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Gil Z. Hochberg: In Spite of Partition

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INTRODUCTION

Between “Jew” and “Arab”

Probing the Borders of the Orient

There was a time
when I'd have said:
I won't defile myself
with this contemptible Orient,
I'll relegate my ancestral
home to oblivion [...]
—Amira Hess, *Keys to the Garden*¹

In a short story entitled “Umami fi Shughl” [Arabic for “My Mother Is at Work”], the Israeli writer Orly Castel-Bloom follows her protagonist—a self-identified paranoiac—as she leaves her apartment to sit down on a nearby bench and “reflect.”² The protagonist’s stream of thoughts is suddenly interrupted when she feels a sharp sting on her leg. Terrified, she jumps and looks under the bench, expecting to find a spider or a scorpion. Instead, she discovers an old Arab woman who claims to be her mother. The two women quarrel for a while, the protagonist insisting that this is impossible (“my mother would never lie underneath a bench!”), the old woman repeating her claim: “I am your mother.” Finally the protagonist turns to the old woman and asks: “so who are you really, some kind of a ghost?” At this point the dialogue shifts from Hebrew to Arabic, the old woman persistently claiming that she is the narrator’s mother, and if not her mother then surely her sister, while the protagonist adamantly denies any such familial affiliations:

—*Ana Ummik*. [I am your mother.]
—*Ummi? Ummi mush huma, ummi fi shurl*. [My mother? My mom isn't here, my mom is at work.]
—*Ana ukhtik*. [I'm your sister.]
—*Inti mush ukhti, ukhti fi shughel*. [You are not my sister, my sister is at work.]
—*Ana ummik*. [I am your mother.]
—*Inti mush ummi, ummi fi shughel*. [You are not my mother, my mom is at work.]³

This dialogue, we are told, is repeated about twenty times, after which the old woman asks the protagonist to please take her home with her. When the latter refuses, the old woman grumpily mutters “Yasater yarab” [so help you God] and slides back down under the bench.

Who or what is this ghostly figure—this old Arab woman who emerges from beneath the surface, proclaiming familial ties, between the Israeli-Jewish protagonist and herself? Who is she, who switches their language of conversation from Hebrew and Arabic? Who is she, if not the embodiment of a haunting repressed memory: the memory of the proximity, indeed familial ties, between Hebrew and Arabic, the Arab and the Jew? Castel-Bloom's absurd representation, itself typical of her Kafkaesque poetic style, unleashes this repressed memory (which could be called the repressed memory of the Semite) by introducing it as an unexpected threat: a fleeting memory that might flash up at any given moment and “bite.” It is a memory that emerges from underneath momentarily, only to be immediately pushed back under the bench, sealed in the dark abyss of national amnesia.

This book attends to this national amnesia and its haunting ghosts, namely, the Arab and the Jew, or more precisely, the inseparability of the two. We are all well familiar with the image of the Arab and Jew as two polarized identities. Often and regularly we hear about the two peoples' “centuries-old” fight over the same strip of land or about their long-lasting “sibling rivalry” dating back to the “legacy of their common father Abraham” (Charney, 1988). But little is usually said about the historical, political, cultural, and, above all, libidinal ties that bind these identities together, even today, under the horrid circumstances in Israel/Palestine. This book seeks to draw attention to these “forgotten” ties. It argues that “Jew” and “Arab,” rather than representing two independent identities, are in fact inevitably attached, each necessarily configured through or in relation to the other. They are, to borrow Derrida's term, always already “traces” of the other when only one of them is addressed.

Historically speaking, my discussion is limited to modern times. I follow this “logic of traces” as formed under European colonialism and at a time when the so-called Jewish question was crystallized in Europe itself, to the more recent reality in Israel/Palestine, where we find that “Jew” is always prefigured in relation to “Arab” (Muslim, Palestinian, the Orient), just as “Arab” emerges, for better or worse, in relation to “Jew” (Israeli, Zionism). Exploring the meaning of this inseparability against the current polarization of the Arab/Palestinian and Jewish/Israeli societies, I suggest that the radical separation of the two people is itself attainable only on the basis of repression and active forgetting. While such forgetting has long been perpetuated by the West for the sake of promoting its own imperial, colonial, and economic benefits, it is today further promoted and secured by an ethno-national separatist politics of memory as manifested most evidently in the case of Zionism, and arguably also by the leading trends of Palestinian nationalism.⁴

My focus, as stated earlier, is literature. If there are plentiful publications on the relationship between Jews and Arabs, or on the various aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these are predominantly historical, political, or social. Little attention has been directed so far to literary representation and to the manner by which it not only *reflects* historical and sociopolitical realities but further *competes* with them, introducing alternative actualities, which might find expression only at the level of cultural imagination, but which, as such, are nevertheless part of our times.⁵ My interest, then, lies in exploring the manner by which Jews and Arabs imagine and write about the relationships between Jews and Arabs, or about the relationship between the signifiers “Arab” and “Jew” (as well as “Palestinian” and “Israeli”) in modern times, and most notably in the context of Zionism.⁶

