow, illuminates twilight zones, pushes the envelope, and creates new continuums. When this third wheel enters the intimate structure of the dyad, something fundamental is violated and disturbed, and the process of translation is forced to change.

In our case the triad is based on the addition of a “native third” whose mother tongue is Arabic, allowing a process of dialogue based on movement between languages. The dialogue within the triangle turns the translation into a product emerging from the experience of being together, as well as a sociological system of interrelated identities. This is why all the translations in the collection are based on the translation method that developed within the Translators’ Circle at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and the Maktoob series that came out of it. Translation is performed in a triad—that is, a three-person team—whose makeup is bilingual and binational. Work on each text includes a translator (Jewish or Arab), a translation editor (Jewish or Arab), and a literary editor, who conduct an interactive dialogue on the text. Every translation undergoes another process of literary editing in Hebrew, in dialogue with the authors and translators.

Working in Maktoob’s model sees literary translation as a performance of identity, like every act of cultural and political involvement that includes intersecting loyalties and emotional conflicts.⁴¹ The objective of the dialogue is not precision—linguistic or syntactic—but a textual cloning that is a form of creation in its own right, standing beside the original and interrelating with it but not replacing it. The decisions taken during the translation process represent not absolute truth but a joint truth with the author’s consent. This is also a model for action in the world—a political model of bilingualism and a model for binationalism and shared textual sovereignty.

Maktoob’s translation method is based on the pragmatic concept according to which translation (and literature) is not an independent aesthetic process that is its own objective and that grants significance only to itself, but an action in reality. It is translation as an activity that breaks down boundaries between literature and everyday

life and stresses the practical nature of literature. In addition to raising the quality of the translation, this process enables the creation of a process of dialogue in the world, a movement between languages across national boundaries. This process lowers the barrier between languages without creating a split between Jews working exclusively in Hebrew and Arabs working exclusively in Arabic. The (direct and indirect) dialogues with the authors permit the translation team to propose literary editing changes without remaining tied to archaic models of word-by-word translation that is ostensibly faithful to the original. In the triadic translation, faithfulness to the original is replaced by the common truth of the translation team in dialogue with the original (if this is possible and the author is still alive, of course). The translation speaks *to* the original, *about* the original, and *with* the original.

Although Maktoob's translation method is not necessarily pragmatic, since it faces numerous practical and economic difficulties, it relies on pragmatic foundations according to which translation is not just a textual achievement—it is not just the thing itself, but also a multidirectional dialogue. It is not just a textual meeting existing in the domain of hermeneutics and literature but also a sociological mechanism of interactivity based on a meeting between people. The translation changes from a replacement of the original to a metatext standing beside the text (whose function is to explain, illuminate, and comment), and in turn it becomes a social text based on movement with the language itself.

The Maktoob model is one of movement; it is a model with linguistic flexibility and a multiplicity of versions with the objective of sharing linguistic space instead of dividing it, breaking down the linear and delayed connection between original and translation. It does not aim to discover the exact truth concealed in the text, but recognizes the text's complex meanings in a condition of linguistic conflict. Linguistic expressions are a variety of action sometimes concealed by the camouflage colors of grammar and syntax, and these expressions are not necessarily classifiable into categories of truth and falsehood. This model has the potential to circumvent the binary pitfalls that are the basis of modern concepts of translation ("exact" as opposed to "free," "faithful" as opposed to "unfaithful," "form-based" as opposed to "content-based," etc.) because it is productive, performative, and generative. Thus it endeavors to perform an action that does not consist of conveying a message or transferring a work from one language to another, but—to paraphrase Joshua Fishman—to be the message itself.⁴² The model strives via the translation to deal with the acute asymmetries described in this article, to challenge an Orientalist and Jewish-only voice, to delineate a different horizon of relations between Jews and Palestinians, and to enable—through language—a different vision for joint sovereignty in the territory between the river and the sea.

Appendix

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of authors

	Total	Female	Male
Gender			
Female	25%		
Male	75%		
Age	60.46	42	64.86
Geographical Area			
Israel	66%	83%	60%
West Bank	16%	11%	18%
Gaza	11%	6%	13%
Diaspora	7%	0%	9%

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of translators

	Total	Female	Male
Gender			
Female	33%		
Male	67%		
Age	63.21	58.73	64.96
Nationality			
Arab	22%	27%	73%
Jewish	78%	19%	81%

Chart 1. Works of Palestinian literature translated into Hebrew, by year of publication (N = 2,058)

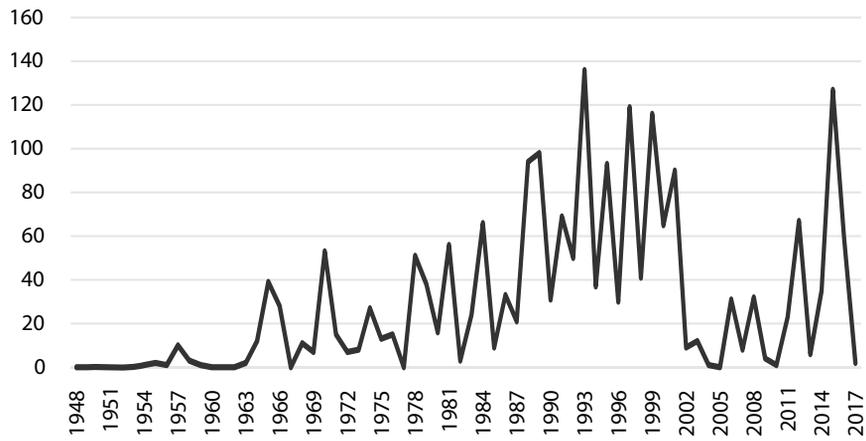


Chart 2. Books of Palestinian literature and collections translated into Hebrew, by year of publication (N = 42)

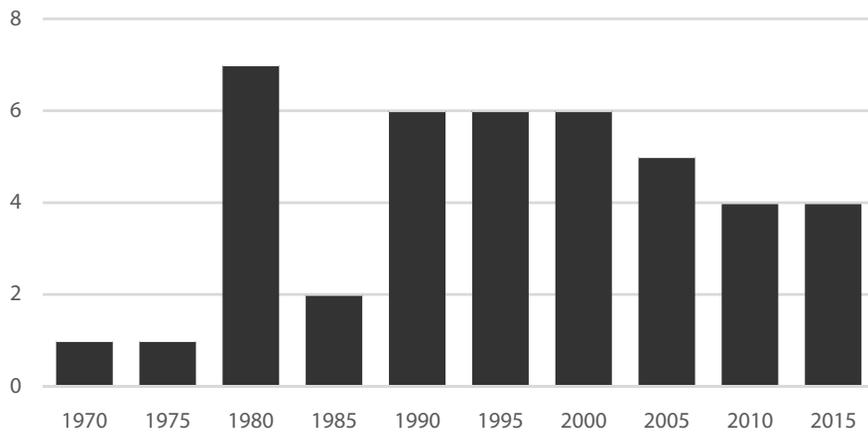


Chart 3. Gender of authors of Palestinian works translated into Hebrew (N = 2,116)

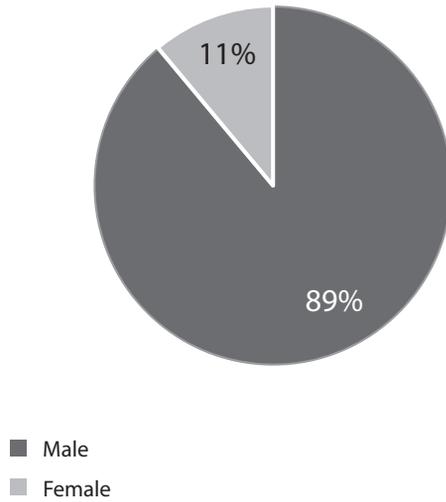


Chart 4. Distribution of translation models

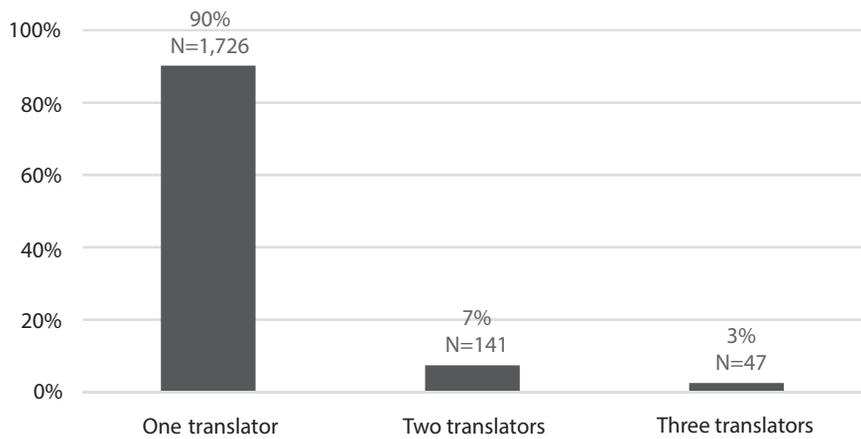
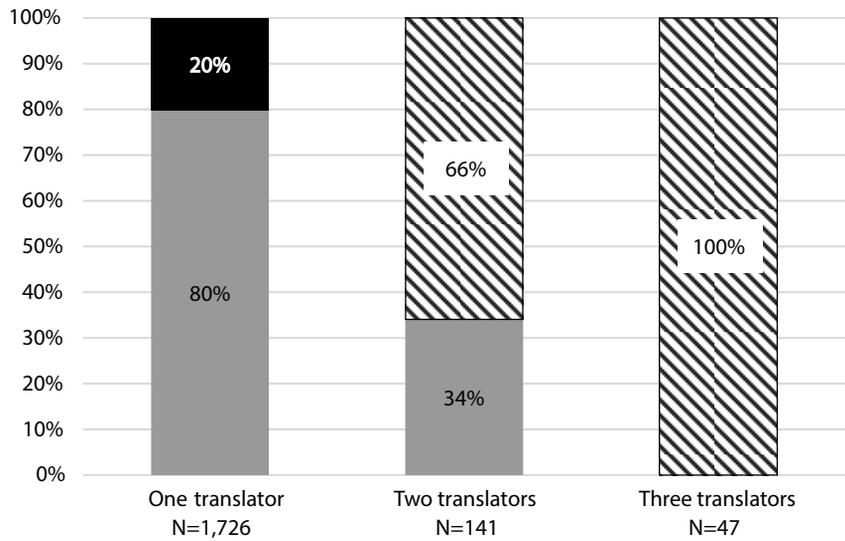


Chart 5. Nationality of translators according to number of translators per work, out of the total translated Palestinian works



