

IYUNIM BITKUMAT ISRAEL

Thematic Series

Volume 10

**Israeli Exiles: Homeland and Exile
in Israeli Discourse**

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**Israeli Exiles: Homeland and
Exile in Israeli Discourse**

Edited by

Ofer Shiff



THE BEN-GURION RESEARCH INSTITUTE
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Facing the Diaspora: Jewish Art Discourse in 1930s Eretz Israel

Dalia Manor

The one period overlooked in the history of Israeli art is the 1930s. This is conspicuous in comparison to the wealth of material dedicated to the 1920s and to later periods, and in view of the significant developments during the 1930s in the art field including the founding of major art institutions. The critical discourse on art that converged with the discourse on Jewish identity may have contributed to this marginalization.

A prevalent idea of the time was that art made by Jewish artists shares a common quality, which is 'to be sought in the hidden racial elements, in the mystery of the Jewish soul.' The notion of Jewish race and Jewish soul were key concepts in writing on art, particularly in the journal *Gazith*, the then main platform for art discourse. Especially influential were the views of French critic Waldemar George published in Hebrew. He argued that the spirituality of Jewish art means that it is detached from any national or territorial base. The admiration pronounced by *Gazith* for Jewish artists in Paris as a model for artists in Palestine added to this hitherto unnoticed important ideological shift. It was accompanied by a stylistic change that has been noticed and heavily criticized.

The reception of these ideas by artists and writers in Eretz Israel deserves attention: art was no longer identified with the national revival in the Land of Israel as it was in the previous decades. Instead, artists turned their faces to the Diaspora and the experience of suffering as a new paradigm for modern Jewish art. In later years the concept of Jewish manifestation in art was rejected and scorned (until the 1980s) and with it the art of the 1930s.

Asher Barash: Between Literature of the Tribe and Literature of a Nation

Hannan Hever

In 1931 writer, poet, and editor Asher Barash, one of the prominent figures in Hebrew Literature in Eretz Israel, published his presentation 'Literature of a Tribe or Literature of a Nation?'. Barash was afraid of provinciality

and alarmed that a fulfillment of Zionism, a fulfillment that will make the diaspora superfluous, will shrink the horizons of Hebrew Literature and will reduce it to a poor Eretz-Israeli Literature that turns its back to Jewish Literature. In contrast to the radical Zionist negation of the diaspora, the diaspora for Barash was not a temporary condition, but an historical human essence that stands for itself and influences the Hebrew cultural center in Eretz Israel. In contrast to the absolute concept of sovereignty of Berdichevski, Barash looked for an alternative and flexible model of sovereignty that would fit Jewish life in the diaspora. In his novella *Man and his Home were Erased* (1934) Barash criticized the Levantine, tribal, and non-sovereign character of Jewish life in Eretz Israel.

Home in the Diaspora and Diaspora at Home: Representations of Diasporic Domesticity in Zionist Domestic Discourse

Michal Chacham

Jewish domesticity in Mandate Palestine–Eretz Israel and in the early years of the State of Israel is discussed in this paper within the framework of what I delineate as ‘Zionist Domestic Discourse’. Zionist culture was intensively engaged not only in establishing national territory, but also in inventing domestic space. Within this discursive framework Zionist domesticity emerges in dichotomist opposition to the historical and literary accounts of the misery and wretchedness of Jewish domestic life in East-European *Shtetls*, later to be associated with the unhygienic lifestyle of the old Jewish settlement in Palestine; the so-called domestic primitivism of the rural Palestinian population; and what was extensively described as backward domestic habits brought by Jewish immigrants from their diasporic origins in Islamic countries.

Zionist domestic discourse originates in an earlier domestic discourse manifested in turn of the twentieth century Zionist utopia and in a medical-hygienist discourse held by Zionist Jewish physicians who were deeply concerned with the physical regeneration of the Jews. The utopian domestic discourse was informed by the establishment of the racial paradigm as a scientific paradigm within the European scientific

discourse of the era. This racial discourse stemmed from Hygienist and Eugenic thought; both had a crucial effect on Jewish identity discourse and undoubtedly on early domestic thought.

Within Zionist domestic discourse in Mandate Palestine and the early years of the State of Israel, literary and visual representations of the diasporic home played a dual role. I argue that while the hygienist image of the modern home cannot emerge devoid of its orientalist mirror-image of the diasporic home, mirror-imaging is not the only foundation upon which Zionist domesticity is constructed. Nostalgic representations also play a crucial part. This paper discusses how nurturing diasporic memory holds two distinct, contradicting yet complementary, roles: the first, antagonistic, the second, nostalgic – when the diasporic home becomes the object of longing and nostalgic indulgence, even amidst the distinct agents of domestic modernity.