This is also the place to note that theology or religion, while certainly playing a growingly significant role in the construction of today’s political reality in the Middle East, is not the focus of this study. Indeed, the literary texts I engage, whether written by Jews, Muslims, or Christians, all locate the question of the relationship between “Arab” and “Jew” within a cultural space that is primarily *secular*. Religion in this context functions as a component of one’s cultural identity (along with, and in relation to, other components such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, and linguistic affiliation), but it does not amount to a privileged or a defined status, nor does it represent a divine order or a transcendental ideology. In other words, if the cultural space examined in this book is clearly secular, “secularism” itself must be understood *not* as the rejection of anything traditional or religious, but as a critical force through which familiar categories or names (“Jew,”

“Arab,” “Muslim,” “Israeli,” etc.), used for mapping social belongings and classifying collective identities along national, ethnic, or religious borders, are liberated from their static positions and relocated in a cultural space articulated *between* and *across* such borders.⁷

The bulk of this book, then, is dedicated to close readings of literary texts, for which this introductory chapter provides a shared political, cultural, and historical context. This context includes, most directly, the legacy of partition as associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—a legacy that assumes and promotes a radical separation between the Israeli Jewish and Arab Palestinian communities—but it further expands to include the broader theoretical and historical debates concerning the possibility or impossibility of fully separating the Arab from the Jew, as reflected in the intertwined Eurocentric discourses of orientalism, anti-Semitism, imperialism, and colonialism.

A Stubborn History of Intimacy

[Both] Zionism and Palestinian nationalism have not amounted to the philosophical problem of the Other; of learning how to live with, as opposed to despise, the Other . . . [the Other] who is always part of us, not a remote alien.

—Edward Said, “What Can Separation Mean?”

The idea of partition has accompanied the Zionist-Palestinian conflict since its very early stages. It was first introduced by the British colonizers of Palestine in 1937 as Britain was losing its power in the colony, and it later gained the support of the United Nations in 1947.⁸ Finally, the Oslo peace negotiations revived this political legacy in promoting the “two-state solution”: the idea that the answer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lies in a territorial division that would allow the establishment of two separate neighboring nations, Israel as a Jewish state for the Jews and Palestine as an Arab state for the Arabs. But if this legacy of partition points at the continual attempts to separate Jews and Arabs, it also reveals the persistent conditions of *inseparability* that turn such attempts repeatedly into failures. Thus, despite the elaborate system of checkpoints, the numerous fences, walls, and roads, all set to police human traffic and separate Arabs from Jews, and regardless of how much most Israelis and Palestinians may wish to exist apart, the

demographic, territorial, and economic reality in Israel/Palestine is such that the two people are forced to share an inextricably linked life.

That this “linked life,” which has so far been governed by extreme inequality, reflecting the power dynamics between Israelis as occupiers and Palestinians as occupied, upholds *alternative*, latent possibilities for envisioning social emancipation achieved across national and ethnic differences, is exemplified in Sahar Khalifah’s gripping novels *Al-Tsubbar* (1976) and *‘Abbad al-Shams* (1980).⁹ Both texts focus on the movement of young Palestinians from traditional working positions as farmers and peasants to new positions as daily workers in Israeli factories, following the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. While Khalifah surely alludes to the harmful effects of this transition, revealing the manner by which it reinforces the fragmentation of the occupied Palestinian society, she also points at the liberating effects this transition carries in terms of breaking “the privileged class’s patriarchal control over [the land]” (Yazili 1996, 88–89). Indeed, by centering her narratives on the question of work “in the inside” (i.e., is it a form of national betrayal? a sheer act of individual opportunism? or, perhaps an act of transgression and defiance?), Khalifah draws attention to the limits of the Palestinian national narrative, which casts the conflict in terms of Israelis versus Palestinians. This representation, her novels show, fails to account for other, not less prominent, social injustices, which take place across national differences and territorial borders. Most specifically, Khalifah shows how, by rendering the question of the land in exclusively territorial *national* terms (does the land belong to Palestinians or Israelis?), the national discourse draws attention away from the oppressive and most concrete labor and property divisions between the rich and the poor, as well as between women and men—between, that is, those who *own* the land and those who *work* the land.¹⁰

To be sure, Khalifah’s novels certainly emphasize the importance of the Palestinian fight against the oppressive Israeli occupation, but they also stress the fact that a meaningful social fight against injustice and oppression must take place *against*, rather than in compliance with, existing separatist ideologies. Both novels, then, replace simplistic notions of national liberation with extensive contemplations on the very meaning of “liberation,” entertaining, among the rest, the possibility of an Arab-Jewish cross-national collaborative fight against the military occupation (*‘Abbad al-Shams*) as well as a shared Arab-Jewish proletarian fight against unjust working conditions (*Al-Tsubbar*).¹¹ Furthermore, Khalifah’s daring exploration of the revolutionary potential imbedded in the growing daily interactions between Jews and Arabs, oppressive as they currently are, takes place not

only thematically but also linguistically. As other critics have noted, Khalifah's language is a pioneering mix of classical Arabic and Palestinian vernacular, which is further enriched by her extensive use of Hebrew words and expressions (Muhammad al-Mashayik, Barbara Harlow, Muhammad Siddiq). But if her use of Hebrew has been described as a "semiotic guerilla warfare" (Harlow) and explained in terms of the need of the occupied to "know all sides of the enemy" in order to use this vital information "whenever the need arises" (al-Mashayik), such combative accounts, I suggest, overlook one of the most distinct characteristics of Khalifah's bilingual expression: the fact that, for the most part, she limits her use of Hebrew to words that sound very much like their Arabic counterparts. In so doing, Khalifah accentuates the phonetic similarity between Hebrew and Arabic, calling attention to the "familial" (Semitic) relationship of the two languages, and further implying, not unlike Orly Castel-Bloom, that the two Semitic people might in fact be closer to each other than they realize, or wish to realize.

