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## **Roots in the Air**

Construction of Identity  
in Anglophone Israeli Literature

With 2 figures

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## 1. Introduction

“I always thought that I am who I am, that I have a name, a label, a moniker, almost unique, that my name is me and I am my name” writes Jerome Mandel in the opening lines of his short story “How I Disappeared: An Immigrant’s Tale” (Mandel 2012: 27). But the wishful, simplistic formula of “I am who I am” is about to be challenged. In the story, the protagonist, identical with Mandel himself, acquires a new identity through a series of misunderstandings. Upon arrival in Israel, his Jewish, but distinctly Anglophone-sounding name is bent by Israeli officials to fit the local phonetics and orthography, and as each subsequent clerk tries to improve the work of his predecessor, “Jerome Mandel” gradually mutates into “Mendel Gross” in the records of various institutions. Although the protagonist refuses to pay taxes under the localized version of his name, the new appellation enters not only the Israeli bureaucracy, but also seeps into the sphere of casual contact. The story is narrated in a comical mode, yet the gradual and involuntary modification of the protagonist’s name upon his migration to Israel becomes symbolic of a deeper and broader change of identity that has become one of the central themes of Anglophone Israeli writing.

The growing body of Anglophone literature that has been produced in Israel since the 1970s is a rather untypical case among contemporary Anglophone literatures. On the one hand, it can be placed among New Literatures in English due to the untraditional locality of production and to its emphasis on hybrid consciousness and cultural synthesis. Defying the borders of the ownership of culture by traditional Anglophone societies of Britain and the USA, new literary waves, currents and traditions have emerged from former colonies, such as from India and the Caribbean, and from migrant communities, like the Latino community in the United States, reassessing past and present paradigms of power and critiquing the increasingly complex social fabric that is permeated by transnational and transcultural connections. Yet although the geographical site of production of Anglophone Israeli Literature is removed from the western centers, it is nevertheless markedly different from most branches of literature which are normally subsumed under the label New Literatures in English. This

loosely bound community of approximately 500–1000 authors (Alkalay-Gut 2002) primarily consists of immigrants from English-speaking countries such as the United States, Canada and South Africa. Being perhaps the largest creative Anglophone expatriate community worldwide – comparable to the American community in Paris in the 1920s – it has no claim to being subaltern or repressed. Anglophone Israeli Literature operates outside the dominant Hebrew culture and is virtually unknown to mainstream Israeli readers, yet its achievements are recognized on government level – two Anglophone Israeli poets have received the President’s Prize for literature – and it is being progressively translated into Hebrew. At the same time it enjoys positive reviews and the attention of readers in Anglophone countries. Being often introspective, it still resists a clear self-definition.

In that respect, Anglophone Israeli Literature presents a remarkable view of the individual’s place in the milieu of diversity, of the relation between the native and the acquired culture and of the choice and validity of group identities. While cultural studies increasingly propagate the awareness that intra-cultural diversity and local and trans-local transcultural connections are not merely a contemporary phenomenon but have been characteristic of communities throughout history (e. g. Hannerz 1996, Kraidy 2005, Erll 2011), the recognition of the various diachronic and synchronic threads and layers of locations, languages and worldviews is the cornerstone of Anglophone Israeli writing, as it will be argued in this book. Counting backwards, there is the personal story of migration to Israel, the migration of parents or grandparents to an Anglophone country from eastern or central Europe, the received or constructed memories of the family’s life before migration and the dialogue with the traditional concepts of Zion and with the narratives of exodus, exile and return, which are an integral part of Jewish and Israeli consciousness. While Mandel’s story satirizes the transformation of his name upon arrival to Israel, others, such as Richard Sherwin, trace their names backwards into the earlier generations, following and processing in writing the geographical, cultural and linguistic layers. At the same time, received images are confronted with the actual experience of the new country as “a transit camp, with tribes that do not mix” (Frankel 1999: 2), with the need to establish and develop a creative identity in one language while communicating experiences from another and with a necessity to redefine oneself anew vis-à-vis composite and shifting social memberships.

So far, Anglophone Israeli writing has been hardly explored academically, with most essays and articles focusing on individual authors such as Shirley Kaufman or Karen Alkalay-Gut. While articles, e. g. by Stiller (1997), Kearful (2000 and 2001) and Felstiner (2005), have contributed important insights into certain aspects of the work of these authors, there is barely an appreciation of Anglophone Israeli writing as a coherent phenomenon, or an attempt to in-

tegrate it into the theoretical framework of contemporary cultural studies. Several articles have treated Anglophone Israeli authors as a group (Alkalay Gut 2002 and 2007 and Stähler 2009), yet there is no overview of the field that would enable the consideration of individual authors within their milieu or the placement of the field within the wider map of literature. Studies of individual texts, such as Wardi's (2004) analysis of Shirley Kaufman's "Sanctum," address the features they analyze as insulated occurrences, with little consideration of the broader creative development to which these belong.

A closer study of the field, however, would be beneficial for two reasons. On the one hand, data from Israel widens the scope of English Literary studies, bringing a new region with a unique cultural history to the attention of literary scholars. On the other hand, it lays bare the mechanisms of identity construction in an environment where some of the dominant modes of New Literatures in English, such as challenging the cultural or economic hegemony of Britain or the U.S., or "writing back" to a colonial center, are hardly relevant. The complex picture of Anglophone writing in Israel cannot be explained by the binary dynamics of receiving culture/ migrating culture (e.g. Papastergiadis 2000: 94) or by the dialogism of domination, resistance and adaptation. Neither is it a transplanted privileged community that exists within its own boundaries. Rather, as the book will demonstrate, it is the awareness of the transcultural complexity of both the present and the past and the resulting questioning of possibilities – the choice of language, country or position versus the Other – that shapes the fluid revision of the self-image and self-presentation in Anglophone Israeli Literature.

This is also the twofold aim of this book. This study seeks to forward the understanding of Anglophone Israeli writing as a field, with its specific history and transcultural currents by establishing its relation to contemporary cultural theories of identity, by describing its social dimensions, by providing a comprehensible overview of its development and major trends and by considering its relation to the neighbouring fields of literature. With an overview at hand, the second part of the book will proceed to elucidate the mechanisms of constructing and expressing identity in Anglophone Israeli writing. The specific analysis of the self's relation to language, locality and the Other will be conducted on the basis of a corpus of original works by some of the most significant Anglophone Israeli authors – Shirley Kaufman, Riva Rubin, Rachel Tzvia Back, Rochelle Mass, Lami, Karen Alkalay-Gut, Richard Sherwin and Jerome Mandel – and a series of personal interviews conducted with these authors between 2010 and 2012.

First, chapter two – "Cultures in Flux and the Flexible Selves" – critiques the concepts of identity in contemporary cultural studies, and especially in post-colonial studies, focusing on the notions of hybridity and transculturalism and

on the deconstruction of the concept of discrete, monadic cultures. These notions are also examined from the perspective of Jewish studies, where the concept of “Jewishness” as an identity has experienced a fragmentation into ethnic, religious and cultural components, and the form and validity of each have been repeatedly challenged. If the interaction with various transcultural forces has continuously shaped and diversified Jewish cultures around the world, Anglophone Israeli Literature produces a new and fluid recombination of already complexly hybrid forms.

Chapter three – “English and English Speakers in Israel” – elucidates the specific social context of Anglophone Israeli writing by examining the place of English and its speakers in Israel. As the status of literature in a minority language is related to the position of the given language and its speakers in society, this chapter analyzes the spread of English in Israel and the shift of popular attitudes and linguistic policy that changed the negative attitudes towards English as the language of British colonial dominion to its present high status. It also seeks to give insights into the pertinent aspects of migration from Anglophone countries, such as the various waves of immigration and their motivation, which are relevant to the temporal and local development of Anglophone Israeli writing, as well as to its themes and opinions.

A concise overview of Anglophone Israeli writing is given in chapter four. Beginning with an attempt at defining the field, the chapter proceeds with a brief history of the beginnings of English writing in Israel in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. It is followed by analyses of some central aspects and trends of the field, such as the role of authors’ organizations, which were especially influential in the 1980s and 90s, the emergence of English-language creative writing courses, workshops and even academic programs at Israeli universities, the opportunities of publishing locally and overseas and the choice of authors to align themselves with specific audiences. It also addresses the issues of the Anglophone authors’ integration into the Israeli culture and into that of their original countries, as well as the question of genre and the poetic form. While the production of novels has increased in the last decades, poetry remains the dominant genre within Anglophone Israeli Literature. A further subject that is especially important for the choice of the corpus is the presence of authors of non-Anglophone origin among Anglophone Israeli authors, who, however, remain a minority within a minority. The overview is also supplemented by a timeline of Anglophone Israeli writing at the end of the present volume.

Chapter five – “Voices in Context” – provides a different kind of context to Anglophone Israeli writing by examining the issues of language and identity in bordering fields – Jewish American Literature and Hebrew Literature. This chapter especially focuses on the role of national ideology and assimilation pressure, and on the change that these factors have undergone in the past cen-

tury, which allowed Anglophone Israeli Literature not only to establish itself amidst the majority Hebrew culture, but also to challenge the boundaries of national and social identities. While among Yiddish-speaking immigrants to the U.S., native-tongue writing initially competed with writing in the acquired medium of English, but was superseded by the latter due to the desire and pressure to assimilate into the majority culture, considerably higher status of English and English speakers in Israel and the growing social recognition of transcultural identities created a more favorable climate for the creation of this minority language literature in Israel. On the other hand, as the chapter will show, the ideological pressure of Zionist nationalism, which was closely interlinked with the revival of Hebrew language and literature and which motivated Hebrew classics such as Hayim Nahman Bialik and Lea Goldberg to produce literature in a non-native tongue, weakened after Hebrew culture had achieved majority status in Israel, giving immigrants more room and license to create literature in other languages.

After exploring the importance of these background factors of literary production, the focus shifts to the analysis of literary works themselves. Chapter six – “Language and the Self” – investigates the connection between language and identity as reflected in the works of Anglophone Israeli authors. Here, a distinction is made between the various positions that different authors offer on the subject. Works of and interviews with authors such as Shirley Kaufman and Riva Rubin suggest that one’s relationship to a language is construed as innate and that the expression of one’s “true self,” especially in the sense of authentic literary production, can only be achieved in the mother tongue. In the words of Shirley Kaufman, “you can’t learn two/ landscapes in one/ life [...] or a language/ to put them in” (Kaufman 1979: 48). Here, one’s struggle with Hebrew is often considered in parallel with the earlier generations’ struggle with English. It will also be shown that other authors, such as Lami and Karen Alkalay-Gut, see the connection between the self and the language as more flexible, where, although English remains the primary medium of literary expression, one’s essentially composite identity is necessarily shaped by the angles discovered through other languages, especially Hebrew. Kaufman’s categorical impossibility of real movement between languages contrasts with Lami’s notions of “foster tongue” and “many mothers,” where the self productively coexists and draws on several linguistic dimensions.

Chapter seven – “Landscapes of Belonging” – focuses on the geographical component of identity. If the transcultural position of Anglophone Israeli authors induces the questioning of language, it also necessitates the reconsideration of home and belonging. Unsettled in terms of geography, both in terms of the personal migration and in the light of Jewish narratives of exile, Anglophone Israeli authors explore to what extent physical arrival is matched by the social

and emotional one. The chapter addresses issues such as the vehement deconstruction of the received images of “return” and “Holy Land,” the condition of “double diaspora” and its literary expression and the contrasting view of the possibility of taking root in the new country. It also expounds on the literary projections of alienation and attachment, where the descriptions of the landscape as harsh and hostile or pleasing and welcoming often stand place for estrangement from or connection to the new surroundings, with mixed forms effectively conveying ambivalent feelings. At the same time, the very idea of home as a geographical place is shown to be simultaneously desirable and disputable, where the struggle to reimagine one’s roots coexists with a need to find an equilibrium between the original country and the chosen country. Thus, not only the experience of the original country functions as a lens for perceiving Israel, but Israeli life also gradually becomes a filter for life overseas.

“Deconstructing the Other,” which is the eighth and final chapter of analysis, addresses the unsettling of the distinction between the self and the Other in Anglophone Israeli writing. The positioning of the self against the Other – an important boundary of identity – is especially relevant to Anglophone Israeli authors in the light of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unlike contemporary Hebrew poetry, which is largely apolitical, the Other takes a key position in Anglophone Israeli writing, which addresses conflicts such as the Lebanon wars and the First and Second Intifada. As the chapter will demonstrate, despite different political opinions, there is a strong tendency to reassess the Israeli national narrative and to supplement one representation of events with the re-imagination of the point of view of the other side, often focusing on the human dimension of the conflict and representing the suffering of both sides in parallel. Here, the half-outsider perspective of the Anglophone Israeli author is perceived as granting a special vantage point, as the lack of complete identification with the Israeli side may allow for a greater dissociation from political narratives. The specific responses range from the poetic rendition of personal experiences during bombardments to the erasure of ethnic boundaries in situations of personal contact, which foreground the shared humanity rather than antagonism.

As the book will show, Anglophone Israeli Literature is located on many seams. The awareness of the linguistic and geographic journeys across generations interacts with the branching of current possibilities, and with the need to find a better moral and political position, where identities are negotiated without violating the rights of the other. Mobile and malleable, these seams require the adaptation of consciousness to the unsettled paradigms, and give rise to salient images – a walking tree, a stranded buffalo in the Jerusalem hills, a dirty joke in the bomb shelter – that can provide a face to an experience of complexity. While some old forms of culture are in a state of decline, new ones

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are created, and it is the very challenge of the intensely translocal and trans-cultural that serves as an impetus for many Anglophone Israeli authors.





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## 2. Cultures in Flux and the Flexible Selves

### 2.1. Identity, Hybridity, Transculturality

In her poem “The Way” (1979: 48), the Anglophone Israeli poet Shirley Kaufman reflects on the experience of an immigrant:

So this is the way  
you leave the old country  
where they're practicing awareness  
in the hot tubs  
at Big Sur.

So this is the way  
you leave the mother  
tongue that stays  
in the mouth that feeds it  
but keeps quiet.

You can't learn two  
landscapes in one  
life he said  
or a language  
to put them in.

Picasso couldn't  
learn arithmetic  
because the number 7  
looked like a nose  
upside down.

So this is the way  
you stand on your head  
in Jerusalem: the wind  
is the sea at Point Lobos  
beating against the rocks.

The poem is characterized by its existence in the liminal space between the experiences of two countries: Israel and the USA. The title “The Way” indicates a passage, a lasting state of transition which manifests itself both on the geographical and on the linguistic level. The awareness of the self is turned on its head as the images of California – “the hot tubs/at Big Sur” and “the sea at Point Lobos” – are projected onto the Jerusalem reality, exposing the speaker to the wind that mixes the old and the new. The native tongue, English, is described as “quiet” and being left behind; in the new country its function as a carrier of creativity is impaired, but it is nevertheless used to write the poem. Like many other works by Anglophone Israeli authors, Shirley Kaufman’s “The Way” engages in a dialogue between the realities of Israeli life and the pre-migration experiences.

In a time characterized by unprecedented mobility of people, ideas and media, cultural studies are increasingly concentrating on exploring the ever more mobile borderlines of identifications, beyond the restraints of monolithic nation-oriented ideologies. Forfeiting the nationalistic struggle for centralizing nation-states around an ideal national “essence”, the focus of contemporary cultural and social studies is shifting towards the borderlands – the sites where the permeability of cultures and identities surfaces the most.

The growing recognition of the constitutive nature of nations, cultures, religions, etc. has led to a development of critical terms for the description of the processes of mixing, recombination and synergy in different disciplines and regions of study. The term *syncretism* has been largely employed in referring to instances and processes of mixing in religions around the world, especially with reference to the exchange of practices and cognitive constructs between Abrahamic religions and indigenous beliefs, from folk Catholicism in Mexico to the incorporation of the figures of Mary and Jesus into the Baltic pantheon. The term *creolization* is a cultural and social term that primarily refers to the surfacing of new identities emerging from the mixture of people of indigenous, African and European descent, particularly in the Caribbean and in South America (Brathwaite 1971: 11, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000: 51–52). At the same time, *creolization* can be used in a more narrow linguistic sense, describing the appearance of a new language in an environment where groups of population with distinct linguistic codes engage in prolonged territorial contact. Though originally applied to the societies of the Caribbean, it is now recognized that due to inevitable contact with other languages, creolization is characteristic of all languages, albeit to a different extent. *Mestizaje* is a related term utilized mainly in South-American and Meso-American contexts for new forms emerging from intense cultural contact and exchange between indigenous populations, Spanish and Portuguese settlers and, in certain areas, people of African origin. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2000: 121–122) note that in the Latin American context,

*mestizaje* has been developed as a positive element of national identity, while Gloria Anzaldúa advocates the development of a “new mestiza” consciousness for Chicanos (Anzaldúa 1999: 101).

In post-colonial theory and New Literatures in English, this permeability and reconfiguring of identities in the turbulence of mobility has been taken up in the discussion of *hybridity*. Not unique to literature studies, as Marwan Kraidy points out, *hybridity* has become one of the buzzwords of the new generation: “[h]ybridity has proven a useful concept to describe multipurpose electronic gadgets, environment-friendly cars with dual combustion and electrical engines, companies that blend American and Japanese management practices, multi-racial people, dual citizens, and postcolonial cultures.” (Kraidy 2005: 1) A salient, though by no means unambiguous term, hybridity has become one of the major themes of postcolonial theoretical discourse, on a par with the paradigm of “writing back” and colonial discourse analysis. If identity at first sight seems to imply a rigid identification with groups, then hybridity describes the process of transformation where fixed identities are called into question (Schulze-Engler 2007: 22). The very etymology of the word *hybridity* suggests the shifting of meanings and interpretations. With its origin in biology, the initial usage of the word signified a cross-breeding between different species of plants and animals, which would produce hybrid offspring that was stuck halfway between the two parent species, neither fish nor fowl. Furthermore, hybrid offspring is often infertile, especially among animal hybrids, which was thought to highlight its unnaturalness. Often produced for a specific reason, hybrids would have a practical, but not an aesthetic or emotional value, e.g. the mule would be more practical for certain types of work than a purebred horse, but it was nevertheless considered less noble or emotionally valuable than the horse. Already tainted by the suggestion of impurity and unnaturalness, hybridity acquired further negative connotation in colonialist race ideology, which emphasized the essential distinctiveness and superiority of the white race (Young 1995, Kuortti and Nyman 2007: 4).

However, as colonial modes of group representation were subjected to critical scrutiny, the term hybridity emerged as a way of challenging the monadic representation of cultures. In his study of philosophical and artistic works by Afro-American authors in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Paul Gilroy demonstrated the importance and the awareness of movement and of mutual exchange between spaces and cultures. The phenomenon of ‘double consciousness’ in the writings of authors such as W.E.B. Du Bois was used to demonstrate the permeability of supposedly monadic cultures and the multiple awareness of individuals (Gilroy 1993: 130–132). A year later, in his seminal work *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha used the image of a stairwell suggested by the works of

the contemporary visual artist Renée Green to describe the continuous formation and transformation of identity:

The stairway as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, presents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed and imposed hierarchy [...]. (2004: 4)

Bhabha's metaphor of the stairwell focuses not on its incrementality, but rather on its role as a space of multidirectional passage, an in-between space between not autonomous, but nevertheless recognizable polarities. Instead of representing a directed ascent or descent, it is a scene of ongoing there-and-back movement that stitches together the spaces of cultural realities. The in-between spaces become the sites of rootedness for uprooted identities; they "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself." (Ibid. 2)

At the same time, Bhabha's hybridity is not merely a descriptive term, but is closely linked to power relations; the liminal space is the site where the subaltern can challenge the sovereignty of dominant discourses and assert an identity apart, as Bhabha demonstrates drawing upon the examples of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story*. Critiquing Goethe's vision of world literature produced by a tumult of nations, he contends that literature of the "border and frontier conditions" (ibid. 17) – of transnational migrants, of the colonized and of political refugees – may become the new terrain of world literature, which would rely not on autonomy of national cultures or on the blurring and reductive universalism of human culture, but on omnipresent instances of displacement.

The modern city becomes the site where hybridity is being carried out. A magnet for migrants, minorities and the diasporic, the contemporary urban space has such density of population that it makes cultural engagement, affiliative or antagonistic, inevitable, providing a space in which "emergent identifications and new social movements are played out" (ibid. 243).

The significance of the new contact zone for the process of hybridity is taken up by Nikos Papastergiadis (2000). While Bhabha applies the notion of hybridity to post-colonial experience and the subaltern narrative, Papastergiadis relates it to a more general context of migration and globalization. Addressing the increasing deterritorialization of culture, Papastergiadis points out that a growing number of people experience a sense of belonging to certain communities

without sharing a common territory with the majority of its members. Papastergiadis challenges the ethnographic assumption that cultures can be mapped onto autonomous and bounded spaces; the authenticity of cultural phenomena is no longer exclusively linked to their centers (Papastergiadis 2000: 116). Although the borders of cultures and nations have always been fuzzy, migration and accelerated communication have brought differences closer together. Instead of creating a uniform global culture, the dynamics of migration have resulted in the emergence of spaces where varieties are entertained simultaneously. Referring to Roland Robertson, Papastergiadis discusses the shaping of cultural identity in the age of globalization:

Globalization need not lead to a uniform, singular state, nor is it inevitably a system that tends towards homogenization. It may, as Robertson has argued, lead to a heightened form of relativization whereby the particularities of individual units are not flattened but are both in sharpened contrast and involved in more intense dialogue with others. From this perspective globalization will accentuate both the incommensurability and the translation between cultural systems. This implies that the interaction will not be confined to the superimposition or duplication of one code or another. It also demands that cultural identity is not confirmed to the binarism of either particularism or universalism. (Ibid. 97)

It is then the process of cultural translation that becomes the meaning-making mechanism in a liminal space populated by differences, yet cultural translation is in itself a term that has invited criticism. The limitations of cultural translation in the context of hybridity have been addressed by Pnina Werbner and others scholars, who focus on the position of colored diasporic cultures. Noting that hybridity has been theorized as simultaneously “powerfully interruptive” and “commonplace and pervasive” (1997: 1), Werbner questions whether the apparent omnipresence of hybridity does indeed obviate its transgressive nature and whether the advance of hybridity in critical discourse reflects the social realities of the subaltern. Instead, Werbner draws attention to the counterforce of anti-hybrid discourse that, despite the apparent advance of heterophilia, persists in societies on all levels. Refocusing the discussion from a merely historically challenging discourse of injustice, Werbner advocates a contemporary interrogation of “the schismogenic forces that undermine coexistence, however uncertain and fragmentary, and precipitate polarizing essentialisms” (ibid. 3). At the same time Werbner calls into question the extent of influence that the aesthetic and theoretical works of diasporic intellectuals have on the realities of ethnicity, racism and nationalism, and whether the analysis of these “ritual objects” should indeed be used for theorizing about society and culture. Instead, Werbner proposes to refocus on the juxtaposition of hybridity and anti-hybridity forces in the context of the quotidian, where “cultural meaning, fusions and excluding essentialisms are dialectically negotiated” (ibid. 7), and high-

lights the need for a processual theory of hybridity, which goes beyond a recognition of tensions and moves towards “ethical responsibility, moral action and committed positioning” requested by Aijaz Ahmad (1995).

Similarly, hybridity has been theorized as an insufficient tool for propagating social change. Concentrating on hybridity in relation to diasporic Muslims and Asians, Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk (2005) point out the change in perception of hybridity discourse following 9/11. On the rise at the turn of the millennium, the critical challenging of the homogenous nation was weakened by the “us” and “them” polarization following the 9/11 attacks, which, according to Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, made the “once applauded hybrid creativity meek and mild in the face of aggressive neo-liberal conservatism” (2005: 1). At the same time, echoing Bhabha’s use of the Freudian term *unheimlich* in connection with the rootlessness produced by shifting identities, the validity of hybrid models of culture is emphasized:

New cultural hybridity becomes the panacea for uncertain times, and in conditions of diasporic hybridization, without the certainty of nation state or class identity for comfort, we may usefully and chaotically affirm promiscuity at every turn. In this conception, “hybridity” is a contender for a ‘new model’ of social possibility that will assert ‘uncertainty’ as its political guide. (Ibid. 88)

However, while propagating hybridity as an inclusive attitude, Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk draw attention to the chasm between the theory and applied practice of hybridity, which, the authors contend, is becoming a commercialized buzzword rather than a real impetus for social change. They suggest that “hybridity as politics seldom addresses how capitalism forces an equivalence in which all differences can be made similar by the market, various and fragmented yes, but always up for sale” (ibid. 91). Warning against the usage of hybridity as a celebratory term to distract attention from the social situation of diasporic Muslims and Asians in Europe, Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk call for an integrated approach, where awareness of hybridity becomes the driving force of a new society.

While the challenging of the monolithic image of cultures has been gaining ground in culture research, the focus on new subaltern-centered world literatures has not remained undisputed. Despite the fact that creative output produced by migrant and refugee communities is clearly a significant contemporary development of world literature, implicitly granting a higher status to literatures of displacement appears to be hardly fair towards literatures produced in India, Africa or the Caribbean in situ. As Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp (2000) and Frank Schulze-Engler (2007) note, a vision of post-colonial literature centered on western metropolises would in fact result in renewed Eurocentrism, with lesser regard for specific modernities of Asian, African and Caribbean countries. Frank Schulze-Engler writes:

At this point, it seems questionable [...] to regard hybridity merely as a 'postcolonial' phenomenon: in a world characterized by rapidly accelerating globalization processes, hybrid problems seem no longer tied to particular ('postcolonial') regions; rather, they appear to constitute a baseline reality in the 'global ecumene' of contemporary modernity. (2007: 23)

Marwan Kraidy (2005: 66) identifies further sources of mistrust towards post-colonial hybridity discourse. On the one hand, Kraidy questions the usefulness and the practical content of the term, which is being employed by different disciplines and to different ends, suggesting that without being grounded in empirical research, hybridity has become too flexible a term to conjure a real meaning, "a floating signifier, a situation that undermines the explanatory power and parsimony that concepts usually have" (ibid.) At the same time, Kraidy points out the increasing mistrust of the capability of the unencumbered émigré intellectual to theorize beyond the scope of the western academe and to reflect the actuality of cultural processes in paces other than western metropolises (Kraidy 2005: 67 and Ahmad 1995: 13). Similarly, Werbner (1997: 12) discusses the privileged position of the cosmopolitan, whose often celebratory experience of fusion is markedly different from that of a migrant worker or of the citizens of former colonies, who are subject to hybridity in situ. Thus, the empowerment through a destabilized perception of self and society, which seems to reflect the final stage of the dissolution of fixed identity, described by Michel de Certeau, appears rather as an advantage of an affluent western citizen than the actual experience of the majority of earth's population:

This mobility rests on the postulate that one is not identified either by birth, by family, by professional status, by friendship or love relationships, or by property. It seems as if all identity defined by status and place (of origin, of work, of residence, etc.) were reduced, if not swept away, by the velocity of all movements. It is known that there is no identity document in the United States; it is replaced by the driver's license and the credit card, that is, by the capacity to cross space and by participation in a game of fiduciary contracts between North American citizens. (Certeau 1981: 10–18, in Canclini 1995: 233)

While movement-based identification in spatial and financial spheres may offer a new mode of identity to some, this rather romantic view of the on-the-road freedom from identificational attachments would appear to be more fleeting and less attainable for citizens encumbered by unobtainable visas or simply by the lack of funds. Travelling across borders and continents may have become the norm for citizens of western countries and economic elites worldwide; yet it is neither a universally applicable phenomenon, nor a necessarily pleasurable experience, especially in cases of forced migration. Thus, it should not be regarded as a self-explanatory vantage point for theorizing hybridity. Yet despite

the fact that such positive identification through mobility and through the capacity to cross borders (cf. Papastergiadis 2000) is unattainable by citizens of countries such as Eritrea, where the majority of population are not issued passports, or North Korea, where transnational mobility of the population is almost impossible, other mechanisms of hybridity are certain to be operating locally in the face of specific modernities.

*Hybrid Cultures* by Néstor García Canclini has been viewed as an important critical and empirical counterpoint to the discussion of hybridity in diasporic post-colonial contexts (Kraniuskas 2000: 245, Kuortti and Nyman 2007: 10). Referring to the context of Latin America, Canclini theorizes hybridity as a characteristic of modernity, which permits the co-existence and the mutual permeation of often antagonized currents of the traditional and the modern. Viewing the development of Latin American countries in relativist terms, where tradition has not yet departed and modernization has not yet arrived, Canclini focuses on instances of internal contradictions and code breaking both along the temporal and the spatial axes:

How can we understand the presence of indigenous crafts and vanguard art catalogs on the same coffee tablet? What are painters looking for when, in the same painting, they cite pre-Columbian and colonial images along with those of cultural industry, and then reelaborate them using computers and lasers? The electronic media, which seemed to be dedicated to replacing high art and folklore, now are broadcasting them on a massive scale. Rock and “erudite” music are renewing themselves, even in metropolitan cities, with popular Asian and African melodies.

This is not a question only of strategies of hegemonic sectors and institutions. We find them also in the economic and symbolic “reconversion” with which migrant farmworkers adapt their knowledge to live in the city, and their crafts to interest urban consumers; when workers reformulate their work culture in the face of new productive technologies without abandoning old beliefs, and popular movements announce their demands on radio and television. [...]

Just as the abrupt opposition between the traditional and the modern does not work, so the cultured, the popular, and the mass-based are not where we are used to finding them. (Canclini 1995: 2)

Noting the ability of objects and people to combine and move between identifications, Canclini renders hybridization as inevitable in the face of the ongoing and changing situation of contact, whether in terms of the transgression of physical borders, as on the Mexico-Texas border, or temporally, where digital media are saturated with pre-Columbian artifacts. Canclini documents the advance of what he refers to as the *multitemporal heterogeneity*, which characterizes the ongoing internal dialogue of each nation. As the borders between the cultural, the popular and the mass-based become increasingly blurred, Gracia Canclini strongly advocates the transdisciplinary approach to contemporary



culture studies, encouraging a model of nomad social studies that will “redesign the floor plans” of “high culture”, folklore and mass culture (ibid. 3) and connect the levels horizontally.

Canclini links the deterritorialization of symbolic processes and the break-up of clearly classifiable systems to the formation of group and individual identities. In his empirical study of de- and reterritorialization in the rapidly growing city of Tijuana, he demonstrates how images related to the borderland and experience have come to be major elements of the definition of self and space, where the verbal symbolism of the city freely and frequently crosses the linguistic border between English and Spanish and where the physical interactions on both sides of the border become a ground for new roots.

Another influential perspective on new consciousness in the context of contact space has been provided by the Chicano writer and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa. In her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa interprets the innate multiplicity of identity, *mestizaje*, inherent to the inhabitants of the U.S.-Mexican border, whose existence is characterized by constant shifting between multiple identifications on ethno-political (e.g. indigenous, colonial-Spanish, Tejano, Mexican, U.S. citizen) spiritual (such as Catholicism, shamanism, indigenous religions) and other layers. The recognition of constant shifting, Anzaldúa argues, develops an epistemological flexibility that can entertain tolerance for ambiguity:

Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations, from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move towards a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and towards a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldúa 1999: 101)

Anzaldúa advocates a new consciousness of pluriculturality not only among theorists, but primarily among Chicanos and Chicanas themselves. By deconstructing the feminine 1<sup>st</sup> person plural personal pronoun *nosotras*, she exemplifies the multiple layers of meaning inherent in Chicana group identification. By spelling it as *nos-otras* (us-the others), she draws attention to the internal power relation: *nos-otras* becomes the simultaneous juxtaposition and union of “us” (*nos*) and the “others” (*otras*), the self of the colonizer opposes, but eventually blends with the otherness of the colonized, forming a self-understanding

marked by unavoidable ambiguities. While Anzaldúa utilizes specifically characteristic terms such as *mestizaje* and *nepantla* – the Nahuatl word for the space between two worlds – she links it to the discussion of identity in a broader post-colonial context (Ikas 1999: 243–242), pointing out the parallels in the sense of simultaneous belonging and being removed from a multiplicity of cultures. However, Anzaldúa criticizes post-colonial theory for its preoccupation with external hybridity that typically implies trans-continental dislocation and for ignoring the culture-internal exile.

Using a similarly inter-disciplinary approach as Canclini and Anzaldúa, Marwan Kraidy (2005) specifically focuses on the contact space and the fissures of identification that occur in Asian and Latin American countries against the backdrop of corporate and ideological globalization. In his empirically grounded study of Maronite youth in present-day Lebanon, Kraidy describes the mechanism of hybridity on different levels. On the ideological level, media texts that subvert the “traditional” local values appear on par with more conventional views, resulting in a propensity to “cross confessional lines” and in occasional shifts of ideological perspective according to the situation. On the level of reference, “imported” as well as local texts are employed to produce self-description, blurring the lines between the self and otherness, source and application. Temporarily, as in the case of Canclini’s “entering and leaving modernity,” the cultural reference of the now permeates and is permeated by historical references in a broader meaning making process, exemplifying that no modernity is absolute. As with diasporic communities, hybridity becomes a state of shifting self-awareness: “As the past is rearticulated in the present and the present is projected onto the past in an affective economy animated by media texts, it is clear that hybridity is not a negation of identity; rather, it is its quotidian, vicarious, and inevitable condition” (Kraidy 2005: 147).

In the light of his analysis of hybridization processes in the media in countries as distinct as Mexico and Lebanon, Kraidy reaches the conclusion that hybridity is not merely a facilitating factor for propagating globalization, but rather its cultural logic. Kraidy links the relation of hybridity to power – its potential as a descriptive, denigrating or empowering term – to the variation of agency, rooted in social practice. In order to subvert the simplistic model of power relations based on domination and resistance, Kraidy proposes the term *critical transculturalism* that adopts a synthetic view of culture and hybridity as its trope. Empirically, Kraidy’s critical transculturalism focuses on material as well as on discursive and textual practices. According to Kraidy, such an approach would also be able to analytically integrate both local and translocal factors:

Critical transculturalism [...] considers that (1) the local is intricately involved in supralocal relations and that (2) exogenous and endogenous circuits of power pervade

the local. [...] A translocal approach focuses on connections between several local social spaces, exploring hitherto local-to-local links. A translocal approach that focuses on connections reformulates Galtung's "wheel model" (1971) of cultural imperialism, where the hub and rim are metaphors for, respectively, the center and periphery, by shifting the focus of research on connections between several points on the rim of the wheel, without predetermining that such connections must necessarily spring from the hub and through the spokes. [...] In contrast to this hub-through-spokes-to-rim model, a translocal perspective calls for an analysis of how [the] different nations' hybrid cultures are shaped by their mutual interaction, in addition to their links with the West. While there is a risk of overemphasizing these local-to-local connections, lapsing into another romanticization of the local that would obscure the supralocal power plays, a translocal perspective, at least analytically, allows us to remove the West from the center of intercultural relations. International communication research would benefit greatly from more emphasis of local-to-local, "East-to-East," or "South-to-South" interactions and exchanges. The objective of this decentering is not to deflect attention from western power, but to pave the way for the construction of alternative perspectives on hybridity and locality that are not confined to global-to-local links that reinscribe dependency. (2005: 155)

By recognizing the multiplicity and the different kinds of power relations that shape contemporary societies, Kraidy distances himself from the models of cultural hegemony and cultural imperialism and their implied fixation on the western influences. Instead, locally-grounded forms of hybridity step into limelight, allowing an assessment of identity-formation in the context of inherent variety and mutual influences, beyond the reactions to American or British artistic or economic practices. Essentially, Kraidy's view of hybridity in terms of critical transculturalism allows for simultaneous processes of transition in terms of time, by ongoing mutual validation of the present and the past, and in terms of space, in the simultaneous combination of local and supralocal processes.

In terms of New Literatures in English, Frank Schulze-Engler advocates a similar transcultural shift in favor of a decentralized view of world literatures, where the aspiration towards a unitary modernity is replaced by a "network of multiple modernities":

Thinking of these contexts in terms of a 'transcultural world literature' should not mean losing sight of them or in shifting the centre of attention exclusively to migrant or diasporic literatures, but in relating English-language texts to a wider comparative perspective that acknowledges the manifold 'transnational connections' shaping English-language literatures everywhere in the world. These transnational connections not only link the new literatures to the former imperial centre, Britain, or to what many perceive as a new imperial centre, the USA, but increasingly constitute a multipolar network where various new literatures interact with each other. (2007: 29)

The transcultural position addresses both the scope of English-language literatures – locally produced as well as diasporic – and the nature of ties between them, foregrounding the importance of the regional and local interactions besides the ties to former colonial centers. At the same time, as speaking of “cultures” becomes increasingly elusive with the recognition that “cultures” are by no means finite segments but rather multi-faceted constitutive entities with no clear demarcations, the transcultural approach seeks to transcend the mode of “intercultural dialogue” that implies an exchange between discrete entities. Instead, the focus shifts from the notion of “cultures” as general structures that interact with each other to cultural practices (including the production of literature) in an increasingly globalized world (ibid. 28).

As outlined by Wolfgang Welsch (1999), the advantage of the term *transculturality* over *interculturality* and *multiculturalism* is precisely its awareness of ongoing hybridity on multiple levels. Despite the fact that interculturality seeks ways in which cultures can “get on with, understand and recognize one another” (Welsch 1999: 196), it presupposes the process of contact and mixing only on the external level, where discrete and apparently homogenous cultural entities negotiate their presence in the global arena, with only limited recognition of the constitutive nature of these entities per se. At the same time, multiculturalism explores the possibilities of the coexistence of cultures within the frame of a specific, often state-bound society. It addresses the contact situation in a society-space, yet like interculturality, it is prone to overlook the internal heterogeneity within groups, construing broader groups, e.g. the British or the South-East Asians, as entities total in themselves.

Welsch distinguishes between two intricately connected levels of transculturalism: the macro-level, which addresses the “inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures,” and the micro-level, which focuses on the composite formation of identity in individuals. On the macro-level, Welsch addresses the contemporary interconnectedness of cultures, where hybridity inevitably takes place:

For *every* culture, all *other* cultures have tendentially come to be inner-content or satellites. This applies on the level of population, merchandise and information. Worldwide, in most countries, live members of all other countries of this planet; and more and more, the same articles – as exotic as they may once have been – are becoming available the world over; finally the global networking of communications technology makes all kinds of information identically available from every point in space. Henceforward there is no longer anything absolutely foreign. Everything is within reach. Accordingly, there is no longer anything exclusively ‘own’ either. Authenticity has become folklore, it is oneness simulated for others – to whom the indigene himself belongs. To be sure, there is still a regional-culture rhetoric, but it is rather simulatory and aesthetic; in substance everything is transculturally determined. Today in a cul-

ture's internal relations – among its different ways of life – there exists as much foreignness as in its external relations with other cultures. (Ibid. 199)

Welsch's macro-level of transculturality combines the local and the trans-local levels described by Kraidy, indicating the similarities of the processes of hybridization on different levels as well as the potential of interaction between them. But if cultures are shaped by hybridity both on a local and a trans-local level, so is the understanding of the self increasingly determined transculturally. The combination and processing of a multitude of cultural influences within a single lifetime, which may have been previously seen as a marker of exceptionality, are becoming increasingly routine. Following Nietzsche's claim that a man harbours not "one immortal soul", but "many mortal souls" (Nietzsche 1980: 386), Welsch points out the constitutive nature of identification, where "[w]ork on one's identity is becoming more and more work on the integration of components of different cultural origin." (Welsch 1999: 200) Such recognition and acceptance of transculturality, the recognition of "internal foreignness" on the local level is seen as a precondition for accepting and dealing with external transculturality, ultimately approaching the ideal of harmony-in-difference.

Welsch's concept of transculturality also addresses the fear of increasing homogenization of cultures and a uniform world civilization as a consequence of globalization and hybridization processes. Whereas from the viewpoint of globalization, particularisms are bound to become extinct, Welsch defends the individual's desire for a positive particular identity that is distinct from others. At the same time, as self-definition in terms of nationalism is increasingly undermined, transculturalism suggests that other, non-alienating forms of self-determination be pursued and promoted, enabling future cultural forms to cater both for globalization and pluralism. Similarly, despite the unifying and homogenizing potential of globalization, Ulf Hannerz (1996) argues that the prospects of diversity are not necessarily doomed, as new forms of diversity emerge continuously:

[S]ome cultural forms vanish, and the spectrum of what is alive and well may become narrower. But at the same time as some of the human cultural record remains available only through archives, museums, and monographs, there is that continuous cultural reconstruction going on within the global ecumene.

If we look at cultures around now, I think we can discern that much of their diversity is not merely old diversity in decline, but new diversity that the global ecumene has bred. In this, cultural diversity differs from biological diversity. Zoological and botanical species now become extinct much more rapidly than new species can develop; the development of new culture, in contrast is not such a slow process. (Hannerz 1996: 64)

Though aware of the practical sides of homogenization of cultures in terms of facilitating communication through the eradication of difference, Hannerz examines different arguments for diversity. Critiquing the struggle for preserving diversity from political, ecological and aesthetic points of view he concludes that while none of these arguments by themselves are decisive or unambiguous, the emergence of new kinds of diversity seems to testify for sufficient space for diversity in the prognosis of transculturalism.

Astrid Erll (2011) has argued for a stronger consideration of the transcultural perspective in the field of memory studies. Individual memory has been theorized as constitutive and mobile early on in the writings of, for instance, Maurice Halbwachs, where the selection, interlapping and mixture of frames of memory (*cadres sociaux de la mémoire*), such as ethnicity, religious affiliation, profession, musical and sports preferences, contributed towards the synthesis of the individual self. However, *Traveling Memory* (Erll 2011: 11) is gradually being recognized as the pattern that in many ways underlies the formation of collective memory and cultural identity, becoming increasingly mobile in terms of its carriers, media, contents, mnemonic practices and mnemonic forms. For instance, similar forms of the remembrance of the dead, such as the tomb of an unknown soldier or two minutes of silence, were developed and adopted in post-WWI Europe and in the colonies, whereas Holocaust remembrance practices, such as the sounding of the siren, were adopted to commemorate victims of other genocides (ibid. 13). Not unique to modernity, such travelling practices have been linked to the historical development of cultures, e.g. the transmission of astrological knowledge from Ancient Greek to Arabic, Ptolemaic and Indian contexts and further on to medieval Italy (ibid.). While the nation-state remains a major institution that propagates specific practices of remembering, the manifestations of mnemonic practices are being more often viewed through a transcultural lens, putting cultural memories in their larger contexts.

## 2.2. Challenging Autonomous Cultures and the Jewish Perspective

If the discussion of hybridity primarily centers on postcolonial and Latin and Meso-American subjects and if transculturality seeks to adopt a more universal, multi-layered approach to mechanisms of contact and mixing, where lies the parallel to Jewish studies? One of the answers is provided by Homi Bhabha himself, in the introduction to *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, where he draws the parallel of the diasporic experience of the Jews and of postcolonial communities:

The “Jew” stands for that experience of lethal modernity, shared by the history of slavery and colonialism, where the racist desire for supremacy and domination turns the ideas of progress and sovereignty into demonic partners in a *danse macabre*. In the half century since the Shoah, we have to stand too often with or in the place of, ‘the Jew’, taking a stance against the spread of xenophobic nationalism. (Bhabha 1998: xv–xvi)

With an identity grounded not in a sovereign nation state, but in a diasporic condition, Bhabha envisions Jews as a perpetual minority, constantly engaged in a dialogue of power with the surrounding host society. As such, it appears to be a precursor model for new diasporic societies of the western world, who may experience similar mechanisms of branding as the domestic Other. Despite the fact that contemporary Jews, one of the historically oldest and most persistent minorities, are increasingly seen as a part of the new establishment and may appear to be “too successful, too white, and too Jewish” (Gilman 2006: xii) to qualify as the subaltern, some scholars nevertheless suggest that the experience of diasporic Jews may serve as a model and/or a cautionary tale for the new minorities in today’s multicultural society. Quoting rabbi Sacks, the sixth chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth, Sander Gilman suggests that Jews may be a litmus test for the treatment of difference in a society, for the success or failure of the approaches of tolerance and plurality (ibid. x), which may have contributed to the very origin of the models of hybridity and cultural pluralism in the twentieth century. In this way, the study of the relation between the diasporic community and the host has been interpreted in an instrumental way, with an outlook towards the relevance of its findings for new migratory societies.

Where external hybridity, i. e. hybridity of (distinct) cultures based on power relations, is considered, one of the influential historical approaches to Jewish history was the foregrounding of the cultural connections between Jewish communities and the host societies (e.g. Salo W. Baron and Bernard Dov Weinryb), where the points of fluidity were explored (cf. Rosman 2008: 137). However, as in the case of other fields where hybridity theory is applied, such approaches are equally prone to ignore the constitutive nature of societies, presuming both the diaspora and the host societies to be of respectively uniform texture, foregrounding merely the external power relations.

Beyond the external level – the power relations between local Jewish diasporas and the respective host societies – one of the most important trends in Jewish cultural studies is the increasing questioning of an internal definition of Jewishness, defined not in relation to the surrounding culture, but in its own right. As such, Jewishness increasingly ceases to be a self-explanatory axiom, but becomes recognized as a constitutive entity with considerable internal variation. The conservative centripetal forces that advocate consolidation and unity are increasingly challenged by centrifugal forces that advocate pluralism, which

entails multifaceted and numerous identities in terms of beliefs, cultures and citizenships (Gorny 2003: 19). “Whatever the formal historical, institutional, or national definitions of ‘who is a Jew,’” write Susan Glenn and Naomi Sokoloff, “the experience of identity is layered, shifting, syncretic, and construed and [...] Jewish identity can be reforged under new circumstances” (2010: 5). One of the recent major collections in the field was marked by the decisive usage of the plural form in its title *Jewish Literatures and Cultures* (edited by Anita Norich and Yaron Eliav, 2008), inviting a comparison with the usage of plural in *New Literatures in English*, which similarly brings together a variety of literary traditions from around the world. Moshe Rosman comments on the debate that preceded the editorial decision in favor of the usage of *cultures* rather than *culture* in the publication of an earlier publication, *Cultures of the Jews* (edited by David Biale, 2002):

As one of the authors of *Cultures of the Jews*, I can testify that the “s” in “Cultures” was a subject of a lively e-mail debate when it was proposed, with the authors deeply divided on the issue. The pros contended that it was essential to emphasize that Jewishness was always pluralistic and multivocal. The cons insisted that by denying the existence of a common Jewish culture at some basic level, the book was denying existence of a Jewish people and negating the legitimacy of the entire project – for what might define such a people except its shared culture? Moreover, even if the plurality of Jewish cultures be granted, one is still left with the question of how each of them is to be recognized as indeed “Jewish.” (Rosman 2008: 145)

The awareness of inherent internal difference may in fact be interpreted as one of the key features of Jewishness – Anita Norich (2008: 4) gives the example of the Jewish law, the creation of which was subject to a strong translocal element: “There is one written law, but two so-called oral traditions – the Bavli (Babylonian) and Yerushalmi (Palestinian) Talmuds – developed in different places and subject to different influences. Yet no one denies the legitimacy of each or each one’s significance for the development of Judaism.” Reflecting on the subject of incommensurability as discussed by Isaiah Berlin, Moshe Halbertal (2008: 48) argues that Jewish identity – an umbrella term for Jewish alternatives – is inherently incommensurable, where there is no way to organically “integrate and synthesized [sic] the conflicted options in one form of life.” Such options can coexist in individual fulfillment or in a compromise, but not in simultaneous materialization. On a more prosaic level, the awareness of differences and schisms within Judaism and Jewishness is expressed in the well-known joke about the Jew who, when asked what he would do if he was stranded on a desert island, answers that he would build two synagogues – one to pray in and the other one to despise. To put things into perspective, Eddy Zemach suggests in his discussion of the contemporary state of Jewishness that people who identify



themselves as Jews may in fact be quite ignorant of “Jewish” issues beyond their own immediate cultural context:

An American student of mine by the name of Cohen [one of the most common Jewish family names] once asked me the following question. Jews, he knew, do not celebrate Sunday; so what day of the week is their Sabbath? He was not sure. A Jewish colleague at a large university in the eastern United States remarked during a conversation that the Bible was written in Greek; when I said that this is not entirely true, he replied that he knew that the original language of the Old Testament was Aramaic. In the Church of Santa Maria la Blanca (in it there is a synagogue that dates from 1203, one of the only two synagogues left standing in Spain after the expulsion of the Jews in 1492), I met a Canadian woman who later told me she is Jewish. Hearing that only two synagogues from the Middle Ages are left in Spain, she remarked, “So Jewish religion was not popular in Spain, was it?” A Jewish man in Boston asked me whether the Arab Jews in Israel support the Arabs or the Jews in the current conflict. A Dutch man of Jewish extraction on a visit to Israel wanted me to show him “the remnants of the Hassidic sect,” those, he said, who “in the old days used Christian blood for Passover” (he was sure, though, that this custom has been discontinued). (Zemach 1993: 119)

Considerable geographical separation has contributed to variations in historical, religious and cultural development of different diasporas, not to mention the multiglossia of Ladino, Yiddish, Hebrew and other languages spoken by Jews. But besides the acknowledgement of regional difference synchronically and temporal difference diachronically, the contemporary notion of Jewishness also tends to address the question of the connection between components such as ethnicity, nationality and religion (cf. Rosman 2008, Glenn and Sokoloff 2010, Goldscheider 2010). While there are still proponents of the rather romantic idea that regards the three as given and inseparable, Jewishness is being increasingly viewed as a constitutive entity, where all possible elements of the constellation are not necessarily present simultaneously in any given example of Jewish Culture, but where varying combinations of them are observable. An increasing number of people consider themselves Jewish ethnically, but not religiously, while converts may practice Judaism, without having claim to Jewish ancestry. By the Halakha, the Jewish law, persons born in a Jewish family continue to be Jewish even if they renounce their Jewishness, while the validity of conversion is highly disputable between the different confessions. In eastern European countries, where *nationality* habitually denotes ethnicity, Jewishness is almost unequivocally an ethnicity, while in western countries such as Germany and the USA, where nationality is synonymous with citizenship, Jewishness is more likely to have a strong religious component<sup>1</sup> (cf. Liebman 2003: 144; Sand 2009: 46–47).

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1 If a biographical example be permitted – great was the astonishment of my mother, stigmatized as a Jew for over five decades in Soviet and Post-Soviet Latvia, when she was denied

The ethnic side of Jewishness has been questioned from new perspectives in the last decades. The controversial book by Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (2009), suggests that the national awareness of Jews was to a great extent formulated simultaneously with European nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that such an ethnic identity is in fact assumed rather than inherent. Instead of being descendents of a single-core ethnic group, Sand suggests, Jewish communities around the world were in fact largely produced in the process of conversion, where local populations assumed Jewish beliefs and customs, which would account for the divergence of Jewish cultures as well as for the visual similarity between the Jews and their host societies. To decrease the emphasis on nationality, which is increasingly felt to be a segregating term, Revivi and Kopolowitz (2008) have argued for the substitution of the term *Jewish nationhood* for *Jewish peoplehood*, which is felt to be more inclusive and perhaps more beneficial for inducing positive Jewish identification in an increasingly transnational world.

At the same time, the advance of genetic research seems to provide a means of analysis of biological Jewishness. In a 1997 study of the Y chromosome in 188 subjects who identified themselves as Kohens (i. e. descendants of the Kohanim, Jewish priests in biblical times), a group of researchers (Skorecki et al. 1997) claimed to have identified the “Kohen gene” – six polymorphisms that confirmed a distinct paternal descent. This Y-DNA haplogroup was present in about half of the subjects who identified themselves as Kohens and was barely present (~5 %) in other Jewish subjects. Based on the specific, limited spread of the Kohen modal haplotype, the researchers suggested that it may be linked to a common male founder of the line, dating back approximately 106 generations (~3,300 years). This can be interpreted as a corroboration of the descent of the Kohanim from Aaron, the brother of Moses. However, since paternal heredity is only one of the preconditions for being a Kohen in the biblical sense, a possibility of sharing genes with Aaron is not tantamount to being a priest. Similar studies on mitochondrial DNA were conducted on Jewish women from geographically distinct communities by Thomas et al. in 2002. Despite certain resistance, genetic tests were also conducted among Lemba Jews (Zimbabwe and South Africa) and Kuki-Chin-Mizo (India) to determine their genetic relation to other, traditionally recognized Jewish communities and examine their claim to Jewishness. However, genetic findings of this kind are not unambiguous from the point of view of population genetics, which denies the existence of the “Jewish gene” or the usefulness of it as a unit of analysis, as these tests deal with statistical probabilities of genetic relatedness among groups of people and do not establish

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membership in a synagogue congregation in Germany on the grounds of insufficient Jewishness.

religious and ethnic identities of individuals (Kahn 2010: 16). Elliott and Brodwin point out both the limitations of information about ancestry that one can induce from genetic research as well as the element of volition that determines the extent of how such findings can be incorporated in identity formation:

The problem is that mapping Y chromosome and mitochondrial DNA polymorphisms will only trace two genetic lines on a family tree in which branches double with each preceding generation. For example, Y chromosome tracing will connect a man to his father but not to his mother, and it will connect him to only one of his four grandparents: his paternal grandfather. In the same way, it will connect him to one of his eight great grandparents and one of his 16 great great grandparents. Continue back in this manner for 14 generations and the man will be still be [sic] connected to only one ancestor in that generation. The test will not connect him to any of the other 16 383 ancestors in that generation to whom he is also related in equal measure. (Elliott and Brodwin 2002: 1470)

Noting a rather limited overview of ancestry that genetic tests provide, Elliott and Brodwin warn that genetic findings should not be regarded as the decisive source for the formation of identity. Especially in the religious and traditional sense, identity is to a great extent created by adherence to certain sets of rules and patterns of behavior and that heritage is determined by social participation rather than by genetic heredity. Where genetic findings contradict narrative accounts, they may cause more questions than they solve.

Except the theoretical debate, the criteria by which Jewishness can be determined – especially the connection or dissociation between the ethnic and religious elements – has a strong practical dimension. Bearing the title of *the Jewish State*, the state of Israel was founded on the premise of a sovereign national state for the Jews. Thus, *Who is a Jew?* is a pivotal question in the matters of Israeli citizenship; it becomes a “dynamic construction of political interests amid struggles of communities over political power” (Barzilai 2010: 28, cf. Ben-Rafael 2003: 350–356, Halbertal 2008: 42–43). According to the Law of Return (1950) and the Citizenship Law (1952), all Jews are to be granted citizenship – *every Jew has the right to immigrate to the country* (Law of Return, 1950, section 1) – while non-Jews are subject to other, more selective regulations. In 1970, an amendment to the Law of Return was passed, granting the right of immigration to children and grandchildren of a Jew, as well as to their spouses. This, however, is highly controversial from the point of view of Orthodox Judaism, which only recognizes the transmission of Jewishness through the maternal line. If, for example, a Jewish man has a child with a non-Jewish woman, the child would not be considered Jewish in the Orthodox sense, while the child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father would.<sup>2</sup> In questions of immigration, the secular law

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2 One of the explanations of this preference for the maternal line is that a child's maternity was

would override the religious view and the child of either couple would be granted citizenship. The Israeli family law, however, is primarily regulated by religious authorities, so that a proof of Jewishness in the orthodox sense is necessary in order to enter matrimony.<sup>3</sup> The incongruity of the definition of Jewishness became visible especially in cases of immigrants from diasporic groups that were not immediately recognized as Jewish by the orthodox religious authorities, such as the Indian Jews and the Ethiopian Jews, and, to a certain extent, the Soviet and Post-Soviet Jews, who had had little affiliation to the Jewish religion at home and defined themselves as Jewish largely based on the ethnic premise. Furthermore, the Israeli religious authorities have been reluctant to acknowledge the Jewishness of converts, where the conversion was not carried out by the recognized Orthodox authorities. Gad Barzilai outlines the complex quest for the definition of Israeli Jewishness in terms of a power struggle, where different groups that coexist on Israeli territory generate their own criteria of Jewishness:

First, the ultra-Orthodox Jews define citizenship based on communally specified criteria for framing what it means to be Jewish. These criteria include blood origins and a very restrictive set of religious procedures. Second, Jewish Orthodox authorities legitimate claims for citizenship that are based on state law, but they define legitimacy under very demanding religious hermeneutics, which do not include personal, subjective, definitions of Judaism. Third, definitions of Jewish non-orthodox citizenship are based on social resistance to statutory state law, and some Supreme Court judicial rulings advocate for privatization of religion, including Orthodoxy. Accordingly, being a Jew is a matter to be decided by the individual and his or her non-Orthodox community and its non-Orthodox conversion procedures. Fourth, definitions of Jewish territorial citizenship are based on residency and identification with a secular national concept of political membership. (2010: 33–34)

However, while candidates for immigration to Israel may struggle with an adequate proof of Jewishness, the dissociation of the ethnic, national and religious components has also been approached from the opposite end. In a recent case that has attracted public attention, the prominent Israeli novelist Yoram Kaniuk petitioned the Israeli Ministry of the Interior to remove the entry *Jewish* from the description of his religious status in his passport. Instead, he demanded it to be changed to *no religion*, as in the passport of his newborn grandson, claiming that he had never actively practiced Judaism and thus had no religious affiliation (Mualem 2011). His request was eventually approved by the court, which was

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generally known with certainty, while paternity could be questioned with relative ease. Especially in cases where children were conceived as a result of rape, the obligation to recognize the bastard child as a member of the community despite questionable fatherhood has often been regarded as a protective measure.

3 This, of course, does not apply to other recognized religious communities in Israel, who have their own regulations.

celebrated as a victory for the separation of religion and state (Zarchin 2011). As such, it may have far-reaching consequences for family law, as non-Jews are exempt from the Chief Rabbinate regulations on marriage and divorce.

The discussion of the multi-facetedness of Jewishness and its internal diversity has also strongly resonated in literary studies. While the academic study programs of Jewish literature have been on the increase, the actual subject of the field has been evading clear definitions (cf. Wirth-Nesher 1994, Grauer 2003, Miron 2008), where the possible criteria – the Jewish origin of the author, themes that deal with Jewish subjects, texts written in Jewish languages, texts intertextually bound to the Jewish religious tradition, texts discussing Jewish history or displaying a distinctly Jewish imagination – seem to propel the discussion by raising further questions rather than resolving it.

The analysis of Jewish literature (or literatures) increasingly recognizes the diversity that has existed both vertically – between different historical ages – and horizontally – between contemporaneous traditions, increasingly undermining the myth that documented Jewish literature had in fact ever been a unified tradition with one centralized ideology. Throughout history, Jewish literature(s) has been characterized by translocality and multiglossia, not only in a comparative view between geographically distinct communities, but often within the same unit, where individual authors were often able to navigate between a number of languages and perspectives, e.g. Yiddish, Hebrew and German or Spanish, Ladino and Arabic. At the same time, multiglossia was paralleled by a diversity of genre and approach. Speaking of what has become the canon of the Jewish literature of the High Middle Ages, Dan Miron demonstrates that the tendency to regard epochs of Jewish literature as authentic and homogenous entities can be highly deceptive:

It is easy to doubt the coherence of a literature that encompassed the following: Maimonides' philosophical-rationalist masterpiece *The Guide to the Perplexed*, written in the highly conceptualized language of the Arabic Aristotelian philosophers; Moshe de Leon's *Sefer hazohar* (The Book of Splendor), the quintessential Jewish mystical midrash, written in the fourteenth century in a fabricated Aramaic and presented as the creation of the second century C.E. *tanna* Shimon Bar-Yohai; Al-Harizi's *Sefer takh-kemoni* (Book of the Wise One), the collection of mundane and sensual novellas written in rhyming prose; Moshe Ibn Ezra's florid homosexual love poetry, written in medieval Spanish Hebrew but based on Arabic court poetry.

Not only were these written in five different languages and within unrelated intellectual frames of reference, but each of these works was also distanced from some of the others by deep ideational shifts. To the followers of Maimonides, de Leon's mysticism was nonsensical and subversive, characterized by gross, all but pagan mythologization and sexualization of the Jewish deity. The Kabbalists viewed Maimonides' rationalism as heretical, or at least as deaf to the inner significance of the Torah. Both rationalists and Kabbalists vehemently disapproved of the witty hedonism of Al-Harizi and Ibn Ezra.

All of them would seem foreign and quite irrelevant to the Ashkenazi writers of the Era of the Crusades. If there was one Jewish literature of the High Middle Ages, it was not only multilingual and multifarious but also characterized by its intrinsic unrelatedness, by lacunae, gaps, differences of mentality, terminology, and intellectual commitment that a common religious tradition could not unify. (Miron 2008: 17)

Focusing on the internal heterogeneity and multiglossia of Jewish literature and culture throughout the ages, Miron argues that the turbulence of modernity has further intensified the intrinsic processes of diversification. Instead of trying to demarcate the borders of Jewish literature, Miron compares the relation between the elements of this decentralized, multifocal field to a galaxy, where constituents move away from each other, but nevertheless form a spatial unit. At the same time, it appears that in the multidimensional space of literature, Miron's galaxy of Jewish literature is permeated by other galaxies, making multiple memberships a possibility, if not a norm, where authors like Paul Celan would co-inhabit the galaxies of Jewish, Romanian and German literature:

There is simply no such thing as one modern Jewish literature. There are multiple Jewish literatures and a rich plethora of Jewish literary works written in non-Jewish languages and belonging within their respective non-Jewish literary milieus. Yet by the sheer fact that these works were formed and informed by Jewish experience – no matter of what nature and whether it was directly or indirectly articulated – they also belong, together with the literatures clearly defined as Jewish, within a large and fluid complex that evades simple definitions and demarcations. We can compare this complex to a galaxy: though parts of it constantly move away from each other, they also form one spatial configuration. (Ibid. 32)

Following a pattern similar to postcolonial hybridity discourse and transculturalism, Jewish studies in general and especially Jewish literature studies have followed the path of deconstruction of monolithic identities. As Tresa Grauer has remarked in her discussion of Jewish American Literature, the multitude of texts that have emerged over the past decades are not characterized by a commitment to a specific identity but rather by their focus on identity (Grauer 2003: 270). Instead of the intrinsically problematic debate of *Who is a Jew?*, the contemporary study of identity in Jewish literature(s) focuses rather on the ways that identity is represented, taking into account not only external differences from other groups, but also internal variation, making heterogeneity the basis of discussion. In treating identity both on the individual and on the group level, the concept of a pre-fabricated holistic identity is being increasingly substituted by a process of synthesis, addressing questions such as the role of nationality and exile imagery, or the representation of religious belief and ritual. Instead of providing straightforward answers, “contemporary stories of Jewish American identity work against a single, monolithic self-definition, and describe

instead what Philip Roth calls the ‘and/and/and/and/and’ of possibilities” (ibid. 272), an ever updating interplay of *cadres sociaux*.

At the same time, Moshe Rosman (2008: 147–148) warns against an indiscriminate application of hybridity theory to Jewish studies. Rosman argues against instrumentalist approaches to Jewish studies that are prone to undervalue the particular in an attempt to prove a contribution to a larger framework. Echoing the concerns of Welsch, Kraidy and others that studies of hybridity should not only focus on modes of dominance and resistance between former (and new) colonial centers and the perceived periphery, Rosman emphasizes the necessary commitment to considering local relations and specific contexts: “If hybridity is to be added to the armamentarium of Jewish cultural interpretation, [...] [scholars] should be required to prove its presence in each separate historical circumstance, and to delineate carefully how it functions as a factor and what its limits are.” (Ibid.) Instead of focusing merely on an instrumental or ideological value, Rosman argues for a well-rounded approach to the subject, where a relation to the general does not exclude the examination of the subject “on its own terms, with the knowledge and by the methods most appropriate to unlocking its secrets.” (Ibid. 154)

It is then in this light that the construction of identity in Anglophone Israeli writing is to be conducted – a study of an emerging literary tradition where the local and the translocal, the particular and the global are not construed as mutually exclusive, but constitute complementary levels of understanding. Neither an isolated discussion of a subject in its own right – even assuming that defining Anglophone Israeli Literature as an isolated concept was at all possible – nor its instrumental use would appear to do it justice: while Anglophone Israeli writing is doubtlessly in tune with the global development of transculturalism and mechanisms of hybridity, it is a site of vividly specific creative output, where creative energies react to a unique combination of local, trans-local and trans-temporal factors. As such, it adds to Hannerz’s and Welsch’s defense of productive heterogeneity emerging in the face of apparent homogenization; a space where rather than propagating uniformity, recombinations produce results that are greater than the sum of the individual parts.

Examining a literature in the context of migration necessitates the consideration both of local and supra-local factors, of specific scholarship of Jewish and Israeli culture(s) and literature(s) as well as of contemporary approaches to identity. A literature produced by migrants with bi- and tri-cultural heritage can be hardly examined without considering the transcultural perspective, providing at the same time a detailed insight into a literary modernity beyond European and North American centers. As in Miron’s overlapping galaxies, Anglophone Israeli Literature is a field at a crossroads – it can be simultaneously considered a part of New Literatures in English, since it brings to light literature

in English produced in a new locality, of Israeli literature, because it is being produced in Israel, of Jewish American Literature, as the majority of authors emigrated from the United States, and more broadly, as a part of Jewish studies, migration studies, bilingualism studies and other areas. And as in a situation described by Grauer, it is not a field stapled by a central identity, but rather characterized by a strong focus of identity that emerges in a process of multi-vocal dialogue. Ed Codish complains in his preface to the twentieth issue of *Arc* (2008):

[C]onversations with Israeli writers always centered around their insistence that I tell them who I was. ‘Are you American or Israeli?’ they would ask, or, ‘Do you feel more Jewish than Israeli?’ ‘What does being Israeli mean, an Israeli writer?’ And on I went. Magazines, from Friday newspaper supplements to quite serious journals, devoted articles and whole issues to these questions. They arose in panel discussions on television and at academic conferences. For whatever reasons, identity has been problematized in contemporary Israel. (Codish 2008: 4)

As the field itself, so are its members – individual Anglophone Israeli authors – co-inhabitants of different structures within and beyond Anglophone Israeli writing. There is variation in terms of origin – American, South African, Moroccan or native Israeli; integration into Hebrew language – from practically bilingual to almost entirely unintegrated; level and locality of recognition – from recipients of the President’s Award in Israel to those who only publish overseas. This variety is also enriched by more personal *cadres sociaux* such as religious views – orthodox, traditional, secular; allegiance to institutions – *Israeli Association of Writers in English*, *Voices Poetry Group* or local workshops; daily experience in terms of locality – Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, various parts of the countryside; political opinions – left, center, right. Faced with such diversity, the quest for locating the self within these overlapping possibilities becomes the major theme in Anglophone Israeli writing – the wind of Point Lobos beating against the stones of Jerusalem in the poem of Shirley Kaufman.

