Women, Violence, and the “Arab Question” in Early Zionist Literature

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the themes of rape and domestic violence in Zionist literature on the “Arab Question” published in Hebrew from the last years of Ottoman rule in Palestine through to the 1929 riots that erupted during the British Mandate. By bringing to light the import of rape and domestic violence in works by authors such as L.A. Arieli, Yehuda Burla, Aharon Reuveni, Yitzhak Shami, and Shoshana Shababo, I demonstrate that Zionist motions of race and gender developed in an intertwined manner as writers imagined the future of Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine. Moreover, while scholarly treatments of gender in the yishuv have thus far largely concentrated on questions of masculinity, I show how reading for masculinity and femininity together reveals Zionism’s horror-stricken sexual underbelly; as authors do away with early fantasies of Jewish-Arab interweaving in an increasingly volatile political climate, they translate pogrom-associated fears of bodily violation from Russian and Eastern European settings into the Palestine arena. In novels, short stories, poetry, medical literature, and propaganda pamphlets Zionist intellectuals also urge reform of Jewish family life, sexual partnering, and hygiene education—this, all the while that they mount a case against turning to the Arabs as a viable folk source and partner for the New Jew.
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Introduction

Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish anxieties about male-female partnerships, familial domesticity, and sexual vitality contour early Zionists’ writings on Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine. Key Hebrew authors in the years preceding and following the watershed Arab riots of 1929 soberly assessed regnant hopes for Jewish-Arab coexistence through stories that explore the often uncontrollable urge to use force—upon one’s family member, neighbor, or oneself. In particular, the motif of violence against women (and those put in the position of ‘woman’)1 perpetrated by both Jews and Arabs surfaces repeatedly in stories by writers such as L.A. Arieli, Aharon Reuveni, and Yehuda Bura. Zionist intellectuals probed, and intensified, their concerns about interethnic tensions in Palestine through tropes of rape and domestic violence.

Joan Wallace Scott in her seminal essay “Gender: A Useful Category for Historical Analysis” makes the case that scholars of history must grapple with the ways that people create systems of social relations based upon their assumptions about differences between the sexes. Gender is at the heart of

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1 The phrase is from Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver's *Rape and Representation* (New York, 1991), 2.
how people inherit and rework symbols, choose frameworks via which to interpret those symbols, and develop political, familial, and literary spheres that supply those interpretive frameworks and dynamically evolve through them (1069). A fundamental inquiry of the present study, then, is how can gender (and, specifically, violence against women) be a useful category for historical analysis of Arab-Jewish conflicts at the dawn of Zionism? Moreover, do modern Hebrew writers supply gendered interpretive frameworks and rework specific tropes of women's experiences in ways that consolidate or challenge visions for Arab-Jewish cooperation in Palestine? Such inquiries have not received sufficient attention in existing scholarship on the Arab Question in Zionism.

The Arab Question in Zionism

One of the central moral and social issues for Zionists, dating as far back as Ahad Ha-am’s essay “Truth from the Land of Israel” (1891) and continuing to this very day, is what has become known as the “Arab Question” (*ha-shē’ela ha-‘aravit*): the recognition that at the dawn of Zionist settlement efforts in Palestine the majority of the local population was not Jewish and had no desire for the
Jews to take control of the contested homeland. As the initial Jewish immigration waves (‘aliyah, pl. ‘aliyot) to Palestine got underway (each of the first five major successive waves with its own character, 1881-1903, 1904-1914, 1918-1923, 1924-1926, 1932-1936), Zionists debated about Arab-Jewish relations on various fronts—including economics, labor, natural resources, demographics, immigration and the associated impacts on government structure, language, urban and rural planning, and security.

Since its first appearance in Ahad Ha-am’s essay and in ensuing milestones like Yitshak Epstein’s “A Hidden Question” (1905), the “Arab Question,” as its name indicates, is as much a matter for philosophers and observers of the human passions as it is a matter for social scientists, workers’ rights activists, and urban planners. The notion of “accursed questions” (proklyatye voprosy) from nineteenth-century Russian intellectual history as explained so beautifully by Isaiah Berlin in his well known essay on Tolstoy, “The Hedgehog and the Fox,” applies as well to the prominence of “Questions” in Zionism: “those central moral and social issues of which every honest man, in

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2 Zionist writers during the pre-state period differed in how they referred to Palestinian Arabs (“Arabs,” “Ishmaelites,” “non-Jews,” etc.). On the formation of Palestinian Arab identities, see Khalidi (New York, 1997); on the earliest Arab and Turkish reactions to Zionism, see Mandel (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1980).
particular every writer, must sooner or later become aware, and then be faced
with the choice of either entering the struggle or turning his back upon his fellow-
men, conscious of his responsibility for what he was doing” (30). One of the
contributing factors in the central moral and social issues early Zionists faced
regarding the Arabs of Palestine was the Jewish nationalist search for a plausible
ancestry group.

Anthony Smith explains that nationalist intellectuals search for a folk or
‘low’ culture as the authenticating source of their own ethno-history. Writers of
literature are among those who take the lead in this endeavor, appropriating and
weaving into their tales specific elements from an identified ancestry group which
can enrich the nation’s narrative of its past and future. Nationalists must limit
themselves to choosing a folk population that they can ‘rediscover’ as their own
(Smith 1998, 44-45).

For the bulk of Zionists, the impecunious Jewish masses who earned their
daily bread as rural shopkeepers, itinerant tradesmen, displaced yeshiva
students, and urban craftspeople failed to fit the bill. Where to find the mystery,
romance, and inner fire of the Hebrew past? The search for a plausible ancestry
group led Zionists such as Joshua Radler-Feldman (penname: Rabi Benjamin),
Yosef Meyuhas, Moshe Smilansky, and Ber Borochov to the Arab and Muslim
residents of Palestine, for by the end of the nineteenth-century the idea of ‘the Semite’ had taken root in Western thought. The English writer and proto-Zionist George Eliot, for instance, emphasizes in Daniel Deronda the alien quality of the Jew in English culture through the character Herr Klesmer, about whom she writes in a quietly malicious manner: “a felicitous combination of the German, the Sclavé (sic), and the Semite, with grand features, brown hair floating in artistic fashion, and brown eyes in spectacles. His English had little foreignness except its fluency” (Eliot 1876, 47). She would explicate further in “The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!” as she included the Jews, “a people with Oriental sunlight in their blood,” in a list of “immigrants with alien blood” with whom “it would be a calamity to the English . . . to undergo a premature fusion” (Eliot 1894, 203-4). Selected Jewish intellectuals, in turn, looked to such ‘Oriental sunlight’ and Semitic ties for inspiration. Franz Oppenheimer, among others, referred to the father of political Zionism, Theodore Herzl, as “the most noble type of pure Semite” (qtd. in David 77). The American Zionist Josephine Lazarus asserted in 1905 that “we Jews still carry in our hearts the divine spark—the day star of the Orient,” (qtd. in Omer-Sherman 2). Martin Buber would later characterize the Zionist Jewish vanguard in Palestine as being “both Orientals and Europeans” (Buber 1983, 41).
David Ben-Gurion was one of the Zionist leaders who, influenced by his fundamental belief in workers’ cooperation, found the concept of the ‘Semitic’ applicable to the Jews and the Muslim peasants of Palestine. The Palestinian Arab workers, he mused in 1917, were proto-Zionists, Jewish in blood, who converted to Islam generations ago in order to preserve their ties with the Land of Israel. Needless to say, the Arab riots that erupted in Palestine in August of 1929 dramatically strained this posture as he, like many of his Zionist comrades, shifted his thinking about the Arab Question. As art history scholar Yigal Zalmona explains in a 1998 essay for the Israel Museum,

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3 David Ben-Gurion, “On the Origins of the Fellahin,” *We and Our Neighbors* (Tel Aviv, 1931), 25: “But despite the plethora of these mixtures [Arab, Persian, Northern European, Circassian, Egyptian, Algerian] the majority and essential aspects of the Muslim fellahin in the Western part of the Land of Israel exhibits to us one racial type and a complete ethnic set, and undoubtedly in their veins flows much Jewish blood—the blood of those same Jewish farmers known as “*ame ha-’arets*” [peoples of the land], who chose in the times of utmost danger and pressure to deny their religion, only so they would not be forced to uproot themselves from their land.” To understand further the scientific, ideological, and literary discourses at the heart of Ben-Gurion’s and other Zionists’ ‘adoption’ of the Palestinian Arabs/Muslims as Jewish blood relatives, see Ben-Ezer (Hod ha-sharon, 2001), 16; Ben-Ezer (Tel Aviv, 1992), 16-17; the Palestine Exploration Fund report “Our Work” (London, 1873), 309-310; Peleg (Ithaca and London, 2005), 1-29; Olender (Cambridge, 1992); Karsel (Spring 2003),181-182; Zerubavel (2008); Govrin (Tel Aviv,1978), 38-47.
1929 was the rift-year, a kind of existential and political crossroad.

One may say that from here began the real, cultural self-separation
of the Jewish community from the Arab-Palestinian community.

Here was forged the self-understanding on the part of the Jewish
Israelis who saw themselves in their own eyes as modern
Westerners whose identity was absolutely differentiated from the
system of characteristics of the traditional folk Arab. This
perception is pervasive and exists until today in Israeli society as a
subconscious principle of separation. (63)

While instances of limited violence had occurred in the yishuv (the Jewish
settlement in Palestine) prior to 1929, particularly drawing attention in 1920-1921,
“the events,” as they came to be known in Hebrew (ha-me’ora’ot) of this “rift-
year” were significantly more widespread in scope compared to previous flare-
ups.4 Damage was especially shocking in the ethnically/religiously mixed cities

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4 On March 1, 1920, the Jewish settlements of Tel Hai, Kfar Giladi, and Metula
were attacked by anti-French Bedouin together with residents of al-Khalisa, a
nearby village, and the death of Jewish defender Yosef Trumpeldor became a
foundating source of Zionist mythology. After the Second General Syrian Congress
on March 7th, which passed anti-Zionist resolutions and announced Faisal king
of Greater Syria (including Palestine), the Palestinian Nebi Musa pilgrimage in
April turned violent in Jerusalem. Over the course of the following months,
Palestinian leaders developed increasing momentum for an independent
Palestine, fueled by the Third Palestinian Congress’ creation of the Palestine
of Hebron-El Khalil and Safed. Mobs murdered 130 Jews (fifty-nine in Hebron-El Khalil alone) and inflicted serious injuries on others. Most of the victims were unarmed and of religious households, families that had been residents of Palestine for generations. In the wake of 1929, the mainstream Zionist leadership in Palestine articulated a recognition that their work was under unprecedented threat. While many in the socialist Zionist parties had, for years, maintained faith that the Palestinian Arab opposition to Zionism would dissipate, after the bloodshed of 1929 Meir Ya’ari asked the Union of Trade Workers (the Jewish Histadrut): “A hundred and fifty thousand Jews on a volcano. What will come of this?” (qtd. in Shapira 174). David Ben-Gurion at the founding conference of the Mapai Party in 1930 diagnosed the situation starkly:

Arab Executive, ratification of the British Mandate in San Remo, the start of the civilian government, increased Jewish immigration, and the French overrunning of Faisal in Damascus. On May 1, 1921 Arab-instigated violence erupted again in Jaffa following inter-Jewish clashes between Marxists and socialists at the annual May Day procession. The following day the Hebrew author Yosef Ḥayim Brenner was killed. After a year of tensions regarding the Temple Mount stirred up by Haj Amin al-Husseini, with Jewish protests in mid-August 1929, violence again erupted at the end of the month. From Jerusalem it quickly spread. Sixty Jews were killed in Hebron, with additional deaths and wounded in Safad, Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Haifa, Kibbutz Hulda, and Motsa, among other places. See (Morris, 1999), 93-116.
Even prior to “the events” there were, perhaps, individuals within the [Palestinian Arab] population who considered the simplest and most direct path to settling the stakes with us to be the annihilation of the local Jewish community by total massacre. Yet certainly such people were merely individuals . . . who surely would not venture to bring up such things outwardly, in public. After the “events” the situation changed. The idea of annihilating the local Jewish community has become commonplace. (213, emphasis added)

Things were looking grim. With the economic crisis of the late 1920s, Jewish immigration to Palestine had slowed dramatically (in 1927, Jews leaving Palestine outnumbered those arriving)—and now nationalist Arabs had demonstrated a brutality that left the Zionists horrified. Though the Zionist mainstream continued to make public declarations about hope for Jewish-Arab peace and cooperation on the international stage, it was time to start preparing for war.

**Gender and the Arab Question**

The Arab Question did not develop in a vacuum. Gender is fundamental to the conceptual and psychological ‘baggage’ that informed

Comparable speculations by Joshua Radler-Feldman and Vladimir Jabotinsky on Jewish-Arab kinship are helpful for briefly illustrating how the Arab Question in fact has a ‘sexual underbelly’ worthy of further study. Radler-Feldman fantasizes about the Bedouin of Palestine in the July 1907 issue of *Ha-me’orer* (*The Awakener*), edited by Yosef Ḥayim Brenner: “There is no distinction or division between a Hebrew and an Arab. . . . / You shall give your sons to him and you shall take unto yourself his sons: / And the blood of his heroes shall enter your blood and you will grow and gain strength: / And each shall find its kind and become of one kind” (272-273).
Radler-Feldman, who would become active in the binationalist advocacy group *Brit shalom* (*Covenant of Peace,* founded in 1925), articulates a pan-Semitic fantasy in which the cross-breeding and intermixing of Arabs and Jews will make the already extant commonalities of blood-race between the two even stronger.\(^5\) In contrast, Vladimir Jabotinsky, who would become the founder of the right-wing Revisionist Zionist camp in 1925, did not believe in such a racial commonality and did not foresee any such future of intermixing. In an early statement from 1903 he argues: “When the English and the Saxons met in one corner of the earth . . . indeed the mixed Anglo-Saxon race came out of this. [Yet in the case of Palestine] we will not find anyone there with whom to mix. . . . [The] Arabs there will display the same readiness to mix with us that we display regarding mixing with the nations that rule us in the Diaspora” (56-57). According to Jabotinsky, the Anglo-Saxon experience will not be the blueprint for the Jewish-Arab one in Palestine, for there will be no racial fusion. Just as the Jews eschewed sexual relations with the populations who ruled over them in the diaspora, the Arabs will have an

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\(^5\) Yosef Gorni refers to Radler-Feldman’s position as the “integrative outlook” in early Zionism; see Gorni 41-49. Radler-Feldman’s view that miscegenation may act as a counter to weaknesses in the Jewish race is similar to that expressed by the character Oved ‘Etso in Yosef Hayim Brenner’s 1911 novel *Mi-kan u-mi-kan (From Here and There)*, (Tel Aviv, 1960),1295-97.
antipathy toward sexual relations with their Jewish rulers. Sexual relations are contingent upon shared political goals. Jabotinsky predicts that the Arabs and Jews will not come together to build the Jewish state because their national goals are mutually antagonistic, and hence miscegenation is out of the question. As Jabotinsky writes in another essay (“Zionism and the Land of Israel,” 1905), authentic Zionism, which must pick up where Biblical Israel left off, will allow Jews to restart the growth process of their aborted national distinctiveness. Nothing, he writes, except “the admixture of foreign blood”—miscegenation—can take away the nation’s never-abandoned desire to strengthen and develop its national distinctiveness (122). Thus both Radler-Feldman and Jabotinsky delve into the issue of sexual partnering as they forward differing agendas for future generations in Palestine. The Arab Question under their pens is most certainly a gendered matter, one in which the focus on procreation necessarily invites delving further into Zionism as a movement for creating both male and female ‘New Jews.’

Most scholarly treatments of the Arab Question use data sources such as commission reports, speeches, essays, news articles, and census figures—paying little attention to gender, and little attention to Hebrew literature. Yet as we shall examine in the present study, much of the conceptual and psychological
‘baggage’ that Zionists bring to the Arab Question is so burdened by gender-oriented shame, disgust, and suspicion that it manifests most penetratingly in literary fantasies and confessions—hence the import of Hebrew literature with its multi-faceted characters and extended narrative trajectories. Studies from the social sciences that do mention Hebrew literature—such as Anita Shapira’s Land and Power and Yael Zerubavel’s “Memory, the Rebirth of the Native, and the ‘Hebrew Bedouin’ Identity”—do not emphasize gender and particularly do not emphasize women. Moreover, studies by literature scholars such as Risa Domb (The Arab in Hebrew Prose, 1911-1948) and Nurith Govrin (“Between an ‘Enemy’ and a ‘Cousin’” 2002), too, do not emphasize gender but rather the extent to which Hebrew writers portray Arabs ‘accurately’ or depict Arabs along the continuum of antagonist/comrade, respectively. Yohai Oppenheimer’s extensive and much-needed recent contribution Barriers: The Representation of the Arab in Hebrew and Israeli Fiction 1906-2005 dedicates only a few pages to the subject of the erotic.

When scholars of Hebrew literature and arts do write on the Arab Question and do attend to gender, their rather exclusive focus is masculinity. A major theme is male homoeroticism, as in Raz Yosef’s Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema and Yaron Peleg’s in Orientalism
and the Hebrew Imagination. Peleg subtitled a chapter “The Invention of a
Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine” by locating this invention in how the Hebrew
writer Moshe Smilansky creates “an alternative Semitic masculinity” (but not
femininity). Eric Zakim writes about Zionist geography in the Hebrew poetry and
prose of Palestine’s disputed landscape, featuring on the cover of his book a
drawing of a Jewish man and woman pioneer couple—but then opens his study
by discussing how he intends to elucidate “the identification of the ‘new Jew,’ as
the movement called him, and the envisioned environment of Jewish renewal” (2,
italics added--AS). Zakim asserts that because Zionist writers’ focus “was
usually cast in masculine terms,” he too will echo their usage (187, ftnt. 5).

Thinking through the Arab Question and the Woman Question in early
Zionist literature—the goal of the present study—is an effort to respond to
further challenges. Women’s Studies scholars (who have dealt little with the
Arab Question) have occasionally contributed to this ‘masculinization’ of
research on Zionism as they have gone about the daunting task of
illuminating the Woman Question in modern Jewish history and text. In other
words, the effort to uncover and put a magnifying glass to the heavily
patriarchal language of Zionism (frequent default to an assumed male
addressee, the male homosocial bonds that transfer from the yeshiva ethos
to the *kevutsa* commune ethos—the list could go on and on) has also at times led scholars interested in feminist readings astray. For example, in Esther Fuchs’ *Israeli Women’s Studies: A Reader*, Tamar Mayer writes that “Zionism and masculinity have become inseparable” (113—what does this mean? a linkage? a complete overlap? what is this process of ‘becoming’?) and she asserts that Max Nordau’s famous 1898 call for a “Jewry of Muscle” is indicative of a much broader blanket “invisibility of women in Zionism” (99). Yet, as my study seeks to prove, women are not invisible in Zionism. They may be startlingly present, they may be intriguingly absent, but they are not invisible.

The paucity of women in that Zionist intellectual sphere occupied by personages like Ahad Ha-am, Vladimir Jabotinsky, and Ber Borochov, combined with the sheer rarity of women’s literary subjectivities in pre-state Hebrew literature indeed pose daunting challenges for scholars interested in feminist approaches to the history of Zionism. Acknowledging these challenges and asking “Where are the women?” has required tremendous effort from scholars of Jewish women’s history and literature who have doggedly expanded research on the Haskalah and early Zionism. Yaffa Berlovitz, Margalit Shilo, Iris Parush, Deborah Bernstein, and Paula Hyman
are scholars to whose work I have turned repeatedly in preparing the present study.⁶

To borrow a phrase from Natalie Davis’ scholarship on women’s European history: scholarly forays that aim to identify the “range in sex roles and in sexual symbolism” will nuance an understanding of early Zionism:

It seems to me that we should be interested in the history of both women and men, that we should not be working only on the subjected sex any more than a historian of class can focus entirely on peasants. Our goal is to understand the significance of the sexes, of gender groups in the historical past. Our goal is to discover the range in sex roles and in sexual symbolism in different societies and periods, to find out what meaning they had and how they functioned to maintain the social order or to promote its change. (qtd. in Scott 29)

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⁶ Deborah Bernstein’s *Women on the Margins: Gender and Nationalism in Mandate Tel Aviv*, a study of Jewish prostitution published as I was finishing the research for my project, in particular reinforced for me the notion that searching for women’s experiences (often on the margins of texts) at the nexus of race and gender opens new ways in which to understand the *yishuv* vis-à-vis *both* men and women. While Bernstein’s expertise as a social scientist draws upon methodological practices different from those called for when reading *belles lettres*, and while the bulk of Bernstein’s research for *Women on the Margins* focuses on the years immediately following the time period which comprises the heart of the present study, I view my project as one kindred to hers.
Accordingly, in the ensuing pages I document how contributors to Hebrew literatures reflect upon the significance of the sexes to maintain the social order and to promote change in Jewish life—all the while that they are interpreting those great ‘accursed questions’ through their encounters with Palestinian Arabs and Muslims.

Why Violence Against Women?

A policewoman in the Congo recently remarked, “He who rapes a woman rapes an entire nation” (Brown 1)—one may ask, then, how does such a sentiment function as the nation itself is fragmented, in formation, its sense of “entirety” vis-à-vis the nation-state inchoate? As the title character of A. A. Kabak’s 1912 novel Daniel Shafranov laments, do the Jews of Russia recognize the fate of the Jews of Romania as their own? Do the Jews of Germany recognize the fate of the Jews of America as their own (Kabak 189-190)? Shafranov turns to his Christian friend Nikolai:

[When pogromists] throw rocks at us, when they rape our sisters and do all kinds of abominations to us that they regularly do in Russia—if at that moment you eat and sleep as if nothing had occurred, and calmly you read the news coverage, which finds it
utterly unnecessary to voice even one cry of outrage about our 
tragedy, then you are none other than a ’propomist’ yourself, in 
terms of ethics…” Nikolai calmly listened to his words and 
responded in a disparaging tone, with a raised gaze: “Unfortunately 
you are right, a little, of course…” (Kabak, italics added, 115)

According to Shafranov, becoming aware of incidents of anti-semitic rape and 
consequently feeling a profound agitated reaction is a key measure of who is in 
and who is out of the evolving nation of readers. He identifies Nikolai, a man with 
deep roots in the Russian landscape, as an outsider who will never fully 
 ingratiating himself into the Jewish cluster of young adults, despite all of the 
Christian’s good intentions. In Daniel Shafranov’s eyes, he and Nikolai Ivanov 
belong to two different groups. To borrow from the Americanist Ezra Tawil’s 
study on interracial courting in early America, the Jew Daniel Shafranov and the 
Russian Nikolai Ivanov “feel different things, and feel things differently” (2); under 
Kabak’s pen, the Russian does not feel the same instinctive response of outrage 
that a Jew feels about pogrom-associated rape and other acts of anti-semitic 
molestation. For Daniel Shafranov, to be aware of sexual violation perpetrated 
against a Jew is to be shaken to one’s very core. Such feelings are not 
principally about logical deduction but rather are intangible and irrational
emotions—it is “a healthy national sense” (Kabak 114), the same intangible and irrational emotions at the heart of Nikolai’s passionate connection to his Russian birthplace and fondly-remembered Christian religious rituals. It is because Nikolai recognizes the staying power of the intangible and irrational that he concedes Daniel Shafranov’s point. “Unfortunately, you are right, a little, of course,” Nikolai says. Nikolai is the wrong kind of reader, and Daniel Shafranov’s statement extends beyond the realm of newspaper coverage. One cannot mistake the implied parallel: to read this Hebrew novel and to experience a strong reaction to the threat of rape is to authenticate one’s position as a participant within the imagined Jewish community.

Tropes of violence against women in racially-charged nationalist contexts invite participants to imagine, texture, and reify different degrees of violence, different cravings for violence, different reactions to violence, and different exchanges of power in violence, all in a high-stakes comparative framework: the races and sexes can “feel different things, and feel things differently.” By situating the Hebrew texts in their historical contexts and by experimenting with reading against the texts themselves (particularly when the Zionist texts in question inherit and perpetuate modes of inquiry based upon a vocabulary of male experience), authors’ deep-seated fears about
both masculinity and femininity, the use of force, sexual expression, and catastrophic gendered space emerge.

What weighs heavily upon the contemporary reader informed by feminist reading practices is not only the centrality of rape—including the specter of rape—as an unmistakable theme in Jewish letters of the fin-de-siècle; it is also the shock that he or she must grapple with upon recognizing the almost total absence of any comprehensive scholarship on rape in modern Jewish literatures. The topic extends well beyond that most famous of modern Hebrew poems on the Kishinev pogrom which galvanized a generation, Ḥayim Naḥman Bialik’s “In the City of Slaughter” (1903), and yet there is not a single major book or article that attempts to understand modern Jewish literary history through the lens of rape. Why has there been so little voiced about how rape comprises an extensive link across fin-de-siècle Jewish texts in its own right, side-by-side with well-studied topics such as the crisis of faith, the poverty of the ghetto, the shock of immigration, even the role of Jesus in the modern Jewish imagination? Perhaps the horror of rape is so ever-present in the modern Jewish literary imagination yet also so frequently elided in the space of a single phrase or in the figure of a marginal disheveled woman, it may be easily overlooked. Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver write in Rape and Representation that a survey of
literatures across cultures and historical periods reveals a pattern of “an obsessive inscription—and an obsessive erasure—of sexual violence against women (and against those placed by society in the position of ‘woman’). The striking repetition and erasure raises the question not only of why this trope recurs, but even more, of what it means and who benefits” (Higgins and Silver 2). Part One of this study (Chapters 1 and 2) thus proposes that an appreciation of the Arab Question in early Zionist prose is woefully impoverished without serious attention to obsessive inscriptions and erasures of rape in modern Hebrew narratives.

In order to delve into this line of inquiry, one must have a basic understanding of the legacy of rape in pre-modern Jewish texts from the Bible forward, then situate late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hebrew rape-writing within and against this legacy. This foundational material comprises the bulk of Chapter 1; at the culturally-specific fulcrum of anti-semitism, vitalism, and nationalism of the fin-de-siècle one finds fascinating shifts that catapult rape to new significance in Jewish text. These shifts shall anchor the analysis of two central Hebrew texts on the Arab Question, the focus of Chapter 2: L.A. Arieli’s drama Allah Karim! (1912) and Aharon Reuveni’s Shamot (Devastation, 1925, the third section of the trilogy Unto Jerusalem). Both Arieli’s and Reuveni’s
stories feature Jewish women whose vitality and sexual appetites threaten to dwarf the Zionist male immigrant as he attempts to root himself in the Land of Israel. Where Arieli’s men fail, Reveni’s hero Meir Funk succeeds, and Devastation is the capstone text of newfound Jewish triumph in Zionism prior to 1929. Yet Reveni’s narrative is also quite disturbing as an expression of continuing loss, a loss that requires one to grapple with how these two texts recast the Jewish rape trope as a battle between the sexes.

Rape remains a continuing element of interest in Part Two of this study (Chapters 3 and 4), however, the analytic focus shifts to literary scenes of domestic violence. Chapter 3 explores three short stories: L.A. Arieli’s “Ma’avar ha-stks” (“Crossing the Styx,” 1914), Zalman Brokhes’ “Be-tsel ha-ḥerman” (“In the Shadow of the Hermon,” 1920), and Yitzhak Shami’s “Av u-venotav” (“Father and His Daughters,” 1923/4), all scenarios of Jewish fathers’ rage directed against independence-seeking daughters, set in locales highly populated by Arabs. These three stories demonstrate how authors transport and translate from the diaspora into the Arab Question the ‘big three’ sins associated with modern Jewish womanhood of the fin-de-siècle: Jewesses’ attraction to non-Jewish men, prostitution, and conversion. Arieli, Brokhes, and Shami raise concerns about the New Jewish Woman and her search for independence while
they craft and condemn a type of easily incensed, outdated, even murderous Jewish man whose brutality toward his defenseless daughters is outside the bounds of acceptable conduct in Zionism.

In Chapter 4, domestic violence is the starting point from which to examine the Hebrew novel that deals the most significant blow to Zionist hopes for Jewish-Arab cohabitation, Yehuda Burla’s *Bat tsiyon* (*Daughter of Zion*, 1930-31). Burla’s marriage scenario of a Muslim man and a Jewish woman, both native to Jerusalem, is a prime example of what Doris Sommer terms “an erotics of politics” (6). Yet while in the case of Sommer’s material (early nineteenth-century Latin American romance novels), love allows for “apparently nonviolent consolidation during internecine conflicts” (6), Burla’s unstable status as a Sephardi writer in the *yishuv* requires him to maneuver his narrative to navigate two separate internecine conflicts: he breaks up Arab from Jew while consolidating Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Integral to this maneuvering process, I argue, is the fact that Burla’s heroine identifies the presence of a women’s rights agenda as the key legitimizing element of Zionism over Palestinian nationalism. However, a reading of Burla’s tale in light of the debut novel by his fellow Sephardi writer and student Shoshana Shababo (*Marya*, 1932) shows Burla’s
discomfort when such an agenda extends to the blunt expression of female sexual desire.

Chapter 5, the conclusion of this project, is an effort to suggest further directions for research in Hebrew cultures at the intersection of race and gender. The chapter investigates how luminaries of the Hebrew literary scene extended their hands to those working on issues of gender, sexuality, domesticity, and the Arab Question in medical and visual realms of the late 1920s and into the 1930s. I begin by returning to Reveni’s Devastation for an analysis of Meir Funk’s final days, his Ottoman army experience and subsequent suicide, aspects of the plot I do not discuss in prior chapters. I employ the scholarship of feminist geographers on the “spatiality of fear” in my reading of the novel to highlight how Zionist horrors about the violation of Jewish space (neighborhood boundaries, bodies, homes, etc.) resonates in the blossoming hygiene/sexology field in the wake of 1929. Motherhood becomes a subject for studied expertise among women manning (!) the home front, while correct Zionist sexual partnering becomes essential to maintaining a balance of physical order and chaos. I offer an experimental, interdisciplinary foray into works by doctors like Yosef Meir and Israel Rivkai, as well as artists like Nahum Gutman who, integrating their work with Hebrew
literature, limned the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine just as tensions were reaching their fateful turning point.

In sum, what begins as an open Zionist field of debate in the search for a plausible ancestry group becomes, by the 1930s, an intellectual environment that largely rejects possibilities for Arab-Jewish cooperation in Palestine. Writers who pave the way for this rejection are Sephardi and Ashkenazi, newcomers to Palestine and native-born, affiliated with the political left and right. What the Hebrew literary evidence suggests is that sexual symbolisms of violence indeed turn out to play a crucial role in this transformation, one that will continue to reverberate well after the 1930s and arguably to this very day.
Anti-Semitism, Vitalism, Nationalism

Fig. 1. Abel Pann, “Terror” from *In the Name of the Czar* (1918)

“[When pogromists] throw rocks at us, *when they rape our sisters* and do all kinds of abominations to us that they regularly do in Russia—if at that moment you eat and sleep as if nothing had occurred, and calmly you read the news coverage, which finds it utterly unnecessary to voice even one cry of outrage about our tragedy, then you are none other than a ‘progromist’ yourself, in terms of ethics. . . .” Nikolai calmly listened to his words and responded in a disparaging tone, with a raised gaze: “Unfortunately you are right, a little, of course…”

--A.A. Kabak, *Daniel Shafranov* (Warsaw, 1912), 115 (emphasis added)
In Zionist literature on the Arab Question, it is the rape trope that pulls together the most potent combination of anti-semitism, vitalism, and nationalism. When encountering the overdetermined aspects of rape in early Zionist writing, it is instructive to recognize that concerns about distorted masculinity and femininity of the era are not a ‘Zionist problem’ per se, they are rather a problem of Zionism. In other words, obsessions about enervated or misdirected masculinity, superficial or unruly femininity, and a call for a more muscular national character are not limited to Zionist texts among world literatures, yet with Zionism such concerns take on a particular cast. Specifically, a sophisticated look at two of the most well-known Hebrew texts on the Arab Question, L.A. Arieli’s drama Allah Karim! (1912) and Aharon Reuveni’s Devastation (1925)—the focus of the next chapter in this study—requires readers to be sensitive not only to the legacy of rape in biblical and rabbinic texts but also to the tremendous shifts that catapult rape to new significance in Jewish writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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1 For comparative nationalist cases, see for instance Engelstein (Ithaca, 1992); Mosse (New York, 1997); Gunning (New York, 1996).
Jewish Textual Rape Traditions

The significances of rape in Jewish text, as with masculinity and femininity, are not static over time but rather change from generation to generation. Regarding rape in the Hebrew Bible, for instance, feminist scholar Rachel Adler explains,

The only rapes about which the Torah legislates are destructions of virginity. The rape of an unmarried girl is viewed as a property crime against the girl's father. Perpetrators must pay a fine and bride price and keep the woman (Deut. 22:28-29). . . . The rape of an arusah, a woman who has been appropriated but not yet installed in her husband's home, is not merely a property crime but a socially disordering act like adultery whose perpetrators incur the death penalty. . . . Other rapes, even the brutal gang rape by which the concubine of Gibeah meets her death in Judges 19, are not classified as world-disordering violations. (130)

In biblical rape, the crime committed is not against the woman but rather against her father. Rape is so far from being a "world disordering violation," for instance, that the biblical Jacob believes his sons Simeon and Levi to have overreacted to the rape of their unbetrothed sister Dinah. He gives Simeon and Levi a severe
tongue-lashing when he discovers how they have exacted collective
punishment on the town of Shechem: “And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi: “Ye
have troubled me, to make me odious unto the inhabitants of the land, even unto
the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and, I being few in number, they will gather
themselves together against me and smite me; and I shall be destroyed, I and
my house”’ (Gen. 34:30). Biblical law declares rape to be a more serious issue if
the rape survivor is a betrothed virgin. Her in-between status in the gift exchange
among men is a complicating factor. Nevertheless, there is no substantial
difference in the biblical mindset between the rape of a betrothed virgin and
adultery, which may be “socially disordering act[s]” but do not elicit a unique
outrage.

Rape in the Talmud undergoes important legal development. One key
issue raised in the Talmud is whether the rape survivor is permitted to resume
sexual relations with her husband. For instance, in one such example the rabbis
rule that a rape survivor who otherwise would be permitted to resume sexual
relations with her husband may not do so in the event that her husband is a
kohen (a priest, bYev56b). In another (ySot4.5), there is a story about a woman
who comes to Rabbi Yohanan and reports that she has been raped. To make his
ruling about whether she may resume sexual relations with her husband, what
concerns Rabbi Yohanan is her admission that midway into the rape she began to be sexually aroused. She makes the case to Rabbi Yohanan that her arousal does not equate with assent to the initial violation, and he eventually rules that she may indeed return to her marriage. In *bNiddah* 45a there is a similar story, except that the rape occurred when the girl was a young child. The ensuing debate concerns the designation of rape based upon the woman’s age at the time of the incident.

In addition to delineation of the circumstances under which a raped woman may return to her husband, the Talmud adds variegating layers to the aspect of restitution payment. Judith Hauptman contends that in the Talmud the rabbis subtly institute a process of moving away from restitution payments granted to the father—an older biblical mode—and a process of moving toward payments going to the woman herself in recognition of her suffering (480). Hauptman, like Jonathan Boyarin, highlights that the Talmud (*Eruv100b*) also prohibits marital rape, an aspect of Jewish law way ahead of Western legal systems (marital rape was not a crime, for instance, in nineteenth-century England). Hauptman concludes that the rabbis, “within their patriarchal social

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configuration, which they had no intention of eliminating, . . . extended new
rights to women” vis-à-vis rape (485). That said, for the purposes of the present
study one must state the obvious: rape in the Talmud is still containable within
the halakhic system. Rape in the eyes of Jewish law is an act that one may
examine and grade in a process similar to that for any other act, an aberration
of regular, hegemonic social relations between men and women.

The Hebrew First-Crusade narratives do not mention rape. The scholarly
jury is still out on the reasons for this strange absence—is it because incidences
of rape simply do not jar enough to merit discussion, or because rape is an
unseemly topic to discuss within the confines of tsni’ut (modesty), or because the
authors wish to avoid the difficult halakhic ramifications of rape, or because the
narrator employs a rhetorical strategy of silence so as to deny the aggressor a
privileged position of having hit at the community’s very core (Furst 8)? As
Susan Einbinder notes, images of the Jewish woman’s raped body as well as
increasing constrictions on women’s purity laws appear in Jewish literature of the
later twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Ashkenaz. She posits that as the secular
and ecclesiastical authorities increasingly challenge rabbinic authority in the
wake of the crusader attacks, the rabbis respond by shoring up their own
authority as well as that of the Jewish family unit. Women, depicted in these
twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts as exclusively passive victims (which they are not in the Crusader chronicles), are symbols of loyalty to patriarchal family models and community religious norms, with men the protectors of these institutions (127). Rachel Furst, in her study of responsa composed in the wake of the anti-Jewish riots in Frankfort-am-Main in 1241, also understands textual characterizations of rape as sites of rabbinic negotiation of inter- and intra-communal boundaries. As the texts are legal in scope, she explains, they deal not with origins of the violence but its consequences, namely, the legal status of the survivors (25). In the “Frankfort Case” responsa, the question at issue is whether a betrothed kidnapped woman, forcibly converted to Christianity and presumed raped, may return to her intended (who has meanwhile taken a different woman as wife). Furst reads the arguments arising among Isaac ben Moses of Vienna “Or Zarua” and his contemporaries as efforts to channel onto returning women’s ‘polluting’ bodies broad political concerns about Jewish communities faced with increasing pressures of conversion (8).

Given the legacy of rape in Jewish writing—of which we have touched upon selected examples only in the briefest of outlines—what is so new, then, in the works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Of course, Jewish writers of this period do not start from scratch. They capitalize upon pre-existing
Jewish rape tropes, from a woman’s unruly hair as bearing the traces of her sexual defilement to a hyper-vigilance about women as definers of communal boundaries. They do not entirely shed the notion that women are, or should be, the property of men in a masculine economy of exchange. ³ A number of key elements are new, however.

Rabbinic Judaism functions within the containing mechanism of halakhah, a container that by the dawn of Zionism no longer holds the authority with Jewish writers of the fin-de-siècle that it once did. As Ḥayim Naḥman Bialik famously writes in his poem on the Kishinev pogrom “In the City of Slaughter,” the halakhic question of whether a raped woman is or is not allowed to her husband is not the

³ On gift-giving and masculine economies of exchange, see Schrift (Charlottesville, 1994), 210-229. A Jewish character in L.A. Arielī’s Yeshimon (Wasteland, 1920) invokes a masculine economy of exchange in a particularly direct manner when he remarks: “Last week my niece ran off with some Arab man. . . . And there are more and more doing like her. . . . How is it that a daughter of Israel becomes wretched. . . , a virgin entrapped! May God pardon this utterance of my lips, but young women even with all of [modern] achievements are a kind of commodity . . . which demands the utmost protection, like the most tender of tender oranges” (249). As for the Jewish sexual trope of women’s hair (and the concept of kisui ha-rosh, covering the head): in rabbinic Judaism, married women cover their hair in order to conceal that which rabbinic authorities traditionally consider to be erotic. A woman with disheveled hair may be wanton, even a prostitute. Hence in pogrom stories, a woman whose hair has become uncovered connotes some kind of trouble in sexual matters. See the development of the Sotah figure in rabbinic texts: Grushow (Leiden, 2006) and Rosen-Zvi (Jerusalem, 2008).
relevant question at hand. "Woman by woman under seven after seven
uncircumcised," Bialik writes of the horrors in the cellars, “daughter in front of
mother and mother in front of daughter, / . . . / And those who survived their
contamination and woke from their blood / their lives abhorred, the light of their
world dunned and all their lives made loath / forever, the profanation of soul and
body inside and out--":

And their husbands emerged from their holes and ran to the house
of God,
And blessed the miracles of the Holy One blessed be He their
refuge and respite;
And the priests among them went out and asked their rabbis:
“Rabbi! My wife,
What is she? Allowed or not allowed?”
And everything returned to its course, and everything fell back into
line. (3, lines 69-95)4

What is notable about this most famous of sections in Bialik’s most famous of
poems is the sheer flatness of the poet-prophet’s presence as the stanza ends.

In the section before this rape scene, faced with evidence of barbaric murders
the poet-prophet is commanded to stifle the scream in his throat before leaving

4 The citation is to Atar Hadari’s translation (Syracuse, 2000), 3. Hadari translates
the title of the poem as “City of the Killings.” For Bialik’s poetry in the original
Hebrew, see Shirim (Poems), ed. Dan Miron (Tel Aviv, 1983).
the attics; in the section after this rape scene, faced with agonizing images of Jews in hiding and a son coming upon the corpse of his father, the poet-prophet shields his face with his hands and is directed to “Gnash your teeth and dissolve” (4) before moving on to the hill of the city. The rape scene, in contrast, does not fit this format. Instead of a description of the atrocities (murdered Jews, Jews in hiding, etc.), followed by the poet-prophet’s denied physically emotive reaction (stifled scream, gnashing teeth), followed by the command to go to the next tour destination (leave the attics, go to the hill), Bialik removes the middle element. There is no physically emotive reaction at the rape scene, not even a forbidden physically emotive reaction. The poet’s underlying sense of disgust at the husband-priests is so self-evident that Bialik lets the scene speak for itself. With the poetic equivalent of rolling one’s eyes in silent disengagement, he expresses his deep sense of the inadequacy of the priests’ invocation of the halakhic framework, for traditional rape-oriented questions of “allowed or not allowed” simply miss the mark. What is the use for such questions in the Bialikian rape scenario, given the poet-prophet’s gnawing doubts about the fundamental vitality of Jewish life?
Vitalism

The vitalist alternative to mechanism as articulated by its nineteenth-century adherents echoes in philosophical-literary experiments by thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, whose ideas circulated--directly or indirectly--into Hebrew letters. Activity, thrust, energy, and the associated naturalization of morality is, according to vitalist schemas, what makes the world go 'round. In contrast to the mechanist foundational position on matter as inert, the vitalist position held that an intangible life force motivates all change. Although Nietzsche had his doubts about whether the vitalist theory was sufficient to explain all organic phenomena (Moore 46), he argued that the life force, in its struggle to realize itself, is not subject to an external divinely-ordained morality.