I take this brief detour through Khalifah's writings not to suggest that the growing economic relationships between Israel and the Palestinians, or the new territorial proximity between Jews and Arabs (especially since 1967), in themselves carry a promise of social or political transformation. For anybody familiar with the devastating living conditions of Palestinians in the occupied territories, it is evident that this is far from being the case. But the point I wish to emphasize, and which I believe Khalifah's novels powerfully illustrate, is that these relatively new territorial and economic realities, while so far working in the service of separatist ideologies, nevertheless introduce a level of social and linguistic familiarity that furnishes our cultural imagination with "new-old ways," to borrow David Shasha's term, for envisioning the relationship between the two peoples in terms of proximity and affiliation. Above all, these new conditions intensify the so-called drama of identification between the Jew and the Arab, as new libidinal attachments join older narratives of familial intimacy, bringing Jews and Arabs closer together despite, or even due to, their current animosity. Such attachments follow the general principle of differentiation by which, to borrow Judith Butler's words, "that from which I am differentiated returns to me at the heart of what I am" (2000, 35), and are further contextualized by Said, who observes, in one of his earliest essays on the question of Palestine, that the more the two people seek to separate, the more attached they become:

Neither people can develop without the other [already] there, harassing, taunting, fighting; no Arab today has an identity that can be unconscious of the Jew, that can rule out the Jew as a

psychic factor in the Arab identity; conversely, I think, no Jew can ignore the Arab in general, nor can he immerse himself in his ancient tradition and lose the Palestinian Arab and what Zionism has done to him. The more intense the modern struggles for [separate] identity, the more attention is paid by the Arab or the Jew to his chosen opponent, or partner. *Each is the other.* (1974, 1, my emphasis)

It is this “psychic factor” that interests me the most: the drama of identification that binds the Jew (or the Israeli) and the Arab (or Palestinian) together, making a clear differentiation between them impossible: “Each is the other.”

The immediate historical and political context against which we must understand this drama of identification centers on the ironic “meeting” that took place in Palestine between modern Jewish and Arab histories or between two semi-independent narratives of oppression: that of anti-Semitism and that of modern colonialism. Thus, if for Jews the establishment of Israel was, to a certain degree, a “response” to centuries of anti-Semitic persecution, primarily in Europe, for the Palestinians it was a manifestation of yet another European-modeled colonial occupation; in fact, the harshest Palestine has ever known. Acknowledging the significance of this historical intersection, the Palestinian scholar and politician Azmi Bishara notes that “the question of Palestine [which is first and foremost a colonial question] is fully intertwined with the Jewish question. This might not be fair or just but it is true . . . any attempt to find a political solution in the Middle East must therefore attend to the history [of modern Palestine] as a *shared* history of these two people” (1995, 54).

Moreover, the shared history of the two people, reflected in the historical link between the Jewish question and the question of Palestine, or between the history of anti-Semitism and that of colonialism, does not begin with the actual encounter of Jews and Arabs in twentieth-century Palestine. Rather, it finds its origins in much earlier political and theological discursive practices by which Europe, or the Christian West, has differentiated itself from, and identified itself against, *both* Jews and Arabs.¹² Where we best witness this process of “doubled othering” is, without doubt, in the discursive practices Said has called “Orientalism.” Indeed, it is through its orientalist imagination, I suggest, that the Christian West has indirectly, yet systematically, brought the Jew and the Arab, as well as the “Jewish question” and the question of the Orient (of which the question of Palestine is a clear example) together, by paradoxically pulling them apart. To paraphrase Jonathan Boyarin (1992, 77), if the Orient [Arab or Muslim] represented Europe’s “Other from without,” it is the Jew who for Europe came to represent the “Other/Oriental within.” Most important to note in this context

is the fact not only that Jews and Arabs were both othered by Europe, but that their othering was directly linked to their *shared*, albeit different, status as Orientals. Indeed, the so-called Jewish question was itself articulated in terms borrowed directly from the orientalist discourse, the same discourse through which Europe justified its colonial domination over the Orient.¹³ The actual question behind the “Jewish question,” particularly in its German manifestation, was, after all: do the Jews represent a racial/ethnic group, and as such are they part of the Oriental people (and hence essentially Other to Europe) or, are Jews a religious group and as such capable of assimilating into European culture?¹⁴ Moreover, if the Jewish question—as manifested in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe—was articulated through orientalist and, at times, even explicit colonialist terms, the orientalist discourse of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, directed primarily toward Arabs/Muslims, has itself borrowed directly from the European anti-Semitic discourse. As noted by Said: “The transference of a popular anti-Semitic animus from a Jewish to Arab target was made smoothly since the figure was essentially the same” (1979a, 286).¹⁵