- ▨ Mixed teams
- Arabs only
- Jews only

Notes

- 1 A. B. Yehoshua, *The Continuing Silence of a Poet: The Collected Stories of A. B. Yehoshua*, trans. Marsha Pomerantz (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 210.
- 2 Shimon Ballas, ed. and trans., *Sippurim Peliṣtiniyyim* [Palestinian stories] (Tel Aviv: Eqed, 1970). Before 1967 Sasson Somekh had translated poems by Fadwa Tuqan published in the journal *Keshet* 21, (1963): 29.
- 3 In the same year, 1970, the journal *Keshet* dedicated a special issue (no. 47) to Arabic prose and poetry, translated by Sasson Somekh. The issue included translations of texts by three Palestinian writers.
- 4 In this context it is worth noting that the anthology *Shtayim/Athnaan*, ed. Tamer Masalha, Tamar Weiss-Gabbay, and Almog Behar (Jerusalem: Keter, 2014), subtitled as “a bilingual anthology of contemporary young Hebrew and Arabic writing,” includes stories by nine young Palestinian women, a significant achievement.
- 5 On Maktoob’s website this is clearly evident: “The Maktoob series does not translate texts without receiving rights or permission from the Arab writers and authors. This decision is not based on economic value or considerations of trade in the commodities market but is based on respect for the original, on recognition of the living Arab culture in the Middle East, and on commitment to dialogue with the Arab world.” See <https://tinyurl.com/AmputatedTongue>. All translations are our own.
- 6 Ibrahim Nasrallah, “Tarjamat al-’adab al-’Arabī ilā al-’Ibriyya: Bi-muntahā al-wuḍūh,” *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, January 9, 2019, accessed December 9, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/tap8rpq>. The article is on the Hebrew translation of his book and the moral and political preconditions that he believes are required for the translation of Arabic literature into Hebrew.
- 7 See, for example, Yonatan Mendel, “The Philological Revolution and the Latinization of Arabic,” *Journal of Levantine Studies* 19, no. 1 (2019); Yonatan Mendel, *The Creation of Israeli Arabic: Political and Security Considerations in the Making of Arabic Language Studies in Israel*, Palgrave Studies in Languages at War (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Gil Eyal, *The Disenchantment of the Orient: Expertise in Arab Affairs and the Israeli State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).
- 8 For further reading on the symbol of the key in Palestinian identity in the shadow of the Nakba, see Ahmad H. Sa’di and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds., *Nakba: Palestine, 1948 and the Claims of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
- 9 For further reading, see Benjamin Harshav, “Masa ‘al teḥiyat ha-lashon ha-’Ivrit,” *Alpayim* 2 (1990); Yael Darr, *The Nation and the Child: Nation Building in Hebrew Children’s Literature, 1930-1970* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins B. V., 2018). For reading on the “conquest of the Hebrew language” side-by-side with the “conquest of labour” and “conquest of the land,” see the

- subchapter “Between Three Conquests: Labour, Land and Language,” in Mendel, *The Creation of Israeli Arabic*, 21–25.
- 10 Quoted in “Kinus artsi rishon shel murshey Va’ad ha-Lashon,” *Leshonenu* 14 (1946): 136.
 - 11 The terms “language planning” and “language management” are often used to analyze directive methods used by a state in relation to language. For further reading, see Bernard Spolsky, *Language Policy: Key Topics in Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
 - 12 For further reading on the discussions of the Hebrew Language Council, see Yair Or, *Bor’im signon la-dor* (Tel Aviv: Ov, 2016).
 - 13 Zeev Jabotinsky, *Ha-mivta ha-’Ivri* (Tel Aviv: Hasefer, 1930), 25.
 - 14 From a lecture by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, “Meqorot le-male ha-ḥaser bi-leshonenu,” published in *Zikhronot Va’ad ha-Lashon ha-’Ivrit* 4 (Jerusalem: Hebrew Language Council, 1912), 9.
 - 15 Ibid.
 - 16 Yehouda Shenhav, Maisalon Dallashi, Rami Avnimelech, Nissim Mizrachi, and Yonatan Mendel, *Yedi’at ‘Aravit be-ḳerev Yehudim be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2015), 24.
 - 17 Ibid., 18.
 - 18 Data from a survey by the Geocartography Knowledge Group. See Roece Nachmias, “Marriage to an Arab Is National Treason,” *Ynetnews*, March 27, 2007, accessed December 9, 2019, www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3381978,00.html.
 - 19 Anton Shammas, *‘Arabeskot* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1986). Translated into English by Vivian Eden as *Arabesques* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
 - 20 It is worth mentioning here two pioneering works by Palestinian writers writing in Hebrew: Atallah Mansour, *Be-or hadash* (Tel Aviv: Karni, 1966), translated into English by Abraham Birman as *In a New Light* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1969), and Fouzi al-Asmar, *Libhyot ‘Aravi be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem: I. Shahak, 1975), translated into English by I. F. Stone as *To Be an Arab in Israel* (London: Frances Pinter, 1975).
 - 21 Salman Rushdie, “The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance,” *Times* (London), July 3, 1982.
 - 22 Shammas, *Arabesques*, 84.
 - 23 Ibid., 137.
 - 24 Ibid., 92.
 - 25 Shenhav, Dallashi, Avnimelech, Mizrachi, and Mendel, *Yedi’at ‘Aravit be-ḳerev Yehudim be-Yisrael*.
 - 26 Znoy, “Likrat shevua ha-sefer u-le-regel shnat ha-shivim la-medina,” *Sfarim*, June 5, 2018, accessed December 9, 2019, <http://readbooks.co.il/books050618/>.
 - 27 Hannah Amit-Kochavi, “Al tirgumey ha-sifrut ha-‘Aravit le-‘Ivrit,” *Ha-mizrah be-hadash* 43 (2002).
 - 28 The index includes translations from Arabic into Hebrew performed from the end of the nineteenth century until today, and is currently being uploaded to the Maktoob series website. See <http://maktoobooks.com/search-the-index>.
 - 29 Hannah Amit-Kochavi, “Zarim ve-oyvim o shutafim le-otah kivrat derekh,” *Jama’a* 10 (2003).

- 30 Ghassan Kanafani, *Ha-shiva le-Haifa* [The return to Haifa], in *Ha-hadarim ha-aherim* [The other rooms: Three Palestinian novellas], ed. Ami Elad-Bouskila (Or Yehuda: Maariv and Hed-Arzi, 2001).
- 31 Anton Shammās, ed., *Bi-shney kolot: Kovets du-leshoni mi-yetsiroteihem shel meshorerim ve-sofrim Yehudim ve-'Aravim lefi behiratam* (Jerusalem and Haifa: M. Buber Center for Adult Education, The Hebrew University, the Israel Interfaith Association, and Beit Gefen Arab-Jewish Cultural Center, 1974).
- 32 Naim Araidi and Nabil Tannus, eds., *Hayalim shel mayim* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Maariv, 1988).
- 33 Moshe Hacham, ed., *Sippurim Falestiniyyim* (Tel Aviv: Y. Golan, 1997).
- 34 Masalha, Weiss-Gabbay, Behar, eds., *Shtayim/Athnaan*.
- 35 Al-Tayyeb Ghanayim and Yossi Granovski, eds., *Nakba light ve-sippurim aherim* (Tel Aviv: Mitán, 2014).
- 36 For further reading on the neoclassical translation model, how it differs from older translation models based around group translation, and how Maktoob is aiming at reviving the group model, see Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, "The Neoclassical Bias in Translation," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 9, no. 1 (2019): 5–18.
- 37 For further reading on the Orientalist Israeli translation model in the early period, see Mahmoud Kayyal, "Tirgumey ha-sifrut ha-'Aravit le-'Ivrit: Me-Orientalizm le-hitkablut," *Ha-Ivrit* 63, no. 4 (2013).
- 38 Hacham, *Sippurim Falestiniyyim*, 7.
- 39 Quoted in Mahmoud Kayyal "Gesharim el ha-aher," *Jama 'a* 10 (2003): 144–145.
- 40 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1819).
- 41 For details of Maktoob's rationale in Hebrew, Arabic, and English, see <http://maktoobooks.com/about/>, <https://tinyurl.com/maktubArabic>, and <http://maktoobooks.com/en/about-us>
- 42 Joshua Fishman, *The Sociology of Language: An Interdisciplinary Social Science Approach to Language in Society* (Rowley, MA.: Newbury House, 1972), 4.



Fida Jiryis
The *Khawaja*

Translation from the Arabic: Serene Husni

Literary editor: Shoshana London Sappir

Smith dismounted his donkey in a pitiful state. Sweat poured down his face, dust covered his white clothes and blond hair, and his mustache drooped in surrender to the sweltering heat. As he stood bewildered at the entrance to the village, the burning sun stinging him, a crowd of people quickly gathered around him, devouring him with intensely curious eyes.

“People,” the village *moukhtar*¹ grumbled, as he dismounted another donkey. He had accompanied the *khawaja*² on his journey from Tarshiha, the neighboring village. “The *khawaja* came from abroad, from London, and he’s going to be our guest for a few days.”

“What did he come for?” someone cried out suspiciously. He then added, as if speaking to himself, “Is there anything from the West that brings the heart any rest?”

“He’s writing a book about our region, and he came to see it,” the *moukhtar* said, ignoring the comment.

“Where is he going to stay?” wondered Siham, who was standing in the front row.

“With me. If he goes out, or asks anyone for anything, I want you to help him. Hospitality is a duty.”

“And how are we going to understand him?” Ayyoub, Siham’s husband, wondered. “Does he speak Arabic?”

It seemed the *moukhtar* hadn’t thought about this point, so he addressed Smith: “*Khawaja*, do you speak Arabic?”

Smith turned toward him with an idiotic smile that had been on his face since he saw everyone gather around him. It was clear he didn’t understand a thing.

“*Aarabi . . . Aarabi?*” the *moukhtar* repeated, thinking of the nuisance that had fallen upon him.

prose

“Aaah! *Aarabi . . . shwaai . . . shwaai*,” Smith responded as he nodded his head eagerly.

“Ha! . . . Praise God. He understands a little something. Go easy on him, people!”

“Poor guy, take him to your place, let him take a bath,” Siham said with pity, at which her husband turned toward her angrily.

“Why is he your business now?!”

“Can’t you see how miserable he looks? This one’s not used to our country’s heat. It’s always cold and rainy where he comes from. That’s what Souad told me, because her brother traveled there and sent her a letter . . .”

“Ok, enough talking!” the *moukhtar* interrupted, in frustration. “I’ll take him to my house. Everyone, get back to your business! And for God’s sake, make way for us!”

No one left, of course, to mind any business. Instead, they followed the two in a large crowd, until the march ended at the *moukhtar*’s house.

“Ufff, how long is this going to go on for?!” he erupted. “Have a little mercy! He and I came from Tarshiha on donkeys in this heat. Give us a break so we can get some rest!”

The people dispersed and went home. The *moukhtar* called his wife, Um Adel, as he wiped the sweat from his brow. He presented the *khawaja* to her. Then he showed him the room where he was going to sleep, and explained to him, with gestures, how to take a bath using a bucket and a basin. The guest was smiling and mumbling a lot in a foreign language, but the *moukhtar* knew the meaning of the words “thank you” that he heard Smith saying. Then he said “Shook-ran” in a broken Arabic accent. “He’s thanking us, Um Adel,” the *moukhtar* told his wife, with a smile. “He’s truly a polite and lovely *khawaja*!”

The *moukhtar* had asked his wife to prepare dinner for the evening, and the dignitaries of the village came to greet the guest. Many villagers followed them soon after, finding something to amuse themselves with. The *khawaja* showed up shipshape. He had bathed, changed his clothes, and taken a little nap.

“Come in! My house is your house, you’re welcome!” the *moukhtar* said as everyone gathered to feast.

“What’s this, *Moukhtar*?” someone asked teasingly. “We’ve never seen this kind of food in your house! All this for the *khawaja*?”

“You are in my face every day. You’re like a worry in the heart.” They burst out laughing. “But he’s a guest. Eat already! Go ahead, *khawaja*!” he said as he smiled and pointed at the food.

Smith seemed shocked, his eyes widening when he saw the feast. He kept staring at the food and at the guests, as if to make sure that what he was seeing before his eyes was normal. Then he understood that everyone was waiting for him to eat, so he put a spoonful of tabbouleh salad on his plate, a small chicken drumstick, and a piece of bread.