One of vitalism's keenest voices in Hebrew letters is Mikhah Yosef Berdyczewski, whose first public usage of the phrase "shinui 'arakhin" ("transvaluation of values") is in his 1897 essay "Wrecking and Building." Berdyczewski, well over six years prior (and before his study of Nietzsche) had already developed his ideas about the centrality of "life" and instinct as the heart of any human effort; the Hebrew writer thus adopted selective parts of Nietzsche's vocabulary when they resonated with already-existent convictions of his own (Holtsman 216). Berdyczewski's espousal of a Jewish people fully
cognizant of lived experiences—with all of their concomitant physical, emotional, and moral turmoil—has a political and sexual bent. The “error” of Jewish history (Berdyczewski uses the image of a scale balanced between two weights, “Judaism” and “nation,” with the scale tilted too far to the side of “Judaism”) has caused “the principal bodily organs—those needed for a nation to exist—to degenerate, and in their stead dependent juveniles have arisen, castrated/uprooted.”⁵ He continues on to explain what must happen in order for this dysfunctional, castrated nation to return to healthy maturity:

What is needed [for the Jews] is a secular culture and values common to all human beings instead of the religious values. When the Jews return to Canaan to live the life of a people on their own land, they must return and grasp the ancient historical thread which the prophets already in their time had cut off because of their moralism. We are in need of a state-based and spiritual renaissance; a renaissance as a nation, but as a vital nation. Judaism which is religious and intellectual-but-only-intellectual has robbed the nation of its political strength and rendered it impotent

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⁵ Berdyczewski here plays upon the Hebrew root ‘a/k/r, which can refer both to castration and to being uprooted from a given place. The citation is to his Diaries (Tel Aviv, 1974), 106.
by depriving it of the necessary qualities needed by the nation to
exist. . . . I have come to the clear realization that it will be
impossible to erect this building unless it will be upon secular
foundations alone, even idolatrous ones, as it were. (106)6
Berdyczewski imagines that the Jewish people can only create a fully-realized
national life in the Land of Israel by returning to an ancient, pre-prophetic and
pre-rabbinic Judaism that harnesses all of the potential afforded by the energetic
eros of pagan, even profane, rites as a catalyst for action.

One must be careful here to delineate the differences between vitalism and
the unruly, even generative powers accorded to the concept of yetser ha-ra in
rabbinic thought. Daniel Boyarin in Carnal Israel recalls a famous rabbinic
saying: “Nahman in the name of Shmuel [said]: Behold it was good [Gen. 1:31].
This is the good desire. Behold it was very good [ibid]. This is the Evil Desire
(yetser ha-ra)! Is the Evil Desire indeed good? Incredible! Rather, without the
Evil Desire a man would not build a house or marry a woman or beget children”
(qtd. in Boyarin 63). From this text, as well as others, Boyarin finds evidence for
a collapse of the good/evil bifurcation, for all that comes from the Divine must be

6 I initially came upon this excerpt from Berdyczewski’s diaries in S. Aaronson
(Jerusalem, 2002), 308. However, Aaronson does not include the original
preceding lines about degenerated bodily organs.
good: “The force within the human being that causes him or her to create is precisely the same force that causes human beings to do evil and destroy” (64).

The force that Boyarin invokes here, however, is not of the scientific-philosophical-aesthetic life force as explicated by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century vitalists. Whereas the Evil Desire may lead man to perform good acts (such as siring children), the entire sum total designation of “good” and/or “evil” is of little significance in the life-force-of-struggle in Nietzsche's world. “Fortunately,” Nietzsche writes in *On the Genealogy of Morals*,

I learned early to separate theological prejudice from moral prejudice and ceased to look for the origin of evil behind the world. . . [Under] what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? *and what value do they themselves possess?* Have they hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plenitude, force, and will of life, its courage, certainty, future? (17)

Good and evil here do not exist outside of human history, nor are they fixed values with self-evident definitions. The value judgments humans make regarding “good” and “evil” may reflect something about the state of the
“plentitude, force, and will of life” as it realizes itself in them, but there is no such thing as a “good force” or an “evil force.”

What, then, of rape for this castrated, uprooted people? Is there anything inherently “evil” about rape? The import of vitalism to Jewish rape tropes is not only that it blurs distinctions between good and evil in Jewish text (thus troubling an analysis of murder, say, as much as it troubles an analysis of rape). Vitalism transforms the ways Jews write about sexuality and gender. Rape raises a whole set of anxieties for Jews about sex—and power—or perhaps more accurately, sexualized power, that simply does not arise in the event of murder.

One must pause here to emphasize the sexual element of rape, for feminists of the 1970s and 1980s in their efforts to encourage the courts to acknowledge the legitimacy of rape survivors’ charges went to great lengths to establish rape not as a crime of sex but rather of violence, just like any other violent crime. Feminists of the last ten to twenty years, in turn, have had to work to reinstate rape within a framework of sexual violence. Joanna Bourke in her recent study on rape explains, “rapists choose to attack their victims in a way that they, and often their victims, identify as sexual. As philosopher Catherine MacKinnon correctly observed, ‘if it’s violence not sex why didn’t he just hit her?’” (13). Any review of Zionist fascinations with rape must include an eye toward sex
and violence, not merely toward violence alone. When combined with anti-
Semitic notions about the racialized/gendered degeneration of the Jews, vitalism,
then, with its often celebratory thunderous sublime, compels Zionist writers to
delve into the deepest recesses of Jewish sexual relations.

Peter Hans Reil argues that the original harmonizing tendencies of the late
Enlightenment vitalists—including a balanced, reciprocal ideal for masculinity and
femininity—largely disappear in vitalist thought of the mid/late nineteenth-century
(235). He references the phrase coined by scholar Anne-Charlotte Trepp for
Enlightenment vitalists’ ideal gender relations: “tender masculinity and self-reliant
femininity” (qtd. in Reil 224), citing a letter from Friedrich Gantz to Rachel
Varnhagen in 1803 as an example that could never be found amongst later
nineteenth-century vitalists:

Do you know, my dearest, why our relationship has become so
great and complete? I will tell you. You are infinitely productive, I
am infinitely receptive; you are the great man, I am the first among
women who have ever lived. . . . My receptivity is totally without
boundaries; your eternal, eternally active, eternally fruitful spirit (I
mean not just mind, but soul, everything) met this unbounded
receptivity, and so we gave birth to ideas, and to feelings, and to
language, which have not been heard before. No mortal can
surmise what we both know together. (qtd. in Reil 225)

Gantz as a male writer identifies receptivity with women and activity with men,
then pronounces himself to be the ultimate “woman” and Varhagen to be the
ultimate “man”—a perfect harmony consisting of two different but infinite
gendered characteristics (“totally without boundaries,” an infinity of space
associated with the feminine, and “eternal,” an infinity of time associated with the
masculine). It is not that later nineteenth-century vitalists, Reil explains, proceed
to do away with the bifurcation of masculine-active / feminine-receptive, but
rather, the balance shifts. Masculinity now aligns more strictly with the notion of
the ideal male and becomes patently superior to femininity as the ultimate
expression of the life force in its ever-progressing drive (235). In the 1861 words
of leading physician and gynecologist Carl Gustav Carus, women, as highly
impressionable creatures, are unable to feel “deep feeling” the way men can (qtd.
in Reil 234). To evince the quality of effeminacy or ambiguity of gender
indicates a distortion, an enfeebling, of the instinctual life force (229).

Anti-Semitic intellectuals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries do
not miss an opportunity to charge the Jews with a wide array of gender-troubling
racial characteristics, often in strikingly contradictory ways. The anti-Semitic
pendulum can easily swing from ‘no gender’ to ‘too much gender,’ as Alison Rose notes in her study *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna*. Jews were accused of “an overlapping of male and female qualities,” mixing what must not be mixed, seemingly both oversexed and under-driven, sexual parasites of their Christian neighbors and themselves, carriers of venereal disease and responsible for the social blight of prostitution (143). In this vein, the German Thomas Mann’s 1905 “The Blood of the Walsungs,” for instance, features the Jewess Sieglinde and her twin brother Siegmund who are so insufficiently differentiated from one another that they consummate their incestuous love just before Sieglinde is to ‘marry up’ racially by wedding a non-Jew.

Moreover, one cannot underestimate the legacy of Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character*, one of the most oft-printed and oft-referenced texts of his generation. Yosef Ḥayim Brenner, for one, states in 1914, “Weininger was indeed correct. This nation has the attributes of women” (Brenner 1977-1985, 4:1293). For Weininger, the Jewish man is the ultimate non-man; the Jewish woman is the ultimate woman. The Jewish man cannot impress anything upon his wife, and it is for this reason that the Jewish woman outdoes her non-Jewish sisters when it comes to the “natural tendencies of the female nature” (320).

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7 I thank Philip Hollander for his assistance with this reference to Brenner. See Hollander (2004), 165.
Woman is mendaciousness personified with no will of her own, hence the Jewish woman pretends to be merely a reflection of anyone and thus is no one. “Unhampered,” Weininger writes of the actress-Jewess, “[she] plays the part required of her, as house-mother or odalisque, as Cybele or Cyprian, in the fullest way” (320). Pseudo-mother, pseudo-sex slave, pseudo-goddess/castrator, pseudo-prostitute—such are the Jewess’ remarkable capabilities in Weininger’s schema. In fact, the only way a woman’s true essence can be revealed, according to Weininger, is when an act of sexual trauma perpetrated upon a woman’s body is so severe that it manages, even if only momentarily, to provide a breakthrough jolt to her usual exoskeletal costume. Weininger even concludes that because women are so singularly sex-obsessed they take pleasure in the assault and hence their recollections of the penetration as traumatic are, too, merely a testament to women’s mendacious natures (Sengoopta 111). It is not improbable that a reader could draw a connecting line from Weininger’s denial of rape-trauma (she really enjoyed it, after all), to his depiction of assault-semen as truth-serum, to his argument that the Jews and women have much in common: Weininger as celibacy-advocate and Jewish convert to Christianity imagines a scenario in which the rape of all of those too-steeped-in-femininity-Jews actually serves a higher purpose.
Rapes of Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are not only, however, mere metaphorical fodder for anti-Semitic musings, but also lived events which make their way into Jewish prose and poetry. In other words, most Jewish writing on rape of this period arises as a response to real incidents of mob sexual violence in conflict zones. There is a certain basic trauma of pogrom-oriented rape that anchors these responses, an attempt to grapple with a lived collectively-targeted crisis, which differentiates them from those rape-prominent literary classics such as Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748), Heinrich von Kleist’s *The Marquise of O* (1808), or Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891). Today the violent reverberations of the successive waves of pogroms that began in 1881 (including the rapes, so many of which undoubtedly went unrecorded) and that so preoccupied Jewish writers of the era have become mere tremors, faintly felt—if at all—in our own time. One must search history books to unearth reports of the pogroms, the stories of which have so much in common with other, more recent mass-scale human rights disasters that directly influenced the United Nations in 2008 to declare sexual violence against civilians in armed conflict a war crime. Indeed, although circumstances vary from conflagration to conflagration, the gender-based abuses that took place in the pogrom waves of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have much in
common with later, better documented outbreaks of mob sexual violence.\textsuperscript{8} In the early twenty-first century alone, whether in the Gujarat region of India (“After raping me, one of the men kept a foot on my neck and hit me. They hit me with sticks and stones, . . . [saying] . . . ‘We will not leave any Muslims alive.’ . . . [My] fellow villagers were part of the crowd that killed my relatives”); in Bouaké, Côte d’Ivoire (“The attackers came to our home. . . . [They] raped me in front of my husband and children. . . . They pushed me to the ground; one held my arms and the other was standing, forcing my legs apart with his own while the other raped me”); or along the border of Sudan and Chad (“They pointed their guns at us, calling us \textit{Nawab} [plural of \textit{Nuba} or ‘Africans,’ used as an insult] and telling us that the land did not belong to us. . . . [Then] they took one of the girls, and one held her by her arms, and one by her legs and one raped her, they took turns”)—the communities targeted, including the Jewish survivors of pogroms from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, must ask how or even whether widespread occurrences of mob sexual violence as a political, economic, or

\textsuperscript{8} The remaining quotations in this paragraph are from the following Amnesty International reports: “India: Justice, the Victim – Gujarat State Fails to Protect Women from Violence” (London, 2005), 7.1b; “Côte d’Ivoire: Targeting Women: The Forgotten Victims of the Conflict” (London, 2007), 3.3.4; “Sudan/Chad: ‘No One to Help Them’. Rape Extends From Darfur Into Eastern Chad” (London, 2006).
psychological weapon may be reshaped into narratives that envision a future for traumatized societies and/or traumatized individuals.

What was to become a wave of pogroms began in mid-April 1881 with the outbreak of violence in the town of Elisavetgrad (in what is today Ukraine). Within eight months over 250 pogroms had erupted in the provinces of the southwest region of the Russian Empire (I. Aaronson 47). More pogroms followed through 1884. The violence tended to start in urban areas and then move into more rural ones. While the violence did not always reach the level of murder and rape in each eruption, the danger of Cossacks and others accosting and raping Jewish women was very real. The pogroms of the 1903-1906 wave were much more physically destructive than those of the early 1880s.\(^9\) They began with the onset of the Easter holiday in Kishinev (in what is today Moldova). According to the research of Shlomo Lambroza, from then until the end of 1906 657 pogroms occurred inside the Pale of Settlement and seventeen outside, with over three thousand Jews killed, many more wounded, and countless houses burned. The greatest number of pogroms in Russia and Poland during the 1903-1906 wave hit the provinces of Chernigov (251 pogroms), Kherson (82), Bessarabia (71), Poltava (52), Ekaterinoslav (41), Kiev (41), and Podolia (37). Additional regions

\(^9\) The following information on the 1903-1906 wave in this paragraph is drawn from Lambroza (Cambridge and New York, 1992), 227-8 and 240-242.
saw five to fifteen pogroms each. For much of the period, government forces
did not intervene to put a halt to the eruptions, which were fueled by a
government-supported rise in right-wing agitation that tapped into peasant
discontent. The 1905-6 period, particularly after the issuance of the October
Manifesto, was the heaviest in violence.

The Jewish refugee crisis in Russian Poland and the Pale of Settlement
that began in March 1915 overlapped with the 1919-1921 wave of pogroms of
the Russian Civil War. This third wave of pogroms was carried out by officers of
the anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army and their Cossack fighters as well as, to a
lesser extent, the Red Soviet forces. Moreover, local peasants often joined the
attacks at the instigation of the batki, Ukrainian nationalist regional leaders like
Nikifor Gregoriev whose *Universal* manifesto urged uprisings against “foreign
elements from the ever hungry land of Moscow and the land where Christ was
nailed to the cross” (qtd. in Heifetz 68). There were over a thousand pogroms in
this third wave. It is estimated that approximately ten percent of Ukrainian Jewry
(no less than eighty thousand people) perished in these pogroms, the worst
massacre of Jews in the modern period prior to World War II (Laqueur 104).

The experiences of Jewish women in pogrom-related violence of the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were certainly variegated, although the
subject has not yet been sufficiently studied. A few examples are instructive.10 During the wave that began in 1881, girls as young as ten years old were raped. In the Kiev pogrom of April 1881, over twenty Jewish girls and women were raped, though only two reported the rapes to the government authorities. At Balta in 1882, also, over twenty Jewish women were raped, including a seventeen year-old who was gang raped. It is estimated that one-quarter of the total number of Jews killed in the 1903-1906 wave were women. There were instances such as in the Gomel pogrom in which women participated in Jewish self-defense groups and proved themselves admirably. In Kishinev, women’s breasts were hacked off, and one boy saved his mother from rape by sacrificing his own life in the attacking mob. The targets were not uniform: according to testimony by Ḥana Sooleman from Ḥayim Nahman Bialik’s Kishinev notebooks, women and children in her household were left physically unharmed because it was the male Jews whom the progromschciki sought to beat and murder. Meanwhile, Bialik records stories of Sima Zychick and Rivka Schiff, gang-raped

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10 The following examples and rape statistics through page 21 of this study are culled from: Berk (Westport and London, 1985), 36; Dubnow (Philadelphia, 1918), 255 and 302; Dubnow (Philadelphia, 1920), 74; Lambroza (Cambridge and New York, 1992), 208 and 231; I. Cohen ((London, 1919), 12, 27, and 30; Bialik (Ramat Efal, 1991), 72 and 80; Moser (Oxford, 2009), 25; Heifetz (New York, 1921), 70-71.
by another group. Rivka reports that “They were mocking and abusing me. ‘It
seems like you haven’t slept with a Gentile yet. Now you will know the taste of
one.’ I don’t know how many had their way with me, but there were at least five,
possibly seven” (80). Moreover, the attackers

hit [Sima] on her cheek with a tool, and surrounded her. She fell to
the floor from the force of the blow. They lifted her dress, pushed
her head down, pulled her bottom up, and started to slap her
buttocks with their hands. Then they turned her around again,
spread her legs, covered her eyes, and shut her mouth so that she
couldn’t shout. One took her from behind while the others
crouched around her and waited their turn. They all did what they
did in full view of the people in the attic. (Bialik 1991, 80)\textsuperscript{11}

After the two women went into hiding they were gang raped again by another
group of attackers who discovered them.

Regarding the third wave of pogroms, kidnappings of Jewesses were
common in the wake of property destruction by Cossacks in the Ukraine, and
women who refused to leave with the molesting Cossacks were murdered. In

\textsuperscript{11} This testimony by Sima Zychick and Rivka Schiff are translations by Michael
Gluzman from his article “Pogrom and Gender” (Winter / Spring 2005), 45-46.
November of 1919 in Chyrow, Poland, “Over 100 girls and women [were] stripped of boots and stockings” writes Israel Cohen in his report to the British government, “forced to march to Felsztyn and compelled in turn to wade into an ice-cold stream”; only a few days prior in Lemberg, over the course of two days, “women and girls were outraged . . . [in an] orgy of plunder and massacre” in which all Jews “who resisted were brutally assaulted or shot.” More incidences of rape occurred in Lemberg a month later during what Cohen calls a “small pogrom” in which a group of soldiers sealed off a two Jewish streets, arrested two hundred inhabitants, “and outraged several girls.” In an “average pogrom” in this third wave, a contemporary report prepared by the American Jewish Congress summarizes, “The gang breaks into the township, . . . killing without distinction of age and sex everybody they meet, with the exception of women, who are bestially violated before they are murdered,” with pogroms often repeating in the same locale as contested territory changed hands. Another contemporary report (for the Jewish People’s Relief Committee of America) documents that the Ukrainian nationalists “put to death or mutilated tens of thousands of Jews and violated thousands of Jewish women and girls” in a few months’ span of 1919 alone.
A prominent Haskalah response to pogrom-associated rape is Yehudah Leyb Gordon’s “My Sister Ruḥama” (1883), a poem which does not yet reflect the vitalist impulse that will soon characterize Hebrew rape writing by poets and prose writers like Berdyczewski and Tschernichovsky. Gordon writes, “Why do you sob, my sister Ruḥama? / Why are you downcast, why is your spirit agitated, / And the lilies of your cheeks—why have they withered? / Because plunderers have fallen upon your honor and profaned it? If the fist has triumphed, the hand of the enemy grown mighty, / Can the blame be yours, my sister Ruḥama?” (Gordon 41). The poem capitalizes upon traditional biblical and post-biblical motifs such as the representation of the nation as a lamenting female while subverting others, such as the notion of the onslaught as Divine punishment for collective sin. There is no major shock or emotional stagger when it comes to the reaction of the speaker, and there is no rage vented about any supposed failure of vitality on the part of the victimized Jewish people; the situation is devoid of a command to “tear your soul to ten pieces / and your heart give food to a helpless

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12 Translation of the first stanza with the exception of the line “And the lilies . . . .” is from Mintz (1982), 264. See also Stanislawski (Oxford, 1988), 198-199 and 204. Y.L. Gordon’s “My Sister Ruḥama” was first published in Ha-melits in 1882 and dedicated to “the daughter of Jacob, who the son of Ḥamor raped.” The poem includes references to the biblical Dina and Tamar, and subverts the name of the prophet Hosea’s daughter “Lo-ruḥama” (“not pitied,” Hos. 1:6-7, the daughter born to Hosea’s promiscuous wife, Gomer).
fury” as Bialik will write almost twenty years later in “In the City of Slaughter.”

As “My Sister Ruḥama” concludes, Gordon suggests that the proper response to mob sexual violence is for the Jews to comfort each other, pull themselves together, and move to America.

Following the late nineteenth-century shift to Hebrew lyric poetry, with its emphasis on the specific poet/speaker’s personal ‘on the ground’ experience, one major way in which literary representations of rape becomes codified in Zionism is as a pervasive anxiety over the choices that the individual Jewish male makes before, during, and/or after the rape threat. This anxiety includes a concern about the Jewish male’s misuse of his virility and a profound suspicion over his supposed failure to protect Jewish women’s honor. Hence Bialik’s condemnatory lines in “In the City of Slaughter,” in which Jewish men not only cower in corners but also watch with a perverse, voyeuristic sexual fascination as Jewish women suffer: “under this bench and behind this barrel / lay husbands, fiancés, brothers, peeping out of holes, / at the flutter of holy bodies under the flesh of donkeys / . . . / they lay in their shame and saw—and didn’t move and didn’t budge, / . . . / and perhaps each to his soul then prayed in his heart: / master of the universe, make a miracle—and let me not be harmed” (Bialik 2000, 3).
Bialik’s poem features a condemnation of men who leave their women behind to face rape because they are Jewish men. In other words, while it is not uncommon for men who survive mob violence to exhibit shame and rage,13 Bialik’s men’s failures are their failed Jewishness. Bialik’s concealment of his Kishinev notebooks so as not to contradict the propagandistic (and incorrect) impression that Jews, particularly Jewish men, did not at all resist their attackers has been well documented (Gluzman “Pogrom and Gender,” 42), for Bialik crafts diasporic Jewish peeping toms to be exemplars of that supposedly degenerate malfunction of Jewish virility.

Another text--this one prose from the 1920s --that explores such a degenerate Jewish malfunction of virility in the pogrom rape setting is Jacob Steinberg’s “Dream.” The protagonist, David, is a man consumed by humiliation. He obsesses about the low esteem in which non-Jews hold Jews, about the shame of failing to complete his higher education studies, about the lack of honor in his father’s job as lowly assistant to a rich Jew, about the indignity of Jews’ sexual perversions, and about the mortification he feels regarding his own sexual inhibitions. He has sojourned back to his village from the city in order to write a

13 As a study of Darfur by Tara Gingerich and Jennifer Leaning suggests, “feelings of guilt are also present, arising from the fact that, in fleeing, the men had to leave their women behind to face rape” (Boston, 2004), 24.
book that he hopes will transform the stature of the Jewish people and restore their pride as a nation. He considers the Jews’ sexual perversions, “hidden crimes” as he calls them, to be a major aspect of why the Jews are unable to live a healthy and active national existence. The Jew “is a glutton for the mere passing moment,” “without connection to nature,” “without connection to anything, without the heart-warmth (hamimut ha-lev) of a creature subject to the hidden Will” (237). Given this vitalist vocabulary, David hopes to demonstrate in his manuscript that although the Jews are incapable of building a connection to nature in the manner of non-Jews, at the very least they in fact have a heart-warmth of their own; he wishes to explain that Jews do follow the ways of nature, even if those ways are convoluted and indirect. If the Jews can free themselves from their degenerate sexual mores and tap into their unique, elusive, and sublime lofty heart-warmth (an example of which, David notes, manifests when he sits serenely between his two sisters in front of the fire at home), perhaps the Jewish people can rescue themselves from their death-in-life existence.

What David comes to realize over the course of the story is that he cannot author the manuscript he wishes to write, for he is no better than the perverted Jews he so condemns. The lofty heart-warmth he feels sitting next to his sisters is short lived, for his incestuous enthrallment/revulsion for his sister Malka
constantly haunts him. He cannot stop his mind from fixating upon her long, beautifully exposed hair, hair that symbolizes to him her unruly sexuality. She practically prostitutes herself to the younger son of her father’s employer, and the money her father has received in exchange (a connection the father tries to ignore) has built the very room that David now sleeps in, the room in which he is supposed to author his magnum opus against Jewish sexual deviance!

The narrative climax of Steinberg’s tale is David’s dreamlike vision at the end of the story. In his isolated village there have recently been reports that hoards of the “uncircumcised” are cropping up in the area, to such an extent that David’s mother is always on edge. In his dream, David huddles alone in a small hideout together with the devastatingly beautiful wife of the older son of David’s father’s employer. Although she is having an affair with a local non-Jewish elderly doctor, David imagines her as blameless because she is not sexually active at home; her husband is sickly and incapable of satisfying her sexually. A precursor to Lady Chatterley’s English lover Oliver Mellors, David is titillated by the prospect of rescuing the trapped Jewess from her tragic situation. In their little hideout he will fulfill her sexual needs and be for her an honorable alternative to the non-Jewish doctor. David vows to be her protector against the uncircumcised hoards. At the last minute, however, as pogromists storm into the
hideout, David fails to make good on his promise. He flees the scene, abandoning the Jewess to her predators.

Undisciplined Jewish virility against the backdrop of pogroms takes many forms, and in “The Red Heifer” Mihah Yosef Berdyczewski examines the havoc-wreaking acts of Jewish butchers. Here at issue is not enervated masculinity, but rather, explosive masculinity. “The Red Heifer,” a short story published in late August and early September 1906, takes place only a few years after the 1881 wave of pogroms. Although the location of the story is a fictionalized town called Dashya, in an earlier draft Berdyczewski sets the tale in the Hasidic Ukrainian town of Savran (Holtsman 79). A look at a map of the Ukraine in 1881 shows that the closest urban center to Savran is Balta, one of the most notorious sites of pogrom-oriented rape, even gang rape. Berdyczewski in “The Red Heifer” emphasizes that the story’s main characters, the Jewish butchers, have a unique position in the town:

The Jewish people is a weak and timid people, fearful of the slightest provocation; and whenever there have been pogroms against Jews, a hundred might flee from one drunken peasant and

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14 The red heifer is a reference to the biblical purification sacrifice ritual described in Num. 19.
passively submit to the breaking of windows and tearing up of pillows and chairs. But the butchers understood how to fight back and to arm themselves with clubs and axes when the times called for it. Something like this happened once in Dashya at Easter during a brief interregnum, a full generation before the Jews in every place had learned how to do like they did and come to fight for their lives. Is it any wonder that [the butchers] have the right to crown themselves the vanguard of Israel’s heroes? (Berdyczewski 146-147)\textsuperscript{15}

Only such virile Jews as these butchers are capable of rising to the occasion and stepping up to defend the community in the event of a pogrom. The butchers’ strong bodies and voracious appetites provide hope that the primitive, intuitive, pagan-like legacy of pre-prophetic Judaism still thrives in the Jewish soul; yet, significantly, they are also the very ones who hack apart the body of a cow in a sublime, ecstatic description of what may be read as a horrific gang rape.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Translation adapted from that of William Cutter; see Berdyczewski (New Milford, 2004).

\textsuperscript{16} One thinks here of Finke and Shichtman’s characterization of the rape of Eleine by the giant in the twelfth-century chronicles of Wace and La\textsuperscript{3}amon, a story-history “producing a certain excess (Žižek calls this ‘surplus-enjoyment’) that exceeds the rape’s ideological and structural function” (68). Or again, what
Sexual violence against a female serves as evidence of the ultimate and even inevitable expression of virility and strength: “What pent-up feelings sought release!” Berdyczewski writes (38).

However, movement toward the pagan and profane involves such extensive destruction that it deeply unsettles Berdyczewski just as it thrills him. At times the author evinces an apprehension (as Bialik does in his long poem “The Dead of the Desert,” 1902) that perhaps the realm of the primitive, so crucial to his entire system of thought, cannot in fact be the saving grace of the Jewish people. For while we find statements such as a September 1906 diary entry that “the will is the voice of nature (in its wild and barbaric sense) which is in the heart of man” this wild barbarism is also the reason why Berdyczewski just over a month later notes that he is suspicious of democracy: “a government of the masses can only result in a return to nature, a return to barbarity” (qtd. in S. Aaronson 315, ftnt. 19; 321, ftnt. 30). These diary entries appear in September and October of 1906, following the publication of “The Red Heifer.” Hence this enthralled suspicion of a barbaric, explosive Jewish virility, too, travels from the outskirts of the Balta setting all the way to Zionist Palestine with its tumultuous Arab Question—an uneasy travel partner for the reviled peeping toms of Bialik’s the narrator of Z. Shneour’s “On the Banks of the Dneister” calls “a strange desire […] to cause trembling” (85).
“In the City of Slaughter” and the anguished, pathetic coward of Steinberg’s “Dream.”

As Jewish-Arab tensions rise in the yishuv, why and how the rapist figure becomes quite so intriguing thus derives in no small part from modern Hebrew writers’ reformulations of classical Jewish textual perspectives on rape. Actual cases of Muslim and Christian Arabs raping Jewesses in the yishuv were few and far between. Even allowing for what may have been women’s reluctance to report rape, a look at the press and selected court records does not reveal more than a handful of cases. However, when Jewish writers turn to the Palestinian landscape, the Arab rapist is a larger-than-life figure, “something more than what appears to be merely positive knowledge” (to invoke Edward Said’s phrase).\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, as shall be explored in the next chapter, it is the imagined predator of the Orient in early Zionist culture that requires further explication.

\textsuperscript{17} Said, \textit{Orientalism} (New York, 1994), 55. We shall consider a few cases of Palestinian Arab sexual aggression mentioned in primary sources of the yishuv later in this study. See also: Hess (2003, on memoirs by women of the Second Aliyah), 97; \textit{Davar} (1925, “Ma’ase ones?”, 1; \textit{Davar} (1928, “Ta’alulim be-ḥutsot yerushalayim”), 1.
L.A. Arieli’s *Allah Karim!* and Aharon Reuveni’s *Devastation*

![Mermaid illustration]

Fig. 1. [And the serpent said to the woman] “You are not going to die…: (Gen. 3:4)”
Abel Pann, color lithograph (1926)

“Unconcerned, mocking, violent—thus wisdom wants us:
she is a woman and always loves only a warrior.”
*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, quoted at the opening of Nietzsche’s
“Third Essay: What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?” in *On the Genealogy of Morals*
Of pre-war Hebrew *belles lettres*, the most significant warning to Jews that they are headed for disaster with the Arabs of Palestine is L.A. Arieli’s drama *Allah Karim!* (1912). Thus *Allah Karim!* is a useful text for perusal prior to examining Aharon Reuveni’s definitive novel on Arab-Jewish confrontation, *Devastation* (1925). Moreover, when read in light of material explored in the previous chapter of this study, Arieli’s drama requires the reader to add an additional element to the fraught dynamics of sexual aggression in Zionist thought: the figure of the scary-strong Jewish woman.

A number of scholars (most recently Philip Hollander and Yaron Peleg) have noted that Arieli in *Allah Karim!* mocks and dismantles Jewish fantasies about the alluring power of the Orient regnant in contemporary Hebrew letters of his era.¹ Indeed, Arieli’s drama, serialized in *Ha-shiloah*, shatters these fantasies against the backdrop of contemporary examples: A. Kornman’s 1907 depiction of Petach Tikva leader Avraham Shapira as a “Bedouin, son of a Bedouin,” or the *Ha-shomer* group whose members (inspired by Shapira’s example) so proudly sported *kefiyehs*, or Hemda Ben-Yehuda’s mythical Palestinian Jewish-Bedouin woman who adopts the Hebrew name “Shulamit” as a Zionist male pioneer becomes her soul mate, or even Yosef Ḥayim Brenner’s narrator in *From Here *

and There who admires the Jewish pioneer workers of Galilee for being
“exemplary Hebrew workers. As if they were really Arab. Arab fellahs in their
mode of dress and intent.”2 While Hollander and Peleg engage in
comprehensive analyses of Allah Karim!, for the purposes of the present study I
wish to focus on Arieli’s text through the specific lens of sexual violence.

The characters in Allah Karim! are enmeshed in a cycle of
interethnic/religious miscommunication and murder that has no end in sight. The
three-act piece set in 1905 pivots around Naomi Shats, a young woman who
takes control of the stage from the moment she enters a scene. In Act One,
Naomi arrives in Palestine to join her suitor, Bronskul, a member of a small band
of Jewish men trying to ‘make it’ as pioneers in the Zionist landscape. These
Jewish men are: Fogel (an impotent, heavy-drinking guard who despises the
Arabs, and despises himself because he cannot control his urge to be violent
around them), Kalman (an older, worn-out laborer who cannot sustain his
idealism), Yunter (a shy suicidal weakling who wants to enter the Teachers’
College), and Bronskul (a poet who contributes nothing of substance to the

2 Kornman writes under the pseudonym “Carman.” See his story “Jedda” in vol.
17 of Ha-shiloah (1907), 503. Ha-shomer (“The Guard”) was a Jewish self-
defense group founded in Palestine in 1909. See also Ben-Yehuda (Tel Aviv,
1903). The quotation from Brenner can be found in his Ketavim (Writings, Tel
upbuilding of the *yishuv*). Looking for stimulation, Naomi begins a fling with the pastry-seller Ali, an Arab who knows some Hebrew. In Acts Two and Three, the Jewish men clash with local dervishes who try to enter their room in search of water. Ali makes half-hearted preparations to head to Nablus to avenge the murder of his father (Bedouins killed him ten years ago) and invites Naomi to join him. She refuses, and ultimately Ali fails both at wooing Naomi and at embarking on his revenge mission. He is not a virile alternative to the Jewish men whom Naomi finds so boring. Late in the drama, the action shifts to the outside grounds guarded by Fogel. Fogel mortally wounds a passing Arab shepherd and in turn is killed by the revenging Ali. Ali then enters into a weird catatonic state. With devastating clashes erupting between the Muslims and Jews, Naomi—“unconcerned, mocking, violent,” to borrow Nietzsche’s phrase—finally storms offstage alone in search of a new future.

Naomi’s desire to find a man who can best her motivates her actions throughout the drama. In Act Three she says, “I am waiting for a man, for whom I will not be the one to make demands of him, but rather he will command me, he will demand surrenderings from me…and then I will give up everything” (405, bold in original). It is with this statement that Naomi comes closest to the slogan that so thralls her: “today—me, tomorrow—you” (352). She craves power
exchange, and although she is the virile one calling the shots today, she hopes to find a man who will do so in her stead tomorrow.

In one of the play’s most oft-quoted sections, Bronskul describes his fiancé Naomi as a poisonous female spider who eats her male mate; Bronskul’s friend Yunter then counters that actually the situation is even worse—the men are the female spiders, not Naomi. “[W]e are defeated female spiders: we do not eat, we are eaten” Yunter says (413). Not only do the men in Allah Karim! fail to possess the necessary vitality to compel Naomi into submission, but also, the nexus of vitalism, anti-semitism, and nationalism we have reviewed in this study thus far makes the prospect of Naomi’s forced submission extraordinarily fraught. Let us examine this point in some detail.

It is no accident that Naomi mentions Mikhail Petrovich Artsybashev’s Sanin in her opening utterance in the play. Arieli’s knowledge of Russian literature was so vast and nuanced that it even drew the notice and admiration of the formidable critic Yosef Haim Brenner (Hollander 158 ftnt. 4). Sanin, the most controversial and best-selling novel of its time in Russia, appeared in the periodical Sovremennymir (Contemporary World) in 1907. Much like the eponymous hero of the novel, Naomi has a talent for unnerving everyone around her through her unexpected comments and unconventional behavior. When
Sanin speaks about and acts upon desire, he is interested in how the individual channels his or her fundamental life-affirming urges of all kinds. He rails against anyone who “can’t or won’t [sic] reap from the richness of life enough to satisfy his true needs,” who, “grasping at any straw in the sphere in new moral ideals . . . [is] . . . afraid to live, miserable, afraid to feel” (Artsybashev 232). Like the disruptive Sanin, whom one scholar characterizes as “difficult to define as a character. . . . [It is] hard to believe in his existence outside the novel—he enters from and returns to limbo at its close” (Luker 264), Naomi is elusive both to the reader and to the characters around her. At the beginning of the tale she bursts onto the Palestinian scene and at the end she flies off into the distance: “Suddenly she pushes Yunter away from her. . . . ‘My soul is disgusted, disgusted by you, cultured worms!’ . . . I am sprouting wings! . . . I feel it! . . . I have chosen the path of life and contest! [She leaves with emboldened steps toward the path visible from afar.]” (Arieli 422, brackets in orig.).

This final scene of Allah Karim! is quite similar to that of Sanin. The title character of the Russian novel climbs out of his train car and vanishes:

Mankind’s a sordid thing, he felt, rather than thought, and suddenly he felt a desire to leave all these people behind. . . . “That’s better!” he said aloud, giving a free, ringing cry of pleasure. . . . Sanin
breathed easily and gazed cheerfully at the endless expanse of earth, advancing with powerful broad steps farther and farther toward the bright, joyous life of dawn. . . . [A]nd when the sun rose sparkling and shining ahead of him, it seemed as if Sanin were striding forth to meet it. (Artsybashev 259)

Sanin strides forth to meet the sun; Naomi, too, metaphorically goes skyward as she imagines herself to be growing wings, leaving the men she has encountered thus far behind in the dust.

Arieli’s Naomi would ultimately be utterly out of place in Sanin’s world; she is a kind of Sanin in a woman’s body, and one of the most jarring incongruities of this mix is obvious when it comes to insinuations of rape. Sanin has absolutely no qualms about raping Karasavina, who finds his sexual prowess enticing but cannot stop him from overpowering her physically. As Laura Engelstein correctly notes of the Russian text,

Artsybashev reinforced the principle of gender polarity. If he depicted the old-style predatory male as lacking in virility, he exalted the new, sexually defiant male for restoring manhood to its true heroic stature by arousing women’s equally avid sexual desire. Artsybashev’s female characters are no less feminine for acting on
their sexual impulses, even for initiating sexual play; their bodies are portrayed as soft, yielding, and sensuous against the male’s firm, muscular physique [thus leaving] ideas about femininity largely intact. (397)

In contrast, there is little in Naomi that is “soft, yielding.” She has it in her to be a kind of man-killer, like the serpent figure in Abel Pann’s sketch featured at the opening of this chapter (Fig. 1). She makes toys out of bones for fun. Indeed, such are members of that shadowy Jewish sisterhood who possess unfathomable, terror-inducing strength—another example being the fifty-five year-old woman Yokheved in Zalman Shneour’s “On the Banks of the Dniester” (1907-1910), who kills her own baby grandson to stifle his cries as pogromists approach a Jewish hideout. It is clear in Shneour’s story that none of the men hiding together with the grandmother has the will to do the necessary deed.

Naomi is so forceful in *Allah Karim!* that it is she, one of many fin-de-siècle Salomés, who symbolically rapes a man. When Naomi commands Yunter to take her for a walk, Arieli notes in detail in the stage directions: Naomi forms a half-circle with her right arm and urges Yunter to put his hand into it (Arieli 353). When he refuses, afraid of her, she grabs his arm and with a phallic gesture forces it through the circle. She violates him by coercing him to enter her,
indicative of her complex as an overpowering woman who wishes to be
overpowered. The gesture is not lost on the other men in the room, as Arieli
clearly indicates, “Bronskul looks on at all that is happening . . . and his face
expresses sadness and discomfort. Kalman turns his head and glances at
Naomi in wonder. Fogel’s face is cold and angry” (353). None of the men
intervenes to try to rescue Yunter or stand up for him.

Yet I would also argue that as much as Arieli suggests Naomi as a rapist-
figure, he also uses her to tap into fears about Jewish women’s vulnerability to
being kidnapped by ‘outsiders’ and subject to associated sexual violation. The
association of kidnapping with rape is one that Rachel Furst has noted in her
study of the 1241 Frankfort Case responsa; in fact, the linkage is particularly
stark in the origins of the English word for rape, “raptus,” meaning “to carry off by
force” (Finke and Shichtman 62). In Allah Karim! after Naomi flirts with the Arab,
Ali, he comes by the commune and playfully makes a gesture to carry her off for
a romantic tryst. Something in Naomi goes bizerk and snaps. She reacts by
trying to strangle her would-be attacker. She takes radical measures when
trapped in a situation she interprets as threatening or abusive, in this case,
choking Ali until he is forced to let her go. It is a rather awkward moment in the
text, since Naomi’s reaction is so overboard (even for her!), it suggests that here
Arieli has hit his character’s breaking point. It is as if a switch goes off and Naomi enters into a fight-or-flight mode, an extremely sharp self-preservation instinct that causes her both to shrink inward and to lash out. “One does not commit acts of violence toward me!” she yells at Ali (Arieli 398). It is a move that one may read as Arieli’s invocation of deep-set Jewish fears that the Arabs intend to seize and ravish Jewish women.