If, then, the Israeli-Jew and the Palestinian are today locked in a circuit of identification in which “each is the other,” such accounts of orientalism expand this claim to the broader historical context of modern Europe, where the figure of the Arab and that of the Jew appear to be “essentially the same.” The continual impact of this intimate relationship between orientalism and the Jewish question or between anti-Arab polemics and modern anti-Semitism (both discourses, one must note, conflate the political and the theological as well as the ethnic/racial and the national) on the present relationships between Jews and Arabs, particularly in Israel/Palestine, cannot be overestimated. Indeed, what we notice as we follow the trajectory of orientalism from eighteenth- to twentieth-century Europe to contemporary Israel is that the very paradoxical effect of Orientalism, as a discourse that distinguishes between Arabs and Jews while simultaneously collapsing the differences between them, finds its most extreme and perplexing manifestations. Thus, as I attempt to show throughout the book, while the Zionist orientalist imagination clearly seeks to set apart the Jew and the Arab, and to do so by mobilizing Eurocentric orientalist binaries (West/East, Europe/Orient, civil/barbarian, modernity/tradition, etc.), these very binaries repeatedly crumble. This is due primarily to the ambivalent and unstable position of the Jew within the orientalist imagination, a position that reveals the stubborn historical intimacy between the two Semitic figures: the Arab and the Jew.

Orientalism, Judaism, Zionism or The Arab, the Jew, and the “New Jew”

Despite their eager adoption of modern Western culture, the Jews' oriental provenance was never quite forgotten, or forgiven.

—Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions*

Zionism[s] persistence in oppressing the Palestinians is precisely its persistence in suppressing the Jew within.

—Joseph Massad, “The Persistence of the Palestinian Question”

Originating in Europe of the late nineteenth century, it is well known that Zionism was greatly influenced by European modern nationalism and no less by Europe's patronizing and colonial relationship toward the Orient. Inspired by Said's *Orientalism* (1978), several critics have discussed the orientalist nature of Zionism as a settlement ideology, and the orientalist imagination that continues to inform Israel's national and ethnic/racial politics to this day.¹⁶ The most elaborate analysis of this kind has been presented by Ella Shohat, who has convincingly argued that the issue of inter-Jewish racism, manifested in the discriminatory attitudes toward Mizrahim (Arab and African Jews), must be understood as part of Israel's broader antagonistic relationship with the Orient and the Arab world in general. Being an ideology of European provenance, Zionism, she notes, created a national reality modeled on the false idea that “Arabness and Jewishness are mutually exclusive” (1999a, 11) and has further falsely equated the Jew with Europe and the West, while identifying the Arab as the sole representative of the East.

Others have elaborated this argument, discussing Zionist orientalism not only in terms of its European heritage, but also in terms of sublimation and denial. Thus, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin (1993, 24) has made the connection between the Zionist notion of “the negation of exile” (*Shlilat ha-galut*) and Israel's discriminatory policy toward Palestinians and Arab Jews. At the heart of both, he suggests, lies “forgetting”: if the negation of exile has shaped the Israeli-Jewish national collective identity by presenting the project of nationalizing Judaism in terms of a “return to history” and a “renewal of the authentic Jewish territorial existence,” it has necessarily promoted the forgetting of Jewish history, presenting two thousand years of Jewish existence in exile as a mere “break” or “interruption” of an otherwise continual Jewish national consciousness. Furthermore, this process of

forgetting Jewish history is directly tied to the erasure of Arab-Palestinian history, for within the Zionist narrative, the “place of return” (i.e., Palestine) is itself imagined as an empty land “in exile from its people.”¹⁷ As for Arab Jews, if they wish to be integrated into the new Jewish national collectivity, they are required to first rid themselves of their Oriental part, that is, their “Arabness.” Interestingly enough, the question concerning the ability of an Arab Jew to become a full member of the new Zionist national collective seems to echo very similar questions directed two centuries ago toward Europe’s Jewish population. “In both cases,” as Raz-Krakotzkin concludes, “the presupposition shared by those heading the debates, is the need to change and ‘repair’ the Jew (whether, as in the European context, it was the Ashkenazi Jew, or, as in the Israeli context, the Mizrahi Jew)” (1994, 125, n. 25).

What this ironic repetition of history teaches us, I believe, is that we cannot isolate the question of Zionism’s orientalism from the broader question concerning the dubious status of the Jew within the European orientalist imagination. In other words, what might initially seem to be two separate if not opposed paths of research—one focusing on Jews as perpetrators of orientalism (i.e., on the orientalist nature of the Israeli-Zionist society), the other focusing on Jews as victims of Eurocentric and (Christian) orientalist discourse—must in fact be regarded as complementary investigations.¹⁸ Indeed, I believe that it is only by bringing the two lines of research together that we can fully explore the paradoxes involved in the transformation of Jews from targets to perpetrators of orientalism and understand this process as part of the (failed) Zionist attempt to create a “new Jew”: one who is “[finally] European and no [longer] an oriental” (Raz-Krakotzkin 2005, 166).