So far, Anglophone Israeli writing has attracted relatively little scholarly attention – either in its own right or as a part of overlapping galaxies of culture. For instance, in her introduction to *Ideology and Jewish Identity in Israeli and American Literature* (2001) Emily Miller Budick describes the development of Jewish American and Israeli literatures as so isolated from each other “as if these two populations of Jews had nothing whatsoever to do with one another, at least within the realm of literary fiction” (Budick 2001: 1). The stated mutual lack of literary contact is described as an “Israeli American failure-to-engage on the literary level” (*ibid.*). While this may be true of a large part of the texts that have entered the respective canons, such an approach ignores the achievements of



Anglophone Israeli writing, which, by the time of the publication of the said volume, had existed for decades.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the first articles on the subject were published by Karen Alkalay-Gut: in “Poetry by Women in Israel and the War in Lebanon” (1989) she discusses the perspectives of women poets writing in English and in Hebrew on the war in Lebanon, in “Getting Women to Talk about Themselves: My Role Models of the Previous Generation” (2004a) she focuses on the relation of narration and re-living the past, while in “The Anglo-Israeli Writer: Double Identities in Troubled Times” (2007) she analyses the reasons for using English in poetry, and elucidates its functions in the texts – e. g. linguistic defamiliarization from the Hebrew-coded reality, a neutral “bridge language” to avoid the politically loaded Hebrew and Arabic when discussing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians or a language that connects memories of earlier life with the present-day experience. “Double Diaspora: English Writers in Israel” (2002) explores the social side of English writing in Israel, discussing its place within Israeli literature. Similarly, the recent article “From the Belly of the Fish: Jewish Writers in English in Israel. Transcultural Perspectives” by Axel Stähler (2009) discusses the real and the perceived isolation of Anglophone Israeli authors, which is one of the first attempts to place Anglophone Israeli authors in a trans-cultural context.

Other essays, reviews and interviews focus on individual authors. Frank Kearful (2000 and 2001) and John Felstiner (2005) explore the themes of migration and up-rootedness in Shirley Kaufman’s work, while Eynel Wardi (2004) concentrates on the role of space and place in Kaufman’s long poem “Sanctum”. Reviews of Kaufman’s works were written by, for instance, Gardner McFall (1994) and Florence Howe (1996), and Kaufman has been interviewed by Grace Schulman (1991), Lisa Katz (2002) and Eve Grubin (2004). A number of reviews also followed the publishing of *Aftertaste* (2001) and *The Startled Land* (2003) by Rochelle Mass, e. g. by Karen Alkalay-Gut, Bev Greenberg, Andrena Zawinski, Terri Brown-Davidson, Julie Hill Barton and Kim Hegerberg. Most notable interviews of other Anglophone Israeli writers include the interview with Rachel Tzvia Back by Susan Ito (2006) and interviews with Karen Alkalay-Gut by August Highland (2003) and Nilanshu Agarwal (2008). Furthermore, a series of interviews with Israeli authors, which also included Anglophone poets, was published in German by Ingrid Wiltman in 1998. With most studies and interviews commenting on individual works and authors without integrating them into a research context, there is a research desideratum regarding the discussion of Anglophone Israeli writing in relation to contemporary identity studies. Thus, as the context and contents of Anglophone Israeli Literature are perhaps not yet a

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4 This collection of essays does not feature a single essay on or reference to Anglophone Israeli authors.

part of the academic frame of reference, the following chapters will attempt to provide a brief overview of the social context and of the major tendencies within the field before proceeding to the analysis of perceived and projected identities.

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### 3. English and English Speakers in Israel

#### 3.1. The Status of English in Israel

The status of literature in a given language, especially if it is being produced as a minority literature, is inexorably tied to the position that this language holds in the country in question. This position can be determined by various factors including top-to-bottom language policy, attitudes towards the speakers of this language and the amount and kind of exposure to this language. Rather than being a fixed entity, it develops in accordance with these factors. Before proceeding to the analysis of the construction of identity in Anglophone literature written in English, it is necessary to outline the specific language space of Anglophone Israeli writing. This section is going to discuss the status of and the attitudes towards English in Israel, which on the one hand facilitates creative production in this language and, at the same time, influences the self-image of the creator, bearing a strong influence on the construction of identity in literary works.

In assessing the current role of English in Israel, researchers such as Spolsky and Shohamy (1999) and Ben-Rafael (2001) acknowledge its growing presence and recognition in all spheres of life, agreeing that it is the language that has most successfully challenged the policy of Hebrew monolingualism, carving out a growing niche in the overall language space. Language policies and attitudes in Israel have, however, fluctuated greatly during the last century, bringing about a changed perception of identity in terms of language. English was regarded as an imposed language of a colonial power during the British Mandate for Palestine (1920–1948); yet, in the years following independence, it regained its economic and cultural influence and established a positive image due to factors such as immigration to Israel from English-speaking countries, close ties with English-speaking countries in political and economical spheres and ties with major Jewish communities in the U.S., Canada, Britain, South Africa and Australia (Spolsky and Shohamy 1999:156).

Although Israel is rarely discussed in the (post)colonial context, it is in fact

during the British Mandatory government that it was for the first time strongly exposed to English. A three-language policy was established: English, Arabic and Hebrew were written down as the official languages in Article 22 of the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine; the policy included the usage of all three languages on such representative tokens as stamps and money bills (Spolsky and Shohamy 1999: 158–161). However, partly due to the attempt to save funds, Arabic and Hebrew communities were allowed to maintain their own education facilities, with their own textbooks and their own examination system. So despite the fact that English was the main language of government, it did not acquire the status of the favored language of education: except for some private schools, most of the schools were run by the Jewish and Arab communities in their own language. The two higher education facilities extant at the time – the tellingly named Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Technion in Haifa – had both been established and funded by the Jewish community and maintained Hebrew as their language of instruction. English, however, remained a major and mandatory subject both in Hebrew and in Arabic schools and there were attempts to fashion English as a language tool to bridge the developing strife between Hebrew-speaking Jews and Arabic-speaking Arabs (Lockard 1996). In 1936, the Palestine Broadcasting Service was launched, addressing the population in English, Hebrew and Arabic, based on the assumption that besides positioning English in the spotlight as a means of communicating information, it would also have the capacity to mediate between the mutually hostile groups of Hebrew-speaking Jews and Arabic-speaking Arabs. Thus, the foreignness of English was employed to potentially provide a neutral ground for the speakers of two ideologically charged languages. It may be assumed, however, that the hoped-for mediating potential of English at the time was vastly overshadowed by its association with the colonial power and with the British military and civil presence. Nadel, Fishman and Cooper (1977: 29) describe two opposing tendencies with respect to the attitudes towards English during the British mandate: on the one hand, many young Jewish activists resisted the usage of English, opposed English classes at school and personally refused to utilize any language other than Hebrew. On the other hand, the anti-English sentiment was mitigated by the fact that Britain opposed Germany – many Israelis served in the British army during the Second World War, putting aside the dislike of the colonial domination before the greater evil of Nazism. These people typically had acquired and retained functional English communication skills.

The independence of Israel in 1948 radically changed the position of English. The ideological focus on Hebrew as the language of the Jewish state implied and implemented an active rejection of other languages, discouraging their usage both in public and in private. The aspiration of the Israeli cultural policy was to build a unified nation grounded in Hebrew culture. During immigration in the

1950s, the mass of immigrants was forwarded to the *Ulpanim* – a temporary residence in absorption centers, where intense Hebrew classes were offered. These courses focused especially on speech performance, enabling immigrants to quickly acquire the necessary communication skills. But the ulpanim were more than mere tools for acquiring the means of communication: they fostered a reshaping of identities in linguistic terms (cf. Selwyn 1990). Hebrew, as the unifying sacred language of different Jewish traditions, became the symbol of a new identity and identification and was in this quality accepted and internalized by immigrants. According to Ben-Rafael (2001: 179), it was especially the underprivileged communities from the Middle East and North Africa that embraced the shift to Hebrew, motivated by Zionism and by the wish to be reborn in a new country.

The rebirth, acceptance and internalization of Hebrew by the vast majority of immigrants was deemed a success of a monolingual state policy. The status of rival languages – whether the autochthonous Arabic, other world languages such as German and French or other inherently Jewish languages such as Yiddish and Ladino – was greatly reduced. The use of these languages was in fact actively discouraged in the years following independence (Spolsky and Shohamy 1999: 161–162) in an attempt to strengthen the new Hebrew-coded Israeli identity by subjecting the new arrivals to a linguistic and cultural melting pot. Specifically, English was repeatedly targeted in public campaigns, which discouraged the use of English in the public space. For instance, there was a strong pressure for TV shows to be dubbed in Hebrew and to eliminate English from shop and café signs. Anglicisms in Hebrew were equally discouraged. In the first decades following independence the amount of spoken English was consistently low – Nadel, Fishman and Cooper report that in the surveys of 1948 and 1961, less than 1 % of the Jewish population used English as their main language and that children of expatriates from English-speaking countries would not answer in English. Even the earlier data of English proficiency preceding independence may have been subsequently obfuscated in an effort to foreground the steady growth of Hebrew and to enhance the image of success of the Zionist Hebrew-only policy (Nadel, Fishman and Cooper 1977: 29–30).

But despite the attempts to eradicate it from the everyday life, English remained the first foreign language in schools, though the number of hours of instruction decreased compared with the education under the British Mandate (ibid. 31). Moreover, the learning of Hebrew and the attempted remolding of linguistic identity did not result in the disappearance of other languages in Israel. On the one hand, the mother tongues were not forgotten quickly, even though proficiency among the second generation declined significantly. On the other hand, the importance of relations with the western world in terms of economy, technology and structural development resulted in a renewed ap-

praisal of foreign languages, especially of English (Ben-Rafael 2001:179), foregrounding the need for plurilingual proficiency.

Specifically in the case of English, a major change in its diffusion occurred after 1967. The immigration from English-speaking countries was on the rise, which resulted in a large number of English speakers flowing into the country en masse, as opposed to the more sporadic influx of Anglophone immigrants in the previous decades. Typically, immigrants from English-speaking countries were associated with the educated strata and benefited from the generally favorable public opinion (Waxman 1989). At the same time, there was an increase of tourism both to and from Israel, which produced a growing necessity of communication in English and an additional stimulus to acquire it, as the possibilities to actually use it became more frequent. A further economic factor was the expansion of the economic and political ties with the United States, which, among other consequences, decreased the popular association of English with the colonial power of Britain and substituted it with a more favorable association with the U.S. as an allied country as well as with its high standard of living.

The following decades witnessed an increasing presence of English in everyday life. According to Nadel, Fishman and Cooper (1977), significant proportions of the populations claimed to listen to the BBC or Voice of America radio programmes, while television was providing English language movies and series, subtitled in Hebrew. There was Anglophone publishing in Israel, supported by imports of books in English, as well as a rapid increase of circulation of newspapers in English. In 1977, 10 % of all newspapers and periodicals published in Israel were in English, and international news publications in English were gaining ground – the *Time* magazine alone sold 20,000 copies weekly, *The Herald Tribune* 2,000 copies daily and the first locally-published English daily paper, *The Jerusalem Post*, sold 31,500 copies daily in 1972, which amounted to an increase of almost 100 % in ten years (Nadel, Fishman and Cooper 1977: 46).

Moreover, the knowledge of English was becoming connected to the more successful strata of society and became recognized as a marker of and a tool for success. According to sociological studies (e. g. Isaacs 1967, Cooper and Fishman 1977, Rosenbaum et al. 1977), English is a language that has increasingly enjoyed high proficiency as well as a positive image. Ever since the creation of Israel, English has been a compulsory subject in elementary and high school; it is a requirement for high school graduation and for admission to the university, and a high level of proficiency is expected of academics. It is a prerequisite for many middle- and higher-rank jobs, especially in foreign trade, tourism and technological development. The use of English is frequent in the names of stores and the dictionary of the Israeli Academy for the Hebrew Language exhibits an increasing number of words borrowed from English (Alony-Fainberg 1977 in Ben-Rafael 2001: 181). It is also the first language that parents want their children to

learn, far ahead of French and Arabic. On the whole, English proficiency is associated with the higher strata of society, prestige, modernity, education and good career chances. This association has in fact become so strong that in one case, North African immigrants in Ashkelon, a town about 50 km south of Tel Aviv, successfully resisted the efforts to teach their children French, which was considered to be the language of the privileged class in Northern Africa, and demanded that their children be taught English instead (Nadel, Fishman and Cooper 1977: 43).

A study of settlements with a strong presence of immigrants from English-speaking countries, mainly from South Africa, outlined the prestige of English in urban communities. In Kohav Yair and Raanana, towns in the central area of Israel, the inhabitants of South African origin found the use of English in public to be accepted and gratifying; English was used at home, though children would speak Hebrew with each other (Ben-Rafael 2001: 182–183). The proficiency in Hebrew and the rate of usage of Hebrew when addressing Hebrew speakers correlated with the length of the stay in the country. On the other hand, in a rural setting, such as in *moshav* (a cooperative village) Orot, the native English speakers had switched almost entirely to Hebrew, using it among themselves (ibid. 184–185). The identity as a member of a *moshav* is closely linked to giving up English in favor of Hebrew, as one of the members stated: “To be a *moshavnik* is incongruent with remaining a non-Hebrew speaker. To be a Hebrew speaker is to stop being a South African” (ibid. 185). As in the case with *ulpanim*, this statement suggests a strong tie between ideology, language and identity, where the choice of one entails an effect on the other parts of the equation. The emerging distinction in the usage of English between urban and rural areas is also corroborated by interviews conducted during this study, and will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

The positive image enjoyed by English especially contrasts with Arabic, the study of which is also compulsory in the Israeli school system. The importance of Arabic could not be more pronounced: it is the second official language of Israel, the language of all the neighboring countries, of the Palestinian territories, of the Arab minority in Israel and it is the language of origin of 50 % of Israel’s Jewish population. However, in contrast to English, it is a language of low public prestige associated with groups with low social status. In many cases, it is not being presented as a language of the diaspora but is perceived as a language of hostile populations, leading to widespread negative attitudes among Jewish students in Arabic classes and to a reluctance to learn it. Though it is still being used by Jewish immigrants from Middle Eastern and North African countries, its usage among the second generation is strongly declining (ibid. 195–200).

In short, ever since the late 1960s, English has enjoyed the status that no other foreign language has ever held in Israel. Despite the relatively small number of its

native speakers, as the following chapter will demonstrate, its utility as an international language and its association with the power, economic wealth and appealing popular culture of Israel's prime political partner – the USA – ensured its strong representation in Israel as well as favorable attitudes. Thus, the outward conditions to the emergence and spread of Anglophone writing in Israel were quite advantageous.

### 3.2. Immigration from English Speaking Countries

While an overall positive attitude towards English and high English proficiency among Israelis certainly facilitated the emergence of Anglophone Israeli Literature, it was the native speakers of English living in Israel that were the main agents of literary production in English. As the dominant majority of Anglophone Israeli writers was composed of expatriates from English-speaking countries, the dynamics of migration may elucidate the quantitative aspects of the field. The data summarized in Table 1 was published in the Statistical Abstract of Israel from 2011 by the Central Bureau of Statistics and represents the number of immigrants by country of origin during different periods of immigration. While the original table listed data from over 50 countries and regions, Table 1 was abridged to focus on Anglophone countries – the USA, United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand – with a small selection of other regions provided for a comparative perspective.

One of the limitations of the above table is that as it is based on the information of the Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel, it only provides information from the official establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 onward and does not display information about *aliyah*<sup>5</sup> in earlier times. One can assume, however, that the number of Jews who immigrated to Israel from English-speaking countries prior to the declaration of independence was relatively small. Waxman (1989: 78) cites two sources that give different estimates of pre-statehood immigration: Lapidé (1961: 132) suggests that more than 11,000 people immigrated during the British Mandate (1919–1948), while Goldscheider (1974: 348) mentions statistical evidence for 6,613 registered immigrants from the U.S. during the same time frame.

The observable pattern of Anglophone migration to Israel shows that before 1960, there was but a small number of migrants from English-speaking countries – the USA, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Canada. A radical increase in absolute numbers followed in the 1960s – the number of Anglophone immigrants grew almost eight times compared to the previous decade from 4,141

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5 *Aliyah*, the Hebrew term for immigration to Israel, literally means *ascent*, which highlights the ascribed ideological value of the move.



Country of origin	2010	2009	2000–2008	1990–1999	1980–1989	1972–1979	1961–1971	1952–1960	1948–1951
<i>Immigration total</i>	<b>16,633</b>	<b>14,574</b>	<b>253,700</b>	<b>956,319</b>	<b>153,833</b>	<b>267,580</b>	<b>427,828</b>	<b>297,138</b>	<b>687,624</b>
<i>English speaking countries – total</i>	<b>3,205</b>	<b>3,365</b>	<b>19,829</b>	<b>25,977</b>	<b>32,403</b>	<b>36,191</b>	<b>31,917</b>	<b>4,141</b>	<b>4,639</b>
<i>USA</i>	2,071	2,129	13,271	15,480	18,904	20,963	18,671	1,553	1,711
<i>United Kingdom</i>	523	578	3,157	4,851	7,098	6,171	6,461	1,448	1,907
<i>South Africa</i>	266	319	1,473	2,918	3,575	5,604	3,783	744	666
<i>Canada</i>	242	246	1,456	1,711	1,867	2,178	2,169	276	236
<i>Australia and New Zealand</i>	103	93	472	1,017	959	1,275	833	120	119
<i>Asia – total (especially Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and (former) Asian republics of USSR)</i>	970	918	29,515	61,305	14,433	19,456	56,208	37,119	237,704
<i>Africa – total (especially Morocco, Tunisia, Ethiopia)</i>	2,557	1,128	34,634	48,558	28,664	19,273	164,885	143,485	93,282
<i>Europe – total (especially Poland, Romania, (former) European republics of USSR)</i>	9,465	8,966	154,247	812,079	70,898	183,419	162,070	106,305	332,802

Table 1. Immigration to Israel by country of birth (based on the Statistical Abstract of Israel 2011, Section 4.4)

between 1952 and 1960 to 31,1917 between 1961 and 1971. The following decades continue to show high numbers of immigrants from English-speaking countries, peaking with 36,191 between 1972 and 1979. The number of new arrivals from Anglophone countries decreased slightly to 32,403 between 1980 and 1989 and decreased further to 25,977 between 1990 and 1999. Between 2000 and 2008, 19,826 people arrived from English-speaking countries, marking a further decrease. It must also be remembered that these numbers are to a large extent cumulative: while some immigrants returned to their country of origin, unable or unwilling to cope with the experience of migration to Israel, the majority stayed, adding their numbers to the number of Anglophone expatriates already in Israel. In other words, around 77,000 immigrants from English-speaking countries had arrived by 1979, 100,000 by 1989, 135,000 by 1999 and 160,000 by 2010.

Compared to migration from other countries and regions, the immigration from Anglophone countries was relatively small. Especially in the early years, the number of immigrants from English-speaking countries – 4,639 in 1948–1951 and 4,141 in 1952–1960 seems insignificant against the overall number of migrants of European origin (332,802 and 106,305), from Africa (93,282 and 143,485) and Asia (237,704 and 37,119). The high numbers of early migration from Europe were especially determined by the mass exodus of Jews from post-Holocaust countries, especially from Poland and Romania. As to Africa and Asia, almost 900,000 Jews left, fled, or were expelled from Arab countries between 1948 and 1970 (e.g. Shulewitz and Israeli 2000: 133–134). For instance, almost the entire Jewish community of Yemen – about 48,000 people – was transported to Israel in the course of the operation “Magic Carpet” (1949–1950). To relate the total number of immigrants from English-speaking countries to immigration data in general, Table 2 on page 52 shows the percentage of immigrants from countries where English is spoken as a native language by the majority of population from the total number of immigrants by period of immigration.

In terms of overall migration to Israel, migration from Anglophone countries constituted but a very small share until the 1960s, when not only the overall number of immigrants from English-speaking countries increased, but also their proportion (7 %) in the growing number of immigrants overall. A further increase of their percentage followed in the 1970s (14 %) and in the 1980s (21 %), featuring prominently as the absolute numbers of overall immigration decreased while the numbers of Anglophone immigrants increased. In the 1990s, the sharp drop to 3 % from the overall immigration can be explained not only by a certain decrease in the number of immigrants from English-speaking countries, but also by an overwhelming increase in the number of immigrants in general, due to mass immigration from the former USSR, numbering about 820,000 between 1990 and 1999.

So far, immigrants from Anglophone countries have been discussed as a group. Taken individually, this group consists of the USA, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – countries where it can be assumed that the majority of Jews who were born there and immigrated to Israel were native speakers of English. Moreover, the common ground for discussion is not limited to language. Though there are naturally differences between these countries, certain factors pertinent to Jewish culture in general and to Jewish migration specifically – e.g. the socio-economical situation, the freedom of religion – are considerably more similar between these English-speaking countries than, say between the USA and Morocco or South Africa and Soviet Russia. However, an insight into the specific composition of the larger group of native speakers of English in Israel is not irrelevant to the discussion of culture of origin of Anglophone Israeli authors. Table 3 on the following page relates the percentage of immigrants from specific countries of origin to the overall number of immigrants from Anglophone countries.

The early years of migration to Israel were marked by a similar number of immigrants from the USA and the UK: between 1948 and 1951, U.S. Americans constituted 37 % and the British 41 % of the total number of immigrants from English-speaking countries. This was also the only time in the history of aliyah that U.S. Americans were not the largest subgroup among the immigrating English speakers. However, by 1960 the USA had moved into the first place in relation to the proportion of immigrants and has held this position ever since. While in 1952–1960, when the amount of migration from English-speaking countries was still very limited, the number of immigrants from Britain was nearly the same as those of U.S. Americans, this relation changed dramatically over the following years. Ever since the 1960s, the U.S. – the country with the largest Jewish diaspora – has also produced the absolute majority of immigrants to Israel among English-speaking countries. Reaching 58 % in the 1960s, the proportion of U.S. American Jews among overall immigration from Anglophone countries has grown further, reaching its peak of 68 % between 2000 and 2008. The most recent entry suggests the proportion of 65 % in 2010.

Besides the clear quantitative dominance of immigrants from the U.S., the proportions of immigrants from other Anglophone countries have remained relatively stable. Ever since the 1950s, the UK has produced the second largest number of immigrants to Israel, followed by South Africa, Canada and Australia and New Zealand. The share of the UK has been generally declining, as has the share of South Africa. Canada, conversely, has experienced a slight rise of percentage, while the share of Australia and New Zealand has remained relatively constant.

In short, aliyah from English-speaking countries has been quantitatively dominated by U.S. Americans for six decades. In the 1960s, for instance, the

	2010	2009	2000–2008	1990–1999	1980–1989	1972–1979	1961–1971	1952–1960	1948–1951
<i>Immigration total</i>	16,633	14,574	253,700	956,319	153,833	267,580	427,828	297,138	687,624
<i>English speaking countries – total</i>	3,205	3,365	19,829	25,977	32,403	36,191	31,917	4,141	4,639
<i>English speaking countries – % from immigration total</i>	19 %	23 %	8 %	3 %	21 %	14 %	7 %	1.4 %	0.7 %

Table 2. Percentage of immigrants from Anglophone countries by period of immigration

Country of origin	2010	2009	2000–2008	1990–1999	1980–1989	1972–1979	1961–1971	1952–1960	1948–1951
<i>English speaking countries – total</i>	3,205	3,365	19,829	25,977	32,403	36,191	31,917	4,141	4,639
<i>USA</i>	65 %	64 %	68 %	60 %	58 %	58 %	58 %	37 %	37 %
<i>United Kingdom</i>	16 %	17 %	16 %	18 %	22 %	17 %	20 %	35 %	41 %
<i>South Africa</i>	8 %	9 %	7 %	11 %	11 %	16 %	12 %	18 %	14 %
<i>Canada</i>	8 %	7 %	7 %	7 %	6 %	6 %	7 %	7 %	5 %
<i>Australia and New Zealand</i>	3 %	3 %	2 %	4 %	3 %	3 %	3 %	3 %	3 %

Table 3. Percentage of immigrants from specific Anglophone countries in relation to total immigration from Anglophone countries

number of immigrants from the U.S. was roughly 2.5 times larger than the number of immigrants from the UK, 5 times larger than the number of immigrants from South Africa, 8 times larger than the Canadian number and almost 20 times larger than the number from Australia and New Zealand. In the 1970s, the period when the overall largest number of Jews from Anglophone countries immigrated to Israel, the share of the U.S. was nearly three times larger than that of the UK, 3.5 times larger than that of South Africa, almost 10 times larger than that of Canada and almost 20 times larger than that of Australia and New Zealand. Though the quantity of people in a certain group does not equal the quantity or quality of creative output produced by that group, immigrants from the U.S. remain at least numerically the most significant presence in Anglophone Israeli writing.

### 3.3. Geographical Distribution

The statistics of migration have demonstrated that in terms of absolute numbers, English-speaking immigration to Israel was strongly dominated by U.S. Americans, followed by a considerably smaller number of immigrants from the United Kingdom. However, upon arrival to Israel, the Anglophone *olim* did not dissipate equally over the territory of Israel, but concentrated in certain areas, which in time provided ground for certain regional dynamics in the development of Anglophone literature. Table 4, adapted from the Central Bureau of Statistics, provides an overview of the geographical distribution of the two largest groups of Anglophone immigrants – from the USA and from the UK – contrasted with some other groups of immigrants.

District	Country of last residence					Average (including countries of origin not listed here)
	USA	United Kingdom	European republics of the (former) USSR	France	Ethiopia	
<i>Jerusalem District</i>	45.5 %	47.6 %	6.5 %	22.6 %	21.2 %	20.5 %
<i>Northern District (especially Safed, Kinneret, Acre and the Golan)</i>	8.5 %	4.7 %	9.8 %	1.2 %	37.6 %	14.5 %
<i>Haifa District</i>	4.9 %	5.1 %	17.8 %	4.7 %	12.3 %	11.5 %
<i>Central district (especially the Sharon, Petah Tiqwa and Rehovot)</i>	13.6 %	12.2 %	19.5 %	30.1 %	0.2 %	18.8 %

(Continued)

District	Country of last residence					Average (including countries of origin not listed here)
	USA	United Kingdom	European republics of the (former) USSR	France	Ethiopia	
<i>Tel Aviv district</i>	11.1 %	20.6 %	11.3 %	16.3 %	0.1 %	12.8 %
<i>Southern district (especially Ashkelon and Be'er Sheva)</i>	5.5 %	4.9 %	22.8 %	19.0 %	28.6 %	17.9 %
<i>The West Bank (Israeli localities)</i>	10.8 %	4.9 %	2.3 %	6.2 %	-	4.0 %
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 4. Distribution of immigrants in specific regions in 2010 (based on the Statistical Abstract of Israel 2011, Section 4.9)

Although this diagram presents only the most recent numbers, it indeed follows what has been perceived as a general trend – the strong concentration of immigrants from the USA and United Kingdom in the Jerusalem area. For both groups, the proportion of immigrants settling in these areas is more than twice higher than the average of 20.5 %: 45.5 % for American immigrants and 47 % for immigrants from the United Kingdom. By contrast, only 6 % of immigrants from the former Soviet Union settled in the Jerusalem district; for immigrants from countries such as France and Ethiopia, only about one fifth of the arrivals settled there. The second largest area of residence for U.S. Americans is the central district, including the towns of the Sharon plain; these towns also house about 12 % of arrivals from the United Kingdom. While the distribution of immigrants from the U.S. and from the UK in the southern district and in the Haifa district are similarly low, especially compared to the numbers of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, there are two regions where the population dynamics of American and British arrivals differ significantly: the Tel Aviv district and the West Bank. While the proportion of immigrants from America settling in Tel Aviv (11.1 %) is relatively close to the immigrant average – 12.8 %, i. e. around one fifth of immigrants from the United Kingdom settle there. Conversely, about one tenth of all American immigrants chose to settle in Judea and Samaria, i. e. in settlements of questionable legitimacy located in the politically charged West Bank. This number is a lot higher than the immigrant average of 4 %. The percentage of immigrants from the UK in the West Bank – 4.9 % is still slightly higher than the average, but considerably lower than that of Americans. By contrast, the statistics shows that only 2.3 % of immigrants from the former Soviet Union settled there, whereas no Ethiopians at all selected the disputed territory as their living space.

In terms of lifestyle and political orientation, Tel Aviv and the West Bank are often perceived as opposites. While Tel Aviv is associated with a virulent, modern and secularly liberal lifestyle, often influenced by left-wing ideas, the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, e.g. in Hebron, have come to be associated with right-wing views and adherence to religious practices. In his assessment of the American aliyah, Chaim Waxman (1989) describes the image of the settlers in the Territories, i.e. the West Bank and the Gaza Strip:

Conventional wisdom has it that the Israeli settlers in the Territories [...] are political extremists and religious fundamentalists who are zealously driven by political messianism. Further, the Americans among them are widely believed to be among the most fanatically irredentist of all. (Waxman 1989: 150)

However, in his research on immigrants from America living in the Territories, Waxman found out that such stereotypes of the settlers is not necessarily accurate, at least as far as the American immigrants are concerned. Though most of them indeed led an orthodox way of life and had a higher-than-average number of children, they were neither recent converts – most of them had belonged to the orthodox community prior to aliyah, nor uneducated – at least 17 % of adult males had a doctorate. The overall education rate was higher than that of Jews in the United States, where a large number of children would be an indicator of low education (1989: 152–154). Moreover, the majority did not profess extremist views, but also cited associational community factors along with the need to have a Jewish presence in historically significant locations as reasons for settling in the territories. But although the research of Waxman and others suggests that as a group, American settlers in the West Bank are not the stereotypical radical fundamentalists, it may indeed be the orthodox affiliation that accounts for a high percentage of American-born Jews in the Territories, while the lack of orthodox affiliation may account for the higher number of UK-born Jews in Tel Aviv.

On the whole, Jerusalem is indeed the most powerful magnet for settling for immigrants from the USA and from the UK alike, in contrast to the pattern of migration from other countries, where a much smaller share selected Jerusalem as their new home. Lesser numbers have settled in the Tel Aviv district and in the central district, with even smaller percentages of immigrants from the UK and the USA settling in the northern and in the southern districts. About one tenth of immigrants from America settled in the West Bank, while only about 5 % of immigrants from the UK chose these localities.

What is the relation of these figures to the general population in these areas? The following figure (Table 5) shows the total population (Arab and Jewish) in different parts of Israel in 2010.

Districts							Total
Jerusalem district	Northern district	Haifa district	Central district	Tel Aviv district	Southern district	The West Bank (Israeli localities)	
945,000	1,279,200	913,000	1,854,900	1,285,000	1,106,900	311,100	7,695,100
12.3 %	16.6 %	11.9 %	24.0 %	16.7 %	14.4 %	4.0 %	100 %

*Table 5. Israeli population in approximate numbers and in percent by district in 2010 (based on the Statistical Abstract of Israel 2011, Section 2.7)*

The comparison with the general population statistics in Israel emphasizes the concentration of immigrants from the U.S. and from the UK – the two largest sources of Anglophone migration – in the Jerusalem district. As was demonstrated in the previous table, nearly half of immigrants from the U.S. and the UK gravitated towards Jerusalem – an area that accounts only for 12 % of the overall population of Israel. By contrast, the Haifa district, which has roughly the same overall population numbers, attracted only about 5 % of immigrants from the U.S. and the UK. The by far most populous district – the central district – attracted relatively small numbers of immigrants from the U.S. and the UK – 14 % and 12 % respectively. In short, the marked concentration of immigrants from the U.S. and the UK is not only high in absolute numbers, but also extremely disproportionate to the place of Jerusalem in the quantitative hierarchy of population statistics. Conversely, the lower attractiveness of other districts to Anglophone speakers is disproportionate to their significance for the overall Israeli population. Some of the reasons for this demographic pattern will be discussed in the following section, which will shed light on the changing motivation of immigrants from Anglophone countries that had a strong impact both on the demographic and cultural development.

### 3.4. Motivation of Immigrants

While the 2010 data discussed in the previous chapter emphasizes the trend that had been established in recent decades – a strong concentration of immigrants from the U.S. and the UK in and around Jerusalem, one must also bear in mind that by the time of the statistical research of 2010, the data of which have been presented above, an important way of settling in rural Israel – the *kibbutzim* – had diminished considerably compared to the earlier stages of pre- and post-independence history. Immigrants from the U.S. founded a number of *kibbutzim*, such as Ein Hashofet (1937), Kfar Menachem (1939), Hatzor (1948) and Ein Dor (1948) (Waxman 1989: 79), or settled in already existing agricultural communities, e. g. in Urim and Gal On. Settling in *kibbutzim* also presupposed a



somewhat different underlying ideology: while many Anglophone Jews who have made aliyah in recent years were primarily motivated by religious considerations, the predominant motive of early aliyah was secular Zionism.

Among immigrants from English-speaking countries, American-Jewish immigrants are the best-studied group. And as the American Jews constituted a large part of Anglophone immigration to Israel, the motives of this specific subgroup are, at least to some extent, important for the consideration of the group as a whole. In his extensive work *American Aliya*, Chaim Waxman notes the fluctuations in the motivation of immigrants from the USA during time. In the period of the British mandate, the first and foremost reason for immigration was secular Zionism. The immigrants were typically young – about 90 % were between the ages of 20–30 – and unmarried; the few married couples who entered Israel did not have children yet. Many were associated with Zionist youth movements, such as *HaShomer HaTzair* (Hebrew for *the young guard*) – a socialist-Zionist youth organization – and about two thirds settled, at least for some time, in kibbutzim (1989: 81). The poll that questioned pre-state immigrants about their motivation (Antonovsky and Katz 1979 in Waxman 1989) showed that the “Zionist” motivation was more likely to be the main cause for aliyah, more so than “Jewish” or “religious” reasons.<sup>6</sup> Even for those who joined a religious kibbutz, the underlying motivation would have been more Zionist than religious (*ibid.*). The idea of building the country, creating a habitable Promised Land through personal effort in a pioneer-like mode became the prevalent notion of the generation, a kind of *ersatz* religion.

In *Aliya: Three Generation of American-Jewish Immigration to Israel*, a documentary of immigration from America, Liel Leibovitz describes both the motivation of young Zionists and the less-than-supportive surrounding mood by using the example of Betty and Marlin Levine, who moved to Israel in 1947 from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania:

A Hebrew teacher by profession, Betty was even more immersed than Marlin in the constant concern over the progression of events in Palestine. She, too, felt drawn to the Jewish cause, having herself emigrated from Estonia to Latvia and from there to the freedom offered by the United States. Her father had travelled to the United States in 1923 with his oldest son, with the intention of bringing the rest of the family with him shortly thereafter. Just then, however, Congress passed a law requiring immigrants to

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<sup>6</sup> Waxman, however, notes that surveys on motivation must be treated with caution, as respondents may have been unaware of, forgotten, reconsidered or altered their original motivation to appear in a better light. Thus, somebody whose decision to emigrate could have actually been prompted by a local dissatisfaction like loss of job, may eventually find it emotionally and socially more rewarding to attribute the decision to the attraction of Israel. Such assessment of motivation thus entails an interplay of push and pull factors on subjective and objective levels.

become citizens before granting them the right to bring over their families, which meant that Betty, her mother, and her three siblings had to wait for five years, fatherless, every day asking their mother if the *shif's carta*, Yiddish for ship ticket, had arrived. Palestine, then, represented the promise of an independent Jewish state, a state where Jews would never again have to wait for others to decide their fate. She realized the risks, of course – when reading the news one was burdened with images of carnage – yet thought them all trivial compared to the goal at stake. (Leibovitz 2006:19)

However, when Betty announces her wish to marry her boyfriend Marlin and board a ship to Palestine, her social contacts are visibly less enthusiastic about her plan:

Some, the more practical ones, showered them with fact upon fact, each carefully selected to dissuade them from leaving. Palestine, they said, was no-man's-land, a war zone where countless different sects clashed over incoherent and ever-shifting political goals. It was a land where bombs just went off, reaping lives without warning.<sup>7</sup> Others focused on shaking the couple's confidence; they reminded Marlin that the only three words of Hebrew he spoke were *shalom*, *Bar Mitzvah* and *hallelujah*, none of which were likely to come in handy for a reporter wishing to cover the ongoing battle for Jewish independence. You know no one there, they would say, and nobody guarantees that you will find a job, a home, a circle of friends. Others tried a more cautious approach, supporting the couple's decision, yet trying to persuade them to wait just a little while longer, until things clear up just a little bit. (Ibid. 18–19)

The two passages above illustrate both the attraction that Mandatory Palestine held for some and the practical consideration that made aliyah into the pre-state Israel inconceivable for the vast majority of Jews in America. Though neither Betty nor Marlin appear to be practicing members of a Zionist organization, they are concerned about the future of Jews as a nation, and the building of a new, accepting Jewish homeland seems to offer fairness, dignity and political self-determination, which exceeds the concerns about economic prosperity. Especially for those with a history of tribulations endured for the sake of resettling in the United States, the yet imaginary Jewish state was also a dream of stability, of the end of wandering and of return to the historical homeland. At the same time, it becomes obvious that it took a great deal of romanticism and ideological involvement to actually make the step: while the idea of the Jewish state was appealing to the majority of American Jews, most did not consider the danger of the unstable political situation and the lack of a functioning “safety network” as a feasible alternative to the ever-improving life in the US. Though strongly present in the community, Zionist sentiment would only rarely override the

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<sup>7</sup> This image is not dissimilar to the image of Israel and the Palestinian Territories conjured by contemporary European media.

attachment to the current country, and it was typically the young and the yet unsettled that would eventually dare the move.

While such an approach characterized by ethnic and national affiliation is also typical of the American immigration in the decades following the foundation of the state, later migration, especially after 1967, saw a shift of motivation. During this time, the significance of the religious component was growing increasingly. Based on his extensive survey of more than 1000 American immigrants to Israel, Harry Jubas (1974: 124 in Avruch 1982: 96) suggests that “[i]f the motivation for coming to Israel of this population were to be summed up in one word, it would be unquestionably ‘Jewishness.’” However, Avruch (1982: 97–99) and Waxman (1989: 101–102) suggest that this concept of “Jewishness” became interpreted in increasingly religious terms and that classical secular Zionist ideology was losing its grip. The representative examples of American *olim* in this period chosen by Avruch and Leibovitz are those of observant Jews who were attracted to Israel by the promise of a more full religious life as a Jew among Jews. Among others, Avruch cites the following testimony: “In the U.S. I had to compartmentalize my Jewishness, and especially my religiousness. I’m a chemist. Everyone thought of me as a chemist who is Jewish. I thought of myself as a Jew who happens to be a chemist. Here in Israel I *happen* to be a chemist” (1982: 96). The studies of American immigrants to Israel in the late 1960s and 1970s (Goldscheider 1974 and Jubas 1974 in Waxman 1989: 98–99) suggest that an increasing number, between 37 % and 42 %, identified themselves as Orthodox, i.e. strictly observant, which is a marked overrepresentation in comparison to the admitted religious denomination both in earlier waves of American aliyah and in the American society at home. At the same time, however, there was a significant proportion of religiously unaffiliated immigrants: both studies give a figure of 20 %. Further on, Waxman notes an even more significant increase in the religiousness of American immigrants: referring to the 1986 interview with Bobby Brown, the assistant director of the American Section of the Aliyah Department of the World Zionist Organization, Waxman estimates that about 60 % of U.S. Jews who were immigrating to Israel in the mid and late 1980s were Orthodox (*ibid.*). It can be assumed that especially this gradually growing group of immigrants with heightened religious sensibility were attracted to settling in Jerusalem – the pivot of Jewish spiritual imagination – and in the West Bank, the territory of which to a large extent corresponds to the biblical areas of Judea and Samaria.

Besides the proportional significance of Zionist and religious factors concerning the motivation for aliyah, Ilan Riss (2010) makes an interesting observation regarding gender distribution among immigrants from the U.S. Between 1969 and 1972, when American aliyah was at its apex, there was a remarkable asymmetry between the number of young men and young women

immigrants. In the age category of 15 to 29, there were only 686 male immigrants per every 1000 female immigrants, i. e. the gender ratio was 40:60. In effect, during this time period, women between 15 and 29 constituted 28 % of total immigrants from America (ibid. 38–39). This is significantly different from the considerably more even distribution among other age groups (0–14, 30–44, 45–64), where the number of male immigrants was, in fact, slightly higher, as well as from the data on the same age group (15–29) among immigrants from different countries, like Romania and the USSR. Neither is there a correlation to the demography of Jews in America, where, from 1969–1972 the ratio of 15–29 was almost perfectly equal. Riss points out the importance of individual gender strategies of migration and non-migration. Young American Jewish men, sympathetic to the anti-Vietnam war sentiments, may have been reluctant to immigrate at the age when they would be drafted to the Israeli army and may have valued their professional chances in America higher than those in Israel. For women, Riss argues, it may have been the promise of a better marriage market increasingly motivating them to immigrate to Israel: Jewish women in America were by half less likely to participate in Jewish/non-Jewish intermarriage than Jewish men were; among female Jewish baby boomers, the percentage of those who never married is higher than that among Jewish men (ibid. 44). Coincidentally, two of the most significant Anglophone Israeli authors, Karen Alkalay-Gut and Shirley Kaufmann, settled in Israel (in 1972 and 1973 respectively) through marriage with residents of Israel, which indirectly supports Riss's assumption. Moreover, gender issues and the challenging of the religious, traditional Jewish androcentric approach are strongly present in the works of Anglophone Israeli women writers.

### 3.5. From Demography to Writing

This chapter outlined some general tendencies concerning English and English speakers in Israel throughout the years, in order to provide a brief overview of the social context of English writing in Israel. Originally the language of the imperialist domination under the British mandate, the role of English diminished in the years following independence under the Hebrew-only policy of the new Israeli identity, but rapidly acquired an unprecedented status as a desirable vehicle of communication and success after 1967. Simultaneously, the number of immigrants from English-speaking countries, especially from the USA, rose rapidly, peaking in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though not overly impressive in numbers, constituting 7 % and 14 % at its climax in the 1960s and 1970s respectively, immigrants from English-speaking countries were generally well regarded and associated with the educated strata. From the 1960s onwards,

Anglophone immigration to Israel has been numerically dominated by U.S. Americans, the proportion of whom has reached its apex especially in recent years – between 2000 and 2008, 68 % of all immigrants from English-speaking countries were from the USA. Furthermore, while the early immigrants from English-speaking countries were especially attracted to the idea of building the country and to kibbutz life, the newest data shows a tendency of Anglophone immigrants to concentrate in or around Jerusalem, which is disproportionate to the general pattern of a more even distribution. An equally disproportionate pattern of locality is found in the West Bank settlements, where 11 % of immigrants from the U.S. were found to be living in 2010. This development of a settlement strategy may be related to the remarkable shift of motivation for aliyah, from the rather secular and socialist-Zionist agriculture oriented earlier immigrants to the more recent waves of religiously motivated migrants.

As will become visible in the following section, these factors are inexorably connected to the development of Anglophone Israeli writing. The improvement of the general attitude towards English in the late 1960s produced a more favorable atmosphere for creative expression, while the rising absolute numbers of immigrants from English-speaking countries in the late 1960s and 1970s brought about a certain concentration of Anglophone authors, which facilitated creative dialogue and contributed to the developing conscience of English authors writing outside the dominant Hebrew culture. The budding formations of immigrant writers from English-speaking countries also encouraged non-native speakers to join their ranks. The numeric domination of immigrants from the USA among Anglophone immigrants is reflected in the strong American presence among Anglophone Israeli authors; the propensity to settle in certain areas correlates to the concentration of writing activity as well as locality related themes; the motivation to move and the following experience in the country is a strong formative element, which finds expression both in the interviews with authors and in their poetic works. Thus, if this section mainly analyzed the social aspects pertinent to the English writing in Israel, the following section will focus on the immediate creative context.



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## 4. Overview: Anglophone Israeli Literature

### 4.1. In Lieu of a Definition

What is Anglophone Israeli Literature? On the most heuristic level, it is literature written in Israel in the English language. But as with many concepts of cultural studies, the apparently self-evident is bound to bounce back in a spectrum of questions when confronted with an attempt to produce a definition. One of the ambiguities of the subject concerns the temporal aspect. Does the mere fact of being written on Israeli soil make a piece of writing a part of Anglophone Israeli Literature, or does it become a part of it only after the author has resided in Israel for a specific period of time? In Israel, the influx of tourists is paralleled by a steady flow of medium-term residents and immigrants, and especially the members of the last two groups are prone to reflect on their experience in writing, as is visible, for instance, in the explosive spread of my-Israeli-experience-type blogs. It can be perhaps agreed upon that a poem produced by a tourist on a week's stay in Jerusalem has a different relation to the general phenomenon of Anglophone Israeli Literature than that of a long-term resident, but where does one draw the line? For example, in March 2012, the stage of the weekly English-language storytelling contest in Xoho bar in Tel Aviv was shared, among others, by a native Israeli, an Australian-born man who had resided in Israel for at least 15 years, a French contestant, about four years in the country, and another Australian, who had come on a three-month volunteering program. Conversely, some authors are still being classified as a part of their original literary tradition, regardless of their long-term residence in Israel and notwithstanding the fact that most or even all of their creative works have been produced in Israel – for example, Shirley Kaufman (in Israel since 1973, seven out of nine poetry collections published during her residence in Israel) and Linda Zisquit (in Israel since 1978, all poetry collections published during her residence in Israel) appear in an array of U.S.-grounded Jewish American poets in Janet Kaufman's discussion of poetry by Jewish American Women (2002: 294–296).

Another question is posed by “Israeliness”: would it theoretically include also the writing produced by Palestinian Arabs and Jewish settlers in the contested West Bank? And in a case of a dispute, by which borders should such a belonging be defined? Or should the choice be guided by self-definition of the author, such as that of Ossama Massarwa, who explicitly defines himself as “Palestinian-Israeli writer and poet”? Needless to say, any attempt at definition on politically and emotionally charged territorial grounds would become an easy target for advocates of the opposite ideology. Though to a certain extent true of literary traditions and movements in general, the territorial insecurity in the context of the ever-pending two-state solution makes literary borders malleable.

Yet another question concerns the “literary” nature of works. As mentioned earlier, the experience of migration can be a strong impetus towards artistic creation, where individuals often feel the need to reflect on their experiences in forms of blog entries, poems or short stories, and as migration to Israel continues, this type of writing constantly receives “new blood”. Without entering into the discussion of the definition of “literature” – an elusive and disputable term by itself – one can note that the genre, medium, audience and quality of literary production in Israel are extremely varied. On the one end of the spectrum are authors such as Riva Rubin and Shirley Kaufman, who are critically acclaimed in Israel – having received the President’s Prize for Literature – and abroad, with a number of publications in local and international releases. On the other side of the spectrum there are the countless bloggers, participants of creative writing groups, and other occasional authors, whose creative works are hardly known beyond their immediate communities, whether physical or virtual. Often entertaining and endowed with strong power of communicating experiences, many of these works nevertheless lack continuity and exhibit very different levels of expressive, poetic or narrative abilities. Lamenting the difficulties that “serious” writers face when attempting to make their work known, Jerome Mandel writes in the introduction to *Arc* (2006):

But there is another group of English-language writers, larger and in some ways less somber than those who aspire to the Israel Association of Writers in English. This group, rather, attends writing groups and workshops around the country. They are grandparents, first-timers, retirees, and amateurs. Some aspire to fame and glory, literary prizes and movie contracts. They are constantly disappointed. Some write novels for profit and vengeance that are never published. Some write biography or autobiography (how their parents survived the war in Europe). Many write memoirs for themselves or their grandchildren who, born and raised in Israel, may never have the English language skills necessary to read what their grandparents have written. Most write poems, more lyrical than philosophical, more personal than profound. (Mandel 2006: 9)



At the same time, as will be discussed later in more detail, Anglophone Israeli writing is not limited to immigrants from English-speaking countries, but is also a site of creativity for native Israelis or immigrants from other parts of the world. And again, although some of these works are surprisingly impressive, as in case of Zygmunt Frankel (born in Poland) or Villie Kohn (born in Hungary), many of them struggle with the English syntax or lack vocabulary. Doubtlessly remarkable as a phenomenon of the spread of English as an increasingly global language of self-expression, many of these works would provide interesting material for linguistic and sociological research.

A so far un-academized field, Anglophone Israeli Literature has not been discussed in terms of a canon of works, which, at least to a certain extent, could be regarded as a representative *pars-pro-toto*. But while the question of quality and “literature-ness” of Anglophone Israeli writing has not been addressed academically, it provides a source of ongoing debates between the authors themselves. This has led to the formation of various coexistent groups, from the institutionally-universal *Iawe*, which was created as an organization for professional Anglophone authors under the auspices of the Israeli Writers’ Union, to the locally all-embracing *Writers in Jerusalem*, which opens its doors to known and unknown bloggers, poets and self-proclaimed memoir writers. While some represent the elitist view that writing is a matter of professional achievement and vehemently oppose self-publishing, others adopt a more inclusive view that encompasses the work of unknown and non-professional authors.

Recognizing the inherent problematic of defining the borders of the field, it is perhaps a more productive approach to view the subject from the inside, in terms of its development and tendencies. Thus, this section is going to briefly address some general aspects and trends of Anglophone Israeli Literature, from the formation of writers’ organizations to the distribution of works over different genres.

## 4.2. The Beginnings

The biographical data suggests that the first (future) Anglophone authors started settling in Israel immediately after the independence of Israel in 1948. Among the first to arrive were the South African poet Olga Kirsch and the U.S.-American novelist Chayym Zeldis, followed by Robert Friend, already a published poet. More immigrated during the 1950s – among others, Zygmunt Frankel, Dennis Silk and Lami (Shulamit Halperin), during the 1960s – Riva Rubin, Richard Sherwin, and during the 1970s – Shirley Kaufman, Karen Alkalay-Gut, Jerome Mandel, Rochelle Mass, Naomi Ragen. But despite the rapid increase in numbers, the strongly Hebrew-oriented post-independence Israel provided very

limited output opportunities for local English-language writers. To a large extent, there appears to have been a mutual lack of information about the activity of fellow Anglophone authors in Israel, due to geographical and sometimes ideological separation – while a number of (future) authors settled in Jerusalem, others preferred Tel Aviv or even developing agricultural settlements – e. g. Lami in Kibbutz Urim in the Negev Desert or Rochelle Mass in Moshav Gan Ner in the Galilee. Besides the lack of direct contact, there were no periodicals or writers' organizations (like the long-standing Hebrew writers' association that has been active since 1921) that would function as an information hub and would perpetuate local influences. Judy Labensohn (in Brodie 1981: 26) commented on the feeling of local isolation among Anglophone Israeli authors: "There was no motivating factor for the poets who wrote in isolation and sent off their stuff in isolation to get together. [...] There was no forum, no place to turn to, and so we worked alone."

In short, Anglophone Israeli writing did not develop as a "circle" of authors in the sense of the Bloomsbury Group or the Language Poets, with strong mutual awareness and information exchange between its members. In graphic terms, it can be rather imagined as a multi-dimensional network, where individuals with roots in different continents, cultural backgrounds and literary influences interact with greater or lesser frequency in the framework of the Israeli experience and Jewish cultural knowledge.

It was not until the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s that Anglophone Israeli authors became more self-conscious and vociferous. According to Karen Alkalay-Gut, the year 1978 marked a significant change of consciousness, as Anglophone writers began to enter the public arena:

The significant date, as I recall it, is 1978. Dick Flantz, a lecturer at Tel Aviv University and known to both English and Hebrew writing circles, "organized" the "Tel Aviv Poets." He began with a broadsheet publishing the works of Richard Sherwin, Riva Rubin, himself, and me, and then organized a number of exciting and unusual readings where the broadsheet was sold. There was a reading at a nightclub in Jaffa, for example, one of the first readings I'd ever participated in, which was – in its excitement, its atmosphere, and its big audience response – comparable to a rock concert. There was a big happening in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel, in which English poetry was mixed with Hebrew poetry and music. There were readings at the various universities in the neighborhood, all extremely well attended, and extremely stimulating. One reading at Tel Aviv University, featured slides and music to accompany the poems, and the crowded room was filled with a kind of excitement of being in on a new and exciting experience.

The response we experienced stimulated all of us, as I recall, to writing newer and better poems. A poem by Flantz inspired me to write a poem about his poem, which we read – and published in New Zealand – as a kind of dialogue, and there was a general feeling of a sudden opening up into an audience.

This was very different from what we'd experienced in the years before, I think. All of us, and there were many more poets than the four of us, had been writing in isolation, feeling – perhaps – a bit guilty that we were not contributing to the culture of our adopted land because we were not writing in Hebrew, and longing to communicate with an immediate audience who could understand us. Some of us said that writing in a vacuum had been good for us, because it helped us develop an original voice, but all of us were grateful for the chance of feedback.

It began to be clear that we did not have to apologize for not writing in Hebrew. On the contrary, we could be used as bridges to the western world, explaining something of what it feels like to be living in this country without the barrier of translation. (Alkalay-Gut 1993–94: 13)

In relation to the earlier discussion of aliyah from English-speaking countries, the “awakening” of Anglophone authors in Israel followed two decades of intense immigration from Anglophone countries, which provided not only a certain security in numbers, but also a higher density of creative exchange in English. Judging by the data of the Central Bureau of Statistics (see tables 1, 2 and 3 in the previous chapter), about 77,000 Jews from Anglophone countries had immigrated to Israel by 1979.

Centers of Anglophone literary production had crystallized in Jerusalem, with Robert Friend, Dennis Silk and Harold Schimmel at the core, and in Tel Aviv, around Richard Sherwin, Karen Alkalay-Gut, Riva Rubin and Dick Flantz. Readings in English became increasingly popular in cafés and other spaces, providing local poets with a stage and an audience. For instance, in 1981, a series of the *Jerusalem Cricket* readings was organized in the Tzvata theater in Jerusalem by Alan Kaufman, who together with David Twersky (Brodie 1981: 26–27) under the auspices of the English edition of the Kibbutz literary magazine *Shdemot*, showcased the works of over 10 local poets to an audience of 170. Besides poetry proper, the readings were supplemented by paintings, dance performances and music, providing a multi-media experience of local Anglophone culture. The local audience greeted the readings with enthusiasm, which provided additional motivation for the authors, who felt that at least partly their work was beginning to resonate with the listeners that they were implicitly addressing in their works. The Tel Aviv poets started publishing a broadsheet that eventually developed into *Arc* – the periodical of the newly established *Israel Association of Writers in English*. With the formation of *Iawe* in 1980, Anglophone Israeli writing can be said to have carved an officially recognized niche in the local literary scene, with a number of readings and publications increasing in subsequent years. At the time, there was also a degree of Hebrew recognition of this English phenomenon. Articles by Yoram Kaniuk and other important figures of the Hebrew literary world took interest in and reviewed the books and readings by Anglophone writers despite their language; local efforts were made

by writers to integrate English writers into Hebrew events, thus bridging the language gap within the framework of the same cultural occasions. Moreover, a major factor was the existence of the American Cultural Center in Tel Aviv, which brought together authors of both Hebrew and English backgrounds in a respectable and relatively neutral framework.

### 4.3. Writers' Organizations

The role of writers' organizations in Anglophone Israeli writing is not unambiguous. Karen Alkalay-Gut (2002, 2007) has argued that since many Anglophone authors, especially expatriates from English-speaking countries, have an inborn tendency to stress and express their individuality, they have a natural aversion to centralizing themselves in a unified writers' union – unlike, for instance, Russian-speaking writers in Israel, who seem to have created a more powerful organization that both strengthens the authors' community and promotes their work. In short, there is no umbrella organization that represents or lists the quantitative majority of Anglophone Israeli authors, but authors tend to be affiliated with at least one of the different organizations, with multiple memberships for the sake of increased circulation of works being an open option. However, the diversity of authors' organizations and groups of Anglophone Israeli writers may be seen as a vital expression of difference within the larger group and a marker of the plurality of events of poetic expression, even though they neither claim representative qualities nor, to the chagrin of some authors, do they perform a lobbyist function to forward the interests of Anglophone writers.

*Voices Israel Group of Poets in English* is perhaps the oldest major organization of Anglophone authors in Israel. It was founded by Leslie Summers, Reuben Rose, Moshe Ben-Zvi and Jacob Katwan in July 1971 (“Voices Israel Poetry: Home”) and the first reading was held the following month. Created with a strong focus on poetry, the aim of *Voices* was to provide an outlet for writers of English poetry in Israel, to encourage new poets and to provide opportunities for poetic dialogue. Since 1974, *Voices* has published an annual anthology. An annual poetry competition, financed through application fees, has been organized since 1989. Currently, *Voices* claims to have a membership of 150 poets and organizes regular group meetings, readings and poetry workshops in various locations in Israel and occasionally abroad: in Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Modi'in, Beer Sheva, Kibbutz Amiad as well as in Boston and London. Perhaps the largest and most open organization, it is nevertheless confronted with the lack of “new blood”, as a large number of its members – at least the ones participating in Tel Aviv workshops – seem to have reached a rather venerable

age. As such, it is less attractive to younger authors. At the same time, it has been criticized by others, notably by the critically acclaimed author Rachel Tzvia Back, for its insufficient standards of poetry.

In terms of the “professional” profile, the *Israel Association of Writers in English (IAWE)* can be seen as an antithesis to *Voices*. *IAWE* was founded in 1980 under the auspices of the Israeli government as a professional union of Anglophone authors in Israel by Karen Alkalay-Gut, Richard Sherwin, Riva Rubin and Zygmunt Frankel. The formation of *IAWE* was paralleled by the formation of similar professional writers' unions in other languages, e.g. Arabic, Russian, Romanian and Spanish, as the presence and potential of non-Hebrew writing became increasingly recognized on the official level. From the beginning, *IAWE* has maintained a selective membership policy based on literary achievements: the authors represented by *IAWE* need to be qualified by “virtue and quantity of their professionally published poetry, fiction, or creative nonfiction” (“Registering” on *IAWE* website). According to the member registration statement, potential members are expected to have at least one or two published books, or the quantitative equivalent in journals and anthologies. As applicants for membership had to satisfy both the quantitative criterion and qualitative judgment – an arguable matter in itself – *IAWE* has been criticized for being overly selective and self-focused. But at least in the first decade, *IAWE*, as a part of the larger union of Israeli writers, enjoyed official recognition and government sponsorship, which enabled it to organize popular readings, publish volumes of poetry as well as the annual journal *Arc*. This was certainly an advance in terms of promoting the image of local English writing and making it accessible to a larger number of people. However, the state funding of *IAWE* has been gradually reduced until it ceased altogether, and its activity has inevitably decreased. Currently, the activities of *IAWE*, including the ongoing publication of *Arc*, are self-financed. Moreover, like *Voices*, *IAWE* is currently confronted with the problem of aging and seems to hold little appeal to younger writers.

Besides these national-level options, there is a number of local groups, circles, public reading lines and workshops that target various groups. For instance, *Writers in Jerusalem*, active since 2009, acts as a local hub for local creative production and has organized a series of workshops, meeting and a peer-review program, primarily addressing migrants from English-speaking countries in the Jerusalem area. Conversely, *The Wondering Workshop*, founded in Tel Aviv in 2007, has been a site of weekly meetings for young Israelis, who have chosen English as their language of creative expression. *Stanza* is an independent line of readings in Tel Aviv, where Anglophone poets of different origins and age groups perform their work. Unlike *Voices* and *IAWE*, the audiences of which have been dwindling lately, *Stanza* events are attracting a growing audience. Recently, *Stanza* published an anthology of the works presented at recent readings, do-

nating the revenue to a center for the development of African refugees in Israel. In Jerusalem, an English poetry slam has been organized monthly.

While authors' organizations can function both as indicators and propagators of status of a certain kind of literature, the impression that Anglophone Israeli writing can be summed up under such labels is deceptive. Affiliation with a writers' organization or group is not only an instrumental act of joining forces to propagate a specific direction of writing, but also an act of identification, which is not necessarily regarded as an asset. While authors such as the Canadian-born poet Rochelle Mass actively and positively identify with what they see as an emerging tradition of Anglophone Israeli writing, other authors, notably such critically-acclaimed authors as Shirley Kaufman and Rachel Tzvia Back, have chosen to set themselves apart from the dominant organization circles and have resisted official local affiliations, concentrating instead on institutions and audiences overseas. Pertinent to the issue of local vs. translocal identification, the question of the intended audience will be addressed in more detail in the sections 4.5. and 4.6..

#### 4.4. Creative Writing Courses

Scholars such as Jonathan Wilson (2007) and Axel Stähler (2009) have expressed doubt regarding the future of Anglophone Israeli writing. And indeed, the aging of the members of *Voices* and *Iawe* and the lackluster interest of younger authors in these organizations may provide grounds for pessimism. However, the last decade has witnessed an increase of creative writing programs in English, which suggests a growing interest in the ability to produce literature in English and a greater marketability of creative writing education both among native English speakers and among native Israelis. The Bar Ilan University offers an M.A. program in English Literature and Creative Writing, self-described on the university website as “creative writing with a Jewish flair” (“English Literature & Linguistics” 2014) that attracts local and overseas students. Among the teaching staff are Anglophone Israeli authors such as Linda Zisquit and Evan Fallenberg as well as visiting authors from Anglophone countries. The University of Tel Aviv offers a not-for-credit creative writing workshop that is primarily directed towards the students of the English Department. Moreover, there are a number of creative writing courses offered privately. Typically set in cities with a large population of native English speakers, especially in Jerusalem, there is an array of creative writing programs, courses and workshops, such as Judy Labensohn's *Creative Writing Gym* (Jerusalem), Madelyn Kent's memoir writing and playwriting courses (Jerusalem) and creative writing courses by Jennifer Lang (Raanana), K.J. Hannah Greenberg (Jerusalem) and Annie Kantar (Jerusalem).

Similarly, there are several creative writing groups in Tel Aviv, conducted under the guidance of Riva Rubin, Jerry Mandel and Dara Barnat. Though the growing popularity of these writing programs can be seen as a safeguard of persistence and rejuvenation of Anglophone writing in Israel at least for some time, it is not at all certain what kind of thematic and formal development the emerging generation will bring about and what the relationship of local vs. global connections will be in the increasingly transnational world.

#### 4.5. Publishing

A seemingly technical matter, publishing is inexorably related to the relationship of an author to his audience. Inevitably, it poses the question of the possibility of spreading the work beyond the immediate surroundings of the author and the extent and range of its accessibility. For Anglophone Israeli writing, an insight into publishing foregrounds the relationship of the author to the audience locally and overseas, the supra- and translocal aspects, overall opportunities and individual choice.

From the beginning, Anglophone Israeli writers have been utilizing both the local and the international publishing opportunities. While many authors eagerly embraced the arising opportunities of local publications, others, especially those who had already established a literary reputation in their country of origin, published overseas. For instance, all collections by the poets Linda Zisquit and Shirley Kaufman were published in the U.S.; the poetry collections by Lami, Riva Rubin and Richard Sherwin were published in Israel, while Robert Friend published his collections alternately in Israel, Britain and the U.S and Karen Alkalay-Gut – in Israel, in the U.S., in Canada and in Italy<sup>8</sup>. All of the above also published individual poems in international magazines.

Some of the local periodicals that showcased Anglophone writing in Israel were *Shdemot*, *Kibbutz Trends*, *Seven Gates*, *Voices Israel* anthology, *Arc*, *Jerusalem Review*, *Meggid* and, most recently, the online publications *Cyclamens and Swords*, *Non Sequitur* and *The Ilanot Review*. The sheer number of publications focusing on or devoting considerable attention to English writing may seem impressive, considering that the current overall population of Israel is, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, approaching eight million, and was nearly half of that in 1990.

The *Voices Israel* anthology has been published by the *Voices Israel Group of Poets in English* annually since 1974. A rather slim collection of sheets at its

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<sup>8</sup> Besides the print edition, the bilingual Italian-English selection of Alkalay-Gut's poems has also appeared as an audio e-book.

origins, the publication has accumulated volume, presenting the works of 100 poets in 2008 and of 150 poets in 2012. Following the open policy of the *Voices* group, the anthology accepts the works of members and non-members alike, without thematic limitations. To a great extent, the *Voices* anthology is liable to the same kind of criticism as its parent organization, where the broad policy of attracting contributions may result in diminished overall quality.

Appearing almost annually since 1984, *Arc* (also spelled as *ARC* or *arc*) is the publication of the *Iawe* that presents poems and short prose of Anglophone writers in Israel and abroad. Initially subsidized by the Ministry of Culture as a part of the official support of non-Hebrew writing in Israel, *Arc* is now largely self-sponsored. Alternately edited by various members of the *Iawe*, *Arc* often offers themed issues, with guideline themes including expatriates and ex-patriots (1999), nature and environmentalism (2003), war and peace (2010) and humor (2012), inviting the contributors to contribute to mosaic presentation of these subjects.

Other local periodicals include the English edition of the kibbutz magazine *Shdemot*, which was published between 1974 and 1987, *Seven Gates*, 1985 to 1995 and *Kibbutz Trends*, published between 1991 and 2003 in Ramat Efal under the auspices of the Federation of Kibbutz Movements. The currently revived independent journal *Jerusalem Review* features works of Anglophone Israeli writers, along with translations of Hebrew texts, essays on contemporary Jewish and Israeli culture and other related texts, establishing links between various disciplines.

Online, some of the local publishing options include the online journals *Cyclamens and Swords* and *The Ilanot Review* (formerly *Ilanot*). Centered around several Anglophone Israeli poets, *Cyclamens and Swords* also features English-language works of residents of other countries. *The Ilanot Review* is closely linked to the creative writing program of Bar Ilan University and provides publishing opportunities especially for younger authors. Moreover, it provides interviews with authors involved in the local English literary scene.

But besides periodicals, many Anglophone Israeli authors have made use of the opportunity to publish their books in Israel. One of the earlier examples of a book of locally-written Anglophone verse being printed in Israel was the bilingual publication of Riva Rubin's *The Poet Killers* in 1969. The establishment of the *Iawe* considerably advanced printing opportunities in English, and a large number of poetic and prose works have been published in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in the 1980s and 1990s. Some of the authors whose work has been printed locally are Riva Rubin, Lami, Jerome Mandel, Charles Kormos, Villie Kohn, Jeffrey Green, Zygmunt Frankel, Dick Flantz and Karen Alkalay-Gut. The amount of self-publishing has also increased, with several small presses offering an opportunity to publish a batch of copies for private distribution.



However, despite the increased possibility to put out collections of works locally and to thus potentially integrate into the local scene, publishing in Israel has its disadvantages. The publishers who deal with local English writing are typically small establishments without resources to aggressively promote the work of their clients, so it falls to the authors themselves to prove the value of their work. Thus, the news of a publication typically reaches but a small circle. Publishing locally puts the authors in a position of minority writers in a rather small world dominated by Hebrew writers, which may result in a sense of poetic isolation and alienation from the majority culture that Anglophone Israeli authors frequently describe (e.g. Flantz 1978, Brodie 1981, Alkalay-Gut 2002 and 2007).

At the same time, especially authors who had literary records prior to their immigration to Israel have continued to publish abroad. For instance, Shirley Kaufman, who had already published two volumes of poetry with American publishers, continued publishing in the U.S. after she had moved to Israel in 1972. Similarly, other poets such as Linda Zisquit and Rachel Tzvia Back have published solely abroad. Anglophone novels have been published abroad almost exclusively, and often one cannot escape a feeling that these have been especially styled to fit the tastes of the North American readership in a kind of new orientalism. For example, the highly successful women's books author Naomi Ragen has written several novels that render especially the experience of religious Jewish women in Israel. Despite her high sales in the U.S., she only became known to Israeli readership after her American-published works were translated into Hebrew.<sup>9</sup> Some other novelists, such as Matt Rees – the author of a series of mystery novels around the Palestinian detective Omar Yussef – have also been successful in publishing “locally flavored” works on the American market.

Though perhaps not consciously, these authors find themselves in an interesting relationship between local and translocal factors. On the one hand, the Middle Eastern atmosphere influences their work and often provides an exotic setting for works primarily intended for overseas markets. On the other hand, they are in effect isolated from Israeli audiences, as their work is not actively marketed locally and is not accessible to the local majority due to the language barrier. At the same time, these authors are typically distant from other Anglophone Israeli literary structures, such as *Voices* and *Iawe*, largely circumventing the local authors' networks.

