# Disavowed Polylingualism and Heteroglossia in the Languages of Arab Jewish Literature and the Identity Politics of In-Betweenness

By
Eliana Geller

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DEDICATED TO my beloved and unconditionally selfless parents. Perhaps one day they too will settle their Sephardic and Ashkenazi differences.

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the critical body of scholarship that is concerned with identity and language politics surrounding the continued conflict in Israel and Palestine. Through close readings of Arab Jewish literature written by authors who span geographical, national, ethnic, cultural, and temporal borders, the following chapters examine the ways in which languages, particularly Hebrew and Arabic, inform representations of Arab Jewish identity that work both directly and inadvertently to dispel mythological assertions that Hebrew and Arabic inhabit mutually exclusive categories predicated along binary oppositions between "Jew" and "Arab" that are deeply embedded in hegemonic historical discourses. More specifically, this project considers translation in narrative, accents and/or absence as presence, and the distances and points of connectivity between generations who span a historically polylingual and heteroglossic linguistic landscape, in order to identify certain patterns and/or divergences in Arab Jewish literature. These include but are not limited to: the reiteration of Arab Jewish heterogeneity, the relinking of Judaism to Arabness as a matter of necessity, the reimagination of Arabics to accommodate the monolingual Hebrew-speaker, and the affirmation of the historical presence of Jews in the Arab world. In writing this thesis, I aim to contribute to the deconstruction of Eurocentric and Orientalist historical conventions that have rendered Arab Jewish identity a modern day impossibility and a historical misnomer. Finally, this paper entertains the prospective possibilities implicit in the corrective project of restoring Arab Jewry to the historical memories of competing Jewish and Arab nationalist discourses.

**Contents**

## Introduction

Like any history, the history of Jews in the Arab world is an amalgam of intricately interwoven narratives. Generally speaking, the term "Arab Jew," commonly referred to in Israel as "Mizrahi," refers to Jews from Arab Muslim regions.[1] The term itself is problematic in that just like most identity labels, it fails to account for the idiosyncrasies of the group it represents. In this case specifically, it emcompasses too many converging, but also vastly distinct histories of culture, geography, religion, ethnicity, and so forth, for it to adequately reflect the acute differences that fall under the auspices of the term. However, perhaps even more problematic than the generalizing effect of the term "Arab Jew" is that that which it signifies has been deemed transgressive and its history violently neglected in most, if not all, dominant discourses that implicate Jews and/or Arabs. In her essay "The Invention of the Mizrahim," Ella Shohat describes the ways in which nationalism, itself problematic because of its perpetually alternating valences across historical and geographic contexts, was a particularly destructive historical phenomenon for Arab Jews, who were at once caught in the crossfire of not only competing, but also antagonistic and thus 'mutually exclusive,' nationalist movements.[2] She writes of this impossible dilemma, "Yet what both Jewish and Arab nationalisms have shared, in discursive terms, is the notion of a single, authentic (Jewish or Arab) nation...The rigidity of these paradigms has produced the Arab Jewish tragedy, since neither paradigm has room for crossed and multiple identities."[3] It is between the cracks of these exclusionary categories of peoplehood into which Arab Jewish history is subsumed and from which the more recent phenomenon of

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[1] Shohat, Ella. *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. Print. 330.
[2] Shohat, Ella. "The Invention of Mizrahim." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29.1 (1999): 5-20. Web. 7 Dec. 2015. 10.
[3] Ibid., 11.

recovering Arab Jewish history emerges. The following chapters are largely informed by the reawakened project of scholarship, activism, literature, and other art forms, that actively unsettle conventions that render Arab Jewishness a historical misnomer and a modern day impossibility.

In *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine, and Arab-Jews*, Shohat describes the process of erasure of Arab Jews from the Jewish historical record and its pernicious effect on representations of their identity. Pointing to the Enlightenment as a pivotal historical moment, she describes the ways in which the then-emerging field of Judaic Studies, informed by colonialism and Zionism, perpetuated (ongoing) Eurocentric representations of Arab Jewish history and effectively disintegrated centuries of correspondence between Ashkenazi Jewish religious scholars and those of the Islamic world.[4] She writes, "But since the Enlightenment, with the partial secularization of European Jewry, Ashkenazi-Sephardi relations entered a new transcultural semantics...Ashkenazi-Jewish scholars became central to the representations of Jewish history, including Arab-Jewish history. Eurocentric norms of scholarship established typically colonial relations that have taken a heavy toll on the representations of Arab-Jewish history and identity."[5] One of the most devastating consequences of this process has been, apart from the marginalization and systematic erasure of the history itself, an undermining of "comparative studies of Middle Eastern Jews in the context of *diverse* religious and ethnic minorities in Muslim geographies," which otherwise actively resists the cultural and historic appropriation and commodification of Arab Jewish identity (emphasis mine).[6] Using this discursive moment as a point of departure, this thesis seeks to contribute to the ongoing endeavor

[4] Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices.* 206.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 213

of Arab Jewish writers to recover a centuries-old, yet nonetheless abandoned, history of Jewish presence in the Arab world. Through the affirmative articulation and cultural expression of Arab Jewishness (and the myriad of identities that are signified by this term), first-, second-, and third-generation scholars and authors alike, in distinctively meaningful ways, push against deeply ingrained notions of "Arab" and "Jew" that render Arab Jewishness a historical misnomer.

Although Arab Jews in Israel have suffered religious, cultural, ethnic, and nationalist rupture in place of Zionist models of representing and historicizing a richly diverse landscape of Arab Jewry, the following chapters point to language specifically as a site of ongoing negotiation, of both dispossession and affirmation, for the dispersed Jewish communities of the Arab world. As a project of unification and homogenization, Hebrew became a critical instrument in the Zionist effort to construct a single social, cultural, and historic national collective for all Jews. In her book, *Poetic Trespass*, which closely examines the "lives and afterlives of Arabic and Hebrew in Israeli literature, culture, and society,"[7] Lital Levy details the site of intersection between the invention of a national historic memory of Jews in Israel and the simultaneous dispossession of languages that were central to those of Jewish communities elsewhere. More specifically, she describes the unique position that Arabic-speaking Jews found themselves in as a direct consequence of the assimilationist policies that informed a newly constructed national historic memory for all Jews. She writes,

[7] Levy, Lital. *Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel and Palestine.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014. Print. 2.

> As for Arabic, not only was it now widely perceived as a backward and unharmonious language, but to make matters infinitely worse, it was the language of the enemy with whom the state was still at war. Arabic-speaking Jews thus threatened to collapse the distinction between Jews and Arabs...While all new immigrants experienced hardships, while all the Diasporic languages were suppressed, in practice, the dilemmas of Arabic speakers were compounded by the added misfortunes on the scene long after the Ashkenazi founders, of being socially marginalized and stigmatized as a minority population, and, worst of all, of being associated with the language and culture of the enemy - an utterly intractable problem...Today, the history and demise of Arabic as a *Jewish* language barely registers in Israeli public consciousness. Yet Arabic retains a strong presence, even a hyperpresence, within Israeli society as the 'language of the Other.'[8]

The authors discussed throughout the following three chapters work within this highly embattled and politicized dialectic of language and identity in Israel and Palestine. They represent a diverse group of Arab Jews whose works are shaped by various national, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic contexts and as such, diverge in many ways in their relationship to language. I look categorically at in-text translations, accents and/or silences, as well as the role of colonialism in influencing the complex history of polylingualism between and across generations, to evaluate the ways in which these authors relate to their collective pasts and affirm the continued presence of Arab Jewry through multiple and mixed languages. Finally, I conclude with a prospective evaluation

[8] Ibid., 40-41.

of what possibilities are harbored in the liminality of Arab Jewish identity, specifically those that may work towards dismantling discursive power structures that continue to cement binary identities in the Middle East and that support ongoing conflict in the region.

Chapter One, "Translation as a Site of Liberation, Loss, and Solidarity," looks at translation as a poetic device and as a critical element within the literary narratives of three Arab Jewish authors. Inhabiting a space that is described in translation theory as in-between languages, translation is investigated in this chapter alongside the pervasive assumption that Arab Jewish identity is itself an embodiment of 'in-betweenness,' and is repeatedly articulated as such by several of these authors. Engaging in linguistic questions regarding Arab Jewish self-representation, it points specifically to patterns of mistranslation and non-translation to examine the ways in which these authors and poets navigate the liminal borderland between Hebrew and Arabic to which they are outcast. Furthermore, it considers translation not only as a site of syncretism among languages, but also as a site of intersection between languages and experiences. In other words, it necessarily probes the possibilities and limitations that arise when translating a particularly Arab Jewish experience into a language that is used instrumentally to enforce Hebrew hegemony.

The second chapter, on "Accents and Absence as Presence," examines the continued presence of Judeo-Arabic(s) and Jewish Arabic dialects in third-generation Mizrahi writing. Predicated on the fact that the authors in question have been largely, if not entirely, dispossessed of the Arabic(s) spoken by preceding generations and of written Judeo-Arabic dialects, this chapter investigates the possibility that accents and silences stand in for Arabic as a literary device and are at times employed purposefully to allude to the continued presence of these

forgotten dialects. Through close readings of three literary works in particular, this chapter asserts the ongoing centrality of Arabic to both the restoration of Arab Jewish history as well as the present and prospective affirmation of Arab Jewish identity, not only in spite of, but by virtue of its muteness.

The final chapter focuses on the role of European colonialism in Egypt in shaping the dialectic of language and intergenerational relations. In order to recontextualize this paradigm in colonialist historical discourse, I reread two essays written by first-generation Egyptian Jewish immigrant Jacqueline Kahanoff and examine the ways in which she reaffirms her Levantinism in Israel not in one language specifically, but rather in the echoed memory of her great-grandfather's second wife's strong willed effort to learn Judeo-Arabic. Afterwards, I introduce Ronit Matalon's reflective and autobiographical essay, "My Father at Age Seventy-Nine," in which Matalon engages directly with both Kahanoff and her father's conflicting discourses on Arab identity. Inserting herself in between them and allotting herself critical discursive distance, I aim to demonstrate how Matalon extends Kahanoff's formative process of navigating a polylingual Egyptian Jewish past in order to translate it into her own Levantinism.

Ultimately, this project is aimed at infusing the liminal and often hyphenated space between "Arab" and "Jew" with the symbolic and functional currency it deserves. It contends that a reawakening of the term "Arab Jew" into an affirmative signification of both Jewish and Arab histories is a critical point of departure for dismantling larger power structures that resist the duality of the term. Given the tragic and ensuing conflict in Israel and Palestine, this project

is written with eagerness for a mutual willingness amongst all parties to accept multiple narratives and in an optimistic longing for lasting peace in the region.

## Chapter I

### Translation as a Site of Liberation, Loss, and Solidarity

Common among many contemporary literary representations of Arab Jewish/Mizrahi identity is the notion of in-betweenness or liminality. Given that 'Arab' and 'Jewish' are signified and represented as antithetical and mutually exclusive categories within hegemonic discourse surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to which notions of identity in the region are often confined, the reality that 'Arab' and 'Jewish' can and do exist as one identity is constantly called into question. Thus outcast to write beyond the margins of dominant representations of Jewish identity in Israel and within this literary zone of in-betweenness, many Arab Jewish authors actively resist the practice of settling into fixed notions of identity and privileging representations of Jewish identity that are anchored to a Zionist metanarrative and by extension, to Hebrew language. Beyond employing multilingualism in order to convey a more authentically Arab Jewish historical narrative, some authors, such as Sami Shalom Chetrit [b. 1960], Erez Bitton [b.1942], and Roy Hasan [b.1983], engage in translation between Hebrew and Arabic as a poetic device to further articulate the in-betweenness that is ascribed to them as Arab Jews. Because translation itself exists as a space that is 'in-between' languages and is thus embedded within notions of movement across linguistic boundaries, it proves a compelling dialectic through which to discuss what it means to perceive oneself as inhabiting one authentically multifaceted identity in a society that otherwise considers Arab and Jewish as necessarily dissociable. While Chetrit employs translation to expose the fallacy that his 'Jewishness' can exist in isolation of his 'Arabness,' Bitton represents translation, or more accurately, the constant need to translate his 'Arabness', as a site of repression and loss. Set apart

as a third-generation Mizrahi writer, Roy Hasan demonstrates the ways in which Arabic has been appropriated in colloquial Hebrew to reanimate the idea of in-betweenness itself and recenter the Arab Jewish collective from the margins of Israeli society. In contrast to Chetrit and Bitton who are both second-generation Arab-Jewish authors, Hasan distances himself altogether as a speaker of Arabic and uses inner-text translation to reserve multilingualism for his Arab friend in a gracious literary gesture of solidarity.

In language and linguistic theory, translation generally signifies the transformation of a text from a source language to a target language. As such, the variable of change across translation is typically the text itself and its signified meaning. However, translation as it is used in this chapter deals more pointedly with translation in narrative, both as the coexistence of multiple languages within a single text and as Bakhtinian heteroglossia, or the coexistence of multiple languages within one language itself. In his essay "Unitary Language," Bakhtin critiques philosophical and linguistic thought for pushing "real ideologically saturated 'language consciousness' outside its field of vision."[9] He writes of the "deaf" and problematic stylistics of the novel that, "A literary work has been conceived by stylistics as if it were a hermetic and self-sufficient whole, one whose elements constitute a closed system presuming nothing beyond themselves, no other utterances. The system comprising an artistic work was thought to be analogous with the system of a language, a system that could not stand in a dialogic interrelationship with other languages."[10] Here, Bakhtin inserts his own dialectic of heteroglossia, meant to account for the tensions, contradictions, and continuities *within* a single

[9] Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Unitary Language." *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*. Ed. Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley, and Alan Girvin. London: Routledge, 2000. 269-79. Print. 272-273.
[10] Ibid., 272.

unitary language as opposed to between multiple languages and language logics. Translation as it is dealt with in this chapter resonates closely with a Bakhtinian language perception in that it looks at translations within and between Hebrew *in addition to* between Hebrew other unitary languages.

Moreover, in "The Task of the Translator: An introduction to the translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens,*" Walter Benjamin describes translation not only as a space of in-betweenness, but moreover as a site of intersect between, and transformation of, languages. Accordingly, Benjamin describes translation as a transformative process not only for the texts in question, but also for the languages in which they are written. He writes, "The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect *[Intention]* upon the language into which he is translating which produces it in the echo of the original...Not only does the aim of translation differ from that of a literary work - it intends language as a whole…"[11] As such, the employment of translation as a poetic device, as a meaningful site *within* a text and even within a unitary language, necessitates a closer examination into the intention of the authors discussed here *upon* their respective original and/or host languages. In an interview with Ammiel Alcalay, Shimon Ballas [b.1930] describes his transition from writing in Arabic to writing in Hebrew years after emigrating from Baghdad, Iraq. He states, "If anything, I am in dialogue with language itself. On the one hand, I am trying to fend off, avoid or neutralize ideological connections or associations with the language. On the other hand, I think that I am probably trying to bring my Hebrew closer and closer to Arabic. This isn't done through syntax, but maybe through some sense of

[11] Benjamin, Walter. "An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's Tableaux Parisiens." Introduction. Task of the Translator. Trans. Harry Zohn. N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Print. 19-20.

structure or way of approaching things."[12] Likewise, in addition to inserting translation as a liminal space within which these Arab Jewish writers can can situate themselves, Chetrit, Biton, and Hasan are also confronting serious theoretical and practical questions of language itself. More specifically, they each explore, according to their respective backgrounds and relationships to both Hebrew and Arabic, the limitations and/or possibilities of Hebrew as a hegemonic language to transgress its alliance with Ashkenazi and Zionist ideology. If, according to Benjamin, "It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work,"[13] then perhaps all three writers' use of translation in narrative must be understood as an effort to liberate not only Hebrew, but likewise Arabic, from the heteroglossic tensions and ideological frameworks that have rendered multilingualism, if not for the speakers themselves than for the societies from which they write, an impossibility.

*Sami Shalom Chetrit and Arabic as a Jewish Language*

In Sami Shalom Chetrit's "A Mural With No Wall: A Qasida for Mahmoud Darwish"[14] Chetrit represents his Arab Jewish speaker as a site of intersection between identity and language in Israel and Palestine. By making a gesture toward the classical Arabic poetic genre, the Qasida, and by addressing the Palestinian National Poet, Mahmoud Darwish, Chetrit at once forces his Israeli readers to engage with modes of identity representation unconventional to hegemonic Israeli literature and society. Moreover, he forces both Hebrew and Arabic to confront one

[12] Alcalay, Ammiel. *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writing.* San Francisco: City Lights, 1996. Print. 68.
[13] Benjamin, 22.
[14] Chetrit, Sami Shalom. *Jews: Poems*. Trans. Ammiel Alcalay, Dena Shunra, and Shay Yishayahu Sayar. Ed. Fred Dewey. N.p.: Cervena Barva, 2014. Print.

another and to populate a liminal literary space reminiscent of Chetrit's own declaration of selfhood. Chetrit's strategic use of Arabic demonstrates the ways in which he relates to his own collective, familial, and personal history and settles rather uncomfortably into his own bilingualism as both a member of the Hebrew-speaking Israeli left as well as of Arab Jewry. In "A Mural With No Wall: A Qasida for Mahmoud Darwish", Chetrit incorporates translation into his narrative in order to reimagine the zone between Hebrew and Arabic as an affirmative space of identity formation. Although his text is thematically replete with notions of 'Arabness' and 'Jewishness' that are separate from one another, Arabic idioms that surface sporadically throughout Chetrit's Qasida create a linguistic subtext that dominates the speaker's Hebrew narration and comes to reflect a process of negotiating bilingualism as part of Arab Jewish identity.

Chetrit's speaker first writes in Arabic within a translation dialectic in order to articulate his sense of in-betweenness of language and identity. As Chetrit addresses Mahmoud Darwish, and at the same time his own position within Israeli society and Arab Jewish history, he questions, "וְאֵיך אֶכְתֹּב לְךָ מִלִּים שֶׁל שָׁלוֹם, דּוּ-קִיּוּם, תָּאעַיּוּשׁ יַעְנִי"[15] ("And how am I to write to you words of peace, of coexistence, *ya'ani ta'ayush*…")[16] This question is both rhetorical and poetically experimental. At first glance, Chetrit's speaker seems to suggests that his 'Jewishness' or 'Hebrewness,' essentially his ascribed identity, by default undermines his ability to speak words of peace and coexistence. The function of the Arabic word "*ya'ani*" here is bifold. As a loanword from Arabic adopted into Hebrew slang, the word translates into "so called" or "alleged." As

[15] Chetrit, Sami Shalom. ""ציור ללא קיר - קסידה למחמוד דרוויש" מאת סמי שלום שטרית - הכל שקרים"." *Allies.org*. N.p., 09 Aug. 2010. Web. 30 Mar. 2016. <http://alllies.org/blog/archives/1334#.Vvv1pBIrLaZ>.
[16] Chetrit, *Jews: Poems, Translations from Hebrew*.

such, the English translation reads, "And how am I to write to you words of peace, of coexistence, *alleged* coexistence." Here, the Arabic subtext asserts that the monolingual Hebrew-speaker's gesture towards Arabic renders coexistence a delusion and an impossibility, and functions only to falsify the notion of coexistence. As a Hebrew speaker, Chetrit implicates himself within his critique, doubting not only non-Arab Jews' use of Arabic to claim coexistence, but also his own. Situated within the context of Hebrew hegemony, Chetrit exposes the phrase "*ya'ani ta'ayush*" as a ridiculous rhetorical device circulated among the political left in Israel.

Read only as colloquialized Hebrew, "*ya'ani ta'ayush*" seems to imply both the impossibility of coexistence between peoples as well as between Hebrew and Arabic. However, the ambiguity surrounding the referenced "words of peace and coexistence" leaves the possibility open that, as an Arab Jew, Chetrit may in fact be able to utter them. Translated into proper Arabic, "יַעְנִי תָאעַיוּש" instead reads "in other words, coexistence." Yet, his words are not *other* words. Technically speaking, they are the same words, a mere translation of his earlier sentiment written in Hebrew. The paradox embedded in Chetrit's translation, or non-translation, creates another possibility for the Arab Jewish narrator and therefore functions to subvert the dominant paradigm under which the speaker would be *either* Arab or Jewish, would be able to speak words of peace and coexistence, or would not be. If "*ya'ani ta'ayush"* are in fact the words of peace and coexistence to which the speaker refers, then not only is the Arab Jewish speaker successful in conveying them, but also the act of choosing between languages becomes the primary language of peace and coexistence. Given that the words "peace" and "coexistence" are not the variable of change in Chetrit's translation but rather the speaker's switch from Hebrew to Arabic,

Arabic is not simply privileged above Chetrit's 'Jewishness' as a marker of his identity, but moreover it becomes inextricably linked to the very Jewishness that ultimately allows him to gesture towards peace and coexistence.

This act of privileging language above words becomes especially pertinent to an Arab Jewish author like Chetrit, who was born in Qasr as-Suq in Morocco but moved to Israel at the age of three and thus received an Israeli, Hebrew education.[17] Although Chetrit does not write in literary Arabic, the symbolic value of his use of Arabic in his Hebrew writing should not be understated; it functions effectively to implicate Hebrew into the larger project of restoring Arab Jewish history to the Jewish and Israeli historical landscape. In *The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective*, Raz Krakotzkin encourages the inclusion of the Orientalist paradigm into the project of historicizing Jewish identity. He argues that it was not just the dispossession of Arab Jews' 'Arabness' that constitutes their collective experience of assimilation and non-belonging, but also the dispossession of their Judaism, the latter being necessarily linked to the former. He writes, "The binary Zionist distinction between Jew and Arab produced an impossible rupture between what were, up to the mass migrations following the establishment of Israel, congruent aspects of Mizrahi identity - Jewish and Arab. Suddenly, in order to be considered Israelis, Mizrahim had to forsake the culture and language in which they defined their Judaism - the Arab culture - and in some cases even give up their "religion" as they understood and practiced it."[18] By implicating Jewish history as a whole - by claiming that

[17] Alcalay, 357-358.
[18] Raz-Krakotzkin, Amnon. "The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective." *Orientalism and the Jews.* By Ivan Davidson. Kalmar and Derek Jonathan. Penslar. Waltham, MA: Brandeis UP, 2005. 162-81. Print. 171.

Arab Jews were not only dispossessed of their 'Arabness' but also their 'Jewishness' - Krakotzkin necessitates the reclaiming of a *specifically* Arabic form of Judaism as part of the larger project of historicizing the Arab Jewish collective. Thus, if the speaker in Chetrit's "A Mural With No Wall: A Qasida for Mahmoud Darwish" is seemingly unable to convey words of peace and coexistence because of 'Jewishness' (that is linked in dominant ideology to his use of Hebrew), than it is his 'Jewishness' that must be liberated by a narrative shift into Arabic in order for him to successfully convey these precious words. Chetrit writes, לָכֵן מְשׁוֹרֵר עֲרָבִי יָקָר, אֲנִי כּוֹתֵב לְךָ בְּעִבְרִית, / לָכֵן צַיָּר מִלּוֹת הַנֶּצַח, אֲנִי מְצַיֵּר לְךָ בִּיהוּדִית, / צִיּוּר שֶׁאֵין לִי עֲבוּרוֹ קִיר וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לִי לְעוֹלָם, / כִּי מָאַסְתִּי בְּאַדְמָתְךָ וְאַדְמָתִי תָּמִיד הֵקִיאָה אוֹתִי / וּבַגָּלוּת אֲנִי חַי עַל גַּרְגְּרֵי אֲוִיר בֵּין שָׁם לְפֹה, / וְכָאן אֲנִי עוֹצֵם עֵינַיִם, נוֹגֵעַ לֹא נוֹגֵעַ…[19] ("And so, dear Arab poet, I write to you in Hebrew, / And so, painter of eternal words, I paint for you in Jewish, / A mural I have no wall for, nor will I ever, / As I have come to detest your land and my land has always cast me out, And I live in exile on motes of air, not here nor there, / Closing my eyes, touching, not touching…")[20] Ultimately, it is Chetrit's bilingual voice that creates the possibility for his speaker to reclaim not his 'Arabness' and 'Jewishness' as separate entities, but rather his identity as an Arab Jew that must exist as one descriptor.