Shaul Tchernichovsky's Poetry in the Exile-Homeland Zionist Discourse

Ido Bassok

Critics in the generation of Shaul Tchernichovsky (1875–1943), and the one following, related to him as a poet who belonged either to the remote past or the future. With the liberation from exile, Tchernichovsky, the prophet of the new, ‘healthy’, earth-bound Jew, would become the most admired of the modern Hebrew poets. However, in the competition for the title of National Poet, Bialik won out because in the era when these two poets first emerged, Bialik’s ways of thinking and attitude towards the Jewish people were more compatible with the mentality of the Jews in the Diaspora. The secularism and free thinking of Tchernichovsky were the secret to his charm, but led to his being relatively marginalized.

When Tchernichovsky settled in the land of Israel during the beginning of the 1930s, the issues he dealt with were no longer central to the main concerns of the young generation. Beginning in the 1970s, when deep social transformations were taking place in Israeli society, his poetry was gradually removed from the educational curricula and hence from public awareness.

This article examines Tchernichovsky’s acceptance during the period in which he lived and wrote in accordance with three cross-sections of the

readership of his poetry: 1. Age or generation; 2. Geographic location; 3. Sector (social class, political alliance, religious affiliation, ethnic group).

The Nationalization of the Ashkenazi Tradition in Israeli Religious Zionist Congregations

Nissim Leon

The tension existing within Religious Zionism between exile and its negation, and between the ‘new Jew’ and the ‘old Jew’, has been documented and studied in two main contexts: firstly, against the background of the connection between Religious Zionism and Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and secondly, against the background of ideological and political initiatives, following the Six-Day War, calling to adopt activist Zionist approaches rather than maintaining conservative patterns. Less attention has been paid to the influence of this tension on communal religious life in Israel – perhaps with the exception of the Religious Kibbutz Movement, and the lively debate in recent years surrounding issues of gender and halacha (Jewish law). I wish to present the influence of this tension on a process that often appears marginal, but which in fact plays an ongoing role in molding the dominant ethno-religious character of Religious Zionist communities in Israel: the nationalization of Ashkenazi tradition. The article addresses the involvement of Religious Zionist educational institutions and communal frameworks in the deconstruction and national reconstruction of Ashkenazi ethnicity. It will elaborate on the development of a phenomenon that has played a significant role in this process: the youth minyan (prayer quorum).

The Ashkenazim - East vs. West: An Invitation to a Mental-Stylistic Discussion of the Modern Hebrew Literature

Yigal Schwartz

In this essay, I suggest a new foundation, based on mental-stylistic criteria, for the historiography of Modern Hebrew literature. I will make and attempt to prove four claims. The first is that Modern Hebrew literature consists of

various corpuses created by groups of writers, each of which has a separate mental character that stems from the geo-cultural contexts in which it was created. My second claim is that the mental character of the writers from the various geo-cultural groups is reflected in stylistic characteristics of the corpus of each of these groups. Third, these stylistic characteristics, or rather, the clusters of these stylistic features, have become fixed and turned into 'literary styles': conglomerates of routines of description, typical vantage points, inter-textual fabrics, distinctive narrative tones, and so on. Fourth, these 'literary styles', which were created in certain geo-cultural contexts, were adopted over the course of generations, of course with necessary modifications, both by writers who had an 'inborn', 'genetic' connection to writers of a particular literary style – the offspring of parents born in those geo-cultural provinces, and by artists who had 'only' an 'acquired' interest in them; that is, those who adopted one of the literary styles because it suited their philosophical and literary assumptions and expectations.

The 'test case' for my proposed stylistic mental historiography of Modern Hebrew literature is the corpus referred to as 'Ashkenazi literature'. I attempt to demonstrate that this corpus, which is usually considered a single entity, consists of (at least) two different corpuses, which were created in the first phase of their development in distinct geo-mental contexts and have, accordingly, unique stylistic characteristics.

Who Marched in the Fields? Looking for the Real Sabra

Avner Ben-Amos

The article examines the diverse and even contradictory characteristics of the sabra, the nickname of the Israeli-born Hebrew youngster, through a study of several real or imaginary figures. First, those that appeared in or were involved with Moshe Shamir's novel *He Marched in the Fields*, written in 1946, and the namesake play, first staged in 1948 during the War of Independence: Uri, the protagonist of the novel – a sensitive Kibbutz-born youth, who commits suicide; the namesake protagonist of the play – a heroic, assertive youth who dies in a battle; Emanuel Ben-Amos – the father of the article's author, who played the role of Uri in 1948 and immigrated to New York in the mid-1960s;

and Moshe Shamir himself, who wrote the novel as a kibbutz member and a member of the leftist party *Ha'shomer Ha'tsa'ir*, left his kibbutz in 1947, and later became a member of the Right wing party *Ha'techiya*. Another figure is Yousef Hinawi, a Palestinian who was born in Jaffa, fled in 1948 to Egypt as a child, and immigrated to New York, where he met Emmanuel Ben-Amos. The search for the 'real sabra' thus ends without a clear conclusion.