Tellingly entitled “Off the Map,” a recent review of the bi-annual creative writing conference organized by the Bar Ilan University formulated one of the pertinent questions concerning the translocal position of these authors: “Ulti-

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<sup>9</sup> Several plagiarism lawsuits, which have been filed against Ragen in the recent years, have raised her publicity in Israel even further.

mately, will the work of English language writers resonate for Israelis and in Israel, the place these writers are choosing to live?” (Steinberg 2012). Primarily focusing on the reception of new Anglophone Israeli novelists such as Evan Fallenberg and Matt Rees, Steinberg arrives at a twofold conclusion. While these writers, whose works are linguistically separated from the potential local audience, may experience a feeling of alienation, in terms of individual self-expression such alienation may turn out to be beneficial. Evan Fallenberg claims that productivity is in fact enhanced by distance from the over-stimulation of literary hives such as New York: “If I lived in a place like New York, I don’t think I would be able to write anything because every third person there is a writer [...] I don’t mind being out of the center of all that, and being left to do my own thing in my private place” (ibid.). Similarly, Matt Rees points out the automatic process of filtering determined by linguistic alienation: “I’m living here and don’t pay much attention to Israeli popular culture or culture in general, and it phases out a lot of the rubbish that would be infiltrating to me if I were living somewhere else. It protects me” (ibid.).

These considerations resonate with the question of the “Israeliness” of Anglophone Israeli writing. While one can assume that the works published in Israel are to a large extent consumed locally, and are likely to address issues pertinent to the local readership, the relation of works published abroad for audiences across the ocean to the general Israeli culture may become rather instrumental.

But in addition to the opposition of publishing in Israel versus publishing abroad, internet publishing opened another passage of translocality. Here, the costs of publications are minimal and the audience potentially limitless and determined rather by interest group than by a specific locality. For example, Moshe (Mois) Benarroch, a Moroccan-born poet who switched from Hebrew to writing in English and Spanish, attributes his breakthrough to publishing online after a prolonged lack of success with local Hebrew publishing houses:

I decided to translate some of my poems from Hebrew to English. I translated fourteen poems and sent them to Internet sites. I sent the same poems to between twenty and forty e-zines and (some) printed magazines. Some poems in the past had been accepted, but I’d been used to lots of rejection; I had an idea that I was in a war — I was a guerilla campaigning against the big army of the editors. To my surprise, my poems were, very suddenly, everywhere. All the sites accepted them — one was on ten sites (that was “The Bread and the Dream,” a poem I was never able to publish in Israel). I started translating more. I even had the guts to translate the “Self Portrait of the Poet in Family Mirror,” a ten-page poem. I then met Klaus Gerken, editor of *Ygdrasil*, and he published it. Indeed, he encouraged me to translate more poems, including my other long poem, “The Immigrant’s Lament.” The response was huge: I was receiving e-mails from readers, other e-zines were asking for more poems. In the meantime, here in Israel

it was more of the same, and much more of the same. Soon, I remembered —that once I wrote in English. Instead of writing in Hebrew, then translating into English, I wrote poems in English. In fact, I have written only two poems in Hebrew since March 1998. My poetry has been written in Spanish and English. (Alkalay-Gut 2003)

In terms of online publishing, Anglophone Israeli authors have a considerable advantage over the surrounding Hebrew writers: the numbers of potential online readership of Hebrew texts do not differ substantially from the Hebrew speakers physically present in Israel. If anything, some of the more conservative Hebrew readers would prefer a printed copy to a digital publication. Conversely, writing in English, while being still available to the local audience, is also accessible to the ever-increasing number of English speakers worldwide. Independently of their place of publication, works can also be marketed online, and authors such as Karen Alkalay-Gut and Rachel Tzvia Back offer printed and often digital copies of their books on Amazon.

#### 4.6. Translation and Cultural Integration?

As was mentioned in the previous section, due to its markedly translocal position, the relation of Anglophone Israeli writing to the surrounding Hebrew culture and to the overseas ‘source’ culture is far from being straightforward. The choice of authors to publish in Israel or overseas reflects, to a certain extent, the aspiration to be read by certain audiences, and to become a part of the cultural luggage of this population. Yet what is the extent of ‘belonging’ of a translocal author to a certain culture? Ernest Hemingway may have lived in Paris in the 1920s and written extensively on the life of fellow expats in France, yet hardly anybody would consider him a French novelist. At the same time, writers with hyphenated origins and identities have played a leading role in English and American literature. While later chapters are going to analyze the concept of belonging through themes and images in the poetic texts, this section is going to address the issues of recognition and translation in Anglophone Israeli writing.

Though the pattern may be changing with the advance of the Anglophone novel from Israel, barely anybody came to Israel with the goal of becoming an English-speaking author. “No one comes to live in Israel in order to write in English,” writes Jerome Mandel in his 2006 introduction to *Arc 18*. He continues:

No one wakes in Melbourne or London, Cape Town or Los Angeles and says, “Ah, I need the vast empty Negev to improve my iambic pentameter” or “I must go to Jerusalem to hone the rhythm of English conversation.” Most come for other reasons – political, religious, Zionist, matrimonial – and then discover they want to write and decide to write in English. Or they resurrect (Israel is rich in resurrections) interests and skills they already possess and brought with them when they came. Or they are touched anew

by what they see and how they live and satisfy the need to express themselves in the language of their former lives. (Mandel 2006: 5)

Far from being celebratory, the passage is laced with irony, suggesting that there is a contradiction in the mere idea of fostering literary aspirations in the field of Anglophone writing in Israel. To be sure, the status of local English-language writers in Israel is far from being iconic. So far, none have made their way into the syllabus of local schools – either as Hebrew or English literature – and the general awareness of their work remains fairly low (cf. Alkalay-Gut 2007: 195). While immigrants from English-speaking countries in Israel would likely know somebody who is writing in English, at whatever level of professionalism, within their wider circle of acquaintances, Anglophone Israeli writing is barely recognized as a larger phenomenon. To other Israelis, the existence of the Anglophone Israeli writing scene is often a surprise. At the same time, especially before the advent of the internet, Anglophone authors residing in Israel were also to a degree cut off from the literary arteries overseas. While authors such as Shirley Kaufman and Robert Friend, who already possessed an established reputation in their country of origin upon arrival in Israel, could maintain their international professional ties, for young authors promoting their work overseas would have been quite an ordeal. In an interview, Riva Rubin, who only completed her first collection of verse after her arrival in Israel, comments on the feeling of being cut off by her choice to live in Israel:

Had I gone to Canada, or London, or Australia with my friends, I do really believe that I would have written far more and been acknowledged more and published more. But being far away from the plate, you only eat the crumbs. To me, it was more important to live here.

[...]

And when we first came here, I met a young man who was somebody's family and he came and he lived with us for a while and when he left us and while leaving the country he motivated it with "Because I live in English and I am not giving up my English!" And I was so shocked! I thought why can't you just sit here and write in English. You can't. He was right. He went. I don't know what became of him, if he became an accepted and acknowledged writer, but the thinking was right. Given the choice, I chose to live here. (Rumjanceva 2010d)

The young man's desperate wish to escape to an English-speaking country to pursue a writing career is contrasted with Rubin's initial incredulity. While retrospectively recognizing the professional challenge entailed by the decision to write in English in Israel despite a limited local audience and the decreased ability to interact with the writing world overseas, Rubin defends her loyalty to her country of choice. But while it was not easy to carve a niche for authors such as Riva Rubin, who lived in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem – large, culturally bustling cities – it was perhaps even more difficult for those residing in the countryside.

For example, Lami (Shulamit Halperin), another Anglophone Israeli author, has spent most of her Israeli life in Kibbutz Urim in the Negev Desert, close to the Gaza strip. As a kibbutz member, her creative endeavors came second after her immediate work duties; her advances in writing and visual arts were acknowledged, but not morally or financially supported:

The kibbutz movement had a certain committee and you would apply to them and they would let you know if you could get a day or two off for some kind of creative activity. And I finally did and everyone saw I had something published and I was very proud, but I didn't feel that people paid that much attention. And the same thing is happening with art today. I have a few things that are on display in the dining room and only one person came to me and said something about it. So people take it for granted, I guess. On the other hand, they really know who does what, and as long as you do your other work, then you can create also. And since I've always worked with children in special education and I had a name for myself in that, so it was also all right that I wrote.<sup>10</sup> (Rumjanceva 2010b)

Though without malignance, writing and other creative occupations in this case were downgraded to recreational occupations, of lesser importance than the direct duties towards the kibbutz – an essentially harmless idiosyncrasy, as long as it does not interfere with work. Such an attitude was far from encouragement and support. A mitigating aspect in the attitude of the fellow kibbutz members could have been the fact that initially Lami wrote her poems in Hebrew – in a Zionist-oriented kibbutz in the 1960s the attitude towards writing in English may have been even less favorable. However, Lami persevered and, during a one-year stay in Jerusalem, she started publishing, eventually bringing out several volumes of poetry through a small Israeli publisher, which gave her a degree of local recognition.

At the same time, the achievements of Anglophone authors are not unrecognized in Israel. English authors have twice received the most prestigious literary awards in Israel: the President's of Israel Prize for Shirley Kaufman and for Riva Rubin. Moshe Benarroch, who started writing in Hebrew and subsequently switched to English, which contributed to the growth of his popularity, has been awarded the Prime Minister's Prize in 2009. In 1996, Rachel Tzvia Back received the Absorption Minister's Prize for Immigrant Writers. A selection of books of Anglophone Israeli authors is available in bilingual Hebrew-English editions, in Hebrew translations, or in volumes where English and Hebrew

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10 A similarly pragmatic approach to artistic creation was noted by the Israeli artist Yitzhak Greenfield, who, as a member of different kibbutzim in the 1950s, had to combine painting with physical labor. However, when he had accumulated a body of works and asked for support for his exhibition at the kibbutz meeting, one of the replies was that the kibbutz needs workers, not artists. Eventually, however, the vote resulted in a slight majority in favor of allocating the necessary funds. Greenfield recounted this anecdote in a personal meeting.

works of the same author appear side by side. Among others, the Anglophone Israeli authors whose work has been translated to Hebrew include Karen Alkalay-Gut, Riva Rubin, Rochelle Mass, Vivian Eden and Rachel Tzvia Back (her book *Azimuth* was translated by the renowned poet Aharon Shabtai). Besides written translation, there are also public events when Israeli poetry in Hebrew and in English appears side by side. Notably, at the launch of the translation of selected poetry by Karen Alkalay-Gut in 2011, the works of Alkalay-Gut were read out both in Hebrew and in English.

But the translation process is even more vigorous the other way, as many Anglophone Israeli authors have been active in translating Hebrew authors for English-speaking audiences. While many profess the impossibility of internal translation when dealing with their own creative expression, authors such as Shirley Kaufman, Rachel Tzvia Back and Linda Zisquit have nevertheless translated numerous classic and contemporary Hebrew authors for international audiences. For instance, Robert Friend translated the Works of Rachel and Lea Goldberg, Shirley Kaufman has translated several collections by Abba Kovner as well as the selected poems of Amir Gilboa and Meir Wieseltier; Linda Zisquit has published a volume of translations of Yona Wollach; Rachel Tzvia Back has translated selected poems and drama of Lea Goldberg and a volume of poetry by Hamutal Bar-Yosef; she is currently working on the translation of Tuvia Ruebner. Back was also the editor and the main translator of the English edition of *With an Iron Pen: Twenty Years of Hebrew Protest Poetry*. Karen Alkalay-Gut has translated, among others, several dramatic works by Hanoch Levin. Evan Fallenberg has translated novels by contemporary Israeli writers Meir Shalev and Ron Leshem. Vivian Eden regularly translates Hebrew poetry for the literary supplement of the English edition of *Haaretz* – one of the most important Israeli newspapers. Thus, while the writing of Anglophone authors in Israel has been made available to the Hebrew audience through translation, the Anglophone authors themselves are instrumental in building the bridge between Hebrew authors and the audience overseas.

Moreover, long-time residence in Israel does not exclude the authors from membership in the literary canon in their country of origin. For instance, as was mentioned earlier, in her analysis of poetry by Jewish American women Janet Kaufman (2002: 294–298) treats the poets Linda Zisquit and Shirley Kaufman as essentially Jewish American poets, while noting that they “complicate the question of home by choosing to live in and write from Jerusalem.” The works of both are analyzed in relation to the works of other Jewish American women. And indeed, through the choice of publishing abroad and participation in readings overseas, it is likely that some Anglo-Israeli poets are better known in their country of origin than in their country of destination. Author’s awards received in the country of origin, which signal the acceptance and appreciation of the

work of the author as a part of a specific national literature, are another point in case. For instance, well into her residence in Israel (since 1973), Shirley Kaufman has received the Fellowship of the National Endowment for the Arts (1979), the Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award (1989) and the Shelley Memorial Award (1990/91) of the Poetry Society of America. Thus, some Anglophone Israeli authors may exhibit “multiple memberships” within different literary traditions, at once belonging to the fluidly demarcated bodies of Israeli and American (or South African, British, etc.) literatures, circulating works in print, online and in performances.

In her introduction to the 2001 volume *Ideology and Jewish Identity in Israeli and American Literature*, Emily Miller Budick writes that “with a few notable exceptions, Jewish American and Israeli literature have developed in some significant isolation from one another” (2001: 1–2). While Budick (as well as Furman 1997) points out the works of fiction by American authors that feature the issue of Israel in their works, it appears that perhaps the most direct nexus between these two branches of literature, or, indeed, between other Anglophone diaspora literatures and Israeli literature, is the emergence of Anglophone Israeli writing, which combines the initial Anglophone mode of perception and expression with intense exposure to Israeli culture and to the overall experience of Israel. While in the current period of physical and informational mobility, multiple trans-cultural influences of some form may be inevitable and ubiquitous, Anglophone Israeli writers are characterized by multiple cultural memberships in a most direct mode, assimilating not only the influences from both the initial and the chosen surroundings, but also producing their own influence both ways.

#### 4.7. Genre

The previous sections mainly addressed the production of poetry and prose. So far, these have indeed been the dominant genres of Anglophone Israeli writing. Judging by the number of known authors, the number of works published as well as by the more arguable aesthetic standards, the genre of poetry is the most prominent in the field, followed by prose and, to a much lesser extent, drama.

In terms of organizations, poetry clearly benefitted most from the dynamics of support and recognition. As the name suggests, the oldest major authors’ organization – *Voices Israel Group of Poets in English* – has been focusing exclusively on poetry. Founded by the poets Leslie Summers, Rueben Rose, Moshe Ben-Zvi and Jacob Katwan, its activities largely consisted of organizing local groups, workshops and readings that connected the poets between themselves and to their audience. Similarly, the *Iawe* emerged from the efforts of a group of

poets in Tel Aviv centers around Karen Alkalay-Gut, Riva Rubin and Richard Sherwin. Though this organization was open to authors of all genres, provided they fulfilled the criteria of quality and publications, it has been dominated by poets, who also profited from the exposure of their works at readings. *Arc*, the literature magazine published by the *Iawe*, has been largely devoted to poems, with inclusion of short prose. In its 30 years of history, only one edition of *Arc* has been dedicated exclusively to prose.

Moreover, as was discussed in the previous section, Anglophone Israeli poets have achieved a considerable measure of acclaim. Poets such as Shirley Kaufman and Robert Friend had already enjoyed critical recognition prior to the aliyah, and their international reputation continued to magnify.

For many, a genre that typically produces short, highly individual works may have been a more natural creative reaction to the emotional and informative impulses of the migration experience. However, poetry also proved to be most inviting to non-native speakers of English, perhaps because its inherent idiosyncrasy allows a different usage of vocabulary and syntax than, for example, naturalistic dialogue in a play or scene descriptions in prose. Albeit clearly a minority among Anglophone Israeli authors, which is in itself a minority culture in Israel, Moshe (Mois) Benarroch (Morocco), Zygmunt Frankel (Poland), Ada Aharoni (Egypt), Ossama Massarwa (Palestinian Israeli) and other non-native speaker poets have produced a body of poetic works, published by local publishers or online. Though several prose works of non-native speaker authors exist – e.g. stories by Villy Kohn and Zygmunt Frankel – their number is very small compared to the volume of the poetic output.

While poetry has been in the lead, prose works have been nevertheless carving a growing niche in Anglophone Israeli writing. As mentioned earlier, novelists tend to publish overseas, targeting primarily readers in Anglophone countries. Though the themes of novels vary, most revolve around Jewish and Israeli subjects, often with a fair share of exoticism and drama. Interestingly, perhaps the first successful English novels written in Israel were crafted by a non-native speaker of English – by the Israeli-born Yael Dayan. Born to one of the most prominent Israeli families – her grandfather Shmuel Dayan was an important politician, her father, Moshe Dayan – an iconic military commander and minister – Yael Dayan pursued a career in journalism, writing for various Hebrew periodicals. Dayan's first novel, the largely autobiographical *New Face in the Mirror*, was published in 1959 and produced a splash due to its depiction of affairs that the protagonist has with high-ranking officers in the Israeli army. Written in English so that they would be available to a larger audience (Livneh 2012), it was soon followed by *Envy the Frightened* (1961), *Dust* (1963), *Death Had Two Sons* (1967) and *Three Weeks in the Fall* (1979). The choice of writing in English, as well as the sexual elements in her novels, proved indeed to be a



stepping stone to at least temporary international renown: the international press termed Dayan as the “Israeli Françoise Sagan” and her books were translated into several languages, including German, French and Italian. Dayan and Sagan shared a publisher and had joint book launches in Cannes and in Paris; they autographed books together and were jointly reviewed by critics (*ibid.*).

Another novelist who reached a degree of popularity early on was the Buffalo-born author Chayym Zeldis, who immigrated to Israel in 1948 and started publishing in the 1970s. Partly still available on Amazon, his novels suggest strong feeling and exotic historical environment: his first novel, *Golgotha* (1974), is a fictionalized account of Christ’s crucifixion, *Brothers* (1976) is a fictional story of the evil brother of Jesus Christ, and *The Geisha’s Granddaughter* (2004) tells the story of the eponymous character. Naomi Ragen, the most successful Anglophone Israeli novelist termed “the Israeli Danielle Steel”, especially addresses women’s issues in Orthodox Jewish communities. In Israel since 1979, her novels include *Jephthe’s Daughter* (1989), *Sotah* (1992), *The Sacrifice of Tamar* (1994) and *The Ghost of Hannah Mendes* (1998). Most recent authors include Evan Falleberg, who has also translated a number of contemporary novels from Hebrew in addition to his own titles, *Light Fell* (2008) and *When We Danced on Water* (2011), and Matt Rees, the author of several mystery novels around the character of the Palestinian detective Omar Yussef. Recently, a collection entitled *Israel Short Stories* (2011) provided a sample of stories of over 50 local authors, mostly native speakers of English living in Israel, and the publisher Ang.-Lit. Press, proceeded to publish further volumes of English short stories from Israel. If poetry has long dominated the scene of Anglophone Israeli writing, it appears that prose is currently on the rise, with a number of mystery and women’s novels being produced locally for the global market of English speakers. As the occupation of a novelist tends to be more lucrative than that of a poet, it is possible that the writing of Anglophone prose in Israel will expand even further.

Furthermore, it may be assumed that the quantitative rise of English prose in Israel may also increasingly involve non-native speakers of English. While Yael Dayan, a native speaker of Hebrew, was responsible for perhaps the first internationally-read Israeli novel in English, the currently latest international success belongs to the young Israeli-born author Shani Boianju, whose first novel – *The People of Forever Are not Afraid* – was released in 2012 by Hogarth and was reviewed in a large number of press publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *The Economist*. Even before the release of the book, Boianju, who had just graduated from Harvard University, was selected as one of the 5 *under 35* by the U.S. National Book Foundation. Her short stories, which were produced during her participation in the writing

program at Harvard, appeared in *The New Yorker*. A major parallel to the international success of Dayan, Boianjiu's book also strongly relies on the themes of sex and the army. Presenting a number of interwoven stories, the novel follows three girls from an isolated village in the north of Israel, who go through their army service, each encountering her share of boredom, sex and humanitarian dilemmas. However, even as Boianjiu is celebrated as a success abroad, the critics at home are more divided. While the popular Israeli author Etgar Keret spoke positively of the novel's power of expression (Amazon.com), Maya Sela raises the pertinent question of whether the overseas media hype around Boianjiu is motivated by her "alien-ness" and by her choice of subject rather than by her writing as such: "The book portrays [...] everything that is so routine for Israelis but seems bizarre, even surreal, to outsiders" (Sela 2012). Further on, Sela continues:

Could it be that the publisher's enthusiasm over the Israeli author is just part of the worldwide trend of seeking voices on the periphery? The French are going out of France, searching for other Francophone voices. For Americans, Boianjiu is perhaps the intriguing other: a woman, an Israeli, an author, the army, guns, sexuality, boredom, darkness. (Ibid.)

Addressed to Boianjiu, Sela's criticism of the exploitation of the otherness factor may indeed be relevant to other authors as well, which to a degree accounts for the popularity overseas and relative anonymity at home. However, to North American readers, Boianjiu – the "authentic" Israeli – is perhaps even more of the Other than expatriates from Anglophone countries. So far more of an exception than a trend, the international success of Boianjiu's novel allows to conjecture that with the rise of English proficiency and international mobility among Israelis, more of them will choose to write their prose works in English.

As regards Anglophone Israeli theater, the odds are in favor of the performance of adapted repertoire rather than the composition of new plays in English. In 1997, *The New Aliyon* notes the existence of 13 amateur Anglophone drama groups, among others JEST (Jerusalem English Speaking Theater), JSP (Jerusalem Stage Players) TACT (Tel Aviv Community Theater) and Haifa English Theater ("Theater" 1997: 14). The loose association of these groups, EADI (English Amateur Drama in Israel) published a newsletter, *Curtain Falls*, offered bi-annual workshops around the country and held an annual competitive English drama festival in Tel Aviv, with local and international participants. There is, however, virtually no information about locally written plays in English, which suggests that if they have ever existed, these dramatic works did not enjoy notable attention.

However, a noteworthy exception from the general pattern is Naomi Ragen's play *Women's Minyan*, which has been performed in the National Theater of

Israel (*HaBima*) over 500 times. A dramatized depiction of a true story, Ragen's play emotionally portrays a dramatic story of a woman from the ultra-Orthodox community in Jerusalem, who is suffering from domestic abuse by her violent husband. However, separating from her husband also results in the loss of the right to communicate with her children, who, siding with the majority of the conservative patriarchal community, refuse to forgive her. Though the play received mixed reviews regarding its composition, it attracted a lot of attention to the discrimination against women in the ultra-Orthodox community and was a considerable home success for an Anglophone Israeli dramatist.

#### 4.8. The Poetic Form

As the analysis of the various themes and motifs of Anglophone Israeli writing in the following chapters will largely focus on poetry, a couple of remarks on the poetic form in Anglophone Israeli writing are perhaps necessary. Notably, Anglophone Israeli poetry is neither a stylistic movement such as the Imagists or the Objectivists, nor is it a subaltern resistance movement such as the Harlem Renaissance and Chicano writing, where the issues of form and language are linked to the political and cultural statement. There is neither a common ideological goal nor an intense social network that would promote mutual stylistic influence (though it does happen occasionally). By and large, the poetic form follows the pattern of diversity and individualism characteristic of this highly varied field, precluding any attempt to isolate an archetype of an Anglophone Israeli poem. While most poems are written in free verse, varying from Rubin's highly condensed and fractured stanzas to Alkalay-Gut's almost conversational tone, other writers have favored more established forms. Notably, Richard Sherwin has relied both on the western sonnet as well as on eastern haikus, while Linda Zisquit's latest collection, *Ghazal-Mazal* (2011), as the title of the volume suggests, adapts the oriental ghazal form for her poetic expression. Rather than suggesting a unified group identity, these choices reflect the influences and preferences of individual authors. Thus, Sherwin's interest in Tai Chi, eastern religions and aesthetics relates to his use of far eastern forms (Rumjanceva 2010c), while Zisquit attributed her interest in the ghazal to an occurrence during her creative writing class, when a student brought a translated Persian ghazal (Weizman 2012). In interviews (e.g. Katz 2002), Shirley Kaufman has acknowledged the influences of a range of 20<sup>th</sup>-century American poets such as William Carlos Williams, George Oppen and Denise Levertov, in addition to European poets such as Rainer Maria Rilke and Federico García Lorca. The American and European influences in the often politically critical works of Rachel Tzvia Back are also supplemented by the awareness of the works of

Palestinian authors such as Mahmoud Darwish and Taha Muhammad Ali (Rumjanceva 2012).<sup>11</sup> By contrast, the works of Karen Alkalay-Gut show a strong affiliation with American pop culture in addition to “classical” sources. One can also conjecture that especially authors who have acted as translators from Hebrew have been influenced by the production of Hebrew authors.

Within this variety of influences and styles, a highly transcultural intertextuality often becomes a common feature, as authors draw on texts from western, especially British and American authors, as well as on traditional Jewish texts. For example, Shirley Kaufman’s “Realities” (1973: 19–20) begins with a reference to Wallace Stevens “The Snow Man” – “When I’ve been warm/ a long time, I don’t think of any fever in the absence of wind” – and several lines later follows it with a statement attributed to the Jewish sage Hillel – “The rest is comment<sup>12</sup>” (cf. Kearful 2000: 263–265). Karen Alkalay-Gut has remarked in verse on the ubiquitous occurrence of references to traditional Jewish texts: “We are writing a rock song in Hebrew./ I say, now that’s a nice phrase./ You say, yes, Isaiah liked it too” (Alkalay-Gut 2000: 66). However, considering that Kaufman’s “Realities” was written prior to her immigration to Israel, this type of intertextuality is not unique to Anglophone Israeli writing, but is also present in other fields where western texts interact with Jewish sources, such as Jewish American Literature.

On the other hand, the Israeli experience is often conceived in distinctly western imagery. For example, Lami has given markedly Italianate titles to her three collections of poetry – *Penumbra* (1986), *Parlando Rubato* (1991) and *Falsetto* (1995), in tune with the numerous western images that she uses in her work. Thus, the description of a windy day in Jerusalem invokes Paul Klee’s painting *Twittering Machine* and a Hawaiian storm (1995: 50); the depiction of a kibbutz swimming pool in “Early Morning Swim” features moiré shadows, a Botticelli shell and the sun “[r]olling out of the clouds/ Like William the Conqueror” (1995: 11). However, western images and references are not necessarily taken at face value and are often modified or subverted to express a locally pertinent message. Alkalay-Gut’s “Herzeliya Beach – 12–88”, for example, paraphrases the famous poem by Matthew Arnold:

11 Back and sometimes Kaufman explicitly draw attention to intertextuality in their work by italicizing quotations and by explaining references at the end of their poetry volumes.

12 Hillel was asked by a gentile to explain the essence of Judaism while standing on one foot. His brief response was “What is hateful unto you do not do unto your neighbor. The rest is commentary.” (In Telushkin 1991: 121)

Ah, love  
 as we lie together on the sand  
 in a declining summer day  
 the salt so sweet on our answering skin  
 I feel the paradise upon my tongue.

Further inland the earth is heaving,  
 overturned by entire generations dying  
 for the taste of this sand. (Alkalay-Gut 1992b: 50)

Published in the collection *Ignorant Armies* – another Arnoldian reference – the poem in several ways reverses “Dover Beach”: Arnold’s night becomes day, the melancholy rumble of the sea turns into violently heaving sand, the longing for an escape into the private life acquires a distinctly sensual touch. Building on a reference familiar to her Anglophone readers, Alkalay-Gut construes an unmistakably local version of it by pointedly modifying the imagery to convey the Israeli experience.

Another formal feature is the incorporation of words from other languages into the matrix of English, which reflects the necessarily multilingual consciousness. Humorously, Roy Runds, a poet of Australian descent, has remarked: “What would I, as an Israeli settler, do without Hebrew words, like *chutzpah*, *balagan*, and *khamor*<sup>13</sup> to enrich my English vocabulary?” (in Alkalay-Gut 2002: 461). The strategies of local color, which Runds seems to imply, are, however, comparatively rare. Instead, as the chapter on language and identity will discuss in more detail, Hebrew words, as well as words from Yiddish and Arabic, are more often used as signifiers of the various spatial and temporal planes of identity. Even when non-English words are not used directly, the poems of e. g. Kaufman, Back, Sherwin and Lami sometimes convey a longing to supersede linguistic boundaries. And while these mechanisms of intertextuality and transcultural references are not exclusive to Anglophone Israeli writing, the process of locating the poetic self within the specific transcultural context and the authors’ highly individual approach to this dilemma are the basis not only for their cultural, but also for their aesthetic achievement.

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13 Meaning *audacity*, *mess* and *donkey* (or, conversationally, *moron*). Tellingly, these are all negative and emotional expressions, linked to the greater permissiveness of Hebrew to complain and argue in public.

#### 4.9. Authors: Native and Non-Native Speakers of English

A final note in this overview of Anglophone Israeli writing concerns the distinction between authors who are native speakers of English and those with a different mother tongue, but who nevertheless chose English as their writing medium. Especially considering that in recent years, literature written by non-native speakers of English, such as Chicano fiction, or speakers of non-standard varieties of English, such as writing from the Caribbean, has gathered increasing attention, one may legitimately question the fairness and practicality of this division.

It needs to be stressed at the beginning that the distinction is not made under the qualitative presumption that the work of a native speaker is inherently “better” or more worthy of attention than that of non-native speakers. The popularity and critical acclaim that have surrounded the works of such non-native English language authors as Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov and Kazuo Ishiguro are proof enough that non-native speakers of a language can produce works of utmost accomplishment. Similarly, the venerable classics of Hebrew Literature, including Hayim Nahman Bialik and Lea Goldberg, acquired Hebrew, their instrument of writing, through study rather than as a first language. Moreover, some of the commercially successful novels of Anglophone Israeli Literature were produced by native speakers of Hebrew, Yael Dayan and Shani Boianjiu. While the mastery of English syntax and precision of expression may be a challenge for non-native speakers, some Anglophone Israeli authors have produced works of high aesthetic merit.

However, it is the consistency needed to produce a considerable body of notable work in English that is largely lacking among non-native speakers of English. The peak of the involvement of non-native speakers of English in Anglophone Israeli writing seems to coincide with the activity of *I.A.W.E.* For instance, Zygmunt (Zygy) Frankel, the author of numerous poems, short stories and works in other media and genres, was characterized in the 1997 *in memoriam* as an in-effect driving force in many of the activities of the Israeli Organization of Writers in English. Having published a number of his own works, he was also strongly involved in the solution of bureaucratic proceedings, correspondence with members and book design. Frankel’s collected poems have appeared in a posthumous edition complemented by the author’s linocuts, but have not been reissued.

In terms of quantity, by the apparent number of authors and the amount of literary output, Anglophone Israeli Literature is clearly dominated by immigrants from English-speaking countries, who have English as their mother tongue. Among these, consistent with the general numbers of immigration, writers with U.S.-American background constitute the clear majority. At the

same time, the recent experience of Jews in Anglophone countries is to a large extent similar in terms of economic and political freedom, which allows for a certain common base. In Israel, immigrants from English-speaking countries have been further somewhat homogenized by the label “Anglo,” which, as a noun, is used as a term of reference to immigrants with Anglophone background both by the general Israeli public and by the immigrants themselves. Conversely, the minority of non-native speakers of English among Anglophone Israeli authors come from a wide variety of backgrounds as different as Morocco (Moshe Benarroch), Egypt (Ada Aharoni), Poland (Zygmunt Frankel), former Czechoslovakia (Thomas Ungar) and Hungary (Villie Kohn), bringing in a network of influences from a multitude of languages and literary traditions, which cannot be duly analyzed under the present scope.

Moreover, the younger generation of these writers has not (or not yet) emerged. The majority of non-native English speakers associated with the *Iawe* have either passed away or have reached a venerable age. Currently, one may assume that an increasing number of younger non-native speakers are involved in literary activities in Israel – the participants of the Tel Aviv *Wondering Workshop*, for instance, are predominantly native Israelis from non-English speaking families in their twenties and thirties. Similarly, the creative writing courses at the Universities of Bar Ilan and Tel Aviv also attract Israelis with non-English background, while some native Israelis, such as Shani Boianjiu, chose to participate in writing programs overseas. However, while the scope of aspiring authors may be on the rise with the quantitative growth of the population and with the higher rate of English proficiency among Israelis, it is yet to be determined in the future if and how this group is going to influence Anglophone Israeli Literature as a field.

Thus, the present study is going to focus on the works of some of the most prolific and acclaimed Anglophone Israeli authors – Shirley Kaufman, Karen Alkalay-Gut, Riva Rubin, Rochelle Mass, Lami, Jerome Mandel, Richard Sherwin and Rachel Tzvia Back, all of whom are native speakers of English. At the same time, works by non-native speakers will be featured in the section on locality and the self as well as in the analysis of the theme of conflict.





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## 5. Voices in Context

### 5.1. Jewish American Literature

The situation of re-negotiating one's identity through language in the context of migration is in itself not unique to Anglophone Israeli Literature. What is in a way striking, however, is the outcome of this re-negotiation in comparison with similar processes that have occurred in related fields of literature such as Jewish American writing and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hebrew Literature. Though the present analysis of Anglophone Israeli writing is not conducted in a specifically comparativist sense, a brief outline of language trends in these two bordering fields of literature will nevertheless illustrate how its approach of defining the self through language differs from the influential models of the past.

While Anglophone Israeli authors come from a variety of origins, both natively Anglophone and otherwise, a large part of them possesses American roots. As was discussed in the section on Anglophone immigration to Israel, the sheer number of immigrants from the U.S. accounts for the predominance of Americans among Anglophone Israeli poets. Besides referencing their home landscape directly, authors such as Karen Alkalay-Gut, Shirley Kaufman and Richard Sherwin draw parallels between the struggle with English of the parents' generation with their own struggle with Hebrew (as is discussed in more detail in the chapter on language and the self). But while the problematic of re-constructing the self in a new language is similar to that of their ancestors in the United States, the difference lies in its outcome, as the eastern European Jews in America became assimilated in the language of the host country, while Anglophone Israeli authors remain loyal to creating in their native tongue.

A new chapter in Jewish history opened when almost two million Jews fled discrimination and persecution that erupted in Russia following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. Being considerably larger than the preceding waves of Sephardic and German Jewish immigrants to the United States, this new wave of immigration irrevocably altered the makeup of the Jewish American community and provided a formative contribution to what we now perceive as

Jewish American Literature (Fischer 2007: 212–213). Highly heterogeneous in itself due to the geographical multiplicity of origins in eastern Europe, the group nevertheless shared not only the literacy in Hebrew and Yiddish, but also the need to quickly acquire English in order to be able to function in the American society. Though, due to the influx of Yiddish-speaking immigrants, Yiddish publishing flourished in America at the turn of the century and enjoyed popularity later on, it was the usage of English as their creative medium that catapulted authors such as Abraham Cahan and Mary Antin into the national limelight. For immigrants, the knowledge of English represented the key to successful Americanization and to enjoying the economic and social opportunities that their chosen country provided (Wirth-Nesher 2003: 111–114 and 2006: 7). The transformation of the protagonist's name in Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896) emphasizes the abandoning of the Yiddish-rooted *shtetl* identity, as the immigrant Yekl becomes Jake, an aspiring American.

The linguistic dimension was a crucial part of becoming successful in the country of destination. In her 1912 testimony *The Promised Land*, Mary Antin admits her admiration of concrete embodiments of America, such as “fine houses, gay shops, electric engines and apparatus, public buildings, illuminations, and parades” (1912: 188). Yet it is her progress in her knowledge of English that is perceived as giving her a ticket into this dazzling world. In the much quoted passage, Antin speaks with reverie and excitement of the miracle that “I, Mashke, the granddaughter of Raphael the Russian, born to a humble destiny, should be at home in an American metropolis, be free to fashion my own life, and should dream my dreams in English phrases” (ibid.). Though never perfectly free of a “foreign” accent, at least in her writing and in her dreams Antin was proud to pass as an American among Americans. At the same time, the English writing by immigrant writers served as a vindication of Jewish immigrants as a group. For example, in his 1898 article “The Russian Jew in America,” Abraham Cahan represented the ambition to master the language of the new country and thus to submit to the melting pot ideology as one of the ingratiating features of Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe (Fischer 2007: 214). Americanization, both in terms of learning the language and of cultural blending-in, was equally glorified by the Yiddish press (Steinmetz 1986: 19). Featuring Yiddish and Hebrew words to add local color to their narratives, the writers from the turn of the century to the Second World War – immigrants or children of immigrants – would translate them for their American audiences, along with their customs and rituals.

The attitude towards Yiddish changed as English gradually became the majority language of the American Jews, aspiring, in the words of Cyntia Ozick, to the status of “new Yiddish.” No more faced with the primary challenge of acquiring English, the first-generation Jewish American writers, i. e. the children of

immigrants, were more concerned with shaping their own poetic voices. Sometimes, these were affected by “inscribing traces of immigrant speech into their writing, by retaining an ‘accent’ of ethnicity,” which expressed the replacement of the bilingualism of immigration with the bilingualism of ethnicity (Wirth-Nesher 2003: 114–115). Removed from the overbearing aspiration to master English and express the emotional storm of novel experiences characteristic of the previous generation, the authors of this generation, including Henry Roth, Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Grace Paley and Cynthia Ozick, would employ bilingualism in a variety of ways, including dialect, the reproduction of “foreign” languages, internal translation and untranslatability, cultural literacy through non-English triggers, inter-lingual puns, liturgy, sacred and secular language, linguistic home and exile (ibid. 122).

While English established itself firmly as the majority language of Jewish American writing, through the medium of which linguistic sensibilities could be carried out, the emotional stance towards other Jewish languages changed after the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Having been a frequent target of self-addressed jokes in earlier decades, Yiddish became increasingly associated with the annihilated European Jewry, while Hebrew, apart from its religious significance, was now recognized as the revived language of the Jewish state (Fischer 2007: 220). To a degree, the languages experienced a reversal in attitudes: the significance of the originally low-prestige vernacular was resurrected with longing, while the cultural center of Hebrew shifted elsewhere. As expressed in a 1999 poem by Jacqueline Osherow (cf. Wirth-Nesher 2007: 290), “Ch’vil Schreibn a Poem auf Yiddish,” the speaker longs for self-expression through the medium of Yiddish and for a convergence with what is perceived as a lost world; a sentiment that can only be expressed by a wish for a language but not by means of a language itself. Even the seemingly Yiddish title includes elements of English (“poem”) and German (“auf”), challenging the possibility of resurrecting Yiddish beyond the sad irony of the English poem. On a broader scale, Jeffrey Shandler characterized the post-war attempts to poetically resurrect “Yiddishland” as imagined, symbolic memories: “Not so much a failure to reconstruct, or even to recall, the place of Yiddish in pre-war eastern Europe, this is rather a deliberate effort to conjure visions of the Jewish past that speak to the needs and desires of the present” (2003: 144).

At the same time one needs to note that for decades, Yiddish writing in America existed side by side with its Anglophone cousin. While Yiddish became a marker of identity for writers who wrote in English, a broad body of work was produced in Yiddish itself, by immigrants who remained faithful to their native tongue. Although the peak of Yiddish literary activity can be located in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it persisted much longer, culminating in the 1978 Nobel Prize for the Polish-born author Yitzhak Bashevis Singer. Hardly a neg-

ligible phenomenon, it encompassed a range of themes and ideologies and spanned over a number of genres and forms. Focusing on Yiddish poetry, Benjamin Harshav describes it as having two faces. On the one hand, it gave prominent expression to contemporary Jewish culture, answering to a unique twist of Jewish history through a language brought along from the old life. On the other hand, more than being narrowly Jewish, it strove to be “consciously and effectively cosmopolitan” (Harshav 1990: 162). Quoting the 1919 manifesto of the Introspectivist poetic movement (*Inzikh*), “poetry is, to a very high degree, the art of language [...] and Yiddish poetry is the art of the Yiddish language and is merely a part of the general European-American culture” (in Harshav 1990: 162–163). Distanced from “local color” or linguistic pride based on heritage, the manifesto stresses the universal communicability of experience and positions itself within the framework of western culture. However, the *Inzikh* represented only one facet of Yiddish writing in America. In an attempt to summarize its influences, Harshav notes that American Yiddish literature to a large extent inherited genres, forms and conventions of Russian literature, combined it with layers of Germanic and Hebrew texts and mythology, and featured Jewish images, typology and intonations, while remaining open to broader European trends. Arriving to the New World in this form, it would respond to American stimuli and, to a degree, absorb the influences of American literature, lifestyle and ideology. At least intellectually, the reader or critic would have to travel the same road in order to perceive the multiple voices of the Yiddish text (ibid. 164). Harshav also makes an interesting observation regarding the age of immigration: the majority of Yiddish American poets, such as Moyshe-Leyb Halpern and A. Leyeles (a pseudonym of Aaron Glanz), immigrated in their late teens or early twenties. At this age, they would have an adult world of experience in Yiddish and a varied vocabulary, but they would be not yet firmly integrated into Yiddish tradition of their old homes, which left room to the exploration of new poetic trends. On the other hand, they would be too old to fully embrace English as their creative medium (ibid. 167). By contrast, authors such as Mary Antin and Anzia Yezierska, who acquired a reputation as Anglophone authors, immigrated at a younger age (13 and 10), which facilitated their integration into the new language.

The parallel between Anglophone Israeli Literature and Jewish American Literature is especially pertinent in terms of first-generation writing. On the surface, the situation appears to be quite similar: a group of Jewish immigrants arrive to a new country, which promises to be the embodiment of the Holy Land – in the socio-economic, or in the biblical sense. In both cases, the mother tongue of the immigrants is different from the national language of the target country. Both groups proceed to create a sizeable body of work in the new country.

One of the major distinctions is the very different status of Yiddish in the United States in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the status of English in Israel in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before the post-Holocaust reversal of attitudes, Yiddish was generally regarded as an immigrant language with low social prestige, which fell under the monolingual maxim of the American melting pot ideology expressed, for example, by Theodore Roosevelt in 1919:

In the first place, we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the man's becoming in very fact an American, and nothing but an American [...]. There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag, and this excludes the red flag, which symbolizes all wars against liberty and civilization, just as much as it excludes any foreign flag of a nation to which we are hostile [...]. We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language [...]. and we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people. (In Skutnabb-Kangas 2010: 213)

Americanization became one of Roosevelt's favorite themes towards the end of his political career. Insisting on unity, the statement foregrounds concepts such as assimilation, undivided allegiance and single language. Despite the various geographical and linguistic origins, once arrived in the New World, the immigrant is granted the right to share the boons of America under the condition of shedding their old identity and becoming "in every fact an American, and nothing but an American." Ethnic, national and linguistic allegiances are construed as mutually exclusive, where adherence to any previous identification would preclude the individual from becoming truly American. The Americanization movement was especially keen to target immigrant languages, which were stigmatized as carriers of alien culture. Ironically, the requirement of assimilation was the American counterpart of what eastern European Jews were fleeing from – the accusations of cosmopolitanism and disloyalty to their country due to multiple attachments that were prevalent in Tsarist Russia at the turn of the century (Yudkin 2001: 45). At the same time, as immigrant languages were being attacked by the campaign for integration, the influx of Yiddish speakers was limited by immigration quotas (e.g. the Johnson Act of 1924) and financial support for Yiddish cultural institutions diminished notably after the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression (Steinmetz 1986: 20–21).

Besides the outside pull towards Americanization, Yiddish culture also suf-

ferred from internal criticism. During the Haskalah<sup>14</sup>, the “ways in which a Jew dressed, ate, worked, studied, and spoke” (Shandler 2003: 128) ceased to be regarded as given and inevitable, and Yiddish became the object of scrutiny and attack, being increasingly seen as the embodiment of the shortcomings of the traditional way of life. Moreover, besides internalizing the negative stereotype of backwardness, Yiddish was also perceived as a language of lower value due to its supposed “mongrel-ness” as a combination of Hebrew, German and Slavic influences (Harshav 1990: 28, Roskies 2003: 71–72). According to Harshav (1990: 28), “Yiddish had to defend itself against the double accusation of being a “jargon,” a distorted and poor form of German, and an unprincipled hodge-podge of words stolen from various languages.” The scholar Joseph Klausner pejoratively refers to it as “debased German-Jewish jargon” (1932: 1), and even its own literary masters, such as I.L. Peretz, Sholem Aleichem and Simon Dubnov, called it lovingly “jargon” (Harshav 1990: 28). Even Abraham Cahan, who had a strong emotional connection to his *mame loshen*, had reservations about using it for literary purposes and initially published his Yiddish works under a pseudonym (Fischer 2007: 215). In the US, some of the most avid proponents of the radical Americanization of Jews came from their own ranks, typically represented by members of the more established German Jewish community, who had managed to gain considerable financial advancement through integration. Howe (1976: 230–231) recounts how in their zeal to integrate the new arrivals into the American society, the Educational Alliance – a mixture of night school, settlement house, day-care center, gymnasium and public forum that was set up by German Jews in the 1880s – would attempt to instill a sense of American-ness by imposing such routines as flag saluting and patriotic singing on new arrivals from eastern Europe.

The status of English and English speakers could hardly have been more different in Israel in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the time of development of Anglophone Israeli writing. As discussed in chapter three, though there was an overbearing centripetal pull towards Hebrew as the only possible language of the new Israeli identity in the first decades after the establishment of the state, after 1967 the attitude towards English changed radically, substituting the negative associations stemming from the colonial oppression of the British Empire with positive connotations of American affluence and international success. Though it was still a social requirement to master Hebrew to pass for an integrated, albeit perhaps not fully authentic Israeli, the knowledge of English came to be seen as an asset rather than a shameful luggage of the *galut* (exile) or

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14 The Haskalah (meaning Enlightenment or education) was a movement among the European Jews in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. It advocated an “enlightened” way of life, which included better education in secular subjects and integration into the European society.

of colonial subordination. Unlike Yiddish in America, which was initially the language of the Other who was marked by poverty, lack of secular education and alien traditions and beliefs, English in Israel quickly came to be associated with good education and the prosperous strata of society, giving immigrants from Anglophone countries a positive notion of their initial identity, which would be productively supplemented by the subsequent knowledge of Hebrew. Though some Anglophone Israeli authors, such as Lami, who during her kibbutz life often regretted not having been born in Israel, may have felt uneasy about writing in English, it was an unease about its appropriateness to the new country and not a doubt about the value of the English language as such.

While the difference in terms of language prestige and the drive for integration can be pointed out with relative straightforwardness, the comparison in the intertwined questions of publishing, success and relationship with the readership is a more complicated matter. Even though in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Yiddish certainly did not enjoy the same global status as English did in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was nevertheless a language with a potential readership of millions, dwelling in Europe, North America and, to a lesser degree, elsewhere. Besides, it was at the beginning of the twentieth century that Yiddish literature reached its full bloom: at the conference of Czernowitz in 1908, Yiddish was declared the national language of the Jews (Stemberger 1977: 161), the newly proclaimed classical writers of Yiddish literature – Mendele Mokher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz – saw their collected works published in multivolume editions and new centers of Yiddish literature emerged in Poland, the Soviet Union, the US, as well as in Rumania, Lithuania, Argentina, pre-mandatory Palestine, France, Britain, Canada, South Africa and elsewhere (Harshav 1990: 139). In other words, a work produced by a Yiddish author in the U.S. would be potentially accessible to a wide international network of Yiddish readers, just as the works of Anglophone Israeli authors could be theoretically disseminated across the English speaking countries and further to English-savvy audiences elsewhere. However, in practice, the work of Yiddish writers in America would be locally published and locally consumed, with little financial benefit to the author. Though a large number of small literary magazines were published between 1905 and 1940, their readership was insignificant, and it was the bigger periodicals such as the *Day*, *Forward* and *Varheit* that could make an author noticed, but their choice of material was necessarily dictated by the need to appeal to a mass readership (Howe 1976: 441–442). The relative fame gained by publishing in bigger magazines did not guarantee affluence either, as even Sholem Aleichem, already a well-known author upon his immigration to America, struggled to make ends meet by working first for *Day* and then for *Varheit*. The earnings of a purely Yiddish author, writing de facto for the local Yiddish audience, would be hardly comparable to the promise of pe-

cuniary success as Anglophone American author, who could still utilize Yiddish cultural material, but would address an audience vastly superior in numbers. Otherwise, the relationship of authors to their mostly local readers ranged from an almost folk-hero status among the so-called sweatshop poets, who directly addressed the troubles of the working class, to the almost complete disconnection among the authors with a modernist agenda, such as the members of the *Di Yunge* movement (ibid.).

On the contrary, as discussed in the overview of Anglophone Israeli Literature, it is the question of relevance to the local population in Israel that has become one of the dilemmas of Anglophone Israeli writing. The number of the local Anglophone expatriates – the potential home readership – is much smaller than the number of Yiddish readers in the U.S. at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nor are they as easily moved by specific themes (unlike, for instance, the popularity of socially-critical works of Yiddish sweatshop poets). Conversely, no Anglophone expatriate has so far achieved the same importance in Hebrew writing as Mary Antin or Abraham Cahan gained in the U.S. with their English works. However, even though their work is not widely known in their country of residence, Anglophone Israeli authors have been at times recognized institutionally, by centralized government support for the *Iawe* and through national awards for Shirley Kaufman, Riva Rubin and Rachel Tzvia Back. It can be assumed that for many Anglophone Israeli authors, especially those less involved in local readings and workshops, such as Rachel Tzvia Back and Shirley Kaufman, the majority of their audience reside overseas. At the same time, financially Anglophone Israeli authors are considerably less dependent on their local audiences than their Yiddish predecessors in America, as the majority of them are practicing white-collar occupations, being often affiliated with one of Israel's universities or colleges (e.g. Karen Alkalay-Gut, Jerome Mandel, Richard Sherwin, Dara Barnat, William Freedman, Rachel Tzvia Back, Linda Zisquit, Evan Fallenberg).

As one speaks retrospectively of Jewish writing in the US, one notes the initial stages where the struggle for expression in the native tongue competed with the strong drive for Americanization and linguistic integration, and was followed by the establishment of English as the majority language, which would frequently include traces of or references to Yiddish, but would nevertheless function as the main narrative and poetic medium. In writing by expatriates from Anglophone countries, such competition is largely absent – Anglophone Israeli authors seldom utilize Hebrew as their creative instrument, and there are considerably more cases of Israelis achieving a share of recognition through writing in English than of native speakers of English successfully delivering literary texts in Hebrew. To a degree, this discrepancy can be explained by the vast difference in the status of Yiddish in the U.S. in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and of English in Israel after



the Six-Day war, as well as by the financial independence of Anglophone Israeli writers from their limited local audience and their links to publishers overseas. Another important matter was the requirement of a monolithic identity acquired through assimilation into and identification with the majority culture, dominant during the Americanization period, but increasingly deconstructed and weakened in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Anglophone Israeli Literature took root. The following section is going to examine the progression from the aspiration of monolithic and discrete language-coded national identity towards a more inclusive model through a glance at another field of literature directly adjacent to Anglophone Israeli writing – the national Israeli literature in Hebrew.

## 5.2. Hebrew Literature

### 5.2.1. The Revival of Hebrew

Though Hebrew writing has become the majority literary tradition in the state of Israel, its “normalcy” is historically non-linear. In recent evaluations of what has come to be regarded as the national Israeli literature, which extends back in time beyond the foundation of the state in 1948, the formation of the modern Hebrew canon has been increasingly challenged by scholars such as Dan Miron, Hannan Hever, Michael Gluzman and Leon Yudkin, who have gradually deconstructed the depiction of the modern Hebrew literary tradition as a linear and continuous process. Addressing the role of national literature in the formation of a national consciousness, the focus has shifted from glorifying literature as an expression of the achievement of national sentiment to its role in shaping the national consciousness, and to the ideological and political factors that have favored the creation of a specific majority canon. At the same time, recent studies of individual “canonical” authors such as Leah Goldberg and Yehuda Amichai have addressed their relationship to language, which, as Nili Scharf Gold (2005 and 2008) and Rachel Tzvia Back (2005) suggest, may have been characterized by a more intense struggle between the mother tongue and the adopted language than was assumed earlier. Focusing on the issues of language and identity, this section will outline some ideological and social factors that accompanied the emergence of “new” Hebrew Literature, and will illustrate the paradigm shift in the national consciousness that enabled the emergence of Anglophone Israeli writing.

Unlike literature of more established nation-states, such as France or Russia, where the “standard” language of the national majority was also the standard of literary expression, the role of Hebrew as the national language of the Jews before the Israeli statehood was anything but undisputed. On the one hand, as the

language of Jewish religious texts, spiritual writings and prayer, Hebrew was the staple of Jewishness that linked various Jewish communities around the world. On the other hand, essentially a non-spoken code, in the multilingual diaspora existence it was rivaled by the variety of local Jewish and non-Jewish vernaculars, including Yiddish, Ladino, German, Russian, Spanish, Parsi and Arabic, which had less claim to Jewish universalism, but enjoyed higher local proficiency and more versatile usage, and were arguably better suited for expressing the facets of local life.

The revival of Hebrew Literature in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century was a rebirth in the relative sense, as belletristic writing in Hebrew had in fact persisted throughout the high middle ages and the Renaissance in Spain, Provence, Italy and other Mediterranean countries, and even flourished during the Baroque and Neoclassicism in Italy and Holland (Miron 2010: 59). However, with the rise of national awareness in Europe, the importance of Hebrew expanded beyond the religious sphere to becoming the symbol of past glory, a remnant from the times of statehood and of a retrospective national pride. This ideological luggage is embodied, for example, in the following poem by Adam Hakohen Lebenzon from the 1830s:

I was thinking of all the glories we lost:  
 The land, independence, the pomp of kingship,  
 The temple and its servants, our shepherds...  
 In my despondency I sought some comfort:  
 Has any vestige of our freedom survived?  
 I found our language, it is still ours,  
 The hands of strangers have not touched it.  
 It escaped into the holy books and was rescued. (In Miron 2010: 60)

The first lines enumerate the losses of the Jews since exile from Israel, dwelling both on the physical and political aspects – land, independence and self-government – as well as on the demise of the religious system, the loss of the temple as the defining symbol and of the guiding wisdom of temple priests. The only source that can give the speaker comfort amidst brooding over these monumental losses is the Hebrew language, which, encoding Jewish literacy in the holy books, remains a witness of the idealized Jewish state. Through utilizing it, one at least linguistically approaches the legendary glory. Unlike physical entities such as the land, which could easily change hands and would be inevitably marked and, from Lebenzon's perspective, defiled by the new presence, the Hebrew language was perceived to have remained pure, uncorrupted by foreign influence – “The hands of strangers have not touched it.” It is a link to the past, interpreted as a token of collective strength.

Subsequently, such glorification of Hebrew and its use as a “national” writing

medium was construed as natural and obvious by leading Hebraists. For example, in his 1932 revised “History of Modern Hebrew Literature,” the scholar and critic Joseph Klausner writes that

when the intellectual movement began to spread among the Jews of Germany, there could be no question as to what language should be used as the vehicle from promulgating its ideas among the Jews: it was obvious that a new movement among Jews could and must be launched solely through the medium of Hebrew. (Klausner 1932: 2)

Seeking to underscore the normalcy and legitimacy of Hebrew as the ultimate medium for progressive Jewish thought and literary achievement, Klausner, who became the first Chair of Modern Hebrew Literature at the newly established Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1927, frames the choice of Hebrew as a writing medium as an obvious matter, promptly dismissing all possible inquiries. At the same time, Klausner acknowledges the political dimension of Hebrew Literature, stating that since its revival in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hebrew Literature had become not merely a vehicle for spreading the ideas of the *Haskalah*, but “a national possession and a necessary condition of national life for the Jewish people” (Ibid. 28).

The claim of “naturalness” regarding the choice of Hebrew as a literary language has been extensively challenged in recent decades. For example, Dan Miron points out that Hebrew Literature was a literature written out of a national territory and in a language that was still unspoken – “a language, that only a short while ago had been yanked out of its historical matrix of sacrosanct texts [...] and ready to explode in the faces of those who naively employed it for the purposes of mundane communication” (Miron 2010: 11). As such, the ideological revival of Hebrew appears in sharp contrast to the fairly straightforward choice of mother tongue for the majority of writers of other national literatures. In the absence of the defining triad of the European nation-state – nation, territory and language – the Hebrew republic of letters emerged as a programmatic substitute for other forms of self-definition and national identification (Gluzman 2003: 3). Referring to Eric Hobsbawm’s statement that “for Germans and Italians, their national language [...] was the *only* thing that made them Germans and Italians, and consequently carried a far heavier charge of national identity than, say, English did for those who wrote and read that language” (Hobsbawm 1994: 179), Gluzman suggests that though Hebrew certainly played a central role in the rising Jewish national consciousness, the choice of a language that had not been spoken for 2000 years was a radical inversion of a tradition. Unlike Germany and Italy, which underwent a process of unification in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and where the common language spoken by the population and the culture it embodied were a significant factor in defining the borders of the

new political entities, the programmatic reestablishment of a non-vernacular as the definitive Jewish writing medium appears to be considerably less “natural.”

Increasingly adopted by the Zionist movement as the language of the future Jewish state, Hebrew not only ousted its competitors, such as German, which Theodor Herzl imagined to be the language of the Jewish state in his 1902 utopian novel *Altneuland*, and Yiddish, which was construed as the language of the outdated European diaspora, but in the context of the formation of its Zionist literary canon it also suppressed Hebrew works that were informed by a different ideology. For instance, Hannan Hever refers to the example of Hebrew writers in Galicia around 1900 (e.g. Yitzhak Fernhoff and Reuven Fahan), who were harshly criticized by Yosef Haim Brenner and Micha Yosef Berdichevsky – influential literary authorities at the time and central figures of new Hebrew Literature – for the allegedly poor quality of their writing. As Brenner’s and Berdichevsky’s vehement criticism seems markedly out of proportion to the marginal renown of the attacked authors, Hever suggests that the main cause of this condemnation may in fact have been Fernhoff’s and Fahan’s positive attitude towards life in the diaspora that is expressed in their works. Rivaling the Zionist ideology, which sought to implement Hebrew as the language of the dreamed-of Jewish state, a verbal attack on these authors may have signified an attempt to stomp out a nascent alternative canon of Hebrew Literature (Hever 2002: 20).

When the first issue of the Hebrew monthly journal *HaShiloach* appeared in 1896, the question addressed in its editorial was not whether Hebrew Literature was to be programmatic, but rather what the nature of its program should be. Distinctively, Ahad Haam (the pseudonym of Asher Ginzberg literally means “one of the people”), the editor of *HaShiloach*, advocated abstaining from beltristic writing that merely provoked an overflow of emotions, and concentrating instead on the task at hand – Hebrew writing should address the conditions of the Jewish people and arouse and expand national consciousness. Though not rejecting primarily aesthetic works outright, he suggested that, as the capacity of Hebrew literary figures was limited, they should focus on serious writing that would propagate national ideas, leaving primarily aesthetic literature to other languages (Gluzman 2003: 16, Hever 2002: 14). Such a pragmatic approach was contested by Ahad Haam’s co-editor Berdichevsky, who defended the aesthetic and the universal of literature, suggesting that the “nation’s survival is grounded in its poetry more than in its thinking” (in Hever 2002: 14). The overt promotion of the role of literature in nation-building and the dispute over its appropriate forms of expression inevitably affected contemporary authors. The young Hayim Nahman Bialik, who was yet to acquire the title of Hebrew national poet, was greatly influenced by Ahad Haam’s ideas, yet expressed concerns that his poems were too lyrical to be accepted by the publishing house

*Achiasaf*, which was also supervised by Ahad Haam. His poems, which focused on private sentiments, were indeed rejected, and Gluzman suggests that this resistance of the editors led Bialik to infuse the private sensitivity into a more clearly defined public agenda, which was more palatable to his readership (Gluzman: 2003: 19–20).

### 5.2.2. Non-Native Speakers Now and Then: Proficiency and Ideology

A point almost too obvious to be highlighted is that both the writing and its criticism were done by non-native speakers of Hebrew, who sought to express their voice in an adopted tongue. Moreover, this development did not encapsulate one generation only: though Hebrew had been revived as a spoken tongue by Eliezer Ben Yehuda and had yielded its first native speakers in Palestine, it was not only the “first generation” authors like Shaul Tchernichovsky and Hayim Nahman Bialik who wrote in an adopted language, but also the “second generation” – e.g. Avraham Shlonsky, Nathan Alterman and Lea Goldberg – who came to Palestine from Europe. This writing of literature in Hebrew by non-native speakers has acquired iconic quality by now and is studied and revered by Israelis as the benchmark of Hebrew literary expression.

There appears to be a sharp contrast between the earlier Hebrew writing by non-native speakers and the more recent development of Anglophone Israeli writing, where the majority of immigrants from English speaking countries seem to adhere to their native tongue in their writing and even to entice some non-native speakers to write in English as well. With so many examples to the contrary, one may question the deeper nature of the claims on the part of some Anglophone Israeli authors, e.g. Riva Rubin and Shirley Kaufman, who argue that they are unable to write in Hebrew. Why has Hebrew writing by immigrant writers virtually petered out in the case of Anglophone Israeli writers?

There are several factors to consider in this context. On the one hand, some underlying social factors, such as the differences with respect to the quality and attainability of Jewish education, meant that “first” and “second” generation Hebrew authors, despite being non-native speakers, were much better equipped for embarking on a Hebrew writing career. On the other hand, the ideological drive of a growing national consciousness meant that Hebrew was a major manifestation of the new sense of belonging, of a minority culture on the surge towards becoming a majority culture. This centripetal movement towards a unified national culture has been increasingly waning in recent decades, allowing for the recognition and appreciation of variety and counter-currents. But at the same time, while the need to respond to and reshape the imperative of nation-building was a major force in the earlier generations of Hebrew writing,

more recent studies show that even in cases of allegedly “quintessentially” Hebrew Israeli authors such as Lea Goldberg and Yehuda Amichai, creative works were in fact permeated by a linguistic dialogue, which remain underrepresented in the canonic view of Hebrew Literature. As Leon Yudkin (1996), Rachel Tzvia Back (2005) and Nili Gold (2005, 2008) suggest, their struggle with languages may have been profound – the traces of duality found in their works in fact reveal the sentiment of a split linguistic consciousness and alienation.

In terms of education and Hebrew proficiency, late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century middle class Jewish education often meant that solid foundations of Hebrew were communicated to the child early on. Unlike the literature of the Hebrew enlightenment up to the 1860s, which could hardly claim universalism due to low numbers of readership, the new Hebrew Literature and journalism after the 1880s was indeed addressing hundreds of thousands – an audience national both in the sense of sheer numbers and of the burgeoning national identification. This readership consisted of the expanding Jewish middle class in the Pale of Settlement<sup>15</sup>, who enjoyed the benefits of traditional Jewish education and therefore could read Hebrew. For example, in Volhynia, where Bialik was born in 1865, by 1897 there were more than five million Jews whose lingua franca was Yiddish, but where Hebrew was actively cultivated by the cultural elite (Yudkin 1982: 78–79). Boys would be educated in the way that they would start learning the Hebrew alphabet at the age of three, and they would enter the elementary school (*Cheder*) at the age of five. There they would start studying the Torah in its Hebrew original and would later proceed to study other religious texts, accumulating the command of Hebrew, even though Yiddish remained the widely spoken vernacular. Thus, informed by the language of Hebrew textuality rather than speech, eastern European Hebrew writers were already able to write and publish their first Hebrew work at an early age – Bialik and Brenner at 19, Agnon at 20. In the light of the pogroms of 1881, rising anti-Semitism and the deteriorating economic position of the Jewish middle class, the attempts of integration into wider society appeared increasingly futile, while the appeal of nationalism and of its anchor language, Hebrew, grew. Miron suggests that for the populous Jewish middle class, “Hebrew literature (in the widest sense of the term, including Hebrew journalism, which was at the time very literary) became their chief source of information, as well as the guide that helped them in the forming of ideas, concepts, and plans” (Miron 2010: 72). Such a function of Hebrew Literature both required and propagated the knowledge of Hebrew among the

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15 Territory in the western part of the Russian Empire where Jews were permitted to reside permanently. First established in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it spanned over much of present day Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and parts of western Russia.

eastern-European Jewish middle class. In contrast to this, as was discussed in the previous section, for first-generation American Jews, who became the ancestors of many of today's Anglophone Israeli writers, participation in the public sphere did not mean the acquisition of Hebrew, but of English; the importance of Hebrew as the carrier of contemporary culture was considerably smaller for this segment of the population.

The possibility of acquiring Hebrew in central and eastern Europe persisted in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, as a schoolgirl in Kovno (Lithuania), the future poet Lea Goldberg attended the Hebrew Gymnasium, where she became fluent in Hebrew (in addition to Russian and German); there she began to compose her first Hebrew verses. She perfected her knowledge of Hebrew during her university studies in Bonn and in Berlin and published her first Hebrew poems at the age of 22. Upon arrival in Israel in 1935, at the age of 24, Goldberg was fully equipped linguistically to continue to create literary works in Hebrew, as well as to perform a variety of other jobs connected to literature and writing – the positions she held included editor of children's books at the *Sifriyat Poalim* publishing house, literary consultant at the *Habima* Theater as well as theater critic for the newspaper *Al Hamishmar* (Back 2005). At the same time, Bialik's biographer Sara Feinstein (2005) states that reared in pre-war Poland in Hebrew, she was already affectionately introduced to Bialik's poetry in her childhood. Though such high command of Hebrew was by no means universal – in his novel *Shira*, for instance, Agnon satirizes the language difficulties of German Jewish academics in Jerusalem in the 1930s and 1940s – it was nevertheless considerable and provided an “advantage” over later Anglophone Israeli writers, of whom much fewer had had extensive Hebrew education during their childhood and youth.

However, the differences concerning the attitude to Hebrew among the early new Hebrew writers and Anglophone Israeli writers cannot to be solely reduced to the differences in terms of Hebrew education. As is for instance demonstrated by Rachel Tzvia Back, who commands Hebrew on a native-like level (more on this in chapter six), it is more than a mere language proficiency that is required for identification with the language and for creative expression. While the acquisition of Hebrew is still seen as a normative requirement among immigrants to participate in Israeli majority culture and to be able to extend social ties beyond the immigrant community, the pressure to acquire Hebrew is considerably less pronounced than it used to be in the decades preceding and following the establishment of the State of Israel. Immigrants may still be occasionally criticized for their insufficient Hebrew skills, yet such criticism is not comparable to the drive to oust diasporic existence from the cultural memory of the “new Jews,” including the campaigns against the use of other languages in the public sphere (discussed in more detail in chapter three).

Inexorably tied to high Hebrew skills of new Hebrew writers was the role ascribed to Hebrew and especially to Hebrew Literature in both expressing and creating the national sentiment. As Gluzman notes, “Zionism emerged almost from the onset as a literary utopia” (2003: 3), where the “Republic of Letters” had to compensate for the lack of obvious means of national identity, such as common territory and political independence. A national-political value was ascribed to the language and it was talked about in military terms: “well chosen words were like carefully selected arrows that the warrior-poet would use in order to hit his target and pierce it” (Miron 2010: 241). And although Hebrew Literature was broader than the Zionist agenda per se, especially after the cultural center of Hebrew writing had moved to Palestine in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the Bolsheviks had outlawed Zionism and the study of Hebrew in Russia, the literary and political worlds were tightly intertwined (Shaked 2000: 4): writers would address political questions and political leaders would express their views on literary and aesthetic questions (Gluzman 2003: 7).