The Arabic that circumscribes Chetrit's narrative transitions succinctly alongside his exploration of selfhood. While at first Arabic signifies the speaker's attempt to convey words of peace and coexistence, it necessarily becomes employed as "Army Arabic," a form of appropriated Arabic that is infamously encoded within charged conversations between Israeli

[19] Chetrit, "ציור ללא קיר - קסידה למחמוד דרוויש" מאת סמי שלום שטרית - הכל שקרים."
[20] Chetrit, *Jews: Poems, Translations from Hebrew*.

soldiers and Palestinians and that largely informs second- and third-generation Arab Jews' encounters with Arabic. At first the narrator confesses,

אֲנִי אֶחָד מֵהֶם
כִּי אֵינֶנִּי אֶחָד מִכֶּם, זֶה הַחֶשְׁבּוֹן הֶעָגוּם זֶה
אֲנִי הַנִּכְנָס וְיוֹצֵא בְּמִפְתָּנֶיךָ כִּבְשֶׁלִּי
כַּעַם לוֹגֵם מִן הַקָּפֶה הָעֲרָבִי
וּכַעַם בּוֹעֵט בַּקַּנְקָן וְקוֹרֵא עֲרָבִי מְלֻכְלָךְ
וּמְנַפֵּץ אֶת הַמַּרְאוֹת כֻּלָּן שֶׁלֹּא אֶרְאֶה שָׁם
אֶת פְּנֵי סָבִי תּוֹהֶה עָלַי בַּעֲרָבִית[21]

…I am one of them
Because I am not one of you, that is the miserable bottom line;
I — who steals in and out of your thresholds as if it were my own –
Sipping from the Arab coffee,
Kicking at the jug and shouting 'dirty Arab!'
Smashing each and every mirror so that I will not see in them
The face of my grandfather, puzzling back at me, in Arabic.[22]

In this passage, the speaker personifies Arabic itself in order to describe his grandfather's confounded gaze. Here, Arabic serves as a direct connection across time between the speaker, whose relationship to Arabic is unsettled, and his grandfather, whose Arabic was once entirely unquestioned and did not protrude as part of his identity. Chetrit's speaker further complicates the association between temporality and language. He narrates,

תִּרְשֹׁם,
אֲנִי נוֹלַדְתִּי יְהוּדִי מִתּוֹךְ מוֹתְךָ, מוֹתְךָ הָעֲרָבִי שֶׁבִּי,
וְאַז יָצָאנוּ בִּמְחוֹלוֹת הוֹרָה סוֹעֶרֶת הַפּוֹלָנִי וַאֲנִי
וְהַפּוֹלָנִי מְנַפְנֵף בְּזִקְנוֹ שֶׁל סָבִי
וּמַצְבִּיעַ עַל עוֹרִי הַשָּׁחוּם וְשָׂר: מִכָּאן אֲנִי, מִכָּאן בָּאתִי, כָּאן בֵּיתִי,
וַאֲנִי נִמְלֵאתִי גַּאֲוָה יְהוּדִית חֲדָשָׁה וְשִׁנֵּי זְאֵב חַדּוֹת וְאַתָּה רוּחַ מִן הוּן[23]!

[21] Chetrit, "ציור ללא קיר - קסידה למחמוד דרוויש" מאת סמי שלום שטרית - הכל שקרים
[22] Chetrit, *Jews: Poems, Translations from Hebrew.*
[23] Chetrit, "ציור ללא קיר - קסידה למחמוד דרוויש" מאת סמי שלום שטרית - הכל שקרים

> Write it down,[24]
> I was born Jewish out of your death, the death of the Arab in me,
> And then we danced a bracing Hora and the Polack waives my grandfather's beard
> And points at my dark skin and sings: Here is where I came from, this is where I hail from, this is my home!
> And I was filled with new Jewish pride and sharp wolve's teeth and you—*rooh min houn*![25]

Here, the narrator not only speaks in its aforementioned appropriated form, but also purposefully reimagines it to adapt to the historical and social landscape of the Arab Jewish speaker. As he becomes filled with Jewish pride—as he becomes Israeli as a consequence of Ashkenazi assimilationist policies and practices—the speaker at once turns his back on what remains of his past, his grandfather. As such, Chetrit not only exposes the ways in which ideas of 'Jewishness' have becomes racialized to exclude those Jews with "dark skin," but he also exposes the ways in which "Army Arabic" has functioned to erase and dismantle an entire lineage of Jewish history, that of his own collective. Finally, Chetrit's Arab Jewish speaker, and not the Polack, is notably the one whose Arabic utterance directs his own grandfather away and transforms his grandfather's Arabic into its appropriated form. In this unsettling moment, Chetrit embodies the impossibility of negotiating his own Arab Jewishness in a society that systematically cements notions of 'Arabness' and "Jewishness' in binary oppositions. As an inhabitant of an identity that is qualified through its intersectionality, Chetrit powerfully articulates the ways in which conventional multilingualism in Israel, namely the encoding of Arabic in military rhetoric, has subjected *not only* Arabic as the language of the Palestinian minority but also as a language of Jewish history. Moreover, he demonstrates how the two are inextricable—how one cannot

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[24] This line is a direct reference to one of Mahmoud Darwish's earlier poems, "Identity Card," which repeatedly reads, "Write down! I am an Arab". http://www.barghouti.com/poets/darwish/bitaqa.asp
[25] Chetrit, *Jews: Poems, Translations from Hebrew.*

appropriate the Arabic of non-Jewish Arabs without at once subjecting the Arabic of Jews as well.

Chetrit's speaker finally settles into Arabic in a declaration of selfhood and an affirmation of his Arab-Jewish identity. He states, ״אַל תִּטְעֶה בִּי אֲנִי לֹא כָּאן לְהַחְלִיף אוֹתְךָ, וַאֲנִי לֹא מִזְרָחָן, אֲנִי מִזְרָחִי, יַעֲנִי יְהוּדִי אוֹרְיֶנְטָלִי״[26] ("And do not mistake me, I am not here to replace you, / I am not an Orientalist, I am Oriental, *ya'ani* a *Mizrahi* Jew.")[27] Here, rather than cautiously reach out to his non-Jewish Arab addressee in a gesture of peace making, or accost his grandfather in a violently appropriated version of Arabic, Chetrit's narration becomes affirmative as he unconditionally links his 'Arabness' to his 'Jewishness' through both Arabic and Hebrew. While the narrator's 'Jewishness' may be questioned as he extends words of coexistence to Darwish and his respective collective, and while his 'Arabness' too may be distrusted, as he is by default an agent of his own history's erasure, Chetrit's speaker undoubtedly asserts his Arab-Jewishness in an overtly constructed Hebrew/Arabic amalgam, which arguably for Chetrit, may be the only way it can in fact be asserted unconditionally.

*Erez Bitton and the Dispossession of Arabic through Translation*

תקציר שיחה

מה זה להיות אותנטי,
לרוץ באמצע דיזנגוף ולצעוק ביהודית מרוקאית.
״אנא מן אלמגרב אנא מן אלמגרב״
(אני מהרי האטלס אני מהרי האטלס).

מה זה להיות אותנטי,
לשבת ברוול בצבעונין (עגאל וזרביה, מיני לבוש),
או להכריזבקול:
אני לא קוראים לי זהר אני זיש, אני זיש (שם מרוקאי).

[26] Chetrit, ״ציור ללא קיר - קסידה למחמוד דרוויש" מאת סמי שלום שטרית - הכל שקרים.
[27] Chetrit, *Jews: Poems, Translations from Hebrew.*

וזה לא, וזה לא,
ובכל זאת טופחת שפה אחרת בפה עד פקוע חניכים,
ובכל זאת תוקפים ריחות דחויים ואהובים
ואני נופל בן העגות
אובד בבליל הקולות.[28]

If in his Qasida to Mahmoud Darwish Sami Shalom Chetrit represents translation as a site of liberation for Arab Jews from the paradigm which positions "Arab" and "Jew" (and Arabic and Hebrew) as antagonistic, Erez Bitton, in his short poem *A Brief Conversation*, creates a literary battle zone in which he problematizes translation as a mode of transmitting meaning across languages as well as across cultures. In Bitton's text, translation is represented as a site of loss rather than as a source of liberation. Submitting himself to a thirteen-line poem during which the speaker attempts to define authenticity of identity, Bitton engages in an illuminating writing exercise in which he explores what it means for his Arab Jewish speaker to be constantly translating his words in a state that will otherwise question his authenticity as a member of society and that refuses to conform to the more authentic and polylingual character of its population. Thus, while translation for Bitton functions symbolically to represent a process of dispossession, his use of inner-text translation is also performative, as it not only represents but demonstrates the ways in which he navigates an Ashkenazi-dominated society as an Arab Jew. As such, Biton constructs this embattled linguistic space to depart from it at once and dismantle it as a paradigm in which Arabic and Hebrew are positioned as opposing languages. Within Bitton's literary battle zone, whose borders are circumscribed by the text's brevity, are three narrative voices that ultimately constitute one multilingual speaker: the privileged Hebrew voice, the disadvantaged Arabic voice, and the bilingual Hebrew-Arabic translator whose voice is most

[28] Biṭon, Erez. *Timbisert Tsipor Maroḳa'it*. Tel-Aviv: Hotsa'at Ha-Ḳibuts Ha-me'uḥad, 2009. N. pag. Print.

authoritative. Although short in length, Bitton's text is a tremendous act of defiance in which the fallacy of homogenous identities, rather than the lived reality of multifaceted identities, is uncovered. Bitton uses his position in-between languages to speak in multiple voices and to represent translation as a site of loss. Ultimately, he deems multilingualism a true indicator of authenticity by representing the monolingual speaker as unable to escape the trenches of translation in which meaning and signification become lost to false binarisms of Hebrew and Arabic.

In Bitton's brief conversation, Hebrew and Arabic operate both dependently and antagonistically as they fight for dominance over the text's narration. The resulting narrative is multilayered, as the primarily Hebrew-speaking narrator delineates a 'conversation' that is really taking place within his own split consciousness, between his Hebrew and his Arabic. At first the Hebrew voice states, "מה זה להיות אותנטי, / לרוץ באמצע דיזנגוף ולצעוק ביהודית מרוקאית."[29] ("What is it to be authentic, / to run into the middle of Dizengoff and shout in Moroccan-Jewish dialect:")[30] to which the Arabic voice continues, "אנא מן אלמגרב אנא מן אלמגרב"[31] ("*Ana min el-Maghreb, Ana min el-Maghreb*").[32] At this point, the Arabic voice is rendered insufficient as the narration proceeds with a parenthetical Hebrew translation, "(אני מהרי האטלס אני מהרי האטלס)"[33] (I am from the Atlas Mountains, I am from the Atlas Mountains),"[34] making the conversation accessible to the implied Hebrew reader and rupturing what may have otherwise been a seamlessly bilingual narration. In this example alone, Hebrew and Arabic serve different functionalities in Bitton's

[29] Biton, *Timbisert Tsipor Maroḳa'it*.
[30] Alcalay, 264.
[31] Biton, *Timbisert Tsipor Maroḳa'it*.
[32] Alcalay, 264.
[33] Biton, *Timbisert Tsipor Maroḳa'it*.
[34] Alcalay, 264.

text and ultimately come to occupy different statuses relative to one another. While in the above passage Arabic is triumphant in positing 'what it means to be authentic', it's utility eventually breaks down, as the implied Hebrew-speaking reader will not understand 'what it means to be authentic' without the authoritative voice of the bilingual translator. By demonstrating the ways in which the bilingual narrator is forced to translate his own sense of self, and by creating a dissonance between the Hebrew and Arabic voices within the bilingual speaker's consciousness, Bitton creates a scenario in which both authenticity of narration and of identity can never truly be achieved. As long as Hebrew and Arabic exist within the speaker's consciousness as separate languages rather than inhabit a mutual space of overlap, Bitton's question "What does it mean to be authentic?" must remain somewhat ironic.

The tension between Hebrew and Arabic continues to manifest itself throughout Bitton's "brief conversation" as the distinct narrative voices they assume become more explicit. In an assertion of self-identification Bitton writes, "אני לא קוראים לי זהר אני זיש, אני זיש (שם מרוקאי)"[35] ("My name isn't Zohar, I'm Zayish, I'm Zayish (A Moroccan name)").[36] Here, the Hebrew subtext is threefold: first, the speaker articulates what he is *not* (namely, the Hebrew version of himself) and second, the parenthetical bilingual translator reenters the text to clarify his own Arabic voice. Once again, and this time more explicitly, Bitton privileges the Arabic speaker and his edition of authenticity, and more specifically his sense of self. The text's primary voice makes clear that the speaker's Arabic voice is more reliable as his Hebrew counterpart comes to represent what he is not instead of what he is. Lastly, the bilingual voice again creates an obvious interruption in the text's narration. What could have otherwise been a harmonious bilingual text

[35] Biton, *Timbisert Tsipor Maroḳa'it*.
[36] Translation mine.

becomes a glaringly ruptured and dysfunctional narrative in which the Arabic speaker is time and again forced to conform to his Hebrew counterpart. Rather than construct a cohesive bilingual text in which speaker's Arabic and Hebrew voices coexist harmoniously, Bitton methodologically represents the asymmetry that inserts itself between the Arabic and the Hebrew, collectively forced to occupy different spaces within the bilingual speaker's own consciousness.

Bitton's "A Brief Conversation" functions as a site of contestation between Hebrew and Arabic. By restricting his text in length, Bitton creates an obviously impossible scenario in which he must answer what it means to be 'authentic', and performs its impossibility by endeavoring to answer this question in thirteen lines and between the fragments of a ruptured narration. He ironically questions what it means to be authentic as he performs multilingualism as it is supposedly 'lived' in Israel; as two separate peoples speaking two entirely distinct languages. By doing so, Bitton elevates the truly bilingual voice as the authoritative narrator and witholder of authenticity and presents bilingualism as it is sincerely lived by the second generation Arab Jew that Bitton's speaker represents. He writes, "ובכל זאת טופחת שפה אחרת בפה עד פקוע חניכים, / ובכל זאת תוקפים ריחות דחויים ואהובים / ואני נופל בן העגות / אובד בבליל הקולות"[37] ("...but despite everything another language moistens the tongue to the point of renting the gums asunder, / and despite everything the repressed and beloved aromas are overpowering / and I fall between circles / lost in the medley of voices").[38] In the end, it is only the speaker who can cross over between

[37] Biṭon, Erez. *Timbisert Tsipor Maroḳa'it*.
[38] Alcalay, 264.

languages and who has both Arabic and Hebrew at his command, and perhaps also the bilingual reader, who is able to recover what becomes lost in translation.

*Ars Poetica and the Dissonance of Multilingualism in Israel/Palestine*

In his poem "All the Arsim Will Come," Roy Hasan, a contemporary Mizrahi poet and leader of the Ars Poetica literary movement[39], explicitly articulates his own identity as a Mizrahi in opposition to other Jewish groups in Israel. Throughout the text, his speaker describes various personas whose actions are mismatched with their supposed political ideologies, usually in relation to the Arab-Jewish conflict in Israel. As Hasan's speaker exposes the paradoxes and contradictions within Israeli society and proceeds to articulate his own identity in opposition to them, he ultimately creates a nuanced category of in-betweenness reserved for Jews in Israel other than the Arab-Jewish population. While 'in-betweenness' in the context of identity in Israel and Palestine is often reserved for those groups whose identities are peripheral (i.e. Arab and/or Palestinian Israelis and Arab-Jews), Hasan appropriates even the notion of in-betweenness to unsettle its presumed association with marginalized identities. In Hasan's literary world, identity in general occupies a liminal space of in-betweenness and plurality. Furthermore, while in-betweenness for the mainstream Jews that Hasan describes essentially equates to hypocrisy or disingenuity, for Mizrahim (or "Arsim") in Hasan's text, in-betweenness is ascribed to an elevated status of sincere duality-in-identity.

Hasan's "All the Arsim Will Come" explores the ways in which certain Jewish-Israelis straddle the paradoxes of their identities or at the very least, of their social and political

[39] This group of writers transliterates the term "Ars" in Hebrew as "ערס," which is a loanword from Arabic meaning "a pimp." The term is used derogatorily in Israel to refer to Mizrahim.

ideologies. For example Hasan writes, [40] ״אֲנִי מֵת עַל אֵלֶּה יְהוּדִים רְגִישִׁים שֶׁמַּפְגִינִים נֶגֶד הַכִּבּוּש וְחוֹזְרִים לַבַּיִת הָעֲרָבִי שֶׁלָּהֶם בְּיָפוֹ שֶׁהֵם קוֹרְאִים לָהּ יָאפָא״ ("I just love those / sensitive Jews who demonstrate against the Occupation / and go home to their / Arab house in Yaffo / which they call Yaffa…").[41] With each hypocrisy Hasan declares in Hebrew "אני מת על אלה," which in modern Hebrew translates into the contemporary English idiom "I die for" or in other words, "I love". However, as it's used, Hasan actually affirms that each paradox or duplicity embodied by the Jewish-Israeli collective indeed functions to violently erase Hasan's own claim to genuine in-betweenness, or in other words, his Arab Jewishness (or Jewish Arabness). As such, Hasan uses Arabic strategically to unsettle fixed notions of certain Jewish identities that are otherwise categorized by *belonging* to a national, ethnic, and religious collective, as well as to cement his own identity in a sense of collective belonging. Whereas the presence of Arabic in a majority Hebrew text may otherwise function to disrupt the narrative, Hasan employs multilingualism in a way that does not explicitly present itself as such.[42] More specifically, he uses translation across (what are, in dominant Israeli rhetoric) presumably fixed and impenetrable Hebrew/Arabic borders to construct a subtext that foregrounds his most acute claims of Arab Jewish identity in questions of multilingualism. By engaging with Arabic both in narration and more pointedly in translation, Hasan brings language politics and multilingualism to the forefront of his critique of dominant Israeli discourse and to his affirmation of Arab Jewishness or "Ars-ness".

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[40] Hasan, Roy. "אִם יִהְיֶה שָׁלוֹם כָּל הָעַרְסִים יָבוֹאוּ." Haaretz, 30 June 2015. Web. 08 Apr. 2016. <http://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/poetry/.premium-1.2672250>.

[41] Hasan, Roy. "If There'll Be Peace, All the 'arsim' Will Come." *+972 Magazine.* Trans. Ron Makleff. + 972 Blog, 12 July 2015. Web. 20 Mar. 2016.

[42] In the case of this text, "multilingualism" refers to the use of multiple languages by a single speaker and within a single text.

Hasan uses Arabic in both distinct and overlapping ways in order to disrupt assumptions of who in Israeli society inhabits "in-between" or dubitable identities. Firstly, Hasan's first-person narrator uses Arabic that would be easily understood by his Hebrew-speaking readership. He writes, for example,

בעיניים נוגות של שתפות
גורל, על צלחת חומוס
אצל אבו משהו
מלקקים שפתים עם כל נגוב
ממלמלים די לכיבוש וחולמים
שתי מדינות לשני עמים
כי ואללה[43]

with a melancholy glance of
shared fate over hummus
at Abu something-or-other
licking their lips with every
wipe of the pita and
murmuring about ending the Occupation,
dreaming of two states for two nations
because – *walla* –[44]

Here, the term "ואללה" ("Wallah") adapts to the predominantly Hebrew narration of the text as the term itself has been adopted into colloquial Hebrew and is used in everyday speech accordingly, as are the other Arabic terms interspersed throughout the text (i.e. רמדן, מואזין, נכבה) ("Ramadan, Mu'azzin, Nakba"). As such, multilingualism in the text itself occupies an ambiguous space in that the use of Arabic can function to make the text multilingual, or can be read as part of the colloquial Hebrew narrative. In fact, "ואללה" ("Wallah") could likely be read mistakenly by the Hebrew-speaking reader as "יאללה" ("Yallah"), a similar term adopted by colloquial Hebrew from Arabic meaning "by god" or "I swear". This reading of the text would be fitting in the context of

[43] Hasan, Roy. "אִם יִהְיֶה שָׁלוֹם כָּל הָעַרְסִים יָבוֹאוּ".
[44] Hasan, Roy. "If There'll Be Peace, All the 'arsim' Will Come."

the stanza which describes a group of Jews demonstrating against the Occupation. In *Poetic Trespass*, Levy detects a similar device in Samir Naqqash's writing, an Iraqi-Jewish author who continued to write in various Iraqi (mostly Jewish) Arabic dialects using an elevated modern standard Arabic even after immigrating to Israel. She writes of Naqqash's use of translation-in-narrative, "The logic of this 'false equivalent' in Albert's translation of monetary values recalls the logic of the false cognate: even (or especially) when things seem to be familiar - to *make sense* - they are essentially different, thus they trick and confound."[45] Overlooked by the Hebrew reader who is conditioned to read "Yallah," Arabic may additionally function ironically to further expose the appropriative use of Arabic in mainstream Israeli society. Ultimately, if the text were to end at this point, "Wallah" may or may not stand apart from its surrounding Hebrew narrative. As the text proceeds, however, the signification of the Arabic presence within the predominantly Hebrew narration changes. Hasan continues,

(הם מלהטטים בערבית)
כבוש כבוש
(או נכבה נכבה)
לצדם אבל לא אתם
בכל זאת, ערבים.[46]

(they juggle with in Arabic)
Occupation Occupation
(or *nakba nakba*):
next to them but not with them,
After all, they're Arabs.[47]

[45] Levy., 137.
[46] Hasan, Roy. "אִם יִהְיֶה שָׁלוֹם כָּל הָעַרְסִים יָבוֹאוּ."
[47] Translation mine.

Immediately, the utterance of "Wallah" by the Hebrew speaker is exposed by the parenthetical narration as yet another paradox that the implied Ashkenazi-Jewish multilingual subject embodies. The speaker explicitly provides the parenthetical and elucidatory statement, "They fumble for the Arabic," in order to clarify that "כי ואללה" is not intended to be read as natural to the Hebrew narration of the text. Instead, Hasan's speaker takes a firm stance with regard to reading the Arabic in the text as Arabic and not as colloquial Hebrew. By doing so, the text resists qualifying Hebrew as a hybridized or heteroglossic language of mixed Hebrew and Arabic. More pointedly, by declaring that those who utter "Wallah" fumble for Arabic as opposed to some alternative by which the Hebrew speaker would either settle into Arabic or state in Hebrew, Hasan exposes language as yet another paradox that is performed by his Hebrew-speaking Jewish subjects. Moreover, as the speaker continues to situate himself in opposition to their disingenuous form of in-betweenness or hypocrisy, he further distinguishes himself as inhabiting one legitimately multifaceted identity rather than straddling between two separate identities. As an Arab Jew, the multilingual speaker affirms ownership over both the Hebrew and the Arabic at his command and thereby appropriates the notion of in-betweenness itself to accommodate his own identity.

Translation across Hebrew and Arabic is also central to understanding the ways in which "All the Arsim Will Come" functions as a multilingual text. In addition to affirming that the Arabic in the text should be read as such, the parenthetical subtext demonstrates the ways in which Hebrew and Arabic are encoded within ideologies that render translation in certain cases an impossibility. When the speaker narrates, "כבוש כבוש" and then endeavors to provide an Arabic alterative, the translation assumes an entirely new meaning and ideological signification, and the secondary speaker is at once exposed as a monolingual Hebrew speaker who uses appropriated

Arabic without understanding its implications on the Occupation as he or she ironically demonstrates against it. The use of mistranslation within the text's narrative is articulated by Levy as well in her analysis of Emile Habiby and Samir Naqqash's writing. She states, "These works...suggest a theory of translation in which it is not equivalence, but the lack thereof, that yields a statement's truth value...Habiby's use of misunderstanding is also a project of destabilizing linguistic referentiality. Meaning in his narrative is conveyed *not* through the successful delivery of the message from the speaker to addressee, but through its failure."[48] Likewise, Hasan inserts mistranslation within his text specifically to expose Arabic as it is spoken in Hebrew as a failed project of hybridizing the many different languages that populate the Israeli societal landscape. Read alongside the parenthetical subtext, the narration, which reads," "ואללה" and then "כבוש כבוש,"illustrates how the two terms cannot comfortably cohabitate the same narrative, or at the very least cannot do so as one that is genuinely multilingual. To use Arabic while expressing support for the Occupation against Israel/Palestine's Arabic-speakers is to once again disarm them. Thus, translation as it is utilized by third-generation Mizrahi Roy Hasan paradoxically represents Hebrew hegemony, and its subjects' code switching between Hebrew and Arabic, as an agent of linguistic appropriation.

Despite his portrayal of a failed attempt at multilingualism in the face of Hebrew hegemony, Hasan does not ultimately render Hebrew/Arabic bilingualism an impossibility for everyone who inhabits his literary portrait. Firstly, the Arab Jewish narrator, although Hebrew-speaking, is considered closer to achieving multilingualism over his Ashkenazi counterpart, who has adopted Arabic into his or her colloquial Hebrew speech. Given his ability to

[48] Levy, 139-140.

understand the ways in which Hebrew and Arabic are encoded in ideology and should be used accordingly, the primary speaker in the text is at least *capable* of becoming multilingual. Ironically, however, the text's most genuine moment of multilingualism is located in its concluding stanza, in which no Arabic is spoken at all. Here, the only implied bilingual speaker in the text is the narrator's Arabic friend, who is given the final say in the narration when he states,

אלה בחיים
לא יעשו שלום
כי אם יהיה שלום
כל הערסים יבואו.[49]

An Arab friend said about them once
that they'll never make peace,
because if there'll be peace
all the *arsim* will come.[50]

In this moment, Hasan foregoes the only opportunity the text presents to use Arabic that is not in its appropriated form. Instead, he graciously reserves multilingualism for the authentically multilingual speaker, and distances himself as an Arab Jew, and as a Hebrew-speaker, from the violent appropriation and resignification of Arabic into the Hebrew that historically dispossessed the third-generation Arab Jew of Arabic in the first place. For Hasan's speaker, it is not his in-betweenness that disqualifies him from speaking Arabic. On the contrary, it is his Ashkenazi counterpart's straddling of identities and ideologies that make him or her ineligible for multilingualism in Israel and that continues to implicate the Arab Jew in a dialectic of separation between Arabic and Hebrew.

[49] Hasan, Roy. "אִם יִהְיֶה שָׁלוֹם כָּל הָעַרְסִים יָבוֹאוּ."
[50] Hasan, Roy. "If There'll Be Peace, All the 'arsim' Will Come."

Sami Shalom Chetrit, Erez Bitton, and Roy Hasan each utilize translation between Hebrew and Arabic, and in some cases mis- or non-translation, to engage meaningful and compelling questions of language and identity politics in Israel and Palestine. While as second-generation Arab Jewish authors, Chetrit and Bitton are less cautious to entertain the possibility of multilingualism in Arab Jewish consciousness and literary/cultural expression, Hasan distances himself from the violent appropriation of Arabic that has been qualified as a form of multilingualism in Israel. In fact, Hasan appropriates assumptions tied to in-betweenness altogether in order to reposition himself within the borders of identity in Israel and relocate his Ashkenazi counterparts outside its margins, effectively dismantling conventional modes of thinking about identity in Israel altogether. Moreover, Chetrit and Bitton themselves depart from one another in their use of translation in narrative. Whereas Chetrit's text is more concerned with reconnecting Arabic to its Jewish history and defining himself as *necessarily* Arab by virtue of his Jewishness, Bitton represents translation as a site of continued dispossession for the Arab Jewish collective in a society with mostly monolingual Hebrew speakers. Perhaps most importantly, however, is that all three use translation as a liminal linguistic space in order to, borrowing Shimon Ballas's words, "dialogue with language itself," and to probe the borders of Hebrew as a hegemonic language. In effect, these authors at once distance themselves from Hebrew hegemony while at the same time push Hebrew away from its ties to the dominant discourse that marginalizes the non-Ashkenazi Hebrew-speaker.

In all three texts discussed in this chapter, translation functions critically within each narrative as a site of negotiating language as part of Arab Jewish identity and marginalization. In *Poetic Trespass,* Lital Levy necessarily distinguishes between "the politics of translation as a

process applied *to* a text rather than a process that takes place *within* it."[51] In this chapter, I have focused on translation in narrative and have demonstrated the ways in which three authors utilize it distinctly to construct and convey uniquely Arab Jewish narratives. However, translation as a process applied to a text is also critical to the symbolic value and dissemination of Arab Jewish literature, given that many of the authors being discussed cannot translate their highly-pertinent work into literary Arabic. Translation thus functions as a form of afterlife for these texts, many of which thematize the inability of second- or third-generation Arab Jews to write in Arabic without playing into a larger project of language appropriation, as illustrated in all three of the texts discussed in this chapter. In particular, Levy cites the translation of Almog Behar's short story "Ana min al-yahud" (I Am of the Jew") into Arabic by Mohammad 'Abud of the 'Ain Shams University in Cairo Hebrew Department.[52] In the following chapter, I will focus on silence as afterlife in two texts, including Almog Behar's "Ana min al-yahud". In that discussion, it is useful to keep in mind translation in considering the various afterlifes that a text may assume.

[51] Ibid., 107.
[52] Levy., 55.

## Chapter II

## Accents and Absence as Presence:

## A Third-Generation Afterlife of Judeo-Arabic(s)

> "The idea of life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity. Even in times of narrowly prejudiced thought there was an inkling that life was not limited to organic corporeality."[53]
>
> -Walter Benjamin

In an effort to recover Arab Jewish history as it was lived prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the emigration of Jews en masse from the Arab World, scholars have pointed to language as being central to Arab Jewish identity. In her essay "The Question of Judeo-Arabic(s): Itineraries of Belonging," Ella Shohat argues that the general notion of the "Arab-Jew" is inextricably linked to what she calls "the linguistic/cultural question of 'Judeo-Arabic'.[54] More specifically, she outlines the ways in which Judeo-Arabic functioned not as a specifically Jewish, or Diasporic, language per se, but rather as one of many religiously-, ethnically- and regionally-specific dialects of Arabic. Also central to the question of Arabic as it's employed in Hebrew writing today is Shohat's assertion that first- and second-generation Arab Jewish writers differed in their relationship to Arabic. More pointedly, she argues that while earlier Arab Jewish authors like Ezra Haddad methodologically wrote in-between, or back and forth between, Hebrew and Arabic, younger authors such as Sami Michael and Shimon Ballas abandoned the use of Arabic in writing altogether, and instead opted for Hebrew as their primary mode of literary expression. In both cases that Shohat discusses, the authors in question had Judeo-Arabic, as well as other regionally-specific Arabic dialects, at their command. Her

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[53] Benjamin.,16.

[54] Shohat, Ella. "The Question of Judeo-Arabic(s): Itineraries of Belonging.*"Languages of Modern Jewish Cultures: Comparative Perspectives.* Ed. Joshua L. Miller and Anita Norich. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 2016. 94. Print

compelling historicizing of these earlier authors' use of Arabics begs the question of how Judeo-Arabic functions differently in the contemporary writing of Arab Jewish authors who do not necessarily have Arabic at their literary disposal, if at all. Using three literary works of third-generation Arab Jewish authors Almog Behar [b.1978] and Adi Keissar [b.1980], I argue here that a reimagining of what constitutes Jewish dialects of Arabic and Judeo-Arabic indicates a persistence of its use in Arab Jewish writing and points Arab Jewishness in Israel affirmatively towards the future. While, as Shohat argues, Hebrew "stands in" for Arabic in the literature of authors like Sami Michael and Shimon Ballas, accented Hebrew and silence likewise stand in as a form of Arabic dialects and Judeo-Arabic in the contemporary writing of Keissar and Behar. Furthermore, the common practice among second- and particularly third-generation Arab Jewish authors of accentuating the appropriation of Arabic into colloquialized Hebrew itself constitutes a continued use of Judeo-Arabic in writing.

At the crux of Ella Shohat's questioning of Judeo-Arabic(s) is the representation of Judeo-Arabic as a site of appropriation. More specifically, Shohat outlines the ways in which Judeo-Arabic has been adopted into the linguistic canon of Jewish Diasporic languages and thus "has been subjected to a form of linguistic ghettoization, secluded from its linguistic family and dialectal neighbors."[55] As such, the "ghettoization" of Judeo-Arabic(s) represents a larger rupture of Arab Jewry from its place in Arab history and by extension an uncertainty regarding its future. Disconnected at once from Judeo-Arabic and from its proper historicization as one of many Arabic dialects, Shohat purposefully and critically reimagines the current state of Judeo-Arabic(s) as she considers its centrality to the lived experiences of the collective Arab

[55] Ibid., 99.

Jewish past, present, and future. Both her grounding of Judeo-Arabic(s) in a necessarily reunited Jewish and Arabic historical narrative, as well as her nuanced approach to redefining Judeo-Arabic(s), and the Jewish dialects of Arabic they represent, as living languages, are critical to reading third-generation Arab Jewish literature. Describing the psyche from which many of these authors write Shohat states,

> Currently, the younger generations of Arab-Jews/Mizrahim, both inside and outside of Israel, express considerable anxiety about the possible disappearance of their home mother-tongue, or of their grandparents' Arabic. The current period has witnessed an almost frenzied attempt, evident in multiple sites and spaces, to revive the various home Arabic dialects...Partially due to the anxiety provoked by the imminent disappearance of the older generation that actually lived in the Arab world, there has been a remarkable resurgence among the younger generation of performance in Arabic dialects...capturing the Arabics spoken by Jews becomes a kind of affective return to Arab spaces in the wake of historical rupture.[56]

The literature discussed in this chapter reflects this current state of affairs between a small group of third-generation Arab Jewish authors and Arabic(s) as an inseparable part of their cultural and literary expression. In part, I am trying to provide one possible answer to Shohat's question, "Is/are Judeo-Arabic/s dying with its/their last speakers, members of a dying linguistic tribe?...By which criteria is 'Judeo-Arabic' alive, dead, or somewhere in-between?"[57] through a re-consideration of the absences/silences within this particular body literature as the ongoing

[56] Ibid., 121-122.
[57] Ibid., 133.

presence of Judeo-Arabic. In her concluding remarks Shohat posits, "Rather than erect a fixed, static and presumably coherent entity called 'Judeo-Arabic language' to be retrieved within a museological project, it is vital to conceive the Arabics deployed by Jews as constantly shifting utterances, which can even be imagined in their future potentialities."[58] As such, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the ways in which two third-generation Arab Jewish authors, Adi Keissar and Almog Behar, serve as agents in the continuation of a uniquely Arab Jewish dialect and by extension, in a greater project of reconciling the deeply embedded rupture in Arab Jewish consciousness. More specifically, it contends that the "shifting utterances" and "future potentialities" to which Shohat refers are encoded within distinctive forms of Hebrew that maintain echoes and/or absences drawn directly from former Arabics of Jews in the Arab world.

*Writing in Judeo-Arabic(s) and Speaking in Silence*

In "My Arabic is Mute," Almog Behar employs a prosopopoeia prose style to imagine Hebrew and Arabic as cohabitating a shared space, as in the bilingual Arab Jewish speaker. Similarly, in his earlier work "Ana min al-Yahoud," Behar explores his speaker's relationship to both language and time as he recasts his third generation Iraqi Jewish protagonist as being inhabited by his grandfather's voice. As a writer whose connection to Arabic derives from a historical and familial link, rather than it being his vernacular, Behar forces his readers to reimagine the possibility of restoring multilingualism as an alternative to silence to the Israeli and Jewish landscape, both in writing and in speech. More specifically, he necessitates an investigation into whether this possibility still exists, and if not, what alternatives remain for the Arab Jewish collective in Israel/Palestine. However, as investigations into the functionality,

[58] Ibid., 137.

necessity, and possibility of multilingualism, or coexistence between Hebrew and Arabic both within Hebrew literature and within Israel/Palestine, Behar's texts are largely unresolved as Hebrew and Arabic relate antagonistically to one another and as Behar's third-generation Iraqi Jewish speaker is ultimately forced to settle into silence.

While Behar purposefully employs a surrealist writing-style to set his prose in pre-1948 Jerusalem, "Ana min al-Yahoud" is more pertinently set in the physical and figurative no-man's-land between Iraq and Israel/Palestine to which the speaker's grandfather alludes. The narrator speaks,

> והיה סבי מדבר אלי, שואל אותי בקולי האם יש סוף לסיפור הזה, ומה היסטוריה זו שלי מתערבת בשלך, איך באתי להפר חייך, אני דור מדבר ואיך אתה קם לחדש אותי, אתה הדור חיכינו אותו...ונשארתי במדבר למאכל עופות דורסים בשבילך, כדי שלא תזכור אותי, שלא תהיה כואב כמונו...אבל אני לא מצאתי את מותי בירושלים, גם לא בעיר הולדתי, אני מת במדבר שביניהן, הרבה מדבר שתיקה.[59]

> And my grandfather would speak to me, asking me in my voice whether there is any end to this story, and why is this history of mine mixed up with yours, how I have come to trouble your life, I am the generation of the desert and how have you arisen to renew me. You are the generation for which we waited...and we remained in the desert for the birds of prey to eat us for your sake, so that you would not remember me, so that you would not be hurting like me...but I did not meet my death in Jerusalem, nor in the city of my birth, but rather in the desert between them, a great desert of silence[60]

Already, Behar qualifies the first- and third- generation Iraqi Jewish experience through silence and equates them as such. Describing his grandfather's physical, immigrant experience of displacement as yet another site of in-betweenness or liminality in Arab Jewish history, Behar at once connects the past to the present in a linear narrative of dispossession that resists the

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[59] Behar, Almog. "אנא מן אל־יהוד." *Haaretz.co.il*. Haaretz, 7 Sept. 2014. Web. 25 Mar. 2016. <http://www.haaretz.co.il/short-story/25-years/.premium-1.2427011>

[60] Behar, Almog. "Ana Min Al Yahoud – I'm One of the Jews." Web log post. *Almogbehar.wordpress.com*. www.wordpress.com, Apr. 2005. Web. Oct. 2015.

historicization of this moment via dominant Zionist narrative as a moment of homecoming rather than exile. Here, the death of the speaker's grandfather is equated not just to loss but to death itself. Accordingly, the direct link between past and present that Behar reclaims allows for a closer investigation into the dispossession and/or resurrection of the Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic and into the silence that continues to inform Arab Jewish identity in Israel. Thus written in Hebrew but set in silence, Behar appropriates the muteness of his grandfather's Arabic and instead renders Hebrew a mute language, unable to accommodate not only the Arabic-speaking Iraqi Jew, but even the third-generation, Hebrew-speaking Iraqi Jew as well.

One of the ways in which Behar navigates the transgressive zone of Hebrew/Arabic intersect is through the thematizing of accents as a manifestation of belonging to this intermediary space. While "Ana min al-Yahoud" is written and narrated almost entirely in Hebrew, almost no characters that inhabit Behar's surrealist world speak it with a 'standard' Israeli accent. In Behar's hallucinatory depiction of Jerusalem, it is not the resurrection of languages themselves but the remnants of what were once vernacular Jewish Arabic(s) that plague Behar's literary landscape. Accordingly, Behar creates a distinction between accented-Hebrew and the languages they are derivative of, and moreover a distinction between what each represents for the third-generation Iraqi Jew. Behar writes, for example,

> ואז הייתי מתחיל עושה טלפונים, אומר לשוטר, תראה, רק מאתמול המבטא שלי ערבי ככה, כבד כזה, והוא בכלל לא פַלַסְטִינִי הוא עִירַאקִי, וגם אתה לא נראה לי דובר יִידִיש מן הבית, אולי למדתָּ אותה באחד המקומות החיצוניים, ובכלל, אולי גם לסבא שלךָ היה מבטא כמו שלי...[61]

> And then I would start to make phone calls, telling the policemen, look, it's only since yesterday that my accent has been Arab like this, heavy like this, and it isn't even Palestinian, its Iraqi, and you don't look to me like you spoke Yiddish in your

[61] Behar, Almog. "אנא מן אל־יהוד."

> parents' home yourself, maybe you learned it somewhere outside, maybe your own grandfather had an accent like mine...[62]

By circumventing multilingualism[63] itself as the point of tension between Behar's Arab Jewish speaker and his implied Ashkenazi accuser, and instead emphasizing a multi-accented society in which different histories and languages of the past inform the present, Behar asserts that Hebrew operates more as an ideological state apparatus in Israel than as a practical means of standardizing language and communication. As the surrealist narrative materializes, Behar's speaker contracts a so-called 'accent-epidemic', or in other words, the resurrection of Arabic to the Arab-Jews of Israel. However, Yiddish and other European (or "Diasporic") languages are likewise eventually revived, and as such, Ashkenazi Jews *in addition* to Arab Jews are no longer capable of concealing the histories that their accents represent beneath the veil of Hebrew hegemony. Thus, while Behar employs surrealism in order to imagine Iraqi-Arabic, Ladino, Yiddish, Hungarian, etc. as being restored to the soundscape of Jerusalem, he actually describes Israel in a terrifically realistic light; as a country of immigrants in which multilingualism represents authenticity and serves as a symbol of repressed history rather than a threat to Israeli nationality and collectivity. Behar therefore purposefully distinguishes between multilingualism and different versions of accented-Hebrew in order to foreground his critique of Hebrew hegemony in practices of discrimination within Israel rather than in larger questions of how language functions practically in the nation-state model.

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[62] Behar, Almog. "Ana Min Al Yahoud – I'm One of the Jews."

[63] While there are several conceptual frameworks through which one can define multilingualism, it refers here to the major presence or use of multiple languages by an individual and/or within a single society.

While Behar must write in Hebrew, he nonetheless uses Arabic purposefully throughout his story. Behar continues to incorporate Arabic into the idioms that have been adopted into colloquial Hebrew where Arabic is employed. He writes,

> ואני הייתי נותר לעמוד מול השוטרים לבד, מתחיל להתקשר לחברים החַלַבִּים והטְרִיפּוֹלִיטַאִים והתוּנְיסַאִים שלי, אומר, אלה אולי אין להם עברית מושלמת, אינה צחה כל־כך, אינה כפי שעברית צריכה להיות, אבל בכל זאת טובה היא משלי. והם היו עונים מיד, לא מתמהמהים למשמע הצלצולים, ופתאום גם להם נעשה מבטא ערבי כל־כך כבד כל־כך, והם בדיוק היו שומעים ברקע איזה עוּד פתלתל או קַאנוּן עיקש, והם היו מברכים אותי "אַהַלַן בִּיכְּ" ומכנים אותי "יַא חַבִּיבִּי" ושואלים אותי "אַשְׁלוֹנַכְּ" ונפרדים ממני ב"סַלַמְתַכְּ", ומה יכלו השוטרים, איך יכלו להאמין לי, אחרי שכל חברַי זנחו אותי כך, שאני בן ישראל ולא בן ישמעאל[64]
>
> I'd remain standing there facing the policemen all alone and start to call my friends whose parents were from Aleppo or Tripoli or Tunisia saying maybe their Hebrew is not perfect, it isn't so pure, but nevertheless it's better than mine…and suddenly they too had such a heavy Arab accent…and they'd greet me with *"ahlan bik"* and call me *"ya habibi"* and ask me *"ashlonek"* and take their leave of me with *"salamatek"[1]* and what could the policemen do, how could they believe me, after all of my friends had abandoned me, that I was an Israelite and not an Ishmaelite.[65]

Here, Behar's employment of Arabic serves multiple purposes. It seems Arabic itself is not entertained as a possibility for even the speaker's Arab Jewish friends; although they try to speak it, they arrive at a linguistic dead-end and are left only with their thick accents and Hebraized Arabic with which to communicate. As products of a ruptured history that includes both the dispossession of Arabic from its place in Jewish history and its categorical appropriation into a Jewish/Arab dichotomy, the use of Arabic seems only to function as an indicator of its own impossibility. However, as the appearance of Arabic breaks the Hebrew narration of Behar's prose, it closely recalls the historical Arab Jewish practice of writing Arabic in Hebrew script. Describing this form of Judeo-Arabic in written-text Shohat writes,

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[64] Behar, Almog. "אנא מן אל־יהוד."
[65] Behar, Almog. "Ana Min Al Yahoud – I'm One of the Jews."

> For over a millennium, Arab Jewish thinkers wrote in Arabic, *including to comment on the Hebrew language* (emphasis mine), often mediating between two textual worlds...A millennium later, Hakham Yoseph Hayyim (Baghdad, 1832-1909AD) continued the tradition of writing Arabic-in-Hebrew-letters...Directed largely toward women, this Arabic text in Hebrew letters was composed in a context where Jewish men and, to a lesser degree, women, traditionally trained to read Hebrew script, even when having little knowledge of the Hebrew language, could understand an Arabic text in Hebrew letters.[66]

What Behar and other modern Arab Jewish writers are doing by writing in the Arabic at their, as well as their Hebrew-speaking audience's, disposal, can thus be read as one possible extension of Judeo-Arabic(s). Ultimately, Behar likewise writes in Arabic-in-Hebrew-letters in order to critique not only the Hebrew language, but moreover Hebrew hegemony and its appropriation of other Arabics. In this sense, Behar and his contemporaries actualize the project of restoring Judeo-Arabic(s) at the very least to written expressions of Arab Jewish identity.

While Behar's use of Arabic in "Ana min al-Yahoud" functions critically to recover Judeo-Arabic(s) as a written language, it also serves to mythologize Hebrew/Arabic bilingualism as a feature of the mainstream Jewish population within Israel. Furthermore, it works towards denormalizing the use of Arabic in a state in which language, and particularly Hebrew, operates as an ideological state apparatus. Levy herself states, "In Behar's story, Arabic does not supplant Hebrew; rather, Hebrew becomes uncanny via its close encounter with Arabic. Creating a

[66] Shohat, 103-104.

monolingual text with a bilingual consciousness, Behar effectively breaks down these distinctions and renders language itself 'uncountable,' to use Derrida's term."[67] Read alongside Behar's poem "My Arabic is Mute," which personifies Arabic and Hebrew, multilingualism in Israel today is further falsified and revealed as yet another guise under which Arab Jewish history is repressed. Behar writes,

הערבית שלי פוחדת
מתחזה בשקט לעברית
ולוחשת לחברים
עם כל דפיקה בשעריה:
"אהלן אהלן".
ומול כל שוטר עובר ברחוב
שופלת תעודת זהות
מצביעה על הסעיף המגונן:
"אנא מן אל-יהוד, אנא מן אל-יהוד".

והעברית שלי חרשת
לפעמים חרשת מאוד.[68]

My Arabic is scared
quietly impersonates Hebrew
Whispering to friends
With every knock on her gates:
"Ahalan, ahalan, welcome".
And in front of every passing policeman
And she pulls out her ID card
for every cop on the street
pointing out the protective clause:
"Ana min al-yahud, ana min al-yahud,
I'm a Jew, I'm a Jew".
And my Hebrew is deaf
Sometimes so very deaf.[69]

[67] Levy, 271.
[68] Behar, Almog. "My Arabic is Mute. Web log post. *Almogbehar.wordpress.com*. www.wordpress.com, 25 May 2011. Web. Mar. 2016.
[69] Ibid.

In this final poetic stanza, as in "Ana min al-Yahoud," Behar's use of Arabic is strategically misleading. Although it appears to affirm the prospect of multilingualism in Hebrew writing, the antagonistic relationship between Hebrew and Arabic that Behar portrays reflects a larger critique of multilingualism itself for the third generation of Arab Jews in Israel, and functions more to unsettle Hebrew as *the* Jewish language rather than to impose multilingualism onto the soundscape of a largely monolingual Hebrew-speaking state. Arabic appears twice in the text itself, where it reads "Ahalan, ahalan…" and "Ana min al-yahud, ana min al-yahud". In his first use, Behar writes in Arabic as Arabic-impersonating-Hebrew-speaking-Arabic. He paradoxically uses the appropriated form of the Arabic greeting "ahalan wasahlan," used to welcome guests, to expose the irony of borrowing the Arabic idiom for "welcome" from a peoples that were exiled from their homeland as a direct result Zionism's actualization. In the second instance, Behar writes in Arabic as a sincere declaration of selfhood and Arab Jewishness. As such, Behar illuminates the ways in which Arabic, although present in the text, is essentially mute by virtue of Hebrew's deafness, or unwillingness to approach Arabic in a manner other than impersonation. The way in which Behar demonstrates how his declaration of selfhood is undermined by his preceding Arabic utterance further demarcates the zone of liminality from which he writes.

In a final dismissal of Arabic as a viable option for the third generation Iraqi Jew, Behar imagines yet another linguistic literary space in which his speaker's grandfather reaches out to him in Hebrew. He writes,

> בנה אגפים בלבך, נכדי, היה אומר לי, עשה אותו מדורים מדורים, ושכן אותי באחד המדורים הנחבאים, ובשאר המדורים חייה. או עבור למדור השתיקה, כי השינוי אשר חשבת כי מתחולל פשוט

מדי, ואם ידובר מבטא אחר מה ישתנה...אולי שתיקה תשים בלבם פחד ההווה מן העבר והעתיד. ולמה לא תראה להם את סיפורך, אולי כך יתעוררו, אמר סבי כמעט משביע אותי מן המתים[70].

> Build extensions in your heart, my grandson, he would say to me, make many departments, and lodge me in one of the hidden departments, and live in the rest of them. Or move into the silence department, because the change that you thought is occurring is too simple, and what is going to change if a different accent is spoken...Perhaps silence will put the present's fear of the past and of the future into their hearts. And why don't you show them your story, perhaps that way they will wake up, said my grandfather from the dead, almost making me swear an oath.[71]

In this profound exchange between the first- and third-generation Arab-Jews, Behar imagines that even the third generation Arabic speaking Jew dismisses the possibility that speaking in Arabic today will somehow reclaim their shared history. Utilizing his imagined grandfather's voice, Behar lends authority to his assertion that a multilingual and even multi-accented Israel is not the answer to the dispossession of Arab Jewish history in Israel. Instead, with permission from his speaker's grandfather, Behar asserts his silence in the only language he can, Hebrew.

Left in irresolute silence and between hostile languages, Behar is forced to negotiate what other possibilities exist for the first-generation Iraqi Jewish writer and speaker. More specifically, he explores the impossibility of multilingualism as an impossibility of return, or homecoming, and instead looks towards the past to raise compelling questions regarding the future. For Behar's speaker in "Ana min al-Yahoud," Arabic as it was once spoken by his grandfather is a figment of the text's surrealism. In fact, once the surrealist narrative breaks, the speaker's parents expose the narrator's imagined accent as 'fraudulent'. The text reads, ״אמרה אמא ואיפה, לנו אין מבטא הזה, אמרו ביחד לפקידים לא היה לו מאין לרשת מבטא זה, לא מן המשפחה הפנימית, סבא

[70] Behar, Almog. "אנא מן אל־יהוד."
[71] Behar, Almog. "Ana Min Al Yahoud – I'm One of the Jews."

שלו אנואר מת לפני לידתו, בן שלנו לא"[72] ("…and where, we don't have this accent, they said in chorus to the officials, he had nowhere to inherit this accent from, not from the nuclear family, his grandfather Anwar died before he was born, our son wasn't there").[73] Even more so, Behar imagines that the Arab-speaking generation of Arab Jews themselves would acknowledge the possibility of multilingualism as corrupted by a false sense of one that already exists. As such, Behar renders Jewish dialects of Arabic silent, and instead replaces them with Judeo-Arabic(s) as a written language, both in form and in enterprise. As a language that existed in writing as Arabic-in-Hebrew-letters, and that was used purposefully to comment on the Hebrew language itself, it seems that remnants of Judeo-Arabic(s) continue to inform the expression of Arab Jewish identity even in third-generation writing. Lastly, as a gesture towards denormalizing the appropriation of other Arabics and the simultaneous dispossession of Jewish-Arabic(s) Behar endeavors to appropriate Hebrew itself. "Here I have written poems of opposition to Hebrew in Hebrew. I give them many more signs," writes Behar, "because I have no other language to write in…"

*Reading Between Words: The Secret Judeo-Yemenite-Arabic of Adi Keissar*

In "Black on a Black Body," Adi Keissar thematizes the connection between language and temporality through the speaker's relationship with her Yemenite grandmother. Although Arabic itself is entirely absent from the text, its absence functions purposefully to underscore the complex ways in which a dispossession of Arabic across generations has formed a rupture within the linearities of familial lineages and collective histories that become central to formulating

[72] Behar, Almog. "אנא מן אל־יהוד."
[73] Behar, Almog. "Ana Min Al Yahoud – I'm One of the Jews."

conceptions of selfhood and identity. The text, although written only in Hebrew, is alternatively multi-accented as the grandmother's strong Arabic accent informs the speaker's relationship with her and even more so, with her own sense of self. Keissar emphasizes absences: silence, muteness, and in-betweenness in what at first glance seems like an articulation of loss and non-belonging that qualifies her narrator's Arab Jewish experience. However, as the speaker's very inability to narrate her experience multilingually necessitates a narration that is both accented and silent, these ostensibly 'hollow' spaces come to constitute a shift in the Jewish Yemenite-Arabic of the Arab Jewish Israeli speaker. Ultimately, as a means of reclaiming her collective past and declaring her grandmother's Arabic as still alive, Keissar reimagines Jewish Yemenite-Arabic as a silent or mute language into one that is simply kept secret and thus misunderstood.

The familial bond between the text's narrator and her grandmother is bound by silence and fear. As the speaker is unable to understand her grandmother as a young girl, she learns to communicate with her via gestures. However her attempts at communication function only to compound the silence between them, and instead generate a sense of fear between the speaker and her grandmother. For example, after her grandmother offers her a juice, the speaker finds herself mute as she attempts to express her gratitude in Hebrew. She narrates,"ושתיתי הכל / רציתי לומר תודה / אבל לא ידעתי / באיזו שפה צריך"[74] ("And I drank it all, / I wanted to tell her thank you / but I didn't know / in which language I needed to")[75]. Later on, the speaker continues to pursue

[74] Keissar, Adi. *Shahor 'al Gabe Shahor = Black on Black.* Ed. Almog Behar. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.
[75] Translations of this poem are mine.

a common language through which to thank her grandmother. After picking flowers for her she recalls,

אני זוכרת
כמה מבוכה עמדה בינינו
של דם אחד
ושתי לשונות אלמות
והיא שטפה את גביע הפרילי
בשתיקה
מלאה בו מים
והניחה בו את הפרח שנתתי לה[76].

I remember
How much embarrassment stood between us
Of one blood
And two mute languages
And she washed the juice cup
In silence
Filled it with water
And placed in it the flower that I gave to her.

Once again, the speaker's attempt at communication falls between the trenches of two mute languages. However, it is critical to note that Keissar nevertheless perceives both "mute" languages as part of one shared history and identity. Here, rather than position Hebrew and Arabic as two distinct languages, Keissar fuses together her speaker's modern Hebrew and the Jewish Yemenite-Arabic dialect of her grandmother under a single identity that does not change across time along with the speaker's dispossession of Arabic.

The text's narrative promptly shifts when the speaker transitions from a reflection of her childhood to a description of her current condition. She relates,

ולפעמים הלב מבקש לעצמו

[76] Ibid., 52.

דברים מוזרים
כמו ללמוד תימנית
ולחזור לקבר שלה
ולהצמיד שפתים לתוך האדמה
ולצעק פנימה
את כל מה שהיה לילדה ההיא לומר
ובעקר להזהיר אותה
מהפרח שהבאתי לה
פרח מלא בנמלים.[77]

And sometimes my heart requests of myself
Strange things
Like to learn Yemenite
And to return to her grave
And to attach my lips to the ground
And scream inside
Everything that little girl had to say
And especially to warn her
Of the flower that I brought her
A flower covered in ants.

Here, the speaker herself admits that what once was a sense of fear *of* her grandmother becomes a fear *for* her. Having recalled earlier, "אני זוכרת / איך פחדתי להשאר אתה לבד / מחשש שלא אבין את הלשון בפיה / שהמשיכה לנגן אלי בחיוך"[78] ("I remember / how afraid I was to stay with her alone / It was obvious that I would not understand the speech in her mouth / that continued to play with me in a smile"), the speaker admits that it is now herself that she fears the most. In this moment, there is an acute sense of loss that circumscribes the Arab Jewish familial bond. The speaker not only relates to her grandmother as one would a stranger or a foreigner, but she also comes to identify herself as a hazard to her grandmother, to the history her grandmother represents, and to the future of Arab Jewry in Israeli consciousness. Whereas her grandmother's Jewish Yemenite-Arabic haunts the speaker in her youth as something foreign or distant, her own sense of responsibility in sustaining her grandmother's legacy comes to haunt the speaker as an adult.

[77] Ibid., 53.
[78] Ibid., 51.

Moreover, because it seems the speaker's attempts to communicate with her grandmother via gestures of kindness prove insufficient in childhood, in adulthood she is thus forced to confront and negotiate her own agency in relating to her grandmother. As such, Keissar's narrative is as much about temporality across one's own life as an Arab Jew as it is about temporality across generations and across Arab Jewish history. Furthemore, the physicality embodied in the moment when Keissar's speaker quite literally attaches her lips to her grandmother's grave underscores the ways in which language *in particular* is employed as a site of connection across time and place and as a critical link in Keissar's representation of reconciling a deeply ruptured history.

And yet, even after this disheartening realization the narrator does not settle into silence as a finite resolution. Keissar's final line, "פרח בנמלים" ("A flower covered in ants"), read instead as "פרח בן מילים", or, "a flower between words," indicates that Keissar's narrator is not quite convinced herself that silence is the ultimate qualifier of her relationship with her grandmother. In fact, understood as a subliminal indication of another language rather than yet another moment of silence and miscommunication between the speaker and her grandmother, Keissar's reader soon becomes the one who is subsumed in silence, who becomes deaf to Keissar's unconventional Jewish dialect of Arabic that is anything but mute. As such, Keissar's concealed subtext, which comes to populate the spaces in between the superficial silence of the text's narrative, is in fact what connects the speaker to her past and likewise guarantees her future. Although language itself does not resolve the silence that circumscribes the text, Keissar opts for an alternative: a clandestine narrative that perhaps only she and her grandmother can understand, a bond that remains unspoken but is nonetheless more powerful as such. In fact, Keissar briefly

offers a glimpse into the special bond that the speaker and her grandmother posses but that she herself cannot articulate in words, writing, אף פעם לא הבנתי / מלה ממה שאמרה / סבתא שלי, / אבל את הידים שלה הבנתי / את הבשר שלה הבנתי[79] ("I never understood / a word of what she said / my grandmother, / but I understood her hands / and I understood her meat…"). Ultimately, the space that Keissar carves out for herself in between the words on her page, "בן המילים," proves the only suitable literary space within which she may adequately convey the 'in-betweenness' that likewise describes the Arab Jewish lens from which she writes.

Although at first glance Arabic seems the source of silence and disconnect between the speaker and her grandmother in Keissar's text, language itself takes a backseat to other forms of communication across time (i.e. across generations, childhood and adulthood). Rather than use Jewish-inflected-Arabic at all, which the text renders a mute language along with the speaker's own Hebrew, Keissar opts out of the limitations that language produces for the Arab Jewish Israeli writer, whose relationship to either Arabic or Hebrew is itself an ongoing investigation. As such, Arabic is not what disconnects Keissar's speaker from her grandmother, but rather becomes an important part of the thread that weaves together their personal and collective histories. And although the speaker must warn her grandmother to look between the words, in essence, to liken her to the condition of the third-generation Arab Jewish author, she does so as a final act of connecting to her even after their time together on earth has passed.

Both Almog Behar's "Ana min al-Yahoud" and "My Arabic is Mute," as well as Adi Keissar's "Black on a Black Body," follow a pattern common to third-generation Arab Jewish literature of thematizing the presence of absence as well as the notion of accented-languages in

[79] Ibid., 52.

order to symbolize the presence of a distinct Arab Jewish history that categorically opposes a Zionist metanarrative. Because writing in Arabic is taboo for Jewish writers in Israel, and because Arabic is not taught as a Jewish language, monolingual third-generation Arab Jewish writers work within Hebrew to accentuate absences and preserve Jewish dialects of Arabic and Judeo-Arabic(s) as a living phenomenon. In her conclusion on "the presence of absence" Lital Levy's eloquently affirms,

> Above all else, the texts examined in chapters 5 and 6 explode the myth of Israeli Hebrew as a single unitary language while giving powerful representation to the presence of absence. Beyond resisting nationalist monolingualism, these literary strategies reintroduce Hebrew into the multilingual regional framework whence it originated and in which it had persisted for millennia. The reclamation of Arabic both as a native language and as a Jewish language challenges its enforced separation from Hebrew. By resisting the erasure of Arabic, Aramaic, and other Diasporic languages, the texts in question renegotiate of the rules of identity and of discursive possession within the context of Israeli state and society...By bringing the ruins of the Arab Jewish or Palestinian past into their Hebrew poems and stories, by intentionally allowing Arabic and Aramaic to shape their Hebrew words, these writers create a literary palimpsest in which Israeli Hebrew actually reveals, rather than covers, the traces of that which came before.[80]

Levy's asseveration of contemporary Arab Jewish literature as a "literary palimpsest" perfectly describes the continued presence of Jewish- and Judeo-Arabic(s) in Arab Jewish literature. While

[80] Levy, 284.

silence, absences, and accents rightfully affirm Arab Jewry's dispossession of Arabics and accordingly, the presence of Arabic(s) in Jewish history, they also imply a continued presence of the dialects and languages themselves. In Behar's texts, the same appropriated Arabic that renders its spoken use an impossibility for the Iraqi Jewish Hebrew-speaker simultaneously mimics the practice of writing in Judeo-Arabic to comment on Hebrew from within. For Keissar, the very silence between her speaker and her speaker's grandmother operates only at a superficial level, masking the profound presence of a hidden Jewish Yemenite-Arabic dialect that extends across generations and beyond binary oppositions of Hebrew and Arabic that otherwise rupture Keissar's connection to her past. For both authors, silence and the question Jewish/Judeo-Arabic(s) are inextricably linked as together they constitute its continued presence in Arab Jewish consciousness.

# Chapter III

## Discovering Arab Jewish Consciousness:

## Intergenerational Distance and Harmony

## and a Window of Opportunity in Egyptian Jewish Polylingualism

> Gathered around our festival tables here in Israel we rejoice to see the increasing number of grandparents and even great-grandparents living with their children and grandchildren. Perhaps to them the ring of our faces constitutes that fortress which in childhood appears impregnable. But together with the rejoicing, a sadness, a kind of anguish, creeps in as we remember those we are no longer, who rest in abandoned graves in lands we cannot visit. And somehow we would like these children descended from them, wherever they now are, to remember those who sat at the head of the table when we ourselves were children, in other lands, in other times.[81]
>
> -Jacqueline Kahanoff

> He, in any event, loved this *Mayflower* idea. For a while I studied his emaciated, beaming face, *with the slightly tormented tic of the lip*, and thought to myself: What right do I have? What right do I have to rip the *Mayflower* badge off his shirt and to step on it and crush it for whatever reason? (emphasis mine)[82]
>
> -Ronit Matalon

### *A Levantine Take on In-Betweenness and the Colonial World of Cosmopolitan Cairo*

Over the past half-century, the vast majority of Arab Jews have become increasingly detached from the Arab world and as such, intergenerational relations among them become ever more central to the expression of Arab Jewish identity. One theme that quite clearly threads together the heterogeneous category of Arab Jewish/Mizrahi literature in Israel and the Diaspora is a longing to reconnect to those generations whose lived experiences in the Arab world were

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[81] Kahanoff, Jacqueline. *Mongrels or Marvels: The Levantine Writings of Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff*. Ed. Deborah A. Starr and Sasson Somekh. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2011. Print.165.

[82] Matalon, Ronit, and Mikhal Dekel. "My Father at Age Seventy-Nine."*Callaloo* 32.4 (2009): 1182-188. *Project MUSE [Johns Hopkins UP]*. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.

categorically purged of their historical claims and present/future space in the Israeli cultural landscape. In the two preceding chapters on translation in narrative and accents and/or absence as presence, the notion of intergenerational relations was present unambiguously. When, for example, Sami Shalom Chetrit tells his own grandfather, "rooh min houn," or when Adi Keissar describes the way in which her fear of her grandmother's Arabic accent becomes a fear for its imminent disappearance, the thematic and practical employment of Arabic is conveyed as central to these authors' attempts to connect to their personal and collective pasts. However, the question of language in Arab Jewish literature is not only a linear gesture backwards towards the many Arabic dialects spoken by Jews in the Arab world. In fact, a careful historicizing of Arab Jewish past reveals that the question of language and its use in Arab Jewish literature is itself highly diversified and contingent on cultural, geographical, and historical context. Levy argues that scholars' non-engagement with Arabic-language texts has produced a body of scholarship that is "a historical revision of the Zionist narrative...rather than a direct recuperation of Arab Jewish history and culture."[83] Here, I argue through an engagement with non-Arabic literary texts that they likewise function to restore Arab Jewish history and culture by reclaiming the polylingual historical landscape that characterizes Arab Jewishness both as it was lived in the Arab world and as it continues to be expressed in exile.

In this chapter, I aim to contribute to this critical restorative project by recontextualizing the dialectic of language and intergenerational relations within an alternative historical framework: European colonialism in the Arab world. Building off of the ubiquitous literary presence of Arabic in expressions of disconnection and/or reconciliation across generations in

[83] Levy, Lital. "Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the *Mashriq*." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98.4 (2008): 455-456.

Arab Jewish literature that underlies the two preceding chapters, this final chapter argues for a reconsideration of Hebrew as well as other languages, particularly those of European colonialist countries, to further complicate the ways in which poly/multilingualism have shaped intergenerational relations and likewise, in which intergenerational relations are shaped by a complex history of languages in the Arab world.

The diverse and intricate ways in which languages other than Arabic shape and inform Arab Jewish intergenerational relations is embodied in the work of Jacqueline Kahanoff. Born in Cairo in 1917, Kahanoff was a leading advocate for the idea of Levantinism, especially as it pertained to envisioning Israel's cultural position in its region.[84] Her autobiographical essays reflect a linguistic intersection of overlapping historical contexts, including colonialism, competing nationalisms, and accelerated change in the Arab World stemming from the modern Arabic renaissance, or *nahda*.[85] Raz-Krakotzkin writes of these converging historical forces,

> The dialectics of assimilation were also the dialectics between West and East and between colonizer and colonized. This position between two poles of existence is relevant for the analysis of both the modern European and Middle-Eastern Jewish experiences within a colonial context. In each colonial context this condition took on different manifestations, and in each of them it was associated with other features to constitute a particular social reality. In Western and Central Europe, orientalist discourse was directed primarily towards Jews, whereas in Middle

[84] Alcalay, 18.
[85] Levy, 459-460.

> Eastern and North African countries it played out in the relationship between the European colonizer and the Arab colonized.[86]

As someone born in colonial Cairo, this notion of in-betweenness is deeply embedded in Kahanoff's personal essays and even more explicitly in her relationship to language. However, the idea of liminality here as it applies to her lived experience *in* the Arab World situates Kahanoff as 'othered' by virtue of her Arabness and notably not her Jewishness. Furthermore, as someone who self-identified more strongly with "the Levantine generation" rather than what she refers to as the "the Muslim masses,"[87] or even as part of the Jewish community in Cairo, Kahanoff tended to privilege European languages over not only Arabic, but over Hebrew as well. She writes of her adolescent years and of her "Levantine generation," "The only language we could think in was the language of Europe, and our deeper selves were submerged under this crust of European dialectics, a word we loved to use...We wanted to break out of the narrow minority framework into which we were born, to strive toward something universal, and we were ashamed of the poverty of what we called 'the Arab masses,' and of the advantages a Western education had given us over them."[88] Kahanoff's lucid account of her own internalization of orientalist dialectics as manifested in her ambivalence to language is a critical element in historicizing Arab Jewry and in further complicating the retrospective and teleological Hebrew/Arabic binarism that later would inform the construction, or disavowal, of Arab Jewish

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[86] Raz-Krakotzkin, 176.
[87] Matalon, 1184.
[88] Kahanoff, 11. It is interesting to note the connection between language and shame in the Arab Jewish context and its varied uses over time. Here, Kahanoff is ashamed of Arabic as it connotes low culture and what she refers to as the uneducated Arab masses. However, in Chetrit's use of it in "A Mural Without a Wall," it is actually the Israeli Arab-Jewish speaker's inability to speak a non-appropriated/militarized form of Arabic that signifies shame. In Kahanoff's case, and perhaps as it is used by Chetrit as well, the connection between language (specifically Arabic) and shame is closely linked with the colonial process of shaming.

history. For Kahanoff specifically, Hebrew, Arabic, English and/or French all serve particular functionalities in the construction of her identity as an Arab, a Jew, a subject of colonization, a member of an educated minority, of the Levantine generation, etc. Comparing two of her essays, "Childhood in Egypt" (1959) and "A Letter from Mama Camouna" (c.1968), which represent Kahanoff's early life in Cairo and her later years in Israel, respectively, this section traces Kahanoff's alternating and complex relationship to Hebrew and Arabic within the specific framework of intergenerational relations.

Kahanoff immediately engages with language as a central theme in her autobiographical essay, "Childhood in Egypt." She recalls, "When I was a small child, it seemed natural that people understood each other although they spoke different languages, and were called by different names - Greek, Moslem, Syrian, Jewish, Christian, Arab, Italian, Tunisian, Armenian."[89] As a child, Kahanoff dismisses language as a source of divide among peoples and represents it as secondary to other forms of meaningful connection and communication. Yet despite her explicit articulation of this sentiment, language nonetheless seems to be a constant source of tension for her even *as* a child. Reading the traditional Jewish Passover Haggadah story, in which Jews were enslaved by Egyptians, Kahanoff struggles to reconcile the historical split in her identity as an Egyptian Jew. She writes of the forthcoming of the Messiah, "Then we would return to the Promised Land once more, the Messiah would come, and all would be peace and harmony. Everything would be different. We and the Egyptians would be free together, and no one would set us against each other."[90] However, in order to settle into some resolution, Kahanoff decides she must discover what had gone wrong between the Jews and the Egyptians

[89] Kahanoff, 1.
[90] Ibid., 7.

during the period of Pharaoh's reign. To do so, she opts out of language altogether, recalling, "True, I was very young, but I also felt that none of our languages we spoke could express our thoughts, because none was our own. We were a people without a tongue and could speak only through signs and symbols." Here, Kahanoff clearly problematizes language as a means of relating to her past. Still, the "we" that she refers to in the above passage is somewhat misleading. At first glance, Kahanoff seems to refer to Egyptian Jews, describing the impossibility of reconciling the hybrid Egyptian-Jewish identity, entangled in the embattled history of the Passover Haggadah, in a particular language. However as she continues, "we" actually reverts back to the pronoun Kahanoff uses to refer to the Levantine generation. She proceeds,

> Our elders spoke of ordinary, everyday things, or about religion. Their religion was to say *maktuh, inshallah,* 'amen,' 'Our Father who art in Heaven,' and to pray and fast sometimes; but it did not say anything about the things that were so difficult for us in life. Whether, for instance, it was right to want the British to go, and wrong to hate them, right to learn so many things from them and from their schools, but wrong not to want to be like the British and French, or our parents, or the Arabs.We were searching for something *within* ourselves which we had yet to find. Religion seemed to have nothing to do with how people lived, and this did not seem to worry them, although they said that religion explained life and told them what they must do.[91]

[91] Ibid., 8.

In Kahanoff's childhood narrative, Hebrew is inescapably linked to an antiquated notion of religion. Her abrupt jump from discussing language to critiquing religion not only interrupts the otherwise coherent and linear narration of her essay, but likewise implies the possibility of rupture in Kahanoff's Levantinism, which can be articulated neither in "the" language of the Jews nor "the" language of the Egyptians (Hebrew/Arabic, respectively), but rather in other European and, according to Kahanoff's adolescent self enlightened, languages. In contrast to the European languages of the elite educated minority of the Levantine generation, Hebrew and regionally-specific Judeo-Arabic were languages only suitable for religious utterances of the past.

Moreover, in the same moment where Kahanoff may have to choose between the history of the Jews and the history of the Egyptians, which eventually converge into her 'Egyptian-Jewishness,' she opts instead for her secular Levantinism. Here, both Hebrew and Arabic serve only to distract from or threaten Kahanoff's deeply embedded self-identification with the Levantine generation during her adolescence. She writes, "When I reached adolescence, these fantasies lost their grip on me, or rather they expressed themselves more deviously through rational thoughts and political sympathies. I was not entirely aware that I was pretending to believe in certain ideas because they were already clearly formulated, while I could not express my own, partly for fear of appearing absurd, and partly because a reflex of self-defense prompted me to keep secret what was my own."[92] Examining Kahanoff's essay, "A Letter from Mama Camouna," which is set in her later years living in Israel, it appears that Kahanoff does indeed

[92] Ibid., 10

uncover what has been kept secret: her connection to her past articulated and expressed through *both* Hebrew and Arabic in addition to English and French.

"A Letter from Mama Camouna" tells the story of Jacqueline Kahanoff's exiled and dispersed family reconnecting across both generational and geographical divides. Her essay diverges drastically from "Childhood in Egypt," mainly in its nostalgic resonance with her collective and personal Egyptian Jewish past. In fact, the notion of the Levantine generation is entirely absent from this later autobiographical essay, and is instead replaced with Kahanoff's, and perhaps even more so Kahanoff's mother Yvonne's, acute desire to reconnect to her family, now scattered across continents. For Kahanoff, it is the disconnect between her journalistic work writing for the Jewish Agency on the euphoric reunion of immigrants in Israel and on the supposedly congenial process of integration and absorption, and her mother's traumatic dispossession of home and deep sense of non-belonging, that draws her to Mama Camouna's letters. She writes, "It was on such occasions that I would recall the big, jerky, clumsy alphabetic characters filling the letters Mama Camouna used to write. Mama Camouna was a great power of a women, and totally illiterate. How was it then that she could write letters? Well, that's the story."[93] Here, the story of Mama Camouna's letters is invoked precisely when Kahanoff feels most in exile in Israel. Despite her strong identification with the Levantine generation, it is entirely noteworthy that Kahanoff reaches across generations in order to articulate her feeling in exile and her longing to connect with the past.

Ultimately, the story of Mama Camouna is a story of language acquisition. As a "Tunshi," or a member of the local Jewry who spoke a Maghrebi dialect, Mama Camouna was

[93] Ibid., 168.

almost entirely illiterate. Thus, when her family left Tunis for Egypt she was forced to rely on others to write letters to her stepdaughter abroad. Kahanoff narrates,

> So Mama Camouna, watching her grandchildren in Tunis doing their homework, got it into her head that if those little brats could write, so could she. It was simple: they'd teach her. They teased, 'How can you learn to write, Mama Camouna? You don't know how to read and you hardly know any French'… The grandchildren would get impatient as they guided the old woman's hand on the paper as she learned to write her name…'You aren't going to play until you've taught me to write the sound SSSS.' And so it came about that Mama Camouna learned to write her Judeo-Arabic dialect with French letters. Her letters were incomprehensible to those who did not know the Maghrebi dialect, and the writing was so completely phonetic that it made no sense until read aloud. She wrote exactly as she spoke.[94]

If, as Jacqueline Kahanoff describes, Mama Camouna's letters are simply a few lines written in an impossible jargon that took Mama Camouna hours to write,[95] it is legitimate to question how they became so central to the weaving together of Kahanoff's dispersed family and what their symbolic and/or practical function is in Kahanoff's identification with her collective past. Ultimately, the letters themselves are not as central to Kahanoff's nostalgic narrative as is Mama Camouna's process of learning to write the letters in her local Judeo-Arabic dialect in an effort to maintain communication and connection within her own family, uncoincidentally across

[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 169.

generational and geographical boundaries as well. In fact, Kahanoff does not even bother to include one of Mama Camouna's letters within her brief essay, despite the fact that they comprise of only a few short sentences. In this sense, the story of Mama Camouna is convincingly representative of Jacqueline Kahanoff's personal negotiation with languages and identity. It is through her arduous tension with language that ultimately connects Kahanoff to her collective past and establishes linearity in her family's story of constantly moving from one place to another. Read alongside "Childhood from Egypt," Kahanoff's personal account of alternating between languages, of consistently renegotiating Hebrew, Arabic, English, and French as part of her identity and as as a product of converging historical forces, transcends the need to actually choosing between these languages.

*Ronit Matalon and the de-Romanticization of Kahanoffian Levantinism*

Ronit Matalon [b.1959] is an Egyptian Jewish novelist and a second-generation immigrant. Born the same year that Jacqueline Kahanoff's "Generation of Levantines" essays were published,[96] Matalon's early work engaged directly with Kahanoff's aspirations to cultivate an Israeli cultural landscape predicated on her notion of Levantinism. Also central to her work is her identification with, and giving voice to, her parents' immigrant experience and marginalization within an Ashkenazi Israeli society. In *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt: Literature, Culture, and Empire*, Deborah Starr necessarily reads Matalon's novel, *The One Facing Us*, not only as drawing inspiration from Kahanoff's Levantine vision but as also as a

[96] Starr, Deborah A. *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt: Literature, Culture, and Empire*. London: Routledge, 2009. Print. 135.

counter-hegemonic alternative to it that is largely informed by post-colonialist discourse.[97] She argues that by embedding Kahanoff's essays directly into the novel's narrative, Matalon allots herself the critical distance through which she can construct her own Levantine and Egyptian Jewish consciousness from within Kahanoff's pre-existing framework, which she rightfully sees as being tainted with ambiguities and contradictions.[98] She writes of *The One Facing Us* that, "The novel explores the ambivalent place of Levantine characters in colonial discourses, inferring parallels between Levantines as colonial subjects on both sides of the divide."[99] Furthemore, Starr identifies Kahanoff's discursive blind spot specifically in her colonial complicity, which she, along with other scholars, argue is critical to reading Matalon's work and her expression of Egyptian Jewishness.

In this section, I argue that Matalon's critique of Kahanoff and her revisions of and within Kahanoff's discursive hegemony points the presence of Egyptian Jews towards an affirmative future rooted in an non-romanticized historical consciousness. Through a close reading of her autobiographical essay, "My Father at Age Seventy-Nine," in which Matalon places her father's intellectual stance on Levantinism in dialogue with that of Kahanoff's, I suggest that Matalon ultimately finds her Egyptian Jewish second-generation immigrant voice *within* the chasm that underlies Felix Matalon and Jacqueline Kahanoff's divergent logics of parting from Arabic, which more broadly represent their respective versions of Levantinism. Through the writing and activism of earlier Egyptian Jewish intellectuals such as Kahanoff and

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[97] For further analysis on the Levantinism of Jacqueline Kahanoff and Ronit Matalon, see Hochberg, G. Z. "Permanent Immigration": Jacqueline Kahanoff, Ronit Matalon, and the Impetus of Levantinism." *Boundary 2* 31.2 (2004): 219-43. *Project MUSE [Johns Hopkins UP]*. Web.
[98] Starr, 135.
[99] Ibid., 145.

her father, Matalon discovers her own Levantine and Egyptian Jewish identity by virtue of and within the heterogeneity that distances Kahanoff from Matalon's father, but that ultimately brings Matalon closer to them both.

While Sami Shalom Chetrit declares "יַעֲנִי יְהוּדִי אוֹרְיֶנְטָל"[100] ("*ya'ani* a *Mizrahi* Jew")[101] and Almog Behar likewise asserts "אנא מן אל־יהוד"[102] ("I'm One of the Jews"),[103] both purposefully affirm their respective Moroccan- and Baghdadi-Jewish identities in Arabic. Contrarily but unsurprisingly, Matalon immediately proclaims her Egyptian-Jewishness in French in her personal essay "My Father at Age Seventy-Nine." She states, "It isn't simple, this whole business of the *Mayflower* in the *Mizrahi* context, not simple at all. Sometimes it seems to me that all of us, *Nous les Orientaux* are trapped within the wrench of our conflicted position vis-à-vis what can be called 'our part in the Zionist project.'"[104] Here, Matalon aligns herself closely with what she sees as a shared notion of Levantinism between her father and Kahanoff, predicated on the notion of social elitism. She writes, "I thought to myself that my father, the writer Jacqueline Kahanoff, and other *Mizrahi* immigrants like them felt themselves strongly and principally as a social elite."[105] Matalon's preference of French as the language in which she declares herself an Arab (or a Mizrahi/Oriental) Jew at once sets her apart as someone who identifies more strongly with Levantinism than she does with other Jewish and non-Jewish Arab subcultures or even a collective Arab identity. However, it is more so within the tensions

[100] Chetrit, .מאת סמי שלום שטרית "קסידה למחמוד דרוויש - "ציור ללא קיר
[101] Chetrit, *Jews: Poems, Translations from Hebrew.*
[102] Behar, Almog. "אנא מן אל־יהוד."
[103] Behar, Almog. "Ana Min Al Yahoud – I'm One of the Jews."
[104] Matalon., 1182. Like in Kahanoff's essays, it is not entirely clear whether Matalon's "us" refers collectively to Mizrahim or specifically to Egyptian, or Levantine, Jews. If she does refer to Mizrahim, which seems likely given that she refers directly beforehand to "the Mizrahi context," it is interesting to think of how Matalon herself internalizes some of Kahanoff's tendencies of privileging Levantine culture over other Arab cultures.
[105] Ibid., 1183.

between her father and Kahanoff (explicit in their use and/or non-use of French, Hebrew, and Arabic), than within their commonalities, that ultimately provides Matalon the space in which she finds her Egyptian Jewish voice.

Apart from their shared displeasure in the mistreatment and marginalization of Mizrahim in Israel, Felix Matalon and Kahanoff differ in their approaches to voicing their mutual indignation. Matalon states of her own relationship to this divergence, "I have two models of *Mizrahi* discourse, and ever since I have come into my own I have vacillated between them like a pendulum between two bells: my father, Felix Matalon, and the author and essayist Jacqueline Kahanoff."[106] Inserting herself between these two discursive modes of thinking about her identity, Matalon proceeds to further distinguish between her father's Levantinism and that of Kahanoff. She highlights what she sees as the fundamental difference between their discourses, which she claims "represented their degree of proximity and distance from Israeliness."[107] Matalon argues that while Kahanoff engaged directly with Israeli society at its center and pursued a cultural revolution from within the mainstream, her father on the other hand rejected the possibility of this discourse altogether as a "declaration of war on Israeliness and all its manifestations."[108] More specifically, she points to Kahanoff's colonialist attitude towards what she refers to as "the Muslim masses" (mentioned in the previous section), as the critical juncture separating her father from Kahanoff and their self-identifications/representations as Arab. She writes of her father, "Never in his many publications was he ever tempted to reproduce the classic dichotomy between *Ashkenazi* and *Mizrahi* - this had seemed to him a-priori racist; his

[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., 1184.
[108] Ibid.

own demarcation between good and evil stretched between Ben-Gurion's adherents and opponents."[109] In clear contrast she writes, "When Kahanoff goes to the occupied territories with her various cultural sensibilities, her sharp and analytic skills, and her somewhat naive feminism, she goes there at the end of the day as a colonialist. But not as an Israeli colonialist: as a Levantine Jewish-Egyptian woman who internalized colonial values, even while she tried to disown them."[110] Yet whereas Matalon finds this critical juncture of separation in fundamentally discordant discourses between her father and Kahanoff, I find it encoded more profoundly within the essay's subsidiary discussion of polylingualism. Ultimately, underlying Matalon's implied identification with her father's version of Levanitnism over Kahanoff's, which she purposefully distances herself from, is the question of whether or not Arabic has a place in post-emigration Levantine culture.

One of the distinctions Matalon makes rather abruptly between her father and Kahanoff is that unlike Kahanoff, Matalon's father spoke, read, and wrote Arabic fluently.[111] She explains that his fluency in Arabic "was not at all a given among the educated Jewish-Egyptian class to which they belonged."[112] And while Matalon glosses over this aspect of her father's identity, it seems quite paramount to the friction between his and Kahanoff's Levantinisms. Despite being a fluent Arabic speaker, Matalon's father distanced himself from Arabic (at the very least) in his political activism in Israel. Matalon writes how, "In the beginning of the 1960s [my father] moved, out of the ideological solidarity with the despair of the *Mizrahim* and a desire to act politically from within them and on their behalf, to *Ha-Tikvah* neighborhood in Tel-Aviv. In

[109] Ibid., 1185.
[110] Ibid., 1186-1187.
[111] Ibid., 1184.
[112] Ibid.

*Ha-Tikvah,* he founded an intellectual-political group, *The Sohba*...and for many years published different bilingual (Hebrew-French) bulletins...whose focus was the *Mizrahi* issues."[113] While it may seem counterintuitive that Matalon's father opts out of Arabic in his political activism that was aimed quite radically at dissolving and divorcing the State from any cultural notion or manifestation of Israeliness (of which Hebrew hegemony and monolingualism was a critical instrument in foregrounding), the rationale behind his doing so is explained by Matalon as a matter of practicality. She writes,

> The *Sohba*, like the bulletins my father published on its behalf, was exceptional even among other *Mizrahi* groups...because of its particular ideology, which positioned the *Mizrahi* issue and the question of Arabs and Arabic culture in a single nexus. This nexus, which my father re-articulated in almost every one of his articles, reduced almost to a minimum the bulletins' potential impact on the larger public. Yet on the question of Arab identity, even a man like father knew there are lines that cannot be crossed: the newsletters were published in Hebrew and French, not Hebrew and Arabic; when I called him on it his answer was simply that the *Mizrahi* reading public would not have looked favorably upon the Arabic.[114]

It is the very tacticality underlying Felix Matalon's disuse of Arabic that for Ronit Matalon ultimately distinguishes him from Kahanoff. She reflects, "Kahanoff is a writer that has no authentic existence in any language. She wrote her essays in English, and they saw the light of

[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., 1186.

day only in Hebrew, in Aharon Amir's translations...I learned how burdened she was by this mained and constricting literary existence."[115] As such, although Matalon's father and Kahanoff both opted out of Arabic in place of Hebrew and French, and in latter case English, bi/multilingualism, they differed in their decisions to do so in two significant ways. Firstly, Matalon is the only one of the two who was actually fluent in Arabic and to whose Levantinism Arabic became a critical element. As such, his decision not to use Arabic in his political activism in Israel was thereby also a conscious undertaking to re-acclimate his Levantinism within the socially-, culturally-, and politically-dominated Zionist Israel into which he immigrated. On the other hand, Arabic never played a defining role in Kahanoff's notion of Levantinism, aside from her dismissal of it as a sign of low culture. As evidenced in the previous section, the very essence her Levantinism was grounded in the command and use of colonial languages and the dissemination of its ideological currency. Second, Matalon articulates quite explicitly that, "What for my father was mostly a tactical consideration was for Jacqueline Kahanoff a powerful and tremendously blind intellectual position."[116] While neither intellectual used Arabic in their political and/or literary endeavors in Israel, Matalon's father was the only one of the two whose experience of dissociating with Arabic engendered a sense of loss.

Ultimately, Matalon inserts herself between her father's and Kahanoff's conflicting dialectics of language and Levantinism that are themselves replete with ambiguities and contradictions. While Matalon explicitly critiques her "blind intellectual position" as colonial complicity, it is by virtue of Kahanoff's unromantic association with colonialist discourse, including her unmitigated eurocentric gaze unto Arabic, that actually helps Matalon find her own

[115] Ibid., 1187.
[116] Ibid., 1186.

Egyptian Jewish voice. Furthermore, the dissonance between Kahanoff and Matalon's father, and more pointedly their disparate positions on using Arabic in Israel, creates another fold in the heterogeneous discursive space in which Matalon embeds and affirms her own Egyptian Jewish consciousness.

Both Jacqueline Kahanoff and Ronit Matalon identify and represent themselves proudly as Egyptian Jews. As intellectuals and writers whose identities are marginalized from the dominant social-, cultural-, political-, and historical-discourses in Israel, both Kahanoff and Matalon navigate their collective pasts to construct their individualized discursive spaces from which they can express themselves culturally, politically and most aptly, linguistically. However, both Kahanoff and Matalon's retrospective frames are packed with contradictions and ambivalences that complicate the ways in which they draw on previous forms of Egyptian Jewish expression to compose and assert their own. In this chapter, I have looked specifically at the ways in which colonialism intervened in the Hebrew/Arabic binary in which Arab Jews are often placed and assumed to oscillate between. Ultimately, both Kahanoff and Matalon establish their Levantine and/or Egyptian Jewish consciousnesses *in* the very act of fluctuating between languages (and by extension their respective ideological conventions) as well as between the complex discursive models expressed and renegotiated by previous generations. While Kahanoff finds harmony with her Egyptian Jewish past through Mama Camouna's language learning narrative (specifically her learning of Judeo-Arabic), Matalon effectively inserts herself between two conflicting positions on Arabic-in-Levantinism in order to reimagine its place in Israel with critical distance.

## Conclusion

In his poem, "איך עושים עירקי" ("How to Make an Iraqi")[117], Yossi Alfi reimagines Israel Zangwill's now-famous metaphor, invoked and reiterated by Zionist leaders, of the "melting pot."[118] When, in a 1949 symposium designed to "discuss the spiritual-cultural absorption of the immigrant masses,"[119] David Ben-Gurion declared that, "in the wake of European Jewry's annihilation, the mass immigration soon arriving in the country would be coming mainly from sparsely populated, physically and spiritually impoverished Jews remote from the major centers of the Jewish life and human culture for centuries,"[120] he referred explicitly to the imminent mass emigration of Jews from the Arab and Islamic world. In one statement, Ben-Gurion forcefully inserts Arab Jews into the historical narrative of European Jewry. He continues to expand on his vision, foreshadowing,

> In the coming days when immigration increases immensely, a great effort will have to be made to preserve national unity. Our nation is in the process of being recreated from tribal fragments and this requires gathering up the Jewish human dust, scattered throughout the world, returning to the Land of Israel [and being forged] in the crucible of independence and the framework of sovereign statehood. Hebrew attributes and styles that never existed before and that could

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[117] Alfi, Yossi. *Ekh ʻośim ʻIraḳi: Shirim*. Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat Poʻalim, 1981. Print.
[118] Zangwill, Israel, and Edna Nahshon. *From the Ghetto to the Melting Pot: Israel Zangwill's Jewish Plays: Three Playscripts*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2006. Print.
[119] Gorny, Yosef. "The "Melting Pot" in Zionist Thought." *Israel Studies* 6.3 (2001): 54-70. *Project MUSE [Johns Hopkins UP]*. Web.
[120] Ibid., 64.

> not have existed in the Diaspora, [when we were] a nation lacking a homeland, independence, and national freedom, will now have to be crystallized.[121]

Aside from his problematically Eurocentric and Orientalist assertion that the immigrants about to arrive in Israel are without a "homeland, independence, and national freedom," Ben-Gurion's vision of "preserving national unity" is predicated on false assumptions that the absorption policies being, and to be, implemented by the State would somehow successfully create a homogenous Hebraized Israeli society. When, however, Yosi Alfi questions, "אז איך עושים 'עירקי'?" (So how do you make an Iraqi?"), and then proceeds to deconstruct the essentialisms of Israel's assimilationist policies, he immediately undermines the misinformed assumptions of early Zionist thinkers like Ben-Gurion and resituates Iraqi Jews outside of the Zionist framework. His concluding statement, "אם לא הצלחתם הפעם נסו שנית. / זה חיב לעבוד![122]" ("If you didn't succeed the first time try a second. It must work!"),[123] is simply a reiteration of his original message implicit in his asking "איך עושים 'עירקי'?" (How do you make an Iraqi?). Not a question at all but rather a declaration of selfhood, Alfi asserts that Ben-Gurion's vision of a melting pot failed miserably in its objective; rather than emerge from it an Israeli, he emerges from it an Iraqi.

Alfi's subversion of a specifically Hebraized Israeli or Jewish identity in place of his Iraqi identity reflects a positive recuperation of Arab Jewishness and its associative history. At once, Alfi affirms the presence of Iraqi Jews not just despite, but by virtue of Zionism's concerted efforts to erase Arab Jewry and implicate its history in the echo of European Jewish memory. Its intervention in normative representations of mass immigration to Israel as the actualization of the

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[121] Ibid., 65.
[122] Alfi, 29.
[123] Translation mine.

ingathering of Jewish exiles becomes critical to reversing the pressures that have allowed for the appropriation of Arab Jewish identity. The other works discussed at length in the preceding chapters likewise function in meaningfully distinct ways to try and reverse years of erasure of Arab Jewry from Israeli consciousness. Although divergent in their uses of translation, accents, absences, and representations of intergenerational relations, the authors that have been discussed work largely within formal and colloquial registers of Hebrew to bring it closer to Arabic, to distance themselves altogether from the "Hebrew attributes and styles" generated by Hebrew hegemony, and/or even to reimagine Jewish Arabic dialects and Judeo-Arabic(s) in courageously unconventional forms.

Written into the discursive framework of European hegemony, Arab Jews have been subjected to a regressive historicization that implicates not only them, but the rest of the Arab world from which they came and which is now situated on the opposite end of the Jewish/Arab Orientalist dichotomy. Their history occupies a unique position of simultaneously inhabiting the peripheral borderland of two competing nationalist movements, namely Zionist and Arab nationalism, as is illustrated almost as a matter of convention in the literature discussed prior. As such, the corrective project of restoring the history of the Jews in the Arab and Islamic world is only partly a matter of correcting the historical record. The project of scholars like Lital Levy whose focus is to "suggest an alternative historical backdrop for the reading of Mizrahi literature in Israel,"[124] is critical today for its prospective functionalities and urgent in the opportunity it presents to intervene in ongoing representations of Arabs and Jews as diametrically opposed, of which the affirmative and singular identity "Arab Jew" challenges by definition. In his essay on

[124] Levy, "Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the *Mashriq*." 468.

Orientalism and the Mizrahi Jewish perspective, Raz-Krakotzkin arrives at a similar conclusion. He states,

> As in other colonial contexts, Mizrahim can easily turn fundamentalist, but they can also make use of the in between position to advance a third way - one of critical resistance to the prevalent modes of representation and historical perception. The in between position of the Mizrahim embodies the possibility of a critical perspective toward Western-orientalist culture, as well as Arab nationalism, which ignored the Jewish existence in the Muslim world, and particularly the departure of the Jews from the Arab countries. But the multiple perspectives the Mizrahim carry with them makes their cultural location particularly interesting, since it embodies the combination of the Jew and the Arab, within a complex colonial discourse, and within the framework of Jewish sovereignty. This location embodies the perspective of the colonizer and the colonized, as well as the interrelations between them.[125]

The sentiment articulated here by Raz-Krakotzkin is a critical element underlying the Arab Jewish question today and challenges one of Lital Levy's own conclusive distinctions in her historicizing of Arab Jews in the *Mashriq*. Clearly distinguishing between Jewish intellectuals of the late 1920s through the mid-1940s, and contemporary intellectuals, Levy argues that while for the former group it was still possible to conceive of being included in a shared Arab identity "not only as a matter of citizenship but as a matter of popular or collective consciousness," for the later group "the statement is more a reconception or reclamation of past experience (a back-projection) than it

[125] Raz-Krakotzkin, 178.

is a project aimed at the future (a forward-projection)."[126] As an alternative framework for reading contemporary works of Arab Jews, I suggest that the logics underlying both groups in Levy's distinction do not exclude but implicate and necessitate one another. The determined mindfulness of contemporary writers and intellectuals to reconceive and recall their collective pasts is not only a back-projection but a forward-projection as well, directed not towards their possible inclusion in a unified Arab identity, but instead towards dismantling the hegemonic language and historiographical practices that created an Arab identity from which they became excluded and that give ensued conflict in the region between Israelis and Palestinians discursive and institutional backing. Thus, although Arab Jews comprise of only a small group of people relative to the rest Middle East and other pertinent regions, the value of reclaiming even the historical possibility of Jewish inclusion in a unified Arab identity goes beyond the symbolic currency of the term "Arab Jew".

The realization of this possibility necessitates further research into the points of connectivity and disconnect between Arab Jews and Arab Israelis/Palestinians. A closer look into the ways in which Arab Jewish writers express solidarity with their Arab Israeli/Palestinian contemporaries, as well as the presence/non-presence of reciprocated identification with Arab Jews, is a meaningful point of departure from which to continue breaking down discursive and practiced binaries between Arabs and Jews. My hope is that the sentiments and arguments expressed in this project find their place as a starting point in a larger discourse on the intersection between Arab Jewish and Arab Israel/Palestinian liminality.

[126] Levy., 463-464

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## Appendix

ציור ללא קיר – קסידה למחמוד דרוויש

זֶה זְמַן שֶׁרָצִיתִי לִכְתֹּב אֵלַיִךְ לֹא עָלַיִךְ
וְגַם עַכְשָׁו אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ מֵאֵיפֹה לְהַתְחִיל, מֵאַיִן
אָקַח מִלִּים מוּל מִלּוֹת הַנֶּצַח שֶׁלָּךְ וַאֲנִי עוֹבֵר חוֹלֵף
בְּבָתֵּי שִׁיר שֶׁלָּךְ, מוֹלֶדֶת הַמִּלִּים מְקֻפֶּלֶת בִּכְרָכִים דַּקִּים
שֶׁל שִׁירָה שֶׁלָּאַחֲרוֹנָה אֶהְיֶה גָּלוּי אֹתָךְ אֲנִי מִתְמַלֵּא בָּהּ קִנְאָה,
לֹא קִנְאַת סוֹפְרִים, אֶלָּא קִנְאַת גּוֹלִים,
כַּמָּה הִיא שֶׁלָּךְ לְגַמְרֵי שֶׁלָּךְ, אֵין לִי מוֹלֶדֶת כַּזֹּאת לֹא שֶׁשִּׁבְכְתָּב וְלֹא שֶׁבָּאָרֶץ,
אֲבָל אַל תִּרַחֵם עָלַי, לֹא זֶה הַעִנְיָן, הֵן בְּסוֹפוֹ שֶׁל דָּבָר אֲנִי הוּא הָרוֹצֵחַ
וְלֹא יַעֲזְרוּ לִי אֶלֶף עֲצוּמוֹת נֶגֶד הַכִּבּוּשׁ אֲנִי הַחַיָּל
הַהוֹרֵג שׁוּב וָשׁוּב שָׁלוֹשׁ יוֹנִים בִּירִיָּה אַחַת,
וְזֶה כְּבָר עִנְיָן שֶׁל הֶרְגֵּל-
אֲנִי יָרִיתִי בַּסּוּס הָעָזוּב לְבָדוֹ לְיַד הַבַּיִת שֶׁהָפַךְ בֵּיתִי הֶחָדָשׁ
וְהֵגַפְתִּי אֶת חַלּוֹנוֹתָיו הֵיטֵב שֶׁלֹּא תָּבוֹא בַּעֲדָם הֶמְיַת הַנּוֹהִים
וְאָטַמְתִּי אֶת שְׂפַת הַבְּאֵר בְּבֵטוֹן מְזֻיָּן הֵיטֵב
שֶׁלֹּא אֶרְאֶה וְלֹא אִשְׁמַע חַיִּים מִתּוֹךְ הַמַּיִם
וּמָה אֲנִי צָרִיךְ סוּס עֲרָבִי אוֹ סַבְּרֶס נִצְחִי,
לֹא תִּמְצָא סַבְּרֶס אֶחָד לִרְפוּאָה בְּחוֹלוֹת אִיסְדּוּד
שָׁם בָּנִינוּ עִיר לַאֲנָשִׁים שֶׁלֹּא שָׁמְעוּ אֶת שְׁמְעָךְ
שִׁמְךָ נִמְחָה בְּמָרוֹקָאִית וּבְרוּסִית וְגַם בְּאַשְׁדּוֹדִית,
צָרִיךְ לְהוֹדוֹת עַל הָאֱמֶת, עִם כָּל הָאַנְדָּלוּסִיָּה,
כָּךְ עוֹשִׂים אַנְדָּלוּס בְּאַשְׁדּוֹד, בֵּינְתַיִם בֵּין יְהוּדִים,
וְעַכְשָׁו חוֹגְגִים לָהּ יוֹבֵל בְּמוּזֵיאוֹן חָדִישׁ מוּל הַיָּם אֵיפֹה
הָיָה פַּעַם נַבִּי יוּנָס, כְּפַר דַּיָּגִים, וְאֵין בַּתַּעֲרוּכָה
אֲפִלּוּ לֹא שָׂרִיד לְסוּס עֲרָבִי בּוֹדֵד וְאֵין צַבָּר
וּמְלַמְּדִים שָׁם יְלָדִים אֶת הַהִיסְטוֹרְיָה הַקְּדוּמָה שֶׁל הָעִיר
הַפִּלִישְׁתִּית לֹא הַפָּלַסְטִינִית, כִּי מוּזֵיאוֹן זֶה לֹא פּוֹלִיטִיקָה!
אֲנִי קוֹרֵא אֶת שִׁירֵיךְ כְּמוֹ כְּתְבֵי אִשּׁוּם וַאֲנִי מוֹדֶה בְּכֹל סְעִיף וּסְעִיף
כֹּל פַּעַם מֵחָדָשׁ וְלֹא יַעֲזְרוּ כָּאן אֶלֶף מְחָאוֹתַי עַל הַצִּיּוֹנִים הַזְּקֵנִים
וְהַצְּעִירִים אַשְׁכְּנַזִּים וּמִזְרָחִים לְבָנִים וּשְׁחוֹרִים – אֲנִי אֶחָד מֵהֶם
כִּי אֵינֶנִּי אֶחָד מִכֶּם, זֶה הַחֶשְׁבּוֹן הָעָגוּם זֶה
אֲנִי הַנִּכְנָס וְיוֹצֵא בְּמִפְתָּנֶיךָ כִּבְשֶׁלִּי
פַּעַם לוֹגֵם מִן הַקָּפֶה הָעֲרָבִי
וּפַעַם בּוֹעֵט בַּקַּנְקָן וְקוֹרֵא עֲרָבִי מִלֵּכְלָךְ
וּמְנַפֵּץ אֶת הַמַּרְאוֹת כֻּלָּן שֶׁלֹּא אֶרְאֶה שָׁם
אֶת פְּנֵי סָבִי תּוֹהֵה עָלַי בַּעֲרָבִית,
מַה פִּתְאֹם עֲרָבִית? אֲנִי מְשׁוֹרֵר עִבְרִי!
אֲנִי מְשׁוֹרֵר סוֹהֵר אַל תַּאֲמִין לְאַף מִלָּה שֶׁלִּי
אֲנִי סוֹהֵר גַּם שֶׁלִּי עַצְמִי וְשֶׁל מִלּוֹתַי
קְצוּצוֹת הַכְּנָפַיִם וְשֶׁל שְׁנָתִי הַנּוֹדֶדֶת
לְלֹא כְּתֹבֶת מְדֻיֶּקֶת לִמְנוּחָה,

וְכָל-כָּךְ צָדַקְתָּ הַמּוֹלֶדֶת אֵינֶנָּה מִזְוָדָה
וְכָל-כָּךְ צָדַקְתָּ הַמּוֹלֶדֶת הִיא מִזְוָדָה
כְּפִי שֶׁיּוֹדְעִים לְהַסְבִּיר הַיְּהוּדִים בִּשְׁדֵה-הַתְּעוּפָה,
מָה אַתָּה טָס עִם מוֹלֶדֶת שְׁלֵמָה בְּתוֹךְ מִזְוָדָה חֲשׁוּדָה?
זֶה חֹסֶר אַחְרָיוּת בְּסִיסִי בְּיוֹתֵר, בּוֹא הָצִדָּה בְּבַקָּשָׁה, אֲנִי
הַבּוֹדֵק הַבִּטְחוֹנִי הַמְּחֻפָּשׂ לְאִינְטֶלֶקְטוּאָל מִזְרָחִי,
הַמְּחֻפָּשׂ לַשָּׁוְא מוֹלֶדֶת נְפִיצָה בְּתוֹךְ מִזְוָדָה עֲרָבִית,
וְאָמְרוּ לִי שֶׁאַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ לְהַסְווֹת פְּצָצָה עָמֹק בְּתוֹךְ הַמִּלִּים,
וַאֲנִי כֹּל מִלּוֹת הָאַהֲבָה וְהַיְסּוּרִים שֶׁכָּתַבְתִּי וְשֶׁאֶכְתֹּב וְגַם אֵלֶּה
שֶׁמַּכּוֹת בְּרַקּוֹתַי, שֶׁלֹּא אֶכְתֹּב,
גַּם הֵן לְעוֹלָם לֹא יְגָאֲלוּ אוֹתִי וְאוֹתָךְ
כִּי אֲנִי בְּחַיַּי מְגַלֵּם אֶת מוֹתָךְ,
אַתָּה נָחְנָק כִּי אֲנִי נוֹשֵׁם,
אַתָּה רָעֵב כִּי אֲנִי אוֹכֵל,
אַתָּה אָסוּר כִּי אֲנִי מֻתָּר,
תִּרְשֹׁם,
הַשַּׁלְשֶׁלָאוֹת שֶׁלְּךָ הֵן לִי כְּנָפַיִם
וְאֵיךְ אֶכְתֹּב לְךָ מִלִּים שֶׁל שָׁלוֹם, דּוּ-קִיּוּם, תָּאֲעִיּוּשׁ יַעֲנִי,
גַּם אִם אֶקְנֶה לִי מִזְוָדָה בְּדִיּוּק כְּמוֹ שֶׁלְּךָ וְאֶסַּע מִכָּאן רָחוֹק,
וְהֲרֵי נָסַעְתִּי הַרְחֵק הַרְחֵק מִכָּאן, וְזֶה לֹא עוֹבֵר הָעִנְיָן הַזֶּה,
כְּפִי שֶׁהִטִּיחַ בִּי פַּעַם אִינְטֶלֶקְטוּאָל עֲרָבִי בְּכְנוּת שֶׁל מְשֻׁגָּעִים:
"אֵיךְ אַתָּה יָכֹל לְהַמְשִׁיךְ וּלְהִתְעַקֵּשׁ לְהִשְׁתַּיֵּךְ לַיְּהוּדִים?"
צָחַקְתִּי לוֹ, מָה זֹאת אוֹמֶרֶת אֵיךְ? אֲנִי יְהוּדִי, אֲנִי לֹא יוֹדֵעַ לִהְיוֹת מַשֶּׁהוּ אַחֵר,
אֵיזוֹ חֻצְפָּה, אֲנִי יְהוּדִי, לֹא צִיּוֹנִי, אֲבָל יְהוּדִי, עוֹד מִשֹּׁחַר הָאָדָם הַמּוּגְרַבִּי אֲנִי יְהוּדִי,
וְאוּלַי לֹא הֵבַנְתִּי מַמָּשׁ, עַד שֶׁבְּנִי גָּדַל וְהָיָה לְעֶלֶם צָעִיר שֶׁקּוֹרֵא לְבָדוֹ וְשׁוֹמֵעַ דְּבָרִים זָרִים…
וְיוֹם אֶחָד כְּשֶׁאָמַרְתִּי לוֹ בְּצַעַר כַּמָּה רָחוֹק הוּא הוֹלֵךְ מֵאִתָּנוּ הַיְּהוּדִים, הוּא נִעֵר אוֹתִי בְּנִמּוּס:
מָה אַתָּה רוֹצֶה מִמֶּנִּי, אָמַרְתָּ קוּמוּ נֵלֵךְ לְאָמֵרִיקָה לִבְרֹחַ מֵהַיְּהוּדִי שֶׁל חֶבְרוֹן,
אֲבָל אַתָּה לֹא מַצְלִיחַ כִּי אֵין יְהוּדִים אֲחֵרִים בָּעוֹלָם… אַתָּה בּוֹרֵחַ מֵעַצְמְךָ אַבָּא.
וְיָשַׁבְתִּי וּבָכִיתִי מָרָה כַּמָּה אֲנִי מְקַנֵּא בַּחֹפֶשׁ שֶׁלּוֹ,
כַּמָּה הָיִיתִי רוֹצֶה לָצֵאת מִדַּעְתִּי, יְדִיעָתִי, תּוֹדָעָתִי…
לָכֵן מְשׁוֹרֵר עֲרָבִי יָקָר, אֲנִי כּוֹתֵב לְךָ בְּעִבְרִית,
לָכֵן צַיָּר מִלּוֹת הַנֶּצַח, אֲנִי מְצַיֵּר לְךָ בִּיהוּדִית,
צִיּוּר שֶׁאֵין לִי עֲבוּרוֹ קִיר וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לִי לְעוֹלָם,
כִּי מָאַסְתִּי בְּאַדָּמָתְךָ וְאַדָּמָתִי תָּמִיד הֵקִיאָה אוֹתִי
וּבַגָּלוּת אֲנִי חַיַּי עַל גַּרְגְּרֵי אֲוִיר בֵּין שָׁם לְפֹה,
וְכָאן אֲנִי עוֹצֵם עֵינַיִם, נוֹגֵעַ לֹא נוֹגֵעַ…
תִּרְאֶה אֵיךְ אַתָּה נִרְדָּם וְהַיְּהוּדִי שֶׁבִּי מִתְגַּנֵּב בַּמִּלִּים
לְעוֹרֵר בְּךָ אַשְׁמָה, לִסְחֹט מִמְּךָ חֶמְלָה,
וְלֹא יַעֲזֹר לְךָ כָּאן קְהִלַּת עַל כֹּל הֶבֶל הֲבָלִיו,
גַּם לֹא שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים וְשִׁירַת הַשִּׁירוֹת,
גַּם הַמָּשִׁיחַ לֹא יוֹשִׁיעַ אוֹתְךָ מִמֶּנִּי וְאוֹתִי מִמְּךָ,
כִּי הָרַגְתִּי אוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם בַּבֹּקֶר,
כֹּל יוֹם אֲנִי מַשְׁכִּים לְהוֹרְגוֹ מֵחָדָשׁ,
לִדְחוֹת אֶת קֵץ כֹּל הַקְּצִים,
כִּי בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם…

כִּי בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִתְגַּבֵּר עַל פַּחַד הַגְּבָהִים וְהַמַּעֲמַקִּים
וְיָבוֹא אֲלַי בְּרִיצָה קַלָּה עַל גַּלֵּי הַמַּדְמֵנָה הַסּוֹעֶרֶת,
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִתְהַפְּכוּ הָעוֹלָמוֹת וְאָעֻמַּד אָז
מוּל סָבִי וּבְנֵי וְאַבִּיט לָהֶם יָשָׁר בָּעֵינַיִם וְאוֹמַר דַּי!
מַסֶּכֶת חַיַּי שְׁקָרִים יְהוּדִים בְּרִקְמָה עֲרָבִית,
וְלֹא שָׁנָטַלְתִּי אֶת חַיֶּיךָ וְהָפַכְתִּי אוֹתָם לְחַיַּי,
הֲרֵי חַיַּי הָיוּ פַּעַם חַיֶּיךָ עַד שָׁבָא דָוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ מִפְּלוֹנְסְק
וְהוֹרִיד אֶת שִׁנֵּינוּ בְּאֶבֶן רוּגַטְקָה אַחַת,
כְּאִלּוּ הָיִינוּ עִיָּיוֹ שֶׁל אוֹתוֹ גָּלְיַת, בְּעֵינָיו לְפָחוֹת,
יְרִיָּה פּוֹלָנִית אַחַת הִסְפִּיקָה לְשִׁנֵּינוּ,
כִּי הָיִינוּ עֲסוּקִים בִּתְפִלָּה וּבְסִפּוּר מַעֲשִׂיּוֹת, בַּאֲפִיַּת לֶחֶם וּכְתִישַׁת זֵיתִים,
וּשְׁאָר עִסּוּקֵי לֵב אוֹרְיֶנְטָלִים בּוֹלְעֵי זְמָן וּמַנְעִימֵי מוֹחִין,
אֲבָל הַמֶּלֶךְ רָצָה אוֹתִי וְהֵקִים אוֹתִי
לְתִחְיָה, כְּמוֹ אלישע, בִּנְשִׁיפַת וודְקָה אַחַת וְשִׁלַּח אוֹתִי עָלֶיךָ
לְחַפְּשִׂי וְקָרָא: מֵת הָעֲרָבִי, מֵת הָעֲרָבִי, יְחִי הַיְּהוּדִי הֶחָדָשׁ!
תִּרְשֹׁם,
אֲנִי נוֹלַדְתִּי יְהוּדִי מִתּוֹךְ מוֹתְךָ, מוֹתְךָ הָעֲרָבִי שֶׁבִּי,
וְאַז יָצָאנוּ בְּמְחוֹלוֹת הוֹרָה סוֹעֶרֶת הַפּוֹלָנִי וַאֲנִי
וְהַפּוֹלָנִי מְנַפְּנֵף בִּזְקָנוֹ שֶׁל סָבִי
וּמַצְבִּיעַ עַל עוֹרִי הַשָּׁחוּם וְשָׁר: מִכָּאן אֲנִי, מִכָּאן בָּאתִי, כָּאן בֵּיתִי,
וַאֲנִי נִמְלֵאתִי גַּאֲוָה יְהוּדִית חֲדָשָׁה וְשִׁנֵּי זְאֵב חַדּוֹת וְאַתָּה רוּחַ מִן הוּן!
סַרַבְתָּ לְהִסְתַּלֵּק מֵעֵינַי הַמַּבִּיטוֹת אֶל אֹפֶק מַעֲרָב...
הָיִיתָ לִי לְאוֹיֵב הַמַּצִּיץ אֵלַי מִן הָרְאִי כֹּל בֹּקֶר מֵחָדָשׁ,
וַאֲנִי יוֹרֵק וּמְקַלֵּל וְהוֹרֵג בְּךָ שׁוּב וָשׁוּב
כְּדֵי לְהוֹלִיד אֶת עַצְמִי מֵחָדָשׁ יְהוּדִי מְחֻדָּשׁ,
וְאַל תִּטְעֶה בִּי אֲנִי לֹא כָּאן לְהַחְלִיף אוֹתָךְ,
וַאֲנִי לֹא מִזְרָחָן, אֲנִי מִזְרָחִי, יַעֲנִי יְהוּדִי אוֹרְיֶנְטָלִי,
יַעֲנִי אֵין לִי כַּפָּרָה וְאֵין לִי תַּקָּנָה, לֹא בַּגִּלְגּוּל הַזֶּה,
אוּלַי בַּיּוֹם בּוֹ יִתְגַּבְּרוּ עַל פַּחַד הַגְּבָהִים שְׁלֹשֶׁת מְלַוֶּיךָ דּוֹרְשֵׁי סוֹד הַחַיִּים
(גִּלְגָּמֵשׁ, שְׁלֹמֹה וְיֵשׁוּעַ (יֵשׁוּ מֶלֶךְ הַיְּהוּדִים, יֵשׁוּ מֶלֶךְ הַיְּהוּדִים -
וְיֵרְדוּ מִצַּמֶּרֶת עֵץ הַחַיִּים אֶל אֶרֶץ קֵץ הַקִּצִּים,
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, שֶׁלֹּא יָבוֹא עוֹד לְעוֹלָם,
אֶקְרַע מֵעַל פָּנַי אֶת הַמַּסֵּכָה
חֲסוּדַת הַפָּנִים וְהַנָּפֶשׁ
וְאֶהְיֶה מָה שֶׁאֶהְיֶה,
מִי שֶׁאֶהְיֶה אֶהְיֶה,
יְהוּדִי בְּלִי יְהוּדִים,
עֲרָבִי בְּלִי עֲרָבִים,
מִזְוָדָה לְלֹא מוֹלֶדֶת,
מוֹלֶדֶת לְלֹא מִזְוָדָה,
צַיָּר לְלֹא מִלִּים,
מְשׁוֹרֵר לְלֹא צְבָעִים,
קִיר לְלֹא צִיּוּר,
צִיּוּר לְלֹא קִיר.

-סמי שלום שטרית

*A Mural With No Wall*: A Qasida for Mahmoud Darwish

It's been a while that I've wanted to write to you, not about you,
And even now I don't know where to start, from where
I can take words to face your eternal words, and I am in transit
Through the verse-houses of your poems, homeland of the words, folded into slim volume-cities
Of poetry which – I'll be frank with you – fill me with envy recently;
Not that of a poet but of an exile: it is so yours, so fully yours,
I have no such homeland, neither in writing nor on earth
But do not pity me – that's not it. When it comes down to it, I am the murderer
And a thousand petitions against the occupation won't help me, I am the soldier
Who kills three pigeons again and again with a single shot
And it is a matter of habit –
It was me who shot the forsaken horse, alone beside the house that became my new home
And I who sealed its windows well against the keening of the yearning mourners
And I who sealed the well with armored concrete
That I should not see nor hear life from within the water
And what do I need an Arab horse or eternal Sabra cactus for?
You will find not even one Sabra cactus to soothe your soul in the sand dunes of Isdud[2]
Where we built a city for people who have never heard your name
Your name rubbed out in Moroccan and in Russian and in Ashdodian[3] Hebrew,
To tell you the truth, Andalusia or not,
That's how we do Andalusia in Ashdod, among the Jews,
And now they celebrate fifty years for it in a brand-new museum by the sea, exactly at the spot where
Nabi Younes, a fishing village, used to stand; and the exhibition holds
Not even one shred of lonely Arab horses and no Sabras
And children are taught the ancient history of the city
The Philistine, not the Palestinian, because museums are not about politics.
I read your poems as indictments and plea guilty to every single charge,
Each time anew, and my thousands of protests will not help here, against the elders of Zionism,
Nor the youngest, Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, white and black – I am one of them
Because I am not one of you, that is the miserable bottom line;
I – who steals in and out of your thresholds as if it were my own -
Sipping from the Arab coffee,
Kicking at the jug and shouting 'dirty Arab!'
Smashing each and every mirror so that I will not see in them
The face of my grandfather, puzzling back at me, in Arabic.

What do you mean Arabic? I am a Hebrew poet!
I am a jailor-poet, do not believe a word I say,
I am the jailor of myself and of my words
Whose wings are clipped, and of my sleep that wanders,
With no exact address to rest within,
And you were so right – the homeland is not a suitcase;
And you were so right – the homeland is a suitcase,
As the Jews can explain at the airport, you there!
What are you flying with the whole homeland in your suspicious suitcase?
That's the most basic irresponsibility, step aside please, I
The security screener dressed up as a Middle Eastern intellectual
Desperately seeking his homeland inside an Arab suitcase,
And me, all the words of love and agony that I have written and that I have yet to write and also all those
That beat against my temples, that I will never write,
Even they will never be salvation for me and for you
As in my life I embody your death,
You are suffocated because I breathe,
You are hungry because I eat,
You are bound because I am unfettered,
Write it down,
Your shackles are my wings
And how am I to write you words of peace, of coexistence, *ya'ani ta'ayush[4],*
Even if I buy myself a suitcase just like yours and travel far away from here,
And I have traveled so, so far away from here, and it does not go away, this thing,
As an Arab intellectual once told me with a madman's bluntness:
"How can you insist on being with the Jews?"
I laughed at him, what do you mean, how? I am a Jew, I do not know how to be something else,
What insolence! I am a Jew, not a Zionist but a Jew, I have been a Jew since the dawn of the Mugrabi man,
And perhaps I did not really understand until my son grew up and became a lad who reads for himself and hears things on his own...
And one day, when I told him sadly how far he is going from us, from the Jews, he shook me off politely:
"What do you want from me? You said get up, we have to go to America to run away from the Hebron Jew,
But you can't, because there are no other Jews in the
world... you are running away from yourself, Dad."
And I sat and wept bitterly; I so envy his freedom,

I so would like to take leave of my knowledge, my mind, my consciousness...
And so, dear Arab poet, I write to you in Hebrew,
And so, painter of eternal words, I paint for you in Jewish,
A mural I have no wall for, nor will I ever,
As I have come to detest your land and my land has always cast me out,
And I live in exile on motes of air, not here nor there,
Closing my eyes, touching, not touching...
Look,
How you fall asleep and the Jew inside me creeps up with words
To make you feel guilty, to wheedle compassion out of you,
And Ecclesiastes and all of his vanity of vanities will not help you here,
Nor will the Song of Songs nor the poetry of poetries,
Even the Messiah himself will not save you from me and me from you,
Because I have killed him this morning,
I rise every day to kill him anew,
To put off the end of everything,
*For on this day atonement shall be made for you...*
For on this day he shall rise above the fear of heights and depths
And he will come a-running to me on the waves of the roiling bog,
On this day the worlds will be upturned and then I will stand
Before my grandfather and my son and look them in the eye and say Enough!
The tapestry of my life is Jewish lies in Arabic embroidery,
And it is not that I took your life and made it mine,
But rather your life was once your life until King David came from Poland
And knocked us both down with just one sling shot,
As if we were the eyes of that same Goliath,
A single Polish shot did us both in,
As we were busy with prayers and storytelling, baking bread and cracking olives,
And other time-consuming, mind-sweetening, Arab activities of the heart,
But the King desired me and raised me up
To life, like Elisha, with a single vodka-filled blow, and sent me upon you,
Sent me free and cried: The Arab is dead! The Arab is dead! Long live the new Jew!
Write it down,
I was born Jewish out of your death, the death of the Arab in me,
And then we danced a bracing Hora and the Polack waives my grandfather's beard
And points at my dark skin and sings: Here is where I came from, this is where I hail from, this is my home!
And I was filled with new Jewish pride and sharp wolves' teeth and you – *rooh min houn*[5]! Go away!

You refused to remove yourself from my eyes, watching to the Western horizon...
You became my enemy, who peeks anew at me from the mirror every morning,
And I spit and curse and kill you and kill you again,
To rebirth myself a renovated Jew,
And do not mistake me, I am not here to replace you,
I am not an Orientalist, I am Orienatal, *ya'ani* a *Mizrahi* Jew,
There is no atonement or redemption for me, not in this lifetime,
Perhaps on the day that your three companions overcome their fear of heights,
Lo', those inquirers into the secret of life –
Gilgamesh, Solomon, and Yeshua[6] (Jesus, King of the Jews) –
And descend from the top branches of the tree of life down to the land of the end of all,
On that day, which will nevermore come,
I will tear the mask off my face,
Benevolent of countenance and soul,
And be who I am,
Whoever I am I will be,
A Jew with no Jews,
An Arab with no  Arabs,
A suitcase with no homeland,
A homeland with no suitcase,
A painter with no words,
A poet with no paint,
A wall with no mural,
A mural with no wall.

-Sami Shalom Chetrit

Translation from Hebrew by Ammiel Alcalay, Dena Shunra, and Shay Yishayahu Sayar

"Summary of a Conversation"

What does it mean to be authentic,
to run through the middle of Dizengoff and shout in Moroccan Jewish
dialect:
*"Ana min el-Maghreb, Ana min el-Maghreb"*
(I'm from the Atlas Mountains, I'm from the Atlas Mountains).

What does it mean to be authentic,
to sit in the Cafe Roval in brightly flowing robes,
or to proclaim out loud: My name isn't Zohar, I'm Zayish, I'm Zayish.

Neither this nor that,
but despite everything another language moistens the tongue to the point of
renting the gums asunder,
and despite everything the repressed and beloved aromas are overpowering
and I fall between the circles
lost in the medley of voices.

-Erez Bitton

Translated from the Hebrew by Ammiel Alcalay

כל הערסים יבואו

אֲנִי מֵת עַל אֵלֶּה
סוֹצִיָאלִיסְטִים שֶׁשּׁוֹנְאִים קָפִיטָלִיזְם
בְּצוּרָה מֻחְצֶנֶת, נוֹעֲלִים סַנְדְּלֵי שֹׁרֶשׁ
וְלוֹבְשִׁים חֻלְצָה קְרוּעָה, עוֹטִים עַל עַצְמָם
מַרְאֶה שֶׁל הוֹמְלֶסִים, בְּלִי לְסַפֵּר לְאַף אֶחָד
עַל הַיְרֻשָּׁה שֶׁל הַסַּבְתָּא וְהַנְּכָסִים שֶׁל הָאַבָּא
(שֶׁגַּם נִרְאִים כְּמוֹ הוֹמְלֶסִים)
וּמְבַקְּרִים בְּבוֹטוּת אֶת תַּרְבּוּת הַשֶּׁפַע
כְּאִלּוּ הָיוּ נְבִיאֵי תּוֹכָחָה עִם בֶּטֶן מְקַרְקֶרֶת.

אֲנִי מֵת עַל אֵלֶּה
הַמְּאֻחָלִים לַאֲחֵיהֶם הָעֲרָבִים
רַמַּדָּאן כַּרִים
וְחוֹתְמִים עַל עֲצוּמָה לִמְכִירַת חָמֵץ
בְּפֶסַח.

אֲנִי מֵת עַל אֵלֶּה
שֶׁמִּתְעַנְּגִים עַל קְרִיאַת הַמּוּאַזִּין
וְרוֹאִים אֶת הַטְּרַנְזִיט שֶׁל הַבְּרַסְלָבִים
אוֹ הַחַבַּדְנִיקִים בַּשִּׁכּוּנוֹת
כְּמוֹ שְׁלִיחֵי הַשָּׂטָן עַל גַּלְגַּלִּים.

אֲנִי מֵת עַל אֵלֶּה
שֶׁקּוֹרְאִים לַמִּתְנַחֲלִים מְשִׁיחִיִּים
הֲזוּיִים עַל שֶׁהֵם מַאֲמִינִים בָּאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת
מִתּוֹקֶף צַו אֱלֹהִי
וְזוֹעֲקִים אֶת הַכְּאֵב הַפָּלַסְטִינִי
עַל שֶׁנִּשְׁלוּ מֵהָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת
שֶׁהֵם מַאֲמִינִים שֶׁהִיא שֶׁלָּהֶם
מִתּוֹקֶף צַו אֱלֹהִי
(אַגַּב, בְּדִיּוּק אוֹתוֹ צַו שֶׁל אוֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים).

אֲנִי מֵת עַל אֵלֶּה
דּוֹר שְׁלִישִׁי לְשׁוֹדְדֵי הָאֲדָמוֹת בַּקִּבּוּצִים
שֶׁמַּחֲרִימִים אֶת הַהִתְנַחֲלֻיּוֹת
כִּי שֹׁד אֲדָמוֹת וְכִבּוּשׁ

אני חוֹלֵם יוֹם אֶחָד)
שֶׁתִּהְיֶה לִי הַפְרִיבִילֶגְיָה
לְהַחְרִים אֵרוּעֵי תַּרְבּוּת בְּקִבּוּצִים
כְּאַקְט פּוֹלִיטִי, בֵּינְתַיִם
מִסְתַּפֵּק בְּלִגְבּוֹת מֵהֶם תַּעֲרִיף
.שַׁבָּת פְּלוּס חַג בִּימֵי חֹל

אֲנִי מֵת עַל אֵלֶּה
יְהוּדִים רְגִישִׁים שֶׁמַּפְגִינִים נֶגֶד הַכִּבּוּשׁ
וְחוֹזְרִים לַבַּיִת
הָעֲרָבִי שֶׁלָּהֶם בְּיָפוֹ
שֶׁהֵם קוֹרְאִים לָהּ יָאפָא
בְּעֵינַיִם נוּגוֹת שֶׁל שֵׁתָּפוּת
גּוֹרָל, עַל צַלַּחַת חוּמּוֹס
אֵצֶל אַבּוּ מַשֶּׁהוּ
מְלַקְקִים שְׂפָתַיִם עִם כָּל נְגִיב
מְמַלְמְלִים דַּי לַכִּבּוּשׁ וְחוֹלְמִים
שְׁתֵּי מְדִינוֹת לִשְׁנֵי עַמִּים
כִּי וַאלְלָה
(הֵם מְלַהַטְטִים בַּעֲרָבִית)
כִּבּוּשׁ כִּבּוּשׁ
(אוֹ נַכְּבָּה נַכְּבָּה)
,לְצִדָּם אֲבָל לֹא אִתָּם
בְּכָל זֹאת, עֲרָבִים.

חָבֵר עֲרָבִי אָמַר לִי עֲלֵיהֶם פַּעַם — אֵלֶּה בַּחַיִים
,לֹא יַעֲשׂוּ שָׁלוֹם
כִּי אִם יִהְיֶה שָׁלוֹם
כָּל הָעַרְסִים יָבוֹאוּ.

-רועי חסן

All the ‘arsim’ Will Come

I just love those
socialists who hate capitalism
so ostentatiously, wear ugly sandals
and torn t-shirts, wrapping themselves in a homeless look
without telling a soul about grandma’s inheritance or dad’s real estate
(they look homeless too)
and criticize the culture of affluence with bombast
as if they were prophets of vengeance with gurgling stomachs.
I just love those
who wish their Arab brothers
*Ramadan Kareem*
and sign petitions legalizing
the sale of *hametz* during Passover.
I just love those
who relish in the *muazzin*’s call
and see the Chabad or Breslav
truck in the neighborhood
as the devil’s wheeled messengers.
I just love those
who call the settlers messianic
and crazy because they believe in this land
by some godly decree
and cry the pain of the Palestinians
for having been expelled from this land
which they believe to be theirs
by some godly decree
(the very same decree from the very same god, by the way).
I just love those,
third generation to the
plunder of lands by the *kibbutzim*,
who boycott the settlements
because Occupation and stolen land
(I dream one day
to have the privilege
of boycotting cultural events on *kibbutzim*
as a political act, in the meantime
I suffice with charging them weekend rates
on weekdays).
I just love those
sensitive Jews who demonstrate against the Occupation
and go home to their
Arab house in Yaffo
which they call Yaffa

with a melancholy glance of
shared fate over hummus
at Abu something-or-other
licking their lips with every
wipe of the pita and
murmuring about ending the Occupation,
dreaming of two states for two nations
because – *walla* –
(they fumble for the Arabic)
Occupation Occupation
(or *nakba nakba*):
next to them but not with them,
they're Arabs after all.
An Arab friend said about them once
that they'll never make peace,
because if there'll be peace
all the *arsim* will come.

-Roy Hasan

Translated from the Hebrew by Ron Makleff

אנא מן אל־יהוד

בזמן ההוא התהפכה לשוני, ועם שהגיע ראש חודש תמוז נתקע לי בפה, עמוק עמוק בגרון, עמוק מן הגרון, המבטא הערבי. כך, כשהייתי באמצע הליכת רחוב, חזר אלי המבטא הערבי של סבא אנואר עליו השלום, וכמה ניסיתי להוציא אותו מתוכי ולהשליכו באחד הפחים הציבוריים ככה לא הצלחתי. ניסיתי ניסיתי לרכך את העי"ן לרכך את העי"ן כמו אמא, שעשתה זאת בילדותה נוכח המורים ושאר התלמידים, אבל זרים עוברים רק קיבעו אותי במקומי; ניסיתי לרכך את החי"ת ולעשות אותה כ"ף, ניסיתי להרחיק את הצד"י מן הסמ"ך, ניסיתי לצאת מן הק"ע העיראקית הזאת, ולא צלח המאמץ. ושוטרים התחילו לעבור מולי ברחובות ירושלים תקיפים, התחילו להצביע עלי ועל זקני השחור באצבעות מאיימות, התחילו להתלחש ביניהם בניידות, התחילו לעצור אותי ולדרוש בשמי ובזהותי. ואני מול כל שוטר עובר ברחוב הייתי מבקש לעמוד מהליכתי ולשלוף את תעודת הזהות שלי ולהצביע על סעיף הלאום ולומר להם, כאילו אני מסגיר סוד שיפטור אותי מאשמה גדולה: "אנא מן אל-יהוד, אנא מן אל-יהוד".

אבל פתאום התחילה נעלמת לי תעודת הזהות דווקא כשהייתי נזקק לה מאוד. וכך היו עוצרים אותי השוטרים ערב ערב ובוקר בוקר כשאין בארנקי תעודה אשר תסכים לגונן עלי. אחר כך בבית הייתי מוצא את תעודת הזהות מגולגלת בין שני שטרות, או בכיס מחוץ לארנק היה מתגלה לי רשיון הנהיגה כאילו ככה הוצאתי אותו בשביל איזה דבר מה, או בתיק הגב בין מסמכים היתה נחבאת תעודת המילואים כאילו שכחתי אותה שם בלי כוונה. אבל כשהשוטרים היו נעצרים מולי לא היתה נמצאת לי ולו תעודה אחת שתספר להם על עברי ועתידי. ואז הייתי מתחיל עושה טלפונים, אומר לשוטר, תראה, רק מאתמול המבטא שלי ערבי ככה, כבד כזה, והוא בכלל לא פלשתינאי הוא עיראקי, וגם אתה לא נראה לי דובר יידיש מן הבית, אולי למדת אותה באחד המקומות החיצוניים, ובכלל, אולי גם לסבא שלך היה מבטא כמו שלי, ותשמע, אני מתקשר לחברים, חברים שלי, תשמע איזה מבטא יפה יש להם, עברית כמו שצריך לדבר עברית, בלי שום מבטא, ואם אלו חברי אז מי אני.

אבל החברים האשכנזים שלי פתאום לא היו עונים לי בכלל, לא היו שומעים לתחינת צלצולי, ורק לעת ערב או ביום המחרת היו מתקשרים אלי חזרה, שואלים לרצוני ומסרבים לזהות את קולי. ואני הייתי נותר לעמוד מול השוטרים לבד, מתחיל להתקשר לחברים החלבים והטריפוליטאים והתוניסאים שלי, אומר, אלה אולי אין להם עברית מושלמת, אינה צחה כל כך, אינה כפי שעברית צריכה להיות, אבל בכל זאת היא טובה משלי. והם היו עונים מיד, לא מתמהמהים למשמע הצלצולים, ופתאום גם להם נעשה מבטא ערבי כבד כל כך, והם בדיוק היו שומעים ברקע איזה עוד פתלתל או

קאנון עיקש, והם היו מברכים אותי "אהלן ביכ" ומכנים אותי "יא חביבי" ושואלים אותי "אשלונכ" ונפרדים ממני ב"סלמתכ", ומה יכלו השוטרים, איך יכלו להאמין לי, אחרי שכל חברי זנחו אותי כך, שאני בן ישראל ולא בן ישמעאל.

ואז היו בודקים אותי באטיות, מפשפשים בבגדי, עוברים על פני גופי עם גלאי המתכות, מפשיטים אותי בשתיקתם היסודית ממלים ומחשבות, מחפשים עמוק בשכבות כסויות עורי את טינתי, תרים אחר חגורות נפץ, חגורות נפץ בלבי, ששים לנטרל כל חפץ חשוד. וכשהיו השוטרים ניצבים עלי בזוגות, היה אחד אומר לרעהו אחרי כמה רגעים כשהתארכה בדיקתם, תראה הוא נימול, הוא באמת יהודי הערבי הזה, ושני היה אומר, גם ערבי נימול, וחגורות הנפץ אינן מעניין המילה, והיו ממשיכים בחיפושיהם. ובאמת באותו הזמן שהנחתי את גופי להם החלו נולדות חגורות נפץ על לבי, החלו תופחות ומסרבות להיות מנוטרלות, רועמות רועמות. אבל כיוון שלא היו עשויות פלדה או אבק שריפה הצליחו לחמוק מן הגלאים המוכשרים.

בסוף, כשהיו השוטרים עוזבים אותי לנפשי חופשי אך לא חף, הייתי ממשיך בדרכי והולך בדרך מרכוס היורדת לתיאטרון ירושלים מן הבניין היפה של הקונסוליה הבלגית והכיכר שעל רחוב ז'בוטינסקי. הייתי מחכה לראות שם איזה סרט אמריקאי מרובה אוסקרים, אבל פתאום לא היה שם תיאטרון בקצה הרחוב, ופתאום לא היה זה רחוב מרכוס, היה זה רחוב עם שם ערבי, והבתים היו שבים להיות ערביים, גם הקונסוליה הבלגית, וגם האנשים בחצרות, משפחות משפחות, היו ערבים, לא רק גברים צעירים פועלי בניין, לא רק מנקי רחובות ועושי שיפוצים.

והייתי מתחיל להתהלך ברחובות קטמון וברחובות טלביה וברחובות בקעה, ובמקום לראות את עשירי ירושלים שהתכנסו שם בבתים המרווחים, ובמקום לקרוא שם "כובשי קטמון" ו"יורדי הסירה" בשמות הרחובות, ראיתי פתאום שוב את עשירי פלשתין, והם היו שם כמו שהיו לפני מלחמת 48', כמו לא היתה מלחמת 48'. אני רואה אותם והם הולכים בחצרות בין עצי הפרי וקוטפים פירות כמו לא סיפרו להם העיתונים כי יקמלו העצים, כי הארץ תימלא פליטים. והיה כאילו הזמן הלך היסטוריה אחרת, שונה, וזכרתי ששאלתי את אמא למה אנחנו מרבים כל כך לדבר היסטוריה, די עם ההיסטוריה, די לנו מהיסטוריה, כי ההיסטוריה הזאת כובלת אותי, כובלת אותך, לא משאירה בי דבר, לא משאירה גם לך.

ובאמת נעשינו קבועים כל כך בהיסטוריה שלנו, גם כבויים, אבל הנה ההיסטוריה הלכה לרגע מהלך אחר. והייתי אני הולך ברחובות עשירי פלשתין, וחשבתי אולי ידברו אלי הם בכבוד, לא כמו השוטרים, קיוויתי אוכל לספר להם כמה קראתי על הסופר והמחנך ח'ליל אל-סכאכיני, וכמה רציתי להתיידד עם נכדיו, והייתי הולך ביניהם, מתקרב לחצרות ואיני מצליח להתערות ביניהם, כי לרשותי עומדת רק העברית במבטאה הערבי, ואילו הערבית שלי, שלא באה לי מן

הבית אלא מן הצבא, פתאום הערבית שלי אילמת, חנוקה מן הגרון, מקללת את עצמה בלי להוציא מלה, ישנה באוויר המחניק של מקלטי-נפשי, מסתתרת מבני המשפחה מאחורי תריסי העברית. וכל הזמן, כאשר ניסיתי לדבר אליהם ערבית מן הקצת והעילג שידעתי, יצאה לי איזו עברית במבטא ערבי, עד שחשבו כמעט שאני לועג עליהם, ואלמלא המבטא שהיה עיראקי כל כך, אלמלא זה, היו הם בטוחים שאני לועג להם.

אבל ככה עם המבטא התבלבלו, חשבו אולי אני לועג לעיראקים, לסדאם חוסיינים, או אולי אני איזה עיראקי ישן, שנותר לו המבטא אבל נשתכחה שפתו. ולא עשיתי שמה חברים למרות רצוני, ונזכרתי איך שמעתי פעם דוד אחד שלי אומר על הערבים הללו של השכונות העשירות של ירושלים, אלה אפנדים, אלה הולכים בחליפות מערב ותרבושים לראשם, ושמעתי אז את המלה אפנדי במין בוז כזה, אף על פי שעכשיו אני יכול להיזכר שהוא לא אמר אותה כך, שמעתי בה בוז כאילו הייתי איזה פלמ"חניק בסנדלים ומכנסיים קצרים שלועג לבעלי הקרקעות הערביים ומשבח את הסוציאליזם הקדוש שלו ושל כל הסיונים. אלה אפנדים, אמר לי הדוד, והתכוון לומר כבוד, אך נעלמה ממני שפתם והם לא ידעו את שפתי, ונשאר בינינו מרחק המשטרות והדורות.

ובדרכי חזרה הביתה רק נהגי האוטובוסים היו מקבלים היטב את מבטאי, יודעים כי אין לצפות מה מבטאו של נוסע אשר עולה לאוטובוס בירושלים. ולא ידע לבי כי שבתי אל לבי, לא ידע, ולא ידעו פחדי כי הם כולם שבו עלי, לא ידעו.

וכך התחלף קולי בקול סבי, ופתאום הרחובות האלו שהתרגלו כל כך למותו והיעלמו והעדרו מהם, פתאום התחילו שוב לשמוע את קולו. ופתאום הקול הזה, היפה, שהיה כלוא בתוך עברי, פתאום הוא היה יוצא ממני ולא כמבקש נדבות ולא כמבקש לזכות בפירורים, אלא ממש קול שלי קול שלי חזק ורם. ורחובות ירושלים שהתרגלו לשתיקתי, לשתיקתנו, התקשו מאוד מאוד מול הדיבור, והיו משקיטים את הקול, משקיטים אותו לאט לאט אומרים לו זהירות, אומרים לי זהירות, אומרים לו אתה זר, אומרים לי די לך בשתיקתך. ולמרות פחדי, ואף שגם לי היה הקול הזה זר ממרחק שני דורות של שכחה, השמעתי את כל מלותי במבטא ההוא, כי לא יכולתי להתמיד בשתיקה, כי היה בי דיבור רוצה לצאת, והמלים היו משתנות לי עת היו יוצאות מעומק הגרון. וזר שלא היה מכיר היה חושב אני נכד נאמן, ולא היה יודע כמה הרבתי אי-זיכרון על זיכרון לאורך השנים, ולא היה מנחש כמה זיכרוני היטשטש וכמה זמנים הרבה הרבה זמנים לא קשרתי את קשר סבי על שפתי.

וכששבתי הביתה מן ההליכה הראשונה ברחובות עם מבטאי החדש וחיפושי השוטרים על גופי, היתה זוגתי מתפלאת על קולי, ותוך כדי דיבורה אלי והמלצתה לי לחדול התחילה נדבקת משינויי ובשפתיה התקשרו בערבוביה המבטא התימני של ערבית אביה והמבטא האיסטמבולי של ספניולית אמה. ואחר כמה ימים החלה חוזרת הביתה מעבודתה מדווחת כמה

חוששים במדורים, כבר מתפשטת מגיפה קטנה בין אנשים במשרדה, יוצאים המבטאים הישנים שמקווה היתה כי נעלמו. וידיעה קטנה בשולי אחד העיתונים החשובים גילתה כי הממונים על הביטחון עוקבים מי נדבק ממי במבטאים האסורים, והם כבר חוששים כי תימלא הארץ ערבים, הרבה הרבה ערבים, ועל כן החליטו לתגבר את הרדיו בקריינים בעלי עברית כה רהוטה כך שיובטח לנו כי נחוש זרים בדיבורנו.

ועוד מעט, היתה מסבירה לי זוגתי ודיבורה רועד, רגע מצפין אל מצרי הבוספורוס ורגע מדרים אל מפרץ עדן, הדיבוק הזה נוגע גם באשכנזים. אצלם תהא ההשתנות אטית יותר, התנבאה, כי השתכנעו ילדיהם שמבטא הוריהם והורי הוריהם היה במקורו אמריקאי, ואצלם מועט יותר הזיכרון המוחש של דיבורם הישן. אבל עוד מעט יישמעו כאן מחדש ברחובות המבטא הפולני וההונגרי והרומני והגרמני והאוקראיני, ומכך חוששים יותר מכל הממונים על ביטחון הציבור, חששם שאז לא יימצאו קריינים לשלוח אל צבאות הרדיו, לא יימצאו מורים להורות סוד מבטא נכון לילדינו.

ולמרות התנבאויותיה על גל גדול של השתנות, הורי עמדו עיקשים מולי ומול פני המגיפה, בזוכרם את שנות המאמץ לקנות להם את מבטאם הנקי, והחלו רומזים לי נחרצות לחדול, מזכירים לי את תוכניותי ללמוד. והיו מבקשים מאוד מה יכולתי לעשות, איך אוכל לכסות על געגועי וגעגועי פתאום בתוך הקול הזה שהוא כל כך זר לי, ואני מצר ומצטער כי הוא יוצא ממני, אבל גם לא יכול ככה, ככה סתם ברגע אחד לעצור אותו כי אין בו מחסום מתוכו ואין בו מעצור. אם תמשיך את הדיבור הזה הנמשך ממך תרחק מן המלגות, אמר אבי וצדק מאוד מאוד, אם לא תשוב אל דיבורנו הפשוט מה יהיה עליך, אמרה אמי וצדקה מאוד מאוד, בכל ראיונותי היו כל הפרופסורים והפרופסוריות תמהים מאוד על מבטאי, מבקשים למצוא בי דיבור אחר, אוניברסיטאי יותר, אקדמאי יותר, חרף שהיו המלים כמעט אותן מלים, אולי מעט יותר שבורות. איך תמשיך אם תדבר כך, אמרו ביקשו מאוד מה יכולתי לעשות, והם דואגים מאוד את עתידי, ולא שלוות לבי החרבה, ולא אבני לבי השבורות, ולא פינות לבי המחודדות, לא יכלו לעזור להעביר ממני את הגזירה.

אבל אותם ימים של דאגתם לא היו אוזני פקוחות לשמע דיבורם, ונעשתה שפתי חירשת ונעשה לי מבטאם זר ומרוחק, ונהניתי איך חולפים כך וכך הירחים ונבואות זוגתי מתגשמות ומשתנים רחובות ירושלים, רק הורי נשארים לבד עם אי-השתנותם. וגיליתי את אוזני זוגתי, אמרתי לה התחלתי כותב את סיפורי באותיות הערביות, שוב יזדעזעו במדורים החשובים. והיא אחרי ימים מספר חזרה הביתה לספר כי צחקו ראשי המדורים, אמרו, יכתוב כך, יכתוב סיפורים שרק הוא יוכל לקרוא, לא יקראו בו הוריו או ילדיו, וגם ילדינו לא ייפלו בסכנה, ואנחנו נעניק לו, אם יבקש, את כל פרסי הממשלה לספרות ערבית בלי שנקרא מלה מתוך ספריו.

וצדקו כמובן ראשי המדורים, וזוגתי החלה מתנבאת על המציאות בפתגמים ספניוליים, אומרת לי פתגם זה שאמי היתה משתמשת בו, אמנם איני זוכרת איך היתה אומרת בשפתה, אך את מבטאה אני זוכרת. זה הביקור האחרון של הבריאות לפני המוות, לחשה ואז החלה מבהרת, אלו פרפורי גוסס ולא תחיית מתים, וכבר יודעים בגבוהים שבמדורים, החליטו כי אפשר להירגע, ייתנו את המשרות בדיבור העברי הנכון, וישוב כל אחד למקורות פרנסתו וכלכלת ימיו ודוחק משפחתו, ואז תשוב העברית הרגילה כמו לא היתה כאן מגיפה.

ולבי התחיל נותן בקולותי סימנים, אומר זה קולי וזה אינו קולי, זאת למ"ד יוצאת מפי וזאת ק"ע זרה זרה היא ללבי. והייתי מאט את קצב מחשבותי, כדי לחשוב, לחשוב גם על מחשבותי ולא רק את מחשבותי, אבל עת לא היתה לי, והייתי זורה מלים לרוח כמו המלח של הים אשר ודאי איש לא זורה אותו אל תוך הים. והיה סבי מדבר אלי, שואל אותי בקולי האם יש סוף לסיפור הזה, ומה היסטוריה זו שלי מתערבת בשלך, איך באתי להפר חייך, אני דור מדבר ואיך אתה קם לחדש אותי, אתה הדור חיכינו אותו שלא יהיה מבדיל בין עברו לעבר מוריו, כי כבר כאב מאוד עברנו, ונשארתי במדבר למאכל עופות דורסים בשבילך, כדי שלא תזכור אותי, שלא תהיה כואב כמונו, ואיך שיניך נוגסות שוב את מילותי, ואיפה, מחוזות ירושלים אחרים, אין בתי-תה, אין חידקל חוצה את העיר לרחמים, אבל אני לא מצאתי את מותי בירושלים, גם לא בעיר הולדתי, אני מת במדבר שביניהן, הרבה מדבר שתיקה.

בנה אגפים בלבך, נכדי, היה אומר לי, עשה אותו מדורים מדורים, ושכן אותי באחד המדורים הנחבאים, ובשאר המדורים חייה. או עבור למדור השתיקה, כי השינוי אשר חשבת כי מתחולל פשוט מדי, ואם ידובר מבטא אחר מה ישתנה, האם אחיה שוב, האם תחיה אתה את חיי החדשים? די לך מן הרחובות, לך אל הוריך, אותם לא ישכנע מבטאי, הם מכירים וכבר הניפו אלף מרידות. אולי שתיקה תשים בלבם פחד ההווה מן העבר והעתיד. ולמה לא תראה להם את סיפורך, אולי כך יתעוררו, אמר סבי כמעט משביע אותי מן המתים.

והתחלתי מודד את שתיקותי, זאת שתיקת יום, זאת שתיקת שבוע, זאת שתיקת חודש ממוסגרת היטב בתוך קירות הבית, ואין פוצה פה, אין חלון פוצה, ואין אוויר נכנס, ואין תמונות החול מגיעות אבל אין גם קודש, ואין מחסיר, ואין מוסיף. והכל הקול שתיקותי, שתיקותי הרבה מלים הרבה מלים נשתקות, ואין אני הווה, ואין מתהווה, ואין גמר סוף הסיפור, ואין כבר טרם שהיה הסיפור, אין התחלה.

ושתקתי עוד ועוד הרבה זמנים, עד שהורי היו אומרים דבר, אם לא תדבר איך תקבל מלגה איך תמשיך בלימודיך ומה תעשה עם חייך, ואיה חיוכיך, לאן הלכו מקום מסתור, דבר, דבר בכל מבטא כי בא עלינו פחד השתיקה.

אין חידקל חוצה את ירושלים, והמייתו לא משתיקה את הגבולות הקמים עלינו, הגבולים המפרידים ביני לבין עצמי, אני לא שם לא כאן, לא מזרח לא מערב, לא קולי עכשיו ולא קולות עברי, ומה יהיה בסוף. אילם אני הולך ברחובות וגם מעט חירש, הפעם רק חזותי טורדת את השוטרים, רק זקני העבות, ועקשנותי לא להוציא מלה מפי, שוב חודש תמוז הולך גווע בתוכי, ולמרות החום אני מתעטף במעילים לכסות על חגורות הנפץ של לבי. וכך מתוך נאמנות השוטרים למשימתם אני מובא אל בית המעצר והורי באים אחרי, לראות את בנם ואנה הוא מובל.

אני שותק מול הורי, ואיך יגיבו, אני שותק מול הורי ומוסר להם את כל סיפורי שהסתרתי מהם, רומז הנה כאן כתבתי עליך אמא, וכאן עליך אבא. הנה אני כותב שירי התנגדות לעברית בעברית, אני מרבה את רמזי, כי אין לי שפה אחרת לכתוב בה, מרוב בושה לא הורשתם לי דבר. והזמן הזה אוסר עלי שירה בזמן שהם מתגודדים עלי גדודים גדודים, מתגודדים גם עליכם, והשפה שהיתה לשפתי מצווה עלי להשתפך בה, להיות חליל ריק למשביה, עד שנפיק ביחד צליל, נהיה נאי צרוד יחדיו, נתחזה שפה אחרת, נעדרת. וזה באמת אותו סיפור שוב ושוב חוזר, כמה סיפורים יש לי, אמא אבא, כמה סיפורים יש לאדם, אותו סיפור הוא מנסה לספר כל פעם במלים מעט שונות, כל פעם מנסה לפתור מעט אחר את אותו סיפור בלתי נפתר, והאם אין אתם מזהים כאן גם את סיפורכם, בכל זאת מעט סיפרה לי שתיקתכם. הנה עכשיו ניסיתי לכתוב את הסיפור במבטא הערבי, אך מה עלה מכך, תראו היכן אנחנו נפגשים. קחו, קראו את סיפורי, אמא אבא, קראו את כל סיפורי שכך הסתרתי מכם שנים רבות, הרי גם אתם אותה גלות, אותה שתיקה, אותה זרות בין לב לגוף ובין מחשבה לדיבור, אולי תדעו כיצד תיפתר העלילה.

והורי דיבור ראשון התכחשו, אמר אבא לא זה בננו ולא זה הזקן שגידלנו, אמרה אמא ואיפה, לנו אין מבטא הזה, אמרו ביחד לפקידים לא היה לו מאין לרשת מבטא זה, לא מן המשפחה הפנימית, סבא שלו אנואר מת לפני לידתו, בן שלנו לא. דיבור שני רמזו, ואם לא תיטיב שאת נשוב הביתה ממתקן הכליאה מאוכזבי דורות, ואם תיטיב שאת ותעזוב את הסיפורים, את הסיפור הזה, את הדיבור הזה והשתיקה הזאת ותדבר עמנו בשפתנו, נישאר כאן עמך עד שתהיה נידון לצאת לחופשי, עד שנהיה כולנו יחד נידונים.

ולא ידעו הורי כי שבתי אל לבם, לא ידעו, ולא ידעו כי פחדיהם כולם שבו עלי, לא ידעו.

-אלמוג בהר

Ana min al yahoud – I'm one of the Jews

1. At that time, my tongue twisted around and with the arrival of the month of Tammuz the Arabic accent got stuck in my mouth, deep down in my throat. Just like that, as I was walking down the street, the Arabic accent of Grandfather Anwar of blessed memory came back to me and no matter how hard I tried to extricate it from myself and throw it away in one of the public trash cans I could not do it. I tried and tried to soften the glottal `ayyin, the way my mother had in her childhood, because of the teacher and the looks from the other children, but strangers passing by just rooted me to the spot; I tried to soften the pharyngeal fricative het and pronounce it gutturally, I tried to make the tsaddi sound less like an "s" and I tried to get rid of that glottal Iraqi quf and pronounce it like "k," but the effort failed. And policemen started to head assertively towards me on the streets of Jerusalem, pointing at me and my black beard with a threatening finger, whispering among themselves in their vehicles, stopping me and inquiring as to my name and my identity. And for every passing policeman on the street I would want to stop walking and pull out my identity card and point out the nationality line and tell them, as if I were revealing a secret that would absolve me of tremendous guilt: "Ana min al yahoud, I'm a Jew."But suddenly my identity card started to vanish precisely when I was very much in need of it. And thus, every evening and every morning the police would arrest me without anything in my wallet that would agree to protect me. Then at home I would find the identity card rolled up between two NIS 20 bills, or in my pocket outside my wallet I would find my driver's license as though I had taken it out for some reason, or in my knapsack among the papers my military reserve service card would appear as though I had forgotten it there unintentionally. But when the policemen stopped in front of me I couldn't find any document at all that would tell them about my past and my future. And then I would start to make phone calls, telling the policeman, look, it's only since yesterday that my accent has been Arab like this, heavy like this, and it isn't even Palestinian, it's Iraqi, and you don't look to me like you spoke Yiddish in your parents' home yourself, maybe you learned it somewhere outside, maybe your own grandfather had an accent like mine and listen, I'm calling friends, my friends, listen to what a beautiful accent they have, Hebrew as Hebrew should be spoken, without any accent, and if these are my friends, then who am I.

But all of a sudden my Ashkenazi friends weren't answering me at all, they wouldn't hear the plea of my ringing and only in the evening or the next day would they call me back, ask what I wanted and refuse to identify my voice. And I'd remain standing there facing the policemen all alone and start to call my friends whose parents were from Aleppo or Tripoli or Tunisia saying maybe their Hebrew is not perfect, it isn't so pure, but nevertheless it's better than mine. And they'd answer right away, not hesitating at the sound of the ringing, and suddenly they too had such a heavy Arab accent and they'd be listening to some meandering oud in the background or some persistent qanoun, and they'd greet me with "ahlan bik" and call me "ya habibi" and ask me "ashlonek" and take their leave of me with "salamatek" and what could the policemen do, how could they believe me, after all of my friends had abandoned me, that I was an Israelite and not an Ishmaelite. And then they'd check me slowly, rummaging in my clothes, going over my body with metal detectors, stripping me of words and thoughts in their thorough silence, searching deep in the layers of my skin for a grudge, seeking an explosive belt, an explosive belt in my heart, eager to defuse any suspicious object. And when the policemen presented themselves to me in pairs, the one would say to his companion a few minutes into their examination, look, he's circumcised, he really is a Jew, this Arab, and the other one would say, an Arab is also circumcised, and explosive belts don't care about circumcision, and they would continue their search. And really, during the time when I left my body to them explosive belts began to be born on my heart, swelling and refusing to be defused, thundering and thundering. But as they were not made of steel or gunpowder they succeeded in evading the mechanical detectors.

In the end, when the policemen had left me alone, I would continue on my way from the beautiful Belgian Consulate building and the circle at the top of Jabotinsky Street and walk down Marcus Street to the Jerusalem Theater. There I would wait to see some American film plentifully endowed with Oscars, but suddenly there was no theater at the end of the street, and suddenly it wasn't Marcus Street, it was a street with an Arabic name, and the house had gone back to being Arab, and so did the Belgian Consulate, and the people in the yards, family by family, were Arabs, not only construction workers, not only street cleaners and renovators.

2. And I would start to walk the streets of Katamon and the streets of Talbieh and the streets of Baqa and instead of seeing the wealthy Jerusalemites who had gathered there in the spacious homes, and instead of reading there on the street signs "Kovshei Katamon" and "Yordei Hasira," I'd once again see the wealthy Palestinians, and they were the way they had been before the 1948 war, as if there had never been a 1948 war. I see them and they are strolling in the yards among the fruit trees and picking fruit as though the newspapers had not told them that the trees would wither, that the land would be filled with refugees. And it was as though time had gone through another history, a different history, and I remembered that I had asked my mother why we talked history so much, enough history, we've had enough of history, because this history binds me, leaving nothing inside me, and also nothing inside you.

And really, we have become so fixed in our history, and extinguished, but here for a moment history has followed a different trajectory. And I would walk through the wealthy Palestinians' streets, and I thought that perhaps they would speak to me respectfully, not like the policemen. I hoped that I would be able to tell them how much I had read about the writer and educator Khalil al Sakakini, and how much I wanted to make friends with his grandchildren, and I would walk among them, approaching their yards and I do not succeed in mingling with them because all I have at my disposal is Hebrew with an Arabic accent and my Arabic, which doesn't come from my home but from the army, is suddenly mute, strangled from my throat, cursing itself without uttering a word, hanging in the suffocating air of the refuges of my soul, hiding from family members behind the shutters of Hebrew. And all the time, when I tried to speak to them in the small, halting vocabulary of the Arabic I knew, what came out was Hebrew with an Arabic accent, until they thought that I was ridiculing them, and had my accent not been so Iraqi, had it not been for that, they would have been certain that I was making fun of them.

But like that, with the accent, they were confused, they thought I was making fun of the Iraqis, the Saddam Husseins, or maybe some old Iraqi who had kept his accent but forgotten his language. And I didn't make friends there even though I wanted to, and I remembered how I had once heard an uncle of mine say of those Arabs of the wealthy neighborhoods of Jerusalem, they are effendis, they wear Western suits and tarboushes on their heads, and I heard the word effendi

at that time with a kind of scorn, even though now I can remember that he hadn't said it that way and I had heard the scorn as though I were some Palmachnik in sandals and shorts who scorns the Arab landowners and praises his own holy socialism and that of all the Zionists. They are effendis, my uncle told me, and he meant it respectfully, but I had lost their language and they didn't know my language and between us remained the distance of the police forces and the generations.

On my way back home, only the bus drivers were accepting of my accent, knowing that it is impossible to expect what the accent of a passenger who boards a bus in Jerusalem might be. And my heart did not know I had returned to my heart, he didn't know, and my fears didn't know they had all returned to me, they did not know.

3. And thus my voice was replaced by my grandfather's voice, and suddenly those streets that had become so accustomed to his death and his disappearance and his absence from them began to hear his voice again. And suddenly that beautiful voice, which had been entirely in my past, started coming out of me and not as a beggar and not asking for crumbs, but truly my voice, my voice strong and clear. And the streets of Jerusalem that had grown accustomed to my silence, to our silence, had a very hard time with the speech, and would silence the voice, gradually telling it careful, telling me careful, telling me I am alien telling me my silences are enough. And despite my fear, and even though this voice was foreign from the distance of two generations of forgetting, I spoke all my words in that accent, because there was speech in me that wanted to come out and the words would change on me as they came out of the depths of my throat. And a stranger who didn't know me would have thought that I was a loyal grandson, and would not have known how much I had piled non-memory on memory over the years, and would not have guessed how much my memory had blurred and how many times, how many, many times, I had not made the connection to my grandfather on my lips.

And when I returned home from that first walk in the streets with my new accent and the policeman's searches of my body, my life's companion wondered about my voice, and as she spoke to me and advised me to stop she was infected by my transformation and her lips

connected to a jumble of her father's Yemenite Arabic accent and her mother's Istambouli Ladino accent. And a few days later, she began coming home from work with reports that there was anxiety going around the different departments and a small plague was spreading among the people at her office and the old accents that were hoped to have vanished are coming out again. And a small item in the margins of one of the major newspapers revealed that the security authorities are keeping track of who has been infected by whom with the forbidden accents, and there is already concern that the country will be filled with Arabs, many, many Arabs, and therefore they have decided to reinforce the radio with announcers whose Hebrew is so pure that we will feel alien in our speech. And shortly thereafter, my life's companion was explaining to me in an unsteady voice, one moment veering north to the Straits of the Bosporus and one minute veering south towards the Gulf of Aden, that this dybbuk was also haunting Ashkenazim. For them, the change would develop more slowly, she prophesized, because their children were convinced that their parents' accent and their grandparents' accent had originally been American, and they have less concrete memories of their old speech. But in a little while the Polish and the Hungarian and the Rumanian and the German and the Ukrainian accents will be heard again in the streets, and this is what is most feared by those who are responsible for public security, their fear being that they will no longer be able to find announcers to send to the armies of the radio and teachers will not be found to instruct our children in the secret of the correct accent.

And despite her prophecies of a huge wave of change, my parents stood staunchly against me and against the plague, remembering the years of effort they had invested to acquire their clean accent, and they began to hint strongly to me to cease and desist, reminding me of my plans to study. And they would ask me earnestly what could I do, how I could cover up my longings, my longings so suddenly in this voice that is so foreign to me, and I am so sorry and regretful that it is coming out of me, but I can't, I can't stop it just like that in a single moment, because there is no barrier inside me and no brakes. If you persist in this speech that keeps coming out of you, you will distance yourself from the scholarships, said my father, and he was very, very right, if you don't come back to our plain speech, what will become of you, said my mother, and she was very, very right. In all my interviews all the professors and the women professors were very

surprised at my accent, trying to find a different speech in me, something more like university speech, more academic, even though the words were almost the same words, perhaps a bit more broken. How will you go on if you speak like this, they said plaintively, and they are very concerned about my future, and neither my heart's ruined tranquillity nor my heart's broken stones nor my heart's sharp corners could help lift the decree from me. But during those days of their worry my ears were not opened to hearing them, and my language became deaf and their accent became alien to me and distant, and I took pleasure as cycles of the moon went by and my life companion's prophesies were being fulfilled and the streets of Jerusalem were changing and my own parents were alone in their non-transformation. And I revealed to her ear that I had started to write my stories in Arabic letters, and soon the important departments would be shocked again. And some days later she came home to tell me that the department heads had laughed and said, let him write like that. Let him write stories that only he can read, his parents or his children will not read them and our children will not fall into the danger and, if he applies, we will give him all the government prizes for Arabic literature without having read a word in his books.

And of course the department heads were right, and my wife began to prophesize the future in Ladino proverbs, telling me this proverb my mother had used and though I don't remember how she said it in her language, I do remember the accent. This is the last visit of health before death, she would whisper and then begin to explain, these are death throes and not the resurrection and in the highest of the departments they already know, they've decided that it is possible to relax, they will assign job slots for correct Hebrew speech and everyone will think back to the source of his income, earning his living and his family's penury, and then regular Hebrew will return as if there had never been a plague.

4. And my heart began to give indications in my voices, saying this is my voice and this is not my voice, this is a lamed coming out of my mouth and this is an alien quf, alien to my heart. And I would slow down the pace of my thoughts, in order to think, to think about my thoughts and not only about my thoughts, but I had no time and I would scatter words to the wind like the sea salt that certainly no one is scattering into the sea. And my grandfather would speak to me,

asking me in my voice whether there is any end to this story, and why is this history of mine mixed up with yours, how I have come to trouble your life, I am the generation of the desert and how have you arisen to renew me. You are the generation for which we waited so that there would be no difference between its past and the past of its teachers, because our past was already very painful and we remained in the desert for the birds of prey to eat us for your sake, so that you would not remember me, so that you would not be hurting like me and how is it that your teeth are again biting into my words and where, the districts of Jerusalem are different, there are no teahouses, there is no Tigris River flowing through the city for pity's sake, but I did not meet my death in Jerusalem, nor in the city of my birth, but rather in the desert between them, a great desert of silence. Build extensions in your heart, my grandson, he would say to me, make many departments, and lodge me in one of the hidden departments, and live in the rest of them. Or move into the silence department, because the change that you thought is occurring is too simple, and what is going to change if a different accent is spoken? Will I live again, will you live my new life? Enough of the streets for you, go to your parents, my accent will not convince them, they know it and have already raised the flags of many revolts. Perhaps silence will put the present's fear of the past and of the future into their hearts. And why don't you show them your story, perhaps that way they will wake up, said my grandfather from the dead, almost making me swear an oath.

And I started to measure my silences, this is a day's silence, this is a week's silence, this is a month's silence, well-framed inside the walls of my house, and no mouth opens and no window opens and the scenes of the profane do not come in, but there is nothing sacred either, and nothing is subtracted and nothing is added. And everything is the voice of my silences, my silences are many, many silenced words, and I am not being, and I am not becoming, and there is no end to the story and there is no before there was the story, there is no beginning. And I was silent for more and more time, until my parents would say speak, if you don't speak how will you get a scholarship, how will you continue your studies and what will you do with your life, and where are your smiles and where have they gone into hiding, speak, speak in any accent because the fear of silence has descended upon us.

5. There is no Tigris flowing through Jerusalem, and its murmur does not silence the borders that rise up against us, the borders that separate myself from myself. I am not here not there, not East not West, not my voice now and not the voices of my past, and what will happen in the end. I walk through the streets mute and also somewhat deaf. This time only my appearance worries the police, my thick beard and my stubbornness not to utter a word. Again the month of Tammuz is waning in me and despite the heat I wrap myself in coats to cover up the explosives belt of my heart. And thus out of the policemen's devotion to duty I am brought to the jail and my parents come after me, to see their son and where he is being taken.

I stay silent in front of my parents, and how they will respond, I stay silent in front of my parents and give them all my stories that I had concealed from them, hinting here I have written about you, Mother, and here about you, Father. Here I have written poems of opposition to Hebrew in Hebrew. I give them many more signs, because I have no other language to write in, out of so much shame you have not bequeathed me anything. And these times prohibit me poetry and force me to sing, and while they are crowding in on me, crowds and crowds, crowding in on you too, and the language that has become my language is commanding me to pour my soul in it, to be an empty flute for its gusts, until together we produce a sound, and together we would become nay – an arab flute, we would be disguised as a different language, an absent language. And this really is the same story, recurring over and over again, how many stories do I have, Mother, Father, how many stories does a person have? Each time he tries to tell the story in different words, each time he tries to resolve the unsolved story a bit differently, and aren't you identifying your own story here, nevertheless your silence has told me a little. Look, now I've tried to write the story in the Arabic accent, but what has come of it. Look where we are meeting. Take them, read my story, Mother Father, read all my stories that I have hidden from you for many years, you too are the same exile, the same silence, the same alienation between heart and body and between thought and speech, perhaps you will know how the plot will be resolved.

And the first speech my parents uttered was a denial, Father said this is not our son and this is not the beard we have raised, said Mother, and where, we don't have this accent, they said in

chorus to the officials, he had nowhere to inherit this accent from, not from the nuclear family, his grandfather Anwar died before he was born, our son wasn't there.

And the second speech they uttered was the implication that if thou doest not well we shall go home from the jail disappointed in the cycle of generations and if thou doest well and drop the stories, this story, this speech and this silence and speak to us in our language, we will stay here with you until you are judged fit to go free, until all of us together are judged.

And my parents did not know that I had returned to their heart, they did not know, and they did not know that all of their fears had returned to me, they did not know.

-Almog Behar

Translated from the Hebrew by Vivian Eden

שחור על גבי שחור

בְּמִבְטָא כָּבֵד אָהֲבָה אוֹתִי סָבְתָא שֶׁלִּי
וְדִבְּרָה אֵלַי דִּבּוּרִים תֵּימָנִיִּים
שֶׁאַף פַּעַם לֹא הֵבַנְתִּי,
וּבְתוֹר יַלְדָּה
אֲנִי זוֹכֶרֶת
אֵיךְ פָּחַדְתִּי לְהִשָּׁאֵר אִתָּהּ לְבַד
מֵחֲשַׁשׁ שֶׁלֹּא אָבִין אֶת הַלָּשׁוֹן בְּפִיהָ
שֶׁהִמְשִׁיכָה לְנַגֵּן אֵלַי בְּחִיּוּךְ,
וַאֲנִי לֹא הֵבַנְתִּי
מִלָּה אַחַת שֶׁאָמְרָה
וְהַצְּלִילִים נִשְׁמְעוּ רְחוֹקִים רְחוֹקִים
גַּם כְּשֶׁדִּבְּרָה אֵלַי קָרוֹב.
וּפַעַם אַחַת
אֲנִי זוֹכֶרֶת,
קָנְתָה לִי פְּרִילִי אֲנָנָס
וְאַחֲרֵי שֶׁנִּקַּבְתִּי בָּאֲגוּדָל
אֶת עֲטִיפַת הָאָלוּמִינְיוּם הַדַּקָּה
וְשָׂתִיתִי הַכֹּל,
רָצִיתִי לוֹמַר תּוֹדָה
אֲבָל לֹא יָדַעְתִּי
בְּאֵיזוֹ שָׂפָה צָרִיךְ
וְיָצָאתִי לַגִּנָּה הַגְּדוֹלָה
קָטַפְתִּי פֶּרַח
וְהִגַּשְׁתִּי לָהּ אוֹתוֹ,
מְבֻיֶּשֶׁת
אֲנִי זוֹכֶרֶת
כַּמָּה מְבוּכָה עָמְדָה בֵּינֵינוּ
שֶׁל דָּם אֶחָד
וּשְׁתֵּי לְשׁוֹנוֹת אִלְּמוֹת
וְהִיא שָׂטְפָה אֶת גְּבִיעַ הַפְּרִילִי
בְּשִׁתִּיקָה
מִלְּאָה בּוֹ מַיִם
וְהִנִּיחָה בּוֹ אֶת הַפֶּרַח שֶׁנָּתַתִּי לָהּ.
אַף פַּעַם לֹא הֵבַנְתִּי
מִלָּה מִמַּה שֶׁאָמְרָה
סָבְתָא שֶׁלִּי,
אֲבָל אֶת הַיָּדַיִם שֶׁלָּהּ הֵבַנְתִּי
אֶת הַבָּשָׂר שֶׁלָּהּ הֵבַנְתִּי
לַמְרוֹת שֶׁאַף פַּעַם
לֹא הֵבִינָה בֶּאֱמֶת
אֶת הַמִּלִּים שֶׁאָמַרְתִּי
וְרַק אָהֲבָה אֶת הַגּוּף הַקָּטָן שֶׁלִּי
שֶׁל הַבַּת שֶׁל הַבַּת שֶׁלָּהּ.

וְלִפְעָמִים הַלֵּב מְבַקֵּשׁ לְעַצְמוֹ
דְּבָרִים מוּזָרִים
כְּמוֹ לִלְמֹד תֵּימָנִית
וְלַחְזֹר לַקֶּבֶר שֶׁלָּהּ
לְהַצְמִיד שְׂפָתַיִם לְתוֹךְ הָאֲדָמָה
וְלִצְעֹק פְּנִימָה
אֶת כֹּל מַה שֶּׁהָיָה לַיַּלְדָּה הַהִיא לוֹמַר
וּבְעִקָּר לְהַזְהִיר אוֹתָהּ
מֵהַפֶּרַח שֶׁהֵבֵאתִי לָהּ
פֶּרַח מָלֵא בִּנְמָלִים.

-עדי קיסר

איך עושים עירקי

אז איך עושים "עירקי"?
ראשית המרכיבים:
קחו אדם, רצוי רגיש,
הכינו מעט עבר, אין צרך בעתיד.
הוסיפו בדיחה אחת או שתים
בעניני פיג'מה או פסים.
קחו ארץ שאינה במפת הידע שלכם.
הוסיפו ספר היסטוריה מחוק,
לפחות בחלקים גדולים.

עכשיו אתם מוכנים לבשול.
הוציאו את האדם מארץ מוצאו.
הרתיחו אותו היטב במיץ של ערכים ואידיאלים.
כל זה לאחר השריה טובה בציפיות רבות.
רחצו אותו היטב וסחטו את עברו.
וכשיקפץ מתוך סיר הלחץ שנוצר סביבו בארצו
הוא יהיה מוכן לשלב הבא.
העבירו אותו לאזור אחר, רצוי במהירות שלא יבין מה קרה לו.
כשיגיע חטאו אותו היטב (רצוי בדי.די.טי.)
טבלו אותו בבדיחה אחת טובה על פיג'מה (כדי שלא ישכח)
אתם כמעט מגיעים למטרה...
עכשיו הניחו לו למצא את מקומו בסיר הלחץ החדש.
הוא יכנס למסחר - כי תעסוקה אחרת לא תהיה לו.
הוא יסתגל לסביבה ויקשיח.
טעמו יזכיר לכם את טעמו של התבשיל "היהודי"
המכר לכם מספר בשול אחר.
אם לא הצלחתם הפעם נסו שנית.
זה חיב לעבד!

-יוסי אלפי