Exile and Diaspora: Two Zionisms

Chaim Gans

From its inception Zionism was beset by debates about how to interpret the doctrine of the negation of exile. Under a maximalist interpretation, it entailed an absolute rejection of any Jewish life outside the Land of Israel; it was a principle according to which *no Jew should live in exile*. Under a minimalist interpretation it entailed that *not all Jews should live in exile*, denying only that the totality of Jewish existence should lie outside the Land of Israel. The maximalist interpretation came to dominate mainstream Zionism from at least as early as the 1930s. However, it has softened from the 1980s onward.

I distinguish in the paper between two interpretations of the Zionist narrative: an essentialist-proprietary interpretation and a constructivist-egalitarian interpretation. After explicating some major practical implications of the first interpretation, I argue that from the perspective of the essentialist-proprietary version of Zionism, the transition from a maximalist to a minimalist interpretation of the negation of exile can only be explained by pragmatic and tactical considerations, and cannot be explained by principled considerations. After explaining the constructivist-egalitarian interpretation of Zionism, I show how this approach implies the transition from the maximalist interpretation of the negation of exile to its minimalist interpretation as a matter of principle.

Aspects of the Negation of Diaspora

Moshe Zuckermann

The rise of anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century Europe brought about the so-called 'Jewish problem'. How were Jews to be perceived within the gradually

established bourgeois society, after the French Revolution and the spreading Industrial Revolution? Were they a religion? A people? A nation? Each possible answer would cause a specific problem pertaining to their integration into the newly built society. Three fundamental strategies were adopted in order to confront the ‘problem’: assimilation, socialism, and Zionism.

The Zionist solution, though a result of the nineteenth-century’s national movements, differed from any other nation-state building in Europe: It lacked the unity of territory, the unity of a collective population inhabiting this territory, and even the cultural unity embodied in a consolidated national language. Thus, Zionism was constituted *ex negativo*, relying on the two postulates ‘Negation of Diaspora’ and the birth of the ‘new Jew’. This is why everything Jewish, reminiscent of ‘Diaspora’, was pejoratively perceived and fought to be erased; even Yiddish, the language of Eastern European Jewry. And this explains the essentially ambivalent relationship of Zionist Israel to the Shoah and its survivors: While instrumentalizing the memory of the Shoah as an argument for the ideological justification of Zionism’s political way, it related to the survivors themselves as incarnations of the Diasporic Jews. This had some tragic consequences.

The *Nakba* and the Arab-Jewish Melancholy

Yehouda Shenhav

I look at language as a symptom of space and sovereignty. The Judaization of the space along the classic Westphalian model, which is reflected most dramatically in the Palestinian *Nakba*, is also evident in the relationship between Hebrew and Arabic. Today, according to rough estimates, only two percent of Jews have command of Arabic, compared with about 92 percent of Palestinians who have command of Hebrew. The purification of the Israeli space from Arabic has predicaments not only for the Palestinians but also for the Arab-Jews. Using a nostalgic gaze at Saleh Shahrabani, an Arab-Jew from Baghdad, and capitalizing on *Nakba* texts translated from Arabic, I address the role of language in constructing the binary contrasts such as homeland-exile, and the problems associated with the ‘negation of the diaspora’ in the Arab-Jewish context.

The Galizionist Vision and the New-Old Jew: Exile and Sovereignty in the Work of Yossi Avni-Levy

Batya Shimony

The issue of identity and complexity between ‘Mizrahiness’, Zionism and the Shoah are central throughout the work of Yossi Avni-Levy from its onset. In his last novel, *An Ode to Sins* (2010), this tension reaches its peak, and the novel suggests some interesting ideas that challenge the Zionist project. This article aims to research the advent of the Mizrahi Jew into the Zionist space as it shaped Avni-Levy’s work. I analyze the nature of this meeting through two main tools: the human perception and – more specifically – the tension between the ‘Old Jew’ and the ‘New Hebrew’ man. Additionally, I analyze the perception of the place, with a focus on the tension between exile and sovereignty.