One of the first attempts to directly follow the trajectory of orientalism from eighteenth-century Europe to contemporary Israel is offered by Aziza Khazzoom in her informative essay, “The Great Chain of Orientalism” (2003). Basing her argument on sociological studies of internalized stigma and coping mechanisms, Khazzoom suggests that the current orientalization of Mizrahi Jews and Palestinians by Ashkenazi Jews in Israel must be accounted for, among the rest, in terms of “stigma-managed strategies” (484). According to Khazzoom, Ashkenazi Jews sought to overcome their past association with the Orient (as “Jews”) by radically othering Mizrahi Jews: “by marginalizing Mizrachim [and associating them with the Orient], Ashkenazim were producing themselves and their state as western” (486).¹⁹ This, however, is only one of many such projections and displacements of orientalism among Jews:

The two past centuries of Diaspora Jewish history in Europe and the Middle East can be conceptualized as a series of orientalizations. Through this history, Jews came to view Jewish tradition as oriental, developed intense commitments to westernization as a form of self-improvement, and became threatened by any elements of Jewish culture that represented [their own] Oriental past. (482)

Previous accounts, attending to the role of the Jew within European eighteenth- to twentieth-century orientalist imagination, have similarly noted that western European Jews have often attempted to overcome their exclusion (as Orientals) from Christian Europe by identifying themselves as Westerners and differentiating themselves from their “East-European brothers.”²⁰ Thus, Steven Aschheim (1982) has argued that the anxiety produced by the demands placed on German Jews to “prove” their ability to assimilate in modern Europe by shedding their Oriental “backward” traditions and communal infrastructures led to an explicitly orientalist split in the Jewish European community between East and West: “The idea of the *Ostjude* (‘eastern Jew’) was developed,” he notes, “only over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, when western European, particularly German Jews, fearing their rights would be compromised, began to distinguish themselves from the East-European Jews, whom they associated with backward Asiatic traditions, superstitious belief, ugliness and ‘social pathology’ ” (3, 6). The eastern Jew, then, was constructed as the German Jew’s antithesis: his “mirror opposite” (5), through which the western Jew sought to secure his new self-image as modern, enlightened, and European. In a similar vein, Ismar Schorsch (1989) has shown that the identification of nineteenth-century secular-liberal German Jewry with medieval Muslim Spain was less about embracing the orientalist essence of Judaism than about avoiding the stigma of being identified with the *Ostjuden* and Yiddish, which the Jewish German intellectuals associated with the “abysmal state of Jewish culture” (54). German Jewry turned to the Sephardic mystique, Schorsch notes, not only to avoid “its East-European origins” (47), but also to “recover classical heritage in common with German culture . . . paradoxically, the contact with Islam had made Judaism part of the Western world” (66).²¹

If the casting out of the eastern European Jew was primarily enacted by German Jews, we find a parallel “Jew on Jew” process of orientalization taking place between the French Jewish community and the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East. Following the French model of colonial education, French Jews established the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU) school

system in an explicit attempt to “uplift,” westernize, and modernize their eastern Jewish brothers.²² Attempting to rid themselves of their stigma as oriental people (and hence essentially foreign to Europe), West European Jews, then, repositioned themselves in opposition to eastern Jews, onto whom they sought to displace their stigma as orientals. And yet, as Khazzoom observes (2003, 493), it may very well be “only when western Jews orientalized other Jewish communities in the mid to late 1800s that the characterization of their *own pasts* as Orientals crystallized.” (493). In other words, the very attempt to overcome the stigma of the Jew as an oriental by displacing this stigma onto other particular groups of Jews ended up paradoxically reinforcing the oriental image of the Jew *as such*. Thus, both Jews and non-Jews in Europe seemed to have shared the opinion that Jews, as a whole, require a radical transformation in order to become valid members of the Western world. To put it bluntly, if Jews were to become Europeans in the full sense, they would have to become “less Jewish.”

A very similar logic feeds the Zionist attempt to create a new national Jewish collectivity. Dismayed by the prospect of assimilation and integration into Europe, the first Zionists sought to find an alternative solution to the “Jewish question.” Inspired by other European national movements, early Zionism replaced the Jewish Enlightenment’s (*Haskalah*) integrationist project with a settlement ideology, which can be summed up as follows: if Jews cannot become European in Europe, they might as well become European in their own country, whether this is to be established in Latin America, East Africa, or the Middle East.²³ In other words, the Zionist national-colonial project, much like the preceding *Haskalah* plan of integration, was essentially about the Westernization of Jews: a final attempt “to bid for acceptance as equals in the European family” (Khazzoom 2003, 499). If, then, as Shohat (1997) justifiably argues, the Zionist construction of the false differential between “Jewishness” and “Arabness” has come at the expense of a complete erasure of the historical experience of the Arab Jew, we can now see that this erasure extends beyond the experience of the Arab Jew to include Jewish history more generally. Indeed, Zionism not only targeted and excluded the particular history of the Arab Jew; more accurately, it denied the entire history of the Jew *as Arab* (Oriental, Semite, eastern, Asian, half-Asian, etc.).²⁴ That is, for the Zionist “new Jew” to appear, both Jew and Arab, or, better yet, the configuration of Jew as Arab, had to disappear.

When Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, assures Europe that his government will “prevent Israelis from becoming Arab-like” (1966), and when the prominent Israeli writer Haim Hazaz echoes this idea by noting that Israelis “cannot afford to become Oriental people” (quoted

in Rejwan 1967, 100), they are surely expressing internalized European orientalist racist views. But the phobia captured in these expressions cannot be fully accounted for without taking into account the history of orientalism and the location of the Jew within it. Thus, as many critics have previously noted, if the Ashkenazi political and cultural elites in Israel considered Miz-rachi Jews and Palestinians to be part of a “barbaric orient” that must be contained and blocked by Israel,²⁵ then I would insist that the fear of the Orient, as captured in the various racist expressions of the Zionist founders, is not only about “influence.” More accurately, it is a fear of identification: the fear of being identified *once again* with the Orient, the Arab, Asia. Indeed, if Ben Gurion and others need to assure their followers and European supporters that Israelis will not be “Arab-like,” it is not only because Israel is surrounded by an Arab population, or because half of the Jewish immigration to Israel is from Arab lands, but also because the racial or ethnic proximity between “Jew” and “Arab” itself continues to haunt the new national reality created in Palestine, a reality based on the false division between the Arab (or the Orient) and the Jew. If, then, in eighteenth-century Europe this proximity was articulated in the question: Are the Jews in essence oriental people, or can they be successfully Westernized? with the establishment of the Jewish state, this question takes a new, yet related form: Can the Jews who have “returned” to their ancient land in the East finally *become* European, or will their past status as Oriental people be exposed: will they remain, cease to be, or become (again) “Arablike”?

This question concerning the relationship between the Jewish settler and the local Arab (will the Jew become “Arab-like”?) is not only of strategic, political, or diplomatic gravity. Captured in this question is a fundamental tension embedded within the Zionist ideology. As a modern nationalist movement originating in Europe, Zionism aspires to establish a modern, secular, Western nation, based on the European model of Enlightenment. As a Jewish movement of reform, it aims at fighting assimilation by recovering an authentic form of Judaism. But how can the recovered “authentic” Jew remain Jewish; what is it that would be Jewish about him (or her), if he is to (finally) become European? Another way to put this is: how could the Jewish modern nation be Jewish *and* modern; Jewish *and* Western, when Judaism itself is associated with backward traditions, non-Western looks and behavior, and, most importantly, the looming connection to the Orient? Indeed, it is this Jewish aspect that Zionism seeks to overcome in order to create a national Jewish society and a new, regenerated Jew. In the words of the renowned writer M. J. Berdichevski, this transformed Jew was to become among “the last Jews and the first members of the new na-

tion” (1922, pt. 2, 20). The British novelist and critic Arthur Koestler (1948) further notes that the “Jew born in Palestine is better looking than both European and Oriental Jews [for he is] taller, robustly built, mostly blond or light brown haired, frequently snub-nosed and blue-eyed . . . [in short] he looks entirely un-Jewish.”²⁶ The task of creating a new, “less Jewish” Jew, one must note, is further complicated by the fact that the very *basis* for this Jewish recovery is itself to be found in the Orient. As Yael Zerubavel (1995), Raz-Krakotzkin (1998), and others demonstrate, the Zionist project holds an apparent paradoxical relationship to the East, as it aims to rid Jews of their historical connection with the Orient while simultaneously relocating their true and original home in the East.²⁷

In light of such tensions immanent in the Zionist ideology of “return” and “regeneration,” we can better understand not only the racism, but also the irony and desperation found in Ben Gurion’s statement: “Israelis will not become Arab-like.” This statement, like many others delivered by Israeli officials throughout the last fifty-five years, not only expresses Israeli antagonism toward anything Arab; it also attests to a terror at the very heart of the Israeli nation’s enterprise, haunting it from within. It is a terror associated with the repressed memory of Zionism’s originary and most inescapable ghost: “the Jew.” The Jew with the long history as an other to Europe: a Semite, Asian, half-Asian, Oriental, Arab. It is this historical figure, this configuration of identity, that situates the Jew *next to* the Arab or *as* an Arab, that truly threatens to collapse the Zionist attempt at creating and sustaining a new, Western, modern, and “Jewish” nation. In saying this, I am not suggesting that “the threat of Judaism” is bigger or more politically invasive to Zionist-Israel than the threat presented by “the Arab” (“the enemy,” the Palestinian). What I do suggest here is that the two “threats”—that presented by the “Jew” and that presented by the “Arab”—are in fact one. Indeed, it is only by establishing a connection between these threats that we can fully uncover the internal phobia operating within the Israeli society still today: one that rejects anything “Arab,” but also anything “too Jewish.” Nothing can reaffirm this argument better than the words of the liberal journalist and politician Tommy Lapid, a secular “new Jew” who self-identifies as “an old-fashioned Western liberal.” He warns Israelis against the spread of Levantinism, described in his words as “a thin coating of European lacquer spread over Oriental decadence,” itself equally associated with the growth of “Arab influences” and the “appeal of Jewish orthodox traditions” (see Klein 1999, 14). Here, once again, we find that the two figures, that of the Arab and that of the Jew, while apparently separated, continue to be “essentially the same.”