It is worth a short digression to highlight how different Naomi Shats is, then, from a heroine like Diana Mayo, the central woman in E.M. Hull’s English interracial romance novel of the era, *The Sheik* (1919). Set in the Algerian desert, *The Sheik* became the source for sequels and a film starring Rudolph Valentino. E.M. Hull (pseudonym of Edith Maude Winstanley) had never visited the Arab world prior to penning the dime novel that would become one of the best-selling English books of its time. Hull, writing at the seat of an imperialist empire, creates an interracial love story in which strictly hierarchical gender relations attributed to an imagined Arab tribal heritage are an allure and source of salvation for the modern woman. Arab masculinity here is an effective, much needed corrective to problems with virility in English masculinity. A new English femininity benefits accordingly. Whereas prior to encountering Ahmad (who actually turns out to be an Englishman!), Diana had induced fear and trembling in
the enervated men of the English elite, Ahmad’s rape of Diana awakens in the heroine feelings that lead to love. During the course of the novel, Diana learns that love conquers all; everything is worth giving up, even her independence, for this exhilarating lifestyle in the Eastern wilderness far from the decadence of English society. The virile Ahmad has liberated her femininity. In contrast, submission on Naomi’s part, if that submission is forced upon her in a situation of sexualized violence, cannot be the foundation for the male-female hierarchy she seeks via her orientalist fantasies.

Who, then, is Naomi, and what is her role in the larger unfolding of Zionist history? One can only conclude that no matter how critical Arieli is of the men in his drama, he cannot envision Naomi, the scary-strong woman, to be the zenith-figure that the Zionist nation needs to take on the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine. Naomi represents a significant midway point in the battle, but merely a midway point. A few final observations about Allah Karim! will highlight why this is so.

Like Artsybashev’s Sanin, Naomi exhibits a pronounced distain for political ideologies. The men in the all-male Zionist commune of Allah Karim! have hung pictures of Marx and Herzl prominently in their little room, but Naomi has come and brought to the fore the exhaustion—mental, physical, sexual, ethical—that
plagues the pioneers in their ideologically-saturated ethos. Yunter laments, “we are lost, lost . . . with no path, . . . no God . . . where are we headed to? I am asking you: where to? On the contrary! . . . [We], the bearers of humanity of the future, a humanity shattered” (Arieli 413). True, Naomi serves to critique myths of the Zionist pioneer ethos, and in doing so she supports a kind of rhetorical vein similar to Yosef Haim Brenner’s at his most caustic. Yet Naomi, for better or for worse, is not a Brennerian male, she is not weighted down by the yoke of ideological pilpul (arcane disputation) the way the men in Arieli’s drama are. She is not enervated by the neurosis of constant self-castigation that is part and parcel of their lifestyle. She never speaks of Zionism or of the collective Jewish future—this, when Arieli chooses to publish his piece in Ha-shiloah— that bastion of modern Hebrew renaissance. She is not invested in Hebrew culture, and she arrives in “Palestine” (as she calls it—not “erets yisra’el”) simply for adventure. Naomi cares not one bit for the argumentation and responsibilities of Zionist discourse. She is full of energy because she is not obligated, a modern version of the Jewish woman so jealously looked upon—even if satirically—by the overly-burdened Jewish man in Kalonymus ben Kalonymus’ famous fourteenth-century Hebrew text, Even boḥan (Touchstone). The medieval speaker, characterized by Tova Rosen as “exhausted by the male project,” laments the pressures put upon
him (Rosen 176-177). Naomi, on the other hand, is free, for she simply lives
with all of her desires.

Arieli thus creates a text quite critical of the Jewish men’s efforts in the
_yishuv_, but at the same time does not give the strong life-affirming woman any
real improvement upon the male-female hierarchies that often plague traditional
halakhic discourses. Naomi does not count in the Zionist _minyan_. The Jewish
woman who most keenly prods the men into asking whether they are properly
contributing to the communal needs of the Jewish future sees herself as having
no stake in, or potential contribution to, this realm. Although she is the very
character responsible for being, like Sanin, the one to shake things up by
possessing the very vitality that the collective needs, and as much as her caustic
comments tap into a Brennerian mode of critiquing Zionism, she lacks that
Brennerian element of involvement/care for the Jewish people. Her Sanin-like
apolitical detachment is ultimately not a particularly woman-affirming message for
Arieli to publish in a periodical dedicated to Hebrew cultural and collective
renaissance.

Naomi as a _female_ character rising in the wake of Artsybashev’s hero
Sanin thus suggests rather disturbing consequences to readers invested in
feminist critiques of literature. Arieli, on the one hand, creates a heroine who has
much of Sanin’s tempestuous energy and confident distain for political
cconformity. Naomi leaves all others around her, Arab and Jew, bewildered as
she scoffs at the Zionist pioneers’ pathetic efforts to live out the ideals of Herzl
and Marx. Yet if Sanin is at the apogee of his strength as he strides off on “the
endless expanse of earth, advancing with powerful broad steps farther and
farther toward the bright, joyous life of dawn,” Naomi as a woman flies away into
the blinding sun in search of a still unrealized supremacy of masculinity over
femininity within which rape is nevertheless a panic-inducing taboo. Abuse is not
the key to ‘freeing’ Naomi’s femininity, a femininity that remains like an
unresolved chord to the very end of the text. One by one she picks off the men
around her, posing as an insurmountable stumbling block for them. In the final
scene of Allah Karim!, as the conflict between Muslims and Jews in Palestine has
already claimed lives, Naomi leaves behind men who have failed to muster the
virility necessary to rope her into submission.

Aharon Reuveni’s Devastation—Rape and the New Zionist Hero

Aharon Reuveni, born in Poltava, Ukraine only a few years after the 1881
wave of pogroms, worked together with his brother Yitzhak Ben-Tsvi collecting
weapons for the local Jewish self-defense group (Schwartz 1987, 412). After the
1905 revolution he and his family were imprisoned for these activities (Yitzhak managed to flee) and exiled to Siberia. Reuveni’s trilogy ‘Ad yerushalayim (Unto Jerusalem, authored 1916-1920, published 1919-1925, set during World War I) and particularly its final section Shamot (Devastation) is arguably the capstone modern Hebrew text prior to 1929 to inaugurate a new phase in the Zionist quest for well-directed virility vis-à-vis rape.

A mere ten pages into Bereshit ha-mevukah (In the Beginning of the Confusion, 1919-1920, the first novel of the trilogy) Manya Appleboim and her fiancé Aaron Tziperovitch are out for an evening stroll near the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem when the conversation turns to rape. Tziperovitch speaks to Manya about the political shifts overseas and the anti-Semitic assaults on Jewish villages lying in the path of Russian and Serbian soldiers:

Tziperovitch’s news roused in [Manya’s] heart harsh scenes. The sound of Russian marauders came to her ears, drunk and rowdy, going to smash and shatter Jewish stores, to torture women.

Pictures of pogroms rose up in her memory. She sighed: “Those poor Jews of Galicia . . . my heart aches for them . . . I can picture
the extent of the disaster upon them at the hands of the Russian
Cossacks. . .” (Reveni 22)³

Manya knows the raw sounds that portend rape, the timbre of drunken voices out
on a hunt. Such a dissonant vocal arrangement is not one she could absorb
from second-hand accounts of a pogrom, whether oral or in print (and Manya, the
reader learns a few lines before the aforementioned excerpt, does not peruse
newspapers). Most likely, Manya is a pogrom survivor who has come close
enough to the aggressors that, whether or not she herself was raped, at the very
least she has endured the terror of waiting to find out whether she will be the next
woman targeted.

With such scenes flooding her mind, Reveni’s Manya is conditioned to
associate danger with certain sounds and images; a horse’s gallop brings her
back to the Galician landscape with its Cossack warriors on the sexual prowl.
It is no wonder, then, that as Manya and Tziperovitch continue their walk on
the outskirts of Jerusalem, she is acutely sensitive the sound of a single
approaching horseman:

    Behind them they heard clear foot-stomps on the hard, stony
    earth’s path—the thundering of a horse’s hoofs. Manya was

³ All citations listed as “Reveni” are to Unto Jerusalem, unless otherwise noted.
alarmed. Terrible stories that her acquaintances had told her about the savagery of the Arabs and their licentiousness came to mind. The story of the young woman who was walking at night from Ramallah to Jerusalem in the company of young men, returning from an outing: suddenly Arab peasants, a big group, pounced upon them, thick clubs in their hands, and hit them and drove away the young men, while she remained alone…and only after a few hours did she return home, ripped apart and unkempt. . . . Manya quickened her steps. . . . [The] horseman turned in his saddle, fixed shining, arrogant eyes upon Manya, and called out something in his guttural language. (Reuveni 34-35)

Thus Reuveni draws a clear line linking the Russian Cossack marauders in Galicia to a gang of Arab peasants to a single horseman with “his guttural language.” When the looming Muslim rapist Haj Yusuf will later emerge in Devastation as the Palestinian Jew’s greatest adversary, the showdown which ensues is rooted essentially all the way back to the diaspora pogrom.4

4 Reuveni makes deliberate distinctions throughout his trilogy between various exemplars of the Muslim ‘man of the East.’ Haj Yusuf is “the African,” one of the Muslim guards who have come to Palestine from North Africa; the aforementioned lone horseman is a Bedouin; the Palestinian Arab peasants cower before the Turkish authorities, yet inspire fear among many of the
The fact that Reuveni’s Manya has no confidence in Tziperovitch’s ability to defend her, were the horseman to try something akin to the anecdotal Arab peasants’ gang-rape, comes on the heels of texts like Bialik’s “In the City of Slaughter,” A.A. Kabak’s *Levada (Alone, 1905)* and *Daniel Shafranov* (1912); whether a Jewish husband hides in a corner while his wife is raped, or a Jewish teenaged Torah scholar cannot stop a mob from abusing his aunt, or a man of the Jewish intelligentsia abandons his wife and child at home with a pogrom threat in the air, respectively, over and over again Jewish writers of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century despair over Jewish men’s supposed failures to protect their women. Manya upon hearing the horseman’s gallop makes a quick calculation about her fiancé: “He is far from heroism. . . . [One] blow would send him falling to the ground,” she muses (Reuveni 35). Reuveni further condemns Tziperovitch when, after the horseman passes the couple by, the Jew is pathetically transparent as he fakes a self-assured smile.

The horseman is an elusive figure with a non-human quality. He speaks to the couple with a “shrieking, throaty voice” in a language they cannot decipher. He appears out of nowhere and disappears in a cloud of dust, omnipresent. Even when he is gone he remains in front of Manya and Tziperovitch’s eyes, Palestinian Jews—though not in the character Meir, the hero of the third novel in the trilogy.
leaving them with a “feeling of alienation” from the land, as if they are “strangers” to it (Reveni 36). The horseman appears to them as “a symbol of freedom and strength-of-spirit” at an elemental level utterly out of their grasp (36). Reveni suggests that there is something absolutely crucial about coming into contact with and fully exploring this elemental quality if the Jew is to be at home in the Jerusalem landscape.

Reveni began work on the first novel of the trilogy in 1916 and the second in 1918. He began Devastation in 1919 but was interrupted by the 1920 violence in Jerusalem. In early March 1920 the Syrian Congress officially rejected Zionism and declared Faisal King of Syria (including Palestine), adding fuel to the annual Palestinian Nebi Musa pilgrimage the following month. On April 4, mobs of pilgrims, incited by the speeches of their leaders, attacked Jews in Jerusalem, injuring 211 and killing five. Members of the Arab police joined in the violence. Most of the Jewish casualties, according to the British Palin Report, were unarmed residents of the Old City who were accosted from behind—the elderly, women, and children (Caplan 58). Among the causes for concern over the 1920 violence was rape (two cases were reported). The Zionist leader

5 Reveni composed the entire trilogy Unto Jerusalem in Yiddish but published it in Hebrew. Mordehai Temkin assisted Reveni with the translation of In the Beginning of the Confusion. Reveni did the translation work himself on the other two parts of the trilogy (Schwartz 1993, 160).
Menaḥem Ussishkin even refused to shake the hand of Jerusalem Mufti Kamil al-Husseini at a Government House ceremony afterwards, saying, “How could I extend my hand in peace to a religious leader whose followers raped Jewish women?” (qtd. in Caplan 64). To Reuveni, the 1920 violence had all the hallmarks of a pogrom, and he insisted on calling it so. As he explained decades later upon receiving the Bialik Prize:

I was already close to the end of Devastation [Passover, 1920] when the first pogrom broke out in Jerusalem. I stopped, went outside, ran with other young men (headed by Zeev [Vladimir] Jabotinsky) to the Damascus Gate to protect Jews in the Old City (we heard a rumor that the Arabs were perpetrating a massacre on the other side of the wall; and we in our hurry without understanding the situation ran without any weapons—only a few sticks and one or two guns). . . . [Our] newspapers obeyed the demand of the government not to bring up the word ‘pogrom,’ so instead they said ‘events,’ and this misleading word became the convention. (qtd. in Schwartz 1993, 160-161)

From 1920 on, Reuveni began to move to the right, away from the leftist Poale Zion movement of which until this time he had been part; Yigal Schwartz in his
analysis of *Devastation* concludes that “the dramatic events of 1920
influenced, without a doubt, the character of the novel’s mood” (1993, 161).

While Tziperovitch in the first novel of the trilogy lacks vigor and potency,
Meir Funk, the Russian-born protagonist of Reveni’s *Devastation* struggles with
the opposite problem—a concern that his aggressive urges are out of control.
Indeed, Meir reincarnates—albeit in a more benign form—that just-barely-
contained chaos always in danger of surfacing, embodied by the giants in Bialik’s
famous poem “The Dead of the Desert,” the butchers in Berdyczewski’s “The
Red Heifer,” or the speaker in Lamed Shapiro’s “The Cross” (1909). The major
source of tension that Meir must confront over the course of the novel is *what to
do with the latent sexual savagery in himself*, for the overflowing release of
animal-like brute force on the part of the Jewish male can be extraordinarily
destructive.

Meir is the only one of the three men featured in Reveni’s trilogy who is
an agricultural laborer, who has a physical strength and a mental constitution
unburdened by overwrought nerves or the tendency to extrapolate himself from a
given situation by overly philosophizing about it. This does not mean that Meir is

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6 The speaker in Lamed Shapiro’s short story “The Cross” rapes a dear non-
Jewish friend after witnessing the murderous violation of his mother by
pogromists.
free from worries or heavy thoughts; however, he is the one Jewish man in the
trilogy who innately gravitates toward that which is primordial and feels his
connection to the land as intimately bound up with his relationship to his lover,
the Jerusalemite Sephardi, Esther. He is the only one of the three men who has
the capacity to take on the challenge represented by the Arab horseman
encountered by Manya and Tziperovitch.

Meir and Esther at the midpoint of the novel go out for a walk around
Jerusalem and its hills—just as Tziperovitch and Manya do—and, like them,
grapple with a sense of alienation from the land:

[O]n a protruding tooth-of-a-rock stood a shepherd, a village Arab
youth wearing an ‘abayyah brown as the land, a black, thick
headband over his headdress; he leaned on his twisted staff and
gazed upon the flock. They were one—he and the rock upon which
he stood, and the mountain from which he had emerged with his
sheep. Also Meir and [Esther]—they were one—but another “one,”
different, one that wandered and came from a foreign place, one
over the course of time that had lost its first oneness with this wild
landscape of rocky ground, and now yearned [for this first oneness]
and craved its return. (Reuveni 342)
Whereas Tziperovitch and Manya’s encounter with the Arab on their stroll leaves them with “a feeling of alienation that would not leave their hearts,” Meir and Esther experience a foreignness that is embedded with the deep desire for return to some kind of primal wildness. What role will such primal wildness have in their relationship? Meir and Esther are of “one” with each other just as the Arab is with the landscape, yet it is a different oneness. Through the vicissitudes of sexual partnership the couple may be able to tap into a “first oneness” that is akin to, but not exactly like, the wildness that characterizes the Arab among these rocks. Uniting through the savage elements of eros is not identical to being in unity with the savage elements of the terrain, but the parallel is close enough to put the Jews potentially on par with the Arab vis-à-vis gaining access to that at-homeness in the land lost after the exile.⁷ The sexual relationship between Meir and Esther thus is not only a test about how a raw “first oneness” will play out between two individuals, it has greater ramifications for a narrative which connects the Jewish people to Jerusalem and the land of Israel in an arc of exile and return at this moment in history.

⁷ Esther as a Jerusalemite is a product of the Old Yishuv, thus Reuveni positions her as a ‘native’ who is yet in exile.
Thus for Meir, the savagery inside himself if properly directed has the potential to be the quality that establishes a Jewish fitness for Palestine-as-home, yet it is clear that Meir recoils from this savagery because it makes him feel as if he is coming dangerously close to committing rape. Reuveni uses the technique of the leitmotif to tease out this aspect of Meir’s spirit. That leitmotif is a disabled sixteen-year-old girl named Neḥemke. Neḥemke thus functions in the narrative as a warning note indicative of impending physical tragedy. She epitomizes Joanna Bourke’s characterization of the female body as “already, and always, violated. Before any penetration (consensual or not) [her] body ‘precipitates’ attack” (421).

Neḥemke scurries in and out of the narrative only a handful of times. The first time we meet Neḥemke, Meir is gazing at her out his window, and that is exactly how she stays for the duration of the novel: gazed at, observed, looked upon. He pities her, smiling “a smile of good will, a good will mixed with compassion and grief that he, strong and healthy, always expressed to this pathetic creature, for whom there is no point in its suffering and there is no one to whom it can turn to protest” (Reuveni 241). Meir objectifies Neḥemke in a manner that crafts her weakness as a testament to his strength, a strength that also scares him. As Disability Studies theorist Tom Shakespeare succinctly
articulates, “the peculiar and particular fascination—fear and loathing—that
disability has for human beings is because impairment represents the physicality
and animality of human existence” (296). Meir explicitly associates the orphan
Neḥemke with Esther and with the lust he feels for Esther.

Immediately after Meir gazes at Neḥemke at his window, he mulls over
how Esther (whom he has barely spoken to at this early point in the novel, let
alone married) both fascinates and repulses him. “Sometimes he pitied her as
he did Neḥemke,” he thinks,

And that which was liable to happen but had not yet happened
began to stimulate him and rob him of his equanimity. A feeling of
gratitude toward this modest woman [Esther]—who possessed a
wild beauty of first bloom, so fragile, so rich—was mixed in him with
a fear of what was to come. . . . [She] was drawn to him without
doubts, . . . and this cast upon him a fear for her sake, for the great
sacrifice she was about to sacrifice unknowingly, . . . because his
heart lacked a pure and perfect response to the calls of her heart.
And from all of this a feeling of guilt before her was born in him, and
a terrible expectation of the tragedy that would come. (Reuveni
242)
Meir understands that Esther is ready to sacrifice everything for him—including her virginity. The prospect of deflowering the modest Esther and penetrating the “wild beauty of her first bloom” arouses him. Sex with Esther will be a way to enact that first oneness, a way to access that alluring elemental quality which is so present in Neḥemke and so present in the Arab natives. With guilt and fear in addition to arousal, Meir recognizes that he has tremendous power over Esther; with a single move he can ensure that she make the great sacrifice of a young woman’s life. She adores him unreservedly while he cannot return the feeling in the same unadulterated manner.

The second time we meet Neḥemke is right before Meir and Esther first have sex. Meir comes to the courtyard of the building where he rents a room from Esther’s family and sees the young orphan. Neḥemke “lifted her wide eyes to him […]. Meir answered her with a nod and a smile” (327). The next hours occur with Meir moving in and out of sleep. When he realizes that he is alone with Esther in the apartment, he is overcome by sexual urges and can barely control himself. Esther, however, has blocked access to her room. With pent-up energy Meir leaves for a short stroll and returns to find Esther curiously approaching his room, indicating perhaps an invitation. He cannot help but smile, that facial expression he always gives to Neḥemke: “He arose with a
strange smile hovering on his lips—the smile of someone who is about to do something that he was not supposed to do, who does not want to look himself in the eye, who does not want to think about it, and despite all that he goes and does it” (330-331).

Reuveni notes that the next morning following the unmarried couple’s first sexual episode, Meir suffers from shame more than does Esther, for whom shame is merely a passing thought. What concerns her is what others would think if the news of their premarital sex were to be made public. For Meir, the shame runs much deeper. He is appalled by the uncontrolable nature of his desire and his sense that he misused it. He is consumed by “his yielding, which he was supposed to overcome and did not overcome. In this he sinned not only against himself, . . . but rather against another soul, weaker than him and destined to suffer terrible torments” (332). What haunts him is his conviction that the rough, disorderly nature of his virility diminishes his capacity for self-discipline, in turn causing him to bring tragedy (rape-not-rape) upon a woman weaker than himself.8

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8 For more on Reuveni’s take on the physical weakness of women in comparison to men, as well as his conviction that it is men who have the longer and more intensely internalized tradition of being disturbed and distressed by all things related to nakedness and sexual expression, see his late essay “Nakedness and
It is no accident that during the night stroll Meir takes between his
gazing at Neḥemke and his initial bedding of Esther he first runs into the sexual
predator Haj Yusuf. Meir is on a stroll because he must do something with his
pent-up sexual energy. Haj Yusuf, as one of the many “hajjim” who have taken
up residence in Jerusalem, exhibits a thirst for violence that rivals that of the
cruelest of pogromists. He fantasizes about committing genocide against Jews
and Christians, ridding the land of infidels by handing them the same fate as was
handed to the Armenians (370). He imagines going into a nearby Jewish house
and enacting a scene right out of one of Bialik’s Kishinev notebooks: Haj Yusuf
fantasizes that he “could burst into one of the homes, slaughter the males and
take for himself their women” (370). As the North African-born Muslim guard of
the neighborhood, Haj Yusuf is a “strong man” “tall and broad-bodied,” known for
his “wild rage” and “shining eyes” (328). He is also a peeping tom who looks at
women through windows. Meir is the only Jewish man in the Jerusalem
neighborhood of Nahalat Yehuda who could be his match, in more ways than
one: Meir too is “tall and broad shouldered,” enough so that the Muslim skulks
back into the darkness when the Jew catches him at a window (329).

Pornography” in his collected essays, *Studies and Criticism* (Jerusalem and Tel
Aviv, 1966), 90-91.
Haj Yusuf is a darker, more sinister manifestation of that which Meir
detests in himself; Reuveni had introduced Neḥemke into the novel with Meir
standing at his window, gazing at her—and here is Haj Yusuf, the compulsive
window-gazer consumed by his overpowering sexual needs. Although Haj Yusuf
(“the African,” as Reuveni refers to him repeatedly) is no more native to Palestine
than is Meir, the Muslim is a formidable adversary. He is the embodiment of a
primordial chaotic wildness in its purest form. He is what has been diluted and is
latent—to invoke the racialized descriptive language of the novel—in the local
Palestinian Arab peasants, whom he views as “the result of a mixture between
the weak-hearted Syrian and the bland Levantine” (368). ⁹

⁹ The supposed ‘racial’ makeup of the Palestinian Arab peasants was a source of
controversy for Arab and Jewish writers who weighed in on the developing
political tensions in Palestine. See the Introduction of this study for David Ben-
Gurion’s early conviction, for instance, that the Palestinian fellahin were largely of
Jewish blood, proto-Zionists who were so attached the land that they converted
to Islam rather than abandon the soil. George Antonius, supporting the
Palestinian cause in The Arab Awakening writes as late as 1938 that the
Palestinians have a particularly high measure of “Arab stock”: “namely, the
spread of the Arabic language and the infiltration of the Arab stock, differed both
in range and in reach [throughout the Muslim world]. . . . Of the countries lying
on the fringe of the Arabian Peninsula, the portions now known as Palestine and
Transjordan received and absorbed the largest proportion of Arab stock, and
Egypt the smallest, while Syria and Iraq occupy a midway position.” Antonius
adds, “In a brilliant essay published in the Revue du Monde Musulman, Vol LVII
(1924), Professor Louis Massignon estimates that nearly two-thirds of the settled
Moslem population of Palestine is of original Arab stock. In Transjordan, the
percentage is still higher.” Antonius pushes the idea of Palestine being high in
The third time we meet Neḥemke is when Haj Yusuf rapes her. Yet before Meir can throw himself into revenging the rape, he must encounter the Salomé-esque Tsiporah. The journey Meir takes from Tsiporah to Haj Yusuf has some unexpected and far-reaching twists. If Neḥemke is the Jewish-female-hauntingly-rapable, Tsiporah is the Jewish-female-monstrously-powerful. Like Naomi in Arieli’s drama, Tsiporah is an example of the masculine woman who so troubles early Zionist writers. Tsiporah, who informs Meir that as a child she wished to be a boy (384), is a woman whose dynamism and sexual avariciousness exceeds that of her male partner. The ‘sin’ that Meir commits with Tsiporah is that he lets himself be seduced by her.

While this way of framing Meir’s misstep may sound like an excuse for his behavior (or alternatively, like a condemnation of the victim, depending on whether one emphasizes his sexual aggression in the incident or not), it has an important plot function in terms of how it positions him vis-à-vis an attacker. Meir ‘Arab stock’ in order to forward the argument in his book that the country should be in the hands of the Arabs, not the Zionists. As for Reuveni in Devastation, Haj Yusuf’s low opinion of the Palestinian peasants as “the result of a mixture between the weak-hearted Syrian and the bland Levantine”—in other words, as a kind of enfeebled, ‘mixed-breed’ of poor racial stock (to use the discourse of contemporary anthropology of the era)—helps to explain why, plot-wise, it is Haj Yusuf and not some ‘lowly’ Palestinian peasant whom Meir ultimately must battle. Since Meir wrestles with the latent sexual savagery in himself, the “weak-hearted” and “bland” fellah is insufficiently virile to torment him the way that Haj Yusuf does.
is utterly out of his league with Tziporah, a woman totally in control of her sexuality who moves easily from lesbian flirting to being the kept woman of a wealthy Arab man. As Ellen Rooney points out in her analysis of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, “the seductive woman remains an enormously threatening figure,” “an aggressor *provocateur*, paradoxically active,” “an overpowering temptress / temptation, a species of rapist.” Indeed, the “problematics of seduction,” writes Rooney, “remain mired in an ambiguity where complicity is a crucial but elusive term”; to focus exclusively on the hazy issue of consent is to lose the complexity of the role of agency in the encounter (93).

Tziporah seduces Meir because she is bored, because she has some extra free time on her hands, because she has no doubt that “from just one word that comes out of her mouth” she can make him lose his mind (Reuveni 384). Moreover, Tziporah knows that Meir is in dire need of money. She manipulates this need to a hilt, indicating a willingness to give him a small fortune in exchange for his compliance. She reaches deep into Meir’s pants pocket for his wallet and it is already clear that his body has gotten the better of him: “Her face reddened and a dry laugh escaped from her throat. ‘One moment—I just need to change my dress!’” He has made the major error of giving in to his lust and following her
back to her apartment, but now any remaining hesitation or resistance on his part cannot oppose her touch. Reuveni details,

His “I,” that which usually considers and weighs consequences, that which is responsible for concepts like “permitted” and “forbidden”—suddenly was removed from its elevated spot, cancelled out as if it never was, and a wild strength bursting forth from unfathomable depths usurped its place, and this strength was also him, Meir Funk, but another “him,” different from usual. Meir jumped and put his knee on the couch. The young woman struggled, pushed him away, laughed and shuddered – all this only heightening the acuteness of the stimulation and the completeness of the satisfaction. (386)

Meir is unable to mount any resistance to his own desire as stimulated by Tsiporah, to such an extent that he separates himself from his “usual” self and loses a sense of right and wrong. His encounter with his seducer is a wrestling match in which she struggles, pushes him away, shudders, and the struggle feeds his sexual appetite. Who gets the better of whom is elusive. It is because Reuveni at least partially paints Meir as the victim of Tsiporah’s calculated sexual manipulation that Meir’s battle to revenge the rape of Neḥemke takes on a
heightened resonance. Meir must triumph over the violations of both Neḥemke’s body and of his own by tapping into the very same overpowering virile forces that characterize Tsiporah and that she brings out in him in a particularly traumatic way.

When Meir leaves Tsiporah’s apartment and stumbles upon Haj Yusuf crouching in the shadows, the Jew once again releases his unruly strength—but this time for a proper cause. “Thief, rapist!,” Meir cries out as he finally gives Haj Yusuf his due: “Where are the wild blows of his hard fists hitting? Is he striking [the Haj] on his head, his chest, his neck? Grabbing his throat was a wild sensation, insane, blind, the sensation of the fingers themselves, without the participation of perception. Oh—Oh...” (394, italics in orig.). It is language strikingly similar to Meir’s sexual climaxes earlier in the novel. Here Meir prevails against Haj Yusuf not by clamping down on his own virility, but rather by finally using his virility well.

When Meir moves from the nadir of committing adultery with Tsiporah to the zenith of redirecting himself productively to kill Haj Yusuf in revenge for the rape of Neḥemke, he channels what had been his self-defeating disorderly virility into his greatest strength. In doing so, he enacts a major transformation in the Jewish rape literature corpus of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century,
becoming the protagonist who manages to track down a perpetrator, punish him for his crime, and ensure that he will not strike again. Meir’s victory is significant given the legacy of the cowering men in Bialik’s “In the City of Slaughter,” of the character David who abandons a young Jewish woman to the hungry mob in Steinberg’s “Dream,” of the title character in Kabak’s novel Daniel Shafranov who worries that he could not fire a gun if pogromists were to attack his wife and child, of the crazed speaker in Lamed Shapiro’s “The Cross” who takes revenge on a Christian female friend instead of on the men responsible for the rape of his mother. Yet is Meir’s success so clear cut?

Obsessive Erasure: Rape and the Search for Jewish Women’s Voices

Ruth Karton-Blum in her essay on women in Reuveni’s Unto Jerusalem overlooks little Neḥemke. However, since Reuveni builds his trilogy upon what Dan Miron calls a “symphonic system” (Miron 1992, 150), even the smallest notes have their place. They are crucial to the tonal qualities and rhythmic unfolding of the narrative, both among the three novels and within each novel. Without Neḥemke, Meir would arguably not have a story that warrants telling.

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10 See Karton-Blum (Israel, 1992), 207-213.
Make no mistake, though: *Devastation* is Meir’s story, it is not Neḥemke’s. On this point Reuveni does not depart from the rape-writing tradition to which his work responds. As atypical and momentous as Meir’s trajectory is, Neḥemke’s is disturbingly similar to so many of her female counterparts. Neḥemke is a character who makes us recognize her “rapability” (to use Higgins and Silver’s term), who requires readers to read for rape in a way that “involves listening not only to who speaks and in what circumstances, but who does not speak and why” (2-3). Rape in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish literature—as in many literatures—is often structured upon hints, requiring the reader put two and two together, to fill in gaps, to focus on the unstated as much as on the author’s words. Rarely can the reader arrive at a stable, definitive conclusion that a rape actually happened, with a beginning, middle, and end, involving specific people at a specific time. Neḥemke’s entire rape scene in the novel is as follows:

She [Neḥemke] did not hear his [Haj Yusuf’s] voice. She merely sensed that he is dragging her forcefully away from the houses. A terror was discharged onto her—an enormous bodily terror. She began to slip through his grasp and struggled wildly with him and raised her voice in a weird howl, the howl of a dog. . . . [He] carried
her to his hideout—like the primordial man of the forest who stole a girl from among those of another tribe—and pushed her face to his chest so that she would not be able to emit a sound. (Reuveni 371)

Afterward (after what, really?), Neḥemke is bedridden for days, banging her head repeatedly against a wall. When she finally begins to move about again, fear pervades her steps. Just as one never learns directly from the abandoned woman in Steinberg’s “Dream” or the women in Bialik’s “In the City of Slaughter,” never catches anything but silence about the speaker’s sister in David Frishman’s “Daniel in the Lion’s Den,” never hears from the speaker’s mother or from Mina in Lamed Shapiro’s “The Cross,” never gets the perspective of Menahem’s wife Ettel in Shapiro’s “The Jewish Regime,” never finds out details from Sarah’s aunt in Kabak’s Alone, and never gathers from Zinah why her hair is so disheveled in Zalman Shneour’s “On the Banks of the Dniester” – Neḥemke is in the company of fundamentally voiceless raped (or probably raped) women.¹¹

As an abduction survivor Neḥemke is dead, for all intents and purposes.

¹¹ A few notes on selected texts from this list: Frishman’s poem (1903), one of the earliest responses to Kishinev in Hebrew belles lettres—published only two months after the violence—features a speaker who describes the mangled, murdered bodies of his father, mother, and brother. Yet when it comes to his sister, the speaker insists upon silence: “As for my sister / do not ask me about
Neḥemke is deaf and dumb. She has no conventional language. She cannot narrate her own story. To borrow from Disability Studies theorist Leonard Kreigel, she is one who lives in a world that is “strange and dark […T]he creature who has been deprived of (her) ability to create a self” (qtd. in Shakespeare 285). Reuveni renders her disability as a weird animalistic asexuality. Even before she is raped, she is like the women in Bialik’s “In the City of Slaughter” who are, paradoxically, permanently sacred and permanently scarred (their bodies are “holy” while “their lives made loath / forever” (Bialik 3)). Haj Yusuf’s lust for Neḥemke is perverse because the very girl who is a “pathetic creature” in Meir’s eyes is, in Haj Yusuf’s, a young woman of undeniable sensual appeal (Reuveni 241). Haj Yusuf blatantly unsettles the idea that Neḥemke should remain distant and untouched because she is—in all respects of the word—awful. Haj Yusuf sees in her eyes “a pale light, like the light of a very distant star” surrounded by

her / for I will not say a word. / If only the sun in the sky had been extinguished / and darkness ruled the universe / so no man could see / how my face reddened because of the disgrace on my father’s house!” (127-128). The speaker’s mother in “The Cross” is unique in that she obviously chooses silence as a form of rebellion against her attackers. However, readers nevertheless do not read about the rape from her point of view, but rather, from the male narrator’s. In Zalman Shneour’s “On the Banks of the Dniester,” when the women disembark from the ferry, one mentions that before agreeing to take the Jews aboard, the non-Jewish hooligans demanded not only an exorbitant fare, but something else in addition: “We also had to thank them for their generosity,” she says (106). How exactly they were supposed to show proper thanks is left to the reader’s imagination.
darkness. It is the assumption of her diminished faculties and her distance-
brought-close that make her such a pornographic turn-on to Haj Yusuf (Reuveni
370). When Meir gazes at Neḥemke there is almost no physical description of
her body, whereas when Haj Yusuf peers into her window, she is naked, her
arms “curvaceous”: “She lathers herself with coarse laundry soap, rubbing her
chest and her back, her entire—half-child-like—slight body, all the while making
abnormal sounds, non-human, that express the pleasure of her flesh” (370).12
Haj Yusuf is a menace on two accounts. Not only does he rape Neḥemke, but
also he acknowledges her ability to experience a monstrous and “abnormal”
physical pleasure in the first place.

There is a disturbing inevitability and even suitability of the rape in

Devastation. As with the Arab horseman, the Arab peasant boy, and Haj Yusuf,

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12 That Meir sees Neḥemke’s eyes as “lightning” (Reuveni 241) while Haj Yusuf
sees them more as “a distant star” contributes to the hierarchy of wildness
Reuveni establishes in the novel; it is because Haj Yusuf is so utterly
untamed/untamable compared to Meir that the intensity of Neḥemke’s rawnness is
less glaring to him than it is to Meir. Also, Dalia Manor notes that the
nude/prostitute female bather as erotic and primitive (and generally Arab) is a
theme in Nahum Gutman’s paintings and sketches of the 1920s (see, for
instance, his “Woman in a Pool”) (London, 2005), 156-8. Manor suggests both
the nudes of Renoir and literary scenes such as those of the night bather from
Moshe Smilansky’s short story “Humadi’s Vengeance” as possible sources for
Gutman’s work. On Gutman, the erotic gaze, and the theme of rape see also
Bilsky and Verbin (2002), as well as the final chapter of this dissertation.
Neḥemke is a solitary, elusive figure whose personal background and family roots are obscure. She is an orphan, an adopted stray child. She is a blend of the human and non-human, a creature who speaks a curious indecipherable language. While the Arab horseman leaves Manya and Tziperovitch bewildered with his guttural voice (a “shrieking, throaty voice”), Neḥemke’s voice strikes Meir as strange: “It seems to him, as if his ear perceives the odd barking and howling sounds with which the girl answers him” (241). Similarly, Reuveni describes Haj Yusuf as being “like a dog” (329). She bears a striking number of traits associated with the mythic Arab and Muslim men in the trilogy. In other words, she is a fitting mate for her rapist. She is untamed and uncultivated. She possesses that very rappiness which, in a more compartmentalized (civilized, human) translation makes Meir the man that he is.

That Neḥemke is disabled enables Reuveni to cast her both as defenseless and as expendable. As poor quality ‘human material’ she is unfit to parent a child. Nor does she know a trade that would enable her to perform any kind of work besides being an errand-girl for the elderly woman who has taken her in, and it is unlikely that Neḥemke could find or adjust easily to another benefactor. She is a character who has no future. She is female enough to be raped, but not female enough to be a mother or a wife. Hence Neḥemke, by
virtue of being merely acted upon, is uniquely positioned in the narrative to be the catalyst for the unfolding of events that lead to Meir’s transformation.

Once the rape of Neḥemke occurs, Meir takes matters into his own hands because the Ottoman authorities have failed to act and the Jewish community has failed to demand that they do so. Meir grumbles, bitterly: “A nation born of slavery…with the spirit-of-slaves for its eternal inheritance…” (394). He interprets the rape of Neḥemke principally as an affront to Jewish national honor; it is not that Haj Yusuf has done this to her, it is that he has done this to them. Meir must usher in a new era for the nation, for Jerusalem, and for himself as an individual all at the same time. Reuveni makes clear that Haj Yusuf is one of a type, an example of an entire segment of the population dedicated to violence and easily roused into fanaticism. There are other Haj Yusufs waiting in the wings (367).

Conclusion

One cannot overstate the stakes in Reuveni’s classic foundational narrative of Zionist Jerusalem. It is a narrative anchored in a portentous rape story, appearing just a handful of years before the violence of 1929 and 1936-39. This
study began with an inquiry into rape as overdetermined in the Jewish late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, particularly given the backdrop of the pogrom legacy. God forbid that Ali carry off Arieli’s Naomi into the wilderness of Palestine—she lashes out at him like a madwoman. There is hell to pay when Haj Yusuf grabs Reveni’s Neḥemke in the middle of the night—Meir tracks him down mercilessly.

Yet one may conclude that Arieli and Reveni have instigated a rather ingenious switch: Arieli’s Naomi and Reveni’s Tsiporah (even, perhaps, Reveni’s animalistic Neḥemke, as well) represent a kind of intermediate step which the Jewish man, if he is to have any hope of surviving and thriving in his efforts to create new collective Jewish life in Palestine, must encounter along his high-stakes journey. The woman thus functions as a kind of gateway through which the Jewish man must pass, a wily hydra who must be dealt with to ready the Jewish man for his ultimate battle. He cannot triumph in his confrontation with the man of the East without first struggling with, and absorbing, something of the Jewish woman’s terrifying vitality. Any hope of restoration of the right balance for the Zionist man’s virility (not too enervated, not too barbaric) is conditional upon him getting past the stumbling block that the Jewish scary-strong woman poses for him. Metaphorically speaking, the Jewish man must
wrestle with her, penetrate her, conquer her, take from her, and it is this process, Arieli and Reuveni suggest, that holds the key to the future of the Arab-Zionist conflict. It is an extraordinarily phallic contouring of the Arab Question.
Beautiful, extraordinarily beautiful are you, Jewish maiden:  
Your black eyes—shining stars!  
On your head, curls—crested like waves,  
You are the splendor of youth, song of songs!  
But alas, Jewish maiden  
To us you are a stranger!

For you sign “Juliet” falsely  
Whereas your name in the Holy Tongue is Rivka or Sarah!  
Your speech: “que,” “qui,” “pardon” and “merci”  
It is a foreign language and alien to your people.  
Thus, Jewish maiden  
To us you are a stranger!

[Your betrothed] is not devoid of opinions, he who has sidelocks,  
Though indeed his modest dress is long,  
He is not alien to his people and he feels their sorrow  
It is this that is the cloud on his face.  
But alas, Jewish maiden  
To him, too, you are a stranger!

--“To a Jewish Maiden, and She is Estranged” (Heb.) by Y.L. Peretz
The central ‘sin’ committed by Jewish women in terms of the Arab Question is that they too easily occupy liminal intercommunal space and have the propensity to leave the Jewish fold. In the three short stories that are the focus of this chapter—L.A. Arieli’s “Crossing the Styx” (1914), Zalmen Brokhes’ “In the Shadow of the Hermon” (1920), and Yitzhak Shami’s “Father and His Daughters” (1923/4)—young women improperly cross over into forbidden foreign space. Jewish authors writing on the Arab Question do not invent this focus on the Jewish maiden’s troublesome liminality; Arieli, Brokhes, and Shami each take up at least one of the ‘big three’ sins committed by Jewish women that had already been identified by intellectuals of modern Jewish discourses even prior to the rise of Zionism: Jewish women’s prostitution, conversion, and attraction to non-Jewish men. The stories thus translate the problem of Jewish femininity into the context of Zionist Palestine and use it as a springboard for exploring the Arab Question.