“What’s this?” Everyone looked at him in bewilderment.

“People, have mercy! The man is tired. He’s shy because you’re all staring at him like that. Eat, so he can relax and eat with us!” the *moukhtar* said, showing pity for Smith, who was being treated as a spectacle. Indeed, everyone began eating, and the quantities of meat and chicken were quickly disappearing. As for Um Adel, she wasn’t very pleased. “What?! We made all this so he could have a drumstick? What a shame! *Moukhtar!* Insist upon him!”

The *moukhtar* obliged, pointing to the food and to Smith, but the latter shook his head no, as he put his hand on his chest in gratitude: “No, no, thank you . . . Shook-ran.”

“Nonsense! The man is shy!” Um Adel said. She decided to take matters into her own hands. “I’ll serve him!” She served him two big pieces of barbecued meat, some potatoes, a quarter of a chicken, and some more of the rice with meat, almonds, and pine nuts. Then she added an assortment of salads to help him digest.

Smith’s eyes popped as he gestured with his hand: “No! No! Thank you!” But Um Adel smiled at him with satisfaction. “Go ahead! You need to stand on your own two feet. Do you want them to say we starved you to death? For shame!”

Smith found himself under an immense amount of pressure. He was raised to finish everything on his plate, so he obliged and began eating again, while everyone around him was happy for the chance to refill their plates. Dinner and laughter continued until midnight, when Um Adel served an assortment of sweets and a big bowl of fruit.

The *khawaja*’s face was pale and he seemed uncomfortable. After dessert, of which he did not partake, he thanked his hosts with a faint voice.

The *moukhtar* said, “Everyone, maybe we should let him rest.”

The gathering dispersed. But the *moukhtar* and his wife didn’t sleep that night. Smith spent it going and coming to the bathroom in the house’s yard, waking them up each time he opened and closed the door. Finally, at 2:30 in the morning, the *moukhtar* left his bed and went to check on him. He found the man a mess, sitting on the side of his bed, looking pale, his hands pressed against his stomach.

“Um Adel! The *khawaja* is sick!”

“Why? What happened?” she said as she hurried out of bed.

“Make him a cup of chamomile tea!”

Smith’s bathroom visits didn’t stop until sunrise. They all went to bed exhausted afterward.

The next day, the *moukhtar* told his wife, strictly, “Um Adel, this man doesn’t know our food and he’s not used to it. Have a little mercy! Make him soup and stop stuffing him with food!”

Smith finally appeared, wearing a shirt and pants. He had washed his face, which was still yellowish, and he greeted them with a smile. The *moukhtar* welcomed him and asked him to sit and join them. Um Adel offered them some tea and some toasted bread. Smith seemed relieved as he nodded his head and smiled: “Oh! Toast!” They didn’t understand anything, but they were happy to see that the *khawaja* had regained his health. The *moukhtar* understood that Smith wanted to go for a walk.

prose

“Fine. Um Adel, I’m going with him. They’ll eat him up out there! The children alone will chase him around and drive him crazy!”

They went out for a stroll down one of the village streets. The *moukhtar* thought to himself as they walked: “I wish I spoke English . . . I would at least be able to tell him about the country and understand him a little bit. But what would I tell you . . .” After giving it some thought, he said, “Here’s Abu Issam’s house, and here’s the well, and over there is the threshing floor?” Smith looked at him with incomprehension, but he took out a small notebook and a pen, and he seemed to take some notes as they walked.

At that moment, Abu Issam stepped out of his house and greeted them. “Welcome! You’re in our neighborhood?! Come in *Moukhtar*, let’s have some coffee!”

Smith seemed pleased with the encounter, even though he didn’t understand anything. A conversation between the *moukhtar* and Abu Issam took place.

“So, how’s the *khawaja*? Happy?”

“Man, yesterday he kept us up all night!”

“Why? What happened?”

“It seems his stomach was upset. He’s not used to our food.”

“Oh, you’re right. Those people live on light stuff. Not like us, *Moukhtar*,” he said as he laughed and caressed his round belly. “We should learn from them. Look at his body! He’s like a stick. Not a bit of flesh on his bones. You’re welcome, *habibi*!” he said with a big smile as he poured Smith some coffee.

Smith tasted a little bit of the coffee and smiled. He said some English words and then returned to his small notebook.

“What did he say?”

“I swear I don’t know,” the *moukhtar* sighed. “I barely understand him in Arabic, but he seems to like the coffee.”

“You’re most welcome! Here’s some more!” Abu Issam laughed as he poured more coffee for the *khawaja*, who was relishing the second cup.

“Anyhow,” the *moukhtar* said after a while. “Excuse us, Abu Issam. I want to continue showing him around town.”

“You’re welcome. We’re honored. Come again, *Moukhtar!*”

They barely made a move before Abu Samir, Abu Issam’s neighbor, pounced on them, dragging them to his house.

“You have to drink a cup of coffee . . . you can’t pass right by our house without coming in. Come in, *Moukhtar!*”

They had coffee at his house, and at the house of Abu Karim, and Abu Fadel, and Saeed the blacksmith, and Latifa the old lady, and Asaad the doctor, and Salim the butcher, and Rabee the school teacher, and Adel the *moukhtar*’s son. They finally returned home at sunset.

“Ufff, we went all around town!” the *moukhtar* said. “Maybe tomorrow he’ll leave me alone and write for a little bit. That’s what he gestured earlier. Um Adel, serve us a light dinner so he can calm down and sleep and let us sleep too! I feel my head is as big as this house!”

Indeed, dinner was no more than a few sandwiches.

“What a shame,” Um Adel whispered sorrowfully.

But the *moukhtar* rebuked her: “What? Do you want to spend another night staring at him? Come on! Clear the plates and let’s go to bed! Ach, I’m so tired . . .”

But rest wasn’t their lot that night. The sound of Smith’s footsteps walking back and forth in the house kept them up until two in the morning. At that point, the *moukhtar* stormed out of bed to see what was the matter with him this time. He found him sitting in the living room, staring at the darkness with red eyes and trembling.

“Um Adel, come see this! What’s wrong with this man?!”

“What did you eat today?”

“Nothing. We just made a few house visits.”

“And what did they offer you?”

“Nothing much, just coffee.”

Suddenly, the *moukhtar* recalled, “Um Adel, this guy drank around twenty cups of coffee today! He drank two cups at every stop! It seems the coffee in their country is not as good as . . .”

“And you want him to sleep? Look at his eyes! He’s like an owl. And his hands are shaking. It’s lucky that nothing happened to him! I’m going to warm up a cup of milk for him to relax.”

Poor Smith was nailed to the couch until noon the next day. His eyes were red with insomnia. It was only after he had lunch that he managed to sleep until evening.

“How long will this go on for? Why did he come here? Isn’t he better off returning to his country?” Um Adel said with concern.

But Smith was in good shape and in a cheerful mood. He smiled as he joined them. Um Adel made him a cup of chamomile tea, and he avoided coffee entirely.

prose

“Good evening. How’s the *khawaja*?” Abu Issam marched through the door with his big laugh. He then asked the *moukhtar* if he could take Smith olive picking with him the next day. “I thought I might take him off your hands for a bit, show him around. Didn’t he want to see the country? Isn’t that why he’s here? Maybe he’ll even make a few scribbles in his book.”

They all laughed as they observed Smith, who was taking notes again.

“I swear, *Moukhtar*, I’m afraid he’s a spy and we’re clueless!”

“No way, man. If they wanted a spy, would they pick such an idiot? The man hasn’t slept for two nights!”

The *moukhtar* was happy with Abu Issam’s suggestion. He was suffocating from accompanying the *khawaja* around. The next day, he was relieved of his heavy burden for a few hours, which he spent making up for lost sleep.

Smith went with Abu Issam to the fields, carrying his notebook as usual and wearing a big hat that drew laughter from those around him. At the end of the day, he returned in an awful state, leaning on Abu Issam and his son.

“What’s wrong with him?! What’s going on?!” the *moukhtar* yelled in fright.

“*Moukhtar*, he insisted on picking olives with us. It seems he had sunstroke and fell off the tree and twisted his foot.”

“Our Lord and Savior! Now what?! Um Adel, get over here with a wet cloth!”

Smith spent another night that was more miserable than the two before it. He was in bed all night burbling from fever and groaning from his twisted and swollen foot. The *moukhtar* called for the village doctor, who wrapped the foot with some herbs and asked Um Adel to stay by the patient’s side with a cold, wet cloth. Finally, in the early hours of the morning, Smith calmed down and got some sleep.

He recovered over the next two days, but he didn't leave the house. He sat on the balcony and spent hours writing in his little notebook. Finally, the *moukhtar* felt sorry for him. He told Um Adel: "So? Do you think we should take him with us to Issam's party tonight? Look at him! He's as healthy as a monkey! The poor guy. It's better than being trapped at home."

"You're right! The poor guy . . . he's dried up from sitting at home for so long. Abu Adel, is he staying with us much longer?" she digressed, worriedly.

"I swear I don't know. Tarshiha's *moukhtar* told me that he's staying for about a month. He can stay as long as he wants, so long as he doesn't cause any trouble."

Abu Issam greeted them most graciously. He squeezed Smith's hand tightly. He considered him family now, after the olive-picking adventure.

"Welcome, *khawaja*! Praise God you're well. We were worried about you! Come in! Issam, bring some drinks!"

Of course Abu Issam's niceties were lost on Smith, but he seemed very pleased to join the gathering. He soon began clapping to the music and tapping his feet.

"Praise God," the *moukhtar* laughed. "Let this poor guy see one happy hour. He's been doomed since he got here!"

The dancing, clapping, and cheering intensified. Enthusiasm took over Smith, who had had three glasses of arak, as he sat with the *moukhtar* and Abu Issam. His eyes were red, and suddenly, he stood up and grabbed the hand of Enaam, Abu Issam's youngest daughter, with whom Smith had been exchanging glances and smiles all evening. He dragged her to the dance floor.

"What's this?!" roared Issam.

Before anyone knew what was happening, he and his friends were beating up poor Smith. The *moukhtar* jumped up and helped Abu Issam get the young men off Smith and extract him from the gaggle as he screamed. His hair was in disarray and his face was bruised.

As soon as they returned home, the *moukhtar*, who had the only telephone in the village, made an urgent call to the *moukhtar* of Tarshiha, startling him out of his sleep.

"What's wrong, Abu Adel? What's going on?!"

"*Moukhtar*, for God's sake, I'm bringing you the *khawaja* tomorrow morning. You can send him back to wherever he came from or send him to hell, for all I care. We can't keep him here any longer!"

Notes

- 1 *Moukhtar*: ‘Chosen’ (Arabic), the traditional head of a village, town or clan in many Arab countries.
- 2 *Khawaja*: An honorific usually used to describe a Western or foreign man.

About Fida Jiryis

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Palestinian writer Fida Jiryis was born in Lebanon, grew up in Cyprus, and returned to her native village of Fassouta in the Galilee in 1995, following the signing of the Oslo Accords. Since then, she has lived in the Galilee, Canada, and Ramallah. Jiryis, who writes in Arabic and English, has published three collections of short stories in Arabic: *Our Small Life* (2011), *The Khawaja* (2014), and *The Cage* (2018). Her essay “Occupation’s Untold Story” was included in *Kingdom of Olives and Ash: Writers Confront the Occupation* (2017), a collection of essays edited by Ayelet Waldman and Michael Chabon to mark the fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The book includes contributions from today’s most renowned writers and has also been published in Hebrew. Jiryis is currently working on her memoir, in which she chronicles her return to Israel and her life as a Palestinian there.