Construing itself as the political avant-garde of the Jewish people, the trail-blazers for a brighter future, Zionism not only praised Hebrew per se, but also juxtaposed it with a negative portrait of diaspora existence (Hever 2002: 31). Drawing on David Lloyd’s and Homi Bhabha’s emphasis on the programmatic selectiveness in the formation of national identity, Gluzman contends that the advancing of the new hierarchy of cultural and aesthetic values was carried out through the negation of other possible modes of existence, first and foremost of diaspora and exile. To distinguish Zionism positively from other models, the new Zionist Hebrew culture and the texts it disseminated presented the differences between the new and the traditional forms of Jewish existence as a set of opposites: Zionist/diasporic, Hebrew/Yiddish, strong/weak, productive/un-productive, masculine/feminine (Hever 2002: 5, Gluzman 2003: 6, Gold 2008: 103). Through setting it against the perceived disadvantages of the Diasporic existence, the strong, productive, masculine, Hebrew-coded Zionist dream was construed as the only desirable future way of life. The abandonment of the mother tongue was thus an integral part of acquiring a new, future-oriented identity.

Ironically, the most vehement negation of diaspora existence can be observed with ex-diasporic Jews. Though multilingualism was widespread among first-generation immigrants from Europe – Harshav (2007: 24) suggests that the usual number of languages spoken or understood by an individual would range between five and seven, and, in special cases, up to fifteen – it was subdued by the ideological drive of Hebrew. Typically, these languages would include Yiddish and Hebrew, Polish and Russian, German, and perhaps French and English. In his memoir *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, the Israeli novelist Amos Oz documents the language attitudes of his parents in Jerusalem in the early 1940s:



My father could read in sixteen or seventeen languages, and could speak eleven (all with a Russian accent). My mother spoke four or five languages and read seven or eight. They conversed in Russian or Polish when they did not want me to understand. (Which was most of the time. When my mother referred to a stallion in Hebrew in my hearing my father rebuked her furiously in Russian: *Shto s toboy?! Vidish malchik ryadom s nami!* – What’s the matter with you? You can see the boy’s just there!) Out of cultural considerations they mostly read books in German or English, and they presumably dreamed in Yiddish. But the only language they taught me was Hebrew. Maybe they feared that a knowledge of languages would expose me too to the blandishments of Europe, that wonderful, murderous continent. (Oz 2004: 2)

Positioned at the very beginning of the memoir, this recollection of the parents’ language skills set the tone of striving for a better future through the means of language. Though Oz’s well-educated parents of Lithuanian origin drew on the culture of a variety of nations and spoke a large number of languages, it was only Hebrew that they sought to imprint onto their son’s consciousness; the wealth of the parents’ outstanding multilingualism was to be sacrificed in favor of the new ideal of the pure and strong *sabra* (native-born Israeli)<sup>16</sup>. Oz points out the protective aspect of Hebrew – the ignorance of other languages would exclude the boy from participation in the vilified diaspora way of life, with the victimhood of anti-semitism. As Oz’s childhood took place in the early 1940s, the “murderous” nature of Europe and its languages would directly refer to the Holocaust, as well as to earlier pogroms in eastern Europe. Moreover, only purified Hebrew is to be passed on – even vaguely sexual references, such as the image of the stallion, are discussed by the parents in Russian and Polish, enforcing the privacy of the conversation by not referring to their son by his name within his earshot and using *malchik* – “boy” – instead. Markedly, Yiddish – the language most strongly associated with diaspora existence – is not used at all and is presumably suppressed into the realm of the subconscious, while more “cultured,” albeit less private languages are employed in daily life.

Later on, Oz further expounds on his father’s attitude towards Yiddish:

Like so many Zionist Jews of our time, my father was a bit of a closet Canaanite<sup>17</sup>. He was embarrassed by the shtetl and everything in it, and by its representatives in modern writing, Bialik and Agnon. He wanted us all to be born anew, as blond-haired, muscular, sun-tanned, Hebrew Europeans instead of Jewish Eastern Europeans. He always loathed the Yiddish language, which he termed ‘*jargon*’. He saw Bialik as the poet of victimhood, of ‘eternal death pangs’, while Tchernikhovsky was the harbinger of the

16 The Hebrew word *sabra* literally means *prickly pear* – the fruit of the *opuntia* cactus, which grow wildly all across the country. The connotation is that native-born Israelis are tough and prickly on the outside, but soft and pleasant on the inside.

17 The Canaanite movement, especially active in the 1940s, advocated the dissociation from the Jewish past and the creation of a Hebrew nation in the Middle East that would also include the local Arab population.

new dawn that was about to break, the dawn of 'The Conquerors of Canaan by Storm'. (Ibid. 35–36)

In this excerpt, the difference between the past and the future is conceived in strong physical terms. Unlike the unpalatable image of the Yiddish-speaking shtetl Jew, associated with excessive spirituality, a frail body, abstaining from physical labor and a compliance with his role as the eternal victim of discrimination, the new Jew was to be distinguished by health, strong physicality and athletic beauty. In terms of language, he is to be a "Hebrew European" – strongly rooted in the new Hebrew nationality and politically on a par with other European nations. Instead of partaking in the precarious status as a weak minority of the "Jewish Eastern European," the "Hebrew European" is to benefit from the normality of being part of the majority in his own land. Pointedly, the desire for the change of the national status is expressed through tastes in literature: while Bialik and Agnon are treated as a painful reminder of the eastern European suffering, Tchernikhovsky's nationalistic poetry assumes the role of the beacon of optimism for the next generation.

However, while emphasizing the role of Hebrew as both the desired instrument and the expression of national rebirth, Oz also makes ironic comments on the nature of the Hebrew that was actually spoken. Despite all efforts, the Hebrew of the parents' generation lacks the ease of native speakers:

[T]here was a great lack of words: Hebrew was still not a natural enough language, it was certainly not an intimate language, and it was hard to know what would actually come out when you spoke it. They could never be certain that they would not utter something ridiculous, and ridicule was something they lived in fear of. They were scared to death of it. Even people like my parents who knew Hebrew well were not entirely its masters. They spoke it with a kind of obsession for accuracy. They frequently changed their minds, and reformulated something they had just said. Perhaps that is how a short-sighted driver feels, trying to find his way at night through a warren of side-streets in a strange city in an unfamiliar car.

One Saturday a friend of my mother's came to visit us, a teacher by the name of Lilia Bar-Samkha. Whenever the visitor said in the course of conversation that she had had a fright or that someone was in a frightful state, I burst out laughing. In everyday slang her word for 'fright' meant 'fart'. No one else seemed to find it funny, or perhaps they were pretending not to. It was the same when my father spoke about 'the arms race' or raged against the decision of the NATO countries to re-arm Germany as a deterrent to Stalin. He had no idea that his bookish word for 'arm' meant 'fuck' in current Hebrew slang.

[...]

In their private moments they never spoke Hebrew to each other. Perhaps in their most private moments they did not speak at all. They said nothing. Everything was overshadowed by the fear of sounding ridiculous. (Ibid. 11–12)

Oz compares the Hebrew of his parents to a driver in an unfamiliar car who is trying to find his way around in a strange city – despite the knowledge of words and principles, it still remains somebody else’s instrument, in the city not quite their own. As such, it is unsuitable for expressing emotions privately – a sentiment akin to that of the Anglophone Israeli poet Riva Rubín when she likens the Hebrew self to a mere skeleton, which is functional, but ultimately without the necessary emotional attachment that would allow it to function as a complete self (see next chapter). At the same time, Oz stresses the major role that ridicule and shame played in his parents’ linguistic conduct. Beyond the content of their utterances, the fear of sounding ridiculous is extended into the very way of their usage of Hebrew – even proficient speakers are afraid of making a mistake, relying on frequent reformulation rather than taking the chance of misusing a phrase. Such behavior echoes that of nineteenth-century Hebraists, whose attitude towards Hebrew – functional, but still unspoken – resembled that of “grammatological theology” (Miron 2010: 241), where the study of the minute grammar turns and the never-ending improvement of proficiency were elevated to the levels of utmost priority. The admiration of Hebrew – both as the vestige of the old glory and as the new beginning – and the imperative to adhere to the vocabulary and rules derived especially from religious texts was so widespread among some of the Hebraists that Miron compares it to a “quasi-Masonic deity, whose acolytes gather secretly in the night to celebrate its resplendence” (ibid. 240).

On the other hand, in the passage above Oz suggests the inability of the older generation to ultimately control Hebrew, as the language has entered another stage of evolution through its usage by the generation of native speakers. As the usage of Hebrew ceases to be mere mimicry of older texts and begins to be negotiated by unsuspecting native speakers, new and old meanings appear in dialogic contrast. Despite the obsession with accuracy, which was to aid the older generation in their linguistic insecurity, the language is shown to be slipping through their fingers. The attempts to express most solemn ideas – personal fright, rearmament – result in bursts of laughter from the younger generation, who have adapted the older terms for new, considerably less formal usage. As the transformation of spoken language is taking place, the older generation’s obsession with the preservation of their own dignity through adherence to the rules of formal language not only precludes them from internalizing it on the personal level, but also renders them ridiculous to those aware of the altered meaning of words. In effect, parallel variants of Hebrew coexist: the static, bookish code of polyglot parents that is an expression of Zionist ideology rather than of private feelings, and the rough and dynamic language of the child, who fills the lacunae in the parents’ language with slang and street-talk. This development would also permeate Israeli literature, as the formerly revered classical forms of Hebrew in

literature increasingly gave way to the use of spoken language (Yudkin 1982: 142 and Miron 2010: 241).

One can hardly imagine that what has been discussed here as a major historical development is still relevant today with the same intensity and on the same scale. In addition to the differences in middle class Jewish education among turn-of-the-century Zionist writers and the authors who immigrated to Israel from Anglophone countries in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, which suggests a difference in the age of acquisition and proficiency in Hebrew prior to migration, the importance of Hebrew as the defining element of nation building has diminished. While for early Hebrew authors, who aspired for the advent of a new nationhood rooted in an ancient tongue, the instrument of communication was part of the message (Yudkin 2001: 41), for many Anglophone Israeli authors learning Hebrew has become rather an aspect of integration into the existing Israeli society. Instead of attempting to politically and culturally shape the already extant Jewish state through literary endeavors, the ambition of Anglophone Israeli authors such as Rochelle Mass and Lami was rather to be part of what they saw and liked, to integrate into the local social structures. For example, Rochelle Mass recollects her decision to move to Israel in the following way:

We came here first on a holiday in 1970. That was our first big holiday. My husband was already a dentist and he had worked for a few years; I was a teacher and this and that and our children were born already. We came for a holiday and when we saw how flourishing it was, we very excited and we thought it would be a great privilege to be here, just to join in, just to be who we were and have our kids grow up here. We felt that even if it worked out only for a year or two, it would be a very enriching experience for us as a family and we could always go back. We were just very excited. I had more of the language, I was in an Israeli dance group and I sang songs with the youth group etc. My husband very much loved what he saw. He loved the oriental markets and loved the pace of things and the spirit here. And we decided to come. We never really said we'd give it a year or two or three and then we'll decide – we just came and lived here. (Rumjanceva 2010e)

Though Rochelle Mass had belonged to a Zionist youth organization in Canada and her parents strongly sympathized with Israel, her decision to emigrate to Israel in 1973 came not from a cultivated *hibat zion* – love of Zion, a vociferous sentiment among earlier European Zionists – but from a personal experience of joy and belonging. Instead of the earlier trope of building the country – among other means through literature – that was prevalent among the pre-state settlers and in the early Israeli statehood, Mass's motivation is characterized by the appreciation of what has already come into being throughout the decades – the oriental markets, the pace of things, the general impression of the society that is flourishing. Mass's emphasis of the joy “to be just who we were” is radically different from the frantic attempts of integration and propriety and bringing

about something new that the earlier generation of new Hebrews described by Amos Oz was haunted by. Where Oz's parents agonize over correctness of behavior and expression and measure their speech by an internal etalon of perfect Hebrew, Mass's attachment to Hebrew is more casual – it is fed in particular through recreational activities, such as group singing and dancing. In another passage, Mass further outlines her acquisition of Hebrew as follows:

The language was a big part of it. We worked very hard at it. People were delighted to speak English to us and we tripped on with our few words in Hebrew, because we felt that if we continued to speak English, we would always then speak English. And we purposefully chose a kibbutz that did not have a large English speaking population, because we felt that it would be just more comfortable to slide into it and make our deep friendships. And the stronger we got [in Hebrew], the stronger our connections became, because we understood. A long time we didn't understand, we didn't even know what we didn't understand. So it took a lot of patience as an adult. And we realized that our children went through the same thing, they just didn't express it as much as we did. The language is very important.

[...]

And many times people did not know what to expect from us, they did not know how much we understand. It takes some time to know us to see that yes, we do understand. And that still continues – our neighbors getting to know us. But they just don't accept us as Israelis, as everybody else, because we are not and there is a whole culture that we are bringing with us. (Ibid.)

By the 1970s, when Rochelle Mass arrived, the acquisition of Hebrew was still seen as a necessity, but the attitude towards English had improved to the point where the neighbors were happy to speak English to the new arrivals, rather than insisting on the Hebrew-only policy of the earlier years. In Mass's description, it was largely through the conscious choice of moving away from other Anglophone immigrants and using her then still primitive Hebrew in everyday life that her integration into Israeli society came about – a personal preference rather than an imperative. Markedly, the other option is sketched in Mass's narrative of migration as well: an alternative of sojourning in Anglophone communities and getting about the daily business in English, which Mass declines in favor of forging deeper ties with Hebrew speakers around her. Instead of the obsession with correctness and the fear of ridicule, as in the case of Oz's parents, Mass foregrounds the process of gradual acquisition, with its increasing rewards of a better understanding of the surrounding life. At the same time, there is a strong awareness that from the outside, her integration may seem incomplete, as other Israelis primarily classify her as an immigrant.

Others, such as Shirley Kaufman, Jerome Mandel and William Freedman, never mastered the more advanced levels of Hebrew, which did not contradict their loyalty to the country, even though it resulted in the feeling of alienation

from the majority culture. Jerome Mandel commented on his divided sense of integration due to the lack of Hebrew:

I don't know what that means [to be integrated]. My daughter is saying I'm not integrated at all, my wife/partner doesn't think I am integrated at all. I am not integrated in that I can't listen to news in Hebrew, I can't follow a lecture in Hebrew, I cannot interact with the Israeli culture the way I do in the U.S. or even a little bit in England. It's problematic. I feel integrated, but I am not. And indeed in the fiction that I write, one of my daughters says – the academic among my two daughters – is written by an immigrant to Israel, because it does not touch any of the authentic Israeli topics – kibbutz, the youth groups. (Rumjanceva 2010a)

In an even more pronounced way than Mass, Mandel addresses the sensation of feeling integrated while not being perceived so by other Israelis and even by his immediate family. Though he feels at home in his chosen country, where he has resided since 1977, he is aware of the lacunae of his participation in the majority culture due to the language barrier, e. g. the inability to follow the current events on the news or to deal with academic Hebrew. While for the late nineteenth-century Hebraists Hebrew became not only the symbol of rebirth, but also a medium of exchanging news and ideas, its elevation to an established majority culture has diminished the ideological emphasis of this function – Mandel, like a number of other immigrants from Anglophone countries, relies on non-Hebrew sources of information, while retaining the sense of being integrated in other ways. However, as Mandel suggests in the same passage, the partial linguistic isolation trickles down into his writing. Due to Mandel's lack of 'authentically' Israeli experiences – influenced by his relatively late age of migration and academic lifestyle, but also by the lack of participation in the Israeli society because of the language barrier – his writing is defined by his view from the outside. Admitting partial lack of familiarity, Mandel describes his treatment of 'Israeli' issues as mere 'touching': "The story ["Stone"] touches the kibbutz, but it is a sort of the outsider's view of the kibbutz, and maybe an idealized outsider's view. I touch on the moshav, I touch on the art scene – I know a little about artists" (Ibid.). While a number of Mandel's stories focus on the lives of native-born Israelis (e. g. "Find," "After Great Pain" and "The Brown Boys"), his reflections on the strong emotions of immigrants from America such as the need to confront their past and make choices anew ("Stone") or find themselves bewildered and betrayed by the Israeli society ("The Orange") are among his most memorable works.

As Hebrew has entered the state of normalcy as a majority culture and the perceived necessity to actively defend and propagate it has declined, the acquisition of Hebrew – or rather the aspired degree of proficiency and the spheres of application – has increasingly become a matter influenced by individual

choice. With the weakening of the imperative to re-define oneself in Hebrew and to cast aside all vestiges of previous identities, the drive to adopt Hebrew in creative endeavors has weakened as well, especially in the case of Anglophone and Russian speaking authors.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the government's endorsement of foreign language writers' unions in the early 1980s signaled the acceptance and recognition of non-Hebrew Israeli literary production.

In the course of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Hebrew national narrative has gradually ceased to vilify diasporic existence as a defeatist and backward way of life. After 1967, when Israel's political and economic ties with the U.S. expanded significantly, especially English speakers came to be associated with education, affluence and cosmopolitanism (e.g. Isaacs 1967, Cooper and Fishman 1977, Rosenbaum et al. 1977, Ben-Rafael 2001). Rather than being seen as an imprint of an unpalatable diaspora past, acquaintance with another culture and language has been reevaluated as an asset. Moreover, especially in the last decades, emigration from Israel has increasingly challenged the claim of the early Hebrew writer Yosef Haim Brenner that "[t]here is no other country" (Handelman-Smith 2013). A survey carried out by Raz and Shapira on behalf of the daily newspaper *Haaretz* in 2012 suggests that 37 % of Israelis are considering moving to a different country (Klingbail and Shiloh 2012). A small share of 2 % express an absolute certainty that they will emigrate at some point. The primary reason for the desire to emigrate (55 %) is the difficulty of getting ahead economically in Israel; especially the opportunities in North America seem to be alluring. The desire to emigrate is particularly prominent among secular, salaried voters of left or center-left parties, in the age group of 30–49. As a contrast, the relatively unstable security situation and ideological reasons such as disagreeing with the policy of the occupation or the increased influence of the Ultra-Orthodox, are at the bottom of the motivation scale. In fact, the desire to stay in the country even rises with the surge of patriotism when the security threat mounts. As the Zionist imperative has weakened, especially amidst those with more humanistic-oriented left wing opinions, the loyalty to the country is measured, among others, in terms of economic prosperity, in which Israel finds it hard to compete with other developed countries, which have become major recipients of emigration from Israel. At the same time, the emigration rate of Israelis is not higher than that of other developed countries such as the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand (Klingbail and Shiloh 2012). The total pool of Israeli citizens living abroad was 5–600,000 in 2011 (DellaPergola 2011: 152), while the population of Israel in the same year amounted to approximately 7,800,000. The largest group of expatriates – around 200,000 – reside in the US;

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18 The union of Russian writers in Israel, founded in the early 1980s, currently has more than 200 members.

other attractive destinations include Canada, Australia and western Europe. Though considering the small size of Israel and its limited opportunities for employment for high-level professionals, who are among the group most prone to emigrating, emigration may seem unsurprising, DellaPergola notes that in a country whose founding ethos was immigration and the absorption of immigrants, emigration is seen as an inversion of tradition (ibid.). While emigrants from Israel have been branded as “a fallout of cowards” by Yitzhak Rabin, emigration has become a feasible option for a large share of Israelis. And as the acceptance and desirability of emigration or a prolonged sojourn abroad reaches an increasing number of Israelis, the national imperative at home is deconstructed further, allowing a rise of locally-produced foreign-language literature.

### 5.2.3. Language and Uprootedness in the Israeli Hebrew Canon: Lea Goldberg and Yehuda Amichai

Besides the differences in education, which may have given early Hebrew authors a head start over later immigrants, and the weakening of the national narrative and the role of Hebrew in it, another aspect to consider is that the fragmented identity of migrant writers, so obvious in Anglophone Israeli writing, was also present in Hebrew writing. Despite the strong ideological drive to adopt Hebrew among the first generations of new Hebrew writers and the perhaps even stronger tendency to depict the adoption of Hebrew as a uniform success story, later research suggests that the feelings of fragmentation and conflicting allegiances were in fact integral to a number of Hebrew authors, including such quintessentially Hebrew and Israeli poets as Lea Goldberg and Yehuda Amichai (e.g. Yudkin 1982 and 1996, Gluzman 2003, Back 2005, Gold 2005 and 2008). Though Goldberg and Amichai adopted Hebrew as the ultimate medium of expression, both in fact seem to have wrestled with memories of other tongues. Lea Goldberg, who immigrated to Israel in 1935, writes in her poem “Tel Aviv 1935” (from the sequence “The Shortest Journey”):

Then the aerials on the city's roofs were  
like the masts of Columbus' ships  
and every raven that perched on their tips  
announced a new continent.

And the kit-bags of travelers walked the streets  
and the language of a foreign land  
cut through the heat of the day  
like the blade of a cold knife.



How could the air of the small city  
 bear so many  
 childhood memories, wilted loves,  
 rooms which were emptied somewhere?

Like pictures blackening in a camera  
 the clear cold nights reversed,  
 rainy summer nights across the sea  
 and shadowy mornings of great cities.

And the sound of footsteps behind your back  
 drum the marching songs of foreign troops,  
 and it seems – if you but turn your head  
 there is your hometown church floating on the sea. (Goldberg 2005: 134)

The shortest journey is that of memory – from 1964, when the poem was written, to 1935, when the author arrived in Tel Aviv, and from 1935 to the “childhood memories, wilted loves,/ and rooms which were emptied somewhere.” The arrival is hopeful: the trivial antennas on roofs of buildings are likened to the ships of Columbus, inspiring the sense of awe and wonder at the discovery of a new continent. However, in retrospect, the former sentiment of astonishment and hope is viewed in a melancholy mode. Already the image of the ravens on rooftops suggests a departure from the idealizing mode of earlier Zionist writing. Unlike Noah’s dove, which signals safe arrival after the biblical deluge and precedes the covenant with God, the raven is a much less promising bird – the failed messenger in Noah’s first attempt to find dry land (Genesis 8: 7). Alienation is explicitly formulated in terms of language: the European idiom conspicuously enters “the heat of the day/ like the blade of a cold knife.” Remarkably, this is an inversion of the Zionist juxtaposition of settlement in Palestine and the diaspora as strong, active and masculine vs. weak, passive and feminine – here it is the immigrant tongue that dissects the air of the would-be homeland. Though the year mentioned in the title suggests that the poem is sharing private impressions (Goldberg moved to Israel in 1935 and settled in Tel Aviv), the second stanza presents a de-personalized, collective panorama (cf. Mann 2001: 361, Gluzman 2003: 61), where the metonymic “kit-bags of travelers” walk the streets; the anonymous new arrivals are likened to the bagful of possessions and memories that they bring. Rather than rejoicing at her arrival, the speaker is melancholy, lingering in the memories of life elsewhere, now obscured by the “marching songs of foreign troops” that had become increasingly threatening by 1935. The heat of the day in a small, newly founded Levantine city is both a reminder and contrast to the “rainy summer nights across the sea/and shadowy mornings of great cities.” The feeling of alienation is never remedied and the poem poignantly ends with a longing for a distinctly Christian image of the

“hometown church floating on the sea.” Counterpointing the raven-ridden antennae of Tel Aviv in the first stanza, the spire of a church – traditionally a landmark for seafarers – is so present in the speaker’s imagination that it seems to be prone to emerging any moment.

In terms of Deleuze and Guatarri, Goldberg’s poetry, which is permeated by an immigrant’s sense of divided identity and dislocation, goes against the grain of the Zionist political and cultural struggle for reterritorialization (Gluzman 2003: 63). Juxtaposing the preferred deterritorialized existence of western modernist authors such as Joyce and Gertrude Stein with the Hebrew writers at the time, Gluzman suggests that in this respect, Goldberg was in fact closer to the fragmented self of western modernism than to the Zionist ideal of wholeness and wholesomeness of Jews returning to their historical homeland. Goldberg’s sense of dislocation did not pass unnoticed to her contemporaries. For example, in 1967 Abraham Blat evaluated her in the following way: “Leah Goldberg is a humanist poet. This is her great strength and this is her weakness [...]. Although we relish great humanist lyrical poetry, we cannot ignore the absence of a specifically Israeli color in her poetry” (in Gluzman 2003: 63–64). Though strongly committed to Hebrew as a language of expression, Goldberg’s poetry overtly features the coexistence of different backgrounds, locations and languages in the individual consciousness.

The multiple allegiances of another iconic figure of Hebrew Literature, Yehuda Amichai, who is now widely regarded as the greatest Israeli poet, are more covert. Born in 1924 in Würzburg, Germany, into an Orthodox family, in 1936 Amichai came to Israel with his parents. He served in multiple wars – in the British Army in World War II, in the Israeli War of Independence in 1948, in the Sinai War in 1956 and in the Yom Kipur War in 1973. In his poems that appeared in print since the 1950s, Amichai greatly simplified the written Hebrew of his immediate predecessors such as Lea Goldberg, Nathan Alterman and Avraham Shlonsky, who were still steeped in the biblical Hebrew to the point of using the biblical tense system (Harshav 2007: 177). Instead, in his poetry Amichai relied on the directness of everyday spoken language and on images familiar from day-to-day Israeli existence; the lofty and the grand came to be substituted by the poignancy of the mundane. Rather than addressing the needs of the collective, it was the individual that now stepped into the limelight (Yudkin 1982: 149, Gold 2008: 9, Miron 2010: 240). In his poem “National Thoughts,” Amichai describes this transformation of Hebrew:

People caught in the homeland-trap:  
to speak now in this weary language,  
the language that was torn from its sleep in the Bible: dazzled,  
it wobbles from mouth to mouth. In a language that once described  
miracles of God, to say car, bomb, God.

Square letters want to stay  
 closed; each letter a closed house,  
 to stay and to close yourself in  
 and to sleep inside it, forever. (Amichai 1996: 57)

Describing the experience of an immigrant, Amichai renders the shift of language from its habitual use as a closed, sanctified code to its rupture into the everyday, where the same medium of communication is used to talk of God, war and traffic (Bloch 1996: xiii). The register and the purpose of the language are abruptly widened. The language, and with it the experience of the immigrant, are characterized by the sense of shock and displacement, where unnaturally torn from the religious use, the dazzled language “wobbles from mouth to mouth” – a sense akin to the apprehension and lack of control over language that Amos Oz described in his parents and a sharp contrast to Klausner’s belief in the “naturalness” of the switch to Hebrew. The idealized Zionist homeland has become the “homeland-trap,” where the square letters of Hebrew are “closed,” inscrutable, promising isolation and alienation. In other poems, e.g. “Jews in the Land of Israel” and “And the Migration of My Parents,” Amichai elaborates on the sense of wandering and ongoing uprootedness, where the arrival in Israel seems to be confirmed and questioned anew at the same time. For instance, in “And the Migration of My Parents,” Amichai writes:

And the migration of my parents  
 Has not subsided in me. My blood goes on sloshing  
 Between my ribs, long after the vessel has come to rest.  
 [..]  
 And the migration of my parents  
 Has not subsided in me. From bitter nations I have learned  
 Bitter tongues for my silence  
 Among these houses, always like ships.  
 And my veins and my sinews, a thicket  
 Of ropes I cannot unravel. And then  
 My death and an end to the migration of my parents. (In Gold 2008: 340)

Depicted in terms of his own naval passage to Israel, Amichai’s rendition of migration is a process rather than an act. Presented with a degree of estrangement – the migration is that of his parents rather than his own – it nevertheless has a profound effect on the speaker, who finds himself perpetually caught in a violent act of passage. The sea voyage is internalized in the images of blood sloshing inside and in the simile between the tangled veins and sinews and ropes (of a ship); the speaker identifies with the vessel. At the same time, it is externalized in the image of houses that are forever threatening to go adrift, offering no lasting stability; the notion of dwelling and home becomes a transit station rather than a permanent condition. Moreover, in Hebrew, the word for

house – *bait* – that Amichai uses in the plural also means *stanza*, offering a double reading – it is not only the physical buildings that are incapable of becoming solid anchors, but also stanzas of a poem, thus undermining the Zionist faith in literature as an instrument of nation building. And yet, unlike Goldberg, who spells out her attachment to foreign places – the rainy summer nights, the hometown church – and produces a sentiment of longing, Amichai denies not only the arrival, but also the starting point, from where he only carries the “Bitter tongue for my silence.” In contrast to the sound of the immigrant’s tongue slashing through Palestine in Goldberg’s poem, Amichai’s poem offers only the Hebrew text and an admittance of the silence of other languages looming behind.

The issue of Amichai’s silenced tongues has been recently explored by Nili Scharf Gold in her book *Yehuda Amichai: The Making of Israel’s National Poet* (2008). As the title suggests, Gold focuses on the construction of identity that enabled Ludwig Pfeuffer, a boy from Würzburg, to reinvent himself as Yehuda Amichai, a celebrated Israeli author. And while scholars such as Leon Yudkin, Michael Gluzman and Hannan Hever address the sites of exclusion and suppression that characterized the formation of the Hebrew canon, Gold points out to similar phenomena on the individual level. Among others, Gold juxtaposes Amichai’s self-representation as flesh-and-blood Hebrew speaking Israeli with her own findings in Amichai’s archives, which shows the importance of German, Amichai’s native tongue, for his creative process. Observing the absence of personal childhood memories or references to his native tongue in Amichai’s work, Gold points out that Amichai’s foreign roots were typically glossed over by reviewers and journalists; both the poet and his critics emphasized his Israeliness and treated the year of his aliyah as his second birth (Gold 2008: 8). Such an attitude was consistent with the contemporary celebration of the rebirth of Jews in Israel and the negation of the diaspora past, where the immigrants were expected to be reborn in their new country and forge a new, more powerful identity in Hebrew and to abandon the “weak”, “passive” and “unproductive” languages of the diaspora (Hever 2002: 5, Gluzman 2003: 6, Gold 2008: 103). The change of name in itself is significant: as the poor James Gatz modifies his “mitteleuropäisch”-sounding name to become Jay Gatsby, so the German sound of *Ludwig Pfeuffer* is abandoned in favor of *Yehuda Amichai*, where *Amichai* literally means *my nation is alive*.

Gold recounts Amichai’s explicit denial of writing in German in a private conversation in 1996, long after the “Hebrew only” policy ceased to be the only alternative in Israel: “I asked if he ever wrote poetry in his first language. He conceded that he could still hear the music of his childhood rabbi’s German sermons, but insisted he had known Hebrew “from age zero” and firmly rejected any suggestion that he ever wrote German verse” (Gold 2008: 16). However, her

later research in the Beinecke Library at Yale, where Amichai's archive – newspaper clippings, final proofs of poems, handwritten notes – landed after his death, suggests otherwise. Gold states that she found “short poems in German; drafts of published Hebrew poems in which the key image or a stanza is jotted down in big, wild German letters; verse in German script dotted with Hebrew terms like Kineret Lake or Mount Gilboa; German and Hebrew mixed in the same sentence to form jarring metaphors” (ibid. 17). Gold concludes that her findings document Amichai's creative process: conceiving poems in his native tongue, he would ultimately produce them in his adopted language in a practice of camouflage. Thus, not only did some of Amichai's poems document the uprootedness and alienation of migration and the silence of the native tongue, but his bi-lingual creative process in itself suggests that the aspired merging with Hebrew was not nearly as complete as presented to the outside.

Despite the Zionist aspiration of Hebrew multilingualism as both the symbol and the instrument of rebirth, Oz, Goldberg and Amichai demonstrate the inherent struggle of tongues in migration. However, the higher initial degree of Hebrew proficiency and the strong ideological drive to adapt to the nascent majority culture influenced the differences of the outcome of linguistic struggle among earlier Hebrew authors and later Anglophone Israeli authors. While Goldberg and Amichai, both with high proficiency of Hebrew early on in life, achieved iconic status in their language of choice and utilized other languages as off-stage characters or even as a closeted writing tool, Anglophone Israeli authors were linguistically less suited and ideologically less pushed towards writing in Hebrew, opting for English as both the intimate native tongue and the language of largest global importance. In effect, English retained the status of the medium of expression, to a degree absorbing the influence of the surrounding language, landscape and current affairs.



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## 6. Language and the Self

### 6.1. Me, Myself, Ani and Ikh

The connection of one's self to language is a crucial one. Less obvious in a monolingual environment, where the medium of communication can be easily taken for granted, it poignantly and almost inevitably surfaces in case of language contact. Though the contemporary understanding of culture challenges the earlier vision of discrete cultural entities and, among others, foregrounds the influence of other languages as major factor in the development of living languages – e.g. borrowing words from Old Norse, French, Latin and Greek throughout the history of English – it is in the situation of migration, where one becomes severed from the usual flow of linguistic information, that the connection between language and the self manifests itself to the strongest degree. Not only does migration require the adaption to the customs and the social mechanisms of the target country, but it also presupposes the knowledge and usage of a technically and emotionally different code of expression. In between the two (or more) language spaces, there is plenty of room for ambivalence and non-arrival – from insufficient proficiency that hampers the precision and complexity of messages, to the untranslatability and unique referentiality of certain concepts and modes of expression and the lack of emotional association with the language that results in the perception of the self in the new language as different, or even fake or unreal.

Though contemporary philosophy can hardly imagine the self being generated apart from language, the notion of self in connection to language has been especially prevalent in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting, among other things, that contemporary literature has been strongly influenced by the authors' familiarity with and an interest in contemporary ideas on the connection of language and identity. For instance, following Eva Hoffman's own comparison to an earlier immigrant writer, Mary Antin, whose determination and upbeat tone contrasts with Hoffman's own analytical melancholy, Mary Besemeres proposes that the foregrounding of the problematic aspects of

moving between languages is in fact a relatively recent phenomenon (cf. Besemeres 2002:12; 276–277). Marked with uncertainty and self-doubt, where even a visit to a psychoanalyst is ironically presented as an asset, Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989) has become an iconic text of migrant writing.

At the same time, even the cultural concept of the self has strong ties to the respective language. The English concept of the self, dictated by a specific perception of the inner world of a person, is not a universally applicable concept and the conceptualization of a human person can in fact be quite different in other languages and cultures (Besemeres 2002: 23). Grammatically, the importance of the reflexive pronoun “self” is underscored by its versatility, easily mutating into a noun (“the self”) or into a prefix, as in “self-righteousness” and “self-assertion.” As John Haiman suggests in *Grammatical Sings of the Divided Language* (1995: 224), “[a]ll languages have means (simple intransitive verbs; middle voice; clitic pronouns) to indicate that some action is performed on oneself: relatively few of them have separate reflexive pronouns, and even the Indo-European languages came by them only recently.” Such a view would suggest that the preoccupation with the self and a self-reflective view of the universe is in fact anchored and reflected in the language even on the most technical level, pre-establishing the groves of its possible usage.

An even more intimate relationship between the language and the formation and perception of identity surfaces in literary production. Assuming that besides pecuniary goals, the majority of authors perceive writing as an act of self-expression, a degree not only of familiarity but also of identification with the language seems to be necessary to make its usage as a medium of literary creation possible in the first place. Extending Bakhtin's model of heteroglossia, a dialogism inherent in each single language, onto a multilingual environment, one is confronted with the question of how the broad, two-dimensional map of heteroglossia projects on the multi-dimensional space of a multilingual environment, where stylistic and ideological choices are influenced by factors such as proficiency, emotional connection and limited translatability. The need expressed by Bakhtin of appropriating the word in a language to make it truly one's own – the creation of a distinct voice – has experienced a quantum leap of possibilities.

In November 2012, the Anglophone Israeli poet Karen Alkalay-Gut made the following statement in the framework of the conference *Language & Voice* (Tel Aviv):

What happens to your mind when you live in one language or culture and feel in another? My parents lived in many different languages in the forty years before I knew them. And when I was introduced to the family they spoke English on the street,



Yiddish at home, Hebrew in the synagogue, Ukrainian when we went to the doctor, Polish when the cleaner we finally got came, German when they were writing the lawyers to try to regain some of their property and Esperanto when they didn't want the children to understand. Me, I never had a linguistic facility like that. It was easy for them, a way to get by without losing their souls. If the new refugees they were housing spoke only French, they spoke French to make them feel at home. If the nurse in the hospital I was in for tonsillitis spoke Lithuanian, they could win her over and maybe earn some extra attention by speaking Lithuanian. If because my tongue is tied I needed to exercise it with tongue twisters and Russian was as good a language as any. Language was a tool to get by.

But for me words had such significance even one language was difficult. Not Yiddish, of course, which was the source of the comic and ironic outlook on the strange world outside. So that when I rejoiced at having finally learned – just a bit – to climb a rope, the success was put in place by my mother's comment, "Goyishe Naches,"<sup>19</sup> not only because Jews should not be concerned with physical culture, but also because the language itself reminded me that this was a foreign success.

Of course we took biblical Hebrew seriously, which was explained to me in Yiddish word for word and about which I had many questions, answered with great delicacy. "Vos is a zoineh?" "Mazon, farshteishe?" "Yeh, s'iz essen." "Gut, az a zoineh farkeift essen."<sup>20</sup>

But all this only raised larger questions for me. It was the concept of language, the depth into which one could fall by examining a single word or phrase. Why is there no English (or Hebrew) substitute for "Af tsu lochis"<sup>21</sup> or "Kaput?" What is there about the Hebrew culture that makes me introduce English phrases as a sign of intellectuality? What makes Arabic so integrated and yet so spare in Hebrew? What is there about having various languages and/or cultural perspective on the same language that makes the examination of language almost imperative? (Alkalay-Gut 2012a)

Exemplifying one of the key dilemmas of Anglophone Israeli writing, Alkalay-Gut poignantly addresses the relation of self to language. Beyond the polarities of English and Hebrew – the immediate language dichotomy for an Anglophone Israeli writer, Alkalay-Gut addresses adjacent and intermingling languages spaces, the contact with which, whether continuous or sporadic, has left its trace in cultural perspectives, if not directly in linguistic choices. In her address, Alkalay-Gut challenges the assumption that linguistic and cultural mobility is a recent phenomenon and humorously points out the distinct spheres where her polyglot parents, immigrants from Lithuania, would slide into various languages during their life in Rochester, NY – Yiddish in the context of the family, English

19 Yiddish: *dubious pleasure*, literally – the pleasure of the non-Jews.

20 The story relies on the phonetic similarity between the words "zoine" (whore) and "mazon" (food), which is used to avoid the explanation of a sexually suggestive term to a child. The passage can be translated in the following way: "What is a 'zoine'?" "Do you understand the word 'mazon'?" "Yes, it means 'food.'" "Good, so a 'zoine' is somebody who sells food."

21 Yiddish: *spitefully*.

as a default language in the public sphere, Hebrew as the language of religious learning in the synagogue, Esperanto as an impenetrable island of privacy within the earshot of their children, and Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Polish and Russian whenever the need arose. But Alkalay-Gut also acknowledges that such a light-hearted rendition of slipping in and out of languages is to a certain extent but a superficial perspective. To a large degree, the polyglot skills of the parents' generation were dictated by necessity – to employ German in order to regain property lost through prosecution by the hands of Germans; Lithuanian or Polish – to facilitate medical services. All in all, the parents possessed at least eight languages in which they could communicate, and even though Alkalay-Gut admits that she inherited neither the same variety of languages nor the confidence and ease of switching between them, she nevertheless suggests the richness of the influences that have left traces in the shaping of her identity.

At the same time, Alkalay-Gut points out that the languages were embedded in the respective worldview. In the world of the parents, the dominant one is that associated with Yiddish: the mother's exclamation "Goyishe Naches" (i. e. "the pleasure of the non-Jews") suggests her ironic rejection of the physical culture, promoted by the surrounding mainstream American Anglophone Christian society. Perhaps a requirement for the physical education class at school, the physical achievement seems to be classified as an unwelcome, but necessary compromise; it is "put in place," i. e. shown to the daughter in the light of Yiddish interpretation. At the same time, biblical Hebrew is treated with reverence and transplanted into the child's consciousness with care and tact, circumnavigating the sexually suggestive implications of the word "zoine" – "whore". The irony of the culture-dependant usage and interpretation of the biblical Hebrew texts is highlighted by the fact that the instructor uses a distinctly Yiddish-ized reading of the biblical word – "zona" would be currently regarded as the biblically correct pronunciation of the word, while "zoine" gives away stigmatized eastern European origins.

But Alkalay-Gut not only acknowledges her strongly networked linguistic roots, but also points to the new complex branching in her own generation. If the linguistic abilities of the parents are represented as enormously wide, but essentially discrete – each language would be used for a specific purpose, e. g. Russian for tongue twisters and German for legal affairs concerning lost property – her own use of languages is strongly overlapping. The latter part of her address is devoted to questions of the degree of translatability of expression between languages even in the head of one individual, of the desire to appeal to another language to produce a sense of awe in the interlocutors, of the extent of how one language can penetrate another. Not merely garments that one would don at ease and then exchange for the next one when the need arises, Alkalay-Gut as well as other Anglophone Israeli authors represent their own ties to language

as intimate; the degree of their linguistic flexibility is limited. The process of choice and recombination has in itself become a subject. In the words of Wolfgang Iser,

[f]or most of us, multiple cultural connections are decisive in terms of our cultural formation. We are cultural hybrids. Today's writers, for example, emphasize that they're shaped not by a single homeland, but by different reference countries, by Russian, German, South and North American or Japanese literature. Their cultural formation is transcultural (think, for example, of Naipaul or Rushdie) – that of subsequent generations will be even more so. (Iser 1999: 199)

However, the growing malleability of borders between cultures does not signify a collapse of distinctions – the feared monoculture that, according to the critics of globalization, would inevitably follow the transcultural permeability of cultural entities. Not only has the attempt to balance the multiple languages of the self become a major theme of Anglophone Israeli writing, but it has also produced a number of distinct responses to the issue of migration from one language into another and to its impact on the construction of identities. Among these approaches there are pledges to monolingualism, exemplified by Shirley Kaufman, the overlap and branching of language spheres, e.g. in case of Karen Alkalay-Gut, an almost indefinite expansion of formative languages in the works of Richard Sherwin, or the seemingly unconscious gliding between English and Hebrew that the poet Lami describes in her collection of literary essays *Ars Poetica*. Furthermore, in a number of interviews, the authors discuss their personal experience with English and Hebrew and their reasons for choosing (or retaining) English as their writing medium. Without laying a claim of generating a complete picture of the ever-changing field, the following sections will address various facets of Anglophone Israeli authors coming to terms with their English *I*, Hebrew *ani* and Yiddish *ikh*. Among other things, it will discuss the subjective position of the self in relation to the mother tongue, strategies of coming to terms with multilingualism on the personal and on the creative level and the individual motivation for the choice of English as a writing medium. It will begin with the critical notion of monolingualism and its relevance for authors such as Shirley Kaufman and Riva Rubin and will proceed with a discussion of Bakhtian heteroglossia, its extension into transcultural and translingual environment and its specific manifestations in the works of Rachel Tzvia Back, Karen Alkalay-Gut, Richard Sherwin and Lami.

## 6.2. Shirley Kaufman and Riva Rubin: The Monolingualism of the Self

During an interview conducted in 2010, the poet Riva Rubin narrated an anecdote about a young author whom she met soon upon her arrival to Israel (also discussed earlier in relation to translation and cultural integration). The young man stayed with Rubin for some time, but soon left, explaining that it was utterly impossible for him to stay in Israel and continue writing in English. With a surge of emotions, he declared: “I live in English and I am not giving up my English!” (Rumjanceva 2010d). Though the complex and malleable nature of identity in the framework of language contact is a major part of Anglophone Israeli writing, the view of one language, the mother tongue, as an exclusive carrier of the self has had a strong presence in Anglophone Israeli writing in the works of authors especially of the oldest generation, such as Shirley Kaufman and Riva Rubin. This attitude carries a mixed blessing – the one tongue, modeled as a discrete entity, is both a powerful tool of expression and an inherent limitation which prevents any transgression beyond its bounds without a mediator.

Such a view of language has been formulated by Jacques Derrida in his work *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*:

My monolingualism dwells and I call it my dwelling; it feels like one to me, and I remain in it and inhabit it. It inhabits me. The monolingualism in which I draw my breath is, for me, my element. Not a natural element, not the transparency of the ether, but an absolute habitat. It is impassable, indisputable: I cannot challenge it except by testifying to its omnipresence in me. It would have always preceded me. It is me. [...] It constitutes me, it dictates even the ipseity of all things to me, and also prescribes a monastic solitude for me; as if, even before learning to speak, I had been bound by some vows. This inexhaustible solipsism is myself before me. Lastingly.

[...] I wonder if one can love, enjoy oneself, pray, die from pain, or just die, plain and simple, in another language or without telling anyone about it. (Derrida 1998: 1–2)

Using monolingualism both metaphorically and literally, on his own example as a Maghreb Jew raised in French, Jacques Derrida appeals to the unity and uniqueness of language in the construction of consciousness. In Derrida’s view, the individual’s ties to language seem essential – it is the “dwelling,” the “habitat,” the space that a consciousness inhabits; a place, from where perspective is taken. Furthermore, Derrida links the expression and even the perception of emotions to the state of being in the locus of language – it is presented as the medium in which feelings and sensations can be defined. Indirectly proving his point, Derrida uses emphatic expressions in his text and invokes the experiences of his youth, emphasizing the emotional connection. Yet this connection is not inexorable insofar as language exists in the political dimension – in *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida refers to the process of “othering” through

language, an imposition of language as a colonial practice, which generates the illusion of the “possession” of the language among its subjects. The capacity for forming conscious inferences about oneself and the world is paralleled by power play through the medium of language.

Though in terms different from the colonial practice, the sense of being unalterably bound to language and of being othered through it is strongly present in the works of Shirley Kaufman and Riva Rubin. Speaking not only directly of the experience as Anglophone authors outside the pale of the surrounding Hebrew culture, but also of the even earlier generation of Yiddish speakers, both authors conjure up a strong sense of exclusive identification through language.

A child who listens behind the door  
to trouble, trouble [...]

Ashamed of the language  
like hand-me-down sweaters  
the rich cousin gives  
when you want something new.  
The immigrant dustbin.

Thus writes the Seattle-born poet Shirley Kaufmann in her poem “The Road out of Poland” (1996:108). The immigrant language – perhaps Polish or Yiddish – is the carrier of the memories of trouble. It is different; it seems shabby, shameful, an unpleasant secret that is kept away from the child, but whose presence is nevertheless in the air. To a child, it comes as an unwanted legacy, a marker of otherness that is perceived inferior to the surrounding culture. The semantic field of poverty – the “hand-me-down sweaters” and the “immigrant dustbin” – highlights the sensation of inferiority arising from using a language with a low social status.

“You shake out the past as you shake out the cloth after dinner,/ but your tongue is under the window/ catching the crumbs,” Kaufman continues, suggesting that the past, which is perceived as shameful, may be dispensed with at a certain intellectual level. However, the determination to shake out the crumbs, i. e. to eliminate the traces of the past, is paralleled by a clinging to it, a secret catching of crumbs under the window, the somewhat shameful desire to retain what is recognized as a formative part of the self. On the personal level, Kaufman never learned enough Yiddish to communicate with her maternal grandparents, who served as authentic sources for her poem (Schulman 1991: 16). However, though direct communication was impaired, Kaufman speaks of inheriting other kinds of attachment, such as that to the land of Israel, in more subtle, indirect ways.

But the catching of the crumbs in the poem does not merely refer to the

generation that came out of Poland: throughout her work, Kaufman parallels the linguistic struggle of the previous generation with her own experience in Israel, whose language she never fully mastered (Schulman 1991, Grubin 2004, Kearful 2000). Kaufman's approach is that of faithfulness to language. In her work, an authentic mode of expression is voiced through adherence to a mother tongue. If that is not possible, silence takes its place. In the poem "The Way", she writes:

So this is the way  
 you leave the mother  
 tongue that stays  
 in the mouth that feeds it  
 but keeps quiet.

You can't learn two  
 landscapes in one  
 life he said  
 or a language  
 to put them in. (Kaufman 1979: 48)

The line break between "mother" and "tongue" suggests that the expression "mother tongue" is more than just a formality – it has a strong association of belonging, of emotional nourishment; to abandon it is an act of emotional betrayal. It remains in silence, but is not replaced by a new emotional loyalty to another language. Ultimately, Kaufman's undivided emotional allegiance to the native tongue culminates in the categorical line "Everything dies in its own language," referring to a dinosaur footprint near Beit Zayit, suggesting that whole worlds of experience cease to be comprehensible after the death of the speaker. Kaufman's languages are diachronically variable – each generation seems to be inevitably trapped in their own language; the possibility of meaningful transition from one to the other is construed as impossible, as an irrevocable breach of expression of the self. In Kaufman's works, the older generation of immigrants to the U.S. is marked by a sense of shame of their alien tongues – Polish or Yiddish. Similarly, the contemporary speaker in the Israeli environment faces muteness, confronted with the dissociation of her mother tongue from the surrounding environment. The three language spheres remain essentially separated.

A similar conclusion is reached by the South African-born poet Riva Rubin, who equally emphasizes the untranslatable and the alienated in the cross-cultural moves. In her 2005 keynote lecture at the Conference on Minority Literature in Cape Town, she formulated her position in the following way:

Cross-cultural writing is more than a practical problem of writing in one language and living in another. It is as if you have come home to discover that the furniture has been moved around, your family has become deaf and you have become mute. Your family

has forgotten its intimate knowledge and memories of you. You try to communicate with sign language, but as you look into the uncomprehending faces, you realize that reality itself has changed. It has become untranslatable.

Let me just say that in an ideal world, poets would never leave the soil of their homeland, the price is too high. There is a silence at the heart of a translated poem that is like lovers making love in different languages.

In spite of my formative physical and emotional bonds with South Africa, the country was politically and philosophically alien to me in the 'sixties, when I left. But when I came to Israel I was faced with alienation of a different kind, one in which language became a lost sense.

In the words of the South African writer, Lionel Abrahams: 'The literary endeavor places one where individuality and society intersect. The writer without a sense of self has no story to tell. Without a sense of community, he has no one to tell his story to, no means of telling his story, no language. For language is inescapably social, inescapably shared. The nature and business of language is connection.' (Rubin 2005)

Like Kaufman, Rubin speaks of silence which fills the void produced by the sense of displacement. Denying that the issue of transferring the understanding of the self and the vital connection to the social environment is merely a technical matter, she emphasizes the emotional incongruence produced by the subconscious attempts to locate old landmarks on a changing map – an image of the rearranged room, where the tactile memory cannot reconcile with the rearranging of familiar objects. The "sign language," which one is forced to adopt, becomes a mere mimicking of real communication, a translated hint at the original power of expression. Language becomes "a lost sense" in such a consciousness, not only relocated, but irrevocably inaccessible. At the same time, Rubin links the subjective, inner loss of the self to its social dimension – the alienation from others. Where Derrida's othering is external and motivated by political tendencies, Rubin's othering is internal, a changing parameter of individuality that fails to establish familiar ties with the changed surrounding community. The weakened self fails to shape its own voice; the altered, damaged sense of one's own identity appears to have no claim to authenticity.

Rubin further likens the authors who have abandoned their native tongue and attempt to write in Hebrew to "swimmers who have jumped into the stream from one bank and are floundering in the shallows because they can't quite make it to the other side." (Ibid.) Again using the metaphor of alienation and incompleteness, Rubin underscores her perception of the impossibility of a transfer of the self between languages, where the endeavors end in "another kind of silence," getting stuck in the limbo between the source self and the target expression, losing the first and not gaining the second one in the process.

Furthermore, Rubin's impaired sense of self in Hebrew cannot be explained merely through the lack of knowledge of Hebrew. Unlike Kaufman, who never learned to speak Hebrew fluently and had to rely heavily on dictionaries and

concordances when translating Hebrew poets (Schulman 1991: 16), Rubin's Hebrew competence is close to that of a native speaker, as she described in a personal interview (Rumjanceva 2010c):

I speak Hebrew fluently and as I say, I translate Hebrew to English and I have a very solid classical background. I know the Tanakh. But I wrote one or two poems in Hebrew and I nearly died of shame. I just threw them away. But that's ok – English does that thing for me. [...]

[M]y Hebrew persona is really a skeleton without the flesh. And English is the flesh and blood person. And the skeleton, after all, is very important. But when I meet somebody in Hebrew, and our communication is in Hebrew, they can very seldom perceive me, my real personality as I am in English. In Hebrew I'm translating all the time.

Here, English is clearly perceived as a more emotionally true, authentic space of self expression. To emphasize the need for an organic connection with the language, Riva Rubin visualizes her connection to Hebrew in terms of human anatomy. The self in Hebrew is likened to a skeleton without flesh: functional and precise, this self lacks creative confidence and the capacity of emotional expression. The living, feeling flesh and blood persona is in English; it is the English medium of communication where what is perceived as the real self can surface.

Paralleling her critical stance, Rubin's poetry is permeated by themes of isolation and alienation. Often framed as abstract, fragmented narratives (e.g. "Meribah" (1969), "Trap" (1979), "Surfer" (1996), "Jews the Bones in Your Eyes" (1996)), these poems communicate through images of separation, uncompleted journeys and non-arrival. For instance, the poem "Trap" (1979: 3) utilizes the usually positive image of free directed motion – the flight of birds – and subverts it in an image of the disillusionment of arrival:

Why do they keep coming back to  
 these empty tiers  
 of makeshift cells that have rotted and rusted –  
 Why do they fly in, these white-winged,  
 cooing, settling, puffed to a semblance  
 of homecoming,  
 on the twig and feather layers  
 glued with droppings and the slime  
 of their own hatching  
 and the cycles before them and after?  
 [...]  
 They will keep coming back, fooled  
 by the skeleton of the coop until  
 we brave to tear it down at least  
 for the boy with his fingers in their wings.



The image is that of birds with words such as “white winged,” “cooing,” “droppings,” “hatching,” and “coop,” yet the actual grammatical referent is never named in the poem. Likewise, the identity of the repeating, doomed “they” remains unspecified; the boy is the only concrete actor of the poem. The lacuna of the noun at the end of the line “these white winged” results in a marked ungrammaticality of the sentence and seems to point to the loss of definability – the permutations of self that make it impossible to include it into a concrete noun. In this state of loss of a stable reference, the only defining traits seem to be those of the journey – the flight, the attempted coming back, akin to Amichai’s never-ending turbulence of voyage in “And the Migration of My Parents Has Not Subsided in Me.” But even this staple of existence turns out to be deceptive: the imagined coop proves to be only a skeleton, full of “twig and feather layers/ glued with droppings.” As will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven, Rubin’s poetry marks a strong presence of the sense of displacement and non-arrival in Anglophone Israeli writing.

But if one’s own sense of spatial and linguistic dislocation is evoked largely indirectly, the language boundaries of the earlier generation are laid down indirectly in the poem “The Yiddish Club” (1996: 43):

The bright lost faces lean  
towards each other, though  
they sneer, hiss and take  
massive offence, and revenges  
bloom and wither in the eyes,  
on the tip of the tongue  
where the language bleeds  
and throbs with nowhere to go.  
They lean towards each other  
in rooms like fossils impressed  
on the underside of the heavy  
stone left unturned, rooms in  
reverse, in the negative, like  
moulds to cast real rooms dense  
with tea and jam and lump sugar  
and a bit of lemon and coughing  
and a sudden song, rooms that  
were hollowed not by fashion,  
not by style and passing time,  
but by the act of sweeping them  
clear out of history. The few  
faces that floated like motes  
after the cleaning shine in the  
last shaft of sun, saying quickly  
their words before the museum

clamps them out of sight and the  
grave finally closes, killing  
and stilling the light.

Portrayed like a collection of fossils, the members of the Yiddish club are slowly withering away. The survivors, the ones who avoided “the sweeping [...] clear out of history” – both in the sense of the holocaust and in the sense of their own slow decay without leaving linguistic heirs – seem to be huddled together in a confined space. Their “rooms in/ reverse, in the negative” emerge out of collective memory, but do not materialize into the desired warmth of “real rooms dense/ with tea and jam and lump sugar/ and a bit of lemon and coughing/ and a sudden song.” Instead of finding a positive sense of the community, the Yiddish speakers appear to be merely exchanging sneers and hisses used to express revenge and offence. Their existence is ephemeral and doomed; already during their lifetime, they have become relicts disconnected from reality – “like motes [...], saying quickly/ their words before the museum/ clamps them out of sight and the/ grave finally closes.” More than that, it is not an epic passage, but rather an unspectacular transfer from a petty existence into non-existence – their faces are merely the last specs of dirt, ready to be wiped off altogether, which may be an allusion to the Nazi image of the Holocaust (which these Yiddish speakers survived) as an act of purification. The indistinct faces are about to be objectified in a “museum” of cultural memory as the tokens of a by-gone age, and erasing the understanding of the human and emotional side of their existence. The impression is finalized by the image of the grave claspings shut, killing the last rays of light in the imagined room of the Yiddish club.

The name of the language, mentioned in the title only, is in itself the marker of a group. Unlike Kaufman, who uses the reference to the immigrant language in the context of immigrants’ humiliation and shame, but also as a longed-for constituent of identity, Rubin’s Yiddish is a constituent of confinement, coding the suffering-filled past, but inaccessible to the outside world. On the tip of the tongue “their language bleeds/ and throbs with nowhere to go” – a reversal of the linguistic tip-of-the-tongue, where the speaker suddenly fails to retrieve a word from memory. The still living but wounded language has no outlet, no escape beyond the segregated group of its rapidly aging speakers. In the concluding lines, the last words are said quickly and are muted by the clamping of the museum.

In fact, the position of Yiddish in Israel is a complex one. Once the best known diasporic vernacular and the historical source language of about 50 % of Israeli Jews (Ben-Rafael 2001: 189), its active usage has now largely become limited to the circles of the elderly as well as to the segregated sphere of the ultra-Orthodox, who use it as a vernacular in opposition to Hebrew, which is considered the holy

tongue of prayer and learning. Marked as undesirable by the *Speak Hebrew* campaign in the first decades after the establishment of the state of Israel, Yiddish still belongs to the less esteemed languages compared to English, French and even Arabic, despite the fact that its original speakers – immigrants from Europe – laid the foundations of the Israeli middle and upper class (ibid. 190). Both in the cases of the original elderly communities and of the usage among the ultra-Orthodox, Yiddish is a marker of a bygone way of life. Almost as a real-life parallel to Rubin's poem, Ben-Rafael carried out a research project in a Tel Aviv home for the elderly. Among 400 residents, the average age of which was 83, about 70 % originated from Poland, Russia, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, or Germany, most of whom immigrated to Israel prior to 1939, i. e. those who had escaped the Holocaust by timely departure. Though Hebrew was found to be the dominant language of organized activities, it was Yiddish that the residents mainly used among themselves. Despite their long-term residency in Israel and a highly positive evaluation of the importance of Hebrew, many had only partial knowledge of Hebrew and a few spoke Yiddish exclusively, having never acquired a full social membership in the surrounding culture. The respondents were also reading periodicals in Yiddish and regularly listening to Yiddish broadcasting, remaining in the rather segregated world of Yiddish-coded information.

However, despite the fact that the vast majority of Israelis, especially those born in Israel, rarely have a competence in Yiddish beyond some familiar words and expressions, one of the best known attempts to make Yiddish appealing to the masses was the establishment of the Yiddish Theater in Tel Aviv. Following several unsuccessful attempts to instill Yiddish entertainment in the popular consciousness, the Tel Aviv Yiddish Theater was established in 1987 and is still operating today, showcasing plays in Yiddish with Hebrew subtitles. Rejecting the notion of the museum, as in Rubin's poem, the new theater aspired to rejuvenate Yiddish artistic production. Though the theater has been recognized as a part of Tel Aviv cultural life, it is unclear for how long it will be able to retain this status, as the majority of the audience are elderly native speakers of Yiddish and there is no Yiddish acting school in Israel (ibid. 190–193). Nevertheless, the younger part of the audience signifies that at least marginally Yiddish has carved a niche in the popular consciousness as a language of contemporary entertainment, enabling the breach of the language-coded generation gap.

Both Rubin and Kaufman approach the issue of constructing identity by means of language largely through the focus on faithfulness. By putting emphasis on the essential monolingualism – the exclusive power of the native tongue to shape and express what is perceived as the authentic self – they simultaneously focus on the difficulties that such rigid identification poses in the context of migration. Though especially Riva Rubin champions the organic tie to

the native tongue as the only emotionally valid linguistic manifestation of the self, the effects of this organic connection in transcultural environment are portrayed as overbearingly negative. For Kaufman, it is the shame of the immigrant whose otherness is peaked by the language of low social prestige, which nevertheless cannot be abandoned; a language of hushed conversations about troubles that are embedded in the cultural memory. The linguistic handicap of the parents' generation is projected on the self in admittance of the personal impossibility of transplantation into Hebrew. Rubin stresses the language-imposed limitation of the integration of the creative facility into Hebrew even more vehemently; despite her own excellent Hebrew skills, a considerable portion of her poetic work and critical statements deal with the impossibility of arrival into a new language and the sense of confinement and isolation experienced both by the Yiddish speakers of the previous generation and by herself as an English poet in Israel.

### 6.3. Translingual Heteroglossia

#### 6.3.1. The Critics' Voice

If Shirley Kaufman and Riva Rubin critique their own vision of monolingualism, other Anglophone Israeli authors such as Rachel Tzvia Back, Karen Alkalay-Gut, Richard Sherwin and Lami exemplify a different understanding of the linguistic space. Operating on less categorical maxims, these authors – in individual ways and to a varying degree – extend Bakhtin's vision of heteroglossia into the transcultural environment. Though remaining true to their mother tongue as a basis for their poetic expression of identity, they simultaneously acknowledge and employ their position at an intersection of languages and cultures in positive and productive ways. Rather than feeling a sense of confinement to a rigid system of expression and communication, these authors draw on different spheres, creating the sense of identity that is at least in certain ways transformable and multi-faceted. This section is first going to introduce Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia in a monolingual environment and relate it to contemporary findings about the multivocality of the self for multilinguals and will proceed with a discussion of a translingual view of the self in the poetic works of Rachel Tzvia Back, Lami, Richard Sherwin and Karen Alkalay-Gut.

Unlike Derrida's view of language as a closed system, Bakhtin's vision emphasizes the fluid divisions that exist within a language and the dialogic nature of expression, where any given utterance is inevitably in connection to other utterances. Rejecting the monadic view of language, Bakhtin focuses on the inherent heteroglossia and internal dialogism that every living language ("nation

language”) possesses. Bakhtin notes the infinite stratification of the supposed monolithism of natural languages into sociolects (“heteroglot languages”). These sub-units – “languages of social groups, ‘professional’ and ‘generic’ languages, languages of generations and so forth” (Bakhtin 1994: 75) – are associated with specific ideological aspects, approaches, and worldviews; their position is being negotiated both on the community level and on the level of the individual. In literature, the novel is an important instance of the surfacing of heteroglossia. In Bakhtin’s view, especially the novels of Dostoyevsky reflect the plurality of language with respect to the worldview carried by each sociolect; the fluid meaning emerges through the simultaneous consideration of these different linguo-ideological positions.

But, even more importantly, Bakhtin points out the dialogic nature of utterances and discourse. Utterances and discourse do not emerge in isolation, but stand in relationship to other future and past utterances:

Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the ‘light’ of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed towards its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet another group. [...]

A living utterance [...] cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it—it does not approach the object from the sidelines. (Ibid. 75–76)

In every utterance or discourse, Bakhtin detects inherent intertextuality. As a learned skill, the usage of a word relies on its previous usages – acoustic, semantic, pragmatic, etc.; both the referent and the shape of the reference exist within the consciousness of the shared language group. Equally, the more complex levels of speech, utterances and discourse necessarily bear a reference to preceding traces – as a response or agreement to, negation, appraisal, parody or judgment of a precedent, not to mention direct quotations and references. Not only do utterances arise in a dialogue, but they provide a basis for further dialogue, potentially adding another layer to the network of references. There is thus no *tabula rasa* in discourse – having entered the entity of speech at a certain point one inevitably participates in the textual network, positioning the contribution of the self to that of the others. Bakhtin further elucidates this joint participation in language:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as a heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker

populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of the dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from here that one must take the word, and make it one's own. And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.

[...] The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to a historical consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse. This process is made more complex by the fact that a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual consciousness (just as the struggle with one another in surrounding social reality). (Ibid. 77–79)

Language itself becomes an experience of the borderline, where the production of discourse is characterized by the zigzag movement along the border, by the mechanisms of appropriation of elements of discourse from the surrounding resource pool and of a simultaneous enlargement of the pool with new production, which is then open for further re-appropriation. There is no individual “mastery” or language, no absolute ownership of words – each element appears in relationship to its prior, concurrent or future usage, as well as in relationship to its neighbors and their usage across the axes of time, ideology, intention, etc. The view of language is that of an open high-density network where usage, meaning and intention are in constant interaction. Besides, the impossibility of a “total” mastery of language is highlighted by the fact that even in the framework of a specific natural language, one is limited to specific sociolects, others sounding “foreign” in one's mouth. Bakhtin addresses the issue of authenticity, of finding or creating a voice that is, to a degree, “one's own” – it emerges though the individual pattern of appropriation, inevitably in dialogue both with the sources and with the recipients. Though this complex interrelation on various levels – from semantics and pragmatics of individual words to the dialectics of discourses – seems to happen largely on the levels of cognition and mental analysis, the results, carried by the individual voice, surface on the level of production.

But while Bakhtin speaks of a general framework of language, discussing the

layered nature and the dialectic mode of functioning within 'national' languages, the situation becomes even more complicated in translingual and transcultural contexts. Already on the level of a single language, the individual voice is shaped by the surrounding ones. But in contexts where more than one language is involved, these voices also speak different languages, each with its own world-view and emotional implications, ranging from a received memory of languages that were spoken by one's ancestors, to languages the direct usage of which has actively shaped the individual notion of the self.

Moreover, just as Bahktin uses the terms *heteroglossia* and *polyphony*, emphasizing the multitude and the fluidity of layers and avoiding dual Manichean oppositions, so does the current focus on transculturalism address language spaces that are often larger than the rather narrow designations "bilingual" and "bicultural." On the one hand, as contemporary patterns of mobility easily allow for first-hand contact with more than two cultures, so does the contemporary notion of culture emphasize the internal variation within cultures as well as their non-discrete nature, i. e. the historical grain of dialogue with foreignness characteristic of all cultures.

However, though the theoretical awareness of transculturalism is gaining ground, its manifestation in reality can be complex and problematic for the individual as well as for group consciousness, resulting in feelings ranging from self-congratulation on transcending the barriers to the negative dimension of alienation and uprootedness, as was explored earlier in the cases of Rubin and Kaufman. For example, in his essay "Dialogism and Schizophrenia," the French-Bulgarian critic Tzvetan Todorov addresses what he perceives as the celebratory acceptance of transcultural tendencies by the contemporary intelligentsia:

Who, in our day and age, would not prefer to side with dialogue, cultural pluralism, and tolerance for other voices? On this score, governmental declarations and the demands of the artistic avant-garde are in agreement.