In this translation process, each of the three writers—who, notably, are by no means uniform in their attitudes toward the Arabs—include in their stories rather graphic depictions of Jewish domestic violence. The violence usually takes the form of fathers attacking transgressive daughters. Why scenes of domestic violence? First, these male authors utilize the chaotic reactions of
father characters to vent anxieties about how Jewish men can and should respond to the era’s destabilizing Jewish maidens, all the while portraying the women in a sympathetic pro-reform light. Second, the authors suggest that the family, women’s sexual preferences, and male-female relations in the yishuv are make-or-break issues that Jews cannot afford to ignore as they imagine their future. Finally, domestic violence plots allow the authors to refract concerns about Jewish powerlessness in an Arab-majority environment through instances of Jew-on-Jew violence, using the Arabs as a measuring stick for Jewish men’s failures of self-control. Each story features a concern about the Arab male who lusts after the Jewish female, however, but is not the lascivious Arab who holds the focus of the narrative. Clearly the potential for the Arab to erupt in a fit of passion constantly haunts these stories. However, it is the Jewish male characters, keenly aware of their minority status amidst their Arab neighbors, whom the authors most condemn for improperly using the power they do have when they lash out at women. By no means are the Jewish men featured in these three stories feeble-bodied; it is their unfortunate sense of judgment, rather than any physical defect, that renders them utterly incapable of reacting effectively to the messes created by their daughters.
To begin examining these three short stories in greater detail, it is instructive to note that, as Flora Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis discuss in their study on nationalism, women often function “as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups” (qtd. in Smith 1998, 207). Yet one must be cautious in emphasizing just how much Jewish women’s liminality vis-à-vis the Arabs haunts the imaginations of early Zionist writers, for the question arises: what about Jewish men’s liminality? The Arab Question inherits from writers such as Bialik, Abromovitsh, Berdyczewski, and Peretz, for instance, a concern about men who leave the *beit midrash* (house of study) for the world of secular education, are “Frenchified” in the eyes of the traditional Jew, are attracted to non-Jewish women, or convert to Christianity. The issue of intercommunal liminality for modern Jewish letters is thus not only a problem of Jewish femininity. Take, for instance, the issue of Jews who pursue romantic relationships with non-Jews. Dan Miron in *Founding Mothers, Stepsisters* highlights that the Jewish man’s fin-de-siècle literary sexual transgression—for instance, in M.Y. Berdyczewski’s “*Maḥanayim*” (“Two Camps”)—is in fact, unlike similar transgressions by women, “a national symbolic drama par excellence”:
The lack of sexual self-confidence of the young Jewish man is put forth in the literature of the beginning of the century as a spiritual and cultural problem at the essence of Jewish historical experience in its attempt to adapt itself to the modern world, whereas the problems of sexual communication of the young Jewish woman are at most the “sociological” result of certain conditions of education. Young Jewish men who are sexually enticed are identified with the experiences of the biblical Joseph, the Greek Oedipus, with the rejected Uriel Acosta and Spinoza; but the many Jewish women who are enticed . . . are, in objective sociological terms, servants who are enticed or poor women who could not get strong tough men without giving out sexual favors. *In personal / subjective terms [these women] are devoid of individual life; their trial is without any analogous glory or historical importance,* and their expected suicide does not say anything about the tragic future of the nation and the expected failure of Jewish culture. . . . There is a deep and essential difference between this representative social quality . . . which does not penetrate the subjective gist of the feminine experience and does not expand its
significance in the eyes of the woman experiencing it, and
between the national-historical symbolism which forms the
subjective gist of the masculine experience and transforms it from
something in and of itself into a national drama with great
proportions. (67-8, emphasis added)

Miron’s observation that women’s subjectivity is unmistakably partial or absent in
the largely male-authored literature of the era undoubtedly rings true, given the
nation/self metonymic continuum that runs through much of early Hebrew prose
impacted by the logic of male experiences in Hebrew lyric poetry. Yet for the
present discussion on the Arab Question in early Zionism, I wish to decouple the
link Miron makes between the sociological and the subjective in terms of national
import. In the three stories by Arieli, Brokhes, and Shami, female characters
indeed lack a fully-fleshed out interiority and their fates run a course certainly
determined by “sociological” factors related to education and economic status.
The pain and ruptures they experience are not “an organic part of the ‘grief of the
nation’” (Miron 67, italics added). However, the women’s trials regarding
communication with men as exemplified in the following three stories have
historical import that goes well beyond the personal. Their stories do say
something about the tragic future of the nation. Their tales are a wake-up call
about the expected failure of Jewish culture in Palestine unless a breakthrough in male-female relations can be found. Perhaps it is because fin-de-siècle Jewish letters absorb Jewish men’s interior explorations of liminality into the experience of the nation as a whole—men’s experiments in leaving the fold are troubling and deeply felt but ultimately digestible in the national journey of awakening and renaissance—that Jewish women’s liminality is particularly stark in its indigestible and mysterious character for the mostly male contributors to the early Zionist literary republic. In the first few decades of Zionism women accounted for a fraction of the Jewish population, and the Zionist leadership increasingly fixated upon the Arab/Jewish population ratio as a source of impending crisis; hence in the Palestine context, the idea that Jewish women could slip away assumed national repercussions central to the health of the nation, even if nevertheless not synonymous with the subjective experience of the nation itself.

Nurith Govrin makes the vital observation that the most significant phenomenon that characterizes Jewish writing on the Arab Question is how authors turn the Arab Question into a Jewish Question. In other words, stories about the Arabs function as commentaries on Jewish identity (2002, 278). I wish to emphasize how the stories by Arieli, Brokhes, and Shami employ Arab culture
as a framing mechanism, turning inward to critique Jewish men’s treatment of Jewish women.¹

As William R. Handley writes, the first few decades of twentieth-century American frontier literature usher in a scenario in which “‘civilized’ violence comes home in all senses of the word—among family members, best friends, and members of the same race” (18). The home is not a place of peace and tranquility for the family that functions as a reflection of broader communal problems. Handley continues, “In these imagined relationships, women figure often . . . as both the repository of ideals and the sacrificial victims” (21). I suggest that Jewish writers contributing to early Zionist culture create female characters who are “the repository of ideals” and “sacrificial victims” but who also transgress in ways dangerous to the future of the Zionist settlement efforts. Something is clearly rotten in the state of the Jewish family.

Domestic violence certainly is a theme that crops up in modern Jewish writing well before Arieli, Brokhes, and Shami infuse it into the Arab Question context. In fact, it is not only women who are victims in domestic abuse

¹ Govrin lists S. Yizhar and Amos Oz as two primary examples of this internalization process. I am suggesting that the internalization process takes place well before Yizhar, who started publishing in the late 1930s, and Oz, whose literary career took off over a decade after the birth of the state of Israel. I am further suggesting that gender is a key part of the equation, a factor that Govrin does not mention.
scenarios of nineteenth-century Hebrew and Yiddish literature; in texts such as S.Y. Abromovitsh’s *The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third* (1878 in Yiddish and 1896-7 in Hebrew) and Y.L. Peretz’ “A Woman’s Rage” (1893 in Yiddish, based on an earlier story he published in Hebrew in 1890) it is actually the *man* who fears his wife’s wrath--verbal and/or physical abuse. Yet in the three stories on the Arab Question considered in this chapter, it is the framing mechanism of Arab male aggression as directed at women which then makes the comparison of Jewish male aggression against women at home an important one.

In her well-known essay “Manifest Domesticity,” Amy Kaplan highlights the key role that the home plays for nineteenth-century American literature in establishing what is foreign to the emerging nation. “The idea of [the foreign] depends on the sense of the nation as a domestic space imbued with a sense of at-homeness, in contrast to an external world perceived as alien and threatening,” she writes. “The conditions of domesticity often become markers that distinguish civilization from savagery” (581-2). One can identify such a desire for the walls of the Jewish home to be the distinguishing marker between civilization and savagery in Martin Buber’s early Zionist writing on women. In 1901 he wrote in *Die Welt* that while women in Biblical, Talmudic, and even
ghetto life were paragons of virtue and national strength, in modern times it is
women who are primarily responsible for the disaster of assimilation:

Women, who adapted themselves most easily to their environment
and adopted its ways, participated in a most lively manner in the
evolving fanaticism of assimilation. [...] The tight family organization
in which the life force of our people rested disintegrated in the face
of the new; not only Jewish customs were lost, but the Jewish
home, loyalty, and love as well. [...] Jewish] national revival can only
originate with the Jewish woman. [...] Imagine this new house—
Jewish art on the walls, Jewish books on the table, the practices of
meaningful Jewish customs. Then the family will once more collect
the quiet strength that easily overcomes anything threatening.

(Buber 1999, 114-116)

By diagnosing Jewish femininity as the primary culprit in Jewish assimilation—
because women more naturally adapt themselves to that which is foreign—Buber
argues that it is in women that the national revival will originate. Women have
the potential to restore glory to the Jewish home. It is his conviction that through
women’s efforts the family “easily overcomes anything threatening.”
Yet in the three stories by Arieli, Brokhes, and Shami, there is no
stable “sense of at-homeness” (to use Amy Kaplan’s phrase) in the domestic
sphere, and the contrast with the alien external world is not so clear-cut. With
the savage specter of the Arab male as a constant, these authors characterize
the mistreatment of Jewish womenfolk in Palestine as no true alternative to those
gender relations that smack of the diaspora. In drawing a parallel between Arab
outbursts and ones enacted by ‘old style’ Jews, Brokhes, Arieli, and Shami
hammer a wedge between ideals for new Jewish life in Palestine and the model
of Arab as potential folk-emulation source. Meanwhile, the New Woman
continues to leave men bewildered with her ‘big three’ intercultural liminal
maneuverings: conversion, attraction to non-Jewish men, and prostitution.

Jewish Women’s Liminality, Issue #1: Conversion in L.A. Arieli’s “Crossing the
Styx”

In 1913, the respected educator Shlomo Shiller wrote to the head of the
Teachers’ Union in Jaffa about L.A. Arieli, a Ukrainian-born writer who had
served in the Russian army before fleeing to Palestine in 1908: “It would be
worthwhile to send to Mr. L.A. Arieli [your] lecture on the battle against the
Mission and the parents who send their children to the goyim for education, for
he has fully immersed himself in this battle” (qtd. in Arieli 196). The presence of missionary schools in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Palestine was a cause of deep concern for Zionists.

Margalit Shilo notes that the Hebrew press reported prior to World War I that Jewish girls exceeded the population of Jewish boys attending the Palestinian missionary schools (2005, 207). The missionary schools of choice for the hundreds of Jewish female attendees were the Protestant School of the London Society, the Catholic San Joseph School, and the Sisters of Zion School, which offered cheaper and more rigorous educations than the Jewish schools. Moreover, almost one-quarter of Jewish girls in attendance at these mission schools at the turn of the century converted to Christianity (Argov 191). Missions targeted girls and women in their charitable work for a number of reasons: Jewish families were more permissive about letting their girls than their boys receive a non-Jewish education (Shilo 2005, 207), females were thought to be instigators of transformation in impoverished societies (203), the early marriage age of local Jewish girls was a practice which church workers saw as dangerous to young women and wanted to change (Perry 183), and female missionaries found personal pleasure and meaning by creating motherly relationships toward their female charges (Melman 203).
It is thus no surprise that when L.A. Arieli—a writer active in the transnational Jewish literary republic of the early twentieth-century—pens a story about the threat of Jewish conversion in Palestine, his principal focus is on an adolescent impoverished girl. Her name: Freydl. The story: “Crossing the Styx,” originally published in 1914 in the New York Hebrew journal *Ha-toren* (“The Mast”).

The idea of religion being lost among Jewish females—either through assimilation or conversion—was a horror that captivated the imaginations of Jewish activists of the fin-de-siècle in both Western and Eastern Europe. As Paula Hyman points out, Western European Jewish writers blamed women for the phenomenon of assimilation in Jewish communities, when actually it was men who tended to assimilate more often and in more radical ways (Hyman 22 and 48). Model bourgeois women were supposed to be the carriers of tradition, yet given the value put on men’s learning, such women were not offered an extensive formal religious education. London’s *Jewish Chronicle* in 1875 notes,

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2 Arieli, L.A. “Crossing the Styx.” *Ha-toren*, Jan.-June 1914, 158-171. All citations to the text are from *Kitve L.A. Arieli* (New York, 1999), 197-208, in which the title of the story is “Tsarot” (“Troubles”). Arieli reworked “Crossing the Styx” into another story that he then published in 1916, “Bi-yemot ha-geshamim” (“In the Days of the Rains”). However, the latter story falls outside the scope of this chapter.
for instance, “[P]ossibly there is no feature of the age more dangerous or more distressing than the growing irreligion of women” (qtd. in Hyman 46).

Tensions over whether women were retaining enough ‘Jewishness’ were not only a source of discomfort for Western European Jews. As Iris Parush notes, some Eastern European maskilim recognized that the fact that Jewish women read more translated literature than did Jewish men made the women potential “agents of social change” who could infuse Jewish culture with fresh, positive elements (66 and 70), yet writers such as Y. L. Peretz nevertheless laments in 1887: “alas, Jewish maiden, to us you are a stranger!” Indeed, this Hebrew poem “To a Jewish Maiden, and She is Estranged” (excerpted at the opening of this chapter) sets up a sharp dichotomy between the Jewish maiden and the religiously learned Jewish man. Only he “is not alien to his people and he feels their sorrow.”

The line between women’s attraction to foreign cultures and women’s conversion could seem dangerously thin, as articulated in a 1913 pamphlet from the Vilna girls’ school Yehudiyah:

Once the Jewish daughter ceaselessly absorbed [Jewish] culture from the day of her birth. She was taught no Torah, but the spirit of the Torah already soared over her cradle. In our times, a girl
receives no knowledge at all of Yiddishkayt ["Jewishness"]. The first song that she hears is not a Jewish one; the first letter she learns in not from “alef-beis”; the first little story she reads is of foreign life in a foreign tongue. . . . Years go by. The girl becomes ever more distanced from her people, from its culture, from its traditions, from its pride in its past, from its concerns in the present, from its hopes for the future. . . . And this is the result of such an education: the mediocre woman either heads toward apostasy...or she arranges her house in a non-Jewish way and yearns her whole life after foreign peoples. (qtd. in Hyman 50)

Were women’s conversion patterns truly of alarming proportions in the Ashkenazi world? In Germany there was certainly a growing trend of women’s apostasy: between 1873 and 1882 only 7% of all Jewish converts were women, while in 1908 the number was up to 37% and in 1912 it was at 40% (Hyman 20). As for Russia, Michael Stanislawski has suggested based on a small available sample of archival materials that women, the young, and the impoverished made up large proportions of Russian Jewish converts, whose numbers overall grew in the late 1880s and 1890s, fell in 1905-6, and then steeply rose again between 1907-1917 (Stanislawski 1987, 191). As recorded in Stanislawski’s sample, only
among the women are there examples of Jews who appeared to convert out of true belief (198). The proportion of female converts as compared to male converts is significant: 0% in the 1830s, 12% in the 1840s, 33.3% in the 1850s, 57% in the 1860s, 54% in the 1870s, 53% in the 1890s, and 65% from 1900-1911. None of the Jewish women signed their conversion documents in Hebrew. Stanislawski concludes: “a tantalizing hypothesis does assert itself: that as Russian-Jewish society underwent the dramatic revolutions of the nineteenth-century, its female members were less able successfully to adjust to the new social, economic, political, and cultural conditions than their brothers, husbands, and sons; therefore, more women than men made their way to the baptismal font” (200).

Thus a streak of ‘conversion panic’ vis-à-vis Jewish women—whether reflected in the transnational Jewish literary republic or on the local Palestinian scene—comprises the cultural context in which L.A. Arieli composes his short story, set during the First Aliyah. The Christian missionary school that the character Freydl attends is her single source of pleasure. Whereas Freydl’s brother is in the habit of fulfilling the Jewish male’s responsibilities of daily Hebrew prayer and prays with deep fervor, Freydl does not have this ‘fence’ of male religious obligation to keep her inside the Jewish fold. Arieli writes that
Freydl’s brother, also a student at the mission school, “was not interested in the holy studies and his heart was not captivated by the prayers and praises sung by the choir as was his sister’s heart” (Arieli 198-199). Freydl excels as she rehearses the role of Mary in which (unbeknownst to her parents) she has been cast to play in the school’s Easter drama “Jesus’ Crucifixion and His Rise from the Dead.” She loves the presents she receives from the school’s nun—an apron with flowers in the shape of crosses and a red hair ribbon she readily ties in the shape of a cross.

The missionary school is Freydl’s only place of respite away from her abusive home. She is accustomed to recognizing the signs of an impending explosion between her father Yonah Papirshnayder and her mother, Alte-Leah. The father’s family name is apt—when he gets angry, he slices through his wife and children like a “paper cutter” with emotionally abusive words (including the constant threat to leave his wife an agunah, a woman ineligible for marriage because she has not obtained a proper divorce according to halakhah). Once, Arieli tells his readers, Yonah “was almost ready to slap [Alte-Leah] across her cheek but he restrained himself . . . and instead with a burst of anger threw a dirty dish . . . and broke it” (201). Alte-Leah’s face is permanently scarred. Arieli laconically tells his readers that the disfigurement is due to a carbolic acid spill
but he does not elaborate upon the circumstances that caused the spill, leaving open the possibility that somehow domestic violence was an exacerbating factor in the injury. Alte-Leah’s face is a constant reminder of unspeakable dread. In the darkness, “the light spot on her cheek appeared to be like a kind of deep hole that some insatiably hungry mice with their teeth had gnawed and bored into her” (199). The image is not unlike the jagged light-to-dark cavity in the painting “Isle of the Dead” (Fig. 1) by Arnold Böcklin, the artist to whom Arieli refers later in the story (206 and 208):

![Isle of the Dead](image)

**Fig. 1.** Arnold Böcklin, “Isle of the Dead,” 1880

Freydl’s greatest wish is to take her mother and siblings away from the dread of their home and into the welcoming arms of Miss Pitcher, the nun who is her teacher at the local mission. “We must escape”—she thought: Miss Pitcher
awhile back said that she would help me. We must escape. . . And he—evil, cruel, ugly—he will stay here, alone” (Arieli 204).

Yonah Papirshnayder is a Russian immigrant shopkeeper. His store is on the main street of an unnamed Arab town in which he and his family are the only Jews.3 The closest population center is Jerusalem and there is a Zionist agricultural settlement nearby with which he has virtually no contact. Yonah struggles to stay afloat in his business. He is forced to sell to the local Arabs on credit because they threaten him if he refuses. He has to be careful about where and when he walks outside, for at any time there may be a dead body in the street: “If the corpse is an Arab the mob would cast an evil eye toward the Hebrew settlement . . . and the danger of being mortally beaten hovers over his head, whereas if the murdered person is a Jew [Yonah] could not stand to witness with his own eyes how the young Arabs would torture the corpse” (198).

Yonah is a Jew in Palestine just as Zionism is in its very infancy, an immigrant without any Jewish support network, a lonely man on the sidelines as Hebrew agricultural efforts are beginning to take shape.

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3 Arieli’s choice to set a lone Jewish family in the middle of an Arab village indicates the extent to which he projects onto the Palestinian landscape the dynamics of Ashkenazi Russia and Eastern Europe. In contrast, for instance, to the stories of Tevye the Dairyman (who had to trek into town just to attend a minyan), in the yishuv it was largely unheard of for a Jewish family to live alone amidst non-Jews.
Yonah’s aggression against his family seems moderate only when put into perspective against the violence of the Arabs who surround the Jewish family on all sides. Among the charges Arieli mounts against the Arabs: mothers abandon their babies to the mercy of swarming flies (197); children hit each other as they run around naked and parrot in broken English the “Father, Thou Art in Heaven” prayer they learn at the missionary school (197); Arab boys lust after the one Jewish girl in the town (200); the Arab guard expects a bribe to carry out his responsibilities (203); the neighbors watch with pleasure as Yonah beats Freydl (204); the Arabs who own a cart demand for an exorbitant price when Yonah at the end of the story needs to rent it for his baby’s funeral (206).

Yonah is an unsympathetic character, but that he has insight on two matters cannot be doubted: as he insults his children, he mentions that Freydl is vulnerable to conversion by the Christian nun and to rape by the local Arab boys (199). One night on the way home from rehearsal, Freydl’s classmate Khalil stalks her on the roadside and grabs her. When she resists his gropes, barely escaping rape, he screams, “Take this, Jewess!” and delivers mortal blows to the baby sibling she carries in her hands (201).

Freydl arrives home and tries to hide the damage to the baby, fearing her father’s wrath and hoping the child’s health will be restored. The next day, when
the local Arab guard visits Yonah’s store to tell him about the incident and to ask for a bribe, Yonah storms home and blames the victim, losing all self-control. He whips his daughter mercilessly because she is going to cost him money:

He began to bring the belt down with a tense hand, hard as iron, onto Freydl’s sleeping body, whipping her with a terrible cruelty.

[Her brother] and Alte-Leah awoke from their sleep at the sound of her screams . . . —but after a moment the woman wept bitterly:

--Hangman! Thief! Devour my flesh…drink my blood…ay ay ay…

[The girl screamed]—Father…dear…no more…not again…I will not go again…here, I brought…a red ribbon…a gift… (202-03)

Freydl tries to pacify her father the only way she knows how, by appealing to the only thing he cares about—material gain. She offers him the paltry gift of the red ribbon that the nun had given her to tie into the shape of a cross. Arieli here paints a terrible condemnation of the Jewish man who cannot control his anger and a pitiful picture of a young girl who has gone astray.

The baby dies. There is no future for these ruinous family relations at the dawn of Jewish settlement activity in Eretz Israel. A young pioneer enters the narrative and the focus on the story shifts to him. He represents those Jewish idealists for whom “the Land of Israel is beautiful and wondrous,” who believe
Arab customs to be heroic, “knightly” (205-06). He comes upon the household and tries to equate the family’s despair with the sublime gloom of Böcklin’s painting; yet ultimately he must give up his romanticism. “The grief of death grasped at the soul of the bespectacled pioneer, but it was not the grief spread across the paintings of Böcklin” (208), the story concludes. There is nothing transcendent about this family, a far cry from Buber’s aforementioned early Zionist vision about the restoration of Jewish womanhood, the restoration of the Jewish home, and the restoration of the Jewish nation: “the family will once more collect the quiet strength that easily overcomes anything threatening,” Buber had written. In contrast, violence here reigns from without and from within.

Jewish Women’s Liminality, Issue #2: The Jewess Attracted to the Non-Jew in Zalmen Brokhes’ “In the Shadow of the Hermon” (1920)

No reader could miss Zalmen Brokhes’ choice to open “In the Shadow of the Hermon” with the theme of Arab mistreatment of women:

One of the sheikhs had a wife with a beautiful face who was beautiful to look at, and the son of a second sheik desired her very much. . . . One day the sheik went [out hunting] and the man who
was in love with her stole into the sheikh’s tent. . . . The sheikh returned and his servant Abed told him everything that had happened. The sheikh grew very angry and his fury burned in him. . . [so] he raised himself up and removed his beautiful wife out behind the tents . . . and stabbed her with his spear. . . . From that day on a fierce battle was kindled, a blood-feud between the two tribes. (Brokhes 186)⁴

Such is the local anecdote recalled by an Arab in the presence of his Jewish and Arab buddies huddled around a campfire. A member of an outside group has gained access to the body of a sheik’s wife, and so she must be killed. This is the code of the wilderness. It may cause ongoing war but it does not utterly destabilize inter-group affiliations or the psychological health of the perpetrator. Just the opposite—the sheik’s attack on his wife is intended to restore his honor and restore proper boundaries between the two tribes.

This is a portentous opening to Brokhes’ story in which Rachel, a daughter of one of these Jewish men who sit around the campfire, will have sex with Salim. It is certainly not the only story in the modern Jewish canon in which a

⁴ All quotes from Brokhes’ short story are from its first Hebrew appearance in 1920. In Hebrew Brokhes’ name was written “Brakhot,” however, I refer to him as Brokhes in accordance with Yael Chaver’s study *What Must Be Forgotten* (Jerusalem, 2005).
young woman becomes intimately involved with a non-Jewish young man.

Aaron Halle Wolfssohn’s maskilic milestone “Hypocrisy and Light Mindedness” (Yiddish 1795, preceded by an earlier Hebrew version unpublished in his lifetime) features Yetkhen, whose romantic trysts with gentile suitors lead her to a brothel. Sholem Aleichem’s “Chava” (1905) is merely the most famous depiction of a Jewish woman gone astray when the beloved daughter of Tevye runs off with a Russian Christian writer. Yosef Ḥayim Brenner makes the point in a particularly succinct manner in a 1913 “Notebook” piece: “It is not alien to the nature of a Daughter of Israel to be attracted to a son of a foreign nation” (qtd. in Ben-Ezer 2001, 70), and by the mid-1930s the topic is still sufficiently raw for Yitzhak Dov Berkovitz to make it the crux of his novel Days of the Messiah (orig. Yiddish Meshiekhs tsaytn serialized in the Forverts starting in 1934-5, then published as a book in Hebrew in 1938). Moreover, the taboo has a long history. As Rachel Furst notes, interfaith sex is an anathema in the Talmud, for such liaisons may be a gateway to intermarriage, which in turn is a breach of norms that ranks a close second to the supreme horror of idolatry (5).

By the modern period, the taboo is as much about interracial sex as interfaith sex. Despite early musings about Jewish-Arab fusion as manifest in the fantasies of Yehoshua Rader-Feldman (“A Burden of Arabia,” 1907) and Ḥemda
Ben-Yehuda (“The Farmstead of the Sons of Rekhav,” 1903) the proposed
efficacy of Jewish-Arab interracial sexu al encounters never really gains traction
in modern Jewish literature. I borrow the framework of “interracial literature” from
Werner Sollors’ *Neither Black nor White yet Both*, in which Sollors takes as his
point of departure “works in all genres that represent love and family relations
involving black-white couples, biracial individuals, their descendants, and their
larger kin” (3). Interracial romances in early Zionist fiction—Arab male / Jewish
female in particular—tend to strengthen the case for Jews to develop their
cultural and communal identities separately from those of the local Arab
residents. Let us consider how Zalmen Brokhes does this in his short story—
originally written in Yiddish, translated into Hebrew and published by Sin Ben-
Tsiyon for the inaugural issue of the Zionist journal *Ha-’ezraḥ (The Citizen)* in
Jaffa in 1920.5

In Brokhes’ story the young Ashkenazi Jewish woman, Rachel, lives in a
small agricultural village of six Jewish households situated next to an Arab village

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5 Upon moving to Palestine in 1903 from Belorussia, Brokhes worked in
construction and camped with the Bedouin. After ten years he left Palestine,
returning in the 1970s. For more on Brokhes’ biography, see Chaver (Jerusalem,
2005), 80. Another rendering of the original Yiddish can be found in Brokhes (Tel
Aviv, 1954), trans. A. Goldenson. Chaver reads the story in its Yiddish context; I
am interested in how the story functions as a piece in the Hebrew literary
environment.
near the Ḥermon mountain. Her family is from Safed in the Old Yishuv. The Jewish men in her village are close friends with the Arab men who live nearby. One day, Rachel’s father hires Salim, a well-born, gallant, “ancient-blood[ed]” local Arab— in other words, the Zionists’ romantic Arab ideal— to help with agricultural work (Brokhes 193). When Rachel receives taunts about the presence of Salim, she begs her father to fire him, to no avail. During the course of the story, she and Salim fall in love and have sex. Rachel’s father responds by savagely beating her, pulling a gun on her (283), raising his staff to her (287), kicking her and pulling her by the hair (289). She runs off with Salim, pregnant with his child, and announces her intention to convert to Islam, saying, “I wish to become an Arab woman!” (290). The Jews are ashamed, and the bonds of friendship between the local Jews and Arabs are no more. Rachel’s father picks up the remnant of his family and moves back to Safed, abandoning his land.

Significantly, Brokhes does not paint Rachel in a condemnatory fashion. She is caught in a web of men’s designs on her femininity. Her own father, Jacob, fantasizes about being an Arab head of household and jokingly raises the possibility of a Rachel-Salim union by referring to Salim as his son-in-law. At the beginning of the story Jacob casually offers Rachel as a prize to Salim if the Arab will work for him. Unlike the classical biblical tale in which the patriarch Jacob
labors to secure his beloved Rachel, now it is Salim the Arab who “works at Jacob’s for Rachel” (187). Early in the story, Jacob comments to Salim, “You’re the lucky ones, you Arabs. You marry two, three women. Take the example of Abdul Hafez, he took three wives and does not do anything. All the work is on his women” (189). Thus, although Jacob never actually gives his blessing for a Salim-Rachel union, at some level he may nevertheless wish to increase his exposure to “Arabness” by bringing Salim into his family line; let Salim substitute as the laborer who pursues Rachel, and Jacob could enjoy the fantasy-life of leisure. Salim takes the bait and becomes a confident Arab suitor, wooing Rachel with plaintive songs at all hours of the day. Meanwhile, Avimelekh, an angry young Jew who lives in the village, obsessively rivals Salim for Rachel’s affections.

What interests the author is not merely that the Jews and Arabs live so closely together. Rather, it is the psychological and cultural norms of how the Jews respond to and cultivate this closeness. While the Jews, in an effort to mold themselves to the landscape, emulate their Arab neighbors, the Arabs, notably, do not seek outside models to supply new codes of conduct. Brokhes tells us that Rachel’s Ashkenazi family builds its house in Arab style (190), sings Arabic songs (190), dresses like Arabs (198), eats Arabic food (192), and speaks
the Arabic language (199). Thus the only framework through which Rachel could reasonably be expected to interpret the value of Salim’s presence in her household would be the constantly reinforced assumption of her Jewish settlement that bringing ‘Arabness’ into the Ashkenazi Jewish cultural environment is the highest and most natural expression for the revitalized Jewish family experience in Palestine.

There is an unspoken agreement among this six-family Jewish collective that the endeavor of entering into the Arab world ends at the Jewish woman’s body. Among the six Jewish families in the story, there is a taboo against women fully adopting Arabic dress. Brokhes writes that the Jewish men dress as Arabs, whereas the Jewish women dress “half Arab and half European” (190). Jewish women must maintain exterior signs that signify the presence of (albeit ill-defined) limits on the ways in which Jews reveal themselves to themselves and to their Arab neighbors.

Indeed, the dynamic of the gaze is a major theme in the story. Avimelekh aggressively stares at Rachel, and Salim, too, for all of his good intentions, watches her incessantly. Rachel, a “surveyed female” (as John Berger would

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6 For another such half-and-half picture of a Jewish woman in partial Arab dress, see Eitan (July 1907), 273-275.
phrase it in his now-classic *Ways of Seeing*,⁷ develops an anxiety about
being looked at by the men around her. Even the land itself has become
threatening to her; one night, she looks toward the Ĥermon mountain and has a
vision “of a man’s eye known to her, calling, beseeching, winking at her” (198).
For Rachel, in this omnipresent “shadow of the Ĥermon” (from which the story
takes its title) the masculine gaze of her village life has become so acute that she
projects the dangerous social relations around her onto the very landscape in
which she dwells. This land, the Land of Israel, contrary to Zionist ideals is *not* a
place of refuge for Rachel. Rather, it is an extension of the gender-based
aggression she faces night and day. She must navigate her way through the
treacherous question of who will provide the model for how she may view herself.

One marginal character in particular in Brokhes’ tale arguably provides
Rachel with this model. In the neighboring Arab village Rachel attends an
evening celebration where an Arab woman “wrapped in black” is engaged in a
ritualized Arab sword dance (a primary trope of orientalist literature). In this

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⁷ Berger reads the history of the female nude in Western art as one in which
“men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This
determines not only most relations between men and women but also the
relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman herself is male: the
surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most
particularly an object of vision: a sight” (47).
dance, the woman plays the role of both hunted and hunter, erotically battling
a circle of men while they lustfully try to snare her:

Facing the Arab men, lit by the light of the campfire and wrapped in
black, a woman circles with a sword in her hand. With every
movement, her long and wide sleeves flutter like wings, the wings
of a large black bird-of-prey. She circles hastily, searching for
something. With a scream of fiery lust . . . the Arab men rise up
toward her, and she shrinks back with the threat of her sword. Her
movements, laden with transgression, bring the men . . . to
madness and fainting with desire; they fall to her feet and dig up the
ground with their hands. . . . [With] their faces to the ground, on
their hands and knees the men burst forth toward her—another
moment and they will catch her. But suddenly . . . all jump back,
and in peace and quiet start the merrymaking all over again. (193)

At the end of the story after Rachel’s father has severely beaten her, Rachel
appears “wrapped in a black outer garment” (289), an all-black covering
reminiscent of the Arab female dancer. When she declares in this garb that, “I
wish to become an Arab woman!”(290) it is a radical act in which following her
heart gives her the added benefit of veiling herself. She may not be able to avoid
being the object of men’s gazes completely, but like the female dancer, she now takes an active role in her fate. She refuses to be merely the hunted. She demonstrates that the notion of Jewish Woman’s Body as *limit-site* for proper Arab-Jewish relations in fact backfires, for it offers a signifying exit point for a Jewish woman when her community does not satisfy her ethical, personal, or physical needs. At the end of the story, Rachel leaves the village and heads to an undetermined destination with Salim.\(^8\)

Brokhes thus offers a critique in two spheres. In the sphere of intra-Jewish relations, the beating and aggressive staring by the men in her life force her to flee. In the sphere of inter-Arab/Jewish relations, Brokhes posits that the Jewish project of emulating the Arabs as a means to new cultural authenticity can only end in failure. Rachel's father tries to kill Salim, but unlike the more

\(^8\) The problem of the ending in interracial stories is a complex one, as Sollors points out. Jewish writers on the Arab Question in Zionism could not imagine what the daily life of a Jewish-Arab couple could look like until Yehuda Burla’s *Daughter of Zion* (published soon after the 1929 riots), which will anchor the next chapter of this study. As for the woman’s sword dance, for a Palestinian example contemporary to Brokhes’ time see the photo “Bedouin woman holding sword for sword dance” in the Library of Congress’ G. Eric Matson Collection of the American Colony Hotel. I thank Nili Gold for calling my attention to the fact that the Hebrew poetess Esther Raab also uses the orientalized image of the woman’s sword dance in the beautiful 1922 poem “Ani tahat ha-’atad” (“I’m Under the Bramble”): “I’m under the bramble, / at ease, wicked, / I point thorns / laughing at you. / . . . / . . . Rejoicing, / I brandish a glittering sword.”) Trans. Kineret Gensler (Raab 93).
powerful Arabs in the surrounding area with their clearly delineated violent
codes of conduct for restoring male honor, he cannot even take revenge
successfully. The Jewish man may not go as far as the Arab sheik who kills his
wife as reported in the story’s opening campfire scene; yet the Jewish man’s
inability to wield violence productively and in a communally agreed-upon manner
utterly destabilizes both him and his community—a major problem given the
political backdrop of increasing tensions between Arabs and Jews in Palestine.
The Arabs merely laugh at Jacob and go back to their village. The Jews are
ashamed when their fantasy of being Arab-like crumbles, and the two
communities go their separate ways. Rachel’s father abandons his land and
returns with his wife and younger daughter to Safed.

The tensions that arise between Arabs and Jews in this story derive not
from problems regarding access to land or water resources, but over a different
and arguably no less decisive issue—access to a woman, her body, and the
proper reaction to her desires. As a Jewish character in L.A. Arieli’s “Yeshimon”
(“Wasteland,” published in the same year that “In the Shadow of the Hermon”
appeared in Ha-ʿezraḥ) remarks, women—the young in particular—are a national
commodity:
Last week my niece ran off with some Arab man... And there are more and more doing like her... How is it that a daughter of Israel becomes wretched... a virgin entrapped! May God pardon this utterance of my lips, but young women even with all of [modern] achievements are a kind of commodity... that demands the utmost protection, like the tenderest of tender oranges... (249)

Rachel’s fateful choice to wrap herself in black, abandon her family, and “become an Arab woman” is one she enters into out of compulsion. It is not Salim who forces her hand, with his wild eyes and boundless passion, nor the legendary Arab sheikh with his murderous wife-killing jealousy—it is her own father, an old Jew from Safed, who sets her up to fall and then cannot handle the results of her choices.

Jewish Women’s Liminality, Issue #3: Prostitution in Yitzhak Shami’s “Father and His Daughters” (1923/1924)

The 1921 Arab riots in Palestine shook Yitzhak Shami to his very core. A Sephardi Hebrew writer born to a traditional Jewish family in Hebron, he had left
his birthplace as a young adult to study (against his father’s wishes) at the
progressive Ezra Teachers’ Institute in Jerusalem. He then spent a number of
years teaching in Damascus and in Bulgaria, and by 1921 had recently returned
to Palestine.

During the riots he feared for his life. Afterward he wrote to a friend,

For two or three days we had to entrench ourselves in holes and

cracks […] and our nerves were stretched taut. . . . What is most

upsetting is that we had no ability to rise up and revolt, and the

waiting was humiliating. . . . Can you picture to yourself wondering

and waiting at night, amidst the narrow dark alleys of the ghetto?

(qtd. in Ogen 38)

Shami authored very little literary prose in his lifetime. He labored over the

creation of each text. His entire corpus consists of one slim volume of six tales

and a novel. “Father and His Daughters” is the one text he published during the

period of time between the 1921 Arab Riots and his best and most nuanced

work, his novel Revenge of the Fathers.⁹

⁹ Revenge of the Fathers was published in 1927. For an insightful analysis of the

novel’s structural fissures, see Hever and Shapira (2006), 124-139. “Father and
Given the sense of horror he experienced in 1921, it is fascinating that Shami chose to publish a story that is not primarily about violence perpetrated by Arabs on Jews but rather about violence perpetrated by a Jewish man on his daughter. Whereas *Revenge of the Fathers* is Shami’s statement on the inevitability of Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine, it is in “Father and His Daughters” written immediately prior that Shami sets out his concerns about the fitness of traditional Jewish life to meet the inter- and intra-communal challenges facing the region in the post-war era. As with Arieli’s and Brokhes’ aforementioned short stories, the character who most draws the author’s ire is a Jewish father whose values vis-à-vis gender and family are outmoded, with terrible consequences for his transgressive daughter.

“Father and His Daughters” has that element of social commentary which warrants the kind of contextual situating thus far presented for Arieli’s “Crossing the Styx” and Brokhes’ “In the Shadow of the Hermon”; the Jewish woman’s

His Daughters” was published twice because Shami made the faux pas of sending the manuscript to two journals at once. The short story appeared in *Ha-tekufah (The Era)* in 1923 (vol. 20, 149-168) and in *Ha-shiloh* in 1924 (vol. 41, 30-140 and 217-226). While the exact composition date of the story is unknown, Shami tended to consider himself to be under tremendous financial stress, and there is no reason to believe that he would have ‘sat’ on the story without publishing it as soon as possible. In addition to his literary prose, Shami also published non-fiction articles which remain uncollected. In this chapter I cite to “Father and His Daughters” as it appears in Shami’s *Shisha sipurim (Six Stories)*. All citations to Shami are to this short story unless I indicate otherwise.
liminality issue—in this case, prostitution—is the thread that connects both
the story’s domestic violence scenario and the specter of Arab eruption.
Recognizing the importance of prostitution as a Jewish problem in both
transnational and local Palestinian arenas enriches a reading of Shami’s piece.

Ḥakham Tsvi Cohen, the patriarch of “Father and His Daughters,” has
three children—Jamilah, his eldest, Tirah, and Rosa, all of whom at the tale’s
opening are of ripe marriageable age and independent-spirited. Ḥakham Tsvi
has been away from his Damascus home and family for years collecting money
for the Jewish community and for his daughters’ dowries. Now he returns to his
city with the desire to realize his dream of immigrating to the Land of Israel.
World War I has recently ended.

From the very first scene of the tale, Shami lays out two sources of strain
that plague Ḥakham Tsvi’s train ride. The first is the power dynamic between
Ḥakham Tsvi and the Muslims who share his crowded car. “The elderly Jew,
sitting frozen in his place . . . made a movement of complaint and anger with his
shoulders when he saw the sheik push and enter into his space” (Shami 69).
Two old men: one Jew, one Muslim, having trouble sharing the same space—it is
a little clash played out, as the passage continues, with a certain amount of
amusement and exaggeration on the part of the author, but it is pervaded by a
sober note nonetheless. Is it deliberate that the Muslim would pick out the one Jew in the car and ‘invade’ his space for ablutions (what can the Jew really do to protest?) rather than encroach upon the space of his fellow Muslims?  

The second source of tension in Ḥakham Tsvi’s mind is his family. What has happened to his three girls and wife during his seven-year absence? Nagging thoughts plague him. He cannot shake a “hidden fear which thrust its fingernails deeply into his heart more and more as he approached his destination. . . . Visions of the destruction stood before his eyes. . . . he remembered stories of horror about those killed by the sword and those swollen from hunger that his ears had heard in every place to which he had ventured” over the past years (Shami 70). The reader must wonder if this “hidden fear” is not only about whether his family has even survived the war, but also, how they have managed to survive day to day. 