Rawiya Burbara
The Art of Rhetoric

Translation from the Arabic: Shoshana London Sappir

Literary editor: Deema Darawshe

The winter smells brought out strong feelings in us on the ride from the Galilee to the peak of the Carmel. The Hebrew pages we had been working on all night fluttered in our hands every time the taxi hit a pothole. We paid no attention to the trees lining the road, their leaves rinsed from the summer dust. Fog engulfed the windows of the university building piercing the sky on the mountain, high and unattainable. The taxi hurtled along. I silently begged the driver to slow down, hoping to put off the inevitable confrontation, but the black wheels were impervious to my human anxieties and shortly announced our arrival.

prose

We hurried to the lecture hall for our rhetoric class. The assignment: to persuade the others of our point of view about a subject of our choice. The teacher took a seat among us and suggested that the students present in alphabetical order. We exchanged glances. After a brief consultation we said we would rather hear our Jewish classmates first.

Yael got up and began expounding her topic. She looked at each one of us, alternating between smiles and frowns, explaining words and sentences, her body swaying naturally, leaving us squirming at her choice of subject. Yael was arguing vehemently that it was better to wear sandals than shoes in the winter. She listed the disadvantages of winter shoes, holding her nose with two fingers. She pointed at her bare toes and wiggled them. Bare feet collect the heat that spreads through them, she argued, whereas the cold penetrates your shod feet and makes them stink. When she finished her presentation we clapped. The lecturer promised to surprise us with his shoes next class.

Then Yafit stood, scattering her long hair over her shoulders, and with it our thoughts. Her goal was to convince us of the importance of drying off after a shower

with a robe instead of a cotton towel. The warm drops trapped by the damp robe heat you up in the winter, whereas the cool ones cool you off in the summer, she argued passionately. Toweling down is just an unnecessary effort at the end of a hard day. Finally, she showed us different kinds of colorful robes that dress the soul, she explained, even before they dress the body. The lecturer suggested she open a robe store because she had shown great talent for marketing them.

Finally, our turn came. Samir, impeccably dressed as usual, stood up and attempted to persuade us of the topic of the hour. Peace is the only possible solution, he said with a distant voice. War leads to nothing but disaster and suffering. The words shriveled on Samir's lips. His pages full of theories, quotes, and ideas crumpled in his hands. He never looked up from the black print. We felt the earth shake beneath us. Why are the words running away from you, Samir? Haven't we spent many a night refining our theories, singing hymns to peace, preparing for it, reading about it in all the languages in the world? Haven't we said we can read the international language of peace without translation? And here you are failing to translate our own thoughts!

Samir sat down dripping with failure, wiped his brow, and folded the accursed pages he had toiled over for hours. Now Suad rose. It was up to her to salvage us from utter humiliation. She looked sheepishly from one student to the next, pausing between seats, and finally posited in a stifled voice that evacuating settlements is a precondition for peace. She listed the reasons, the advantages and the disadvantages of the unilateral, bilateral, and trilateral approaches, all the while looking as if her body were mummified in a pyramid of fear.

Where was her sharp tongue that had just recently lashed out at the student and political parties she disagreed with? Where were her barbed theories and counter-theories that could pierce the armor of the most formidable adversary? How did her tongue freeze and rob her of her force of persuasion?

One of us had to come to the rescue. Why were we persuaded by the nonsense presented to us, but not persuaded by subjects that should need no persuasion?

We paused to catch our collective breath, while the students continued showcasing their goods. One said that wooden sculptures are more beautiful than stone ones, and another tried to persuade us that the heat of frost is warmer than the breeze of sour sweat. The class was stirred when Ahlam advocated the advantages of planting olive trees instead of palm trees, quoting verses from the Qur'an, the Bible, and the New Testament. They burst out laughing when someone suggested covering the nakedness of palm trees with headdresses.

At the end of the class we stood before the lecturer, scorned. He was impressed by our choice of important subjects, but disappointed by our delivery. He gave us the benefit of the doubt, attributing our failure to be persuasive to the Hebrew language obstructing our Arabic ideas, to our body language stifling us like a ready-made wardrobe, to our eyes being afflicted with a short-sightedness that prevented us from seeing what was under our noses. And he gave us a second chance to search for our own special language, in which we could persuade ourselves before we tried to persuade others.

About Rawiya Burbara

Rawiya Burbara was born in Nazareth in 1969. An author, poet, and literature researcher, she has a PhD in Arabic literature from the University of Haifa and is a lecturer in Arabic language at the Oranim Academic College of Education, as well as an inspector of Arabic instruction in Arabic education in Israel, at the Pedagogical Secretariat, Ministry of Education. Burbara has published seven books, including youth literature, short stories, and a novel. Some of her poetry has been set to music. She has participated in numerous local and international conferences, published numerous articles, and won an Arts Award from the Minister of Culture and Sports (2009) in the area of the short story.

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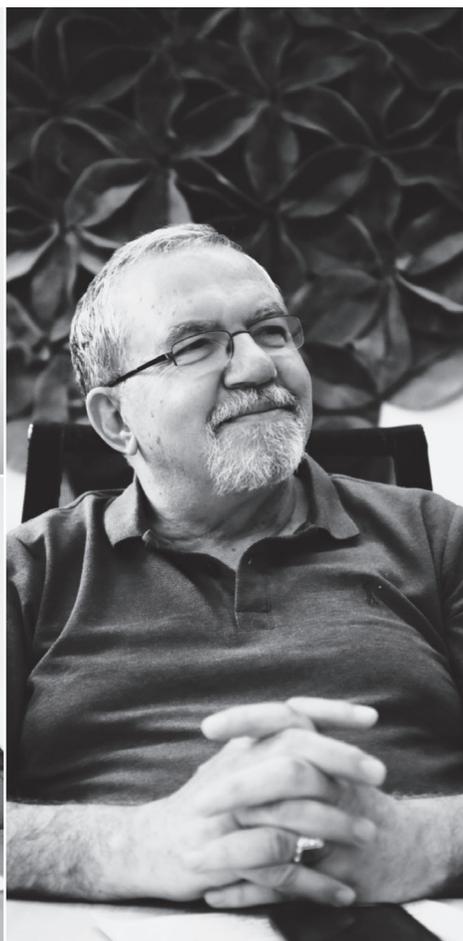
Maktoob in Action

Text and Photography: Duygu Atlas

I walk into a room
With the burden of my own land heavy on my mind and heart
The land of age-old conflicts
And their offspring, the erased languages
I remember how late it was when I first heard a Kurdish song
Or uttered my first Kurdish word
Here I am, years later, in another conflict zone
Where I've heard similar stories time and time again
But today I walk into a room
To find Arabic and Hebrew murmuring in the air
Like nightingales in a Khayyam poem
And I feel my belief resurrected
From the burial ground of hopelessness.

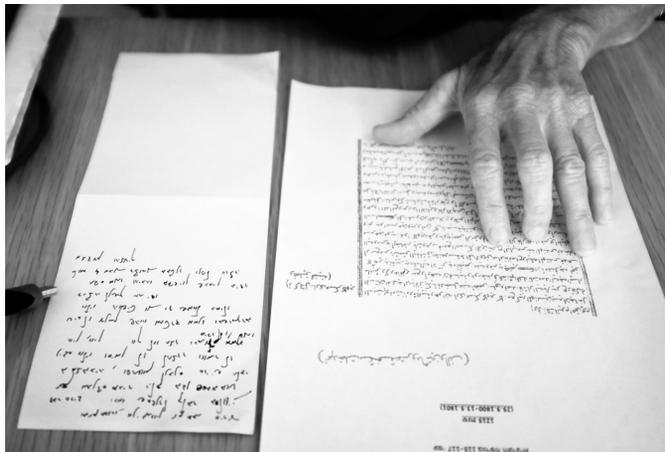




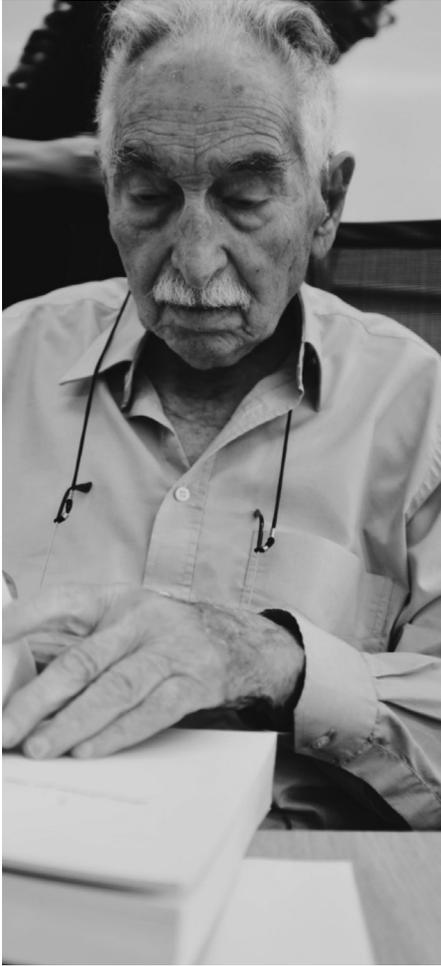


















Dossier
"Where Did the Ghetto Come From?"

Tawfiq Da'adli In This Ghetto for Which We Have Gathered

Al-Lydd, in the ruins of a Mandate-era structure whose glory days have passed, now called “the Club,” the launch of Elias Khoury’s novel *My Name is Adam: Children of the Ghetto*, translated into Hebrew by Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani. Ustadh Ali, sitting in the audience, feels the earth cracking on the brink of the abyss along which he walks.

Al-Lydd. The corner of IDF and Borochov streets. Ustadh Ali looks uncomfortably at a crowd of a few bearded men and two women in light dresses. The ficus-lined avenue from the days of British rule creates a relaxed atmosphere before sunset. On the right is a gravel-covered unofficial parking lot, covering a mass grave that is a landmark for those in the know. A quick spin through the torn city, dressed in an orange silk scarf of early sunset. A light stroll through the ghetto for which we have gathered here.

After a quick glance at the ghetto we go back to the Club. “The Club” is a remnant of a scarred Mandate-era structure groaning under the surrounding filth. Three pointed arches perched on thin pillars are the sole testaments to a once-commanding mansion. The house faced King Faisal Avenue, not far from the Central Post Office and the bus station from which passengers embarked on their journeys to Jaffa and its environs. The two-story post office building that still imbues the plaza with some grandeur stands witness to the changing reality of the city cloaked in faded rags.

“The Club” was about to host the meeting with the guest from Beirut. On an improvised screen stretched before rows of Keter plastic chairs, the guest was going to appear. Elias Khoury, the author who insists on coming back to Palestine and digging through its past, appeared on the stretched piece of fabric against the backdrop of a shelf hanging on two cleats, creaking under the weight of papers. His hands caressed a glass of tea. Not a library weighted down with olive green or dark brown ancient tomes with golden letters, and a glass of whiskey. Just a scattered pile of papers and a simple glass of tea, not even herbal. The screen is stretched, the voice comes through,

and everything is in place. What in the world do you do in front of such a pillar, Ustadh Ali asks himself. But people like him are used to this kind of evening. A piece of paper is pulled out and a word is read, albeit in a fragmented voice because of the bad connection. After all, the voice is coming from Beirut, which may be just a little bit north of Acre but is also beyond the mountains of darkness and barbed wire fences. A tolerable disruption. Very quickly the fragmentation is forgotten and the words transport into another dimension. An esteemed author, friend of past prophets, draws words up from his well and drops them into the improvised courtyard in the back of the Mandatory building on IDF Street. Ustadh Ali absorbs the verses that penetrate his soul, shake it, and move on. Riding the waves of letters that seek to weave fibers that will pull the ropes of spirit into the streets, into the alleys, into the city that once was. The soul soars above, strolls, and clings to the sudden recognition it has just received. Here, finally, has appeared someone who recognizes it as part of this place. Even the friend of Mahmoud Darwish and the people of the real Palestine recognize it as part of this place.