[T]here is a kind of euphoric proliferation in the groups that are self-proclaimed avant-gardes, in France at least; and there has been a plethora of works, these last years, that speak of the beauty of *mestizaje*, eulogize cosmopolitanism or voice the polylogue's passion. There is a propensity to define "écriture" as a crossing of borders, a migration, an exile. And I read, in the works of one of the epigones of this trend, an invitation to writers to "strike out in the unbounded polyphony in which all languages are foreign, and distinct languages do not exist." (Todorov 1994: 204)

Speaking with detectable irony of "self-proclaimed avant-gardes" and "epigones" of border-crossing, Todorov seems to suggest that the all-accepting, celebratory embracing of the Other and the different has in fact become a superficial trend, a political choice rather than a heart-felt acceptance and the willingness to examine and critique. Using his own experience as a bi-lingual and bi-cultural French-Bulgarian intellectual, he provides an example of alien-

ation and confusion that can easily arise on the personal level despite the awareness of the advancing mixing processes in society. Fluent in French and in Bulgarian, and, in his own assessment, privy to the cultural luggage of both, he nevertheless describes an experience of “malaise and psychological oppression” (ibid. 209) upon an academic visit to Bulgaria, his country of origin after 18 years of life in France. Initially quite secure both in his hyphenated identity and in the content of the talk for the conference, in the course of the narrative passage Todorov is forced to discover the emotional undercurrents of belonging and identification through language. On the one hand, he realizes that the conference talk that he had originally written in French and then translated into Bulgarian would not communicate the intended meaning to the audience of Bulgarian intellectuals due to his usage of the revised notions of history, nationality and identity embedded in his French mode of writing. Though words and syntax would be transferred from one language to another without significant loss, the overall meaning of the presentation would nevertheless be very different for a country with a markedly different socio-historic position in the balance of world power than France. On the other hand, the sense of a stable and satisfying duality of identification is hampered by what Todorov perceives as the equal significance of the French and the Bulgarian voices. Despite the initial need to modify the talk for the purpose of the audience, he is amazed and scared by the ease of transition back into his native Bulgarian cultural environment, which appears to threaten the 18 past years of French experience:

I was recognized, accepted. We'd take up conversations broken off eighteen years earlier. Everything conspired to make me believe those years simply did not exist, that they were a dream, a fantasy, from which I was now being wakened. I felt as if any minute I'd be offered a job, I'd settle in, perhaps get married... On the contrary, what I would like is for people not to recognize me, for them to be amazed at the changes that have taken place. I felt positively relieved talking on the phone to the French cultural adviser: I could speak French: I was not dreaming [...]

The ability I had to reimmerge myself immediately, totally, in the Bulgaria I had left behind, cast as unreal before my own eyes my experience of the recent past and my French identity. It was impossible to create a whole being out of two halves: it was one or the other. (Ibid. 212)

Though intellectually conceivable, the ease of transition between the two largely dissociated worlds of experience raises the question of authenticity and reality. The seamless transition to the native language, relatives, old friends and the familiar mode of life seems to undermine the reality, and implicitly the value, of the past 18 years of life in Paris, which for Todorov were marked with considerable recognition and achievement. Instead of marveling at the change and the effects of formative experiences abroad, the boundless acceptance appears to result in a revival of the Bulgarian identity at the expense of the French one,



which then needs to be resuscitated through the usage of French in a Bulgarian environment – a proof of the reality and validity of the French identity.

In effect, Todorov presents a reversal of the common trope of multilingual migrant experience. Instead of feeling challenged and intimidated by the language of the target country, and socially and emotionally hampered by the inability to express oneself fully in the new language, as was earlier discussed in relation to Riva Rubin, it is the absence of the hierarchy of proficiency, referentiality and situation-bound usage that is perceived as threatening and inconceivable. It is the mastery of the two languages and the resulting competition of both in accessing reality that seem to account for the confusion experienced. The equality of the two languages in the consciousness of one speaker, the fullness and completeness of the world offered by both is at the same time an asset and a challenge to the mind's ability to define reality.

This, however, is only one of the possible reactions to the multilingualism of the self. In 2006, Aneta Pavlenko published an empirical study of the personal perception of bilingualism among adults and of its influence on the personal conception of identity. Pursuing the divide of consciousness suggested by Tzvetan Todorov, Claude Esteban, Eva Hoffmann and many others, Pavlenko focuses on the arising feeling of becoming a different person when speaking different languages, and on whether and how individuals come to terms with this sensation. Perpetuated as a web-questionnaire, the study yielded more than a thousand responses over the period of three years. While the majority of the respondents professed an academic education, the questions also elicited responses from participants from various strata of society. Besides offering data about the major world languages, the study also produced responses from speakers of languages as varied as, for instance, Welsh, Basque, Bengali, Navajo and Ngunu, thus providing a composite picture of multilinguals from a range of backgrounds. Concealed among fact-oriented questions about the individual history of multilingualism, the question about different selves when speaking different languages was the one to provoke many emotional responses, where the participants often felt the need to express emotions and/or expound on their experience with the subject. Altogether, 65 % offered an affirmative response, admitting that they do feel like they become different people when switching languages. The affirmation was often strengthened by the use of capitals, e.g. *YES*; *OOOOOOOOH yes!*, exclamation marks, enthusiastic superlatives, e.g. *absolutely*, *definitely*, or even explicit approval of the question itself. 26 % produced a negative response, 6 % an ambiguous response and 3 % did not answer the question. Moreover, among the affirmative statements, as many as 70 % chose to expound on their perception of the subject, which suggests a significant personal relevance of the issue. By contrast, only 14 % chose to elaborate on the negative responses.

But beyond noting the considerable consensus on the issue of “different languages – different personalities,” Pavlenko develops a qualitative thematic analysis of the sources that point to the different perception of the self in different languages: linguistic and cultural differences, distinct learning contexts, different levels of language emotionality and different levels of language proficiency. Though often overlapping, these factors nevertheless help to produce a clearer picture of the complex individual reactions to the issue of Nietzsche’s “many mortal souls” in relation to language switching. Awareness of linguistic and cultural differences signals the understanding of the connection between language, worldview and cultural practices of its community. Statements of this kind would usually demonstrate the awareness of an individual accommodation to the cultural norms of the respective society.<sup>22</sup> Other empirical studies have also corroborated the findings that answers, self-reports and narratives may vary in bicultural bilinguals, e. g. in cases of self-rating among Chinese-English bilinguals in Canada (Ross, Xun and Wilson 2002) or in different responses to the same story read out in different languages to English-Greek bilinguals (Panayaiotou 2004 in Pavlenko 2006:16). At the same time, unlike the statement of Todorov that professes a perfect equality of languages, many responses in Pavlenko’s study suggest a sense of detachment from the real self and from the habitual expression of emotion when using a non-native tongue – what some of the respondents explicitly defined as a mask or a persona.<sup>23</sup> Largely, but not exclusively, this factor is linked to proficiency, as one may naturally experience impediments and othering when using a language where one is conscious of being a foreigner, whereas a high mastery of L2 may actually help avoid the stigmata and traumata acquired in L1.

On the critical and on the empirical level, Todorov and Pavlenko explore the sensations of multilinguals, who find their consciousness divided between and composed by emotions, memories and behavioral patterns embedded in different languages – a semblance of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia that has invaded a

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22 The responses that demonstrated the awareness of the connection between language and culturally determined behavioral patterns included statements such as the following: (1) Definitely! Speaking another language causes me to assume certain cultural perspectives that also entail cultural behaviours. Language and culture are a package and true command of a second language requires extensive cultural knowledge and practice. (Luise, 25, English-German-French-American Sign Language-Lakota) (Pavlenko 2006: 11)

23 The notion of the different persona or wearing a mask need not be negative, as the following response suggests: (12) Not entirely but a little bit. I feel less myself when speaking any language other than German but not in a bad sense. I feel more like I am acting a persona which can be good or bad. At the same time I tend to be more polite and self-conscious when speaking L2 to L5 I don’t tend to consider as much what I say when speaking L1. But very often I feel like a better person when speaking L2 or L3. (Stefanie, 31, German-English-Spanish)

multi-dimensional space. Apart from being positioned in a dialogic relation to more voices and more languages on the outside, the individual consciousness needs to devise a strategy to come to terms with this polivocality within itself – Bakhtin’s never ending dialogue carried hither and thither in Bhabha’s imaginary staircase; a theoretically paradoxical, but practically increasingly ubiquitous integrity of difference.

### 6.3.2. Rachel Tzvia Back: Echoes in the Third Space

An illusion of belonging (we come from a long  
line of women who hated themselves) and no other  
  
longing (unhinged) but for order in the voices  
that storm (the last train left weeks ago) –  
  
we’ve been always longer than those markers (don’t  
forget the hour of candlelighting) show, languages  
  
forgotten (in secret closets, in musty cellars)  
though a memory of the source, somewhere between  
  
heart and throat, remains. (Back 2001: 24)

In the above excerpt from the poem “Litany (I)” from the collection *Azimuth*, the poet Rachel Tzvia Back speaks of an illusion of belonging that is tied to language. The wishful illusion is characterized by the desire for “order” – harmony and clarity – of the many storming voices, partly abandoned and unintelligible (“in secret closets, in musty cellars”), belonging to the past, but still echoing in the present on the internal level – a token of cultural memory disrupting inner integrity, yet never quite achieving the outward expression through the throat. The unsettling of consciousness by the lack of order in voices and by the memory of the unnamed source is matched by the disruptions in the flow of the sentence, which form a parallel, seemingly erratic narrative of details that seem to float up from the subconsciousness – the admission of self-hatred, unhinged-ness, the image of the train irrevocably missed, the tradition of lighting Shabbat candles, the secret closets and musty cellars of memory. Interrupted and fragmented, as if more than one voice were supplementing each other, it references both the passage of unnamed languages and the awareness of their resonance that ultimately dispels the illusion of linear, unchallenged belonging.

In interviews (e.g. Ito 2006, Rumjanceva 2012), Back has outlined her own complex relationship to languages. Unlike the estimated majority of Anglophone Israeli writers, who had no recent roots in Israel or in the vernacular use of Hebrew, Rachel Tzvia Back belongs to a family that counts seven generations in

Israel. She was, however, born and raised in Buffalo, NY, and returned to Israel several times with her family in what she described as “unsuccessful aliya” attempts – i. e. a repeating yo-yo of a year or two in Israel followed by a return to America – spending a considerable number of her teenage years in the Israeli school system and afterwards in the army service, before settling there permanently. Despite the geographical and linguistic there and back, Back acquired perfect Hebrew to the point where she forgot how to read and write in English and had to re-learn it upon her return to the US. She also admits to having felt very “Israeli” as a child and in later years describes a sense of resentment when her American colleagues and audiences failed to perceive her as such, classifying her as an American who merely resides in the Middle East. At the same time, she juxtaposes her ease of everyday usage of Hebrew with her inability to use it as a creative medium:

I still couldn't imagine writing poetry in Hebrew. Though in my everyday life, Hebrew is a comfortable place to be. But that doesn't translate into expressing myself on the page in Hebrew. [...]

It's not my emotional language. Even though I want to think that some of the rhythms of Hebrew are an emotional space for me. And I do see that there is a third entity that is not Hebrew and is not English, but something else that is between the two. And I'm not speaking about something theoretical; I'm speaking about a language. I feel that the English language that I write in has Hebrew rhythms to it. (Rumjanceva 2012)

To a degree similar to the statement by Riva Rubin discussed earlier, Back acknowledges her routine use of Hebrew and describes it as “a comfortable place to be,” which contrasts, for instance, with the alienation and othering through language in the works of Shirley Kaufman. However, though natural in everyday use, poetic self-expression through the medium of Hebrew seems unattainable. Perhaps unwittingly, Back employs the words “that doesn't translate”, emphasizing the disruption of the emotional connection when substituting words of one language for the closest equivalent in the other language – the perception of emotional incongruence between languages described in the studies by Pavlenko and Besemeres. Both in the interview and in her poetry, Back recognizes the existence of “the third space”, which is cohabited by sounds, images and associations in both languages; the third space where the synergy of language becomes tangible and where rhythms and sounds of languages transcend rigid boundaries and find their expression on the page, such as the perceived permeation of her English verse by Hebrew rhythms. The third space is a point of rupture between the two languages. In the poem “two languages”<sup>24</sup> (2007: 84), Back describes the dialogue between the two polarities of language and the gap between them, which becomes the space both of division and connection:

24 Original usage of lower case in the title.

left to right right  
to left

they might  
meet

in the middle  
but rarely do

letters  
nothing alike yours

tender like you  
austere like you

angular ancient  
having traveled distances

and deserts  
(when you speak

there is sand gravel  
in your throat)

my letters rounded  
curved cursed

with youth  
surrounding

emptiness  
in the gap

between the two  
how often

do we fall

The poem places English and Hebrew on different sides of the gap. A play on the opposite direction of writing in English (left to right) and in Hebrew (right to left) allows for a playful conjecture that perhaps the languages may meet mid-distance in way of a simple compromise. This, however, seems to be a rare outcome. The languages and the letters seem to have little in common – the “ancient” letters of Hebrew are angular, tender, but austere, carrying the sand of “deserts” and “distances,” alluding both to the travels of Hebrew as the language that wandered together with the Jews through ages and regions and to the harsh climate of contemporary Israel. The gravel in the throat of the addressed “you” is also an allusion to the abundance of guttural sounds in Hebrew. In contrast to the harsh, angular historicity of Hebrew, the English letters – the carriers of the language – are softer – “rounded” and “curved,” yet “cursed with youth.” Instead

of a direct meeting, the coming to terms of the two languages is subliminal, realized through falling into the “gap”. The gap between languages is both a disconnection and a connection between two entities, a space of difference but also an involuntary meeting place. It is construed by the unconsciousness of fall rather than by directed will; unlike the rare meeting of two languages on equal ground, it is frequent and omnipresent; a space of new understanding emerging almost by accident.

Moreover, devoid of upper case letters or punctuation marks to separate sentences and clauses, the poem employs words that can be potentially attributed to different phrases, adding to the sense of a subliminal dialogism. For instance, the second instance of “right” in the first line “left to right right” first appears to be a colloquial affirmation of the direction “left to right” and only when proceeding to the next line can it be attributed to the description of reverse direction – “right/ to left”. Similarly, towards the end of the poem, the marker of location “in the gap” connects both to the preceding line “emptiness” and to the following “between the two,” making the closure of the sentence ambiguous and challenging the borders of the sentence and the very rules of the language that it uses as its creative medium.

Similar to Riva Rubin, Back uses direct references to languages sparingly, yet her work nevertheless communicates a sense of both discord and synergy of voices. In her latest work, *A Messenger Comes* she explains in the reference to a poem dedicated to her late sister – a public historian in the USA who specialized in oral histories – that “the multiplicity of voices is intrinsic and essential for any historical retelling. This seems no less true for literary retellings.” (Back 2012: 106) And signaling the echoes of different languages in her works, Back breaks up the syntactic and semantic linearity of her narrative, challenging a settled sense of identity.

### 6.3.3. Lami: A Leak in the Word Pouch

Another Anglophone Israeli author who relies heavily on the idea of the third space in her work is the poet Shulamit Halperin, who has been publishing since the 1980s under the pen name Lami. However, unlike Back and other Anglophone Israeli authors who frame English and Hebrew as opposite spheres which can be reconciled in the creative consciousness only with difficulty, Lami uses the concept of the third space as the underlying state which can find expression equally in English and in Hebrew. In “The door between two languages is not tightly sealed” (1981: III: 6)<sup>25</sup>, Lami writes:

25 The volume from which this poem is quoted, Lami’s *Ars Poetica* (written around 1981, but

What is this sudden word from another dictionary?  
 It is a surprising thing to come upon in a white cotton  
 patch – like one blue ball, one variant plant. Part of  
 incomplete switching on the current word panel while the  
 inner language has not yet gone to sleep.

If a stray word comes onto the paper, the seal has  
 been broken. There is a tiny leak in the word pouch.

But here, something else is sensed. A common source –  
 one and the same person is chanting, trying to deny  
 any splitting of self, waiting to be controlling the expansion,  
 waiting to rake in rich words from two fields.

Establishing a sharp contrast with Riva Rubin's alienation and the sense of a lost language, Lami presents a vision of a positive and productive translingual consciousness. Instead of emphasizing individual dependence on a "native" language system, Lami relies on the notion of the "inner language," a "common source," from which expression seems to flow into either channel. Akin to Paul Ricoeur's notion of inner translation (Kearney 2006: XIX), it is the position of where ideas are formed before they can be expressed in any language, whether native or not. Yet the unifying consciousness – "one and the same person chanting" – is nevertheless represented as an instance of struggle and control, where "any splitting of the self" is to be kept at bay, channeling the self into an inclusive and productive mode where the raking in of "rich words from two fields" becomes possible.

Lami's flow from the source, especially in its undirected mode, is what enables the mutual penetration of English and Hebrew. A "word from another dictionary" seems to have invaded the surrounding text in a different language. Like "one blue ball, one variant plant" it stands out on the surrounding patch of words. Remarkably, the languages at stake are not identified: while one may assume that it is a Hebrew word that has permeated an English text in a way that immigrants often incorporate words and expressions of the new language into the underlying conversation in the mother tongue, the unassigned roles in Lami's poem suggest that the movement goes in both directions. While the text of the poem is in English, no language is assigned a role of superior personal expression or authenticity, unlike in the works of Kaufman and Rubin. At the same time, in contrast to Kaufman's emotive descriptions of displaced immigrants and Rubin's desolate birds, Lami appears to find technical images for the

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with later inclusions), never appeared in print. The reference refers to the type-written manuscript which consists of three parts, each with individual numeration of pages. Hence the number of the part indicated in the Roman capitals, followed by the number of the page in the respective part.

permeability of languages: it is expressed as an “incomplete switching on the current word panel,” a broken seal, a “leak in the word pouch.” Instead of positioning the self as an emotional focalizer, Lami’s perspective is that of a more impartial observer, looking with fascination at the process of emerging of transcultural creative output. Distancing herself from expressions of attachment to language, Lami devises a way to undermine the apparent split of personality by following the chasm back to its unified core of the inner language.

As a parallel to the accepted notion of the mother tongue, Lami introduces the term “foster language.” Though the word “foster” indicates a consciousness that is not perfectly native and that an organic connection is only developed at a later point, it nevertheless communicates the idea of comfort and home. In “Foster Language” (1981: I: 10), Lami communicates several underlying assumptions about the mother tongue:

Which is your best mother tongue?

1<sup>st</sup> assumption: We all have had many mothers.

2<sup>nd</sup> assumption: By the time we talk we have our own tongue.<sup>26</sup>

[...]

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that we must all sit down at the edge of the street in order to write altogether.

Already the question conveys the paradox – how can there be the “best” mother tongue, when we are accustomed to understanding the mother tongue as a monolingual experience? Lami emphasizes the importance of multiple formative experiences, the “many mothers,” where the supremacy of the first one becomes a contestable matter. At the same time, in a sense similar to Bakhtin, one’s own tongue, i. e. one’s own voice is being brought out. Tied to the individual worldview and perception, it is to a degree language-independent. And for any language, the creative agency operates from the “edge of the street,” i. e. from the position of an observer removed from the thick of events.

In interviews, Lami has expressed her deep immersion in Hebrew that resulted not only in her personal coming to terms with a simultaneous existence in two languages, but also in an inclusive creative approach. Born into a family of a Bible scholar, who had worked with the Bible in 22 languages, Lami has been exposed to the multiplicity of expression from her childhood onward. When she arrived to Israel in 1958, at the age of 28, she settled in Kibbutz Urim in the Negev desert, close to the Gaza Strip and made an effort to surround herself with Hebrew both in everyday life and in the cultural world, making a point of

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26 Perhaps unintentionally, Lami’s syllogism about the multiple influences of the formation of one’s self echoes a quote by Mary Antin: “We are not born all at once, but by bits. The body first, and the spirit later...Our mothers are racked with the pains of our physical birth; we ourselves suffer the longer pains of our spiritual growth” (1912: 87).



becoming familiar with Hebrew Literature in the original. According to Lami's statement, in Urim, a kibbutz with a strong Zionist motivation and a considerable influx of immigrants, even the Americans – a group notoriously attached to their language and often considered an epitome of an unintegrated immigrant in Israel – would make an effort to speak Hebrew. In fact, her first creative endeavors in Israel were in Hebrew, in the framework of a local writing group. However, in her own words, "at one point it became very clear that you have to write in your native language if you can." She joined the Jerusalem *Voices* group and travelled there by bus once a month. Though Lami laments that she was not born in Israel, regretting that she does not have the perfect ease and immediate access of a native speaker to its language, she nevertheless treats her writing languages on egalitarian terms, acknowledging their intrusive coexistence. Stating that she does not feel like a different person when writing in different languages, she remarked in a personal interview (Rumjanceva 2010b): "It is as if at a certain point it became not a rational thing to take my thing and a poem would occur, either in Hebrew or in English. Every once in a while I would start something and then I would say: heavens, I want this word and I realize I am in the wrong language!"

In effect, during her writing career, she has published volumes of poetry both in Hebrew and in English, though quantitatively English poetry seems to dominate somewhat. Demonstrating her linguistic duality, her 1986 collection *Penumbra* appeared as a hybrid, where poems in English and in Hebrew were printed under the respective covers. On the one side, the English poems appeared under the left-to-right cover stating *Penumbra* in Latin letters. On the reverse of the book, i. e. where a book directed from right to left would have a front cover, a cover stating פֶּנּוּמְבְּרָה (the Hebrew transliteration of *Penumbra*) announces a sequence of Hebrew poems. Not translations of each other, but autonomous poems in English and Hebrew coexist in this volume, each in their own right, signifying an expression of harmony within duality. The sentiment of duality is expressed poetically in the following excerpt from the poem "They're romping around in two languages:"

Now the language of the country – a sometime lingua franca – is not just for buying bread. It gets through to people who would otherwise be naïve to the newcomers (26 years a newcomer), and closes common links, It says what people are right now, what they hear and see. But, it has no childhood.

Balancing the two languages is like being light-handed with several small balls always waiting in the air to be caught. This friendly tension keeps one awake and aware, and ultimately gives more

than it snatches away. It adds new interest, a small adventure, a divergent path. (1981: III: 5)<sup>27</sup>

Unlike Rubin's and, to a certain extent, Back's perception of Hebrew as an entity dissociated from the perception of the emotional, the authentic self, Lami's notion of "the language of the country" is more than merely instrumental. What used to serve as a lingua franca for necessary transactions has exceeded the range of the instrumental function, alluded to by the reference to the action of buying bread. As a bridge between the newcomers and the locals, it identifies and fills the lacunae of consciousness, "closes common links" and acts as a sensitive, expressive power true to the original, saying "what people are right now." At the same time, it is a language where after 26 years the non-native speaker without a childhood in the language still identifies herself as a newcomer, both with respect to the Israeli way of life and to the vast historical expanse of the Hebrew language. And yet, the position of a bilingual is described as a positive and productive place: Lami uses the image of a juggling game, where the balls of languages are equally airborne, adding the element of playfulness and joy and producing the sense of heightened wakefulness and awareness. Instead of a sense of struggle and loss of balance, the linguistic consciousness of the self is presented to be complementary and cumulative, adding "new interest, a small adventure" and branching out in a divergent path. Whether complementary or mutually intrusive, Lami's sense of bilingualism is that of a flow from the common creative source of the inner language, where, almost subconsciously, the thoughts and images find the best possible outlet with little consideration for linguistic demarcations.

#### 6.3.4. Richard Sherwin: The Continuum Widens

A distinctive feature of many Anglophone Israeli writers, shared e. g. by Rachel Tzvia Back and Lami, is that the linguistic dilemma in their works focuses on the immediate balance or imbalance of English and Hebrew in their environment and creative process. However, especially authors whose heritage in their countries of birth is laced with traces of further cultures and languages – Yiddish, Polish, Russian – widen the scope of the discussion of languages and recognize the process of linguistic adaptation and redefinition of the self that is broader than the immediate referent, and, in fact, spans over generations of migration.

<sup>27</sup> The poem "They're romping about in two languages" is from the typewritten manuscript "*Ars Poetica*," which is dated 1981. However, the mentioning of "26 years a newcomer" suggests that the poem was written later, perhaps in 1984, which would mean 26 years after Lami's immigration in 1958.

Being to a certain extent also present in the works of Shirley Kaufman, this recognition of the continuum of languages, where each subsequent generation is confronted with a new challenge, is a salient element in the works of Richard Sherwin.

In the collection *A Strange Courage* (1978), Sherwin explores the struggle of his immigrant parents and grandparents in a way similar to that of Shirley Kaufman. Fleeing anti-Semitic attacks in Tsarist Russia, they settled in the United States. Far from being celebratory, Sherwin frames this transition in linguistic terms:

Everything he abandoned  
freely, except the tongue, and that too frozen  
slowly into dying idioms  
neither children nor grandchildren would commit  
to spring again.

Soon the wind blows  
through the hollow vowels, icing the lilt  
until it snaps in time...the prepositions  
lose solidity, and echo...the order  
of words the ligaments that verb the muscles. (Sherwin 1978: 35–36)

In the context of the grandfather's migration, the mother tongue is presented in contrast to "everything." While the freely-abandoned "everything," presented in the first line of the passage, probably refers to the precarious socioeconomic position of Jews in Tsarist Russia, which could be improved in the new country, where a better material situation would combine with a new community life, it is the language that is left in perpetual exile, homeless in the Anglophone environment of the US. Using the imagery of the cold Russian winter, Sherwin proceeds to describe the gradual deadening of the once functional language on several levels – pragmatic, phonetic and syntactic. The tongue is said to be frozen, the idioms – the poignant and often untranslatable sparks of indirect imagery – cease to be intelligible, as their meaning falls through the frame of reference of children and grandchildren.<sup>28</sup> As the practice of speech production discontinues, the sound of the language is altered, "hollowed out" by the wind, until the peculiar intonation of language loses its original quality. Taken out of its living dialogic mode and kept in isolation, the language degenerates, until even its grammar becomes forced. The disintegration of grammar – the internal logic of the language and an ordering force in the mind – is echoed in the forced sentence "the order/ of words the ligaments that verb the muscles," which

28 Ironically, many Russian idiomatic expressions have passed into present-day Hebrew, so that after moving to Israel and learning Hebrew, Sherwin's speaker is in fact in a better position to understand his grandfather's intended meaning than in America.

confuses through the lack of punctuation in “words the ligaments” and the verbal use of “verb.”

Further on in the poem, the linguistic isolation of the earlier generation is projected upon the self, in recognition of a state of isolation:

I speak a tongue  
 my children do not live in any the more  
 than I in my father’s tongue. For better and worse  
 I know the hunger Russia chose for him,  
 the only language he passed on to me (ibid.)

Although the specific languages change – the cleft between Russian and English for the father and the grandfather or between English and Hebrew for Sherwin himself – the situation is that of being othered through language. Markedly, the othering is carried out in the most intimate environment, within the boundaries of the family, where the crumbling Russian of the father is a world closed to Sherwin’s speaker, just as his own English-coded consciousness can be only partially communicated to his own children. What remains throughout the generations – “the only language he passed on to me” – is the diffuse sense of hunger and longing. The father’s hunger for the taste of Russian bread in the US, described earlier in the poem, can be stilled neither by abundance nor by imitations, yet the speaker of the poem insists that “[t]his is not nostalgia.” Claiming that “A man’s composed/to the marrow of his dying by more than genes,” Sherwin insists on the limited power of personal effort, which can overcome the longing for the native tongue only to a certain degree, leaving a sense of incompleteness and an inner void.

In another untitled poem from *A Strange Courage* (1978: 31–32), Sherwin describes an ongoing geographical and linguistic journey, which is potentially even broader than the transition between the parents’ generation and his own. Expansive in both temporal directions, the poem invokes a progression of stations:

I’m not a holy man  
 writing the holy tongue for God  
 looking over my shoulder.

I’m not a Cohen.

They say my name was Chernovsky once  
 from Yekaterinaslav, and now it’s Sherwin  
 from, let’s say, Boston, for all it matters  
 since it’s clearly from, not of,  
 and no cities are battling for the honor  
 that I have left them.  
 What name or city it was before that

and will be after, God only knows,  
 and I try not to bother him too much.  
 [...]
   
 With such a job  
 the world is always foreign. And now my where's  
 Herzliyah, and my tongue's still English,  
 a nice and pagan tool for sanctifying:  
 and not Hebrew.  
 [..]
   
 I insist on singing a strange song  
 in the Lord's land, that he not forget  
 the wanderings endured for him.  
 I cut what cloth I could afford  
 to out of styles I learned. Silence suits me  
 no worse than any broken heart I've ever worn.  
 My bags're unpacked, for better or worse,  
 and if they're musty and passé,  
 they're Jewish, and I've yet to see better.

The progression seems to be linear – Yekaterinaslav, Boston and Herzliya, indicating the passage not uncommon among Anglophone Israeli writers – eastern Europe, the United States and finally Israel. However, the stations are not represented in a monumental way; almost in an attempt to erase the traces of his presence, the speaker points out that no city is battling for the honor of calling itself his hometown; his presence remains anonymous to the changing landscape. The journey is open ended on both sides – “What name or city it was before that/ and will be after, God only knows.” Though the long-used, musty traveler's bags are unpacked in the end, it is not clear whether the final destination has indeed been reached; though emptied, the bags are still in the picture. Ironically, the geographical anchorage of the roots is equally malleable, as the locations mentioned in the poem are prone to transformation – for instance, what was once the city of Yekaterinaslav, a part of the Russian Empire, is now called Dnipropetrovsk, a metropolis in the Ukraine.

The fluctuations in geography are inevitably tied to language. Leaving behind Russian, the language of the forefathers in Yekaterinaslav, the speaker never seems to arrive into Hebrew, the language where the bags have been unpacked. The speaker asserts his right to continue singing a strange-tongued song in the Lord's land, utilizing English and not Hebrew and challenging the biblical question “How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?” Distancing himself from claims of holiness in writing, the speaker remains true to the “pagan” way of expression, a marker of the long journey that is perhaps still going on. Effectively, the speaker willfully remains in the state that Alkalay-Gut has termed “double diaspora” – a community that continues semi-diasporic

existence within the country of destination. Coincidentally, Sherwin's name does not arrive in Hebrew either. The eastern European surname *Chernovsky* originates from *cherny* – Russian for *black*. Upon arrival to the United States, it is anglicized to Sherwin – a name deriving from the Anglo-Saxon descriptive nickname, consisting of the elements *shere* – *cut through* – and *wind*, that is *quick as the wind*; a name as if cut out for a traveler. Unlike *Cohen*, a quintessentially Hebrew name with a claim to holiness, in Israel, *Sherwin* remains a meaningless combination of syllables, a distinctly foreign element, until it may be perchance changed into a new designation. Like Bhabha's identity in the staircase, both Sherwin's name and his linguistic attachment retain an unsettled state, forever in a dialogue with foreignness.

Biographically, the relation of Sherwin to Hebrew is similar to that of Riva Rubin. As an Orthodox Jew living in an observant community, Sherwin adapted Hebrew in everyday life, though according to his own statement, he never learned it well enough. Accustomed to its usage in academic, administrative and religious environments, Sherwin stated that his Hebrew was not good enough for literature and that he would opt for translations. Though being to some degree proficient in French and German, he summarized his language skills in one sentence: "English is the only one I swear by and I know what I think I know I'm saying" (Rumjanceva 2010c). Immersed in Hebrew in everyday life and especially during spiritual activities, for Sherwin, English remains the uncontested language of poetic creation.

### 6.3.5. Karen Alkalay-Gut: An Alter Ego

Among Anglophone Israeli authors, Karen Alkalay-Gut has perhaps given most attention to the issues of the impact of language on the understanding of the self. A recurring theme in her oeuvre, which by now consists of over 20 volumes (including audiobooks and translations into Hebrew and Italian), the issue of language is examined from different angles and in various contexts. Like Shirley Kaufman and Richard Sherwin, Alkalay-Gut explores the impact of language on identity across generations, but also gives credit to the linguistic variety and the composite nature of languages within the overlapping generations. Unlike the essentially impenetrable and confining language spheres of Rubin and Kaufman, Alkalay-Gut's understanding of the self is constructed as permeable and malleable by multilingual experience, resulting in an inclusive and transformable sense of identity.

Unlike Kaufman, Rubin and Sherwin, who treat the Jewish vernaculars of the previous generations – Polish, Yiddish or Russian – as a bygone world, the presence of which has been largely stored away as a half-accessible item of

collective memory, Alkalay-Gut, herself fluent in Yiddish, gives it a greater presence in her work. Being more than merely an immigrant's dowry, the multilingual imagination juxtaposes the meaning generated in Yiddish to what appears to be the English equivalent:

“*Nem mir arouf!*”  
 “Pick me up!” she screams,  
 lying on the floor by the chair.  
 You wrap your arms  
 around her frail body  
 and return her to the seated position.

“*Nem mir arouf!*”  
 She screams again,  
 sliding down as soon  
 as you turn your back.

“Wait, it isn't pick me up.”  
 I suddenly realize. It's

“Take me up.” (Alkalay-Gut 2012b: 44)

The communication between an elderly patient and a younger speaker takes place in a hospital. The one-sided conversation is conducted in Yiddish, which the speaker, no longer naturally thinking in Yiddish, translates in her mind. The misunderstanding arises in the imperative *nem*, which, depending on the context, can assume the nuance of either taking or lifting. Judging from the immediate context, the speaker interprets the plea “*Nem mir arouf*” as the elderly lady's wish to return to a seated position. Only after a repeated cry “*Nem mir arouf*” does the speaker understand that the plea was in fact not addressed to her – it was a command to God to end the suffering and loneliness of old age. The words of the language are still intelligible, but it is the nuances of expression that need to be reinterpreted. In a parallel passage of the same poem, the speaker takes the mother's response “*Mir ist gut*,” meaning “I'm doing fine”, as an affirmation of good health. Only upon a chance re-reading of Shalom Aleichem's *Motl, the Cantor's Son* does a remarkable line catch her attention: “‘*Mir ist gut*’, he sings, / I'm an orphan.” (Ibid.) “In Yiddish, everything becomes a parody, a comment on the pretensions of the modern world/ from the perspective of the eternal outsider./ Explaining it in English is also strange,/ a stuttering admission of sentimentality,” comments Alkalay-Gut in another poem (2000: 29). Though primarily associated with the older generation and accompanied both by direct translations and by interpretations in English, the speaker nevertheless manages to open a window not only into Yiddish words, but also into the corresponding view of the world. Though now accessible with some difficulty, the poems still showcase an authentic mode of expression in the European Jewish vernacular.

But if a dialogue with Yiddish is to a large extent a poetic interaction with the parent generation, the dialogue between English and Hebrew moves both backwards and forwards.

Where I live, speech is deeper  
than the archeological digs that remind us  
of the many layers under our feet.

I exist  
in this tongue  
discover my hidden face  
again and again  
in words remote  
as hazy desert oases.

[...]  
I limp in my children's language  
as my parents limped in mine,  
alone in my foreign eloquence. (Alkalay-Gut 2000: 66–67)

In contrast to Kaufman's treatment of the non-native tongue as an insurmountable challenge, Alkalay-Gut's poem suggests a feeling of immersion. The presence of Hebrew invokes various directions in time. On the one hand, it is "deeper/ than the archeological digs that remind us/ of the many layers under our feet." Like an archeological site where layers of time are uncovered one by one, Hebrew appears as a vertical cross-section of Jewish cultural heritage, from the first layers of testified literacy to the present day, a connecting element throughout the years. It is the site of discovery, where in a dialogic mode, the "hidden face," i. e. new facets of identity emerge through the relocation of the self into the layered medium of Hebrew. At the same time, it remains distant and exotic, characterized by "words remote/ as hazy desert oases" – a distinctly "desert" image that localizes Hebrew in its middle-eastern surroundings and underscores its nurturing effect and its desirability. The speaker never quite merges with Hebrew, retaining a degree of perceived isolation, "alone in [her] foreign eloquence." But while the speaker is submerged in Hebrew, only in the children's generation does Hebrew acquire the degree of complete mastery and authenticity. The speaker recognizes that as she herself surpassed her parents in the mastery of English, so it is now up to the children's generation to acquire Hebrew as an uninhibited, natural medium. While her own immersion in the simultaneously ancient and new tongue is considerable, it is nevertheless perceived as a struggle, a stutter akin to that of the parents' generation in English; only in the next generation can this struggle fully disappear, producing a mode of expression that is perceived as fully authentic.

While acknowledging the intrusive overlap of languages on the generational



axis, on the synchronic level Alkalay-Gut oscillates between the position of an observer apart granted by her existence and expression in English amidst the Hebrew culture, and between the strong realization of various linguistic influences that shape the location of the self. With characteristic humor, she comments on the marginal position of Anglophone poets in Israel in her long poem “Alter Ego”:

I'm never going to forge a privileged connection  
with this land I have loved all my life.  
I'll always live in a strange language  
talking to myself and maybe you  
while everyone here believes in Hebrew.

That's why I'm decided on a radical plan:

I'm going to make someone up  
who would be my mirror,  
only more marketable:  
a long dead native woman poet  
who passed away without heirs  
or any translators  
but me. (2012b: 56)

Starting out almost as a psalm, the opening lines of the poem invoke “the strange language” in what is supposed to be the familiar biblical land, an inversion of the diaspora trope of singing in a strange land. The connection of life-long love is apparently one-sided, as it never transforms into “a privileged connection” that the speaker aspires to. The fact of sharing with the implied Anglophone reader is emphasized, creating the image of being drawn into an intimate circle of understanding amid the surrounding Hebrew speakers. However, instead of continuing in the mode of lament, the narrative turns into an explanation of a planned PR trick, where the Anglophone speaker invents an alter ego – “a long dead native woman,” whose “genuinely” Hebrew voice would be deemed to carry more justification and authenticity in writing about Israel than that of a poet writing in a foreign language from the beginning. In its continuation, the poem delineates the detailed invention of the alter ego. The deceased “native poet” is to be called Ruth Ibn Shoshan. The choice of the name, as the poem explains, is not accidental. Ruth is the name of the biblical character, Moabite in her origin, who converted to Judaism and embraced the land of Israel, its people and customs. Despite hardship after the death of her husband, Ruth persisted in her new faith and entered the Jewish scriptures as a positive example of an outsider's conversion to Judaism and the importance of convictions and deeds rather than lineage. Ultimately, the union of the convert Ruth and of the Israelite Boaz produced the line that gave birth to King David, providing an additional

validation for newcomers in Israel – a hint at Alkalay-Gut’s own position. The family name Ibn Shoshan, which is to be given “after my father,” consists of the Arabic “Ibn,” meaning “son,” and “shoshan” – the derivative of “shoshana” – the Hebrew word designating “rose” or “lily;” a reference to Alkalay-Gut’s maiden name “Rosenstein.”

Fleshing out her character, the speaker decides on a career for the alter ego: she ought to be neither weak in the body and consumed by her own idealism, like “some/ romantic Russian agronomist/ too tubercular to work” – perhaps an allusion to the biography of the Hebrew poet Rachel Bluwstein (1890–1931) – nor a conceited professional bohemian, “demanding flowers/ every time her verse appears in the papers.” Instead, she is given a “real” career as a WWII nurse, who is also “busy with passing information from the British to the Hagana<sup>29</sup>” (2012b: 57), which implies not only solid personal qualities, but also heroic service to the nascent country. Thus, her constructed belonging is grounded not only by her presence in Israel two generations before Alkalay-Gut and her “nativeness” as opposed to the position of Alkalay-Gut as a recent arrival, but also through her part in actively aiding the creation of the very notion of Israeliness through her assistance to the Hagana.

Further, the alter ego falls in love with a British officer in her care, who becomes the unsuspecting subject of her poems. The dash of adventure in the desert further romanticizes Ruth, making her biography more “marketable” through an exotic romance. But her poems, “full of sea and sand and never ending/ phoenixes and bridges” and written in Hebrew, never reach the consciousness of their British addressee, who is confined to his native tongue, and Ruth resorts to quoting from Browning at his sickbed. In fact, the language barrier between the alter ego and her patient presents a reversal of the current situation of Anglophone Israeli writers, who complain about the deafness of the Hebrew majority culture. Nevertheless, the hospital affair is to provide a hint of eroticism – “not too erotic [...]/ but a little sexual fantasy [that] can pique/ even the most fanatic beast.”

Having never achieved fame in her lifetime, the fictional Ruth Ibn Shoshan is struck by a random bullet on the way to the hospital and her literary legacy remains hidden and unclaimed until the “discovery” by the narrator. Through the act of “translation,” an appeal to a source whose authenticity appears to be grounded in its historical relevance, Alkalay-Gut’s speaker seeks to legitimize her own position as a valid poetic perspective: “It would be a way to tell the untold story of this country/ the one I don’t have a right to tell from the inside”

29 The Hagana – from Hebrew *ההגנה*, “the defense,” was a Jewish paramilitary organization that operated during the time of the British Mandate (1920–1948). It later became the core of the Israeli Defense Forces.

(2012b: 61). Satirizing the public relations practices that are used to increase the popularity of an author through a dramatic personal story, Alkalay-Gut criticizes the lack of poetic authority that Anglophone authors are confronted with, in relation to what is perceived as an “authentic” Israeli culture.

At the same time, while lamenting the incomplete recognition of a poet on the basis of language, Alkalay-Gut also construes the space of an Anglophone poet in Israel as a positive one. Unlike Kaufman and Rubin, who focus on the exclusion and disillusionment of finding themselves othered through language, in the poem “Living” (1992b: 19) Alkalay-Gut half-jokingly points out the pleasant sojourn in a personal world that it seems to offer:

In Israel, English  
 was my private world –  
 America, my secret tongue:  
  
 laughing alone at flitting jokes in films  
 lost in the subtitles,  
  
 like a patient in asylum playroom.  
  
 How banal to be cured  
 to drop from Illyria to commercials  
  
 to waste a language every way  
 in sales, coupon, “Have a nice day.”  
  
 Take me back to the Holy Land  
 where a polite word is hard won, well deserved  
 and English for reading Shakespeare,  
 writing  
 of life.

Here, English seems to offer a kind of individual dreamland, where, taken out of the commonplace, it becomes the medium of aesthetic pleasure – reading Shakespeare – and of self-expression. The behavior is likened to that of to a mental patient whose emotions, caused by occurrences in the private world and unseen to others, seem perfectly normal to the self and absurd to others – in this case the vivid image of laughter out of place, where only the English speaker can catch the puns lost in translation. Continuing the metaphor of mental illness, the poem invokes a “cure” from idiosyncratic enjoyment – the profaning of the private sphere, defined through enveloping in the enjoyable usage of language, by extending it into the mundane and the commonplace. The sense of a secret life in another language is lost when the mastery of English fails to be exclusive in the American environment; what has been harbored as personal and precious is suddenly used as unimaginative marketing strategies in ads and coupons and in commonplace phrases, such as “Have a nice day.” As it was mentioned earlier,

such constant “wearing out” of language by native speakers that seems to decrease its attractiveness to the author has been in fact pointed out by some authors, e. g. by the novelists Matt Reese and Evan Fallenberg, as an advantage of choosing Israel as a locality of writing, where one feels protected from verbal rubbish (cf. Steinberg 2012). However, by the virtue of globalization and the influx of the English language to Israel on the one hand, and of American business practices on the other hand, the same usage of English seems to be attacking the speaker’s English “Illyria” on home ground. The Holy Land, to which the speaker asks to be taken back, “where a polite word is hard won, well deserved,” as opposed to the free flow of the western pleasantries, seems to equally recede into the past.

However, as Alkalay-Gut acknowledges both the satisfaction of existing in a “private tongue” and the difficulty of having it recognized as an authentic expression of the Israeli experience, she also explores and incorporates the numerous transcultural influences that shape her creative consciousness. In her address at *Language & Voice* (2012a) cited earlier, Alkalay-Gut traces the everyday linguistic “branching out” of her parents, who, communicating in a number of languages, seem to effectively disprove the assumption of monadic cultures prior to globalization. But together with accepting the multi-faceted cultural inheritance, Alkalay-Gut discovers the creative power of more recent inclusions. Relying on the similar imagery of televised language as in her poem “Living,” in “Mabrouk” (1992b: 47), Alkalay-Gut penetrates the linguistic barrier of television in Arabic:

Confined to the couch by a bad back,  
 I watch Israel TV with my son.  
 There is an Arabic program on  
 and we slowly learn that the man  
 at the final fitting for a suit  
 (“Mabrouk, Jamil!”) and the woman  
 showing her new dress to her best friend  
 (“Mabrouk, Azziza!”) are getting married.  
 We watch the men come in to shave the groom,  
 the woman warm the bride with dance and song,  
 the separate dinners with ululations.  
 More congratulations, then:  
 the two groups bring the couple to the square.  
 And when Azziza and Jamil look at each other—  
 Slowly, shyly – I begin to cry.  
 I always cry at *chasenes*.<sup>30</sup>

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30 Original use of *italics*.

Through the eyes of the Anglophone speaker the reader enters the slowly unfolding scenes of an Arab movie. In English, we follow the dressing of the bride and the groom, the shaving of the groom and the women's ceremonies, the dinners, the ululations and the final, emotionally charged meeting of the couple at the wedding. Despite laying out the structure of a wedding that is clearly perceived as differing from that customary to the speaker's culture, the poem is sparse in adjectives and regular in terms of grammar, largely foregoing the orientalist mode, and focusing instead on the experience of excitement and expectation built up by the preparations. Touched by the joy at the culmination of the wedding, the speaker begins to cry.

Following a seemingly linear structure, the poem nevertheless reveals a striking intermingling of cultural spheres. Settled in the domestic frame of a mother watching TV with her son – a marker of normality – the Arab wedding is carried out on an Israeli TV channel. Screened for the benefit of both Jewish immigrants from Arab countries such as Yemen and Morocco and for the Arab population of Israel, Israeli television indeed offered entertainment in Arabic, especially showing ready productions from Arab countries. The subject of the movie is as homely as the frame narrative, introducing scenes of preparation for a happy marriage. The words of Arabic used in the poem are those of blessing – “*Mabrouk, Azziza*” and “*Mabrouk, Jamil*” are kind wishes for the young couple, i. e. “Blessed be you, Azziza,” “Blessed be you, Jamil.” And when the wedding is over, culminating in the meeting of the two processions, the speaker integrates it into the universal world picture, expressed by the phrase “I always cry at *chasenes*.” The usage of the Yiddish word *chasenes* (weddings) completes the punch line of the poem: not merely rendering a snippet of Arab culture into English, the poem seems to suggest an experience much broader than that of two languages, implicitly likening the nuptial rites of diaspora Jews to Arab weddings and bridging the gap between cultures that have often been portrayed as irreconcilable.

Similarly, in the poem “Crossing the Bridge” (2012b: 41), where the title is both the summary of the plot of the poem and a statement of its political intention, the speaker experiences a comical incident with Arab workers while crossing the bridge over the Yarkon River in Tel Aviv. The speaker tries to avoid the big clouds of indeterminate material that are being sprayed on the bridge, which brings about a series of theatrical gestures and an exchange of pleasantries on both sides. The action of the poem is permeated by the usage of civilities in Arabic by both the speaker and the workers as a token of mutual good will. Retorting to the good wishes of the workers, the speaker, “weeping,” expresses a desire that the moment of positive mutual permeation of English, Hebrew and Arabic be continuous rather than momentary – “May all our days be full/ of the double vision/ we share right now” (ibid.).

The fifth part of “Some Thoughts of Writing in English in Israel” (2000: 67) summarizes the composite nature of Alkalay-Gut’s creative agency:

But ah the options at my command!  
The dog turns from filth on the curb  
At the Arabic, “Wossach.”

My curses come from words my mother learned  
from Russian soldiers in pogroms, blessings  
from soft-eyed Yemenites, irony from that old  
tongue of alienation in the shtetl.

It is language soup,  
the kind you make when all  
the vegetables in the fridge  
are wilting and need renewal,  
collective transformation.

Here, the listed multitude of borrowings is explicitly referred to as “options at my command” – what has already passed into possession and, in Bakhtin’s sense, has been dialogically appropriated as one’s voice. Yet there is no attempt to fashion monadic unity where a multitude of sources and influences are at play – emotionally charged Arabic exclamations, Russian curses acquired in the parents’ generation (and perhaps reiterated by the considerable presence of Russian in contemporary Israel), blessings from Yemenites (i. e. Jews of Yemenite decent, who constitute a large ethnic group in Israel) and irony from Yiddish. However, this is not a raw mixture either – like the image of vegetable soup in the poem, the elements have passed a “collective transformation” in the creative consciousness, crystallizing in a voice that is at once excluded from the surrounding Hebrew culture and inclusive of its various influences.

#### 6.4. Conclusion

In his examination of European nationalism of 1880–1914, Eric Hobsbawm emphasizes the importance of language and ethnicity as the decisive criteria for the potential nationhood of population groups whose “nationhood” had not yet been confirmed by political sovereignty (Hobsbawm 1994: 178). As was discussed in chapter five, such identification through language was ideologically crucial for the Zionist cause and its literature. Despite the development of styles and themes, where authors of the new generations often resisted and challenged the models inherited from their literary predecessors, Hebrew remained the staple of the identity of the new Jew, who was to shed the diaspora past and be reborn in a stable national territory with a national language and culture.

However, responding to contemporary ambitions of “power, status, politics and ideology” (ibid. 184) rather than a “natural” development, such programmatic attitude to language and literary production was subject to change once the perceived need to establish and defend a unified majority culture declined with the establishment of normality and stability. Once the need to belong together to a coherent and stable community is satisfied, the need to defend it – among others, through linguistic nationalism – diminishes (Kedourie 1994: 55). Thus, nationalistic movements that aim for clear-cut definitions and unitary representation of group identities through territory, language and cultural features may be reduced to the dimensions of patriotism, which Elie Kedourie defines as “affection for one’s own country, or one’s group, loyalty to its institutions and zeal for its defense,” independent of asserting “a particular doctrine of the state or of the individual’s relation to it” (ibid. 49–59). Combined with favorable social and linguistic factors, such as the rise of English as the world language, the strengthening of political and economic ties between Israel and the US, increased migration from the U.S. after 1967, the desirability of English as a marker of success and wealth and the generally positive attitude towards English speakers, the gradual decrease of the ethno-linguistic national narrative provided not only a framework for the rise of Israeli literature in English in the final quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also a platform for individual exploration of the connection between language and identity. While some earlier works of “integrated” Hebrew authors, such as Lea Goldberg and Yehuda Amichai, look back at the uprootedness of immigrants and suggest – overtly or covertly – the authors’ own non-linear relationship with languages, many Anglophone Israeli authors project the sense of integration into the Israeli society without adapting its language for creative purposes.

The arising pluralism is reflected even more pointedly in the variety of individual approaches to viewing the self in terms of different languages. Certain authors, such as Shirley Kaufman and Riva Rubin present identification with languages in terms of monolingualism, where despite second language skills, the “deeper”, “authentic” self can only be expressed in the mother tongue. Hebrew, the adopted tongue – more or less functional depending on the individual degree of proficiency – is therefore seen as an inadequate tool for creative self-expression, “a skeleton without the flesh” as opposed to the “flesh and blood person” (Rumjanceva 2010d). The struggle with Hebrew is paralleled by the description of older generations that faced the same sense of uprootedness and isolation through language – whether Jews from eastern Europe in the U.S. or Yiddish speakers in Israel. Rather than a positive sense of identity, faithfulness to the mother tongue appears as a source of unavoidable alienation, where “everything dies in its own language” (Kaufman 1979: 56).

Other authors, such as Rachel Tzvia Back, Lami, Richard Sherwin and Karen

Alkalay-Gut engage in the exploration of the interplay of languages and of re-negotiating identity. In a transcultural extension of Bakhtin's heteroglossia, the multilingual experience is that of interaction of languages within the individual consciousness. The degrees and results of interactions, as well as the imagery used to describe them, vary greatly. While Rachel Tzvia Back describes memories and echoes of languages and talks of the "in-between" gap between the English and Hebrew, where the speaker of her poem involuntarily falls, Lami envisages Hebrew as her favorite "foster tongue", which is perhaps not perfectly equal to, but nevertheless as personally valid as her native English. In line with this view, she has published original works both in English and Hebrew. Furthermore, like Back's unconscious falling between the languages, Lami characterizes English and Hebrew as mutually and subconsciously intrusive, where words from one language may "leak" into the other one. Though admitting a degree of struggle while "[t]rying to deny any splitting of the self" (1981: III: 6), Lami speaks of the "common source" – a deeper level of consciousness that can be a source of creative productivity in either language. Unlike Todorov, who constructs the splitting of the self through perfect bilingualism as a deeply confusing experience, Lami's bilingualism becomes a site of productivity and mutual enriching.

Furthermore, Richard Sherwin and Karen Alkalay-Gut explore language spaces that surpass the duality of English and Hebrew. Examining the geographical and linguistic wanderings undertaken by generations of his family – from Russian into English and then Hebrew – Sherwin arrives at no sense of conclusion, suggesting a potential extension of the linguistic journey in both directions. As the individual consciousness finds its habitat in a specific language – different for every generation – the connection to language proves to be more durable than that to landscape or geographic points of reference. At the same time, in the works of Karen Alkalay-Gut there is a special awareness not only of the temporal succession of languages over generations, but also of the variety and mutual influence of different languages in the same generation. Perhaps closest to the assertion of Wolfgang Iser that "[t]here is no longer anything absolutely foreign," Alkalay-Gut explores both the branching multilingualism of her parents as well as her own "language soup," where the influence of Yiddish, Hebrew, Arabic and Russian surface in the medium of English. However, despite the inclusive attitude towards the mosaic of languages and the exploration of their enriching properties, there is an awareness of exclusion, of the attributed lack of authenticity reserved for Hebrew writing.

Though the language of expression is the same and the transcultural sources are essentially similar, the Anglophone Israeli authors that have been discussed here produce several distinct approaches that rely not only on the artistic idiosyncrasies of expression, but also on the differences in the underlying stance



towards the progression of locations and languages and their meaning. Without switching into Hebrew, these authors have produced their versions of the Israeli narrative, exploring their relationship to the majority culture in their chosen country as well as to the one left behind. While this section has mainly focused on the feelings of belonging and dislocation in relation to language, the following chapter will discuss their construction in terms of locality and landscape.



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## 7. Landscapes of Belonging

### 7.1. Territorializing the Translocal

In his poem “Jerusalem,” Zygmunt Frankel shares an immigrant’s perspective on one of the most pivotal landscapes of Jewish imagination:

I know it’s been there for the past four thousand years  
but it still looks temporary to me.

A transit camp, with tribes that do not mix  
like sacred oil and holy water,  
on their way to some other place,  
preferably with a beach and a port.

(They used to build of Jerusalem stone because it was to hand,  
and kept on building of it because of municipal rules  
to preserve the appearance).

Perhaps one should come to Jerusalem a virgin,  
but I,  
I already had behind me  
my first girl  
my first war  
and my first continent  
by the time I saw my first  
scorpion under a Jerusalem stone. (Frankel 1999: 12)

Centering on the landscape overburdened with religious, historic and cultural associations – e.g. the capital of the biblical Israel, the site of the destroyed Temple, the longing for Jerusalem ever since the Babylonian Exile – Frankel’s poem both feeds on and rebels against the settled tropes. The structure of “I know, but...” signals the awareness of the received lore – so well known that it is merely mentioned in the form of historicity – and its rejection in the face of first-hand experience. The age of stones may be venerable, but it does not prevent the contemporary tumult of “tribes that do not mix,” where the speaker perceives

everybody to be on their way to somewhere else. Instead of the proverbial ingathering of exiles, it seems to be a place of instability where the diversity of sacred oil and holy water become an explosive Molotov cocktail rather than a model for productive coexistence.<sup>31</sup> Rather than taking Jerusalem's architecture at face value, Frankel de-romanticizes it by reducing it to the practicality of builders and to the choices of the municipality, who were preoccupied with keeping up appearances. Tellingly, the speaker's first memorable experience of Jerusalem is not that of awe, but of a scorpion under a stone, which combines the longed-for authenticity of experience with an unpleasant shock. Against the speaker's first love, war and continent, Jerusalem ceases to be an absolute place, but becomes a site of dialogue between locations of experience and belonging, where each new place is measured against other places, real or imagined.

One can hardly overestimate the importance of place for transculturalism. The new interest in geographical space takes various forms, including economic interests, environmental concerns and the conservation of historical sites (Assmann 1999: 57). From the cultural perspective, Monika Reif-Hülser notes that in a world where more and more people are on the move, the notions of "home" and "belonging" grow more desirable, but at the same time less tangible and concrete, approaching the status of new cultural myths. Instead of the primacy of birth, heritage and familial bonds, "home" and "belonging" increasingly become a matter of personal decision (Reif-Hülser 1999: 279). As culture becomes progressively de-territorialized, a growing number of people experience a sense of belonging to a community without sharing a common territory with the majority of its members (Papastergiadis 2000: 116). A sense of belonging to a locality may be enacted as much by actual territorial emplacement as by acts of collective remembering with respect to a particular landscape (Lovell 1998: 1).

The discussion of the cultural relevance of geography involves a number of terms with more or less flexible meanings. These include *space*, *place*, *land*, *territory*, *location*, *locality* and *landmark*, which can be considered from perspectives as various as, e.g., geological, historical, ethnographic, anthropological, literary and economic. Aleida Assmann defines *spaces* as geographical and political domains that are created by boundaries, whereas *places* are marked by names and qualified by histories; *land* is invested with myth (Assmann 1999: 58). Similarly, *location*, *locality* and *local* are problematic terms in the sense that they seem to underplay the extent of transcultural connections as well as of the

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31 Written in the early 1980s, before the first Intifada and before the image of Jerusalem as a hopelessly divided city had crystallized in the West, the poem catches the sentiment that was yet to spread. The image of incongruity is also relevant to the divide among the religious and the secular Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem as well as to the different Jewish ethnic communities.

role of interstices between people and between people and their environment (Lovell 1998: 4–5, 7).

Ulf Hannerz (1996: 26–27) suggests that the experience of the local is primarily grounded in “everyday life” – repetitive activities in enduring settings, which develop trained capacities for handling things in specific ways. Moreover, large parts of “everyday life” tend to revolve around face-to-face contacts and various kinds of long-term-relationships, which may have a strong emotional content. In continuous face-to-face encounters, shared understandings can be worked out in detail in a repetitive flow of information and a commitment to these meanings can easily arise. Furthermore, a specific site of face-to-face “everyday life” is likely the context where human beings acquire their first experiences; these will to some degree affect the perception of other sites that may be encountered later.

The local also tends to be a special site of sensual experience. Not only are early sensual experiences of, e.g., the color of the sky, the smell of food, the feeling of entering the ocean or walking through snow, to some degree formative, but they are also characterized by tangibility and sensual immersion – a superior, more sensually complete reality compared to the visual and audible input received from digital translocal sources. However, Hannerz notes that “[f]or all its real qualities, ‘the local’ in cultural thought sometimes becomes a thing of romance and mystique” (Hannerz 1996: 28). Hannerz suggests that just as the consideration of the global should be brought down to earth with respect to its specific impact and interactions, so the local should likewise be de-mystified. Rejecting the cultural adage of anti-globalists that “[t]he global is shallow, the local is deep,” Hannerz argues that “the local” – a concept often endowed with a strong emotional charge – is eventually “an arena where various people’s habitats of meaning intersect, and where the global, or what has been local somewhere else, also has some chance of making itself at home. At this intersection, things are forever working themselves out, so that this year’s change is next year’s continuity” (ibid. 28).

Place and territory, and especially their political dimension, are of particular importance in the postcolonial context. In his discussion of the anti-imperialist dimension of Irish literature, Edward Said writes that “[i]f there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical element. Imperialism is after all an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control” (Said 1994: 271). The establishment of the new geographical power is especially visible in the linguistic re-definition of geographical space, such as the imposition of new place names like Rylstone, Sydney, Victoria, Nova Scotia and Wellington in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The renaming of places is paralleled by the renaming of their natural

content – flora and fauna, which was often carried out in analogy to the species familiar from Europe. Cases in point include the Australian robin and the Australian magpie, which belong to a different species than their English cousins (Innes 2007: 72).

With the increasing awareness of the process of the linguistic side of geographical de-appropriation, some post-colonial authors have attempted to re-appropriate the scenery through the usage of native names. For example, Derek Walcott's poem "Names" emphasizes the specific locality of Caribbean signifiers rather than the implied relation to the European counterparts of their English equivalents: "Listen, my children, say: / *moubain*: the hogplum, / *cerise*: the wild cherry / *baie-la*: the bay" (Bhabha 2004: 332–335, Innes 2007: 94–95). Others, notably Salman Rushdie, foreground the "in-between" space, where cultural and geographic boundaries – "the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home*" (Rushdie 1989: 4) – are transgressed to the benefit of the subaltern: when everything is thrown into the air, everything becomes possible (Reif-Hülser 1999: 273–274).

Questioning the landscape of belonging is also an inherent part of the Jewish tradition. The relationship to the Land of Israel – the central cultural landscape invested with myth and highly charged politically – has barely ever been associated with a sense of normality and stability. Instead, Jewish literacy attests a complicated relationship to territory and a strong emphasis on movement and displacement from early on: after all landmarks had been de-stabilized in the deluge, Abraham is promised the Land of Canaan<sup>32</sup>. Soon afterwards, however, Abraham's grandson Jacob and his sons leave Canaan and move to Egypt during a severe famine. Exodus narrates the establishment of a sizeable community in Egypt, until the mistreatments of the new Pharaoh cause the Jews under the leadership of Moses to embark on a journey back to the Promised Land. The extent of the journey – forty years and four books of the Hebrew Bible – features both nostalgia for Egypt and a gradual de-territorialization of cultural awareness, in preparation for a re-territorialization of Canaan. Every spring, exodus is commemorated during the celebration of Passover, where the tradition of reading the *Haggadah* during the festive dinner reinstates the cultural memory of returning to the land through divine grace. Another biblical event of displacement – the Babylonian Exile following the destruction of the First Temple – produced the trope of "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

32 The boundaries of which, according to the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15: 18–21), greatly exceed the territory of today's Israel and extend from the River of Egypt (the Nile) to Euphrates, encompassing the modern territories of several other nations of the Middle East.

(Psalm 137: 4). Sitting by the rivers of Babylon, the psalmist professes his inability to reproduce a song of Zion for his captors, framing it, at the same time, in a poetic mode:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept  
when we remembered Zion.  
There on the poplars  
we hung our harps  
for there our captors asked us for songs,  
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;  
they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

How can we sing the songs of the Lord  
while in a foreign land?  
If I forget you, Jerusalem,  
may my right hand forget its skill.  
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not consider Jerusalem  
my highest joy.<sup>33</sup> (Ibid. 1–6)

Atypical in its mode compared to the other psalms – neither a song of praise nor of petition, but an imprecation against the captors, which follow vociferously in the final stanza – Psalm 137 may in fact delineate a notion of poetry in relation to the de-stabilized territorial belonging of the Jews. As Maera Shreiber suggests, "singing in a strange land" appears both as a response to and as a consequence of exile: though songs grounded in the locality of Zion cease, the psalm itself embodies an act of meta-song. Shreiber argues that "the condition of displacement or exile ultimately becomes the ground for an alternate account of belonging." (Shreiber 2007: 6, 12)

The chapter "Voices in Context" has already to some degree addressed the relationship to place and territory in the American Jewish and the Zionist tradition, where the Jewish American struggle to first integrate and then to re-state

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33 The psalmist's approach of measuring exile against the historical homeland and proclaiming the superiority of the latter became a major mode within the later Jewish literary tradition. A well-known example of the proverbial love of Zion is, for instance, the poem "A Longing to Return to the Land of Israel" by Yehuda HaLevi (c.1080–1141):

My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west.  
How can I find savor in food? How shall it be sweet to me?  
How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet  
Zion lieth beneath the fetter of Edom, and I in Arab chains?  
A light thing would it seem to me  
to leave all the good things of Spain –  
Seeing how precious in mine eyes  
to behold the dust of the desolate sanctuary.

group identity within the American society contrasts with the Zionists' effort to create a political and cultural majority community in Israel. In Hannerz's terms, both vividly demonstrate the creation of the local from transcultural and translocal elements, where the experience of locality in situ is created by migrants self-consciously re-negotiating identities. While Jewish culture is essentially transcultural, the (new) local experience becomes to a certain degree the benchmark of defining identity. And as scholars such as Naomi Sokoloff, Andrew Furman and Emily Miller Budick have noted, being grounded in locality has produced a significant detachment between Jewish American and Israeli Literature. In her analysis of Anne Roiphe's *Lovingkindness* and Philip Roth's *The Counterlife*, Sokoloff (1991: 65) observes that "[g]iven the importance of Israel for American Jewish identity and communal self-expression, considering the quantities of ink spilled on polemics about relations between the two cultures, and taking into account the increasing familiarity of each with the other, not much imaginative writing has addressed this topic in a substantive way". Andrew Furman points out that the theme of Israel in American Jewish imagination is far less significant than that of the Holocaust. Furman suggests that a basic reason for such lack of engagement is that there is insufficient intimate and palpable knowledge of Israel that would stimulate good fiction (Furman 1997: 2). In his 1998 assessment of the role of Israel for American Jews, Arnold Eisen summarizes that only one third of American Jews have ever visited Israel; it remains "by and large a far-off, distant place" (Eisen 1998: 47). The lack of personal experience, however, does not preclude the formation of strong opinions, which, in terms of Jewish American attitudes towards Israel, have shifted from pre-Zionism to Zionism and post-Zionism in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Furman 1997: 5–9). The initial suspicion and distrust of "secular messianism" of Zionist settlers<sup>34</sup> were overturned by the Holocaust and the perceived need to create and defend an independent Jewish state. This following phase of the seemingly indiscriminate support for the young Jewish state lessened, however, as the state acquired stability and became increasingly seen as an aggressor itself; the change of opinion was especially influenced by the negative perception of Israel's involvement in the First Lebanon War in 1982, the Pollard affair in 1985 and in the First Intifada in 1987.

Perhaps the most tangible literary tie between Anglophone countries and

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34 Irving Howe writes that due to the reports of extreme hardships experienced by the first aliyah during the 1880s, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century American Jews had hardly reason to suppose that a notoriously despoiled and ill-ruled land would ever be settled successfully. Besides being regarded as an intellectual fantasy, Zionism also ran counter to religious sensibilities of many American Jews: Reform Rabbis, for instance, passed a resolution declaring themselves "unalterably opposed to political Zionism" and added that "America is our Zion." (Howe 1976: 206–7).



Israel, Anglophone Israeli Literature is inherently unsettled in terms of geography. Like Frankel's poem "Jerusalem," reactions to migration and to the change of physical and social landscape are omnipresent and illustrate an ongoing process of questioning and reevaluating the self. As the range of poems and prose works written on this subject by Anglophone Israeli authors is vast and expanding, this chapter is going to explore some of the more common themes and tropes of locality as a constituent of identity; it will especially focus on the deconstruction of the holiness of Israel, the adaptation and subversion of the Zionist narrative, the sense of displacement and alienation, as well as the relation of the Israeli landscape to landscapes of real and received memory – the USA, Canada, South Africa and eastern Europe – and the resulting fluidity of the concept of home.

## 7.2. Demystifying the Land

As Aleida Assmann (1999: 58) notes, the term *land* is invested with myth. The emotionally- and religiously-tainted denotations related to a strip of territory in the Middle East – the Holy Land, the Land of Canaan, the Promised Land, the Land of Israel – are prime examples of mythologizing and mystifying an area, especially when first-hand experience is lacking altogether. But as Frankel's poem above demonstrated, for Anglophone Israeli writers the mystification of the personally and intrusively familiar landscape is hardly a plausible outlet for creative energies. Instead, the demystification of the land through juxtaposition with actual experience is a pervasive theme.