This proximity between “Jew” and “Arab,” one must add, not only threatens Zionist aspirations, but it also challenges notions of Arab or Muslim separatist national aspirations manifested in the “Palestinian desire to exist in a utopian [Arab/Muslim] land without an obtrusive Jewish-Israeli presence” (Said 1999b). Indeed, one of the most pressing questions Palestinians have faced since 1948 concerns the role of the Jew within the newly formed Palestinian national identity. This question, which becomes particularly potent after 1967, can be articulated as follows: How can one assert a distinct Palestinian identity and fight decades of oppression while also acknowledging the inevitable centrality of the oppressor, the Israeli-Jew, along with his own history of oppression, at the very heart of this recovered identity? That this question is not only a matter of political pragmatism, but rather a question of great ethical importance is made clear in the writings of several key Palestinian writers, such as Rashid Husain, Fawaz Turki, Imil Habibi, Ghassan Kanafani and Mahmoud Darwish.²⁸

If I emphasize the proximity between the Arab and the Jew (“each is the other”), it is by no means in order to draw a simplistic parallelism between these two figures. Clearly, neither can nor should be understood only through reference to the other. This focus must be understood within the specific context against which it is set, that is, the prevailing image of Jews and Arabs as opposed or polar political identities, separated by a current national conflict, which is equally portrayed in terms of a colonial division between West and East and further linked to a theological enmity between Jews and Muslims dating back to the biblical rivalries between Isaac and Ishmael or Jacob and Esau. My intent is to challenge the determinism of such common representations by tracing the relationship between Jews and Arabs along “a different and more creative logic of differences,” to paraphrase Said (1985, 40). Such “creative logic” acknowledges differences but similarly recognizes the fact that “differences” as such are never simply that: they are never pregiven or “natural” but rather are an outcome of a preceding process of differentiation, itself created in the service of particular political interests and specific “ideologies of difference,” to mobilize Said’s term.

A Different Logic of Differences

Literature should show life as it *should be* not just as it is. [It] should transcend reality into another reality.

—Sahar Khalifah, “Interview with Peter Nazareth”²⁹

It is in an attempt to capture the preceding and “forgotten” process of differentiation responsible for sustaining the current polarity between Jews and Arabs that I turn to literature. For literature, thanks to its critical distance from reality and its reliance on metaphoric language, may help us “see,” if only momentarily, the intricate process of identification and differentiation that precedes and assures the becoming of the self in relation to otherness. In retracing this process of self-formation, literature, maybe better than any other discursive practice, is capable of supplementing the economy of identity (I versus You, Arab versus Jew) with an economy of relation (I as You, Arab as Jew). It is this haunting presence of alterity within the self, this belated return of the not-me-within-me, that I seek to trace in the following chapters, as I locate this dynamic within the specific cultural, sociopolitical and historical territory shared today by Jews and Arabs. The cultural space examined in this book, it must be further clarified, should not be confused with notions of “coexistence,” “collaboration,” or “hybridity,” insofar as the latter stands for the junction of two predetermined national, ethnic, or cultural identities. What interests me is not the idea that we might have lost or that we may still create a space of “cultural dialogue” that would successfully bridge the Arab and Jewish distinct cultural systems or identities. Quite the contrary, my attempt is to free both “Arab” and “Jew” from their current status as markers of fully separable, if not radically opposed, identities. In other words, I am interested in the passage *between* the Jew, and the Arab: “the possibility or impossibility of the Arab, the Jew, and the Arab Jew,” to borrow Gil Anidjar’s words (2003a, 40).

In exploring this imagined space, created and examined discursively, I undoubtedly risk abstracting the very identities I set up to study. This is in some ways an unavoidable tension that accompanies any critical attempt to deconstruct existing sociopolitical constellations by questioning the very status of cultural identity or political agency as pregiven or fully identifiable. This said, I wish to emphasize that my intention is not to draw attention *away* from reality (i.e., “real” Arabs and Jews and their “real” experiences and histories), but rather to draw attention *back* to the silenced, obscured, and forgotten aspects of this reality, manifested in the libidinal ties that make up “the unspoken components of social belonging” (Rose 1996, 6). For if “Jew” and “Arab” are repeatedly and anxiously separated (with a particular intensity within the context of Zionism), these identities, I hope to show, continue to escape their assigned opposed position within this structure of differences. Indeed, it is along these lines, I

suggest, that we can best understand Anton Shammas's (1987, 26) provocative claim that Israelis and Palestinians are "organically attached," "each [being] an integral part of the other," as well as Mahmoud Darwish's (1996, 195) related observation that Jews and Arabs today continue to "dwell inside each other."

The following chapters call attention to this obscured, if not altogether denied, "dwelling." Each chapter, dedicated to a close reading of one or more literary texts, explores the manner by which the tie between "Jew" and "Arab" or "Israeli" and "Palestinian"—itself configured as a constellation of tensions between Self and Other, memory and forgetting, actuality and potentiality—directly challenges the separatist imagination and proves the disjuncting of "Jew" and "Arab" to be at least partially impossible. We meet, for example, Shammas's "schizophrenic pair," the Israeli and Palestinian protagonists of his novel *Arabesques*, who "have not yet decided who is the ventriloquist of whom." In Albert Swissa's *Aqud*, we follow a young Moroccan-Israeli protagonist whose identity is located in the liminal and unspeakable space opened between the "Moroccan Muslim boy he *could have been*" and the "Jewish Israeli boy he has become." Other examples draw attention to the inseparability of the Jew and Arab (Muslim and Jew, Israeli and Palestinian) by emphasizing the intricate linguistic proximity of Hebrew and Arabic, the historical link between the traumatic memory of the Jewish Holocaust and the traumatic memory of the Palestinian Nakbah (the Palestinian uprooting in 1948), or the territorial reality that makes the two "enemies" necessarily function also as "partners."

Despite significant thematic and stylistic differences, the texts engaged in this book all share a fascination with the persistent presence of alterity within the self—the Jew within the Arab, the Arab within the Jew—and draw attention to the limits of partition, not only as a political model suitable for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but, more significantly, as a broader ethical and psychological principle accounting for the relationship between Jews and Arabs in modern times.