Khoury came here today to stand with his friend Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, who translated his book *My Name is Adam: Children of the Ghetto* into Hebrew. Two aging men standing side-by-side, one on the screen and one in reality, one reading in Arabic the story of the discovery of Arabic after a conscious repression, or maybe not. Shenhav-Shahrabani and Khoury, one facing the other and opening up to him, presenting him with the fruit of his labor, the other picking fruit that won't be easy to digest and handing it to the reader who detests the deliberate disregard and the abyss hidden under shaky branches and piles of hay.

There, on the brink of the abyss along which Ustadh Ali paces, the soil is brittle and cracking. One would be wise to keep one's distance. The brave ask to find out, hear, and see. They and their friends, the likes of Ustadh Ali, understand that the flimsy bridge stretching across the abyss is no longer holding up.

About Tawfiq Da'adli

Tawfiq Da'adli is an archaeologist and art historian who earned his degrees at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His field of expertise is Islamic material culture throughout the medieval period. He teaches at the departments of Islam and Middle Eastern Studies and Art History, both at the Hebrew University. His book, *Esoteric Images: Decoding the Late Herat School of Painting*, was published by Brill in 2019.

Elias Khoury

This Is al-Lydd/This Is Palestine

I delivered this talk at a meeting organized by youth groups in the city of al-Lydd and held at the Communist Party's club on Friday night, July 13, 2018, on the seventieth anniversary of the occupation of al-Lydd, and one of the biggest massacres of the 1948 Nakba War, and the expulsion of the overwhelming majority of its residents, and the internment of those who remained in a ghetto enclosed by a barbed wire fence.

First I would like to admit that I feel embarrassed, as if I were a beginning writer learning how to spell the rhythm of a text he knows he is unable to write. And the words that were enveloped in silence for seventy years crumble in his hands and take over his spirit and imagination, making him feel as if he were not writing but being written, and as if the text being composed in front of him were rewriting his consciousness.

That is what the City of Saint George has done to me. I came to it in order to follow the stories of my novel *Bab al-Shams*, and I watched myself become a prisoner in the ghetto that the Israeli occupation enclosed in a fence of barbed wire and thirst and blood. And in that ghetto, to which I was led by a man created by imagination and whose name is Adam Danoun, I learned love and perseverance and underwent a baptism of tears and pain.

I stand here with Adam Danoun at my side. I see him returning to al-Lydd, carrying seventy years of the ongoing Nakba on his shoulders, not in order to search for the map of pain, as he did in his novel, but to call forth the pulse of life from the eyes of those who remain and to redraw with you and through you the horizons of freedom made by the resistance of the remains of a people who put together the shards of their lives from the ruins of the Dahmash Mosque and the alleys of the town devoured by the flies brought in by the occupier.

Here in the al-Lydd ghetto and in the ghettos of al-Ramle and Haifa and Yaffa, the Palestinian became the heir of all victims and made a homeland out of exile after his homeland became an exile.

Adam Danoun's symbolic return does not bring back the past but stands on the ruins of the ages, and the only reason we stand on the ruins of the destroyed villages and estates is to lament that savage time that condemned an entire people to the wilderness. We lament the time and cry over the blind history that allowed a Zionism armed with colonialist racism to try to erase an entire people and condemn it to disappearance.

Adam Danoun tries to return to the city carried on words, not in order to recreate a religious myth inherited from illusion but because you stayed here, and just like Israel created for your people a perpetual Nakba, your remaining on your land created for your people a perpetual and possible return.

You are present, even though they call you the "present absent." The absence of those who were expelled from your city in the terrible death march in July 1948 confirms your presence and their presence. In you the absent are present. And from the arches of the language of your daily life, made of pain, the words are born on a land that acknowledges none other than its Palestinian name.

The book *My Name Is Adam: Children of the Ghetto* is a journey through the depths of darkness and oppression with Adam and Manal and Ma'moun. On that journey, full of grief and pulsing with the will to live, I learned how to listen to the silence, to read what was erased, to perceive the whisper of memory.

In the ghetto and on Salah al-Din Street and King Faisal Street and the Old City and the Station Neighborhood, I walked with Murad al-Alami in a march of sorrow of those who were condemned to pick up the ruins, forced to loot their own houses for the benefit of the occupying army—which stole from King Faisal the name of his street—and had to collect the bodies of the victims that covered the whole length of Salah al-Din Street, whose name was taken over by Herzl.

The massacre of this city was the biggest massacre of the 1948 Nakba War, just like the death march into the wilderness toward Ni'lin and Ramallah was the most savage manifestation of the fate imposed on the 50,000 residents of the city and those who took refuge in it from the neighboring villages.

Al-Lydd was divided into two cities: a small city in the ghetto and the Station Neighborhood, and a big city in the wilderness. Here was born the wandering Palestinian, and here the Israeli occupation established the Palestinian ghetto that became known in all of Palestine, and which has today become the new name of the isolated enclaves of the West Bank and the great prison of Gaza.

Here in the al-Lydd ghetto began the organization of Zionist apartheid, and with it the transformation of the 1948 Nakba from a single historic event into a process that has been ongoing for the last seventy years. Houses are destroyed and streets emptied of their residents and humiliation continues daily. I came to you as a visitor who has no right to visit, and as a returnee who has no right to return.

I visit you to take a close look at those who etched the image of your city in my memory: I see Ismail Shammout painting the death march with thirst, and I meet Rajai Basila, your blind poet and author who saw with his closed eyes what no one else saw, and I bring back the pulse of the words of Fouzi El-Asmar, and I reread Spiro Munayyer, who was the first one to write about the ghetto, and I converse with a man who, as long as I live, I will never forget how he cried and made me cry when he talked about leaving al-Lydd. I met the physician Dr. George Habash for the last time in 1998, and when I asked him how he left al-Lydd, he told me about the death of his sister Foutin, and how he had to take off his white doctor's coat to bury her and stay with his family in the forced march of exile.

And through you I go back to my small beautiful village overlooking the hills of Jerusalem, a village built by will before being destroyed by the occupation army only a few days after it was erected in January 2014, and whose name was Bab al-Shams. I look out from the balcony of the ruins of that village onto al-Khan al-Ahmar, to witness with you the crime of ethnic cleansing in Palestine that continues to this day.

Your celebration this evening on the seventieth anniversary of the tragedy of al-Lydd is not a celebration of memory and not of the Nakba, because the Nakba is to be fought and not celebrated. It is a celebration of the will to resist and to stay and to challenge.

You who have been shaped by tragedies know that the era of Zionist death that was imposed on your country is part of the era of tyranny and oppression that was imposed on the entire Arab world. You are alone but you are not alone, because pain unites this Mashriq, and because your resistance and your struggle and your insistence on staying in your land is the only point of light appearing in the Arab tunnel of darkness.

I tell you, by God I don't know what I should tell you, so I will borrow from our poet Mahmoud Darwish his loss of words: "Who am I to say to you / What I say to you? / I am not a stone that was polished by water / Until it became a face / Nor am I a cane that was punctured by wind / Until it became a flute."

Standing with you today, I cannot find anything to say except that I saw how the words were born in your eyes and your pain and your silence and your courage, and the author can only spread his words out on the ground to be trampled under the feet of those returning from the night of exile and wandering.



The Political Syntax of the Absentees: A Translator's Reflection on *Stella Maris*

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Stella Maris, by Elias Khoury, is the follow-up novel to *My Name Is Adam: Children of the Ghetto, Volume I*, but the two novels can be read out of sequence, since they do not follow a linear narrative. Each is made up of multiple layers of space and time, entwined with the history and biography of Adam Danoun, as they move in a time machine-like fashion between past and future, and parallel worlds.

In *Children of the Ghetto*, we meet Adam, a Palestinian man in the later years of his life, as he sets out to relate a first-person account of his memories of the ghetto of al-Lydd. Adam lives in New York City and leads a life devoid of the present, which seems to fade into memory immediately, as it takes place. He finds himself trapped between a predetermined future and a past that will not let him rest—until finally, all the ghosts and demons that have been clawing away at his caged-off world lead to his death in a scene akin to Palestinian poet Rashid Hussein's death/suicide from smoking in bed.

Adam leaves behind notebooks in which he has chronicled his tales, based on childhood stories he had heard back in the ghetto of al-Lydd. His notes are a patchwork of fact and fiction—stories, lists, and musings that do not come together to form a single, coherent narrative and that conclude in silence. “I wrote so much, only to discover that silence is more eloquent than words and that I want these words to be burned.”¹ The silence Adam had opted for (or rather, the silence that had opted for Adam) is not necessarily the absence of speech per se, but rather a language of hidden layers that boasts a full range of modes and avenues of expression. Silence,

whatever form it assumes—whether Hebrew or Arabic—articulates the impasse Adam has come to, as well as his inability to see his story through to its conclusion, coherently and in the first person.

Children of the Ghetto tackles the two endpoints of a man's life story—his early childhood and his autumn years. However, it omits the main chunk of the biography. *Stella Maris*, the second volume in the intended trilogy, is Adam's bildungsroman, his coming-of-age story, which seeks to fill in that blank. It takes us back to an earlier time in his life, shining a new light on that already predetermined ending. The story, for the most part, is set in 1960s Haifa and establishes the main trajectory of Adam's biography, from his early socialization to his teenage years, his discovery of sexuality, his time at university, his political uncertainties, and his journey of introspection that concludes in his rebirth.

The novel features scenes of Haifa life, exposing all the forms of trickery employed in Haifa-themed literature and chronicling the interplay of identities of a young Palestinian living in the Jewish state. In 1963, aged only fifteen, Adam leaves his mother's home after she marries a man who is not his father, embarking on a convoluted journey in the course of which he will have to don a mask that, when slipped on, will find him betraying the expectations of those around him, time and time again. By sheer coincidence, somewhere between Nazareth and Haifa he crosses paths with Gabriel, a Jewish garage owner who sees an uncanny resemblance between Adam and his late brother who was killed in the war. Gabriel offers Adam a job in his garage, sets him up in an "abandoned" flat in Wadi Salib, and arranges for him to be transferred to a Jewish high school. Adam falls in love with Rivka, Gabriel's daughter, but when Gabriel finds out about their affair, he is apoplectic over the Arab's betrayal and throws him out into the street. Adam leaves Wadi Salib and moves on to live in a Wadi Nisnas bakery. In the process, he enrolls in Haifa University's Department of Hebrew Literature. The world of literature opens Adam up to brand new horizons. These lead him, along with his professor of literature—in what is yet another peculiar coincidence—to a historic encounter with Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. These coincidences, along with others, set off a chain of events, as a snowball of revelations and betrayals ultimately leads Adam to uncover a family secret that will upend his whole biography.