Having actually entered the proverbial Promised Land, Anglophone Israeli authors engage in a dialogue with the traditional sources that elevate the significance of Israel beyond diasporic existence. For example, in his poem "For Yehuda HaLevi," Ed Codish alludes to the well-known poem "A Longing to Return to the Land of Israel" by the Spanish-Jewish poet (see footnote 33):

My heart is in the East,  
but my wife, children  
wallet and common sense  
are in a very comfortable suburb  
in the American Midwest.

Far from fanatic rabbis  
and their students armed  
with guns and certitudes  
we talk, the Spanish scholar  
and myself, of foreignness  
and writing poems. (Codish 1999: 2)

The first stanza is a structural parallel of HaLevi's "My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west." The Spanish poet's "uttermost west" as a place of physical confinement transforms for Codish into the comfort, ease and the familiarity of the American Midwest; it harbors both family attachment and material wellbeing. The mode of longing has been supplanted by pragmatism – "common sense:" besides its prosperity, America is also a safer place, shielded from religious extremism<sup>35</sup>. In the poem, the reference to right-wing religious fanatics may be a personal one: during his work in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva in Detroit, Codish had taught Jack Tytell, who later attracted world attention as a West-Bank settler who over a 12-year period allegedly committed a series of terrorist acts against Palestinian Arabs, left-wing Israeli Jews, Messianic Jews, and members or allies of the gay and lesbian community (Fischer 2009); Codish was later interviewed for an article about the younger years of his former student. Confronted with such extremism motivated by a mythologized view of Israel, Codish points out the value of common sense and of "foreignness" – both geographically and as an emotional distance from the myth of the land that leaves room for critical reflection.

Similarly, in "Until we all see a buffalo" – a literary meditation prefacing a collection of poems on the Arab-Israeli conflict – Rachel Tzvia Back points out the danger of mythologizing belonging:

Israel (*Jacob's terrain*), Palestine, Canaan, Palesti'na (*land of strangers*), Judea, Holy Land. All, and none of the above. No name fits. Every name too beautiful and too narrow. Every name too desirous of sovereignty [...]. Land (he said) fatally embraced by the deity. Land that punishes itself and all who love it (too much); land that is punished by all who love it (too much). Land that is my home. (Back 2007: 10)

The contested territory lies at the intersections of various imagined landscapes – each valid as a wish and none of them real or even possible without injuring the others. The plentitude of myths breeds the inevitability of conflict – the punishment brought upon by the "fatal embrace of the deity," which, besides the ethnic conflict, has made the territory sacred and desirable for members of three religions. Like Codish, Back places the agency of "punishment" on zealots of particular dreams. And precisely because the actual physical territory is also a home with its frontal everyday experiences, Back engages in the deconstruction of the notion of the Other, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Another aspect of the myth that is often targeted is the tourists' expectation of omnipresent holiness. In "Baptism Doesn't Happen When You're Afraid," Rochelle Mass presents a dual perspective on a lake in the north of Israel. The poem, which could easily be autobiographical, describes a female swimmer, who is

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<sup>35</sup> Significantly, the poem was written before 9/11.

changing into her bathing suit before plunging into the lake when she encounters a Christian group from Honolulu who have come to perform the rite of baptism. Routinely swimming across the lake, the speaker witnesses the pilgrims' reveries – "The psalms followed me back and forth as I piled/ one length over the other. Each time I raised my head/ Praise and Heaven came over me. Each time/ I finished a length, I heard – *There is God*" (Mass 2003: 18). The location is left unspecified, yet one may assume from the description in the poem that the lake is not Kinneret – the biblical Sea of Galilee, but a location without specific Christian reference; the unspecific setting underscores the tourists' indiscriminate perception that all things Israeli carry a spiritual significance. Unlike the religious excitement of the Hawaiians about the perceived holiness of the place, the speaker's experience of the lake is sensual – a body cutting through cool water on a hot summer day. Faced with the act of imported ritual and re-interpretation of scenery, the speaker notes that "[t]he fat, bronzed folks from Honolulu brought the spirit/ of another place with them" – having originated in Israel, two millennia later the Christian spirit of the Hawaiians is clearly more influenced by their local understanding than by the physical Israeli landscape that they now confront. Perhaps in contrast to their display of spiritual devotion, the poem continuously emphasizes the strong physique and good health of the foreigners.

After establishing a contrast between a routine swim and imported holiness, the second part of the poem provides an additional twist: despite the Hawaiians' repeated affirmations of the holiness of the Land of Israel and the presence of God there, they confess that this may be their last trip due to the dangerous political situation. After all, "[b]aptism doesn't work when you're afraid." The Anglophone swimmer, siding with the collective Israeli "we," points out another common international interpretation of Israel – a place of perpetual danger: "[t]he people of Honolulu are afraid of/ what we live with every day" (ibid.) Eventually, both the religious myth and the negative image perpetuated by news reports give way to the sensual experience of the local routine, where a swim in the lake is neither a religious experience, nor an act of defying danger.

In a similar way, Karen Alkalay-Gut exposes the tourists' perspective that tends to artificially wrap the landscape in spirituality. In the poem "A Guided Tour of Jerusalem: September 2000" (Alkalay-Gut 2012b: 20–21), the speaker, who has apparently acquired the knowledge and perspective of a local, embarks on a tourist trip:

Everything he said enraged me.  
It was as if he were dripping  
poison into my ears, even though  
most of it sounded perfectly  
innocuous, even good-willed.

Like that little remark  
 about the purity of its air.  
 “No polluting industries for the holy city”  
 that it was our own air that was being polluted  
 to keep Jerusalem clean.

[...]  
 The tunnel that took us  
 under Bethlehem  
 under Ramallah  
 showed we had made  
 two levels  
 to suit our vision.

[...]  
 At the wall, I enjoyed most  
 the laminated prayer  
 hanging on the entrance  
 to the toilets, praising  
 the Lord who has made for us  
 holes and entrances.

And kerchiefed I approach the Wall  
 and squeezed a note in a cranny  
 that said: Please  
 arrange a little earthquake  
 to swallow all the holy places  
 without harming a single soul.

Without even re-stating the name of the place or the actors – the fact that it is a guided excursion in Jerusalem is only mentioned in the title – the poem immediately begins with a sentiment of anger at the words of the tour guide. Initially, it seems paradoxical that it is not insults, but “innocuous, even good-willed” praise that produces such reactions. However, by the end of the first stanza it becomes clear that the guide’s sanctimonious descriptions of Jerusalem obfuscate the actual everyday situation, to which the speaker of the poem – a savvy local rather than an easy-to-impress tourist – is privy. Thus, the ecological cleanness of Jerusalem is a conscious effort of the municipality to preserve appearances – akin to the architectural decisions in Frankel’s poem – that takes a toll on the rest of the country. The sights of a de-facto parallel world – the Arab citizens of Bethlehem and Ramallah and their “less presentable” everyday life – are eliminated in order to concoct a uniform image of a holy Jewish land. In its emphasis on willful forgetting – the creation of “two levels/ to suit our vision” – the poem relates to Homi Bhabha’s observations about the sites of exclusion and willful forgetting that characterize group identity (Bhabha 2004: 230). Refer-

encing Ernest Renan's formulation of the necessity of forgetting for nation building – "Yet every French citizen has to have forgotten [*is obliged to have forgotten*] Saint Bartholomew's Night's Massacre, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century" (Renan 1990: 19) – Bhabha emphasizes the syntax of forgetting that sheds light on the problem of national identification. Substituting Renan's and Bhabha's European nation for Jewish and Israeli group identity, Alkalay-Gut lays bare specific sites of double vision which sharply contradict the tour-guide's assertion of holiness and purity.

But besides pointing out the exclusion of the other, the poem criticizes the content of holiness itself. In a comical mode, hypertrophied belief is shown to trickle even into public bathrooms – the Jewish virtue of showing gratitude for the gifts of the Lord is now extended into the sphere usually regarded as taboo and strictly private. One may infer that such seemingly indiscriminate stamping of holiness and religious awareness on every inch of Jerusalem is an act of profaning religion, equal to the injury of the commandment "Thou shalt not wear the Lord's name in vain."

The final stanza is a curious mixture of religiousness and rebellion. The speaker prays that grounds of conflict – the holy sites that magnify the attractiveness of Jerusalem to the rival fractions – be destroyed with the least possible damage to humanity, yet the plea in itself is delivered with spiritual humility. The speaker approaches the wall kerchiefed, i. e. wearing a head-cover in accordance with the Jewish prescription for married women, which signals the speaker's respect for the religious site, and performs the Jewish custom of sticking a note with a wish into a crack in the wall. Implicitly, "Please/ arrange" is a direct address to God. In its essence, the subject of the petition can also be interpreted in religious terms: the rebellion against mythologized places as a source of strife is also a reference to the commandment prohibiting idolatry, where the absurdly decorated bathrooms of Jerusalem have taken the place of the golden calf.

Like in Frankel's poem, the pervasive historicism of Israel and the pre-occupation with antiquity at the expense of actual life is another aspect which is subject to poetic critique. Rather than complying with the traditional mode of celebration, in her long poem "Sanctum," Shirley Kaufman describes the oppressiveness of omnipresent history:

To live in Jerusalem is to feel  
the weight of stones. [...]

*Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!*  
That bleakness when I walk through ruins below  
the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif,  
below the sun and moon of the Dome of Al-Aqsa,  
when I touch the colossal stones hurled down

by the Romans who smashed the Temple and sacked the city,  
when I lay the palm of my hand on pitted history.

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Sometimes, writing, I watch the words grow heavy  
when I place them in rows on the page.  
*Deliver me from a city built on the site of a more ancient city,  
whose materials are ruins, whose gardens cemeteries.*  
Whose people are desperate in their claims.

Sometimes I need to be nowhere. A place  
without history. (Kaufman 2003: 130)

Stone – a durable material that has become an integral part of the descriptions of Jerusalem’s historicity – becomes oppressive. Kaufman couples Jerusalem’s vestiges of bygone ages – the Temple Mount (the multiple significance of which is illustrated by the use of its English and Arabic names), the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the stones used by the Romans, the multi-layered catacombs that stretch under the Old City<sup>36</sup> – with quotations from Shelley’s “Ozymandias” and Thoreau’s “Walden,” underscoring the futility of monumental constructions and of the wish to make oneself notable in history. Instead of a unified portrait of the city that has been the center of Jewish imagination for millennia, Kaufman makes explicit its fragmentation and discord. Jerusalem, in fact, becomes Thoreau’s city built and rebuilt on the site of a more ancient city, where Ozymandias’ aspiration to have the posterity despair at their inability to out-build him echoes in the desperate claims of the Jerusalem’s divided population. The site is charged with historicity to the point that the poet’s “words grow heavy;” there is a need to escape to a “place/ without history” – a clean slate without conflicting aspirations of generations and groups, without cultural myths that are used to justify the ownership of Jerusalem stones.

### 7.3. Place, Acculturation and the Double Diaspora

But once the land has been poetically de-mystified, what is the author’s actual relationship to their chosen landscape and how does it tie in with belonging to former geographical and social sites? In her 2002 article “Double Diaspora: English Writers in Israel,” Karen Alkalay-Gut points towards a dual status of Anglophone Israeli writers in relation to place and identity: “[f]or many of these writers there is a degree of ‘diaspora’ in their work, a sense of cultural, literary

<sup>36</sup> In the area of the Temple Mount, the ground level today is significantly higher than it used to be in the Roman times; large areas of the old city rest on a multi-layered labyrinth of ancient constructions. Only part of this underground city has been explored so far.

and personal center elsewhere that is concurrent with a varying but steady commitment to Israel as the homeland” (2002: 457). The specific dimensions of this “double diaspora” vary greatly with respect to self-reflective statements of the authors and the content of their works, as well as with the degree of the authors’ involvement in the local and overseas literary scenes. As chapter three discusses in more detail, immigrants from Anglophone countries differ from many other groups of immigrants in terms of their motivation: rather than being motivated to leave their countries by economic, political, religious or social hardship, they were primarily attracted by ideological pull-factors, such as by the lure of Israel as a Jewish homeland or by its religious importance. This section will briefly look into two sociological models that may help contextualize the notion of “double diaspora” and the further analysis of literary works.

There is a number of sociological and anthropological approaches that attempt to explain one’s relation to a new socio-geographic space. For example, the model of John Ogbu and Herbert Simons (1998) links factors such as involvement in the cultural life of the host country and the level of satisfaction to whether the act of migration was voluntary or not. Ogbu and Simons differentiate between voluntary migrants, various involuntary migrants such as refugees, guest workers and bi-nationals, and between non-migrant minorities. Voluntary migrants, typically motivated by pull-factors, are generally willing to make a long-term investment of time and effort into acquiring the language and social competence of the country. Though they may experience initial difficulties such as culture shock and discrimination, they mostly do not experience lasting problems. Involuntary migrants, on the other hand, are especially motivated by push-factors, and in many cases will regard their presence in the target country as temporary and/or forced upon them. Especially temporary migrants tend to learn only the basic necessities of the target country’s culture and to suffer difficulties in sociocultural adaptation if their stay extends over time. Finally, involuntary non-migrants are groups that have been conquered, colonized and enslaved and have been made part of a new society against their will. Involuntary minorities tend to be less economically successful and experience greater and more persistent language and cultural difficulties.

The majority of immigrants from Anglophone countries, including Anglophone Israeli authors, belong to the group of voluntary migrants. However, the specific motivation of migration and the associated extent of temporal, economic and emotional investment therein – a strong component of forming identities according to Avruch (1982: 96) – varies greatly, producing an impact on lifestyle as well as the displayed identity in writing. For example, the writing of Rochelle Mass and Lami, who came with strong Zionist convictions, which functioned as a powerful ideological pull-factor, settled in agricultural kibbutzim and invested into learning Hebrew, exhibit a markedly different relationship

to the landscape both of their chosen country and of their native country than authors such as Jerome Mandel and Shirley Kaufman, who came to Israel rather by chance – through work or marriage.

Unlike Obgu and Simons' model, which focuses on the relation between the immigrants' motivation and their subsequent experience, John Berry's approach (2001, 2005) centers on the specific strategies of acculturation. Based on two fundamental issues that migrants face – maintenance of group identity and contact between groups – Berry distinguishes four basic types of acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. Integration is characterized by the preservation of a vital and positive original identity coupled with extended positive contacts with the surrounding society. Assimilation resembles integration in the sense of building positive contacts to the host society, but supposes a significant diminishing of the original group identity. Separation and marginalization display a lack of positive relationship to the outside group, and they differ in the evaluation of the original group identity: it will be negative in the case of marginalization and positive in the case of separation. Berry argues that integration, which combines the retention of positive original group identity with strong positive contact to the surrounding society, is the most rewarding strategy of acculturation.

It appears that the “double diaspora” of Anglophone Israeli writers hovers on the axis between integration and separation, where a considerable degree of identification with the source culture is being retained. Most poignantly, perhaps, it surfaces in the very act of writing in English, but also in the frequent allusions to social and geographical landscapes of the native land. Beyond the heritage of a specific Anglophone country, in Israel there is also a broader identity as “Anglos,” which is based on the vast overlap of language, cultural frame of reference and socio-economic position. What differs, however, is the relationship to Israel and society, which ranges from Shirley Kaufman's “You can't learn two/ landscapes in one/ life [...] or a language/ to put them in” (Kaufman 1979: 48) to Rochelle Mass's declaration of physical identification with the land: “I am made of this earth. I came. I am here/ will not return” (Mass 2001b: 68).

Having de-mystified the land, the Anglophone Israel authors are faced with the need to find a poetic language more in tune with the individual experience. But while de-mystification is fairly universal and has been, in fact, a strong element in Hebrew Israeli writing as well, the further approach – the connection forged with the social and physical landscape of the new country, and the strength of the remaining link to the native country – vary greatly. In a way similar to the authors' degree of arrival into Hebrew and the model of the self as either predominantly monolingual or as inclusive and expansive, the ties to the new landscape range from a sense of alienation and displacement to merging



with the new country. And while Zygmunt Frankel describes the perception of Israel as necessarily permeated by recollections of other continents and communities, new encounters with the landscape of the native country may be permeated by the intrusion of the Israeli landscape as well. The following sections will examine the spectrum between identification and belonging, and the sense of exclusion and rootlessness; they will also address the roles assigned to the Israeli landscape and that of the native country.

#### 7.4. Sprouting Roots: A Suspended Ficus and a Walking Tree

Roots are a poignant metaphor of belonging or the lack of it; this image is morphologically inherent in descriptions of conditions such as *rootedness*, *rootlessness* and *uprooting*. The reference is a complex one: like the roots of a tree, it implies fixation on the spot, stability, an anchor. At the same time, it is also an image of extensive contact, of penetrating and integrating into the local material rather than of superficial acquaintance. This is supplemented by the connotation of nourishment, paralleling a plant's intake of water and minerals from the soil through the root system. In familial terms, it is the lineage – geographical or cultural – of one's ancestors, which may be often taken to create an affinity to a place – whether to give a territorial reason to one's existence in situ, or cause a heightened awareness of a distant place, where the family has lived.

In Anglophone Israeli writing, roots and the possibility of their transplantation is an image under dispute. In the poem "Roots in the Air," Shirley Kaufman comments on the state of not taking root in a foreign environment:

Over my head  
the Bengal ficus  
dangles its roots like seaweed  
out of the sea, licking  
the ashes from the air.

Sure of which way is down  
but unable to get there,  
one tree makes a hundred  
out of the steaming soil it comes from,  
replanting itself.

Not here.  
The roots are shaggy  
with trying in this land.  
No earth, no water,  
what are they doing in the light? (Kaufman 1996: 128)

First published in 1984, more than 20 years after Kaufman moved to Israel, the poem uses a ficus plant as an illustration of literally having roots in the air.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Rushdie's celebratory throwing everything up in the air as a sign of recombination and renewal, the aerial ficus roots are a negative marker of alienation, of a lack of rewarding contact with the new environment. Like sea-weed away from the sea, it is out of place here. In its native soil, the ficus is said to be productive: in "the steaming soil it comes from," the ficus grows and replants itself. In the new soil, however, the roots are merely dangling uselessly in the air, following an impulse of replanting, but failing in apparent confusion. The landscapes are contrastive: where the original terrain is "steaming soil" – a marker of fertility – the new land has neither fecund earth nor water; there is only light and ashes in the air. The nature of ashes that are dispersed in the air is not clear: while they help establish the image of dryness, infertility and disintegration, they may also entail a reference to the First Lebanon War (1982–1983), which was a cause of major disillusionment in the Israeli society at the time that the poem was written. On the other hand, John Felstiner, referencing a talk given by Kaufman, suggests that the poem was inspired by a real observation that Kaufman made during her visit to Kibbutz Ein Hahosh, where many Holocaust survivors, including the poet Abba Kovner, had made their new home. The ficus in the kibbutz had produced a multitude of aerial roots, but they were dangling in the air without reaching the soil (Felstiner 2005: 8). In this interpretation, the significance of the specific location would suggest a parallel between the uprooting of the survivors from Europe and of Kaufman's own migration, where the ashes in the air may also refer to the memories of the destruction of the European Jewry. The underlying personal meaning of alienation, with which Kaufman endows the ficus plant, is especially prominent considering that ficus trees are, in fact, known to take root in Israel: they grow lushly in locations such as Kibbutz Ein Gedi and Gan HaAtzmaut in Tel Aviv. To a large extent, the image of the uprooted ficus in the poem becomes the projection of the speaker's sense of alienation.

The poem ends with a question – "what are they doing in the light?" Unanswered, it creates a sense of suspense and uncertainty corresponding to the hanging roots in the poem. Interestingly, a similar formulation, but with a somewhat different result has been used by the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai in "Jews in the Land of Israel," which was published in his 1971 collection *Not for the Sake of Remembering*. Enumerating the aspects of strangeness of Ashkenazi Jews to the middle-eastern landscape – the family names, the light complexion –

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37 For a detailed analysis of the formal aspects of Kaufman's poem, see Frank Kearful's "Roots in the Air: The Poetry of Shirley Kaufman" (2001: 303–305).

Amichai keeps questioning the nature of their connection to Israel. The poem concludes thus:

What are we doing  
 in this dark land with its  
 yellow shadows that pierce the eyes?  
 (Every now and then somebody says, even after forty  
 or fifty years: "The sun is killing me.")

[...]  
 Spilled blood is not the roots of trees  
 but it's the closest thing to roots  
 we have. (Amichai 1996: 87)

Like in Kaufman's poem, the new environment is construed as hostile – "dark land," "yellow shadows that pierce the eye," the sweltering heat, which one does not get used to even after having spent most of one's life there. The traditional reason for Jewish resettlement of Israel becomes questionable; it appears to bring no satisfaction, no valid conclusion for the proverbial longing to reunite with the land. The biblical roots – the very reason for Jews creating a country in the Middle East, rather than in South America or Africa, which had been considered as alternatives – do not seem to provide a ground for rootedness anymore; the new sense of belonging is now being established by the conquest and defense of the land within the same generation. A participant of all wars of early Israeli statehood, Amichai acknowledges the fragility of such a connection – not like actual roots of trees – and it is construed as a mere semblance of a justified belonging. In the body of Amichai's work, it is rather the snatched moments of personal contact and sensual experiences that create a sense of rootedness amidst his criticism of state ideology and collectivism.

But while Kaufman interprets roots as a metaphor for alienation, an organic part of the self that cannot be transplanted into a foreign soil, the poet Lami explores the possibility of forming new roots. In poems such as "Desert Tree" and "When the Sky was a Blue China Bowl," Lami focuses on the image of a tree as a representation of the self and on forming new connections. In "Desert Tree," she writes:

It happens  
 That I liken myself  
 To a walking  
 Tree  
 [...].  
 Seemingly, I know  
 Where the roots are  
 What I am part of  
 How far I can reach out.

There is a stance against storms  
 An angle, a bentness  
 A singleness in vicissitudes. (Lami 1986: 23)

Unlike Kaufman's Bengal ficus, which has been forcefully transplanted from its native land, Lami's speaker likens herself to a walking tree and claims agency for the committed movement. The roots are intact and functional, and at least to a degree, the speaker is aware of her sense of belonging, but also of the extent of flexibility, comprised of "what I am part of" and "[h]ow far I can reach out." In contrast to the shaggy ficus, which is passively dangling in the air, Lami endows her tree with resilience against natural vicissitudes; the adaptable tree bends into angles for improved resistance. Again, the agency of bending lies not with the power of the storm, but with the tree's willfulness to face it. The difference of the agency of transplantation and the subsequent development of roots in Kaufman's and Lami's poems is reminiscent of the Ogbu and Simons model, which links the immigrants' adaptation to and performance in the new environment to the kind of migratory process they underwent and where active movement based on pull factors is more likely to produce positive results than forced displacement.<sup>38</sup> While Ogbu and Simons naturally describe general tendencies without accounting for differences in individual character, the divergence of approach towards up- and re-rooting in the works of Kaufman and Lami seem to be a case in point.

More explicitly, Lami describes the formation of new roots in the poem "When the Sky was a Blue China Bowl." Divulging the setting in its subtitle – "Jerusalem in May," it describes the interplay of landscape, poetic endeavor and growing roots:

When the sky enclosed us like a  
 blue china bowl  
 and then contained us in its  
 City,  
 lasting as stone,  
 we knew our own lengths, strengthened  
 by limits, as metered rhyme carries  
 its vision of completeness, and  
 rights the fuzzy forest of  
 uneven branches where we live  
 bringing back from there more roots,

38 In the case of Kaufman and Lami, the difference is also biographical. Since adolescence, Lami belonged to a Zionist youth movement *HaBonim*, and had intended to immigrate to Israel for many years prior to her actual aliyah in 1958 at the age of 28. Kaufman's move was more incidental: she moved to Jerusalem in 1973, at the age of 49, after marrying Hillel Daleski, who was at the time professor of English Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

gnarled as in ginger, pale as  
 the stone itself, still malleable,  
 still with appreciable flaws. (Lami 1986: 25)

Beginning with the enjoyment and appreciation of landscape – Jerusalem under the vivid spring sky – Lami’s poem suggests a new assessment of identity. The selves’ “lengths” are recognized; rather than an impediment, the “limits” gain a strengthening, fostering influence. Poetry, the “metered rhyme,” acts both as a simile of growth and development in response to formal limitations, and as a vital tool for finding sense in confusion – “right[ing] the fuzzy forest,” thanks to which, perhaps, new insights are won. It is poetry that becomes the agent of bringing back new roots, which are ultimately created and discovered in the metaphorical forest. As will be discussed in more detail in section 7.5., the physical conception of the environment is telling: Kaufman in “Roots in the Air” speaks of ashes in the air and of the absence of fertile soil or water, whereas Lami seems to reference the forests on the hills around Jerusalem – a considerably less hostile environment from the Euro-American point of view. The roots of the forest, then, become the image for the new sense of belonging of the observers: gnarled, flawed and malleable, they are roots nevertheless, and their color resembles that of the proverbial Jerusalem stone. “Lasting as stone” functions not only as a description of Jerusalem, but also of the selves – a grammatical possibility in the sentence. Rather than providing an image of acknowledging insurmountable displacement, the gnarled developing roots become a message of empowerment and a symbol of new belonging.

## 7.5. Projections of Alienation and Attachment in the Landscape

It is certainly not illogical to describe Israel’s geography as hostile. Disregarding political antagonism, topographically more than half of Israel’s territory has arid or semi-arid climate and the southern half of the country is dominated by the sparsely inhabited Negev Desert. Even outside the arid areas, the subtropical temperatures and the complete absence of rain in summer make the soil parched, unless artificially irrigated. On the other hand, making the land inhabitable – “building the country” – was one of the leading tropes of Zionism. Describing an old postcard from Pre-Mandatory Palestine, Karen Alkalay-Gut notes its relevance to the Zionist dream:

There are three palm trees  
 In interminable sands, a few camels grazing far away...

This is the land my parents dreamed of  
 As children in Lithuania – the land  
 They would cover with heavy fruit trees (2000: 39)

For the Zionist parents, the desert with its lonely palm trees and a string of camels is a romantic sight – a place that with enough effort can be turned into paradise. The choice of fruit trees, rather than more “down-to-earth” crop such as grain, suggests an image of a luscious, Eden-like garden. Until today, remarkable agricultural achievements in the harsh climate are a source of pride for the proponents of the Zionist narrative, as was recently exemplified, for instance, by Dan Senor’s and Saul Singer’s *Start-Up Nation* (2009).

For Anglophone Israeli authors, the apposition of hostile and welcoming aspects of the Israeli landscape has become a scene for projecting one’s sense of alienation or attachment. While the arid climate cannot be ignored, the representations of the physical landscape range from a focus on infertility and hostility to the emphasis on intimate and positive contact with vegetation and water. Authors such as Shirley Kaufman, Rachel Tzvia Back and Riva Rubin, whose works often feature themes of alienation, tend to emphasize dryness and barrenness. Conversely, the representation of the Israeli landscape in the works of poets such Rochelle Mass, Lami and Karen Alkalay-Gut contain more tokens of positive contact with the environment, featuring elements like the beauty of nature and the relief of rain.

### 7.5.1. Conflict in the Parched Land

In her introduction to *On Ruins and Return: The Buffalo Poems*, Rachel Tzvia Back sets the scene for the surrealistic sighting of a buffalo in the Jerusalem hills:

A season of wildfires. The hills all scarred and blackened, sloping into changed valleys where the always sparse-in-summer vegetation is now burnt down or dusted with ash. Nothing is as it was or should be – everything shifted with fires, earth and animals and birds who now have nowhere to perch. Paths that once lead to fragrant spring or deep well swerve in jagged blackened stones and lead one astray. (2007: 9)

The environment is expressly hostile: the already sparse and dry vegetation is charred by a fire, ashes cover the remains – a scene reminiscent of the dust and ash surrounding Kaufman’s Bengal ficus. The impression of alienation and death is strengthened by the displacement of life – birds and animals fleeing the fire – and the disruption of access to water. Besides barrenness and mutilation by the fire, the environment is misleading: the valleys have changed and the paths are prone to lead one astray. An effective setting for the following meditation on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the poet’s place in it is created. The scene is seen

while driving by; sweeping records of impressions – “nothing is as it was,” “everything shifted” – convey the mood rather than describe specific objects. The description of extreme geographical conditions is continuously present throughout *The Buffalo Poems*, where the landscape is characterized by images such as “skies blind and silent” (ibid. 3), “sloped stunted shrubs,” “parched/ edges curling inward like bleached and/ brittle parchment” (ibid. 15), “too many rocks,/ and too many years are meager” (ibid.) and “scarred stone walls” (ibid. 29).

Moreover, the figure of the buffalo in the poems is a geographical reference in itself: for Back, who was born in Buffalo, NY, the animal becomes an important focalizer of geographical transition. In the poems, the surreal sighting of the buffalo near Jerusalem at the beginning of the collection becomes a point of reference for one’s search for belonging amidst alienation on the one hand and on the themes of armed conflict and the mistreatment of the Arab minority in Israel on the other hand. The alien-ness of the miraculous appearance of a buffalo in the Jerusalem Hills is highlighted by the juxtaposition of the buffalo’s native North-American landscape with the Israeli scenery:

a buffalo  
 wandered far from white  
 cedar hickory red-berried hawthorne wild and ice  
 laced  
 [...]  
 I see his body  
 heave  
 in this heat in this wavering  
 air under the weight  
 of this wide flame-white eastern  
 sky. (2007: 16)

Although the wiping out of buffalos in North America is a major theme of Back’s *Buffalo Poems*, the landscape of North America is still portrayed as more appealing than that of Israel. Here, a buffalo’s native landscape appears in a metonymy of trees – white cedar, hickory and hawthorn. Unlike the stagnant Jerusalem heat, the trees are “wild” and “ice-laced,” the hawthorn is covered with berries, while the sparse Jerusalem trees have been burnt by a forest fire. The ice and the hawthorn berries also suggest a temporal discrepancy: while the description of the buffalo’s native landscape point towards late fall or crisp early winter, the buffalo “lands” in Israel in the heat of June, with three months of draught still ahead. Jerusalem’s stifling heat and barren landscape are used to highlight the alienation of the buffalo as well as of the speaker.

A very similar interpretation of the Jerusalem landscape appears in the works of Riva Rubin. In “Abandoned Property” Rubin describes the ghost village of

Lifta near Jerusalem, which was abandoned by the Arab population in 1948 and has remained depopulated ever since:

A village the color of deer  
 in the cleft of a deep hill.  
 Thornbushes grow on domes  
 upturned smashed and empty  
 as the fragment of pomegranate  
 like dry blood among the stones,  
 the membranes of its inner chambers  
 parchment under glass sun. (1996: 23)

The landscape conveys an image of shattering: the hill is cleft, the domes are smashed and empty, and a cracked pomegranate dehydrates under the sun. The images of destruction are complemented by the simile “like dry blood,” establishing the scene of conflict even without direct references to the involvement of Lifta in the Arab-Israeli conflict. And although the second part of the poem describes a fig tree and a patch of green around an unexpectedly found pool, they seem to be dream-like vestiges of the past amidst the alienated reality. The speaker does not appear to belong in this arid landscape that is dominated by the remnants of its past inhabitants. Rubin’s other poems, including “My Son on a Hill in Jerusalem” and “Hosanna,” also establish a parallel between the hostile landscape and the inherent conflict of its inhabitants. For example, in “My Sons on the Hill in Jerusalem,” Jerusalem is described as “an open urn”, a “bone boomerang” and “the metal slippers of Mars;” the hills of Judea are “rock-dust needled with dry pine” (1979: 31), and it takes the joyful yell of a young boy – the speaker’s son – to breathe life into the dead landscape, “searing Judea clean of history.” However, unlike the apposition of Israeli dryness and North American forest in Back’s poem, for Rubin, the hostility of the Israeli landscape does not appear in an emotional contrast to the climate of her native South Africa. The physical difference is shown to be significant: in the poem “Hosanna,” the speaker takes her children to visit South Africa when war erupts in Israel and the South African landscape is constructed from images of “moist light,” “limp-wristed monkey,” “grey mud with stench of fish,” “lichen-scaled trees” and “earth/ asserting sullen growths and moulds,/ fleshing wastefully/ against people” (1969: 66–68). The “moistness” of the South African landscape is not shown to be more pleasant than the heat and dust of Israel; rather it is equally hostile and unsettling, harboring its own conflict<sup>39</sup>. Emotionally separated from

<sup>39</sup> In the 2010 interview, Riva Rubin described her ambivalent relationship with her native country. Although she professed a strong emotional bond to the landscape itself, she has been strongly opposed to apartheid, was marginally involved with an anti-apartheid political group and stated that one of the reasons of permanently moving to Israel is that she did not



the native landscape, the speaker of the poem eventually returns to the hot dust of Jerusalem, without, however, being able to construct a positive image of the city. Though being a home by choice, the Israeli landscape remains alien and the sense of belonging is established not by affection, but through a conscious ritual:

Dumb, with bone eyes I come  
to the last wall.  
My tongue of stone bleeds  
on the wail, the harboured voice  
of Balaam's ass, that cuts upward  
from my stomach and wedges into  
the cracks, sprinkles the dust, strokes  
the ivoried dead, brays  
and whispers and is taken  
and quieted on the shoulder of  
Jerusalem. (Rubin 1969: 72)

A prayer at the Western Wall seals the speaker's return to Israel. The emotional difficulty of the ritual is described in terms of physical effort and suffering: "bone eyes," the bleeding tongue of stone, which suggests the "heaviness" of producing words, the wail – a reference to the Wailing Wall, the voice that has to cut through the throat. And although the religiously significant locality suggests that prayer is what the rising voice produces, the awakening of the "harboured voice" can be equally interpreted as poetic self-expression. Like in Lami's Jerusalem forest, where rhymes and meters foster new roots, Rubin's creative practice interacts with the landscape – "wedges into/ the cracks, sprinkles the dust, strokes/the ivoried dead" – reappropriating it poetically and making it, to a degree, her own. It is through this effort that the fragmentation and alien-ness of the landscape can be overcome to some degree. A semblance of relief issues – the voice is "taken/ and quieted on the shoulder of/ Jerusalem" like a crying child pressed against the mother's body. Nevertheless, the ending of the poem does not seem to suggest a real reconciliation with the land; the speaker's tentatively established belonging leaves plenty of room for criticism and doubt.

The apposition of desert and water imagery is perhaps most apparent in the works of Shirley Kaufman. In a number of poems, water or the absence thereof serve to illustrate the perceived extent of belonging to the landscape. In "The Way" (1996: 77), which was quoted earlier, the longing for the former experi-

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want her sons to grow up as "little white princes". At the same time, her family got physically involved in the conflict when Rubin's father, who had helped to set up the first black trade union in South Africa, was randomly shot at by black radicals. He was seriously injured and developed strong anti-black opinions as a result (Rumjanceva 2010d). One may conjecture that these circumstances contributed to Rubin's unsavory representation of the South African landscape.

ences in the U.S. is coded through water imagery – the hot tubs at Big Sur and the sea breeze of Point Lobos, whose memory invades the alien cityscape of dry Jerusalem stone. Similarly, in “Roots in the Air” (1996: 128), it is the heat, dryness and overall hostility of the Israeli landscape that prevent the water-loving ficus from taking root in Israel, paraphrasing the speaker’s sense of alienation in botanical terms. In “Meeting” (1979: 63), the speaker notes that even spring, which is traditionally associated with rebirth and flourishing, cannot be trusted in Israel: “even the spring is ambivalent/ here with the hot wind/ breaking suddenly to cold.” But the contrast between dry and hostile landscape and wet and welcoming climate surfaces especially poignantly in two consequent passages of “Take Anything:”

## 2

At the end of summer an east wind  
blows from the desert  
like a visible flame, blue  
under the smoky light,  
sucking the moisture from the air  
that shrivels around our heads.

The fresh mint in our pots  
wilts and gets spindly.  
We blame everything on the weather.  
If you don’t feel it, you haven’t  
lived here long enough, they say

The heat drifts out the door  
When the moon rises.

## 3

Swimming in the Puget Sound at night  
when we were children, our skin glowed  
in the phosphorescent water.  
We shook the light off as we ran  
shivering to the great log fire.  
The driftwood sang like jungles,  
and we danced ourselves warm around it,  
close as we dared, and closer  
till I slipped on the wet sand.  
Somebody pulled me out and rolled me  
in blankets while the sparks  
rose over me like stars  
and the smoke whitened my lips. (Kaufman 1979: 59)

The progression of day and night begins with a vivid description of the scorching summer wind; so hot that its appearance is described as flame-like. Even local

plants and people are affected; the awareness of the detrimental effects of the weather is in fact construed as a sign of integration, of first-hand experience of the Israeli weather in its most challenging season. The rising moon, however, brings a change of scene, introducing a regression into childhood memories. The description of the desert wind in the first part is counterbalanced by a dream-like sequence of bathing in Puget Sound, on which Kaufman's native Seattle is located. The scene of bathing is strongly infused with a fairy-tale-like experience of nature: the water is glowing, the children dance around the fire and the sparks rise like stars. The magic of the experience is combined with a sense of security: the actions of swimming and dancing are performed within a peer group, "the great log fire" acts as a source of warmth and light, and even when the speaker slips, she is pulled up and rolled into blankets. Against this combination of water, joy, safety and mystery in the Puget Sound, the Israeli climate appears even more hostile and barren.

Other poems by Kaufman feature a similarly strong relation between water and the American experience. In "If I go down to the docks" (1996: 109), Kaufman contrasts the two landscapes which she has inhabited. Here, Seattle is largely construed from elements connected to water: docks, ferries, and the experience of coming home through the rain. Conversely, the Israeli side is the "Judean desert/ where the cliffs line up/ on their knees to face the sunrise" (1996: 109). Moreover, in tune with the maxim "You can't learn two/ landscapes in one/ life" (Kaufman 1996: 77), Kaufman's speaker professes a sense of confusion and displacement when trying to contain both landscapes in one consciousness: "When I stand on this ridge,/ the earth slides helpless/ in two directions." Similarly, in the poem "Jump" (2003: 101), Kaufman describes a boating experience with her father in Seattle, where memories of the outing are set against her current position: "What did he know/," the speaker says about her father in the boat, "about this hot wind breathing down my neck/ [...] stripping the sand from the desert?" However, while the lake landscape on a Sunday seems to be a more appealing option than the ubiquitous image of the desert wind, none of the landscapes can in fact give fulfillment. In the conclusion of the poem, the speaker remains mentally suspended between the landscapes: "When I get to one side/ what I want most is the other."

Although the water-saturated landscapes of Back's, Rubin's and Kaufman's native countries are not idealized, the abundant references to the heat, dryness and hostility of the Israeli landscape create a sense of struggle between the authors and their chosen environment. Historically, such a mode of the antagonistic representation of the surroundings has been not untypical of European settlers in the colonies. For example, C.L. Innes notes that for the white settlers in Australia, everything was unfamiliar and that the strangeness of the soil, plants and animals strengthened the sense of dislocation and exile. This bled into

writing, producing descriptions of the continent as harsh, ugly and inhospitable (Innes 2007: 79–80).

It needs to be noted, however, that despite the strength of the images of aridity and hostility of the climate, there is also place for appreciation. In an interview with Grace Schulman (1991), Shirley Kaufman commented on her relation to the Israeli landscape:

It's not a lyrical soaring, but a knowledge of dryness. The earth color here is not the green of California, and we don't have the trees, the bridges, the water, of San Francisco. In Jerusalem, you don't look out on any water except the Dead Sea on a clear day. I treasure the little greenness we have besides the overwhelming dryness – but then, the desert has its own beauty.

I love the stones of Jerusalem. I've just written: "the stones look like milk tea with a spoon of honey in it." That's the color, a pinky beige. (Schulman 2001: 17)

Here, the nature of Israel appears in contrast to that of California and, despite Kaufman's concluding affirmative, seems to lose by comparison: in Kaufman's perception it is characterized not only by its own elements, but also by everything that is lacking – the absence of trees, bridges and water. However, tentative appreciation of specific elements has found reflection in Kaufman's creative work. Thus, in "Spring" (1996: 121) "the body loosens itself/ to kindness" during a swim in the Dead Sea, while a lavender crocus in the fall becomes a symbol of positive surprises that life can bring. Yet, the positive impact of these moments of appreciation is often undermined by a sense of their instability and evanescence. "Prologue: Jacaranda" (1996: 97) is perhaps one of the most poignant examples of this duality of perception. The poem opens with a meditation on the fragility and the short lifespan of lush blossoms of the Jacaranda tree – "so delicate/ even their motion through the air/ bruises them." The image is extended to what is perceived to be the human condition – "our lives are sagging with marvels/ ready to fail us." Like the tender Jacaranda blossoms, which are torn by the wind, the individual appears to be powerless: "what's settled for is not nearly/ what we are after, claims/ we keep making or are made on us;" like falling blossoms, there is a sense of being severed from one's geographical and social ties: the shriveled fallen blossoms of Jacaranda are like "clusters of faces drifting away." Joy and beauty – both in nature and in the course of life – seem to be vulnerable and quick to pass. Only at the end of the last stanza relief is provided: the tree makes the speaker look again at the "lilac/ that darts and flickers/ like the iridescent head of a fly." There is a sense that despite individual lack of control, the unstoppable continuity of change may also bring positive surprises. However, such sporadic appreciation of the moment does not seem to be a strong enough counterweight to the sense of being passively exposed to changes of life that permeate especially Kaufman's early work.

Considering that a number of “classic” Israeli authors have produced descriptions of the Israeli landscape as hostile – as in Amichai’s “Jews in the Land of Israel,” which was quoted earlier – it is hardly surprising that a sense of dislocation and the search for belonging in the works of Back, Rubin and Kaufman are supplemented by images of geographical harshness. Yet, as the following section will show, there are alternative modes of representing the landscape in Anglophone Israeli writing – these highlight positive involvement with the physical surrounding as an intrinsic part of forming an attachment to the new country.

### 7.5.2. Projecting Belonging

The works of Rochelle Mass and Lami offer perhaps the most striking contrast to the representation of the Israeli landscape as hostile and alienated. Having spent most of their lives in the Israeli countryside – Lami in the Negev Desert and Rochelle Mass in the Galilee – both discuss the landscape in intimate terms, as close observers and immediate participants. Though their poems do not contradict the harshness of the climate, they often focus on its positive manifestations, using them as a scene of reflection on life’s changes. In “On the Road to Kefar Kisch,” Lami writes:

Even after a long time,  
 The thin flowering trees  
 Were whitened  
 Hoarfrost  
 And their blossoms  
 Ice  
 Caught between them  
 Layers of mind  
 As in between the  
 Tiered glaciers,  
 Or how  
 Leaves are caught by  
 The freezing waters  
 And find their places  
 Between here and there,  
 And when it was  
 Spring, the long rows  
 Stayed on,  
 Stayed in their frost  
 And I have gone away  
 To come back again,

And wonder at their lace,  
 Their propriety, and  
 Certainly,  
 Musing,  
 Finding that during this time  
 I have turned into many  
 People,  
 And been on  
 Roads, been there, returned  
 While grass stayed  
 Plush on the slope,  
 And from the road,  
 The whitened trees  
 Were frozen in their  
 Petals,  
 Just as I had  
 Remembered. (Lami 1991: 8)

Lami's blossoming trees invoke a scene radically different from Kaufman's "No earth, no water,/ what are they doing in the light?" Instead of desolation, they convey elegance and beauty; plush springtime grass suggests the image of fertility and natural opulence. Though the trees are described as thin, their blossoming endures, reappearing year after year and providing a marker of the passage of time. Throughout the poem, the poet continuously uses markedly un-Israeli imagery to capture the flowers: "frost," "hoarfrost," "glaciers," "freezing waters" and "trees/ [...] frozen in their/ petals," injecting the scene with western imagination – a frequent combination in Lami's works, which marks the duality of her perception as an immigrant author. However, despite winter imagery, there is no contrast between the native country and the chosen country; it is rather an assessment of the changes that the self has undergone since the speaker's first trip to the village of Kefar Kisch in the Galilee. The location's appearance of freshness and rejuvenation remains the same, while the speaker has "turned into many/ people." Though the details of this transformation are not provided, it is significant that an Israeli landscape functions as a point of such emotional reference that would be typically reserved for nostalgic memories of childhood and youth. The emotional significance of the scene that the speaker first encountered in adulthood embodies Lami's assumptions in "Foster Language" (Lami 1981: I: 10), where Lami argues that formative experiences are not mutually exclusive and are not limited to the mother tongue or to the native landscape: "We all have had many mothers." Here, the Israeli landscape combines both aesthetic beauty and a sense of personal significance; becoming "many people" and the many roads taken before the return to the scene suggest a

rich personal history in the chosen country – an effective way of creating a sense of belonging.

In a similar way, Rochelle Mass develops a gradation of the past. While memories of life in her native Canada play a significant role in Mass's poetry, her experience of Israel is deep and abundant enough to allow for looking back and assessing personal change on this temporal plane. For example, in "The way it was before" (2001b: 36) Mass portrays the separation of the earlier experience in Israel and of the present in an act of moving house:

The new year will come to this house next week  
to the old one, too, of course, but new folks will be there  
to bring the new year in. A tight place that was, no  
flights of steps – up and also down  
no roof for intimate drinks in the breeze of evening but  
a berth of community issues debating the life  
of the land.

Here it's a moshav<sup>40</sup> with separate people  
on separate land. Neighbors not connected to  
where I was and how I was before. There are  
birds here too, and bougainvillea and pomegranates  
ripening for the succah<sup>41</sup> but it is an empty house  
with plants reaching into the September light  
and one big chair.

I see the old place clearly  
And wonder  
And worry  
How it will age without me.

Unlike Kaufman's pervasive longing for the landscapes of the USA, Mass's speaker looks back at what has already become a pleasant memory of the past: the previous dwelling place in Israel. The new house is objectively superior – bigger and with a roof to enjoy the evening breeze, but it has not yet acquired the emotional significance with which Mass endows the old home. Although the speaker feels ambiguous about community life in the previous location – "a berth of community issues debating the life/ of the land" suggests bickering and rounds of pointless discussions – the new personal independence in the moshav

40 After almost 25 years in a kibbutz in the Jezreel Valley, Mass and her husband moved to a moshav near Mount Gilboa, which is also located in the Galilee. Unlike kibbutzim, which were created based on the socialist idea of communal ownership, houses and land in moshavim were privately owned.

41 A *succah* or *sukkah* is a temporary hut constructed for the Jewish holiday of *Sukkot*, which is celebrated in September or October. Sleeping and eating in these temporary huts is meant to remind of the temporary housing during Exodus.

also becomes an act of separation. Like blossoming trees, which mark the stations of personal transformation in Lami's poem, the neighbors of the old dwelling in Mass's poem seem to occupy a position of old acquaintances, who have witnessed the speaker's passage of life. Such connections of time and familiarity are yet to be forged in the new place.

But despite the current lack of belonging in a new place, it is not described unfavorably in physical terms, as in the poems of Kaufman, Rubin and Back. Instead, the speaker notes the presence of birds, bougainvilleas and ripening pomegranates; there is a prospect of enjoying the breeze on the roof. Such an essentially positive representation is remarkable especially because the poem is set in late summer or in early fall before the celebration of the Jewish New Year and the Sukkot holiday, i. e. after three to four months of hot draught and before the first rain, when the climate is perhaps least welcoming. Yet there is no self-pity because of the unfavorable environment; instead, there is a longing for the familiar people and objects; there is a sense that the new abode may with time acquire similar emotional significance.

Rather than being merely a pleasant locale of residence, the Israeli landscape becomes a place of relief. And just as the aridity of landscape functions as a marker of alienation in the works of Kaufman, Rubin and Back, water often plays a major part in developing a positive bond to locality in the works of Mass and Lami. Swimming in a Galilee lake features frequently in the poems of Rochelle Mass and the poem "Simple things can be gathered here" (2001b: 66–67) focuses on this experience of physical relief and emotional cleansing:

The water was as clear as an empty road today,  
I could see along the surface, down into the cave  
at the end. The clouds resolved themselves, moved  
into one another, and I looked for signs of myself as  
I went down the ladder. A daymoon just over the  
palms was pale, full, subtle as the lake reached round  
my ankle, teased, rolled away the dust. Spread  
round me, rolled time for another place. The waters

fill and part, clap as I furrowed from end to end,  
shuffle, then bulge, lie flat. Cunning in volume,  
brood as I looked for myself, think of the collision  
on the road from Jenin, three women on the ground,  
white scarves bloodied. [...]

[...] Spread my weight, I think  
of a friend whose life depended on her dog, and pile  
on another length. Light splashes as I go down again  
and think of a new friend who sends me photos  
of his mother before, then after a stroke and



I worry for his worry. I plow like farmers do  
 into tough ground. I surface again, and come back  
 to where I began.

I appear, disappear, taking it in, could be blood –  
 could be a live burial – could be lungfuls of air –  
 then down again. Sliding in, I am never done  
 as I wave to the sky, then plunge again. Vanish,  
 emerge, split the lake. Water runs down my legs  
 like syrup as I climb the ladder. I have danced  
 again. The lake pumps me up with dreams, licks  
 me clean, I return to these safe waters – make  
 my borders, stack memories, discard time

that wasn't good. I remember how I almost drowned  
 when I was six and now funnel back and forth  
 where language never goes. A blade I am, cutting  
 passage to where I have to be. Simple things  
 can be gathered here, promises kept.  
 Bread can be shared in such a place.  
 There are echoes here. I listen.

The experience of water is highly sensual – the lake teases and licks; water runs down the legs. The descriptions of contact with water – entering, furrowing, spreading the weight, crossing the lake, exiting – serve as structuring elements both for the poem and for the swimmer's train of thought, inducing the progress from fears of everyday life to a sense of cleansing, order and connectedness in the last two stanzas. Instead of being suppressed or agonized over, the tragic car accident in the neighborhood, the unstable life of a friend and the stroke in the family of another friend are processed and accepted – the swim in the lake is both a therapy and a meditation. It is practically a reversal of Kaufman's description of swimming in the Puget Sound: while the intolerable heat of an Israeli summer day raises memories of a romanticized childhood swim for Kaufman, in Mass's poem, the Galilee lake provides an antidote for a childhood trauma of narrowly escaping drowning. The natural features of the scene in "Simple things can be gathered here" hint at mysteries and discoveries: in the limpid water, a cave can be discerned at the end of the lake; the moon is still visible in the daytime sky and echoes float over water. One needs to give in to the experience of the lake, to listen to the echoes in order to achieve balance and inner piece – an action of accepting the self and the environment that can be extended to the rest of the Israeli experience in Mass's work.

The relief of water is echoed in a number of poems by Lami and Mass. In Lami's "Early Morning Swim," the speaker poetizes the experience of water in musical terms: "I swim quintets/ Am all the instruments/ Gilded cadences/ Trills,

hovering dances/ Floating music,” suggesting a sense of lightness and joy. Emerging from the “transparent palace” of water, the speaker feels “whole, good natured, [like] a murmuring summer rain.” As in Mass’s poem, the focus is on the pleasure of the experience, on its healing effect. A similar function is ascribed to the rain, which acts as a rejuvenating force after a long, dry summer. In “When the rain comes down,” Rochelle Mass describes the awakening of the soil after the first rain:

The first shower usually stutters, is uncertain. This time  
it unbuckled its load. The skies are clear this morning.  
I can see Jenin to the east, and the monastery  
on Mount Tabor. The rains have tamed the place  
softened my olive tree that was dusty and aging,  
polished begonias and added height to radishes  
planted from seed.

I count cyclamens forcing through, ferns  
stretching in the shade. The garden seems bigger now.  
Scorched plants have come alive.  
Lavender, just planted, trembles. Oregano  
is in the air today, and mint. Olives spin  
from the tree,  
black and ripe.

I want you to know about this morning.  
For months the earth has twisted  
from the sun. The crust opens now,  
trusts again, accepts.  
This I will tell you also:  
The rain’s intrusion heals,  
can bring dry bones back. (Mass 2001a: 10)

Mass’s short, economic descriptions of individual features of the landscape create a powerful scene. Sparse in adjectives, the poem relies on the personifying use of verbs for breathing life into an essentially static scene: the rain “unbuckle [s] its load” and “tame[s] the place,” “polishe[s]” begonias. The ferns stretch themselves; olives spin and the dry crust of the earth trusts and accepts. The poem suggests an intimate knowledge of the landscape by providing a concrete location – near the Arab town of Jenin and Mount Tabor – and by enumerating specific elements of the garden – e. g. olive tree, begonias, lavender, oregano and mint. These are infused with a concrete relationship to the speaker – lavender has been just planted, while radishes have been grown from seed, suggesting personal involvement and attachment. One may argue that it is precisely this personal involvement and the effort invested in tending to a garden in the chal-

lenging conditions of the Israeli landscape that accounts for such pleasure in seeing the plants revived; the effect of healing is projected onto the self.

At the same time, this is not a boundless idealization: the poem does not downplay the harshness of the climate. Amidst revival, every stanza features a reminder of the hard months of summer: the olive tree had become dusty and aging, patches of the garden have been scorched and “[f]or months the earth has twisted/ from the sun.” In a way, it is exactly this implied contrast between the arid season and the first rain that accounts for the appreciation of the natural magic. The flourishing of the garden in the fall is not to be taken for granted.

Nor is the horticultural effort always successful: in “Watering the Plants,” Lami laments the futility of trying to induce growth during the hot season. Despite watering, the soil gets harder; the flowering season has passed. Self-consciously, the speaker recognizes that she is projecting a foreign ideal on the middle-eastern landscape: speaking of “[f]antasies of a greening Babylon by the river,” the speaker observes that “[m]y transferred identity/ [f]rom the Euphrates exile/ [g]ives me little selfhood now” (1991: 56). The poem admonishes against unrealistic expectations. Just as the deconstruction of the image of holiness becomes an integral part of defining one’s own place in Israel for Anglophone writers, so the awareness of the impact of one’s cultural baggage and the recognition of the limitations and opportunities of landscape become prerequisites for developing a new sense of belonging. In “Spring in Jerusalem,” Lami specifically addresses the issue of alienation from the actual surroundings because of being “always knee-deep in memory/ [o]f something else” (1991: 28). Here, the female protagonist of the poem ignores the tulip gardens, the freesia patches and the blossoming trees of spring-time Jerusalem in order to relish in the received familiarity of Jerusalem’s towers and in scholarly musings. The actual scene of springtime awakening remains unnoticed behind “the disappointing/ [p]ing of words, the low moan of/ [d]ead religions, the saturated cerebricity.” Notably, the poem is written in the third person, unlike Lami’s other poems, which typically feature a first-person speaker. The change of perspective underscores the author’s criticism of ignoring the actual and suggests that at least to a certain extent, the resulting sense of alienation may be self-induced.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the “rural” poets Lami and Rochelle Mass write about the landscape in positive and sensual terms, using it as a scene of reflection on life’s changes and as an effective backdrop for re-thinking identity. One may imagine that living and working in agricultural communities for decades – since 1958 for Lami and since 1973 for Rochelle Mass – would hardly be possible without coming to terms with the landscape and without finding a sense of belonging. The relief of rain and vegetation presuppose the surrounding harshness of climate, which heightens the value of these experiences. While for “alienated” authors the desert and the dust become the dominant images of the

landscape, water and growth in the poems of these Anglophone Israeli authors suggest the formation of positive ties with their new country.

## 7.6. The Old Country and the New Country: Questioning the Concept of Home

With such differences in the poetic conception of the landscape of the chosen country, one may ask how the idea of home is treated in Anglophone Israeli writing. Extended physical residence in Israel is the precondition for being an Anglophone Israeli author, yet does geographical home equal emotional home? Implicitly, the relationship to the Israeli landscape in the works of different authors can hint at feelings of belonging or alienation. But the idea of home is also developed more explicitly in an attempt to contain the various experiences in the old and in the new country.

For Shirley Kaufman, especially the early works feature a strong sense of dislocation, where home seems an unattainable entity. While in her treatment of language Kaufman finds refuge in the native and the intimately known, here the very idea of home is fragile. In “Wherever We’re Not,” she notes:

Home we keep saying, the keys in our pocket,  
As if there’s a refuge  
Nothing can change.

How the same rooms console us briefly  
When we return, the bed  
And the table with its lamp. (Kaufman 1996: 104)

First published in the collection *Claims* in 1984, a decade after Kaufman moved to Israel, “Wherever We’re Not” does not name a concrete location or provide specific details that would allow geographical placement. In the collection, it is surrounded by poems that commemorate her ancestors’ immigration to the USA, e.g. “Brest Litovsk,” “The Road out of Poland” and “As the Reel Turns” as well as by images of her own new life in Israel, e.g. “The Mount of Olives,” “Stones” and “Chosen,” which loosely form the pattern of a journey through generations. In both stages, the journey is marred by a sense of loss that the new country does not compensate for: elderly relatives in Seattle sigh for lovers lost in Poland (e.g. “Aunt Fan,” “The Distance”), while the speaker herself notices the imperfection of Israeli life – the emotional heaviness of Jerusalem stones (1996: 110), the overripe grapes that attract flies (1996: 125). In “Wherever We’re Not,” the instability of the concept of home in the context of migration is verbalized explicitly: although “the keys in our pocket” initially seem to suggest a private sanctuary, the poem refutes the idea of stability and control. The im-

aged home does not provide a refuge in the face of change; its relief is brief and individual effort to control one's environment proves to be futile. However, while the poem recognizes the futility of control, the resulting sensation is that of lament rather than of acceptance; the transience of home is felt from the position of a forced exile rather than that of a voluntary migrant.

Another poem from the same collection, "Reasons," conveys the inability to account for being in a certain place:

Keep trying to tell them why I am here  
but none of it's true:  
fabric I cling to  
the way a child drags her torn blanket  
in the dark.  
[...]  
That's why a woman  
opens her legs  
with her eyes closed.

That's why I came down  
out of the air, unsure  
as each of us in the first  
departure, everyone telling me  
this is home. (Kaufman 1996: 99)

The poem makes clear that the concept of home is not felt intrinsically but is rather a pretense, a concession to outside opinions. All attempts to explain one's existence in a place prove to be mere crutches, a childish attempt at rationalizing the arbitrary: "none of it's true." The final stanza again invokes the state of being "in the air;" yet unlike in Rushdie's works, it is not a space of productive re-combination and transformation, but a limbo without control. The image of a woman unwillingly submitting to a sexual act strengthens Kaufman's point of individual powerlessness. The "coming down" from the air – an image equally applicable to Kaufman's arrival in Israel by plane – is marked by uncertainty. This uncertainty appears to be the only stable element, persisting since "the first departure;" the same uncertainty is carried into the new semblance of home, preventing the formation of strong connections. The feeling of dislocation persists. In her 1998 "Letter from Jerusalem," Kaufman commented thus on the state of suspense: "I've been spinning around in this empty space, trying to find my balance, for twenty-five years now" (In Kearful 2000: 253).

In the later years, however, Kaufman claimed to have superseded the distress caused by the sense of dislocation. In her 2002 interview with Lisa Katz, Kaufman stated:

[T]he idea of the bridge came to me rather late, after I'd lived here for more than 20 years. I used to wallow in feeling disconnected, and feeling that I wasn't at home anywhere anymore. I don't know how it was possible for me to see that in a new light. But I think it took a lot of living to realize that actually it was a strength and not a weakness, that I wasn't as dislocated as I kept insisting I was, that the fact that I was going on writing and creating and enjoying the emotional and mental stimulation of so many cultures and places was more positive than I'd thought. It became clear to me that wherever I was, the central core of me managed to stay centered and keep taking in stimuli and keep putting words down. So that staring one day at an invitation promoting an American-Israeli poet giving a reading someplace in the USA — [...] I realized that the hyphen meant more than two separate identities. Even though sometimes I still feel the separation strongly, when I've just re-entered California or just come back to Israel. (Katz 2002: 114)

Here, Kaufman reaches a meta-local understanding of identity. Instead of lamenting the impossibility of forming new roots and feeling disconnected from the outward environment, Kaufman shifts the focus to her intrinsic abilities that are felt to be the definitive elements of the self. The continuous poetic engagement with the changing surroundings becomes the cure against dislocation and alienation; for Kaufman, it becomes the essence of personal power amidst the perceived powerlessness to change her surroundings. With that, the Israeli landscape ceases to be a mere recipient of North American images and at times becomes the image donor. In "The New Sign on the Bridge," for example, the uprooted fir trees on Vancouver Island are likened to "ancient columns/ thrown down/ in the *Cardo*<sup>42</sup>" (Kaufman 2003: 34), reversing the transcultural influence of perception.

While Kaufman's works shift from alienation to meta-locational awareness, the idea of home in the works of Rachel Tzvia Back exhibits a strong duality. On the one hand, Back – a seventh-generation Israeli, who has spent parts of her childhood as well as most of her adulthood in Israel and has a native-like command of Hebrew – has strong ties to the Middle East. In an interview with Susan Ito, Back commented on her choice to live in Israel and raise a family there:

It is a choice and has to be acknowledged as a choice and I am fortunate to have the option of choice. Having said that, I have lived in Israel for 25 years and I have Israeli children, not American children. My daughter doesn't speak a word of English by her choice. [...]

[I]t was a choice I made 25 years ago to make my life in Israel. Today I feel like a foreigner in America but Americans don't treat me like a foreigner. Sometimes I wish I had an accent so that they would see me as Israeli. But I sound like an American. [...] [L]eaving [Israel] would absolutely break my heart. I have a great passion for Israel,

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42 A Roman street in the old city of Jerusalem.

even now – a passion for the Israeli landscapes and sensibility, for the rhythms of the Hebrew language, for the ancientness of the culture and its raw newness too. My heart feels most connected to itself in Israel – I feel most myself here. (Ito 2006: 3)

Whereas choices seem to be dictated by fate for Kaufman, Back emphasizes the importance of personal decision in her life in Israel. Passing for an American in America is actually perceived as a disadvantage, diminishing her perception of being authentically Israeli. Though Back does not use Hebrew for writing, she still professes a deep attachment to the language and culture of Israel.

Back's works, however, suggest that this sense of belonging is an uneasy one, where the terms of home need to be constantly re-negotiated. The very title of her first poetry collection – *Azimuth* – invokes the underlying theme of a journey, which is carried out on the geographical and on the emotional levels. In the epigraph that explains the meaning of the term *azimuth*, Back writes: "An Arab of the desert, of the tribe of Keys says: *Thou shalt traverse (addressing a woman) a land without a description, journeying without any sign of the way and without any track, such being the meaning of as-samt*" (Back 2001: iii). In line with the revisionist message of the volume, the admonition is delivered by an Arab sage. In the collection itself, Back swerves from the beaten political track of taking sides in the Arab-Israel conflict and locates herself as the one who, perhaps exactly because of her international heritage, can perceive the pain and struggle of both. But her poems suggest that locating the self, a foreigner and a local at once amidst heat, dryness and conflicting interests is not an easy task. In the title-less concluding poem of the volume, Back poses the question directly:

you ask  
 why here, in the high north,  
 perched on peaks and slopes,  
 open to the sky's full weight  
 of fringed clouds  
 and bombs, why here?  
 [...]  
 In winter, wrapped in shrouds  
 of white silence and space, there is  
 no escape: god follows, bears down  
 with the weight of the child  
 in your arms, on your mind.  
 [...]  
 The soil is not fertile, too many rocks,  
 and too many years are meager.  
 Muscles ache, and the heart –  
 but we are mountain people,  
 we cannot live on flat land. (2001: 103–104)

The dilemma of the poem reminds of the conundrum of Franz Kafka, where the Jewish writer is at the same time beset by the impossibility of writing in German and of writing differently. The danger of the location, the sense of being fully exposed to hostility, the meagerness of the soil and the resulting heartache point towards an impossibility of dwelling “in the high north” – the hills of Galilee where Back lives with her family. Yet the speaker seems to suggest that despite the physical danger and the mental strain, it is nevertheless the only satisfactory choice, where being connected to oneself can only result from dwelling in this difficult home. Remarkably, following the multiple points of view of the collection, where the poet’s own geographical and mental wanderings are permeated by an alternating identification with Jews and Arabs in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the poem can be read in different ways: the lyrical I can equally apply to the transcultural poet herself as well as to the Jewish and Palestinian inhabitants of Galilee, where each feels a sense of inexorable connection with the land. The “why” of the poem has no rational answer; the speaker’s perseverance despite difficulty is shown to be based on a subjective sense of belonging.

In addition, children play an important role for reflections of home and belonging in Back’s works. In the interview, Back points out the Israeliness of her children – partly an unwilling concession to grounding one’s transcultural identity, but also a marker of having established a home in the new country. In the poem, the speaker appears to be weighted down by motherhood; a continuity of one’s existence in a place is established. More explicitly, in the cycle “On the Ruins of Palestine,” Back writes: “(what has anchored us)/ The ballast of their breathing/ in the next room in the bed” (2007: 42) – one’s children act as the most effective element of establishing belonging; the breath of sleeping children becomes the central element of home<sup>43</sup>. This conventional picture, however, is shown to be at least partly an illusion. For example, in the introduction to *On Ruins & Return*, the birth of the third child elicits a sense of safety and euphoria, which is immediately challenged by the outbreak of the Second Intifada; the images of the speaker’s children are paralleled by images of Arab and Jewish children killed or maimed. The strong emotional sense of belonging is challenged by conflict and by the awareness that the other side is entitled to the same sense of identification with the land.

By contrast, the works of Rochelle Mass are permeated by repeated questioning of belonging and by affirmations of the new identity. Mass’s first chapbook was published under the title *Where’s my home?*; questions of location

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43 By contrast, Shirley Kaufman left her three daughters in the USA when she moved to Israel at the age of 46. Although thoughts about her daughters feature vividly in her poetry (e.g. “Notes to My Daughters” and “The Mountain”), this separation is perhaps one of the sources of Kaufman’s pervasive sense of dislocation.



and identity – “*Why do you stay? They ask*” (2001b: 68) and “*Why did you come?/ they ask me, and ask again*” (2003: 1) – are central issues to the poems that close her second collection *Aftertaste* and open her third collection, *The Startled Land*. The specific placement of the poems highlights the importance of the themes. However, unlike Kaufman’s “*What are they doing in this light?*”, which emphasizes the sense of dislocation and alienation, Mass’s questions are not rhetorical. In “*I Came to Join the Women*,” Mass gives an emotional justification for a seemingly illogical act of living in Israel:

I came to a place where cotton grew out of yellow hearts  
 where bitter olives were picked and cured where  
 melons with green flesh grew on the top of the hill where  
 etched numbers from camps were  
 told and told again.

Why did you come?  
 they ask me, and ask again.

I couldn’t say then but  
 after twenty years and more I know  
 I came to join the women before me.  
 Deborah first to judge and  
 Yael first to command troops  
 on the Gilboa ridge and Jezebel who  
 flashed oval eyes at soldier boys and  
 Michal daughter to a king who  
 lost his head on that same height of land.  
 I came to join the women before me  
 Take my place, make things new  
 In the valley of Jezre’el, the Lord himself sowed.

After they drained the swamps, I came  
 after Golda joined a kibbutz just down the road, after  
 eucalyptus rooted into the tough earth and after  
 pines and sycamore bent to the wind.

Why did you come?  
 Why do you stay?  
 they ask.

I walk down the road to the King’s Way where  
 the tillers, the farmers, carve the slim land.  
 The cotton is swelling again.