Chapter 1 introduces a comparative reading of two novels by North African Jewish writers: Albert Memmi's *La statue de sel* and Edmond Amram El Maleh's *Mille ans, un jour*, raising the crucial question concerning the status of the Arab Jew today in the context of Zionism: does this figure belong to a "lost history" and merely represent a current political impossibility, or does it (also) represent a futuristic antiessentialist and antinationalist cultural-political stance with direct implications for the

present? While the first part of the chapter focuses on the similarities and differences between El Maleh's and Memmi's positions, the second part opens the comparison of the writers out to a broader discussion about the political promise associated with the Arab Jew, understood as *both* an imaginary construct and a concrete historical figure. In so doing, the chapter explores the imagined territory opened between past and future, loss and hope, and the Arab and the Jew, suggesting that the figure of the Arab-Jew belongs just as much to "history" as to a futuristic reality yet to become.

The second chapter, dedicated to the writings of the Jewish-Egyptian writer Jacqueline (Shohat) Kahanoff and the Israeli author Ronit Matalon, further explores the productive tensions between past or "lost" historical identities and the potential for such identities to emerge anew. The chapter focuses on the elusive figure of the Jewish Levantine: a cosmopolitan figure formed in the intersection of Oriental (Arab) and Occidental (European) cultures, ethnicities, and languages and who, in many ways, represents the gray zone of the orientalist discourse, escaping its dichotomist worldview. In tracing the evolution of the terms "Levantine" and "Levantinism" from their initial derogatory use by the French and British colonizers of the Levant and the Zionist founders of Israel to the subversive reclaiming of these terms, first by Kahanoff and later by Matalon, chapter 2 exposes the political significance of Levantinism as a model of cultural belonging, which radically opposes both national separatism and ethnic monoculturalism.

In the third chapter I turn my attention to the figure of the Israeli-Palestinian, focusing in particular on his/her necessarily convoluted relationship to Hebrew, a language considered both "Israeli" (the language of all Israeli citizens) and "Jewish" (a language associated historically with the cultural heritage of Jews). The tensions arising from this dual status of Hebrew are at the center of Anton Shammas's maverick novel *Arabesques*, to which the chapter is dedicated. I explore the manner by which Shammas's astute criticism of the ethno-national imagination of Zionism (manifested, for example, in the maintained double status of Hebrew) is further accompanied by his criticism of Palestinian separatist aspirations, which, much like Zionism, overlook the experience of the Israeli-Palestinian and the challenges this figure introduces to the logic of partition and the prospect of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by means of ethno-national separation.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to *Aqud* [Bound], a novel by the Israeli-Moroccan writer Albert Swissa. The chapter expands the discussion initiated earlier in this introduction about the ambivalent status of the Jew

within the Eurocentric orientalist discourse. More specifically, it examines the manifestation of orientalism in contemporary Israel by looking at the phobic Israeli rejection of anything “too Arab” but also, no less, of anything “too Jewish.” If Shammas threatens to destabilize the Zionist ethno-national culture by “un-Jewing the Hebrew language,” Swissa, I suggest, presents the opposite threat: that of “un-Israelizing” Hebrew by rendering it both “Arab” and “Jewish.” Making Hebrew language and culture Jewish and Arab, *Aqud*, I conclude, revives the repressed Zionist memory of the “Oriental within”: the Jew, the Jew as Arab, the Arab Jew.

The final chapter addresses the so-called battle of memories between the Israeli-Jewish collective memory and the collective memory of the Palestinian people. For the most part, this battle has been portrayed as taking place between two competing and negating traumatic memories: the memory of anti-Semitism culminating in the Holocaust and the memory of colonial occupation culminating in the Nakbah. Through a comparative reading of two literary texts—Mahmoud Darwish’s *Dhākirah lil-nisyān* [Memory for Forgetfulness] and Amin Maalouf’s *Les Échelles du Levant*, I show how historical trauma in conjunction with a national politics of memory often serves as a social divider, artificially separating people, histories, and memories. Maalouf’s and Darwish’s texts, I suggest, allow us to “reremember” the fact that trauma, like history, is never “only or fully one’s one” (Caruth 1996, 20–24), and that accordingly, the two histories and collective traumatic memories—the Jewish and Palestinian—are not, truly speaking, independent but must be resituated and understood along a shared historical trajectory.

Finally, if the literary texts discussed in the following chapters replace common dichotomist representations of Jews and Arabs with depictions that emphasize the strong affinities between the two people, or the impossibility of fully separating the Arab and the Jew, it would be wrong to suggest that they are overtly optimistic. For if these texts stress the potential for achieving or renewing a peaceful Arab-Jewish existence, they equally emphasize the hurdles that make this reality currently impossible. This “sober optimism,” or better yet, “pessoptimism,” like that of Imil Habibi’s infamous protagonist,³⁰ calls attention to the present *impossibility* of being both Arab and Jew/Israeli and Palestinian, while further questioning the given status of this impossibility. It leaves us troubled but not hopeless, as it draws our attention to the present moment while furnishing our imagination with a vision of an Arab-Jewish future located beyond the limits of separatist imagination: “after separation, in spite of partition” (Said, 1999b).