In *Stella Maris* Adam ostensibly waives his right to speak, bequeathing it instead to an unseen and unknown third-person. Therein lies the key to reading this novel, which begins with the question of the identity of this mystery third-person narrator (in Arabic, the term for the third-person pronoun—*dameer*—also means conscience and moral compunction), who has assumed speaking duties on Adam's behalf. Could

it be Adam himself who has shed his ability to embrace the “I” form—that is to say, the capacity for existing as a sovereign subject? Is he pretending? Disguising himself as a third-person narrator? Is it that Adam has split into two separate characters, both of whom go by “Adam”—“one who would be the present Adam and one who would be the absent Adam”?² The option of splitting Adam into two halves was probably inspired by Jean Genet, who is mentioned toward the end of the novel out of the blue in an arbitrary, passing manner. Khoury said several times in interviews that he had met Genet in Beirut and had been impressed by his ability to look at himself from the outside, as though he were two different personas.³ Or rather, could the implied author have stripped him of the reins and passed them on to a fellow absentee, on (the *post hoc*) account of his spectacular narrative failure in the autumn of his life, as described in *Children of the Ghetto*?

The novel begins with a series of back-to-back linguistic and metaliterary questions: How can the absentees possibly write about a space and time from which they are removed? Do the absentees rely on those who have experienced and recall those events in the first person? What happens to first-person narrators when they are stripped of their story, which is then handed over to that illusive third person presence? This last question, which ties into grammatical pronouns, takes on both a spatial and corporeal meaning when Adam has his first encounter with a dead man—his friend Ibrahim, who was killed after being hit in the chest by a ball while playing soccer. Adam looks at the body lying on the grass and watches as the soul departs the body as it is transformed into an anonymous corpse, and how his friend’s painfully familiar features become a yellowing mask that has lost the name of its owner. This is how literature (the narrator’s identity), grammar (the pronouns), and the corporeal reality (the body that loses its name on becoming a corpse) all come together to form a literary-political infrastructure used to rethink not only the coined phrase “present absentees,” which has taken up residence in Israeli law, but also the political syntax of those “missing in action.”

However, relocating the narrator’s position from first to third person (especially if these are in fact two sides of the same, now-cloven Adam) does not make him any more coherent or clear. Already on the first page of *Stella Maris*, the narrator reveals how Adam was given the Wadi Salib flat by Gabriel as a gift for his sixteenth birthday; a highly improbable scenario, since Adam is an Arab worker at the garage whose owner is Jewish. In this case, the translator’s kneejerk reaction is to “touch up” this assertion in the name of maintaining the narrative’s credibility. In one instance Rabah, the guard at Benjamin Gardens, turns to Adam and asks him, in Hebrew, the following: “*Ata Yehudim* (Is you Jews)?” Here, too, one’s immediate impulse is

to correct the grammar. However, as one progresses through the novel, a possibility emerges that these slipups may not actually be Khoury's but rather those of the absent narrator, who is not as well versed in the facts and whose Hebrew is clunky. Yet again the translator arrives at a crossroads: should these inconsistencies be corrected or left untouched? The verdict is, of course, dependent on the advance ruling as to the narrator's degree of credibility. If the translator is, early on, tempted to tweak and touch up the text as seen in the aforementioned examples, the later stages paint a much bigger picture, and the conclusion follows that what we have before us is likely a weak, hesitant, and sometimes limited narrator.

Literature has provided us with several modes of unreliability: some are the product of the narrating witness's cognitive limitations or age (such as Faulkner's Benji in *The Sound and the Fury*, or Salinger's Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*), the narrator's inability to make sense of an otherwise vague reality (such as the four in Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's *Rashōmon*), an act of deceit (as with Ian McEwan's Briony Tallis in *Atonement*), or a particular strain of narrator naïveté (such as Winston Groom's titular character, Forrest Gump). Hebrew literature is not without its unreliable narrator archetypes: S. Y. Agnon's Tirza in *In the Prime of Her Life* or Amos Oz's Hannah Gonen in *My Michael*. In these cases, the reason for the narrators' unreliability is their limited, dissociated consciousness, which is unintelligible to them, while behind their back, a higher, informing authority emerges that suggests their limitations to us, the readers.

It seems that, on the face of it, in *Stella Maris* there is at the heart of the narrator's unreliability a fundamental lack of knowledge that is the result of his absence and spatial and chronological distance from those events, which the passage of time has inevitably charged with an array of new meanings. In this case "touching up" the source text no longer remains a viable option, and one must exercise a greater degree of sensitivity in order to retain some degree of the unreliable narrator's position and resist whatever temptation there is to revise and correct him.

I have had the privilege of being in regular contact with the author, and during one of our conversations, while I was sharing with him some thoughts I had been having on the matter of the flat that Adam had allegedly been gifted, Khoury insisted that the narrator's claim remain as is. Bit by bit, I came to realize that this was no random oversight but rather the implied, or absent, narrator's literary strategy, whose meanings gradually come to light as one progresses through the novel.

One's distrust of the narrator's credibility only deepens when the latter invades the recounted event in order to remind the readers of the story's time and setting—not

to mention the fact of his own existence. For instance, when he is required to tell the story of Adam's 1964 trip to the Warsaw Ghetto, he writes:

The narrator has the right to ask himself as he is telling the story, why is he in fact revisiting this trip to Warsaw, and why is he stuttering, losing his wits and realizing that he can write no more? (*Stella Maris*, ص, 222)

The narrator excuses knowledge gaps by arguing that Adam himself is equally confused and therefore cannot recall the exact reasons for embarking on this journey. He describes the loss of control of the ability to narrate, and in doing so he exposes the seams at the very fabric of the narrative tale, and its handicaps:

Stories do not conclude when the author wishes it so. Neither when he puts a full stop to paper over his inability to keep track of things, nor when he wants his story to become a question mark in his readers' minds. When the author concludes his tale, it only means that the writing may now wash over the book cover and beyond, en route to its desired destination. (*Stella Maris*, ص, 307)

Even when describing Adam's encounter with Carma, the narrator apologizes to his readers by way of a metaliterary discussion that hints at opportunities missed because of his inability to narrate. He begins:

Carma's story is extraordinary by any stretch of the imagination and is the stuff detective novels are made of. Unfortunately, though, detective stories aren't exactly a staple of the Arabic novel tradition. You may come across the odd one, here and there, however they do not rise to the caliber of the true detective novels like the ones written by Agatha Christie and which boast a rationale so razor-sharp one would almost think it was based on the most mind-boggling mathematical equations. The magnitude of Carma's story will remain suspended, in a similar, detective story-like fashion, even though it could very well have been the first Arabic novel of this genre. Nevertheless, the author of these lines shall unfold it [his narrative] in a way devoid of any suspense. (*Stella Maris*, ص, 394–395)

Elsewhere, after Adam says goodbye to his professor, slamming the door behind him, the outraged narrator insists that a farewell scene ought not to be described in such a melodramatic fashion. According to him, the description would be far more apt for a play or film. In novels, he argues, things never hit a peak as melodramatic as this.

The narrator's unreliability further stands out in some of the other characters' reactions in the novel, including those of Adam himself. For instance, when describing Adam's feelings of loneliness in Haifa, the narrator reminds the readers

of how Adam would get lost in Haifa's alleyways and explains how he had lost the sense of security he once had, when living in the ghetto. To undercut the narrator's authority, the implied author (or, the first Adam) brings in none other than Adam himself (or, the second Adam):

Adam read the line, "the sense of security he had, living in the ghetto," and laughed at the author of those words, the same, unseen third person presence hiding in his own absence to conjure up Adam's childhood memory. The words sounded like they were someone else's childhood recollections. How dare the memory portray the days of the al-Lydd ghetto as a time of security? (*Stella Maris*, ص, 170)

The novel is littered with innuendoes of this kind that repeatedly betray the instability of the story that cannot stand as a properly "stitched together" narrative, while shining a light on the absent narrator's inability to tell a fully coherent tale. He trips, stumbles, and errs, unable to clarify the events' ontological status. Sometimes he leads readers to false insights into the inner workings of Adam's consciousness and is preoccupied with matters of representation and genres that allegedly pull him away from any narrative cohesiveness. When the narrator is required to recall the stories of the Galilee villages wiped out in 1948 and weave them all into a single, reliable integrative framework, he ends up instead bemoaning the polyphony of both narrators and narratives:

Stories of Umm al-Zinat and Siblun, like all other wiped out villages, stretch out endlessly. No author shall ever be able to fully encompass them. They come undone as the wounds on a smashed-up body do. (*Stella Maris*, ص, 341)

This does not discredit the stories of the Nakba. On the contrary it provides them with greater credibility by adding multiple (Palestinian) voices. The polyphony and plays on narratology make the language of the novel all the more vibrant, and in doing so enable the articulation of those many more hitherto muted voices.

It appears, however, that above all else the narrator comments on the failure to grapple with the unfolding narrative's temporal intricacy, which may explain why the two novels, *Stella Marris* and *Children of the Ghetto*, share no chronological order. The narrator writes:

The logic of the narrative dictates that every story must have its predecessor and successor. And when one is involved in writing, one must bow down to the tempest of story cycles that do not conclude only so they could then start anew. What critics have dubbed a "peak" is nowhere to be found in the story you are telling, for it is more likely to have taken place in the one that had predated it, or in the story that will succeed it. The closer one gets to these stories, the more one will come to realize that

what one is doing is painting endless parallel mirrors and giving in to the allure of this illusory world that will not allow one a way out of its labyrinthine landscape. (*Stella Maris*, ص, 308)

The perception of space-time in the text has a formidable impact on the way the translations were tackled; that perception also warrants a specific grammatical inflection that captures the action's perfect, or alternatively, imperfect nature—for instance, the attempt by those living in the past perfect tense (made refugees in 1948) to tell the story in the present continuous. Opting for the present continuous as opposed to the past perfect is far more than just a grammatical proclivity; rather, it is a political choice demonstrating how, from the absentee's spatial point of view, the present is missing as it articulates the physical rift in space and the removal of all markers of time from it. To give presence is a political act on the one hand, and at the same time, an articulation of the challenge that is the very prospect of such an act. Therein lies the trap one faces in the attempt to stabilize the absentees' grammatical and political syntax.

The matter of the absent person's credibility aside, the *Stella Maris* narrator frequently opts for counterfactual thoughts, in defiance of reality, which point to a variety of possible versions of many events—"an infinity of parallel mirrors" reminiscent of Borges's *The Garden of Forking Paths*. In this vein, Khoury outlines an array of possibilities, imagined in a plurality of voices, that indicate a multitude of authorities speaking in one's own emotional theater.

For instance, when Adam says goodbye to his mother, he expects her to call out to him and ask him to stay. The narrator recalls this scenario in seven different versions supposedly going through Adam's head, with each standing as a would-be draft of its predecessor. In one instance he envisages her holding his hand and shedding some tears; the second time, he imagines taking his father's photo from her before taking off; the third version has her yanking the rucksack out of his hand, taking out Hassan's photo and holding it close to her chest; a fourth version sees her grabbing him by the shoulder, looking into his eyes, and announcing that she's taking off with him; in a fifth iteration she stands in front of him, blocking his exit; a sixth version finds her holding his hand, reminding him that he must not forget that she is his mother and that she will love him until her dying day; and finally, in

the seventh account she collapses and faints, and he must lean down and rouse her awake with his kisses. This is how the narrator produces multiple, would-be versions of the same event that enable the narrative to take wholly different turns in parallel worlds. These versions are organized in a multitude of genres and on a steadily-rising sentimental scale that reaches its climax in the operatic melodrama that was the mother fainting and Adam having to kiss her awake. The imagined episodes seem like an assortment of never-realized possibilities, which only further aggravates the sense of affront that accompanies this goodbye.