The damage of World War I had devastating effects on the setting of Shami’s story. Families splintered apart, starvation was rampant. Of the pre-war population of 3.5 million in Syria and Lebanon, an estimated 500,000 died from

10 Relations between Arabs and Jews in post-war Damascus were largely cordial, even full of camaraderie; yet cordial relations do not obliterate the status of Jews as a minority. Jews in the post-war era in Syria and Lebanon accounted for a mere one percent of population, dwelling primarily in Damascus, Aleppo, and Beirut (Thompson 10). They were far outnumbered by a variety of Christian and Muslim communities at a time when sectarian divides were sharpening.
starvation and 150,000 from military service (Thompson 23). It was an extraordinarily stark contrast to the prosperity that the region had experienced during the decades prior to the war. Ḥakham Tsvi’s absence and return home comes at a time when Damascus and Lebanon were experiencing acutely what historian Elizabeth Thompson calls a “crisis of paternity.” The crisis “reflected both the destabilization of male authority as heads of households and of the larger community and the concomitant transformation in female roles. It was expressed in ideologies of class, religion, nation and gender, and in often-violent conflicts among citizens” (6). World War I had a particular impact on women and children of Lebanon and Syria, left to fend for themselves while their men were conscripts in the Ottoman army or in hiding elsewhere to avoid conscription.

Indeed, rumors circulated about how young women of all communities in the city managed to make ends meet. “The Fall of a Young Girl,” for instance, was a didactic Arabic drama performed locally in October 1918, featuring a plotline marketing the heroine’s “surrender to desire and appetite, her torment of shame and degradation, and her repentance” (qtd. in Thompson 25).11 Once the

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11 Of course, prostitution in Ottoman Syria could be found prior to the pauperization that took place in World War I. See Semerdjian (2003), 60-85. Shami upon his return to Palestine after the war might very well have noticed the problem of Jewish prostitution in Jerusalem; see Shilo (2003).
French began to occupy Syria they established an elaborate regulation
system for women in sexually-compromised money-making endeavors, requiring
“prostitutes, dancers, and singers” to carry special identification cards, turn their
tricks in licensed brothels, and undergo frequent medical exams in an effort to
counter the spread of venereal disease (87).

In cosmopolitan centers of Europe, Russia, and America, the Woman
Question with its emphasis on poverty was born in no small part from the rise in
medical research on venereal disease and the association with prostitution.
Tackling the issue of prostitution was a major project of social reformers calling
for a better future, with the Russian activist Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevky
leading the way with his *What Is to Be Done?* (1863), a novel much beloved
among early Zionists. Moreover, Jewish social reformers in particular zeroed in
on prostitution because of the prominent role that Jews played in the world white
slave trade.

From the 1892 Lemberg trial in which twenty-six Jews were found guilty of
trafficking women to the various Jewish social welfare groups that sprung up to
counter prostitution (London: 1895, Buenos Aires: 1901, Berlin: 1904, Lodz:
1905, among many others) to prominent international Jewish congresses
attended by rabbis and feminist activists alike (1903 and 1910 in particular)—the
blight and plight of fallen women was no secret as young Jewesses from
villages streamed into urban transit centers. Jewish literature reflected this
interest. By 1889 in the Odessa region, for instance, where S.Y. Abromovitsh had
been in residence since 1881, 30 of 36 licensed brothels were run by Jewish
women (Bristow 56); his Yiddish and Hebrew renderings of Jewish prostitution in
*The Wishing Ring / In the Vale of Tears* (1888-9 and 1896, respectively) raised
the problem as indicative of a more generally ill Jewish society. Peretz
Herschbein wrote *Miriam* (Hebrew: 1905, Yiddish: 1906) in Vilna after being
solicited by a tear-stained daughter of Israel on that city’s streets, which by the
late nineteenth-century claimed 47% of its prostitutes as Jewesses (Berkowitz
and Dauber 54; Bristow 23). Sholem Aleichem’s short story “The Man from
Buenos Aires” (1909) features an unsavory Jewish pimp whose talents for selling
merchandise not only captivate the tale’s narrator but also would have put him in
good stead with the estimated eight thousand Jewish women who worked as
prostitutes in that city from 1889-1913 (Bristow 118-119). In such texts, what
authors leave unsaid about the shadowy world of fallen women is often as
important as what they say. In sum, Jewish prostitution as a literary and political
subject of social protest was most certainly well-established by the time of
Shami’s “Father and His Daughters,” and readers of transnational Jewish publications were well-trained to pick up on textual cues about the topic.\textsuperscript{12}

If Ḥakham Tsvi has a “hidden fear” about how his family has managed to make ends meet in his absence, he counters this fear with an expectation that everything will still be as it was when he left. While still on the train, dreaming about home, he imagines himself being welcomed with open arms by his daughters and wife. Surely they will show him the respect customarily afforded to the traditionally dominant and powerful male head of household:

Rosa, the youngest, . . . will lower her long eyelashes and move quickly to kiss his hand with a “\textit{barukh ha-ba}” (“welcome”). After her, Tirah will come forward and with diligent hands take his bags from him, wiping the tears from her eyes with the edge of her apron. She will restrain her emotions, recover herself, and run to the kitchen to make him coffee and to fill the \textit{nargilah} just like he used to love it. Before they can even finish removing the dust from his feet, he will sit with his baskets and packages around him. His

\textsuperscript{12} There are numerous studies on Jewish prostitution in the late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century as well as Jewish social welfare organizations that arose in response. Works consulted for this summary include Bristow (New York, 1983); Gartner (1982); Loentz (n.p., 2007, especially ch. 4); Goldyn (2006).
daughters will sit in a circle with their legs folded beneath them, their heads turned toward him, their faces full of pleasure. . . .

Finally, he will take out the silk dresses and silk hats—a present of the wealthy [Jews] of India for the day of their weddings. . . . [They] will stroke them cautiously with fingers trembling from so much excitement. (Shami 72-3)

Rosa will greet him with deference, eyes lowered; Tirah, in her apron, will surely be a whiz at all things domestic as brings him coffee and nargilah. The girls will wash his feet and finger the silk finery he has brought them, in awed expectation of soon finding--at his direction--their betrotheds, pious Jewish men.

Over the course of Shami’s story, Ḥakham Tsvi makes his way to his home synagogue in Damascus. He catches a glimpse of what he believes to be his daughters Jamilah and Tirah enjoying themselves on the arms of a strange man. “That black obscure thought which until now had been hiding at the bottom of his soul rose up with a giant strength and washed over his entire being” (Shami 96). He has been battling with this “obscure thought” during the entire narrative. Now all of his efforts not to know are about to become exhausted. The reader waits for Ḥakham Tsvi’s bubble of ignorance to pop.
The members of Ḥakham Tsvi’s synagogue quorum advise him to go to Marja Square, Damascus’ entertainment and commercial district, to see what his daughters are up to for himself. As Ḥakham Tsvi makes his way to the area, he mutters a single phrase over and over from Moses’ laws on defilement: “The daughter of any kohen, if she profane herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father” (Lev. 21:10). It is a clue to the reader that murderous violence is already on this kohen’s mind (Ḥakham Tsvi’s last name is “Cohen”), for the Biblical passage continues: “She shall be burnt with fire."

Inside the entertainment club at Marja Square, the girls are on stage. There are hordes of men in the audience. As Jamilah dances, her breasts exposed, “the onlookers erupt in a wild roar, their tarbushes thrown to the ceiling and the floor, older men (“ḥajjm” and “effendis”) open up their money pockets and throw them at the feet of the dancer with screams of dizziness and loss of all sensation” (101). These men are wild with lust. Jamilah has brought them to the brink. The effect is one of extreme outpouring of energy, sound, movement, sexual buildup, and release.

This is the intensity of Arab men whom Shami describes in an early Ḥa-po‘el ha-tsa‘ir (The Young Worker) article as living at a time when they are confronted by changes at a “cinematic” pace: “This is indeed a tremendous,
stormy, fascinating time in the lives of Arabs. They are in a struggle from within and from without, a struggle between new and old, a clash between parents and children. There is a stirring up, and a tearing apart, in their soul," he writes. “Since the Arab is naturally able to adapt quickly to all that emerges in life, . . . he absorbs it all without noticing and becomes addicted to everything without understanding” (Shami 1911, 13). In the stormy struggle between new and old, such Arabs have moved—metaphorically speaking—from the holy space of the mosque that dominates Marja Square to the profane space of the entertainment club. They are stirred up, addicted to new sensation after new sensation—yet they absorb everything, even that which rips at their souls. Under Shami’s pen this crowd may be wild with lust, but it is Ḥakham Tsvi as the lone Jew and as the stranger who goes wild with violence, for he cannot adapt when faced with a struggle between parents and children.

Hence, while raw, roaring sexuality is the domain of the club-going ḥaj and effendi in this picture, murderous family violence is the domain of the kohen. Ḥakham Tsvi leaps onto the stage, his clothes unraveling, his mouth frothing, and he pummels Jamilah without restraint: “Like a crazed animal he pounced upon the dancer, grabbed her hair, bit her with his teeth. His fists rained down upon her like a storm on her head. After a moment, she lay at his feet without
moving like a trampled worm” (Shami “Father and His Daughters,” 101). It is
over for Jamilah. As for Ḥakham Tsvi, he is tossed out of the club, his body
rolling toward the river as he loses consciousness.

Ḥakham Tsvi had fantasized about returning to Damascus and moving to
the Land of Israel as soon as he could. This detail is crucial to the story, for in
the aftermath of 1921 readers must ask: are Ḥakham Tsvi’s values ones that will
help the yishuv respond to Arab violence in a properly self-directed way—that a
husband should expect to lord over his family, that a father should engage in
honor-killing? Ḥakham Tsvi is just like—nay, even much worse than—the
nightclub Arabs who have no self-control and “erupt in a wild roar” in front of his
daughters. Shami responds to the fear he experienced in 1921 by producing a
work that is a wake-up call for the Jewish family facing a new era. Prostitution as
Jewish women’s desperate—if misguided—pursuit of economic and social
freedom is obviously neither an optimal nor a permanent solution to the
precarious situation of being Jewish and female in post-war Greater Syria, and a
Jewish man who has no capacity whatsoever to adapt himself to new gendered
realities in this time of tremendous regional turmoil has no place making ‘aliyah.

Shami arguably colors his “Father and His Daughters” with a particularly
personal hue and infuses his social commentary with an intensity culled from
ruminations about his own tension-filled position as a Sephardi writer. To explore why Shami finds the issue of prostitution personally resonant one may begin with a substantial article that he wrote for the Zionist publication *Ha-ahdut* in 1910, “The Jews of Damascus.”¹³ His article is a sketch of the economic and social conditions of the 17,000-member Jewish population in the city at the time, the city in which he dwelled for a few years prior to leaving just before the First World War.

The setting of “Father and His Daughters” in Damascus is no accident. Damascus as the site of the famous blood libel of 1840 was the place in the Arab world that Shami’s mostly-Ashkenazi readers would have associated with their own locations of anti-Jewish violence and pogroms, a fitting setting for the publication of Shami’s first story after the fear he experienced from the 1921 riots. Shami in his aforementioned article identifies 1840 as the beginning of the end for Damascene Jewry. After the blood libel, Shami writes, the financial stability of the community declined as top Jewish employers began to leave the city and traditionally Jewish trades moved into the hands of non-Jews (2:6 13-14). It was the Jews of Damascus, he writes, who laid the foundation for the city’s Westernization (2:6 13), since “it is difficult for the Muslim spirit to mix with

¹³ See also Halevi (1993), 112.
the European spirit”—but now the Jews have fallen behind economically like
the rest of the Jews in the Muslim world (2:6 13). The Damascene Jews, he
concludes, are in fact currently less equipped than their Christian and Muslim
neighbors to join the wave of local innovation (2:6 12 and 13).

One of Shami’s primary interests in the article is the situation of Jewish
women in Damascus. He appreciates the freedom that women have in this “eye
of the East,” this city rightly proud of its ancient history and its exalted place in
Arabic poetics. He reports that in comparison to places like Baghdad, parents do
not seclude their daughters at home but rather approve of their daughters’
working in public side by side with men (2:6 12). However, it is the Jewish
Quarter of Damascus that hosts the city’s prostitutes. The tone Shami takes is
one of condemnation, disgust, and anguish that Jewesses of questionable
morals have become erotic dancers in the clubs. Poverty is one factor; women
whose husbands have abandoned them for opportunities in far-off America have
no way to support their children and, as agunot, no way to remarry (2:5 7). Yet
poverty is not what captures Shami’s attention as the main motivating factor for
Jewish women’s attraction to the tawdry lifestyle of back-alley singing and
dancing establishments. The clients are the rich and powerful of the local
Christian and Muslim populations, and showgirls sashay about in the latest
fashions. Shami as a pedagogue diagnoses the problem as one of education, blaming parents for allowing the Alliance school system to shape the youth. The Alliance schools, he charges, fail to give the youth the tools they need to fit into modern Damascus’ Arabic culture and fail to instill Jewish national pride. The parents’ generation is one of cultural dinosaurs, but the new generation of Jewish youth is lost, not “Jewish” enough and not “Arab” enough to have a future in the city. The girls in particular, who have neither religious nor secular knowledge and no obligations to keep the Jewish commandments, have no qualms about becoming “sullied” because their parents no longer keep a watchful eye on them (2:7 10-11). Shami reports that there are about two hundred dancers and singers in the Jewish Quarter (not all of them Jewish) and reports a number of them to be Alliance-educated (2:7 11). In essence, Shami’s attitude toward the prostitutes is wholly negative in his Ha-ahdut piece. No matter what their motivations for debauchery, they are “the source of poison” in the community (2:7 9). In “Father and His Daughters,” however, he changes his tone.

Like the prostitutes Jamilah, Tirah, and Rosa in the story, Shami came from a family of three children. Like Hakham Tsvi, his father was usually away from home for most of his childhood. Shami disobeyed his father in an effort to
create himself anew, leaving behind the traditional Jewish lifestyle to seek a place among the Ashkenazi Zionist modern Hebrew literary elite. His father utterly rejected the move, cutting him off and leaving him destitute. This hostility of rejection from home could very well be a personal source that Shami taps into when he publishes his post-1921 story: the trauma he experiences as a Jew who is all too aware that Arab rioters would deny him an honored place in his native hometown, this while he is so steeped in Arabic language and culture that he serves as an authority figure on Arabic literature in the Hebrew press.

And yet: a prostitute? Shami was the eldest child in his family, as is Jamilah, the primary target of the father’s anger in “Father and His Daughters.” The condemnation, disgust, and anguish that Shami directs at the prostitutes of Damascus in his pre-war article now become the attitude of the post-war patriarch character. Shami can identify with that position, but now he also gives greater voice to the prostitute.\(^\text{14}\) Jamilah finds herself unexpectedly faced with her father’s presence after so many years of creating a life of her own. The conservative neighbors of the Jewish Quarter may scorn her, but her position as a prostitute has given her a degree of self-determination and power unavailable

\(^\text{14}\) For a Hebrew novel that features another such entertainer in Damascus, see Yehuda Burla’s *Meranenet* (*Singer*), published in 1930.
to those who have remained within the crumbling confines of their parents’
world. As Margalit Shilo suggests in her study of Jewish women’s history in the
Old Yishuv, “[I]n some cases, prostitution is a feminine form of exerting power, of
defiance, of building a new identity” (Shilo 2005, 197). As with Brokhes and
Arieli, Shami shows consideration to include the transgressive woman’s point of
view in his narrative.

Jamilah cringes in her father’s sudden presence: “He has come from
distant worlds (‘olamot reḥokim) to subject her to his rule, to put fear into her, and
to steal and suppress the entire spark of life, happiness, and freedom…” (78-9).
Shami in a letter to a friend once described the chasm between himself and his
father as being like “two worlds” (shne ‘olamot, qtd. in Ogen 42). Jamilah recoils
as her father scorns her for taking him home from the train station by carriage,
dressed in silk, her face heavy with makeup, her neck and shoulders bare, her
body perfumed, her fingers covered in rings.16

15 See also Shilo (2003) and Bernstein (Jerusalem, 2008) for more on Jewish
prostitution in the yishuv during World War I and in the 1930s-1940s,
respectively.

16 The full scene of Ḥakham Tsvi’s detraining contains ironic twists on the biblical
story of Bat Yiftaḥ that I will not detail for the sake of brevity. An integral part of
Ḥakham Tsvi’s fantasy is that Jamilah will come out to greet him first as he
makes his way from the train station to the residence. She will be the one to
announce his homecoming, at which point all of his daughters will express delight
While it would be overly reductive to assume a simple one-to-one parallel between Shami’s life and Jamilah’s, what might Shami be attempting to work out about himself given his choice to make Jamilah a woman of ill repute? Could it be that Shami, who suffered from depression for much of his life, can hear--maybe even share--the voice of the father scorning him as damaged goods for the choices he has made? The Ladino/Arabic-speaking author’s attraction to the ‘new’ world of modern Hebrew culture with its Ashkenazi elite brings a real resonance to his character Jamilah, for he understands the dance to earn his daily bread for an audience hungry for access to a mysterious, exotic world that he both lays bare and costumes.

Shami is clear to critique Jamilah’s biggest critic, Ḩakham Tsvi, suggesting that the traditional moralizing of the father is belied by subtle affinities he shares with his prostitute daughter’s lifestyle. While still on the train on his way to Damascus, Ḩakham Tsvi muses about the money and goods he has managed to accumulate—perhaps not a fortune, but certainly no shabby sum: “Without thinking, from habit, his hand secretly crept to his chest and softly stroked the golden dinars sewn into his garment around his chest, bundle by bundle” Shami writes. “His eyes glanced with affection at the large sack and the numerous

and joy (Shami 72). By hinting at Bat Yiftah iconography, Shami drops a clue that Ḩakham Tsvi will carry out an act of violence on his daughter Jamilah.
packages under him. . . . Then his eyes lifted toward the heavens with praise and thanksgiving to the Creator, may His Name be praised and uplifted, for the great goodness which he has been rewarded through His mercy” (Shami 72). Ḥakham Tsvi is surrounded by packages full of finery, including the silk dresses he has collected for his daughters from the wealthy Jews of India. The thought of the gold and the silk intoxicates him. Clearly his mind turns to his small fortune frequently and luxuriates there: a “habit.” Ḥakham Tsvi interrupts himself and dexterously refocuses his mind on the Lord as a corrective. Of course, in his mind Ḥakham Tsvi argues that all of his sacrifices have been for the good of his family. Yet Ḥakham Tsvi’s attraction to such finery during an era of rampant poverty is suspicious. He was all too willing to abandon his wife and three daughters to make do—somehow—for seven years while he collected gold and silk dresses. Perhaps he let himself get a bit carried away at a time when his family needed him most? When a daily morsel of bread may have sufficed—why the gold and the silk? This man who sought out to amass finery and make his daughters more ‘purchasable’ to potential suitors ultimately kills his eldest daughter for doing something not all that different: abandoning the world Ḥakham Tsvi had left behind for silk dresses and gold, for a space strange and far away in spirit if not in distance—the wild nightclub with its paying customers. They both,
in essence, have their eyes on the same prize—and when she contests his vision for what he believes is rightfully his, he erupts in murderous fury.

This is Shami’s published statement after the 1921 riots. By the end of the story, both Ḥakham Tsvi and Jamilah have reached a fateful demise. They leave the stage of the narrative, actors in the unfolding drama no more. The only people still standing are Jamilah’s insatiable, fiery, and fervent audiences. The inevitability of the conflict that will erupt among them waits for Shami’s pen in Revenge of the Fathers, a novelistic preview of the conclusion reached by mainstream Zionist leaders’ post-1929: the Jews of Palestine have a calamity on their hands with the Arabs.

Conclusion

Whether the Arabs possess no enviable traits or whether they are gallant and “ancient-blooded,” whether they are totally foreign to the Jewish writer or whether they share a common language, these stories by Arieli, Brokhes, and Shami wrap an internal critique of Jewish life within a premise that that the passionate, volcanic character of the Arab male is a given. As the eruption of Jewish fathers in episodes of graphic domestic violence are contingent upon the actions of trapped transgressive daughters, the authorial reform-minded chastising voice
offers both a condemnation of Jewish fathers’ failures to mount a proper
response and a concern for Jewish women’s yearnings. Never is there the
suggestion that an old Jew from Safed, Russia, or Damascus has an inherently
essentialized, zealous, and blazing nature, unfazed by eruption—in contrast to
the predator Khalil in “Crossing the Styx,” the jealous sheik in “In the Shadow of
the Hermon,” or the pulsating throng of hajjim and effendis in “Father and His
Daughters.” The Jewish fathers self-destruct as a result of their flare-ups, and
the Jewish maidens they attack suffer irreparably for their forays into conversion,
attraction to non-Jewish men, and prostitution. An investigation into how both
male and female Jewish characters channel themselves anchors the high-stakes,
anxiety-ridden fictional scenarios via which early Zionists ‘feel out’ the
possibilities of Jewish-Arab encounters in Palestine.
The Hebrew Heroine

Fig. 1 “Poster for the Levant Fair”
Me’ir Gur-Arie, 1925

Fig. 2 “The Jerusalem Effendi”
Avraham Melnikoff, 1925
The Hebrew writer who most definitively deflates Zionist hopes for productive Arab-Jewish coexistence in Palestine is Yehuda Burla with his novel *Bat Tsiyon (Daughter of Zion, 1930-31)*. Significantly, he chooses to articulate his verdict through the romance of an Arab-Jewish couple and by foregrounding a Jewish woman’s desire for independence. As with L.A. Arieli’s “Crossing the Styx,” Zalmen Brokhes’ “In the Shadow of the Ḥermon,” and Yitzhak Shami’s “Father and His Daughters,” Burla’s novel features a transgressive daughter and a Jewish home wrecked by domestic violence.

*Daughter of Zion* is a landmark work of the wayward Jewish woman’s *teshuvah* (return) to her people. Burla’s heroine, Rosa, follows in the wake of women such as Sarah of A.A. Kabak’s *Levada (Alone, 1905)* and Tamarah of Sholem Aleichem’s *Der Mabl (The Flood, 1907)*, as well as other feisty females who populate the fluid spheres of Jewish, Egyptian, Syrian, English, French, and Russian nationalisms in Burla’s polyglot world. It is comparatively rare for a woman single-handedly to drive the plot of a Hebrew novel during the *yishuv* period,¹ however, Tamar Mayer’s suggestion of the “invisibility of women in

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¹ Yosef Ḥayim Brenner in fact publicly chides Moshe Smilansky in 1912 for opting to focus on a heroine rather than a hero in a novel that claims to be about “life in the new *yishuv*.” In his scathing review of Smilansky’s *Hadassah* Brenner argues that if anyone has managed to transition to pioneer life in the new *yishuv* it is men and not women, and only a few men, perhaps, at that. It is thus utterly
Zionism” (99) among the early Zionists overreaches and closes more doors than it opens. In fact, alongside the literary trope of the wayward woman who puts the nation in danger by leaving the fold, there is an identifiable Jewish nationalist sentiment in which it is the heroine—and not the hero—who most exemplifies a vitality and fidelity to the nation’s spirit.

Nira Yuval-Davis in her well-known study *Gender and Nation* takes Claudia Koontz’ work on the German context of the 1930s-1940s as indicative of a broader phenomenon across nationalisms: “The national duties of . . . boys were to live and die for the nation. Girls did not need to act; they had to become the national embodiment” (45). Such a conclusion settles into a bifurcation of active=masculine versus passive=feminine in nationalist iconography that does not sufficiently account for the complexities of fidelity that heroines can represent in nationalist discourses. Indeed, the convictions which Rosa develops and institutes in her life over the course of the novel serve didactic functions for the men around her in a manner similar to that of Elena in Turgenev’s *On the Eve* or Natalia in *Rudin* (the latter translated into Hebrew in the early 1920s and reprinted in the 1940s). Indeed, one must not overlook how Burla’s efforts to position the imagined contours of Palestinian Jewish-Arab relations in the 1929 unrealistic, he explains, to position a woman ay the helm of a novel that aims to be a true portrait of the *yishuv*. See Brenner (Tel Aviv, 1960), 298.
era *depends* on the fact that his central character is a dynamic heroine, and not a hero.

**Rosa in *Daughter of Zion: Burla’s Two-Pronged Attack on Palestinian Nationalists***

Yehuda Burla, born in Jerusalem in 1886 to a family that had immigrated to Palestine from Ottoman Izmir in the seventeenth-century, initially gravitated toward Zionism with the belief that its Hebraist cultural aims were compatible with Ottomanism. In a 1909 article in *Ha-ḥerut (Freedom)* he urges his fellow Sephardi Jews to join him in a form of Zionism which is “national” but not “state-political” (*ha-tsimonyut ha-le’umit lo ha-medinit*): “we must be Ottomans and something else in addition” (qtd. in Campos 472). As a professional pedagogue, his contributions to Hebrew periodicals frequently called for reform of Sephardi educational systems and cultural norms in light of Zionist achievements in Jewish education. With the advent of the British Mandate and the breakdown of Ottoman allegiance as a viable option, Burla became more and more enmeshed in the largely Ashkenazi-led Zionist establishment.
Nevertheless, the difficulty of being a Sephardi writer in a literary culture dominated by Ashkenazi voices was never far from Burla’s mind. In 1930 he reflects upon his struggles among the Ashkenazi leaders who helm local Zionist institutions: “The Sephardi feels that he is edged out, that people ‘cancel him out’. . . . It is admittedly not obvious or conspicuous—but it is felt between the fingers, and a grudge gains strength in one’s heart” (qtd. in Ogen 52). In *Daughter of Zion* Burla takes the opportunity to push back against those who would “cancel him out” because he is Sephardi. In light of the fact that so many Ashkenazi Zionist writers of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century establish a tradition of equating the Jewish man’s emotional and spiritual journey with the nation’s as a whole, it is a strategic move for Burla the Sephardi Zionist to choose to represent an alternative path via the comparably marginalized figure of a female protagonist.2

Yet Burla’s choice of a female protagonist for this particular novel does not stem merely from parallels between the marginalization of Sephardim and the marginalization of women in early Zionist Palestine. A woman’s tale enables

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2 In her unpublished dissertation on Yehuda Burla, Aviva Argov points to evidence in Burla’s correspondence that suggests he viewed Rosa along lines similar to Flaubert’s famous comment, “Madame Bovary is me” (“Madame Bovary, c'est moi”); Burla referred to his heroine Rosa Rodovits as “Yehuda Rodovits,” invoking his own name. See Argov (2006), 199.
 Burla to foreground a specific contention: *because* Palestinian Arab and Zionist nationalisms are building two different futures for women, the nationalisms are ultimately incompatible. In other words, Burla argues that the extent to which actors in a given nationalist movement incorporate the liberation of women into their social agenda is an indispensable measure of that movement’s legitimacy as a whole.

Ground zero of Rosa’s story in *Daughter of Zion* is a patriarchal, violent Jerusalem Old City home run by her Ashkenazi father as a physical and emotional prison. He constantly subjects his righteous Sephardi wife to abuse. The portrait of a violent Ashkenazi father and diligent Sephardi mother, one must note, is in stark contrast to that presented by A. Sh. Hershberg in an early *Ha-shiloah* article, “The Sephardim in the Land of Yisrael.” Under Hershberg’s pen, the typical Sephardi father treats his wife like “an abused slave” while the typical Sephardi mother is a woman who lacks “that quickness and movement which bring favor to woman” (174). “I would prefer an ugly albeit trained Ashkenazi woman who knows how to fulfill that which is required of her at home over a beautiful Sephardi woman, lazy and untidy,” confides Hershberg’s Sephardi male ‘informant’ (174). Hershberg warns his Ashkenazi readers that they must be on guard around the local Sephardim—-who have “become Jewish-Arabs” (174)—lest
such retrograde habits derived from the surrounding Arabic culture infiltrate into the new Zionist values taking root in Palestine. Burla rejects such a characterization of the Sephardim. Under his pen it is the Ashkenazi who is the household tyrant, who misses no opportunity to threaten and demean his honorable Sephardi wife in the following indicative dialogue early in *Daughter of Zion*:

--Go to hell, you and your children! . . . They are not my children . . . children of the devil! . . . I hate all of you!

--Fine . . . let me go . . . I will leave from here . . . I will escape . . .

--Woe is scum like you! How many times have I blackened your flesh, and you have run away—and returned again, come back like a pathetic dog . . .

--Do I come back of my own volition?—she hastened to respond, bitterly—If it were not for my care for your father . . . if he did not come to me always and appease me, begging—would I come back to see you, would I be able to look at your face?

He pounced from his place like a wild animal upon prey, grabbed her throat and bent over her back. She screamed:

--Help! Anyone! . . .
How can a man detest his wife, mother of his children, as a man detests a loathsome bug? Many times . . . [Rosa] . . . watched when her father’s face twisted as he looked into her mother’s face, how his face was full of ugliness and baseness as he glared at her with glares of a cruel murderer. (31-2, Book 1)³

Rosa’s childhood home is one in which men, whether from bad intentions (Rosa’s father) or even good intentions (Rosa’s grandfather) trap women into positions of powerlessness. It is from such subjugation of women that Rosa, a young maiden acutely aware of the horrors of violence, must flee—with anyone, anywhere. Thus begins her romance with Tawfiq, a local Arab. Over the course of Daughter of Zion, what starts as an innocent love affair full of hope about the potential of universal humanism to overcome ethnic and religious divides turns sour. The couple’s problems actually begin well before each partner gravitates toward his/her respective nationalist movement. The couple spends the years of the First World War in Europe, and it is in Europe that the incompatibilities of

³ *Daughter of Zion* consists of three volumes: *Ba-metsar (In the Narrows)*, *Kishalon (Failure)*, and *Ha-tehiya (The Renaissance)*. The third volume has two parts, Part A and Part B. Hence *Daughter of Zion* is spread over four separate books, marked accordingly on the title page of each. I cite with the page numbers according to Books 1-4. All citations to “Burla” are to *Daughter of Zion* unless otherwise noted.
their worldviews on gender first seriously collide. Rosa’s decision at the end of the novel to abandon her marriage stems from the couple’s inability to create a mutually-affirming relationship that incorporates her strengths of personality and intellect.

Tawfiq is a Jerusalem-born effendi. Whereas his “European” qualities impress Rosa when the two characters first meet in Jerusalem, the transition to life in Europe is anything but seamless for the Arab. The notion of “organic memory” in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century science and literature is present in Burla’s depiction of Tawfiq’s problems in Europe. As Laura Otis explains in her study of the body in Thomas Mann, Emile Zola, and Thomas Hardy:

The theory of organic memory placed the past in the individual, in the body, in the nervous system; it pulled memory from the domain of the metaphysical into the domain of the physical with the intention of making it knowable. Through analogy, it equated

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4 Rosa thinks to herself: “A surprise! He is an understanding young man, a maskil, he is not like an Arab...he understands and speaks like one of the cultured European youths. She had always thought that young Arab men were fiery ‘Asiatics,’ uncultured, [...] like people of a different character, a different education, a different world, but this one—he was otherwise, different from the norm, or perhaps among the children of respectable families these educated and cultured types may be found” (78, Book 2).
memory with heredity, arguing that just as people remembered some of their own experiences consciously, they remembered their racial and ancestral experiences unconsciously, through their instincts. [...] The association of heredity with memory in the nineteenth-century grew out of a fascination with origins that manifested itself in the simultaneous rise of nationalism, philology, biology, and *Wissenschaft* in general. (3)

Trailing behind his wife in Europe, Tawfiq “admitted in his soul that many generations of Eastern tradition and education were an integral part of his blood.” [It is an education in which] the husband is the lord and master over his wife. . . , woman is a creature who must be subordinate to the man” (Burla 69, Book 3, italics added for emphasis). The legal education Tawfiq had received in Beirut and the French language skills he had picked up there are a far cry from his wife’s nuanced autodidactic appreciation of Western philosophy and aesthetics. Prior to leaving for Europe, Rosa had been deeply moved by the writings of Darwin, Goethe, Byron, Maupassant, Spencer, Ibsen, Dostoyevsky, Pascal, Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy, Dante, Wilde, Rousseau, Voltaire, Hugo, and Zola (172-178, Book 1). In Switzerland she surrounds herself with others who love to discuss ideas—including the Woman Question—and for whom such
writing is central to their lives. She also easily learns about European art and
dance styles. Tawfiq, on the other hand, feels lost and marginalized. He is
unable and uninterested in contributing to the debates and social outings of
Rosa’s circle. Burla establishes Tawfiq’s “racial sentiment”\(^5\) as a mechanism
which prevents the Arab from being a trailblazer on women’s issues. His “blood”
is the decisive factor, it carries the histories of previous generations in him and
no amount of French education picked up in Beirut can change this.

Tawfiq develops an incongruous self-image: a veiled Arab man whose
wife is bare-faced. “He, the man, must walk around hidden and quiet, put a mask
on his face, peer out but hold himself back,” Tawfiq thinks to himself, “while she,
the wife, makes her way openly and smoothly, lightly and simply” (6, Book 3). As
Rosa dedicates herself to her intellectual pursuits in Europe, Tawfiq takes on the
bulk of the care responsibilities for the couple’s newborn. He feels like his
manhood is under threat.

The fact that Tawfiq crystallizes his problems in Europe by referring to
himself as masked or shrouded is no accident, for the veil is the most prominent
recurring image threading through the novel. From the book’s very beginning

\(^5\) The term is Ezra Tawil’s. See his study of early American literature, \textit{The Making
of Racial Sentiment: Slavery and the Birth of the Frontier Romance} (Cambridge,
2006).
Burla invokes a kind of face-covering to describe Rosa’s coping mechanism as a young girl living in a home wrecked by domestic violence:

To whom could she turn for advice? . . . To her friends—she could never speak with them about her home life . . . God forbid . . . [She] is ashamed and embarrassed to mention anything about her home life. . . . [In] front of her friends she is always joyous and serene, happy and light; she must always put a mask on her face, as if she had two or even three essences. . . . Friends, people, all know her “fake” essences, but the one [essence], the real one, the hidden one, is unknown to anyone, . . . and she has not even one person to whom she can reveal . . . tell . . . cry . . . not even one. She is alone, alone in this wide world. . . . (35, Book 1, italics added for emphasis)

An external appearance that hides an internal truth—this dichotomy is what Rosa must escape, and Burla reifies as a face-mask that which is opposite of the plain-spoken, ‘natural,’ carefree ideal of early Zionist femininity.6 Donneh, Rosa’s mother, has her own folk philosophy structured by a similar bifurcation of

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6 For such images of femininity, see, for instance, the discussion of correct women’s fashion and comportment in Meir and Rivkai (Tel Aviv, 1993), a source that is of focus in the final chapter of this study.
external/internal that allows her to continue living in the house of an abusive husband. The mother is not particularly well-educated in Jewish texts, but she relies upon her faith in the existence of an inner, loftier, better sphere to help her survive the regular household abuse. She explains to Rosa: “There are deep secrets in the laws of our Torah. Every mitzvah has a body and an essence . . . exterior and interior. . . . When we perform the mitsvot with intention, . . . , in this way we repair essences, worlds, damaged souls” (37, Book 1). Traditional Judaism offers Donneh a way to adapt to the horror of her daily life, and even to regard this horror as part of a sacred totality; the abuse is external, whereas the work of repairing damaged souls such as her own primarily takes place in a realm that the abuser cannot sully. Although this line of thought gives Donneh peace, Burla offers a damning condemnation of the social and educational system that gives rise to such uses of Jewish concepts. Traditional Judaism as Rosa knows it is an utterly inadequate path, given her questioning spirit—and it is a deleterious one for her psychological well-being. Rosa must find a way of being in the world that allows for freedom from abuse, gives her life purpose, and unites her interior and exterior ‘essences’ into a cohesive whole.

Rosa’s mother covers her hair, as is conventional for a pious Jewess of the Old Yishuv. Tawfiq in Europe associates his emasculated self-image with
that of being covered and masked. In this iconography of veiling, Burla
certainly could not have missed the sensation which had spread throughout the
Arab world and had continued for decades thereafter with the publication of
_Tahrir al-Mar’a (The Liberation of Woman)_ and _al-Mar’a al-Jadida (The New
Woman)_ by the Egyptian Qasim Amin in 1899 and 1901, respectively. Qasim
Amin’s argument in favor of a gradual shift in Muslim society so as to allow
women to remove their face-veils was followed by more radical acts on the part
of female activists. Recall, for instance, the Egyptians Huda Sha’arawi and Saiza
Nabarawi, representing the Egyptian Feminist Union at the 1923 International
Alliance for Suffrage and Women’s Citizenship conference in Rome, who
returned to the Cairo train station and removed their face-veils in front of the
expectant crowd, then gave photos of the episode to two Egyptian newspapers
(Badran 93). Another particularly prominent example with which Burla surely
would have been familiar was that of the Lebanese Nazira Zayn al-Din, who
created a scandal when she appealed to the French mandatory government with
the publication of _al-Sufur wa-l-hijab (Unveiling and Veiling)_ in 1928, evincing a
shocking familiarity with Islamic law as she faulted the ‘_ulama’_ for enforcing a
practice that had no basis in the Qur’an (Thompson 127 and 131).
The publication of *Daughter of Zion* thus comes during an important period of “the women’s awakening” in the Arab world. For all of the buzz about women’s rights emanating from places like cosmopolitan Cairo and Beirut, Palestine, however, was a bit slow on the uptake. “Where’s the awakening?” asked one writer from Acre in a 1926 issue of *al-Karmil*. “Where are the women reformers and demanders of rights?” (qtd. in Fleischmann 86). From April to June 1927 a series of fifteen articles on veiling appeared in the local Palestinian Arabic press. Most of the articles appeared in the Orthodox Christian-owned *Filastin*, a publication with many Muslim readers and writers. Opponents of unveiling charged that uncovering the face would lead to increased wantonness, that unveiling was a capitulation to the Europeans, or that the veil was simply not an important issue worth upsetting the status quo. Those who supported unveiling argued that the practice was physically unhealthy, that unveiling was necessary for the promotion of a better form of motherhood, and that unveiling would give women more opportunities for joining men in public political activism.7

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7 The fact that the balance of articles in *Filastin* sided with the cause of the unveilingers’ camp may be more of a reflection of *Filastin’s* editors’ priorities rather than a reflection of social norms. See Fleischmann (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2003), 73.
At the time of *Daughter of Zion*’s publication, Burla was working as the one-man office of the Arab Secretariat in the Jewish workers’ organization, the *Histadrut*. He was one of the *yishuv*’s most updated representatives on the goings-on of Palestine’s Arab population. Significantly, there is no mention in *Daughter of Zion* of the presence of local unveiling advocates whose voices rose to prominence in the aforementioned 1927 press controversy. Perhaps Burla ignores contemporary reform-minded rumblings on the Woman Question emanating from Palestinian Arab reformers because in real numbers the impact of such voices was limited to a tiny subset of the elite, or perhaps because mentioning the voices for unveiling would run contrary to Burla’s political goals of the novel, or perhaps because Burla believes that despite the debate the voices for the liberation of women were not sufficiently progressive.8

8 The Arab Women’s Association (AWA) and the First Arab Women’s Congress in Palestine were born following the violence of 1929 as the women’s wing of Palestinian nationalism. The mostly upper class female members during these first years worked together as a group but limited their actions to statements against the Balfour Declaration or protests in support of prisoners. While their stated goal was to “elevate the standing of women” they did not, for instance, allow their meetings to take place in mixed company with men (Fleischmann 119 and 140). By the late 1930s the AWA would split into two factions, and it has been suggested that the split occurred in part over the veiling/Western dress issue (Fleischmann 153); perhaps the Palestinian (male) rebels’ orders toward the end of the 1936-9 revolt forbidding women to unveil may have strengthened that faction of the AWA that was against the adoption of Western dress.
In any case, when Rosa and Tawfiq take up residence in postwar Palestine and she dons the veil per his request, Burla proceeds to utilize the veiling issue to mount a powerful critique: Arab Palestine with its veiled women is no better alternative to the Jewish Old Yishuv with its intolerable conventions that had forced Rosa to mask herself as a victim of domestic violence in the first place. By employing the recurring image of the masked face, Burla follows reform-minded writers throughout the Arab world such as Abd al-Hamid Hamdi, editor of the Egyptian newspaper *al-Sufur (Unveiling*, founded in 1915), who argued that the veil is much more than just a veil, it is a symbol of a larger cultural failing.  

In Arab Palestine Rosa tells Abu Murid (Tawfiq’s father, crafted in the image of Herzl’s Rashid Bey in *Altneuland*) of a gnawing sense that her life is devoid of purpose, which she associates with her adoption of the veil. “I currently walk about, for instance, with my face covered,” she says to Abu Murid, “[it is because] I do not want to spoil your way of life. Yet it is painful that now I have no will in life. . . . I see my life as empty and foolish” (128, Book 3). In the early days of her relationship with Tawfiq, she had laughed at the idea that she would “become a Muslim woman . . . that I will wear veil and cover my face . . . that I 

9 “Women are not the only ones who are veiled in Egypt,” wrote Hamdi. “We are a veiled nation” (qtd. in Baron 36).
will then be a ‘Fatma’” (122, Book 2). Now she has become a kind of ‘Fatma,’ and her Muslim family cannot understand why she is dissatisfied given the calmness and opulence of the domestic sphere they provide for her. They thrive on maintaining the status quo, particularly vis-à-vis the role of women, while Rosa’s search since adolescence has always been fundamentally about boldness and progress.

Burla offers an utter repudiation of the idealized Fatma, Rashid Bey’s wife in Herzl’s novel. In Herzl’s scenario, Fatma is perfectly happy to remain at home, hidden from view behind a lattice while her husband ventures out and about the land (116). She, like the other women of the New Society, supposedly enjoys equal rights and is no way “relegated […] to a harem” (75). The defining aspect of her lifestyle is that it is one she adopts by choice, one that this “well bred and well educated” woman makes consciously and freely (97) according to her own standards for happiness. Such a relationship between man and woman, in which each “may live and be happy in his own way” serves as a model for the new Jewish residents of Palestine. Herzl’s Ashkenazi immigrant Sarah notes, “If my husband wished it, I should live just as Fatma does” (97). Not Rosa.

For Burla the Arab woman of interest in Daughter of Zion is a member of the social and economic elite. This is in contrast to Hebrew writers such as
Yosef Meyuḥas, Ḣemda Ben-Yehuda, and Moshe Smilansky, for whom it is principally the downtrodden Arab female peasant or hardy Bedouin woman who occupies the imagination. Meyuḥas depicts the Arab woman as the workhorse of the peasant family in his Ha-felaḥim (The Peasants) series for the youth periodical Moledet (Homeland) in 1911-1913. Ḣemda Ben-Yehuda fantasizes about the Bedouin desert woman as model for an earthy Jewish femininity (“The Farmstead of the Sons of Rekhav,” 1903). Smilansky highlights the abuse the peasant suffers at the hands of her husband and the Bedouin woman’s tantalizing sexuality. In “Muhammad ‘Azarah” (1902) the title character ties up his wife when she refuses to sleep with him, in “Ayishe” (1907) an energetic Bedouin suffers in a forced marriage before running off with another man, in "Haj Ibrahim” (1908) a raped peasant is killed by her beloved husband out of “duty” and he spends the rest of his life honorably seeking revenge, in “Latifah” (1910) the plight of the peasant women touches the heart of the Jewish narrator; and in “Daughter of the Sheik” (1919) Bedouin tribeswomen are powerful fighters. Burla, in other works, writes about the Bedouin or village woman, too. Nehorah in his Beli kokhav (Without a Star, 1927), dies by her father’s hand for running off with her lover. Shafikah in Naftule adam (In Darkness Striving, 1929) goes insane and commits suicide after her former husband’s tribesman blinds her
Jewish lover. In *Daughter of Zion*, however, Burla steps in to take stock of the extent to which progressive egalitarian ideals have really made inroads into the lives of Palestine’s professional Arab elite class. It is the elite women and men who are increasingly at the helm of local cultural and political institutions, it is they who are most immediately in touch with the motley ideas circulating in the Arab cosmopolitan centers and it is they who are major gatekeepers for such ideational shifts in the political economy of Arab Palestinian life.

Rosa fails to create any kind of momentum to discard the veil among the elite Muslim women of Tawfiq’s extended family. “He will not eat you . . . he saw a lot there . . . in Europe” she pleads to the women (171, Book 3). When Rosa drags Tawfiq into the room, a few of the women take a moment to reveal their bare faces, giggling, and afterward “their faces are inflamed from the great revolution that had suddenly occurred” (173, Book 3). The giggles and animation that register on the women’s faces would indicate at least a slight interest or openness to the new idea. However, the scene is short-lived. In fact, it is one of the very women who does seize the opportunity to experiment with being bare-faced who then dismisses Rosa’s effort most caustically: “She is a Jewess . . . all of her is a Jewess . . . in her blood and in her speech” (173, Book 3).
Here again the issue of race surfaces in Burla’s narrative. It is the very Arab woman who gives reform a try (only to discard it) who, invoking the image of blood-based identity, articulates an exclusionary racial condemnation of Rosa as a Jew. Burla thus makes an argument that because the Palestinian Arab elite domestic realm is unsympathetic to reform per the Woman Question, there is no door open for any sort of Jewish-Arab hybridity as represented by Rosa’s efforts to make Arab Palestine her home. Veiled upper class women do not possess the requisite tools to act upon even the smallest desire to be anything but—as Rosa characterizes it—“a Muslim woman jailed in her house” (212 Book 4).

It is of note that Burla is aware of the potential charge that, by critiquing the veil, he is adopting a European oversimplification about gender in Palestinian Arab cultures. Burla in fact attempts to assert his credibility as a nuanced critic of Palestinian Arabs by undercutting the one-dimensionality with which the immigrant Ashkenazi pioneers in the novel speculate about Muslim womanhood. Rosa pretends to be illiterate in her encounters with the Ashkenazi workers prior to removing her veil, and they swallow her charade whole.10 Through Rosa’s

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10 While the 1931 Palestine census records the literacy rate of Muslim women at 3% (compared to 44% of Christian women and 78% of Jewish women), Muslim women’s literacy was higher in Jerusalem: 23%, a fact attributed to Jerusalem’s long-established network of schools for girls (Greenberg 68).
exaggerated game of conveying supposedly “just how narrow her understanding and how limited the Muslim woman is” (153, Book 3), Burla clearly chides the Ashkenazi pioneers by highlighting just how simplistic it is to supply them with the images of the ‘backward East’ that they expect to see.

One of the reasons why the Arab women in Tawfiq’s world wish to stick with the status quo is that no man among them will step up to encourage any sort of women’s revolution. The dawn of ‘women’s awakenings’ in both Jewish and Arab contexts depended heavily on the decisive role of men, who were springboards for their female relatives’ entry into their respective literary republics. Where would women like Nazik ‘Abid, Matiel Mughaman, Rachel Morpugo, Miriam Markel-Mosessoohn, or Sarah Shapira have been without the initiative and support of their fathers, husbands, or brothers?¹¹ Early in Daughter of Zion, when Rosa is a perspicacious youngster in the Old City, her loner Uncle Shem Tov breaks from communal norms to promote her talent and inquisitive mind. A well-traveled Talmud scholar fed up with Jerusalem’s religious establishment, Uncle Shem Tov with his knowledge of French and Italian is a uniquely positioned man to invite Rosa into the beit midrash and champion her educational aspirations as far as his own somewhat circumscribed worldview

¹¹ See Cohen and Feiner (Tel Aviv, 2006), 36-44 for more detailed discussion on this point in the Haskalah context.
allows. In contrast, during the postwar section of the novel, there is no such man in Abu Murid’s extended household to provide such an all-important initial intervention for the Muslim women. Tawfiq in his Arab home environment is as uncomfortable as the women are when Rosa attempts to introduce a new paradigm of femininity.

Burla’s most damning incorporation of the veil as a critique of Palestinian Arab nationalism comes during the scene in the novel in which Tawfiq makes plans to attend a theatre performance at the local Arab National Youth Club. As Ellen Fleishmann in her research on gender in the early Palestinian Arab press points out, the veiling issue was a prism through which local writers could craft narratives of tradition and modernity (74). In the scene at the Arab National Youth Club, Burla suggests that the vision of modernity and tradition produced by the actors and audience reflects a contemporary outlook wrong for where Palestine should be headed.

The topic of the historical drama at the Club is Samuel ibn ‘Adiyah, the most famous Jewish Arabic-language poet-hero of the pre-Islamic jahiliyya era, honored in the poetry of Imru’ al-Qais for his loyalty. Ibn ‘Adiyah, when forced to choose between his promises of hospitality to Imru’ al-Qais and the life of his own son, opted to sacrifice his family rather than break a promise to his honored
guest. The play to which Burla refers is most probably Antun al-Jumayyil’s “Samuel, or, Allegiance to the Arabs” (Al-Samaw’al, aw, Wafa’ al-Arab), published in Cairo in 1909. Al-Jumayyil, a Beirut-born Christian, spent much of his life in Egypt and in 1933 would become Editor of Al-Ahram newspaper.

Samuel ibn ‘Adiyah as an idealized hybrid figure of the Arab-Jewish past fits beautifully into political agendas of those who would advocate Jewish sacrifice in favor of Arab wellbeing, whether they be Palestinian nationalists, the late nineteenth-century “Jerusalem Group,”12 or the dovish Brit Shalom. If the activists at the Club wish to position Samuel ibn ‘Adiyah as a model for Jewish life under the Arabs in the past, what are the assumptions they hold about the present? Here Burla shoots a zinger: at the Club no actresses are allowed to appear onstage. All the female parts must be played by men. Burla’s argument is unmistakable: how can the Palestinian Arabs suggest that they are offering a positive vision for the land when they cut women out as actors? When love onstage is so full of artifice? Male-female relationships in this setting lack

12 The Jerusalem Group consisted primarily of Sephardi Jews born in the Old Yishuv who tried during the 1890s to create an alternative to the Ashkenazi-led Zionism. The Jerusalem Group, which suffered from a lack of organization and a dearth of funds, included Avraham Shalom Yehudah, Yosef Meyuhas, and David Yelin. They focused their research and translation efforts to highlight crosscurrents in Hebrew-Arabic literatures (for instance, in medieval poetry) and shared traditions of biblical times. See Berlovitz (Tel Aviv, 1996), 121-131.
authenticity, because the women who appear before the audience’s eyes are not, in fact, women. The tradition of Arab-Jewish peaceful coexistence, with Samuel ibn ‘Adiyah as “the good Jew” of the Palestinian Arab narrative, is a tradition in which under Burla’s pen women cannot represent themselves.

Tawfiq’s invitation to Rosa to accompany him to the theatre comes with a single stipulation: she must be veiled. Rosa rejects the invitation.

For Rosa, trapped in a marriage in which male and female have yet to find a productive balance, the discovery of the Zionist pioneer ethos with its proud, productive, unveiled women is the culmination of the novel’s episodic unfolding. To the ḥalutzot Rosa confesses her secret. “I must tear away the veil of the dream and the fairy tale which have covered my house,” she says. “I am not a Muslim woman . . . I am a Jewess” (182, Book 3). The statement is Rosa’s claiming of the dismissive words by the aforementioned Muslim female would-be unveilier in Tawfiq’s household (“She is a Jewess . . . all of her is a Jewess—173, ______________________________

13 These idealized pioneer women (ḥalutzot) are part of an informal sisterhood developed as a result of laboring together, whether it be in urban building projects or rural agriculture. They call to mind the ethos encouraged in particular by such Zionist activists as Hannah Meisel who, with the assistance of men like Arthur Ruppin, Yitzhak Wilkansky, and Akiva Ettinger established key female worker education programs both before and after World War I: the women’s farm at Kinneret (1911-1917), the Women Worker’s Movement (founded 1914), and the Agricultural School for Young Women at Nahalal (founded 1926), among others. For more on Hannah Meisel’s work and especially the importance of the men who collaborated with her, see Berg (2001), 145-152.
Book 3). As the halutsot share with Rosa Zionist texts such as Leon Pinsker’s Autoemancipation, Rosa finds the blueprint of a life for which she has apparently been suited since she was a precocious little girl. Indeed, an epistolary scene characterizes Rosa’s Jewish future as a ‘natural’ outgrowth of her childhood past, a trope common in nationalist narratives. She writes to Tawfiq:

Now I can express myself clearly and openly. Now the covering, which clouded my face my entire life from the beginning until now, has fallen. Now, at the age of twenty-six, I feel as though I have been reborn. Above all, I must tell you definitively: I do not want to continue--I will not agree under any circumstances--to live the life of a Muslim woman, either trapped in her house or emerging wrapped in a veil and scarf. (Today I am already going out bare-faced and traveling freely.) For seven months I have been covered and costumed out of my own will, because I searched for my life’s path, or better yet: because I searched for myself. Now I have found my path and myself. My path is the path of a human being, the path of a free woman, a ‘bat horin’ like every other human being. In addition to this, I have found that I am a Jewess. You know that all
my life I have been an opponent of religion, of that which
divides and estranges, which eats away at humanity. I have found
that the path via which the Jewish nation is marching today is a
path of humanity. (226-7, Book 4, emphasis added)

Burla sets up a switch: whereas Tawfiq at the opening of Daughter of Zion stands
for freedom from all cultural ties by professing to be a mere “human being” (84,
Book 2), ultimately his racial origin—his organic memory—prevents him from
pursuing a politically progressive path; Rosa, in contrast, with her hybrid
Ashkenazi/Sephardi heritage is sufficiently ‘absorbent’ to be open to (European)
innovations as she discovers, to quote from the above excerpt, her “path of
humanity,” a path which, in Burla’s formulation, merges fealty to the Jewish
nation with a women’s rights-oriented universalism that supposedly exceeds the
confines of any particular race.

Thus Burla’s claim for the justness of Zionism derives not so much from,
say, the call to provide diaspora Jews with a refuge from anti-Semitism, nor from
the contention that Jews from all over the world consider the Land of Israel to be
their homeland. Neither of these two themes receives all that much attention in
the narrative. Instead, he outlines his case clearly: the Jews have a right to conduct their efforts in Palestine because they are at the vanguard of a new, more progressive social structure. The Arab nationalism that Tawfiq adopts toward the end of the novel, with its mob attacks, is a violent divergence from his father’s rather apolitical worldview: “in your desire to be an Arab,” Rosa accuses her husband, “you have ceased to be a human being! . . . If this is your nationalism, it is extreme, radical, and seventy times darker than religion! I ran away […] from similar qualities of religion, and do you think I would bow down my head now before the ‘glory’ of such a nationalism?” (264, Book 4). As a female from a traditional Jewish home of the Old Yishuv who witnessed of her father’s cruelty to her mother, she can make the case that aggression masquerading as self-determination is fallacious. In other words, Burla anchors Rosa’s authority to dismiss Palestinian Arab nationalism as extreme and inhumane in her experience as a survivor of domestic violence.

Rosa and Tawfiq divorce as Rosa, in the tradition of Ibsen’s Nora, leaves her family in the pursuit of self-discovery and liberty. Burla’s Zionism, with its peaceful, universal vision of freedom for all people and its core promotion of

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14 It is no surprise, given texts discussed in this study thus far, that where Burla does touch upon the notion of Eretz Israel as a refuge for victims of diasporic anti-semitism is through the character Tsiporke, the only one of nine Jewish women who survives to tell her story of gang rape and massacre in Russia.
women’s independence occupies the moral high ground, and Rosa’s new partnership with the Zionist pioneer immigrant ‘Atsmon at the novel’s conclusion seals the extent to which she has allied herself with Zionism as opposed to Palestinian Arab nationalism.\textsuperscript{15} Rosa’s choice between lovers who represent competing ideologies puts her squarely within that nationalist novelistic paradigm perfected by Turgenev; to borrow the observation of Michael Clark Troy in his study of Turgenev’s love narratives (such as \textit{On the Eve}), “By consistently presenting ideologically opposed suitors in competition for a symbolically

\textsuperscript{15} Rosa even invites Tawfiq to join her in the Zionist collective, but he refuses. One must ask whether Burla’s depiction of Zionist aims and methods is not rather disingenuous given the job he takes in Arab affairs with the \textit{Histadrut}. Burla was responsible for coordinating efforts to organize Arab workers in a manner that would prevent them from allying with the Arab upper class and neutralize their potential danger to the Zionist enterprise. He noted in January 1931, “If we do not see what is coming and take the initiative, \textit{others} will appear and organize the [Arab] masses against us, in order to make us fail. And then, if the Arab people in their broad masses will be organized against us—our situation in Palestine will be a hundred times more difficult than it is today” (qtd. in Lockman 185). Burla’s job was to build a \textit{separate} division within the \textit{Histadrut} that would cater to the needs of Arab workers (though members could have access to the \textit{Histadrut’s} health clinics), while keeping an eye on local nationalist efforts among the Arab elite. Haifa was virtually the only place where Burla was successful in recruiting Arabs, and even then, the number of members in 1931 was 138 (Lockman 185). Thus the idea that Tawfiq could be a fully-integrated participant in the Zionist project—were he even to desire this—is rather tenuous. It is odd that Gila Ramraz-Raukh in her study \textit{The Arab in Israeli Literature} argues that “As a writer, Burla has no interest in the friction between Arabs and Jews” and “the relation between Jew and non-Jew is not seen as an aberration” in his corpus (24 and 27). Burla’s novel about Jewish-Arab divorce clearly negates this claim.
charged heroine, Turgenev turned courtship into a contest of ideas” in the
grand narrative of the nation’s development (36). Burla, writing almost a century
after Turgenev, fashions Rosa as the principal teacher to her competing suitors.
She is the ideological sophisticate in comparison to the two men who yearn for
her affections. As the heroine comes back into the Jewish fold, she guides
‘Atsmon in the philosophy of free love. He responds enthusiastically, and the two
settle in Motza. For Burla to invoke Motza in the wake of 1929 is a clear refusal
to surrender in the face of Arab attacks, since Motza was a flashpoint of anti-
Jewish attacks in the 1929 riots and had to be evacuated. Led by their feisty
local eretet hayil (woman of valor), the Zionist pioneers of Burla’s vision will not
give up their cause.

Doris Sommer in her authoritative study of early nineteenth-century Latin
American romance novels suggests that authors ‘solve’ competing foundational
national claims through “an erotics of politics.” The goal of such novels, Sommer
writes, is

to show how a variety of . . . national ideals are all ostensibly
grounded in “natural” heterosexual love and in the marriages that
provided a figure for apparently nonviolent consolidation during
internecine conflicts at mid-century. Romantic passion . . . gave a
rhetoric for the hegemonic projects in Gramsci’s sense of
conquering the antagonist through mutual interest, or “love,” rather
than through coercion. (6)

Yet whereas in Sommer’s material, love engenders “apparently nonviolent
consolidation during internecine conflicts,” the conclusion of Daughter of Zion
wrenches Arab from Jew while binding Ashkenazi to Sephardi, newcomer to
native.

Burla cannot end his story without taking a swing at those Ashkenazi
writers whom he characterized in 1930 as being all too willing to “cancel him out”
because of his origins. The name “Motza” calls to mind for the Hebrew reader
the notion of “origin.” Rosa, an Ashkenazi-Sephardi Jewess native to Palestine
is of hardy local physical constitution, giving her natural immunity to regional
diseases; this local origin will allow her to remain healthier than her immigrant
comrades in the malaria-plagued landscape (Burla 400, Book 4). Rosa may
have needed the socialist revolutionary immigrants to expose her to the values
and ideals of diaspora-developed Zionist ideology, but once she is on board, her
origins in the land position her to lead the newcomers. Burla, in essence, has
one-upped his immigrant (mostly-Ashkenazi) intellectual peers. He offers a
nationalist narrative—a woman’s nationalist narrative—to claim local ‘dibs’ on the
question of whose stories, outlooks, and experiences should ‘count’ in the increasingly rancorous debates on the legitimacy of Zionism. By choosing to center his story on a *heroine*, Burla, one may suspect, capitalizes upon the expectation that it is usually the male protagonist in modern Hebrew letters whose success or failure over the course of the nationalist narrative is measured according to the extent to which he is able to build himself anew, to change, to experience a *shinui ’arakhin* (a transvaluation of values). Against this literary convention, Rosa’s return to Jewish Palestine is a return to her native territory, a return to the traits and values which characterized her as an inquisitive child and which now find full expression in her adult life. Burla’s wager—that the local child of a Sephardi mother can top the immigrant Ashkenazi hero any day—is a jockeying-for-position in the Zionist intelligentsia, a move he needs to make as a precondition for delivering up his Arab-Jewish divorce.

In sum, Burla has turned on its head and used for his own benefit conventions of Woman as nationalist symbol; he also obliges today’s readers to question assumptions regnant in the scholarly literature on gender and nationalism. Rosa adheres to Nira Yuval-Davis’ aforementioned contention that women “symbolize the collective unity, honor, and the raison d’ètre of specific national and ethnic projects.” However, while Silke Wenk argues that in
nationalist discourses women represent the nation’s timeless continuity while men represent the nation’s progress and break with the past (69), Rosa belies such a division; if, as previously mentioned, Claudia Koontz can lament “Girls did not need to act; they had to become the national embodiment,” Rosa is, rather, a female who both acts and embodies. Her trajectory is one of self-discovery and change, and her greatest source of strength is that her evolution conjunctly manifests as a native becoming of *that which she has always been*.

Through a Jewish domestic abuse survivor’s experiment as the wife of an Arab man, this Sephardi writer proffers his definitive diagnosis. The time is not yet ripe for widespread, productive, and ongoing Arab-Jewish intermixing in Palestine. The felicitous partnership of ‘Atsmon and Rosa, on the other hand, is the beginning of the birth of a new nation.

**Burla as an Author Afraid of His Heroine**

For all of Burla’s efforts to put a Jewish heroine front and center in his Zionist tale—a heroine who recoiles from the abuse of her mother’s body at the hands of her father--when it comes to the female body and revolutionary sexuality, the author actually reveals himself to be quite circumscribed. Burla’s
attempt to make Rosa the mouthpiece of a forward-looking ideology of love
falls with a dull thud onto the erotically inquisitive terrain of the early 1930s
Jewish-Arab sexual borderland. To explicate this point, it is instructive to
review how Burla positions the dilemma of potential incompatibility between Arab
and Jew as a social-literary problem in Daughter of Zion. During the European
segment (in the midsection of the novel), Burla details with considerable length
one of Rosa’s many philosophical conversations with her artist friend Albert
Dalois. The conversation concerns the question, what is the goal of literature and
what is the role of the author?

The character Dalois argues that literature must free itself from “reality as
it is” (27, Book 3) and instead be a “repair of reality, its purification, its elevation”
(tikkun ha-metsi’ut, tserifatah, ha’alatah–29, Book 3). His remarks resonate with
Rosa, who earlier in the novel touches upon the theme of desire and life using
almost the same words: “a repair (tikkun), a release (shihrut), a spiritual elevation
(hit’alut)” (214, Book 2). Literature, Dalois continues, must “peer out to tomorrow,
. . . be an art of prophecy, which declares that which is coming” (29, Book 3). To
make his case, Dalois recounts the plot of the 1903 German impressionist novel

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16 I borrow the term "sexual borderland" from Kennedy and Ullman (Columbus,
2003), who are interested in the role sexuality plays in cultural exchanges in the
frontier landscape.
Beate und Mareille by Eduard von Keyserling (which, incidentally, was published in Hebrew translation by Mitspeh in 1928, the same house that published Daughter of Zion—rather ingenious product placement!). The novel, like Burla's story, is about a taboo romantic relationship—in this case, between a man of the noble class and a lower-born woman with whom he is having an affair. Dalois criticizes Keyserling's book because the author brings the story to a tragic close. The lovers do not stay together. The noble decides to abandon his lover, returning to the comfort of his own community and to his wife. Such a plot, Dalois contends, is conservative. Had the lovers stayed together, the book would have challenged its readers to aim for a new future where love reigns supreme and coupling can cross boundaries. Literature in its current state, he laments, "is afraid of itself":

Authors are afraid of their heroes. . . . When the hero gets to the climax of his actions, the author hastens . . . to remove him from the stage. . . . Faust, Raskolnikov, Anna Karenina, . . . —all of them, all of them, either they take their own lives, or are handed over to the authorities, or completely repent of their ways. . . . Literature is proceeding hand in hand . . . with the ruling order.

(29, Book 3)
Through Dalois’ critique, Burla demonstrates a consciousness about the pitfalls of writing a story that hails revolutionary love but brings a taboo couple to a tragic end: to deny a future to a mixed-race pairing leaves him open to the charge of being afraid of his heroes.

Burla attempts to sidestep such an accusation by painting Rosa’s commitment to progress and social change as able to find expression only in her relationship with the Jewish pioneer ‘Atsmon, not in her relationship with the effendi Tawfiq. The love offered by ‘Atsmon, the representative of Zionist agricultural settlement, is the true challenge to “the ruling order” in Palestine. By the end of the novel Tawfiq is so caught up in the web of his own confusion and jealousy of Rosa that he tries to kill her, an act reminiscent of the very domestic violence from which as an Old Yishuv teenager she had fled.

The comradely romance between Rosa and Atsmon could jump out of the pages of a socialist tract such as August Bebel’s Woman and Socialism (1879). Bebel’s project of removing ignorance about love and sex was widely discussed by intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. “Who has not read Bebel’s Woman; or at least who has not heard of it?” asked the Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov upon August Bebel’s death in 1913 (qtd. in Stites 239). As the German socialist feminist Clara Zetkin noted, Woman and Socialism was
“not just a book, but an event” (qtd. 237). Bebel’s text, translated into many languages, became famous as the “Bible” for socialist and non-socialist feminists alike for decades after its first publication. Among Bebel’s fundamental contentions: physical intimacy is as natural a part of human life as are all other bodily needs. Sexual organs and impulses, he writes, “must not be objects of secrecy, false shame and complete ignorance” (98).

Bebel’s call for a more productive form of romance is not anti-marriage, nor is it tantamount to espousal of promiscuity. In fact, a de-emphasis on eros accompanied Bebel’s notion that male-female relations exhibit the same evolutionary steps as other societal transformations and are subject to the same laws as other natural phenomena. What is key is love, as Alexandra Kollontai wrote in *The Social Basis of the Woman Question* (1909): the revolutionary woman “step by step . . . transforms herself into an independent worker, an independent personality, free in love” (Kollontai 63).17 Bural’s depiction of Rosa as a devotee of free love clearly follows in this vein.
Rosa credits her first-hand experience of her father’s abuse and lack of affection as a major cause of her gravitation toward the concept of free love.  

What is key, she explains, is to eschew commonly-held archaisms when it comes to male-female relations:

Restrictions such as shyness on the part of the woman, all the prohibitions regarding the company of women, . . . the ownership and control of man over woman, all the rules about monasticism and asceticism, and all the noise and tumult that people make about the ‘wedding’—all this is ancient law which originated from a time when man was still . . . a servant attached to false beliefs and dark decrees. (46, Book 2)

Rosa, who already by the time she was an adolescent had become a self-declared “epikorsit and a non-believer” (85, Book 1), considers the Old Yishuv to be religiously archaic, insular, and authoritarian about rules and boundaries. She believes that one must be willing to transgress the confines of communal norms and fossilized religious law if such transgression is a path toward self-knowledge.

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18 “It is because things are so terrible for me sometimes— . . . —sometimes it seems to me that much of suffering, much of sorrow in life, comes to us from a lack of love . . . because there is not a great, free love in human life” (Burla 44, Book 2).
It is Rosa’s no-barriers approach to love that, at first, enables her to be open to romance with Tawfiq. At the beginning of the novel Tawfiq insists that above all he wants to approach their relationship as a mere “human being,” unbound by conventional categories of religion. He writes her a letter:

Religion divides us like thousands of endless walls, yes. But . . . we can surmount even this, I am not religious. Nothing will hinder me. . . . Otherness, names like ‘Muslim man’, ‘Jewish woman’—get in the way. I know. Therefore as for myself I say to you that I am only a human being. What kind of human being? . . . I am innocent and pure. I am twenty-four years old, but I have not even once touched a woman. My lips, even my hands, have never touched a woman’s face. You know that in our society women are hidden, I have never even seen the face of a woman besides my mother and my sisters, except for the faces of Jewesses and Christian women on the street. (84, Book 2, bold in orig.)

Tawfiq proposes that he and Rosa can surmount any taboos against their relationship by focusing on the ideal of the “human being,” for this ideal will provide a way through the walls that separate them as Muslim and Jew. The details Tawfiq chooses to share in his characterization of himself as a “human
being,” however, give the reader pause from the start. Foremost in Tawfiq’s mind is his need to let Rosa know that he has had no sexual contact with women. In other words, Tawfiq makes the case for being a kind of blank slate, for possessing the qualities of a universal “human being” because he is “innocent and pure.” Not only is he a virgin, he has never even seen the face of a Muslim woman. Islam with its veiling customs has given Tawfiq, according to his rendering of his own history, the benefit of having no sexual past that could mar his claim to being fit for an unexpected future with a Jewess. In this very first example of Tawfiq’s self-appraisal, one can already begin to detect just how incompatible he is with Rosa. He has no more experience in sexuality than does the yeshivah bokher (yeshivah student) of Haskalah literature, and he has no understanding of the role of the body in Rosa’s free-love philosophy.

Indeed, Rosa believes that it is a mitzvah to make one’s body available to the touch of another. This availability, she thinks, serves the greater good because one performs an act of loving kindness by being part of “a great love” (43, Book 2). Throughout her adolescence she has offered her body to the local Jewish boys for investigative examination. Tawfiq may insist that he is a blank slate with no sexual history, but Rosa cannot say the same.
Oddly enough, at the same time that Burla emphasizes just how un-
hidden and available Rosa has been to others—in other words, the very opposite of what Tawfiq has come to expect from women thus far in his life—Burla also emphasizes that Rosa is rather ignorant of her own beauty and sex appeal. Whenever Rosa allows others to explore her body (the Jewish boys, her uncle, her best friend Golda, her teacher the nun Odette) there is no suggestion that she experiences a sexual stimulation of her own or processes the touch as anything other than a de-eroticized philosophy lesson. It is as if Burla can only create a heroine for whom desire is not about physical pleasure but is merely a conceptual category or moral value. “In the desire to know, to seek, to feel, to live,” Rosa says, “there is no evil, no decay, but rather: a repair (tikkun), a release (shiḥrur), a spiritual elevation (hit’alut)” (214, Book 2).

Thus Rosa’s body makes for the perfect socialist pinup girl—wide-eyed, utterly available, and unconcerned about sexual labyrinths. Take the example of the famous scene between Rosa and Golda. Golda stands the naked Rosa in front of a mirror. “You poor thing,” Golda says, “[you] do not even know just how beautiful [you] are! Please look at yourself in the mirror—maybe you will discover it, somehow—for if I, a young woman, love you so much, think how much more so the young men will!” (48, Book 1). Golda here functions as a kind of ‘place
holder’ for male admirers, for the invocation of young men encourages readers to imagine looking at Rosa’s body through male eyes as Golda proceeds to highlight the special qualities of each body part one by one: Rosa’s eyebrows, which meet together “in a light and delicate arc” centrally placed above the nose, would draw any potential suitor to plant there “endless kisses”; Rosa’s breasts, Golda continues, are perfectly-sized (Rosa protests that they are “too large” (!) but her friend assures her that “today, the men like it better that way”). Golda concludes her presentation: “this body, clean of any flaw, free of any imperfection, pure of any blemish” is the most beautiful she has ever seen (51). Rosa has passed the inspection like a piece of meat tested for kosher consumption.

This scene has offered generations of young Hebrew readers their literary introduction to the erotic. Contemporary Hebrew writer Ruth Almog, for instance, recalls in an interview with Haaretz, “One day she did something brave, she stripped off all of her clothes and stood naked in front of a mirror in order to look at her body. The description shocked me in its open eroticism. I think I read it when I was a seventh-grade student, in a school for religious girls.”¹⁹ Yet although readers of modern Hebrew may wish to claim this scene as momentous

¹⁹ Almog (2003).
for women’s ingress onto autoerotic territory, one cannot gloss over how
Burla depicts Rosa here as an object of desire, as the object of others’ gaze but
not the subject of her own.

So many questions go unasked and unanswered in this scene. When
Rosa hears Golda’s descriptions of her body, thighs and breasts put into words,
does anything inside her shift? Does her body-made-words frighten her, disgust
her, elude her, enthrall her, enrage her, beckon her, open her? Does she feel
the weightiness of that moment that Hélène Cixous describes—“Every woman
has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break,
occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from
under her” (Clément and Cixous 92)? Does Rosa experience her body reflected
in the mirror as a feeling that crests over her in waves, or does she absorb
Gilda’s descriptions more as small bursts and pinpricks, or perhaps as a slow
ache? How does Rosa’s skin feel to her as the fabric that covers her body drops
away, leaving her naked? How does she smell to herself?

Readers learn nothing of this. Rosa gets dressed. Burla has titillated with
a peep show and only now, in the heady moments right after the show has ended
and the lights have come up, does he provide a little bonus segment: he ‘reveals’
that his starlet is consumed by an Arab-populated rape fantasy. This is the only
moment in the novel in which Burla allows his heroine to voice erotic
desires—as a kind of confession, a crime report. She first explains to Golda that
she never thinks about being attracted to boys, for her mind is empty of romantic
designs (“I have not yet thought much about that, first I must finish school,” Burla
52, Book 1), but after some prodding, she confesses, “If I were to tell you how I
think, how I am eager to live and to love—then you would say that . . . that I am
bad . . . a dirty girl” (52, Book 1):

I feel rough, large, dry hands plucking my flesh—and suddenly I am
carried away in a big boat with Arab sailors . . . to the distant places
of the sea . . . [The] boat is full black Arabs and they are laughing,
revealing in front of me teeth as white as those of a wild animal . . .
and suddenly – this always happens—a little sailboat passes by
next to the sailors’ boat, quick as an arrow, with a pure white sail.

(55, Book 1)\(^{20}\)

Out jumps her hero, with his “white European hat” and rescues her without a
battle, for the Arabs, upon seeing the hero, immediately cease their feast on her
body and stand motionless in submission (56, Book 1). The entire subsequent

\(^{20}\) For a brief reading of this passage and Burla’s response to 1929 within the
context of the representation of Arabs in Hebrew literature, see Oppenheimer
(Tel Aviv, 2008), 102-109.
plot of the novel may be read as Burla’s effort to play out a deep-seated
desire-repulsion for the Arab (which Burla can only contour as a rape), ultimately
‘ridding’ Rosa of her “dirty” ‘Arab complex’ when she separates from Tawfiq and
chooses ‘Atsmon. It is a bloodless fantasy in which the Arabs give up the object
of their desire without a fight, though as the novel progresses, the ‘reality’ of
Rosa’s life with Tawfiq turns out differently: he does not give up without trying to
kill her first.

Burla on the “Boulevard Woman” of Shababo’s Marya

A brief consideration of Rosa’s Ashkenazi-Sephardi story in light of
another hybrid Hebrew heroine’s, Marya Geada in Shoshana Shababo’s Marya
(1932), further illuminates Burla’s reluctance to address his heroine’s capacity for
sexual self-expression. If Shababo, a fellow Sephardi writer and Burla’s former
student, is bolder than is her mentor in giving voice to her heroine’s libidinous
needs, she is as invested as he is in sorting through Palestinian Arab-Jewish
fault lines. Like Burla, Shababo foregrounds a heroine’s attempt to emerge from
the abuses of violent domesticity in order to comment upon contemporary
political pressures facing the yishuv.
Burla’s swift, venomous reaction to Shababo’s novel has been well-documented. Joseph Halevi’s book-length study of Shababo rehashes the controversy caused by Burla’s scathing review in Moznayim (Scales) as respondents tried to understand what may have prompted his uncharacteristic wrath. Burla, then Editor of the prestigious literary journal, dismisses the newcomer’s debut novel: “For the first time we find among us that type known as the cheap novel, the boulevard novel” (Burla 1932, 11-12). Marya, published by the very same press (Mitspeh) only one year after Daughter of Zion’s concluding volume, clearly touches a raw nerve with the yishuv’s most authoritative Sephardi writer of his generation. What is it about Marya that Burla may have found so threatening, and how might this danger lead one to understand Shababo’s novel as a contribution to the Arab Question of her time?

For Burla, Rosa as an undesiring naked heroine in front of a mirror is kosher, but Marya, a naked heroine taking pleasure from her own body, is pornographic. How different Rosa’s nakedness is from Marya’s! Marya discovers her body auto-erotically one night in her cloistered room:

21 Burla’s review appeared after a more positive one by B. Peri was published in Kolno’a (vol. 2, issue 16, July 15 1932). It is of note that Gershon Shaked, too, rather dismisses Shababo’s writing: “[S]he captured something of [Burla’s] Eastern eroticism [!], but only remained there without the addition of a broad,
For a long time she stayed naked, searching in the dark for her nightgown that lay under the pillow. In her haste, she could not find it. She remained naked. Once again she curved her body along the back of the mattress. Her right breast touched the edge of the pillow. . . . She trembled from a strong pressing-of-feelings. She stilled for a moment, listening to herself. . . . An intoxicating scent emanated from her flesh. A pleasant warmth spread from it. . . . [She] bent again toward the soft pillow and tickled the pink nipples of her breasts . . . she began to blaze. . . . A pain came upon her, but with the pain she felt joy. (Shababo 152-3)

By attacking Shababo for scenes such as this one, Burla can maintain the pretense that his heroine Rosa, a wide-eyed, desired young woman, stands naked in front of a mirror simply to forward an agenda of conceptual introspection rather than to titillate the Hebrew reader’s imagination. Art historian Lynda Nead notes that the female nude is “the subject, the form” that has captivated artists

epic, and restraining dimension; she turned a literature that aimed to be ‘canonic’ and legitimate into low-literature” (Shaked 97). See Halevi (Ramat-Gan, 1996), 166-7, ftnts. 111-113 for other reviews and reactions to the novel. For more on the boulevard novel, see Engelstein (Ithaca, 1992), 359-420. I encountered Engelstein’s research as I was starting my project, and I found her interweaving of published fiction and the history of sexology in Russia to be quite helpful as I was thinking about social/political transitions in Mandate Palestine.
and art historians for generations as “a paradigm of Western high culture with its network of contingent values: civilization, edification, and aesthetic pleasure” (326). On may read Burla’s haste in declaring Marya to be outside the bounds of acceptable modern Hebrew discourse as an attempt to shore up the location of his own work firmly within this Western iconographic tradition of the female nude.\(^{22}\) The female nude in this tradition, Nead explains, is safe and respectable only insofar as the image purportedly leads the viewer/reader to noble contemplation (329). Cultural critics such as Kenneth Clark and John Berger,

\(^{22}\) The unstable binary of acceptable-versus-unacceptable feminine subject of men’s attention, described in a discourse heavy with innuendo deployed as if in service ‘merely’ to the aesthetic and philosophical, is the fundamental trope of an essay no less key to the birth of modern Hebrew culture than Ahad Ha-am’s “Ha-lashon ve-sifrutah” (“The Language and Its Literature,” 1894). Indeed, it is worth a brief digression to note that in this essay, Ahad Ha-am depicts the Hebrew language (ha-lashon, a feminine word in the original Hebrew) as an entity which Jewish philosophers for generations have “expanded and perfected, each one according to the demands of the subject before him,” “giving her grace and honor” (103). Over time her honor has fallen as men have made her their plaything (tashmish, a word that refers to sexual intercourse), devoid of contemplative thought; “she [no longer] comes to fulfill spiritual needs” for the nation but rather debases herself on mere prettiness alone, “as if she were plying a trade with a nation of primitive wildmen” (104). It is time, Ha-am concludes, for this prostituted and wanton female to surrender once again to “contemplative thought” (ha-mahshavah ha-‘iyunit, also feminine grammatically), a feminine form that more truly reflects the essence of the nation. Only then can language return to her previous glory and “be respected by the nation.” Only then will “the Hebrew reader . . . delve deeply into Hebrew literature” (107). Such is proper contemplation (“‘iyun”) for the Hebrew male reader who can direct his attention to the de-eroticized feminine-on-high, Mahshavah.
argues Nead, maintain the pretence of a clear distinction between the
“acceptable” high culture nude and “unacceptable” low culture pornography by
employing a descriptive language that displaces the gazer’s experience of the
erotic into the realm of artistic practice (333).

After the voluminous four-volume effort of Daughter of Zion, in which Burla
as a Sephardi writer expends so much energy to position a hybrid Sephardi-
Ashkenazi character (perhaps a wishfully-crafted ‘post-Sephardi/Ashkenazi
character’?) as a native who absorbs an ideological import from the West,
socialist Zionism, to the point of “out-Zionisting" the Ashkenazi Zionist
immigrants—socially, romantically, philosophically, economically—here
Shababo's treatment of female libido does not fall into line when it comes to that
“paradigm of Western high culture,” the female nude; Burla’s own Sephardi
student gives voice to a female subject whose erotic needs are disruptive,
refusing to offer the reader any ‘noble’ transposition into a higher contemplative
key, rebellious against any containing structure, be that structure the walls of the
convent or the ideological framework of socialist Zionism.23 One may locate his

23 Shababo, as Yaffa Berlovitz notes, did not publish her material in the reigning
socialist Zionist periodicals of the day. Shababo preferred, for instance, Haaretz
or even New York’s Ha-do'ar to Davar (2006, p. 26). Burla was active in the
Sephardi workers’ political faction (for instance, in 1931 he was ranked second
dismissal of her novel as a cheap boulevard piece within inter-Sephardi
Zionist polemics.

Yosef Halevi, while certainly disagreeing with Burla’s dismissal of the
novel, reads Marya as an example of “light literature,” a fantasy getaway
intended as an escape from contemporary political issues and nationalist
violence for the 1929-era reader (18). The lack of explicitly nationalist characters
leads Yaffa Berlovitz, following Yosef Halevi, to conclude that Shababo’s work is
about “questions of God-Man-Universe . . . , questions which were not relevant to
Israeli society [sic] then” (29). Both Halevi and Berlovitz note that Shababo
bases her tale on a true story that had been conveyed to her by Arab friends of
the family: a young local Arab Christian woman with prominent kin had become
pregnant out of wedlock and had fled to a convent. What both Halevi and
Berlovitz overlook is that the origins of the story are not the crucial element for
analyzing the novel; what is of much greater import is the fact that Shababo
takes this anecdote and then fictionalizes it in a particularly contoured manner
that indeed has echoes in the growing Arab-Jewish tensions of the yishuv.

on the candidate list behind David Aviyashar) for the Asefat ha-nivḥarim (elected
assembly of the yishuv).
The suffocating atmosphere of the fictional convent in *Marya*, reinforced by a community that designates this institution as the principal asylum for troublesome women, is the perfect network of spaces in which Shababo can investigate a crumbling, simmering social fabric out of step with changes coming to the Palestinian map. If Shababo’s nude disrupts Burla’s pretense of noble contemplation vis-à-vis the erotic, the fact that she situates her novel within the prison-like walls of a convent puts her novel clearly into dialogue with another Western literary trope, the rich legacy of eighteenth-century French libertine political “quasi-pornographic” works such as Denis Diderot’s *The Nun*.24 Yehuda Burla surely makes use of literary convent debauchery in his characterization of the nun Odette in *Daughter of Zion*; however, whereas he ensures that Rosa ‘cures’ Odette of her lesbianism with a philosophical teaching (the nun eventually throws off the habit and marries a male lover), Shababo views the messy erotic not as an illness to be cured but rather as an opportunity to dig into the vicissitudes of violence. A self-described “bookworm” who consumed French literature “endlessly” (qtd. in Berlovitz 2006, 26), Shababo would surely have been familiar with the French literary convent as that “place where the worst

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24 The descriptor “quasi-pornographic” is Russell Goulbourne’s (Oxford, 2005), xi. Note that Halevi discusses the major role of French language and culture in early Zikhron Ya’akov (Ramat Gan, 1996), 28-29.
dreams of debauchery and violence, because they are hidden from public curiosity, find permission to come into being” (qtd. in Rivers 387). While Burla maintains tight controls on the expression of the erotic in his Jewish-Arab divorce plot, Shababo uses the erotic, violent domestic space of the convent to reify in literary language that elusive fear voiced by Meir Yaari in the wake of 1929: “A hundred and fifty thousand Jews on a volcano. What will come of this?” (qtd. in Shapira 174). Thus while no Arab or Jew in Marya is explicitly nationalist, Shababo’s pre-1929 Palestine is one haunted (in certain ways like Reuveni’s Meir) by the specter of an eruption that could come at any time.

Halevi pairs Shababo’s work with the corpus of another Sephardi writer and one of Burla’s close confidants, Yizhak Shami, arguing that both Shababo and Shami are “divorced from the Jewish-Arab conflict” (Halevi 1996, 135). While Halevi is certainly correct to write about Shami and Shababo in the same vein, his conclusion that the two weave tales that do not engage with the conflict is mistaken. In fact, one may read Shababo’s novel as a feminine compliment to a work published a few years earlier by Shami, Revenge of the Fathers (1927). Shami sets his tale in the public, masculine spaces of desert pursuits and Cairo cafes. Shababo sets hers in the convent and in upper class Arab Haifa with its

25 The quote is Claude Reichler’s, translated from the French by Rivers.
sumptuously furnished late-night salons. Palestinian Muslims and Christians, respectively, are at the heart of *Revenge of the Fathers* and *Marya*, while Jews appear only marginally. Both novels feature a main character’s exilic descent into madness, and both end with the protagonist’s death and self-sacrifice. 

*Revenge of the Fathers* and *Marya*, together with Burla’s *Daughter of Zion*, all published in close succession by Asher Barash at Mizpeh only a few years preceding and following the 1929 riots is each in its own right an attempt by a Sephardi writer to weigh in on the Arab Question while juggling competing pulls on Sephardi identities that confound simple resolution.

In *Revenge of the Fathers*, Shami warns his Hebrew readers that the Arabs will not simply ‘go away’ or leave Palestine quietly, and since Jews and Arabs lack common referents any hopes for shared peace and brotherhood between the children of Abraham will likely devolve into chaos; violence not only plagues inter-Arab tribal frictions in Palestine but also has devastating consequences when directed against the self in the figure of the exiled Arab male. As for *Marya*, by the end of the novel all the Arab characters, whether members of the elite or the urban proletariat, have collapsed or rendered themselves ineffective: the once-powerful Anton Geada has been deserted by his children and has essentially lost his business (built, Shababo emphasizes, on
increasingly outdated models of commerce), George Francois has become a lonely wanderer, Emily’s empty clinging to the shells of Western fashion and style cannot save her from getting old and sick before her time, Jacques has succumbed to a gambling addiction and left for London in search of wealthy women, and the priest Father Gregor commits suicide after attempting murder.

The convent is an intensified reflection of problems happening outside its walls, as readers become aware of the secrets of what happens behind the closed doors of Haifa’s myriad dwellings: the “neighbor who hits his wife, . . . the Christian woman prostitute in a new brothel, the son hitting the father” (Shababo 171). The convent functions in the novel as the ultimate space of domestic violence—not the abuse of, say, husband upon wife, but rather, of an imprisoning set of social conventions upon a young woman who seeks a retreat only to be stalked by Father Gregor—a predator who himself suffers sexual torment. Marya, her family, and her fellow convent residents are people squeezed more and more over the course of the novel by an impossible set of constraints on their liberty. As Diderot writes in *The Nun*, “When you go against the general inclination of nature, the constraint deflects it into depraved affections which are all the more violent for lacking firm foundations. It’s a kind of madness” (141). It is the attempt to grapple with this madness, more than any one clear grand narrative or easily
discernable political agenda, that is Shababo’s contribution to politicized
questions of her era. The way in which Shababo differentiates Arab from Jew
(which we shall explore presently) suggests an element of condemnation of the
Arabs, but on the other hand, there is also a more general sense of mounting
pressure on the characters which may convey the growing sense that the status
quo in the yishuv is untenable—whether the question is Arab versus Jew or the
future of the Sephardi caught in the increasingly taut net of Hebrew and Arabic
cultures in Palestine.

None of the Arabs in Marya is inherently malevolent, nor does Shababo
invoke a vocabulary of race or blood to describe the Arabs’ features—the
characters in her story are not, say, Haj Yusuf of Aharon Reveni’s Devastation,
Khalil in L.A. Arieli’s “Crossing the Styx,” or even Tawfiq with his ‘organic
memory’ in Burla’s Daughter of Zion. Rather, the violence that erupts from
Shababo’s Arabs in Marya is the product of an ill-conceived, self-imposed set of
behaviors, the problematics of which most obviously come to the fore via the
Woman Question. The focus of Shababo’s critique is the Arabs’ inability to adapt
collective conventions so that they may be the source for proactive evolution
rather than reactive fossilization. The Arabs of Shababo’s Palestine are simply
bewildered. Their adoption of new imports from the West is superficial. Their
attempt to cling to retrograde gender norms is a disaster: restricting women’s access to learning (“Her father wished for her to be learned, proud, and tough, but not to be developed. He was afraid that her eyes would open and she would ‘get in with a fast crowd’” (Shababo 23)) and excluding women at home (“They are guilty!” Marya cried out in anguish. “Them: the manners, the traditions [...] Their ways led me into this quandary. Why did they close me away behind their fences?” (41)). The placement of artificial limitations on women’s behavior is a theme that Shababo inherits from Haskalah critiques of Jewish families. Clinging to retrograde norms, she suggests, leaves the Arabs vulnerable to explosion of pent-up passions that somehow must find release. Out-of-control bodies are all over the novel: Marya needs sexual release in the convent to such an extent that she offers herself to a passing drunk, George alternates wildly between wanting revenge on Marya and desiring her, the senior priest Father Gregor attempts to murder Marya after having sex with her. Bodies in the novel do not function as locations of racial difference but rather as sites of seemingly universally-felt life-affirming sexual needs that may all too easily be misdirected toward violent ends.

Given the saturation of violence in the tale, can it be coincidence that Shababo concludes her heroine’s story in 1928? This is her rendering of a Palestinian Arab Christian family as it stands on the eve of the 1929 riots. The
focus of the novel is not a political awareness of the characters (none of the Arabs, for instance, belongs to a Muslim-Christian Association), but rather how _davka_ a rather apolitical group falls so precipitously into violence, any violence. Shababo, publishing in the wake of 1929, incorporates detailed and explicit images of uncontrolled libido within the format of a love story in order to grapple with a source of violence in Mandate Palestine. That source is not Zionist settlement per se: it is not about access to land, or to natural resources, or to the demographics of immigration. All violence in the novel is Arab-on-Arab, Arabs giving vent to needs of the heart, mind, and body which have been stifled most detrimentally by their own behavioral conventions; such conventions, though certainly sharing parallels with those much-maligned Jewish targets of the Hebrew national renaissance, manifest according to the shades and contours of the Arab characters featured in the novel. Shababo warns: even if it is not a Zionist source that supplies the sheer force behind the Arab characters’ volcanic eruptions, these eruptions are not a phenomenon that Hebrew readers can afford to ignore, either.

Arab and Jew are not interchangeable in the novel. They are not some amorphous whole, through which the gender questions of the day might filter in an undifferentiated manner. That said, however, Shababo does encourage
readers to identify Marya as the most ‘Jewish’ of the Arabs in the novel, a Jewess-of-sorts whose tale, after all, unfolds in Hebrew-language narration. Even the Christmas prayer scene resonates in Jewish idiom: Marya refers to the Divine as “El soleaḥ ata” (“You are a forgiving God”) and she castigates herself “Ḥaṭati, ashamti, pashati” (“I have sinned, I am guilty, I have done wrong”)—language reminiscent of Jewish prayer familiar to Hebrew readers (137). Toward the end of the novel as she wanders the streets of Haifa, she speaks in a manner suggestive of the Hebrew prophets (particularly Isaiah), commanding her listeners: “Shim’u” (hear/obey) and “Ha’azinu” (listen, 203).

The Jewish characters in Marya are Lunah and Ḥayim, Arabic-speaking Sephardim, Marya’s family’s best friends. Shababo’s Jews are Sephardi salon-goers, not pioneers. Their names are telling—“Lunah” as “light” and “Ḥayim” as “life” voice a worldview that, even outside of the socialist-Zionist framework--can at least accommodate the changes taking place in Palestine. Lunah and Ḥayim remain physically and psychically intact throughout the novel; Lunah says that instead of retreating behind the walls of a convent in the face of challenge, “We [Jews] do not flee. Our Torah instructs us to live in joy, to enjoy life” (123).

Marya, who—like Rosa in Burla’s Daughter of Zion—is an avid consumer of Western literature (Byron, Shelley, Keats) decides over the course of the novel
that she must break away from the closed, dark life she has set for herself and choose another path. She makes this discovery after having a rather erotic encounter with the land itself on a brief outing from her convent. She stretches out in the fecund earth, her bare legs peeking out of her heavy black nun’s habit-veil as she communes with the vibrant flora and fauna (146). She lifts her voice against the regnant ideals of her childhood home, charging that they “go against nature.” She refuses to continue her “abandonment of life” (154). Marya’s newly-articulated worldview is thus much closer to that which Shababo associates with the Jewish characters (following Lunah’s aforementioned reference to the Torah as an instruction to enjoy life) than to that which Shababo links to the Arab characters. Marya’s life-affirming conversion experience is, like Rosa’s in *Daughter of Zion*, a conversion that simply plays out the yearning for freedom and self-direction that has been at the core of her character since childhood: it is a movement ‘back’ to herself. This progression-as-return to one’s origins taps into the Zionist ideal trope of rebirth in the fertile Land.

Yet, Marya’s fate as an Arab/Jew cannot be that of the Sephardi/Ashkenazi Rosa in Burla’s *Daughter of Zion*. Marya must die because as a lone voice she has nowhere to go in the Arab society Shababo depicts. Despite Marya’s best efforts, she cannot stand up to the hegemonic forces
working to smother her. Marya’s hybrid identity cannot resolve itself into a higher final harmony the way Rosa’s can in Burla’s vision for a new post-Ashkenazi/Sephardi ‘Hebrew’ socialist-universalist Zionism. With nowhere to escape, Marya tries to give her passions life within the walls of the convent and descends into madness. Shababo cannot imagine a future for her heroine. The most ‘Jewish’ woman of the Arabs cannot, narratively speaking, go join a Zionist commune or find a nice progressive Jewish boy with whom to settle down. The novelist who has dug into the very terrain of female subjectivity and sexual abandon that Burla could not explore is the same novelist who ultimately abandons her heroine for dead.

Marya dies within the walls of the convent. With Marya disposed of, might one imagine, then, Delois of Daughter of Zion charging Shababo with being afraid of her heroine? It is worth pausing to note the import of Marya’s consolation to herself that she dies “purified” (236). In Shababo’s effort to reclaim a woman’s body she creates a heroine who, by the end of the narrative, has come to recognize that just because a woman has made sexual choices outside conventional norms (premarital sex, masturbation), and just because a woman has struggled against sexual harassment (a rape attempt by Father Gregor), a woman can refuse to accept the idea that she is forever sullied. For
Shababo to invoke a discourse of purity/impurity as she couples women’s freedom with a declaration of purity-in-spite-of-it-all, Shababo adopts a vocabulary of binary that in fact traverses a linguistic topography quite familiar to nationalist sentiments. In other words, just as Burla posits the importance of separation and boundaries through Rosa and Tawfiq’s divorce in his 1929-era novel of Arab-Jewish tensions, Shababo grounds her tale—which ends on the eve of the 1929 violence—upon the primacy of distilling differences, upon a narrative that climaxes at the reclaiming of purity. One is either pure or impure, this or that. Marya is not a work that lends itself to what Latina feminist scholar Maria Lugones terms *mestiza consciousness*, resistance to an act of “fragmentation into pure parts” (460).

Marya declares on her deathbed: “Or me—or the convent. The Land cannot contain us both” (“O ani—o ha-minzar. Ein ha-’arets yekholah laset et shnenu,” Shababo 228). In a twist upon the notion of the Land’s absorptive capacity, the same vigorous spirit which bonds Marya to the Land is the one that requires her as the most ‘Jewish’ of the Arabs to exit the narrative. With Marya out of the picture for the remaining present, Shababo appears to be setting up a cataclysmic opposition in Palestine: if the Land cannot contain both Marya and the convent, then anyone remaining in the Land who shares Marya’s values is
utterly incompatible with the convent and its values. If one takes a close look at the margins of *Marya*, the seeds for political enmity between the Jews and Arabs are there, though they have not yet started to grow. A mere seven pages into the novel Ḥayim counts himself among the Jews who want “to build up the Land” (15), while toward the conclusion Marya’s father Anton states of his land, “I will never bestow [it] to a foreigner!” (222).

In sum, both Burla and Shababo wrestle with the implications of the 1929 era by creating freedom-yearning heroines at a Jewish-Arab nexus, heroines whose struggles in no small part stem from a first-hand knowledge of gender-based violence. The life choices open to women, a woman’s journey of self-knowledge, female sexuality—all of these are inseparrably bound to the Arab Question in *Marya* and *Daughter of Zion*. Burla, well-versed in Arabic letters, and Shababo, whose father was an Arabic language teacher, are engaged in questions about Jewish-Arab divorce. For Burla to compose the words Rosa tells Tawfiq, “From this moment on I let you go your new way, and I will go mine” (264, Book 4), and for Shababo to put in the mouth of Marya “Either me—or the convent. The Land cannot contain us both” cannot be an easy task.

It is therefore no surprise that, although Burla so venomously condemns his student’s work in an effort to siphon off his own from hers, the two Sephardi
authors share an important concluding element in their narratives: they leave open a distant, messianic future for an indeterminate Jewish-Arab re-emergence. In *Daughter of Zion* Rosa and Tawfiq agree that their mixed-race child, Moise, will begin life with her and then after his formative years will move to live with Tawfiq. Bula needs a narrative solution for getting rid of Moise; there is really no story, yet, for a mixed-race character in the Zionist literary republic. At the same time, this Jew-Arab will take his first, decisive steps in the Zionist environment and then bring the pioneering ethos into Arab Palestine. Perhaps this new Moses can usher in peaceful Arab-Jewish relations in the future? *Only*, it must be emphasized, *in the future*, perhaps in the next generation, maybe in the generation after that. Moses, we must remember, never himself gets to the Promised Land.

As for Marya, her disappearance as the most ‘Jewish’ of the Arabs is a matter of occultation. The novel closes with a new door opened—the tale of a perpetual wanderer, a wildman who lives in nature. The wanderer, Shababo indicates, is an incarnation of Marya’s Arab lover George, who, after Marya’s death, declares that he shall eschew all human contact (250). The wanderer meanders from shepherd to shepherd, joining passing flocks, a kind of holy man who refuses to accept food. It is in the music of the shepherds that Marya lives
on: the flute melodies inspire the wanderer to sing and dance as if moved by a higher power. He chants, face shining, “Marya…Marya…Marya…” (251).

This is the last line of the novel. It is an invocation, an unfinished prayer for a deferred vision that may yet come about in the wake of an ellipsis.
Order, Chaos, and the Sexualized “Spatiality of Fear” After 1929

Fig. 1. Ze’ev Raban, logo created in the late 1920s for Ha-sneh insurance cooperative, Palestine. This logo appeared with the caption “A father must insure security of the home” as an advertisement in The Calendar for Mother and Child, 1933-1934 (Meir and Rivkai, eds.).
On June 7, 1932, the front page of Davar, the yishuv’s labor-affiliated newspaper, featured coverage of a courtroom trial on a matter that had horrified the Jews of Palestine for months. A year prior in June 1931, two young Zionist immigrants had disappeared. Now their gruesome fate was revealed. One of the missing persons was Selyah Zohar, a young woman who had come to Palestine from Vienna in 1930 and was a trainee at the WIZO school for agriculture and home economics. The second, Selyah’s friend Yoḥanan Shtal, was a dedicated member of Giv’at Brenner’s small Zionist commune and had been granted three days leave to go hiking. That was the last anyone had heard from the pair. The Revisionist newspaper Ha-‘am (The Nation) immediately placed responsibility for the disappearance on the Arabs. However, the official Jewish labor contingent and the Brit Shalom group (a small but significant dovish circle of elite, mostly German, Zionist intellectuals in Palestine) had urged patience and calm; why start a furor against the Arabs and blame them for the disappearance, given that Mandate officials had yet to come to a conclusion about the facts of the case? The furor continued nevertheless. The Revisionist writer Yonatan Ratosh—then still at the beginning of his Hebrew literary career and writing as Uriel Halperin, a few translated novels to his name—fanned the flames when he published his only work of fiction, the novella To Ishmael’s
Grave, a prose-poetry dramatization of the crime. By the end of March 1932, advertisements had already appeared for his pamphlet's second printing.

Meanwhile, Avraham Shapira, one of the esteemed elder figures of the moshavot (the more generally centrist, liberal agricultural settlements) and famed head of the guards for the Petaḥ Tikvah region, stepped in to broker what was shaping up to be not only a showdown between Jews and Arabs but also between Zionists on the right and left. Shapira, who maintained largely cordial relations with local Arabs, managed to penetrate their wall of silence and secure the relevant witnesses. According to trial testimony, Yoḥanan was murdered from behind, stabbed in the back. Selyah had been raped by one of the attackers, then raped by a second before being fatally assaulted in the head. The pair's bodily remains, now almost decomposed beyond recognition, were found in a nearby village together with a scrap of Selyah’s clothing ("The Trial Has Begun," 1 and 4).

One can envision a young man or woman of the yishuv perusing the newspaper on that June 7, 1932, gnashing his or her teeth in outrage, shock, and mourning. A statement A.A. Kabak had written in Daniel Shafranov years earlier in the Russian pogromist context comes to mind: “when they rape our sisters, when they do all kinds of abominations to us,” a Jew cannot “eat and sleep as if
nothing had occurred,” cannot “calmly . . . read the news coverage” (115).

The headline about evidence from the trial of Yoḥanan and Selyah’s murderers
would still be ringing in the thoughts of our imagined Hebrew reader well after he
or she had turned away from the newspaper’s front page.

When encountering an archived newspaper like Davar or Haaretz from the
early 1930s, a researcher in today’s age of global technology may be startled by
the reminder of just how fledgling and intimate the Zionist collective in Palestine
was in those days. The items published in these print sources range from
international stories to announcements that from the perspective of today would
be expected in a community club newsletter or a small-town website. Tucked
amongst coverage of political developments in foreign lands or updates about
Palestinian regional elections one finds announcements about a new Jaffa-Tel
Aviv telephone line housed at the post office, or lost-and-found requests for a
500mil banknote (less than $1.50 in today’s currency) and a brown umbrella,
return requested to the newspaper office (“Tel Aviv,” 3). As our imagined
Hebrew reader of Davar that June 7, 1932, may have turned from the paper’s
first page with its shocking coverage of the rape/murder trial to the fourth page’s
more mundane local listings of that evening’s cultural and educational events, the
following announcement may have caught the eye: “Tonight: at Health House
(beit ha-bri’ut), 8pm, the continuation of Dr. A. Rabinovitsh’s lecture on the theory of heredity and eugenics (torat ha-torashah ve-shipur ha-gezah), accompanied by an overhead projector” (“Tel Aviv: Ha-‘erev,” 4).

Interdisciplinary forays into the space jointly inhabited by the eugenics lecture announcement and the news story of the rape/murder comprise the concluding section of this study. Connecting the dots between these two news items will involve revisiting a number of the texts analyzed in previous chapters. The analytic process will highlight how the Arab Question of the late 1920s and early 1930s as an interplay of rape, sexuality, domesticity and violence extends well beyond Zionist fiction and reaches into visual and medical discourses. As Zionists strengthen calls to keep foes out and to promote well-directed order within, this cross-fertilization among discourses reveals that gender is very much in the thick of things.

“The Spatiality of Fear”

Let us return once again to that all-important poem, Ḥayim Naḥman Bialik’s “In the City of Slaughter” (1903). While the poet-prophet figure in the poem lacks a biography—age, residence, specific character traits (besides the
occasional emotional response to be inferred from Divine commands)--what
_is_ clear to the reader is that this figure is mobile.¹ There can be no prophet and
no attempted mission without the chosen candidate’s ability to move about on
Kishinev’s public streets, to ascend to attics and descend to basements, to walk
alone to the edges of the town and to gain access to the synagogue. Even if
one accepts Dan Miron’s reading that the speaker in the poem is a fragmented
unity comprising both the prophet and the Divine (including the Divine as both
male and female, God and His Shekhinah), and even if one allows for the
“feminine” passivity of the prophet as recipient of the mission commands,² what
has been overlooked by scholars is that fact that _it is only a man who could_
_embark upon this particular mission._

As feminist geographer Gillian Rose explains, women tend not to “gesture
and stride, stretch and push to the limits of our physical capabilities” (144), and
Janet Wolff’s well-known observation that a woman could not be a _flaneur_ on the

¹ Dan Miron notes that it is incumbent upon the prophet who is commanded to
carry out the on-location assignment in Kishinev “to be in unceasing motion”
while bringing readers as close as possible to crime scenes (through descriptions
involving sight, smell, and particularly touch) (Gluzman, Hever, and Miron, 112-
113).

² See Gluzman, Hever, and Miron (Tel Aviv, 2005), 135-136.
streets of nineteenth century Paris resonates in the case of Bialik’s prophet.\(^3\)

In Kishinev of 1903 a woman would never have been granted access to any section of the synagogue from which she could speak publicly (“You will come among them . . . to their house of prayer . . . / Speak to them and they’ll thunder!”—“City of Slaughter,” line 191). The moment she would raise her voice, the men present would interrupt, yes, would “thunder” at her, for her infraction, not for that of the Divine! Could a woman, conscious of the confines of her skirt, “climb” up to the attics so easily without tripping (and “leap” out, lines 31 and 58, respectively)—and would she not be hampered on her way up to the roof by the need to check constantly whether someone was coming up beneath her in the hopes of catching an immodest glance into her nether parts? Would a woman even venture alone to the graveyard, a good distance from the population center?

What feminist geographer Rachel Pain refers to as the “spatiality of fear” is a major element in the formation of gender, and it is also a key component in the experiences of marginalized/powerless populations (233). Women, or those “placed by society in the position of ‘woman’” (Higgins and Silver 2) make calculated behavioral adaptations in movements through spaces where they fear

\(^3\) See Wolff (1985), 37-46.
attack, if they cannot avoid such spaces altogether: women retreat into
places that promise a greater degree of safety, choosing to walk on a certain
street over another, hazarding to guess which route will likely facilitate evasion of
potential molesters. Women’s fears of violent crimes (known in the professional
literature as FOVCs, usually with a sexual component) not only reflect and
entrench existing socio-political relations, but also generate ever-evolving coping
strategies as these fears overlap in new combinations with one another (Pain
234).

The Kishinev men in Bialik’s poem cower in a corner, worried that the
pogromists will discover, penetrate, and overrun their all-too-exposed positions
behind barrels and under benches. If such a penetration were to occur, the men
would be doomed. They fear being put in the position of their raped wives,
betrotheds, and sisters. When the prophet is even momentarily immobilized by
his fascination with the perversely pornographic scene, when he sees as the
male relatives do, he gets cornered by that spatially-particularized mode of
viewing that so feminizes the men of Kishinev. This prophet with his motion-
based mode of operation is not one for being stuck behind barrels and under
benches. The Divine command comes for him to leave the scene, and not a
moment too soon.
Hence what sets Bialik’s prophet apart from the pogrom victims is his freedom to stride versus their state of being physically confined. They are frozen in place, crouched in corners, rendered motionless in gloomy underground cellars or graves, in outhouses, in holes and vents in the walls. If they can move at all it is only as groaning beggars “with lowered heads and the shame of petty thieves,” beggars who dig for bones in graveyards and stand as fixtures at crossroads hawking their tainted wares. In contrast, the prophet can move about and enjoy nature, he can come into Kishinev and leave, and even when the broken, exhausted Divine no longer has use for him the directive is to trek into the wide expanse of the desert.

From the cellars of “In the City of Slaughter” to the jail cell that makes possible the sexual torture of the revolutionary Tamarah in Sholem Aleichem’s The Flood, to the village edge where the Jewish female dog cannot escape her abusers in Devorah Baron’s “Liska,” to the house stormed by pogromists who discern the Jewishness of an assimilated family unable to protect a pubescent daughter (K.L. Silman’s “Play!”), to the many bedrooms where a raped aunt dies (A.A.Kabak’s Alone), a raped mother dies (Lamed Shapiro’s “The Cross”), and another raped mother becomes pregnant against her will (Lamed Shapiro’s “Pour Out Thy Wrath”), to the bowels of a gentile’s dark wine cellar where a woman
strangles her young grandson to avoid detection by the pogromist mob
(Zalman Shneour’s “On the Banks of the Dniester”), to the hideout which leaves
the woman of David’s dreams vulnerable to gang rape as he flees in panic
(Steinberg’s “Dream”), all the way to the edge of a Jerusalem neighborhood
where the insatiable border guard Haj Yusuf kidnaps little Neḥemke (Reuveni’s
Devastation), any Jewish nationalist renaissance would need to take into account
the traumatic relationship between Jews and physical space.

Aharon Reuveni’s Neḥemke—like many of her fellow raped women—is
less important to the novel as an individual person and instead functions as a
place, a site of violation, a cavity and a memorial for the breached boundary
where the Jewish collective is (has been, always could be again) invaded and
penetrated by a threatening, chaotic ‘outside.’ The rapist of the East has the
freedom to move about—he can go up and down the streets, peer into the
interiors of homes, ask passersby who they are and what is their destination.
That the Jews in Reuveni’s Devastation have eschewed policing their Jerusalem
neighborhood borders themselves, and that they have chosen for this job a
Muslim predator who in fact makes them more susceptible to penetration rather
than less, is a continuation of Jewish diasporic troubles that Meir cannot stand.
He protests, “Where, in the midst of what nation, is it possible that he—who has
done this to them—could meander around their houses alone at night, and moreover, could detain passersby and require that they account for themselves? (Reuveni 1987, 394). The only way for the Jews to put this mobile threat in check is to police their territory on their own.

Meir’s seminal action to wrest his neighborhood out of the hands of Haj Yusuf comes at a very personal price. It is of note that in between the Meir-Tziporah and the Meir-Haj Yusuf encounters we find the fourth and last, brief, appearance of little Neḥemke in the narrative (Reuveni 390-1). Meir has just wrestled with the seductive Tziporah. As he leaves her apartment he recalls that he had caught sight of Neḥemke a few days after her rape, the little girl’s face grown old, her steps full of trepidation. As usual, Neḥemke’s appearance in the narrative signals an impending physical violation; now, when Meir finds Haj Yusuf in the street and kills him, he experiences this monumental triumph in the modern history of Jewish rape writing as the strange sensation of being invaded by Haj Yusuf’s corpse:

The edges of [Haj Yusuf’s] ‘abayah were rolled up and gathered together under his back. A rough cloth covered his abdomen to the knees, and the bare legs were black as burnt wood pieces in the pale light of the night. His black face was like a huge chunk of coal.
No echo of a breath could be heard, no movement of any kind in his chest could be seen. [Meir] Funk touched [Haj Yusuf’s] naked outstretched hand and released it with a tremble: it seemed to him that a freezing chill was blowing from the black body and entering his own veins. (394)

Meir’s eyes first gravitate to the corpse’s midsection, the predator’s nakedness covered only by a rough cloth. The genitals are too close. As much as Meir takes action to terminate Haj Yusuf’s hold on the Jewish collective in Jerusalem, Meir cannot fully sever himself from his adversary. The moment he kills Haj Yusuf is the moment the Haj most deeply penetrates him, most irreversibly violates him. Haj Yusuf has been Meir’s shadow throughout the novel, the man who gazes and lives according to the darkest forces of his virility, the man who is a constant reminder of Jewish passivity and who represents Meir’s fears of his own capacity for rape. When the triumphantly masculine Meir finally puts his own virility to productive use it is to commit murder, unleashing the spirit of the murderous Haj Yusuf in a manner that makes Haj Yusuf a permanent part of him. The violence necessary for the Jewish man to assert national honor by ridding from his space the Muslim rapist/foe leads to a situation in which he and
Muslim/Arab at some very basic level become fundamentally *inseparable* from one another.

The chill from Haj Yusuf’s “black body” that breaches Meir’s “naked” skin forces Meir, to use Higgins and Silver’s phrase from *Rape and Representation*, into “the position of ‘woman’” (2). The horror of the recipient position is too much for him, and when he puts distance between himself and the crime scene by enlisting in the Turkish army, the horror becomes all the more magnified in the constant threat of homosexual assault. The hazards of being the object of officers’ gazes and the unrelenting exposure to inhumane conditions (random acts of murder, burying comrades alive, etc.) intensifies Meir’s sense that the abuses are “in him, in his bones. And a person cannot flee from himself” (Reuveni 1987, 399). As an object, a receptacle, a position intolerably feminized and from which he cannot escape, Meir takes matters into his own hands and kills himself.

The way that Meir commits suicide is to abandon his camp and walk into the wide expanse of the desert—a move that assumes (or reclaims) a fundamental mobility. Meir walks three hours in the sand and screams, calling out to his wife Esther: “A short cry shattered his voice. . . . His last scream to her was in vain” (405). With this attempt to sanctify Esther’s name, Meir shoots
himself. His corpse becomes food for the desert jackals, torn to pieces. It is an ending that calls to mind the final stanza of Bialik’s “In the City of Slaughter”:

And now what have you left here, son of man, rise and flee to the desert
and take with you there the cup of sorrows, and tear your soul in ten pieces
and your heart give food to a helpless fury
and your great tear spill there on the heads of boulders
and your great bitter scream send forth—
to be lost in the storm. (lines 267-272)

Yet lest one suppose that Reuveni’s ending is merely a reimagining of Bialik’s concluding lines, recall that unlike the solitary wanderer of “In the City of Slaughter” who has no biography, no roots, no family, Meir lives on in his baby boy, brought into the world by Esther soon after her husband’s death. A good mother and a child who is the product of Ashkenazi and Sephardi unification—this is the nation’s next page.

Reuveni’s trilogy of World War I thus leaves a complicated legacy for modern Jewish writing on gender violence. If Esther with her “wild beauty of first bloom, so fragile, so rich” is the fertile Jewish woman whose “great sacrifice” and
“tragedy” is her inevitable loss of virginity en route to her culminating role of mother, Meir’s sacrifice and tragedy involves a parallel violation of bodily integrity as he utilizes his virility to fortify a new Jewish living space in Palestine. Moreover, although Meir’s and Esther’s story may appear to fit nicely into Claudia Koontz’ generalization about gender and nationalism adopted by Nira Yuval-Davis (“[t]he national duties of . . . boys were to live and die for the nation. Girls did not need to act; they had to become the national embodiment” (45)), in fact, as the Arab-Jewish conflict enters into a new phase in the wake of 1929, the picture is not so clear-cut. Of Reveni’s featured couple in Devastation, Esther as Jewish Woman emerges as the hardier of the two—no suicide for her—and at the dawn of the 1930s the basic competencies expected of a mother in the yishuv increase in complexity. The domestic realm of hygiene becomes all-important: parenting, home economics, sexuality, and eugenics.
Domestic Order and the Rise of Hebrew Sexology

In *Wanderings of 'Amasai the Guard*, Yaakov Rabinovitsh's two-volume novel (the second part rushed into publication soon after the 1929 riots), a ‘bit player’ named Vera makes a brief appearance:

(Vera) visited the little Zionist settlement on the day after the holiday, on a workday. She was amazed to see Jewish families working among the vegetables and the saplings—fathers, mothers and children, and the equal distribution of land plots brought joy to her heart. --I am becoming a chauvinist,--she said to Tanya. --Here they tell me that the hand of the Arab must not touch their fields and I agree, I find it to be fitting, whereas in Russia I used to become angry when a Russian comrade from Amur demanded the expulsion of the Chinese coolies who came and took bread from their mouths and lowered the standard of living. Here I am beginning to understand the curse of the races. (Vol. 2, 72-73)

With a stroke of the pen, Ya'akov Rabinovitsh accomplishes a literary coup that is extraordinarily telling of the 1929 era in Hebrew letters. He recasts that most famous of Veras, the Russian radical agitator from Nikolai Gavrilovitch

4 On *Wanderings of Amasai the Guard* see Govrin (Tel Aviv, 1978), 20-49.
Chernychevsky’s *What is to be Done?* (1863), as a down-to-earth Zionist convert impressed by the new Jewish family in Palestine. The heroine responsible for rescuing so many downtrodden women in Chernychevsky’s vision now visits both Arab and Jewish villages in Palestine. She offers authoritative ‘permission’ for Zionist readers steeped in the egalitarian ideals of socialism to ‘give up’ on the Arabs: “I am becoming a chauvinist,” she exclaims. Russia is not Palestine, for “[h]ere I am beginning to understand the curse of the races.”

Industrious Jewish families—fathers, mothers, children—working side-by-side in harmony on equitably-distributed land plots shatter Vera’s faith in a universal standard of living for all peoples. Vera responds to the call for Jewish-Arab separation in physical, sensual terms—the Arab “hand” must not “touch” Jewish fields as cultivated so impressively by Jewish families. Arabs must not be permitted to taint the Zionist picture of order and productivity; they should get nowhere near Jewish space or Jewish bodies.

As Vera continues her tour of Palestine, she adds a word about hygiene to buttress her newfound convictions, connecting proper hygiene to “love” and delineating its opposite, Arab “hate”:

Here—[Vera] said, after she had visited the Yemenite settlement and a small Arab village behind the Jewish workers’ cooperative
with one of the laborers—one would think that the Yemenites
are the same as the Arabs . . . —but what a difference! [The
Yemenites] came here three years ago—and here they have clean
homes, iron beds, pictures on the walls, the gardens beautifully
arranged, trees and rows of cypress, the children go to school,
there is a kindergarten and a clinic. Whereas there [among the
Palestinian Arabs]—it is as if it were a thousand years ago. The
one receives you with love though they have no soil of their own,
while the other has soil but their gaze is full of hate. It is not only
the bit of care and attention [given to the Yemenites] that has
casted this difference—clearly something racial also has
something to do with it. (Vol. 2, 74)

A gentle yet assiduous domestic feminine touch is at the center of Vera’s colorful
description of the Yemenites--dwellings marked by cleanliness, order, health and
vitality, children properly cared for and greenery well-tended. These are the
elements that mark the Yemenites as distinctly un-Arab. Vera marvels at how
successfully these Jews who bear an Eastern countenance have adapted to
Western standards of hygiene (though she notes that they still struggle with
trachoma). Some in the Yemenite community had made the pilgrimage to
Palestine as far back as the First Aliyah and had since found employment as manual laborers supposedly more ‘fit’ for the job than their Ashkenazi counterparts. By the 1929 era they have become the regnant ‘new and improved Arabs’ in Zionist iconography.

While Yehuda Burla and Natan Bitritsky (in Daughter of Zion and Days of the Messiah, respectively) tap into and rework maskilic and early Zionist concerns about the liminally-positioned Jewess who, in Weininger’s schema, could “play any part required of her,” the supposed talent for assimilation now becomes an asset as Zionists claim the figure of the Yemenite Jewess. The Yemenite man was still a bit too embedded in the old ways of the Arabs: he could be the bumbling fool who served as subject of the first Hebrew animated silent movie (“The Adventures of Gadi Ben Sussi”), or Ben-‘Azzai the unenlightened but justified claimant to ‘property’ (in this case, a woman) of which he has been deprived. Such Yemenite men are not enough of an alternative to the ever-consolidating image of the volatile, unproductive, and inflexible Arab

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5 For more on the Yemenite immigrants in the yishuv, including gender issues, see Margalit-Stern “Exemplary Female Comrades” and “Who’s the Fairest of Them All?” (both 2006).

man. The Yemenite woman, on the other hand, fit the bill with her willingness
to give up her jeweled ornaments in service to the Zionist cause and her graceful
dances, so beloved by Zionist orientalist choreographers. She could be one of
the many industrious young Yemenite girls hired on the cheap to clean
Ashkenazi homes, or Ben-‘Azai’s niece-fiancé Nadra who immerses herself in
the workers’ commune, or Tsiporah Tsabari, elected as Tel Aviv’s “most beautiful
and characteristic Hebrew woman” at the annual Purim pageant in 1928.7

That Vera chooses to idealize the order and cleanliness of the Yemenite
home as a distinctive marker of Jewish difference from the Arabs invites scholars
of Zionist history to review the increased focus on hygiene that emerges in
Zionist educational projects of the 1930s. Of course, the association of Arabs
with disease and poor sanitation in Hebrew publications predates the 1930s. As
Sandra M. Sufian notes in her incisive study, *Healing the Land and the Nation:
Malaria and the Zionist Project in Palestine, 1920-1947*, a 1925 survey of
moshavot residents conducted by Haifa-based Dr. A. Ratner attests to the

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7 Qtd. in Margalit-Stern, “Who’s the Fairest of them All?” (2006), 143. It is of note
that not all observers were as sure that the Yemenite woman had already come
into such domestic bloom as Rabinovitsh’s Vera; by the end of the 1930s, home
economics educational clubs for mothers—the Yemenites being one of the
targeted populations—were in operation in lower-class neighborhoods and led by
the Ashkenazi women workers of the Histadrut (Margalit-Stern “Exemplary,” 129-
130).
(mostly Ashkenazi) Zionists’ regnant assumption that living in close proximity to Arabs was the principal cause of malarial infection among Palestine’s Jews.

Ratner writes,

In most of the settlements, they [the Arabs] live near the colonies.

In a fourth of the colonies [surveyed], they live in the settlement itself. The wandering Bedouin are not considered in the survey.

Close neighbors, such as the Arabs, who stand in a much lower level of cultural and sanitary development, can be a source for every kind of infectious disease, especially smallpox, malaria, intestinal diseases, typhus, and dysentery. The second reason for infectious diseases is bodies of standing water. (qtd. in Sufian 298)

Moreover, there is no shortage of references to the Arabs and Turks as disease-ridden, unsanitary, and given to ‘deviant’ ‘contagious’ sexual practices like homosexuality in works such as Reveni’s Unto Jerusalem, Arieli’s “Wilderness,” and Brenner’s From Here and From There.

I do not suggest that the violence of the 1929 era was the principal reason behind the creation of Palestine-based lay-people’s Hebrew journals like Sha’arei Bri’ut (Gates of Health), established 1931 by Drs. Y. Ben-Ra’anah and D. Aryeh Friedman) or book-length Hebrew manuals like Public Health and Sanitation: A
Guide for Guarding the Requirements of Food and Drink and the Establishment of Pleasant and Healthy Ways of Life in and out of the House (1935-6, by the director of the Faculty of Public Health Education of Hadassah hospital Dr. Avraham Levi). However, the intimation of Arab/Jewish difference in a particularly multi-faceted manner (disease / body / sexuality / home) could not have been lost on consumers of the Hebrew hygiene publications, who were exposed to a new public health vocabulary just as the Arab Question reached a turning point in 1929.

Jewish readers exposed to this Zionist hygiene ‘push’ of the 1930s were reminded over and over again that Palestine had been a sanitation disaster before the Zionists arrived, and that despite the Zionists’ best efforts the Arabs continued to pose the greatest danger to the proper containment of disease. Dr. Aryeh Baum, for instance, wrote in his Introduction to Levi’s Public Health that “the Arabs, our cousins, the majority of residents of the Land, dwelt scattered and separated in their villages, in unsanitary conditions”; it was only the Zionist immigrants who took action and established institutions to fight “the war against infectious diseases” (x-xi). The readers of Gates of Health learned that ninety-two percent of schoolchildren in Ramallah were infected with trachoma (Friedman and Ra’anana 21). Dr. Asher Goldstein opens his three-volume
textbook for teenagers, *Torat ha-bri’ut* (*Health Compendium*, 1938), with comments by Prof. B. Ḥayot: "One of the most important factors in the building of the Land of Israel is the guarding of the strength and the health of the Hebrew nation" which faces the threat of communicable diseases (Book 1 p. 3). Goldstein then adds that changing the economic and spiritual values of the Land (*shinui ‘araḥin kalkaliyim ve-ruḥaniyim*) "requires many martyrs (*korbanot*) not only in times of peace but also in times of riots (*me’ora’ot*)" (10). He lauds those who have fallen as they have protected the *yishuv* against Arab attacks, but now he sets up expectations about a different battle against the Arabs: he exhorts his fellow Zionists that they must not “sacrifice even one martyr due to neglect of the fundamentals of health or to frivolity vis a vis the rules of hygiene, which we must know, teach our children, and constantly remind them” (10). Goldstein’s choice of words suggests that the fundamentals of health and the rules of hygiene are a new “Shma, yisra’el” credo that the Jews must promote in their families, inscribe on their doorposts, and bind to their bodies.

Sexology is among the most prominent foci within the Hebrew hygiene discourse in the wake of 1929. The growing fame of internationally-recognized names abroad—Magnus Hirschfeld, Iwan Bloch, August-Henri Forel, Havelock Ellis—contributed to the heightened attention it received in the *yishuv*. The
emphasis on psychoanalysis in health education among the East and Central
European immigrants of the *Ha-shomer ha-tsa’ir* movement who arrived in
Palestine in the 1920s also contributed,8 as did the increased immigration of
doctors from Europe (especially Germany and Austria) with a sexology/eugenics
background in the 1930s. The founders of this new science (many of whom were
Jewish or of Jewish descent) often considered themselves to be progressives
who were trying to change the world, one sexual relationship at a time, through
new definitions of ‘normal’ human behavior and partner selection. With new
definitions came rigorous, hegemonic codifications and systemizations from the
Institute for Sexology (founded by Magnus Hirschfeld), the Medical Society for
Sexology and Eugenics (founded by Bloch, Hirschfeld, and Eulenberg, later run
by Max Marcuse), and the International Society for Sex Research (founded by
Hirschfeld’s rival, Albert Moll), the *Journal for Sexology and Sexual Politics* and
*Anthropopyteia*, and congresses such as the World League for Sexual Reform

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8 On psychoanalysis, particularly in Mordekhai Berakhyahu’s sex-education
curriculum for the Jewish schools of Palestine, see Cavaglion 2001, especially
129. See also Rolnik (Tel Aviv, 2007).
(initiated by Hirschfeld in 1921), not to mention a long list of major books in
the field. 9

As one accounts for the growth of Hebrew sexology publications of the
1930s, both translated and original compositions, one must keep in mind Rita
Felski’s keen observation that “It is surely unwise to reduce sexology to a
repressive disciplinary apparatus for the administration of psyches as it is to
underwrite the self-description of sexologies as heroic pioneers aiding the cause
of human progress. . . . [There] is a growing sense of the profound complexities
and internal contradictions [of this literature]” (3). Indeed, the Hebrew
publications, reflective of the debates abroad, do not speak with one voice.
Readers and writers, adherents of communism or liberalism, jumped on the
hygiene bandwagon and appropriated the new sexology/eugenics frontiers to
forward a variety of ideological agendas. Hence while at one moment, a ‘sex is
nothing’ statement could resonate for young Zionist pioneers (for instance, the
Russian revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai once said: “Love affairs, passion,
romance are only the episodes of life. Its real content is that ‘holy cause’ which

9 For a discussion of Jewish (and Jewish-descent) founders of sexology,
including Friedrich Salomon Krauss, Otto Adler, Karl Abraham, Marcuse,
Hirschfeld, Bloch, and Moll, see Haeberle (1982), 305-323. For a brief discussion
of sex in medical terminology of the Haskalah, see Bartal (Jerusalem,1998), 231.
the new woman serves: the social idea, science, calling, creativity…And this cause, this goal, is often more important, more worthy, and holier for the new woman than all the joys of the heart” (qtd. in Stites 350), while at the very next moment, these same pioneers could immerse themselves in the message that ‘sex is everything’—the central question being how one should engage in sex, not whether.

There is much evidence of a hungry audience for the new sexual sciences. Already in October of 1930, the topic was of such significant interest in the yishuv that Davar covered the World League of Sexual Reform’s Fourth Congress in Vienna. The Congress, convened by Magnus Hirschfeld (“the Jew,” emphasized the report’s author), heralded innovations in birth control, women’s health and equality, anti-clerical ethics, conventions of sex outside of marriage, and sterilization of the insane (“Congress,” 2). Such a social/scientific agenda promoted by European sex educators (many of whom allied themselves with socialism) offered a sense of the cutting-edge to Davar’s audiences. Two years later when the paper debuted a health question-and-answer column for readers, the editors were caught by surprise by the number of sex-related questions they received. The inundation was so overwhelming that the editors printed a plea for readers to consult other sources:
It was our intention with the “Questions and Answers” section to maintain contact with the reading public. However, to our dismay the community has not known how to use [this service] correctly: a segment of the inquirers have demanded personal advice on individual ailments. Most of these have dealt with questions about sexual life. When we would select a question or two which were of broad value and respond briefly, the inquirers were not sufficiently satisfied [by the answers], for they thought—in their ignorance—that it is possible to get a full answer to questions that actually require consideration on an individualized basis. . . . From the dozens of inquiry letters of this sort it became clear to us that we have before us a complex predicament that cannot be ignored. The fact that over 90% of the questions relate to the Sexual Question (ha-she’elah ha-minit) tells us that there is a great need. We have tried to find a solution by opening consult stations, for naught. People have continued to write letters and demand answers—but they have not visited the consult stations, perhaps due to shame or fear, as if this is a matter for lepers. This attitude is unjustified—even in the case of sexually transmitted diseases, for in Europe,
going to clinics established just for this purpose has already,
gradually, become commonplace; it is all the more unjustified for
simple, general questions [...] that pertain to sexual life, family life,
etc. ("Editorial Comment," 3)\textsuperscript{10}

If letter-writers wanted anonymity as they sought answers to sexual questions,
perhaps they were willing to venture out a few months after the publication of this
editorial to join the crowds who welcomed a star from Europe at large public sex
education gatherings in the \textit{yishuv}. Hirschfeld himself came to Palestine for a
five-week speaking tour with ten separate engagements. Auditoriums had sold-
out audiences in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem, all hosted by the Jewish
Workers’ Youth Movement. Hirschfeld, exiled from Berlin (Nazis would destroy
his Institute a few months later), donated all proceeds to his host organizations in
the \textit{yishuv} (Haeberle 305-6).

Hirschfeld was not the only lecturer on the sexual sciences Palestine
audiences could hear, for there were numerous local immigrant experts who
offered counsel at smaller evening events. In Tel Aviv on December 1, 1931, for
instance, one could hop from a lecture by Yehuda Burla at 7pm on contemporary

\textsuperscript{10} Letter-writers were both male and female, as one may note in a similar
question-and-answer format from \textit{Gates of Health}; most readers chose to submit
their questions under anonymous monikers, such as “Girl X” or “P.N” or “One of
the Female Readers of the Periodical.”
Arabic poetry to an 8pm session with Dr. H. Berlin on sexually transmitted diseases. Beginning in the winter of 1932, Dr. Avraham Maṭmon held an annual lecture series “Human Sexual Life,” affiliated with his Institute of Hygiene and Sexual Sciences located at 11 Ha-shahar Street in Tel Aviv. Maṭmon collected these lectures and published them (with forty-two illustrations!) as the Hebrew monograph *Human Sexual Life* in 1938. Among his main messages for both men and women: have good sex, and often, in order to be refreshed and properly ready for productive labor (201-207). Maṭmon’s lectures cover the particulars of male and female sexual anatomy, warning not only about the many dangers of forced abstinence but also about the dangers of abnormal sexual interests.¹¹

What constitutes ‘too much’ sex? What constitutes ‘not enough’? Whereas in the Talmud one finds a legal debate about how many times per week/month a man must satisfy his wife sexually (daily, if he is wealthy; once a month, if he herds camels; only every six months if he happens to be a sailor—Ket61b) in Hebraic discourses of the 1930s *yishuv*, the scientifically-sanctioned codification effort to normalize the sexual behavior of the New Jew, male and female, is far reaching.

Such investment in sex education occurred not only locally in the *yishuv*, one must note, but also abroad in *aliyah* preparation activities for youth. Milek

¹¹ “Those who seek titillations,” Maṭmon admonishes in his Introduction, “are requested not to search here for ‘spice’ that would stimulate their sick urges” (1).
Goldshteyn translated into Hebrew (with the assistance of Hebrew poet and
doctor Sha’ul Tschernikovsky) Max Hodann’s *Young Man and Young Woman:*
*Comrade-Conversations on Sexual Questions*, published in cooperation with Ha-
shomer ha-tsa’ir in Warsaw, 1930. From Hodann’s guide, young Zionist
socialists learned about masturbation (“mostly a natural phenomenon” among
men and women, fine as long as one does not overdo it and is vigilant lest one
becomes “addicted,” 29-30), appropriate condom usage (37), and careful family
planning (“in places with a comparatively low level of civilization, birthrates and
infant mortality are generally higher and average maternal age is lower. A high
birthrate indicates serious exploitation of women. . . . The population of workers
can only grow if there is a next generation to continue the cause, but [what is key
is] family planning [with] choice and purpose,” 54). 12 Printed as an addendum to
Hodann’s original guide is an explanation in Hebrew of “laws related to sexual life
in the Land of Israel,” prepared by Yisrael Bar-Shirah, lead attorney of the
*Histadrut*. Constant self-assessment, moderation, sober understanding, and
right intention: these are the sexual values necessary for successful *aliyah.*

12 On the call to improve the lot of women by lowering birthrates, note that
Aharon Reuveni translated for Mitspeh Katherine Mayo’s colonial classic *Mother
India*, published in 1933. See Reuveni’s writings on *Mother India* in his collected
Members of the Hebrew literary elite were no strangers to this evolving sexual discourse, particularly due to the fact that it was the Mitspeh publishing house (publisher of Burla’s *Daughter of Zion* and Shababo’s *Marya*) that printed so many of the central Hebrew hygiene texts in the early 1930s. Mitspeh distributed a number of books by Dr. Jacob Norman—not only Norman’s *Book of Cooking* (a guide to hygienic food preparation co-created with his wife) and *Love and Sex* (a guide to male and female sexual satisfaction, monogamy, and labor policies for the betterment of maternity), but also *Love, Religion, and Art in Psychoanalysis: from Freud to Adler* translated by the Hebrew poet Avraham Shlonsky. The Hebrew prose writer A.A. Kabak (pseudo. Y. Bar-Natan) translated Forel’s 1905 authoritative French study *The Sexual Question*, which was then published by Mitspeh in 1931 in three volumes. Forel’s work quickly became a primary reference for Hebrew readers.

Thus under the wide Mitspeh umbrella, the Hebrew hygiene discourse in Palestine was so multivocal that it could at once buttress Burla’s vision of free love in the figure of the desired, undesiring Zionist heroine while simultaneously supporting Shababo’s explicit language of female masturbation. Shababo actually invokes the new sexual science in her novel; Marya’s initial downfall, Shababo writes, is due to a sexual ignorance nurtured by a prominent,
patriarchal family which believed itself to be the guardians of restrictive values: “It goes without stating that with this sort of education they hid from [Marya] all the deep secrets of life. These types of things were not mentioned in the Geada household. *Anton was against the new method in which doctors advised parents to tell their children the hidden secrets of nature.* Among her girlfriends she, the smartest one, was very innocent and childlike” (Shababo 22-23, italics added). Since Marya has had no access to “the new method” of the doctors, she falls prey to the first man she meets at a party and, drunk, succumbs to his seductions (“Terror fell upon her . . . ‘No-no-no!’ ...Her mouth resisted and she was pushed forcefully to his body” (36-37)). It is from this encounter that Marya gets pregnant, leading her to seek shelter in the convent-prison with its demands of abstinence and its enclosed walls that house the predator Father Gregor.

As the name of Bloch’s and Hirschfeld’s “Medical Society for Sexology and Eugenics” suggests, eugenics was part and parcel of the new sexology. Hence while the sexual sciences were taking root in the *yishuv*, a vocabulary of eugenics gained traction in Zionism. In *Love and Sex*, for instance, Dr. Norman makes clear his debt to researchers like Havelock Ellis and Norah March, citing their *Eugenics and Towards Racial Health*, respectively. He
explains to his Zionist readers that while the health of the mother is of utmost importance during pregnancy, an even more decisive determinant of the child’s eventual success is the physical and mental state of the parents at the time of conception (106). “Every child has the right to be born perfect and healthy,” Norman writes, “and accordingly it is necessary that he be given the right to choose for himself fit parents” (104). Gates of Health in June of 1932 reported the findings of a recent study that German Jews, compared to other populations in Germany, had higher incidents of mental illness, deafness, and dumbness.\textsuperscript{13} Certainly the Zionists, then, had to improve upon such diasporic Jewish physical and mental constitutions if they wanted to ensure the rights of the unborn to 'choose for themselves fit parents'!

The editors of Calendar for Mother and Child published by Kupat holim (Sick Fund) for 1933 thus warned readers to become mothers only if they and their husbands were physically and mentally stable. Anyone (such as a blind person) who would do harm to the future health of the race should

\textsuperscript{13} Eds. Drs. Y. Ben-Ra’anana and D. Aryeh Friedman, Vol 2, issue 6, June 1932, 17.
not have children (3-6). Subtitled “a compilation of essays on hygiene and education,” the Calendar is a thick book edited by Dr. Joseph Me’ir and Dr. Israel Rubin Revkai. In the book’s Introduction, the editors explain proudly that the publication is the first of its kind in the world, organized chronologically from a mother’s life immediately preceding pregnancy through to raising her child (n.pag.).

The Calendar is a remarkable document that includes both previously published material and newly written pieces. It combines excerpts of Hebrew literature with instructional nonfiction geared specifically for a female reading audience. The stated method of explanation, according to the editors, is known as “psycho-physical parallelism” (ha-paralelism ha-psikho-fizi): “We have tried as much as possible to interweave together hygienic-medical and educational-psychological explanations . . . to emphasize the fact of correspondence between physical and spiritual development of the child” (n.pag.). What the editors leave unstated is that as much as they are interested in the “psycho-physical” development of the child, they are interested in the “psycho-physical” development of the mother. It is so

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14 For more on the Kupat ḥolim, see Shvarts (Israel, 1997). On Hebrew motherhood guides (particularly those published in the 1940s and 1950s), see Stoler-Liss 2003, an article that came out of Stoler-Liss’ unpublished MA thesis.
patently obvious to them that the education of the new Hebrew mother (or mother-in-the-making) requires a mix of popular science articles, Hebrew belles lettres, and images from European art that the editors offer no justification for what is, intriguingly, a rather odd combination of material.

This interweaving of genres makes the Calendar rather unique compared, for instance, to similar contemporary endeavors in the United States, where such pioneering “scientific motherhood” guides were common. Rima Apple characterizes “scientific motherhood” as “deference to medical and scientific experts and expertise” that had become widespread in the American context by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (33). “Evidently many women,” Apple writes, “considered the embrace of scientific motherhood symbolic of modernity; scientific advice was the most modern, most up-to-date, most healthful advice. Scientific motherhood became part of their self-definition; it separated them from a traditional, premodern past and it enhanced their status as well as their child’s health” (93). In this desire for a break with tradition and hunger for modernity, Apple cites a study by sociologist Jacquelyn Litt of America in the 1930s-40s, in which Litt finds that middle-class Jewish mothers were an ethnic and class group that embraced scientific motherhood with particular faith and aplomb (87-88). Perhaps there
was something of this Jewish desire to craft/escape a traditional, premodern past by defining a new motherhood of modernity that appealed, as well, to Jewish women in the Zionist context.

The new Hebrew woman of Palestine, however, required a different set of skills and resources from those of a middle class American Jewish wife and mother. In the Calendar, short excerpts about childhood and maternity culled from aggadic literature and modern Hebrew poetry (including children’s poetry) fill the page side-by-side with articles on topics such as “Marital Hygiene,” “Woman’s Sexual Relations During Pregnancy,” “Woman’s Dress,” “Parents’ Love for the Child,” “Diphtheria,” and “Food Preparation,” creating a mixed-genre progression from day to day and week to week in a kind of secular reworking of daf yomi (Talmud daily page) learning for a young Zionist woman.

There was significant readership of the Calendar of 1933 for it to merit a second version in 1934 (this time titled Mother and Child Yearbook). Among the names of writers whose works featured in the two editions: Ḥayim Naḥman Bialik, Sha’ul Tschernikhovsky, Sin Ben-Tsiyon, Yokheved Bat-Miriam, Leah Goldberg, Yitzhak Lamdan, Shimon Halkin, Jacob Fikhman, Jacob Steinberg, Yehuda Karni, Avraham Shlonsky, and, translated from the
Yiddish, Malke Lee, and Ida Maze. As Hebrew-language teaching tools with voweled text for new immigrants’ ease of use, the two books have space for note-taking and daily planning. Articles suggest further reading through short bibliographies. The ideal Hebrew woman, then, is able to assimilate the modern expertise of doctors into the cultural wisdom of Jewish texts, and vice versa. These guides assume a motivated, detail-oriented, assiduous, self-reliant learner capable of developing a deliberately cultivated proficiency and absorbing a wide range of material.

Significantly, the *only* events of the Jewish year (besides Ḫayim Arlosorov’s assassination date) specifically mentioned in the guide’s first edition are—not Rosh Hashanah, not Yom Kippur, not Passover or Sukkot, not even the date of the First Zionist Congress or the Balfour Declaration, rather: *only the anniversaries of the 1920-1921 and 1929 Arab riots*. For the mother who must, through this guide, become an expert on details like her baby’s target weight and speech patterns, who must train herself in early detection of childhood diseases, and who must understand the importance of home sanitation techniques, the only dates she needs to know are those that relate to Arab violence.
Encouraging the new Hebrew woman to mark the events of 1920-1 and 1929 primes her to feel personal responsibility regarding Jewish-Arab demographics of the *yishuv*. In the *Yearbook*, the editors make clear that a major catalyst for the publication of these maternity guides is a specific anxiety regarding the *yishuv’s* demographic problem: Zionist women, particularly the ‘right’ kind of Zionist women, are not having enough babies. Zionist women, writes Dr. Rivkai, suffer from a “fear of motherhood.” “The psychological problematics” of being a woman in the *yishuv* “are more complex” than elsewhere in the world (47). A major reason for this complexity, the doctor explains, is the “heightened activization (*activizatsiya*) . . . of our working woman, . . . both communal and economic”; since Jewish men are only now learning to be productive laborers, the model of feminism regnant in America and Europe does not apply to the women of the *yishuv* (47). Rather than merely play catch-up to the men, as women abroad are trying to do, socialist-Zionist women are creating “something from nothing.” While Zionist men are pioneers, working to establish for themselves basic human rights and dignities, Zionist women need to be “double pioneers”—working to free themselves as women while they work together with Zionist men to acquire basic human rights. This “double pioneer” causes women to
suffer from “fear of motherhood,” lest they hamper their chances of achieving “full activization,” writes Dr. Rivkai. In other words, Zionist women recognize the costs of being mothers, both in terms of career progress and in terms of the economic demands of raising a family. Moreover, Dr. Rivkai points out, the young pioneer women of the yishuv have often immigrated alone, without the benefit of the presence of their mothers to offer wisdom and assistance in the new experience of maternity (48).\footnote{On pp. 49-50 of the \textit{Yearbook}, Dr. Rivkai reports the results of a survey done on young women of the \textit{yishuv} in which women report reasons for their reluctance to give birth, particularly to multiple children.} What remains unstated is that the \textit{Yearbook} thus serves as a guide for motherless mothers-to-be and as a source of encouragement for Zionist women not only to become mothers, but also to have multiple children.

An Arab was most certainly out of the question as the right sexual partner for a Jew. In 1926 Dr. A. Dostrovsky, Director of Hadassah Hospital’s Faculty of Skin and Sexual Diseases (the only such unit of any hospital in Palestine at the time), published a study entitled “Sexual Diseases in Eretz Israel.” The study, full of charts divided according to population sector, informs readers that syphilis and gonorrhea cases are on the rise among the Muslims but relatively rare among the Jews. What is significant
about Dostrovsky’s study is not only the content but also its fate: the Department of Agricultural Settlement of the Zionist Executive found it significant enough to reprint for distribution across the entire yishuv as a “Special Publication” pamphlet. Dr. Avraham Levi of Hadassah explicitly tells his Hebrew readers in the section “Eugenics among Us” of Public Health: Ways and Means for Protection against Infectious Diseases (1935) that if the Jews of Palestine do not wish to ‘degenerate’ as the Arabs have [one thinks here of that “mixture between the weak-hearted Syrian and the bland Levantine” per Reuveni’s Devastation, 368), those Jews “of a certain level of culture” should partner and give birth to greater numbers of children (Levi 261). Procreation is a national responsibility, young women learn as they read about the riots of 1929 in the Calendar:

During the 1929 Av events, flashpoints in the Land of Israel’s Hebrew yishuv were not “cities of slaughter.” Rather, they were fortified cities of heroism. They were recognition-places of the value of a just enterprise in which its “doers” know how to guard it from destroyers. . . . Our sacrifices (korbanot) who fell in the days of the 1929 Av events defended not only themselves alone, but also, a national communal possession: our national honor and our
right to hold on to the Land of Israel. May their memory be holy
to us always. In their memory may our children and our children’s
children be schooled on steadfastness in the establishment and
defense of positions of national upbuilding. (242)

Zionist mothers have a major role in preventing the *yishuv* from becoming yet
another one of Bialik’s “cities of slaughter.” The author of this particular
section of the *Calendar*, Y. Yeḥezki’eli, also authors those sections on how to
train babies in proper language acquisition and how to ensure moderation
when disciplining children. Readers thus may draw the conclusion that the
expert on educating babies and raising children in violence-free families is
the very same expert who urges young women to continue the legacy of
national creation and defense as exemplified by the heroes of 1929. Not
only must women give birth (Theodore Herzl, readers learn, loved children—
232), but they should raise their children in the best possible homes. Hence
the *Calendar* contains data to demonstrate that infant mortality decreases
when infants are born to married, rather than unmarried, couples (42), and
that the *yishuv*’s infant mortality rate has fallen since 1925 due to attention to

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16 The author of this text on 1929 conveniently overlooks the fact that many of the
Jewish dead and wounded were unarmed members of the Old Yishuv who do
not fit the “New Hebrew” imagery for “fortified cities of heroism.”
hygiene (61). Parents are to be like soldiers in a battle: “In our battle against infant mortality we are advancing, but there remains much work ahead,” readers learn; more centers for the promotion of maternal care and increased “perfection of vigilance” are crucial to the national cause (60).

The battle to strengthen scientific, self-reliant motherhood vis-à-vis the Arab Question makes for some unexpected moments of textual signification in the Calendar and Yearbook. For example, advertisements for the Ha-sneh insurance company appear a few times among the book’s pages. Ha-sneh’s logo (Fig. 1, created by the artist Ze’ev Raban in the mid 1920s) in its original form is a Hebraic, biblical-orientalist rendering of the female as “national embodiment” (per Claudia Koontz). George Mosse’s characterization of early Britannia and Germania in Nationalism and Sexuality is apt: “Like all symbols, the female embodiments of the nation stood for eternal forces. They looked backward in their ancient armor and medieval dress. Woman as a preindustrial symbol suggested innocence and chastity, a kind of moral rigor directed against modernity” (98). Ha-sneh--“the bush,” as in the biblical image of the burning bush which, yet, remains unconsumed by the fire--is the shield, the insurance that protects the Hebrew nation:
Fig. 1. (duplicate) Ze’ev Raban, logo created in the late 1920s for *Ha-sneh* insurance cooperative, Palestine.

*Ha-sneh’s* advertisements throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, whether including the logo or not, usually appealed directly to a male reader: “You (m.) have a family—take care of its future / insure yourself with ‘Ha-sneh’” (*Davar* 25 Oct. 1934, 4). In other words, if the man of the house becomes otherwise unable to provide for his wife and child (i.e., the nation and its future), the *Ha-sneh* insurance shield will do so. In the *Calendar* and *Yearbook*, the *Ha-sneh* advertisement at first glance rehashes this same scenario. “A father must ensure security for the home,” reads the caption under Raban’s image (‘*al ha-ba’al lid’og le-vitaḥon ha-bayit*, 4). Security from what, exactly? Unemployment? Accidental death and dismemberment? The assiduous female student of this intensive hygiene self-education agenda could read *Ha-sneh’s* advertisement in a different light: her battle
against the Arabs of 1920-1 and 1929 has become a homefront protection
effort against the invasion of disease and racial degeneration. Her husband
may be, in the tradition of Meir Funk, on the prowl against the Haj Yusufs of
the *yishuv*, she, meanwhile, has her own shield to hold aloft in the fight to
protect the integrity of Jewish space in Palestine: time to get to work on
mastering the guide’s hygiene curriculum.

In fine, what is significant in the Hebrew hygiene-sexology-eugenics
discourse of the late 1920s and early 1930s is the combined emphasis on
nationalist motherhood, sexual partnering, and disease-fighting together with
the call for a deliberate intentionality among Zionist men and women
committed to directing their youthful vigor *well*. It is in this respect that the
Zionist hygiene discourse is an heir to Reuveni’s sweeping tale of Meir and
Esther. Certainly, in this next generation of texts, there are multiple and
indeed conflicting answers to questions like: How much masturbation is
healthy? Should parents discipline their children? How many babies are
optimal? What cleaners and foodstuffs are critical for the maintenance of
proper order in the home? How often one should have sex? Amidst the
plethora of answers, though, what is clear from the sheer aggregate of texts
is that the success of Zionism hinges on the right Zionist woman partnering
with the right Zionist man, having sex in the right way, the right parents
reading the right didactic literature and ordering domestic space in the right
manner. At the end of the day, one must care for the yearning body, the
restless mind, by cultivating sober knowledge and measured judgment about
when and how (not if) to give vent to the torrential within, whether defensively
or offensively: according to the Calendar, Love and Sex, and Public Health,
this shall be the critical barometer of Jewish-Arab difference amidst the ever-
evolving Zionist spatiality of fear.

*To Ishmael’s Grave* with Nahum Gutman

With the 1929 riots, more and more artists (architects, composers, etc.) of
the *yishuv* were in a process of turning their backs on the Arab East as
inspiration for their work. As Yigal Zalmona notes in his essay for the exhibition
“Kadima!” at the Israel Museum in 1998,

1929 was the rift-year, a kind of existential and political crossroad.
One may say that from here began the real, cultural self-separation
of the Jewish community from the Arab-Palestinian community.
Here was forged the self-understanding on the part of the Jewish
Israelis [sic] who saw themselves in their own eyes as modern Westerners whose identity was absolutely differentiated from the system of characteristics of the traditional folk Arab. This perception is pervasive and exists until today in Israeli society as a subconscious principle of separation. . . . One of the most indicative phenomena born from the 1929 clash in the field of culture was the sudden drop in works on Eastern subjects, . . . [the drop in] attempts to create a local, Hebrew, original, Eastern art, so common only a short while previously among the Eretysisraeli artists. (63)

An extensive survey of Zionist art history is outside the scope of this study; however, even a brief look at selected illustrations produced by Naḥum Gutman during the few years bracketing 1929 reveals how a gendered anxiety about the integrity of Jewish space serves as a transition mechanism that facilitates the Zionists’ “cultural self-separation” from Arab Palestine.

Gutman, the son of Sin Ben-Zion, illustrated three literary documents all published in 1929: A Journey to Health Land (a children’s hygiene book), The Events of 1929: Telegrams and Announcements in Illustrations (collected scenes from the Arab riots), and the Book of Strewn Light (a short fictional piece by
Jacob Horovits about the exile of the Jews from Spain). Significantly, Gutman also illustrated the cover of Yonatan Ratoš’s 1932 novella about the rape/murder of Selyah and Yoḥanan To Ishmael’s Grave.\(^{17}\) Compare Gutman’s soft and whimsical rolling hills in the earlier text, A Journey to Health Land (Fig. 2, illustrated prior to the riots) to scene of the novella cover (Fig. 3, illustrated after the riots):

![Fig. 2. A Journey to Health Land](image1)

![Fig. 3. To Ishmael’s Grave, Cover](image2)

Illustrated by N. Gutman (1929), np\(^{18}\)  

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\(^{17}\) There is confusion in the secondary sources on the publication year of To Ishmael’s Grave. Yehoshua Porath lists the date as April 1932 (58), while Jacob Shavit lists it as 1931 (30). My copy is from 1932, so I use that date even though the phrase “second printing” appears inside the front cover. I have not come across a copy from the earlier date.

\(^{18}\) Originally a 1924 English publication (Boston and New York: Ginn and Co.), authored by the well-known American pedagogues James Mace Andress and Annie Turner Andress, A Journey to Health Land in its Hebrew translation is a small section of the Andress’ full text. Gutman’s illustrations are an integral
The young Zionist children in the hygiene story *A Journey to Health Land* follow a shofar-blower to a magical place where they learn proper posture, bathing, and nutrition. In the bottom left corner of the image is a group of children running freely in the Land, while in the foreground the youngsters stride confidently in a single-file line. In the center of the image, nestled among the rolling hills is a building of ‘oriental’ architecture. The cover Gutman produces for Yonatan Ratosh’s piece could not be more different from this whimsical vision. What was a light-filled landscape has become black, a direct, sober focus on the camel’s carcass in the foreground, the ‘oriental’ building a threatening sight.

In *To Ishmael’s Grave*, as will be recalled, Ratosh—then writing as Uriel Halperin—recasts the missing couple Yoḥanan and Selyah as Yonatan and Zaharah (“Zaharah” reminiscent of Selyah’s last name, “Zohar”). As Ratosh’s first stand-alone, original contribution to the Hebrew literary scene, one may read *To Ishmael’s Grave* as a story of a writer’s self-fashioning. Yoḥanan has become the character Yonatan, and Yoḥanan’s death is symbolically Yonatan Ratosh’s own, a death that marks Ratosh’s entrance as a writer of original prose-poetry. Bialik in “In the City of Slaughter,” contrary to evidence he recorded in his aspect of the text’s effective migration to Palestine. Most likely Gutman submitted his illustrations for the book *prior* to the 1929 riots, for in October of that year the publisher, Omanut, already has it advertised as available to the public.
Kishinev notebooks, blamed the men for failing to take a stand against the aggressor; Ratosh’s dramatization of the couple’s fate blames the character Yonatan for failing to cultivate sober knowledge and measured judgment. Yonatan believes it is possible to extend a hand to the local Arabs, voicing the conviction that “one must lift up his surroundings to himself. He must not descend to it. Man’s path is to ascend. One must not turn back the wheel of culture” (5). With *Ishmael’s Grave*, the Revisionist Ratosh indicts the Zionist left and Brit Shalom, for Yoḥanan’s soft and whimsical ideals about peace and social justice prove to be folly. Ratosh taunts those who would believe that a covenant of peace with the Arabs of Palestine is at hand or that, at the very least, it will be possible to defuse a conflict with the Arabs by slow and steady expansion of settlements: rather than bringing the missing home to an honorable burial (*le-kever yisra’el*), the labor Zionists were busy averting their eyes as Yoḥanan and Selyah’s corpses languished among the Muslims (*le-kever yishma’el*).

At the opening of the story, Yonatan is a young man who, for the first time in his life, comes face-to-face with death in the form of a camel’s disintegrating carcass. He longs for the company of a woman who he hopes will relieve him from the sudden vast emptiness that overcomes him as he gazes upon the
carcass. When Zaharah responds to his summons and joins him in
Palestine, the two set off on a hike during which trust in the local Arabs results in
the couple’s murder and worse, the Jewess’ rape. By the end of the narrative,
the two dead immigrants have become like the carcass from which Yonatan had
tried to avert his eyes at the opening of the story:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Opening)</th>
<th>(Closing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The camel was cast upon the plain of the hill. Half exposed and half in the sand. Wind piled up heaps. The camel was cast upon the plain of the hill. Half was eaten and half was stinking. Sun and ravens. Only one hoof survived intact. A freckle blackens in a kohled cheek. The foot was knocked about and they encircled it. Yonatan averted his eyes. Shining were Yonatan’s eyes and this was their first carcass. (3)</td>
<td>A skeleton was cast upon the plain of the hill. Half was exposed and half in the sand. Wind excavated for treasures. A skeleton was upon the plain of the hill. All of it naked and white. Eagle and jackals. Only one foot survived rotten, a pasty sole in a hobnailed shoe. --- [sic.] A skeleton was cast upon the rock of the hill. Half was exposed and half in the sand. Wind excavated for treasures. A skeleton was cast upon the rock of the hill. All of it naked and white. Eagle and jackals. Only a few strands of golden hair survived billowing; falling with the wind breeze, and rising and falling. (44)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One could analyze these stanzas in detail, however, for the present study only a few comments are necessary. First, the writing excels just where Yonatan failed: in cultivating sober knowledge and measured judgment. Whereas Yonatan
averts his gaze from the carcass, Ratosh’s skeletal iterations require the reader to seek intently the shifts from line to line, to identify differences and assess their significances. It is a technique Ratosh will continue to develop in his poetry collections. This is not a call for explosive expressions of ardent hunger or for an idealization of impulse,¹⁹ but rather, for an unswerving eye that looks directly on unvarnished nakedness. It is an eye that recognizes in a few strands of golden hair the Jewish rape trope, an eye that finds in the carcass’ lone surviving hoof and the skeleton’s rotting foot an invitation to compare Yonatan’s behavior with that of Reuveni’s Meir. “Nothing was left of him,” wrote Reuveni in *Devastation*, “except one foot in a shoe and a bit of bones rendered smooth by licking” (406). Both Yonatan and Meir’s corpses end up decomposed in the same way—but who dies a more honorable death?

To return, then, to Gutman’s stark cover illustration as compared to the earlier, whimsical children’s hygiene book: how does Gutman make the transition from *A Journey to Health Land* (pre-1929 riots) to *To Ishmael’s Grave* (post-1929 riots)? In fact, between the appearances of these two texts Gutman illustrates the *Book of Strewn Light* and *The Events of 1929*. It is of note that Gutman experiments with a visual language in the Book of Strewn Light and The Events

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¹⁹ See Miron (Jerusalem, 1975) on Ratosh and the erotic.
of 1929 particularly brutal in its treatment of sexual violence against women. Coming on the heels of such imagery, Ratosh’s narrative about the rape/murder of Yoḥanan and Selyah may have struck a particularly harsh, resonant cord in Gutman.

The text of Jacob Horovits’ 1929 *Book of Strewn Light*, a narrative about the exile of the Jews from Spain, does not focus with particular prominence upon women naked and abused. Rather, of all the travails described by various characters in Horovits’ narrative, Gutman chooses to illustrate the scenes most conducive to depictions of women as always-already-violated. In the *Book of Strewn Light*, the women are always in some state of undress, and full female nudity is Gutman’s default mode (Fig. 4):

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 4.** Mob attack illustrated by N. Gutman, *Book of Strewn Light*, 1929 (np)
As for *The Events of 1929* (Gutman’s pamphlet about the Arab riots), the
Mandate authorities banned it shortly after its publication, citing inflammatory
contents. However, the booklet was so popular that the authorities actually got
their hands on very few copies; most were already distributed by the time the ban
was issued. While there are no horrific scenes of rape in *The Events of 1929,*
what might Gutman’s lusting Arabs covet so fiercely as they approach a young
Jewish mother with their knives raised, particularly given the pogrom=rape
scenarios so prevalent in early Zionist letters (Fig. 5)?

With the 1929 riots, rape was ‘in the air,’ so to speak, evinced by the
outcry for verification of the state of the Jewish female dead. Were they raped or
not? The reportage is actually quite macabre, as Jewish representatives
demanded official autopsies of corpses already buried. A delegation of doctors
essentially went rummaging among the corpses looking for evidence that

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20 For an additional example of gender-based violence against women in *The
Events of 1929,* see the slaying of the pregnant Jewess entitled “The Events
(Somewhat Idealised)” (np). Note that Gutman viewed this pamphlet as a rather
spontaneous collaboration between himself and some of the *yishuv’s* most
prominent literary figures. In his memoirs, Gutman recalls that luminaries of the
*yishuv’s* literary elite supplied him impromptu with captions for the publication. As
he was working on the illustrations he decided to take a stroll outside: “I ran into
U[ri] Z[vi] Greenberg,” writes Gutman, “and right then and there he gave me his
suggestions. A few steps later I ran into [Avraham] Shlonsky, and he, too, put in
his two cents. Across the way was David Shimoni. And so on and so forth. When
I got to the end of the street I had text for all of the caricatures” (qtd. in Dagon 6).
Jewesses had been raped. Ultimately, the doctors found no proof, though tantalizingly, a number of the corpses were so decomposed that they could not be checked. The question would remain a mystery in perpetuity ("Jewish Committee Report," 3). In any case, Gutman draws the Arabs’ disorderly bodies as lines that ‘leak’ from one body to the next, an intensification of his prior work on the Arab crowds Palestine’s brothels. Indeed, in *The Events of 1929*, brute, pudgy forms threaten to spill over the space allotted to them on the page contrast with the idealized, orderly Hebrew defenders of the *yishuv* (Fig. 6 “Our Fortresses”):

Fig. 5. “Disarm!” by N. Gutman, *The Events of 1929* (1929)
Reprinted in *Naḥum Gutman Visits* p. 15.

Fig. 6. “Our Fortresses” by N. Gutman, *The Events of 1929* (1929) np
The Jewish human “fortresses” in Fig. 6 have bodily integrity: straight, bold lines, distinct bodies in the foreground, young men (and, for good measure, one woman!) in command of restrained virility and steely gazes. This strong Zionist collective exemplifies a controlled and harnessed energy, ready to surge forth for the good of the collective. These are the idealized, disciplined, clean-cut Hebrew heroes of the New Yishuv. Gutman’s illustrations in the wake of the 1929 Arab riots express a design ethic of ethnic oppositions: the Arabs are unruly predators whose disorderly sprawl across the page reinforces a particularly crude strain of attacks against women, while the new Jews of the future distinguish themselves through the ideals of bodily integrity. Purposeful self-discipline includes cultivation of the ability to look at the coming battles for survival head-on, whether manifest in the image of Arab hooligans or as a single camel carcass rotting in the open sands.

**Conclusion**

As noted in this study’s Introduction, at the dawn of the Second Aliyah, Yehoshua Radler-Feldman and Vladimir Jabotinsky articulated quite different attitudes regarding the possibility of full-fledged Jewish-Arab cooperation in
Palestine, and they did so by appealing to opposing scenarios of miscegenation. It is worth repeating their aforementioned statements. Yehoshua Radler-Feldman, who would later be a key voice for Brit Shalom, wrote in the July 1907 issue of *Ha-me’or er*. “There is no distinction or division between a Hebrew and an Arab: . . . / You shall give your sons to him and you shall take unto yourself his sons: / And the blood of his heroes shall enter your blood and you will grow and gain strength: / And each shall find its kind and become of one kind” (“A Vision of Arabia,” 272-273). Vladimir Jabotinsky, who would later found the right-wing Zionist Revisionist movement, argued in 1903, “the Land of Israel will be given into the hands of Jews, in order to create there a Jewish state. . . . [W]e will not find anyone there with whom to mix. And perhaps with the local Arabs? I dare promise . . . that the small number of Arabs there will display the same readiness to mix with us that we display regarding the mixing with the nations that rule us in the Diaspora” (56-57). Over the two to three decades that followed these statements, the Zionist romance with the Arab as folk source symbol for new Jewish culture in Palestine, per Radler-Feldman’s statement and per the orientalist phase of early Zionist arts, collapsed.

As part of this collapse, Hebrew textual explorations of women’s self-development explored in this study emphasized the notion that Palestinian Arab
life offered an insufficient model for improvement upon the diasporic and Old Yishuv male-female relationships to which Zionists hoped to create an alternative. Whereas Jabotinsky in 1903 had phrased his argument by putting the weight of his statement on Arab shoulders—in Palestine, ‘they will not want to mix with us’—the balance proceeded to shift to ‘we by no means want to mix with them.’ This study has shown how Zionists returned again and again to the theme of violence against women as they engendered such changes.

For those young men and women on June 7, 1932, who, after reading about the murder/rape trial on Selyah and Yoḥanan’s disappearance, decided to drop by the eugenics lecture in Tel Aviv later that evening, the connections to be drawn between the article and the lecture were readily available. David Ben-Gurion’s momentous statements at the founding conference of Mapai, and Meir Ya’ari’s question “A hundred and fifty thousand Jews on a volcano. What will come of this?” grew out of a cultural climate in which Zionists were not only concerned about Jewish passivity and powerlessness, but also about Jewish capacities for fury: torrential upsurges of deep-seated urges both liberating and aggressive. Authors played out these concerns and anxieties on both men and women, creating not a unified schema but a rich font of associations and convictions that impacted, and were impacted by, the legacy of the 1929 violence
in Zionist letters. Concomitant questions about Jewish sexuality and hygiene, women as intimidating monsters and freedom-pursuing heroines, and domestic spatial integrity played a constitutive role in the Arab Question during the fateful years of the 1920s and early 1930s. Explorations of rape and domestic violence in Hebrew prose were integral to the development of Zionist racialized directives for self-assessment and gender-oriented vigilance.

Whether a member of the *yishuv* read Burla’s *Daughter of Zion*, Drs. Meir and Rivkai’s *Calendar for Mother and Child*, Reuveni’s *Devastation* or Arieli’s “Allah Karim!”, the acts of the rioters of 1929 alone were not what created the collective Zionist turn away from the Arabs. Representatives of the Zionist intelligentsia such as Aharon Reuveni, Yehuda Burla, L.A. Arieli, Yizhak Shami, Shoshana Shababo, Yonatan Ratosh, and Naḥum Gutman, as well as medical researchers and sex educators who added scientific imprimatur (and their Hebrew translators like A.A. Kabak, Avraham Shlonsky, and Sha’ul Tschernikhovsky), all provided the literary imagery, expert vocabulary, and visual language that contributed to the shift. These contributors to modern Hebrew culture had diverse political affiliations, but they shared a deep knowledge of other nationalist literatures and a specifically Jewish horror of rape voiced with such intensity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the early
1930s, these Zionist intellectuals had built the case for an essentialized, tragic chasm along the Arab/Jewish sexual borderland, a chasm due to which they dispensed with the notion of an egalitarian Arab-Jewish Palestine for their foreseeable future.
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