I remember when I came and why. (Mass 2003: 1–2)

Mass’s “*I Came to Join the Women*” is perhaps one of the most Zionist poems in Anglophone Israeli Literature. Combining biblical, political and agricultural references, it is permeated by a strong sense of purpose, where personal choice

plays an important role. The speaker suggests that her initial move may have been intuitive, but that twenty years of involvement with the physical and social aspects of the land have forged a significant and rewarding connection. Significantly, the land is not a paradise: the soil is slim, the olives need to be cured to get out the bitterness and tattooed numbers of Holocaust survivors serve as a constant reminder of unspeakable loss. Simultaneously, Mass presents a revisionist view of biblical history by foregrounding the importance of female figures. Rather than alluding to biblical matriarchs – Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel – whose importance is mainly linked to their actions as spouses and mothers, Mass chooses less well-known female figures as her points of reference. These are characterized by their power of decision making and action: Deborah was the only female judge mentioned in biblical texts; the Song of Deborah in the Book of Judges narrates how Deborah, with Yael's help, defeated the army of the Canaanite king Jabin. Michal, the daughter of Saul and the wife of David, appears in the Book of Samuel; she helps David escape when her father's messengers are searching for him in order to kill him (Samuel 19: 11–17). The story of Michal has also been embraced by the poet Rachel (Bluwstein) – one of the founding mothers of modern Hebrew Literature – who identified herself with Michal in an eponymous poem. Interestingly, Mass also includes Jezebel – a negative biblical character – as her role model. Although Jezebel was guilty of spreading idolatry and seizing privately-owned land, in her poem Mass emphasizes Jezebel's sexual allure – flashing “oval eyes at soldier boys.” The inclusion of Jezebel may also be motivated by the same considerations as incorporating the unappealing features of the landscape – rather than concealing the unpleasant, the poem works towards an inclusive approach. Notably, these characters were active in the north of today's Israel, where Rochelle Mass has lived since 1973, and the historically significant landmarks – the Jezre'el valley and the Gilboa ridge – serve as an even more direct link to the landscape. Mass also invokes the more recent significance of the area: Golda Meir, known as the “Iron Lady” of Israeli politics, who was Prime Minister at the time of Mass's immigration, had lived in Kibbutz Merhavia for three years, where she engaged in agricultural activity on par with other kibbutz members. In the poem, Golda Meir links the theme of strong women to the trope of “building the country”: the draining of the swamps and the planting of eucalyptus, pines and sycamores, which were carried out in order to make the area more green and inhabitable, are presented as an antecedent of cotton, melons and olives that the speaker observes on her walks. Besides the appreciation of aesthetic beauty, great value is placed on conscious effort and achievement; it is the joy of participating in a common creation that Mass's speaker identifies as her pull towards the land. Investment of effort becomes the foundation of a new sense of belonging.

“I Came to Join the Women” may act as a strong poetic affirmation of a new

belonging, yet a number of Mass's other poems suggest that this reaffirming in fact takes place in an act of constant dialogue with the native world of Canada. Mass's works reveal a complex relationship between these spheres of reference. While a number of her poems invoke terrorism, war and military service in the background of her Israel poems, the prairies of Canada are explicitly presented as a safe place by comparison: "you could feel safe in that level place – in that blunt sameness" (2003: 14). Though "blunt sameness" suggests criticism of a bland routine, the poem "You Could Feel Safe There" in fact presents a powerful depiction of the Canadian landscape and country life, which indicates knowledge and appreciation. Eventually, examination and re-examination of both is contented within a single consciousness: "I want to get a sense of things. Compare places./ Understand how one country stretches on forever/ while another struggles to maintain where it is" (2003: 15).

The dialogic mode between the two physical and social landscapes is especially poignant in the poem "The neighbor's wife is here again" (2001a: 6), where the speaker remembers her own childhood while her Israeli neighbor narrates the story of her life:

[T]he neighbor's wife  
asks: *Have you been to the Negev? Do you know Orot and  
B'ror Chayel? That's where we first farmed* she says and I think of

My father swinging a leg over his bike with his hot omelet sandwich  
And stewed prunes in a bottle, riding to the store where he fixed  
Watches that didn't tell time and clocks taller than I.

The poem continues the dialogue between the spoken words of the neighbor and the speaker's thoughts. The neighbor's references to the Israeli geography and landscape are echoed by the speaker's Canadian associations – the Negev is contrasted with the Canadian prairies; the neighbor's offer of roses for Sabbath evokes the crawling pink roses on a balcony on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Vancouver. Registering the ongoing external-internal dialogue, the poem traces the limits of belonging: despite her strong identification with Israel, Mass's speaker is not "authentically" local in the same way as her neighbor's life-long tie to the land. On the other hand, there is a strong sense that the past cannot and should not be re-lived. Poems such as "Controlling Memories" and "When everything was different" feature acts of revisiting sites of childhood and the speaker's inability to re-inhabit them:

In each room I look for my mother's face,  
my sisters soft bodies. In each mirror  
I watch the older woman  
searching for

when she was there and  
everything was different. (2001b: 11)

Although meditation on the Canadian experience is an integral part of Mass's work, the reconciliation of memories with the current life is also represented as a conscious act. In "Autumn is moving summer on" (2001a: 9), which documents the passage of time and of the changing landscapes of her life, the speaker concludes that in order to be grounded in the present, not too much power should be given to memories: "I should trim the years down,/ shovel away the fragments/ acknowledge/ what's left." Though an inner dialogue is essential and inescapable, the awareness of the influence of the past and of the occasional necessity to curtail nostalgia are shown to play a role in the shaping of identity.

The extremes of assimilation and of the "double diaspora" are addressed in Jerome Mandel's short stories "Stone" and "Orange." The protagonist of "Stone" is a Harvard graduate and a former rising star of playwriting, who has moved to Israel and started a new life as a laborer in a moshav. He is shown to be satisfied with his humble lifestyle in an agricultural community; he has married and fathered four children. To underscore the transition into a new life, he has changed his diaspora name to an Israeli one, selecting a rather conservative one – Avshalom Golani. The story focuses on an episode several years into his new life, when his former lover, portrayed as a wealthy and determined, but insensitive and ignorant Jewish American princess, visits him in Israel and offers him to return to the U.S. to pursue his literary aspirations. Mandel juxtaposes her incredulity at his lifestyle with Golani's attachment to his new country:

"You fell in love with a country?" she said. "With this country? This dirt-poor, rocky, hot, unbearable, wounded country where nothing grows but stones? You're joking." He looked at his watch. Not far from where he was joking, the sprinklers among the fig trees would be shutting down. Water was collecting at the end of the glistening leaves, gathering in the lobes, and dropping silently into the night. And the ground lines among the red and green bell peppers would engorge with water now and drip into the wounded fields. (Mandel 1999: 26)

In an almost exaggerated way, Mandel portrays Golani's conversion as a success of simple life – the sacrifice of his literary prospects seems to be well worth the chosen alternative: living in a natural environment, with a loving wife, four children and stable work which produces tangible results. Although his father in law – the authentic Israeli – still perceives Golani as "the strange American his daughter has chosen to marry" (ibid. 28), he is shown to have made an investment of effort into adapting the ways of the moshav, and implicitly, into learning Hebrew. His concerns with the crops of the moshav, which puncture the story in several points, suggest intimate knowledge of his new environment. This enables the protagonist of the story to feel protective gentleness towards the landscape

that his former compatriot brushes off with the ignorance of a tourist. Rather than feeling a pull to his former country, Golani is shown to be assimilated into the existence of the Israeli countryside – the transition is completed at the end of the story, when the former playwright buries the vestiges of his literary work in the corner of a melon field, next to a grave of a soldier who died in the First Lebanon War. The destruction of the written material is both an act of severing the link with the past and a sacrifice to the chosen land.

Mandel's story "Orange" represents the other extreme – a wealthy and arrogant city dweller, who has little understanding of Hebrew or of the surrounding society. The character of Gilbert Martin is revealed through a minor incident: during his walk, an orange is thrown at him from a passing car. Faithful to the stereotype that Americans are prone to initiate lawsuits over minor confrontations, the retired business shark attempts to get his due by identifying the culprit on the basis of scanty evidence and by summoning the police to his aid. In the process, he betrays deep ignorance about Jews from middle-eastern countries, who form a significant part of Israel's population; he is also unable to communicate in Hebrew and is smug about his American-ness. Unlike Golani, who has developed a familiarity and an affectionate relationship with the landscape where he lives and works, Martin is afraid of nature, suspecting that every bush may bring a terrorist ambush: "He didn't really expect to – he lived too far from interface with violence – but he had read enough stories to know where terrorists liked to lurk" (1999: 51). A caricature both of an overly single-minded businessman and of an unintegrated "Anglo," Martin remains clueless as to why neither the police, nor his wife support him in his determination to take the case of the "orange attack" to court.

Mandel's stories seem to provide no "golden mean", where both the former and the new identity would be positively combined. In terms of Berry's acculturation model, Golani is a perfect case of deliberate assimilation, while Martin exemplifies separation. However, the caricatured portrayal of Martin suggests that self-induced "double diaspora" is clearly a less rewarding alternative, and that knowledge, understanding and participation in the host culture are the key to forming a positive sense of belonging.

Karen Alkalay-Gut has produced perhaps the most varied and multi-angled discussion of home and belonging. In her poetic works, the different modes of addressing identity in terms of locality include vivid sketches of Tel Aviv, questioning the importance of the stations of her own life – Britain, America and Israel – as well as the examination of home on a larger scale, in terms of the previous and the next generation. Though explicit affirmations are rare, many of Alkalay-Gut's poems imply that Israel, and especially Tel Aviv are considered home, while America and Europe are invoked in an examination of personally significant landscapes, creating a rich translocal awareness. In her preface to the

collection *In My Skin*, Alkalay-Gut comments on the role that geography plays in her perception and formation of Jewish identity:

[O]ne of my major reasons for moving to Israel in 1972 was that I wanted to be “normal,” to be able to avoid the constant obsession with Jewish identity that I thought characterized all of the Diaspora.

And living in Israel appeared to have been, until recently, a very “normalizing” experience. If I wrote about Jewish identity at all, it was as an ambassador to the outside world. Within Israel, I did not feel that I had to think about myself as an “other,” as a “Jew.” I was free to forge an identity of my own.

[...]

Enamored by the vastness and richness of American culture, I rebelled against confines of my Jewish schooling, without ever rebelling against the principles and theology of Judaism. I fell in love with English literature, with pop culture, with possibilities of expanding cultural horizons endlessly. But when I first came to Israel, I suddenly was sure that all these various dreams of fulfillment could be reached in this new expanding homeland. (Alkalay-Gut 2000: 9–10)

The passage addresses a geographical question that many Jews around the world have found unsettling – whether it is more rewarding to live in Israel or in the diaspora. In her personal answer, Alkalay-Gut emphasizes both the role of choice and the cumulative aspect of identity. Here, the very fact of immigrating to Israel in a way becomes a license to be American – to cultivate an interest in American culture on par with a fascination with the chosen country. As Jewishness is the norm rather than an exception in the surrounding society, the “obsession” with Jewish identity, which Alkalay-Gut attributes to the diaspora, gives room to the pursuit of other social memberships. Rather than being an act of separating oneself, identity is construed as a mobile, inclusive and expanding entity.

Conversely, criticism of this “obsession” becomes a motif in Alkalay-Gut’s poetry. For example, in the poem “Flight,” the author criticizes the extent of estrangement that may be caused by a fixation on Jewish identity. Observing that “All my old friends in the States are into religion./ It is their new salvation,” Alkalay-Gut describes how *midrashim*<sup>44</sup> and outdated Yiddish words are needlessly introduced into daily communication, with the purpose of outwardly displaying one’s Jewishness. Alkalay-Gut highlights the artificiality of this development by contrasting the casual usage of Yiddish words by her Yiddish-speaking parents with their somewhat sanctimonious reappearance in contemporary speech. She concludes that “Now it sets the Jew apart by dress, a stubborn discovery/ of ritual identity, *frum*<sup>45</sup> with quotation marks” (2000: 34).

44 A *midrash* (plural: *midrashim*) is a story that explains passages from the Tannakh.

45 *Frum*, related to German *fromm*, literally means *pious* or *devout*, but has more recently been used as a reference to and self-reference among Orthodox Jews. Such usage implies that other, less strict kinds of Judaism are considered insufficiently pure and authentic.

To illustrate the point of self-imposed separation by the over-zealous outward exhibition of Jewishness, the poem describes the speaker's neighbor on the flight, who orders *glatt-kosher* – i. e. food that is considered to be even more ritually pure than the regular kosher – and flatly ignores the female speaker during their thirteen-hour flight. Confronted with such self-righteousness and self-imposed separation, the speaker answers with a slightly provocative act: “given up for lost, I take my freedom, unhook my bra and read my Wilde as if/ he too does not exist” (2000: 33). Sufficiently secure in her own Jewishness, the speaker resists the limiting imposition of frum-ness.

The relation to Israel that surfaces in Alkalay-Gut's poems is deeply personal. In allusion to Psalm 137, Alkalay-Gut writes in her poem “Jerusalem”:

My right hand  
has its own cunning  
  
remembers those bones  
it wants to remember  
forgets the stones  
it wants to forget. (2000: 69)

Unlike the psalmist's invocation that his right hand may lose its skill if he should forget Jerusalem, the poem emphasizes the joy of a mix-and-match approach to identity rather than of stark adherence to imposed values. Alkalay-Gut challenges the pathos of the received tradition and instead emphasizes private involvement and observation. Significantly, a large number of her poems on Israel focus on Tel Aviv – the city that became a symbol of modern, secular lifestyle – rather than Jerusalem, where the obsession with religion and history – the stones and bones of the poem – is felt to be too intrusive. Poems such as “He Sleeps in Her” and “Nights in My City” exemplify the author's preference for the business and fashion capital of Israel. The first poem juxtaposes Jerusalem's “enormous appetite to enclose you/ into a religion” with Tel Aviv's “sexy people, its constant foreplay with the sea,” suggesting a predilection for heart-felt sensuality over the exhibition of religious zeal (2012b: 111). “Nights in My City” offers an equally sensual image: Tel Aviv is described as an “ever-hungry lover, teasing, feeding me through the night” (1992a: 2).

In Alkalay-Gut's Israel poems, the speaker is usually physically present in the scene, combining observation with participation. Concise and vivid descriptions of sensory input create a feeling of intimacy and familiarity, of being influenced by the scene directly. One of the most poignant examples is the eleven-part sequence “Apartment Hunting in Tel Aviv,” which displays a mosaic picture of private spaces within the city. Its beginning documents the shift of perspective from that of an uninvolved observer to that of an insider:

The façade is always unfathomable,  
 a united front of blinds closed to the street,  
 at least at midday when we arrive to weigh  
 the possibility of living on the inside, to be  
 part of the scene

When you walk round the side  
 you can see it clearly –  
 rubbish and laundry –  
 rich information  
 of the life within.

Like a urologist  
 I try to gauge the neighbors  
 from their street productions.

Once inside, it is much easier.  
 From each window<sup>46</sup> we can view  
 a different family, busy with their lives  
 and ours. Friday afternoon and the mother  
 of the soldier is hanging his weekend fatigues  
 to be ready for ironing in the morning. She leans  
 a bit further over the clothes lines than she needs to  
 so she can see us evaluating the empty bedroom. (2004b: 84)

If the minute familiarity with plants and fields is an important component of creating and depicting belonging for Rochelle Mass, the constant rediscovery of the urban scene fulfills the same role in the works of Alkalay-Gut. Familiarization follows from bottom up: while the facades and the blinds may give a general impression, it is the often unpalatable specifics – rubbish and wet soldiers' uniforms – that provide insights into the actual routine of life. Despite the unsavory nature of these details, the equal extent of irony that the speaker applies to herself by comparing her way of collecting information to that of an urologist lends the poem an atmosphere of good humor and emotional proximity. The nature of the glance behind the poem's perspective is important: rather than dispassionately sizing up property, as one may expect from apartment hunters, the speaker participates in the shared game of curiosity, where every observer is also the observed. Besides the soldier's mother in the quoted passage, the poem goes on to describe the mutual cognizance between the speaker and the neighbors in other windows, who are engaged in various weekend activities. An immediate, if brief relationship between people in dif-

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<sup>46</sup> The cityscape of Tel Aviv is dominated by apartment buildings; small private houses are more rare. Typically, the apartment buildings are built close to each other, so that visual intrusion into other people's apartments is almost inevitable when one looks out of the window.



ferent apartments is established, suggesting one's inevitable involvement in the social fabric of the city. Compared to the proverbial anonymity and alienation of city dwellers in western society, especially in the U.S., such a rather good-natured permeation of private spheres creates an atmosphere of closeness, of belonging. Typically, such a lack of separation regarding the private spheres is imagined to (nostalgically) characterize either bygone ages or less developed and more "exotic" societies. Indeed, the continuation of the poem uncovers tokens of different times and places – faded photos of Polish immigrants posing with *keffiyeh* and *nargilah*, a highboy from pre-war Carlsbad; all of these contribute to the multi-layered nature of modernity. While the historical and cultural artifacts of Jerusalem – stones and bones – are rejected, a private, more personal historicity is uncovered in Tel Aviv.

A number of poems document Alkalay-Gut's assertion of belonging in Tel Aviv. In "Returning to Tel Aviv," the speaker observes seemingly insignificant and even unpleasant details of city life – empty ampules in front of the health clinic, tattered newspapers and street cats. However, at the second glance, the negativity is turned into appreciation: scraps of newspapers reveal poems, while lean street cats function as models of defiance and independence. Noting that "I stare at the gutters the way/ others look at shop windows," the speaker of the poem confesses that "This is a place I like to know/ with the ease of love" (1992b: 35). Akin to Baudelaire's flaneur, Alkalay-Gut's Tel-Avivian epitomizes the joy of city ramble and observation, where especially the by-products of city life, rather than the display of affluence become tokens of familiarity and belonging. Following Baudelaire's line, in "Tel Aviv" the speaker self-confidently dons the garb of the dandy:

Four fingers in the fob pocket of my jeans  
 the tail of my suede jacket moving  
 with my fast walk – high boots clacking  
 on the broken sidewalks of old Tel Aviv  
 [...]  
 I am on my way  
 here now on a clear fall day  
 when every detail every ornament of this  
 convoluted city is part of an arabesque  
 a single line forming  
 a perfect design. (1986: 29)

Unlike Lami's and Mass's attachment to the rural landscape, here the speaker of the poem seems to become an organic part of the urban space. Dressed in clothes that suggest both glamour and freedom, the speaker merges with the "here and now" of the empowering city walk. The self-confidence of the walker is matched by the appreciation of the city. All things seem to fall into place, creating a sense

of a dynamic and subjective harmony – a momentary antithesis of alienation. In poems such as “Emergency” and “On the Lack of Productivity of Israeli Artists in These Hard Times,” cafés fulfill a similar function: especially in times of danger and instability, such as the Gulf War and the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Tel Aviv cafés act as a place of refuge – “drinking melon juice/ and eating a cinnamon babka redolent/ of loving grandmothers, while easy street cats –/ [...] wander in and out of the sidewalk tables.” (2000: 60) In contrast to Kaufman’s instability of a private notion of home, Alkalay-Gut’s conception of belonging within the geographical and social network seems to provide a more positive sense of identity.

This sense of being at home in Israel despite political challenges is set against Alkalay-Gut’s personal history of migration as well as that of her family. The enormous personal significance of these geographical movements is underscored not only by their treatment in the poems, but also by their recurrence on the covers of her books, in prefaces and in writer’s biographies. Alkalay-Gut was born in London on the last night of the Blitz to Lithuanian-Jewish parents who had escaped via Danzig on the night Hitler invaded. In 1948 her family moved to Rochester, New York, and in 1972 Alkalay-Gut moved to Israel. Although Alkalay-Gut summarizes fleetingly that “Born in London, raised in the U.S.,/ in the bathroom I appear a typical Israeli:/ curly hair (the perm, remember?) dark eyes (kohl)” (1993: 44), there is an emotional connection maintained with the layers underneath the Israeli appearance. In a dedication to Holborn Station in London, where she was conceived during an air raid, the underground station is personified as an old aunt, who “must be paid obeisance/ even if she doesn’t remember our connection/ and likes strangers as much as relations” (2004b: 45). Considering the dramatic events surrounding conception and birth, which are sketched in the poem, the relationship to the London landmark is not nostalgic, but philosophical:

I see the resemblance too, the way we are both  
way stations, bearing signs  
of our traumatic past,  
but except for measured stops, concerned only  
with the hubbub of the moment. (Ibid.)

The emphasis is significant: rather than living in the past, the focus is on the present, where the liveliness of events helps cope with old scars. However, while Holborn station functions as a reconstructed memory of the past, the dialogue with America is highly current. On the one hand, the USA function as a natural setting of poems related to childhood memories, where the awareness of Jewishness is juxtaposed with the pervasiveness of the surrounding American culture, as in e.g. “Yiddish Folk Shule – 1952” and “I explain Darwin to the

Rebbe.” On the other hand, as a prosperous, safe and sedate country, it is construed as a mirror to the intense everyday of the Israeli existence. In the poem “America,” the comparison is made explicit: “In America, even the onions/ don’t make you cry,” “News on tv proves/ all is well,” personal safety can be trusted the same “way you trust/ the water, phone company, soap powder” (1992b: 18). The USA seems to promise wellbeing on all levels – from the domestic concerns of household management to national politics. By comparison, Israel appears to offer nothing of the kind: “electricity stops and the meat/ drips from the freezer/ men go for soldiers some/ come back” (ibid.). The military and the everyday concerns are ironically leveled, suggesting a situation of absurdity, where nothing works as it should. However, the poem is far from praising the U.S. at the expense of Israel: though there is a share of nostalgia for the American onion that “lies/ gentler in the plate,” the plate is shown to be surrounded by the shallowness and boredom of routine: “the serious business (ourselves)/ begins. Then comes/ gossip, weather, gay/ anecdotes.” By contrast, Israeli after-dinner communication is characterized by “painful self-incriminations,/ un-aesthetized/ analysis of the nation’s beating heart.” Although the mildness of the American onion initially hints at nostalgia, it also suggests a blandness of life and a degree of insincerity – the concluding lines “Even the onion lies/ gentler in the plate” can indicate untruthfulness and fakeness as well as mildness (cf. Stiller 1997: 31). Despite its unpredictability and danger, Israel emerges as the more “authentic” home, where deeper, more meaningful issues can be addressed. Like Rachel Tzvia Back, Alkalay-Gut foregrounds the subjective aspect of belonging that seems to go against the common sense of safety and material wellbeing.

Another similarity with the works of Back is the recognition of the role that family plays in the notion of home. In Alkalay-Gut’s collection *In My Skin*, the attempt at defining home is repeatedly addressed to the poet’s children, who seem to be unintentionally carrying on the anxiety of previous generations. While the speaker of “Tel Aviv Stories” conjectures that her son has become a gourmet as a way of compensating for the fear of hunger that haunted his ancestors, her daughter is investigating the meaning of home. In her questioning, the daughter is simultaneously “longing for the stability of a place/ that cannot be taken away” and “terrified of addiction to security” (2000: 44). The speaker attributes it to an “ancestral disease” and introduces a parallel image of her own father, who “grew gray with memory/ of survival through mobility, being light enough/ to skip one step ahead of the Nazis” (ibid.). When interviewed by her daughter about the meaning of home in “Flight,” the speaker does not provide a definitive answer, but remarks “I don’t like homes that keep others out” (2000: 35). A contrast to the statement by another interviewee in the poem – “‘Home,’ said the other woman she interviewed, ‘is a place/ I can defend with a gun’” (ibid.), Alkalay-Gut again foregrounds the inclusiveness of the notion of

home. Rather than an isolated personal refuge, home becomes a site of contact and interaction. In a 2008 interview with Nilanshu Agarwal, Alkalay-Gut suggests that despite the “permanent state of marginalization and alienation” she herself experienced as a child, she had managed to find a “variety of homes on [her] own” culturally, suggesting a flexibility of the social and geographical dimensions of home. For now, however, as the speaker of “Tel Aviv Stories” explains to her daughter, “an old house in Tel Aviv/ may well be the only cure” for the inherited restlessness and the fear of making oneself too comfortable.

The causes of the “ancestral disease” are vividly re-imagined in a number of poems that invoke the geographical stations of previous generations. “Night Travel” follows the speaker’s parents, who escape on a train from Danzig to Berlin, Cologne and finally arrive in the Netherlands, from where they will flee further to Britain and to the U.S.. Despite the search for Jews conducted by German soldiers, the couple is able to escape due to the generosity of two friends, who, recognizing the plight of the fugitives, give up their seats on the train. The two refugees survive “by keeping silent through the long train ride/ from Berlin to Cologne in a car filled with/ staring German soldiers” (1993: 30). An enumeration of stations rather than a visual representation, the poem communicates the tension of flight and the insecurity of place. On the page next to it, the narrative of “Night Travel” is juxtaposed by the speaker’s own train ride through Austria in “The Train” (1993: 31). Half a century has passed and the second train ride carries the whiff of “Kultur” and “Torten” – positive stereotypes – as well as a comical, if somewhat shocking encounter with an exhibitionist. Yet the presence of two Austrian policemen, idly guarding the station as well as the reference to Linz as the site of Hitler’s youth serve as a reminder of the other train, suggesting the permeability of experience and memory.



*Image 1. Photograph taken by a German soldier in Lida in 1916 (Alkalay-Gut 2012b: 71)*

Another poem, “Sepia” (2012b: 71) employs an original photograph from an even earlier age – 1916 – to capture the locations of the family past. In the image from Lida – the hometown of Alkalay-Gut’s parents, which used to belong to Lithuania and is now a part of Belarus – an elderly kerchiefed woman is peeking distrustfully at the observer; the speaker refers to her as “grandmother” in the poem. The image is appropriated poetically – in a 2012 reading, the author confessed that she did not in fact know the identity of the woman in the picture. Printed above the poem in the collection *Layers*, the photograph speaks for itself: rather than restating the surroundings, the poem focuses on the moment of tension between the “grandmother” and the German soldier, who took the picture. The irony lies therein that the only visual token of the Lida “grandmother’s” appearance and of the actuality of street life is a moment captured by an enemy soldier; one is compelled to perceive imagined family history not through the eyes of a loved one, but through those of a curious enemy. The tension of the scene in the street of Lida becomes a prelude to the forced journey of the parents’ generation.

It is this awareness of the precariousness of geographical stations that provides an efficient backdrop to Alkalay-Gut’s conception of home in Tel Aviv. Although migration to Israel is not seen as a homecoming spiritually – in an interview with Nilanshu Agarwal the poet states that at the moment of aliyah, she “didn’t have another homeland than the United States” (Agarwal 2008) – it nevertheless becomes a site both of involvement and belonging. While the traditional mode of longing is de-mystified and despite reoccurring criticism, Israel assumes the function of the emotional center of personal geography. This ambivalence is perhaps best summed up in the words of the poet herself:

Allergic to olive trees,  
 I cannot imagine  
 life without  
 these ancient friends  
 twisting their histories  
 whispering various truths  
 dropping their fruit  
 in my hungry  
 ambivalent lap. (Alkalay-Gut 2000: 41)

## 7.7. Conclusion

The preoccupation of Anglophone Israeli authors with the notions of home and territorial belonging is by itself not unique either globally or locally. As was discussed earlier, locality and place have become central issues of post-

colonialism and transculturalism; for Jewish Studies place has hardly ever been a straightforward concept. Neither is geography a stable entity for the young Israeli society, where each Jewish citizen can name the number of generations that his family have spent in Israel, where the social fabric has been repeatedly changed by waves of immigration from different parts of the world, where Israeli expatriates have been notorious for building large communities in New York and Berlin, where the territorial integrity of the state has been recurrently challenged by wars ever since its independence, where encroachment on Palestinian territory has become habitual and where many state holidays and memorial days are tied either to events that have taken place in other locations – e. g. Passover as a commemoration of Exodus and Purim as a celebration of a failed attempt to eradicate Jews in Babylon – or remind of the struggle to create and maintain the state, e. g. the memorial day for fallen soldiers and Independence Day. Amos Oz, one of the best-known contemporary Hebrew writers has expressed his sense of geographical unsettlement: “I am fundamentally a Jewish writer. But I am a Jewish writer in the sense of writing forever about the ache to have a home, and then having one, aching to go away thinking that this is not the real one” (in Alkalay-Gut 2002: 468).

However, as in Psalm 137, which addresses the relationship between territorial emplacement and creative ability, geographical unsettlement per se becomes a strong prompt for writing. For Anglophone Israeli authors, most of whom have immigrated from English-speaking countries, their double vision – the knowledge and experience of Israel and the language and the frame of reference of their native countries – puts them in a position of interpreters for their wider audience. Especially for internationally acclaimed authors such as Shirley Kaufman and Rachel Tzvia Back, where one can assume that the majority of their readership reside overseas, the act of personal meditation on home and geographical identity also becomes an instance of enacting this identity to the outside. Unlike Hebrew writers who write for their Israeli readership, the discussion of locality in the works of Anglophone Israeli authors is from the beginning intended to be transmitted transculturally and translocally (cf. Alkalay-Gut 2007: 199).

Besides the fact that English is a global language and potentially offers access to an almost unlimited readership, Anglophone Israeli authors have also enjoyed the benefits of geographical flexibility. In that respect, the ability to travel back and forth between their native Anglophone countries and Israel is radically different from, for example, many native Israelis, whose roots lie in social systems that have ceased to exist, as in pre-war Poland or mid-century Iraq. Nor was keeping in touch with the native country politically limited, as in the case of those who immigrated from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s and for whom immigration to Israel practically meant severing all ties with family and

friends left behind. Despite travel and postage costs, the ties between Anglophone Israeli authors and their home countries remained tangible, provoking recurring questioning of geographical belonging: “Every flight I take to Israel is one of reordering,/ a renewed – sometimes reluctant – commitment to a place” (Alkalay-Gut 2000: 35). In recent years, the falling prices and the increased ease of travel seem to have made even this commitment easier: Joanna Chen – a member of the younger generation of aspiring Anglophone Israeli authors – noted that “If you ask me where my poetic home is, it’s the people who surround me, not the geographical place” (Wetzel 2013). One is increasingly able to maintain a personal connection in both places, to participate in the local here and there.

That said, the individual interpretation of one’s identity in terms of locality and place vary greatly among Anglophone Israeli authors, ranging from the pride in involvement in the landscape in the works of Rochelle Mass and Lami to poetic engagement with the sense of alienation and dislocation in the writing of Shirley Kaufman. The majority of authors reject the received image of Israel as an object of spiritual longing; the mythical Promised Land is demystified both politically and socially in the face of extensive personal experience. Yet the following re-territorialization is individual to the point where it almost seems that different authors write about different countries: the harsh, estranged geographical zone in the works of Rubin, Back and Kaufman contrasts with the relief of nature in the poems of Mass and Lami and with Alkalay-Gut’s rich experience of Tel Aviv. At the same time, an emotional center in the country of origin serves as a comparison, a mirror for accessing a current position. Often, the geographical network is also extended to references of family history, expanding the discussion of home to the wanderings of one’s predecessors from eastern Europe westwards. Rather than being merely cumulative, these geographical vectors interact in a constant dialogue, foregrounding the interplay of outward circumstances and of personal choice and involvement. As in the case of the linguistic component of identity, there is no definitive solution either on the group or on the personal level, but a constant re-grounding of experience through the medium of literary expression.





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## 8. Deconstructing the Other

### 8.1. A Question of Perspective

Writing of the losses endured by a Palestinian woman in her poem “(*Close in his arms*)”, Rachel Tzvia Back comments on her relationship as a narrator to the story which she is describing: “This tale/ is not mine to tell/ but I tell it” (Back 2007: 64). The issue is an apparent paradox: the author appropriates the voice and reimagines the thought process of the Other, while simultaneously pointing out the illegitimacy of her account as an essentially inauthentic one. At the same time, the physical and emotional proximity of the conflict produces accounts which highlight the inescapability of personal involvement: “My son is in the air force./ I don’t think theoretically” writes Karen Alkalay-Gut in her collection *In My Skin* (2000: 34).

In terms of writing about the Other, the question of perspective is essential. In regard to Orientalism, but by extension also concerning other kinds of discourse that are dealing with a foreign culture, Edward Said notes that “[e]veryone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kind of images, themes, motifs that circulate in the text” (Said 2001: 20). As one can essentially only express what one can conceive of inside one’s head, this dependence on perspective is inescapable. Conversely, as identities are no longer regarded as primordial and unchangeable, but rather as cumulative and malleable, the stance that one adopts towards various issues becomes an important level of identity formation. This dependence is observed, for example, by Homi Bhabha in his critique of the notion of identification in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*: “[...] to exist is to be called into being in relation to an Otherness, its look or locus” (Bhabha 1994: 117). In the case of Rachel Tzvia Back and other Anglophone Israeli authors, the refusal of authority in representing the Other – Palestinians in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict – or the explicit awareness of one’s poetic position serve as important modes of eroding borders between selfhood and otherness.

To a certain extent, the previous chapter on the importance of locality and belonging has touched upon the political dimension of land. On the one hand, there is a perceived sense of danger and conflict. On the other hand, there is an awareness that the ownership of the land is joint and that the other group possesses a similar sense of identification with the specific geography. Although the issues of conflict and security are not as all-encompassing as one may be led to believe if foreign news reports constitute one's main source of information about Israel and Palestine, they are nevertheless always within the scope of thought. In response, Anglophone Israeli authors have produced a range of poetic ways of addressing the situation, where the personal need to bear witness and to assume a position is counterbalanced by the possibilities of post-modern aesthetics (cf. Yudkin 1996: 139).

While the previous chapters have largely explored the perceived relation of the individual to various kinds of group identities based on language and geography, the issue of the self vis-à-vis the Other becomes the ground of questioning the validity of group identities in general. The different facets of poetic expression that Anglophone Israeli authors adopt – meditations on destruction and the futility of war, the fear of war and the direct experience of extreme situations, the search for solutions – become, irrespectively of the author's political opinion, an expression of personal perspective, where “us” and “them” are increasingly blurred.

## 8.2. Locating the Other

A key concept in philosophy, the Other opposes both the “same” and the “self,” implying an underlying dichotomy of perception. Suggested by Hegel as a constituent of self-consciousness and essential to self-knowledge in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* from 1807 (Hegel 1976), in the second part of the twentieth century the relationship between the self and the Other and the practice of othering have been especially considered from the point of view of power relations. The publication of Edward Said's much-disputed work *Orientalism* in 1978, where he focuses on the imperialist practices of constructing, rather than representing “the Orient,” served as an impetus for further examination of the Eurocentric practice of othering with respect to other regions of the world (Williams and Chrisman 1994: 5). Said points out the dichotomy underlying the representations of the Orient that cast the difference between east and west in emotive terms: “The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (Said 2001: 40). Denying the possibility of pure, politically untainted cultural knowledge, Said suggests that the imperialist way of imagining “the Orient” was inherent not only

in the colonial gaze of British and French politicians, but also in that of supposedly dispassionate scientists, and, by extension, in “that collection of dreams, images of vocabulary available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line” (Said 2001: 31). The resulting picture, which, as Said argues, is still a major influence on the way the Middle East and the Arab World are perceived today, is, in terms of Foucauldian discourse analysis, considered to be a construct of the western perception: “What gave the Oriental’s world its intelligibility and identity, was not the result of his own efforts, but rather a whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations, by which the Orient was identified by the West” (Said 2001: 40). In his later works, such as *The Question of Palestine* and *Covering Islam*, Said extended his criticism of the western practices of producing and distributing knowledge about the Arab world to contemporary political issues, contending that the imaginary division between “us” – the Occident – and “them” – the Orient – was still valid, that Islam and Arabs were vilified in the western media and that even “people whose profession it is to report the Islamic world” produce “a limited series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as, among other things, to make that world vulnerable to military aggression” (Said 2000a: 189).

However, the methods of analysis employed in *Orientalism* were not unproblematic. On the one hand, Said has been criticized by scholars such as Bernard Lewis for insufficient precision regarding facts and documents within their historical context (Said, Grabar and Lewis 1982) and for moving too liberally within time and geography in order to reach consequential analyses (Innes 2007: 9). On the other hand, his employment of Foucauldian discourse analysis in his attempt to demonstrate that the western accounts of the Orient were projections of the European practice of othering is not unambiguous: if the perceived world is, in Foucault’s terms, constructed by discourses rather than by an abstract absolute truth, then the qualification of a particular, in this case imperialist, discourse as untrue inherently contradicts the chosen methodological framework. (Schulze-Engler 2007: 24).

Yet despite criticism of methodological inconsistencies, Said’s analysis of imperialist practices of othering has left a significant mark in post-colonial studies. Building on Said’s treatment of othering through discourse in *Orientalism*, Homi Bhabha explores the practice of stereotyping from the post-colonial and psychoanalytical point of view. Bhabha suggests that in constructing the Other, the information is at once already known and yet must be anxiously repeated (Bhabha 2004: 95) – it seems to need no proof, yet it is constantly reinstated. Colonial discourse is read as an apparatus of power, where the colonized is produced “as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (ibid. 101). Bhabha sees the stereotype, which is inherently entailed in the production of colonialist knowledge, as an act of

fetishism, where what is despised is at the same time desired, and where the perception of the Other is nothing but the “‘otherness’ of the self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity” (Bhabha 1994: 116). Referencing Fanon, Bhabha describes the arresting property of being subject to a stereotype, where the stereotype becomes a point of reference not only for the producer of discourse, but also for its subject (Bhabha 2004: 111).

Besides the immediate political and economic dimensions of othering and the Other, the terms have also been considered from the ethical perspective. Emmanuel Levinas, who has dedicated a large portion of his philosophical oeuvre to the notion of the Other, sees the awareness of the Other as the basis for the recognition of complexity and richness of the world. Instead of attempting to generalize relations and to produce a top-down universalism, which he sees as dominant trend within twentieth-century ontology, Levinas argues for the irreducibility of otherness and for the need of recognizing the limitations of individual consciousness when trying to translate otherness for itself (cf. Peperzak 1993: 19). Levinas foregrounds the ethical dimension of one’s relationship with the Other:

Our relationship with [the other] certainly consists in wanting to understand him, but this relation exceeds the confines of understanding. Not only because, besides curiosity, knowledge of the other also demands sympathy or love, ways of being that are different from impassive contemplation, but also because, in our relation to the other, the latter does not affect us by means of a concept. The other is a being and counts as such. (Levinas 1998: 5)

For Levinas, mere intellectual contemplation with the goal of integrating the Other into one’s frame of reference is but one side of dealing with the Other. Separating the intellectual attempt at understanding, i. e. rationalizing in one’s own terms, from the wider concept of knowledge, Levinas claims that the latter needs to involve an unselfish mode of emotional relationship – sympathy or love that at least momentarily enables to consider the interests of the Other without bending it to one’s own interests. Coincidentally, the lack of such unselfish emotional involvement is one of the deficiencies that Said recognizes in the attitude of the “Occident” towards the “Orient;” he points out “an absence of any cultural position making it possible to either identify with or dispassionately discuss Arabs or Islam” (Said 2001: 27). Rather than an investigation of wrongs produced by skewed power relations, Levinas’ work, anchored in the awareness of the extreme xenophobia of the Holocaust, reconstructs the missing ethical awareness that should characterize the relation between the self and the Other. In this way, Levinas’ critique of the ontological irreducibility of the Other complements the works of scholars such as Fanon, Said, Bhabha and Spivak, who

point out the deficiencies of historical and contemporary practices of othering by offering an ethical alternative.

The interplay of the political and the ethical aspects of the Other are strongly and directly related to the narrative of the self and the Other in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The critical attitudes of Said contributed to the rise of the Israeli “New Historians” and the Post-Zionist movement in humanities and social sciences in the 1990s – a localized version of post-colonial critique (Pappe 2010: 321–322). Israeli scholars such as Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé and Avi Shlaim have attempted to deconstruct the traditional representation of the Zionist project and Israeli policies since 1948, especially focusing on Arab-Israeli relations. The New Historians’ highly controversial historical analysis foregrounds, among others, the culpability of Israel in creating the Palestinian refugee problem and the negative impact of Israel’s subsequent policies on the peace process.

However, the reconsideration of the moral basis of the slanted relationship between the self and the Other has emerged much earlier. Although Said contains that Zionism – an encounter with the Orient within the Orient – has even further exacerbated the negative western image of Arabs, and specifically of Palestinians (e.g. 2000a, 2000b), scholars and authors such as Eliezer Schweid, A.B. Yehoshua and Gershon Shaked point out that there has been, in fact a strong tendency towards an ethical reconsideration of the Palestinian Other beginning with “the Generation of Statehood”<sup>47</sup>.

While the first generation of Israeli authors – “the Generation of the Founding Fathers” or the “Generation of the Palmach” (e.g. S. Yizhar, Moshe Shamir and Aharon Megged) – were motivated by the Zionist-socialist meta-narrative and were struggling with the effort of building a new society in a new country (Kubovy 2001: 67–68), the relative security and stability of the Jewish State that the authors of the second generation – “the Generation of Statehood” – experienced during their lifetime made it possible to express criticism of the state without the fear that their homeland would collapse under their discontent (Yehoshua 2001: 49). On the one hand, such relative political and personal security allowed the creative dissociation of the self from the collective and the need for individualism, as was discussed earlier with regard to the works of Yehuda Amichai. On the other hand, A.B. Yehoshua argues that as personal identity became more secure and stable through the consolidation of the borders of the state, Israeli authors were able to consider the ever-present Palestinian Other from a humanist perspective rather than as an existential threat (ibid.). The shift of the balance of power had a profound effect on Israeli authors such as

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47 *Dor Hamedinah* (literally *the generation of statehood*) generally refers to the second generation of native-born Israeli authors, who were born in the 1930s and 1940s. These include Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua and Aharon Appelfeld.

Amos Oz. Against the background of the Holocaust, the Israeli state had – not unrealistically – seen itself as David fighting the united armies of the Arab Goliath. But when the second-generation authors confronted their defeated enemies – the Palestinians – there was a recognition that these were in fact suffering from the same injustice and misfortune that had befallen the Jews during their long history of discrimination (Schweid 2001: 39). Schweid argues that in their treatment of the Palestinian Other, second-generation authors identified not only with the Jewish population of Israel, but also with the enemy, who was essentially like themselves. Although the division between the self and the Other is not eroded, the Other ceased to be seen as a vilified generic character and to a certain extent became a psychologically complex mirror of the self. In the light of later events, especially after the Sabra and Shatila Massacre during the First Lebanon War and the First Intifada, this reconsideration of the relationship between the self and the Other has also influenced the perception of Israeli poets. Although Israeli poetry is often considered apolitical, Yvette Neisser (2000) demonstrates the sites of engagement with the Other and of national self-criticism in the works of Israeli poets such as Yehuda Amichai, Dalia Ravikovitch and Dan Almagor.

The Other in Anglophone Israeli Literature is located both far and near, in the occupied territories and in the everyday routine. The temporal frame of Anglophone Israeli writing, which gained momentum in the late 1970s and has continued ever since, influences the subject matter – typically more recent confrontations with the Other such as the First and Second Intifada – and creates a propensity towards the postmodern mode of questioning the seemingly clear division into sides. On the one hand, one of the important themes is the impact of the conflict on the civilian population in Israel – suicide bombings, shelling of residential areas, fear of chemical warfare during the Gulf War, fear for family members who are serving in the army. Typically written in the first person, these poems communicate personal experience, focusing on specific events and avoiding judgment. On the other hand, there are vivid descriptions of the unpalatable realities of military response, such as Richard Sherwin's disillusionment in "Lebanon Songs and Sonnets"<sup>48</sup> (1987) and Rachel Tzvia Back's poetic documentation of violence against the Palestinian population in *Azimuth* (2001) and *On Ruins and Return* (2007). Paradoxically, Others to each other, both sides are shown to experience the same suffering at the hands of each other, which provides a base for finding a common denominator for their identities. At the same time, the position of the self vis-à-vis the Other is poetically examined during renditions of casual encounters, which are especially used to foreground

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48 Sherwin's "Lebanon Songs and Sonnets", a sequence of 50 poems, appeared in print as a part of the collection *Nomad in God* (1987).

the shared human nature and the possibility of a better coexistence if the relationship between the groups was carried out in terms of mutual respect rather than of domination and forceful resistance.

In their treatment of the conflict and the relation of the self to the Other, the dual perspective – that of an American/South African/Canadian expatriate and that of an almost, but not quite native Israeli – is a significant factor. The disengagement of the younger generation of Hebrew authors from creative grappling with the conflict has been partly explained by the fact that they were born into a status quo – “the generations after us,” writes A.B. Yehoshua “were born into the political reality of occupation, a burning, all-encompassing reality, demanding, exhausting, and easily exploited, sometimes also a riddle so convoluted as to force one to flee it” (Yehoshua 2001: 50). In her overview of new Israeli writers of the 1980s and the 1990s, Miri Kubovy notes that as the Zionist motifs in literature have collapsed, so the previously dominant themes of Israeli literature – the Arab-Israeli conflict, the division between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, the redefinition of Jewish identity – have been pushed to the margins. Instead, the literary life after the breakdown of the national narrative is characterized by a sense of futility and a lack of emotional engagement:

Rather than rebellion, most of the recent narrative [sic] describe ordinary existence, liberation from personal, social and national myths, rejection of ideology and commitment, observations about the lives of the young today, which is [sic] usually void of meaning, trust and rationality. There is a general feeling of despair, malaise, defeatism. There is hopelessness, and a paralyzing fear of disappointment, which leads to numbness. Most of the narratives pose the question: how can one feel at all, let alone feel heroic in a loveless world without sacrifice, ideology or a broader agenda, a world where there is no one and nothing to turn to, after the bankruptcy of protective family life, all social institutions, and the grand-narratives. (Kubovy 2001: 68)

While one may argue about the use of sweeping generalization in Kubovy’s assessment, it does to a great extent capture the spirit of disengagement and numbness that appears not only in recent Israeli fiction, but also more widely in world literature. But if Kubovy regards the ideological narrative and the need for personal engagement as ruins of the past, they are certainly less so for Anglophone Israeli authors, most of whom were not born in Israel, but immigrated out of their own volition, in the hope of building a more meaningful, if not more prosperous life, than they may have had in their home countries. Works by Rachel Tzvia Back, Riva Rubin, Jerome Mandel, Rochelle Mass, Lami and Karen Alkalay-Gut, which were discussed in the previous section on locality and belonging, suggest that although national narratives are constantly called into question, they have certainly not been annulled altogether. There is a poetic need to examine, formulate and express one’s tie to the country – even if the tie largely consists of searching for that tie, as in the works of Shirley Kaufman, or ques-

tioning the legitimacy of the establishment, as in the poems of Rachel Tzvia Back. Moreover, if younger Hebrew writers, who, in the words of A.B. Yehoshua, “were born into the political reality of occupation” and who, to a certain extent, regarded both the occupation and the strained military situation as a given, for immigrant writers the new direct experience of conflict was yet to be consumed, digested, and translated into their own words a – powerful creative impetus by itself. Alkalay-Gut points out that especially after the breakdown of the peace talks in 2001, non-Hebrew literature in Israel, i.e. literature written by immigrants, became overwhelmingly politicized (Alkalay-Gut 2007: 198). Especially the genre of poetry, which does not claim to tell the objective truth, became a popular medium of expression:

A ‘reality’ medium, poetry came to be preferred precisely because it did not tell the ‘whole story’, but mirrored the sense of narrative uncertainty of the times, the feeling that any narrative could end in the middle with no shape or plot, with a single shooting or bombing, that poetry could deal with the land antithetically, could be the perfect form for a concise political statement. When reality and the grasp of the future changes [sic] from day to day, even from minute to minute, poetry is a far more useful tool in reflecting the situation. (Ibid. 198–199)

Furthermore, writing in English also creates a distance between the often overwhelming Hebrew-coded reality and poetic reflection, generating a space for alienation from material that may be too painful or intimate. Alkalay-Gut cites the example of Chava HaLevy, a poet who usually writes in Hebrew and who used English in order to deal with the fear of suicide bombing in her poem “Let Not Suddenly Boom” (ibid. 200–201). Even for native speakers of Hebrew, English seems to provide the necessary impersonal space and the possibility of finding new, fresh ways of addressing the issue, rather than reverting to the familiar Hebrew mode of expression. Recently, the Israeli Harvard graduate Shani Boianjiu has pursued the relation to the Palestinian Other in her novel *People of Forever are not Afraid* (2013), which she wrote in English; the successful Israeli street artist Know Hope has published *Other’s Truths* (2012) – a volume of drawings and brief poetic texts in English, which addresses the futility of nationalism and the suffering of the respective Other. Conversely, for the poet and blogger Osama Massarwa, who identifies himself as Palestinian-Israeli and whose work largely focuses on documenting injustice against Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line and on the need to find a fair solution, the medium of English becomes both a way of spreading the message to a wider audience and of avoiding the ideological restraints of Arabic and Hebrew.

Inseparable from the experience of the conflict and the search for a solution, the examination of otherness and of one’s relationship to it belong to the pivotal



themes of Anglophone Israeli writing. The following sections will proceed to examine the dominant modes of this poetic discussion.

### 8.3. Tracing the Front Line: Richard Sherwin and Rachel Tzvia Back

“Those who talk up wars ignore the cripples./ The dead, sure. For them nothings<sup>49</sup> ever too good./ Non-returning self disposing troops” writes Richard Sherwin in “Crippled Living” (Sherwin 1987: 17) from the cycle “Lebanon Songs and Sonnets,” which was written in response to the Israeli involvement in the First Lebanon War (1982–1985). Alluding to the practice of posthumous glorification of dead soldiers as heroes who struggled for the right cause, the poem inquires with morbid irony about the place of physically and emotionally crippled survivors in the national pantheon. Unlike the glorious dead and the “presentable” veterans, who had survived with “just/ enough of a wound or pinkie lost to distinguish,” war cripples are erased from the representation of war – they carry on traumatized and dependent on support. Sherwin points out the site of exclusion in the war narrative, an unpalatable in-between condition between the heroic dead and the emblematic survivors.

Among the Anglophone Israeli poets, Richard Sherwin and Rachel Tzvia Back have perhaps devoted most attention to the “distant” side of the conflict – the involvement of Israeli troops in military operations. Although both approach this topic from very different perspectives – that of a soldier in the case of Sherwin and that of an onlooker, who attempts to grasp the situation from the points of view of various characters involved in the First and Second Intifada in the poems of Back – both work towards the deconstruction of the myth of “rightness” of either of the warring sides. The authors question the stance of the individual, who is not involved in the shaping of political decisions, yet who already by his mere physical presence in the scene combines the double awareness of the victim and the culprit.

The perceived powerlessness of the individual within the political and military establishment is exemplified in two title-less sonnets<sup>50</sup> in the opening part of Sherwin’s “Lebanon Songs and Sonnets.” The first addresses the relationship between the dominant political leaders of the time – the Prime Minister Menachem Begin, the opposition leader Simon Peres and the Minister of Defense

49 Perhaps to heighten the sense of confusion and the loss of moral landmarks, Sherwin does not use the apostrophe throughout the cycle. The use of commas is sporadic.

50 Similar to the usage of the sonnet form by the British poets of the Great War, Sherwin’s sonnet may be seen both as an attempt to create a sense of order within chaos by relying on a rigid, traditional form, and as a contrast between the baseness and confusion of war and the elevated way of expressing it.

Ariel Sharon, who was later labeled “the Butcher of Beirut” due to the IDF’s passive involvement in the Sabra and Shatila massacre in 1982. Written retrospectively, the poem evokes political intrigues and the employment of populism; both the politicians and the voters are referred to as being “stoned on manic dreams” (1987: 14). Measured in expression and structured by the syntactic repetition of listed facts, the analytical mode of the first sonnet is juxtaposed by the rapid stream of consciousness that catapults from the mind of a soldier in the second sonnet: “God my mind stuffed sick with thoughts I’d vomit/ like the earth beneath me heaving dizzy” (ibid. 15). Like many of the following poems, the second sonnet is permeated by confusion, which the form of the sonnet struggles to contain with its strained rhymes – dizzy/easy, yet/flesh. There is both the realization of the futility of myth and the inability to avoid enacting it: “We don’t know who and what we are and yet/ we shoot real bullets killing real flesh” (ibid. 15). Challenging the rigid division into right and wrong, the speaker exclaims: “Nothings clean./ Not land, not flesh, not soul, not law, not You/ [...] The problems us, mankind. We live by myths” (ibid. 15). Simultaneously, the two poems deny and reinstate the responsibility of the individual: while decisions are made at the level of military leadership and the soldier finds himself confused, disoriented and disillusioned as he is called to carry these decisions out at ground level, the killing and maiming are nevertheless done by his hands; he is the one directly responsible for the cruelty and injustice of war. Despite inner resistance, the speaker sides with the cumulative “we” of combat troops.

As the poem sequence progresses, the speaker is called on to guard the border. Continuously aware of the political game and doubtful of the moral legitimacy of his actions, the border guard nevertheless prefers to kill rather than to be killed:

Sin hones my sense.  
 I shiver danger alert.  
 No politician  
 officer or god shall serve  
 me up dead as sacrifice.

Once they say there was  
 justice. Worlds sink faster now.  
 Better a hundred  
 refugees be shambled than  
 one terrorist sneak by me.

Shoot first, then ask if  
 stone or handgrenade or snow  
 glittered and flew.  
 All distractions do you in.  
 None are innocent in groups.

I the gate I guard.  
 No slogan over-runs me.  
 Shoot first, theres nothing  
 to ask. Survivors are right.  
 Survivors are always right. (1987: 31–32)

Written in laconic, chopped phrases, reminiscent of orders on the battlefield, the poem suggests the strain and concentration of the moment. The guard's exaggerated readiness to kill in self-defense acts as a stark contrast to the resentment of power and domination, personified by the politician, the officer and god. Sherwin's choice of lower-case spelling of the word "god" suggests that the intended meaning is that of an idol rather than the Jewish God – being an observant Jew, Sherwin capitalizes "God" and "Lord" in poems which act as invocations. The unwillingness to defend a political construct – a projection of somebody else's ambition – is strengthened by the resentment of becoming a eulogized war hero. The speaker is aware that such role is neither morally deserved nor desired – he prefers to commit injustice and survive rather than be to killed and be glorified, either as a war hero by the government, or as a pacifist by the opposition. There is a realization that there is no justice, that a sin is going to be committed in either case – if he allows a potential terrorist to infiltrate during his watch or if a potential innocent is killed. At the same time, the state of emotional strain and alert (even more vivid in the first stanzas of the poem, which are not quoted here) suggests a heightened, exaggerated potential of violence, where "better a hundred/ refugees be shambled than/ one terrorist sneak by" (ibid. 32) – an allusion to the often excessive reaction of the Israeli military. Strongly critical of disproportional response, the poem also points out the difficulty to objectively assess the situation under extreme conditions – the soldier both cannot and chooses not to deliberate if "stone or handgrenade or snow" had been thrown. Though defying political "myths," the soldier acknowledges the victory of discourse – in this case, potentially constructed by himself, the survivor, who can frame the circumstances of the encounter in a favorable light.

In an interview, Sherwin, who served in the American army for four years and for 40 more years in the IDF reserve, comments on his complex feelings towards soldiers and the First Lebanon War:

A lot of young men from our religious community went to the army with their parents screaming after them during the Lebanon Wars. It's a hard thing to explain – they are not somebody else's army, they are not somebody else, they are family. Even though you might not know them individually, but you are close to somebody, who is close to them. And you think – oh God, what's this fallout. In America, you can make geographical and political distance between you and the war.  
 [...]

I don't think we should have been in that war and especially not stayed so long if we went in. My hands are dirty, just like everybody else's. As far as I am concerned, it makes us all complacent. People suffer and you suffer yourself.

[...]

It's the choice when you have to kill some people because otherwise more people are going to die. In theory, clean, nice and emotionless. (Rumjanceva 2010c)

Sherwin points out the element of emotional and geographical proximity that characterizes not only his work, but also the work of other Anglophone Israeli authors. On the one hand, the insignificant geographical distance even from "external" conflicts such as the Lebanon War prompts extreme identification with the events – an occurrence not as obvious in the USA, where the American Civil War was the last war fought on the American territory. On the other hand, the overwhelming involvement of the Israeli society in army life, where military service is obligatory for both sexes and where men serve in reserve duty until their mid-40s, makes emotional disengagement practically impossible, because at least some relatives, friends or neighbors will be performing or be called to military duty in a time of conflict. This is radically different from the situation in countries without obligatory conscription such as the USA or Canada, where a comparatively small part of the population is serving or has served in the military. Thus, even a "distant" conflict becomes ingrained in the private sphere.

This emotional and geographical proximity, however, does not preclude responsibility, as will be shown even more clearly in the works of Rachel Tzvia Back. Although Sherwin criticizes Arab militancy and the lack of interest on the part of Arab leaders to resolve disputes by peaceful talks in the poem "Zionisms Normal People" (Sherwin 1987: 42), in the interview he admits the injustice of the Lebanon War and the essential immorality of killing, even if it is for a (supposedly) higher goal of protection. Similar to his separation between the level of state ideology and the level of personal involvement on the Israeli side, Sherwin differentiates between the private existence and the ideologically-fueled deeds on the Palestinian side. In "Poets for Peace" (ibid. 46), which is addressed to "Poet terrorist, my enemy" – a rare direct invocation of the Other – the speaker separates the terrorist, against whom he feels strong bitterness, from the poet, "a comrade in craft," whom the speaker vows to help. In his recent review of *The Jew is not My Enemy: Unveiling Myths That Fuel Muslim Anti-Semitism* by Tarek Fatah, Sherwin (2012) criticizes the Palestinian leadership for exploiting the conflict with Israel as a political platform rather than focusing on the solutions of political and social problems at hand and achieving statehood peacefully.

As Sherwin's soldier meditates on the morality of his actions while observing the distant Other through the aim of his gun, the perspective of Rachel Tzvia Back varies between the general assessment of actions and closer, more private

insights into the impact of the conflict on the lives of people on both sides. In the lyrical introduction to the volume *On Ruins and Return* Back gives a subjective overview of the beginning of the Second Intifada (2000–2005):

**October 2000<sup>51</sup> – the Galilee/ the Occupied Territories.**

First or final insult. Every insult and wound in between. Wound of what is wrenched away, of wrestled will that can bear no more. We (Israelis) are ignorant. When the first riots erupt, we fail to understand. Fires reach our doorstep, and still we fail to see. In rage and flames, the ripped-out street lamps, the young boys shouting in the village square, the roads blocked with burning tires, the riot police shooting into the crowd – in the rage and flames I remember the buffalo. By riots' end, thirteen (Palestinian-Israeli) Galilean boys are dead. So the second uprising begins. The streets are soon bloody (Ramallah, Jenin, Sachnin, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Gaza, and again demolished Jenin). The ledgers are quickly filled with the names of children. My three grow strong, as though they are safe. Hearts close, and then seal shut. I remember the buffalo and a heart waiting (to be opened). From that moment, it stays with me, wanders through my days, carrying the weight of the violence on its broad back, in its vast and silent eyes – and it allows me to write

what I could not have otherwise. (Back 2007: 12)

The last excerpt of “Until we see a buffalo” begins with a statement of time and place. While the time – October 2000 – corresponds to the beginning of the Second Intifada, the choice of words in establishing the location is telling with respect to the political orientation of the text. “The Occupied Territories” rather than “the West Bank,” “the Palestinian Territories” or “Judea and Samaria” indicates a sense of injustice and the condemnation of Israel’s treatment of this area. In the 2012 interview, Rachel Back, who herself resides in the Lower (Southern) Galilee, pointed out the political importance of geographical knowledge: confronted with the geographical ignorance of her overseas audiences, she would start her readings with the presentation of a map in order to clarify the legal claims of the two sides to specific territories and the involvement of different areas in the conflict (Rumjanceva 2012). Here, the map is enacted textually. The Galilee – an area in the northern part of Israel, which is populated by Arab Israelis as well as by Jewish Israelis – is directly adjacent to the northern part of the West Bank, which entails immediacy and direct involvement. The choice of “Galilean,” qualified as “Palestinian-Israeli,” to describe the identity of

51 Though one may argue about the precise date of the beginning of the Second Intifada, September 29, 2000, when riots broke out in the Old City of Jerusalem following Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount, is considered by many to be the beginning of the uprising. Struggling to contain the riot, the Israeli forces used rubber-coated bullets and then switched to live ammunition, killing and injuring a number of rioters. In the following days, demonstrations erupted in the West Bank and in Gaza. By the end of October, the uprising was already in full swing, with acts of violence being committed on both sides.

victims also suggests a revision of inclusiveness of identity. Rather than ethnic lines, it foregrounds the shared geography – the Galilee – as a source of identification, which suggests, from Backs’s perspective of the Israeli “we,” that these casualties are also “ours,” Israeli-Galilean. This is strengthened by the hyphenated ethnic and national components – “Palestinian-Israeli:” despite their different ethnic and religious identity, they nevertheless belong to the same super-category as the Israeli “we”.

Amidst old and new insults, hardening hearts and violence, the buffalo emerges as a figure with manifold meanings. A kind of a totem animal and alter ego for the Buffalo-born poet, the buffalo in the Middle East introduces the element of alienation, of surrealism – perhaps a necessary emotional block from the surrounding violence and grief of the Intifada, which allows to channel into writing what could not have been written otherwise. At the same time, it is a messenger of disaster, unexpectedly appearing in the hills of Jerusalem in the wake of the eruption of violence, which is described in the introduction to the volume. Furthermore, the buffalo clearly carries the connotation of victimhood, as Back draws the parallel between the slaughter of buffaloes and the mistreatment of Palestinians by the Israelis, as, for example, in the poem “(press release):”

(press release)

*January 26<sup>th</sup> 2004*

Nobody was killed in al Nabi Saleh tonight

Only

500 old and young

forced to stand hours in the cold

in the middle of the night

in the rain

in the range

of snipers in the watchtower

and the children

*in flannel pajamas with coats thrown over*

*thick in layers too loose and bulky to hold*

*sweet calves baby buffalo      their feet pushed*

*hurried*

*into shoes without socks      their small finger bones cold*

*as clay brittle in their parents’ hands      their*

*faces*

*still soft in sleep but eyes waking would be*

*eager or earnest now pulled to screeching jeeps and*

*wild searchlights scattering sharp-cut*

*lightbeams*

*like diamond treasures dreams in the dark*

*megaphones calling out calling names cutting  
silence into strips and coloring their racing hearts  
crayon black* (Back 2007: 65)

Like Sherwin's "Crippled Living," Back's poem indicates the discrepancy between the publically known and the actual events. While the press release laconically points out the absence of dead – a seemingly optimistic line that suggests the image of normalcy projected by the news media – the poem focuses on the exclusion of the "un-newsworthy" human situation. Criticizing both the practice of journalistic reporting and the conduct of Israeli soldiers, the poem portrays disoriented Palestinian children, who are subject to strict security regulations on par with adults. Inadequately dressed in a hurry, these are herded like cattle and forced to stand in the rain at gunpoint. Like buffaloes, they are exposed to the gunmen. While the part of the poem after the summary of the press release is reminiscent of the concise journalistic mode, as if it was cut out from a media report, the italics signify the change of mode from summary to the personal and the emotive. The coldness and hostility of the atmosphere – night, rain, snipers, watchtower, searchlights, megaphone – appears as a contrast to the vulnerability of children, with faces "still soft in sleep" and "their small finger bones cold." From their sleep – a place of innocence and defenselessness – they awaken to a harsh reality. As a result, their hearts become "crayon black" – a visualization of the negative emotions of fear, humiliation and resentment, which are likely to backfire aggressively in the future, through the allusion to children's use of crayons for drawing. At the same time, it invokes the famous line of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, who lamented the immediacy and the prevalence of negative emotions in poetry in context of the conflict: "The color of poetry is coal-black" (Neisser 2000). The graphic, somewhat melodramatic emotive mode, which invokes pity for the victims of the conflict, is also employed in other poems, such as "*Gaza, undated*" (2001: 49–50), where a demolished house emits the smells of warm bread and zatar – a pungent herb used in the local cuisine – while the blood of dead and wounded children is darkening the dirt in the alleys.

The focus on children, visible both in the excerpt from the introduction to *On Ruins and Return* and "(press release)," is central to Back's work. Adults may appear both as victims and as culprits – the clear condemnation of Israeli soldiers' harshness in "(press release)" is somewhat balanced by their despair and defenselessness against Palestinian undercover tactics of booby traps and suicide bombs, as e.g. in ("*emptied house*") and ("*soldiers on their knees in the sand*") (2007: 57–59); the humiliation of Palestinian civilians in "(press release)" contrasts with the devastating consequences of suicide bombings in "What stands between us" (2007: 48–49) and ("*a dream*") (2007: 67). Against this

backdrop of duality, where violence and suffering on both sides are deeply intertwined, Israeli and Palestinian children appear as the ultimate recipients of the surrounding aggression. Unwittingly torn into the conflict of adults, children, killed or maimed, appear as a mirror image. In “(*their sons my sons*)” (2007: 60), the sons of Abraham – Isaac and Ismael, the forefathers of Jews and of Arabs, who metonymically represent their future nations – are sacrificed alternately. When Ishmael’s turn comes, an Israeli bomb drops on a strawberry field, killing seven Palestinian boys and maiming five. Focusing on the strawberry field, where red, juicy fruit is interspersed with torn-off limbs, Back introduces the perspective of the mother, as yet ignorant of the fate of her children. The title – “(*their sons my sons*)” – spells out the identification with the Palestinian mother; it implies both empathy with human suffering and the recognition that the same fate may have easily befallen the speaker’s own children.<sup>52</sup> The poetic interpretation is supplemented by a brief press-like summary of the incident, counterbalancing the factual with the personal and emotional. In a similar way, “(*a fable and a nursery rhyme*)” (2007: 36–37) provides a personal interpretation of the events of November 2000, when a Palestinian bomb was detonated on a road in the Kfar Darom Settlement, as a Israeli school bus drove by; two adults were killed and five children wounded, three of which – all from the same family – lost limbs. The events of Kfar Darom are shown through the lens of the speaker’s own three children, who, in a manner reminiscent of a morbid fairy-tale, set off to find the missing limbs of the three children from the south. The surreal children’s expedition is regularly interspersed with verses from a fictive nursery rhyme, which features the motif of a buffalo hunt – the continuation of the association of the buffalo with the speaker and with the victims of the conflict. The projection of loss onto the speaker’s own children suggests a strong sense of identification with the events.

The interconnectedness of events, roles and emotions bleeds into the choice of form. Rather than ending clearly, especially in the collection *On Ruins and Return*, the poems often continue each other, picking up the ending of the previous segment and developing it from a new angle in the following one – as, e.g. in the consecutive poems “(*pray for the grace of accuracy*),” “(*emptied house*)” and “(*soldiers on their knees in the sand*)” (2007: 55–59). Perhaps for this reason, the titles of poems are italicized and appear in parentheses, which introduces an air of tentativeness – rather than announcing a closed entity, the titles seem to hover between the need to provide structure and to preserve the

52 In the 2012 interview, Back described the immediate proximity to terror attacks that her family experienced during the Second Intifada. On one occasion, she took her son to a tennis match in Haifa when the café adjacent to the tennis center blew up. On another occasion, her husband’s manager and his daughter were killed in a suicide attack on a Jerusalem café. (Rumjanceva 2012)



flow of the poetic narrative of events and impressions. The impossibility of separating the intertwined events and emotions may have led Back to say in the 2012 interview that as her writing developed, she was unable to fit individual poems on individual pages and to provide a clear beginning, middle and end. Instead, her poems are “serial and one leads to another” (Rumjanceva 2012). Unsettled in terms of poetic form and of the multiple foci, the complexity of Back’s poems parallels the complexity and confusion of their subject.