Changes in the Conceptions of ‘Galut’ in Israeli Society

Eliezer Don-Yehiya

There has been a reversal of attitudes toward ‘Galut’ in Israeli society. Most notable is the marked decline of the ‘negation of Galut’ attitude, which is due to various developments; prominent among them are: (a) the decline of secular Zionist ideologies, which strongly supported this position; and (b) the Westernization of Jewish society in both Israel and the Diaspora, which involved a remarkable change in the image of Galut Jews. On the other hand, there has been a considerable change in the opposite direction in Israeli religious Zionism, manifested in the growing tendency to adopt the strongly negative attitude toward Galut. To a large extent this was due to the rise of messianic nationalism in the ranks of religious Zionism. There is, however, a marked difference between the conceptions of Galut in secular and religious Zionism. In its secular version, negation of Galut was closely related to the tendency to identify it with the culture of traditional religious Jewry that was conceived as characterized by passivity, segregation, and exclusion. By contrast, in contemporary religious Zionism Galut is conceived as a way of

life, heavily influenced by foreign and hostile environments, and detached from true Jewish national culture, which is grounded in religious tradition and can be preserved only in the Land of Israel.

‘Zion Shall Be Redeemed With Justice’:
Introduction to the Legal Thought of Shabtai Ben Dov

Amihai Radzyner

Shabtai Ben Dov (1924–1978) is known as a member of the pre-state underground organization, *Lehi*, and a right-wing philosopher. His work has influenced several right-wing Israeli Messianic groups. Ben Dov also developed a unique legal philosophy, which sees the revival of Jewish law as the legal system of the state, and the desire to reinstitute the Sanhedrin as a prerequisite for the establishment of ‘the kingdom of Israel’, and for full redemption. From this standpoint Ben Dov sharply criticized both the legal system and the rabbinical system of Israel, because he experienced them as denying the ideal of creating the state of Israel as a ‘real’ Jewish state.

The article reviews Ben Dov’s philosophy as reflected in his various writings, the studies he carried out on the sources of Jewish law according to his worldview, and the practical efforts he made to promote his ideas, while working in the legislative department of the Ministry of Justice and as a lawyer in the Israeli courts.

‘Beit Hatfutsot’ – ‘Beit Golah’
Poetics and Politics of Memory at the Museum
of the Jewish Diaspora

Shelly Shenhav-Keller

The paper, based mainly on archival research and in-depth interviews, discusses the underlying tension between the motivations in creating the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora and the outcome of that project.

The Museum of the Jewish Diaspora (Beit creating the Hatfutsot) opened

in Israel in 1978, more than 20 years after the idea of establishing a museum dedicated to the Jewish Diaspora was raised. The museum is the product of power struggles between the Israeli initiators of the project and its foreign contributors, and of the dynamics active during the long period of the museum's construction, which lasted from the mid-1950s until 1978.

The permanent exhibition can be viewed as a political text, the outcome of power relations expressed in politics of exclusion rather than inclusion. This attitude obviously contradicts the original aim of the Museum's founders, who wished to execute the project in Israel as a means of staking a claim in the Israeli public space. When confronted with the forces of hegemonic Zionism in a battle fought on the latter's grounds, Diaspora Jewry clearly lost. I conclude by saying that within the confines of Beit Hatefutzoth, poetics seem to have taken second-place to politics.

The Dialectics of Demonization in the Israeli Identity Discourse

Alon Gan

'The purpose of Zionism is to purge and purify true Judaism from the scum and filth of exile ... Zionism demands to remove and obliterate all this pollution and filth' (I. H. Tavyov, 'Segula Laashirut' ['A Talisman for Richness'], *Hamagid*, March 13, 1900).

'Don't you see that the time is ripe for education? ... *Diasporic* education ... is aimed, first and foremost, at an ethical-creative way of life, which derives from the diasporic philosophy and from the exilic idea in Judaism' (*Likrat Hinuch Legalutiyut* [Toward A Diasporic Education], Resling 2004, pp. 192-193).

The first of these two quotations was written in the beginning of the twentieth century, and the second in the beginning of the twenty-first. While the first demands 'to remove and obliterate all the pollution and filth' of exile, the second seeks to adopt a 'diasporic philosophy' and educate for an exilic world-view. This pendulum swing points to a reversal of the objects of glorification

and demonization. With almost the same rage and totality with which the pioneers eradicated the ‘old Jew’, the ‘exilic Jew’, some intellectuals and academics now want to carry out a process of murdering ‘the oppressive *Tzabar* (a Jewish native of Israel) mentality’. The demonization of the *Tzabar* entity constitutes an antithesis to the demonization of the exilic one.

This article seeks to follow basic processes in the formation of the attitude toward the ethos of the rejection of the exile over time, while attempting to point to a gradual shift from rejecting the exile to rejecting the rejection, and to opening an identity discourse that tries to integrate the Israeli essence and the Jewish one as complementary, rather than colliding, entities.