Similarly, when the professor asks Adam to accompany him on the trip to Warsaw, Adam considers telling him that he is in fact an Arab. According to the narrator's version of events, Adam imagines this confessional scene endless times. He pictures the professor overcome with rage and demanding to know why he had lied to him. At the same time, he also conjures up a polar opposite scene in which the professor embraces him and admits considering him a stepbrother. He goes over scores of scenarios only to never come clean to the professor. The existence of multiple versions deepens the narrator's identification with Adam's innermost yearnings while at the same time further cementing the impression that the story, in its initial account, had in fact taken place.

Counterfactual scenarios and episodes are not exclusive to the narrative and may very well occur in the historic reality to which it alludes. One evening, when he was still in the middle of writing *Stella Maris*, Khoury called me and asked when the trips to Poland actually began. I told him that to my knowledge, they started in the 1990s, which he promptly dismissed. "Could they have started in the sixties?" he enquired. "Adam recalls going with a delegation to visit the Warsaw Ghetto." I immediately told him that that would be highly unlikely, since in 1965 there were no such trips to Poland; however, after a brief rummage through the archives, I came to realize that Adam was in fact telling the truth. Between 1963 and 1965, three delegations were sent to visit the Warsaw Ghetto—a project hatched by ghetto survivor Fredka Mazia. And so, Mazia would later emerge as a (marginal) character in the novel. While in this case mimesis came out triumphant over logical likelihood, the novel in other instances features additional counterfactual recurrences that circumvent not only the narrative reality but also the historical one. For example, toward the end of the novel, a conversation is described between Adam and Abu al-Khajar, the Palestinian who had immigrated to the United States in his youth and who later went to Princeton, where in 1948 he met Albert Einstein, whom he may have encouraged to speak up against the Deir Yassin massacre. This counterfactual prospect arises in an *ars poetica*

discussion between Abu al-Khajar (a self-proclaimed “bastard child of coincidence”) and Adam. Abu al-Khajar asks Adam:

“Why are you asking me all these questions? Don’t tell me you want to write a story about me.”

“I don’t write stories.”

“You’re lying. But I will ask you this: if you do end up writing about me, then could you please leave out the Einstein bit? Mostly because no one’s going to believe it.

They’ll take you for a fibber.”

“But is it or isn’t it a true story?”

“Of course it’s bloody true, but people—they don’t believe the truth.” (*Stella Maris*, ص, 457)

Is it or isn’t it, then? Is it a historical possibility that did actually come to pass or, rather, no more than a narrator’s flight of fancy? The reader could just as easily wonder whether Adam’s encounter with Marek Edelman is but another version of a counter-reality prospect or an event that did in fact take place within the framework of the novel’s narrative “reality.” According to the narrator’s account, it is a true story, based on the most peculiar coincidence that had occurred at the university’s Department of Hebrew Literature. The word “coincidence” explicitly recurs a number of times in the course of the novel. The coincidence that is the convergence of events without any clear causative link between them is enabled by the sudden, abrupt cutting between time and space. This is how, for instance, Adam’s encounter with his professor ends up being described as an odd coincidence. His crossing paths with auto-shop owner Gabriel somewhere between Haifa and Nazareth is also labelled a coincidence. Not to mention the mysterious dentist he also happens to meet, who is said to “turn this coincidence into something fate-like.”⁴ In this episode, which offers Adam the potential to reread his entire earlier biography, the coincidence is the product of a hidden kinship.

The novel also explores a number of counterfactual avenues with regard to Hebrew literature as it carries on building additional narrative worlds and parallel mirrors. The chapter “The Lovers of Haifa” presents an alternate world to that created in A. B. Yehoshua’s *The Lover*. In a carnivalesque way, Khoury inverts signs, representations, and names, flipping them on their heads in a game of timelines and roles. Palestinian worker Naim—who can recite “In the City of Slaughter” by Israel’s poet laureate Bialik—becomes Adam, who is studying Hebrew literature; Adam, who owns the Jewish-run garage, turns into Gabriel, while Gabriel, who owns the vintage Morris car, becomes Hebrew author Menachem Zechariah, who is at the

garage looking for an Arab informant so that he may start work on his novel. In this literary exercise, Khoury not only reconceives *The Lover's* garage scene but in his play on timelines is also ahead of the narrating time. He relocates the scene to the early 1960s, a time when Yehoshua was writing *Facing the Forests*, in which for the first time, the Palestinian's muteness is put into words in the most coherent way possible: "The Arab turns out to be old and mute. His tongue was cut out during the war. By one of them or one of us? Does it matter? Who knows what the last words were that stuck in his throat?"⁵

Khoury flips the script in an ironic conversation between Adam and author Menachem Zechariah about the choices a writer faces:

"Now, my friend, you've discovered your protagonist. Start with the hatred you saw all over the Arabs' faces and write about your Arab protagonist."

"No, uh-uh. I need a different protagonist. I need him to be nice, and not so crass when he talks."

"Do you want a mute protagonist or what? Everyone talks like that. That's if they do talk."

"Mute?" Menachem asked.

"That's right . . . A lot of them either became mute or are claiming to be mute."

"A mute protagonist! Why the hell not? That's an incredible idea you've just given me. You're actually pretty smart, kid." (*Stella Maris*, ص, 115)

In this reimagining of *The Lover*, Khoury drags the author into the narrative, turning him into a character in the novel who is forced to confront both the characters he himself has created and the limitations of his own story. Here too Khoury stretches out the linguistic metaphor while examining its material and corporeal aspect. The mute character in *Stella Maris* takes Hebrew literature to task for describing his tongue as having been "amputated":

"No! No!" the mute man cried out, shaking his head right and left as he stuck out a long tongue in evidence that no man had in fact amputated his tongue. (*Stella Maris*, ص, 102)

Khoury ultimately presents us with a double, political-literary move: he summons the absentees and allows them to give their testimony, which exposes the seams that hold together the very fabric of Hebrew literature, only to enlighten us, by the end of this turn, on his own shortcomings as narrator.

Khoury throws curve balls not only to the narrator but also to the translator with his use of complex metalinguistic techniques or by making metatranslative interjections, which present the translator with several dilemmas that are not limited to the understanding of the Arabic source text or the way in which it is adapted to Hebrew. For instance, in one of the scenes where Adam professes his love for Rivka, he quotes an Arab love poem, “*lam yuzidni al-wirdu illa ‘atashan.*”⁶ Adam struggles to translate the line into Hebrew and when he fails to find an appropriate parallel, decides to abandon the poem’s translation altogether. Should the translator then translate the poem to Hebrew after all, or leave it in its Arabic version, as unintelligible to the monoglot readers as it is to Rivka? In this instance, I opted to leave the poem in its Arabic version, transliterated in Hebrew without any translation, and even added a note in the text that follows the same metatranslative register, indicating that the translator also chose to leave the line untranslated. In doing so I was attempting not only to stay true to Adam’s decision but also to make the translator a flesh and blood presence—a figure with a theoretical, cultural, and political agenda, thus breaking with a tradition in which the translator dons a proverbial invisibility cloak with the aim of producing a text so transparent one would never know it is in fact a translation. Uncloaking and making the hidden-absent translator present in the text articulates the reality that translators do have an agenda that mediates the novel’s transition from Arabic into Hebrew, and which is the translator’s ethical responsibility to reveal.

The idiosyncrasies of Arabic are heightened by Khoury’s in-depth foray into language. Every so often, he stops and turns to metalinguistic terminology that demarcates how words, grammar, and syntax ultimately all fall short. The novel’s intense preoccupation with language, and even more with language’s language (metalanguage), forms a long and winding road, littered with linguistic, semantic, and discursive bumps and obstacles that make the recreation of the novel in Hebrew all the more challenging. In one of the scenes, Adam lists for his girlfriend, Dalia, a total of twenty synonyms for the word “love” found in the Arabic dictionary (*hawa, maḥabba, ṣababa, huyam, shawq*, etc.). These are in fact the result of an act of translation within language itself. An attempt to endow each of these words with meaning via the dictionary results in a “dictionary’s loop,” for the semantic fields in which they exist do not overlap between the two languages, nor do they follow any form of hierarchy in Hebrew or Arabic. There is no way of breaking this cyclical pattern without making some arbitrary decision, since every choice made leads to a simultaneous excess and lack. One’s only remaining option is to transliterate the

Arabic words into Hebrew and to decide arbitrarily what their Hebrew markers will be.

He translated for Dalia the twenty scenarios through which love passes, as described by the Arabs; however, he remained unsure as to the exact meaning of the words, for translating words of love to other languages is not possible, as love itself defies translation. He therefore decided arbitrarily whether the “*ṣababa*” is the portal into the “*huyam*,” and whether the “*huyam*” is the peak of love, or if it is in fact the other way around. (*Stella Maris*, ص, 429)

The aforementioned lack of overlap between the different languages makes the translation task much more complicated, since this multiplicity begets both excess and lack at the same time. This multilayered linguistic structure is embedded in the very art of translation and mandates a reexamination of one’s loyalties to the national habitus and its lexicons, for the number of Hebrew synonyms for love at the translator’s disposal pales in comparison to their equivalents in Arabic. The following line, for instance, is not a clear-cut translation of the source text: “. . . from passion to entertainment, from cry to lust, from affection to desire.”

In this formation, from a substitute for the original—that is to say, the thing standing in for it—the translation becomes a metatext placed alongside the source text, often further illuminating it. After all, Khoury himself does not believe the source text’s own stability and time and again allows one to reflect on the narrator’s ultimate (in)ability to tell the story.

Adam regretted telling Dalia his Abu Hassan al-Hajar story, as the story seemed to have quite a few holes in it. In order to salvage the story, he had to come up with several romantic tales about the old man and to say things that had not been said by him. (*Stella Maris*, ص, 447)

This mode of reflexivity peaks when the character of Elias Khoury (“Lebanese writer and author of *Bab al-Shams*”) appears in the novel, and the implied author then undermines Khoury’s own reliability, suggesting an alleged hidden agenda:

The Lebanese author spoke with tremendous confidence, never even conceiving that every story will always have another story preceding it and that the narrator cannot genuinely tell a story, unless he leads us to those narratives hiding behind his own. (*Stella Maris*, ص, 261)

Adam the narrator also challenges Elias Khoury's reliability in *Children of the Ghetto*, branding him a fibber, portraying him as lacking in knowledge and understanding of the Palestinian narrative, and as someone who has twisted the words of *Bab al-Shams's* narrator, Khalil Ayoub. Here we revisit the following question: is this Adam playing tricks on the readers and adopting the third-person form after having split in two, in order to undermine the author's and Khoury's credibility? And if that be the case, how will he opt to address us in the trilogy's third part, currently being written? Will he remain silent, as he had been at the end of his life as described in *Children of the Ghetto*? Will he anoint another absentee as the narrator of his story? Or will he actually set off on a quest to find Khalil Ayoub, Lord only knows where he's hiding, so that he may decipher the political syntax of the absentees?

Notes

- 1 Elias Khoury: *My Name is Adam: Children of the Ghetto, Volume I*, trans. Humphrey Davies (London: MacLehose Press, 2016), 24–25.
- 2 Elias Khoury, *Stella Maris* (Beirut: Dar Al-Adab, 2019), 14.
- 3 Elias Khoury, interview by Robyn Creswell, "The Art of Fiction No. 233," *Paris Review* 220 (Spring 2017).
- 4 *Ibid.*, 418.
- 5 A. B. Yehoshua, *The Collected Stories*, trans. Marsha Pomerantz (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 210.
- 6 Khoury, *Stella Maris*, 128.