As in Sherwin’s “Lebanon Songs and Sonnets,” in Back’s Intifada poems everybody is influenced by the conflict, everybody carries a share of responsibility. While the sides clearly recognize each other as the antagonistic Other, the super-position of Back’s speaker allows for a recognition of similarities, of shared anger, suffering and loss, of the same attachment to land, community and kin. Emotionally identifying with either side and informed of both narratives, Back nevertheless perceives her possibility of linguistic and cultural detachment as an Anglophone Israeli author as a component of her broad, inclusive perspective:

I, half stranger  
 at a stone  
 of loss  
 spoke for no one.  
 I am the one  
 who now speaks  
 (I have been to the barbed North)  
 in translations[.] (Back 2001: 72)

#### 8.4. Short Lines from a Sealed Room

Riva Rubin’s short poem “Night Fears” poignantly summarizes the sense of leading the life of a civilian in times of military conflict:

Boogeyman, Goblin,  
 Sandman, Troll,  
 Babayaga  
 Tokolosh  
 KATYUSHA (Rubin 1996: 29)

Containing only nine words including the title, “Night Fears” consists of a mere enumeration of nouns, separated by commas in the first two lines. The evil spirits of different cultures – Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, Slavonic, Zulu – which have been used to frighten children into obedience, recede before the ultimate

night fear: the Katyusha rocket launcher.<sup>53</sup> Extensively and indiscriminately used by the PLO against military and civilian targets in northern Israel before and during the First Lebanon War, “KATYUSHA” introduces the tension of a concrete, deadly object as opposed to the six fairytale characters before. Printed in upper case, it suggests both the extent of fear and a warning cry, as if a missile has just hit the ground.

Like “Night Fears,” a number of poems dealing with the impact of conflict and war on daily life are curt and sharp, embodying the immediacy of response – Rubin’s “Night Fears” consists of five lines, “The Silence” of seven lines, “Mayday!! Mayday!!” of eight lines, “Place Your Bets” and “Soldier, Boy” of four lines each. Rather than being meditative, these poems are concentrated and laconic, focusing on one moment, one image:

PLACE YOUR BETS

Son calls to son.

A two-gun mother,

I am one

bidding two. (Rubin 1996: 28)

Laced with bitter irony, the poem contrasts the competitive machismo of young men with the depression of their mothers in the framework of the deadly gamble of war; it is a statement rather than an inquiry. As in roulette, to which the bets allude, the poem seems to suggest a situation of *rien ne va plus* – literally, nothing is possible any more; the only power left is to observe the development and hope to stay unharmed. The “two-gun mother,” “bidding” both of her sons, is on the verge of losing everything. While there is a clear possibility of loss, there is no possibility of winning – emotionally, economically or otherwise – in sight. The extreme economy of words strongly contrasts with the acuteness of the speaker’s intense feeling behind the lines.

In an excerpt from “Why I Don’t Write Formal Verse,” Karen Alkalay-Gut comments on the relative lack of embellishment in wartime poems:

As long as I don’t have to follow any rules I’m ok,

This doesn’t include stopping on red but otherwise

I’ve got too many imperatives in my life to want to put them into poetry.

53 The poem, published in 1996, in fact pre-senses the rapid expansion of Palestinian rocket warfare against civilian targets in Israel. Since 2001, an increasing number of rockets have been fired from Palestinian territories, especially from the Gaza Strip. According to the data of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 974 rockets were fired from Gaza in 2006 alone (“Rocket Fire from Gaza and Palestinian Ceasefire Violations” 2013). According to the UN report, 1,456 rockets were fired from Gaza in November 2012, before and during Operation Pillar of Defense (Ban Ki-moon 2012). During the Second Lebanon War, Katyusha rockets were also shot extensively by the Hezbollah both at the Israeli military outposts and at northern towns.

[...]

And the situation: what you do in case of a rocket attack

Biological warheads, dirty bombs, terrorist accidents.

I've got too many imperatives in my life to want to put them into poetry. (Alkalay-Gut 2012b: 93)

Ironically defying its own message, the poem is written as a villanelle, with the repeating reconsideration of the first and third lines of the first stanza. Existing in a world structured by rules and imperatives, the poem mentions formalities such as obligations to the bank and prescribed medications – “Why I don’t Write Formal Verse” playfully argues for the escape from these formalized routines in poetry. The fifth stanza, quoted here, presents the most severe limitations of daily life – wars and suicide bombing, which seem to leave no time to embellish, to bend the impulse into a decorative form. In line with this principle, among her many comments on the Arab-Israeli conflict, Alkalay-Gut has produced “Between Bombardments – a journal” – a fragmented, 39-part diary of the Gulf War, when the civilian population of Israel was exposed to the SCUD missile strikes and was threatened by the possibility of a chemical attack. The mostly short verses of the cycle document scary and bizarre scenes from everyday life, where the speaker, her friends, family and dog are trying to get through the time of alarm sirens, missile explosions and obligatory gas masks.

The sequence begins with the invocation of the first sirens: the missiles are “missing, missing, yet striking the heart” (1992a: 3). Similar to Back’s comment on the superficiality of media reports in “(press release),” “Between Bombardments” invokes the mood of trepidation below the surface: “the child choking on her vomit in her mask,/ the old woman suffocating in unavoidable ignorance,/ the psychotic whose nightmares came true.” Rather than examining global events, the poetic diary delves into the private and the domestic, into the unseen and unspectacular psychological traumata and ways to deal with them. Noting that all the handsome heroes are missing (ibid. 4), the speaker describes the Israeli “front” as “just a bunch of women slapping our babies/ into airtight tents, racing to the stores/ for masking tape<sup>54</sup> and batteries;” the kids are “off to school with backpacks/ and gas masks and fresh/ horrors from the night<sup>55</sup> before” (ibid. 7). Un-heroically, the poems outline both the attempt and the impossibility to keep calm and carry on – household shopping has become survival-themed and children’s school utensils have been supplemented by discussions of

54 Because of the fear that Iraq would use chemical warheads against Israel, every house was to have an airtight room, which could serve as a do-it-yourself chemical warfare shelter. Typically, windows would be covered with plastic sheets to provide extra seal. Masking tape would then be pasted around the edges of windows, doors and other openings to ensure that no chemical fumes could penetrate the room (Lapidot 1994:135).

55 Iraqi SCUD missiles were generally fired at night.

last night's explosions. Seldom spelled out, fear is expressed primarily by focusing on visual details, small actions or fragments of conversation.

Often, wartime stress is relieved through an attempt to laugh at danger – trying to predict bombardments by using tarot cards (ibid. 5) or by interpreting the falling rockets as the ultimate phallic objects (ibid. 8–9). In part XXII, the speaker narrates the phone conversation with a friend, who complains that at night his wife leaves their apartment in Tel Aviv – a major target for Iraqi missiles – in order to sleep in a distant village. The punch line arrives after the conversation among friends is interrupted by a siren: “Two hours later, back in place, he called to gloat:/ the missile fell near her village” (ibid. 10). Reminiscent of a black comedy, the petty squabbles of domestic life acquire a new twist in the conditions of danger, distracting attention from the unnerving reality.

Alkalay-Gut's introduction of irony into extreme situations is, however, not universal, and authors such as Shirley Kaufman and Rochelle Mass adopt a more somber approach in their poetic works dealing with civilian life during war and conflict. Mass, who resides in the Galilee, in the direct proximity of the Palestinian town of Jenin, which supplied the highest number of suicide attackers during the Second Intifada, addresses this unsettling geographical proximity in poems such as “East” (2003: 20) and “Jenin and Turkish Delight” (2001b: 39). Unlike the neighboring Israeli town of Afula, where the speaker of “Jenin and Turkish Delight” does her routine shopping, Jenin, separated by twelve kilometers only, appears as a closed, alien, threatening presence. The speaker's fear of looking at Jenin in the opening lines – “Standing in the field I keep my back to Jenin./ I don't even know how far it is, afraid to see/ the shape of it, where twelve kilometers/ really is” (2001b: 39) – at first appears irrational. Set in the market, the poem contrasts the speaker's fear of Jenin with lively shopping in the center of Afula. As the scene moves back in time, the source of fear is revealed and the same site – a bus stop adjacent to the market – is shown to be the scene of a suicide attack that targeted school buses. Just as the geographical proximity between Jenin and Afula persists, so does the layered coexistence of time – the time of the shopping and the time of school bus bombing – continue in the consciousness of the speaker, betraying a sense of vulnerability and fear.<sup>56</sup>

The works of Shirley Kaufman, on the other hand, feature an attempt to escape from the challenging reality into art. Perhaps influenced by the relative safety of her residence in Jerusalem, which, as a city with a large Arab population and a holy site for Muslims, has largely not been targeted by missiles in the Arab-

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56 Published in 2001, in the second year of the Second Intifada, the poem in fact pre-dates the most dramatic events in relation to Jenin: in April of 2002, in an attempt to curb suicide bombings, many of which have been traced back to Jenin, the IDF entered Jenin and a ten-day battle issued between the IDF and the Palestinian militants.

Israeli wars, her conflict-themed poems, such as “Sanctum” and “Looking at Henry Moore’s Elephant Skull Etchings in Jerusalem During the War”, are longer and more elaborate. As Kaufman stated in an interview with Eve Grubin, “Looking at Henry Moore’s Elephant Skull” was the first poem she wrote in Israel, prompted by the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War (Grubin 2004). In an attempt to both examine and distance herself from the anguish of the war, the speaker re-imagines the surroundings and her emotional responses in terms of the bones of the elephant, sometimes merging with the creature, sometimes projecting the anatomy of the elephant on the surrounding physical and social landscape. Abstract like Henry Moore’s fragments of the inner structure of the skull, the images of some parts of the poem can be traced back to the individual etchings. Thus, Moore’s “Eye of the Cyclops” becomes a metaphoric bunker and the etching “Mother and Child” is transformed into the photograph of “a dead child/ withered against its mother” (Kaufman 1979: 53).

In “Sanctum,” the pressure of the surrounding atmosphere – “Sealed rooms. Windows/ crisscrossed with tape so the glass won’t shatter./ A dark noose of memory around my neck” (Kaufman 2003: 130) – necessitates contact with contemporary art, which provides both the possibility of distancing from the specific and the immediate and of viewing it from a new perspective. The poem references the works *Sky*<sup>57</sup> by Micha Ullman and *Space That Sees*<sup>58</sup> by James Turrell – two environmental pieces which place the viewer in an intense one-on-one engagement with the sky and present an almost other-worldly contact with light and space. The escape into these sensually engaging works of art, which demand the participation of the spectator, reflects an attempt to clear a poetic space apart from the immediate stimuli of wartime (cf. Wardi 2004); it follows the speaker’s acute “need to be nowhere.” The conclusion of the poem brings together the experience of both environmental pieces:

You and I sit on the stone ledge.

The immensity of space watching  
through one small window the immensity of our failures.

Let’s sit here together on the throne  
as if suspended over our own deaths.

57 Located in Tel Hai in the north of Israel, near the Lebanese border, *Sky* can be described as a stone chair, which is tilted backwards over a rectangular, grave-like hole in the ground on top of a hill. While sitting/lying on this chair, one is suspended over the “grave” and forced to face the sky. A site of an early battle in the Jewish-Arab conflict, Tel Hai came to be associated with Israeli military heroism, which Ullman questions in this work.

58 *Space That Sees* is located in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. It is a construction with a large rectangular opening in its roof, which invites the spectator to look up and be drawn into the view of the sky. On clear days, the blue of the sky contrasts strongly with the walls of the building, which form a frame for the experience.



becomes apparent. While the self and the Palestinian Other are shown to be each other's mirror image in terms of attachment to the land and of the suffering of war in the works of Rachel Tzvia Back, the following poem by Karen Alkalay-Gut shows a context of an encounter where hostility and cultural differences recede in a productive way:

It was long ago – my son is now twenty-one  
and the blue dress I wore to Maternity  
has long been ripped into rags and thrown away,  
piece by piece. But that night it was  
the most comfortable thing I owned,  
and while I was alone waiting in Reception  
(the nurses were probably out to dinner,  
and my husband didn't really believe  
it was time yet), and leaned against the wall  
to counter my backache, I was grateful for it.

I wasn't alone – the Bedouin woman in her black robe  
was also in pain and pushing too against the wall.  
But we had no common language,  
and could only show each other  
what we felt, and what to do.  
There were no chairs,  
and the gentle lined woman  
was my only inspiration and succor,  
  
and I got the idea of crouching in a corner,  
pushing at both walls at once  
and the floor as well. Ah, she said,  
and joined me in the niche near by.

And I knew she was telling me that corners  
were a great invention of society, and I agreed.  
Better than nurses who eventually came along,  
picking their teeth and scowling at our primitivity.

We never did  
get to talk. Both of us left  
with our sons the next day. (Alkalay-Gut 2000: 45–46)

This deeply private scene carries a highly public title – “The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Perspective.” With a characteristic mixture of humor and seriousness, Alkalay-Gut describes a scene where two women of different cultures find a common language, united by the struggle of giving birth. Temporarily abandoned by their husbands and by medical personnel, both find themselves alone and in pain, with only each other and the corners of the room for support. During this archetypal scene of femininity, both wear similar clothes – a blue

dress and a black robe; both are subject to the same mixture of pain, anticipation and a need for release. Acutely aware of this shared segment, they communicate without words, aiding each other emotionally and physically. Cultural, ethnic and political divisions recede in the face of the overpowering human experience. The “gentle lined” Bedouin woman becomes the speaker’s “only inspiration and succor;” on her part, the Bedouin woman gratefully picks up the speaker’s idea of pushing against the corner. While the nurses imply with their behavior that the two future mothers are uncivilized in their unsophisticated ways of dealing with pain, the negligence and scowling of nurses, their act of picking teeth while observing women in pain suggest that they are in fact the “primitive” ones. Where the system fails, leaving its subjects to deal with their escalating situation, it is the one-on-one human contact that facilitates understanding and mutual support. In contrast to political speeches, this is accomplished by one word only – the exclamation “ah,” perhaps an ironic comment on the lengthy, demanding and largely unproductive peace talks. Instead, the political distance is bridged by foregrounding common humanity rather than diverging demands.

A similar scene takes place in Rochelle Mass’s “At the Edge” (2003: 112–113). Despite the ongoing Intifada and the fear of explosions, the speaker of the poem encounters anxiety and hopefulness shared by relatives of Arab and Jewish patients in the cardiac ward of a Jerusalem hospital. The urgent bypass surgery that the speaker’s husband undergoes is framed by “Two explosions in Um el Fachem the day the ambulance takes us/ from Afula” and the stationing of Israeli troops in the speaker’s village. Yet as the national concern recedes before private pain, it is the mixed crowd at the hospital that becomes the center of attention:

I realize I’ve never been so aware of the space around my husband as  
I sit among families – both Arabs and Jews – who bring baskets,  
bottles, thermoses, fill the ward with heavy smells. They make the  
place restless, bring in wind and rain. Their concern shuffles mine. (Mass 2003: 112)

There is both a spatial and an emotional proximity among the hospital visitors. Despite the disquieting political acts outside, on the human level, the relatives of Jewish and Arab cardiac patients in the poem merge into one mass; they animate the somber place by their movement and the smell of their food. The shared emotions of others permeate the concern of the speaker; rather than waiting apprehensively in isolation, an impromptu community appears to be born. The situation of being “at the edge,” as the poem’s title suggests, acts as a place of human contact, with an awareness of equality before a medical challenge. As in Alkalay-Gut’s poem, the communication appears to be largely carried out not through words, but through the understanding of and empathy with the situation of the Other.



### 8.5.2. The Mother and the Other

While the poems discussed above illustrate the reconsidering of one's relationship to the Other by showing a mutually positive outcome of essentially involuntary encounters, other poems feature a conscious reaching out on the emotional level. Like Emmanuel Levinas, who argues for curiosity, human good will and sympathy as the basis for the self's relationship with the Other, for accepting the Other as a different, but equally significant human being rather than a concept, these emotions provide a basis for healthy societal ties. Perhaps because Anglophone Israeli Literature has been strongly shaped by women authors, there is a significant presence of the themes of motherhood and protecting children, as was visible in the works of Rachel Tzvia Back, and of such "feminine" qualities as compassion and concern for the sick. For example, in the poem "Muchmed, Achmed or Hassan" (2001b: 47–48) by Rochelle Mass, the speaker gradually gets to know an Arab construction worker, who is renovating her house. For the speaker, the worker first appears as a generic figure; even his name seems insignificant and forgettable – the Muchmed, Achmed or Hassan of the poem's title. However, as the female speaker learns to appreciate the builder's qualification, work ethics and readiness to help, the two develop a bond based on mutual respect. As the Arab worker, whose name turns out to be Mohammed, becomes a friendly and individualized, rather than an alien and generic figure, the speaker learns of the Other's hardship and the struggle to provide for his family. There is a growing resentment of the Jewish foreman, who seems to overwork his Arab workers. Although no lasting relation issues between the speaker and Mohammed – the poem ends with the speaker telling the foreman to give the worker a holiday to recover from exhaustion – a foundation of human understanding and compassion has been established.

The power of Mass's poetry lies in particular in its flowing and elaborate presentation of vivid, concrete details. Written in the mode of "show, don't tell," the poem "Muchmed, Achmed and Hassan" is a sequence of replicas and descriptions of actions – the worker cooking coffee, rubbing his legs, losing his balance and rolling down till the olive tree catches him; the poem provides neither an explicit evaluation of emotions nor an extrapolation towards Israeli-Palestinian relations in general. Without making an explicit political statement, the poem nevertheless focuses on an instance where the relationship between two mutually Others is successfully developed not on political, but on ethical terms.

Even more explicitly, the "maternal" connection appears in Shirley Kaufman's poems such as "Meeting in Ramallah" and "Peace March." In "Meeting in Ramallah" (Kaufman 1984: 69), the speaker is visiting a Palestinian home. Although the purpose of the meeting is unclear in the poem, Frank Kearful explains

it by a quotation from Kaufman's "Letter from Jerusalem:" "I know so few of them. Women, mothers like myself. Poets. I try to listen to what they don't tell me. To understand their bitterness" (in Kearful 2001: 313). Unsure of herself and of the meeting – "Where can it lead" (Kaufman 1984: 69) – the speaker finds access to the situation through communication with children, who are playing with kittens. To reduce the spatial and emotional distance, the speaker goes down on the floor, i. e. to the level of the children "because the kittens are there/ and it's easy to play with them" (ibid.). Although the foreignness and unease of Kaufman and her implied Israeli companion is made obvious, the tension of "[f]ierce little faces," "taut friends" and unspoken ideologies is somewhat discharged by the joint observation of mother cat nursing her kittens "one hunger at a time." Although there seems to be no real emotional closeness in this scene, there is nevertheless an attempt to suggest a framework of communication. Stating that "[i]t's not just a matter of truth/ or occupation," i. e. not only a political matter, the poem seems to call for the inclusion of the Other on private, emotional terms. Similarly, the poem "Peace March" (Kaufman 1993: 17) – part of the sequence "Intifada" – claims familial responsibility for the dead. As photos of child victims of the Intifada, whose ethnic identity is purposefully left ambiguous, are carried by the participants of the peace march, the speaker clarifies her relationship to the dead: "like a family, too long on the road,/ who by their lassitude/ have left this happen." Kearful (2001: 320) suggests that the description of the demonstration commemorating the beginning of the First Intifada may refer to the "Women in Black," who wore black and held vigil in public places in order to protest the Occupation and to commemorate all victims, Israeli and Palestinian alike. Like the Women in Black, Kaufman's speaker seems to put the antagonistic dead on equal footing and professes familial sympathy for all victims.

In even stronger ethical and emotional terms, Alkalay-Gut's poem "Intifada Child" projects maternal feelings on a Palestinian child:

He wets his bed at night and in the morning  
 runs to the junction to throw stones. What  
 did he eat for breakfast? Who washes his clothes  
 when he comes home at dusk full of dust and the  
     sight  
 of his friends (from the same bench at school)  
 fallen in blood? Behind him his uncles  
 are urging him on and shooting over his head  
 at soldiers still boys themselves. In the kitchen  
     Mother  
 wrings her hands and takes comfort in the fact  
 that her child is her savior, alive or dead.

I too dream of you every night, child,  
Small and scrappy and hard to control,  
Determined to change the direction of generations,  
Full of disdain for the days just gone by,  
Sure you can make it by the force of your anger.  
I dream of you not as your foe, but as one  
Who has heard screams like yours in the night  
And do not want to reassure you with dreams of  
paradise  
for martyrs, as one who has grown up with my own  
enemies and bogeymen, have known children  
holding up their hands at rifle point on the streets,  
walk every day with brothers and sisters  
who died before I was born.  
And in my dreams I hold you and feed you and read  
you  
a fairy tale, a bedtime story, still believing I can keep  
your fears  
from growing up true, teaching you gently  
from your folklore and mine, tucking you in  
and promising to wake you  
with a new morning. (Alkalay-Gut 2012b: 37–38)

While the works of Rachel Tzvia Back repeatedly address the killing and maiming of children through their passive exposure to the armed conflict, “Intifada Child” focuses on an even more complex issue – the indoctrination and exploitation of children for military purposes. Besides the involvement of Palestinian youths in protests and stone throwing – the picture of the 14-year-old Faris Odeh throwing a stone at an Israeli tank has become one of the iconic pictures of the Second Intifada – and child casualties on both sides, the usage of children as human shields and the recruitment of children for military action have been condemned, among others, by Child Soldiers International, the Human Rights Watch and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The 2004 report of Child Soldiers International documented the recruitment of children by Palestinian armed groups: although the recruitment is not systematic, “children are used as messengers and couriers, and in some cases as fighters and suicide bombers. All the main political groups involve children in this way, including *Fatah*, *Hamas*, *Islamic Jihad*, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine” (“Child Soldiers Global Report 2004”). Between October 2000 and March 2004, at least nine Palestinian children carried out suicide attacks. Furthermore, Palestinian NGOs documented the deaths of 30 other children involved in organized military action during this period of time (*ibid.*). Photographs from the 2004 military operations showed that Gazan militants

routinely used civilians, including children, as human shields (Harel 2004) and during operation “Pillar of Defense” in 2012. Human Rights Watch severely condemned the practice of Gazan military groups of firing rockets “from densely populated areas, near homes, businesses and a hotel, unnecessarily placing civilians in the vicinity at great risk from Israeli counter-fire” (in “HRW: Hamas Rockets from Gaza Violated Laws of War” 2012). On the other hand, as the 2009 Amnesty International report of the operation “Cast Lead” suggests, the IDF have also made use of the human shield tactics by forcing families to remain in buildings from which the IDF soldiers were shooting (“Israel/Gaza. Operation ‘Cast Lead’: 22 Days of Death and Destruction” 2009: 48–50); the 2013 UNICEF report “Children in Israeli Military Detention” has condemned the Israeli practices of detaining Palestinian youths.

This is, then, the situation which “Intifada Child” addresses from the point of view of a mother. The poem consists of three stanzas. The first stanza attempts to imagine and describe the daily existence of a Palestinian boy, whose natural and touching need for love, care and security is contrasted with reality, where he becomes both a victim and a participant of the conflict. The poem opens with the act of bedwetting – a suggestion of young age, lack of control, private shame and possibly trauma. The child is qualified neither in ethnic, religious nor ideological terms, but from the perspective of a common and universal problem of childhood. The “normal” problems and needs of the child – bedwetting, food, clean clothes, playing with peers – are juxtaposed with the exposure to the danger of war and the ideological pressure to contribute to the Palestinian cause, enacted through the pressure from the uncles. Without the capacity to separate intellectually between the two, both elements – the “normal” childhood needs and the need to participate in the conflict – become natural, self-evident elements of the child’s world. Without the pretention of presenting an “authentic” account of a participant of the scene, the boy’s life is reimagined through the speaker, who introduces evaluations and insights into the situation beyond the scope of the boy’s perception, e. g. that the “enemy,” i. e. Israeli soldiers, are “still boys themselves” or the emotional dilemma of the boy’s mother.

As the first stanza closes with the image of the Palestinian mother wringing her hands in the kitchen, the speaker mirrors her maternal feelings in the second and third stanzas of the poem. Instead of appearing as a distant, third-person “he,” the child is now addressed directly as “you,” as if a mother addressing her son; the distance between the speaker and her subject is bridged. Like a mother, the speaker too expresses strong feelings of love and concern for the child. The act of the speaker’s “dreaming” takes place at night, emphasizing the natural, deep quality of this concern. The child becomes individualized: unlike the aestheticized, often melodramatic images of pleading children in distress which are extensively utilized by the media and by various NGOs to invoke pity for the

victims of war, famine and natural catastrophes, the boy in Alkalay-Gut's poem is energetic and stubborn, determined to become the hero of his own story of liberation. The poem invokes sympathy for the boy's resolve and anger, although clearly condemning his "solution," which has been planted by the surrounding adults – violently attacking the IDF in his own capacity.

The speaker unequivocally defines her own stance towards the unnamed boy: "not as your foe, but as one/ who has heard screams like yours in the night." Here, an explicitly transcultural perspective suggests common ground: the experience of Holocaust victims becomes a strong emotional connection for understanding and sympathizing with the position of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Although the comparison between the Holocaust and Nakba are not uncommon (e.g. Bar-On and Sarsar 2004, Pappé 2006 and Stav 2012), Alkalay-Gut infuses her poetic juxtaposition with the personal experience of "enemies and bogeyman" as a base for emotional understanding. While in the Holocaust/Nakba comparisons the former is often used merely as an image donor for the criticism of the proceedings of the IDF and institutional violence, here the impact of the Holocaust on the speaker's surroundings is invoked directly. Consistent with the biography of Alkalay-Gut, who was born to parents who had narrowly escaped the Holocaust while the majority of their families were murdered, the poem invokes the acute identification of the speaker with the victims of the Holocaust – the indiscriminate violence against adults and children, the traumata of survivors, the presence of the dead in the daily awareness of the living. The parallel of violently stunted childhood serves as a powerful emotional link for the speaker and becomes a basis for a strong identification with the imagined boy. Finally, the speaker's dream of peace becomes a dream of establishing a connection based on emotional warmth and respect for the culture of the respective Other. Phrased in terms of motherhood, the speaker dreams of being able to take care of the material needs of the child and to nurture an understanding and acceptance of the compatibility of cultures – "your folklore and mine." However, the poem also hints at the need for political solutions, which have to be found by adults: as the child should be fed and tucked in, so the surrounding situation needs to be changed in order that "a new morning" – an improved social and political situation – may indeed come. As with the speaker's address of the child, one may infer that these changes also need to be carried out with empathy and compassion.

While poems such as Mass's "Muchmed, Achmed or Hassan" and Alkalay-Gut's "Intifada Child" present an ethical base for approaching difference, the spectrum of possible pro-active ties also includes the intellectual connection, where the Other emerges not just as an object of sympathy, but as an intellectual partner. For example, Alkalay-Gut's "To One in Beirut" is addressed to a Lebanese intellectual friend, of whom the speaker is constantly reminded through

incessant war reports and air raid sirens during the First Lebanon War. Lamenting their exposure to the bombs and rockets of each other's countries, the speaker remembers their previous encounter:

As long as we kept from politics, we were friends  
strolling down a sea road of an Austrian town,  
shocking the guide with our nationalities  
and talking Pound, sex, divorce, food, wine.

How our lives would be fine  
now, if that were all there was  
to talk of. But where we live  
we speak only of death and think  
of somewhere else. (Alkalay-Gut 1986: 44)

In the atmosphere removed from political strife, the two are cosmopolitan friends, who share intellectual and epicurean interests, complain about divorce. Curiously, even the exoticism of their nationalities proves to be a connecting link – in the eyes of the Austrian guide, both belong to a strange and distant corner of the earth. Far from the unraveling conflict, there is plenty of common ground for friendship on equal terms. Yet as the national and familial ties become reinstated by war, the independence of individuals to enter and maintain a friendship is severely limited. The boundaries between the self and the Other, eroded by the mutual enjoyment of intellectual contact, reappear in a physical way by being caught on the opposing sides of the conflict. However, the thoughts of the Other and the concern for his wellbeing in the first part of the poem (not quoted here) suggest that the political and military conflict, albeit currently overpowering, is temporary and curable, and that there is a will and readiness to reestablish the connection of individuals despite the war of societal and political entities.

### 8.5.3. From Personal to Political

So far, the poems discussed in this section have focused on personal contact as a model for encountering the Other and for establishing a relationship of equality based on emotional, ethical and intellectual considerations. And although these poeticized encounters may and do function as a *pars pro toto* for the hoped-for reconciliation on the personal level between Israelis and Arabs/Palestinians, other poems explicitly foreground the political changes that need to occur. If the works of Rachel Tzvia Back focus on the documentation of injustice imposed on Palestinians and the parallel between the suffering of civilians on both sides, it is Karen Alkalay-Gut and the Palestinian-Israeli poet Osama Massarwa who emphasize the need not only of emotional and private, but also of political and

social solutions. Alkalay-Gut's "The Flag" (200:73), for example, states the following:

It  
is still  
possible  
to envision a  
true Jewish state but only if it is  
large enough to include the  
rest of the world  
and generous enough  
to acknowledge and try to right  
the wrongs committed even  
unwillingly in its creation.  
This is  
our  
hope

Shaped like the Star of David – the most recognizable symbol of Judaism and the State of Israel and the central image on the Israeli flag – the poem unmistakably calls for a revision of the political, social and ethnic foundations of the state. While the form of the poem reinstates the symbol of Israel – in line with Alkalay-Gut's strong identification with Israel, as discussed in the chapter "Landscapes of Belonging" – it also addresses the need to redefine the parameters of belonging and to acknowledge the wrongs committed in the name of the state. The poem is both retrospective and directed to the future: having become sufficiently established and stable to afford self-criticism (cf. A.B. Yehoshua 2001: 49), it is the responsibility of the country to enact justice, even if this necessitates the admittance of considerable blemishes of reputation. Although not stated explicitly, the poem evidently refers to the dispossession and expulsion of Arabs during the establishing of Israel's independence and the slanted balance of power between the Israeli state and the Palestinian territories. Highly critical of Israel's dubious record of human rights with regard to Arabs, the poem questions the "trueness" of the current Jewish state: as ethical and fair treatment of both kin and stranger is deeply embedded in the moral principles of Judaism, these should also be the basis of the "true" Jewish state. While the sense of belonging to the Jewish state remains an important component of identity, this belonging is also interpreted as a responsibility to redefine state policies against the antagonized Other. This is the precondition for hope, which in Alkalay-Gut's poem stands highlighted by its singling out of the star-shaped poem, like a dot under the exclamation mark.

In a similar way, Alkalay-Gut cautions against the misuse of language for political means in the poem "Of Israel and Its Language" (2000: 74–76). The

second and third stanzas of the poem focus on the phrase *shalom chaver* – *hello friend* – which was used by Bill Clinton in a eulogy for Yitzhak Rabin. Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel between 1974 and 1977 and from 1992 until his death in 1995, was murdered by a right-wing Israeli extremist, who was opposed to Rabin signing the Oslo Accord. *Shalom chaver* quickly became a catchphrase. Ironically, the assassination of Rabin revealed that not everybody was a *chaver*, nor was there to be *shalom* – which in Hebrew also means *peace*. The poem juxtaposes the trusting, somewhat naïve appellation *chaver*, symbolic of Rabin’s more egalitarian approach to the other side in the peace talks, with Benjamin Netanyahu’s use of the image of a hand extended towards the Palestinians. Having made the promise of the hand of peace, Netanyahu’s hand vanishes, “as if the word/ hand/ was/ a hand itself” (ibid. 75). With irony, the poem points out the readiness of politicians’ words to create the appearance of action without actually implementing a change for the better. Feeling nostalgic for the era of Rabin, when peace seemed to be a matter of the near future due to Rabin’s promising talks with Yasser Arafat, the poem foregrounds the inclusiveness that characterized the word *chaver* – “it meant we were all/ in the same existential little boat” (ibid. 74). Unlike Netanyahu’s vanishing hand, the warmth and egalitarianism of the appellation *chaver* seems to erode enough boundaries to start considering the Other not as an antagonist, but as a partner. “Life and death/ are in the hands/ of language” writes Alkalay-Gut in the final part of the poem and warns against acute separation and a division of society produced by radical nationalism on either side:

I would stand in Rabin Square<sup>60</sup>  
and demonstrate  
with a plaque:  
Death to fanatics  
  
and a banner that said:  
No more banners. (Ibid. 76)

The politization of language is also one of the reasons why Osama Massarwa, who identifies himself as Palestinian-Israeli, writes in English, besides Hebrew and his native Arabic. In addition to making his poetry accessible to a wider audience, the choice of writing in English allows the author to avoid taking sides and to distance his poetry from the often derogatory modes of speaking about the Other, which are proliferated in the languages of the two antagonistic groups. Unhampered by Massarwa’s often strained grammar and rhymes, this message also finds reflection in the content of his poetry. For example, in the poem

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60 A public square in central Tel Aviv, the Kings of Israel Square (Kikar Malkhei Israel) was renamed into Rabin Square after Yitzhak Rabin had been assassinated there in 1995.



“Yesterday They Were<sup>61</sup>,” Massarwa criticizes the practice of ennobling “martyrs” and “heroes” and waging wars “for heaven’s sake.” These “noble” justifications of death and carnage are juxtaposed with the extreme violence and uselessness of these acts, which are ultimately committed “to sanctify the leaders’ greed” (Massarwa 2010). Similarly, in “Contemplations” the speaker laments the fact that it is “easier to stir/ The inhuman elements’ flare/ Than build up the mutual trust,” as the inherent prejudice is not easily uprooted. Consciously distancing himself from these linguistic practices by using English, the medium becomes the message. Notably, besides his own explicit self-identification as Palestinian-Israeli, these designations are virtually absent from his poems. While the referents are often clear from the described acts – Occupation and discrimination are obviously enacted by the Israelis, while martyrs and wars in the name of religion can be attributed to the Palestinian side – in numerous other cases Massarwa’s poems equally implicate both sides, condemning the use of violence and the hatred of the respective Other. This relation is poignantly summarized in the poem “The Magic Word:”

If you had the right magic word,  
 Right away you’d make us vanish,  
 If we had it or the right code,  
 Your existence we’d soon ravish.  
 But because neither you nor we  
 Have that magical skill, let’s think  
 What the alternative might be –  
 Peace lest we all fall down and sink.

Symbolically, the imagined carnage is to be enacted by language – the magic word and the secret code. While these refer to the not uncommon wish among Israelis and Palestinians that the Other would just disappear instantaneously as if by magic, it also suggests the responsibility of the discourse of mistrust and aggression for the violence and suffering on both sides. Pointing out the ultimate impotence of the apparent solutions through magic words and codes, which may negatively alter the perception of the respective Other, but cannot wish him out of existence, Massarwa calls for practical solutions for coexistence. Thus, the poem “The Wall,” which protests the erection of the barrier between the West Bank and Israel, argues that the people enclosed within the wall need “[n]o more racial philosophies” – either their own or imposed by Israel – but that “[t]hey want to exchange expertise,/ They do need to use and release/ Their frustrated abilities.” Similarly, in “Damn It,” the speaker condemns false hopes and states

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61 A copious collection of Massarwa’s work has been published on his blog <http://osama.massarwa.blogspot.co.il/>, which is used as the source here (retrieved on 22. 10. 2013).

that “Peace needs deeds not words.” Rather than empty agreements, there is a need for practical cooperation.

While “The Magic Word” explicitly establishes the division of sides into “you,” i. e. Israelis, and “we” – Palestinians, this identification is more complex in other poems. In “Don Qixote,” the speaker expresses the frustration both with the treatment of Arab citizens of Israel and with the aggression of fellow Palestinians against “his” country:

Heartache my country always offers me,  
 A struggle for ‘to be or not to be’,  
 A hard life I do lead in my country,  
 Just into dungeon I’m grante [sic] entry.  
 Citizenship is just more than being,  
 It’s behaving, believing and feeling,  
 I can’t enjoy my citizenship  
 Because of this queer relationship,  
 My brethren are at war with my own state,  
 How am I supposed to relate?  
 Here I don’t exist, I just eat and drink,  
 Nobody cares whether I feel or think.  
 I have no role to play whatsoever,  
 What can I do? What can I endeavor?  
 I’m Don Quixote trying to fix the world,  
 But my reward is a life dark and cold.

Massarwa portrays a complex situation of an intellectual who is caught in two ambivalent and conflicting social memberships. On the one hand, the speaker feels a degree of belonging to the state of Israel, calling it “my country” and “my state,” yet he foregrounds the social injustice that he experiences as an Arab citizen. In other poems Massarwa also criticizes specific practices of discrimination against Arabs. For example, the poem “A Collective Grave” attacks the state’s covert policy of expelling Arabs from mixed cities by preventing their houses from being improved or restored. On the other hand, in “Don Quixote” the speaker focuses on the unused human and intellectual potential, which he feels is being ignored by the state. The possible extent of identification with the country – “behaving, believing and feeling” – is reduced to a mere participation in the daily cycle of food and drink. However, the situation is complicated by the other problematic identity – that of “my brethren,” who, as a member of the same ethnic group are considered to elicit a strong, familial emotional response, but whose practice of being “at war with my own state” the speaker does not support. The question “How am I supposed to relate?” becomes “With whom am I supposed to relate?” – fully with none, partly with both. In the light of this dilemma, the poem alludes to two literary anchors – *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*.

While the speaker clearly suffers from “the oppressor’s wrongs, the proud man’s contumely” and “the law’s delay,/ the insolence of office,” as a believer in peace and justice he finds himself on Don Quixote’s quest against the windmills of institutionalized discrimination and politically incited aggression. Despite despair, the solution needs to be peaceful and constructive, as this and many other of Massarwa’s poems suggest: “compromising must be mutual,/ Thus the reward goes to each side” (“Oh Country”).

From delineating personal discontent, like Alkalay-Gut, Massarwa progresses to the urgent need to find just political and social solutions. Unlike fickle words – agitation against the Other or empty promises – these solutions need to be backed by a heartfelt will to compromise and the readiness to engage as partners. Foregrounding his own conflicted double identity and laying a finger into the wounds of each side, Massarwa himself seems to exemplify the acute need for and the concurrent difficulty of peaceful coexistence in a politically charged setting.

## 8.6. Conclusion

W.H. Auden famously wrote upon the death of W.B. Yeats that “poetry makes nothing happen.” (Auden 1991: 248) Being an elitist form of production, “it survives/ In the valleys of its making,” detached from the bustle of the world. However, as Jon Stallworthy notes, Auden would not have dared to utter these words to the living Yeats, who saw “painters, poets, playwrights, sculptors as the architects of civilization, generally, and in his own time and place, specifically, those who made the 1916 Easter Rising ‘happen’” (Stallworthy 2008: ix). While one may argue about the power of poetry to move things, one of the instances where poetry is explicitly inscribed in the existence of a country is its national anthem, which construes a part of the “national essence.” The national anthem of Israel – *HaTikvah*, meaning *hope* – has been subject to increased criticism due to its Zionist and Jew-oriented message. Written in 1878 by Naftali Hertz Imber, the song reflects the yearning of diaspora Jews to return to Israel and to live as a free people. As the Jewish references in the anthem clearly do not reflect the presence and rights of Arab citizens of Israel, the anthem has become subject to unofficial revisions with the aim of better representing those that it excludes. For example, at the 2012 *Jerusalem Post* conference in New York, the singer Neshama Carlebach performed a subtly altered text of *HaTikvah*, where “an Israeli soul” appeared instead of the standard “a Jewish soul” and “an eye still gazes toward our country” instead “an eye still gazes toward Zion” (Linde 2012). By utilizing broader, more inclusive terms, the revisionist version seeks to provide more recognition to the politically underrepresented Israeli Arabs and to uproot the

exclusivity of Jewishness in the national symbols of the state. If sung at official occasions and especially on Independence Day, this revised two-verse poem at the heart of the Israeli national narrative may indeed contribute to the change of the relation of the self towards the Other among a broader mass of population.

In her comparison of two poems by Yehuda Amichai and by the Palestinian poet Samih Al-Quasem, Yvette Neisser (2000) points out the poets' disillusionment with words: "[Amichai] and Al-Quassem, like most Israeli and Palestinian poets writing today, prefer a peace which arises from stripping away the façade of politics – a peace which arises from genuine sentiments of people." Similarly, although words are still the medium of poetry, a lot of Anglophone Israeli poetry is dedicated to questioning ideological narratives and to finding a human, emotional connection with the Other. Especially Richard Sherwin and Rachel Tzvia Back draw attention to the confusion and atrocities of war, where the semblance of justification cannot be upheld and where the consciousness of the victim is inexorably intertwined with the awareness of being the culprit. At the same time, the Other and the self often become each other's mirrors in terms of suffering and their emotional response to it. On the other hand, a number of poems document the defenselessness of civilians during wars and suicide attacks. Often short and charged with the immediacy of the moment, these poems vividly convey the everyday trauma of war. Escape into art and irony feature as ways to distance oneself from the surrounding pressure and the very act of framing these experiences in English may function as a strategy of detachment. While there is hardly sympathy with extremists, the poetic depiction of personal contact with the self's counterpart – the Other civilian – emphasize the common ethical and emotional dimension and the essential equality of human value. The promotion of human – intellectual and emotional – contact is supplemented by the acute need to implement it on the level of societies.

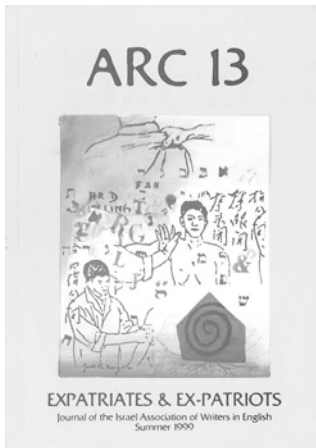
In the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the position of the self with respect to the Other is necessarily a complex and manifold one. The disillusionment with the political peace dialogue and the fear of attacks are supplemented by guilt; the fear of rockets and suicide attacks is interspersed by an intense desire to establish a genuine, fair relationship based on humanist values. The position of the immigrant necessitates grappling with this penetrating aspect of Israeli existence, while at the same time allowing for the emotional space and linguistically distanced perspective of English. Like the attempted revision of the national anthem, this complexity of positioning is in itself a marker of the deconstruction of rigid politicized identities.

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## 9. Conclusion

The cover of the 13<sup>th</sup> issue of *Arc*, subtitled *Expatriates & Ex-Patriots*, at first seems to show a page from an oriental self-defense course or a medical manual (see Image 2 on the following page). Designed by the Israel-based American artist Judith Margolis, it shows three scenes of tactile contact – somebody pulling a man's shirt from behind, a slap on the shoulder, a grip on the forearm. While only one person is clearly visible in each sketch, the hand of the other is always present, suggesting ubiquitous contact and interaction. The images are supplemented by layers of written signs – far-eastern characters and letters of the Latin and the Hebrew alphabets. The far-eastern characters seem to form a unity with the images of the source medium, while the English and Hebrew letters, accompanied by an ampersand and an inverted comma, run wild across the page. Without forming accurate lines or speech bubbles, they nevertheless appear to suggest an ongoing, disorderly heteroglossia, which envelopes the participants of the scenes. The bottom right corner is filled by a brown pentagon – a house-like structure. The spiral on the house indicates development, and indeed, the house is sprouting roots that reach down and continue, unseen, beyond the border, surrounded by human interaction and flowing languages. As the identities of the sketched protagonists remain uncertain, it is the sense of movement and recombination of different symbols that seems to dominate the image.

Indeed, no identity is absolute. Subject to perpetual re-grounding with respect to new stimuli, identities in flux have become a major subject in contemporary literary studies, especially where the interaction between different cultures – Britain and its former colonies, Latin American and Asian migrants in the U.S. or the Jewish minority within the surrounding majority societies – forms the name of the field. And while different disciplines have developed (and partly discarded) their own vocabulary to describe phenomena involving mixture and synthesis, the quickening of transnational connections has provoked an unprecedented interest in their nature and impact both contemporarily and retrospectively. Arguing from different perspectives, Wolfgang Iser (1999), Moshe Rosman (2008) and Marwan Kraidy (2005) reach the same conclusion by



*Image 2. Cover of Arc 13, Summer 1999.*

recognizing that hybridity is indeed an essential mechanism of transculturalism, yet its importance does not lie in the mere statement of its existence. Rather, it is the examination of the specific intra-local and translocal factors and the reactions they trigger that takes the recognition of cultural complexity beyond dualistic modes of, for example, suppression and resistance or the encroaching of globalization upon the mythologized local.

The consciousness of the multitude of transcultural forces is a key element in Anglophone Israeli writing. While migration to Israel is clearly a central factor of forming and re-forming identity, it branches out into the highly transcultural heritage and into the heteroform experience of the new country, with its multiple social and linguistic strata and its unique challenges to national self-understanding. American-Israeli, South African-Israeli or Canadian-Israeli may sound like convenient labels, yet the cultural “products” they describe inherit the complexity of each component, with a potential and ability to recombine and produce a new and transmuted, highly self-conscious form. While this study has treated Anglophone Israeli authors as a group due to their shared language, overlapping literary traditions, eastern or central European roots and similar socio-economic position both in their countries of origin and in Israel, there is naturally further room for examining the specific responses of immigrants from different Anglophone countries.

This study has endeavored to locate Anglophone Israeli writing in several dimensions. On the one hand, although it has not attracted the attention of cultural theorists so far, Anglophone Israeli Literature is subject to migration processes of individuals, media, contents, practices and forms (cf. Appadurai 1996: 3, Erll 2011: 12–13) that have been theorized as the heartbeat of global

modernity. To a certain extent, it is the reversal of the global current that has fed the new cultural production: if immigrants from the former colonial periphery, such as Homi Bhabha, Salman Rushdie, Edward Said, and Derek Walcott have theorized hybridity and cultural resistance from western centers, Anglophone Israeli authors have re-located from western centers to the Middle East. If the resistance to the slanted power nexus and the challenging of western cultural chauvinism belong to the driving forces of the former, Anglophone Israeli writing focuses on the “pull” factors – the desire of finding new and valid forms of social and geographical belonging while maintaining an authentic creative consciousness. Here, identities revolve and reconfigure themselves in Bhabha’s staircase, yet the metaphoric staircase is located not merely on one axis between two rival cultural identifications, but in a multidimensional consciousness of a generation-long transcultural journey, of synchronous variety, of predetermination and choice, of received images and actual experiences, of desires for group identity and for individual self-determination, of ideology and morality, of creative and monetary considerations.

From another perspective, the social perimeter of Anglophone Israeli writing has been explored by focusing on its creative instrument, the English language, and its primary agents, immigrants from English-speaking countries, in Israel. For many post-colonial authors the choice of English – whether a “standard” variety or a local brand – versus the native language(s) directly touches on issues of national self-determination and intelligibility to local or global audiences. For Anglophone Israeli authors, the timeframe of their migration coincided with the weakening of the Hebrew-only policy and with the growth of Israeli-American relations. While the social and ideological pressure and the need to interact with the surrounding society promoted the acquisition of Hebrew, learning a new language no longer presupposed that the “exile” tongue had to be abandoned. A prestigious language of the privileged, the knowledge of English came to be regarded as an asset, which further intensified with the rise of English as the language of international communication. Based on the shared language, overlapping cultural heritage and similar aliyah motivation and socio-economic status, the label “Anglo” appeared as an umbrella label for immigrants from different parts of the Anglophone world in Israel; it is also occasionally used as self-reference by the members of this group. If passing through the apparatus of the Hebrew language school as a part of social integration still functions as a mechanism of transformation, the process has largely shed the implications of a melting pot.

This change of assimilation pressure becomes especially apparent against the backdrop of early Jewish American Literature and the revived Hebrew Literature. If low-status immigrants from eastern Europe were to improve their fortune in America, learning English was the essential tool of entering the majority society.

The low external prestige of Yiddish, combined with internal criticism of the language, functioned as an additional reason to discard the linguistic component of the old identity – a stark contrast to the high status of English in Israel in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And although vestiges of Yiddish emerged as an important marker of identity in Jewish American Literature, the assimilation pressure that dominated American domestic politics in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century acted as a powerful incentive to master English for creative purposes as well as for practical ones. Conversely, the adaptation of Hebrew as a creative medium functioned as a tool of a new self-identification in the developing Jewish nationalism in Europe. Set apart from Yiddish, which epitomized the Jews' precarious minority status in the Russian Empire, Hebrew was constructed as a language associated with the rebirth as an independent nation, which motivated authors such as Bialik and Tchernichovski to adopt Hebrew as the medium of expression. The nationalist necessity was combined with the benefits of education, where a functional knowledge of biblical Hebrew belonged to middle-class education at the turn of the century, which enabled authors such as Lea Goldberg to enter into Hebrew writing with relative ease. After the establishment of Israel and its military success in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, the existential question and the ideological need for self-reinvention as a nation moved to the background, bringing about the weakening of assimilation pressure. Combined with the high status of English and the growing concentration of English speakers in the country, there was now a more fertile ground for the emergence of a foreign-language minority writing culture.

If these chapters examined two kinds of external factors that shaped the emergence and the content of Anglophone Israeli writing, their logical counterpart is the description of Anglophone Israeli writing from the inside. Although the borders of the field are necessarily fuzzy, the account of some major trends, such as the preference for poetry and prose over drama, the sense of existence in a “double diaspora,” the contrast between local and international publishing possibilities, the increase of translation to and from Hebrew or the recent input from native-born Israelis, contribute to a functional overview of the subject. Although Jonathan Wilson wrote that he does not envy his Anglophone writer friends in Israel due to their minority status in Israel and their distance from the major hubs of Anglophone culture (2007: xiii), many authors successfully combine memberships in the culture of their home country, their chosen country, as well as, potentially, the global Anglophone readership. Even though the participation in the cultural networking brew and casual socializing with other members of overseas creative centers is indeed impaired, authors such as Matt Reese and Evan Fallenberg have in fact construed physical distance as an empowering factor that can grant greater creative independence.

With an overview at hand, the second part of the present research addressed



three specific issues that have emerged as major dimensions of reconsidering identity in Anglophone Israeli writing. The first one is language. Clearly, the struggle with a new language acquires an additional significance for authors whose essential existence is tied to the ability to express themselves in a given language. As many regard writing not as a profession, but as a vocation, a need and an extension of something internal, authentic and unique, the validity of a new language to communicate these immaterial, fuzzy, yet deeply felt entities is questioned. The issue of English versus Hebrew is complicated further by the already transcultural heritage and tokens of earlier languages, as well as the flamboyant, and often confusing language fabric in Israel, where the Russian immigrant theater *Gesher*, whose actors used to rehearse Hebrew texts in Cyrillic transliteration, is now located in the prevalently Arabic-speaking neighborhood of Jaffa in Tel Aviv. Positioning oneself amidst such diversity is a challenge; opportunity borders on confusion. Naturally, individual reactions vary. Especially those who immigrated at a more advanced age with little or no Hebrew, such as Shirley Kaufman, would be prone to adopting a negative view of being “caught” in the native language, without a possibility of transferring one’s creative potential into the other language. However, the very weight of the challenge and the unsettling sense of alienation through language serves here as a powerful creative impetus. Moreover, the perceived impossibility of free movement between languages in the creative sphere is not tied to the knowledge of language itself, as even some of those who command Hebrew at a native-like level, such as Rachel Tzvia Back, perceive writing in a non-native language as disconnected from their emotional self. Yet the interpretation of this underlying, authentic self in terms of language varies greatly. Although one is born into specific social and linguistic surroundings, the formative experiences that influence the flow of individual consciousness may come from many directions, as Lami, who has written both in English and Hebrew, conceptualizes in her terms “foster tongue” and “many mothers.” For Karen Alkalay-Gut, whose poetry often refers to the multi-lingual world of her parents as well as to her own heterogeneous linguistic surroundings, Hebrew becomes not only an entry point to the minute intricacies of the Israeli society, but also a site of personal discovery. If the creative dimension of the self is predominantly English, it appears in dialogue, consciously or unconsciously, with the other linguistic dimensions.

Locality and place were examined as the second major aspect of identity in Anglophone Israeli Literature. Transcultural modernity is often regarded as essentially translocal or superlocal, where it is the process and speed of connections that become the pinnacle of fascination. Yet none of this has rendered locality immaterial. Although the vast majority of Anglophone immigrants in Israel have come by choice rather than by pressure, the “return” or “ascent” to Israel – as it is still promoted by the Jewish agency – did not irrevocably resolve

the issues of home and belonging, but rather opened a new set of questions. If the local, the traditional and the authentic are often mythologized by the critics of globalization, one of the key modes of writing about place in Anglophone Israeli Literature is the deconstruction of these concepts. No experience of reality can justify the load of expectation that religious and Zionist Jewish texts have piled on a strip of land in the Middle East: de-mystifying the “Holy Land” and appropriating the actual landscape from frantic rabbis, awe-struck visitors and glib tour guides becomes an important mode of operation. But once the shine of holiness is scratched away, what is actually the experience of the local? For some, such as Riva Rubin and Shirley Kaufman, it is that of alienation, where prolonged existence in a place does not translate into the feeling of belonging and rootedness. Poignantly, the sense of dislocation is projected onto the physical landscape and climate, which often appears as dry, harsh and hostile. Especially for Rachel Tzvia Back, the unkind landscape functions as a physical counterpart to the clashing ideologies of its inhabitants. Her own essentially subjective and conflicted sense of belonging is paralleled by the realization of the equivalent political and emotional territorial ties of the Palestinians. Conversely, a sense of connectedness often surfaces in a more positive description of the landscape, especially by “country-side” poets such as Lami and Rochelle Mass. Here, the very harshness of the climate functions as a point of reference for enjoyment of greenery after the rain or in the appreciation of one’s investment into making it habitable. For Karen Alakalay-Gut, the rejection of the overdrawn religious atmosphere of Jerusalem is accompanied by the appreciation of the free spirit of Israel’s secular capital Tel Aviv, where the variety of perspectives – from rooftop panoramas to zoom-ins on neighborhood garbage cans – creates a varied portrait of the city and suggests familiarity and connectedness. With that, neither locality per se nor the notion of home are absolute: there is a need to reimagine and recreate different spaces, whether from one’s own experience or from narrated family memories. In a shift of perspectives, imagined or real experiences of localities function as filters for looking at each other, establishing a multi-directional system of references.

Positioning the self vis-à-vis the Other is the third major factor of identity construction of the present study. Unlike the colonial past of European countries, the distinction between the self and the other and its practical implications are issues of overbearing currency in the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli relations. This is also a distinction that Anglophone Israeli authors, despite different political opinions, seek to reconsider. The demarcating lines between the self and the Other become increasingly blurred and the apparatus of power that legitimates aggression is increasingly criticized. If locality is reclaimed by dispelling mythology, the perspective of the Other is reappropriated from news reports, where Richard Sherwin exposes the flip side of hero worship and political

whitewashing, while Rachel Tzvia Back supplements the unpleasant particulars of deceptively optimistic news reports. Pointing out to the sites of exclusion in the Israeli majority discourse, both remind of the missing perspective of the Other. Especially in the works of Back, the mutually Others are shown to experience the same kind of suffering at the hands of each other during the First and the Second Intifada. A different subset of Anglophone Israeli poetry focuses on the fear and anxiety of civilians during military attacks – the most hostile kind of transcultural clashes. The sharp, brief lines produce ongoing commentary; their English medium creates an emotional distance from the overcharged Hebrew-coded reality. In times of peace, however, it is the need for a human, ethical connection with the Other that becomes the subject of poems. Chance encounters and mutual help in the poems by Alkalay-Gut and Mass bring to light the common humanity that reconciles difference; especially the female speakers emerge as seekers of reconciliation. Within this quest for finding common ground and accommodating difference, many poems foreground the need for fair political solutions and for new political leaders on both sides, who would be interested in peace more than in their own power ambitions. Where both sides are simultaneously victims and aggressors, Anglophone Israeli poetry blurs the lines between the self and the Other and challenges othering as a practice of self-justification.

Of course, this study has not exhausted the questions of the transcultural dimensions of Anglophone Israeli Literature. While it has focused on the native-speaker majority in the field, non-native speakers of English, with their highly heterogeneous backgrounds, have their own motives and considerations for using English as their medium of expression. Especially with more native-born Israelis participating in Anglophone writing courses and events and even publishing their works in English, Anglophone writing by non-native speakers is an aspect that can generate interest. Similarly, the internal variety within the loosely-knit community of Israeli Anglos can be explored furtherer to establish the extent and kind of difference between the literary production of, say, natives of South Africa, such as Olga Kirsh and Riva Rubin, and of the U.S., such as Shirley Kaufman and Richard Sherwin. Furthermore, there is room for addressing specific intertextuality, such as the female reimagination of the Bible, the relation to the American poetic tradition or the ties with contemporary Israeli pop culture, which have been used instrumentally here. And naturally, the scope of Anglophone Israeli Literature is much wider than the corpus of this study and a number of accomplished authors such as Robert Friend, Dennis Silk and Dick Flantz deserve to be read and studied.

Anglophone Israeli writing is a local response to different layers of the transcultural condition. Highly self-conscious and critical of prescriptive norms of belonging, it seeks to negotiate meaningful identifications when change –

whether chosen or imposed – is ubiquitous and identities are composite, multi-layered and flexible. With a distinct awareness of its trans-lingual and trans-local connections in the past and in the present, it is grounded both in its unique circumstances and in the more universal questions of linguistic flexibility, emotional ties to locations and the deconstruction of the practice of othering. And although its future course is uncertain, Anglophone Israeli Literature is a new and noteworthy complex cultural form that does not resist, but thrives on transition and interaction.

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## 10. A Timeline of Anglophone Israeli Literature

Although this timeline does not raise a claim to completeness, it nevertheless attempts to produce a temporal overview of at least some of the significant developments in the field of Anglophone Israeli writing. Among others, it gives information about the date of immigration of some important Anglophone Israeli authors, the year of their birth and death, their place of settlement, the genre of their works and the time of publishing.

- 1948        *The State of Israel attains independence, Arab-Israeli War*  
The poet Olga Kirsch (born in 1924 in South Africa) settles in Israel. She continues to write poetry in Afrikaans for the next 40 years  
The writer Chayym Zeldis (born in Buffalo, NY) settles in Israel
- 1950        The poet Robert Friend (born in 1913 in Brooklyn) settles in Jerusalem
- 1954        The poet Zygmunt Frankel (born in 1929 in Poland, lived in the USSR and Britain) settles in Israel
- 1955        The poet Dennis Silk (born in 1928 in London) settles in Jerusalem
- 1958        The poet Lami (Shulamit Halperin, born in 1931 in Columbia, MO) settles in Kibbutz Urim in Israel
- 1959        Yael Dayan (born in 1939 in Nahalal, Mandatory Palestine) publishes *New Face in the Mirror* (novel)
- 1962        The poet Harold Schimmel (born 1935 in New Jersey) settles in Jerusalem; he publishes a collection of poems in English (*First Poems*, 1962) prior to aliyah
- Early        Harold Schimmel and Dennis Silk begin translating the poems of Yehuda  
1960 s        Amichai into English
- 1963        The poet Riva Rubin (born in 1931 in South Africa) settles in Israel
- 1964        The poet Richard (Dick) Sherwin (born in 1933 in Malden, MA) settles in Israel  
Robert Friend publishes *Salt Gifts* (poetry)  
Dennis Silk publishes *Face of Stone* (poetry and drama)
- 1967        *Six-Day War*
- 1968        Harold Schimmel publishes *HaShirim* (Hebr. *Poems*), his first collection of poetry written in Hebrew
- 1969        Riva Rubin publishes *The Poet Killers* (poetry)
- 1971        **The Voices Israel Group of Poets in English is founded**  
Robert Friend publishes *The Practice of Absence* (poetry)  
The writer Naomi Ragen (born in 1949 in New York) settles in Jerusalem

- 1972 The poet Karen Alkalay-Gut (born in 1945 in London, raised in Rochester, NY) settles in Israel  
Zygmunt Frankel writes *The Octopus* (novella)
- 1973 *Yom Kippur War*  
The poet Shirley Kaufman (born in 1923 in Seattle) settles in Jerusalem  
The poet Rochelle Mass (born in 1943 in Winnipeg, Canada) settles in Israel
- 1974 Harold Schimmel publishes *Shirei Malon Tzion* (poetry, Hebr: *Songs of the Zion Hotel*) in Hebrew
- 1975 Robert Friend publishes *Selected Poems* (poetry)
- 1977 The writer Jerome Mandel settles in Israel (Haifa and Tel Aviv)
- 1978 The poet Linda Zisquit (born in Buffalo, NY) settles in Jerusalem.  
Chayyim Zeldis publishes *The Marriage Bed* (novel)  
Richard (Dick) Sherwin publishes *A Strange Courage* (poetry)
- 1979 Richard (Dick) Flantz publishes *Shabbat Sha. Surreligious and Provincial Poems of a Family Jew in English in Israel towards Mid-58<sup>th</sup> Century* (poetry)  
Shirley Kaufman publishes *From One Life to Another* (poetry)  
Riva Rubin publishes *Fifty-One Poems* (poetry)
- 1980 **The Israel Association of Writers in English (IAWE) is founded**  
Robert Friend publishes *Somewhere Lower Down* (poetry)  
The poet Rachel Tzvia Back (born in 1960 in Buffalo, NY) settles in Israel  
Karen Alkalay-Gut publishes *Making Love: Poems* (poetry)  
Dennis Silk publishes *The Punished Land* (poetry)
- 1982 **First Lebanon War (the South Lebanon Conflict continues until 2000)**
- 1984 Dennis Silk publishes *The Punished Land: Hold Fast* (poetry)
- 1985 The writer Evan Fallenberg (born in Cleveland, OH in 1962) settles in Jerusalem
- 1986 Karen Alkalay-Gut publishes *Mechitza* (poetry)  
Lami (Shulamit Halperin) publishes *Penumbra* (poetry)  
Harold Schimmel publishes *Lowell* (poetry) in Hebrew
- 1987 **Beginning of First Intifada (continues until 1993)**  
Robert Friend publishes *Cats and Other People* (poetry)  
Ed Codish publishes *Voyage to Gaza or Sailing Down the Wadi* (poetry)  
Charles Kormos publishes *Pawn and Prophet* (poetry)  
Richard (Dick) Sherwin publishes *Nomad in God* (poetry)
- 1988 Villy Kohn publishes *Mazal, Thusnelda and other Stories* (short stories)
- 1989 Naomi Ragen publishes *Jephthe's Daughter* (novel)
- 1990 Robert Friend publishes *Dancing with a Tiger* (poetry)  
Olga Kirsch publishes the *Book of Sitrya* (poetry), her first collection of works in English  
Dennis Silk publishes *Catwalk and Overpass* (poetry)
- 1991 Lami (Shulamit Halperin) publishes *Parlando Rubato* (poetry)
- 1992 Karen Alkalay-Gut publishes *Ignorant Armies* (poetry)  
Karen Alkalay-Gut publishes *Between Bombardments* (poetry)  
Naomi Ragen publishes *Sotah* (novel)
- 1993 Karen Alkalay-Gut publishes *Recipes: Love Soup and Other Poems* (poetry)  
Zygmunt Frankel publishes *The Ducks of Fayid* (short story)  
Zygmunt Frankel publishes *Oedipus* (drama)  
Charles Kormos publishes *A Happy Man. A Selection of Poems Written in 1943-1993* (poetry)  
Linda Zisquit publishes *Ritual Bath* (poetry)  
Shirley Kaufman publishes *Rivers of Salt* (poetry)

- 1994 Robert Friend publishes *Abbreviations* (poetry)  
Jeffrey Green publishes *Half a Baker* (novel)
- 1995 Robert Friend publishes *The Next Room* (poetry)  
Charles Kormos publishes *Stars at High Noon. Variations on Love and Loneliness* (poetry)  
Lami (Shulamit Halperin) publishes *Falsetto* (poetry)  
Naomi Ragen publishes *The Sacrifice of Tamar* (novel)
- 1996 Elazar (Larry Freifeld) publishes *30 Seconds... of Love* (poetry)  
Linda Zisquit publishes *Unopened Letters: Poems* (poetry)  
Shirley Kaufman publishes *Roots in the Air: New and Selected Poems* (poetry)  
The writer Matt Rees (born in 1967 in Newport, Wales) settles in Jerusalem
- 1997 Robert Friend publishes *After Catullus* (poetry)  
Riva Rubin publishes *Surfer* (poetry)  
Dennis Silk publishes *William the Wonder Kid* (drama)  
Death of Zygmunt Frankel
- 1998 Death of Robert Friend  
Death of Dennis Silk  
Naomi Ragen publishes *The Ghost of Hannah Mendes* (novel)
- 1999 Karen Alkalay-Gut publishes *The Love of Clothes and Nakedness* (poetry)  
Posthumous publication of Zygmunt Frankel's *Collected Poems and Linocuts* (poetry)  
Jerome Mandel publishes *Nothing Gold Can Stay* (short stories)
- 2000 **Beginning of Second Intifada** (continues until 2005)  
Karen Alkalay-Gut publishes *In My Skin* (poetry)  
Mois (Moshe) Benarroch publishes *You Walk on the Land until One Day the Land Walks on You* (poetry)  
Rochelle Mass publishes *Where's My Home?* (poetry)
- 2001 Rachel Tzvia Back publishes *Azimuth* (poetry)  
Karen Alkalay-Gut publishes *High Maintenance* (poetry)  
Jeffrey Green publishes *Giving Myself Away* (poetry)  
Rochelle Mass publishes *Aftertaste* (poetry)  
Naomi Ragen writes *Women's Minyan* (play), which runs for six years in Israel's National Theater
- 2002 Naomi Ragen publishes *Chains around the Grass* (novel)
- 2003 Shirley Kaufman publishes *Threshold* (poetry)  
Rochelle Mass publishes *The Startled Land* (poetry)
- 2004 Karen Alkalay-Gut publishes *So Far So Good* (poetry)  
Naomi Ragen publishes *The Covenant* (novel)  
Linda Zisquit publishes *The Face in the Window* (poetry)
- 2006 **Second Lebanon War**
- 2007 Rachel Tzvia Back publishes *On Ruins & Return: The Buffalo Poems (1999–2005)* (poetry)  
Naomi Ragen publishes *The Saturday Wife* (novel)  
Three lawsuits filed against Naomi Ragen accusing her of plagiarism
- 2008 Matt Rees publishes *Betlehem Murders* (novel) and *Saladin Murders* (novel) and *The Collaborator in Betlehem* (novel)
- 2009 Matt Rees publishes *A Grave in Gaza* (novel)  
Evan Fallenberg publishes *Light Fell* (novel)
- 2010 Naomi Ragen publishes *The Tenth Song* (novel)  
Matt Rees publishes *Fourth Assassin* (novel) and *The Samaritan's Secret* (novel)

- 2011 Matt Rees publishes *Mozart's Last Aria* (novel)  
Evan Fallenberg publishes *When We Danced on Water* (novel)
- 2012 Karen Alkalay-Gut publishes *Miracles and More* in English and Hebrew (poetry) and *Layers* (Poetry)  
Rachel Tzvia Back publishes *A Messenger Comes* (poetry)  
Riva Rubin publishes *Bialik's Songbird* (poetry)  
Death of Harold Schimmel  
Shani Boianjiu (born 1987 in Jerusalem) publishes *The People of Forever Are Not Afraid* (novel)



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