Elias Khoury

Thirst

Translation from the Arabic: Humphrey Davies

I was born in thirst, as my mother told the tale. Now, as I write about that woman who vanished from my life when I was fifteen, I don't know whether her lips were indeed cracked in parallel, straight lines, or if it is the image of thirst, which has pursued me since childhood, that transforms her thirsty lips whenever I recall her.

She was my mother, and she was Manal, daughter of Atif Suleiman, of the village of Eilaboun in Galilee. When I remember her, I say, "Manal was . . .", for to me she's like the first word in a sentence that was never completed. After I left the house at fifteen to work in Mr Gabriel's garage in Haifa, I discovered that the woman had passed through my life like a sigh of wind, leaving behind her nothing but her world of stories, and that the only things I could remember of her were her cracked lips, her wide almond-shaped eyes deep inside whose pupils trembled a hint of dark brown, two fine, almost invisible, lines on her cheeks, and a deep feeling that I had been abandoned so that I could live alone.

I don't know what brought this woman of Galilee to Lydda, or why she fled from her village to join a hot and humid city under siege. Is that what love is?

She said that one look from Hasan's eyes had been enough to change the course of her life. When she talked to me about Hasan, she would look at me with pitying eyes and say she'd been surprised that "that boy Adam" (meaning me) did not look like his father.

Hasan was tall, dark-skinned and broad-shouldered. His honey-coloured eyes held a flash like lightning, and his smile, which lit up his face, signalled his attitude to life.

She said she'd met him in Eilaboun. He was with a band of the Holy Struggle *fedayeen*. He asked her about the village spring, so she walked with him and instead of her taking him to the spring, he took her to his city.

prose

The woman loved only one man. When she married Abdallah al-Ashhal and we went to live with him in that house – more of a shack – on the flank of Mount Carmel, she told me she didn't love him and that she'd done it for the respectability. I looked at her with strange eyes and said nothing but decided to leave.

I was ten when I decided to leave the woman for ever. I don't know where that "for ever" came from! I do, however, remember that I whispered it to myself and only put my decision into effect five years later. That's another story, the beginning of my own story.

prose My mother was a woman fashioned of words, the first word of a sentence with no last word but the ghetto, as though she'd been born there. She had no family, no village and no memory. She didn't talk about Eilaboun or her people and only mentioned her earlier life once, when she told me that I looked like Daoud, and my fate would be like his. She said it with dissatisfaction, because I didn't resemble the man she had loved.

"And who's Daoud?" I asked her.

I was seven. I was standing in front of her as she cut my hair.

"You call this hair?!" she asked.

"What's wrong with it?" I asked.

"Fair," she replied, and said she was sad for me because I looked not like my father but like Daoud.

When I asked her who Daoud was, she said my father had been a hero and when she gave birth to me, she'd felt that Hasan had come back to her. She'd wanted to call me Hasan, after him, but Hajj Iliyya Batshoun, head of the residents' committee in the ghetto, said I was the first child born to the ghetto so they had to call me Adam, and that's what happened, against her wishes.

I asked her again about the Daoud whom I looked like but she didn't reply and I had to wait eight years to listen, on that rainy Haifa night, to the tale of Daoud and his endless wanderings.

I don't know why I didn't ask her more! At that moment, I felt poised to escape the trap of the life my stepfather Abdallah had forced on me and was terrified by the violent sea winds that made the entire hovel shake.

It was two in the morning. I hadn't slept that night and was overwhelmed by anxiety; then the rain came, to make me feel entirely alone in this world. I was sitting in the room with the wide rectangular window that my mother used as her sewing workshop, listening to the shloosh of the rain against the glass. I saw her come in wearing her long, light blue nightdress and stand next to the window. She looked at

me with half-closed eyes and said in a whisper that she knew I was going to leave.

“From the day I bore you, I knew you were like Daoud.”

She told the tale of the man’s endless wanderings. She said they’d lost him because the road had swallowed him.

They were driven out of Eilaboun. They walked and walked till they came to Lebanon and at Tyre they looked for him and couldn’t find him. They were told he’d been seen in Sidon. His brother went to Sidon and was told he’d been seen in Beirut and in Beirut he was told he was in Tripoli and in Tripoli they said he was in Aleppo and in Aleppo they said he was in Latakia and in Latakia they said he was in Antioch. His brother went back from Latakia to Sidon, saying he could not go on. “Where should I go? Maybe he’s at the ends of the earth now. Am I supposed to go to the ends of the earth to catch up with him?” And when it was decided that the inhabitants of Eilaboun should go back to their village, a year after they’d been driven out of it, his brother Subhi stood in the midst of the families that had gathered to wait for the buses and wept and moved others to weep. He said Daoud must still be walking northwards and would keep walking till he reached the end of the world.

Manal said the people of Eilaboun had returned to their village, but Daoud was still lost, “And you look like him. You too will walk to the end of the world and I can’t stop you, because you are following your destiny.”

She came close to me. I thought she was going to bend over and hug me to her breast but she remained frozen in place. I thought I saw tears on her cheeks but wasn’t sure. The combination of the darkness and the pale light from the electric lamp made me see things as shadows.

Now too I see Manal as a shadow drawn in black, and I see that her lips are cracked and thirsty. In the past, I thought her cracked lips were an indelible trace of the days of thirst in the ghetto, but now I see things differently. I believe her lips cracked out of thirst for a kiss. I’m certain that her relationship with my father was a thirst for love that was realised only on the deathbed, and that the other man, who married her because he was avid for a house in Lydda that he believed she owned, only to discover she owned nothing – that man never once planted a kiss on her lips because he had no idea how to kiss a woman, or he thought that to kiss one was to make her the equal of a man. When I learned that she’d died alone in Eilaboun after her divorce and that in those last days she’d asked to see me, I didn’t cry. I was getting drunk in a bar in Tel Aviv and I don’t know what devil possessed me but my reaction to the news was to laugh. A grimace of contempt passed over

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the face of the man who told me he'd been looking for me for ages because they wanted me there in the village to receive condolences, and he turned his back and left, muttering insults.

Now, when I recall the story, I feel water filling my eyes and taste tears on my lips. I cry without crying and my crying has no meaning, for crying too has its time, and its time had passed.

I got up, filled my glass with French red wine, lit a cigarette, opened the window so that I could breathe in the hot New York summer air that pricks the face like needles, and decided to forget the woman again.

I can say that I've lived alone inside the cages of the ghetto made out of my mother's words and stories and her nostalgia for the days of the barbed wire. That story planted itself in my memory as firmly as if I'd lived it and as if the wire that encircled the Sakna quarter, where the hospital where I was born was located and where Lydda was transformed into a detention camp surrounded on all sides by graves, had been my life; it would become my secret story for over fifty years. When I was asked at Haifa University where I was from, I'd always reply with a single word – the ghetto – thinking my colleagues, male and female, would look at me with pity as the son of a Warsaw Ghetto survivor.

I wasn't lying. I know the stories of the Warsaw Ghetto as well as I know the stories of the ghetto of Lydda. Such stories resemble each other, like the dead. The stories of the first I read innumerable times, till they were engraved on my memory, and those of the second were like a brand stamped on my soul – stories I read and stories I heard, not just with my ears but with my body, on which my mother's words were traced.

All the same . . .

I don't want to lie now as I did during my childhood and early youth. Or rather, I didn't lie: when I was asked who I was, I'd run my fingers through my fair curly hair and say one word, and the listener would understand that I was assigning myself to his memory, not my mother's. It was, of course, a silent lie, but only if we believe that the clouds are lying when they don't bring rain. Silence has been the distinguishing mark of my life, and that is what I have in common with my mother. Now, I call the woman my mother, but I don't remember ever calling her by anything but her name, devoid of the water of motherhood.

Manal was young and will remain so for ever. If I were to meet her now, I'd treat her as a child. She was a child who had never left her childhood behind her. She'd fallen in love with a man twenty years her elder as though it were a game, and the

game had led her to a tragedy that would draw a permanent mask of childish pain over her face.

I told her I was going. I was a young man. Down had begun to trace the outline of a moustache and I'd decided I could no longer stand life there, next to the garbage dump, where Abdallah al-Ashhal lived with his wife and her son.

He never once called me "son" or addressed a word to me. He'd speak to my mother so that she could speak to me, since I was her son. I knew nothing about the man. I hated the smell of cognac mixed with garbage that wafted from his mouth and clothes. When I later learned his story, pity blended with my hatred of him and of myself. He hated me and hated my mother's insistence on sending me to the school in Wadi al-Nisnas.

As far as I was concerned, it didn't matter either way. Books were doors that I'd open onto the world, and the Hebrew teacher was pleased at how enthralled I was by "the language of paradise," as he called the language of the Torah, which I alone in my class spoke well. It was my door onto the world. I never got into the worlds of children's books, which didn't attract me. In contrast, I entered a wide world fashioned by literature. I memorised the poetry of Bialik and read the novels of Yizhar, was bewitched by Agnon and amazed by Benjamin Tammuz, but my true love was for Russian literature in translation.

"Your son has to work," the man told my mother, one wintry, rainy night.

When it rains in Haifa and the salty sea wind rages, you feel that you, in your house on the flank of Carmel, are in an ark tossed by the waves, and that the dove will drown in the sea.

I told the daughter of the owner of the garage where I'd ended up both working and living, whose name was Rivka, about the dove planted in the water. It was my point of entry into her heart. The girl understood what I meant by the simile only when we went far out to sea together on a fishing boat. There, Rivka discovered the dove and almost drowned in the sea . . . which is another story that deserves to be told.

"I can't spend any more on him. He's big as a donkey now, so he has to work and help me," my stepfather said.

The donkey decided to leave. That night, he didn't sleep a wink, and at two in the morning Manal came to him and he didn't say anything because she already knew.

I was surprised the woman didn't ask me where I was going. She bent down and kissed me and said it was time, so I understood that she knew and that she wanted me to go.

She went to her room and returned, tiptoeing on her bare feet, then gave me a long letter written in ink that had faded almost to illegibility, along with a sheet of paper written in clear ink.

“These papers,” she said, “are your father’s will. I’m giving them to you even though he left them for me, because I have no right to them. They are the will your father left you.”

I took the papers in my hand and almost laughed.

“You call these papers a will?” I asked.

“We own nothing,” she replied, “but words.”

Such was our farewell. She said she might have been wrong. “Well, well, maybe it would have been better to bury the will with your father, but at the time, poor us, I had no idea what was going to happen and everything was topsy-turvy. I didn’t know what to do and now I’m handing over the sacred trust. You’re his son. Do with them as you like.”

I put the will in my bag and left, and when I read the pages in the cramped room where I stayed at Mr Ghurbial’s garage, I felt for the first time like a character in a novel, not a real person. When the feeling repeated itself forty years later in New York as I listened to my blind friend Ma’moun telling me my story as he lived it in Lydda and in the midst of the Caravan of Death that had left the city, I felt as though a thunderbolt had split me in two, and no longer knew who I was. It is a story that “if inscribed with needles on men’s eyes would serve as a lesson for the wise,” as Scheherazade puts it in her book (inviting us to read the story with Ma’moun’s blind vision).

Notes

- * Reprinted by permission of the author, from Elias Khoury, *My Name is Adam: Children of the Ghetto: Volume I* (London: MacLehose Press, 2016), 123–130. The Hebrew translation of the book was published by Maktoob in 2018 under the title *Yaldei ha-Ghetto: Shmi Adam* (translated by Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani).