

# **IMAGINING INDEPENDENCE PARK**

by

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“Doing it in the park,  
Doing it after Dark, oh, yeah”

The Blackbyrds, “Rock Creek Park,” *City Life* (Fantasy Records, 1975)

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In memory of Nir Katz and Liz Troubishi

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## **Introduction**

### **From Zionist Site of Memory to Queer Counterpublics**

#### **Sites of Collective Memories**

Following the Second Intifada, Sarit Rosen introduced an art installation, titled *Holy-Land*, which intertwined competing national narratives; on the one hand, the Jewish-Israeli narrative of belonging to the land of Israel, and on the other hand, the Palestinian narrative of ownership of the same piece of land (Fig. 1). She chose to confront this violent dispute by showing the multilayered history of one particular site: Independence Park in Tel-Aviv.<sup>1</sup> The park, which commemorates the Jewish soldiers who died in Independence War (1948), was built on a Muslim Cemetery (constructed in 1902). In her installation, next to a model of the statue of the broken-wing bird, which was erected by the city to salute the pilots who died in combat, Rosen laid a model of the cemetery, as if to remind visitors of the “forgotten” or “buried” history of the “other” in Israeli society, the Palestinians. By doing so, she brought to the fore the Palestinian narrative and the question of collective memory, that is, who remembers what and how such memory is constructed and maintained. In reviews on Rosen’s exhibition, some mention that the park is also a gay men cruising site, but, alas, they do not delve into that subject.<sup>2</sup> In a sense, by pushing forward the narrative of the Palestinian “other,” Rosen and also the critics of her work push back the narrative of another “other”, the gay one. In this dissertation, I will show how Independence Park contains different historical narratives, including queer ones, and how collective memories are constructed in the process of imagining national and sexual communities. I will show here how writers and artists use the park to structure a site of memory in order to reinforce or deconstruct national or homosexual identities. The writers and artists who are at the center of this dissertation imagine a queer space as part of a greater project of imagining a queer community, and, in turn, in an endless dialectical process, are also shaped by it. Since the defining characteristic of gay men is their sexual desire for other men, many Israeli

representations of them are set in Independence Park, the most famous cruising site for gay men in Israel (there the scope of this dissertation is limited to representations of gay men).<sup>3</sup> Independence Park thus becomes a symbolic space through which the local gay community—especially gay men—imagines itself while being imagined by it (through the non-gay media, for example). Since the park is in Tel-Aviv, “The First Hebrew City,” it is often constructed, not only in opposition to heterosexuality, but also in opposition to the heteronormativity of Zionism, becoming a site of struggle between the national symbolic and the queer counterpublics, that is, a struggle over the Israeli collective memory.



Fig. 1 Sarit Rosen's *Holy-Land*

Coined by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, “collective memory” is a concept that enables us to consider memory not only as a personal, individual, and psychological phenomenon, but also as a shared entity that unites groups and cultures.<sup>4</sup> Halbwachs argues that memory is an active past which is determined by the thought patterns, norms, presuppositions, and experiences of the group that narrates its history; memory is formed by a dynamic narration of foundational events—and a disregard for others—that suits the group’s needs in the present. Functionalistic representations of the past—in the form of rituals, literary and visual texts—produce the collective memory. Novels, newspapers, films, art, and historiography are technologies of memory, which enable groups to imagine themselves as communities.

“Imagined communities” is a concept coined by Benedict Anderson. He argues that a nation is a community constructed by a group of people who perceive themselves to be members of that group. This process of becoming a nation is fueled by imagination: the members of the group, who will never know most of their fellow-members, see themselves as part of a larger community which shares the same collective memories, language, culture, religion, and territory. This comradeship became possible in the last two centuries, Anderson argues, because of “print-capitalism”: historiography became popular due to increasing literacy and the circulations of printed materials, especially in the form of newspapers and novels. Through print media and other widely available artifacts (the establishment of museums at the same time, for example), individuals can identify themselves with a larger collective.

In relation to Anderson and Halbwachs, Pierre Nora shows how technologies of memory enable communities to imagine themselves as nations; he argues that memory—which went through a complex process of bureaucratization and institutionalization by politicians, academics, writers, and artists in the last two centuries—is an artificial prop that maintains collective identities. In this context, Nora’s concept of “*lieux de memoire*” is significant; he argues that particular chosen “sites of memory” not only house the collective symbolic past, but also take part in its imagination:

These *lieux de memoire* are fundamentally remains the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that

calls out for memory because it has abandoned it. They make their appearance by virtue of the deritualization of our world – producing, manifesting, establishing, constructing, decreeing, and maintaining by artifice and by will a society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal, one that inherently values the new over the ancient, the future over the past. Museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders - these are the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity [...] They mark the rituals of a society without ritual; integral particularities in a society that levels particularity; signs of distinction and of group in a society that tends to recognize individuals only as identical and equal.<sup>5</sup>

Sites of memory transport the past into everyday lives and become foci for the collective constructed imagination. Memory technocrats—that is, the agents of the group—channel desired narratives through sites of memory, and imprint them in the nation’s “consciousness.” Collective memory, then, is the mechanism that a group retains in order to remind itself of certain past events; these monopolized events, which are associated with particular symbolic spaces, are politically mobilized to serve various agendas of world-making.<sup>6</sup>

Lauren Berlant argues that sites of memory are loaded with “national symbolism”; it is a discursive strategy by which “the accident of birth within a geographic/political boundary transforms individuals into subjects of a collectively-held history”.<sup>7</sup> The “national symbolic” generates a sense of collective past and a collective destiny: as a technology of memory, the national symbolic conceptualizes an imagined and imaginary space where collective consciousness is discursively constructed. It is also an imagined space whose analysis can reveal and disclose the powers imbedded in hegemony: “the national symbolic is there for *use*, for exploitation, to construct a subjective dependency on what look like the a priori structures of power”.<sup>8</sup> The national symbolic, however, can also create tremendous anxiety in subjects at the possibility of its own dissolution as an imagined entity; the agents of the “national symbolism” fiercely protective of its coherence against any revelation of inadequacy.

### **Counterpublics and Queer Sites of Memory**

National anxieties surface because different groups—both within the nation and outside of it—have competing agendas. Sites of memory can thus hold simultaneously



contradictory and conflicting memories. Michael Warner claims that public spaces are sometimes “structured by alternative dispositions”; that is, minority groups and sub-cultures imagine themselves alongside and against the national symbolic. Warner dubs the spaces that are related to such sub-cultures as “counterpublics”:

A counterpublic, against the background of public sphere, enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theater, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like.<sup>9</sup>

In this sense, a counterpublic is a technology of counter-memory: it enables a different imagination from the national one. As in the case of national sites of memory, performative participations in a counterpublic are means “by which its members’ identities are formed and transformed”.<sup>10</sup> The sub-culture’s collective memory turns at this point to counter-memory, which Michel Foucault defines as a competing narrative of the past composed of memories that exceed that of the imagined national community.<sup>11</sup>

Warner uses gay cruising sites, where men seek sex with other men, as an example of such counterpublics. These are sites that

Work to elaborate new worlds of culture and social relations in which gender and sexuality can be lived, including forms of intimate association, vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment, erotic practices, and relations of care and pedagogy. It can therefore make possible new forms of gendered or sexual citizenship, meaning active participation in collective world making through publics of sex and gender.<sup>12</sup>

Warner describes here a queer site of memory that enables the rise of collective consciousness. The idea of counterpublic formation as a process of world-making is extended further in an article coauthored with Berlant. They describe cruising as a

World-making project, where world, like public, differs from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as birthright [...] world-making, as much in the mode of dirty talk as of print-mediated representation, is dispersed through incommensurate registers, by definition unrealizable as community or identity.

As the process of imagining communities, world-making enables individuals to see themselves as part of a larger group with a shared past and culture. Counter-memory sites, such as dance clubs, bathhouses, and cruising parks become central to the self-imagining of a queer community. In their article, then, Berlant and Warner put forth a compelling statement of defence of the social networks and cultures created through public sex.

### **Writing Space**

Memory agents also cement queer collective imagination by producing texts about homosexual experiences, such as cruising; in so doing, they often emphasize the spaces—that is, the queer sites of memory—in which these experiences take place. Henri Lefebvre suggests in *The Production of Space* that space, like collective memory, is not “natural” or preordained, but produced as discourse by society. It can thus be seen as the inscription of history, power, culture, language, and subjectivity on a given site. For Lefebvre, space is *not* a “form or container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it,” but “social morphology”.<sup>13</sup> Society constructs its own spaces, marked by visible and invisible divisions. In turn, as a related effect, the space also changes society in a dynamic and ongoing process. Since space is a discourse, Lefebvre argues, it can be “decoded, can be read” in order to understand the forces that take part in its construction.<sup>14</sup> He locates three, at times overlapping, areas that enable us to understand the different ways in which space is produced by society: spatial practices, representations of space, and representational space. The first deals with “the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation”.<sup>15</sup> It investigates the social and economic situation in a given space. The second, representations of space, refers to the tangible structure of a place. The third, which explores “the clandestine or underground side of social life,” deals with how the space is imagined and represented by memory technocrats. In *Imagining Independence Park*, I mainly analyze Lefebvre’s third category, but I also give attention to the practices and physical plan of Tel-Aviv’s biggest gay cruising site.

Before I elaborate on the struggle between the national symbolic, as it is imagined by the memory technocrats, and the queer counterpublics, I would like to survey recent

theoretical trends in queer spatial studies, especially studies that explores the ways in which sexual minority groups use public space, and the ways in which they think about such uses politically in terms of power and subversion. Before the 1990s, most studies of queer spaces were sociological, analyzing the sexual practices of gay men, their customs, modes of communication, and reasons for participating in such stigmatized activities.<sup>16</sup> Following the rise of queer theory in the mid-1990s, studies from various disciplines started to point out the subversive potential of homosexual sex in public and the ways it challenges normative concepts of sexuality, such as the liberal separation between public and private.<sup>17</sup> These studies—and my dissertation contributes to this ongoing academic conversation—explore the ways in which sexuality is historically and culturally produced; *Imagining Independence Park* addresses questions regarding the importance of sex for sexual minorities and the significance of the places in which it is performed. This project also examines the role of space in the processes of imagining communities and constructing identities: the discursive powers that are activated on space as well as on sexuality. Both concepts will be examined in the context of Zionism as a national movement that, since the end of the nineteenth century, promoted a heterosexualization of the Jewish body by means of territorialism. Independence Park, in this case, will also be considered as a heterotopic site, in Foucault’s sense of the term: a site that challenges Zionism and the attempt to masculinize Jewish men.

In his article “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault argues that, against the nineteenth century focus on history, the twentieth century would move toward a spatialization of thought and experience:

The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world. The nineteenth century found its essential mythological resources in the second principle of thermodynamics. The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.<sup>18</sup>

This epistemological shift opens an alternative interpretive mode; against historicism, Foucault suggests developing new ways, and methods for thinking about social life. The characteristic spaces of the modern world, he argues, are “heterotopias”: socially produced spaces that are “something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted”.<sup>19</sup> Heterotopias, then, are spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions and work against the master-narratives. These are spaces of otherness, which are neither here nor there, for example, spaces that are not entirely public and not entirely private; places such as the army barracks and the prison, the cemetery and the hammam, and, as I argue in this project, also gay cruising sites.

Foucault describes heterotopias as sites of communities which are visibly excluded and which share experiences and understandings of a particular spatiality. For him, these spaces are “different or even opposite” to all others.<sup>20</sup> In *Imagining Independence Park*, I would like to explore representations of such a heterotopic “counter-site”: a gay cruising park which captured the imagination of writers, filmmakers, singers, photographers, journalists, and artists, and which was pivotal in shaping the Israeli gay community before and after the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1988.<sup>21</sup> Despite its centrality, and the numerous representations of it in different media, academics have given little attention to—indeed have almost ignored—the park, the activities that take place in it, and representations of such activities, especially cruising, the search for situational sex.<sup>22</sup> Academic scholarship on homosexuality in Israel has mainly focused—and still focuses today—on other, more respectable issues, such as, the changing juridical status of the LGBT community, or the experience of gay Kibbutz members and soldiers in the IDF. Following Foucault’s suggestion to write a counter-history from a spatial perspective, *Imagining Independence Park* shows how Israeli gay men construct a safe space that tells alternative narratives to Zionism as well as Judaism; it writes sex into the current Israeli discourse about homosexuality, a discourse that has largely ignored the desire that is so integral a part of gay identity. This project uses literary texts, photographs, and art installations to explore the strategies and practices that gay Israelis adopt in order to both assimilate into mainstream society and also to distinguish themselves from it and from its master-

narratives. I analyze here diverse cultural representations of Independence Park, theorizing the ways in which the local queer community defines itself through the question of space, of “their” space, which is also part of the Israeli space. This dissertation writes the history of the park and introduces a new way to think about the history of the LGBT community in Israel: cruising as a tool for community building. With the help of comparisons to American and European cultures, this dissertation examines how, when facing the threat of HIV/AIDS, gay Israeli men ascribe new meanings to their spatial environment, their own bodies, and other men. This study also contributes to the growing body of scholarship on queer community building by showing how sexual narratives are constructed within a community that sees itself as peripheral to western gay culture. *Imagining Independence Park* discusses cultural constructions of self and communal identity as complex outcomes of diverse cultural influences—Jewish, Israeli, and also western homosexuality—vis-à-vis ideological, historical, political, social, and religious forces.

### **Queer Palimpsests: Conflicting Memories of Independence Park**

For Charles Baudelaire, the figure of the *flâneur* is a symbol of modern urban life; this nineteenth century figure is a man who strolls the city, enjoys what it has to offer, while maintaining a distant relation to it. According to Baudelaire, the *flâneur* is a privileged man who has time and ability to admire

The eternal beauty and the astonishing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained in the tumult of human liberty. He gazes at the landscape of the great city, landscapes of stone, now swathed in the mist, now struck in full face by the sun. He enjoys handsome equipages, proud horses, the spit and polish of the grooms, the skilful handling by the page boys, the smooth rhythmical gait of the women, the beauty of the children, full of the joy of life and proud as peacocks of their pretty clothes; in short, life universal.<sup>23</sup>

The *flâneur* is in search of experience, not knowledge. He is indecisive, unsure of where to go, since he has the ability to choose. In his 1929 essay, Walter Benjamin is fascinated by Baudelaire’s figure. In Benjamin’s understanding of the *flâneur*, the stroller, who does not run from one tourist site to another as if he were a foreign traveler, is a local. The

*flaneur* does not look for the major sights and the tourist attractions, but for private moments.<sup>24</sup> Benjamin's *flaneur* who knows the city well and is familiar with its history as a lived experience sees more than the tourist. He views the city as a palimpsest; he sees its constant shuffling: the destructions and the products of rebuilding. The *flaneur* lives in the urban present while acknowledging the past. He sees the city's different layers simultaneously, and the private experiences attached to it.

In *Backward Glances*, Mark Turner offers a queer reading of Benjamin's *flaneur*. He criticizes Benjamin's disregard of gender and sexuality in this forms of leisurely walking; Benjamin does not pay attention, Turner argues, to female strollers or to homosexual cruisers.<sup>25</sup> Following Roland Barthes and Edmund White, who suggest that cruising is the *flaneur*'s essence or its most successful application, Turner argues that, like the *flaneur*, "the cruiser writes his own text of the city, but it may be a text not all of us can read equally".<sup>26</sup> The cruiser is an anonymous wanderer who wants to see and be seen, but not by everyone, and not in all streets. Turner suggests that writing narratives of cruising, and making them available to a wider audience, "disrupt[s] and disturb[s]" the master-narratives of history; it offers "possible, contingent ways of reading the past in order to engage with the present in ways that do not rely on normative ideas and behaviors. Indeed, to queer history is to challenge, undermine, refute and reconfigure the very notion of norms in history".<sup>27</sup> I follow Turner in arguing that the writers and artists who represent Independence Park and the activities in it challenge the Zionist master-narratives about "Jewish space." Like the *flaneur*, who views the city as a palimpsest and is aware of its past, these writers and artists remind us, for example, that the park is built on a Muslim cemetery, and that Zionism failed to "cure" the effeminate diasporic-Jews who continue to haunt the "First Hebrew City."

Independence Park not only tells us the story of Zionism, it also tells us the stories of the "invisible" individuals and groups which were marginalized and excluded from the national master-narrative. In what follows, I will consider the park from different historical angles while taking into account perspectives which were ignored in the past. Seeing the park as a palimpsest, and telling the history of the park's cruising community, open possibilities for understanding the different ways minority groups work vis-à-vis the hegemony of the state.

### **1950s: The National Symbolic Years**

Independence Park, which is located on the shore of north Tel-Aviv, was open to the public on November 2, 1952. It was the 35th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, a British statement that supported the Zionist agenda by recognizing Palestine as the Jewish National Home. The opening of the park on that day was not a coincidence, since the guests of the inauguration party received a souvenir booklet which narrated the history of the site as the story of making a Jewish homeland (Fig. 2). The booklet stresses that after the evacuation of the British army base and the destruction of the Muslim cemetery, the 32,000 acres of land commemorate the soldiers who enabled Jewish sovereignty. By the same symbolic token, the opening of the park was announced on February 23, 1950, which was Israel's third Independence Day; the park's name then also celebrates the victory of the 1948 war, which is known in Hebrew as Independence War. The booklet makes it clear who was needed to be evacuated in order to establish an independent Jewish space: Palestinians owners and the British Army. The text justifies the new Israeli ownership of the land by stressing the legal procedures that took place: after negotiations, trials, and compensatory payments as a result of the city expropriation of the "Abu Gazelle Lands," Tel-Aviv became "pure" or "whole" as a Jewish space. The city newsletter of the time, which covers the announcement of the park's opening, sheds light on what "Jewish space" means for the city officials: the mayor says in his announcement speech that it is a Jewish victory over "foreign powers" which prevented the development of the Land of Israel.<sup>28</sup> It is important to note here that in 1909 the founders of Tel-Aviv not only named the city after Theodor Herzl's 1902 utopian novel *Altneuland*, in which the "father of Zionism" imagined a Jewish State, but also dubbed it "The First Hebrew City". This nickname signifies the city's status as an emblem, even a hallmark, of the Zionist agenda of territorialization; the national movement's supporters imagined a Jewish space populated and governed by Jews, and Tel-Aviv as a model of such a settlement in the Fatherland.<sup>29</sup> Independence Park, in this case, is the urban ideal of Zionism: the nature-like place that marks the realization of the Zionist dream of homecoming. Indeed, in the park's opening ceremony, one of the city officials claimed that "our brothers, who are still in the diaspora, now look up to us".<sup>30</sup> In a 1955 interview,

Avraham Karavan, the city head-gardener who was also the park's landscape architect, described his inspiration: "there is no doubt that the forcefulness of Israel's revival required suitable representation in a work that bears the title Independence"<sup>31</sup>.



Fig. 2 detail from the booklet

Even before Independence Park was established as a national symbol, the site on which it was built was already seen as part of the national master-narrative. Haim Arlozoroff, one of the leaders of the Yishuv and the head of the political department of the Jewish Agency, was murdered in 1933 near the Muslim cemetery. His murder remains a mystery: some pointed a finger to two young Arab criminals, simple muggers without any political agenda, while others accused Jewish right-wing activists of his assassination.<sup>32</sup> The British police later suggested that Arlozoroff's negotiations with Nazi Germany over Jewish emigration angered his opponents, but an official Israeli investigative committee could not confirm whether or not the murder was politically



motivated. In 2009, which was the 75th anniversary of Arlozoroff's murder, the city erected two memorials on the site of his death, that is, in one of the entrances to the park: an embossment of his profile by Moshe Ziffer and an abstract statue by Derora Domini. The decision to have two memorials, and the 75 years it took to install them, indicate that this chapter in Zionist history has yet to be closed; this violent act continues to recall an open wound in Israeli society. Whether the murder was committed by Jews or Palestinians, the fact remains that this brutal murder is still active in the nation's collective memory.

The violent conflict between left and right-wing Zionist parties would again be staged on this site, now Independence Park. With the declaration of independence and the establishment of the Israel Defense Forces, the new government outlawed the pre-state resistance organizations. Owned by the right-wing paramilitary group Irgun Zevai Leumi, Altalena was a cargo ship carrying weapons, volunteers, and Holocaust survivors to Israel. With its arrival in Tel-Aviv, David Ben-Gurion, the newly elected prime minister, ordered that it be prevented from docking by any means necessary. Heavy guns, placed in the British army base which had been renamed Yona Camp, fired in warning. Likely by accident, the ship received a direct hit and sank on June 22, 1948 (Fig. 3). This affair disclosed deep rifts between the main political factions in Israel and is still referenced in the media today to illustrate the open wounds and national ruptures of Israeli society. As in the case of Arlozoroff's murder, the clash between left and right-wing factions, as well as the conflict with the Palestinians, is an integral part of the place the park holds in the collective memory.



Fig. 3 *Altalena* by Hugo Mendelssohn; taken in the Muslim cemetery, now part of the park

As a place of the “national symbolic,” the site was identified with Zionism in the popular culture of the 1950s. In the first year of the decade, for example, Yigal Mossinson published the popular children’s adventure novel *Hasamba* (הַסַּמְבָּא). The plot, which takes place in Tel-Aviv under the British Mandate, revolves around a group of children who assist the underground movement Haganah in Jewish struggle for statehood. The children’s secret meeting place is located in a cave under the Muslim cemetery. When a ship of Holocaust survivors approaches the shore of Tel-Aviv and there is fear that the British will capture and deport the illegal immigrants, one of the children swims to warn the ship of the ambush, and, on his way back, drowns. His act of bravery and self-sacrifice, the children understand, prefigures and symbolizes the forthcoming victory over British colonialism.<sup>33</sup> Independence in this case means liberation from British occupation, as the children see it. In 1998, the city unsuccessfully tried to change the name of Independence Park to Hasamba Park, but, maybe because of the gay riots that year, the park’s name stayed the same.<sup>34</sup> Later I will talk more about the offer to alter the park’s name.

The Israeli national imagination sees the Land of Israel as a home, that is, a place Jews returned to after two millennia of exile. In her 1995 book *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, Yeal Zerubavel explores the dynamic process of constructing a national identity by rewriting history. She

argues that Zionism isolated certain events in the Jewish past and transformed them into a heroic history; in this process of re-imagining Jewish history, the martial aspects of the Israelites, for example, were stressed.<sup>35</sup> In the construction of Independence Park, workers uncovered the archaeological remains of a fortress from the time of Alexander Jannaeus, the king of Judea from 103 BCE to 76 BCE. This was used as a “proof” that Tel-Aviv, as well as the Jewish settlement in Palestine, had long roots in history, and that Jews had a birthright to the land.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, the construction of Independence Park restored passed glory: Jews again had sovereignty over their own land. This archeological “evidence” of Jewish existence in the place competes with the Palestinian narrative of belonging, since Independence Park is also built on a Muslim cemetery (I’ll elaborate on this later here and also in Chapter Five).

### **The 1960s: Small Changes**

During the 1950s, the park remained a symbol of Zionism and statehood. Although there is some evidence of cruising in and around the park at that time, it was not yet identified by the general public solely with homosexuality (which was considered a diasporic condition that Zionism would cure by territorialization. I’ll elaborate on this issue later).<sup>37</sup> It was during the 1960s that the first representations of homosexuality in relation to the park began to appear; there were few such representations, however, and they were generally marginalized as criminal and sensational anecdotes. The Zionist master-narrative, which celebrated the park as a national symbol, was still dominant at that time. The park would be mentioned, for example, when the press described Independence Day celebrations in Tel-Aviv. On the other hand, when the park was mentioned in the context of homosexuality, its foremost function was as a warning against vice.

The cover story of the weekly *Ha'olam Haze* on July 2, 1962, is an example of such representations. It reads: "Underground on the Esplanade".<sup>38</sup> The subheading of this "special issue on homosexuality in Israel" is no less dramatic: "political leaders, public figures, artists, UN officers, and students are members of a well-organized underground, which the police do not imprison".<sup>39</sup> The park and its surroundings are described in *Ha'olam Haze* as a site that undermines the national project, which is also a project of

heterosexualization. Homosexuality is not only a private problem here, but a national one: it is a subversive tendency that endangers the sovereignty of the state. In this sense, the threat of homosexuals to Israel is manifested in their choice to “plot” against the state in the very same place that symbolizes its independence. Another example of such anxiety and fear in the context of Independence Park appears in a letter of complaint filed in the city archive. A few months before the publication in *Ha'olam Haze*, a tourist from Jerusalem, who refers to herself as a “young and beautiful woman,” expressed uneasiness from the “strange fact” that “mainly men of all ages” visit the park.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that she was afraid of sexual harassment, but her testimony tells us something about the patrons of the park, an “open secret” that she, as a tourist and not a local *flânerie*, cannot read. It may be that after the publication in the popular *Ha'olam Haze*, she realized her possible mistake. If she missed the story there, she had a second chance: in 1963, the weekly edition of the popular daily *Davar* published a story about male prostitution in the surroundings of the park.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of the publication about the “underground on the Esplanade” and hustling, the park would continue to remain an important part of the national narrative as it changed over time. In the 1960s, the park participated in the growing demand of Israeli society to “normalize” the daily life in the state. After the Austerity Years (1949-1959), and after a few years of de facto armistice with neighboring countries, the Israeli public sought to improve its quality of life. Attentive to these voices, the city asked the IDF to evacuate the army base, named after the officer Yona Rasin, who fell in the first days of the 1948 war, from Independence Park; after negotiations and compensation, Yona Base made room for the construction of a Hilton hotel.<sup>42</sup> In a 1962 press release, the mayor’s office linked the setting of the hotel’s cornerstone to the “normalization” of Israel; the city, as well as the state, would benefit from new tourism. The press release further stressed the educational implications of tourism, in addition to the economic ones: “millions of people all over the globe could come and see the miracle of our national revival”.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the construction of the hotel was part of a national struggle. In addition to the evacuation of the army base, and in spite of the discontent and anger of the Palestinian community, most of the Abdel Nabi Muslim cemetery was demolished in order to enable well-to-do tourists to “see the miracle” that was the Jewish national

revival.<sup>44</sup> In the press release, the city expresses its pride that “the land was redeemed in spite of hardship and disturbance”. Not only are the Palestinians not mentioned here by name, they are also disguised or coded as a mere bureaucratic problem that was eventually resolved. The journalistic coverage of the Hilton’s grand opening also utilized the discourse of nationalism; the media emphasized that the prime minister and the cabinet of ministers attended the event as if it were a government function. *Ha'olam Haze* argues that the government gave certain benefits to Hilton, a chain with hotels in the Arab world, to prove that the Arab League boycott of Israel was a failure.<sup>45</sup> The daily *Al Ha-Mishmar* describes the American hotel as having “Israeli character”: it was built from local materials and was designed by a Sabra architect (the Israel Prize recipient, Ya’akov Rechter) and local artists.<sup>46</sup> The daily *Yedioth Ahronoth* emphasized that artists and artisans were commissioned to produce works which stressed the “desert colors,” in accordance to the hotel management’s belief that these colors best represented the Land of Israel.<sup>47</sup>

The Hilton hotel also symbolized the maturation of Israeli civil society; like other developing countries, Israel now saw itself joining the western world. Independence Park and the hotel in its center manifest this “normalization”.<sup>48</sup> In a 1965 advertisement for a local brand of cigarettes, for example, a couple, probably tourists, stand in the park in front of the Hilton hotel (Fig. 4). The title reads: “They Also Smoke Escot.” The couple is fashionably dressed to indicate their class status. The man occupies himself with an expensive camera, and the *mise-en-scène* suggests leisure and bourgeoisie lifestyle, the counter-image of socialist-Zionism, which was still at that time the hegemonic ideology. In this image, Independence Park is almost a foreign land in the heart of “The First Hebrew City”: it takes part in the new imagination of Israeli identity, independent from the Zionist master-narrative.



Fig. 4 Ad in *Ma'ariv*, 10.8.1965

### The 1970s: Bigger Changes

The process of re-imagining Israeli identity was accelerated on the 1970s. The association of Independence Park with homosexuality and cruising grew at the time, but this greater visibility was still mainly linked to crime and transgression, as it was in the 1960s. The Zionist master-narrative, which presented the park as a symbolic site of memory, continued to slowly erode, making room for other histories. For the first time, men started to publicly talk about their experiences cruising in the park (and being “homosexual”).

In the beginning of the 1970s, the national discourse was still dominant. References to the park in the media were related to the installation of Pietro Cascella’s 1972 statue *Arco Della Pace* (Fig. 5). All the daily newspapers found this event important enough to cover, even though a war was then approaching; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, for example, informed its readers that Syria had bombarded the Golan Heights and, in the same section, that the Minister of Foreign Affairs had attended the ceremony of uncovering Cascella’s statue in Independence Park.<sup>49</sup> *Ha’aretz* mentioned that the statue was given by Italy, where Cascella is from, to the city as a gift, and quotes the Minister of

Foreign Affairs as saying that “Israel has friends and supporters all over the world.” Besides relating the statue to the forthcoming war, the minister also stressed the cultural benefits of public art, that is, their importance for the “normalization” of Israel: “we want a beautiful country that is connected to the world of art and science”.<sup>50</sup> In his speech at the ceremony, Tel-Aviv’s mayor said similar things while hoping that the statue, as its name suggests, would indeed be a “gate to peace”.<sup>51</sup> Cascella’s statue, then, takes part in the national discourse of the Israeli-Arab conflict, as did Benjamin Tammuz and Aba Elhanani’s statue which is also installed in Independence Park (Fig. 6).

This earlier statue, a figurative icon of a broken-winged bird, was erected by the city in 1956. It is dedicated to two combat pilots, symbolized here by the bird, who died in 1948 defending Tel-Aviv;<sup>52</sup> Tammuz and Elhanani’s statue, therefore, was an early contribution to the “national symbolic,” cementing the park as a “site of memory.” As in the case of Cascella’s statue, the press in the 1950’s emphasized the national discourse surrounding “the bird,” as it is commonly known by the park’s patrons, and its location. When Dov Feigin’s statue was erected in the park in 1982, when another war was rapidly approaching, the press, even the local press, ignored it (Fig. 7). The silence surrounding the reception of this abstract statue indicates the weakening of the national discourse from the 1980’s onward.



Fig. 5 Tammuz and Elhanani



Fig. 6 Cascella

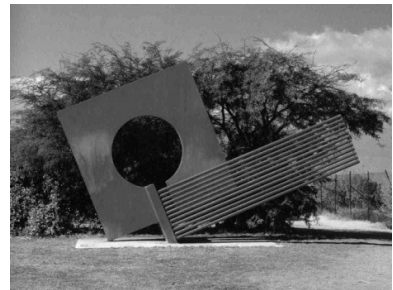


Fig. 7 Feigin

Besides associating the park with the national discourse, the media also linked it to crime, especially homosexuality as an example of transgression. In March 1972, for example, *Yedioth Ahronoth* told its readers about two men who robbed tourists in the park after convincing them to come to an isolated corner in order to have “homosexual intercourse”.<sup>53</sup> A year later, in the same newspaper, a popular columnist failed to

understand why homosexuals complained about police harassment in the park. He claimed that if they wanted to be respected by the authorities, they should not loiter in the park at night, as if they were criminals. He continues, arguing that they do go there at night because they are ashamed of their deeds, and, as he sees it, rightfully so. The columnist is especially upset with the international press, which publicized Independence Park as a cruising site; gay tourism was not to be encouraged.<sup>54</sup> These articles teach us not only about the activities in the park, but also about the anxieties of their writers; for them, gays are a danger from which to keep distant. In their eyes, homosexuality and the places in which it is manifested need to be policed as undesirable elements in society. In the case of the columnist, there is also a heightened anxiety about the new self awareness of homosexuals: they demand “civil right,” they complain, they are organized, and they have agendas.

Not long after these publications, the columnist’s fears were realized. In 1975, the Israeli gay and lesbian association, the Aguda, was established. The members decided to publish a newsletter in order to share their experiences and information with one another; in 1977, in its ninth issue, the newsletter described the park from a gay perspective for the first time, that is, Independence Park was now represented by an insider, a gay cruiser.<sup>55</sup> According to the writer, “the world famous park,” which was known as “the park of the gays,” was a beautiful place that was not raided by the police, thanks to a tacit understanding. He elaborates on this acquiescence: in the past, hustlers bothered tourists on the promenade, but now, when they relocated to the park, the public order was preserved, and the police were satisfied. He concludes by saying that he hopes that “this nice site will continue to be a meeting-place.” In 1978, another writer gives a different explanation for the police’s passive acceptance of cruising in the park: The Aguda worked closely with the authorities—the police, the Justice Department, and Knesset members—to ensure that gays would not be mistreated or abused because of their sexual orientation.<sup>56</sup> For the first time, gays voiced their identity and demand recognition and rights; they see Independence Park as “their” place, and, by so doing, begin to construct a queer “site of memory”. An article published in the tabloid *Bul* in March 1979 illustrates this new awareness. Titled “equal rights and self-determination to homosexuals in Israel,” the journalist criticizes the police for not stopping gay-bashing in Independence Park. As



an example of the mistreatment of gays, the journalist interviews one of the parks' patrons, who tells how he refused to leave the park when he was threatened by bullies, and how the police refused to help him when he complained.<sup>57</sup> In 1982, a similar complaint arrived at the mayor's office in the form of a letter accusing the police of harassment. The author of the letter did not find "the new phenomenon" of writing down names of cruisers necessary: "order the police to stop harassing homosexuals and violating their rights".<sup>58</sup>

It is clear that in the 1970s there was a complex interplay between the national discourse and the private or civil one: the park began to house a new queer awareness as gays began to see the park as a queer space and demand rights which were not given in the past. At this time, representations of the park were still limited to the small gay community press or associated with crime in the national press. In the 1980s, representations of the park would begin to appear in different mediums, reflecting the solidification process of the Israeli LGBT community. This even greater visibility was a result of the AIDS epidemic.

### **The 1980s: AIDS and Greater Visibility**

In the 1980s, gays continued to construct community identity while fighting for rights and visibility. Independence Park also continued to be associated in the media with crime and transgression; because of AIDS, a new dimension was added to this old concept: this gay cruising park, some said, enabled and even promoted the spreading of the "plague." Against this homophobic backdrop, gay filmmakers and writers began to represent the park from a far more sympathetic perspective: bigger audiences were now exposed to the park and the activities took place there from a gay viewpoint. The national symbolic discourse dissolved almost completely. The establishment of a gay press in these years also provided a more supportive and positive representations of the park, which fortified it as a symbol of the Israeli gay community. If in the 1970s, gays began to speak up, but did so in a low voice, now they were louder and less apologetic: they saw the park as theirs. The decade ended with the decriminalization of sodomy, which led to activism and a new flourishing of queer culture. The 1990s would see these cultural expressions reach new heights.

In 1983, Amos Guttman released his acclaimed film *Drifting* (נגיע), which tells the story of a gay man who cruises Independence Park. In one of the film's first scenes, a group of teenagers walk in the park and ironically sing a famous folk song about how "beautiful and blooming is the Land of Israel." The protagonist, a filmmaker who has sex with Palestinians, argues in the opening monologue that he offers a different discourse in his films, one that is not centered on Zionism. Independence Park in *Drifting* is almost an extraterritorial site; located in Tel-Aviv, but divorced from its history, the park is a queer "site of memory" which tells the story of gays rather than Jewish nationalism. Yotam Reuveny's 1987 novel *Night Diary* (יומן לילה), which is in the center of the first chapter of *Imagining Independence Park*, also portrays the park as an extraterritorial site; as if not really located in Tel-Aviv, the park's patrons are depicted as members of a transnational queer community.<sup>59</sup> In this sense, Independence Park is a place that exceeds locality. Seven years previously, in 1980, Reuveny published a groundbreaking series of four articles in the popular *Yedioth Ahronoth*; as one of the first out gay men in Israel, he exposed readers to the untold stories of gay men.<sup>60</sup> In order to do so, he went to Independence Park and interviewed men who shared a deep discontent with the park. Reuveny's agenda is obvious: in order to be accepted by society, homosexuals should be "normal", that is, be straight-acting. In his eyes, Independence Park should cease symbolizing homosexuality since there is more to gay culture than cruising; gay people, then, have to disassociate themselves from the park. This approach would radically shift over time. In his 1987 novel, Reuveny is far more sympathetic to the park and its patrons, and in his 2001 novel *A World History of Men's Love* (היסטוריה עולמית של אהבת גברים), he enthusiastically considers the park a model for queer separatism, that is, he hopes for "independence" from "the straight world." This shift in Reuveny's approach results from his understanding that heteronormative society did not fight AIDS because of its inherent homophobia.

As an epidemic that was associated mainly with homosexuals at the time, HIV/AIDS affected the activities that took place in the park. If in the past cruising was somewhat tolerated, it became less so in the 1980s. The media stressed the danger of cruising in spreading of AIDS, and the police raided the park with greater frequency.<sup>61</sup> In 1986, the local weekly *Ha'ir* reported that the police wrote down the names of the cruisers while degrading them. One of the cruisers told the reporter that there were almost

no sexual activities in the park itself, and the park was mainly used as a place for social gathering.<sup>62</sup> A few weeks later, a columnist, who writes about gay issues in *Ha'ir*, argued that men do have sex in the park; for him, the attempt to gloss over the truth by ignoring sex would not help the fighting against AIDS.<sup>63</sup> The city took a similar position, attempting to combat AIDS by reducing cruising: in winter 1986, stadium floodlight lamps were erected in the park, turning night into day in hope of driving away the cruisers. Fighting back, the park's patrons sabotaged the lamps every time the city reinstalled them.<sup>64</sup> This misspend money could have been used for better causes, Ilan Sheinfeld argues in a 1989 column; the lighting money, he claims, could have been spent on free HIV-testing, which would have been more productive.<sup>65</sup> This money could have also been used for education. The Aguda, which was not funded by the city at the time, had some limited educational activities in the park; in the mid-1990s, with the establishment of the Israeli AIDS Task Force, these activities grew and became more frequent.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, in the mid-1980s, the AIDS campaign, sponsored by the state, encouraged abstention.<sup>67</sup> Besides campaigning against sex, especially gay sex, the state policed the park's activities in other ways, as the American gay magazine *Advocate* revealed in its 1988 story about homosexuality in Israel. Bill Strubbe, the Jewish-American who wrote this somewhat patronizing travel journal, goes to Tel-Aviv in order to "lay the groundwork for dissemination of the latest AIDS and safe-sex information."<sup>68</sup> He tells his readers about Independence Park:

every night of the week, from the early evening on into the wee hours of the morning, men can be seen cruising the paths. With the advent of AIDS, the activity has lessened some, and the men are more careful about what they do. One side of the park boasts an old Arab cemetery where many of the trysts are consummated. I imagine it's thrilling to have sex in the moonlight on top of someone's tomb with the ocean waves crashing in the background. In the last few months, however, the adventure has waned because of the presence of mobile AIDS information and a blood testing unit that roams the perimeter of the park.

It's not clear if Strubbe is surprised by the fact that someone already "la[id] the groundwork" for AIDS activism in Israel, but he does document the Foucauldian power dynamics of homosexuality in heterocentric societies: medicalization is a form of

policing non-normative identities. *Yedioth Ahronoth* also covers the story of “the AIDS-mobile”: the city funded this enterprise in order to go “to the root of the problem,” presumed in advance to be Independence Park.<sup>69</sup> It’s not clear from these articles, however, what the explicit authority of the unit was: did its operators force people to take an AIDS test? Did they have the legal right to detain “suspects”? What did they do with the information?

The distribution of “information” about homosexuality was more diversified than ever before. On the one hand, the media continued to “warn” the public about the park and the dangers it entailed, but, on the other hand, with the establishment of the gay press, more people, gays as well as straights, had access to a different perspective. In 1988, *Magaim*, the first gay monthly in Israel, introduced a map of all the cruising sites in the country; Tel-Aviv’s Independence Park was given much more room than other cruising places. The reporter details the schedule of activities by age groups as if it were a summer camp: between 8 pm to 10 pm – teenagers and their admirers; between 10 pm and midnight – couples who look for a third, men in their twenties who seek relationships, and the daddies who failed to hook up with a teenager; between midnight and 2 am – young adults who have girlfriends, and young out-of-town-tourists who are looking for a place to sleep; and from 2 am on – drunk clubbers and Palestinians who finished a shift in local restaurants.<sup>70</sup> The local weekly *Ha’ir* quoted the entire article from this gay publication and disclosed the information to its subscribers.<sup>71</sup> In the following month, a reader of *Magaim* wrote to the magazine with a few more words of advice regarding the best time to go to the park: when sports games were aired on the one and only TV channel, the park would be crowded, but not when a popular soap opera was on; then the park will be empty.<sup>72</sup> As if it were a beginner guide to cruising, the magazine educated prospective cruisers in the traditions of the place. In a sense, by providing information, the text also cultivated a new generation of cruisers. Continuity plays an important role in imagining Independence Park as a queer space that hosts a community (in 1997, *Hazman HaVarod* published a similar cruising guide, since a new generation of gays needed this kind of information).<sup>73</sup> The search for sex, then, is only one reason why gay men patronize the park; it also enables them to meet, network, and befriend, and to think about themselves through different social lenses. For example, in order to fight gay-

bashing in the park, *Magaim*, which often updated its readers about these acts of violence, as did *Ha'ir*, founded in the early 1990s a volunteer-based group that patrolled the area; as an alternative to the police's impotence, gay men were now creating their own safety nets, which were separated from those of the state. They began to take control over their lives through empowering communal organizations.<sup>74</sup>

The non-gay press at the time continued to represent the park as a “dangerous place.” In 1983, for example, *Ma'ariv* published a story about hustlers in Independence Park, associating teen prostitution with pedophilia and drug-trafficking.<sup>75</sup> While the journalist was shocked by what she saw, and recommended that the police to closely supervise the park's patrons, her interviewee, a 16 year old hustler, tells a different story. He had been going to the park since he was 13 years old because he had made friends there; “I believe,” he says, “that even if I stop working in the park, I'll come just to hear the latest gossip.” The journalist disregarded the teenager's need to be part of a community; she only saw the park as a habitat for crime.

*Yedioth Ahronoth* also reported on the slippery slope of homosexuality: a teenager, who was “seduced into homosexuality in Independence Park by two Palestinians,” became a burglar under their influence.<sup>76</sup> Crime, with more than a hint of national disloyalty, is associated with homosexuality in this cause and effect narrative. In 1987, *Yedioth Ahronoth* reported a similar story: a young orthodox man was stabbed in Independence Park by a Palestinian.<sup>77</sup> If, in the past, the park symbolized the Jewish revival in the fatherland, now, it was a place of danger that threatened the nation, as the media saw it. In their eyes, the site that represented Jewish independence was taken over by Palestinians; coincidentally or not, these kinds of reports began to appear with the outbreak of the first *intifada* in 1987 and the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1988. In these cases, as some journalists saw it, homosexuality was associated with national weakness. *Davar*, for example, reported in 1989 about a robbery in the park: three Palestinians stole the wallet and watch of a fourth Palestinian. The judge at their trial warns the audience: “whoever goes to Independence Park risks his life”.<sup>78</sup>

### **The 1990s: The Israeli Stonewall Years**

The 1990s were the formative years of the Israeli LGBT community, bringing many important changes. As a queer space which is symbolically loaded, Independence Park became a center for activities that redefined Israeli gay identity during this time. The site of struggles against homophobia and AIDS, the park becomes a main arena for queer activism. Like never before, gay Israelis were visible and demanded their place in society. Following the success of these struggles, the park began to be mythologized in queer culture: it became a place that exceeded reality. With the intention to close the park in the late 1990s, gays fought not only to keep it open, but to retain it as a symbol of queer existence and as a safe place for queer community. With the Independence Park Riots at the end of the eventful decade, this defining moment in Israeli queer history also marked the point after which the park became less valuable as a practiced place; with the opening of LGBT community centers, clubs, and internet websites, the park began to lose its attraction.<sup>79</sup>

In the early 1990s, the media often reported on gay-bashing in Independence Park. The daily *Al HaMishmar*, for example, interviewed one of the park's patrons, a soldier, who spoke about hooligans and police brutality. "The straights dub it The AIDS Park," he explained to the reporter.<sup>80</sup> *Tel-Aviv*, a local weekly, also reported about gay-bashing and described how the police often detained the victims and not the aggressors.<sup>81</sup> The *Jerusalem Post* described one of these incidents in detail: a group of twenty teenagers beat up a 17-year-old cruiser, and when the police arrived at the park, the cruisers, and not the attackers, were arrested.<sup>82</sup> Similar stories appeared in *Ma'ariv*, *Hadashot*, and *Yedioth Ahronoth*.<sup>83</sup> Following the increasing violence against cruisers, *Magaim*, a gay newspaper, organized watch patrols; Mark Ariel, the editor, advertised a meeting in the park which twenty volunteers attended. The local press covered the story and quoted volunteers saying, "If we defend ourselves, the assaults in the park will stop".<sup>84</sup> *Tel-Aviv* reports that the self-defense group succeeded in stopping several homophobic events.<sup>85</sup> In an interview to the *Jerusalem Post*, Ariel claimed not only that the group had prevented gay-bashing, but that they also gained respect from the police: "the good news is the cooperative attitude we got from the cops".<sup>86</sup> In another interview, Ariel discussed the social importance of the "neighborhood watch" group: "it forms a

community. It is new for homosexuals do something for their community. Thirty men volunteer and work in shifts. The volunteers and the cruisers have a very productive dialogue, and people befriend one another. People have conversations about various subjects, not only about sex and where they would spend the rest of the night”.<sup>87</sup> To *Hadashot*, Ariel pushed this point even further, stressing that the watch group protected the right to congregate: “most of the people come to Independence Park to meet friends, chat, get to know new people, find love, not sex”.<sup>88</sup> He portrays the park as a community center: “if we had a community center, with classes and what not, people would not have gone to the park. We go there because there are no alternatives”.<sup>89</sup> In *Magaim*, Ariel described how, because of the support of the watch group, one of the volunteers came out of the closet to his parents.<sup>90</sup> In a similarly empowering tone, another volunteer celebrated the togetherness that enabled the cruisers to “face an oppressing power”.<sup>91</sup> This outward appearance of unity collapsed, however, when *Duet*, a competing gay magazine, started to organize its own watch group; with the dramatic decrease of gay-bashing in the park, *Magaim* moved on to educational activities while *Duet* pushed to maintain watch group’s presence. *Magaim* accused *Duet* of opportunism; activism, in this case, was a form of competition.<sup>92</sup> Neither magazine survived for long, and the watch groups ceased their activities. With the continuance of gay-bashing, the Aguda encouraged gays in the late 1990s to join the National Civil Guard, a volunteer organization which assists in daily police work under police supervision.<sup>93</sup> From an independent organization in the beginning on the 1990s, gays joined official state organizations by the end of the decade; this also happened in other areas, like organizing Pride Parades, which expanded from small private gatherings in the beginning of the 1990s to huge city-sponsored marches at the end of the decade.

In the last years of the decade, two central events took place: the fight to keep the park open and the Independence Park Riots. These events, as in the case of the watch groups, empowered the community through activism. In February 27, 1998, *Tel-Aviv* reported that the city was planning to renovate Independence Park.<sup>94</sup> *Hazman HaVarod*, the Aguda’s monthly, started a campaign to prevent “the extermination of the gays’ meeting place”.<sup>95</sup> The reporter exposed that the city wanted to build another hotel there, and when he asked the landscape architect about the gay patrons of the park, the architect

replied: “Independence Park belongs to the city not to homosexuals”.<sup>96</sup> In response, the reporter argued that gays were part of the city and addressed the readers directly: “we need to fight. It is not only a struggle to save Independence Park, but a struggle about gay visibility, and about the presence of the community in the public space. The fact that the city did not ask gays about the renovation proves that we are not seen”.<sup>97</sup> The cover of *Hazman HaVarod* featured a montage of a boy crying in front of the “bird statue” (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8 Cover of *Hazman HaVarod*

The local weekly, *Zman Tel-Aviv*, picked up the story and added a “straight angle” to it: the park’s demolition should not concern only gays but anyone who cares about the environment.<sup>98</sup> *Ha’aretz* also covered the story and added that cruising parks were an international phenomenon in urban centers. The reporter implied that being a cruising site, Independence Park placed Tel-Aviv on the world-map as a western and liberal city; it was best for everyone, then, to let it be.<sup>99</sup> In its next issue, *Hazman HaVarod* continued the struggle; Dafna Hirsch, a scholar who gave a paper about Independence Park at a



university conference, was invited to write a column and explain the importance of the park for the gay community:

the park has important social functions; it is a meeting place without the bustle and hustle of clubs; it is a place that enables the socialization into gay culture; it provides a support to people who are coming out; it is a place where, without being exposed, one can visit and feel that one is not alone; it is a place which has flexible decorum codes [...] more than the commercial gay venues.<sup>100</sup>

Following the campaign, and realizing that it was an election year, the mayor decided to abandon the renovations. A decade later, under a new mayor, and without public protests, the renovations were finally executed. Meanwhile, in 1998, Michal Eden, the first openly gay candidate to the city council, stressed in her campaign that she was obligated to protect gay meeting places. Indeed, after her election, she placed condom vending machines in the park and founded the “City Independence Park Subcommittee,” which dealt with gay-bashing and police harassment related issues.<sup>101</sup>

The second event that proved to the community that it had the power to effect important social changes was the Independence Park Riots in 1998. After the police raided an HIV/AIDS funds-raising event in the park, a large crowd blocked the surrounding streets in what the gay press dubbed “the Israeli Stonewall.” Even before the riots, the park was a center for HIV/AIDS activism; in the mid-1990s, members of the Aguda, who disapproved how the state was fighting AIDS, visited the park regularly in order to distribute their own educational pamphlets. Against the recommendations of the Ministry of Health to abstain from sex or at least be in a monogamous relationship, gay activists provided information and guided cruisers on how to have safer sex. Unlike the official state-sponsored pamphlets, the ones that the activists distributed were not moralistic or clinical: the Aguda’s brochures explained in clear and plain language what to do and what not to do.<sup>102</sup> The grass-roots activists went to Independence Park not only because it was a site of cruising, but also because it was a place that financially enabled their activities; cruisers donated to their organization, especially during an annual drag show festival, Wigstock, that still takes place in the park. *Zman Tel-Aviv* covered the first festival and interviewed the activists as well as the artists, who were working to enable an alternative to the way the state was handling HIV/AIDS. The event was sponsored by gay

clubs and bars, the weekly teaches us, a collaboration which shows the symbiosis between different, sometime said to be competing or even contrasting forces in the gay community: both the commercial venues and the park's patrons collaborated in fighting AIDS.<sup>103</sup> In the 1998 Wigstock festival, the Aguda had a police permit allowing the event to continue until 7 pm, and when that hour had passed, the police closed down the event. Some in the audience were outraged and began voicing their protest; soon after, the angry crowd left the park and blocked the surrounding streets. Police reinforcement arrived on the scene wearing latex gloves and began to arrest protesters. About 150-200 people marched to Rabin Square and hoisted a rainbow flag on the City Hall flagpole. *Yedioth Ahronoth* covered this "violent demonstration" and stressed the role that drag queens and transsexuals played in it: their photographs appeared on a double spread. Protesters told the reporter that they were enraged by the police decision to wear latex gloves as if all gay people had AIDS.<sup>104</sup> *Ma'ariv* focused on the latex gloves and quoted one of the community leaders as saying, "wearing these gloves was a primitive allegation by the police".<sup>105</sup> The Aguda's newspaper, also mentioned the gloves and the police; one of the writers of the special issue of *Hazman HaVarod* argued: "the police united us for the first time. The cops gave us identity. They gave us pride. They made us into a community".<sup>106</sup> The title of the article reads: "The Israeli Stonewall," and the subtitle stresses that "it was the first time that a polite gay demonstration turn[ed] into a fist." In 2008, Yair Qedar, the founding editor of *Hazman HaVarod*, compared "the riots that happened thirty years ago in Stonewall Inn" to the Independence Park Riots that brought about "a revolution in the establishment's attitude towards gays".<sup>107</sup> He tried to establish May 23, the day the riots took place, as the official Israeli Pride Day; however, the Israeli LGBT community still celebrates Pride Day in June, according to the American date.<sup>108</sup> By linking Independence Park to Stonewall Inn, the Israeli LGBT community wrote itself into the narrative of western queer history; this mythologization of the park—the fact that both riots happened at the end of May—enabled Israeli gays to be part of a greater narrative of success. In the weeks that followed the riots, the Aguda organized the first big Israeli Pride Parade, starting for Rabin Square and ending in Independence Park, as a way to say "we are here to stay and nobody could remove us – not the renovation and not the latex gloves of the police".<sup>109</sup> As part of the process of mythologization, a year after the riots, *Hazman*

*HaVarod* concluded: “who can believe that only a year ago we had the first Pride Parade? The streets are also ours; they are not the exclusive property of heterosexuals; we can turn the streets into a queer territory”.<sup>110</sup>

### **The 2000s: The Rise and Fall of Independence Park**

Never before the 1990s, and never in such abundance, were gay novels, short-story collections, films, plays, and art exhibitions made available to the public. *Imagining Independence Park* is centered on works that were produced in this long decade (1987-2003). The renaissance of queer artistic production in the 1990s would not be sustained over the following decade; fewer gay texts were produced in the 2000s (fewer of these texts portray Independence Park). After the high-point of the 1990s, the media also tended to give less coverage to Independence Park and the activities in it. With the opening of clubs, bars, and city-sponsored community centers, and especially with the growing use of the internet for cruising and community-building, the park lost its attraction and became a myth more than an actual practiced place. The renovations that were made in park in the end of the teens may restore the park’s old glory, but only time will tell.

Gay-bashing, homophobia, and police brutality were also present in the first decade of the new century. In May 2000, *Hazman HaVarod* reported on assaults in the park; the paper stressed not only that it was a repeated event lately, but also that the attackers were Russian immigrants.<sup>111</sup> As in the past, the press again emphasized the nationality of the attackers: not Palestinians this time, but the non-western newcomers, the new outsiders. A month earlier, *Hazman HaVarod* published on a double-spread a story about continuous police raids and the Aguda’s attempts to stop them.<sup>112</sup> Similar stories appeared in *Hazman HaVarod* throughout 2001 and 2002.<sup>113</sup> These violent events would reach a climax in 2003. In that year, *Ha’ir* reported that six policemen attacked cruisers in the park; the Aguda organized watch patrols in which volunteers were “armed with internet-connection video-cameras” to document police activity; as a result, the police ceased to raid the park.<sup>114</sup> *Ha’aretz* titled their coverage of similar incidents, “Gays’ Life Is Not Important,” and *Zman Tel-Aviv* gave their coverage the headline,

“People Were Taken as if They Were Animals”.<sup>115</sup> As in the past, the community rushed to protect its territory and limit the state’s control.

In spite of the efforts to protect Independence Park, its relevance was questioned in the first decade of the 2000s. *Ha’aretz* argued in 2002 that “The Internet kills Independence Park”.<sup>116</sup> The reporter interviewed cruisers, who claimed that not only that there was “a clear decline in the number of visitors to the park,” but also that people cruised differently; as in the internet chat-rooms, the park’s patrons, who were once open to conversing with others, are now “getting right down to business,” that is, were looking mostly for sex. Other interviewees argued that the park would survive after all because people would always look for face-to-face interaction. *Ha’ir* also dealt with the question of Independence Park in the age of the internet. The reporter offered another explanation for why the park would survive: it houses the outsiders on the periphery of the community, that is, the transsexuals, the Palestinians, the poor, and the elderly; they are rejected from, or don’t have access to, the clubs, bars, and chat-rooms, and find refuge in a place with less formal selection and fewer social bouncers.<sup>117</sup> As a response to the “disappearance” of the park, at least as a queer space, *Hazman HaVarod* ran a campaign to save it. In one article, for example, the paper suggested going back to the “forgotten scene” and finding the beauty in it; “surprisingly,” the reporter argued, “one will find there not only homeless and marginalized men who are too illiterate to use a computer”.<sup>118</sup> Against the efforts of *Hazman HaVarod* to restore the park’s old glory, it lost its attraction in these years precisely because it housed too many “undesirable” or “unwelcome” people. *Ha’ir*, for example, provided this explanation for the decline in the park’s popularity; the columnist tells a story about his latest cruising experience in the park, in which he meets an Eritrean refugee who lectures him about Christianity and the sin of sodomy.<sup>119</sup> Not exactly what one wants to encounter when one is cruising.

Because of religious and ethnic conflicts in east Africa, refugees from Sudan and Eritrea crossed the Egyptian border and settled in Tel-Aviv. In 2008, *Ha’aretz* reported that, because of over-crowded shelters, 200 refugees were homeless, 60 of them living in Independence Park.<sup>120</sup> Different individuals and organizations came to their aid; Natan Dvir, for example, documented them for the exhibition *Shelter* (Fig. 9). Other photographers, as discussed in chapter five, represented the refugees in their exhibitions.

A columnist of *Ha'ir* recalls that the Electric Cave of *Hasamba* was located in the park, arguing that the African children like the Jewish ones under the British Mandate, deserved freedom and independence. The park, he claimed, always symbolizes independence for the Jews in Palestine, for the gays in Israel, and now for the refugees who were seeking a better future.<sup>121</sup> The park is portrayed here as a transhistorical place, as if it had virtues which were part of its essence. Again, the park was being mythologized.



**Fig. 9 Dvir's "refugee sleeping"**

The refugees were eventually evacuated from the park because of renovations. In the past, the city failed to renovate and renew the park because of public resistance. This time, it was different; not only were gays consulted about the renovations, they also supported them. In 2006, *Hazman HaVarod* published a letter of complaint from a reader, who demands that the city renew the park; he claimed that the park had been so neglected in the past few years that it had become unpleasant to cruise there.<sup>122</sup> A few months later, the city decided to renovate the park and establish a forum which would advise the city about the needs of the gay community. A city counselor, an openly gay man, explained to

*Tel-Aviv* why such renovations were needed: “our goal is to enable a safe and fun environment for mothers who visit the park and to respect the historical legacy of the gay community and its space. As it is, the park is neglected and no one enjoys it”.<sup>123</sup> *Ha’ir* reported on a meeting between the city and representatives of the gay community: the city agreed, for example, to place “romantic lighting“ in the park for the benefit of ”couples in-love,” but insisted on locking the restrooms at night. As it is, the city councilor argued, most cruising nowadays is done in cyberspace, anyway.<sup>124</sup> Near the end of the renovation, after the park had been closed for two years, the landscape architect described the dynamic of working while thinking also about the needs of the LGBT community:

The community wanted to keep the bushes and the hidden paths, and we tried to accommodate their requests. By the way, if they were asking for that 15 years ago, I would have understood, but I do not think that today they need to have such a ghetto, it is no longer a perversion or something to be ashamed of. They can kiss and hug, but, if I am not allowed to have sex in a public place, they shouldn’t either. Nevertheless, I understood them, and we did leave some places less lighted.<sup>125</sup>

To *Ha’aretz*, the architect added after being asked about his thoughts regarding cruising, “the park still has many hiding spots”.<sup>126</sup> The city understood that the LGBT community needed to be considered when dealing with the park; by doing so, the city unofficially declared the park a queer space. In a sense, the park that once was part of the national symbolic, and slowly separated from it in the mid-1960s, had once again become part of the same discourse; in the past, gays reappropriated the park to fit their needs, and now, after the legalization of homosexuality, the city uses the park to prove that Tel-Aviv, and Israel in general, is a progressive and liberal place—a western outpost in the Middle East—that accepts sexual minorities. Gil Hochberg claims that Israel’s progressive gay rights are often flaunted by the state as a way to advance “its public image and divert attention from its ongoing occupation of Palestine”; Jasbir Puar calls it “pinkwashing” the Israeli occupation.<sup>127</sup> From Hochberg and Puar’s point of view, the Israeli LGBT community “collaborates” with oppression when gays and lesbians agree to put themselves before other minorities. That is, when the discourse is focused on

Independence Park as a queer space, little attention is given to the fact that it is built on a Palestinian cemetery (see chapter five).

The reopening of the renovated Park in 2009 revived an older debate in the Israeli LGBT community about the “suitable” public image of homosexuals. In *Time Out Tel-Aviv*, Gal Uchovsky argued that associating homosexuality with cruising would make it more difficult for the wider public to relate to struggles for equal rights on issues such as adoption; “who would let these people who cruise in the park legally adopt children?” he rhetorically asks.<sup>128</sup> “How is it that a community that was trying for years not to be associated with sex is now fighting for a dark cruising site?” he continues. Uchovsky claims that the community cannot have its cake and eat it too; after the great progress of the last decades, “there is no need to be nostalgic about fucking in the park. It is not the kind of freedom we need anymore.” What the LGBT community needs, Uchovsky claims, is more “positive imagery,” which would lead to social change; he is aiming for assimilation into mainstream society on the basis of similarities, and goes against those who emphasize homosexual difference and distinctiveness. A blogger on *GoGay*, a popular Israeli LGBT website, answered Uchovsky’s questions: “not everyone can or wants to adopt children [...] older gays and ultra-orthodox need the park”.<sup>129</sup> A blogger on *Ma’ariv Online* provided a similarly “utopian” answer: “in the park, Moroccans can make out with Russians, Ashkenazim fuck Mizrahim, and the old pleasure the young”.<sup>130</sup> It’s a cosmopolitan park, he argues. In his blog, David Merhav suggested that the city and the Aguda wished to “destroy” the park as a queer space because it failed to fit the image of “the new gay”, an idealized middle-class young professorial, who works out and publicly announces his sexual ordination and his loyalty to the state. Merhav argues that Independence Park is an “exteriority” where “teenagers meet older guys, Arabs meet ultra-orthodox Jews, soldiers meet Romanian migrant workers, and closeted married guys meet transsexuals. The park is one of the last places that is not under the policing gaze of our society”.<sup>131</sup> These unusual encounters, he claims, threaten the gay clone culture; for Merhav, the park is a site of resistance, a counterpublic, in Warner’s terms.

Looking back, we can see that, after the decriminalization of homosexuality, and with the opening of other venues in which gays could meet each other, Independence Park became an ambivalent symbol in the Israeli queer community. After conducting a

series of interviews with gay men, Dafna Hirsh, in the only study done about the park, formulated three positions cruisers hold regarding the park and its place in queer culture. The first position sees the park as an embodiment of everything that is negative in homosexuals' "promiscuous life-style". According to this position, the park is a symbol of everything that is anathema to the image of the "new gay." The second stand views the park as an inevitable institution, which will grow weaker and eventually dissolve by itself once gays "earn" public recognition and equal rights, and become normative members of society. Until then, it would best serve the LGBT community not to shake the "representational boat": the park should be downplayed in queer culture and not celebrated. The third stand, which, according to Hirsh, is far more radical than the first two, celebrates the park; it views the park as a paragon of transgressive sexuality, which deliberately subverts heteronormativity. My dissertation goes beyond surveying the positions of different literary and visual texts on this spectrum; *Imagining Independence Park* is also interested in discussing how Independence Park took and continues to take part in the process of constructing LGBT community and local queer identity. *Imagining Independence Park* is also a study of the different ways in which writers and artists represent space; this dissertation analyzes the techniques, methods, and strategies they use to depict space in their texts, and the ways in which space is "translated" into different mediums of representation.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

*Imagining Independence Park* has two parts that are thematically divided. The first part, titled "queer space as a work of art," analyzes representations of the park in different mediums, and points out the various ways in which writers and artists portray the park in order to say something about artistic expressions of space, especially gendered space. These literary and visual texts, I argue in the first three chapters, go beyond simply documenting Israeli communal queer identity; they in fact construct it, while also investigating the possibilities for representing space in a particular genre or medium. As I show in this part of the dissertation, the writers and artistes I discuss end up asking questions that go beyond the problem of how to represent Independence Park, and how to "translate" the experience of cruising into their chosen medium of representation; they



also ask self-reflective questions about the essence of the medium itself. These aesthetic inquiries enable them to formulate new representational methods and to experiment with various techniques, such as intertextuality and performativity, which ultimately destabilize the mediums they use; as I argue, when they question the “natural” premises of a medium, and when they refuse to accept its presuppositions, they actually queer it. If the emphasis in this part of the dissertation is on form (and less content), the emphasis in the second part is on content (alongside form, which is less discussed). The second part, titled “Queering National Space,” contains two chapters that explore the tension between national and queer identities. By discussing the concept of space, the writers and artists in this part investigate issues of belonging and displacement, of diaspora and homecoming, and of nationalism and transnationalism.

Chapter One, entitled “To Transcend AIDS in a Holy Land,” deals with the first Israeli novel about HIV/AIDS, Yotam Reuveny’s 1987 novel *Night Diary*. In the 1980s, when homosexuality was still illegal in Israel, the Israeli mass media reported extensively on the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Newspapers linked the “dangerous plague” with homosexuals and often described the virus as a “death sentence” and as a punishment for promiscuity. In contrast to the mass media, Hebrew literature avoided the topic entirely, except for Reuveny. A lonely voice crying out in the wilderness, Reuveny’s groundbreaking text confronts this loaded subject and offers a dissenting approach, which confronts the simplicity of the public discussion of its time. I argue that *Night Diary* reappropriates the homophobic HIV/AIDS discourse of the 1980s in order to subvert it by redefining condemnatory labels—such as “sin,” “punishment,” and “death sentence”—as positive, and in doing so, enable the readers to think about HIV/AIDS in new, non-judgmental and productive ways. As I show, by alluding to literary works which discuss the concept of sin and punishment—Albert Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Pinhas Sadeh’s *Life as a Parable*, and Jean Genet’s prison novels—Reuveny’s novel resists the delegitimation of “AIDS victims” and offers a new conception of the virus as a philosophical tool, which allows those infected to transcend not only their “disease” but also the mundane. *Night Diary* is a radical text for its time; its unique and provocative voice rises against discriminating social conventions to become a consoling and empowering work. In this way, *Night Diary* corresponds with contemporary literary

works by Camus and Genet while contextualizing them within local Israeli queer culture. Independence Park appears in most scenes in this novel, expressing the author's interest in the question of queer space as well as queer literature. Against the poplar media, Reuveny offers readers the image of the park as a queer holy ground that enables transcendence; he does so, I argue, by stretching this thousand page novel to a point where his readers experience the difficulty of cruising: his novel becomes a performative text that stages cruising.

The second chapter, entitled "Tel-Aviv's Wailing Walls and White Cubes," focuses on Gil Nader and Yoav Shmueli's art installations (1995, 1995-2005). Separately, Nader and Shmueli stage Independence Park in museums—forcing the viewers to participate in cruising-like wandering—and questioning the function, as well as the possibilities, of gallery space. In this chapter I also argue that one of Shmueli's most significant images is a wall which appears throughout his works. As a frequent visitor to Independence Park, Shmueli is aware that the wall which separates the Hilton Hotel from the park also separates the "gay world" from the "straight world". Known to local gays as "Tel Aviv's wailing wall," it is the center of the park's sexual activity, and when Shmueli constructs replicas of this "wall" in museums, he not only puts homosexuality in a religious context, but also uses it to unsettle homophobic Jewish concepts of sin. Shmueli's works, therefore, appropriate a key Jewish symbol, dismantle it, and then reassemble it in ingenious ways, and in doing so, force new meanings upon it. In the midst of a cruising world that is being destroyed by HIV/AIDS, he builds a queer New Jerusalem in secular Tel-Aviv. Shmueli's installations, as well as Nader's, raise other questions about the relationship between space and identity, and especially the relationship between the gallery space, that is, "the white cube", and the cruising space. Their works, I claim, focus on the ways in which identity is constructed by participation in a space's performative practices, be it a white cube or a cruising park.

Chapter Three, entitled "In Their Own Image: Photography and Independence Park," focuses on recent portrayals of Independence Park in photography. In his 2003 exhibition *Independence Park in the Morning*, Shai Ignatz rebels against the tradition of marking the park as a "dark place" that is associated solely with the night time. In his documentary project, Ignatz records the park's day-time cruisers; at first glance, this

approach seems simply celebratory and emancipatory, however, a closer look at the images tells a grimmer and more complex story, which often involves HIV/AIDS. My reading of these images traces this story by looking at the intertextual relations between Ignatz's work and canonical western works of art. These visual intertexts, I argue, both re-contextualize local queer existence by putting it in conversation with the history of western culture, and re/construct a queer identity grounded in darkness as inseparable from light, death as inseparable from life, and HIV/AIDS as inseparable from "health". The issue of intertextuality also brings forward the tension between documentation and aesthetics, that is, the question of documentation as art. Like Ignatz, Mordechai Geldman in *Open Park* also wishes to re/construct Israeli queer identity; his images, which portray the park as a "respectable" place, overlook its queer context. Geldman, I argue, desexualizes the park: his images ignore the cruising scene that takes place in the park. However, as in Ignatz's case, a close reading of the exhibition's images tells a different story; a story that once again resists and undermines the exhibition's agenda. By means of intertextuality and contextualization, these images reveal more than just the queer aspect that Geldman attempts to cover up; they also deal with the complex history of the park itself and criticize Israel's—and Israeli gays'—attitude toward Palestinians, for example. Other images, by Karin Magen and Sinai Calif-Israeli, represent other minority groups, such as the African refugees that settled in Independence Park. This is the last chapter of the first part of the dissertation.

The Part Two of this dissertation begins in Chapter Four, titled "Looking for a Homoland: Between Sodom and Germany." This chapter deals with two novels which raise a series of questions regarding the possibility of being simultaneously both Israeli and queer; the chapter also considers the alternatives, in case such a project proves impossible. In *A World History of Men's Love* (2001) and *Ziffer and His Kind* (1999), Yotam Reuveny and Benny Ziffer respectively struggle to negotiate between what they see as contradictory terms: homosexuality and Jewish nationalism. For their protagonists, the question of local queer identity is also a question of belonging: should they stay in homophobic Israel, which means to conceal their homosexuality, or relocate to a more tolerant place and therefore abandon parts of their Israeli identity? These protagonists ask what and where is home, and, along these lines, also what are the (dis)advantages of the

diaspora as an alternative to the nation-state. Since these questions are asked by Jewish-Israelis, they mirror similar historic debates between Zionism and diasporic Judaism(s). These debates about “national space” were—and still are today—central in Jewish circles, which debate the opposing alternatives of homecoming and assimilation. The question of queer assimilation versus separatism, and the different costs of each standpoint for the individual and his community, are central to these scenes in the texts that take place in Independence Park. Reuveny and Ziffer’s novels provoke questions regarding the place of homosexuality in Zionism; although based in an Israeli context, their questions transcend locality: these texts also engage with issues of space, collective memory, transnationalism, race, xenophobia, and queer emigration in the process of imagining communities. They invite the readers to think seriously about the issue of separatism and essentialism in a contemporary discourse that promotes social constructivism.

Tel-Aviv’s Independence Park, which is built on a Muslim cemetery, inspires the imagery of ghosts, both in literature, and in the popular imagination. Chapter five, titled “Haunted by Memory: Gay Cruising in a Muslim Cemetery,” deals with the symbolic representations of Palestinian ghosts in the context of queer Jewish-Israeli culture; it asks why these ghosts haunt the Israeli collective memory, why now, and how exactly they appear. It also explores the significance of such haunting, and what it tells us about the construction of Jewish-Israeli collective memory vis-à-vis its own traumas and the traumas of the “other.” This chapter addresses these questions through a close reading of direct actions and street art by Israeli left-wing organizations such as Zochrot, Almost Forgot, and Black Laundry. I suggest in this chapter that gender and sexual orientation play an important role in these groups’ self-identity by determining their all-inclusive political approach to the conflict and by shaping the nature of their activities. I focus on the concept of “solidarity through identification” between gay and feminist Israeli activists and the Palestinians. The second part of the chapter focuses on Alon Hilu’s 2008 bestselling novel *The House of Dajani* (אחוזת דג'ני), which addresses these questions of haunting, national space, gender and homosexuality in the context of the conflict. Against previous readings of this novel, I argue that this post-Zionist text offers a complex understanding of gender and sexuality in the context of the first wave of Zionist

immigration to Palestine. My reading focuses on the plot's location—the Muslim cemetery that later becomes Independence Park—and the appearance of Palestinian ghosts that seek to avenge the Jewish immigrants. I show that Hilu's text problematizes the spectral metaphor when he points out its complexity alongside its weaknesses.

*Imagining Independence Park* explores processes of minority collective identity-formation and reformation through representations of a culturally and politically loaded space. I use an interdisciplinary approach in this dissertation, and in doing so, gain insights from different forms of representation, genres, and mediums. Focusing on Israeli representations of gay cruising and HIV/AIDS across literature, installation art, and photography, my project explores an under-researched topic, and contributes to the understanding of a particular gay men experience with unique local problems.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Sarit Rosen, 2002, *Holy-Land*, The Tel-Aviv Artists Studios.
- <sup>2</sup> Dana Gilerman, "Teror Esteti," (Aesthetic Terror), *Ha'aretz*, 1.10.2002; Rona Segal, "Hame'ra Hakhashmalit" (The Electric Cave), *Ha'ir* 1.10.2002.
- <sup>3</sup> I could not find any representations of women cruising. In her short story Biologia, Noga Eshed portrays a lesbian who wants "Independence Park for women," but knows that such "scene" will not work since women have different "biology" than men. Noga Eshed, *Mazon Melahut* (royal jelly) (Tel-Aviv: Poalim, 1998) 65-66.
- <sup>4</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- <sup>5</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de memoire", *Representations* 26 (1989): 12.
- <sup>6</sup> I'll discuss the term world-making later in the introduction.
- <sup>7</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 20-30
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 27
- <sup>9</sup> Michael Warner, *Public and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 57.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 160-64.
- <sup>12</sup> Warner, 57. For a definition of cruising, see: Dianne Chisholm, *Queer Constellations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 11-13.
- <sup>13</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 94.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 17.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 33.
- <sup>16</sup> See, for example: Laud Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970).
- <sup>17</sup> See, for example: David Bell and Gill Valentine, "Introduction: Orientations," *Mapping Desire* (London: Routledge, 1995); Edward Delph, *The Silent Community: Public Homosexual Encounters* (London: Sage, 1994); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and The Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Clive Moore, "Poofs in the Park: Documenting Gay Beats in Queensland, Australia," *GLQ* 2.3 (1995): 319-339; John Howard, "The Library, The Park, and the Pervert: Public Space and Homosexual Encounter in Post-World War II Atlanta," *Radical History Review* 62 (1995): 166-187; Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1997); David Bell, "One-Handed Geographies: An Archaeology of Public Sex," in Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (eds.), *Queers in Space: Communities / Public Places / Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), 81-87; Gordon Brent Ingram, "Open' Spaces as Strategic Queer Sites," *Queers in Space*, 95-125; Maurice van Lieshout, "Leather Nights in the Woods: Locating Male Homosexuality and Sadomasochism in Dutch Highway Rest Area," *Queers in Space*, 339-355; John Hollister, "A Highway Rest Area as a Socially-Reproducible Site," in

- William Leap (ed.) *Public Sex / Gay Space* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 55-70; Mary McLeod, "Other Spaces and Others," in Diana Agrest, Patricia Comway, and Leslie Kanés Weisman (eds.), *The Sex of Architecture* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1996); Paul Flowers, "The Bars, the Bogs, and the Bushes" The Impact of Locale on Sexual Culture," *Culture, Health, and Sexuality* 2.2 (2000), 69-86.
- <sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22-27.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, 24.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> There are many representations of Independence Park; this dissertation does not survey the abundance of these representations, but examines in depth a few interesting case studies. Here are a few examples of works which were not included in this study: Tamir Greenberg's play *Mizmur LeDavid* (song for David), The Israeli Fringe Theater Festival, Akko 1986; Rephal Rephaly's documentary film *Gan HaAtzmaut*, 2009; Sharit Rozen's 2002 installation art *Holy Land*.; Ilan Sheinfeld's 2000 novel *Raq Atah* (Only you) (Tel-Aviv: Shufra); Ilan Sheinfeld's 1994 poems from *Tashlich* (cast [a Jewish prayer]) (Tel-Aviv: Tag); Ilan Sheinfeld's 1987 poems from *Turim LeReha BeFridah* (lines to a friend in parting) (Tel-Aviv: Alef); Shimon Zimer's 2005 novel *Ra LeTiferet* (majestically bad) (Tel-Aviv: Poalim); Zvi Mermelstein's 1998 poems from *MeHazer Al Pithy Elyunim VeTatonim* (courting higher and lower orifices) (Tel-Aviv: Shufra); David Erlikh's 1999 short stories from *HaBeqarim Shel Shelishi VeHamishi* (Tuesday and Thursday mornings) (Tel-Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth); Dror Hadadi's 2001 novel *Mitrabim Kemo Popkorn* (multiply as popcorn) (Tel-Aviv: Shufra); Yossi Avni-Levi 1995 stories from *Gan HaEtzim HaMetim* (the park of the dead trees) (Tel-Aviv: Zemorah-Bitan), Motti Averbuch 2003 novel *Elohim Nekkeh Meah Ahuz* (God is 100% cripple) (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved); Moshik Sakal's novel 2007 *Ahayekh Elayikh, Ahayekh* (I'll smile at you, I'll smile) (Tel-Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth).
- <sup>22</sup> Press and Fink's 1999 book *Independence Park: The Lives of Gay Men in Israel* has a misleading title; the book does *not* deal with the park itself, but contains interviews with gay men who talk about being homosexual in Israel. Independence Park, in this case as in other cases, is a mere signifier of homosexuality in Israel, and the activities in the park are not discussed in this book. Amir Sumakai Fink and Jacob Press, *Independence Park: The Lives of Gay Men in Israel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). The only article about Independence Park is by Dafna Hirsch. See: Dafna Hirsch, "Homotopya: Gan HaAtzmaut BeTel-Aviv" (Homotopia: Independence Park In Tel-Aviv), *Tarbut Adryhakit* (Architectural Culture), eds. Rachel Kallus and Tali Hatuka (Tel-Aviv: Resling, 2005), 287-310.
- <sup>23</sup> Baudelaire, Charles-Pierre, *Selected Writing on Art and Literature*, tr. P. E. Charvet (London and New York: Penguin, 1992), 400-401.
- <sup>24</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, tr. Howard Eliand and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), ix.
- <sup>25</sup> Mark Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 31-35.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, 36 and 60-61.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, 46.
- <sup>28</sup> *Tel-Aviv Municipality Newsletter 9-10: 136.*

- <sup>29</sup> Joachim Schlor, *Tel-Aviv: From Dream to City*, tr. Helen Atkins (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); Maoz Azaryahu, *Tel-Aviv, ha'ir ha-amitit* (Tel-Aviv: The Real City) (Be'er Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2005); Sharon Rotbard, *Ir Levanah, Ir Shehotah* (white city, black city) (Tel-Aviv: Bavel, 2005).
- <sup>30</sup> *Tel-Aviv Municipality Newsletter* 4-5: 18.
- <sup>31</sup> Omer Hillel, "Omanot HaGan" (the park's art), *BeRashot HaRabym* (public space), ed. Yeal Moriah (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv Museum for Modern Art, 2003), 230-33. This is a reprint of the 1950's article.
- <sup>32</sup> See also *Ha'arets* (6.18.33), *Davar* (6.17.33 and 6.19.33), and Shabtai Teveth, Retzah Arlosoroff (Arlosoroff's assassination), (Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 1982).
- <sup>33</sup> Yigal Mossinson, *Hasamba* (1950, Tel-Aviv: Taverski), 10 and 119.
- <sup>34</sup> Yedioth Ahronoth Reporter, "Gan HaAtzmaut Ya'afoh LeGan Hasamba" (Independence Park will become Hasamba Park), *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 2.27.98.
- <sup>35</sup> Yeal Zerubavel *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1995)
- <sup>36</sup> Yossef Arkyha, *Miqraha Historit-Syfrotit* (historical-literary reader) (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv city council press, 1959), 32-34.
- <sup>37</sup> I have spoken to a man who claims that he have cruised the park in the 1950s (July 2009).
- <sup>38</sup> Here is another example: *Davar* published a story in 1963 that took the readers, Escoted by a reporter, a photographer, and policemen from the vice department, to, as its title suggests, "A Routine Patrol in the Underworld". Like the Ancient Roman poet Virgil, who guides Dante to the inferno, the reporter, Aaron Lahav, leads his readers through the dusky maze of Tel Aviv underworld, where, in the parks and on the boardwalk, gay men meet other delinquents, such as pimps, hustlers, sex workers, thieves, drug addicts, and drug dealers, all of whom conspire to promote social deviation. Lahav, a "concerned citizen", wonders why homosexuals are not imprisoned, and concludes that the police needs them as informers, as a way to get to the sharks. The reportage's images are grained, not in focus, as if they were taken in haste, from a hiding-place, without a flash, while the photographer risks his life to document a breathtaking event. The leading image of the story presents a teenager sitting on a chair on the boardwalk, and not, as one may expect a secret meeting of the heads of mafia families. Lahav, Aaron, 1963. "A Routine Patrol in the Underworld", *Davar*, 8.2: 4.
- <sup>39</sup> Ha'olam Haze Reporter, "Mahteret Bataylet" (underground on the esplanade), *Ha'olam Haze*, 7.2. 62.
- <sup>40</sup> Tel-Aviv Municipality Archive (TAMA) 7/69/392. The date on the letter: 7.19.1961.
- <sup>41</sup> A. Lha'av, "Syur Shgrati Baulam Hatahton" (regular patrol in the underworld), *Davar Hashavoha* 8.2.63.
- <sup>42</sup> TAMA 7(13)/68/391
- <sup>43</sup> TAMA 7/69/392
- <sup>44</sup> TAMA 7(13)/68/391. See also: Barbara Mann, *A Place in History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 62-71.
- <sup>45</sup> Ha'olam Haze Reporter, "Lema'an Hashem Hilton" (for the name: Hilton), *Ha'olam Haze* 22.9.65.



- <sup>46</sup> Y. H., no title, *Al HaMishmar* 10.9.65: 9. See also: Talya Margalit, *Benya Lagovah BeTel-Aviv* (Multi-Story Building in Tel-Aviv), dissertation (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 2007), 133-34.
- <sup>47</sup> Yedioth Ahronoth Reporter, "Malon Hilton Tel-Aviv Neftah Rishmit" (Tel-Aviv Hilton Hotel is officially open), *Yedioth Ahronoth* 9.14.65.
- <sup>48</sup> Tom Segev, *1967* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2005), 34, 43, 49, 51, 306.
- <sup>49</sup> Yedioth Ahronoth Reporter, no title, *Yedioth Ahronoth* 11.24.1972: 4.
- <sup>50</sup> Ha'aretz Reporter, "Pesel Sha'ar HaShalom Nehnah" (the statue Arco Della Pace was inaugurate), *Ha'aretz* 11.24.72.
- <sup>51</sup> TAMA 25/4841
- <sup>52</sup> See also: Boris Senior. *New Heavens: My Life as a Fighter Pilot and a Founder of the Israel Air Force* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2005), 194-5.
- <sup>53</sup> Sabbatay Portnoy, "Tayar MiShvaytz VeAravi-Israeli Hashotim BeShod Tayarim BeTel-Aviv" (a tourist from Switzerland and an Israeli-Arab are suspects of robbing Tourists in Tel-Aviv), *Yedioth Ahronoth* 3.22.72.
- <sup>54</sup> Meydad Schiff, "Tayarin Memyn MeYohad" (special kind of tourists), *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 4.27.73.
- <sup>55</sup> Rish Galey, January 1977.
- <sup>56</sup> Rish Galey, February 1978.
- <sup>57</sup> Tzipora Ziv, "Shyvyon Zekuyot VeAkara Atzmit LeHomosexualim BeIsrael" (equality and self-consciousness to homosexuals in Israel), *Bul* 2.2.79.
- <sup>58</sup> Not cataloged in TAMA: Letter of complaint 8.16.82.
- <sup>59</sup> Yotam Reuveny, *Yomam Laylah* (night diary) (Tel-Aviv: Kadim, 1987); Yotam Reuveny, *Yomam Lailah 2* (Tel-Aviv: Modan, 1988); Yotam Reuveny, *Yomam Lailah 3* (Tel-Aviv: Nimrod, 1989). See also chapter one.
- <sup>60</sup> The articles were republished together with letters that were sent to the newspaper and the author in: Yotam Reuveny, *Hageza Hamekolal* (The Wretched Race) (Tel-Aviv: Nimrod, 2003). See also chapter four.
- <sup>61</sup> Klein, Anat. *Hete VeUnshu* (Crime and Punishment), dissertation (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 2001).
- <sup>62</sup> Ran Geffen, "Gyna Haviva Ly" (lovely garden I have), *Ha'ir* 7.18.86.
- <sup>63</sup> Moshe (Gal Uchovsky), "Ma Qlala, Ma MaHala" (what a curse, what a disease), *Ha'ir* 8.8.86.
- <sup>64</sup> Ronit Horowitz, "Hoshekh Began" (dark in the park), *Ha'ir* 12.15.89.
- <sup>65</sup> Ilan Sheinfeld, "Teno Ahava" (give love), *Ha'ir* 6.2.89.
- <sup>66</sup> Mark Ariel, "Ha'agoda Mitorert" (the association is awaking), *Magaim* October 1987.
- <sup>67</sup> See chapter 4.
- <sup>68</sup> Bill Strubbe, "A Gay Yankee in King David's Court," *Advocate*, 2.2.1988: 43-47.
- <sup>69</sup> Dani Sade, "Naydet Leitor AIDS Tefal BeHof Tel-Barokh UbeGan HaAtzmaut" (patrol car to detect AIDS will operate in Tel-Barokh beach and Independence Park), *Yedioth Ahronoth* 8.21.87.
- <sup>70</sup> *Magaim* Reporter, May 1988, 15-19.
- <sup>71</sup> Ha'ir Reporter, "Gynot Qtanot VeProut" (wild little parks), *Ha'ir* 5.13.88.
- <sup>72</sup> Effy, "Ma ShYsh" (what we have), *Magaim*8 (no year indicated).

- <sup>73</sup> Dror Harary, “Gan HaAtzmaut – Madrikh LaMishtamesh” (Independence Park – user guide), *Hazman HaVarod* October 1997.
- <sup>74</sup> Mark Ariel, “Arvot Mugbelet” (limited guarantee), *Ha’ir* 5.8.87; Ilan Sheinfeld, “Homosexuakim Uteqefo Im alot Began HaAtzmaut” (homosexuals were attacked with clubs in Independence Park), *Ha’ir* 8.4.89.
- <sup>75</sup> Tal Bashan, “Na’arim Ba’afila” (boys in the darkness), *Ma’ariv* 3.11.83.
- <sup>76</sup> Dani Sade, “Ben 15 shasq beznot paratz leBait Shagrir Venetzuela” (15 years old hustler break into the house of Venezuela ambassador), *Yedioth Ahronoth* 2.1.87.
- <sup>77</sup> Dani Sade, “Tzair Dati Nidqar Began HaAtzmaut” (a young orthodox men was stabbed in Independence Park), *Yedioth Ahronoth* 7.24.87.
- <sup>78</sup> Davar Reporter, “Shofetet: Qol HaMagya Legan HaHtzmaut Sam Nafsho BeKapo” (judge: whoever comes to Independence Park risks their lives), *Davar* 11.27.89; Ha’aretz Reporter, “HaMagya Lagan Sam Nafsho BeKapo” (visitors to the park risk their lives), *Ha’aretz* 11.27.89.
- <sup>79</sup> On gay clubs: Nisan Shorem, *Lerqot Im Dema’aot Baenaym* (dancing with tears in my eyes) (Tel-Aviv: Resling, 2008), 168-9, 250-63, 392.
- <sup>80</sup> Niv Gilboa, “Et Shoshi Kevar Lo Ruein Po” (you don’t see Shoshi here anymore), *Al HaMishmar* 3.23.90.
- <sup>81</sup> Itzik Yosha, “Teqfotz Pa’am LaGan, Terner” (Terner, come to the park), *Tel-Aviv*, 7.26.91.
- <sup>82</sup> Marcues Sheff, “Gay Watch Patrols Park,” *Jerusalem Post* 8.9.91
- <sup>83</sup> A few examples: Yoram Yarquny, “Shotrin etallo be Ve’hespilo Uti Raq Ki Ani Homo” (policemen abuse and humiliate me just because I’m gay), *Yedioth Ahronoth* 6.26.90; Yaakov Ha’alyon, “HaTziporim HaTzvout” (the painted birds), *Ma’ariv*, 7.3.90; Hadashot Reporter, “Hamisha Bauo Learbitz Lehomoyim Veneatzro” (five came to bash gays and were arrested), *Hadashot* 8.11.91.
- <sup>84</sup> Eyal Shecter, “Itargenot Lehagana Atzmit Began HaAtzmaut” (organizing self-defense group in Independence Park), *Tel-Aviv* 8.2.91.
- <sup>85</sup> Tami Shem-Tov, “Toqfim otcha, Hosvim Shze Bidor” (you are assaulted, they think it’s entertaining), *Tel-Aviv* 8.16.91.
- <sup>86</sup> Jacob Wirtschafter, “Harassed gays from Volunteer Patrol,” *The Jerusalem Post* 8.13.91
- <sup>87</sup> Ilan Sheinfeld, “Homoyim Ze Lo AIDS” (gays are not AIDS), *Al HaMishmar* 12.6.91.
- <sup>88</sup> Ron Khalely, “Haliga LeHaganat HaHomoyim” (gay defense league), *Hadashot* 8.8.91.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid
- <sup>90</sup> Mark Ariel, “Yesh Peyilot BaGan” (there is activity in the park), *Magaim* September 1991.
- <sup>91</sup> Mark Ariel, “Gan Shamor” (protected park), *Magaim* September 1991.
- <sup>92</sup> Tami Shem-Tov, “Haeytonot Tishmor Al Gan HaAtzmaut” (the press will guard Independence Park), *Tel-Aviv*, 11.22.91.
- <sup>93</sup> Menachem Shizaf, “Homoyim, Hetztarfo LaMishmar Haleumi” (gays, join the National Civil Guard), *Zman Tel-Aviv* 9.19.09.
- <sup>94</sup> Roni Hadar, “Shetah Banuy” (built-up area), *Tel-Aviv*, 2.27.98
- <sup>95</sup> Gil Mualem Doron, “Mehaslim et Gan HaAtzmaut” (destroying Independence Park), *Hazman HaVarod* April 1998.

- <sup>96</sup> Ibid
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid
- <sup>98</sup> Menachem Shizaf, "Leagen Al HaGan" (to protect the park), *Tel-Aviv* 4.24.98
- <sup>99</sup> Orna Coussin, "HaGan Hanelam" (the disappearing park), *Ha'aretz* 4.21.98
- <sup>100</sup> Dafna Hirsch, "Gan HaAtzmaut: Teritoria Homosexualit Behalal Tzbori" (Independence Park: homosexual territory in Public Space), *Hazman HaVarod* May 1998.
- <sup>101</sup> Amir Ben David, "Qontomatim Letqufat Nysayon" (condom vending machines for a trial period), *Ha'aretz* 9.30.99; Eden Michal, "Lalyla Began HaAtzmaut" (night in Independence Park), *Hazman Havarod* July 1998.
- <sup>102</sup> Orna Coussin, "Mesibat Gan" (garden party), *Ha'ir* 9.15.95.
- <sup>103</sup> Sara Tzferony, "Hagigot HaAtzmaut" (Independence Parties), *Zman Tel-Aviv* 9.15.95.
- <sup>104</sup> Yuval Qarny, "Bega'ava Ubeza'am" (in pride and in rage), *Yedioth Ahronoth* 5.24.98
- <sup>105</sup> Itay Asher, "Shotrim Lavesho Kfafot Shel Gomi Behafgana shel homosexualsim (Policemen wear latex gloves in a homosexuals' demonstration), *Ma'ariv*, 5.24.98.
- <sup>106</sup> Dan Lachman, "Halayla Bo Honaf Hadege" (the night the flag was rose), *Hazman HaVarod* June 98.
- <sup>107</sup> Yair Qedar, "HaHayim Bevarod" (life in pink), *Ha'aretz* 6.1.08
- <sup>108</sup> Gadi Shason, "Lean ho ne'elam" (where did he go), *Hazman HaVarod*, January 2002.
- <sup>109</sup> Hazman HaVarod Reporter, "Hamishtara Horida et HaKfafot (the police took off the gloves), *Hazman HaVarod* June 98.
- <sup>110</sup> Aeyal Gross, "Halayla Shebo Dlatot Ha'aron Nifretzo" (the night in which the closet doors were open), *Hazman Havarod* May 1999.
- <sup>111</sup> Hazman HaVarod Reporter, "Shov Hoko Homoyim BeGan HaAtzmaut" (again homosexuals were beaten in Independence Park), *Hazman Havarod*, May 2000.
- <sup>112</sup> Yuval Bugajski, "Zehirot, Shotrin" (caution, policemen), *Hazman Havarod* April 2000.
- <sup>113</sup> Hazman HaVarod Reporter, "HaGan Shov Lo Mogan" (the park is not safe again), *Hazman Havarod* January 2001; Uri Ynetz, "Zehirot: Mishtara" (caution, police), *Hazman Havarod* 2002.
- <sup>114</sup> Eli Sharon, "Tzarot Began" (troubles in the park), *Ha'ir*, 10.13.2003.
- <sup>115</sup> Devir Bar, "Laqho Hanashim Kemo Hayot" (people were taken as if they were animals), *Zman Tel-Aviv* 7.11.03; Devora Luz, "Damam Shel Homoyim Mofqar" (Homosexuals' blood is important), *Ha'aretz* 9.22.03.
- <sup>116</sup> Yoash Foldesh, "HaInternet horeg et Gan HaAtzmaut" (the internet kills Independence Park), *Ha'aretz -Kepten Internet* 1.12.02.
- <sup>117</sup> Liad Kanterovitz, Tayar Mezdayn (fucking tourist), *Ha'ir* 11.25.05
- <sup>118</sup> Ofer Meir, "Adayin Hay, Noshem, Bo'et" (still living, breathing, kicking), *Hazman HaVarod* May 2004.
- <sup>119</sup> Hylo Glezer, "Holh BeTel-Aviv" (walking in Tel-Aviv), *Ha'ir* 3.21.08
- <sup>120</sup> Yigal Hay, "200 Plitim BeTel-Aviv Hayim BaRehov" (200 refugees live in the Street), *Ha'aretz* 3.14.08.
- <sup>121</sup> Ben Zilcha, "Hasamba VeHaplitin MiEritrea" (Hasamba and the Eritrean refugees), *Ha'ir* 3.21.08.

- <sup>122</sup> Yeftah, “HaGan HaNe’elam” (The disappearing park), *Hazman Havarod* November 2006.
- <sup>123</sup> Eli Sinyor, “Gan LeEmaot Bayom, LeGeyim Balayla (park for mothers at the daytime, for gays at night time), *Tel-Aviv* 6.16.2006.
- <sup>124</sup> Roni Hadar, “Hatar Haqruzing Gan HaAtzmaut Yshopatz Veyegath” (the cruising site Independence Park will be renovated and reopen), *Ha’ir* 7.12.07
- <sup>125</sup> Moriah Ben Yossef, “Hagigot HaAtzmaut” (Independence parties), *Zman Tel-Aviv* 7.10.09.
- <sup>126</sup> Noam Devir, “Sod Hagan” (the park’s secret), *Ha’aretz* 7.9.09.
- <sup>127</sup> Gil Hochberg, “Introduction: Israelis, Palestinians, Queers: Point of Departure.” *GLQ*, 16.4 (2010): 510. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 16-17. See also: Jasbir Puar, “Israel’s Gay Propaganda War” (7.1.10): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/01/israels-gay-propaganda-war>.
- <sup>128</sup> Gal Uchovsky, “Eim HaTahat El Haroh HaNoshevet” (with the ass toward the blowing wind), *Time Out* 4.12.09.
- <sup>129</sup> Asaf Romano, “Eyn Dahlilim Began HaAtzmaut” (There are no scarecrows in Independence Park), <http://www.gogay.co.il/content/article.asp?id=8865> 12.4.09.
- <sup>130</sup> Ran Halahmi, “HaGan Haqosmopoliti” (the cosmopolitan park), *NRG*, 6.5.06 <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/40/ART1/431/268.html>
- <sup>131</sup> David Merhav, “Shalom Gan HaAtzmaut” (hello/good-bye Independence Park), *David Merhav’s Blog*, <http://davidmerhav.wordpress.com/2008/05/23/%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%9D-%D7%9C%D7%9A-%D7%92%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%A2%D7%A6%D7%9E%D7%90%D7%95%D7%AA/>

## Chapter One

### To Transcend AIDS in a Holy Land: Yotam Reuveny's *Night Diary*

באה עת שירה גדולה, שירת ה-HIV  
כי סעד הזמנים הוא שיר, הזמן זקוק לסעד.  
נשא אחר נשא נצעד, וכל נשא - נביא:  
באין לנו אלוה נאליה את הצעד

(דורי מנור, "Fin de siècle", *Miut*, עמ' 6)

The time has come for great poetry, the poetry of HIV  
Since a poem is a temporary remedy, time calls for AID.  
One carrier after another, we shall walk, and each carrier – a prophet:  
In lieu of God we shall deify the walk

(Dori Manor, "Fin de siècle", *Miut*, p. 6 [Translation: Alexandra Hoffman and my own])

#### Introduction

In the 1980s, when homosexuality was still illegal in Israel, the Israeli mass media dealt extensively with the HIV/AIDS pandemic.<sup>1</sup> As in many other countries worldwide, the "dangerous plague" was identified with homosexuals and was often described as a "death sentence" and punishment for promiscuity.<sup>2</sup> In contrast with the mass media, Hebrew literature from the time avoided the topic, except for Yotam Reuveny's 1987 novel in installments *Night Diary* (יומן לילה).<sup>3</sup> A lonely voice crying out in the wilderness, Reuveny's groundbreaking text confronts this loaded subject and offers an approach different from and much more complex than the public discussions of the time.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter I argue that *Night Diary* reappropriates the homophobic HIV/AIDS discourse of the 1980s in order to subvert it; condemnatory concepts and imagery—such as "sin,"

“punishment,” and “death sentence”—are redefined positively in the text and ultimately enable the readers to think about HIV/AIDS in new, non-judgmental and productive ways. By alluding to literary works which discuss the concept of sin and punishment—Albert Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Pinhas Sadeh’s *Life as a Parable*, and Jean Genet’s prison novels—Reuveny’s text resists the delegitimization of “AIDS victims” and open the door to thinking about the virus as a philosophical tool which allows them to transcend not only their “disease” but also the mundane. *Night Diary*, then, is a radical text for its time: it has a unique and provocative voice which revolts against discriminating social conventions; it is a consoling and empowering text that corresponds with contemporary Western literary works while contextualizing them in the local Israeli queer culture.

The text’s novelty is found not only in its radical content and its new and positive approach to HIV/AIDS, but also in its form. Throughout its thousand pages, *Night Diary* repeats again and again a scene in which the protagonist, also named Reuveny, cruises Tel-Aviv’s Independence Park in search for occasional sexual relations. For the protagonist, this is not a pleasant experience; in ways similar to the Israeli mass media, he depicts the park as a foreboding place and compares it to a prison. The reiteration of this unpleasant scene, which also turns the act of reading into a punishment, forces the readers to undergo the tiresome experience of cruising in the park; while alluding to the myth of Sisyphus, *Night Diary* stages cruising in Independence Park as a Sisyphean task, but finds it in a meaning, as Camus did in his reading of the myth. The text, then, experiments with various literary *modi operandi* while also exploring different strategies of resistance to policing powers; This experience of cruising in the park, and especially cruising in the age of HIV/AIDS, becomes, I argue, a jumping point through which Reuveny unfolds his philosophical thoughts on homosexual identity and minorities’ symbiotic existence within a dominant majority.

*Night Diary* is a non-linear text, which presents itself as an autobiographical account; it represents three years of the protagonist’s life. The narrator dubs the work an “autistic diary”—a problematic designation—in order to highlight its textual insularity and fragmentation as well as its intentional lack of communication and clarity.<sup>5</sup> Reuveny changes the Hebrew language; deforms its linguistic rules; and breaks, reassembles, and

fits it to his needs. Consequently, this avant-garde text is almost unreadable and certainly difficult to translate, and so much of it is lost in the transition to English. In this paper, I would like first to describe the protagonist's

Attempts to find new ways of expression; since Hebrew literature seldom represents gay cruising, Reuveny promotes the use of an alternative discourse: he insists on automatic writing and promotes the idea of writing only in the present tense. The concept of the present, I claim, becomes for Reuveny an inventive literary technique since the word present in Hebrew also means existence. The second part of this essay centers around Camus's existentialism and the ways Reuveny recontextualizes it. I argue here that *Night Diary* stages *The Myth of Sisyphus* and forces the readers to suffer as the protagonist suffers when he cruises the park in the age of HIV/AIDS and later also when he describes it in his diary. The third part of the essay also focuses on the concept of the present: besides a tense expressing the current time and the philosophical understanding of existence, the word present in Hebrew also means divine. Reuveny uses the concept of the present as a way to transcend the banal reality, to show that HIV/AIDS could be thought of as martyrdom. Allusions also play an important part here: Sadeh and Genet, who idealize suffering, enable Reuveny to romanticize homosexuality while giving higher meaning to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

### ***Against Belles Lettres***

Like other avant-garde texts, *Night Diary* requires patience and involvement on the part of its readers. Provocative and sophisticated, it does not give itself easily over to its readers who must "work hard" to draw meaning and pleasure from it. The diary is deliberately incoherent, and at times unintelligible, due to protagonist's insistence on writing what he calls an "esoteric personal account."<sup>6</sup> This metafictional text, which incessantly questions the distinction between fiction and reality, draws attention to its own status as a linguistic artifact. In a characteristic way, *Night Dairy* begins with an impressionistic, stream-of-consciousness-like sentence:

מוות? הו כן אבל מתי אני אוכל כבר, מתי אני אצא מהתניית הבדיה והדימיון, ואז, כבר בלי אש הלהבה, מסתפק עם הווה, הווה, כאן, במדבר גובי זה של זמן קפוא, צעירים שמרנים יותר מהוריהם, על חוט של אימה משולחים אל אתרי צניחה והבל, לראות את

ילדותם אובדת, אובדת, ועם מה הם נשארים ביד, עם מה אני, אבל אני עדיין לא יכול, גם  
בי הטביע מדבר גובי את חותמו, וסיפרתי סיפורים כאילו אני.<sup>7</sup>

Death? Yes but when can I already, when will I get out of the conditioning of fiction and imagination, and then, already without the fire, satisfied with the present, the present, here, in the Gobi Desert of frozen time, youngsters are more conservative than their parents, on a thread of horror they are being sent to sites of parachuting and vanity, to see their childhood lost, lost, and what are they left with, what am I, but I still cannot, the Gobi desert has left it imprint on me do, and I told stories as if I.

This is but one example of how Reuveny consciously breaks the syntactical and grammatical rules of Hebrew and, therefore, makes it difficult to understand the narrative. For example, it is important to note here the lack of question marks where they would normally be required, the awkward punctuation, and the multitude of sentences without verbs. This introductory sentence, which is supposed to help confused readers situate the events of the narrative, actually leaves them with more questions than answers. Reuveny, the protagonist who writes the diary, rejects the concept of plot, something that he stresses again and again, and his aim is “to find a way out from the dead-end that is literature today.”<sup>8</sup> He sees literature as an “addictive fabrication” that provides an escape from life’s problems.<sup>9</sup> Instead, he prefers to document his life rather than “to give the reader [...] a ridiculous plot, because his present is so poor and unsatisfactory.”<sup>10</sup> Reuveny wish to find “a technique of freedom, which will help me to know that I am free.”<sup>11</sup>

As a text that takes pride in its lack of communicability, *Night Diary* has no stories to tell; it has no funny, facile anecdotes to share with its readers. “Not that it is hard for me to write stories,” Reuveny writes in one of the entries, but, ideologically, he refuses to do so. All the text has to offer, then, or so he claims, are fragmented, undated log entries—almost in the form of inventory lists—which flow confusingly with “the stream of life. Life streams.”<sup>12</sup> The diary announces from the very beginning that it will not have a plot, since “fiction causes nausea.”<sup>13</sup> Self-consciously and systematically, the protagonist repeatedly writes what his diary will not have: “no inventions. No imaginative plots. Fiction, literature, it started to sicken me from early age, the inventions.”<sup>14</sup> He writes:



מהו יומן לילה, מה חי. שאלונים ורשימות-מלאי. אולי אומרים מצאי. הכל אני דוחף למריצה שאיתה אני. לפעמים היומן במריצה. לפעמים המריצה. רצה אצה. עושה אף היא טאי צ'י. עושה תחת שרירי. מתיחת גב במכון אורטופדי. עם היומן של קפקא על המיטה הרפואית, רואה את מושג האני נע ליד החללית. עוד לא התפוצצה החללית. היא תתפוצץ.

What is *Night Diary*, what is my life. Questionnaires and inventory lists. Maybe it is called finding. I push everything into the wheelbarrow that is with me. Sometime the diary is in the wheelbarrow. Sometimes the wheelbarrow. Running, hurrying. The wheelbarrow also does Tai chi. It makes a muscular ass. Stretching your back in an orthopedic clinic. With Kafka's diary on a medical bed, I see the concept of self move near the spaceship. It has not blown up yet. It will blow up.

*Night Diary* is a network of personal associations: it is not clear, at this point, why, for example, he uses the image of a wheelbarrow. The text is an introspective reportage, and it is never entirely separated from the writer's life: the boundaries of his life and his work continually blur.<sup>15</sup> The protagonist actually asks the readers to write the diary as they read it; his diary, as Roland Barthes calls texts that force the readers to produce their own meaning, is a “writerly text.”<sup>16</sup> He writes in the diary: “it is as though as if the poor reader must write the book by himself.”<sup>17</sup> Considering the fact that the diary contains more than a thousand pages, reading\writing such a text is not a simple task. I shall return to the question of length below when I show how the performative act of reading\writing gives meaning to cruising in the age of HIV/AIDS. Considering the length of the text and the amount of energy needed in reading\writing it, it is obvious that the text was not popular.

From the margins, away from the industry of fiction's mass production, Reuveny writes against the grain of popular writing.<sup>18</sup> He wishes to find new ways of expression, which will not limit him; his protagonist wishes to give a testimony of his life-experiences, that is, to verbalize his identity (queer) and the praxis (cruising) tied to it. To do that, the protagonist claims he must break free from language whose conventional usage holds him back. An example of such a disruption can be found where Reuveny describes a sexual encounter in the bushes of Independence Park. He writes, as he often does, without punctuation and in a poetry-like style: “I am in the parks looking for sex talk sex discourse in bushes sextalk fastsex xesdiscourse” (אני בגנים מחפש מין שיהת מין) (שיחמין בשיחים מינשיחה חישמין נימשיחה).<sup>19</sup> “*Min*” in Hebrew means “sex” and also “kind” or “type”; in addition, it means, especially in the Talmudic and rabbinical commentary,

anyone that digresses, transgress, and breaks the law. “Bush,” “*siach*,” also means “discourse” and “talk” in Hebrew, and Reuveny plays with these double meanings: he is having sex, which defines his transgressive identity, not only in the bushes, but also with the Hebrew language, which is, as the poet Yona Wallach once wrote, a “sex-maniac” language, that is, it is gender-specific.<sup>20</sup> When sex and discourse are being written together and backwards as one word, they make a portmanteau, which means quick-sex (הישמין). Reuveny’s text shows how sex is inscribed within a discourse, how a certain kind of sex (*min*) produces a certain kind or type (also *min*), and how they reflect each other. *Night Diary* also asks how an individual who does a certain kind of *min* becomes a *min*, a transgressor in the Talmudic sense, and how he or she can resist or even break free from the *siach* that outlaws them.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Present as a “Technique of Freedom”**

One of the protagonist's “techniques of freedom” is his insistence on writing only “from the present,” or *hoveh* in Hebrew. He wants to produce a literature stricken with, as he says, “Korsakoff’s syndrome,” that is, the inability to remember, to have memory.<sup>22</sup> “My quest after the absolute present,” he writes,

החיפוש שלי אחר הווה מוחלט, השאיפה אל הווה מוחלט, או למיצער השאיפה להגדרתו המילולית המדויקת ביותר, אינו אלא חיפוש אחר טכניקה של שימוש בחירות, שתעזור לי לדעת שאני חופשי, שבה לא תיתכן עוד בריחה ולא תיתכן עוד התמכרות.<sup>23</sup>

is the quest for an absolute present, or at least the ambition for verbalize it accurately; it is nothing but a quest for a technique of freedom, which will help me to know that I am free, that an escape can no longer be possible and that addiction can no longer be possible.

The protagonist opens his diary with a remark about the importance of writing in the present tense, and repeatedly stresses throughout the diary that he writes only what comes to his mind at the moment of writing. His diary, he stresses, is an experiment in automatic writing: he does not go back to rewrite it, to “beautify” reality.<sup>24</sup>

This fixation on the present is punned in the text in an ingenious way, since *hoveh* also means in Hebrew “existence” (הווה). The double meaning of the term *hoveh* is

important since Israeli gay men's existence at the time is in danger: they are being persecuted by the state and are facing prejudice from fellow citizens and the mass media. As with the wordplay with *siach* and *min*, the protagonist also shrewdly "plays" with the different linguistic meaning of *hoveh*. When he writes about the present, he is also writing about existence and vice versa. This layered notion, which dissolves present and existence together into one term present/existence, is well rooted in existential philosophical thought. The protagonist's "techniques of freedom" goes, then, beyond a literary protest, and offers also a philosophical alternative to queer existence. The diary alludes to Albert Camus' notion of the absurd, as it is perceived in popular culture, especially in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and applies it to the Israeli queer experience.<sup>25</sup>

"Let's call Camus," Reuveny writes in one of his entries and starts to unfold his own life philosophy:

נקרא לקאמי. ביקום בלי אשליות ובלי אור האדם חש עצמו זר. זהו עולם של גלות ללא תקנה, כי הוא משולל זכרונות של מולדת אבודה וניטלה ממנו התקווה לארץ מובטחת. הניתוק שבין האדם וחיייו, בין השחקן ותפאורתו קובע את תחושת האבסורדיזם.<sup>26</sup>

In a universe without illusions and without light, man feels himself a stranger. It is a world of irreparable exile, because he is deprived of memories of lost homeland and the hope for a promised land was taken away from him. The detachment between man and his life, between the actor and his setting, determines the feeling of absurdity, and also enables a refusal of the present/existence.

Camus claims that in a world devoid of God, the human's existence is absurd.<sup>27</sup> He rereads the myth of Sisyphus through his absurdist philosophy: Sisyphus, who was sentenced by the gods to forever repeat the same meaningless task of pushing a rock up a mountain only to see it roll down again, is an absurd hero for Camus.<sup>28</sup> The certainty of Sisyphus' fate, Camus notes, frees him from life's determinism and enables him to recognize the absurdity of his plight and nevertheless to carry out his actions with acceptance. Sisyphus, then, rebels against his punishment, when he accepts his "existence," and creates a meaning for it. Life itself, as Camus puts it, is a futile struggle devoid of hope; however, this fate is only horrible if one continues to hope, and continues to think that there is something more to life that is worth aiming for, that there is a "better

future.”<sup>29</sup> Sisyphus is above his fate—that is, he rebels against it—precisely because he has accepted it and lives in the moment, and he ties this potential acceptance with the realization that there is no future: “All Sisyphus’ silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols.”<sup>30</sup> For Sisyphus, then, the present and existence are interlinked.

Reuveny refers to *The Myth of Sisyphus* by saying that all he has is the present, which is an existential struggle.<sup>31</sup> The sentence—“The detachment between man and his life, between the actor and his setting, generates the feeling of absurdity and also enables a refusal of the present/existence”—is almost a direct citation from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, but the context is different. Reuveny situates the “feeling of absurdity” in Tel-Aviv’s Independence Park and the struggle to live in a homophobic society while looking for sexual partners in the age of HIV/AIDS.<sup>32</sup> He asks: “Did one of the men I had sex with inseminate me with death from acquired immune deficiency syndrome?”<sup>33</sup> Later in his diary, he considers abstaining from sex. “AIDS,” he says resentfully, “made us, and still makes us, teenagers who masturbate on Friday nights.”<sup>34</sup> In a period when HIV/AIDS, which casts its long shadow on every page of this lyrical diary, was portrayed as a “death-sentence,” the protagonist is determined to live life to its fullest. Since he knows that much of a person’s life is built on the hope for tomorrow, even though tomorrow brings them closer to death, they, the cruisers, must purify the present/existence from such false hope. Although he considers occasionally abstaining from sex, he eventually accepts his destiny; refuses to be a “masturbating teenager,” and has sex in the park. He accepts the possibility that he may well be an HIV carrier someday, and with this acceptance, he becomes free. He talks about “the fear of fucks that can bring the disease,” and he addresses this fear by saying offhandedly, “Whatever. I will live as long as I live and then later I will not live.”<sup>35</sup> His decision is problematic since he adopts a fatalistic approach, which is somewhat passive. He doesn’t fight HIV/AIDS, but waits quietly and pessimistically for its arrival, and he sees this Sisyphean waiting as heroic.

For Reuveny, an absurd hero is one who makes peace with the present/existence; such absurd hero is a man who does not hope for a better future, since, as Lee Edelman claims in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, there is no queer future with

HIV/AIDS.<sup>36</sup> The protagonist, therefore, believes that one should live a disillusioned life in the present rather than hoping for a “cure” in the future; following Camus, he assumes that acknowledgement of life's absurdity leads to true freedom. The protagonist, who seeks “a technique of freedom,” continues then to have sex in the park, sometime using condoms and sometimes not, “because it is the only thing that is possible.” He writes about his “imperative” but “dangerous” desire:

שילוב של כניעה ושל מרדנות, של קבלת הדין והסכנה והמחלה, בת דמות הסכנה, ושל בוז לסכנה, לא מתוך דיכאון או חרדה או בדידות או נטייה להרס עצמי, אלא משום שזה הדבר היחיד שהוא אפשרי.<sup>37</sup>

A combination of submission and rebellion, of acceptance of a verdict, the danger, and the disease, which is a reflection of the danger, and of contempt for the danger, not from despair or anxiety or loneliness or self-destruction, but, because it is the only thing that is possible.

The protagonist chooses to accept HIV/AIDS because he realizes that it cannot be cured in the near future, yet he cannot abstain from sex.<sup>38</sup> “Again I am mentioning the word that is not to be spoken,” he writes in the diary when he talks about AIDS:

שוב אני אומר את המלה שאין להגיד אותה. ולא זאת השאלה. אלא שאם אדם אינו יכול לעשות את מה שהוא רוצה לעשות, אם הוא לא יכול להגשים את המיניות שלו, אם לא זה, לשם מה עליו לשמר את חייו ולעבור מיום ליום כפקעת של תשוקה מחושלת בתסכול ובציפייה, אותה ציפייה שאנחנו יודעים מה מצוי בסופה, כלומר עוד ציפייה, שגם המצוי בסופה ידוע לנו היטב.<sup>39</sup>

But that is not the question. If a man cannot do what he wants, if he cannot fulfill his sexuality, if not that, what reason does he have for preserving his life and going through it, day by day, like a cocoon of desire, despair, and expectation, the same expectation that we all know how it will end, that is, more expectation, and we know what awaits at the end.

Like Sisyphus, who lives in an absolute present of rolling a rock up a mountain, the protagonist cruises and has sex: sex is his Sisyphean rock. In the diary, he describes how he walks everywhere with a wheelbarrow which has his name and portrait on it; this wheelbarrow represents his “punishments”: his homosexuality, his guilt feelings about not accepting his homosexuality, anger that the Israeli society does not accept his homosexuality, his writing obsession, and his unrestrained desires which lead him to

having too much sex or not enough.<sup>40</sup> The wheelbarrow, which he carries around as if it were a rock, which he wheels from one bush to another in the paths of Independence Park, is a necessity for such a concept. His wheelbarrow is an analog to Sisyphus' rock.

In one entry, in which he describes cruising, he depicts himself as Sisyphus, and says that he “pushes a rock up a mountain, walks in the desert with a wheelbarrow. So hot, so unreasonable, so redundant.”<sup>41</sup> The wheelbarrow, which is an object often found in Israeli parks and is also a Zionist symbol of working the land, is, then, a figurative reminder that, like Sisyphus, Reuveny is sentenced to an absurd life. But, at the same time, the wheelbarrow—that is, his so-called punishment—is also a way to rebel or simply to exist.<sup>42</sup> Sisyphus, as mentioned, rebels against the gods' punishment by accepting his absurd existence, that is, by accepting the fact that there is no future, only present; when Sisyphus embraces his punishments, he frees himself from their power, from their control over him, and so does the protagonist. The punishment—homosexuality, stereotypes of homosexuality, homosexuals' disease, homosexual shame, and the difficulty to have sex in the age of HIV/AIDS—turns out to be the way in which one learns to accept existence. The punishment, then, as the protagonist puts it, is a “gift”:

לגעת בהווה, שהוא לכאורה סמוי מעין. משום שאנחנו בתוכו, אבלים על אובדנו, מצטרפים לקינה עליו ועל כל הדברים האחרים, שראוי ועוד איך לקונן עליהם, אבל לא עכשיו. הנה תפסתי את עצמי עומד על הווה הזה, מצוייד ברשת פרפרים, רשת פשרה, רשת, מנסה ללכוד משהו שמחוצה לו - גבר, מילה - עד שמצאתי את עצמי עומד ככה, עושה בידיים תנועות משוגעות של חוסר שחר, במקום להיות בהווה, לגעת בהווה. ומה זה בעצם לגעת בהווה [...] ואז הווה נפתח לי כמו מתת, ואני רואה את עצמי, לא עוד סמוי מעין הווה שלי, אלא יחד איתו, פגישה גמורה באינסוף הריק החולף סביבנו, ואז, כן, אי-אפשר שלא לצחוק.<sup>43</sup>

To touch the present/existence, which is seemingly hidden, for we are in it, mourning its loss, lamenting over it and over all the other things, which indeed deserve to be mourned, but not now. Here I caught myself standing in it, equipped with a butterfly net, a net of compromise, a net, trying to catch something beyond it—a man, a word—until I saw myself standing like this, waving crazily with my hands for no reason, instead of being in the present/existence, to touch the present [...] and then the present/existence opens itself to me like a gift, and I see myself, not hidden anymore from my present/existence, but together with it, an encounter in the vacuum that surrounds us, and then, yes, you cannot avoid laughing.

At the end of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus also claims that Sisyphus finds some happiness in his punishment—“a laugh,” he calls it— and so he becomes more immune to its difficulties.<sup>44</sup> In a similar way, the protagonist of *Night Diary* problematically claims, while also echoing a Judeo-Christian discourse of martyrdom, that “suffering purifies the soul.”

As in English, in Hebrew the expression “Sisyphean task” means a repetitive, wearisome, and tedious work; *Night Diary* is indeed Sisyphean. The protagonist cruises every day and writes about the thoughts he had while cruising; as in the case of Camus’s Sisyphus, Reuveny’s text does not offer consolation, solutions, or an end: there are no conclusions, but repetitive routines of cruising. The protagonist writes: “Imagine, a conclusion! Only the thought of it makes me laugh, but it is not funny.”<sup>45</sup> The length of the text—more than one thousand pages—plays, then, an important part: it demonstrably stages the Sisyphean process of writing the diary—not to mention, from the reader’s end, the Sisyphean task of reading it—as well as the Sisyphean experience of cruising in Independence Park. Cruising, in this case, is a Sisyphean task; writing about it is a Sisyphean task; and the text reflects both. By writing the same scene again and again and by reading the same scene over and over again, the text becomes a performative act that forces the participants to experience cruising and writing. The text, then, tries to give meaning to a set of repetitive actions that define the identity of the people who do them; what at first looks like a repetitive text becomes a way to protest and transcend the reality of queer existence in Israel at the time. The form of the text, which imitates the “Sisyphean task” of cruising and of being “an outlawed homosexual,” supports its argument about autobiographical writing and about queer existence; in an ingenious way, Reuveny is able to recreate in words a physical experience: he forces the readers, who struggle with a repetitive text, to endure the tiresome and wearisome act of looking for sex in the age of HIV/AIDS and writing about it. Moreover, the coupling of cruising and writing raises questions about the associative link that binds them together: the protagonist seeing cruising (*min*) as writing (*siach*) and vice versa, that is, he binds *min* with *siach*. Is the search for meaning a search for different kinds of *siach* and does it produce certain kinds of *min*? Reuveny uses *min* to create a new *siach*: the diary

establishes queer literature that is defined not by the sexual orientation of the writers and their characters or even the themes of the texts, but rather by their form; he is striving to produce *minsiach*, that is, queered literature that stages cruising in words.

### **The Image of Prison as another “Technique of Freedom”**

Police harassment of cruisers in Independence Park is common, the protagonist claims.<sup>46</sup> In the diary, he does not resist the image of the park as a transgressive place, but ratifies it; when he describes homosexuals as criminals and the park as a prison, he adopts this image, even reconfirms and revalidates it.<sup>47</sup> However, through existentialist philosophy and alluding to other literary works that deal with prison, he charges the image of the park and its patrons with alternative, more positive connotations. Here is a quotation from the diary, in which the park is depicted as a prison and the cruisers as inmates; this quotation also shows the narrator’s positive approach to the Sisyphean task to cursing in a jail-like environment:

מדי לילה היינו באים. אינני יודע כמה היינו. לא הכרתי את האחרים, רק היכרות קלושה שבאה מראייה. לילה בלילה הייתי רואה אותם והיו רואים אותי. צועדים בין העצים, בשבילים, לאורך המידרון, לפעמים עד הים. מניחים היינו את כל עיסוקינו בשעת לילה יעודה או בלתי יעודה, ובאים לצעוד [...] נידונים היינו לבוא מדי לילה, להשתתף בהתפרשות של צעידה, צועדים כמעט עד כלות הכוח, עושים מכונת טווס, טווס ענקי, בלא לדעת עוד לשם מה הצעידה, אם כי זכרנו שמשוהו טוב, משוהו מתוקף ביסודה. נוצרה גם מעין שותפות של שגרה, של נידונים לבוא ולצעוד ככה. ואולם לא היינו נידונים ממש, שכן - אם אדבר במקרה שלי - לא נערך שום משפט אשר יכול היה לתת משמעות, או לפחות הסבר, ויהיה חסר שחר ככל שיהיה, לעונש של הצעידה הלילית, כל לילה, בקור ובשרב, הלך וחזור בשבילים. נידונים על-ידי כוח בלתי נראה, היינו באים ללא דרבון, בלי שיהיה צורך להזכיר לנו, ולא מתוך חשש לעונש שיוטל עלינו אם לא נבוא. כאמור, משוהו טוב, משוהו מתוק, היה ביסוד הצעידה.<sup>48</sup>

Every night we would come. I do not know how many we were. I did not know the others, only superficially. Night by night I would see them and they would see me. Walking among the trees, along the paths, sometimes as far as the sea. At a predetermined time, or not so certain, we had to put aside our occupation and come to cruise [...] we were sentenced to come every night, to cruise almost to exhaustion, making a peacock machine, a giant peacock, without knowing anymore why we are cruising, although we remembered it was something good, something sweet. We had a routine of partnership, in which we were condemned to come and cruise. However, we were not really convicts, because—and I am talking only on my behalf—no trial took place. No explanation, unfounded as it may be,



for the nocturnal punishment of walking back and forth in the bushes, every night, in the cold and in the heat. Condemned by an invisible force, we came unwillingly, without being reminded, and not because of a fear of the punishment for not coming. As I said, there was something good, something sweet, in walking.

The cruisers of Independence Park draw pleasure from their so-called punishment: in this hidden, nocturnal underworld, they, “the inmates,” unite under the banner of their open secret. Under the heterosexuals' policing gaze, if we think through Foucault's understanding of the panopticon, homosexuals' infamies are the marks of shame, but for the homosexuals themselves, these marks also serve as a code of mutual recognition and salutation. The stigma, as seen from the margins, becomes the very locus of desire. The persecutory apparatus of society, which the protagonist calls “the heterosexual inquisition,” has been internalized and sexualized, and Reuveny's attachment to the law and its transgression is made into the prime source of libido.<sup>49</sup> Transgression, which is expressed here in the image of a “daily prisoners’ walk,” meaning cruising, is a way of entering the *hoveh*, the “present/existence,” which in Hebrew also means “the divine.”<sup>50</sup> And, indeed, there is a strong connection in *Night Diary* between “punishment” and religious-like “purification.”<sup>51</sup>

The “convicts” then share the same “punishment” and purify their souls by the same punitive suffering. They, like Sisyphus, are secular martyrs who learn to accept their pain and to enjoy it: without the pain one cannot become a martyr and transcend.<sup>52</sup> The punishment, in this case, I suggest, becomes a gift: the Sisyphean cruising-wheelbarrow is a tool of triumph over absurd existence in the present.

פוטנציאל החישה של הדיכאון ושל הסופיות גדול יותר אצל הומוסקסואלים. אצלי. אולי יש אחרים שלא חושבים על זה אלא על מה שיש היום בטלוויזיה [...] השאלה היא עד איזו מידה אדם מוכן לקחת על עצמו את הסיכון וללכת בערפל לקראת הידיעה.<sup>53</sup>

The sensual potential of depression and of finality is much stronger in homosexuals. In me. Maybe others do not think of such matters, they only think about what is on today on television [...] The question is if a man is willing to take the risk of walking in the fog towards awareness.

Since homosexuals, unlike straight men, suffer more for their love, they can also be purified and transcend reality through it, the protagonist claims while problematically

romanticizing homosexuality and suffering. They, he argues, can experience much stronger feelings fueled by the excitement of eating a forbidden fruit.

The text is not only queering Camus's work, but also Pinhas Sadeh's *Life as a Parable* (החיים כמשל), which is the book that the protagonist's seventeen year old lover is reading when he sees him for the first time.<sup>54</sup> In Reuveny's mentor's influential 1958 diary, Sadeh promotes the idea that life is much more interesting than literature, so instead of plots, one should write diaries. Sadeh also promotes there the idea of liberation through suffering. It is clear that Reuveny was influenced by this and he recounts in *Night Diary* how Sadeh congratulates him on his decision to write autobiographical text.<sup>55</sup> Sadeh indeed writes in *Life as a Parable* about liberation through suffering and transgression. He posits "at times it is necessary to pass through sin in order to reach holiness." In a way, this quotation summarizes Reuveny's approach to gay existence in the age of HIV/AIDS.<sup>56</sup> Sadeh also argues:

I suppose that God wants us to transgress because by transgressing we stop being part of the crowd and become individuals, which is the only true human existence [...] It is plausible that God wants us to attain salvation by the mysterious way of destruction.<sup>57</sup>

The protagonist uses Sadeh's theory to explain how gay men, who transgress the Israeli sodomy law at the time, achieve "salvation by the mysterious way of destruction." Going back to the lengthy citation that opens this section, Independence Park is a prison that "inmates" see as "something good, something sweet." In a sense then, they embrace their togetherness, that is, their communal struggle, to push a rock up a mountain.

The protagonist accepts the terms set by the dominant discourse, which ascribes the park as a darksome, sordid, and transgressive place, but he changes the valuations attached to them by alluding to other literary works that celebrate transgression.<sup>58</sup> He uses the language of homophobic society against itself. *Night Diary* refers to another writer, Jean Genet, who followed a similar strategy in his writing. Michael Hardt elaborates on Genet's technique in his 1997 article "Prison Time." He claims that the narrators of Genet's novels "insist repeatedly that they love prison."<sup>59</sup> Their punishment, Hardt suggests, is a testimony of their sainthood: "Genet finds divinity where life has a heightened intensity, a charge, where the world seems to sparkle, where in the exposure

of its surfaces the oneness of being shines forth.”<sup>60</sup> By using religious terminology—“the language of the enemy,” that is, the language that criminalize Sodomites—Genet’s convicts, like martyrs, embrace their punishments and enjoy them. Their stay in prison is an opportunity for them to be punished and thus to transcend reality; Genet writes in the *Thief’s Journal* that he prefers to live in “the prison world” than “outside”: “the prison—let us name that place in both the world and the mind—toward which I go offers me more joys than your honors and festivals.”<sup>61</sup> And in his book *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, Jean-Paul Sartre identifies this transcendence via prison in Genet’s literature, and writes, “Genet wants his prison, he inspects it without respite, he is proud of it [because] when he makes of his prison a palace [...] The sumptuous words which he utters float above the sordid realities.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, The protagonist finds God, or *hove*, in cruising and, therefore, Independence Park can also be seen as a worship place, a pilgrimage site, a palace, which enables his transcendence.<sup>63</sup> Considering this religious contextualization, it is clearer why The protagonist continues to go to the park despite of the danger of HIV/AIDS: it enables the transcendence of the sufferers. Genet, in a similar way, points in *Miracle of the Rose* at the prison as a holy place, and the death cell as a place that enables freedom: “as our life is without external hope, it turns its desires inward. I cannot believe that the prison is not a mystic community, for the death cell, in which a light burns night and day, is the chapel to which we direct our silent prayers.”<sup>64</sup> This goes against the approach of the Israeli media at the time which depicted Independence Park as dangerous place. Although Reuveny adopts the image of the park as a prison and transgressive site, he also recontextualizes it, and offers to see it also as a positive place.<sup>65</sup>

Through the works of Genet, David Halperin explores the question of gay male subjectivity, and, in particular, the question of why gay men have unsafe sex in the age of HIV/AIDS, a question that the protagonist continuously asks in the diary. Halperin argues that since early gay liberation movements understood their struggles to be directed against psychological repression and political oppression, and since later the focus was shifted to social constructionism, this pivotal question, which some see today as anachronistic and essentialist, was neglected.<sup>66</sup> The questions that Halperin poses, especially when considering Genet’s writing, could also be useful for the understanding Reuveny’s writing in *Night Diary*.

Halperin uses the concept of “abjection” to formulate alternative and non-moralistic models for thinking about the subjectivity of gay men and of gay men's risk-taking. Abjection, as Halperin defines it,

does not originate in psychical causes. It is the consequence of society's collective judgment against us. Its vicissitudes are not those of an unconscious instinct but of social death—the annihilating experience of exclusion from the world of decent people. Abjection is an effect of the play of social power. It describes the shape of gay men's relations to their world. Those relations structure the subjective life of homosexuality.<sup>67</sup>

The use of the term abjection starts, according to Halperin, with Jean Genet's acquaintance, the writer Marcel Jouhandeau, who saw homosexuality as a vehicle of experiencing, in perverse imitation of Christ, his contempt for the world. Jouhandeau, like Reuveny, adopts the homosexual stigma and finds “happiness” in it. He discovers that the effect of his “perversion,” that is his desire for men, “leads him, through the experience of abjection, on a path exactly parallel to that of sainthood.”<sup>68</sup> Jouhandeau, as well as Genet, transcends mundane reality by converting stigma into stigmata, that is, converting this mark of disgrace into source of pride and pleasure. Consider Genet's *Miracle of The Rose*, a novel that takes place in a juvenile correction facility, another intertext to *Night Diary*. In this novel, Genet describes the teen-inmates, who are facing the hardship of prison life, including punishments and humiliation, as “crowned.” The teen-inmates learn how to take pleasure in their suffering by eroticizing their punishments. The word “crowned” alludes to the scene in the New Testament where Jesus was forced by his oppressors to wear a crown of thorns. In this moment, Jesus rejoices this crowning, since this act of suffering anoints him simultaneously as “the king of Jews.” In another novel, *The Thief's Journal*, Genet repeatedly compares homosexuality and sainthood. In the last page of the novel, the narrator parallels himself to a martyr, and says that he prefers the prison, which give him happiness, to literary prizes.<sup>69</sup> As in the case of Sisyphus, this sainthood “enables the individual to break out of ordinary life, to transcend the social.”<sup>70</sup> Similarly, when Reuveny describes Sisyphean cruising as a punitive walk, he says that “suffering purifies the soul.”<sup>71</sup> This is another example how stigma transforms into stigmata. The protagonist finds happiness in the punitive act of cruising, and in so doing purifies his soul. Going back to Sadeh, who is

always in the diary's background, the protagonist is also able to transcend by abjection, which, Halperin argues,

achieves a spiritual release from [domination] by derealizing its humiliating effects and by depriving domination of its ability to demean the subject and, thus, robbing it of a portion of its reality. As a result, social persecution loses some of its crushing power and changes its meaning.<sup>72</sup>

Independence Park, as the Israeli mass media at the time repetitively stressed, holds within it the abject; but it is also a punitive site in which one can find Genet's sainthood. HIV/AIDS, in this case, only intensifies this concept. Reuveny writes: "I am a sinner. But today the concept of sin has disappeared. And then AIDS came and filled up the void"; HIV/AIDS, then, can enable transcendence: if HIV/AIDS is the punishment of the sinner, it is also his way to purify himself, according to Reuveny.<sup>73</sup> Sadeh has a similar point of view; he writes in his diary about sin and disease, which can shed light on the protagonist's approach to HIV/AIDS and queer existence:

What is sin, anyway? This is what I think: sin is the disease of the soul, but through this disease, the soul can attain to the sense of itself, the pain of itself, the revelation of itself. And who knows, perhaps this disease—sin—is what makes existence in this world possible, perhaps existence itself is nothing but sin, and the distress of existence its atonement.<sup>74</sup>

Using this understanding that "the disease" actually allows existence enables the protagonist to go beyond the negative concept of "AIDS victims" to the more positive concept of people who are living with HIV/AIDS. In a similar way to Camus, who does not consider Sisyphus a victim, Reuveny does not see fellow cruisers as victims. For him, HIV/AIDS does not mean "death sentence" for the cruisers/inmates, but, rather, a tool to transcend reality.<sup>75</sup> Against the Israeli mass media, the protagonist refuses to see fellow gay cruisers as demonized people; he is not only giving meaning to their lives, but also empowering them. In this sense, Reuveny does not ask melancholically and accusatively "what AIDS did *to* us?", but rather positively "what can we do with AIDS and what can AIDS do *for* us?"<sup>76</sup>

## Conclusion

The protagonist's revolt against the social conditions that restrict him as an outlawed homosexual starts with literature. As someone who wants to have situational sex in a time of HIV/AIDS, he writes a diary revolving around homosexuality and cruising; this takes him again and again to Independence Park. The concept of the *hoveh* serves him well here since the present tense in Hebrew also means existence and divinity. When he writes in the present tense and about the present, he also brings up the other meanings; because of HIV/AIDS and police harassment, the protagonist asks not only whether there is a queer future in Israel, but also whether there is a queer present. Reuveny's verbal experiment becomes a philosophical inquiry when he uses existentialism, mediated by Camus and Sadeh, to explain to himself and his readers, his own existence, his own struggle to live as a gay man facing oppression and death. He tries to give meaning to his life at a time when such life is being questioned. Here another meaning of the present is invoked: divinity. Using existentialism, alongside texts by Genet, the protagonist tries to prove not only that there is queer existence in Israel, but that there is a higher meaning to such existence. Homosexuality, for Reuveny, is a way to transcend the mundane: since homosexuality was outlawed at the time, the narrator uses images of imprisonment to show how homosexuals' suffering enables them to transcend reality. Independence Park is a place where gay men cruise and it is in the center of the diary, which he writes during and shortly after he cruises. As such, the park is described in the text both as prison and as a Holy Land. Following Genet, Reuveny's usage of religious imagery turns the transgressive park, as it is depicted by the mass media at the time, into a queer pilgrimage site.

It is important to stress that there is a correspondence in the text between form and content. Reuveny's text does not only provoke the multi-layered understanding of the concept of the "*hoveh*," but actually reflects it through the performative act of writing; *Night Dairy* also stages and performs the "*hoveh*" by repetition of the same scene again and again. Camus's Sisyphus is a central intertext here: like Sisyphus, who repeats the same punishment every day, and makes peace with his fate that way, the protagonist cruises in Independence Park, writes about it repetitively and accepts the fact that he was "sentenced" to be homosexual. As Sisyphus, the protagonist finds meaning in the mundane and also able eventually to transcend his "punishment."

This glorifying concept, however, is somewhat problematic and could result in the intended transmission of HIV, as if the text encourages gay men to be liberated through AIDS. It is important to note that the text does not promote the usage of condoms. In fact, in one entry, Reuveny writes that he chooses not to be tested for HIV because he is afraid to know the truth. His passivity and fear may or may not result in the virus transmission and spreading. Another problem is the protagonist's usage of Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Camus wrote *The Myth of Sisyphus* before War World Two, and after the war, in 1951, he sat down to write *The Rebel* as a correction to his earlier work. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus describes a human being who wants to fulfill his or her existence by self-awareness; they are people who are self-centered and who are not concerned of the well-being of others. In his early essay, then, Camus does not pay much attention to Sisyphus' fellowman, as if the existence of others is not relevant to the life of the individual. Chiefly, in this case, Sisyphus is an autarkical man who lives in solitude. After the war, Camus reexamined and revised this with the publication of *The Rebel*; here human beings fulfill themselves by protesting openly against oppression. They actively demonstrate and work against wrong-doing. Solidarity with others becomes a key concept in this essay; the individuals understand themselves by dialogue with others. Thinking about Camus's correction to his early essay, in which the individual was at the center, *Night Diary* suffers from the same problems: the protagonist focuses on the individual—"cocoons of desire" as the narrator describes the cruisers—and neglects others individuals as well as a possibility for a communal struggle. The protagonist's autotelic rebellion in *Night Diary* is a silent one, even passive, when it may have needed to be loud and active; he ultimately accepts the way homophobic society sees him, instead of refusing or rejecting such views. He does not unite with others and fight their oppression. also, the protagonist writing mode is philosophical, sort of art for art's sake, and is not meant to energize the masses.<sup>77</sup>

When *Night Diary* was published, it was generally overlooked, perhaps because of its length and experimental mode. Since then, the novel was forgotten: there are no scholarly publications about this fascinating text and only a handful of short literary reviews in the press.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, *Night Diary* was—and still is today—an important text that deserves serious discussion: it is an avant-garde text that defies basic social

concepts and cultural conventions; it is a highly sophisticated, ambitious, and ingenious text that redefines queer identity, and for the first time in Hebrew literature, also HIV/AIDS. *Night Diary* is a groundbreaking novel that opened the door to much more complex public discourse about cursing in the age of HIV/AIDS and gay identity in a context in which homosexuality was still illegal in Israel. As a symbolic act of transgression against the Israeli law, writing about gay cruising in Independence Park enables Reuveny to formulate an alternative discourse to Israeli mainstream. Observing the park's cruisers, who seem to him as prisoners in narrow-minded Israel, he wishes to set them free by changing the way they understand their identity. As sort of catalysis, the image of park drives Reuveny to define homosexuality in more positive ways. In Chapter Four, I will discuss another text by Reuveny which was written 15 years later, in which he imagines Independence Park as a model for queer safe space. Instead of a prison, the park becomes an inspiration for a queer nation space, that is, homoland. In both cases, the park enables him to think of different ways to separate for the heterosexual society.



## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The *Knesset* repealed the sodomy law and decriminalized homosexuality in 1988; Reuveny does not mention it in *Night Diary*. The text also does not mention other crucial events in Israeli history that occur as he writes his entries, such as the first *Intifada* in 1987. In this sense, *Night Diary* is focused solely on the queer community, that is, it is a queer-centric text.
- <sup>2</sup> Anat Klein. *Hete Veunshu (Crime and Punishment)*. Diss. The Hebrew University, 2001.
- <sup>3</sup> *Yomam Lailah* (Tel-Aviv: Kadim, 1987); *Yomam Lailah 2* (Tel-Aviv: Modan, 1988); *Yomam Lailah 3* (Tel-Aviv: Nimrod, 1989). I consider these books one text. They will be marked respectively as a, b, and c. All translations are mine.
- <sup>4</sup> Reuveny was one of the first public figures to come out of the closet in Israel. His subject-matter was a novelty for the Israeli public, which was curious to learn more about the lives of the “homosexual outlaws.” As a productive writer and translator, Reuveny responded to the demand. Between 1978 and 1984, while working as a journalist and editor for several newspapers and magazines, Reuveny published six novels and collections of poetry: *Hitpakut (Sobering)* (Tel-Aviv: Tirosh, 1979); *Diyuah Mitokh Hitrahashut (Report from Happening)* (Ramat-Gan: Massada, 1979); *Megamah Meorevet (Neutral Trend)* (Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved, 1982); *Etsev Shene'egar Bahalom (Sadness that is Collected in Tears)* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1982); *Milim (Words)* (Tel-Aviv: Yakdav, 1982); *Haser, Mahol Hungari (Absent, Hungarian Dance)* (Tel-Aviv: Kadim, 1984).
- <sup>5</sup> 145b.
- <sup>6</sup> 253a.
- <sup>7</sup> 5a.
- <sup>8</sup> 56b.
- <sup>9</sup> 224a.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> 225a.
- <sup>12</sup> 76a.
- <sup>13</sup> 253a.
- <sup>14</sup> 98c.
- <sup>15</sup> 255a.
- <sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes. *S/Z*, tr. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).
- <sup>17</sup> 91a. Reuveny's saying correlates to Roland Barthes' “the death of the author”, where he claims that the reader is also the author of the text he reads. See Roland Barthes. *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Noonday Press, 1998). 142-149.
- <sup>18</sup> While the first part of the diary was published in a well-known publishing house, the other two parts were published by the author.
- <sup>19</sup> 69a.
- <sup>20</sup> Yona Wallach. *Wild Light*, tr. Linda Zusquit (New York: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1997).

- <sup>21</sup> Although Reuveny undermines both the “romantic literature” and Hebrew, he continues to use and subversively misuse them. He is aware of this and other paradoxes in his diary when he writes: “Contradictions? Of course there are contradictions. Why not have it when the present/existence is composed out of contradictions, and, in fact, it can be only if it contradicts—or better, negates—other existence” (60c).
- <sup>22</sup> 256b.
- <sup>23</sup> 225a.
- <sup>24</sup> 76a.
- <sup>25</sup> On Sadeh see Tal Reshf. “Sadeh Kephilosof Kiyumi” (“Sadeh as an Existential Philosopher”), *Proza* 102 (1998): 7-9; Luz, Zvi. *Hametsiut Haaheret (Other Realty)* (Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 2000). 74. On Sadeh's influence on Reuveny, see Pinhas Sadeh. *Diokan 1 (Portrait 1)* (Tel-Aviv: Nimrod, 2002). Reuveny wrote a few poems about Sadeh. See Yotam Reuveny. *Shirm (Poems)* (Tel-Aviv: Nimrod, 2002). Arriana Melamet. “Neknas Laharon” (“Enter the Closet”), *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 7.6.01: 90-98. Also consider the discussion in *Night Diary* that Reuveny and Sadeh have about gay sex-workers in Independence Park: 158a.
- <sup>26</sup> 21b.
- <sup>27</sup> The scope of this paper does not allow me to analyze Camus' essay. For additional reading see Ephraim Shmaeli, *Adam Bemazor (Man under Siege)* (Tel-Aviv: Yakdav, 1981). 128-53; Ya'acob Golomb. *Mavo Lefilosofyat Hakiyum (Introduction to Existential Literature)* (Tel-Aviv: Misrad Habitachon, 1990).
- <sup>28</sup> Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, tr. Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1955).
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid, 58.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid, 123.
- <sup>31</sup> While also referring to Camus' *The Stranger* and *Exile and The Kingdom*. See 229c. Albert Camus. *The Stranger*, tr. Matthew Ward (New York: Vintage, 1989). Albert Camus. *Exile and the Kingdom*, tr. Carol Cosman (New York: Penguin, 2006).
- <sup>32</sup> 256b. This is one example of many.
- <sup>33</sup> 82a.
- <sup>34</sup> 270b.
- <sup>35</sup> 135a.
- <sup>36</sup> Lee Edelman. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
- <sup>37</sup> 225a.
- <sup>38</sup> The writer calls HIV/AIDS “the Black Plague” echoing the Israeli mass media (32b, 53b, 67c). For discussions on AIDS representations see Simon Watney. “The Spectacle of AIDS,” *October* 43, (1987): 71-86. Kane Race. “The Undetectable Crisis: Changing Technologies of Risk,” *Sexualities* 4. 2 (2001): 167-189; Sender Gilman. “AIDS and Syphilis: The Iconography of Disease,” *AIDS Cultural Analysis Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989). 87-107; Susan Sontag. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 2001).
- <sup>39</sup> 225a.
- <sup>40</sup> 11b.
- <sup>41</sup> 99c.

- <sup>42</sup> 34b. This is one example out of many.
- <sup>43</sup> 215c.
- <sup>44</sup> *Sisyphus*, 123.
- <sup>45</sup> 89c.
- <sup>46</sup> 91a. In 1980, Reuveny published in *Yedioth Ahronoth* a series of articles in which he describes his experience as a gay men in Israel. The article where republished in 2003. See Yotam Reuveny. *Hageza Hamekolal (The Wretched Race)* (Tel-Aviv: Nimrod, 2003).
- <sup>47</sup> 170b. The mass media started to write about the park as a dangerous place in the early 1960s. See, for example, Anonymous. "Machtert al Hataylet" ("Underground on the Esplanade"), *Ha'olam Haze*, 7.2.62: 12-13; Anonymous. "Anyone Who Goes to Independence Park Risks His Life", *Davar*, 11.27.89.
- <sup>48</sup> 67b.
- <sup>49</sup> 154b.
- <sup>50</sup> See the hymn Adon Olam from the Jewish Morning Prayer: "And He was, and He is, and He will be in Glory" ("וְהוּא הָיָה וְהוּא הוּוֹה וְהוּא יִהְיֶה בְּתִפְאָרָה"). In the New Testament, similar concept appears: "who was, is, and is to come". See Revelation 1:4,8 and 4:8.
- <sup>51</sup> Reuveny indeed talks about martyrdom when he describes cruising (99c). The concept of martyrdom in itself raises the question as to why he uses such a vocabulary, which is not common in Jewish culture.
- <sup>52</sup> In his essay about queer literature in Israel, Yaron Peleg argues that Reuveny sees homosexuality as a curse in disguise. While heterosexuals do not have to struggle in order to carry out their love and desire, and do not spend time pondering about the meaning of their sexuality and identity, homosexuals, according to the way Peleg reads Reuveny's views on homosexuality, confront these issues on a daily basis. Thus, Peleg claims, homosexuals in Reuveny's writing grow uniquely "intensified existential sensibilities", which comes with a price tag of loneliness and dejection. See Yaron Peleg. *Derekh Gever: Siporet Homo Erotit Basifrut Haivrit Hahadashah (Man's Wway: Homoerotic Literature in the New Hebrew Literature)* (Tel-Aviv: Shufra Lesifrut Yafah, 2003). 70-73.
- <sup>53</sup> 257a.
- <sup>54</sup> 182b.
- <sup>55</sup> 53c. Sadeh's influence, however, goes further than the concept of liberation though suffering. Sadeh writes in his diary how as a teenager he skipped school and went to the Muslim cemetery in north Tel-Aviv to reflect. In later years, this cemetery was partly destroyed and Independence Park was built in that location. As Sadeh before him, Reuveny also goes there to reflect on his life. See Pinhas Sadeh. *Life as a Parable*, tr. Richard Flantz (Jerusalem: Carta, 1989).
- <sup>56</sup> Sadeh, 101.
- <sup>57</sup> This important part does not appear in Flantz's translation! This is therefore my translation. See Pinhas Sadeh. *Hahayim Kemashal* (Tel-Aviv: Schocken Books, 1968). 39.
- <sup>58</sup> In her 1988 article "Cradled on the Sea: Positive Images of Prison Theories of Punishment," Martha Grace Duncan argues that the risk of imprisonment for a substantial number of criminals is an inducement to crime, rather than a deterrent. She

- also shows how the image of imprisonment as life on a higher plane is a recurrent motif in various fictional and non-fictional texts. These texts often describe prison as a space that is uniquely safe, often as a home, and thus “prison becomes assimilated to this powerfully-charged symbol.” In Reuveny’s text as well, the park as a prison is also a home that provides protection and a sense of partnership. This is significant especially in a time when homosexuality is illegal in Israel and homosexuals are considered outlaws. See Martha Grace Duncan. “Cradled on the Sea: Positive Images of Prison”, *California Law Review* 76.6 (1988): 1201-1247 and especially 1223. See also Andrew Sobanet. *Jail Sentences: Representing Prison in Twentieth-Century French Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008). Especially, chapter two.
- <sup>59</sup> Michael Hardt. “Prison Time”, *Genet: In the Language of the Enemy: Yale French Studies* 91 (1997): 64-79. Especially, see 67.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid, 69.
- <sup>61</sup> Jean Genet. *The Thief's Journal*, tr. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1966). 268.
- <sup>62</sup> , Jean-Paul Sartre. *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, tr. Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1963).
- <sup>63</sup> It is important to note that in Israeli gay slang of the time, the park’s paths are dubbed Via Dolorosa, “the path of torture” in Latin, which is a street in the Old City of Jerusalem through which it is believed Jesus was led to his crucifixion. It is the path of hardship and suffering that enable Jesus martyrdom and his transcendence.
- <sup>64</sup> Jean Genet. *Miracle of the Rose*, tr. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1966). 95.
- <sup>65</sup> It is also important to note that, although Independence Park appears in the diary again and again, Reuveny does not describe it in details. It is almost as if it is an imaginary place. Chiefly, the park is sort of literary construct that Reuveny builds in order to open an alternative space for queer existence; it is a fantasy that ignores and misrepresents the actual site.
- <sup>66</sup> Halperin, David. *What Do Gay Men Want?*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid, 69.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid, 72.
- <sup>69</sup> *Miracle of the Rose*, 222 and 228
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid, 72.
- <sup>71</sup> 121a. Going back to the early discussion about *min* and *siach*, when they are put together as one word, as Reuveny does, *minsiach* (מינשיח) sounds in Hebrew like Messiah.
- <sup>72</sup> *What Do Gay Men Want*, 78
- <sup>73</sup> 213a.
- <sup>74</sup> Sadeh, 137.
- <sup>75</sup> When Marita Sturken describes the problem in romanticizing HIV/AIDS, she ties it to “sainthood and spiritual enlightenment.” Marita Sturken. *Tangled Memories*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. p. 166.
- <sup>76</sup> Dennis Altman, who rejects the idea “that suffering is ennobling” (101), argues that HIV/AIDS “has begun to alter the shape of gay male life in America, not just in terms

of individual behavior [...] but also in terms of creating genuine community” (98). It seems that the protagonist of *Night Diary* starts to think about the “inmates” as community. See Dennis Altman. *AIDS in the Mind of America* (New York: Anchor Press, 1986).

<sup>77</sup> Shy, Eli, and Meshmar, Tamar. “Letfos 'et hoveh Beqranv” (To Catch the Present in Its Horns), *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 9.1.89: 22.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Uri Sel'a. “Letaed Haqul” (“To Know Everything”), *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 12.4.87: 22; Dalyh Ya'ary. “Ta'am Habdidut” (“The Taste of Loneliness”), *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 6.17.88: 23; Eli Shy. “Yuman, Bely Yumra Sefrotit” (“Diary Without Literary Pretension”), *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 2.27.87: 21.

**Chapter Two**  
**Tel-Aviv's Wailing Walls and White Cubes:**  
**Nader and Shmueli's Installation Art**

"חשבתי לכתוב את ההיסטוריה של  
ההומוסקסואליות בישראל דרך פינה אחת בגן  
העצמאות. אבל אחרי שכתבתי שני פרקים, התברר  
לי שמישהו - אמן פלסטי - הציג תערוכה על הנושא  
הזה עצמו".

(בני ציפר, "ציפר ובני מינו", 1999, עמ' 35)

"I thought to write the history of  
homosexuality in Israel through one corner  
of Independence Park. After I wrote two  
chapters, I discovered that someone—a  
visual artist—had an exhibition on the  
very same subject."

(Benny Ziffer, "Ziffer and His Kind,"  
1999, p. 35)

**Introduction**

The 1990s were the cultural and political constitutive years of the Israeli LGBT community: next to films, television series, and bestsellers, there are also less popular mediums, such as art installations, which also deal with Israeli homosexuality. These complex installations—which not only portray Independence Park, but actually entered on it—deserve more attention than they originally got, especially since they bring to the fore issues that other mediums neglect, and that I

wish to delve into in this chapter. Gil Nader and Yoav Shmueli's art installation, which be discussed here, raise different questions about the relationship between space and identity, and especially the affinity between the gallery space and the cruising space, Independence Park, that is. Their works, I argue, focus on the ways identity is constructed by participation in the space's performative practices, may it be the museum or Independence Park.

Nader's mid-1990s installation art *Suppressed His Desires* (הכובש את יצריו) [desires in this case can also be read as temptation]) is centered on the metaphor of the closet. The gallery space becomes a closet from which the visitors, in the end of their stay, "go out," that is, return to the street. The force of the installation begins not when the viewers enter the gallery, but rather when they leave it. This performative act of exiting the isolated close world which is the elevated gallery and entering "real life" is a critique not only on closeted homosexuals but also on the white cube itself. As the 1996 chairperson of the *Aguda*, Israel's gay and lesbian association, Nader has a clear political agenda: he wishes to construct "the closet" in order to destroy it later. His criticism of the closet, I show, goes beyond the discussion of homosexuality and his political agenda: when he constructs the gallery space as a closet in order to deconstruct it later, he also deconstructs the concept of the gallery space as an insulated container of artworks, a self-contained place free of outside context. Nader's installation participates then in two different key discourses of the 1990s—on the one hand, the gay identity politics discourse, and on the other hand, the white cube discourse—and cleverly ties them together. When Brian O'Doherty argues in *Inside the White Cube* that the gallery is a historical construct with specific social purposes, he dismantles the dichotomy between inside and outside: the "outside" context of exhibitions becomes equal to its "inside" content.<sup>1</sup> Nader's work takes similar stand in this epistemological shift: the viewers, who come from the "outside," become active participants in the installation since they become part of it, and import their understanding back outside. *Suppressed His Desires* depends on the participations of the beholders: they go in and out of the gallery, and this performative walk materializes not only the artwork, but also their own identity as gays, as gallery-goers, and also maybe as cruisers. Images of Nader and members of his family posing in Independence Park, which are available in the gallery and represent a different kind of closet, complicate further the issue of the usage of space, and, with it, also the

dichotomy between outsiders (that is, straight visitors to the gay world) and insiders (gay men who “know” the park).

Nader uses the gallery space, which corresponds with the space of Independence Park, to enable a “positive” queer visibility. This question of queer space also reflects back to the question of the white cube: how spatial contexts affect “users”? How, in what ways, and to what extent the inside of the gallery and its outside are interwoven? How spatial practices construct identities? Similar questions appear also in Shmueli’s installations art. I argue that in the age of HIV/AIDS, when homosexuality is being under attack, his installations are an affirmative image for queer identity, cruising, and HIV/AIDS. The visitors to the gallery, who become participators and practicers of the space, turn into a community because of their mutual involvement in the artwork. Like Nader’s, Shmueli’s installations are dynamic, ever-changing performative, and require the visitors’ entanglement; but, unlike Nader, who criticizes the white cube alongside the concept of the closet for their regressive detachment from the outside world, Shmueli uses the aura of the gallery to his advantage as a higher metaphysical realm, as a religious-like place that belongs to posterity, when he portrays Independence Park as a Queer New Jerusalem. He utilizes the concept of the white cube, as he reappropriates it together with religious imagery, to offer gays comfort and solace in the age of HIV/AIDS.

In a short and intense period of three years (1995-1998), Shmueli made seven art installations that were shown in museums and mainstream galleries. These installations, I argue, use the image of the Hilton’s north wall, which separates Independence Park from the hotel’s tennis courts, and the image of the park’s public toilets.<sup>2</sup> On the face of it, Shmueli’s early installations, which appear to be minimalist in spirit, deal with “almost” pure aesthetic inquiries of scales, geometric shapes, forms, materials, substances, surfaces, ratios, and proportions. As other sculpture-like works in the genre, the installations, seemingly, do not invest in investigate political and social issues, but, rather, focus on structuralism. In his 2006 article “Saturated Minimalism: Reflection on Yoav Shmueli’s Installations,” which appeared in a special issue of Hamidrasha art journal dedicated to minimalism, Triger challenges the premise of Shmueli’s “pure minimalism,” and shows that Shmueli’s works actually tell a story, and deal with a specific social issue.<sup>3</sup> For Triger, Shmueli’s installations are a filtered way of confronting his adolescence, his homosexuality vis-à-vis his alienating home.<sup>4</sup> Although Triger’s readings of Shmueli’s works are fascinating and useful, my



close readings highlight the accumulated impact of the installations, an impact that Triger does not discuss, such as the image of the wall. Shmueli's works, as Triger shows, have singular entities; they are interesting and important independently, though they share common traits. These shared characteristics which are a sort of lexicon of images, I suggest, are available mostly to people who are "in the know," that is, "insiders," gay men who cruise the park and so can easily decipher the meanings of the works' symbolic language. I propose that Shmueli's works as a whole are creating ensembles of meaning, and thus allowing new structures of association and feelings to grow in new contexts. Shmueli's works, I argue, depict a specific location: when the works are seen through the lens of Independence Park, new understandings of the artist's world are available, for example, the tension between inside and outside, and between the personal and the political.<sup>5</sup> Shmueli's works in my reading, then, can be read as site-specific although they are constructed in white cubes.

### **Nader's Closet and the White Cube**

1996. Once they enter Borochoy Gallery in Tel Aviv, the visitors to the exhibit find themselves inside a wardrobe (Fig. 10). Cabinets, closets, cases, drawers, boxes, and chests, all in different sizes and shapes, are scattered all over the place without, so it seems, a plan or a system. The floor is covered with scraps of plywood and cardboards. It feels more like a warehouse than a chic alternative gallery. This collection of furniture from various periods of time and styles is not arranged around a specific theme; a modern fiberboard cabinet, for example, stands beside an antique chest, which shares the same space with a Victorian-like water closet (Fig. 11). This piled up mishmash seems unstable and shaky, as if it might fall down any moment. To add to this, the low ceiling only strengthens the claustrophobic feeling, which drives the visitors out of the gallery and into the street, just to breathe fresh air.



Fig. 10 Nader's installation (detail 1)



Fig. 11 (detail 2)

The visitors to Nader's installation *Suppressed His Desires* (curator: Ilana Tenenbaum) open the closets' doors, search the boxes, and browse the cases, just to find that there is nothing there. All are empty, and, without a context, almost lacking meaning.<sup>6</sup> In fact, one or two of the closets face the wall, so their doors cannot even be opened. In short, this space is not an efficient storage-room. Next to these not-in-use closets, on one of the tables, on a child-size table, lies a book entitled *Other Dictionary* (מילון אחר). It was written and edited by the artist, and by Michael Gluzman, a professor of Hebrew literature. The book is a visual and verbal Hebrew-Hebrew dictionary for terms related to homosexuality, far beyond the fossilized and homophobic dictionary definitions of the time. Seventy people from different creative and academic disciplines took part in it; they offer an alternative perspective to the institutionalized Israeli dictionaries, which in 1996 still define homosexuality as a pathological disease and as a deviation. Therefore, Nader and Gluzman's dictionary not only gives alternative definitions for homosexuality, but, more specifically, it gives the perspective of the Other with a hope to create—by changing the discourse—a new reality.<sup>7</sup> After the visitors had read the new dictionary's definition of a “closet,” in which they are in, the context of the exhibition is clearer. Suddenly, everything makes more sense.

Here and there on the gallery's wall, photos of Nader's family are hung. In one image, the family members, who are crowded together and hug each other, are in their living room (Fig. 12), and in another image, they are in the their home's garden (Fig. 13). However, this seemingly happy-family-portrait is disrupted by the oddly, if not

bizarre and grotesque, avocado mask they wear.<sup>8</sup> In other images, these portraits are replanted in Independence Park; the family in these photomontages stands in a similar position, but the background and the setting are different. This is not the only dissimilarity; in the park—in the heart of the notorious cruising scene—this family does not wear the avocado masks. There, they are not disguised.



Fig. 12 (detail 3)



Fig. 13 (detail 4)

Within the context of homosexuality and cruising, it is clear that the exhibition deals with questions of sexual identity and its manifestations. The closet in the exhibition is a metaphor which at the time in Israel is still a novelty and not an over-used cliché. When the visitors of Borochoy Gallery enter the gallery, they—unknowingly, at least for some, at least for those who did not read the reviews—enter the closet, and when they return to the street, when they go through the gallery's doors which are shaped like closet's doors, they virtually go "out of the closet". While they are in the gallery, reading the dictionary, the visitors gain an understanding and knowledge of homosexuality that is not available to them otherwise. Outside of the LGBT community circles, to judge from the dictionaries of the time, gay people are still considered to be deviant and diseased, but from within the closet, now that the visitors gained access to the Other, things are experienced differently. After the visitors read the new dictionary, which offers affirmative definitions of homosexuality, and after they saw the Nader's family-album, they go out of the gallery better informed. That is, they see a positive side of homosexuality's, and not the somber, oft gloomy image that the media portray at the time. In the process of

being free from prejudices, stigmas, and misconceptions about gay people, the visitors come out from the claustrophobic, dusky gallery, that is, the closet, to the bright light of the street. They, as Nader sees it, experience what their gay counterparts seemingly experience when they “come out”: relief.

*Suppressed His Desires* was one of the first exhibitions in Israel that dealt openly with homosexuality. Nader's motivations in his first solo exhibition are almost pedagogical: he wishes to educate his audience and to promote gay visibility by “coming out”. The masks—note the tension here between a so-called-feminine “cosmetics” and so-called-masculine “war paint” or “hunting camouflage—are being ridiculed as too rigid social construction. The binary between the feminine and masculine is shattered, since with the mask everyone looks alike. That is, one could hold both the feminine and masculine together. Most of all, Nader wishes remove all masks, overcome one's self-deception, and reveal one's "true nature". As in the closet metaphor, the implied belief is that without secrets, without hiding their sexual preference, without living undisclosed lives, gay men and women will succeed in changing their lower social and political status. Only when they stop being ashamed of who they are, will they bring about the long-hoped for liberation and the end of homophobia. It is important to note that this nuclear family—is it a poster for “family-values”?”—does not wear the masks in the park: they are not ashamed to be identified, as many other are, with the park. Along this line of thinking: when, supposedly, everyone is "out," the park will not be used as a cruising place, will not be stigmatized, since gays will have legitimized ways to know one another. Families could also congregate there: it will become a regular, “normal” park.

The issue of Independence Park is at the center of the interview Nader gave to *ha'ir* newspaper in order to promote his exhibit. Entitled "An Anthropologist in the Park," the interview is an attack on the park and the park's patrons.<sup>9</sup> Nader says:

Independence Park is not a homosexual's invention, but - the heterosexuals'. It is like the Ship of Fools [Hieronymus Bosch's painting] of the disturbed people. One takes the ostracized and exiles them from the city to the forest. The park is like a forest. Animals and barbarians live in the forest.<sup>10</sup>

He continues:

To this day today I walk in the park as an anthropologist. My anthropological walks rise up from my attempts to get over the hard attitude I have towards the park. I also internalized the attitude that the park is a forbidden place and sex is forbidden too. This is my homophobic gaze at the park.<sup>11</sup>

In an answer to a different question, Nader emphasizes that he is not the only one who think so: "I have talked with several gay men, and they also have difficulties with the park. They find it hard to go there".<sup>12</sup> Nader's *Pride Politics*, then, stresses gay normalcy: for him and for his outed circle of friends—likely privileged, educated man—the park is a place beyond the Dark Mountains, a place in a jungle, in the heart of darkness, where he can go only as a scientist, never as a participant, in order to understand the life of this remote backward tribe. Although, so Nader says, he sympathizes with the park's visitors, he still sees them—and he is aware of his homophobic gaze—as barbarians. As a "scientist," Nader can offer them a "solution" and promote them beyond, according to him, the primitive stage they are in. If outed, if accepted by society, these "emancipated" homosexual men would not have to have sex in the "forbidden place," not have to be ashamed, and would have a normative life with "real" or "normal" relationships. This anti-cruising approach arose—first in the USA in the mid-1980s and decade later in Israel—because of the AIDS crisis. It was and still is the mainstream of Israeli gay politics, especially among assimilative activists and groups, like Nader or others who are mentioned in the first chapter.

In *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and Ethics of Queer Life*, Michael Warner delineates the problem of the cultural constructions of the normal: the use of politics of shame to reward some identities and punish others.<sup>13</sup> White, educated, middle-class gays, who have the means to be "out," excommunicate those who cannot measure up to this ideal. Those who are left behind, those that cannot open the closet doors, carry now a double weight of shame: their homosexuality and their inability to be "out". The closet became in this sense also a marker of class (and often race).<sup>14</sup> Being in the closet marks them as uneducated and from lower class: they are backward people who do not strive to better their lives. This neo-liberal approach blames the unprivileged for their social condition. According to Nader, then, when one suppresses his desires for cruising in the park, as the exhibition's title suggests, one contributes to community building efforts. "Coming out" for him means not to suppress one's desires of open gay relationship. This transformation of desire

coincides with psychoanalytical notions; Freud's Reality Principle is very much at play here. That is, this "delayed gratification" takes one's sexual preference beyond the narrow perspective of sex, of lust, of bodily needs, and transforms it to an identity, that is, to a culture. In Hebrew, the title of the exhibition refers to *pirkei avot* [Ethics of the Fathers] 4:1, where it states, "Who is a nobleman? One who overpowers his inclinations [or in different translation: suppressed his desires]."<sup>15</sup> Nader's installation's title could be read then as a secularized rabbinical admonishment: homosexual men should stop cruising for sex, if they wish to rise up to a level of nobility, of value, respect, and pride. In this case, when Nader says that the park is an invention of "heterosexuals"—that is, it is a space meant to imprison gays, to exclude them—he does not only blame straights for homophobia, but also, he blames closeted homosexuals for collaborating with the system that oppresses them. By going to the park, by "proving" the stereotype about gay men's promiscuity, they, as Nader implies, enable their ongoing exclusion. That is, they enable the closet instead of resisting it: when they will be out of the closet, heterosexuals will not be able to blame them for cruising in the park.

In the *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick offers a different strategy for understanding the social concept of the closet. While she also claims that the closet is a heterosexual invention, she does not, unlike Nader, blame the victims for their existence-under-attack. She does not accuse them, or push for their acculturation into straightdom, that is, she does not play the pride-politics game.<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, Sedgwick shows that resistance to the closet, in some cases, only reinforces its existence. Heterosexuality, she argues, needs the closet to define itself against it. Without such a structure, due to the proximity between heterosexuality and homosexuality, heterosexuality's alleged stability is always in danger of collapsing. Although gay men and lesbians will continue to try to "go out of the closet," will continue to try to assimilate, new closets, Sedgwick argues, will always be erected around them. It will be pointless to hope for a complete disappearance of the closet, especially, since "coming out" is not a singular act, a finish line one crosses and leaves behind, but a life-long process in which one countlessly tells new acquaintances about one's sexual preferences. The closet is still present even if its doors are allegedly open.<sup>17</sup>

Although Nader's approach in the interview is unequivocal about the advantage of "coming out," his installation is more open to dispute. On the one hand,

Nader promotes the suppression of queer desires, but, on the other hand, his work shows, as Freud once claimed, that the repressed will always return. Like the visitors who will come back to see the installation, gays will go in and out of the closet, as Sedgwick claims. Chiefly, while Nader encourages people to come out of the closet—and his position as one of the leaders of the *Aguda* plays here a significant role—his works disclose that this is not an option open for everyone. It is important to note here that some of Nader's closets face the wall; that is, as Warner claims, not all closets can open. Coming out is not for everyone, but for the privileged to begin with. In this case, the amassment of the closets in such a small gallery space can be seen not only from a claustrophobic viewpoint, but also from a more sympathetic approach. This stack of furniture is sort of a cozy fortress, which provides a shelter, a sense of security to some people. In the park, which is, as Nader says in the interview, a large closet, the stack of closets is a place where gay men can remove their masks and be intimate with other men. In short, there is a gap between his political agenda, which was declared in his manifesto-like interview, and the subversive way the concept of the closet could be read while engaging in the installation.

The closet, which is installed in Borochoy Gallery, also invites us to rethink the concept of the white cube, to question how artists and viewers construe artworks in relation to the gallery space. *Suppressed His Desires* gains its strength from the viewers' participation: they exit the closet to enter "the real world," that is, they exit the gallery in order to actualize the artwork outside of the gallery. Nader's promotes this exiting on both levels: not only from the closet, but also from the white cube. He wishes that the viewers will be active in the white cube, and not outsiders—unlike himself when he goes as an anthropologist to the park—who experience the work from the outside. Consider O'Doherty's argument—which resembles Michel Foucault's claim that a museum is "a place of all times that is itself outside of time—about the white cube as a cultural construct that is designed to eliminate awareness of the outside world."<sup>18</sup> He writes:

Since this is a space where access to higher metaphysical realms is made to seem available, it must be sheltered from the appearance of change and time. This specially segregated space is a kind of non-space, ultra-space, or ideal space where the surrounding matrix of space-time is symbolically annulled.<sup>19</sup>

In his work, Nader resists this designed segregation of the gallery, which “promotes unchangingness in the real or non-ritual world,” and advances to its openness.<sup>20</sup> His installation, then, is designed to involve the viewers and to force them to partake in the work: they become participators when they—symbolically—exit the gallery and enter “the real or non-ritual world”. Nader’s call is to be more involved in the world and bring a change: one can do it only if he or she stop being passive and takes control over their lives. His discomfort of the closet is a discomfort of the closet-like white cube, which not only broadens the gap between outsiders and insiders, but also places them in separated or partitioned spaces. When Nader promotes getting out of the closet, he also wishes to promote a change in the main institute of the art world, its frontline fortress; he asks the gallery to open up its doors to the public, that is, to be more accessible. The white cube can be understood, in a similar way to the closet, as a repressive institution that oppresses pluralism and diversity by its selective practices. Nader reminds us that the white cube was and is subject to a constant process of politicization, and, thus, his installation calls for expanding the range of its representational concerns and to include works relating to marginalized groups (in this case, to open gays, and not only to undisclosed homosexuals). With the performative act of leaving the gallery, Nader enables the viewers to move out of the role of passive observers and into the role of active producers, that is, to free themselves from the oppression of the institution. As in the case of the closet, they gain control over their lives, and define their own reality.

### **Shmueli’s Independence Park**

A short time after the opening of Nader's *Suppresses His Desires*, Shmueli's *Innocence* [תוהו] was part of a group exhibition—entitled *Liminal* (רף [can also mean “threshold” or “verge”]) (curators: Sarit Shapiro and Yigal Zalmona)—at The Israel Museum. The installation deals openly with Shmueli's cruising experience in Independence Park, and it raises different questions than Nader about gay identity and spatial practices. *Innocence* also opens a discussion about trauma and the work of memory in the ages of HIV/AIDS. In some ways, Shmueli metaphorically—but also physically—reconstructs the park, or his personal perspective of it, in the national museum and on other white cube spaces.

In an interview to *hazman havarod*, an Israeli gay magazine, Shmueli stresses that his installation art “brings to the museum what the bourgeoisie does not want to



see".<sup>21</sup> That is, he brings Independence Park to the museum. In the interview, Shmueli continues and criticizes Nader, who, like himself, just graduated from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design:

One cannot say "I am an anthropologist. I go there, but I only look around. I fool you. You think that I am your fantasy, but I come from a higher place". It is simply unfair [...] he [Nader] invades a territory that from the start is sensitive, and he hurts a whole community. I know that a lot of people were offended by it. He gains political capital at the expense of other people, and it hurts very much [...] I am bothered by people who see the park as a dirty place. It is the easiest thing in the world to say that the park is dirty. One easily exempts oneself, turns oneself to a saint by saying "I do not play this game. I am better than you. I do not need this filth". For me, it is not filth, sure, it is not an easy place [but ...] I have a few good memories from there.<sup>22</sup>

As we shall see, Shmueli's installation, like his other installations that will be discussed later on, is centered on these contrasted autobiographical memories. This allows Shmueli to present a unique stand and a complex viewpoint on the park, and about cruising in the age of HIV/AIDS.

In one corner of a large space (300 square meters), along the museum wall, another long, narrow, and tall brick wall was erected (10 × 3.5). In between these two walls, there is now an alley, a space which is slightly darkened. The front of this erected wall is smooth and clean, but its rear side—the alley's side—is covered with drops of tallow, which was meticulously poured from above. It looks like drops of rain or drops of semen. The far end of the wall is fractured, as if it is still under construction, or, alternatively, being demolished. An image of a prison cell is projected on the wall's front side. In front of the erected wall, a heavy and massive tarpaulin is hung from the ceiling. On its one side, an image of fallow land is projected, and on its other side—an image of distant lights. In the other corner of the space, on another screen—also made from tarpaulin—an image of a full moon is projected, and on its other side, there is a projection of an image of a soccer field. Behind it, and against the museum wall, there is a mound of soil taken from Independence Park. In it, visible to the eye are stubs of cigarettes, used condoms, and other kinds of litter. Nonetheless, it still has the aroma of freshly dug soil combined with a strong smell of urine.<sup>23</sup> On the museum wall, images of the park are projected. Next to it, a long piece of lacework hangs from the ceiling (Fig. 14). A profile of a

teenager named Tom, so the catalogue says, is projected on it, and since the lacework is somewhat transparent, the projected image is also shown—somewhat pixelated, and not very clear—on the museum wall (Fig. 15). The projection looks more like a shadow of a man. On another lacework, another image is projected; an image of trees from the park. In between, in the center of the space, there is a phallic, tall wooden cylinder, which is covered with candle wax. This sculptural element looks like a memorial candle—and indeed Shmueli calls it candle—but it is hollow, and without a top (Fig. 16).<sup>24</sup>



Fig. 14 Shmueli's *Innocence* (detail 1) Fig. 15 (detail 2) Fig. 16 (detail 3)

The installation, which is spread over a large space in the museum, forces the viewer to wander from one element to the other. In a way, it mimics, or stages, the cruising act: one walks about from one part of the space to the other, stops to look at this or that, and continues to stroll until he or she gets tired, or, if lucky, gets caught up in something interesting or exciting. Like in Nader's, one experiences the installation through participation: the artwork is materialized by the involvement of the viewers who become participators. The installation, like Nader's, provides information to those who are not familiar with the park's topography and activities. For the curious anthropologist (to borrow Nader's term), or for the museum-visitor, *Innocence* maps the physical, but mostly mental, *terra incognita* of homosexual land. It does so in the safety of the museum, since in the public imagination, the park is equivalent to a crime scene. Frequent stories in the Israeli newspapers at the time established that fear. Consider the interview Nader gave to the newspapers, but a better example will be the story covered by the daily newspaper *Davar* that quotes a district court judge who warned the public from entering the park: "to visit

Independence Park is to risk one's life".<sup>25</sup> Shmueli's installation, then, provides an opportunity to explore the park through the eyes of one of the park's patrons, and from a safe distance, without real danger. There is no representation of actual sexual acts, but only abstract hints at such activities. The work, then, provides, most of all, a map of Shmueli's life and memories, and not to the actual site, which gone through a dehomosexualization process in order to be accepted in the national museum.

In an article Shmueli wrote for *Studio*, an Israeli art magazine, he describes *Innocence* as an autobiographical work.<sup>26</sup> Born in 1968, Shmueli grew up in a poor neighborhood in Petah Tikvaha in a governmental housing project. It was a remote, desolate place, as he describes it. Shmueli and his friends, like many others of his age group, preferred to spend their time in the streets, and not in the tiny, over-crowded apartments. The soccer field—a muddy and grimy place with litter scattered everywhere, he remembers—was an outlet for many of the teenagers who hoped that a professional soccer career would be a way to move out of the slums. Shmueli used to linger there until night fall, delayed his return home, and witnessed the cruising scene, in which he ultimately also participated. Later, he started to go to Tel Aviv's Independence Park, where he spent his nights waiting for the first bus to get back to his hometown. In the park, he saw boys like himself, "shadow children" as he calls them,

boys with a special look in their eyes, with typical gestures. There was something innocent about them, something crude. Suddenly, visually and emotionally, it made sense.<sup>27</sup>

These marginalized boys—homeless, as he sees them, in the same sense that he himself was homeless—became his friends, his family. For the first time, Shmueli writes, he felt loved, at home.<sup>28</sup> However, he learned fast that sometimes love had nothing to do with sex: sometimes he felt used. And there was also the excitement and fear of the police, which frequently raided the park. Shmueli remembers that he was afraid that he and his friends would go to jail: it was only later, in 1988, that the sodomy law was abolished. In the interview to *hazman havarod* Shmueli says that for him there is a special connection between liminal people who share the same fate. He says: "I find it charming. *Innocence* is also about that".<sup>29</sup>

Some of these autobiographical elements can be found in the Israel Museum installation, and, in this sense, *Innocence*, with its clear context of cruising in

Independence Park, could be used to decode his other works, some are much more abstract. This installation, then, provides a key that opens other works, especially the minimalist ones, which are puzzling and, for some, even incomprehensible. In short, this work, which will be used from now on as a reference point, an Archimedean point, provides a lexicon—or a dictionary if we return to Nader's exhibition—to understand Shmueli's imaginary world.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Park's Wall**

One of Shmueli's most pivotal images is the wall, which is always broken, fractured, and fragmented. Unlike, for example, a wall of a home, Shmueli's wall does not protect one from a hostile world; rather, it locks one in a suffocating, small space. The image of the prison cell, which is projected on the Israel Museum's wall, only sharpens this point. If being homosexual is a crime—and in his adolescence, when Shmueli frequented the park, homosexuality was indeed illegal in Israel—homosexuals are facing imprisonment. The wall, so it seems and here Shmueli and Reuveny meet, is a prison's wall, which represents fears of punishment, but, since it also represents homosexuality, it is a source of pleasure.<sup>31</sup> In his 1995 essay about Independence Park, and again in his 2010 revisited essay, Ariel Hirschfeld describes how the Hilton's wall metonymically represents homosexuality, since the wall is the center of the park's sexual activity, and the park itself in Israeli culture is a synonym for homosexuality.<sup>32</sup> At day-time, Hirschfeld writes, this gray, plain-looking wall is not noticeable, but, by night-time, it is "charged with high voltage".<sup>33</sup> It becomes a homosexual's wall.<sup>34</sup> In the Israel Museum installation, the darkened side of the wall, that is, its "nocturnal side," is covered with drops of tallow which resembles, on the one hand, tears, sweat, and, on the other hand, drops of semen. This bitonal image, then, captures both sides of the same coin: danger and transgression go hand in hand with desire and pleasure, and together they are the artist's personal perception of homosexuality.

The littered mound of soil taken from Independence Park is another variation of this dualistic theme. Its is sacred soil not only from a religious perspective, since it was taken from the Holy Land, but, also from a national perspective, since the park commemorates the soldiers who died in Israel's 1948 war of Independence.<sup>35</sup> This soil is polluted with cigarette butts and used condoms, which stands in sharp contrast to the elevated meanings the soil holds. Homosexuality itself stands as an opposition

both to Jewish religion and Israeli nationality, since it transgresses God's law and the state's, especially when Independence Park, a national symbol, is involved. It openly—even deliberately—"pollutes" these taboos.

This binary goes on; consider, for example, the opaque, heavy, military-like tarpaulin, on which an image of a full moon is projected, and the soft, gentle, feminine-like lacework, on which appears an image of a teenager boy. The contrast between the harsh material and the romantic image of the moon is strong, and it grows even stronger when, in comparison, the image of the teenager is taken into account. Lacework, which is a material associated with femininity, is used here as a screen on which an image of a man is projected. It marks him as feminine, that is, as a homosexual. His face is in profile as if it was taken from a police record. It relates back to the image of the prison cell which is projected on the wall's front side. Homosexuality—although it is associated with gentle and somewhat flamboyant material like the lacework—is again associated with transgression and crime. The boy's name is Tom, which in Hebrew means "innocence" and it is, not accidentally, the installation's title. Shmueli's work points out here that Tom—like other gay men who patron the park, and especially as other teenagers who, like himself, lost their innocence in the park—is not a criminal and that homosexuality is not a crime. Furthermore, since lacework is transparent, the projected image of Tom goes through it and appears on the museum's wall. Now it is less clear and has shadow-like qualities. In *Studio*, Shmueli stresses that he chose to have Tom's image in profile because he was influenced by the way Jean Genet understands homosexuality. For Genet, Shmueli argues, homosexuality is associated with deprived youth who end up in prison.<sup>36</sup> But, as it appears in Genet's 1943 novel *Our Lady of the Flowers*, Genet sees the prison as a space of freedom.<sup>37</sup> For Shmueli, in the same manner, the prison is a haven or a home for the youth who find in the park an escape from oppressive society. Now reconsider the image of the prison cell projected on the wall; this intertext adds another layer to the installation. In the article, Shmueli dubs the Genet-like teens "shadow boys," and, indeed, the image of Tom is shaded. Tom is concurrently present and absent in the space; his liminal stage—not entirely in, not entirely out, but in-between—corresponds with the title of the group exhibition, *Liminal*.

## The Toilet

*Innocence* provides sort of dictionary, or a glossary of autobiographical images, which enables the viewers to recognize recurrent motifs and elements in Shmueli's earlier works. By contextualizing these motifs—that is, tracing them back to Independence Park—it is possible to see another layer of the works and to be able to have a greater understanding of them. The park is, in this sense, an Archimedean point from which one can return to the seemingly abstract works—and against their minimalist grain, against their indeterminacy, and their formalist aesthetics—to see them also as figurative inquiries. These inquiries, unlike minimalist works as Zvi Triger argues, often have a narration, often address a social problem. This point of view, then, is dealing not only with questions of pure forms, shapes, tactile surfaces, voluminous sizes and spaces, but, also with political questions of identities. The works, it seems to me, have indeed a specific location, which is gendered, sexualized, and erotized, and, in the age of HIV/AIDS, this location—this homosexual site: Shmueli's "foundation stone"—also brings about issues of fear, anxiety, grief, and mourning.

Shmueli's untitled work in the gallery of Bezalel Academy of Arts, which was his schooling final project and was later renamed *Before Innocence* (Fig. 17 and Fig. 18), deals with issues of space and mourning. The installation is a large cubic construction, which looks from the outside like a one-floor Bauhaus building, and is white from the outside as well as the inside.<sup>38</sup> He constructed a white box in the white box, as if they are Chinese boxes. There is an entrance door, one step above the ground, and an exit door. It contains a corridor and five small cubicles—none with doors—which are a combination of toilets and shower space. The small cubicles have no showerheads or lavatory seats; it has only a drainage canal, which looks like a urinal and it runs along the wall. Thin linen covers the light source above, which produces a misty, foggy-like atmosphere, as if it was a steam room. On the opening day of the installation, fresh milk was poured into the canal, and, after few days, it turned sour and reeked.<sup>39</sup> As a temporal, provisory work, the installation continued to change when the almost-clinical white of the construction became soiled, since visitors brought with them to the gallery dirt and filth which was stuck to their shoe-soles. Soon, the installation looked less and less like a "museum piece"; it looked as if it had been in use, that is, as if it is a "real" public restroom.

Shmueli's installation created a dynamic installation that changed with time and by the viewers' involvement. They bring to the white cube, which is supposed to be a closed, segregated world, the "outside" reality. They alter the work when they leave their—actual and metaphorical—footprints: they have a share in the making of the installation. Issues of inside and outside are critical here: the viewers, who become producers, change a work when they soil the whiteness of the cubes. Questions arise about the possibility of keeping the white cube aloft and untouched by the outside world and by its users. Indeed, Shmueli sees the viewers as users of the white cube when his installation appears to be a combination between a restroom and a washroom. This becomes complicated when the users realize that this installation cannot be used since it is not functional. What happens when a private space becomes public? What happens when a shower-room is an exhibit in a showroom? Are toilets perceived differently when an artist who is identified with the LGBT community constructs them in a white cube and in the age of AIDS?



Fig. 17 Shmueli's *Before Innocence* (detail 1)



Fig. 18 (detail 2)

Public toilets have become an icon in the LGBT community, especially among gay men.<sup>40</sup> One of the places where men have sex in Independence Park is the public toilets, and Shmueli uses this image of toilets to ask questions, among other things, about intimacy and love, and about private and public, inside and outside. As a teenager, who preferred to spend as little time as possible in his family's small government housing apartment, Shmueli considered the park as a home, where he could be loved, and where he could find a sort of "foster care" community. However, as he said to *hazman havarod*, soon he "realized that it is difficult to find love in the

world of bars and Independence Park, and it hurts".<sup>41</sup> He was vulnerable, and did not find the kind of protection families—so the stereotype goes—give;

I was considered handsome and innocent, 'fresh meat'. I got lots of attention, but retrospectively I understand that most men only wanted quick sex, a one-time thing.<sup>42</sup>

The installation captures young Shmueli's perplexity, his confusion between these two options which are not necessarily opposite to each other: the public toilets and the home. As Hebrew does not distinguish between a house and a home, and "toilets" literally means in Hebrew "home-in-use" (בית שימוש), Shmueli sought protection and comfort in the home-in-use. Now consider how he sees the viewers in the white cube as users of the space. This notion of toilets as home is not Shmueli's unique notion of; Michael Bronski, for example, writes in the foreword to Patrick Moore's *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality* that cruising sites give "many gay men a sense of home, a sense of physical, emotional, and psychological safety. They were havens in an altogether heartless world".<sup>43</sup> Independence Park's toilets were such a place; a place that is as private as it is public; its social boundaries are blurred and thus unstable. Love, friendship, and lust, cleanliness, purity, filthiness, dirt and impurity are entangled together, as is the concept of intimacy and privacy. For Shmueli, homosexuality holds those so-called binaries together.

The installation does not aim to downplay the down-to-earth function of this queer erotized space. Toilets are still toilets, and Shmueli embodies their tangibility in several ways; the fresh milk, for example, which is associated with infancy, with motherhood, is poured into the urinal canal, and, as time goes by, it turns sour. The small space of the museum and the even smaller space of the installation starts to stink, as if it was "real" toilets' stench. The white color of the milk turns yellow, as if it were actual urine. The cube, then, turns into an unpleasant space, and, like in Nader's installation, it drives the visitors out. Shmueli's forces the users to go out of the first white cube and enter the second, the gallery. The once white cube floor is now blackened, dirty, soiled, and unclean (do the visitors experiencing guilt for soiling the work? Do they feel ashamed about what they "did" in the toilets?). The installation is dynamic and its alteration has a metaphorical function; it is parallel to "maturity," that is, to his then-new understanding that he will not find in the park what



he was looking for, what he needed. When facing reality, Shmueli's *innocence*, and his childish-like naïveté, change into a realistic wide-awakening. His work demonstrates the process he went through: from the heights of romantic fantasies, symbolized in white, to the fall of reality, symbolized here as frowsy, dirty toilets. However, the fantasies do not vanish, and they are still present even if they were "overpowered". The toilets hold together these two possibilities simultaneously. Can this apply also to the white cube? Does Shmueli romanticize the white cube or deglorify it? Maybe he is able to hold these two simultaneously. And if so, how does the space enable it?

### **Urine and the White Cube's Wall**

1996 was a productive year for Shmueli with three installations. The original *Innocence* was part of *Liminal*, a group exhibition at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. *The White Sport / Reflection* (הספורט הלבן \ בבואה) was part of *Desire for Non-Identity* (תשוקה לאי-זהות) group exhibition in Ein Hod Artists' Village; and later that year, but before *Innocence*, *The White Sport / Reflection* was also the title of Shmueli's solo show in The Artists House of Jerusalem.

Although they bear the same title, *The White Sport / Reflection* are two different installations. The one in Ein Hod Artists' Village is less sensual, and, so it seems, studious and abstract. On the gallery's wall, Shmueli drew three circles, which makes the wall resembles a tennis training wall. Instead of a game one plays with another, Shmueli's training wall may suggest loneliness, isolation, and feeling of emptiness. Tennis is associated with high-class, and the whiteness of the title refers not only to the color of the players' outfits, but also to their social status, that is, their race and the color of their collar. In the installation in The Artists House of Jerusalem, Shmueli continues to develop the image of the "white sport" in the white cube. In the middle of the gallery, a stone wall—2.6 meters tall—was erected. In complete darkness, visitors enter the gallery and see an image of a tennis net projected on this wall. A strong smell of urine and men's after shave is in the air; earlier, Shmueli, with the help of friends, urinated on the other side of the wall and then poured perfume on it. The visitors grope the wall in the dark, which eventually leads them outside of the gallery.

Like in Shmueli's first work, where the sour milk drove visitors out from the cube, smell also plays an important part. It materializes one of his abstract concepts,

that is, it sharpens the contrast between the high (leisure, social status, culture, or, in short, the soul, the mind [the white cube]) and the low (the body, its earthy existence, its wastes [the toilet]). This contrast is one of Shmueli's core issues in understanding and describing homosexuality. This contrast sheds light on the "shadow children" who cruise Independence Park at night to find love or belonging. What they often find, when they have sex in the public toilets or against the park's wall, is loneliness and emptiness. They too aim high and hit low. Shmueli's wall is, as said earlier, somehow autobiographical.

The wall of Independence Park is part of the Hilton Hotel's wall, or, to be precise, it is the wall that separates Hilton's tennis courts and the park. The contrast that Shmueli romanticizes in *The White Sport / Reflection*—but also in his other works that are centered on the image of the wall—is between the upper-middle-class and its values, its morals, and homosexuality. The dark side of the wall offers an alternative point of view to the heteronormative "white sport" existence. From this perspective, going back to Freud, homosexuality does not surrender to the "reality principle" by suppressing desire. On the contrary, it gives itself over, openly and sometimes joyfully, to the "pleasure principle". Consider the after-shave: it carries with it positive associations, as if to point to the complexity of the situation; Shmueli is ambivalent about the gay existence: while the manly aroma is appealing and alludes to erotic stimulation, the urine, which is the body's abject substance, on the other hand, is repulsive.<sup>44</sup> These two fragrances—the "good" and the "bad"—do not cancel each other, but are present—separately and distinctly—together.

Shmueli's use of urine has positive connotations not only because of its mixture with perfume, which once again relates to the binaries he repeatedly constructs and deconstructs, that is, between "high" and "low," but, also due to his usage of Biblical intertext. The Hebrew Bible mentions six times the phrase "pisseth against the wall" (משתיין בקיר), and every time it indicates "eligible" masculinity.<sup>45</sup> In this case, the urine is almost a male decorum: the ability to urinate against a wall is a code that signifies what is appropriate. In the Bible it is a term of endearment; since only men can urinate on a wall, this quality defines their manhood. If the park's wall symbolizes homosexuality, this biblical phrase charges it with positive connotations. Shmueli's work, moreover, corresponds with other, more contemporary intertexts, which also use urine in an affirmative manner. From Andy Warhol's 1961 *Piss Painting* to his 1977 *Oxidation Painting*, through Kiki Smith's 1986 *Untitled*, her

1986 *Male and female Uro-Genital Systems* and her 1990 *Pee Body*, to Annie Sprinkle's 1989 *Post-Porn Modernist*, Paul Quinn's 1992 *Pissing Thing*, and Gilbert and George's 1989 *Friendship Pissing* and their 1988 *Urinight*—to mention only a few—artists repeatedly dealt with the theme of urine.<sup>46</sup> In his article "Urination and Its Discontents," Jonathan Weinberg asks why various artists have made works that use or are about urination.<sup>47</sup> While focusing on Robert Mapplethorpe's 1977 *Jim and Tom, Sausalito*, Charles Demuth's 1930 *Three Sailors Urinating*, and Marcel Duchamp's 1917 *Fountain*, he claims that, working against Freud, these artists' idealization of the erotics of bodily functions undermines the boundaries society places on what is clean and what is dirty, as well as what is sexually permissible. For them, homosexuality crosses this boundary, when it embraces the body and its functions, and especially the abjected homosexual body.

Duchamp's *Fountain* and Robert Gober's 1988 *Three Urinals* are particularly important intertexts in *White Sport / Reflection*, but also, of course, in Shmueli's cube-like construction. Duchamp's readymade—a urinal placed upside down—Is a provocative and transgressive attempt to exhibit a familiar, mundane object, which is associated with "low," in the shrine of high culture, the white cube (Fig. 19). For Duchamp, the toilets as a work of art intended, among other things, to ideologically disrupt aesthetic systems and their institutional manifestations.<sup>48</sup> The white cube defines work as artwork, so argues O'Doherty: "an image comes to mind of a white, ideal space that, more than any single picture, may be the archetypal image of twentieth century art; it clarifies itself through a process of historical inevitability usually attached to the art it contains".<sup>49</sup> In short: "things become art in a space where powerful ideas about art focus on them".<sup>50</sup> Gober uses Duchamp's *Fountain* in a different way; his three urinals are not readymade, but were specially hand made for his installation, for the white cube (Fig. 20). In this sense, unlike Duchamp, he points to the latent aesthetic properties of this ordinary object: toilets are "art" not only because of institutional agreement, as Duchamp shows, but because they are, as he sees it, indeed aesthetic. While Duchamp's urinal could be reinstalled and turned functional, that is, returned to its original purpose, Gober's three urinals, although placed in the right angle on the wall, cannot be use since they lack drainage holes. Outside of the museum, Gober's custom-made urinals are useless.

Shmueli, who points at Gober as a source of influence, takes *Three Urinals* further in his installation of a white cube inside a white cube.<sup>51</sup> While Duchamp and

Gober bring urinals to the museum, Shmueli brings to it full-size public toilets. On the face of it, Shmueli, like Duchamp and Gober, is engaged in epistemological inquiries about the nature of art, but, when considering the context of Independence Park, Shmueli's inquiries are also ontological. Like Gober's, Shmueli's work—that is, the public toilets installation—was specially made for the gallery. However, unlike Gober and Duchamp, Shmueli's toilets have no urinals at all, since these toilets are not meant to be used as toilets. Shmueli bring to the museum the concept of public toilets as a cruising site, a place for clandestine sex. The structure that he erects in the museum is an architectural fantasy, while also reflecting the space in which it is installed, of a sheltered cruising space, without the discomforts of urinals that get in the way. To pee, after all, one could always use the wall, as we already learned. This act of urinating against a wall is not only validating masculinity, as it can be understood from the Bible, but it also has something homoerotic about it, not necessarily in an explicit sexual way, but also in the sense of creating fraternal relationship manner. The male bonding, or intimacy, of urinating together, that is, of being part of a group with a similar bodily mechanism that enables one to "pisseth against the wall," could be one way in which a community is being formed: a sort of a shared bond. We must also remember that Shmueli actually peed in the white cube, on a wall, and presents it as part of an installation, that is, turning the urine into art.



Fig. 19 Duchamp's *Fountain*



Fig. 20 Gober's *Three Urinals*

### **Soul Candles and Sodomy Beds**

The image of the wall appears for the first time in Shmueli's 1995 *Untitled* installation in The Artists House of Tel-Aviv. After the discussion of *Innocence* it is clear that this wall could be the Independence Park's Hilton's wall, which Israeli gay men dub "the Wailing Wall".<sup>52</sup> This Jewish religious image could be understood in different directions: the Wailing Wall is a celebrated place of worship, a holy place for the Jewish people; it is also a site of grief and mourning over the destruction of the temple, and the expulsion which came because of it. Shmueli's work captures these oppositions, without overlooking its campness, and recontextualizes them by focusing on homosexuality in the age of HIV/AIDS.

In The Artists House of Tel-Aviv: on a large wooden construct (270×540×45), which resembles a bed, Shmueli poured 250 liters of industrial paraffin. After it congealed and stabilized, the wooden frame was set up on its paraffin-covered side, and then was pushed against the wall. In this process, the hardened, white-gray colored paraffin was fractured, and visible cracks appeared all over its rough, bruised surface. The wooden legs of the bed were not removed, so it was possible to understand how the work was created. The installation's backside, then, is no less important. It was meant to be visible.

One of the uses of paraffin is in the making of candles. In this sense, the installation could be considered as a large, even hyperbolic candle (note here how Shmueli uses the image of the candle in *Liminal*). Candles in Judaism—as in other religions, especially in Catholicism—are used to remember the deceased loved ones; these special candles, unlike regular Sabbath or Hanukkah candles, are bigger and are supposed to burn longer, and are known as memorial candles, or, in Hebrew, literally, "soul candles" (נרות נשמה), and, as it says in Deuteronomy 12:23, "for the blood is the soul".<sup>53</sup> The candle is usually lit during the seven days of mourning in the deceased's home and by his or her grave. A candle is also lit every year in the date of one's death, and on Tisha B'Av, the annual fast day that commemorates the destruction of both the First Temple and Second Temple in Jerusalem.

Since the park's wall is associated with homosexuality, and, at the time in Israel, homosexuality was often associated with HIV/AIDS, the image of a wall made out of paraffin, which is associated, as I see it, with death, consequently brings to mind the act of mourning over gay men who died from AIDS related diseases. The park, in this sense, is not only a cruising site, but, using Pierre Nora's term, his

definition of memorials and monuments, a site of memory, *lieu de mémoire*. According to Nora, sites of memory are artificial spaces and objects, manmade, which force people to remember what they prefer to forget. These sites' purpose—as is the purpose of Shmueli's work, I suggest — is "to stop time, to block the work of forgetting".<sup>54</sup> That is, it compels a continuous remembering, artificial as it may be. As Independence Park is a cenotaphic site that commemorates the young soldiers who fell in Israel 1948 War of Independence, Shmueli's wall, relocated to the white cube, is a cenotaph for his friends, lovers, and acquaintances that he once knew from the park, and who are now dead. The Hilton's tennis wall, against which gays have sex, is a memorial pillar not only for those who died, but also for the age before the HIV/AIDS, and before AIDS panic, when sex was more casual, relaxed—although it was never totally "relaxed" in the park due to police brutality and gay bashing—or, at least, less charged with life-threatening anxieties.

The paraffin, with its strong, easily recognizable smell, evokes connotations of places of worship, synagogues or churches. The gallery, as Walter Benjamin claims, replaces in modern times the Church as a place to display art and relics.<sup>55</sup> The place of worship holds different emotions that drive people to join an institutionalized religion: faith, hope, fears, and enjoyment of art. The gallery where Shmueli erects this wall, then, is a place that one goes for consolations, solace, hope, help, relief, and also to reminisce, to cry, and to mourn. It is also a place to form a community; it is where people congregate and could support each other.

The smell of candles, the smell of a place of worship, the smell of paraffin, together with homosexuality and HIV/AIDS, appear again and again in Gober's works, and, I would argue that, his 1991 *Untitled Candle* is an intertext to Shmueli's installation. Gober scattered pubic hair around a base of regular-looking candle, thus, endowing it with connotations of male genitalia (Fig. 21). Like other posthuman installations art of the time, the candle represent the body, and becomes an erotic object, a dildo-like object, and suggestive of penis and perhaps BDSM practices where candle wax is being used. But, for Gober, the candle is also linked to his childhood and to religion. As a child of a lower-class American-Catholic family, he served as an altar-boy, and he left the Church when his sexuality conflicted, as he saw it, with religion. In his article "Gober is in the Details," Paul Schimmel argues that Gober in time "became increasingly interested in exploring religious imagery".<sup>56</sup> As an adolescent, Gober began to realize that his homosexuality was irreconcilable with

Catholicism, but as an adult he "chose not to ignore the church. Instead, he cannibalized, reconstituted, and regurgitated the moral system that was at such odds with who he was".<sup>57</sup> In his discussion on the candle seeded with hair, "The Art of Missing Part," Hal Foster also argues that "it projects a Catholic sense of the complementarity of the sacred and the profane, of the proximity of the spiritual and the base".<sup>58</sup> The candle, then, symbolizes for Gober not only the Church and homosexuality, but the unresolved tension between them. The candle, now tinged with queer overtones, is also linked to acts of mourning, which is intensified in the age of HIV/AIDS.<sup>59</sup> Candlelight vigils that commemorate people who died from AIDS related diseases are another association here, of course. Yet, as Foster suggests, beyond the metaphor of the candle as a diseased body, which burns from both ends, there is also a metaphor of radiance and sacredness; "the body transformed from an abject thing, too close to the subject, into an honored symbol".<sup>60</sup> Shmueli's work, along these lines, transforms the park's wall, on which men urinate and where they have sex, into an honored symbol, in this case, the Wailing Wall. Again, both are places of mourning and elation.



Fig. 21 Gober's *Untitled Candle*

According to Bruce Rodgers' 1972 study on American queer lingo, *Gay Talk: A Dictionary of Gay Slang*, "a wall queen" is "a homosexual who supports himself against a wall (in an elevator or alleyway) while he has sex".<sup>61</sup> Gay Israelis imports this American expression into Israeli culture, but in the process, the wall is being painted also in local colors: the wall is the Wailing Wall and the "wall queens" are Jewish cruisers.<sup>62</sup> This Wall—in Hebrew: the *Kotel*—is considered a remnant of the external wall of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. For two millennia, this holy place, a pilgrimage destination, has become more than a major Jewish religious site; it is also, because of Zionism and especially after the 1967 war, a national symbol. When gay men call the Independence Park's wall "Tel-Aviv's Wailing Wall," it is not only, as Hirschfeld argues, a camp phrase, a "joke, which ridicules—with a pinch of revenge—Judaism that started the Western contempt for homosexuality".<sup>63</sup> Tel-Aviv's wall, the plain-looking fence, is also loaded, in a similar way to Jerusalem's wall, with strong emotional meanings. Shmueli's approach is much more radical when he goes beyond just camp, beyond mockery; he subverts the Jewish law by using it for his needs and purposes. Since the Kotel is such a powerful image in Judaism, Shmueli does not resist it, which may be unproductive, but he can re-contextualize it, and reappropriate it, in order to make it part of his and the LGBT community's world. Like other Israeli artists of the time—such as Dana and Boaz Zonshine who, in their 1996 *untitled* video art, relocate The Wailing Wall from Jerusalem, the conservative, religious city, to Tel-Aviv, the more liberal, secular city (Fig. 24)—Shmueli does what Audre Lorde doubts that is possible, and that is to dismantle the master's house by using the master's tools.<sup>64</sup> Shmueli offers, alongside others, a progressive, secular alternative to Jerusalem.

For some gay men, then, Independence Park's wall, and the park in general, is a site of secular pilgrimage, where they can perform their identity.<sup>65</sup> In the age of HIV/AIDS, when it is less "safe" to go to the park, gays could assemble in the gallery in front of Shmueli's wall and reminisce. After the destruction of the Temple, or in Hebrew "the destruction of Home," Jews are not allowed to go up the Temple Mount, and the Wailing Wall is the closest they can get to the Holy of Holies, the Foundation Stone. By the wall, Jews will lament their disaster, will light candles in memory of loved ones, and will pray to the rebuilding of their Home. When it is not possible to go to the park because of AIDS, gays would lament the destruction of their home—



and young Shmueli thought of the park as a home—in the closest location available, in front of a “gallery model” of “their wall” (memory candles, in this case, are already included: they are built-in).<sup>66</sup> This resemblance to the kotel has also an aesthetic form; after the paraffin dried, and the wooden frame of the installation was set up against the gallery's wall, cracks on its rough surface started to show up, which made the installation look like a brick wall (Fig. 22, and detail Fig. 23). Consider now, while keep in mind Nader’s discomfort with the white cube, the “toilet” installation, which is a white cube in a white cube. Shmueli, like Nader, is aware of the “mythical place” of the gallery in western culture, but, unlike Nader, he not only wishes to promote its destruction, its demythification, but uses it too his needs. like Gober with his reapportion of religious imagery, Shmueli utilizes the concept of the white cube as a higher metaphysical realm, as a religious-like place that belongs to posterity, to offer gays comfort and solace in the age of HIV/AIDS. Instead of resisting the white cube’s aura, Shmueli uses it to his advantage and to provide his audience—and later I will linger over the meaning of the word audience in Hebrew—a “room of their own”. Even if only momentarily, this space shelters gays from the outside world. O’Doherty argues: “so powerful are the perceptual fields of force within this chamber that, once outside it, art can lapse into secular status”. Shmueli is able to keep his art from lapsing into secular status when he sanctifies the profane – Independence Park, for example, by placing it in the temple-like white cube.



**Fig. 22 Shmueli’s wall (detail 1)**



**Fig. 23 (detail 2)**



Fig. 24 Zonshine's Untitled

Shmueli's wall—the wall against which gay men have sex—is also a bed, and a bed, of course, is often associated with sexual intimacy. The liquid paraffin was poured on a wooden frame that looks like a bed, and only when it dried, it was pivoted, and pushed against the wall (Fig. 25 and Fig. 26). Shmueli rejects the homophobic view, which sees queer sex in public places—or perhaps also straight sex—as something that is not romantic, something brutish and cold. When the wall is also a bed, it allows us to rethink situational sex through lenses of intimacy, affection, and even love. Robert Rauschenberg also raises such issues in his 1955 installation *Bed* (Fig. 27). When he installed his bed in the white cube, he challenged, as Shmueli does, the dichotomy between private and public. His artwork negotiates the existence of a gap between the “inside” and “outside”. Rauschenberg's life became art when it was presented to the public, and Shmueli's life, in the same way, became public, but not because it is his bed in the gallery, but also because, unlike Rauschenberg's homosexuality in the 1950s, his sexual orientation was known. When Shmueli presents in Israel in the mid 1990s a bed of a homosexual, he talks, as Nader does, about “being in” and “being out” in the queer way. Moreover, to have a “homosexual's bed” in the white cube in the age of HIV/AIDS also brings to the fore a different set of anxieties in a society that just decriminalized “sodomy”: is He promoting queer sex? Is he promoting homosexuality? Shouldn't queer sex stay a private matter between two adulaters and not a public affair?

An image of a bed together with an image of queer sex brings to mind the Talmudic phrase "sodomy bed". The punishment of Biblical sodomites, as Genesis 18 is often read after Philo, was because of their "unnatural behavior"; God destroyed the city of Sodom for the transgressive desire of its men to have sex with other men.<sup>67</sup> The Babylonian Talmud holds a different reason for the city's destruction, that is, "homosexuality" does not play a pivotal role for the early Rabbis. *Sanhedrin* 11 argues that God's punishment was because of the men's viciousness and not their sex life: "they had a bed upon which they made guests lie down. If he was too long, they would cut him. If he was too short, they would stretch him" (4-6).<sup>68</sup> The Hebrew phrase "sodomy bed" (מיטת סדום) indicates an impossible situation that limits one's freedom of movement. When homophobic society restricts gays' movement, limits their rights by legislating sodomy laws, it forces them to retreat to and look for a haven, such as, for some, Independence Park. When gay men have sex against the wall that is also a sodomy bed, it does not point to gays' vices, but to the society's viciousness. In this sense—and going back to Nader and the Israeli Pride Politics—the heterosexual hegemony forces queer bodies to change, to fit an imagined male decorum. The hegemony believes that it can medically define and classify homosexuals, and then "stretch" them so as to look "normal" or, in other cases, even to cut them off.<sup>69</sup>

In Hebrew, "bed" is pronounced *mttah* (מיטה), which, although written differently, sounds like *midah* (מידה), which means degree or measure. In *ktubot*, The Babylonian Talmud talks about "Sodom Measure," which means that the court of law has the right to force one to act in a certain way in order to protect society from his or her abuse or misuse of the legal system to their advantage.<sup>70</sup> By viewing Shmueli's installations, this could be applied to gays: the court must protect gays from homophobia, from society's viciousness. The wall which is a bed reminds gays of their basic human rights: the symbol of homosexual sin or crime, the notorious Hilton's wall, becomes a symbol of their entitlements. *Mitah* (מיטה), which means in Hebrew death and sounds like *mitah* and *midah*, also plays here an important part. The sodomy bed is also a place of death, and, therefore, the wall is a place of death. Association of HIV/AIDS comes again to mind, especially because of the emblematic paraffin. *Tom*, the installation's title, is now understood in its full weight: *Tom* means in Hebrew both "innocence" as well as "end". Since the Gallery visitors are invited to see the installation's backside, its end, it is tempting to do the same to its title; reading

it form right to left, that is, from the Hebrew backside, *tom* becomes *mot*, which in Hebrew means death. Accidentally or not, the Israeli slogan for HIV/AIDS campaign in the mid-end-1980s—a problematic, an anti-sex, if not homophobic campaign—was "don't go to death with him," which reads "don't go the bed with him" ( אל תלך איתו (למיתה).<sup>71</sup> (Fig. 28)



Fig. 25 Shmueli's Bed (detail 1) Fig. 26 (detail 2)

Fig. 27 (detail 3)



Fig. 28<sup>72</sup> AIDS ad

A variation of *Tom* appeared in 2005. As a winner of the prestigious Gottesdiener prize, Shmueli was commissioned to reinstall *Tom* in The Tel-Aviv Museum of Art's group exhibition *Dreaming Art, Dreaming Realty* (חולמים את האמנות, (חולמים את המציאות). Instead of using a wooden frame that will later be set up against

the wall, Shmueli decided at the last minute to pour the liquid paraffin into a large hole—7×7 meters, 5 cm deep—carved in the Museum's floor.<sup>73</sup> It does not protrude out, but it is at the level of the museum's floor. Some visitors even did not notice that they were standing on the installation until they felt the rough surface under their feet. As in his "toilets work," the white-grey color of the paraffin floor slowly becomes dirty and dirtier: the visitors soil it with their shoes, that is, with their presence. Shmueli titled this installation *Abyss* (תהום). In Hebrew, there is a sound resemblance, not to mention the use of the almost same letters, between *tom* (innocence) and *tehom* (abyss). For Shmueli, as we already know, innocence and death are related. For him, both are also related to homosexuality.

The image of a wall is now replaced with an image of a floor, but, so it seems, death is still the installations' driving force. To walk on white-grey paraffin floor—and paraffin, like water, is a substance that hardens when in low temperature—is to stand on thin ice. To discover suddenly that one is on the verge of an abyss is to be confronted with death. Moreover, because of the white-gray complexion of the paraffin surface, a connotation of semen comes again to mind; when semen is exposed to air, it, of course, dies. There is a ternary connection here between semen, innocence and death.

To Zvi Triger and to Naomi Siman-Tov *Abyss* also remind death. The work looks to them like a mass grave.<sup>74</sup> However, they do not stop to ask who is buried there and why. For them the grave is an abstract, opaque concept, whereas I consider it also as an actual grave, that is, a resting place for people who died, for example, and after I consider his other works, because of AIDS related diseases. In Hebrew, mass grave literally means "grave of brothers" (קבר אחים). The difference is almost self-evident: in Hebrew, unlike the English, the people who are buried in a brothers-grave, are not an anonymous, but siblings. Death turns them into a family, a community. Both Triger and Siman-Tov focus on the aesthetic tension that lies at the center of the work; by digging a square hole, they stress, Shmueli limits the borders of *Abyss*, however, he cannot control the solidification of the paraffin. In this sense, the work has a life of its own: the artist does not control the way the paraffin hardens. Thus, for Siman-Tov and Triger, the work oscillates between two opposed forces: the artist's strict minimalism and the expressionist outcome, which he cannot control.<sup>75</sup> The "grave," in a similar manner, is a representation of something fixed (death) and the unknown (the secrets of afterlife).

In his 1988 essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?," written at the height of the AIDS crisis, Leo Bersani explores the malignant aversion of heteronormative society to gay men's sexuality. While these views literally see the rectum, which is for him a synonym for "passive" homosexuality, as a grave, Bersani sees this "grave," this transrectal grave, as a site of *jouissance*. For Bersani, sexual pleasure, especially for the passive, penetrated partner, who is willing to submit his autonomy, is a kind of intensification or a mode of revelation. This act, in which one gives oneself to other's control, is "ascetic" and so could be transcendental in an almost religiosity sense. Now consider that Shmueli's grave is also the Kotel. As I see it, this grave made from paraffin, which was a bed made from paraffin in its first version, has also something concrete about it: Shmueli returns again and again to this site of pleasure and death as a way to commemorate the people—his friends and lovers—who were killed by AIDS. His work of memory—the memory candles he repeatedly lights—is a continuance process of mourning. This grave is (in) Independence Park.

In his installations, Shmueli returns again and again to Independence Park; this coercive work of memory, this return to the "homosexual site," brings to mind Butler's performativity. Shmueli's works openly act out the grief over the loss of the same-sex desired. By this performance of mourning, he produces Jewish-Israeli gay identity. This identity production is done independently of heteronormativity: the works do not wish to define homosexuality vis-à-vis heterosexuality and homophobia. This grief enables a collective formation centered of mourning. Unlike straights—who are unfamiliar with the park's lingo, who do not know that the park's wall is a queer Wailing Wall and that the public toilets are in contiguity a queer temple—gay men as insiders see in Shmueli's works more than meets the straight eye. Like the Wailing Wall for Judaism, which congregates Jews all over the world and from different sects, the park's wall congregates Israeli gays, turns them into a community. The people who go to the museum to see the wall, who react to it, who become part of it, make a community. In Hebrew there is an etymological connection between audience (קהל) and community (קהילה): since these terms are bond together, the first enables the latter. Jews go to the Wailing Wall to lament the "destruction of (their) Home" (חורבן הבית); this pilgrimage act is a performative act that shaped and still shapes Jewish society: it is one of the acts that defines Jewish identity. Shmueli's wall functions in a similar way for gay men: they go to the wall to lament in a performative way the destruction of their world.

The park, as could be seen through Shmueli's work, is sanctified: Tel-Aviv's Wailing Wall leads to the Tel-Aviv's temple: the public toilets. In this sense, a house-in-use is sometimes a Home, and a Home is sometimes a Temple. The gay men who come to the holy park are the temple's servants, Levite-like, that is, they belong to a specific tribe; they have a concrete identity which, although it relates to the other tribes, does not depend on them. If gay men are Levites, is Independence Park a Biblical City of Refuge, an asylum space controlled by the Levites, where they made their own laws?<sup>76</sup> Is it a queer New Jerusalem?<sup>77</sup> The image of the temple brings to mind not only memories of destruction, but, primarily, also a messianic hope for its reconstruction. The Wailing Wall in Judaism is not only a relic that marks the beginning of exile and of death, but, rather, a symbol for a future resurrection. Shmueli's works go beyond death, beyond HIV/AIDS, and offer (at bay) a transcendental comfort, consolation, solace, and love. David Roskeis' definition of post-Holocaust Yiddish literature seems to work also in the case of Shmueli's viewpoint of HIV/AIDS in the Jewish-Israeli LGBT community: utopian faith and collective lamentation.<sup>78</sup>

Another intertext to Shmueli's installation deals also with faith, HIV/AIDS, mourning, and utopia (or utopian moments): Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*.<sup>79</sup> The play ends when the main characters, who were affected by HIV/AIDS, sit in Manhattan's central park, just by The Fountain of Bethesda, and talk about going to Jerusalem. Prior, who is in the play a sort of a prophet, says that the Jerusalem they are talking about is not the Jerusalem in Israel, but an abstract Jerusalem, which, for him, is more like the New Jerusalem in the New Testament. Unlike the actual Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem can heal his friends, prior hopes. The Fountain of Bethesda, in this case, is more than a stage prop. In The fifth chapter of The Gospel of John, this fountain—which in Aramaic means “the house of mercy” (בֵּית חַדְסָא)—is described as having miraculous water which can cure illnesses. In 1995, Kushner uses this religious image, which is located in Jerusalem, to provide the characters—as well as to the audience—hope and solace in the form of potential rebirth.<sup>80</sup> In the same years when *Angels in American* gathers international momentum, Shmueli uses another religious image, the Wailing Wall, in a similar way. As Kushner, Shmueli provides his audience hope for rebirth, for cure when the House once again will be built.

## **Conclusion**

In a world that is destroyed because of HIV/AIDS, Shmueli constructs Tel-Aviv's Independence Park as a queer New Jerusalem; He does so by recontextualizing Jewish images of the Wailing Wall and the Jewish Temple. Shmueli mobilizes these religious symbols in a post-secular context by using the aura of the "white cube." Independence Park—which is a darksome place in the eyes of mainstream society and even in the eyes of some Israeli gays—is, for Shmueli, a haven, a pilgrimage site, and a place that offers solace to people who are being oppressed. Nader, on the other hand, wishes to open up both the closet doors and the white cube doors. Like Shmueli, he ties the gallery space, a sort of closeted space, to Independence Park, when he considers them oppressive spaces that need to disappear. Both artists see the viewers as active participators in the artwork: through the participation of their audience, their works are materialized, and create new meanings for the viewers as individuals and as part of a group.



## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica and San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986).
- <sup>2</sup> After this intensive period, the once high-profile artist, art critic, and art professor disappeared from the public eye. His return after six years of silence brought a change to his works; his new works replace the image of the wall with images of sport, mainly soccer. It seems to me that these more recent works do not deal with cruising or HIV/AIDS—although they do continue to investigate issues of homoeroticism—and so, will not be discussed here.
- <sup>3</sup> Zvi Triger, "Saturated Minimalism: Reflection on Yoav Shmueli's Installations," *Ahmidrash* 9 (2006): 220-239 [in Heb].
- <sup>4</sup> This Proustian-like return to the past, Triger suggests, is made possible through series of filters which enable the reconstruction of the past from the "safe place" of the present. Through his work, according to Triger, Shmueli is able to control the past, to reshape it, and so to experience it again from the vantage point of the self-confident man that he is today rather than the innocent and confused teenager that he was. For Triger, this Freudian shift is burdened with tension: There is a struggle between the chaotic, emotionally charged forces of memory and the organized, structured, controlled filters of art. This is especially true, Triger argues, in a "cold," firm, rationalized, and strict genre such as minimalism, which strives to bury, or at least cover, the personal, the emotional, and the autobiographical.
- <sup>5</sup> In her book Miwon Kwon shows how, if removed from their particular location, some installations art would lose all or a substantial part of their meanings. This is positively true, I claim, to Shmueli's works with their clear interrelationship to Independence Park. Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).
- <sup>6</sup> Closets, chair, beds, and other furniture are common items in Art. See Gideon Ofrat's article "what the closets hides?" about the image of the closet in modern art, not necessarily in queer context, especially in Israeli modern art. Gideon Ofrat, "Ma Mahbi' Ha'ron?". *Voshinton Hotze 'et Hayarden* (Jerusalem: Bialik Press, 2008).
- <sup>7</sup> See, for example, the definitions of the "closet" and "going out of the closet" and "outing" in pages 23, 29-30, and 59.
- <sup>8</sup> In 1997, Nadar's films *Adloyade* (Masquerade) continue to ask questions about masquerading and gender. In the film, he wears the Avocado mask in the streets of Tel-Aviv and documents the passers-by reactions.
- <sup>9</sup> Ariela Azulay, "Anthropologist in the Park," *Ha-Ir*, 10.11.06: 67-68.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. The comment in the parenthesis is mine.
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid*

- <sup>13</sup> Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal Sex: Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
- <sup>14</sup> The concept of shame had gained some academic interest lately. See: David Halperin and Valerie Traub, *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James' The Art of the Novel," *GLQ* 1.1 (1993): 1 - 16. Kathryn Stockton Bond, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
- <sup>15</sup> My translation.
- <sup>16</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Ten year after the publication of Sedgwick's book, Steven Seidman wishes not to describe the epistemology of the closet, but it's Ontology. Through series of interviews, he wants to offer a complex view of the experience of the closet as a life-shaping journey. He focuses of the concept of passing and its costs. Steven Seidman, *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002). In *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*, Daniel Harris criticizes gays' desire to "pass," that is, to assimilate into what he describes as socially homogenizing American culture. While acknowledging the personal costs of being an outsider, Harris laments the decline of a gay sensibility that has been a key source of cultural innovation. Daniel Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1997). See also: Vaid Urvashi, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1996).
- <sup>17</sup> *Other Dictionary* offers more sophisticate definitions of the closet than the one Nader provides in the interview. Some definitions—the one written by Yair Qedar is a good example—are aware of Kosofsky's theorization. The visitors to the gallery learn about the complexity of the closet. Michael Gluzman and Gil Nader, *Other Dictionary* (Tel-Aviv: self publication, 1996). The dictionary was printed in 1000 copies.
- <sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," *Diacritics*, 16 (1986): 22-27.
- <sup>19</sup> Thomas McEvilly, "Introduction," *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, by Brian O'Doherty (Santa Monica and San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986), 8. See also Bennett's discussion of how the white cube should be understood not just as a place of instruction but as a reformatory of manners un which a wide range of regulated social routines and performances take place. Tony Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, 9.
- <sup>21</sup> Gur Rozen, "Independence Park in Israel Museum," *Hazman Havarod* 3 (1996) [in Heb].
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid. The comment in the parenthesis is mine.
- <sup>23</sup> Personal communication.
- <sup>24</sup> I learned this from Yigal Nazri, who was Shmueli's assistant to this project.
- <sup>25</sup> Israel news service, "To visit Independence Park is to risk one's life," *Davar*, 11.27.89 [in Heb].
- <sup>26</sup> Yoav Shmueli, "On Innocence," *Studio* 78 (January 1996): 8-10 [in Heb].

- <sup>27</sup> Ibid
- <sup>28</sup> Private communication
- <sup>29</sup> Rozen, *ibid*. It is interesting to see that the theme of innocence return again and again regarding the park. See, for instance, the discussions about Ignatz's images (chapter 3) or Arthur Laurents' play (chapter 4).
- <sup>30</sup> See Triger, p. 230.
- <sup>31</sup> See discussion on the first chapter.
- <sup>32</sup> The January 1977 issue of the Israeli LGBT community newsletter introduced a short essay about Independence Park. The anonymous writer dubbed the park "the gays' park" and says it is a known fact that "our guys took hold of it". Anonymous, "The Park of the Forbidden Love," *Rish Galei* 9 (January 1977): 5.
- <sup>33</sup> Ariel Hirschfeld, *Notes on a Space* (Tel-Aviv: Alma and Am Oved, 2000), 25 [in Heb]. Originally, the essay was published in Haaretz. Ariel Hirschfeld, "Tel Aviv's Independence Park Scented Garden-beds," *Ha'aretz*, 4.24.00.
- <sup>34</sup> This wall of stones also brings to mind Stonewall Inn, the birthplace of a gay liberation movement.
- <sup>35</sup> When Shmueli take a soils from the park he enters again to a religious realm: In Jewish ritual burial it is common to be buried with a soil taken from the Holy Land.
- <sup>36</sup> *Studio*, *ibid*
- <sup>37</sup> See the discussion in the first chapter.
- <sup>38</sup> The British architect Kenneth Clark described in the 1940s Tel-Aviv's houses as a collection of cubes. See: Nitza Metzger-Szmuk, "Houses from the Sand," *Houses from the Sand*, ed. Nitza Metzger-Szmuk (Tel-Aviv: Misrat Habitachon, 1994), 22 [in Heb].
- <sup>39</sup> In Hebrew, milk and tallow are written the same: חלב. There is, then, a verbal link in Shmueli's works between milk and tallow.
- <sup>40</sup> See, for example, the groundbreaking study of Laud Humphreys, who studies in mid-1970s the whys that gay men communicate in WC. His anthropologic research traces the codes and the language of men who have sex in public places. Laud Humphreys, 1975. *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company). Later, theoreticians addressed the issue. Consider: Lee Edelman, "Tearooms and Sympathy, Or, The Epistemology of the Water, Closet," *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).
- <sup>41</sup> Rozen, *ibid*
- <sup>42</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>43</sup> Michael Bronski, "Foreword," *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality*, By Patrick Moore (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), xix.
- <sup>44</sup> In a Kristevaian sense or in Mary Douglas' approach. See: Juila Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).
- <sup>45</sup> See: Kings, 14.10; Kings, 16.11; Kings, 21.21; 1 Samuel, 25.22; 1 Samuel, 25.34; and 2 Kings, 9.8 (KJV).
- <sup>46</sup> Consider also: Sherrie Levine's 1991 *Fountain*; Emiko Kasahara's 1994 *Double Urinal*; Michael Parakawei's 1994 *Mimi*; Andres Serrano's 1988 *Piss Christ*; Scott Redford's 1988 *Urinal, Melbourne*; Bruce Nauman's 1966 *Self Portrait as a*

- Fountain*; Grant Lindgard's 1993 *Smells Like Team Spirit*; Helen Chadwick's 1991 *Piss Flowers*; Sophie Calle's 1994 *The Divorce*; David Hammons' 1981 *Pissed Off*; Pierre et Gilles' 1980 *Le Petite Jardinier*; Larry Clark's 1992 *Untitled*. This is of course only partial and abridged list.
- <sup>47</sup> Jonathan, Weinberg, "Urination and Its Discontents," *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*, ed. Whitney Davis (New York and London: Harrington Park Press, 1994).
- <sup>48</sup> George Dickie, *The Art Circle* (Evanstone: Chicago Spectrum Press, 1997).
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 14.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>51</sup> Private communication. In my interview, he pointed at Gober as a direct influence.
- <sup>52</sup> Hirschfeld, *Notes on a Space*: 25.
- <sup>53</sup> See also Proverbs 20.27: "The lifebreath of man is the candle of God" (נר יהוה נשמתו (אדם)). In Hebrew, candle and soul are interchangeable. See also; David Biale, *Blood and Belief* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), especially, the first chapter.
- <sup>54</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (spring 1989): 19.
- <sup>55</sup> Benjamin Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, tr. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217-251.
- <sup>56</sup> Paul Schimmel, "Gober is in the Details," *Robert Gober* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997), 44.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>58</sup> Hal Foster, "The Art of the Missing Part," *Robert Gober* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997), 62. Foster writes often on Gober's work, see: Hal Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes* (New York and London: Verso, 2002); Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge: MIT press, 2004); Hal Foster, "American Gothic: Robert Gober's New York," *Artforum International* (May 2005): 222-225.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>61</sup> Bruce Rodgers, *Gay Talk: A Dictionary of Gay Slang* (New York: Paragon Books, 1972), 208.
- <sup>62</sup> Tom Boellstorff and William Leap argue in *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay language* that "Gay men's English" become a transnational queer language. However, "The essays in this collection demonstrate how the translocation (not globalization) of gay linguistic practices challenges not only received understandings of sexuality and language but also of globalization itself" (6). This can be applied to Shmueli's works. Tom Boellstorff and William Leap, *Speaking in Queer Tongues* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004). See also Liora Moriel's article "Dancing on the Needle's Edge: Gay Lingo in an Israeli Disco" in the same collection. See also: Erez Levon, *Language and the Politics of Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays in Israel* (Hampshire: Palgrave - Macmillan, 2010).
- <sup>63</sup> *Notes on a space*, p. 25.
- <sup>64</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 110-113.
- <sup>65</sup> It is interesting to note here that the park becomes a pilgrimage site in *Yom Kippur*—Day of Atonement—which is the holiest day of the year for religious

Jews. During Yom Kippur Jews fast, rest, and attend synagogues. *Yom Kippur* had become also a holiday to gay men in Israel: They go to Independence Park, fill it in the hundreds, and offer a secular alternative—one that stresses social gathering and not religious practices—to Orthodox Judaism. The park, especially in *Yom Kippur*, becomes a pilgrimage site since it draws gay men to participate in a communal activity in a specific site that became mythological. Note that during this mass meeting, AIDS activists take the opportunity to initiate educational activities.

<sup>66</sup> Shmueli's work, I argue, not only deifies Independence Park, and venerates the park's patrons, but it enables us to think about the Walling Wall in Jerusalem in a sexual manner. Shmueli's installation eroticizes the Kotel when it reminds us that, to begin with, it is also a place of cruising. Like the cruising wall in Independence Park, the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, as we learn, for example, from the poem *Doubt (Twijfel)* written by Jacob Israël De Haan, was a cruising site in the 1920's ("How much am I waiting in this evening, / Sleep has crept on the city, / Sitting by the Wailing Wall: / God or the Moroccan boy?" [Twijfel: Wat wacht ik in dit avonduur, / De Stad beslopen door de slaap, / Gezeten bij den Tempelmuur: / God of den Marokkaanschen Knaap?]). The ultra-orthodox poet, who was also one of the leaders of an anti-Zionist religious political party, describes in his 1924 *Quatrains (Kwatrijnen)*, [Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen en zoon] how he goes often to the Wailing Wall to cruise, usually in a pursuit after Arab youth. Repeatedly, he will write about his dissonance between the earthly lust and faith, that is, his two great loves, which meet at the Wailing Wall (See in Hebrew: Shlomo Naktimon and Shaul Maizlish, *De Haan: The First Political Assassination in Aretz Israel* [Tel-Aviv: Modan, 1985]). De Haan's poems are not widely read today, and, in a way, Shmueli's project reminds us, the gallery visitors, back to them, back to the understanding that the Walling Wall is an homoerotic site. A decade after De Haan's publication, when Magnus Hirschfeld, the German-Jewish sexologist and the founder of the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*, visited the Wailing Wall, he wrote in his diary that the male youth praying at the Kotel do so in "ecstasy" and to "the point of passionate frenzy". "To an expert," he notes, "it was obvious that here one form of desire was unconsciously substituted for another" (Magnus Hirschfeld, *Men and Women: The World Journey of a Sexologist*, tr. O. P. Green [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935], 275). Magnus, like De Haan, sees the Wailing Wall as an erotic charged place. Shmueli have the same understanding of the place, but he relocates it away from Jerusalem to Tel-Aviv, and points at the "erotic" in a more open—or obvious, "natural"—way.

<sup>67</sup> For different reading of this passage see: John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), especially 93.

<sup>68</sup> I used Adin Steinsaltz's edition. There is also a translation in: Paul Hallam, *The Book of Sodom*, New York and London: Verso, 1993), 105-108. Note: a similar story appears in the Greek mythology - the story of Procrustean. "Procrustean bed," in this sense, is a proverb that comes from the Greek legend of a robber who altered his victims to fit his bed by stretching them or cutting off their legs. Also here it means that something about the force to conform.

<sup>69</sup> Note the resemblance to Kafka's "In the Penal Colony". This short story describes the disciplinary system of the prison: the prisoner would be tied to a bed, and his crime would be inscribed with needles on his body. Franz Kafka, "In the Penal

Colony," *The Complete Stories*, Ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1995), 140-167

<sup>70</sup> כתובות קג ע"א

<sup>71</sup> This is a problematic campaign since it ties, through AIDS, homosexuality and death. Because of a limited space here, I cannot elaborate on how this slogan enforces stereotypes about the "nature" of non-normative sexuality, and about the "nature" of sex. As if HIC/AIDS is a sure death-sentence.

<sup>72</sup> Torm: *Maga'im* gay newspaper, Oct. 1988, p. 4

<sup>73</sup> Triger, p. 235

<sup>74</sup> Naomi Siman-Tov, 2005. "Simple Not Simplistic," *Achbar Ha-Ir*, 05.20.05: 62 [in Heb]. Triger, 236.

<sup>75</sup> She points to Richard Serra as an intertext.

<sup>76</sup> *Makkot* 10a. See also *Deuteronomy* 19.

<sup>77</sup> *Book of Revelation* 3:12 and 21:2

<sup>78</sup> David Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 332.

<sup>79</sup> Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007).

<sup>80</sup> In his reading of the play, David Savran claims that the play "taking us from the Berkin Wall to the former Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, from contemporary New York City to ancient Jerusalem, including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Here too we are reminded of the fantasies of nations, the tentativeness and violence of boundaries. This moment of recognition of the turmoil of and struggle for the future is complicated because it is a moment of hope and prediction, of death, overcoming and contradiction" (92). David Savran, "Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How *Angels in America* Reconstructs the Nation," *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, ed. Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998). In the same collection of essays, Alisa Solomon climes in her article "Wrestling with Angels: A Jewish Fantasia" similar things about the story of Bethesda. She writes about this story that it "reminds us that mythic stories offer, at best, imagery to inspire the search for redemption" (132).

## **Chapter Three**

### **In Their Own Image: Photography and Independence Park**

“You made yourself phallic images,  
And fornicated with them” (Ezekiel 16:17)

#### **Introduction**

Since the 1960s, and even more so since the 1980s, when AIDS was deemed a plague-like disease, Independence Park was associated in the popular press with homosexuality, and in particular with cruising, "promiscuous sex," and illness. Often, it was depicted as a dark, murky and transgressive place. In the first decade after the decriminalization of sodomy, when representations of homosexuality began also to circulate outside of the popular press, this sordid representation of the park was not significantly altered: in the 1990s, queer writers and filmmakers, such as Yossi Avni-Levy and Amos Guttman, replicated the way that the park was depicted in the press until then and continued to portray it along gloomy lines. However, after a decade of adjusting to the new juridical reality and the establishment of a visible, stronger, and active LGBT community, the 2000s brought with them a sea change when artists and writers started to depict the park and its patrons in more complex ways.

In those years, while some wished to celebrate cruising and queer otherness, with the park as its symbol, others wanted to “normalize” homosexuality, to desexualize it, and to show that the park is more than just a cruising site. Both approaches shared the need to redefine queer identity and to adjust it to the new reality. One of the questions that are at the center of this chapter is whether they were able to reinvent queer identities, how did they try to do it, and at what costs?

These new approaches found expression in two photography exhibitions. I will show here how prominent Israeli photographers respond in different ways to the earlier, often homophobic representations of the park and the park’s patrons: they went back to the park with their cameras, and with different agendas, in order to

reclaim it for themselves. Their documentary projects, which were displayed in art galleries, had aesthetic motivations: the tension between documentation and aesthetics will also be discussed here.

In his 2003 exhibition *Independence Park in the Morning*, Shai Ignatz rebels against the tradition of marking the park a “dark place” and associating it solely with night time. In his celebratory project, he records the park’s day-time cruisers in order to showcase queer existence in full daylight. Photography, which is, allegedly, a medium with no or little mediation, is used in the exhibition to document the park and its patrons as people who are not ashamed of their desire and the way it is manifested. Ignatz’s decision to document the park in daylight is also self-reflective since the word photography originates from the Greek “writing with light”: photography, for him, is the perfect medium to capture the park and the activities within it in the day-time. At first glance, Ignatz’s approach seems emancipatory; however, a closer look at his images tells a grimmer and more complex story; a story that raises the question to what extent sexualizing gay identity reaffirms homophobic prejudices and to what extent it represents a form of liberation from it. My reading of the images traces this story by looking at the intertextual relations between Ignatz’s work and canonical Western works of art. By so doing, I, like others, subvert the popular and naïve premise that photography is a medium which grasps little mediation. I also argue that these visual intertexts, which Nicholas Mirzoeff terms “intervisuality,” re-contextualize local queer existence by putting it in touch with the history of Western culture, and, on the other hand, re-construct a queer identity grounded in darkness as inseparable from light, and death as inseparable from life.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, Ignatz reasserts the traditional way that the park was depicted until then; a close reading of his images shows that the images themselves resist the exhibition’s explicit agenda and continuously deconstruct it.

Mordechai Goldman was the curator of the 2007 exhibition *Open Park: Independence Park is for Everyone*. Like Ignatz, Goldman also wishes to re-construct Israeli queer identity; he particularly chose images which portray the park as a “respectable” place while overlooking its queer context. Goldman, I argue, desexualizes the park; his images ignore the cruising scene that takes place in the park and show it as a familial site of recreation, and from this perspective, the park is no different than any other park in Tel-Aviv. Along these lines, gays are not different than others; they are like “everyone”. However, as in Ignatz’s case, a close reading of



the exhibition's images—images by Yoav Shmueli, Uri Gershuni, and Maya Cohen Levy—tells a different story; a story that once again resists the exhibition's agenda and undermines it. By means of intertextuality and contextualization, these images reveal more than just the queer aspect that Goldman attempts to cover up; they also deal with the complex history of the park itself and criticize Israel's and Israeli gays' attitude toward Palestinians.

Through these photography exhibitions, current debates within the Israeli LGBT community are being intensified. For the photographers, the picturesque park is not only an attractive setting, a beautiful green oasis in sooty urban surroundings, but also a platform which enables them to deal with issues of gender, sexual preference, agency, self-representation, subordination, nationalism, hegemony, memory, and the medium of photography. Each photographer in his or her own way, constructs Independence Park to serve his or her needs: they imagine it in their own image. For them, the park is not only the background for their images, but more than a setting, which frames the pictorial events, the park holds an equal part as their subject. It does not only situate the events, but often takes part in them. I argue here that the park is not only the images' context, but rather their co-text. The *mise en scène* does more than indicate the time and the place of the pictorial events, it actually, I suggest, produces them.

### **Hanna Sahar: Princesses of the Night**

From the 1960s on, and in growing rates from the 1980s on, the Israeli press, especially the popular daily newspapers, described Independence Park as a nocturnal gay cruising site associated with lawbreaking, illness, and transgression.<sup>2</sup> The cover story of the weekly *Ha'olam Haze* on July 2, 1962, for example, reads: "underground on the Esplanade".<sup>3</sup> The subheading of this "special issue on homosexuality in Israel" is not less dramatic: "political leaders, public figures, artists, UN officers, and students are members of a well-organized underground, which the police do not imprison".<sup>4</sup> Three decades later—in 1989, a year after the abolition of the sodomy law, which had made it possible to imprison homosexuals—*Davar* newspaper publishes a story about a robbery in the park with the heading: "Anyone who Goes to Independence Park Risks His Life".<sup>5</sup>

In her 1998 exhibition *The Princess' Bingo* (בינגו הנסיכה), Hanna Sahar documents Independence Park's cruising scene not for journalistic purposes, but, for

the first time in Israel, in the context of art: she wanted to exhibit her images in an art gallery. The cruising scene she documents is not in the center of her exhibition; mostly, she focuses on the employees of striptease bars, brothels, and gambling clubs of the Bourse Quarter, the city red-light district. For a year, using a highly sensitive film without a flash, she captured sex workers, bouncers, and customers: the images are grainy, but behind the obscurity, they are also intimate. They were shot in warm colors—red being dominant here—and from a close distance, as if it was a familial, non-threatening event for both the subjects and the photographer. At the time, it is important to note here, Sahar worked as a bartender in one of the clubs, and, therefore, personally knew her subjects.<sup>6</sup>

The images in Sahar's exhibition refuse to glorify or romanticize the Bourse; she is too familiar with it, and, thus, unlike other representations of the place, she cannot—and would not—rise arrogantly above her subjects. The images do not intend to tell a tear-shedding and heart-breaking stories of poor, unfortunate people; they tell fragmented bits and pieces of the mundane lives of hard-working people in their workplace. Sahar's images invite the viewers to have a dialogue with the people in front of the camera, to communicate with them in a less hierarchical way, as she does in her life.

Two of Sahar's images were not taken in the Bourse, where she works in one of the bars, and where she feels at ease, but about a quarter of an hour drive from there, in Independence Park (Fig. 29 and 30). She was the first openly gay photographer to document Independence Park from an insider's perspective and for artistic purposes. However, it is important to note here, that, as a woman, she is not completely an "insider," since she did not partake in the all-male cruising scene there; in this sense, she is also not a completely part of the Bourse's crowd, since it is for her a student-job, which she will leave for a better career. What is her fascination with the "underworld"? Why is she wandering from the Bourse to Independence Park? Why is she associatively swept away to the park when her intentions are to shed light on the sex industry workers?

While adopting earlier homophobic patterns of representations, that is, shooting the park at night-time without using a flash, and from a concealed, waylaid location, making sure to hide details which might serve as identifying marks, Sahar produces similar—but at the same time also different—images of the park and the cruising scene. Whereas earlier images of cruisers were looking for "evidence" to

prove homosexuals' misdoings—deeds which later can and will be used against them in a court of law—Sahar, with her non-judgmental or even positive approach towards the park, documents the life of the cruisers from within. She does not wish to “frame” the park's visitors, that is, to police them, to firmly fix their identity as outlaws, as lowlifes, to stain them, but to uncover their praxes, to describe them as individuals. When Sahar captures a man walking about in the paths of the park—a blurred figure form: is this abstract photography?—she, on the one hand, imitates the techniques of previous representations by obscuring the identities of the individuals, making them look as if they are engaged in shameful, unfavorable activities, but, on the other hand, she also uncovers the mechanism of these techniques, deconstruct their discriminating logic, ridicules it, and, most of all, useed the master's tool, as Audre Lorde asks, to dismantle the master's house.<sup>7</sup> The man in this image, who is an elusive figure that appears from nowhere and also quickly disappears, cannot be judged since the viewers have no incriminating information about him. Do they know why he is there? Is he involved in unkosher activities or is he just an innocent passer-by? Can the viewers distinguish between these categories? Can we label him? As in her other images in *The Princess' Bingo* Sahar does not look down at her subjects, on the contrary, she is affirmative and identifies with them.

Sahar named her exhibition after one of the illegal casinos in the Bourse. *The Princess' Bingo*, however, empowers Sahar's subjects: they are royalty-like who found themselves in the Bourse. Indeed, many of the images show the sex workers as divas, greater than life. In the context of Independence Park, the title is even more allegorical: it marks the cruisers in the familiar term of endearment; they are princesses and queens.



Fig. 29 Sahar's *The Princess' Bingo* 1



Fig. 30 Sahar's *The Princess' Bingo* 2

### Shai Ignatz: Good Morning Independence Park

Sahar's exhibition had such a great impact that a few years later, in 2003, Shai Ignatz responds to it and calls his exhibition in Rosenfeld Gallery *Independence Park in the Morning* (גן העצמאות בבוקר). His response—his need to go back to the place at day-time and to tell a different story about it—is not only directed at Sahar's work, but also to other images of cruising, which intertextually corresponds with her work.<sup>8</sup>

Kohei Yoshiyuki's *The Park* (In Japanese: *Document Kouen*), first published in 1980, is one example of such intertextuality. He depicts the night-time activities in three Tokyo's parks between 1971 and 1979. The book documents mostly heterosexual encounters, but, in its last part, when the focus shifts to Aoyama Park, homosexual cruising scenes are central (Fig. 31, 32, and 33). There are similarities between Sahar's images and Yoshiyuki's; both have something furtive about them: the almost-voyeuristic images taken surreptitiously from a hiding-place and the photographers, like crouching hunters, ambushed their prey; they wait for the best moment to shoot, but, so it seems, do so without the intention of doing harm, to incriminate, only to curiously observe.<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 31 Yoshiyuki 1



Fig. 32 Yoshiyuki 2



Fig. 33 Yoshiyuki 3

Peter Hujar's *Night* is another intertext for both Sahar's and Ignatz's exhibitions.<sup>10</sup> In the late early 1980s, Hujar documented the gay cruising scene of lower Manhattan after dark, when it was sort of a ghost town: the deserted streets and parks were used for cruising, and Hujar, who participated in this hunt—that is, in the hunt for sex but also for a good picture opportunity—witnesses the phenomenon. Unlike Yoshiyuki, so it seems, Hujar's subjects are not only aware that their picture is being taken, but they also pose for the photographer. The relative proximity in which these images were taken implies, like in Sahar's case, intimacy between the photographer and the subjects. The teenager from the *Boy on Park Bench, 1981* is looking straight to the camera: he has nothing to hide (Fig. 34). He is at ease; he sits

comfortably, and, so it seems, "kills time". Unlike Yoshiyuki's subjects, who are in the middle of sexual activities, Hujar's subjects, in a similar way to Sahar's, are almost disinterested, even lethargic and inert. Cruising, from this vantage point, is a boring and tedious act, in which one can wait for hours, sometimes in vain (Fig 35 and 36). Certainly it is less fetching or glamorous in comparison to Yoshiyuki's work.



Fig. 34 Hujar 1



Fig. 35 Hujar 2



Fig. 36 Hujar 3

While Sahar and Hujar are focus on the banal and the prosaic nature of the cruising scene, Yoshiyuki focuses on its spectacle, its enchanting qualities. Like Sahar's images, which were taken from a distance, Yoshiyuki's dim images portray more of a ghostly atmosphere than realistic portraits of cruisers. Hujar's teenage subject, who looks unashamedly and confidently into the camera, has more in common with Ignatz's subjects than those of Sahar's and Yoshiyuki's. Ignatz, on the other hand, decides to document the cruising activities during the day-time with the full cooperation of his subjects.

In *Independence Park in the Morning*, with its photo-essay qualities, Ignatz reacts not only to earlier journalistic and photojournalistic representations of cruising, but also to Sahar and other photographers' work, and the works of Israeli writers, such as Yotam Reuveny, who dealt with park.<sup>11</sup> Ignatz rebels against the tradition they represent of associating the park only with the night time, and the symbolic implications of such representations: he wishes to introduce gay life to Israeli society in full light and show gay life, including cruising, that does not take place in secret hideaways, tenebrous nooks, or metaphorical darkness. On the contrary, Ignatz wishes to record the queer the existence of those who choose not to hide or conceal their identity; the lives of gay men who live openly, who have nothing to be ashamed of or fear. Ignatz's documentary project—and it is important to note here that he does *not*

direct his subjects or stage them in any way—means to showcase Independence Park, to reveal it, and the activities in it, under the bright Mediterranean sun as a beautiful place. By doing so, Ignatz ultimately wishes to demarginalize the park and the identities attached to it. This approach seems, on the face of it, celebratory and emancipatory. Ignatz announces in the exhibition's catalogue that the Israeli LGBT community, of which he is a member, slowly comes out from the darkness of the closet, from the fringes of representation, into the light, and his project is part of that shift. However, a closer look at his unfolding images, reading them as a congeries of images, as I do here, will also tell a grimmer and more complex story, in which struggle and reclusion are still part of the lives of the park's patrons. My reading of the images traces this story by looking at the intertextual relations between Ignatz's work and canonical Western works or art. Such a reading shows that Ignatz's proclaimed agenda collapses under its own weight: Independence Park, and perhaps the place of the LGBT community in Israel, is still also a site of "darkness". In this case, against the backdrop of the celebratory agenda, death appears again and again as a reminder of the harsh reality.

For the first time in a queer context, the exhibition offers, an attractive outlook of the park.<sup>12</sup> Through Ignatz's lens, the park is a seductive place of seemingly pure beauty, an emblazonment of open gay life, where gay men exercise what was, not very long ago, considered an unnatural desire, not to mention, in the Israeli case, also illegal. Nature here is a metaphor for gay normalcy: Ignatz focuses on the greenery—on the lively colors of the flora against the bright blue sky—and on the cruisers, who, in most cases, look unashamedly straight ahead into the photographer's camera.

The first image of the catalogue seems to continue the conventional representational tradition of concealment, especially in the case of gay sex (Fig. 37). The half-naked figure is hidden in the shade amongst the foliage. Between the spots of light and shadow, he stays anonymous. This introductory image, which situates the viewers in the familiar and customary ways of representing Israeli cruising, is more of an exception in the catalogue. The second image is of a teenager cruiser, and here Ignatz's breakthrough concept is manifested, takes different approach: unlike the first image, where the leafage is used as a veil to mask the figure's face, the boy in the second image is unconcealed and overt (Fig. 38). The boy uses his body, his posture, to tell something about himself to the man beyond the camera. He is young, to state the obvious, and very likely under the age of consent. He has only traces of a light

moustache, and no body hair: no armpit hair and not a hint of pubic hair. Nevertheless, he—as if he was a classical cherub-like sitter, and in a similar way to Hujar’s subject of a teenage boy—chooses to pose in a nonchalant way. His white pants’ laces are invitingly untied. He leans on a tree casually, implying that he has some experience in this, and that he is not nervous at all. Is he a runaway teenager? Does he “live” in the park and feel comfortable to be photographed in his “home field”? Is he posing for his potential viewers, maybe potential customers? His left hand lies leisurely but calculatedly on his waist in a “classical” model position, as if to offer a better side of himself to the camera. In a somewhat childish way, he performs “seductiveness”.

This portrait of a boy, when it appears in the catalogue next to a portrait of an older man, raises more questions about the link of cruising and self-representation (Fig. 39). Are these cruisers related? What are the relations between them? Is it pederasty, as was practiced in ancient Greece? Are they contemporary manifestation of *eromenos* and *erastes*? Are the images, when put together, a critical remark on the commodification of gay culture, where the old partner inaugurates but also exploits his alleged apprentice? Like his younger counterpart, the man tediously, so it seems, waits for some opportunities to present themselves. He, who apparently spends many hours at the site, makes the park his home: the towel covers the bench and turns into a bed. Is it a tanning-bed? His complexion is notably darker in comparison to the (symbolic) whiteness of the boy’s body. If the boy’s image was suggestive, the man’s image is more direct. He wears nothing but underwear or a swimsuit, and holds his aroused penis. He feels at home although he is in the park: the private act—is he masturbating?—is done in a public place. There is no doubt, and the phallic agave behind him stresses this point further, that he is on search for sex. But, unlike the boy, whose presence there is only to be guessed, the man’s forthright approach is a matter of irony. While the boy, in contrast to the first image, is unconcealed, the man covers himself with dark sunglasses and a hat shadowing his face. Therefore, he is less direct than it appears to be on first impression. Like the boy, he also performs “seductiveness”: both cruisers try to appeal to the camera; the boy, on the face of it, is nonchalant, and so is the man. However, the man is more—or in a different way—aware of the camera’s presence: it seems that he tucks in his stomach. Both try to minimize their—as they may or may not perceive it—noticeable shortcomings: their age. They manage to do so by carefully posturing themselves in front of the camera

and to their potential lovers. These images, which, on the face of it, seem so different at first, have much in common. Again and again, Ignatz destabilizes binary oppositions and points to similarities that bind seemingly different images to each other. These images also say something about the uneasiness of cruising: the cruisers work with and against stereotypes to increase their attractiveness.



Fig. 37 Ignatz 1



Fig. 38 Ignatz 2



Fig. 39 Ignatz 3

The images not only raise questions about self-representation and the manipulative nature of cruising, but also about the manipulative nature of documentation. Does the camera change the atmosphere in the park, and if so, how exactly? Does the camera put into motion the observer-expectancy effect? Do the cruisers act and look in the same way when the camera is not there? Why do these particular cruisers appear in the catalogue and not others? Ignatz's project shows the diversity of the cruising community: some are young, some are older, some are well-to-do, such as the person in one of the images who wears an expensive gold watch, and others, such as the dark-skinned man in unfashionable underwear, most likely a guest worker or a Palestinian, are poor. Is the park truly an egalitarian place, where all people are equally represented, as if it was a sort of queer parliament, or is the park just a fantasy, in which social and economic status has no significance? When Ignatz puts images in similar size of cruisers side by side, he implies that they are equal, when, as a matter of fact, they are not. Indeed, they take the same space in the catalogue, but in “real life,” they have their different social status, in which younger,



whiter, and richer are noticeable—and much more favored—characteristics. Who, then, cruises the park: those who can afford to go to clubs or surf the internet or those who do not have access to such privileges? Are some of the cruisers also enjoying slumming it down, that is, getting more than just sex, but also a confirmation of their higher status?

Ignatz's fantasy—almost in a paradisiacal sense—cannot carry its own weight, I argue, since the images have strong undercurrents, which resist the exhibition's explicit agenda and continuously undermine it. While the park is showcased, details in the images resist the celebratory representation, raise questions, and subvert the agenda by providing grim and alarming reminders of the uneasiness of reality. It will become clearer that, like the nocturnal representations of the park, even in the morning it is also a place of melancholic grief, fear and death.

In one of the first images in the catalogue, for example, there are two men standing in the shadow of the trees, and the relationship between them brings to the fore more troubling questions. As in the earlier images, it is an image that contrasts a younger and an older figure; an image that brings to the fore the tension between two modes: the celebratory and the dispirited (Fig. 40). The young man in this image is looking straight into the camera. He is not fully dressed and appears to be at ease and relaxed. The older man at the back is hidden in the shade. He is fully clothed and somehow reticent and restrained. Like most of Ignatz's subjects, he also looks outright at the camera (but not as directly as the young man). The composition of this photograph has almost mirror-image symmetry: the unshaved young man leans with his left hand on a branch and the bearded older man holds a branch with his right hand; the young man's right hand is loose as so is the older man's left hand; the young man's leg is slightly lifted and the same goes for the older man's right leg. While a strip is wrapped around the older man's neck—is it a camera case?—the branch which the young man casually leans on symbolically decapitates him. It seems almost as if he is hanged from the tree or even crucified on it. Is he being punished, and if so, is it for his desires, the original sin of lust, or for his identity? Will death liberate his soul from his earthly shackled body? Will his suffering pay for our sins? The religious imagery of this Christ-like subject is intensified as the older man's watch warns us of time, as if to suggest that time runs out. This watch reappears on the left hand of the younger man as if it was a stigmata: a ray of light draws a small circle on his hand, where a nail was stuck through Jesus' veins.

Death, in this case, is very much present here, but, on the other hand, when considering representations of Jesus as an intertext, death is not the end; Death is followed by resurrection and salvation. Can this a cruiser Jesus, which means in Hebrew "salvation"? And if so, who is his executioner? Since Independence Park is associated with AIDS because it is a gay cruising place, it could be, I argue, that the younger subject, the Jesus-like figure, is a witness to the park's deaths. If witness means in Greek martyr, does subject give a testimony to AIDS: this testimony—the act of awaking awareness to AIDS—could be seen as salvation. Is Ignatz a witness, and for what, and is his documentary project a testimony? Why does the figure of Jesus appear in a queer-Jewish context, considering Jesus' problematic place in Jewish culture? The questions of testimony and martyrdom will appear again in other images, and, so, will be discussed further.



Fig. 40 Ignatz 4

The full effect of Ignatz's documentary project occurs when the images are read side by side. Then, as in a musical leitmotif, they begin to tell a bigger story: not only the celebratory one, the one which takes place in the light, but also the melancholic one, the one which take place in the shade and dark, the one that involves death and mourning. Following the image of the Jesus-like figure, which tells both "stories" simultaneously, there is another image of a man who waits amid the trees (Fig. 41). This image brings death to the fore once again. Like other cruisers, the subject waits in anticipation for someone, for some excitement. This lingering existence characterizes almost all of Ignatz's images: in contrast to Yoshiyuki's

subjects, who are engaging in sexual acts, most of Ignatz's subjects—a few of them indeed masturbate in front of the camera, but always alone, never with partners—are in an almost metaphysical waiting; most of them are also alone. Is cruising a nerve-racking expectation or a dull, laconic and monotonous routine? Maybe it is both? The man's elbow is on his knee, which traditionally in Western iconography symbolizes mourning and lamentation.<sup>13</sup> He sits on a tree trunk in a position that resembles Auguste Rodin's 1904 statue *Le Penseur*.<sup>14</sup> It looks like he is pondering: does he meditate? He is submersed in his own private world. Unlike the emphatic green color in the other images, the brown is dominant here—even his trousers and shoes are brown—which produces a shriveled and sullen tone. At first glance, it is difficult to see the man or even to distinguish between the earth and the tree trunk he sits on. While Rodin's *The Thinker* guards Dante's Gates of Hell, Ignatz's thinker waits for a random passer-by with whom he will find relief. In this case, is Independence Park the Circle of the Sodomites (cantos 15:16-24 and 16:1-6)? Is it hell or purgatory? Is this man being punished? Is cruising, “the deed,” the punishment or homosexuality, “the identity”? The shades on the ground, together with the thick vegetation, give an impression of isolation, as if he is imprisoned in the lattice of the trunks and branches. More questions come to mind: if the figure here is Dante, is Ignatz Virgil? And if so, is photography equivalent to poetry? Will Ignatz, like Virgil, return from hell to deliver the news to his community?

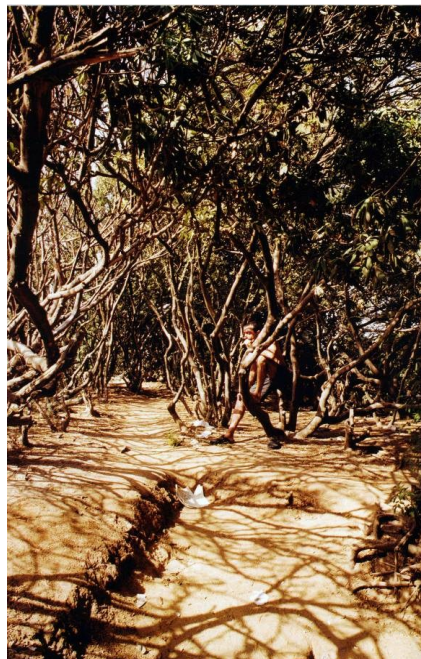


Fig. 41 Ignatz 5

A closer look at the image reveals an oblongish dig in front of the subject which resembles an open grave. If the intertext to Dante's *Inferno* was missed earlier, and the viewers do not yet associate Independence Park with death or hell, here come another opportunity to think about the “risks” of cruising. Is this “grave” an allegory for cruising? Is it a symbolic reminder of the ephemeral nature of youthful beauty? Is it a queer version of the renaissance concept of *vanitas*? One thing we can be sure of: death awaits this thinking-man who awaits sex while he may or may not think about the consequences of cruising in the age of HIV/AIDS.<sup>15</sup>

The image of a man holding a dry palm branch in his right hand is another example of the twofold nature of Ignatz's images (Fig. 42). Why is he holding such a peculiar item? Is it sort of a partial screen? He wears women's jeans with white flowery embroidery. His belt is open; the jeans' buttons are suggestively unfastened; and the salient, zooty red underwear, which are at the center of the composition, are provocatively peeking. The viewers' gaze—especially those who read from right to left—follows after the course that the cane makes: from the cane's top on the right corner of the image, the gaze slides softly down and left along the reed until it reaches the genitalia, which is the metaphorical and literal center of the image. It is clear that the figure is in the park looking for sex and wanting to be looked at.

Like all of Ignatz's subjects in *Independence Park in the Morning*, the man in the image was not instructed on how to pose.<sup>16</sup> He chose to roll up his black shirt, and to uncover a pudgy belly, which is in contrast to today's gay men's decorum of flat muscular stomach. His blond hair is dyed. His left wrist is strapped to the back of the neck, which indicates femininity, and is intent to seduce. In fact, his entire campy posture indicates artificiality and effeminacy: his left leg is stretched forward and his buttocks are lifted and emphasized. He is a queen. Does his posture show self-acceptance, even to the point of *vanitas*, as if to ask, maybe in irony, "am I beautiful"? Does he protest against the gay men's decorum by mimicking a “classical” posture?

The subject's posture, as if it is a *tableau vivant*, points to the "classical": one of the intertexts that are in play here are images by early twentieth century photographers—such as Guglielmo Plüschow, Vincenzo Galdi, Wilhelm von Plüschow, Fred Holland Day, Thomas Eakins, Frank Eugene, and others—that imitate, in the tradition of the German neoclassicist art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann, classical Greco-Roman *mise en scene*.<sup>17</sup> In times of censorship of men's nudity, such artistic conventions were often an "excuse" for these and other

photographers to show—and to enjoy watching—the male body. The intertext that is especially at play here, from the same circle of queer *fin de siècle* photographers, is Wilhelm Von Gloeden's image of a boy holding a reed cane (Fig. 43). In the beginning of the twentieth century, the German baron, who turned his avocation to a profession, left his homeland and headed to Sicily. There, he photographed youth—often in the nude—and sold the homoerotic images to tourists and to private collectors in mainland Europe. Today, Von Gloeden is considered to be a pioneer queer artist, and his work is often quoted by photographers, such as, for example, the Israeli Adi Nes. In this specific image, besides holding a phallic reed cane, a nude effeminate boy is wearing a bright hair ribbon and a white pearl necklace; he leans on a plain modern style column, but near him lies a Greek column in the Doric style and another one in the Corinthian style; his legs are stretched; the right one is slightly bent in order to emphasize the penis. Ignatz's flamboyant subject, in this case, resembles Von Gloeden's subject: like the boy, the older man also wishes to be seen as a beautiful adolescent—the *puer aeternus*—and as a classical Greco-Roman sitter.<sup>18</sup> What is the effect of looking at these two images together? Is Independence Park a “classical” place? Questions also arise about the moral aspect of such a project: if Von Gloeden, the rich, older European, exploits his poor, Sicilian, young sitters, does Ignatz also exploit his subject when he “catches” them in an intimate act? Does he gaze, like Von Gloeden gazes, in a superior way at his subjects?

Both Ignatz's and Von Gloeden's images, which “resurrect ancient Greek life,” go back to antiquity, or a modern fantasy of ancient Greek life, when “homosexuality”—not yet to be defined and stigmatized as it was later—was, seemingly and under few conditions, accepted.<sup>19</sup> Both images use the understanding that the concepts of masculinity and beauty—manifested in male nudity—were different, more public and accessible. Independence Park, then, from this neoclassical prism, is not a transgressive place, a site of beastly lust and promiscuity, but a place of culture and freedom. The park has the aura of both the “classical” and the “neoclassical”. However, in the back of one's mind, one also knows that most of Von Gloeden's images were destroyed by the Nazis when they occupied Sicily: the fantasy about brotherly love, as Von Gloeden saw it while adopting German romanticism, was eventually shattered because of fascism. Von Gloeden's images, when viewed today, are charged from the start with this knowledge, and with strong overtones of violence and death. In this sense, Independence Park is also charged with such foreboding perceptions.

The intertextuality in Ignatz's image, which charges it with further meanings, goes further in its use of the "classical". The man holding the reed also evokes the motif of the calamus in Walt Whitman's 1860 *Leaves of Grass*.<sup>20</sup> For Whitman, the phallic calamus is a symbol of "adhesiveness," the sentiment of male-male comradeship and attachment. In Greek mythology, Kalamos and Karpos were in love, and when his lover drowned in the river, Kalamos, out of grief, allowed himself to drown too. By the grace of the gods, he then transformed into a reed, whose rustling in the wind was interpreted as a sigh of lamentation. This elegiac male same-sex love story is in one of the centers of Whitman's collection. In poems such as "To a Stranger," "City of Orgies," or "We Two Boys Together Clinging," Whitman deals with homosexuality, and with cruising, and, in this sense, when a man who cruises Independence Park is holding a reed in his hand, Whitman's collection and themes come to mind, and with it also the prestige attached to the great poet. Ignatz's project, which documents an Israeli cruising scene, gets legitimation by this—and other—intertexts. It also allows the viewers to place Ignatz's project in a wider cultural context: the rich history of artistic representations of cruising. Furthermore, when the reed is contextualized, besides the prestige of the intertexts, there is also the element of grief. The reed is a reminder of death: the image shifts back and forth between the celebratory attitude and the one that is more lachrymose. The intertexts enable to hold them simultaneously together.

"Whitman," Robert Martin argues about *Leaves of Grass*, "often compared himself to Christ". In this sense, he claims, "*Leaves of Grass* was to be the *new* New Testament, the gospel of 'comrades', revealed by Whitman just as Christ revealed a new religion of love to replace the harsher Judaic code".<sup>21</sup> Ignatz's project—as we already saw, especially in the image of the Jesus-figure—is charged with religious imagery. His homoerotic imagery inverts the religious themes of the past to produce non-religious icons: Ignatz follows—and adds to—the tradition of gay hagiography, such as Saint Sebastian, and relocates it to Independence Park. Is Ignatz, like Whitman's "*new* New Testament" or Yoav Shmueli's installations art, creating a queer New Jerusalem? Considering what Allen Ellenzweig claims about the queer photography of the *Fin de siècle*—that is, "the lure of Christian martyrdoms presented apt if exaggerated analogies to gay aesthetes"<sup>22</sup>—a question arises: are Ignatz's cruisers martyrs?

The cane that the figure holds goes beyond the Greek mythology and Whitman's collection: it is also based in Christianity. Ignatz's figure holds a palm leaf as if it was a scepter of government. In this case, is the golden ring on his finger sort of a royal seal? In Matthew 27:29 and in Mark 15:19, Jesus was mocked by the Roman soldiers, when they put a crown of thorns on his head, a reed cane in his right hand, and then announced him as the "king of the Jews". In Ignatz's image, when the figure holds a cane in his right hand, it echoes this story as well as Whitman's use of it. Consequently, the image suggests that, like Jesus, homosexuals were persecuted and humiliated, and, eventually, will also overcome, survive, and triumph. They, in this case, become martyrs. The queen in Ignatz's image is empowered by the cane and, indeed, it seems that, for him, Independence Park is his realm, a queer kingdom. Earlier, it was established, Ignatz's unnamed figure stresses—in a campy way—his femininity; in this sense, he is not only the "king of the Jews" but also the "queen of the Jewish gays". He turns the stigma of queer effeminacy into stigmata, a mark that exemplifies his strength and virtues. It is important to note here—though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to evaluate the role of Christian imagery in the *Fin de siècle* culture—that the figure of Jesus was at the time, as Christopher Forth argues, "frequently enlisted in debates about masculinity".<sup>23</sup> In certain milieus and at specific periods, Caroline Walker Bynum claims, Jesus was feminized.<sup>24</sup> Ignatz's image, then, takes part not only in Christ's feminization, but also with His queerization. The park's patrons could be seen as prophets, and, like other men of gospel, such as Whitman, they will not carry only Good News, but also bad ones: they will have to die in the service of their faith.

The legitimation of the park and its patrons goes further in this case with another intertext: as if it was a *tableau vivant*, the man's posing as an empowered queen is an intertext also to Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* (Fig. 44). Both subjects' wrists are strapped to the back in a seductive manner, and both cloths—one wears a shirt and the other wears bandages—are rolled up. Michelangelo's subject, unlike Ignatz's, is nude, and he touches himself as if he is masturbating, but, unlike Michelangelo's work, which underlines the subject's status as a slave, Ignatz's subject is not a passive subordinate. The figure in the image has control of his life—he is a queen—that is, he chooses how to be represented: unlike Michelangelo's subject, Ignatz's subject stares—almost defyingly—straight at the camera.

The hierarchical tension that is in the center of the image is between two possibilities—queen and slave—and it is too implicated in the image to be resolved easily. Sally O'Reilly argues in her 2009 *The Body in Contemporary Art* that subjects in photography who were not instructed how to pose “may attempt to adopt orthodox poses that reflect received ideas of identity in an attempt to mask their self-doubt”.<sup>25</sup> This is also the case here, since the figure maintains simultaneously both possibilities: power and weakness (and even death). If the intertext to the last minutes of Jesus' life was not sufficient, the intertext to Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* brings death to the fore. The subtext of this image undermines Ignatz's celebratory agenda: Independence Park is also a place of suffering, of pain, of violence, of horror, and of weakness. Since the park is identified with gay cruising and promiscuity, and the intertexts echo death, AIDS casts here its long shadow. Again, a binary opposition appears and dissolves: both coexist side by side and are even interlocked. In the age of HIV/AIDS, in times when sex is a life-threatening act, life, or sex, and death are united.

Death appears here due to another intertext: Robert Mapplethorpe's 1974 *The Slave*, which is a photograph of a photograph of Michelangelo's statue (Fig. 45). While Mapplethorpe's image points the attention to the question of representation in the age of mechanical reproduction, it also points to the question of power struggle and the drama of sex and of gender-roles; a question that occupied Mapplethorpe in his earlier works that often deal with S&M. Mapplethorpe legitimatizes his works by citing Michelangelo: he shows how his so-called provocative works are not pornography—as some of his critics describe his art—but, in fact, are dealing with the same issues that others before him, the great masters, were interested in.<sup>26</sup> Like Michelangelo, he, Mapplethorpe, depicts slaves, and slaves can be found in Western societies nowadays only in sexual role playing.<sup>27</sup> Ignatz's image, along these lines, gains the same respectability: the project is not pure voyeurism, but a legitimate inquiry that others—Michelangelo and Mapplethorpe—did before him. Both artists are also known for their desire of men, and it once again situates *Independence Park in the Morning* among other queer cultural works, as if to say that such a project does not exist in a vacuum. Mapplethorpe's image, it is important to note here, is well known to the Israeli queer readership, since this image appears on the cover of the 1991 Hebrew translation of Jean Genet's 1947 *Querelle de Brest* (Querelle of Brest). Genet will appear again in Ignatz's catalogue, and I will discuss it shortly.



When one considers Gilles Deleuze's understanding of S&M—in which he reverses the roles of the partners, that is, the masochist has control over the sadist, so that he or she writes the script of the sexual drama and directs it—the thought of slavery is complicated. Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*—mediated by Mapplethorpe whose images refuse the Freudian understanding of sadomasochism and are closer in spirit to the Deleuzian definition—is not only a passive victim, but can be seen as an active agent. He draws pleasure from his status: Mapplethorpe links pain and pleasure—notice the knife that added to the image which brings to mind the relation in the French language between orgasm and death—and shows how close they are allied, and so is Ignatz in his image. Following Mapplethorpe's image, Ignatz's image plays with the different ways Independence Park is understood by different people: a beautiful place, a dangerous place, an empowering place, a place of degeneration, a place of love, a place of sin and immorality. All exist simultaneously. The figure of the queen, then, illustrates the twofold dichotomy: on the one hand, his status as an effeminate man is low, but, on the other hand, he—as well as other cruisers—conceives of himself, or prefers to present himself, as a powerful figure. This image of a man holding a cane is an example of Ignatz's celebratory agenda and the way this agenda is subverted when it is closely read.



Fig. 42 Ignatz 6



Fig. 43 Gloeden's boy



Fig. 44 Michelangelo's slave



Fig. 45 Mapplethorpe's Slave

More about Jean Genet, and his “appearance” in the park: Intertextuality and the flora of the park continue to go hand in hand in Ignatz’s exhibition. In the catalogue, Ignatz chooses to show an unremarkable shrub—known in Hebrew as *rotem*—on a double spread. Why does he “waste” valuable space on an image of *cytissus scoparius* as the shrub is called in Latin? While in English *rotem* is known as “broom,” in French it is known as *Fleurs de genets*. When the context in which the image was taken is Independence Park, the name of the shrub in French is important to note. Genet enters here from the backdoor; he writes in *The Thief’s Journal* about the special connection he has with the shrub: “whenever I come across broom blossoms on the heaths [...] I feel a deep sense of kinship with them” (44). Genet is named after the genet, and both appear in Ignatz’s “documentation” of the park. Like Genet, the “homosexuals’ park” is a place of pride and shame, of love, sex, and transgression.<sup>28</sup>

### **Mordechai Goldman: Everyone is (Almost) Welcome to the Park**

In 2007, Mordechai Goldman—a psychoanalyst, a poet, and an art critic—was the curator of an exhibition about Independence Park in Tel-Aviv’s Artist House Gallery.<sup>29</sup> Entitled *Open Park: Independence Park is for Everyone* (גן פתוח: גן העצמאות (לכולם)), the exhibition, as Goldman writes in the press release, seeks to show the park’s “many faces,” that is, he rejects the immediate association of the park with homosexuality, and he wishes instead to promote other possible ways to think about the park and to represent it. In this sense, Goldman’s project is post-queer: he thinks that there is no need nowadays for “identity politics”.

Goldman, who, among other issues, deals with homoeroticism in his poetry, and even wrote a few poems on Independence Park in the past, downplays now the park as a queer site.<sup>30</sup> He desexualizes the park and uses the “diversity argument” to justify his choice: “the park is more than a gay club [...] it is a place where everyone will find what they are looking for”.<sup>31</sup> He finds the park, as he continues and explains, to be mostly a place of great beauty nature-wise, which is being misused by some of its visitors: by visitors who litter; by homeless persons who set fires there; by guest workers who congregate there to play soccer, and by gay cruisers. In this case, a question arises: who are exactly the park’s visitors who will find there “what they are looking for”? Moreover: is the park *open* only to those who are not socially stigmatized? Is it open only to those who know how to “behave”?

According to his agenda, Goldman selects picturesque images of the park which capture the place at its best. In a sense, like Ignatz, Goldman turns the park to an almost surreal, pastoral fantasy—consider the cinematic sky in the photographs he himself took—rather than mundane, not-so-nurtured, concrete site (Fig. 46, 47, and 48).



Fig. 46 **Goldman 1**



Fig. 47 **Goldman 2**



Fig. 48 **Goldman 3**

In order to show the park's beauty, Goldman asked both gay and non-gay artists to depict the site. Artists, photographers and painters—such as Jan and Galit Rauchwerger, Helen Berman, Tamar Messag, Nurit Sade, Pesakh Salbusky, Naomi Brikman, and others—present in the exhibition their insights and thoughts on the park. Some of their images were focusing on the park's scenery, while others on the park's visitors and patrons, without explicitly declaring their sexual preference. However, it seems that many images in *Open Park* refer indirectly to homosexuality. It is almost as if the images themselves intentionally resist the exhibition's official agenda: like in Ignatz's case, close readings of the images will show how they subvert the official intention of the curator. Often, such a reading, which goes “against the grain” of the agenda, is done like in Ignatz's case by contextualization and intertextuality. The images will point again and again to the political implications of representing Independence Park: against Goldman's de-politicization of the place, the images continue to show the less comfortable and easy sides of the park.

As one of the artists who are most associated with Independence Park, Ignatz was asked by Goldman to present one of his images in *Open Park*. The image in the exhibition was taken from *Independence Park in the Morning*, however, without the wider context of Ignatz's exhibition, the image of a man who crosses his arms over his bare chest is more open to interpretations, not necessarily queer ones (Fig. 49). In other words: when Goldman encourages the visitors to the exhibition not to assume that the park is being occupied entirely by gay men, Ignatz's image will not

necessarily be associated with gay cruising. The man in the image, then, is, on the face of it, not necessarily cruising. Why is he crossing his arms? Is he bored? It is important to point here to the red color of his lips; they look as if lipstick had been applied on them. The lips here are analogous to the red flower of the poisonous *Nerium Oleander* which surrounds him. The connection here between the beauty of the evergreen shrub and its lethality could, by association, be pointing to homosexuality in the age of HIV/AIDS. This image—which surfaces Ignatz’s motif of Eros and Thanatos—is, therefore, also about cruising, and not only about the gardening and the flora of the park, as Geldman may want us to think. The image, even when removed from Ignatz’s larger project, still points to effeminacy: notice the flower behind the subject’s ear—the flower is actually far in the background, but due to optical illusion it seems as if it is behind his ear—that indicates, in the tradition of art history, Femme-fatalism, seduction and vanity.

This image of a male version of femme fatale, who is as dangerous as seductive, has an almost baroque luminism—sort of tenebrism effect—which was achieved, since it is dark amidst the bushes, by the usage of camera’s flash. This burst of light exposes the subject and his strong features: consider the sweat on his rotund face, the emphatic eyebrows, and the reddish complexion. The flash, in fact, stresses not only the subject but also the shrub, and ties them together. It looks more like a painting than a photograph, and, the resemblance to Caravaggio’s *Bacchus* is notable (Fig. 50, and enlarged detail Fig. 51). As in the case of Caravaggio, whose sitters are usually beautiful youth, Ignatz wishes to showcase the park and the park’s visitors’ beauty, and, like Caravaggio’s understating of *vanitas* which appears in his paintings recurrently, Ignatz also expresses repeatedly, as we already saw, the park’s patrons’ *vanitas*.<sup>32</sup> In Caravaggio’s *Bacchus* the withered fruits’ leaves in Bacchus’ basket—and also the overripe fruits themselves—are a sign of the anticipated loss of youth, and, in Ignatz’s image, this sign manifests itself in the subject’s sweat and the poisonous shrub around him. He is surrounded by death. Against Geldman’s wish to glorify the beauty the park, this image tells a much more complex story.

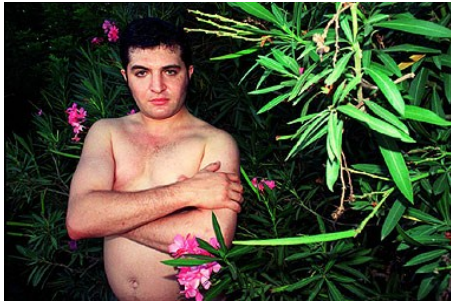


Fig. 49 Ignatz's 7



Fig. 50 Caravaggio's Bacchus



Fig. 51 detail

The queer content of Ignatz's image—and his images almost always are less celebratory than he intended them to be: homosexuality and melancholia in the images are continuously interwoven—is further highlighted when discussed in comparison to Yoav Shmueli's image of a gecko sunbathing on a rock in the park (Fig. 52). Shmueli—an artist who specializes in complex art installations, and the second chapter of this dissertation dedicated to his earlier works—seemingly addresses Geldman's agenda of celebrating the park's nature. It is, on the face of it, an ordinary image of one of the park's wildlife inhabitants: something that can be found in any other park in Israel. However, a closer look will reveal that the rock the gecko sits on is actually a piece of Pietro Cascella's sculpture *The Gate to Peace*, which, at night, is one of the cruising centers of the park.<sup>33</sup> In itself, this information is irrelevant, but when one also considers the nature of the gecko—its nocturnal life, for example, or, in some cases, its parthenogenic nature—the full picture slowly unfolds. It could indeed be an image that deals with homosexuality, but not only because it was taken in the park, and not only because it captures Cascella's sculpture, and not even because it depicts a gecko: it is the sum of all of the above; and, like Ignatz's intertexts to earlier influential art works, it is “queer” as a result of the charged symbolic meanings of lizards in the history of western art.

In the *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, J. N. Adams claims that in ancient Greece and Rome, lizards were associated with the penis.<sup>34</sup> In *Apollo Sauroctonos*, for example, Praxiteles depicts adolescent Apollo in a conventional Hellenistic manner, that is, in a non-heroic moment: the boy who is about to catch a lizard stands in a gentle, even “feminine” posture; in fact, his posture carries some resemblance to the posture of the boy in Ignatz's *Independence Park in The Morning* (Fig. 53 and, in particular 54, which is an enlarged detail from *Apollo Sauroctonos*). Apollo's capturing of the symbolic lizard can point to his maturation: after he is trained in catching lizards—

that is, after he got a hold of the phallus—he, as an adult, will be ready to catch the chthonic Python of Delphi. Shmueli's lizard, if it is put side by side with Praxiteles' lizard, carries additional meanings: the contexts and intertext of this seemingly "mundane" image enable us to see it, among other things, as a queer representation. Like Ignatz's usage of Greco-Roman art, and later the adoption of this art by photographers in order to legitimize men's erotica, Shmueli uses such imagery to charge this representation of the park with additional meaning: any attempt to overlook, deny, or downplay homosexuality in relation to the park—as Geldman proposes—is doomed to failure.



Fig. 52 Shmueli's gecko



Fig. 53 Praxiteles Apollo



Fig. 54 detail

When put next to each other, as it was in *Open Park*, Ignatz's and Shmueli's images synergistically refer to Caravaggio's *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* (Fig. 55). In this painting, a shocked boy, evidently also in pain, flinches as his finger is unexpectedly nipped by a gecko hidden amongst the fruits. The painting contains complex sexual symbolism: as in Ignatz's, the boy's shoulder is bared in a "womanly manner," and, again as in Ignatz's, he has a rose behind his ear; his third finger—the finger used to gesture obscenity, and not the probable forefinger—is bitten. Why does he look surprised at us and not at his injured finger? As in *Apollo Sauroctonos*, Caravaggio's boy is on the verge of adulthood: he becomes aware, with a shock, to the pains of physical love as so to his changing body. "The moral tale that pleasure has a price and that unsuspected dangers lie beneath beautiful appearances", Emmanuel Cooper argues in his discussion of the painting, "gives a particular edge to the youth's seductive attraction".<sup>35</sup> Homosexuality and homoeroticism, then, sneak through the backdoor to the exhibition and subvert its proclaimed post-queer agenda.



**Fig. 55 Caravaggio's Boy Bitten by a Lizard**

Uri Gershuni's work is another example of how intertextuality queers and politicizes Geldman's agenda. Gershuni presents two images of a young man that he photographed in one of his visits to the park: the first image depicts an attractive adolescent lying down on the grass (Fig. 56). He is in sport apparel, and his shorts are nonchalantly, but also lusciously, slightly pulled down. The gap between the young athlete's shorts and his t-shirts exposes an in-shape stomach. He looks with deep blue eyes at the camera. Is he resting after a soccer game? Is he before or after having sex in the park? One intertext to this untitled image is Pierre et Gilles' 1998 *Le Footballeur Blessé* (Fig. 57).<sup>36</sup> Both boys are lying in the same position: on a green grass, they are on their stomachs; their right arm is under their head—one has a short blond hair and the other brown—and their left arm is resting. The shot was taken from the ground level, and their legs are left outside the frame.





Fig. 56 **Gershuni 1**



Fig. 57 **Pierre et Gilles' Footballer**

Pierre et Gilles' soccer player is bleeding from the temple—did it happen because of a too strong bunt from the ball?—and, as if he was a Christian martyr, his death is sanctified: rays of divine light shine all over his body, as in ecclesiastical iconography. The title of the image is a pun: the word *blessé* means “wounded” in French and “shine” in German, and the boy “has” both. Gershuni's subject, in comparison to Pierre et Gilles' soccer player, seems healthy: he is not bleeding. Does the reference to Pierre et Gilles' image suggest otherwise? While the injury of Pierre et Gilles' soccer player is visible, the disability of Gershuni's subject—if there is one: the viewers cannot tell at this point—is not visible. Since the image was taken in Independence Park, and presented in *Open Park*, Can it be that it—that is, his “disability—is homosexuality? Is this sitter vulnerable or damaged because he is in the park? Does his injury allow the artist to glorify him?

The other image of Gershuni in the exhibition answers some of these questions (Fig. 58). It seems that the young man is paraplegic or temporarily disabled: he is assisted by crutches. He is lying on the grass perhaps because he must rest, or, because he fell. Now it is clear why in the first image his legs are outside the frame: they, and not his homosexuality, or not only his homosexuality, point to his disability.



Fig. 58 **Gershuni 2**

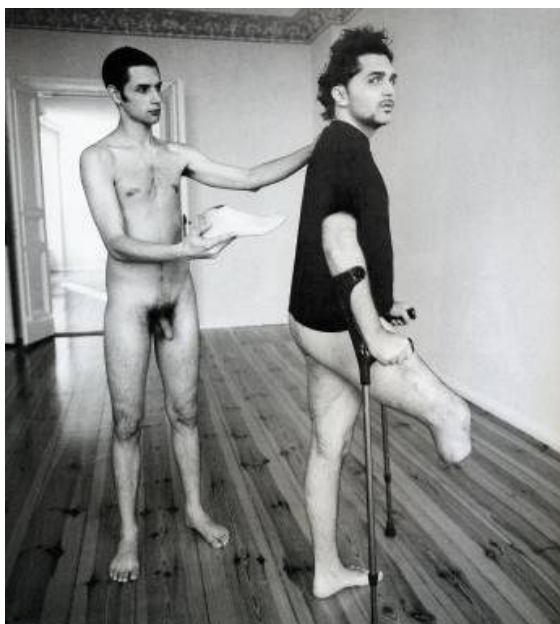
Gershuni's images, however, say much more than just pointing to the subject's (temporary or permanent) disability. As in Ignatz's images, Gershuni documents the tense beauty of the park, and he does so by using an image of a disabled teenager. His disability does not lessen his attractiveness: he is the same good-looking man from the first image. This challenges the notion of what society determines as a "beautiful body". In his article "Disability in Theory," Tobin Siebers claims that "the disabled body provides insight into the fact that all bodies are socially constructed".<sup>37</sup> That is, culture—through its biopolitical institutions, as defined by Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic*—classifies the physique decorum and excludes the nonnormative erotic bodies, may it be, for instance, homosexual, black, Jewish or disabled.<sup>38</sup> According to Siebers, Disability Studies offers an alternative to the existing model of beauty, which strives to "cure" nonnormative bodies. That is, it is cure

by particular treatment, isolating the patient as diseased or defective. Social constructionism makes it possible to see disability as the effect of an environment hostile to some bodies and not to others, requiring advances in social justice rather than medicine.<sup>39</sup>

Gershuni's representation of a disabled teenager undermines the normative conception of "beauty" in general and in the gay men's community in particular. These images deconstruct the viewers' perception in order to enable the reconstruction of an alternative understanding of what can be considered beautiful. When considering Gershuni's earlier work, *The Middle Ages*, this criticism sharpens: in that 2005 project, he documents teenagers who party in Tel-Aviv's gay bars and clubs. The young man and women in the images are well-dressed and groomed: they follow the cultural codes of beauty. The image of a young man in *Open Park* could not have been taken in the clubs that Gershuni documented because, due to his visible disability, he would not pass the bouncer's selection. The Israeli gay culture is highly hierarchical and judgmental, and a disabled person, attractive as he may be, would be excluded from such places that sell glamour and hedonism. The clubs' dark rooms are not dark enough to overlook one's crutches. The park—which has no bouncers, no walls, no dress-codes, or overpriced drinks—is, as the exhibition's title states, "open for everyone".

Gershuni's celebratory approach of representing the disabled (queer) body as beautiful is not unique. Recently, more and more photographers deal with images of disabled people with homoerotic overtones. In his 2007 untitled image, Arthur Tress, for example, eroticizes the disabled male body (Fig. 59). The enigmatic image in question problematizes the relationship between the two men: are they lovers? Is it a physical therapy session? Why does the man in crutches turn his back to the man holding a prosthetic foot? Is the nude man a hospital staff? Why is he nude? Why does the other man wear only a black t-shirt? These unanswered questions do not decrease the unmistakably homoerotic tension between the two subjects. Disabled bodies, as seen also in George Dureau's image (Fig. 60), can be sexualized. Dureau's mid-1980 work *New Orleans* introduces 50 images of men—most of them are people of color, some are disabled—who position themselves in front of the camera in self-confident, seductive manner. As a photographer whose core-work is openly and intentionally homoerotic, Dureau's subjects are aware that their images will be viewed by gays, and, as said, gay culture is often judgmental even to the point of brutality. Still, Dureau's subjects do not, in any way, appear to be inferior due their physical features: they look straight at the camera unashamed.

The muscled Afro-American man in this image is bare-chested; his abdominal muscles, and his upper-body, are chiseled. He crosses his arms over his chest. He presents himself not as a poor victim: his disability, so it seems, almost has no presence in his life, or so he wants us to believe. Is he free from the tyranny of mainstream decorum? Did he, as a black man and as a disabled man, learn how to carry those two crosses—coded here as the crutches—on his back? Does he live with them in peace?<sup>40</sup> Gershuni's images are part of this empowering shift toward the embracing of vulnerability. The images of a teenager with crutches suggest a way to face stigmatization: by undermining social and cultural constructionism to the point of its deconstruction, that is, by not only accepting one's features, but also enjoying and celebrating them. This is the point where—as in James Graham Ballard's novel *Crash*—the prosthetic turns to “pro-esthetic”: as something that one recognizes as beautiful.<sup>41</sup> Kristian Kožul's Installation art, in which he covers a crutch in gemstones, is a good example of such pro-estheticism (Fig. 61). In this sense, and as a way to close a circle, Gershuni's images correspond with Ignatz's and Shmueli's images, which reference Greco-Roman and neoclassical art. In a similar way, Gershuni's images of a “lame” teen remind us of the Western male ideal found in the Greco-Roman sculpture: he too, then, partakes in the sort of neoclassical homoeroticism. Although many of these statues are now missing legs and arms—for instance, the statue of *Antinous, Hadrian's lover* (Fig. 62)—they still represent the ideal of beauty, and so does the disabled adolescent from Independence Park. On the face of it, Gershuni's subject, unlike the subjects in *The Middle Ages*, is disabled; however, taking into account contemporary trends in the representation of disability, the subject's “invalidism,” like his homosexuality, is primarily pro-esthetic. That is, these images refuse to accept the social decorum, and formulate an alternative canon of beauty, where homosexuality and cruising, as they appear in Independence Park, are less or completely not stigmatized.



**Fig. 59 Tress' disabled man**



**Fig. 60 Dureau's disabled man**



**Fig. 61 Kožul's Installation art**



**Fig. 62 Antinous**

Geldman wishes to downplay the queer role of the park in order to make room for other groups. He does not mention, however, who exactly are the people who will use the park's facilities in the absence of gay cruisers. In fact, why don't they use the park's facilities now? Can exclusion of one group open the door to others?

In addition to artists who are identified with the gay community in Israel—such as Ignatz, Shmueli, and Gershuni—Geldman invited non-gay artists, some well-known and others emerging newcomers, to display their works on the park. Most of the images were especially commissioned for *Open Park*; and among them, the images of the renowned painter Maya Cohen Levy. She presented a few images that tell a much-needed story—from a political point of view—of the park's history. For many of the park's visitors, including the cruisers, the story that Cohen Levy's images tell is unknown. Her black and white image of one of the park's garbage containers surfaces the forgotten uneasy past of the site (Fig. 63).<sup>42</sup> On the face of it, Cohen Levy's image suits Geldman's complaint about the abuse of the park by its visitors: the beauty of the place—a manmade green oasis in an urban desert—is soiled by “civilization” (or people who are not “civilized”) allegorized here by the garbage container; that is, the image apparently protests the disappearance of nature and its obsequiousness to culture. However, the image adds to this an additional layer, which goes against Geldman's celebratory approach. In fact, one could recognize the garbage container as such only after paying close attention to it, only after meticulously studying its details. At first glance, the garbage container, the green dumpster, looks like, I argue, an armored car widely used in Israel's 1948 war of Independence (Fig. 64).

This image of a seemingly armored car, which shares the same cutting technique of Cohen Levy's 2006 *Azrieli Center* series, is actually a photomontage. Unlike more conventional collages, she does not assemble, combine, or add components to the image in order to create a new one, but, on the contrary, subtracts from it. She cuts, clips and removes pieces of the image's surface, and does so in order to uncover the white printing paper. Cohen Levy applies a physical manipulation on the image: She uncovers and exposes a preceding layer. In short, by cutting the garbage container's image—she adds, for example, the arrow slits, which were not there originally—the image resembles a tank-like vehicle. The viewers, then, are forced to recall that the park was not always there: before 1953, when the site was reopened as a public park, it was one of the largest Israeli army's draft bases. From

there, in 1948, soldiers were sent in these primitive tanks to the battlefields, to fight for the new state's independence. To commemorate these soldiers, the city of Tel-Aviv decided to name the park after the 1948 war, Independence War. These armored cars, now official memorials of the state, are still visible along the Tel-Aviv expressway to Jerusalem.

Cohen Levy's image is neither patriotic nor nationalistic. The image does not lament over "how the mighty have fallen" or wish to restore a forgotten honor. Not nostalgic or sentimental, the image applies critical, and somewhat ironic or cynical approach to the national ritualistic mechanism, that is, the image suggests that once glorified events are today's garbage. The resemblance of Israeli Independence War tanks to garbage containers deconstructs and subverts the national celebrated narrative. The image can be read as saying that Zionism's triumph—the establishment of the State of Israel following Independence War—belongs, after it was consumed, to the trash can of history. The refuse container in Independence Park is, in this case, a metonymic for the national ideology and its executive authority's bankruptcy. The image of a refuse container, then, refuses to contain the national history.

The Zionist history is indeed his-story. When gay men patronize the park, which carries such a charged name and, in addition, is located on Nordau Street, they not only symbolically announce that they deserve independence and freedom, but also, they undermine the Zionist narrative of *Muskeljuden*. Max Nordau, a Jewish physician and Zionist intellectual, describes in his influential 1892 book *Entartung* the "degeneration" of Western Society. In one of the chapters, for example, he criticizes Walt Whitman's poetry for its homosexual overtones, and in another chapter, he criticizes Jews for being effeminate. Zionism accepted Nordau's views and promoted his suggestion to "cure" the Jews by way of gymnastics, that is, by becoming muscular, by adopting the male physical decorum of Western society. Zionists, from this point on, struggle to erase any trace of "effeminacy" from Judaism, and reinvent themselves as "real men," or, as it was known, as the New Hebrew Man.<sup>43</sup> The Independence War, in a way, is a symbol of the triumph of the New Hebrew Man: not only over the Arabs, but also over the weak, effeminate, Diasporic Jew.

This memorial park, which honors the men who died for their country, is now mostly identified with other men, those who are considered, then and still, "unmanly". The park, in this sense, points to the failure of the Zionist New Man model: the failure of the collective to reinvent itself. Pierre Nora's work on collective memories and its

manifestations in the public sphere shows how private memories are subordinated to the "collective memory". One way of maintaining collective memory, for example, is by erecting public monuments by the state: the national narrative has the ability to alter and reformulate the private memory so it will better fit the official narrative. The state's "sites of memory" produce "authentic memories," which strengthen its sovereignty. As a "site of Memory," Independence Park, in fact, fails to tell the national narrative of overcoming diasporic effeminacy and Palestinian aggression. It actually floods these submerged "effeminate memories," which were silenced by Zionism.<sup>44</sup>

The image of the "trash-tank" in the park also forces further, perhaps unwanted, reminiscing. The "armored car" reminds us that the ground on which now the park stands on, before it was a military base, was a Muslim cemetery. In fact, some gravestones of the Abdel Nabi cemetery are still there; and the fifth chapter of this dissertation deals extensively with this issue.<sup>45</sup> Geldman even wrote a poem—entitled "Holy Ground"—about the park; a poem in which he calls Independence Park, "The meeting ground of love and death".<sup>46</sup> The image then reminds us that Jewish independence, symbolized ironically by the "trash-tank," came at the expense of Palestinian freedom, symbolized here as the cemetery. The trash-tank, in a way, tells the Palestinian story of the Nakba (Arabic for catastrophe): their land was taken by force and their history is trashed, put away in refuse containers so it will disappear. By focusing on the refuse container, evocations of the park's past force the viewers to ask themselves questions about the meaning of "independence" and of "memory". Cohen Levy's white printing paper, then, is sort of a pentimento to the Palestinians' simultaneous presence and absence; pentimento in more than one sense: not only as a visible sign of earlier painting under the paint on a canvas, but also—as it is in Italian—repentance, regret, and remorse.

Cohen Levy's image, among other things, deals with traumas of history. She does so by rupturing the image with great force, which evokes the etymology of the word "trauma": in Greek it means a wound. The image indeed is injured: it is peeled and torn apart in many places. Cohen Levy's knife cuts deep into the surface of the image: she lacerates it, hurts it, and scars it. The wound she opens and reopens in the image cannot be recovered or heal. Expressive and aggressive, using a frottage technique, she rewrites history with a scalpel: when Cohen Levy "reveals" what hides beneath the image, she revises the national narrativized past. This enables her to



create—and not only document—her story, and the national history from her point of view. The white printing paper she bares is a constant transgressive reminder of what was left out of the image, that is, the traces of what was there before it became the "gays' park". Cohen Levy's blank printing paper is a metaphor for the traces—Derrida's traces come to mind now—of the absence of a presence: the story of those whose story is continued to be erased, of those that the park's visitors always remember to forget.<sup>47</sup> In short: the story of those who cannot enter Independence Park, since the park is not, as Goldman wants us to believe, “open to everyone”.



Fig. 63 Cohen Levy's “trash-tank”



Fig. 64 1948 Armored Car

Cohen Levy's deconstruction—peeling layer after layer only to expose (metaphorical) white void, as if it was palimpsest—is evident in another image (Fig. 65). Here she gives the same treatment to the cacti in the park, when she reminds us that this plant is an Israeli national symbol: the cactus, or Sabra in Hebrew, denotes a native-born Israeli.<sup>48</sup> Being a Sabra is a Zionist hallmark, Oz Almog claims, since, for some, it indicates the success of the national movement to metamorphose the diasporic, effeminate Jew into a local, masculine, virile New Hebrew Man, who is, “like the cactus,” indigenous to the land.<sup>49</sup> As in her other image in *Open Park*, Cohen Levy is not promoting the national iconography of the Sabra; in the black and white image of the cacti, she again engraves and peels the image as if to strip it from its symbolic meanings. The white paper, on which the image is printed, illustrates the falsity of the icon: it is empty. That is, there is not actual depth to it: Cohen Levy mutilates the image, grooves in it, and exposes the bright surface. Her peelings, which are made near the cacti leaves, are made to look like thorns. If the Zionist iconography stresses the twofold nature of the cacti, and especially its prickly fruit, meaning, on the one hand its spiny toughness, and, on the other hand, its softness and

sweetness, Cohen Levy focuses almost solely on its thistles. She emphasizes their threading and alarming characteristics.

At the left side of this split image, Cohen Levy uses the same peeling technique as she did in the other images. On the face of it, it is an image of tree and its shadow, but a closer look will reveal that the shades of the ground are actually her work. Again by cutting the printing paper, she, painstakingly makes the shadowing effect. As a result, she stresses the black areas of the image. In fact, since the image was taken at high noon on a clear day, she manipulatively adds shadow where originally there is none: the shades look like a shattered glass. The ground is covered with splinters, and sharp chips: the beautiful scenery is exposed here as also perilous.



Fig. 65 Cohen Levy's "thorns"

### **Conclusion: From Sudan to Tel-Aviv and Back**

In 2008, following civil wars, violent conflicts, and natural disasters, African refugees, mostly from south-Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea, sought shelter in Israel: some of them settled as homeless in Tel-Aviv's Independence Park, until, few weeks later, they were driven out by the immigration police. Karin Magen (Margoninsky), who was troubled by the living conditions of the refugees, decided to document their lives. Her 2009 exhibition in Dizengoff Shopping Center was entitled *Tel-Aviv's Backyard* (החצר האחורית של תל אביב): Magen wanted to show to the Israeli public what they prefer not to see. She chose to present the images of the refugees not in a

highbrow white cube, the art gallery, but in a crowded shopping mall; that is, to confront the shoppers, who are secluded in their consumer's existence, with "reality," with what they overlook and ignore, with what happens in a park nearby.

Magen's approach is different from Geldman's, he promotes the idea to open Independence Park to everyone, but, in the same breath, he also accuses some of the park's patrons of ruining the natural beauty of the park. He does not only blame the gay cruisers in that, but also the homeless, the guest workers, and others who do not fit middle-class norms. Mainly, Geldman stresses how the park could have been if it was better maintained. The images in Geldman's exhibition, against the backdrop of his post-queer agenda, actually resist this fantasy and raise uneasy questions about social exclusion and social constructionism. Similar questions appear in Ignatz's images, and they too resist the photographer's agenda: while he fantasizes the park to be a shining queer haven, his images repeatedly reveal it also as a murky place of danger and death. Both Geldman and Ignatz, from opposite directions, wish to showcase the park, and this aerie desire collapses under its own weight. This is also a desire to restore the park's past glory: for years, since its inauguration in 1953, Independence Park was an Israeli hallmark, which stood for the success of the nation to reroot itself in the Fatherland, but, because of the city's negligence, and gay cruising which followed bad publicity, the park lost his status and place in the collective memory.

Unlike Geldman and Ignatz, Magen does not partake in such a desire to restore the park's glory days. Her project opposes such attempts to showcase the park and to imagine it as something that it is not. She goes to the park exactly because of its marginality, of its "backyard" existence: it allows her to explore Israeli society's other blind spots. As Ignatz and Geldman, she also asks questions about the meaning of independence, freedom, and emancipation. Magen brings to the fore questions about the meaning of home, of belonging, of Otherness, and of being rootless; she wishes to draw attention to those who are present but transparent: the African refugees do not have civil status. That is, because of the absence of Israeli regulations regarding the question of non-Jewish refugees, they are not considered citizens, tourists, or guest-workers. The state, in a sense, does not see them: they disappear within the bureaucracy, and in the cities slums, and, therefore, become almost invisible to middle-class Israelis.

The image of an African refugee—his nationality is not indicated here—is a good example which brings to the fore some of the questions Magen raises in *Backyard* (Fig. 66). The man stands in Independence Park in front of a large pile of bags full with clothes. Is it his? Is he homeless? What is the relationship between Ignatz’s “homeless cruisers,” as I referred to them earlier, and Magen’s homeless man? Is there an allegorical relationship between the gay patrons of the park and the refugees that settled there? Is Independence Park a haven to both groups or is it a place that perpetuates their marginality? Can we think about the park’s gay cruisers, especially if we do it from a Nordauian perspective, as rootless? Are the sufferings of both groups symmetrical? Do they see themselves as having something in common or, perhaps, the fact that they have to share the same space is problematic for them?

Other questions bring to the fore issues of class as well: the man in the image stands in front of a pile of shopping bags full with clothes. Some bags have the brand name on them, while we do not know the name of the man. It is clear to see the social priority here: do the Dizengoff Center’s shoppers make the connection between their shopping bags and the man’s? Is it a criticism on the shoppers and on the Western consumerist mentality? Will the image be consumed in the same way that other cultural products are consumed and forgotten? Does Magen sell poverty in a similar way to the next-door-store which sells clothes? Is there any chance to break free from this vicious circle of consuming? Will the image make a difference?



Fig. 66 Magen’s *Tel-Aviv’s Backyard* (detail)

Although it does not seem at first that his images deal with the issue of the Sudanese refugees in Israel, this issue, I argue, is in the center of Sinai Calif-Israeli's work. Like the questions that Magen's documentary project raises, his staged images raise similar questions, but, unlike her project, his images also say something about homosexuality when, through intertextuality, they tie together homoeroticism, trauma, and nationalism. Calif-Israeli's 2008 series, entitled *Inspired by Leni Riefenstahl*, is referring explicitly to Riefenstahl's 1974 project *The Last of the Nuba*, which documents the tribal living in Sudan.<sup>50</sup> On the face of it, Calif-Israeli is fascinated with Riefenstahl's images without being aware of her problematic past in Nazi Germany, or, more likely, without expressing it openly in his work; his images, however, bring to the fore questions about erotica, race, masculinity, and self-representation, and, thus, these questions points again and again—against Calif-Israeli's enchantment with Riefenstahl—to the problematic aspects of her work.

In these staged images, which were taken in Independence Park, Calif-Israeli's models, some in the nude, are smeared with white shaving cream (Fig. 67, 68, and 69). Are they part of the gay clone culture, which involves performative rituals such as dieting, going to the gym, and shaving one's body hair? Is this a gesture to Nader's installation art *suppressed His Desires* in which his family wears avocado masks in Independence Park (see the second chapter)? The sitters here look straight into the camera, while they are positioned in different poses. The man on the far left has accented ruby lips, and he wears the shaving cream as if it was make-up or a mask (Fig. 67); the man in the middle image intimidatingly crouches as if he is ready to jump and attack the photographer or the viewers (Fig. 67); and the third man, on the far right, looks down to the camera: his hand reaches out as if to touch the photographer and the gaze is drawn to the white tan line and the penis (Fig. 69).<sup>51</sup> All models stay anonymous, since the masks that they wear enable them to stay unrecognized.



Fig. 67 **Calif-Israeli 1**



Fig. 68 **2**



Fig. 69 **3**

The title of Calif-Israeli's series refers to the work of Riefenstahl, the infamous Nazi director and photographer, who, after the Second World War, withdrew to Africa. In Sudan, she documented the life and religious rituals of the Nuba tribes, mainly in her work on the Zariba camps.<sup>52</sup> The Zariba is an all-man herdsman camp, which is used as a school through which almost all the men pass: it is used as a rite of passage. After graduating from the Zariba, where the young-men spend few years since their childhood, they will be allowed to go back to the village and sleep with women. Up until then, all their sexual experiences were with older men in the camp, but it did not count as intercourse. "The Nuba firmly believe," Riefenstahl writes when she describes the way the men see sex with women,

That sexual intercourse at this time would weaken them. So they submit willingly and even proudly to this traditional custom. In order to show externally that they are Zariba dwellers, they cover themselves with white ash (*weege*) or paint ornaments on their body with a mixture of ash and milk beaten into cream. A Nubian who sleeps with a woman will never have ash on his body.<sup>53</sup>

Consider the following images by Riefenstahl, which depict the ritual of applying the ash on one's body (Fig. 70 and 71). This ash, the men believe, confers mystical strength and holiness on those who wear it. Moreover, the ash also has applicatory usage since it keeps the skin clean, protects the body from insects and vermin, and acts also as decoration.



Fig. 70 Riefenstahl's Zariba 1

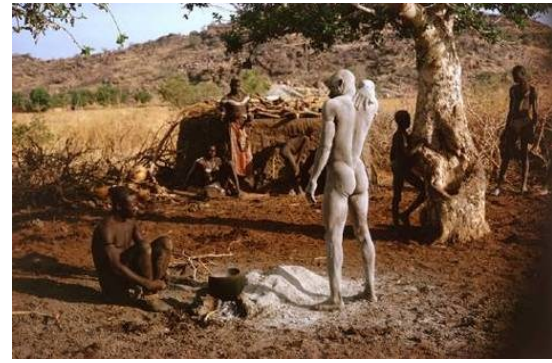


Fig. 71 Zariba 1

Calif-Israeli's white shaving cream is referring to the white ash, inasmuch as Independence Park is the Israeli equivalent to the Zariba. Like the Zariba men, the Israeli gays abstain from sex with women. Like the Zariba camp, Independence Park is also used as a place of sexual apprenticeship.<sup>54</sup> Both places—which are located in the margins of their settlements: physically or metaphorically—are homosocial in nature. In many ways, the Zariba is a masculine utopia, and, thus, the park also has the potential to be such a place. Calif-Israeli is fascinated with the possibility that such a place could exist: his fascination does not only emerge from the idea of such an existence, but also from the powerful images of black men taken by Riefenstahl. In her review of *The Last of the Nuba*, Susan Sontag argues that Riefenstahl's photography, in a similar way to her films for the Third Reich, emphasize purity, force, the lack of pollution, the “authentic,” and the triumph of the strong over the weak. Sontag sees continuity in Riefenstahl's vision from her earlier to her later works, which she names “fascist aesthetics”.<sup>55</sup> Why is Calif-Israeli referring to Riefenstahl's work? While adopting Riefenstahl's primitivism, Calif-Israeli gives the gay men in the park potentiality. From an inferior position, they, through Calif-Israeli's composition, are Nietzschean-like *Übermenschen*: the camera is located beneath them, and so their image is enlarged, in a similar way to Riefenstahl's depiction of the Africans (in other images in her book), and before that the German athletes in *Olympia*. It is important to note that since the camera faces upward, the men in Calif-Israeli's images look downward to the viewers. Inevitably, one literally—but also metaphorically—looks up to them. They, like the homosocial men of the Zariba camp when viewed through Riefenstahl's admiring gaze, are masculine in a way that does not resemble the gay stereotype. They are empowered.

Calif-Israeli's self-portrait, in comparison with the other images in the series, is much more critical of Riefenstahl's fascist aesthetics (Fig. 72). This image, which was also taken in Independence Park, depicts Calif-Israeli in the nude; he is also covered with white shaving cream, and, although he looks straight to the camera, it seems that his image was taken when he was off guard. It is noticeable that he is surprised—notice that he has a similar expression of Caravaggio's model in *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*—since his mouth is slightly open, and his hands are loosened, hanged in the air as if a puppeteer controls his movements. Was the Camera's timer too fast? Why did he choose to keep this image and not to take another one instead?

While in all three images the deep blue sky is cloudless, and the scenery is green and seductive, this self-portrait is different in mood. It was taken in the north part of the park, next to the wreckage of the old Sheraton hotel. If the other images had a utopian horizon, this image, contrariwise, is almost dystopian. This paradise, as Ignatz and Goldman see the park, turns here to apocalyptic debris, where chaos and destruction rule. If the models appear to have control over their lives in the other images, here Calif-Israeli is subordinate to the destructive forces of modern existence and technology. This image, unlike the other images, does not let the viewers to forget the consequences of fascism, of which Riefenstahl was a devotee, that is, the catastrophe and death fascism brought to the world and especially to the European Other, the Jew, the Gypsy, and the Homosexual. This destruction—*Shoah* in Hebrew—was made possible, as Saul Friedländer claims in his essay *Reflections of Nazism*, due to the synchronous linkage in German culture between kitsch, nationalistic romanticism, and death.<sup>56</sup> Riefenstahl's work, in this case, is an example of such linkage.





Fig. 72 Calif-Israeli's "self-portrait"

The waste in this self-portrait, as in Cohen Levy's image of a garbage container, is significant. This dunghill—sembled of mattress, chairs, and other domestic and industrial trash—is a metaphor not only of the park, and the collective memories sunk in it, but also, possibly, of the human condition in general. The viewers cannot overlook anymore the twofold outcome of the reference to Riefenstahl's work: on one hand, she produces a seductive but dangerous beauty, and, on the other hand, her ideology, which classifies and rates "unwanted people" as human waste.

When Calif-Israeli covers himself in shaving cream, his image not only refers to Riefenstahl's work on the Nuba, but also to the Israeli performance artist Honi HaMagel, who, in 1984, presented in Acco Festival for Alternative Theatre his work entitled *From Auschwitz to Hiroshima* (Fig. 73). As a protest against modernity, which promises progress and enlightenment but offers destruction, Honi HaMagel undresses and removes from his body any symbols of civilization and culture. He then stands naked on the stage and shaves his body hair. This, on the one hand, reminds the viewers how the Nazis shaved the prisoners in the concentration camps to dehumanize them, but, on the other hand, this can also be seen as a cleansing ritual, in which Honi HaMagel wishes to "restart" humanity, that is, to go back to a metaphorical

infancy when the world was a simpler—but also harmless and innocent—place. Auschwitz, therefore, is very much present in Calif-Israeli's self-portrait: the image points to the problematic past of Riefenstahl.

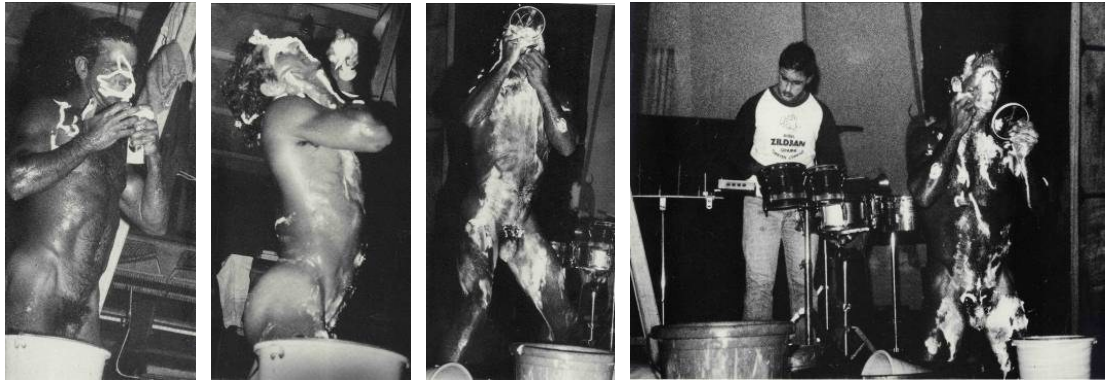


Fig. 73 Honi HaMagel's *From Auschwitz to Hiroshima*

Calif-Israeli's images move then back and forth on the axis between the utopian and the dystopian. However, his self-portrait goes beyond this, when he inserts another component to the equation: the phallus. In his self-portrait, Calif-Israeli chooses to be naked all-the-way, and shows his semi-erect penis. The erection is not only a biological reaction, but it is also loaded with social and cultural meanings.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Calif-Israeli reminds his viewers that Riefenstahl's documentation of naked African men is not purely "scientific" or "objective," but also erotic. He calls into question the definition of pornography, which has unclear, unstable boundaries. Unlike his models, or Riefenstahl's subjects, Calif-Israeli is excited and aroused, since he is not only aware of the camera, but also controls it: he is not only the object of the image, but also its subject.<sup>58</sup> When his image was taken, he could have imagined not only how he would look like, but also how he would be looked at: he sees himself through the voyeuristic gaze of his viewers, and this reification—the "thingification" of one's penis—is the pornographic moment which enables, in the first place, the erection.<sup>59</sup> This is the point of narcissism: when the erotic, through homoerotics, turns into autoerotics. The penis through Calif-Israeli's apparatus, that is, through Lacan's Mirror-stage, becomes the phallus, the symbol of domination and control. Calif-Israeli's erection is the outcome of the ability to be at once the controlled—his hands look as if operated by puppeteer—and the controller.

Calif-Israeli's self-portrait points to the ways in which the body is socially constructed—as erotic, as gay, as primitive, and so forth—and also deconstructed by racism that may lead to wars and genocides. Images that are inspired by Riefenstahl not only empower the gay cruisers—glorify them as *Übermenschen*; celebrating their bodies as beautiful and attractive—but also using as a *vanities* reminder of reality in which oppression still exists. Calif-Israeli's images, although do not refer directly to the Sudanese refugees in Independence Park, points at the danger of glorification of the “right” body on one hand, and the dehumanization of other bodies on the other hand. The images of the cruisers in Independence Park remind us of the Sudanese refugees and of the Holocaust when “we”—Jews and homosexuals—were refugees.

Calif-Israeli's images are political on different levels. Like Ignatz, Calif-Israeli also depicts the park in the morning. This political act, not only goes against previous homophobic tendencies of the Israeli press, but, unlike Ignatz, Calif-Israeli goes further when he directly points to the “blind spots” of the Israeli gay men's community, that is, their estrangement from other minority groups, such as the refugees. Calif-Israeli's provocative stand—which is also expressed in his choice to portray himself in the nude with an erection—not only celebrating the freedom of gay people in Israel, but also criticizing their silence about those who are deferred the same freedom. While Geldman's images, against his agenda, are political (in the narrow sense) as well as queer, Calif-Israeli's images tie these two together by intertextuality, which plays an important part in other representations of the park. Intertextuality situates Israeli queer culture within a broader Western culture, that is, sharing the same vocabulary enables the photographers, and the viewers, to be part of Europe although they are in the Middle East. The intertexts, which use, following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, as universalizing tools, provide an historical link to Israeli gays, as if to say that there is a historical—even transhistorical—continuity of representations of homosexuality, and homoerotics, and that they are part of it.<sup>60</sup>

## End Notes

I would like to thank to all the artists and the curators, who, besides the generous time they spend with me in the summer of 2008, also opened their homes, studios, and private collections for this study's benefit. Thank you also for allowing me to use your images: Hanna Sahar, Shai Ignatz, Mordechai Geldman, Yoav Shmueli, Uri Gershuni, Maya Cohen Levy, Karin Magen, Sinai Calif-Israeli. This study could have not been possible without the financial support of Jean and Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies – University of Michigan. I would like to thank the Center for its generous support.

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Introduction," *Diaspora and Visual Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

<sup>2</sup> To name just few: Yossi Bar, "The Sad Life of Gays," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 5.16.80: 13-14; Tal Bhashn, *Ma'ariv* 8.11.83: 18-20.

<sup>3</sup> This is only but one example. Here is another: *Davar* published a story in 1963 that took the readers, escorted by a reporter, a photographer, and policemen from the vice department, to, as its title suggests, "A Routine Patrol in the Underworld". Like the Ancient Roman poet Virgil, who guides Dante to the inferno, the reporter, Aaron Lahav, leads his readers through the dusky maze of Tel-Aviv underworld, where, in the parks and on the boardwalk, gay men meet other delinquents, such as pimps, hustlers, sex workers, thieves, drug addicts, and drug dealers, all of whom conspire to promote social deviation. Lahav, a "concerned citizen," wonders why homosexuals are not imprisoned, and concludes that the police needs them as informers, as a way to get to the sharks. The reportage's images are grained, not in focus, as if they were taken in haste, from a hiding-place, without a flash, while the photographer risks his life to document a breathtaking event. The leading image of the story presents a teenager sitting on a chair on the boardwalk, and not, as one may expect, a secret meeting of the heads of mafia families. Aaron Lahav, "A Routine Patrol in the Underworld," *Davar*, 8.2.63: 4.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous. "Underground on the Esplanade," *Ha'olam Haze*, 7.2.62: 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, "Anyone Who Goes to Independence Park Risks His Life," *Davar*, 11.27.89. These articles were not only focusing on the violence and crime of the "murky" gay life, but, in fact, they were also constructing the park as a dark criminal space. Most of the representations of gay life in the press were negative ones, and the reports, which sought after the sensational, newspaper-selling-materials, did not stop to ask why gay men are forced to "sneak" at sunset into Tel-Aviv's parks in the hope to find partners for sex, friendship or company. Under the Israeli sodomy law, gay men had only few choices of where to meet each other, and cruising in a public place was a convenient, semi-legal option. Rather than asking critical questions, the press chose to stress prostitution and other "gay-related" misdeeds, which, as is common in the "underworld," as it is imagined in popular belief, take place at night-time. Instead of criticizing the homophobic law, the press "documented" it, enforced it, provided evidences to the public, proofs which tied together sexual preference with "other" criminal behaviors. By so doing, the press added to the intolerance, anti-gay atmosphere, and, moreover, justified its existence. On the uncomfortable history of photography within journalism, see: Karin Becker. "Photojournalism and the Tabloid

Press," *The Tabloid Culture Reader*, ed. Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007), 81-98.

<sup>6</sup> For complication of the inside/outside binary, see: Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Inside/Out," *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document*, ed. Kara Kirk and Fronia W. Simpson (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> For definition of intertextuality see: Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language - A Semiotic Approach to literature and Art*, ed. Roudiez Leon, tr. Gora Thomas Jardine (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> See: Vince Aletti, "Night Vision," *Kohei Yoshiyuki – The Park* (New York: Yossi Milo Gallery, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Peter Hujar, *Retrospective*, ed. Urs Stahel and Max Kozloff (Zurich: Scalo, 1994). See also: Peter Hujar, *Night*, ed. Robert Nickas (New York and San Francisco: Fraenkel Gallery and Matthew Marks Gallery, 2005). Also: Max Kozloff, *Lone Visions Crowded Frames* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), in particular p. 91 - 100.

<sup>11</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>12</sup> The catalogue bears the same title as the exhibition and all of the copies of which were destroyed by a court's order due to a legal dispute over privacy issues some of the photographed subjects went to court in order to prevent the publication. They did not want to be "outed" as homosexuals or cruisers, and complained that they were not aware that their picture was taken. In order to prevent lawsuits, Ignatz did not publish his book, and it is now not available for the public.

<sup>13</sup> See: Sander Gilman, "AIDS and Syphilis: The Iconography of Disease." *October* 43 (1987): 87-107.

<sup>14</sup> In an interview to *Ha'ir* newspaper, the artist Gil Nader describes the park as follows: "at night there is silence there. The people and the trees look the same, like Rodin's statues". Ariela Azulay, "Anthropologist in the Park," *Ha'ir*, 10.11.96: 67-68.

<sup>15</sup> In his influential article, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" Leo Bersani claims that the heteronormative society analogizes between "passive" anal sex, which represents a breakdown of bodily boundaries, especially because it devastates the male self, to death. Hence, gay men are perceived as "unable to refuse the suicidal ecstasy of being a woman," whereas being a woman, that is, being penetrated, means loss of ego, injury, and death (212). For Bersani, however, that is exactly the reason why gay sex—even in times of AIDS—should be celebrated. Gay sex, he writes, "never stops re-presenting the internalized phallic male as an infinitely loved object of sacrifice. Male homosexuality advertises the risk of the sexual itself as the risk of self-dismissal, of losing sight of the self, and in so doing it proposes and dangerously represents *jouissance* as a mode of asceticism" (222). The "grave" in Ignatz's image, then, is not a symbol of desolation and destruction, that is death, but, on the contrary, a symbol of rectal enjoyment and life. The *jouissance* is the result of the grave as a metaphor for the possibility to lose the ego. This interplay appears also in the Jesus-like image, and in many other images in *Independence Park in the Morning*, which tie between sacrifice and salvation. See: Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Aldrich, whose *The Seduction of the Mediterranean* deals with Fin de Siècle tourism and immigration to Mediterranean countries by northerners, especially Germans, homosexuals, has a chapter about homoerotic photography (136-162). Aldrich mentions a bunch of artists, who explore homoeroticism against the background of Greek-Roman relics. Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Edmund White, on the other hand, writes about Gloeden's exploitation of his sitters. His article, "Eros and Photography," is a survey about homoeroticism in photography and the influence of Grecian ideals, in particular on Herbert List. Edmund White, "Eros and Photography," *Herbert List: The Monograph*, ed. Max Scheler (New York: Monacelli, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Jason Goldman, "The Golden Age of Gay Porn: Nostalgia and the Photography of Wilhelm Von Gloeden," *GLQ* 12.2 (2006): 239.

<sup>20</sup> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Robert Martin, *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 42. See also: Joseph Cady, "Not Happy in the Capitol: Homosexuality and the Calamus Poems," *American Studies*, V. xix (1978): 2; Charley Shively, *Calamus Lovers: Walt Whitman's Working-Class Camerados* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1987); Hammond, Paul, *Love between Men in English Literature* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), 158-166.

<sup>22</sup> Allen Ellenzweig, "Gay Images in Photography: Picturing the Homoerotic," *Homosexuality and Homosexuals in the Art*, ed. Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1992), 73-79.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Forth, "Bodies of Christ: Gender, Jewishness and Religious Imagery in the Dreyfus Affair," *History Workshop Journal* 48(1999): 16-39.

<sup>24</sup> Walker Bynum, Caroline, 1982. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>25</sup> O'Reilly, Sally, 2009. *The Body in Contemporary Art*, Thames and Hudson, N.Y. p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> For the Mapplethorpe controversy, see the introduction of Allen Ellenzweig's *The Homoerotic Photograph* and page 129. Allen Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). Also: Paul Morrison, "Coffee Table Sex: Robert Mapplethorpe and the Sodomasochism of Everyday Life," *Genders* 11 (fall 1991): 17-36.

<sup>27</sup> In his Mapplethorpe's biography, Patricia Morrisroe writes: "By quoting Michelangelo, then affixing his name so prominently on the piece, he may have been alluding to his own desire to merge the sculptural with the photographic, and perhaps to remind viewers that he, too, was 'working in an art tradition'" (148). Patricia Morrisroe, *Mapplethorpe: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> As Yotam Reuveny sees the park through Genet's understanding of homosexuality - and the first chapter of this dissertation deals with this issue extensively; consider also how Reuveny's play with bush and discourse which both share the same word in Hebrew: siach - the park is a celebratory prison, which, simultaneously, limits and transcends the queer body.

<sup>29</sup> Mordechai Goldman mentions Independence Park in a number of his poems. I will deal with his work in chapter 5.

<sup>30</sup> More on his poetry see chapter five.

- <sup>31</sup> The invitation, which uses as a catalogue for the exhibition, contains a short essay in Hebrew by Geldman.
- <sup>32</sup> Vittorio Sgarbi, *Caravaggio* (Milano: Skira, 2007).
- <sup>33</sup> More about the statue, see chapter five.
- <sup>34</sup> J. N Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 29-30. See also: C. J. Bannon, "Erotic Brambles and the Text of Horace Carmen," *Classical Philology* 88.3 (1993): 220-222.
- <sup>35</sup> Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994). Consider also the fact that Caravaggio became a gay icon because he is known for his love and desire to boys: Derek Jarman's 1986 film *Caravaggio*, for example, tells the story of the painter's love to his sitter, "a street boy" (Caravaggio often used "street boys" as models for his religious paintings).
- <sup>36</sup> See: Dan Cameron, "The Look of Love," *Pierre et Gilles* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2000).
- <sup>37</sup> Tobin Siebers, "Disability in Theory," *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis, New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 173.
- <sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *The birth of the clinic; an archaeology of medical perception*, tr. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1975). Allan Sekula and John Tagg implement Foucault ideas on photography, especially when they deal with physiognomy. John Tagg, *Burden of Representation*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). On the issue of photography and eugenics, see: David Green, "Veins of Resemblance," *Photography/Politics: Two*, ed. Patricia Holland, Jo Spence, and Simon Watney (New York: Comedia, 1986).
- <sup>39</sup> Siebers, 173.
- <sup>40</sup> In his chapter on Dureau and Robert Mapplethorpe, Davis Melody claims that unlike Mapplethorpe, Dureau does not deny the complex mixture of seduction, suspicion, hostility, and vulnerability. He writes: "In Dureau's sympathy, handicapped people are subjects in their own right, and the forcefulness of their presence denies any more comfortable, more objective consideration. His portraits do not ask for charity or pity but for the collapse of such mechanisms of distance, and this is their very difficulty" (p. 102). Davis Melod, *The Male Nude in Contemporary Photography* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).
- <sup>41</sup> James Graham Ballard, *Crash* (New York: Picador, 2001).
- <sup>42</sup> These containers are known in Hebrew as Green Frogs due to their greenness glare.
- <sup>43</sup> Quoted in: Michael Gluzman, "Longing for Heterosexuality: Zionism and Sexuality in Herzl's Altneuland," *Theory and Criticism* 11 (1997): 145-63 [in Heb]. As argued by Michael Gluzman, David Biale, and others, in the beginning of the twentieth century, Zionism was not only a project of nation-building, but, first of all, a project of body-building: a performative conversion of one's "effeminate" physique into heteronormative, masculine body. By immigrating to Palestine, the effeminized Jews of the Diaspora will gain back their "lost" masculinity. In this sense, Jews are not only coming back to the "Fathers' Land," but they are also hoping to get hold of their fathers' "lost phallus," which they left behind when they were forced to exile. It is immigration, then, not to Palestine, but, rather, as Daniel Boyarin suggests, to Phallustine. See: Daniel Boyarin, "The Colonial Drag: Zionism, Gender, and

Mimicry,” *The Pre-Occupation of Post-Colonial Studies*, ed. Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 234-265; and also: David Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). David Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (New York: Basic, 1992); David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986); Michael Brenner and Gideon Reuveni, *Emancipation Through Muscles* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de memoire, Volume 2: Space*, ed. David Jordan (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> For the history of the cemetery, see: Mann, *A Place in Time*, p. 62-72.

<sup>46</sup> Mordechai Geldman, “Holy Ground,” *Poets on the Edge*, ed. and tr. Tsipi Keller (New York: SUNY Press, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 65. Derrida claims that texts have meanings, which writers are not aware of, since they are prisoner of their culture and language in which they think. They already incorporate others' ideas, since they use the same signifier system. This system leaves traces of foreign ideas in the writings of authors, which lead to a different places than the authors anticipated.

<sup>48</sup> Gideon Ofrat writes about the history of the Sabra representation in Aretz-Israeli and Israeli art. See: Ofrat Gideon, "Those Sabra," *Within A Local Context* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004). (In Heb)

<sup>49</sup> Oz Almog, *Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, tr. Haim Watzman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). *Ha'olam Haze* in the 1950's, for example, had a popular section entitled Our Young, Prickly Sabra. This iconography of the Sabra is so well rooted that when the American artist Robert Rauschenberg, who became known for using trash he collected from the streets for his ready-mades, visited Israel in 1975, he took black and white images of abandoned armored cars alongside cacti plants. In a split image, which can be found in his Israel Museum catalogue, he binds the symbolized cacti, that is, the icon of the New Hebrew Man, with burnt armored cars from the Independence War. These two charged icons sustain each other. The trash – that is, the offcast armored fighting vehicles on the side of the road – is reused by Rauschenberg. Cohen Levy, in a similar way to the artist that is known as a garbage collector, reminds us that the armored car is a trash, a dumpster. Her ready-made is being deiconized: She plays back and forth between the symbol and the actual artifact.

<sup>50</sup> Leni Riefenstahl, *The Last of the Nuba* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

<sup>51</sup> Consider now the art installations of Gil Nader, who calls himself anthropologist of Independence Park, and positions his family in the park wearing avocado masks. See discussion in the second chapter.

<sup>52</sup> Other possible sources of inspirations could be, for example, the image of Keith Haring, graffiti artist and AIDS activist, taken by Annie Leibovitz. Haring is body painted as a Nubian: he is nude and covered in white with black lines as ornamentations.

<sup>53</sup> Leni Riefenstahl, *Africa*, tr. Kathrine Talbot (London: Collins and Harvill, 1982), 37.

<sup>54</sup> Ignatz's image of a boy already suggested that he is *eromenos* while the older cruiser is *erastes*.



<sup>55</sup> Republished: Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *Under the Sign of Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Picador, 1980), 73-105

<sup>56</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: an Essay on Kitsch and Death* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

<sup>57</sup> Melody Davis shows how the male body, which was invisible for generations, was rediscovered through photography. This discovery led to the definition of masculinity, and since the penis defines masculinity, when it is unerect, "it is hardly muscular" (6). Davis D Melody, *The Male Nude in Contemporary Photography* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> Another meeting point of primitivism and homosexuality appears in the work of David Armstrong *Rare Flesh*. The subject is body painted with black color; and he imitates an African tribal dance, while having an erection. The image, among other things, deals with issue of fetishism to colored people. David E. Armstrong, *Rare Flesh* (New York: Universe Publishing, 2003). The afro-American Carl Van Vechten uses in his 1930' homoerotic images primitivism in order to empower black community. See: James Smalls, "Public, Face, Private Thoughts," *Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*, ed. Deborah Bright (New York and London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> Hunt, Lynn, 1993, *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity*, Zone Books, New York.

<sup>60</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 87-89.

**Chapter Four**  
**Looking for a Homeland: Between Sodom and Germany**  
**Separatism and Safe Queer Space in Reuveny and Ziffer's Novels**

“Say this city has ten million souls,  
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:  
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us”.

(W.H. Auden, “Refugee Blues”)

Following the removal of sodomy from the state's law-book in 1988, the mid-nineties to the mid-noughties were the formative years for the Israeli LGBT community. If before this revival, publication of gay works were limited and scattered, suddenly, books, films, TV programs, art exhibitions, and plays were available in growing numbers, and many of them portray Independence Park. Those cultural products constituted of a new enterprise: imagining Israeli gay community and defining Israeli queer identity, which was done often, as I show in this chapter, through the issue of space, mostly Independence Park. Yotam Reuveny and Benny Ziffer, the writers whose works will be discussed here, struggle to negotiate between what they see as contradicting terms: homosexuality and Jewish nationalism. They raise a series of questions regarding the possibility of being simultaneously both Israeli and queer, and consider the alternatives in case such a project is impossible. For their protagonists, the question of local queer identity, as it constructed in Independence Park, is also a question of belonging: should they stay in homophobic Israel, which means to conceal their homosexuality, or relocate to a more tolerant place and abandon parts of their Jewish and Israeli identity. These

protagonists, then, ask what and where is home, and, along these lines, also what are the advantages and disadvantages of the diaspora as an alternative to the concept of nation-state. In addition, they also ask what the consequences of being queer expatriates are. Since these questions are asked by Jewish-Israelis, they mirror similar historic debates between Zionism and diasporic Judaism; debates that were—and still are—central in Jewish circles regarding the issue of “Jewish space” and the opposing alternatives of homecoming (to the Land of Israel) versus assimilation. The issues of queer assimilation versus particularism and separatism, and the different costs of each standpoint for the individual and his community, are pivotal; I argue here that although it seems as if these novels have firm and fixed agendas regarding these issues, their positions are in fact less stable than it would appear at first glance: these texts continue to go back and forth between these positions and waver their options.

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick presents two polarized stances about homosexuality which exist in Western societies: a minoritizing view, which, among other things, defines homosexuality along the lines of essentialism, and a universalizing one, which sees homosexuality as a social construction and a product of culture.<sup>1</sup> Reuveny and Ziffer’s texts, which try to define homosexuality and Israeli homosexuality in particular, vacillate between universalizing point of view and minoritizing one, and, often, choose both: one viewpoint is used to justify the other. My analysis of their works, thus, leads me to claim that one can see the universalizing-minoritizing spectrum more as a circle, in which, as the texts show, both ends eventually meet.

The negotiation over the question of queer versus national space is also a negotiation over the question of memory, which is, according to Maurice Halbwachs and as I show in the introduction to this dissertation, always collective. Halbwachs argues that one knows oneself because one possesses memories that are collectively articulated, revised, and confirmed; Memory, along these lines, is a cultural construct of a certain social group with certain goals and agendas. In *La mémoire collective*, which was published in Paris in the wake of the Second World War, Halbwachs also argues that memory does not refer only to consciously lived time but also to socially lived space and collective representations of that space. For him, space is a paradigmatic image of

collective memory: it enables and supports its construction.<sup>2</sup> Independence Park is a queer space at the heart of “The First Hebrew (read: Zionist) City”; while for most Israelis, the park commemorates the nation’s war of Independence, for queer Israelis as well as for queer Palestinians, the park holds different memories, such as, memories of sexual desires, love, and feeling of communal belonging, or, on the other hand, memories of outsidership, police brutality and homophobic violence. The novels, which centered on Independence Park as a model for a safe queer space and for “queer homeland,” “remember” the park—that is, construct its past from the present point of view—in order to imagine a sustainable community. These texts, I argue, use intertextuality, which is a form of a collective memory to a literary community, to claim their place in the history of the land, of Judaism, of Zionism, and of queer diasporic transnationalism. Can the park, in this case, be used as a site of resistance to nationalism and homophobia? Reuveny’s text, I argue, promotes queer nationalism and uses Zionism as a model for separatism; the novel’s protagonist advocates queer homecoming to Sodom where homosexuals would be the majority. Ziffer’s text, on the contrary, resists nationalism and promotes queer Diasporism, that is, the ideology that advances existence as a minority; the novel’s protagonist relocates to Germany to escape homophobic Zionism.

Since they do not feel safe or wanted in their homeland, the gay protagonists in these texts search for a new homeland; however, although they are disappointed by Israel, and wish to leave it, they cannot divorce from it completely.<sup>3</sup> Even in their new host countries, I claim, they incessantly continue to negotiate their place and their identity vis-à-vis the country they left. This situation, in which issues of assimilation and emigration sprout, becomes even more extreme when Ziffer’s protagonists choose to associate or disassociate themselves with Germany, the country that sought to exterminate Jews and homosexuals. Some of the characters relocate to Germany, or use Germany’s past as an Archimedean point in their discussion about queer space, to make a provocative statement about Israel and the oppressive way it treat its minorities, be they or Palestinians. In this sense, they offer a “countermemory” to the Zionist master-narrative.<sup>4</sup> Reuveny’s protagonist also utilizes the memory of the Holocaust; he perceives HIV/AIDS as a “Gay Holocaust” and considers territorialism as a solution to the pandemic problem. This chapter then raises questions about why and how the Holocaust

is used or misused in Israeli post-memory discourse, and, in particular, in Israeli queer discourse; this sharpens the other inquiries that revolve around issues of universalizing and minoritizing, as I show.

Reuveny and Ziffer's novels raise provocative questions regarding the place of homosexuality in Zionism; although based in Israeli context, their questions, however, goes beyond locality: these reflective texts also touch upon issues of space, memory, transnationalism, race, xenophobia, and queer emigration in the process of imagining communities. They invite us to think seriously about the question of separatism and essentialism in a queer discourse that promotes queer social constructivism.

### **Returning to the Fatherland: Yotam Reuveny's Queer Nationalism**

Reuveny self-published in 2001 an apocalyptic novel (but with a utopic happy ending); titled *A World History of Men's Love* (היסטוריה עולמית של אהבת גברים), the novel retrospectively tells the story of the establishment of Sodom, a queer city-state that is located on the plain near the Dead Sea where "historical Sodom" used to be.<sup>5</sup> In this "foundational narrative," which takes place 25 years after the establishment of Sodom following the 2011 "Gay Holocaust," the state is a thriving community. Reuveny, who share the same name with his protagonist, writes his "memoir" as the "visionary of the State"; thinking about Sodom's future generations, he describes how, after the land was deserted by the Israelis and Palestinians who grew weary from the violent vicious circle, a group of gay men had settled in their ancient Fatherland.<sup>6</sup>

Paralleling homosexuality to race and ethnicity, Reuveny brings to the fore in this novel some issues concerning queer nationalism and gay separatism. As in his novels from the late 1980s, which were discussed in Chapter One, he raises questions about the feasibility of transnational gay identity and the usage of existing models of nationalism, such as Zionism, to promote and enable such self-determination. *A World History of Men's Love* is a narrative, I claim, that investigates the advantages of queer particularism, often promotes it openly, and goes against attempts to universalize homosexuality by means of assimilation; Reuveny, who supported assimilation early in his career, as evident from his 1980 articles in the popular daily *Yedioth Ahronoth*, opposes in *A World History of Men's Love* any form of "gay acculturation." This paradigm shift, I argue, is

manifested in the different ways he reads, reworks and deconstructs Marcel Proust's 1922 novel *Sodom and Gomorrah*, the fifth volume of *In Search of Lost Time* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*). This novel, which is an intertext for both the 1980 articles, titled *The Wretched Race* (הגזע המקורלל), and *A World History of Men's Love*, allows Reuveny to formulate and then reformulate his position toward homosexuality. Like Proust, Reuveny compares homosexuals to Jews, and, by so doing, understands in his second reading of *Sodom and Gomorrah* that gays, like Jews with the foundation of Zionism, especially after the Holocaust, need to have their own safe space, metaphorically and literally. This safe space is a place which would provide them more than just protection from homophobia, he assumes, but also restore their sense of pride and self-worth; he imagines Sodom as a homeland that would attract homosexuals in the diaspora to come back to their historical native land. Independence Park, as Reuveny sees it, is a model for such separatist queer space, and, therefore, the park appears several times in the novel and always at crucial moments; the park, therefore, plays an important part in Reuveny's prophetic journey toward defining homosexuality through nationalism.

### **Visions and Revisions**

Reuveny's protagonist does not immediately accept his role in history as the visionary of the future queer state. In fact, he tries not to be involved with gays since he does not approve of the hedonistic lifestyle of the Israeli gay community and its apathy to social problems. His persistence to stay uninvolved, which holds strong even after he experiences two revelations, weakens when he experiences the third revelation, which takes place in Independence Park. The park, I argue, is the reason why he is willing to lead the new queer national movement.

The protagonist's first revelation takes place in a trip to the ruins of Sodom. It is on *Yom Ha-Shoah*, the Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day, and the protagonist, who listens to a radio talk-show while driving, is upset with the speaker's disregard of homosexuals who were murdered by the Nazis. It seems to him that, for Israelis, the murder of homosexuals in the concentration camps is only secondary to the murder of Jews. Years later, when he collects his thoughts in his memoir, the protagonist stresses that this event was a sort of catalyst to his involvement in the queer national movement.

He writes: “the Holocaust of the Jews was caused by the Nazi-Christian inquisition and our holocaust was caused by the heterosexual inquisition”.<sup>7</sup> By using high-inference language, the protagonist reappropriates the loaded term “inquisition,” which, for the Jewish reader, carries strong emotional overtone, to serve his agenda; he promotes the analogy between homosexuals and Jews not only to draw the attention of his readers, but also to get their support by identification. In this equation, gays, like Jews, should think of themselves as a particular group and develop a collective consciousness; in this spirit, Jews should see themselves as inquisitors if they do not support homosexuals.<sup>8</sup> The protagonist develops further the analogy between the Spanish inquisition and the “heterosexual inquisition” by comparing blood libels to the accusation that homosexuals “snatch” teenagers and “convert” them to homosexuality. Again, he shows his readers the absurdity of homophobia which, like anti-Semitism, derives from irrational fears.

The protagonist’s second revelation occurs when he is in Jerusalem. In his memoir, the protagonist remembers that, although he dislikes this religious city, he went there as if he was answering an unknown calling. Around midnight, near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City, he sees a monk who looks like his lover who died from AIDS related disease, and the monk meaningfully gazes at him.<sup>9</sup> At that moment, the protagonist gets a glance into the future: he sees Sodom as a place where “our brothers,” the survivors of the “Gay Holocaust,” go to find shelter. Seeing his dead lover’s face and learning of the “Gay Holocaust,” the protagonist returns to Tel-Aviv Shocked by this vision. Initially, he ponders about Sodom and the homecoming of “our diasporic people,” not to mention his important role within such an event, but, then, he dismisses these thoughts. He is afraid that, like many others who suffer from “Jerusalem syndrome,” he is a false prophet, a madman.<sup>10</sup>

The third revelation, which is the most effective and affective, takes place in Tel-Aviv’s Independence Park. There, in the secular city where there is less danger of religious visions, the protagonist cannot renounce anymore his prophetic mission. As always, he goes to the park to find sex, but, since his return from Jerusalem, his visits are somehow unusual; every look that he gives and gets when cruising sends him back to Sodom. Now, when he goes to the park, he does so not to look for sex, but seeks to relive the vision he had in Jerusalem. At that moment, for the protagonist, homosexuality is no

longer centered on sex between men, but, rather on their spiritual bonding; later in the novel, the protagonist will explain that in Sodom, where homosexuals renew their ancient religion, they will understand that their interpersonal connection is not bodily, but rather lies on a higher level, on a spiritual level. He writes in the memoir: “in this new age our people have a new, ungrateful and painful role, which is the need to find [...] the meaning and purpose of otherness”.<sup>11</sup> The protagonist, who does not elaborate on the issue of this new religion and assumes that gays will willingly convert to it, pushes an essentialist agenda; for him, gays, who have different spiritual belief than straights, are intrinsically different, and once they understand it, they will stop imitating the cultures, including the religious, of heterosexuals; in Sodom they will develop their own system of beliefs and world-views. Religion plays an important part in the protagonist’s queer nationalism; influenced by Zionism, the protagonist cannot imagine a pure secular nation-state; in this sense, Sodom is national home for homosexual whereas homosexuality is a new-religion. In the park, while thinking about religion, the monk reappears before the protagonist and says to him: “Proust was afraid, but you will do it”.<sup>12</sup> Puzzled, the protagonist stops cruising and returns home. There, he chooses to read the 1896 pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*) by Theodor Herzl, “The Visionary of the Jewish State.” Again, the protagonist doubts his abilities to start, as Herzl did, a national movement.

The fourth revelation, which happens few weeks later in Independence Park on the corner of Max Nordau Street, finally convinces the protagonist to take upon himself the role of the queer prophet. Compared to the previous ones, this revelation is less emotional: the monk hands the protagonist a piece of paper with a reference to the biblical story of Sodom. This simple gesture, which sends the protagonist to rereading Genesis, forces him to identify with the Sodomists whose city was destroyed. Reading this story from the victims’ point of view, while assuming that homosexuality is a transcultural and transhistorical phenomenon, the protagonist rejects the story since it was written as a way to justify heterosexuals’ homophobic aggression; in the spirit of Rictor Norton, who encourages queers to write their own history, the protagonist revises historiography and write its own revisionist narrative of the past events.<sup>13</sup> From this point



on, his visions turn into revisions, in which he actively writes and rewrites queer history as a way to resist the homophobic representations of homosexuals.

The protagonist is indeed aware of Benedict Anderson's argument in *Imagined Communities*, and mentions him when he claims that because of revisionist historiography homosexuals now see themselves as a "brotherhood of people with same orientation and common interests".<sup>14</sup> Similarly to Zionism as an imagined community, the protagonist recovers the historical roots of homosexuality in order to establish a queer collective memory which is the cornerstone of such social and cultural construction.<sup>15</sup> In the making of a "queer national tradition," the protagonist reinterpreted the story of ancient Sodom in order to rewrite history, that is, to queer it.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, his aim is that homosexuals will return to "our ancient homeland," and, similarly to Zionism's use of archeology as a way of substantiating the Jewish claims in the land, the protagonist also enthusiastically describes how archeologists, who were excavating in Sodom, "found us a past, which serves as our historical ground".<sup>17</sup> No wonder that when the protagonist reads *The Jewish State*, he thinks about—but doesn't tell his readers why—Bradley Francis Herbert, the British philosopher of nationalism, who, in his 1876 book *Ethical Studies*, argues that people materialize themselves as individuals through participation in the state.<sup>18</sup>

### **Rereading Proust, Rethinking Assimilation**

The protagonist's gay messianism mirrors Zionism as a national movement that uses religious discourse to justify its ideology of homecoming. After the third revelation, in which the "queer prophet" is assigned to correct Proust, the protagonist reads *The Jewish State*, "Theodor Herzl's vision of the Jews' return to their historical homeland".<sup>19</sup> Influenced by the writings of the Father of Zionism, the protagonist decides to devote himself to idea of queer territorialism. He writes in his memoir: "I saw that Herzl's detailed plan, which is based on an institutionalized national structure, brought to the establishment of a (Jewish) state".<sup>20</sup> The protagonist, then, adopts Zionist rhetoric, strategies, and *modi operandi*, and goes against Proust, as the monk instructed him.

After the third revelation and before he reads Herzl's manifest, the protagonist thinks about Proust's *Sodom and Gomorrah*, and, especially, about Proust's comparison between Jews and "Sodomists":

It is possible that they may return there one day. Certainly they form in every land an oriental colony, cultured, musical, malicious, which has charming qualities and intolerable defects. We shall study them with greater thoroughness in the course of the following pages; but I have thought it as well to utter here a provisional warning against the lamentable error of proposing (just as people have encouraged a Zionist movement) to create a Sodomist movement and to rebuild Sodom. For, no sooner had they arrived there than the Sodomites would leave the town so as not to have the appearance of belonging to it, would take wives, keep mistresses in other cities where they would find, incidentally, every diversion that appealed to them. They would repair to Sodom only on days of supreme necessity, when their own town was empty, at those seasons when hunger drives the wolf from the woods.<sup>21</sup>

While in 1922 Proust is skeptical about the chances of queer nationalism, as he is skeptical about Zionism, the protagonist, who witnesses the success of Zionism, is optimistic about the future of a queer national movement. As Zionism was seen at the beginning as a whim or fallacious delusion, the protagonist, who knows that he will be mocked for proposing queer homocoming as Herzl was when he proposed Jewish homecoming, takes upon himself the role of a queer prophet. He wishes to be a queer Herzl. In *Sodom and Gomorrah*, Zionism is a comic relief within the larger humorous remark about the nature of homosexuals. The protagonist, however, takes Proust's comparison seriously, and goes all the way to prove him wrong.

While promoting nationalism, the protagonist assumes that because Jews see themselves as—and are considered by others—a "race," homosexuals should do the same and be treated similarly. Essentialism in the protagonist's case is necessary for queer nationalism. In his article about the analogy between homosexuals and Jews in Proust's *Sodom and Gomorrah*, Jonathan Freedman argues that in the early years of the twentieth century, when essentialist theories were on the rise in Europe, "Jewish and sexually transgressive identities were molded in each other's image," because both had a problematic taxonomy.<sup>22</sup> By putting together "the Homosexual" with "the Jew," Proust, Freedman argues, articulates the social anxiety about these assimilated groups which allegedly destabilize the nation's structure: assimilation makes Jews and Sodomists, who

are both allegiant to their kind rather than to the state, untraceable, and this makes it difficult for loyal citizens to protect themselves and their state from them. Proust, then, according to Freedman, advocates the idea of marking the “outsiders,” anatomizing them, and keeping them under control.

Paradoxically, while the protagonist opposes Proust’s skepticism about queer homecoming, and uses Zionism to prove him wrong, he does resemble Proust in fearing assimilated minorities. In his memoir, the protagonist defines two types of assimilated homosexuals: gays who try to “be like” the straights, and closeted men who are ashamed of their homosexuality. Both types, he argues, mimic the behavior of their haters and see themselves through their homophobic judging eyes; thus, assimilated gays and closeted men jeopardize the queer national cause of forming a “true” and “unique” identity. Like Proust, the protagonist wishes to stabilize identities which, in an intellectual world that gives precedence to social constructivism, are weak and indecisive; his essentialism could be seen as a strategic one: the protagonist brings forward the group identity in a simplified way to achieve his political goals.<sup>23</sup>

In his memoir, the protagonist dubs assimilated gays and closeted men by the denigratory name: “the wretched race” (הגזע המקולל).<sup>24</sup> While he does *not* provide anywhere a clear definition of such a problematic term as “race,” he encourages men to come out of the closet and fight homophobia which defines them as “wretched race.” As in the case of Zionism, which bases itself on the concept of race, for the protagonist biology is a liberatory tool in the struggle for independence; moreover, he uses this derogatory term not only to evoke his readers’ emotions and encourage them to fight oppressors, but also to refer to his own series of articles by the very same name.<sup>25</sup>

In 1980, Reuveny published a series of articles in the popular daily *Yedioth Ahronoth*, where he began to develop his thoughts on Israeli queer identity, which are quite different from those he developed in *A World History of Men’s Love*. In the articles, which were written at a time when homosexuality was still illegal, Reuveny argues that if homosexuals want to be part of mainstream society, they have to demonstrate their “normalcy,” that is, to “prove” that besides their different sexual orientation, they are similar in every way to other Israeli men.<sup>26</sup> In order to do that, while assuming that all homosexuals want to assimilate, Reuveny stresses that homosexuals must first break free

from the oppressive straight decorum they internalized which stigmatizes them as effeminate deviants. He argues that homosexuals should not see themselves through the homophobic eyes of their oppressors, who think that all homosexuals are not manly enough to be considered “normal men”; as a way to fight this self-fulfilling prophecy, Reuveny asks homosexuals not to become what heteronormative society wants them to be, that is, effeminate and flamboyant, a caricature of homosexuality. Instead, he proposes, homosexuals should be “themselves,” that is, “average Joes”: “the ordinary homosexual man is not different—neither in his apparel, nor in his customs, nor his private-life—from an ordinary heterosexual man. While one prefers blond women, the other prefers men”.<sup>27</sup>

In his 1980 articles, Reuveny understands homosexuality as Jean-Paul Sartre understands Judaism. In his 1946 essay “The Anti-Semite and the Jew,” Sartre argues that a Jew is a person whom others consider to be a Jew. Therefore, a Jew's Jewishness exists only to the extent that they are considered Jewish by those around them.<sup>28</sup> Along these lines, for Reuveny, homosexual is a person whom others consider to be a homosexual. At this stage of his writing, Reuveny does not assume that there is “something” essentially different about homosexuals; his 1980 series of articles, then, are an attempt to answer the questions who are those who wish to define homosexuality as a “wretched race,” and why they do it. His conclusion is that if homosexuals “prove” that they are just like everyone else, they will stop being defined as Others, and, therefore, will be accepted as equals; when homosexuals stop seeing themselves as “wretched,” others will stop deprecating them. Like in other “blame the victim” rationalizations, which correlates also to Sartre's essay, Reuveny estimates that if homosexuals will act like “real men,” straights will lose the justification to prosecute and subjugate them. If this was the case in the past, Reuveny suggests in the article, Proust would not have been able to slander Sodomites as he did in his novel.<sup>29</sup>

Twenty years after the publication of the articles, Reuveny reads again Proust's novel and understands the concept of assimilation in a different way, although, he does retain some of his previous approaches. Contrary to expectations, mainly because homosexuality in Israel is more acceptable in 2001 and it seems that assimilation proved successful, Reuveny (the protagonist) does not celebrate it; In fact, now he promotes

separatism on the basis of essentialism (and later I will answer why and what made him change his mind). In his anti-assimilative mode, Reuveny no longer preaches homosexuals to “disappear in the crowd,” as he did in the articles, but, rather, advocates a more radical disappearance from the national space, that is, relocation to Sodom. In the same way that Zionism “solved” the “Jewish problem,” Sodomism in this perception would solve the “homosexual problem”; only separate state, he realizes, would bring to an end the constant attempts to stigmatize homosexuals. After his third revelation, when Reuveny is instructed by the monk to “correct” the French novelist’s mistakes, Reuveny considers Proust to be a member of the “heterosexual inquisition,” that is, a collaborator who causes homosexuals to see themselves through the gaze of their persecutors. In a similar way, Reuveny sees Pride Parades as part of the problem and not the solution since they reaffirm the way the straights see gays, that is, as “loud, noisy, leather wearing, mooning sissies”.<sup>30</sup> The same is also true for “obsequious assimilative gays,” who demand their right to marry; they do so, Reuveny argues, because they look for the hegemony’s approval. This “bootlicking,” Reuveny retrospectively writes, did *not* help them when, during the “Gay Holocaust,” their necks were under the hobnailed boots of the “Nazi majority”.<sup>31</sup> “For me,” he writes, “the affirmation that our people were seeking from the hate institutions, from the courts of law and parliaments, was horrible and pathetic”.<sup>32</sup>

On the face of it, in his second reading of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, Reuveny is not looking for approval anymore; on the contrary, he tries to break free from the Sartre-like deadlock, in which one’s identity is defined for him by others. According to Reuveny, who is an advocate of self-determination, by having their own sovereign territory, homosexuals would be liberated from the homophobic gaze, and, therefore, could be “themselves.” Separatism, in this context, is a key factor for self-determination; however, in Reuveny’s case, I argue, separatism complements assimilation: Reuveny actually does *not* divorce the need for social approval, but rather regulates it by using nationalism. This is also the case, I suggest, with Herzl and his approach to Jewish nationalism.

Early in his career as a Jewish public figure, Herzl sought to find a solution to the “Jewish problem” by means of assimilation. He believed that if Jews were absorbed into the local culture, after adopting its mores, they would not be considered a threat anymore,

and would thus be accepted by their fellow citizens. In his diary, Herzl even goes further in his will to solve anti-Semitism and considers a mass baptism of Jews as a way of acculturating them into European society.<sup>33</sup> However, this assimilative agenda changed, as Herzl stresses in his diary, when, in 1894, he witnessed the Dreyfus Affair in Paris, in which a French Captain, an assimilated Jew, was wrongly accused of treason. Following the anti-Semitic trial, Herzl saw that assimilation did not stop the prejudices and hostility towards Jews, and, therefore, he “converted” to Zionism, a political movement that sought a solution to the “Jewish problem” outside of Europe.<sup>34</sup> Following the Dreyfus Affair, Herzl published in 1896 the pamphlet *The Jewish State*, subtitled “proposal of a modern solution for the Jewish question,” in which he proposes territorialism as the answer for “the Jewish question.” Like Herzl, Reuveny’s protagonist, the founding father of Sodom, also promotes territorialism as a way to address the “homosexual question” and the problem of homophobia. He imagines Sodom as a “safe space” for persecuted homosexuals: impenetrable zone that is protected by barbed-wire fences, walls, and deadly laser beams.<sup>35</sup>

In adopting nationalism, however, as Daniel Boyarin argues, Herzl did *not* divorce the idea of assimilation, but rather transformed it.<sup>36</sup> According to Boyarin, Herzl understood that Jews would be accepted into European society only when they completely emulated the European notion of nation-state: when Jews had their own land, they would be looked at as equals, that is, as “real men.” In this equation, national territory equals manhood which is the driving force of Jewish assimilation.

For Jews at the time, Boyarin claims, assimilation was a “sexual and gendered enterprise, an overcoming of the political and cultural characteristics that marked Jewish men as a ‘third sex’, as queer in their world”.<sup>37</sup> Boyarin points out the resemblance between the homophobic and anti-Semitic discourses of the time: the Jewish men were associated with degeneration, sexual perversity, and, like the homosexuals, also with femininity; their inferior, pathological bodies, some scientists warned, undermines the “natural” differentiation of the genders. In other words, the Jews' transgressive "unnatural bodies," like parasites or vectors, endanger the existence of their hosts, the nation-states in which Jews live.<sup>38</sup> The identification of Jewish men with homosexuals penetrated also the Jewish inner-discourse: Zionism internalized this anti-Semitic discourse and sought to

cure Judaism from its ill-gendered, effeminacy weaknesses. Reconstruction of the Jew's body was, for some Zionist leaders and writers, the first step to a successful revitalization of the disembodied Jewish nation. This national reclamation project was perceived, among other things, as a sexual revolution, an attempt to reverse the image of the weak, passive, female-like, diasporic "old Jew," and to create a "New Jew," that is, a strong, proud, potent, muscular and healthy physically as well as mentally "Hebrew Man." Nordau, the author of *Degeneration*, an influential 1892 book that describes the deterioration of "crooked-back, hollow-chested, melancholic Jewry," wished to metamorphose the unproductive, subordinate ghetto Jews into a *Muskeljuden*, "muscular Jews," who, ultimately, root themselves in the soil of Palestine.<sup>39</sup> Jews' homecoming to the "Fatherland," Nordau claims, could only be achieved if the "Hebrew men" disassociate themselves from the "coffeehouse Jews" of the gloom, dark Diaspora, and immigrate to sunny Palestine. He blames "the narrow Jewish street" of the ghetto and "the dimness of sunless houses" for the physical and spiritual degeneration of European Jewry. But, in the Land of Israel, free of such an inferiority complex, liberated from exilic minority conscience, the soon-to-become virile and active men could restore the Jewish heroic past and establish a modern nation. Then, they will be treated by other nations, meaning, by other men, as equals, as "real men," that is, as "normal heterosexuals".<sup>40</sup> In this sense, this is a project of heterosexualization: Zionism was not only a project of nation-building, but, first of all, a project of body-building: a performative conversion of one's Jewish "effeminate" body into heterosexual body. By immigrating to Palestine, the effeminized Jews would gain back their "lost" masculinity, and, in this sense, Jews are not only coming back to the "Fathers' Land," but, mostly, they are looking for the "lost phallus" of their fathers, which they left behind when they were forced to exile. It is homecoming, then, not to Palestine, but, as Boyarin cleverly puts it, to Phallustine.<sup>41</sup> Once they hold their lost phallus, Jews will be fully assimilated into European society, since they will be respected as equals.

The protagonist's project, along these lines, is also a project of masculinization: he promotes queer homocoming as a way to normalize effeminate homosexuals. Only with their return to their homeland, the protagonist's homosexuals gain the respect that they failed to get in their host countries; that is, only then they are seen as real men who

“just” happen to have a different sexual orientation. This is, as in Herzl’s case, a desire for respectability by means of normalization: the protagonist’s separatism is assimilative in nature, and, like his 1980 articles, he still defines homosexuality, although he claims he does not, through the eyes of the “heterosexual inquisition.” No wonder that when he describes the men of Sodom, he does not see there a place for effeminate men.<sup>42</sup>

It is important to note here that it is not a pure coincidence that the protagonist visits Sodom for the first time on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, which is Herzl’s birthday, and has a major revelation on Nordau Street. The protagonist sees both social reformers as role models, which, paradoxically, makes him, the advocator of queer nationalism, a gay Zionist.<sup>43</sup>

### **What Would We Be Without The Holocaust?**

In his 1994 short manifesto “Reclaiming Sodom,” Rocky O’Dovovan, a “Sodomite-American,” as he prefers to call himself, dreams of queer homecoming to Sodom. He utilizes the memory of the “Jewish Holocaust” to support his claim: “let Sodom be the symbol of what heterosexism and homophobia do to us, like the Holocaust has become for the Jewish people”.<sup>44</sup> Other writers also use the Holocaust to justify a national queer space. Alabama Birdstone—Ed Boggs’ pen-name—in 1981 wrote an apocalyptic novel, *Queer Free*, about a “Gay Holocaust” in the US following the election of a “Hitler-like,” right-wing president. The narrative mostly takes place in San Francisco and describes how the LGBT community reacts to the rumors of “Auschwitz-like extermination camps”.<sup>45</sup> Other American writers wrote similar stories: Jed Bryan (*Cry in the Desert*, 1987), Tracy Hickman (*The Immortals*, 1996), and Marty Rubin (*The Boiled Frog Syndrome*).<sup>46</sup>

A similar theme also appears also in Hebrew literature: Sami Flato-Sharon, a former Israeli Knesset Member, published in 1994 the novel *Fatal Sex* (סקס גורלי). The narrative follows the relocation of Israeli gays to Sodom, where they are supposed to have a “constructive life.” Sodom is not concentration camp, one of the characters in the novel unconvincingly argues when he talks to his gay friends; he thinks that quarantining people with HIV/AIDS would stop the spreading of the epidemic. The name chosen for this ghetto-like city is not coincidental: Flato-Sharon identifies homosexuality with AIDS and wishes to provide a “final solution” for both “problems”.<sup>47</sup>



Like these texts, which utilize the memory of the Holocaust in order to maximize the affect of the narrative, Reuveny's novel, I argue, also uses the Holocaust to promote this agenda. In what follows, I suggest that, like Herzl's Zionism, the protagonist's Sodomism shifts from promoting assimilation to promoting assimilative separatism: in Herzl's case, this pseudo paradigm shift is a result of the Dreyfus Affair, and, in the protagonist's case, is the outcome of his internalization of post-Holocaust Zionism, and, not less important, of the AIDS pandemic. I also argue here that the protagonist's separatism results from his own post-traumatic reaction to his lover's death following the "AIDS Holocaust."

In a similar way to Zionism, the protagonist wishes to reclaim Sodom; initially, his homocoming campaign is not a success, since he is not convincing enough to mobilize mass queer immigration to Sodom. In fact, during his tours, the protagonist's audience mocks and scorns him. It seems then that, compared to assimilative gay groups, Sodomism is a marginal movement which was doomed to fail. However, after the 2004 American elections, in which an ultra Christian-conservative president was elected, and, consequently, "concentration camps for deviates" were built in the US and around the world, homosexuals start to listen to the protagonist.<sup>48</sup> Only after the "Gay Holocaust" ended, a massive immigration wave started: queer survivors from the liberated death camps relocate to Sodom and make it a thriving community. The protagonist acknowledges in his memoir that without the "Gay Holocaust" the dream of building a queer state would have never come alive: "it is a shame that a catastrophe had to happen that our people [...] understand that they belong here and that they could have come here earlier".<sup>49</sup> Does the protagonist insinuate here that without the Shoah, Israel would not be founded and that Zionism would have stayed a marginal movement? This argument continuances the Sartre-like argument in which the Jews' Jewishness is defined for them by others; Israel, along these lines, is a by-product of the Shoah, that is, of Nazism.<sup>50</sup> In a similar problematic way, what defines homosexuals, and brings them together, is homophobia. The protagonist, I argue, is aware of this fallacy and tries to resolve it, as I show in what follows, by pushing further the idea of queer essentialism.

The protagonist emphasizes in his memoir that only a sovereign queer state, with a strong army, will be able to protect its citizens and prevent another "Gay Holocaust."

This moral justification—meaning “Sodom’s right to exist”—is achieved by manipulative use of the memory of the Holocaust. In a sense, the way the protagonist utilizes the memory of the “Gay Holocaust” corresponds with the “Zionization” of the Shoah in Israel. Politically and culturally, the collective memory of the Shoah plays a key role in the construction of Israeli identity; “Holocaust memory was constructed as a means of cementing the Zionist ethos in the struggle for statehood,” Daniel Gutwein claims, “The victims’ suffering was used to foster recognition of the Jewish people’s right to a state according to Zionist ideology.” Gutwein calls this period, in which the lesson of “never again” became the cornerstone of the Israeli society, “the nationalized memory”: “the Holocaust lesson was used to imbue the sense of ‘the whole world is against us’ and to legitimize hawkish politics”.<sup>51</sup> The protagonist’s memoir, which also promotes the idea that “the whole (heterosexual) world is against us,” continues to reproduce Zionism, and this time its post-Holocaust version. No wonder, then, that when the protagonist visits Sodom for the second time, it is the Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day.<sup>52</sup>

The protagonist’s “Dreyfus Affair,” his watershed moment, is when he recognizes the monk as his deceased lover who died from AIDS related disease.<sup>53</sup> If Herzl became Zionist after he understood that the project of assimilation failed, and therefore Jews could only be safe in their own territory, the protagonist, the writer as well as the fictional character, realizes following his lover’s death that homosexuals cannot depend on the “Nazi majority” to help them fight the AIDS pandemic. In the memoir, when he talks about his first campaign tours, the protagonist compares homosexuals, who live among heterosexuals and think that they are safe, to pre-Holocaust assimilated German-Jews.<sup>54</sup> While in his 1980 articles, Reuveny pushed an assimilative agenda, two decades of heterosexuals’ silence in the face of queer annihilation due to AIDS drives him to conclude that it is time that homosexuals take care of themselves; because of AIDS, Reuveny (the protagonist of the novel) began to consider queers a nation. He writes: “the AIDS Holocaust accelerated the reemergence of our people as a nation”.<sup>55</sup> Here, for the first and only time in *A World History of Men’s Love*, the “Gay Holocaust” is called “AIDS Holocaust”; this may allow us to read “Holocaust” in the novel as a metaphor for “AIDS”.<sup>56</sup>

Gay men, for the protagonist, are “like the German-Jews in Hitler’s time who not only ignored the danger that was lurking for them, but also despised those who did not behave like them”.<sup>57</sup> For that reason, he opposes cities’ gay ghettos, which reminds him of Jewish ghettos, because they provide a false sense of security. Gay bars, dark-rooms, saunas, and parks, in the same way, are dangerous since they are part of gays’ false consciousness; gays wrongly believe that there are safe queer spaces.<sup>58</sup> The protagonist recounts in his memoir that he also thought that Independence Park was such a safe place until he was attacked there by a group of teenagers when he was younger. As he writes his memoir, the protagonist retroactively understands that the first time he thought about Sodom was there and then; together with AIDS, this traumatic event, which are now expressed for the first time in his post-traumatic memoir, “proves” to him the inevitability of a separated and sovereign safer queer space. With its army and its sophisticated security system, Sodom, then, for the protagonist, is the only place in the world that provides protection to homosexuals.

#### **New-Old-Land: Independence Park as a Model for The State of Sodom**

In the novel’s postscript, Reuveny describes what made him think and write about a safe queer space; he, the writer of *A World History of Men’s Love*, describes a “revelation” he had in Independence Park during *Yom Kippur*, The Day of Atonement, one of the holiest days in the Jewish calendar. On that day, he saw in the park hundreds of Israeli gay men sitting together on the lawn, and, instantly, he had a vision of Sodom’s Independence Park, a place that celebrates queer independence, not a Jewish one, from the bondage of existing as a minority in a “heterosexual world”.<sup>59</sup> In this sense, the novel comes to a closure: his gay bashing in Independence Park made him think about a solution to the “homosexual problem,” which was intensified because of the AIDS crisis, and, such a solution indeed presented itself, as if it was an epiphany, when he saw a queer mass gathering in the park.

The end of *A World History of Men’s Love* is optimistic. The protagonist understands that a queer state cannot be based solely on fears from homophobia that is expressed in the belief that “the whole world is against us.” Sodom’s scientists, therefore, work to identify the unique characteristics of the queer “race,” that is, the protagonist’s concept of ethnic exclusivism. “Soon,” he writes at the end of his memoir, “an expected

promulgation will be delivered about the existence of three genders”.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps as a way to eschew the narrative of victimization, the protagonist tries to replace the “never again” ideology with an essentialist one; he therefore “adopts” historical figures as role models; in the middle of his memoir, for example, the protagonist briefly mentions Magnus Hirschfeld, the German-Jewish sexologist who developed the concept of “The Third Sex” in the first years of the twentieth century, as someone who influences him.<sup>61</sup> He ends his memoir hoping that Hirschfeld was right, and homosexuals are indeed a different race. This essentialism solves the problem of queer assimilation as well as being defined by homophobia and not by an internal and eternal queer qualities. It does not solve, however, the protagonist’s problematic premise about assimilation, meaning, that it supposedly goes only in one direction: homosexuals emulate heterosexuals. I suggest that thinking of assimilation like this—not as osmosis, but as diffusion—devalues the influence and impact of homosexuals’ contribution to Western society.

Hirschfeld appears again and again in Israeli queer literature, especially in post-memory narratives that deal with the Holocaust. In what follows, I will linger on his appearance in another text, Benny Ziffer’s novel *Ziffer and His Kind*, mostly as an example of a writer who is searching for queer ancestors that are not based in Zionism. Hirschfeld, in this case, is a figure that represents queer transnationalism. The protagonist’s project, on the contrary to this text, is not only based in nationalism, but openly advocates it. While comparing Jews to homosexuals, *A World History of Men’s Love* draws on Zionist texts in order to promote queer separatism. While concepts such as essentialism are considered nowadays anachronistic and even obsolete, the protagonist insists on exploring the ways in which such concepts could be productive for the gay community and not work necessarily against it. This text also shows the resemblance between Sedgwick’s deconstruction of the seemingly polarized stances; the minoritizing view in the novel, which stresses essentialism and separatism, complements the universalizing view, which emphasizes sameness. In this case, the protagonist supports queer nationalism in order to be accepted by heterosexuals who are already aligned in national movements. As if saying “I want to be different like everyone else,” Reuveny crosses back and forth the thin borderline that separates the minoritizing and universalizing views.

### **Getting to Know One's Grandfathers: Benny Ziffer's Genealogy**

Benny Ziffer is the literary editor of *Ha'aretz* daily newspaper and a columnist; in 1999, he published the provocative novel *Ziffer and His Kind* (ציפר ובני מינו). While continuously changing characters' focal points, the novel portrays a relationship of an Israeli gay couple.<sup>62</sup> By using irony and camp to criticize both gay and Israeli cultures, the text raises similar questions that appear in Reuveny's novel: Ziffer is interested in investigating issues of essentialism, homecoming, and queer genealogy. Like Reuveny's protagonist, who follows Herzl and imagines himself as "the father of Sodom," Ziffer's protagonist searches as well for forefathers and queer ancestry; like Reuveny's narrator, he does so by juxtaposing homosexuality and Zionism, which meet in Independence Park. In both novels, I suggest, Independence Park is used as a model for a safer queer space; the park enables the characters to think about national and sexual identities and their relations to specific spaces that defines those identities.

*Ziffer and His Kind* is a work of fiction, but the author of the novel shares his name with the protagonist.<sup>63</sup> In the novel, the protagonist is an openly gay man who lives with his partner Hugh, "the homemaker," in Tel-Aviv. As a writer who works on a book about homosexuality in Israel, the protagonist is invited to Germany to talk about the subject. Amazed at the Germans' tolerance to minorities, he decides to relocate to Berlin. The protagonist, Hugh, and Khoury, a Palestinian boy that the Jewish-Israeli couple adopted, leave as soon as they can. The protagonist's parents, who are Holocaust survivors, join them. In Berlin, after Khoury dies of an AIDS-related disease, and Hugh returns to Israel, the protagonist commits suicide. He will never finish the historical novel that he started to write about Magnus Hirschfeld's visit to Mandatory Palestine.

Before his death, the protagonist sends a letter to Tel-Aviv's city council in which he proposes to change the name of Independence Park to Magnus Hirschfeld Park.<sup>64</sup> In the letter, the protagonist claims that the city should acknowledge the contribution of the German-Jewish sexologist to the Tel-Aviv. He reminds the council that Hirschfeld sympathetically describes it in his 1933 book and was also supportive of the Zionist project in Palestine.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the protagonist argues, the city should commemorate him. In the letter, the protagonist also explains how Hirschfeld's Scientific-Humanitarian Committee has similar characteristics to Zionism, besides that both were founded in the

same year and both advanced oppressed minority groups in Europe. Mainly, the protagonist emphasizes, both movements were persecuted by the Nazis: Jews and Homosexuals alike were sent to concentration camps.<sup>66</sup> As in Reuveny's novel, victimhood unites Jews and homosexuals, and justifies their political goals: Reuveny and Ziffer dream of a safe queer space. Along these lines, Ziffer's protagonist gives another related reason why the city should change the name of the park: "naming the park after Magnus Hirschfeld will prove to the world that Tel-Aviv is a liberal city".<sup>67</sup> This justification, as in Reuveny's Sartre-like approach, is based on a "resemblance argument": Israel, even though located in the Middle East, is like other progressive European countries, that is to say, "we are like you." As in Reuveny's novel, minority groups define themselves through the outside's gaze, and Ziffer's protagonist, who is aware of this, utilizes it to promote his cause. In his letter, however, the protagonist does not mention the known fact, which may or may not be self-explanatory, that the park is a gay cruising site; he does not openly say that the park should be named after one of the forefather of "modern" homosexuality. Strategically, the protagonist chooses to desexualize the park, and to bring to the fore Hirschfeld's contribution to Zionism.

The protagonist's motivation to change the park's name is not altruistic, as in the case of Reuveny's protagonist. He is not a queer activist who dreams of changing the world and solve the problem of homophobia. As a self-centered megalomaniac, and egotist, the protagonist's motivation is personal. For him, Hirschfeld is not only a queer forefather, but mainly his own grandfather: after the protagonist's biological grandparents were murdered by Nazi hooligans, the protagonist's father was adopted by Hirschfeld who hid him in the house of his cross-dresser German lover.<sup>68</sup> As Hirschfeld's "grandchild," the protagonist wishes to change the park's name in order to commemorate himself and his family; by so doing, the untalented writer, who is unable to get his work published, will get famous. By using Hirschfeld's name, the protagonist could be honored; in this scenario, the protagonist will be placed in the collective memory next to his grandfather, a man that he actually never met. The protagonist's father writes his memoir of the war, which he titles *Gods and Heroes*, and there he gives Hirschfeld an important part.<sup>69</sup> The protagonist, in that case, is part of this mythical genealogy of gods and heroes.<sup>70</sup>

In his desire to glorify his family, the protagonist decides to write a fictional novel about Hirschfeld's life in Palestine. In this fictional novel, following the Nazis' arson of the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* in Berlin and hunting homosexuals, Hirschfeld decides to immigrate to Palestine and to settle in Tel-Aviv. The protagonist's novel about his grandfather starts where Hirschfeld's travel journal *Men and Women: The World Journey of a Sexologist* ends. In the journal, although Hirschfeld is not very optimistic about the chances of Jews to establish their own state, he congratulates the Zionists for their success in Westernizing the "backward" land.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, he decides to leave Palestine and to continue touring the world; perhaps he did not see himself living in a city where "only one group was missing: the transvestites".<sup>72</sup> While Hirschfeld eventually returns to Europe and finds refuge in France where he dies of a heart attack in 1935, in the protagonist's unfinished novel, he stays in Palestine where he is murdered by Zionists. Unlike reality, Hirschfeld in the fictional novel discovers the hidden queer underworld of Palestine.

In reality, Hirschfeld meets with Haim Arlosoroff, the leader of the Zionist-Socialist Labor Party. Arlosoroff is not impressed with the famous sexologist and "his dandy secretary, a young Chinese man," and writes in his diary, "he is slightly disappointed me".<sup>73</sup> In the protagonist's version, Arlosoroff is impressed with the professor and invites to rebuild for him the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* in Jerusalem; in the meantime, he also offers Hirschfeld to write a survey about homosexuality in Palestine. While Arlosoroff wishes that Hirschfeld will write that there are no Jewish homosexuals in Palestine, since they were all cured by Zionism and Nordau's concept of *Muskeljuden*, Hirschfeld stays loyal to the "scientific truth" and finds many of them. His survey is quoted in the text as it is: Hirschfeld discovers that the homosexuals' meeting place is the Muslim cemetery in Tel-Aviv, which is now part of Independence Park. There, at night time, Jews and Muslims get together and put their hostility aside. Hirschfeld's conclusions, which he submits to Arlosoroff, are radical: he suggests that if it was possible to combine the "natural homosexuality of the Arabs," their noble savage qualities, with the "sophisticated urbanism of the Jews," an "ideal homosexual race" could have been created.<sup>74</sup> Instead of promoting the Zionist masculine agenda, Hirschfeld imagines a queer *Übermensch*: while Arlosoroff hopes that Hirschfeld will confirm

Zionism's ability to change the effeminate Jewish man into a virile prototype of masculinity, Hirschfeld imagines a powerful competitor to the Jewish settlement in Palestine. Instead of joining Zionism and "metamorphosing" themselves into "real man," now, with the help of Hirschfeld's survey, queer Jewish men have a more tempting alternative. In the protagonist's novel, Hirschfeld challenges Zionism: if there is indeed a "homosexual race," will it triumph Zionism? Will Jews still want to be "cured" by the Zionist concept of *Muskeljuden*? Will homosexuals support the Zionists or the Palestinians? Can Homosexuals be a race, and if not, what does it say about Judaism? Is there an "identity hierarchy," in which some elements are more important than others?

In his novel about Hirschfeld, the protagonist takes the sexologist's concept of "the third-sex" into the next step, where it becomes a race-like identity; this is similar to Reuveny's conceptualization of race. Both writers explore the idea of race identity based in sexual orientation, and ask in what constellations it can or cannot work. These texts demonstrate not only the centrality of race in the Israeli discourse, but also its instability: it is an elusive concept that is in a constant process of definition. Maybe that is the reason why Hirschfeld was murdered by Zionists: not only does he not only threaten Zionism with the idea of Jewish-Palestinian (sexual) cooperation, but also ruptures the integrity of the concept of the Jewish race.<sup>75</sup> By suggesting that a new race could sprout, Hirschfeld points out that race is a social construction; this subverts the national belief that races are transhistorical and transcultural "facts."

### **Adopting an "Arab Dog"**

The protagonist of Ziffer's writes the sequel to *Men and Women: The World Journey of a Sexologist* as a way to rewrite Zionist history, that is, to resist the existing master narrative. In his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James Scott describes how behind the scenes of the master narrative, subordinate subjects, who are not always able to rebel openly, create a social space in which offstage dissent from the official transcript. These "weapons of the weak" insinuates a critique of power while hiding, for example, behind fiction.<sup>76</sup> The protagonist of Ziffer's novel, along these lines, investigates an historical possibility that was not chosen at the time, that is, the queer alternative to the Zionist *Muskeljuden*. However, being the man that he is, the protagonist



also writes the novel as a way to establish a stronger connection to his famous grandfather. In the novel, for example, Hirschfeld, like the protagonist, cruises Independence Park. Moreover, both have the same experiences, both share the same space, both criticize Zionism, and both eventually seek political asylum away from their “homeland.” throughout *Ziffer and His Kind*, the protagonist tries to walk in Hirschfeld’s footsteps: when the protagonist and Hugh decide to adopt a child, one cannot overlook how this is a duplication of Hirschfeld’s adoption of the protagonist’s father; furthermore, the protagonist and Hugh put Hirschfeld’s notion of “homosexual race” into use when they adopt a Palestinian teenager, and, thus, create an alternative family; this family, which combines the “natural homosexuality of the Arabs” with the “sophisticated urbanism of the Jews,” also resists the “official transcript” of Israel as a Jewish State.<sup>77</sup>

The story of Khoury’s adoption by the protagonist and Hugh is central to the novel’s criticism of both Zionism and gay culture, and it is achieved by referring to Nazism and the Holocaust. When Hugh exits a supermarket in Tel-Aviv which posts a sign that reads “No Arabs or Dogs Allowed,” he hears children repeatedly and angrily shout “Arab dog”; when he approaches them, he sees that they abuse an “Arab dog,” and so he chases them away.<sup>78</sup> Unlike English, Hebrew does not have special pronouns which distinguish between human and animals, and, therefore, one cannot tell if the “Arab dog” is a human (he) or canine (it). The novel complicates this confusion further since Khoury can speak but has a fur, barks but wears a coat, and so forth. Later in the novel, close to his death, it will be clearer that Khoury is human; however, even then, his dehumanization does not stop. Until then, the protagonist and Hugh take care of Khoury, feed him, clean him, and try to “domesticate” him. Anticipating the Jewish neighbors’ reaction to Khoury, Hugh says to the protagonist: “I am starting to feel like those who hid Jews in the Shoah”.<sup>79</sup> Their neighbors, who are against keeping “pets,” eventually drive the gay couple out, and the protagonist suggests relocating to Berlin; for him, it is a tolerant city and the place which his grandfather once considered a home. In “the city of one thousand darkrooms,” as Hugh dubs it, this alternative family is thriving.<sup>80</sup> Khoury, for example, does not stop wagging his (metaphoric) tail, and continuously disappears to shop in Berlin’s department stores. When the protagonist and Hugh see one day blood in

Khoury's urine, they start to realize that he got sick in Berlin—"we did not say out loud the explicit name of the disease"—and that maybe leaving Israel was not a good idea.<sup>81</sup>

Shortly after Khoury loses weight, they nickname him *Muselmann*, which was a derogatory term used among concentration camps' inmates to refer to those suffering from a combination of starvation and exhaustion, and who did not maintain basic standards of physical hygiene.<sup>82</sup> During selections, the *Muselmanner* were the first to be sentenced to death by the Nazis. An associative connection is made here between AIDS and the Holocaust; this association will be further developed in the text: I suggest that the protagonist understands his life and makes sense of events only through the prism of the Holocaust. As in the case of race, this text demonstrates the centrality of the Shoah in the Israeli discourse, and how it is utilized in the service of different agendas. I shall return to this later. Meanwhile in Berlin, the dehumanized "Arab dog" becomes human thanks to AIDS which evokes the Holocaust; Khoury is now recognized as Muslim-man, that is, as a human being with specific characteristics, because he looks like a camp's inmate. The protagonist and Hugh, who take part in Khoury's dehumanization since they too see him as an "Arab dog," accept him now as human only because he is dying. The text criticizes, then, the Israeli mentality that allows and permits identifying with Palestinians only when they are weak, passive, and non-threatening: as in Hirschfeld's orientalist journal, the protagonist is fascinated with the Arabs as noble savages, but when they become more like the diasporic Jews—weak, passive, ill, or, in short, *Muselmann*-like—he loses interest. The novel, therefore, does more than pointing out the dehumanization of Arabs in Israeli society; it also, I suggest, offers Israelis a problematic way to identify with Palestinians, and that is to see them as victims. This scene, however, also criticizes gay culture which worship health and beauty: because Khoury becomes human by turning into a *Muselmann*, he, as other *Muselmanner*, can be disposed of, and, indeed, the protagonist and Hugh throw him into a dumpster. The text mocks here a culture that prefers to turn a blind eye to social problems; in this scene, the couple demonstrates not only the shallowness of gay culture, as the text perceives it, but also its deep and paralyzing fears from AIDS.

On the face of it, for the protagonist and Hugh, Khoury is an erotic commodity that is replaceable: because Khoury is a hustler, he could be bought, used, and also

thrown away. It also seems that the protagonist continues to exploit Khoury even after his death, since he turns his dead lover into a symbol in an essay that he submits to a literary periodical, "The Dog as a Homosexual." Since the protagonist is a repressed and restrained man, who cannot show affection and mourn publicly the death of his young Arab lover/boy, he, I suggest, actually finds other ways to work through his melancholic pain. His failure, however, to make peace with Khoury's death, I propose, could also explain the protagonist's puzzling suicide at the end of the novel. Although it does not seem immediately to be an elegiac text, it is, as in the case of Reuveny's text, a novel that is preoccupied with AIDS and its "victims." In the article, which is quoted entirely in *Ziffer and His Kind*, the protagonist describes how he and Hugh housebroke their "dog"; he brings up this personal anecdote about his "dog" to start a discussion about the resemblance of dogs to homosexuals. In the Bible, the protagonist argues, dog, or *Kelev* in Hebrew, is a code for a male prostitute, a hustler. Indeed, Deuteronomy 23:18-20 reads: "no Israelite woman shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall an Israelite man be a cult prostitute. You shall not bring the fee of a whore or the pay of a dog into the house of the LORD your God in fulfillment of any vow, for both are abhorrent to the LORD your God".<sup>83</sup> From early times, the protagonist claims, dogs became a symbol of homosexuality; this is also true to modern times: in Nazi Germany dogs were associated with Jews—as in the signs that read "No Jews or Dogs Allowed"—and Jews were associated with homosexuals, and, ergo, dogs are also associated with homosexuals.<sup>84</sup> In this equation, Khoury, as a homosexual dog who is not allowed to enter an Israeli supermarket, is also associated with Jews. It seems that the protagonist can only lament Khoury's death if he sees him as a Jew and as a victim of the AIDS Holocaust. Jews who died during the Holocaust are considered to be *Kedoshim*, which means in Hebrew, among others possibilities, martyrs. In its original meaning, the Greek word martyr means witness. Khoury's *Muselmann* body is indeed a testimony to AIDS as well as to the Holocaust: he bears witness to both catastrophes. Furthermore, when Khoury dies as a Moslem-man, he could be considered a *Shahid*, which literally means in Arabic both "witness" and "martyr," the one who testifies for God's greatness.

In his 2006 article "A Story of a *Shahid* Dog," Alon Hilu does not read *Ziffer and His Kind*, but Shmuel Yosef Agnon's 1945 novel *Only Yesterday* (תמול שלשום).<sup>85</sup> In this

novel, Agnon introduces a personified dog, Balak, and tells the story of Yitzhak Kumer, a Zionist dreamer, who immigrates during the Second Aliyah to Palestine. Contrary to his ideals of becoming a New Hebrew Man, Yitzhak finds himself in Jerusalem living on donations; before his relocation to an ultra-orthodox Jewish neighborhood, he playfully writes with a paintbrush on a stray-dog's back the word "mad-dog." Balak, who is being abused by passersby who believe that he has rabies, bites Yitzhak after he understands that he is the one to blame for its maltreatment. Yitzhak eventually dies from this bite. This *Shahid* dog, I suggest, is one of the intertexts to *Ziffer and His Kind*: the text utilizes this famous lovable fictional dog to humanize the "Arab *Kelev*"; it gives Khoury a history, relates him to other oppressed people, and empowers him.<sup>86</sup>

*Only Yesterday* alternately gives the viewpoints of both of its protagonists: the Zionist immigrant and the indigenous dog. In his postcolonial reading, Hilu suggests that in a novel that ignores Palestinians completely, the dog could be symbolically read as the voice of the silenced Other. Balak's bite, then, is the violent return of the repressed, which disrupts and ruptures the national master narrative. In this case, Balak is an "Arab dog" that dies as a *Shahid* in war against injustice. Although Balak does not have rabies, Yitzhak starts to have symptoms as if he was bitten by a "mad-dog": he crawls, barks, and bites, and, therefore, is chained to the bed. As the novel progresses and the dog's inner-thoughts are developed, Balak appears to be more and more human, and, on the contrary, Yitzhak appears to be more and more canine; the identification of the readers shifts slowly from Yitzhak to Balak. Khoury, in this case, becomes more and more human as well; he is not only acknowledged as a Muslim-man, but as a silenced subject that cannot be "thrown away" and ignored,

Another famous Human-like dog in Hebrew literature is Adam Stein, the protagonist of Yoram Kaniuk's 1969 novel *Adam Resurrected* (אדם בן כלב).<sup>87</sup> This intertext also humanizes and empowers a silenced "dog," a Holocaust survivor in this case. As in the Hebrew title, which literally means "man son of a dog," a Holocaust survivor, a mentally ill man, tries to become human again after he was dehumanized in a death camp: Adam, a clown in his profession, is granted life by Klein, the camp's commander, for entertaining the Jews in their last way to the gas chambers. When he is not on the selection ramp, Adam, "Klein's dog," is chained to a doghouse and shares his

food with Rex, the commander's German shepherd dog, which is known in Hebrew as a "wolf-dog." In the camp, Adam understands that "man is man's wolf" (*Homo homini lupus*), and internalizes his dehumanization. After liberation, Adam is hospitalized in an insane asylum, which is "a mirror image of Israel where Holocaust survivors are the other side of the country's history, usually disparaged or silenced".<sup>88</sup> There, Adam comes to terms with the past through fathering an abused boy who is also treated as if he is a dog, and like Adam, internalized this dehumanization. The two "dogs" cure each other by proving to themselves that "man is *not* man's wolf": they resurrect each other human—Adam in Hebrew—when they refuse to believe in the ideology of "dog-eat-dogism, man-be-wolfism".<sup>89</sup> Khoury, like Adam and his "adopted son," is dehumanized as a "dog," but, unlike them, he dies without the catharsis of realizing that he is human after all; he, the victim of the AIDS Holocaust and a Muslim-man, is thrown away to a dumpster. When comparing the two texts, *Ziffer and his Kind* refuses to comfort the readers; it criticizes the Israelis and gay Israelis for not learning a lesson of the Shoah, that is, for being nationalistic and intolerant of minorities. In what follows, I shall elaborate more about the association of the Holocaust with AIDS; the morals of the Shoah, as the text perceives it, will also be discussed.

### **Independence Park Ghetto Uprising: The Search for a New Exilic Homeland**

As a child of a Holocaust survivor, Ziffer's protagonist gives meaning to the world through constant comparison to the Shoah; everything that he experiences is filtered through this post-traumatic event. For example, when he is invited to Germany to talk about homosexuality in Israel, he compares it, and the ways he is treated in Israel, with the Holocaust. In the talk, which appears word for word in the text, he tells the German audience how the police, as it did often in the 1980s, raided Independence Park. In one incident, for the first time, the cruisers decided to react to the police brutality. Yossi, the leader of the protesters, punched a policeman, and a few "queens" surrounded the patrol cars while repetitively shouting "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising"; the police pulled back, and the park was "liberated" by the gay resistance.<sup>90</sup> The text does not use the more available example of the 1969 Stonewall riots, but goes further back in history to the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: in his account, the protagonist perceives Independence Park as the

Jewish ghetto, which, on the one hand, is a place of oppression, but, on the other hand, is also a place that symbolizes resistance.<sup>91</sup> The protagonist sees the cruisers not as outlaws, who transgress the Israeli sodomy law, but as freedom fighters who revolt against unjust misuse of power and authority. As the Jewish ghetto, Independence Park is not only an enclosed space where oppressed people are dehumanized, but also an empowering site that represents their heroism, their resistance to their dehumanization, and their will to fight back. As the protagonist prefers to remember the event, the cruisers see themselves as the heroic Jews who fought back: to Yossi he calls the “heroic liberator” and, hence, is compared to Mordecai Anielewicz, who was the leader of the Combat Organization, the main Jewish-Polish group that fought the Nazis in the uprising. Yossi died later from AIDS related disease, which, once again, associates the Holocaust with AIDS. In a similar way to Reuveny’s text, *Ziffer and His Kind* utilizes the narratives that are in the center of the Jewish-Israeli collective memory to make his audience sympathize with his agendas. By comparing Jews and homosexuals, the protagonist wants his gay audience to think of themselves as a unique group, similar to the way his “grandfather” saw them, “a third sex.” As Jews in the Holocaust, homosexuals too can resist their oppressors, even if only in a symbolic manner; both are minority groups that share similar histories in which they were oppressed by hegemonic groups. This provocative analogy, I argue, not only parallels Independence Park to the ghetto, but also the Israeli policemen to Nazis. By doing so, the protagonist stretches again the resemblance between himself and his grandfather: both persecuted by the Nazis. This serves more than a political agenda that criticizes intolerance, I suggest, it also demonstrates how an Israeli capitalizes on the memory of the Holocaust: a member of the Reichstag who was in the audience offers the protagonist political asylum. The protagonist, therefore, benefits from painting Israel in dark colors and describing it as a Nazi-like state: he is able to immigrate to Germany and, as a refugee, to get financial support from the government.

When the protagonist’s father joins his son in Germany, he, in a sense, returns home, returns to his birthplace. The protagonist, however, who was born in Israel, perceives his relocation to Germany as a homecoming. He stops considering Israel his homeland, so it seems from a letter he sends to the Israeli president. Before the protagonist immigrates to Germany, the president asks him to write a survey about

homosexuality in Israel, which he declines. In an open letter to the president, the protagonist argues that he cannot write such a thing since homosexuality and Zionism do not go hand in hand. “Homosexuals’ loyalty to a certain society or to a certain place is not self evident,” the protagonist argues, “their homeland is where they feel at home”.<sup>92</sup> When Hirschfeld is asked by Arlosoroff to write such a survey, he agrees, and then suffers from the consequences; the protagonist, who “learns” from his grandfather’s mistakes, refuses. Like his grandfather, the protagonist is not willing to write a positive review which is what he thinks that the president wants, and, by so doing, as he claims, to “whitewash” Jewish and Zionist oppression of homosexuals.<sup>93</sup> The protagonist, I argue, chooses to make his home outside of Israel; this brings him close to Proust, who claims that Homosexuals as well as Jews are not loyal to the state. While Reuveny opposes and rejects this claim, the protagonist of Ziffer; novel accepts and celebrates it: for him, homosexuals are not confined to the concept of nation-state, and offer a pro-diasporic alternative to this idea. Despite their differences, I claim, Reuveny’s protagonist and Ziffer’s protagonist share a belief about homosexuality as a race; both promote essentialism and queer separatism from opposing directions: nationalism versus Diasporism.

Hirschfeld could not return to Germany because of the Nazis, but now that they are gone, his “grandson” feels there at home. In Berlin, which is a tolerant city that has a large population of gays and that accepts him with open arms, he finds peace and a sense of belonging among “his kind.” In Hebrew, the title of the novel *Ziffer Ubnei Mino* is more evocative than the English translation, since, besides “kind,” *min* also means “sex.” In this case, sex is central in a novel that deals with men who define their identity as men who have sex with men. The importance of *min* is especially eminent when considering the Talmudic denigratory meaning of the word: gnostic, heresy, schism, outsiders, and opponents. The protagonist, in this sense, is an “outsider” who “denies” and “goes against” the Jewish and Zionist hegemonies: he criticizes them from a position of an incredulous heresy who questions the master narrative and its “truths.”

The title of the novel—*Ziffer and His Kind*—is relevant here also not only because the reference to Hirschfeld’s concept of the “Third Sex,” his desire to define homosexuals as a unique kind, different sex, but also to Christopher Isherwood’s 1976

autobiographical novel *Christopher and His Kind*.<sup>94</sup> In his novel, and like Ziffer's protagonist, Isherwood shares the same name as his protagonist; he also leaves his conservative and repressive homeland for progressive (Weimar) Germany. There, he reunites with his friend and former schoolmate Wystan Hugh Auden, who introduces him, the inexperienced young man, to his homosexual friends and the vibrant queer scene of Berlin. Christopher, who wishes to stay in Berlin with or without "Hugh," says to an immigration official: "I'm looking for my homeland and I've come to find out if this is it".<sup>95</sup> Like Ziffer's protagonist, who claims that "homosexuals' homeland is where they feel at home," Christopher has no sentiments for his birthplace. The question of queer homeland in *Christopher and His Kind*, as it is in *Ziffer and His Kind*, is central; both narratives offers alternative approach to nationalism by replacing one's alliance with the state with one's alliance with others who have the same sexual desires. This queer "imagined community," which competes with traditional nationalism, is a subversive idea from the state's point of view which prefers to promote patriotism above other kinds of alliances.<sup>96</sup> I suggest that unlike Reuveny, who adopts the concept of nationalism and then adjusts and modifies it to homosexuality, Ziffer's protagonist, following Isherwood, resists and subverts it; he undermines nationalism when he deconstructs the concepts of "homeland" and "birthplace" which is the foundation stone of nation-building.

Isherwood's novel bears witness to the rise of National-Socialism, and, thus, he describes with a warning, how German nationalism quickly turns into chauvinism. This nationalistic turn, against his understanding of queer uprootedness, is in the center of the novel since Christopher searches for ways to prevent his lover, Heinz, from conscripting to the *Wehrmacht*. The couple travel through Europe looking for asylum, but denied every time; as homosexuals they are not welcome anywhere. In the end, after they failed finding a rescue, Heinz returns to Germany and faces imprisonment. Luckily, he is not sentenced to a concentration camp because the judge believes his renunciation of homosexuality, "he did it only for money".<sup>97</sup> While Christopher and Heinz fail to find a new homeland, Ziffer's protagonist and Hugh succeed, but only for a short time: Khoury dies, Hugh returns to Israel, and the protagonist takes in own life.<sup>98</sup> This questions the alternative that Ziffer's protagonist offers, I argue. It seems that both Christopher and Ziffer's protagonist fail in the long run to materialized their utopian diasporic



nationalism. Jose Esteban Munoz argues in his 2009 *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* that queerness is an utopian concept which cannot be fully materialize; it is a momentary “thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing”.<sup>99</sup> Following Douglas Crimp, Munoz suggests thinking about queerness as a possibility rather than something tangible.<sup>100</sup> In this spirit, both Reuveny’s protagonist and Ziffer’s protagonist offer a possibility of an alternative queer existence; Ziffer promotes it even if it is only momentary.<sup>101</sup>

Christopher meets in Germany many homosexuals who will later die in concentration camps; he meets them in bars, clubs, and in the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*. When Christopher looks for an apartment in Berlin, he ends up renting a room in Hirschfeld’s institute that, besides study-rooms and a small museum, also offers monthly lodging. There, when he becomes more familiar with homosexuals outside of the club scene, he learns more about “his kind,” and becomes an admirer of Hirschfeld and his concept of “The Third Sex.” Like Ziffer’s protagonist, Christopher sees the professor as a father-figure of an alternative family or a leader of a tribe; he indeed perceives homosexuals as a tribe:

Christopher was embarrassed because, at last, he was being brought face to face with his tribe. Up to now, he had behaved as though the tribe didn’t exist and homosexuality was a private way of life discovered by himself and a few friends. He had always known, of course, that this wasn’t true. But now he was forced to admit kinship with these freakish fellow tribesmen.<sup>102</sup>

As in Reuveny’s novel, homosexuals are tribesmen who belong to a different “race” than heterosexuals. Both Christopher and Ziffer’s protagonist, who adopts the idea of homosexual race, find their “kind” in Berlin thanks to Hirschfeld; by fraternization with others like themselves, he offers them a safe home and a refuge from an oppressing society. In short, Hirschfeld offers them queer kinship.<sup>103</sup> No wonder, then, that in Berlin, Christopher is beginning to “realize how completely at home one can be as a foreigner”.<sup>104</sup> In a similar way, Ziffer’s protagonist chooses to leave Israel and become a foreigner in Germany because he too feels at home there. Unlike Reuveny’s protagonist, who promotes queer settlements and homecoming, Ziffer’s protagonist, following Isherwood’s cosmopolitanism, advertises Diasporism as a counter-ideology to

nationalism.<sup>105</sup> Ziffer's protagonist becomes what Meg Wesling calls "sexile," a queer figure that emerges from the debris of nationalism, "a gay cosmopolitan subject who, once exiled from national space, is therefore outside of the duties, identifications, and demands of nationalism, and is paradoxically liberated into free transnational mobility".<sup>106</sup>

Ziffer's protagonist and Isherwood's self-imposed exile, I suggest, is part of their practice of resisting the production of heterosexuality through nationalism; for them, queers should not be part of the nation-building mechanism that promotes heteronormative identities. Christopher, like Ziffer's protagonist, moves to Berlin because "his life in England was basically untruthful, since it conformed outwardly to standards of respectability which he inwardly rejected and despised".<sup>107</sup> Along these lines, Ziffer's protagonist argues in the talk he gives in Berlin that "the Israeli society was and still is a society of men-worriers"; by relocating to Berlin, Ziffer's protagonist subverts the Israeli social decorum of militarism: he becomes an effeminate, passive, diasporic subject.<sup>108</sup> By doing so, however, Ziffer's protagonist also reaffirms the essentialist concept of genders in Zionism, as if women inherently are submissive and men are not; he does not wish to deconstruct the binary system, but to work within it, despite its obvious flaws.

In the Zionist master narrative, as seen in Nordau's concept of *Muskeljuden*, the New Hebrew Man is a "real man," muscular, virile, and active, who wants to root himself back in the Fatherland and protect it, unlike the degenerated, weak, frail "Wandering Jew".<sup>109</sup> When Ziffer's protagonist chooses to return to the diaspora, he, in this sense, offers Israelis a new-old model of Jewish queerness. In *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, Gayatri Gopinath argues that "queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation".<sup>110</sup> Ziffer's protagonist queers the nation by returning to the diaspora. I argue here that while Reuveny adopts a Zionist-like approach, in which he wishes to "normalize" homosexuals through statehood and nationalism, Ziffer's protagonist, although he too perceives homosexuality as a race, celebrates weakness and effemination through Diasporism.<sup>111</sup> A similar idea about Jews and the Diaspora appears in Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's 1993 article "Diasporism within Sovereignty".<sup>112</sup> Raz-Krakotzkin resists the Zionist concept of "Negation of the

Diaspora” and demands that Israel should embrace Diasporism as an “ethical-cultural position” that acknowledges the repressed elements in the national narrative: the Palestinians, the Mizrahim, the ghetto Jews, and Holocaust survivors. Raz-Krakotzkin does not suggest that Israelis should return to the Diaspora, but understands it as a pluralistic alternative to Israel’s “melting pot” agenda. Existence in the Diaspora enabled a hyphenated identity, which does not agree with the Zionist ideology of “Ingathering of the Exiles.” Raz-Krakotzkin delivers this message by exploring the different possibilities of the Holocaust’s moral lesson discourse: while for Zionists, the Shoah justifies territorialism and militarism, for him, it demonstrates the need to fight xenophobia as well as to promote pragmatism and multiculturalism.

If Reuveny’s protagonist is a queer Herzl, Ziffer’s protagonist is a queer Simon Dubnow, one of the ideologists of Jewish Diasporism. In the early twentieth century, Dubnow argues that because Jews have been living in the Diaspora for two millennia, they had evolved beyond territorialism. To survive as a race without a land, he claims, Jews had struggled to have cultural autonomy and this has strengthened their identity as a spiritual nation.<sup>113</sup> In this spirit, Ziffer’s protagonist also opposes territorialism and promotes queer culture autonomy; for him, however, queer does not mean only sex between men, but also anti-nationalism. As columnist in *Ha’aretz*, Ziffer promotes the idea of Dubnow-like Diasporism and queer effemination. In 2008 *Yom Ha-Zikaron*, the Israeli Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism Remembrance Day, he begs the IDF soldiers to be weak as “feygelech,” which literally means in Yiddish “birds” and figuratively “homosexuals”: “be all you want but not the heroes Israel wants you to be”.<sup>114</sup> Ziffer argues, then, that the concept of *Muskeljuden* only brings more violence to the region, and it may serve Israel better to be weaker. Two years later, in another column, Ziffer asks the Germans “to stop supporting the Zionist project, and save Israel from itself”.<sup>115</sup> Germany, he claims, should welcome Israelis who want to immigrate, since “more and more Israelis that I meet, who are young, curious, and talented, feel suffocated in Israel, and need Berlin’s air to breathe freely.” Ziffer the writer, as Ziffer the protagonist, promotes Diasporism which enables the lost—but, as he perceives it, much needed—queer weakness. In another column, which he publishes in 2009 when the translation of *Ziffer and His Kind* to German came out, Ziffer writes that he feels better

holding the German copy of his book than the original Hebrew.<sup>116</sup> When he held the German copy for the first time, he writes, “all of a sudden I felt like I was a citizen of the world, like I’m a free bird, and that I was able to break free.” In a sense, with the translation of his novel into German, Ziffer, whose name sounds in Hebrew like “bird” and who writes about “feygelech,” is able to relocate mentally to Berlin and reunite there with “his kind,” with feygelech, as he defines them in this column: progressive and secular Jews who offer an alternative to the militaristic Jewish State. Ziffer, nevertheless, stays in Israel although he enjoys thinking about relocation to Berlin. Ziffer’s “diasporic homosexuality” allows him to practice new forms of identification by which he could subvert the national construction of sexuality and masculinity. It is important to note here, however, that Ziffer, as the protagonist of the novel, eventually fails to acculturate into German culture, and commits suicide. This, of course, complicates Ziffer’s promotion of Diasporism, since its results can be detractive. Ziffer’s protagonist, who dies in Germany, may return symbolically to Independence Park if the city would agree to change the park’s name to honor his “grandfather”; then, he would be again part of the land.

To conclude, as in Reuveny’s novel, Ziffer’s protagonist perceives Independence Park as a model for queer space; Reuveny’s protagonist wishes to have such park in Sodom in order to honor the sovereignty and independence of the homosexual nation-state. Ziffer’s protagonist, on the other hand, sees Independence Park as a diasporic site of resistance that preserves the queer qualities that the Zionist *Muskeljuden* ideology tries to erase. Both texts process the trauma of losing a lover to AIDS through the memory of Shoah: for Reuveny, the moral of the Holocaust is “queer territorialism,” a gay nation with a strong army, and for Ziffer, on the contrary, the moral of the Shoah is anti-nationalism. Both are essentialists who promote the idea of “The Third Sex,” and both want to divorce their Israeli identity.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 87-89.
- <sup>2</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, tr. Francis Ditter and Vida Yazdi-Ditter (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).
- <sup>3</sup> On safe space see: Jackie Alexander, "Separatism, Feminism, and the Betrayal of Reform." *Signs* 19 (1994): 437-447.
- <sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).
- <sup>5</sup> Reuveny is a Journalist, translator, and one of the first gay men to come out of the closet in Israel. For more details, see the first chapter of this dissertation.
- <sup>6</sup> Reuveny imagines Sodom as a community of me. He suggests that women should establish their own communities. On Lesbian separatism, see: Joyce Cheney, *Lesbian Land*, Minneapolis: Word Weavers, 1995).
- <sup>7</sup> 12. All the translations from Hebrew in this chapter are mine.
- <sup>8</sup> The term "the heterosexual inquisition" appears for in the novel in the sentence that opens the novel *A World History of Men's Love*, in which Reuveny says that the establishment of Sodom is a proof that love can overcome the regime of the "heterosexual inquisition". Only later, with his discussion on the Holocaust, he will continue to develop this image.
- <sup>9</sup> 26-28. Reuveny mentions his ex-lover again in page 40. The scene with the monk seems to me as if it was a cursing moment.
- <sup>10</sup> 29-30.
- <sup>11</sup> 188.
- <sup>12</sup> 36.
- <sup>13</sup> See: Rictor Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (London and Washington: Casseli, 1997). Norton, as he self-proclaims, is an essentialist, whose book goes against social constructionism. He writes: "my aim in the present book will be to examine the nature of queer history, with a focus upon historiographical issues that have not been adequately addressed by historians in the 1980s and 1990s, who have largely failed to recognize the difference between attitudes towards homosexuals and the experiences of queers, and who built up theories that have no empirical foundations in history" (11). In this sense, Reuveny's project has a similar aim.
- <sup>14</sup> 226. See also: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York and London: Verso, 2006).
- <sup>15</sup> Yael Zerubavel. *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995).
- <sup>16</sup> See: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Reuveny's actions are an example for how "traditions, which appear or claims to be are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" (1). Collective memory has a major role here: "Invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and

- norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (ibid).
- <sup>17</sup> 267 and 296. On archeology and Zionism, see Silberman and Small’s collection, especially its first part: Neil Asher Silberman and David Small, *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).
- <sup>18</sup> 28. See also: Francis Herbert Bradley, *Ethical Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959).
- <sup>19</sup> 38.
- <sup>20</sup> 39. My parentheses.
- <sup>21</sup> Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Sodom and Gomorrah*, tr. C.K. Scott Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin, and D.J. Enright (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), 43-44.
- <sup>22</sup> Jonathan Freedman, “Coming out of the Jewish Closet with Marcel Prost.” *GLQ*, 7.4 (2001): 521-551. See also 523.
- <sup>23</sup> On strategic essentialism, see: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Spivak Reader*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York and London: Routledge, 1996). Unlike Spivak, who utilizes essentialist definitions of the subaltern while also continually critiquing the concept itself, Reuveny, so it seems, is satisfied with his simplified version and does not wish to deconstruct it. See also: Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989).
- <sup>24</sup> 110. Reuveny’s title may refer to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* and his argument about assimilation and mimicry to Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. Both try to define a particular identity of a minority group vis-à-vis a hegemonic majority. The discourse is libratory: Both speak of the divided self-perception of people who have lost their “native” cultural originality and embraced the culture of the hegemonic majority. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, tr. Charles Lam Markmann (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968). Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, tr. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968).
- <sup>25</sup> 129.
- <sup>26</sup> The articles were republished together with letters that were sent to the newspaper and the author in: Yotam Reuveny, *Hageza Hamekolal (The Wretched Race)* (Tel-Aviv: Nimrod, 2003).
- <sup>27</sup> 26. This assimilative approach of “what homosexuals do in the privacy of their home is nobody’s business” echoes what Judah Leib Gordon, one of the leading figures of the Jewish enlightenment movement and a supporter of acculturation, once wrote in his 1863 poem “Awake, My People”: “be a Jew in your home and a man outside it”. In this poem, Michael Stanislawski argues, Gordon calls “the Jews to limit their Jewishness to the home or synagogue and to suppress it in public, in other words, to deny their nationality, become part of society around them, and relegate Judaism to the private sphere of life.” Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 51.
- <sup>28</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, tr. George .J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1948). See also: Steven Schwarzschild, “Sartre as Jew,” *Modern Judaism*, 3.1 (1983): 39-73.
- <sup>29</sup> 24-26, and conclusions in 27-28.

- <sup>30</sup> 37.
- <sup>31</sup> 33 and 36.
- <sup>32</sup> 351.
- <sup>33</sup> Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 81.
- <sup>34</sup> In chapter 8 of his book, Kornberg argues that the full effect of the Dreyfus trial on Herzl was not during the trial itself, as Herzl argues retroactively in his diary, but much later. Nevertheless, since myths have life of their own that not always corresponds with history, it is still common to accept Herzl's affirmation: "What made me Zionist was the Dreyfus trial" (190).
- <sup>35</sup> 218.
- <sup>36</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1997). 271-312.
- <sup>37</sup> 222.
- <sup>38</sup> Others also dealt with this issue of Jewish effemination in the turn of the century. See: Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of New Jew* (Berkeley: University of California, 2000); Aviv Caryn and David Shneer, *New Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry before the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); David Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Sander Gilman, "The Image of Hysteric," *Hysteria Beyond Freud* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1993); Sander Gilman, "The Jewish Body: A Foot-note," *People of the Body*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany: New York University Press, 1992); Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991); Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Michael Gluzman, "Longing for Heterosexuality: Zionism and Sexuality in Herzl's Altneuland," *Theory and Criticism*, 11 (1997): 145- 63 [in Hebrew].
- <sup>39</sup> Barbara Mann, *A Place in History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).
- <sup>40</sup> John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siecle Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 176.
- <sup>41</sup> 222.
- <sup>42</sup> 114.
- <sup>43</sup> Sedgwick talks about "gay Zionism" in Proust's. See: *Epistemology of the Closet*, 177. For more information on Nordau Street, see: Ram Gophna, *Mikerm Matari Leben Yehuda Strasse* (From Kerem Matari to Ben Yehuda-strasse: The Story of the Tel-Aviv Suburb of Tel Nordau 1922-1932) (Tel-Aviv: Ram Gophna, 2008).
- <sup>44</sup> Rocky O'Donovan, "Reclaiming Sodom," *Reclaiming Sodom*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg, (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 247-248.
- <sup>45</sup> Alabama Birdstone, *Queer Free* (New York: Calamus Books, 1981), 74, 88, and 192.
- <sup>46</sup> Jed Bryan, *A Cry in the Desert* (Austin: Banned Books, 1987); Tracy Hickman, *The Immortals*, New York: Roc, 1996); Marty Rubin, *The Boiled Frog Syndrome* (Boston: Alyson, 1987).
- <sup>47</sup> Sami Flato-Sharon, *Sex Goralì* (Fatal Sex) (Tel-Aviv: Yaron Golan, 1994), 156, 189-191. In an open letter which was send in the same year to all members of the

- parliament, as is says on book's jacket, Flato-Sharon demands that not only to actually build Sodom, but also, among other things, to fight "homosexual prostitution" and to closely watch public restrooms and parks. See: Ari Folman, "Na'ash Laem Geto Delikates" (We will make them a Nice Ghetto), *Ha'ir*, 5.21 (1993): 69-70.
- <sup>48</sup> 319.
- <sup>49</sup> 88.
- <sup>50</sup> It is possible that this is a parody on Zionism; Reuveny criticize this tactic by mirroring it.
- <sup>51</sup> Gutwein, Daniel, 2009. "The Privatization of the Holocaust: Memory, Historiography, and Politics," *Israel Studies*, 14.1: 36-64; p. 37. See also: Dalia Ofer, "The Pat That Does Not Pass: Israelis and Holocaust Memory," *Israel Studies*, 14.1 (2009): 1-35.
- <sup>52</sup> 12.
- <sup>53</sup> 26.
- <sup>54</sup> Simon Watney similarly claims about AIDS in the gay community that the "media cares as much about our health as *der strum* cared about that of the Jews in the 1930s". Quoted in: Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 209.
- <sup>55</sup> 43. On Queer Nation, See: Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality." *Boundary 2*, 19.1 (1992): 149-180.
- <sup>56</sup> "Is AIDS a Holocaust"? David Caron asks and points out that this "threatening" metaphor in France, as well as elsewhere, became a common trope. His main question, though, is if and how exactly the gay community can "go beyond the straight public's sympathy in times of hardship, and try to assert its specificity through the political recognition of a founding disaster?" Caron show how the French gay community uses the Jewish memory of the Holocaust in its activism. David Caron, "AIDS/Holocaust: Metaphor and the French Universalism." *L'Esprit Créateur*, XLV.3 (2005): 63-73. For more AIDS comparison to Holocaust, see Deborah Landau, "How to Live. What to Do. The Poetics and Politics of AIDS." *American Literature* 68.1 (1996): 193-225, especially 201-202; Sander Gilman, "Plague in Germany, 1939/1989: Cultural Images of Race, Space, and Disease." *Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis*, eds. Timothy Murphy and Suzanne Poirier (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 54-82.
- <sup>57</sup> 31.
- <sup>58</sup> 179.
- <sup>59</sup> This happen, in fact, every year. See, for example, Ilia Malnikov, "Al Hasafsal Leyad Hayam (On a bench Near the Sea), *Time Out*, 9.23.04: 98.
- <sup>60</sup> 370.
- <sup>61</sup> 135.
- <sup>62</sup> Benny Ziffer, *Ziffer Ubnei Mino* (Ziffer and His Kind) (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1999).
- <sup>63</sup> Unless otherwise stated, Ziffer always refers here to the protagonist. Reuveny also shares the same name with his protagonist. I suggest further investigation, but because of limited space here, I postpone this issue of autofiction to future article.
- <sup>64</sup> It is interesting to note here that in 2.6.2005 Tel-Aviv City Council considered naming one on the city's street after Hirschfeld. See: <http://www.gogay.co.il/content/article.asp?id=5670>.



- <sup>65</sup> See: Magnus Hirschfeld, *Man and Women: The World Journey of a Sexologist*, Tr. O. P. Green (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), 278.
- <sup>66</sup> See: Ziffer, 158.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid, 14.
- <sup>69</sup> It is interesting to note here that *Gods and Heroes* is also the title of Gustav Schwab's 1840 book, which was widely used at German schools and became very influential for the reception of classical antiquity in German classrooms. Ziffer's father, although he is Israeli, is also deeply invested in the German culture. Gustav Schwab, *Gods and Heroes of Ancient Greece*, Tr. Werner Jaeger (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001).
- <sup>70</sup> His motivation is similar to the prophet's motivation in Reuveny's novel, who also searches and finds a lost queer dynasty of gods and heroes, which enables him to convince homosexuals to restore the "old glory" of the New-Old-Land, Sodom.
- <sup>71</sup> Hirschfeld came to Palestine as an orientalist who wanted to educate the locals about the science of sexuality. It is interesting to note here that three decades before his visit, Hirschfeld's research was in fact known: In the periodical *Hashkafa*, Abraham Elmalich writes in November 9<sup>th</sup> 1906 about "androgynous people" and mentions Hirschfeld's work. Abraham Elmalich, "Androgynous," *Hashkafa* (1906): 4.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid, 284. Hirschfeld quotes a letter that Meir Dizengoff, Tel-Aviv's mayor, wrote him: "It gave me a great pleasure to receive Dr. Hirschfeld in the city hall of Tel-Aviv. This visit shows us that the famous scientist is interested in our creative work of reconstruction and in our national rebirth, of which Tel-Aviv has become the symbol. May Dr. Hirschfeld, who has dedicated his life to the benefit of the human race, help us in regeneration of our nation and may he gaze upon the restoration of Israel and his country with his own eyes" (281).
- <sup>73</sup> Haim Arlosoroff, *Yoman Yerushalaim* (Tel-Aviv: Mapai Publication, 1953), 224.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid, 65. See his report in pages 47-52, 61-69, and 77-83.
- <sup>75</sup> The murder of Hirschfeld is not accidental: Ziffer utilizes Arlosoroff's murder in June 1933 to further criticize Zionism. Arlosoroff was murdered in the entrance to the Muslim cemetery, which is now part of Independence Park, by right-wing Zionists (There is a small monument that honors him in the south entrance to the park). The British police claimed that the murder was done by *Berit ha-Biryanim*, the Bruisers Alliance, a radical revisionist group, since their newspaper, *Hazit Ha-Am*, The People Front, continuously attacked Arlosoroff's willingness to bribe Nazis in hope that they would allow Jews' immigration to Palestine. These slandering articles, which accused "the socialist Arlosoroff" of collaboration, compare him to a dog—"the Red Diplomat crawls on all four in front of Hitler"—an image that will grow bigger and bigger as the novel unfolds. The article was reprinted in: Shabtai Teveth, *Retzah Arlosoroff* (Arlosoroff's Assassination) (Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 1982).
- <sup>76</sup> "Every subordinate group," he argues, "creates, out of its ordeal, a hidden transcript that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant". James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii.

- <sup>77</sup> This is not Hirschfeld's idea, but a concept that Ziffer develops in his in-progress-novel. Since the text mixes reality and fiction, it is not clear if Ziffer distinguishes between reality and its own thoughts.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid, 86.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid, 88.
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid, 101. For scholarship on queer migration, see *GLQ* 14.2-3. Especially: Eithne Luibheid, "Queer Migration: An Unruly Body of Scholarship," *GLQ*, 14.2-3 (2008): 169-190.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid, 102.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid, 103. See the Yad Vashem's recourse center's definition of Muselmann: [http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206474.pdf](http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206474.pdf). Agamben offers more details and philosophical discussion: Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1999).
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid, 108. The biblical citation is from the JPS translation.
- <sup>84</sup> Ziffer's puns here are ingenious: Since Khoury is a young *kelev*, he is a puppy, *gur* in biblical and post-biblical Hebrew (גור), which, in different inflection, means "immigrant" (גר) and also "fornication" (לגור). In a similar way to how Hebrew ties together "foreignness" and "vices," Khoury is an embodiment of this cause and effect relationship. Other writers as well use the same pun when they write about male prostitution, dogs, and foreignness. See, for example, Joseph Itiel's short story "The Price of a Dog" in which he describes a Jewish-American hustler who immigrates to Israel and sees himself there as a "dog". Joseph Itiel, *Escort Tales: The Trophy Boy and Other Stories* (New York and London: Harrington Park Press, 2003).
- <sup>85</sup> Alon Hilu, "Siporo shel Kelev Shahid." *Ho!* 4 (2006): 54-66; Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Temol Shelshom* (Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 1947); Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, tr. Barbara Harshav (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- <sup>86</sup> There are other intertexts here, but because of the scope of this paper, I will have to elaborate on them elsewhere. Consider, for example, Octave Mirbeau's 1913 novel *Dingo*, which is told from the viewpoint of a "French" dog. Similarly to his other novels which were written after the Dreyfus Affair, Mirbeau is critical of the French society of the time. Octave Mirbeau, *Dingo* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1913). Another example: Franz Kafka's 1922 short story "Investigations of a Dog," see: Franz Kafka, *The Great Wall of China: Stories and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946). See also Isherwood and Auden play: W.H Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (New York: New York Modern Library, 1937).
- <sup>87</sup> Yoram Kaniuk, *Adam Resurrected*, Tr. Seymour Simckes (New York: Atheneum, 1971); Kaniuk, Yoram, *Adam Ben Kelev* (Tel-Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth Books, 2005).
- <sup>88</sup> Efraim Sicher, *The Holocaust Novel* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 26.
- <sup>89</sup> *Adam Resurrected*, 204
- <sup>90</sup> Ziffer, 26-29. See, for example, police brutality against gays in: Ronen Zartzki and Liora Shuster, "Hayi Hahomosexualim Ba'ir Hapcho Lefeker" (The Homosexuals' Life in the City are Forsaken) *Tel-Aviv*, 6.11.93; Devir Bar, "Ein Hudna" (No Peace), *Zaman Tel-Aviv* 7.11.03; Uri Yegez, "Zhirut: Mishtarha" (Caution: Police), *Hazman Havarod*, Oct 2002; Shmuel Meiri, "Homosexualim Betel-Aviv: Shotrim Shov

Matridim Utanu Gan Haatzmaut” (Homosexuals in Tel-Aviv: Policemen harass us again in Independence Park) *Ha'aretz*, 7.22.97.

<sup>91</sup> Here is an example for using the Stonewall and not Warsaw as a reference point: In May 22, 1998, the police raided a licensed AIDS fundraising event in Independence Park, “The Wigstock”. In reaction, hundreds of the participants blocked one of Tel-Aviv’s main traffic roads, in what was known later as “the Israeli Stonewall”. This, and not the Warsaw Uprising, is much more relevant or convenient reference. See the special edition of the *Hazman Havarod* (June 1998) which was titled “the Israeli Stonewall Issue”.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>93</sup> In chapter 5 I deal extendedly with Israeli “pinkwashing” the Palestinian question.

<sup>94</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>96</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 286. “Heinz,” Christopher is relieved, “might easily have been sentenced to an indefinite term in a concentration camp, as many homosexuals were. In camp, Heinz would have been treated as an outcast of the Reich who differed from a Jew only in having to wear a pink triangle on his clothes instead of a yellow star. Like the Jews, homosexuals were often put onto ‘liquidation’ units, in which they were given less food and more work than other prisoners. Thus, thousands of them died”. Here is another example of comparison between Jews and homosexuals.

<sup>98</sup> For Ziffer and Hugh, then, Berlin is a queer Promise Land and their immigration, *hagirah* in Hebrew, seems ironically like an *Aliyah*, ascending, the traditional way to describe Jews’ return to the Land of Israel, the Fathers’ Land. Along these lines, Ziffer also “ascends” to the Fathers’ Land, Germany of Hirschfeld and his adopted son, Ziffer’s father. This *hagirah*, then, is celebrated in the same way that Jean Genet celebrates his forced exile from France during the 1954-1962 Algerian War, which he refers to as queer *hegira* (Edmund White, *Genet: Biography* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993], 471-473). Like Christopher and Heinz, who flee Germany and its conscription, Genet and Abdullah, his French-Algerian lover, flee France and its conscription; the couple refuses to support their homeland and its war in Algeria, and, like the migration of the prophet Muhammad and his followers to the city of Medina in 622, they escape persecution and find a shelter in other countries. In this sense, Genet and Abdullah are prophets who fight injustice: Their exile is elevated to a higher degree. Ziffer and Hugh, as Christopher and Heinz and Genet and Abdullah, glorify their positions as expatriate who actively resist to heteronormativity and nationalism. This *hegira*, which defines Islam and it is one of its five pillars (حج), turns the bottom dog Khoury, as said earlier, into a Muslim-man: His immigration to Germany, as Muhammad’s exile to Medina before his victorious return to Mecca to overpower the infidels, is an empowering act. In this sense, like the other Muslims who died during the *hegira*, Khoury’s death also marks him as a martyr, a *Shahid*, or, as in Hilu’s reading of Agnon’s *Only Yesterday*, as a *Shahid* dog.

- <sup>99</sup> Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid, 35.
- <sup>101</sup> Ziffer act reminds us of Theodor Adorno's saying "it is immoral to feel at home in one's own home". Theodor Adorno, "On the Question What is German?" *New German Critique* 36 (1985): 121.
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid, 16.
- <sup>103</sup> See Judith Butler's discussion on queer kinship: Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid, 22.
- <sup>105</sup> The Boyarin brothers' have a similar argument. See: Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, "Yin Moledet LeIsrael: Al Ha-Makom Shel Ha-Yudim" (There Is No Homeland to Israel: On Jews' Space), *Teoryah U-Bikoret* 5 (1995): 79-103. In "Diaspora: Generation and the Grounds of Jewish Identity," the Boyarins argue: "Diasporic cultural identity teaches us that cultures are not preserved by being protected from 'mixing' but probably can only continue to exist as a product of sich mixing" (721). Daniel and Jonathan, "Diaspora: Generation and the Grounds of Jewish Identity." *Critical Inquiry* 19.4 (1993): 693-725. See also: Aviv Caryn and David Shneer, "From Diaspora Jews to New Jews," *Postzionism: A Reader*, ed. Laurence Silberstein, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 345-369.
- <sup>106</sup> Meg Wesling, "Why Queer Diaspora?" *Feminist Review*, 90 (2008): 30-74. Especially: 31. For example of Israeli queer expatriates in Berlin, see: Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Israelim, Berlin* [Israelis, Berlin] (Jerusalem: Keter, 2001). See also: Manolo Guzman, "pa' La Escuelita con Mucho Cuida'o y por la Orillita: A Journey through the Contested Terrains of the Nation and Sexual Orientation," *Puerto Rican Jam: Essays on Culture and Politics*, ed. Frances Negron-Muntaner and Ramon Grosfoguel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 209-28. See also a list of "sexual exile writers" in Martin Tucker, *Literary Exile in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 809-810.
- <sup>107</sup> Ibid, 7. It is interesting to note that Mosse argues that the concept for respectability, which he marks as central for the understanding of the rise of nationalism, was tied to gender decorum in Europe and it gave birth to heteronormativity. Ziffer and Isherwood go against respectability with their sexual preference. See: George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985).
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid, 28.
- <sup>109</sup> David Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (New York: Basic, 1992); Daniel Boyarin, "The Colonial Drag: Zionism, Gender, and Mimicry," *The Pre-Occupation of Post-Colonial Studies*, ed. Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 234-265; David Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siecle Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); Sander Gilman, "The Jewish Body: A Foot-note," *People of the Body*, ed. Howard Hilberg-Schwartz (New York: New York University Press, 1992); Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991);

Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995).

<sup>110</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>111</sup> If Reuveny belongs to Herzl's school, with a gay twist, than Ziffer belongs more to Ha'ad Ha'am's school, in which Zionism primary aim was to overcome the threat to the survival of Jews as a nation due to historical processes such as emancipation without relocation to Palestine.

<sup>112</sup> Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Galton betoch Ribonut," *Teorya Uvikoret*, 4 (1993): 23-55; Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Galton betoch Ribonut – part 2," *Teorya Uvikoret*, 5 (1994): 113-132.

<sup>113</sup> On Dubnow and the concept of New-Diasporism, see: Allan Arkush, "From Diaspora Nationalism to Radical Diasporism," *Modern Judaism* 29.3 (2009): 326-350. Also: Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>114</sup> See Ha'aretz Online:

<http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArtPE.jhtml?itemNo=981606&bl=2&contrassID=2> ("Young-men, Be Feygelech. Only Weak Israel Will Returns Us To The Lost Path").

<sup>115</sup> See Ha'aretz Online: <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/1173898.html>. ("Give The Next Peace Prize To The One Who Will Build a Jewish-Secular "National Home" in Berlin").

<sup>116</sup> See Ha'aretz Online:

<http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArtPE.jhtml?itemNo=1072707&bl=2&contrassID=2> ("The Sad Story With a Happy End of my Novel *Ziffer and His Kind*").

## Chapter Five

### Haunted by Memory: Gay Cruising in a Muslim Cemetery

Who balled in the morning in the evenings in rosegardens and the  
grass of public parks and cemeteries scattering their semen  
freely to whomever come

(Allen Ginsberg, "Howl," *Howl and Other Poems*, p. 12)<sup>1</sup>

Queens in drag: makeup, high-heels, sequins – like colorful ghosts

(John Rechy, *Numbers*, p. 28)<sup>2</sup>

To mock our nation's literature even from beyond the grave

(Michal Witkowski, *Lovetown*, p. 14)<sup>3</sup>

#### Introduction

Independence Park is built in part on a Muslim cemetery.<sup>4</sup> Gay cruising often takes place among the gravestones which are still standing there, visible. Artists, such as Sarit Rosen whose work on the park is discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, acknowledges this tension, in which the Jewish-Israeli national narrative collides with the Palestinian one. Activists and writers, as I show in this chapter, also react in different ways to this symbolic collision, often complicating things by adding the issue of homosexuality to this already loaded discourse. They ask what happens when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict meets homosexuality; what are the issues, tensions and stakes that

these writers and activists bring to the fore when this meeting takes place; how do gender and sexuality play out in such context, and what are the gains and advantages of this link between questions of sexuality and nationhood; and also what are the losses and disadvantages of such link.

The chapter addresses these questions by closely reading direct actions and activities of Israeli left-wing organizations such as Zochrot, Almost Forgot, and Black Laundry that took place in Independence Park or engage somehow with the park. I suggest that alongside the concept of “remembering the other”, gender and sexuality play an important role in these groups’ self-identity: memory and sexuality determine their all-inclusive political approach to the national conflict and also shape the nature of their activities.

The second part of this chapter focuses on Alon Hilu’s 2008 bestselling novel *The House of Dajani*, which also addresses questions of national space, gender and sexuality in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it dramatizes in Independence Park. Against previous readings of this novel, I argue that this post-Zionist text offers a complex understanding of gender and sexuality in the context of the first Zionist immigration wave to Palestine. My reading focuses on the plot’s location—the Muslim cemetery which later becomes Independence Park—and on the appearance there of Palestinian ghosts who seek revenge on the Jewish immigrants. I show how Hilu’s text problematizes the spectral metaphor when he points out its complexity alongside its weaknesses; unlike other Palestinian ghosts who appear in the Israeli left-wing discourse, as I show in the first part, the ghosts in this Hilu’s text are also vengeful instigators who do more damage than good. I read this as well as the texts and organizations discussed in the first part of the chapter mainly through and against Avery Gordon and Jacques Derrida’s concept of hauntology and Jarrod Hayes’ queering of that concept.

### **Jewish and Palestinians Ghosts**

In 1882, the prominent Russian Zionist leader Leon Pinsker published his influential pamphlet *Auto-emancipation*. In this text, he tries to find a solution to “Judeophobia,” a term he coins which means the pathological hatred of Jews; the nations hate the Jews, he argues there, because Jews are always seen as foreigners, even if they

are fully assimilated in their host culture. If they had their own national homeland, he continues, the Jews would gain respect and be treated as equals. Pinsker's pamphlet, then, promotes self determination through territorialism as a way to address anti-Semitism.

The images and metaphors of *Auto-emancipation* are provocative; Pinsker describes the diasporic Jews as a "ghostlike apparition of a living corpse, of a people without unity or organization, without land or other bonds of unity, no longer alive, and yet walking among the living".<sup>5</sup> With the loss of their homeland, Pinsker argues, the Jews as a nation decayed; however, this is reversible if they only stop consenting "to play forever the hopeless role of the Wandering Jew".<sup>6</sup> According to him, the diasporic Jews, who are a dying nation that antagonizes other nations with their spectral-like existence, will be rejuvenated if they return to their homeland. This national resurrection, Pinsker concludes, will appease the Jews' fellow-men, and, with it, solve Judeophobia.

Pinsker's pamphlet became one of Zionism's ideological building blocks in the construction of a "national home". The Jewish national movements aspired, and indeed succeed for a while, to exorcize their own diasporic ghosts. Hebrew culture, therefore, does not have many gothic ghost stories; early Zionists were too invested in creating a "living," new and vigorous society and remembered to forget their own diasporic past.<sup>7</sup> This, I argue, somewhat changed after 2000 with the Second Intifada; spectral metaphors started once again to haunt the Zionist discourse, especially diasporic narratives of the 1948 Palestinian exodus as seen from an Israeli point of view. The *Nakba* as it is known in Arabic, or catastrophe in English, made visible the story of people who left, fled or were expelled from their homes during the 1948 war. The *Nakba* and Palestinian existence in general, which were ignored by Jewish-Israelis for many years, together with the debate over "Palestinians' right to return," reactivated the old image of the ghost as a symbol of diasporic living. Palestinian ghosts start to haunt the "Jewish national home" as a metaphor for Jewish-Israeli territorial insecurity.

In his 2000 *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948*, for example, Meron Benvenisti describes the transformation of an Arab land into a Jewish state. He starts his account from a personal anecdote: after the 1948 war, he visited a deserted Palestinian village with his father, a renowned Zionist geographer; from a child's point of view, he was stunned by the empty houses were "still standing, the



ghost of a village once bustling with life”.<sup>8</sup> Still haunted by this ghost decades later, he decided to write an account of Palestinian existence before 1948 and the Israeli erasure of their history after the war of that year. In his book, therefore, Benvenisti focuses on the Palestinians’ perspective on the war and its “catastrophic” outcomes. Others have engaged in similar projects, using spectral metaphors to address the issue of Palestine’s past. The grandchild of Uriel Shelach, better known by his pen name, Yonatan Ratosh, published in 2003 the novel *Picnic Grounds*. His book, which was written in English, stands in oppositional position to the right-wing revisionist and Canaanite legacy of his famous family. Like Benvenisti, the younger Shelach’s vision of Israel is also haunted by spectral forms; in a trip with a youth movement to a forest, the novel’s protagonist “discovers” the ruins of a Palestinian village, which looks to him “like ghosts that haunt the soil which is soaked with blood”.<sup>9</sup> Like Benvenisti, Shelach is preoccupied with the Nakba and uses a spectral metaphor to explain to himself and others what happened in the picnic ground. More than just seeing ghosts, both writers also summon them, I suggest, perhaps even welcoming them, to haunt Israeli society. Their texts, like other texts of the time, I show, encourage Jewish-Israelis to ask questions about their past and their active forgetfulness of that past. Examples of such questions appear in Gil Hochberg’s 2008 *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination*; her book attends to this “amnesia and its haunting ghosts, namely, the Arab and the Jew, or more precisely, the inseparability of the two”.<sup>10</sup> She uses the metaphor of ghosts to demonstrate how Israelis and Arabs prefer to ignore their shared past and to exorcise the image of their “other” from their national narratives.

Israeli left-wing activists, artists, Hebrew writers and critics, then, have again started to use the image of ghosts, but instead of applying it to diasporic Jews, they now apply it to the Palestinians refugees.<sup>11</sup> With the Palestinians’ demand to return to their homeland, which took a more violent approach in the 2000s, their “ghosts” started to haunt the Jewish-Israeli separatist imagination. The Palestinians refugees, who want to return to their homeland, remain, therefore, present in the Israeli discourse. From an Israeli perspective, these revenant-like figures—literally, those who come back—conjure the past and work against the intentional Zionist oblivion. This chapter deals with the metaphoric representations of “Palestinian ghosts” in the context of Jewish-Israeli

culture. It asks why these ghosts haunt the Israeli collective memory, why now, and how exactly do they do it. Moreover, it asks what the significance of such haunting is, and what such symbolic haunting tell us about the construction of Jewish-Israeli collective memory vis-à-vis its own traumas and the traumas of the “other”.<sup>12</sup>

### **Writing Ghosts**

In their 1944 short article, Horkheimer and Adorno argue for the need for a theory of ghosts, which would be a way to mourn modernity’s failure and its inability to remember its own victims. As an irrational and superfluous phenomenon, ghosts, and being haunted by them, could offer a non-instrumental approach that gives room for the dead and their traces, they claim:

Only the conscious horror of destruction creates the correct relationship with the dead. Unity with them because we, like them, are the victims of the same condition and the same disappointed hope.<sup>13</sup>

Writing about the Second World War and its aftermath, Horkheimer and Adorno understand that the survivors of modernity will have to give an account of their deeds to the victims of modernity, the ghosts that haunt them; but this shared account, eventually, could also unite them and bring consolation. In this case, the “ghosts” are a metaphor for the subjects that modernity, acting under the banner of progress, chose to ignore and reject.

In her 2008 *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon follows Horkheimer and Adorno’s idea and argues that the ghost, as a metaphorical marker of haunting, is an epistemological tool for comprehending the past and “uniting” with it:

The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating. It can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening.<sup>14</sup>

This epistemological tool, which haunts individuals as well as entire societies, involves a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows. Ghosts often manifest, Gordon argues, in what seems to be a form of absence, such as violent disappearance, but this absence also has great significance, which makes it present and visible. Writing ghosts stories, then, is an attempt to “not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future”.<sup>15</sup>

Like Gordon, Jacques Derrida does not wish to exorcize ghosts, but to embrace them in order to create a countermemory. In his 1993 *Specters of Marx*, Derrida invites ghosts to haunt our memory in order to change it; he grants ghosts “the right [...] to [...] a hospitable memory [...] out of a concern for Justice”.<sup>16</sup> To talk about ghosts, for him, is to talk “about certain others who are not present, nor presently living, rather to us, in us, or outside us”.<sup>17</sup> Written to address today’s disavowal of Marx, Derrida focuses on the opening sentence of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*—“a spectre is haunting Europe: the spectre of communism”—and welcomes the Marxist prostrate ghosts to haunt once again the Western thought. Derrida’s aim is not to restore Communism, but to think through Marx about New-Liberalism, that is, to criticize the current hegemony, to haunt it, from the perspective of the rejected alternative. He offers, then, “to learn to live with ghosts” as a commitment to the past and to justice.<sup>18</sup> “No justice,” Derrida claims,

seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism.<sup>19</sup>

To live with ghosts, then, is to rethink ourselves through the dead; because they haunt us to revise our existence, we should welcome their return, he argues. This ethics of countermemory is made possible thanks to their haunting. Derrida’s portmanteau of haunt and ontology—“hauntology”—emphasizes the obligation to continually fight the urge to exorcize the inconvenient past; his hauntological politics of memory provides us with a way to think critically about our existence and about justice.<sup>20</sup>

In his 1991 *Looking Awry*, Slavoj Žižek also discuss the living-dead. Like Derrida, he claims that “the dead return as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt”.<sup>21</sup> In order to appease the ghosts, he claims, society must either pay for the injustice done to them or correct the wrong.

One form of such symbolic wrong, argues Terry Castle in her 1993 *The Apparitional Lesbian*, is the invisibility of Lesbianism in film and in culture:

many people have trouble seeing what's in front of them. The lesbian remains a kind of 'ghost effect' in the cinema world of modern life: elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot even when she is there, in plain view, mortal and magnificent, at the center of the screen [...] the lesbian is never with us, it seems, but always somewhere else: in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight, out of mind, a wanderer in the dusk, a lost soul, a tragic mistake, a pale denizen night.<sup>22</sup>

As a way to fight the denial of Lesbianism that haunts modern culture, Castle's project wishes not to exorcize the lesbian ghost but, in the spirit of Derrida and Žižek, to acknowledge and embrace it, that it, to pay the symbolic debt to its cultural contributions. In his 2000 *Queer Nations*, Jarrod Hayes reads Castle through Derrida and argues that she practices hauntology which is “reading that simultaneously rewrites”. When she reads lesbianism into cinema, she also rewrites the queer subject into the collective memory, he argues.

Hayes suggests that hauntology is related to the process of queering. The revenants return with a vengeance as does the Freudian repressed:

since nonnormative sexualities suffer repression to a far greater extent than normative ones, these sexual ghosts are often queer. Queering as a form of hauntology thus exposes the connection between sexual repression and political oppression.<sup>23</sup>

Hayes' project deals with sexuality and nationalism in the context of the Maghreb; the ghosts that haunt northwest Africa are not the same ghosts that haunt Israel/Palestine.<sup>24</sup> In what follows, I would like to see what happens when Hayes' concept of queer hauntology is applied in a different context: who are the ghosts that return in this case? What do they haunt? How do they do it? Where does this haunting takes place? What is the discourse

that surrounds their return? Does sexual repression in Zionism projected onto the Palestinian oppression? Who promotes this link and what is to be gained from such a linkage?

### **Memory Has Gender in Hebrew, Herzl Almost Forgot**

It is time “to bring about conciliation between the [Israeli] society and the ghost of the Nakba, which haunts it and stirs up uncomfortable emotions and fears,” claims Eitan Bronstein, the founder of Zochrot (זוכרות), an Israeli NGO that wishes to commemorate the memory of 1948 from a Palestinian point of view.<sup>25</sup> As in Gordon and Derrida, Bronstein uses a spectral image as a tool to evoke a countermemory, “to bring justice”. In another essay about the Nakba and the Jewish-Israeli collective memory, Bronstein pushes the idea of hauntological conciliation further:

Jewish acknowledgment of this historical tragedy and the development of a sense of responsibility for Zionist ‘ethnic cleansing’, massacres and property confiscation are essential for bringing about an end to the conflict and promoting true reconciliation between the two peoples.<sup>26</sup>

This acknowledgment of the excluded other, as Zochrot’s position paper emphasizes, will “promote an alternative memory to the hegemonic Zionist memory”.<sup>27</sup> The nation depends not only on communal remembering of a glorious past, Ernest Renan and Benedict Anderson argue, but also on a communal forgetting of a troubled past, such as civil wars and other atrocities.<sup>28</sup> Zochrot wished to remind Israelis of their troubled past by summoning the ghost of the Nakba.

Zochrot’s promotion of a countermemory is gendered. The word “Zochrot” uses the Hebrew verb meaning “remember” in its feminine plural form. In Hebrew etymology, memory (zicharon) derives from manhood (zachar); memory, hence, is the product of men and is consumed by them: they enable each other. Zochrot, on the other hand, offers a different kind of remembrance platform, since it

articulates a fundamentally different approach towards the public sphere and towards collective memory. The hegemonic Zionist discourse conjures up images of a violent memory, invariably exclusive and masculine, and leaves no room for the (Palestinian) other.<sup>29</sup>

In this essentialists approach to memory, to remember in its feminine plural form is to tell an alternative version of his-story and to rewrite it against the grain; it is a subversion that stirs up possibilities for different forms of memory constellations. By stressing a “feminine memory,” however, Zochrot reproduces the Jewish traditional separation of the sexes and grounds it in binarism, I argue. This fixation of gender roles doesn’t leave much room for more complex gender identities or for men who want to remember the Nakba in their own skin, that is, in their “memory in the masculine form”; it feminizes those who want peace and masculinizes the right-wingers. This is also true for those who want to “remember” in the singular and not in the plural form, which limits the individual’s space. Zochrot’s decision to fortify feminine stereotypes is strategic. Although problematic, this can be useful if critically employed, and that’s what Zochrot is aiming for.

Zochrot’s *modus operandi* is simple. The organization is known for its “discovering trips”: several times a year, activists organize tours to the sites of destroyed Palestinian villages and there refugees share their memories of the village; in Arabic and in Hebrew, they offer testimonies regarding its depopulation and destruction. This goes against the Israeli authorities’ attempts to erase any memory of a Palestinians’ presence in the land by, for example, planting groves or forests in that location. In the site, then, the refugees, the activists, and the audience erect signs to mark the place as a site of Palestinian memory. This is the tour’s highlight, as Zochrot’s website stresses, since it is a symbolic and performative act of memory making: “posting signs is an act fundamentally connected to the past, as it constitutes recognition of the moral debt that is owed for the injustices committed in the creation of the Jewish state”.<sup>30</sup> In a similar way to Žižek’s explanation of spectral haunting, Zochrot wishes to pay the Palestinians the symbolic debt of Zionism, and they do it from a feminine perspective, which goes against the Zionist project of masculinize the Jewish people. As in a *séance*, Zochrot encourages the Palestinian ghosts to haunt Israeli society which prefers to forget and cover rather than to remember and expose.

Zochrot’s website hosts an affiliated organization, Almost Forgotten (כמעט שכחתי), which also brings to the fore issues of memory and oblivion. The webpage, which offers a YouTube short film about the aims and the activities of the organization, does not

provides much information, probably because the organization's actions take place in a legal gray zone. In the dark of night, as the film shows, a group of activists post posters in strategic places in Israeli cities; the posters read in various ways "I almost forgot that this site was once Palestinian". As in the case of Zochrot, Almost Forgot wishes to confront Jewish-Israelis with the denial of the Palestinian presence in the past and with their absence in the present. Posters, and sometimes humorous graffiti, remind Jewish-Israeli city-dwellers that the Nakba did not only take place in small villages and towns in the northern and southern periphery, but also in Israel's metropolises. Posters, such as "I almost forgot that Tel-Aviv University is built on a Palestinian village," address those who do not join Zochrot's trips. While, in most cases, Zochrot is preaching to the choir, Almost Forgot faces a much more unsympathetic audience: their posters confront their target audience—regular passers-by on their way to work or shopping—when they least expect it and on their own territory, their own neighborhood.

Almost Forgot wishes to reclaim the streets in the name of their previous owners, the Palestinians who had to relocate because of the war. On the website, Al. Z. Heimer, the group's fictive spokesperson whose name puns on the common form of dementia, writes:

we, members of the group Almost Forgot, citizens who seek to act before amnesia completely takes over the land, took to the streets on the eve of Independence Day, the day in which Tel-Aviv is dressed in blue and white, in order that we not forget those who lived here until 1948. In the public spaces expropriated by commercial companies at the expense of our freedom of choice, we placed speech balloons on advertisements in bus stations and in the streets, causing them to say what we Almost Forgot about the Palestinian Nakba.<sup>31</sup>

In a similar way to how Kalle Lasn suggests to fight commercialist media by "freeing" the streets from advertisements, Almost Forgot's modus operandi resembles a guerilla group of culture jammers: they use an advertising campaign against itself.<sup>32</sup> Jamming the national campaign that celebrates Herzl Day is an example of subverting the original message of an ad and replacing it with another; it shows that, like Zochrot, Almost Forgot also uses gender and sexuality as a tool to facilitate the dismantling of the Zionist

collective memory in favor of a different one. Almost Forgot, then, tries to dismantle the master's house by using the master's tools.<sup>33</sup>

In 2004, the Knesset legislated “the Benjamin Ze’ev Herzl Law”; according to this new law, the Father of Zionism’s birthday would be commemorated every year in a national ceremony and his Zionist legacy would be discussed and celebrated in schools and army bases. A budget was allocated, and this new law was introduced in a massive media campaign. Herzl’s iconic image appeared on billboards on every street corner with one of his famous quotes from *Der Judenstaat*: “We are A People. One People”; this quote, which seems quite ironic since it was also printed in Arabic, was not in the original German, but in Hebrew, Amharic, Russian, English, and, of course, in the language of the Palestinians. In Tel-Aviv, activists of Almost Forgot glued a speech balloon on Herzl’s poster which read: “I almost forgot that under Independence Park there is a Palestinian cemetery” (Fig. 74).<sup>34</sup> This comics-like spoof, with its satirical intentions, derails the original message of the campaign and draws attention to the consequences of Herzl’s dream to establish a Jewish State.



**Fig. 74 “We are A People, One People” vs. “I almost forgot that under Independence Park there is a Palestinian cemetery”**



In 1904, Herzl died and was buried in Vienna; in 1949, after the establishment of the state of Israel, his remains were moved to Jerusalem. He had never been to Tel-Aviv, the city which was named in 1909 after his utopian novel *Altneuland* and which is Zionism's hallmark: the First Hebrew City. Tel-Aviv's Independence Park symbolizes Herzl's dream of a sovereign Jewish State that would  $\alpha\tau\iota\sigma\tau\eta$  independently alongside other nation-states. Part of the park, as *Almost Forgot* reminds the people of Tel-Aviv, is built on the Abdel Nabi Muslim graveyard (Fig. 75). In order to do that, the remains of the dead were disinterred and the headstones were removed.<sup>35</sup> Their remains, unlike Herzl's, did not travel to Jerusalem, but were put together in one grave in the south-west corner of the park. *Almost Forgot's* subvertising—that is, making spoofs of advertisements and subverting their original message—retrieves this forgotten fact; it emphasizes that, in order for Jews to gain their independence, Palestinians had to lose theirs. The activists who cause Herzl to speak on behalf of the dead also cause him to speak on behalf of the living: Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis. *Almost Forgot's* activists, like Zochrot's activists, believe that Israelis must acknowledge the Palestinian past and current presence in order to have a true dialogue which will lead to reconciliation. In this spirit, Herzl's speech balloon suggests that Jewish-Israelis should take responsibility for their actions. By bringing up the dead, *Almost Forgot* wishes to point out that Israel is haunted by Palestinians ghosts and that this haunting will not stop until they find rest; the Herzl's spoof emphasizes the obligation to continually remember the inconvenient past in order to correct injustice.<sup>36</sup> Since traces of headstones are still visible in the park, as well as a small house of prayer, the Palestinian existence in the Land of Israel before 1948 is not forgotten. Despite the authorities' efforts to erase their memory, one can only “almost” forget them, but never totally.<sup>37</sup> Herzl, therefore, almost forgot that under Independence Park there is a Palestinian cemetery; but, after all, he still remembers, they suggest. When Israelis are asked by the government to remember Herzl, they are also asked by *Almost Forgot* to remember the debt that he, as well as they, have to the Palestinians. Herzl, in this case, becomes the carrier of countermemory. This provocative subvertising, however, could antagonize potential supporters of *Almost Forgot's* agenda who will see this Herzl spoof as disrespectful. *Almost Forgot's* activists assume, it seems,

that only radical post-Zionists will accept their position, and therefore, like Zochrot, they choose to preach to the choir. In this case, the group’s activism is directed inwards; they work to strengthen the lines rather than to recruit new activists and supporters. While they become familiar with the Palestinian ghosts of Independence Park, they fail to convince others that they are not dangerous and should be welcomed.



**Fig. 75 Part of the Abdel Nabi Muslim Cemetery (8.20.08, Segal); South-West side of Independence Park**

As in the case of Zochrot, *Almost Forgotten's* counter-memory is gendered. Following recent theories about Zionism and “the Jewish Body,” Erez Levon claims that “one of the most pervasive tenets of early Zionist thought was the belief that Jews in the diaspora led a disembodied existence”.<sup>38</sup> The *luftmentsh*, literally the air-man and metaphorically the spectral figure of Jews in the diaspora, is a problem that needed to be resolved, as Pinsker thought. A return to their Fatherland, according to these tenets, would enable Jews to surmount their weak diasporic bodies, which were perceived at the

time as queer, and metamorphose into “real” men. Zionism, hence, is an attempt to heterosexualize the male Jewish body by means of territorialization, argues Daniel Boyarin in *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*.<sup>39</sup> Max Nordau’s fin de siècle concept of “muscular Judaism” plays a pivotal part here; Zionism, as he and many others believed, is the cure for diasporic effeminacy and degeneration. Independence Park, which is located at the beginning of Nordau Avenue, is a symbol of Zionism’s success in reinventing Judaism in the spirit of Nordau: a public park that celebrates the republican ethos and commemorates the fallen soldiers of the newly established Jewish State. This “masculine site” of national heroism is confronted on a daily basis with the gay cruising scene, the contemporary manifestation of what Nordau would have considered diasporic effeminacy in the heart of The First Hebrew City; it seems that Nordau’s “muscular Judaism” failed to change the Jewish “queer” character after all. The diaspora, in this sense, reemerges in the National Home. When Tel-Avivians are reminded of Herzl, who in turn reminds them of the cemetery on which “The Homosexuals’ Park” is built, they are reminded of the diaspora. The Jewish-Israeli gays are a symbolic reincarnation of the diasporic Jews, and, after the establishment of Israel, the Palestinians are in the diaspora. Almost Forgot, then, tries to rupture the Zionist collective memory by pointing out its failures to erase either Jewish effeminacy or the memory of the diaspora and Palestinian existence. All reemerge in Independence Park against the attempts to erase them. Through this rupture, new understanding can sink in and infiltrate the national ideology. Almost Forgot’s spoof, then, ties together the oppressed and repressed groups of Israeli hegemony. I will explore this subject in greater depth shortly.

Levon’s 2010 *Language and the Politics of Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays in Israel* explores the different ways that LGBT people use the Hebrew language as a performative act to express their sexuality. In many cases, this consciously goes against the Israeli national ideologies of gender and belonging, for example, when female anti-occupation activists talk in the masculine form or when men speak in a high pitched voice. The ad for Herzl Day “speaks” in five languages—Hebrew, Amharic, Russian, English, and Arabic: Israel’s vernaculars—but with one voice, the official voice of the Zionist ideology. Almost Forgot’s speech balloon is also in Hebrew but it introduces a

different voice, the voice of post-Zionism or even anti-Zionism. When considering the context of Independence Park, the ad “talks” in a “queer language”; it delivers its message in a high pitched voice and, therefore, promotes even further the activists’ belief in an alternative, non-hegemonic form of memory. Again, when Almost Forgot chooses to use homosexuality in the spoof, they may alienate people who support the Palestinians’ cause but not LGBT people, such as the anti-Zionist ultra-orthodox communities.

### **El-Aqsa Mosque in Independence Park**

Zochrot and Almost Forgot raise questions regarding the politics of memory, that is, who remembers what and how. Different questions are raised regarding the process of identification across national and ethnic divides. What happens when heteronormative people or Zionist gays encounter counter-memory activities that challenge their national beliefs? What happens when they encounter this on their “own turf,” that is, Independence Park? With whom they identify? Do they embrace nationalism, or do they see themselves as victims of Zionism and identify with the Palestinians? Do they also “forget,” for example, that Independence Park is built on a Palestinian cemetery? Do they “forget” in the same way that straights forget? In short, are they haunted by the same ghosts that other Israelis are haunted by?

Depending on the Hebrew calendar, Herzl’s Day and Independence Day are celebrated within a few days of each other. Another event that often takes place in the same week is The Nakba Day, the day that Palestinians mourn the results of the 1948 war, the Israeli War of Independence. On the night of May 14, 2002, which was the eve of the Nakba Day, a group of queer anti-occupation activists were engaged in a direct action demonstration in Independence Park; they installed there a small-scale model of the El-Aqsa Mosque and placed next to it a sign that read “Without Memory There will Be No Peace”. This confrontational event addresses the questions above, and offers, as in the case of Zochrot and Almost Forgot, to bring conciliation through acknowledgement of and identification with the “other”. The activists were members of Black Laundry, a short-lived Israeli anarcho-queer group that was established at the beginning of the Second Intifada, known also in Arabic as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, and dispersed shortly after. As in other Black Laundry’s activities, this performative act also ties together—and

struggles with—different forms of suppression. In the spirit of Hayes, this direct action is an example of queer hauntology; it exposes the connection between sexual repression and political oppression.

In her 2010 article “Performative Politics in Israeli Queer Anti-Occupation Activism,” Amalia Ziv describes Black Laundry’s insistence on linking queer issues with the struggle against the occupation. The group’s identification politics, she argues, cross national and religious divides and move away from the assimilationist, often conservative, ethnocentric politics of the Israeli LGBT community with its narrow understanding of identity. Black Laundry’s performative activities, Ziv argues, have to be read through the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which “inflects local gay identities and politics and at the same time provides a symbolic terrain in which dreams of identity, belonging, and disidentifications are played out”.<sup>40</sup>

Against the tendency of the Israeli LGBT community to promote an assimilative agenda of gender normativity and respectability, which translates into sabro-centrism, Black Laundry promoted the politics of identification, which, as Ziv defines it, is

a struggle to lift the oppression or secure rights or freedoms for a group to which one does not belong; a struggle that nevertheless predicates and grounds itself on a relation of identification with the group for whom one is struggling.<sup>41</sup>

Fighting against the occupation, Black Laundry emphasized, is fighting against racism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, and so forth; the group’s performative protests, which took the form of direct local interventions in the public arena, shaped the communal and individual identities of the participants. “This identitarian dimension,” Ziv suggests, “is not only integral to activism but forms a vital motivating force.” In other words, for them, in order to be queer one must fight the occupation. In Tel-Aviv’s 2000 Pride Parade, for example, about 200 Black Laundry members and supporters were dressed in black, some women topless and some men in Speedos, carrying signs that read in Hebrew, Arabic, English and Russian: “No Pride in the Occupation,” “Transgender, Not Transfer,” and “Free Condoms, Free Palestine” (Fig. 76). Ziv explains that these marchers felt that it “was impossible to keep one’s sense of gay pride apart from one’s sense of shame and accountability as an Israeli”.<sup>42</sup> Black Laundry, then, wanted to remind

the LGBT community that as Israelis they are part of the occupation and, in a sense, enable it. Gil Hochberg claims that Israel's progressive gay rights are often flaunted by the government as a way to advance "its public image and divert attention from its ongoing occupation of Palestine"; Jasbir Puar calls it "pinkwashing" the Israeli occupation.<sup>43</sup> From Hochberg and Puar's point of view, Israeli gays and lesbians "collaborate" with oppression when they agree to put themselves before other minorities.



**Fig. 76 A collage poster in pink and black: Tel-Aviv's Pride Parade looks like a military march; the participants are famous soldiers (Yoni Netanyahu and Yossi Ben-Hanan, for example) and "sell out" LGBT public figures (Dana International)**

In the evening of the 2002 Nakba Day, a few members of Black Laundry installed a smaller-scale model of the El-Aqsa Mosque in Independence Park.<sup>44</sup> Since hundreds of Israelis and Palestinians were killed during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, this was a thoughtful provocation; it brought the Palestinian national icon to the heart of Zionism. This golden painted styrofoam model, half a meter in size, was put on the top of Pietro Cascella's 1971 statue *Arco Della Pace* (Arch of Peace);<sup>45</sup> this statue, which was given as a present to Tel-Aviv by the artist, is one of the centers of the park's gay cruising scene.<sup>46</sup> Since the

model was put on the statue in the cruising rush hour, it was probably removed quietly by one of the cruisers; the provocation was not a total success, then, because it had only limited exposure, not surviving the light of day.<sup>47</sup> Neither the national press nor the local press mentioned it; yet, this act carries great symbolic importance since it raises pressing questions about national memory, queer countermemory, and the process of identification with others. It brings to the fore another symbolic element that is at the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and which is rarely discussed in relation to homosexuality: space and the gendered identities attached to it.

By bringing the El-Aqsa Mosque to Independence Park, the activists challenge the Jewish-Israeli collective memory. As in the case of Zochrot and Almost Forgot, the Israelis are reminded that Tel-Aviv was *not*, as the cliché goes, “born from the sand”; in fact, there were small Arab settlements there before The First Hebrew City was founded. This act of countermemory, then, resists the Zionist agenda to naturalize the land, to see it as a tabula rasa, as “a land without a people for a people without a land”.<sup>48</sup> Placing the El-Aqsa Mosque in Independence Park is an attempt to replace Zionist historiography with, as the activists see it, a different and less biased version of the national history. The sign that was placed there emphasizes this point: “Without Memory There Will Be No Peace”. This manipulative act of countermemory—manipulative since it uses a Muslim icon that is in fact located in Jerusalem; manipulative since art is manipulative in nature—asks Israelis to acknowledge the Palestinians’ past; for the activists this act of accountability is integral to peacemaking. Cascella’s statue’s title is relevant in this case; “the road for peace” goes through a “gate” that is also Palestinian now that a model of the El-Aqsa Mosque is on its top. On the side of the statue, the Italian artist inscribed in Hebrew the biblical phrase: “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares / And their spears into pruning hooks” (Fig. 77). This is also relevant for peacemaking, since the rest of the utopian quote from *Micah* continues with “Nation shall not take up / Sword against nation / They shall never again know war”.<sup>49</sup> These comforting words were very much needed in the violent days of the Second Intifada. Moreover, when the context of these words is considered, the placement of the mosque’s model in the park becomes more intelligible. Chapter Four of *Micah* starts with a reference to “the Mount of the LORD’s house,” which is where the El-Aqsa Mosque is located after the destruction of the Temple

in 70 CE.<sup>50</sup> The installation, therefore, constructs a complex mirror maze that reflects the Palestinian narrative onto the Zionist narrative and vice versa: Independence Park is built on a Palestinian cemetery as the El-Aqsa Mosque is built on the Jewish Temple. This never-ending cycle of destruction and rebuilding, which blends together the past and the present, is manifested in the vicious circle that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Against the optimism of Micah and perhaps the activists' intention, this installation is more pessimistic, I argue. It presents the conflict as a never-ending process, a trans-historic "fact" that will never be resolved. When the activists become artists—and this act should be considered Street Art—the complexity of the work, I suggest, damages the political message that they group wishes to deliver: it sends mixed and contradictory messages.



**Fig. 77 Pietro Cascella's *Arco Della Pace*; one of the centers of the gay cruising scene in Independence Park**

Another example of the complexity of this work is in its pun, which may not reach everyone. The prophet Micah, as mentioned earlier, describes how weapons become unnecessary in the End of Days. *Zayin* in Hebrew means both weapons and penis. Since this installation was made by activists who define themselves as queer, the location chosen for their protest is of great significance: they address not only the general public, but specifically the gay cruisers. They ask gay Israelis to think about the etymology of the word *zayin* and not to use their penis as a weapon. As in other activities of Black Laundry, the activists criticize the Israeli LGBT community for cooperating



with Zionism and contributing to the oppression of the Palestinians. Ziv emphasizes Black Laundry's resentment of how "the flourishing of gay rights in Israel was being used by the government to divert attention from its gross violations of human rights in the occupied territories".<sup>51</sup> Homosexuality, then, is used in the hands of Israeli officials as a weapon against the Palestinians, and Black Laundry's activists ask gays not to enable oppression in their names, not to misuse their *zayin* against other minorities.

The installation reminds us of the forgotten past; it asks gay men to embrace the Palestinian ghosts while cruising. By doing so, as in the case of Zochrot, it also awakens the diasporic ghost of the effeminate Jew. The installation, then, creates a coalition of minorities who were and are oppressed by Zionism. In the scenario imagined by the activists, the cruisers identify with the Palestinians; this identification should prod them to oppose the occupation. With its complexity, however, the installation sends mixed messages that damage the hope of creating a coalition that could cross the ethnic and national borders and that will resist the Israeli strategy of divide and rule. The context of Cascella's work is significant in this case; together with his brother Andrea and Giorgio Simoncini, Cascella built and unveiled in May 16, 1967 the "Auschwitz Monument," which became his most recognized work, the main monument in the Auschwitz Concentration and Death Camp. *Arco Della Pace* carries a striking resemblance, but on smaller-scale, to his earlier work, which James Young describes as "sarcophagal." The outcome is quite uncanny, as if Auschwitz itself had reappeared in Independence Park.<sup>52</sup> The memory of the Holocaust here, I argue, overshadows the Nakba; its overwhelming resonance in the Jewish and Israeli collective memory blocks any attempt of identification with the Palestinians. In this metaphorical arm-wrestling, in which Jewish and Palestinian traumas are competing, the Holocaust is "winning," at least in the eyes of the Jewish-Israelis. They, who are haunted by the Shoah, have more ghosts than the Palestinians.<sup>53</sup> In this case, the activists "lost"; their message, which parallels the Shoah and the Nakba, failed to reach the hearts of their target audience because it is seen as manipulative and unjust. This not only antagonizes the viewers but it also pushes them back into the arms of Zionism. As in other activities of Black Laundry, this performative activity is more about confirming the group identity than about convincing and converting people to their political agenda.

The act of installing a model of the El-Aqsa Mosque in Independence Park initiates the park as a queer space. If the LGBT community sees the park as a place where men seek the company of other men and fight for their right to do so, the queer activists wish to see the park as more than “just” a cruising place. By acknowledging the Palestinian past of the place and formulating a countermemory to Zionism, the park becomes for them a “counterpublic”. Ziv follows Nancy Fraser’s definition of counterpublic, which is also relevant here: “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs”.<sup>54</sup> The park as such a place enables the activists to construct their queer identities; they define themselves not only in relation to their sexual practices, but also in relation to their anti-occupational protests. The park, then, becomes a site of resistance to both the heteronormative and the homonormative societies; the activities see themselves as part of minorities that can not or will not take part in the hegemony. This comparison, however, is problematic: while the queer activists see resemblance between themselves and the Palestinians, most of the Palestinians, who are more conservative on gender and sexual issues, would prefer to distance themselves from such an embrace. For example, when the head of the Islamic Movement in Jaffa addresses the issue of cruising in Independence Park, he uses loaded language: “they not only loot the final rest of the dead but rape it”.<sup>55</sup> He sees gay Israelis as the most horrendous transgressors.

### **The Nakba Also Sells Books**

With the increase of the Nakba in Israeli discourse, many Jewish-Israelis feel threatened, as if the Palestinian narrative of 1948 canceled out the Zionist narrative and Israel’s right to exist.<sup>56</sup> As a response to this threat, in 2011 the Knesset legislated the Nakba Bill; this new law forbids holding public events that mark the birth of Israel as a day of mourning, and violation of the law by state supported institutions could lead to a withdrawal of funds. Previous to the introduction of the Nakba Bill, Alon Hilu’s 2008 bestseller *The House of Dajani* (אהוזת דג'אני) was in the center of a polemical public dispute about the Nakba, which brought it into mainstream discourse. The novel, which describes the 1880 Zionist immigration to Palestine as a colonialist project that

anticipates the Nakba, won the prestigious Sapir Prize for Literature which was later taken away due to a legal dispute.<sup>57</sup> With extensive media coverage, this scandal created oppositional camps: Hilu's supporters defended his right to promote the Nakba narrative and claimed that the prize was revoked because of political pressures, while, on the other hand, Hilu's detractors argued that his novel was unpatriotic novel, historicity false and misleading, and that it delegitimized the early Zionist settlers.<sup>58</sup>

I offer here a close reading of Hilu's novel and show that, while promoting the Nakba narrative, it at the same time criticizes the Palestinians for their shortsightedness and passivity. In this sense, Hilu's text demonstrates the inextricability of the conflict and asks both sides to share responsibility for the past events; the novel, therefore, does not neatly fit the binary in which a text such as this could only be either pro-Zionist or pro-Palestinian. Although the book was extensively reviewed in the popular press, it was never read closely and its complexity was never fleshed out. My reading of the novel touches upon issues—such as gender, sexuality, and spatial metaphors—which have been neglected in other readings. I draw attention to the homoerotic relationship of the macho Zionist immigrant and the effeminate Palestinian teenager. This, I argue, is intensified due to the event's location: the Muslim Cemetery which will become later, with the establishment of Israel, Independence Park. As in the case of Zochrot, Almost Forgot, and Black Laundry, this loaded space symbolizes the Nakba which haunts Israel's conscience. Ghosts are central to *The House of Dajani*: the ghost of the Palestinian teenager's father, who was (or was not, it is not entirely clear) murdered by a Jewish settler, haunts the boy and tries unsuccessfully to persuade him to defend the honor of his mother and all other Palestinians. Through Derrida and Hayes' concept of hauntology, national and sexual haunting will be discussed here as a way to address the changes in the identity of Jewish-Israeli society.

The story, set in the late 1890s, takes place in Ottoman-era Jaffa and its new Jewish neighborhoods. The agronomist Haim Margalioth Kalvarisky, who moved from West-Europe to Palestine, hopes to buy lands and become a farmer.<sup>59</sup> His wife Esther, a frigid dentist, accompanies him but prefers to stay in the city where she opens a successful clinic. Salah Dajani, a troubled young Palestinian who belongs to a rich elite family, prophesies a war in which Jews drive out the Palestinians from their lands.<sup>60</sup>

Salah, who sees Kalvarisky in the market and finds him fascinating, convinces his mother Afifa to invite the beautiful stranger for a visit, and then for another and yet another. Without Salah's awareness, his married mother and his Jewish friend are having an affair which may or may not have resulted in the death of his father. In the meantime, Kalvarisky demands from Afifa, and gets possession of, the neglected Dajani lands. After acknowledging what happened, and with the visits of his father's ghost, Salah tries to fight Kalvarisky. The melancholic boy, then, invites Kalvarisky to a duel in the Muslim Cemetery, but, before he is able to avenge the family's honor, he commits suicide. Shocked by the news, and after Afifa's hospitalization in a psychiatric institute, Kalvarisky takes his wife and they relocate to a pioneers' settlement in the north.

### **Colliding Narratives**

The text is written in a lush archaic style that evokes the writings of the time. It is built around the intertwined diaries of Kalvarisky (in Hebrew) and Salah (in French, but translated into Hebrew by the "publisher"), and, therefore, gives voices to the protagonists' different viewpoints. Kalvarisky's diary, for example, reveals a passionate man who wants to better the world; he wants to take control of the widow's lands so he can modernize them and increase her profits. Salah's diary, on the other hand, depicts Kalvarisky as a handsome but charismatic swindler, who wants to trap his mother, seize the lands, expel the vassals who till it, and employ instead his Jewish friends. In this case of competing narratives that cancel each other out, the readers cannot unequivocally decide what really happened and what the characters' true motives were. The question of the father's death is significant here: from Salah's perspective, his father was a victim of a conspiracy that involves his gullible mother and malicious Kalvarisky; however, from Kalvarisky perspective, the father's death, although welcomed, was not his doing, and Salah, the mentally ill boy, spreads the vicious rumor in vain. This unresolved tension, which is the novel's driving force, is significant because it is also symbolic: did Zionism, which is represented here by Kalvarisky, pre-plan the seizure of the land? What were the tactics and strategies that the Zionist pioneers applied in their first years of settlement, and were they legitimate and ethical? Even if they did not pre-plan the course of events, did the pioneers take advantage of the Palestinians' misfortune? The text quotes Elijah

the Prophet's famous question to Ahab, King of Israel, which captures the spirit of Salah's diary: "have you murdered and also taken possession?"<sup>61</sup> Salah, in this case, is portrayed as a weak and passive boy: why does he prefer to surrender rather than fighting back? Why does he, who represents the Palestinians in this allegorical novel, commit suicide instead of facing his oppressor?

Salah is a lonely boy. His mother keeps him isolated in the estate and doesn't allow him to play with other boys. He sees them growing up and compares their growth to his weak, pale and undeveloped body. While writing his poems in his room, Salah dreams of the other boys, envies their togetherness, and decides to punish his own effeminate body:

I climb with bare hands one tree-trunk that I have chosen at random, scraping my skin against rough bark until I drip blood in my desire to suffuse my body with the very same lash marks and gruff manners of other boys, and the branches snap under my feet and the trickle of blood on my arms and legs brings me the pleasure of pain.<sup>62</sup>

His melancholia, which existed long before the death of his father, marks Salah as a pathological subject. As a member of the Palestinian elite, he prefers not to mix with the lower classes and focus on his own pain. In fact, he enjoys this pain since it validates his uniqueness and superiority; he feels his body without the need to be with the illiterate boys and he uses this painful experience to enrich his writings. This masochism will reappear later in the suicide scene, which, as I argue, will also bring Salah "the pleasure of pain"; I will elaborate then on the allegorical applications of such enjoyments.<sup>63</sup>

Salah is a dreamer; he prefers to fantasize about the world instead of experiencing it. Around the estate and in Jaffa, people say that Salah is "possessed by a genie, who goes forth as one of the moonstruck poets of Jahilya, causing strife among the tribes".<sup>64</sup> Often, he fantasizes about killing himself after he sees in his dreams "an all-encompassing war and pillars of smoke".<sup>65</sup> His mother takes him to see a healer, and there, in front of the clinic, he meets Kalvarisky for the first time. In his diary, he describes their meeting as love at first sight: "a foreigner not of the Arab peoples is standing in the alleyway gazing at me and smiling with gaiety, and I bow my head,

gripped with shame, but all the while he keeps his eyes upon me”.<sup>66</sup> While taking the role of a shy girl, Salah continues to be amazed by the man whom he now calls “my angel”:

he sports gossamer wings on his back and his beautiful golden curls sway gently in the late-afternoon breeze, and the angel smiles serenely, capaciously, and spreads his wings and rises high in the air and as he rises he utters my name.<sup>67</sup>

The lonely teenager, who lacks a father-figure in his life, idolizes the stranger and seeks his company; evidently, this attraction has a strong homoerotic element, as if he were seduced by the older man. Salah ecstatically describes in his diary the drawings he made of his imagined-lover:

abundance of drawings covering my bed and my writing-table and my chair, all in the image of the handsome foreigner, some depicting his height and others his muscles, like firm, round apples, and others his curly golden hair and still other his blue eyes, those repositories of goodness and wisdom, and how esteemed was this angel of mine, his smallest finger more precious to me than my own body.<sup>68</sup>

Afifa, who sees the good effect of Kalvarisky on her son, invites him to the estate, *La Maison Dajani*.<sup>69</sup> When Salah sees his beloved, as Kalvarisky writes in his diary, “a reddish blush bloomed on his cheeks like that of a nervous virgin facing her suitor”.<sup>70</sup> Kalvarisky, then, is aware of the teenager’s attraction to him, and, perhaps manipulatively, invites Salah to go urinate alongside him: “a burst of laughter peeling from his tongue as he grasped his trickling member”.<sup>71</sup> Kalvarisky tries to befriend the boy not because he is attracted to him, but because he is attracted to his mother; he tries to get to Afifa through the heart of her son. Kalvarisky first saw her when he saw Salah, and, in an orientalist manner that also resembles the Song of Songs, he romantically describes her in his diary: “her skin was creamy brown and enticing, and the curve of a pair of handsome breasts, twin gazelles, could be glimpsed through her dark robe”.<sup>72</sup> When Kalvarisky visits the estate for the first time, his feelings for Afifa grow stronger because he sees the richness of the estate: “my heart clenched with envy. The earth of *La Maison Dajani* was lush and fertile”.<sup>73</sup> As an agronomist, Kalvarisky understands and explains the world to himself through agricultural images and metaphors; while his own

frigid wife has “arid genitals” and cannot produce children, the Arab woman, like her land, is “lush and fertile”.<sup>74</sup> If the connection here between women and land was not clear enough, Kalvarisky clarifies it when earlier he asks Saleem and Salaam, Arab brokers and pimps, to find him “Arab land and an Arab woman”.<sup>75</sup> In his orientalist mind, both are the same and both can be bought with money. Kalvarisky, then, falls for the woman because he wants the land, and he wants the land because he wants the woman.<sup>76</sup> When he thinks about the estate that “a handsome woman reigns supreme there,” he rhetorically asks himself: “what else could an agronomist wish for and what else could a man desire?”<sup>77</sup> Since he knows that he can obtain both by befriending Salah, he does what he needs to do in order to reach out to the boy, who “is the sole pipeline to the woman’s heart and to her splendid estate”.<sup>78</sup> Kalvarisky, hence, takes Salah skinny-dipping. Later, the boy describes this in his diary: “I steal glances at his body, a body into the likes of which I, too, shall grow, and like the seashore I am set awash in the waves and I am filled with admiration”.<sup>79</sup> Seeing her melancholic son’s mood improve, Afifa consents to Kalvarisky and has sex with him. At this point, Salah suspects nothing.

Suddenly, Afifa’s husband and Salah’s father returns home from his business trip. He, a healthy young man, surprisingly dies at night after an argument with his wife about Kalvarisky. Salah notes in his diary that Kalvarisky visited the estate that night; however, only after witnessing his mother and “his dear friend” having sex does he realize that his father was murdered. Earlier, when Kalvarisky sees the estate for the first time, his heart “clenched with envy”.<sup>80</sup> Now, when Salah sees his mother with the man he loves, he is also envious: “the green-eyed gruffness of jealousy rose inside me”.<sup>81</sup> From now on, this jealousy becomes Salah’s driving force; he will try to hurt Kalvarisky who, as he sees it, betrayed him. Sexual jealousy, disguised as anger, is Salah’s main motivation for avenging his father’s murder, I suggest; this strong emotion is shared by both characters who resemble each other.

The text, I argue, not only positions the Zionist character against the Palestinian one, but also shows how they mirror each other and how they are created in each other’s image. This resembles how Gil Hochberg sees the deep cultural and psychological frameworks that bind the Jew and the Arab to each other: “the Israeli-Jew and the

Palestinian are today locked in a circuit of identification in which each is the other".<sup>82</sup>  
When, for example, Kalvarisky thinks about Salah, he describes him as Jewish:

strange, bitter fate, for he is not a boy like other boys; he carries the world's sorrow on his shoulders. He is in some ways a Jew: in the seriousness of his discourse, in the paleness of his face, in his feeble hands.<sup>83</sup>

The text, therefore, builds a bridge over the national gap that is constructed in both the Israeli and the Palestinian discourses in terms of "ethnic character," that is, as if Jews and Palestinians were inherently different. On the other hand, the Palestinian youth here takes on the diasporic stereotype of the Jew as seen from a fin de siècle Zionist point of view; Salah is the embodiment of the effeminate, weak and passive queer ghost that continues to haunt Zionism: he is a threat to Zionism since he voices not only the rival national movement but also the queer rival within that refuses to disappear even in the Fatherland. The text's position, therefore, is radical; it invites the readers to identify with the other who, at the same time, is reflected in them. The relationship between the Zionist(s) and the Palestinian(s) is symbiotic, then.<sup>84</sup> However, this comparison that emphasizes the resemblances between the Zionist and the Palestinian is somewhat problematic, I argue; it does not leave room for the Palestinians to construct their own identity. If Salah is only an imitation of a Jew, he does not have "authentic" national qualities, and I will address this issue of essentialism later on.

The jealous boy, who wants the company of the Jew but feels betrayed by him, shifts his love into anger. The man he once dubbed an "angel" is now "a wicked man, prince of malice".<sup>85</sup> This Freudian displacement appears in the form of murder fantasies, in which Salah kills the "vile and contemptible" Kalvarisky.<sup>86</sup> Since Kalvarisky's "conspiracy" to inherit the estate is exposed, Salah's visions of the Nakba become more and more frequent. His mental health drastically deteriorates. In the meantime, Kalvarisky expels the Palestinian peasants from the estate and mechanizes the irrigation system with the help of his Jewish friends. He also takes care of the dysfunctional widow, who becomes suicidal. Salah, who loses not only his father but also his mother and his "lover," starts to see the ghost of his father who demands revenge. Kalvarisky, who sees the boy's instability, wants to hospitalize him, but the boy runs away in order to regroup



and confront his “enemy”. In the end, instead of facing Kalvarisky in the cemetery as he had planned, Salah unexpectedly and without any explanation commits suicide. This final act only emphasizes the problematic representations of Palestinians in the novel, I argue, especially because of the nationality of the writer: on the one hand, Hilu promotes the Nakba narrative and enables his readers to identify with the Palestinians and their disaster, that is, he subverts the Zionists denial of the Nakba. On the other hand, all the Palestinians in his novel are pathologically sick or desperately passive in such a way that it is insinuated that they only have themselves to blame for their situation. Even the living Palestinians in this text are ghost-like: they are there but not really. Coming from a Jewish-Israeli, who voices in Hebrew a Palestinian boy, this is troubling; Hilu does not allow his Palestinian protagonist to have a national awareness since he is motivated only by anger and madness. While Kalvarisky is guided by a historical understanding of the “Jewish problem,” which is translated immediately into national ideology, Salah, as well as the other Palestinians characters, lack such historical awareness; he has visions about a coming-disaster, but he and the others Palestinians can neither explain nor relate politically to the larger historical narrative.

### **The Cemetery as the Birthplace of Nationalism**

Kalvarisky and Salah tell different stories about the tragic course of the events. These competing narratives, which were expected to collide from the very beginning, reach a violent peak in a specific and loaded location: the Muslim cemetery. In the novel’s epilogue, the text emphasizes that this cemetery, where Salah and his father are buried, “fell into disuse over the years and was forgotten. Today it is in the grounds of a large luxury hotel and a public park that plays host to homosexual encounters”.<sup>87</sup> The novel, then, not only reminds us of the story of one Palestinian boy, but also of one Palestinian cemetery; both represent the Nakba, on the one hand, and the Israeli estrangement from the Palestinian past, on the other. The place in which Palestinians mourn is the place in which Israelis celebrate their independence. The novel, in this case, wishes to disturb these celebrations by summoning Palestinian ghosts to haunt the Israeli collective memory. It does so, however, by questionable methods: when the text focuses on the park as a gay cruising site, it implies that this act is especially disrespectful to the

dead. Keeping this in mind while considering that Salah is depicted as a melancholic, hysterical, and effeminate boy, attributes which explains his weakness and passivity, *The House of Dajani* seems more and more tainted with homophobia. Saleem and Salaam, the Arab lovers who “pathologically” dress as women when alone, are another example of such homophobia; they are depicted stereotypically as lustful, greedy, disloyal, grotesque, and effeminate. In short, they are the tragic novel’s comic relief, and their brutal murder is understood and justified as a moral punishment.<sup>88</sup> Why single out a minority group, gay Israeli or gay Palestinian, which was and still is ostracized? Why does the novel give gays special treatment? Are they less moral than others? Why should Israeli gay men be more accountable to the Nakba than straight Israelis? Does Hilu believe, like some in *Black Laundry*, that gays should identify with the Palestinians even if it is at the expense of their own sexual and identity practices?<sup>89</sup>

The cemetery is mentioned several times in the novel. From its first appearance, the cemetery symbolizes death and foreshadows the tragic end of the Dajani family as well as of the Palestinian people. Such a somber place summons the ghosts of those whom we, the novel’s readers, did not leave in peace and who, therefore, could not find eternal rest. It is a place they haunt; a place they return to in order to remind us of the wrong done to them. The cemetery also brings to the fore the Zionist project of covering up the Palestinian landscape while creating a new Israeli space that is confronted with the Palestinian demand of “the right of return”. When Salah’s father returns to the estate, Salah tells him about his “new friend” and about the time both spend in the cemetery. By so doing, he accidentally exposes his mother’s infidelity. From this point on, the plot turns into a tragedy: this scene triggers the collapse of the Dajani family. The father, who died after discovering his wife’s affair, returns after his death to the estate. He asks his son to revenge his death and save the land from the hands of the Jews. Since Salah is mentally ill and delusional, his father “returning” is not surprising: from the very beginning of the novel, the boy suffers from visions and hallucinations. This makes even more sense considering that he was the one who told his father about the affair and therefore set the coming tragedy into motion. Driven by guilt and the belief that Kalvarisky killed his father, Salah hopes to recompense his father for his mistake by avenging the family honor. This desire for revenge originates very likely in Salah’s

nonreciprocal “relationship” with Kalvarisky; the boy replaces one strong desire with the other. Does the ghost of the father wish to help his son or does he have his own agenda to promote? Does the father want his son to die?

Like in Shakespeare’s, the ghost starts to haunt more and more people, not just Salah. First it appears to a peasant’s son and later also to a group of peasants; considering the age of the infant and the superstitious nature of the backward peasants, this could be dismissed as an “oriental imagination”. Later, however, the Jewish workers also see him. Kalvarisky expels the peasants because of their laziness and backwardness; he believes that they spend their time day-dreaming about ghosts instead of working, and therefore, he replaced them with “modern” and “European” workers, his Jewish friends. When they also start to see the ghost, Kalvarisky’s orientalist paradigm collapses; he fails to profit from the land because no one is willing to cultivate it. At the end of the novel, he relocates to the north and the abandoned estate is doomed to fall into ruin. This destruction is allegorical: not only did the colonialists take the land from the Palestinians, but they also destroyed it. In the novel, Salah prophesies that multi-story buildings will be erected in the future on the estate’s ground; this calls the allegory into question, I claim, since it shows that the Jews in fact did and do use the land.

The second time that the cemetery is mentioned is when Salah learns where his father will be buried. Just after the burial, the ghost starts to appear and the intensity of Salah’s prophecies grows. While the readers, who have a wider perspective on these and future events, know that his visions will eventually come true, the characters do not. In this case, the readers tend to assume that Salah is right also on other issues and therefore adopt his point of view. Kalvarisky, on the other hand, is perceived as shortsighted and as someone who has a limited understanding of the situation. For example: in January 1896, when Herzl published *The Jewish State*, Salah writes in his diary about

a man in elegant clothing with a thick black beard, and this man is a sort of prophet who leads the Jews to our land in order to inherit it from [us, Palestinians] even though we are still alive. He is slick-tongued, this prophet, and he speaks to kings and aristocrats about creating a realm for the Jews.<sup>90</sup>

When Kalvarisky hears this description of Herzl, he says that he doesn't know this man or his deeds. Assuming that Kalvarisky is sincere, this incident shows, I claim, that at the time, according to Hilu, the Jews did not have a "master plan" to take over the land from the Palestinians; in fact, it is Salah, and not Kalvarisky, who reads the situation through nationalism. The ghost of his father rouses Salah's national sentiments: he suddenly understands the conflict between Kalvarisky and his father in terms that goes beyond the personal, that is, as a struggle between competing nations over the woman who is also the land; a violent struggle over the Motherland, that is, the land that belongs to his mother.

After learning that one of the peasants' children was buried in the Muslim cemetery, Salah gets another visit from the ghost of his father. The ghost says that Kalvarisky is a murderer and also that he wants to expel the Palestinian peasants from the land. Once again, the personal argument turns into a national struggle; the Muslim cemetery, which represents here the Palestinian's longstanding settlement in the land, is the birthplace of Arab nationalism in the text; since the readers know that this site is also Independence Park, the place that represents Jewish nationalism, Zionism is portrayed as necrophagous, that is, as a movement that dances on Palestinians' graves. On the other hand, it is not less problematic to associate the Palestinians with death, as if they were the embodiments of destruction and of mourning.

In this point, Salah has another vision: he sees in his mind that the Muslim cemetery becomes Hilton Hotel, which is located in Independence Park. Salah rebukes Kalvarisky because of that: "in that very spot you and your people will build a large hotel, where people will come and go and where they will defecate and urinate without ever knowing that my father's grave cries out from the ground beneath them".<sup>91</sup> Learning this, one may believe that the hotel was built in order to humiliate the Palestinians. Salah's rhetoric is manipulative and is meant to feed his nationalist agenda: the new immigrants belittle the native sons of the land, and moreover, they desecrate a holy land. This is somewhat problematic, even if only on a factual level. The novel is set in the late 1890s. The cemetery did not exist until 1902. Hilu's approach, then, is somewhat orientalist, I argue, as he images all things Muslim to be "old" and "authentic". This is not necessarily the case here; Hilu "remembers" a Palestinian past that doesn't exist.

The fourth time that the cemetery is mentioned is when Salah goes there to light candles and ask for his father's advice. He does so after he encounters the peasants' passivity:

the idiot peasants are holding fast with their rebellion and have refused to raise a hand against the pernicious angel even though there are, among them, those who possess swords and daggers and have rich experience with slaughter and murder".<sup>92</sup>

Salah tries to reproof them but they stay submissive; in the cemetery, therefore, his father's ghost orders him to "take control" and kill Kalvarisky himself. Again, the cemetery is the location of Palestinian nationalism. Salah pleads over the grave:

I swear to you that I will carry out your command and I will slay the good angel who comes to our estate so that your soul will find its eternal resting-place instead of roaming between the false world and the true one, between the living and the dead, and I offer only this prayer before you, that you will pass on to me the courage of spirit so that I may rise up against my enemies and kill them with my sword, just as you did on fleet-footed camels among the palm trees, and would that I were swift and determined like you in brandishing a spear and in matters of murder, and father's hands protruded from the grave, cold and bony, and took hold of my fingers and placed in them a dagger that began to slash my flesh right and left, and he said to me, in the voice of death and hell, this is what you must do, Salah, there is nothing simpler. This is how one cuts flesh and this is how you shall take the lives of your enemies, and this is how our particular will at long last be resolved.<sup>93</sup>

Salah wants to be like his brave father. He imagines him as a fearless warrior. Earlier, Kalvarisky had a different opinion of Salah's father, the obese merchant: "the man before me did not look like a man at all, but like a women. His expression was feminine and feeble".<sup>94</sup> Salah, however, prefers to image his father as something that he is (maybe) not; the boy constructs his father's image in the spirit of Arab heroic narratives. The boy's name is significant here: Salah means justice in Arabic, and, indeed, he seeks justice. His name is also symbolic here since it refers to Salah ad-din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, the warrior who led the Arab opposition against the European Crusaders in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. He and his army were successful in recapturing Palestine, and therefore, he has become

nowadays a symbol for the Arab, and specific Palestinian, struggle against Zionism. Hilu's Salah echoes this Arab national symbol; the text uncritically implies that the Zionist pioneers are modern Crusaders. *The House of Dajani*, I argue, not only adopts this Palestinian narrative but also promotes it and its trans-historical logic. Since the reasons for Zionists' immigration to Ottoman Palestine are not parallel to those of the Christian Crusaders, and the historical and cultural circumstances are also completely different, Hilu's text not only oversimplifies the situation but also misleads the readers.

Salah in this scene, as later seen from Kalvarisky's point of view, is cutting himself with a knife. This self-abuse foreshadows his suicide. Does the text insinuate that this is the result of nationalism? Does the desire for revenge blind Salah to the extent that he cannot distinguish between what is real and what is a (national) fantasy? Does Salah become Salah ad-din and forget that it is nothing but a heroic narrative and that he doesn't have to measure up to this national ideal? This masochistic act recalls a previous scene in which Salah climbs up a tree in order to bruise himself; he enjoyed the feeling of bleeding and therefore being alive. Now, something different is happening: by cutting himself, he becomes a martyr, and shows devotion to his cause. Since he cannot fight Kalvarisky, Salah theatrically demonstrates his courage. Again, however, it suggests that Salah is "pathologically" ill and has a death-wish, maybe like "all" Palestinians: if Salah is an allegorical figure, can it be that the text blames the Palestinians for their ill-fantasies and? Do they prefer to promote martyrdom instead of fighting back? Salah's father orders his son to kill not only Kalvarisky but also Afifa and then to commit suicide. Salah kills only himself.<sup>95</sup> The text, I suggest, opposes martyrdom; it depicts it as a pathological practice and belief and as a form of self-abuse. The ghost, in this case, asks for justice by means of revenge; this is not the ghosts of justice that Derrida talks about in *Specters of Marx*. Unlike other Palestinians ghosts, Hilu's "ghost" is a subject of criticism; the ghost revengeful desire, and not only the Jews' deeds, catalyzes the texts' tragic ending. The ghost here is an instigator who prefers revenge at all costs as if the aim always sanctified the means.

Following his father's (bad) advice, Salah decides to challenge Kalvarisky to a duel, which will take place in the cemetery. He hopes that his father will help him: "I do not desire this man's liver but rather the redemption of my family and my people, my

fellow Arabs and Muslims, for if I do not stop this enemy with my body, with my right hand, if I do not kill him for us in this twilight battle, great destruction will befall us all”.<sup>96</sup> Again Salah describes a personal argument in terms of national honor. The Muslim gravediggers, as if they were a Greek chorus, make fun of his innocence and his culture that promotes martyrdom:

see, boy? This is the end of glory, a place of rot and blight under the earth, and their laughter resounded again and they said, this is a sweet lesson for us; eat, drink and be merry in the company of women, for our days are short and the darkness is great and after it comes, no hell, no heaven, not twenty virgins or one hundred, only this narrow chamber covered with clumps of earth, each bitter and grainy, and they asked me, have you encountered a female’s sweet orifice, the moist pit, the tangled darkness that is the origin of man’s actions?<sup>97</sup>

The gravediggers discourage Salah and he doesn’t execute his revenge plan. They oppose the idea that a martyr will be rewarded in the afterlife; a man should not wait for virgins in heaven but should go to whores in this life, they claim later. In this, they not only expose the national metaphor that redirects the desire for “our women” to a desire for “our land,” but they also suggest something more radical although not less misogynistic: to share the land like men share whores. Their comparison between virgin women, whores, and land is significant to Salah who doesn’t want to be with women. In this case, he intuitively understands that he should not be buried in a vagina-like grave. Since Salah knows that he cannot win the duel, he seeks an alternative way to protest. I will later elaborate about his choice to commit suicide by drowning while wearing his mother’s wedding-dress. Salah, who sought to find a different way to confront Kalvarisky than a violent revenge, is buried in the Muslim cemetery next to his father. His ghost, who wants justice as its name suggests, will haunt Independence Park and the Israeli collective memory. This melancholic ghost, who cannot withdrawal of its libidinal attachment to lost objects, will also haunt the Palestinian collective memory. In this sense and in the spirit of Freud, the text, I suggest against previous readings that see the novel as pro-Palestinian, criticizes the Palestinian society for its “pathological” mourning, that is, its melancholic obsession with the past that prevents them from moving forward and bettering their lives.

### **To Be or Not To Be**

Intertextuality is central to *The House of Dajani* since the novel is mapped on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.<sup>98</sup> In what follows, I draw attention to the similarities and differences between those texts, and show how concepts of mourning, sexuality, nationality, spectral revenge and resistance play out and shift in the transition from one context to the other. By reading *The House of Dajani* together with *Hamlet*, I argue that the former is a text which is locked in a double bind; it uses gender stereotypes to promote non-violent national resistance, that is, it seeks national justice at the unjust expense of other oppressed minorities. This is problematic, I argue, since it "solves" one problem by creating another.

*Hamlet* is set in medieval Denmark. Hamlet's father, the king, has just been killed by his brother Claudius, Hamlet's uncle. Claudius has married his brother's wife, Gertrude, and has ascended the throne. Hamlet doesn't know that his father was murdered, but he is extremely upset by his father's death and above all by his mother's marriage to Claudius. A further cause of distress appears to be his lack of success in wooing Ophelia, who is warned by both her father and her brother not to trust his advances. Then the ghost of Hamlet's father appears to him, telling him of the murder and urging him to seek revenge. In order to conceal his intentions, Hamlet starts behaving as if he were mad, or actually becomes mad, but at the same time devises a plan to ascertain whether Claudius is indeed guilty. In order to see Claudius' reactions, Hamlet asks a group of actors to perform a play about a man who kills his royal brother and marries the Queen. Following this, Hamlet decides to kill Claudius, but he doesn't immutably exclude his revenge; he reproaches his mother for having married Claudius and kills Ophelia's father who hides in the room. Following this murder, Claudius sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to accompany Hamlet to England, where Hamlet will be murdered. Hamlet, who finds out about the scheme, kills Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and returns to Denmark. Upon arrival, he discovers that Ophelia has committed suicide. Her brother, who is mad with rage at Hamlet, invites him to a duel in which he will be served with poisonous drink by Claudius. The duel takes place, but it is the Queen who ends up drinking the poison. Both Hamlet and his rival are mortally wounded, and in his



last breath, Hamlet kills Claudius. After the death of all its main characters, the play ends with the arrival on the scene of the King of Norway and his army. *The House of Dajani* presents similar scenes: the son's mother has a lover; her husband mysteriously dies and her lover takes control over the estate; the husband's ghost haunts his son and demands revenge; the son writes a story about his mother and her lover's misdeeds, and reads it to them; the lover sends the "mad" son to a faraway place accompanied by two collaborators who are murdered, and the son returns to the estate; a duel takes place; and finally, all main characters are dead or leave the estate; the second wave of Zionist immigration to Palestine begins.

Like Hamlet, Salah obsessively mourns his father's death. However, while Hamlet's grief is personal, Salah's national melancholia is allegorical: his pain, which is derived from his loss, represents the Palestinians' pain and their national loss. Both see ghosts which represent their search for justice, in a Derridean sense.<sup>99</sup> In both cases, "outsiders" will take advantage of the locals' weak point and execute a hostile "invasion"; the locals' loss then will multiply. A significant divergence between *Hamlet* and *The House of Dajani* is the lack of an Ophelia-like character; in fact, because of her absence, which may explain Salah's initial homoerotic desire for his mother's lover, Salah performs both roles. In this case, *The House of Dajani* queers *Hamlet*, and this also has allegorical implications, I argue. Unlike Hamlet, who after many hesitations kills his father's assassin, Salah chooses to kill himself. The text does not provide any explanations for this self-destructive act; although clues were provided earlier, the suicide comes as a surprise, and especially surprising is Salah's choice to wear his mother's wedding dress before he jumps into the river. Salah, then, imitates Ophelia's act, which needs to be explained and clarified. I suggest that since Salah knows that he cannot win the duel or overcome Kalvarisky in other ways, he chooses to perform a symbolic act that expresses his pain. By choosing his own fate, Salah takes control over the situation, and, for the first time, dictates the rules; Kalvarisky will have to react to Salah's deed and not the other way around. Following Salah's death and Afifa's hospitalization, Kalvarisky indeed withdraws; since he lost the justification to be in the estate, and maybe because of guilty feelings, he moves on and relocates to the north, as Salah had wanted. Salah, then, has found a way to resist the "power" and to protest injustice. The cost of such act is

enormous: he loses his life; against the gravediggers' advice, he chooses martyrdom death. The way he executed his death, I claim, cannot easily be adopted as it is into the Palestinian collective memory, since the boy dies in drag; a transvestite martyr does not fit neatly into the paradigm of national heroism.

Afifa, which means "chaste" in Arabic, is lustful; unlike her name, she is not a faithful or loyal wife. As a symbol of the nation, she is treacherous because she betrays her husband with another (the enemy). After his father's death, Salah feels that he must protect the family honor; he is also especially sensitive to the concept of betrayal, since he feels that he was cheated by Kalvarisky. In Arabic, the word "'ird" (عرض), which connoted patriarchal honor based on the protection of women's sexuality, is related to "ard" (أرض), which means land; as the Arabic saying goes: honor is land.<sup>100</sup> Salah wants to protect his mother as well as their land from the once-welcomed stranger who penetrates their lives. By wearing his mother's wedding dress, Salah takes upon himself the role that his mother abandoned; he, the effeminate boy, although not "really" a woman, will become "a symbol of immutable and eternal national qualities of an ancient people, the daily producer of an authentic national culture".<sup>101</sup> His performative drag, then, acts out his mourning over the lost land and lost family honor; his suicide, in this case, protests the present situation and works to restore an ideal past. The theatrical spectacle of committing suicide in drag stages more than Salah's grief and desire to restore past glory, I suggest; it also relates back to Independence Park. Salah, who was buried in the Muslim cemetery, will haunt the Jewish-Israeli gay cruisers and remind them that he, a Palestinian teenager, is just like them; as queer, his plea for recognition, and even identification, may be more easily accepted. His suicide also reminds us how deeply Salah once loved Kalvarisky, and, therefore, he may have chosen to kill himself because he couldn't hurt his beloved rival. Queering, Hayes argues, is a form of hauntology that exposes the connection between sexual repression and political oppression; Salah is well aware of this link and his haunting, if indeed he chooses to haunt Independence Park, will remind the park's patrons of this connection, and of how similar their situation is.

Kalvarisky takes part in the building of a new city, Tel-Aviv, which in time grew bigger and bigger until it eventually contained not only the small villages of the

coastal plane, but also Jaffa, the economic and cultural capital of Ottoman and later Mandate Palestine. While Tel-Aviv was known as “The First Hebrew (read: Zionist) City,” Jaffa was dubbed at the time The Bride of the Sea.<sup>102</sup> When Salah is dressed as a bride and drowns himself in the sea, he symbolically becomes Jaffa; the city that will be swallowed by Tel-Aviv. Reading *The House of Dajani* in current times and circumstances, historical Jaffa comes to life; the city’s nickname materializes in Salah: by emulating Ophelia, Salah performs the historical narrative of the place, that is, its downfall. Moreover, if “’ird” is “ard,” the reverse is also true, and “ard” is “’ird”: because Salah lost the land, he also lost his manly honor, and thus became a woman-like. His drag performs his failure as a man to protect the land while at the same time, restoring it.

Salah’s suicide is a mixed blessing, I suggest, since the text does not attempt to break the patriarchal Gordian knot between “honor” and “land” in the Palestinian culture. Moreover, it only reaffirms the stereotypes of women and their marginal role in the public arena: *The House of Dajani* allows them no real forms of resistance and protest besides suicide. In this sense, this is a conservative text that reasserts “old world” values: it pushes women back to the margins and leaves them only a symbolic role in the national narrative. *The House of Dajani*, however, does more than just that when it pathologizes femininity: women are weak, passive, compulsive, and, in short, insane. Almost all the Palestinian characters in the novel, including the male characters, have the same “feminine shortcomings”: they are grotesque, clownish, feeble, irrational and superstitious. In order to explain the Palestinians’ failure to resist the Zionists, Hilu effeminizes them: their “inferiority” results from their “feminine nature” which the text essentializes as such. Womanhood is paralleled in this text to victimhood, even if in some readings, as mine, victims can symbolically protest. While promoting national resistance, the text, then, also promote essentialism; once again women are exploited and used as a way to imagine a national community in which they do not have a place.

### **Conclusion**

In their 2010 introduction to *Places of Public Memory*, Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian Ott explore the ways in which memory, and space “seem to haunt one

another in recent scholarship”.<sup>103</sup> This chapter takes part in such an exploration; by focusing on representations of Palestinian ghosts in Independence Park, and the sense that recently the Nakba is haunting the Jewish-Israeli collective memory, similar questions are raised about memory and place, and the way both of them materialize in the local discourse. Since Independence Park is a known gay cruising place, these questions intersect with questions of gender and homosexuality, such as, for example, do LGBT rights trump other human rights? Should Jewish-Israeli identify with Zionism or with other oppressed minorities?

As a way to conclude this chapter, I would like to focus on a poem by Mordechai Goldman, which brings to the fore the main hauntological issues of this chapter and raise more questions for further discussion. Goldman’s 1997 *Book of Ask* (ספר שאל) precedes the Second Intifada by three years, but it foreshadows the hauntology discourse that would follow. The poem “Holy Ground” (מקום קדוש) mentions the Muslim Cemetery that is in Independence Park.<sup>104</sup> While concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it intersects with gay cruising, the poem also suggests that this conflicted space summons not only the dead but also the muse of poetry.

The speaker in “Holy Ground” is a poet who notices a new sign that was just posted near the cemetery. The text does not specify if it was posted by the city or the waqf, the Muslim officials who are the guardians of religious properties and assets. The question that strikes him most is to whom this sign that reads “holy ground” is addressed? He gives three possible answers that he leaves open: gay cruisers, townsfolk, Palestinian ghosts; all are meant to stay away and keep a distance from this holy place. “Is the sign designed to deter lovers not yet frightened by death?” The poet problematically associates homosexuality with death; he situates cruising “at the edge of the abyss”. In the age of HIV/AIDS, the poet stereotypically stigmatizes gays as carriers of death because they are not “frightened by death,” as if those who did not yet die were already dead. If homosexuals are driven by “dangerous” lovemaking, the townsfolk, according to the poet, are driven by hate: “perhaps it’s a sigh for the Jews \ that the deed of living Muslims \ having increased their hatred \ to offer a Muslim skull or a skeleton hand \ as a plaything for a child”. The poet criticizes the Jews’ apathy about death; the violent vicious circle has benumbed them to the point that they celebrate the death of

their enemies and dance on their graves. Considering that Independence Park is also a playground, a child that plays with a Muslim skull will grow up to dehumanize “living Muslims”. In this case, as if it were a warning against hatred, the sign is a reminder of “the sanctity of life,” a key concept in post-Holocaust Judaism that promotes survival over martyrdom. This is also true for the Palestinian ghosts, the poet implies; the sign is meant to discourage them from haunting the place, and especially the cruisers. They “must not return”; the poet wishes, “to share in the joy of lovemaking \ with those who do it on tombstones”. Although he is concerned for the cruisers and hopes for their wellbeing, again the poet associates homosexuality with death, but, this time, death for him is also linked to Palestinians. As if they were a *shahids*, suicide martyrs, dead Palestinians return from the otherworld to retaliate and they use sex—read: AIDS—to execute their vengeance. AIDS, in this case, is the weapon that is directed against the Jewish-Israeli cruisers; the text, then, I argue, problematically compares Palestinian nationality to AIDS since both bring death. The sign, in this case, is meant to remind the dead not to take part in unholy deeds like, for example, revenge. With this point, the poem closes a circle that imitates the vicious circle that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the Jews disrespect the Palestinian dead that return to bring death to the Jews who disrespect the Palestinian dead, and so on and so forth.

The second verse attempts to break out from this vicious circle by importing a new context into it; this, the poet assumes, will destabilize the whole discursive system. The poet, I suggest, distances himself from the conflict by introducing an intertext that, for him, exceeds the national struggle between Israelis and Palestinians. This “solution,” however, turns a blind eye to the problem, I claim; the poet evades reality by escaping into the realm of *ars-poetica*, where he feels safe and where death is only a romantic metaphor to poetry. The Muslim cemetery, which is also a cruising site, is “the meeting ground of love and death”; the poet, who is “a compulsive Orpheus,” goes there every night and witnesses the play between Thanatos and Eros. For him, this is a religious-like ritual that transforms Independence Park into a “holy ground”. Moreover, if the poet is Orpheus, the park is the underworld: mourning his lost love, since “another love-affair had ended yesterday,” he goes there to find what was lost. According to Greek mythology, Orpheus travels to the underworld to retrieve Eurydice, his beloved wife, but

because of his carelessness, she vanishes forever. Similarly, the poet cruises Independence Park to find consolation for his loss or maybe to retrieve the lover who rejected him yesterday. This, he knows, is pointless, and “he returns \ at his side nothing but poems \ sparkling fresh like dewy leaves”. Cruising, then, produces poems; it’s a sadomasochist act, in which the poet must suffer in order to create poetry. This romantic notion explains the poet’s compulsiveness and why the park is holy: it’s a place that summons the muse of poetry and not, necessarily, Palestinian ghosts.<sup>105</sup> The muse appears in death, which, in turn, enables and enriches queer existence; the poems that the poet writes are “sparkling fresh like dewy leaves”. Did the poet post the sign that reads “holy ground”? Can HIV/AIDS be an incentive to create great poetry? Is cruising a constructive poetic tool for writers? Are both *ars moriendi* in time of AIDS? Is cruising poetry? Is cruising a form of haunting? Is AIDS a form of haunting? The poet prefers not to take sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; he shuts himself in the ivory tower of poetry, as if he were able to prevent reality from entering his “safe place”. Independence Park, in this case, symbolizes more than a national-conflicted place; it becomes a mythical site that exceeds history, an exterritorial space, somewhat hellish in an inspiring way, that exists only in literature and queer imagination.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> John Rechy, *Numbers* (New York: Grove Press, 1984). The protagonist of this novel cruises the parks of Los Angeles; he describes it as haunting: “Long ago, Johnny saw a movie in which misty ghosts rose from their graves to prowl a foggy cemetery. He wasn’t so much frightened as saddened by the silence and remoteness of it all - though at times the ghosts did fuse. Now, in the arena - still struck by the sense of entering a separated world, and seeing the men here cruising the misty greenness - he’s reminded of that movie - and of the awake ‘dream; he had last night” (144). See also p. 130. In his 2010 *London Triptych*, which also tells the story of rentboys, Jonathan Kemp uses spectral metaphors to describe gay sex. For example: “These words can only explain how I disappeared completely, how I moved through this city like a ghost” (112). Jonathan Kemp, *London Triptych* (Brighton: Myriad Editions, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Michal Witkowski, *Lovetown*, tr. W Martin (London: Portobello Books, 2010). Witkowski’s novel describes the gay cruising scene of post-communist Poland. The characters’ nostalgia to the communist past is evoked in spectral metaphors.

<sup>4</sup> See: Yossi Goldberg, Shula Widrich, and Irit Amit-Coher, *Tel-Aviv, Ir Gloia* (Tel-Aviv Exposed: Walking Tours at Its Forgotten Historic Corners) (Tel-Aviv: Achi Asaf, 2009), 227-228. See maps and correspondence in Tel-Aviv City Archive: Sector 7(13), case 68, box 391.

<sup>5</sup> Leo Pinsker, *Auto-emancipation* (New York: Zionist Organization of America, 1948), 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrew literature did have a revival of the living-dead image after the War of Independence, but it did not entail actual appearance of dead soldiers. Mainly, it dealt with the vivid image of the soldiers in the memory of their loved ones; a symbolic image of a brave soldier that his death enable the creation of the new setae. See: Hever Hannan, *Sefrut Shnikhtevet Mikan* (literature that is written here) (Tel-Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 1999), 20-22. It is interesting to note here Simcha Shirman’s project from the 1980s. He has been photographing the Muslim cemetery in Acre to remind himself and other of the Arab history of the city.

<sup>8</sup> Benvenisti Benvenisti, *Landscape: The Buried History Of The Holy Land Since 1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Oz Shelach, *Picnic Grounds: Novel in Fragments*” (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2004), 77.

<sup>10</sup> Gil Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Yossi Waxman’s 1999 novel *Every Time We Say Goodbye I Die A Little* ( אל נא תאמר לי ( שלום) follows the ghost of a Jewish woman who is also the storyteller; the story takes place in 1987 with the beginning of the first Intifada and the discovery that her closeted son is gay. As a ghost she sees her son go to Independence Park and approve his relationship with a man (88). Yossi Waxman, *Al Na Tomar Li Shalom* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> In her 1999 *The Political Lives of the Dead Bodies*, Katherine Verdery asks similar questions in the context of post-communist East-Europe: “Why has the post-socialist period been accompanied by so much activity around dead bodies, and what does the politics concerning them signify? How does this dead0body politics differ from examples in other times and places?” (3). This chapter deals with these political meanings in the Israeli context as a case of “other time and place”. See: Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of the Dead Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in: Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 19-20.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 8.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 175.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, xix.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, xviii.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid: xix.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>22</sup> Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 19.

<sup>24</sup> I’m interested here in the link between nationalism and homosexuality through the image of ghosts. In his 2009 *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Jose Esteban Munoz uses “ghosts” to talk about AIDS (in the second chapter: “Ghosts of Public Sex”). Since the scope of this chapter is limited, I will not talk about AIDS, and I hope to delve into it in the future. Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Eitan Bronstein, *Studying the Nakba and Reconstructing Space in the Palestinian Village of Lifta* (Florence: European University Press, 2005), 17. The booklet is also available on-line: [http://www.eui.eu/RSCA\\_S/WP-Texts/05\\_35.pdf](http://www.eui.eu/RSCA_S/WP-Texts/05_35.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Eitan Bronstein, “The Nakba in Hebrew: Israeli-Jewish Awareness of the Palestinian Catastrophe and Internal Refugees,” *Catastrophe Remembered*, ed. Nur Masalha (London: Zed Books, 2005), 219.

<sup>27</sup> Zochrot website in English:

<http://www.zochrot.org/en/menu/%D7%96%D7%95%D7%9B%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA/%D7%9E%D7%99-%D7%90%D7%A0%D7%97%D7%A0%D7%95>

<sup>28</sup> Ernest Renan, “What Is a Nation?” *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homo Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 8-22; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>29</sup> The Nakba in Hebrew, 221.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.zochrot.org/en/print/51017>.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.nakbainhebrew.org/index.php?id=413>.

<sup>32</sup> Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam* (New York: Eagle Brook, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 1984), 110-113.



<sup>34</sup> I would like to thank Yael Azgd for allowing me to use her image.

<sup>35</sup> Barbara Mann, *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel-Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 64-71. Note here that the cemetery was sold to the city by the waqf, Muslim officials who are the guardians of religious properties and assets.

<sup>36</sup> In Žižek reading of Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*, he argues that the dead keep on haunting the house because they did not get proper burial. In the novel, a residence house was built over a Native-American cemetery to the resentment of the dead. Their return, Žižek claims, is the return of the Lacanian Real, and when their demands will be answered, they will leave. See: *Looking Awry*: 25-26.

<sup>37</sup> Recent scholarship deal with this, see: Naama Meishar, "Fragile Guardians: Nature Reserves and Forests Facing Arab Villages," *Constructing a Sense of Place: Architecture and the Zionist Discourse*, ed. Haim Yacobi (London: Ashgate, 2004), 303-325; Tovi Fenster, "Belonging, Memory and the Politics of Planning in Israel." *Social and Cultural Geography*, 5.3 (2005): 403-417; LeVine, Mark, 2004. "Planning to Conquer: Modernity and Its Antinomies in the New-Old-Jaffa," *Constructing a Sense of Place: Architecture and the Zionist Discourse*, ed. Haim Yacobi (London: Ashgate, 2004), 192-224.

<sup>38</sup> Erez Levon, *Language and the Politics of Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays in Israel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 43.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> Amalia Ziv, "Performative Politics in Israeli Queer Anti-Occupation Activism." *GLQ*, 16.4 (2010): 538.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 554.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 537.

<sup>43</sup> Gil Hochberg, "Introduction: Israelis, Palestinians, Queers: Point of Departure." *GLQ*, 16.4 (2010): 510. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 16-17. See also: Jasbir Puar, "Israel's Gay Propaganda War": <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/01/israels-gay-propaganda-war>.

<sup>44</sup> I intertwined the four activists in August 2008. Their act was not an official action of Black laundry, but more as an unaffiliated side-project. Because of the distance of time and the participants' personalities, I ended up with four different Rashomon-like perspectives on the event. That being said, they all agreed on the basic details which were summarized here. More than gathering information, I saw the interviews as dialog in which their agendas were shared with me in a reflective manner.

<sup>45</sup> Travertine, 500 x 600 x 300 cm. For more information and images: Mario De Micheli, *Il monumento d'Auschwitz di Pietro Cascella* (Milano: C.E.I, 1970).

<sup>46</sup> The Israeli daily newspapers covered the inauguration on 11.24.1972. (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, p. 4; *Ma'ariv*, p. 2). The first page headline of that day was "Israel was attacked with 2500 Syrian shells"; the inauguration of monument was therefore important considering the day's events.

<sup>47</sup> This act is mentioned in a short footnote in Amalia Ziv's Hebrew version of her article. See: Amalia Ziv, "LaCatozot Et Gevolot HaMigdar," *Pa'ari Ezechot, Hagira, Pirayon*

*VeZeot Belsrael* (citizenship, immigration, fertility and Identity gaps in Israel) (Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2008), 290-321. See footnote six in 294.

<sup>48</sup> The phrase "a Land without a People for a People without a Land" is one of the most oft-cited phrases in the literature of Zionism; Diana Muir argues that it is erroneously attributed to Israel Zangwill whereas, in fact, the phrase was coined and propagated by nineteenth-century Christian writers. Moreover, it was never popular in Zionist circles. Diana Muir, "A Land without a People for a People without a Land." *Middle Eastern Quarterly*, 15.2 (2008): 55.

<sup>49</sup> Micah 4:3.

<sup>50</sup> Micah 4:1.

<sup>51</sup> *Performative Politics*, 539.

<sup>52</sup> James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 139.

<sup>53</sup> In his 2009 *Multidirectional Memory*, Michael Rothberg suggests a different way to think about memory. He argues: "Against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory – as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources – I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: As subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative." (3). This approach may work in the context of the Holocaust in American society, but not in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since it is still a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources, that is, the land. Rothberg Michael, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>54</sup> *Performative Politics*, 552. Ziv relies on: Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2000). See especially 56-58.

<sup>55</sup> See an interview to *Ma'ariv's* website, NRG:

<http://www.nrg.co.il/online/54/ART1/790/028.html>.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, the Booklet *Nakba Bullshit* (נכבה הרטא) that a right-wing Zionist group, Im Tirtzu, published in 2011.

<sup>57</sup> The Legal Forum for the Land of Israel, a right-wing organization, challenged the award in court. The claim was that the head of the award panel, an ex-leader of the left-wing political party Meretz, had a conflict of interest because his niece was Hilu's editor, a fact not noted on required disclosure forms. Another legal dispute was over the characters' names, which refer to real people. After a suit was made by families and relatives, and an agreement was achieved, from the second edition in Hebrew and from the first edition in other languages all the names were changed. My references are to the first edition in Hebrew; the quotes, with necessary modifications, are from: Alon Hilu, *The House of Rajani*, tr. Even Fallenberg (London: Harvill Secker, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> Compare Gal Uchovsky's celebratory review (<http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3512569,00.html>) to the backlash reviews by Aharon Megged (<http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3549051,00.html>) and Ben-Dror Yemini (<http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/913/539.html>).

<sup>59</sup> This fictive character is based of a real man; Kalvarisky was the agronomist of the Jewish Colonization Association (יקא), for which he acquired lands, and a member in Brit Shalom, the 1920s-1930s Jewish-Palestinian Peace Alliance.

<sup>60</sup> The Dajani family is a well-known elite Palestinian family from Jaffa and Jerusalem. See: Taher Dajani, *From Palestine to America: A Memoir* (New York: Iuniverse, 2008).

<sup>61</sup> 1 Kings 21:19.

<sup>62</sup> 34 (E: 17).

<sup>63</sup> On colonialism and national allegories see: Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text*, 115 (1986): 65-88; David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>64</sup> 49 (E: 28).

<sup>65</sup> 51 (E: 29).

<sup>66</sup> 55 (E: 32).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid (E: 33).

<sup>68</sup> 61 (E: 37).

<sup>69</sup> 66 (E: 42).

<sup>70</sup> 76 (E: 49).

<sup>71</sup> 100 (E: 69).

<sup>72</sup> 54 (E: 32).

<sup>73</sup> 74 (E: 47).

<sup>74</sup> 110 (E: 77).

<sup>75</sup> 53 (E: 31).

<sup>76</sup> In their introduction to *Woman-Nation-State*, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias claim that women are often the symbol of the nation and are seen as the cultural carriers of the ethnic group. In this case, Kalvarisky "conquers" more than just Afifa, but, by extension, also the Palestinian nation. See: Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, *Woman-Nation-State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 9. See also: Anon Raz-Krakotzkin, "The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective." *Orientalism and the Jews*, ed. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek Penslar (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 168).

<sup>77</sup> 92 (E: 61).

<sup>78</sup> 93 (E: 26).

<sup>79</sup> 102 (E: 71).

<sup>80</sup> 74 (E: 47).

<sup>81</sup> 142 (E: 104).

<sup>82</sup> In *Spite of Partition*, 8.

<sup>83</sup> 148 (E: 106). This is also common in the literature of the First Aliyah. Yaffah Berlovitz claims that writers of the time Judaized the Palestinians and use them for their own national-building's needs. Yaffah Berlovitz, *Lehamtse Eretz, Lehamtzi Am* (Inventing a Land, Inventing a People) (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1996). 153.

<sup>84</sup> In his 2008 study on the representations of the Arabs in Hebrew literature, Yochai Oppenheimer claims that from the Oslo Accords on, more and more Israeli writers adopted the Palestinian narrative of the Nakba. Hilu's novel is part of this radical shift. Yochai Oppenheimer, *Me'ever Lagader* (Barriers: The Representation of the Arab in Hebrew and Israeli Fiction) (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2008), 14-15.

<sup>85</sup> 159 (E: 116).

<sup>86</sup> 158 (E: 115).

<sup>87</sup> 360 (E: 278).

<sup>88</sup> 56 (E: 33), 123 (E:88), 214 (159).

<sup>89</sup> In common demonstrations of Black Laundry and conservative Palestinian organizations, the queer activists were asked, and consent, not to emphasize their sexual orientation.

<sup>90</sup> 187 (E: 137).

<sup>91</sup> 219 (E: 157).

<sup>92</sup> 229 (E: 172).

<sup>93</sup> 230 (E: 173).

<sup>94</sup> 119 (E: 86).

<sup>95</sup> 242 (E: 182).

<sup>96</sup> 309 (E: 235).

<sup>97</sup> 310 (E: 236).

<sup>98</sup> See Shira Stav's 2008 review in *Ha'arezt*:

<http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/962721.html>.

<sup>99</sup> In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida reads Hamlet as a tragedy that focuses on two interlocked issues: justice and mourning.

<sup>100</sup> See: Sheila Katz, *Women and Gender in Early Jewish and Palestinian Nationalism* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2003), 85. See also: Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape*, 247.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

<sup>102</sup> Sharon Rotbard, *Ir Levanah, Ir Shehorah* (White City, Black City) (Tel-Aviv: Babel, 2005), 147.

<sup>103</sup> Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian Ott (eds.), *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>104</sup> Mordechai Geldman, *Sefer Sheal* (Book of Ask) (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1997), 124-15. All translations of "Holy Place" are by: Tsipi Keller, *Poets On The Edge* (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 190-191.

<sup>105</sup> In *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet*, Charles Segal examines the evolution of this narrative throughout the generations. Modern readers of this myth, he argues, stress not the death of the characters but the meaninglessness that this death symbolizes. Maurice Blanchot, for example, "utilizes Orpheus as a myth for understanding the creative process of the artist who confronts the potential emptiness of literature. He allegorizes Orpheus as the writer who descends into the depths of being by forgetting himself in the work". Charles Segal, *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 195.

## Afterword

### The American Forefather of Israeli Gay Cruising

#### The Forgotten Predecessor: Arthur Laurents Cruising Tel-Aviv

Following his 1965 visit to Israel, probably to see the local production of *West Side Story*, Laurents, the celebrated gay Jewish-American writer, writes a one act play about his cruising experience in Tel-Aviv.<sup>1</sup> The questions that he raises in *Loss of Memory* about homosexuality vis-à-vis other identity markers, and especially the tension between queer diasporic alliances and Jewish nationalism, precedes similar questions that will surface in Israeli queer culture three decades later, particularly in works that portray Tel-Aviv's Independence park and engage in questions of queer space. Laurents' play, which was published twenty years after it was written, is not only one of the first texts that document the gay cruising scene in and around Independence Park, but it also touches many of the issues that were in the focus of in this dissertation. As a way to conclude this project, it is interesting to revisit these issues from the viewpoint of a non-Israeli who pioneered in documenting Israeli gay cruising.

From the beginning of his career, with plays such as *Home of the Brave* (1945) and screenplays such as *Rope* (1948), Laurents principally explores two main issues; on the one hand, anti-Semitism, and particularly post-traumatic reactions to the Holocaust, and, on the other hand, queer identities. In his 2000 memoir *Original Story By*, Laurents notes that "the theme of discovery and acceptance" informs much of his work. His texts, indeed, bring to the fore the tension between the private, one's religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation that produce shame and then guilt, and the public, which is where the private is exposed and where one, eventually, accepts his or her otherness. *Loss of Memory* is not exceptional in that sense: the play is a prime example of Laurents' poetics; it demonstrates the intense negotiation between competing minority identifications in relation to the hegemony and the question of queer assimilation.<sup>2</sup> Unlike most of the works that were in the center of this dissertation, which often try to form an alternative discourse to the national one, this play, I argue, advocates Zionism at the expense of homosexuality; like other writers and artists, Laurents also promotes separatism, not of the

“homosexual race,” but rather of the “Jewish race.” In this case, as well as in other cases, having space that it’s one’s own is a pivotal issue; Independence Park in the play, I suggest, is romanticized as a site of Jewish nationalism; other identities (queer, Arab, gentile) are marginalized.

*Loss of Memory* retrospectively tells the story of a Jewish-American writer who visits Tel-Aviv in 1965 and finds himself in the midst of the city’s gay cruising scene. He is picked up by a good-looking Israeli, a Holocaust survivor and now an officer in the army, who takes him back to his apartment. There, the writer learns that the soldier’s boyfriend is a non-Jewish German tourist and that both will relocate to Germany soon; the writer, who finds the soldier very attractive but opposes the life choices he makes, has sex with him but regrets it afterwards.

The characters in the play do not have names; they are identified only by their nationality. One is an American and the other is an Israeli who was born in Ukraine. More than individuals, they are representatives of their nations, and, accordingly, their conversations are centered on the topic of nationalism, separatist space, and the Diaspora. The Jewish-American, who is excited to visit the Jewish State for the first time, shares his excitement with the Israeli, a decorated soldier, only to discover that his companion is not the patriot he assumed he was. The Israeli does not appreciate the American’s anecdote from his first day in Israel:

I got off the plane and the attendant said ‘welcome home’; I walked into the hotel and the doorman said ‘welcome home’; I went up in the lift and the operator said ‘welcome home’ [...] I took a little walk down I don’t know what street – it doesn’t matter, but it suddenly struck me: for the first time in my life, I am part of the majority.<sup>3</sup>

The Israeli, who is not impressed by the American’s discovery of his “new-old-land,” nevertheless takes him, the good-looking tourist, back to his apartment. There he confronts him: “it is nice that you had your little moment of feeling you are part of the majority, but you aren’t, you know. We are not wanted here”.<sup>4</sup> The American’s “we” is not the Israeli’s “we”: while both are homosexuals, the American emphasizes his affiliation to Jewish nationalism whereas the Israeli, as a local who does not romanticize the land and the revival of Jewish power, prefers to be part of transnational queerness. The Israeli, who has been in Israel more than a few hours, knows that in order to be part of the majority—that imaginary “we” his companion fetishizes about—he will have to hide or deny parts of his identity. Both are looking for a home: the

American, who may shed his homosexuality in order to enter the majority, finds “home” because he is willing to pay the price of assimilation, and the Israeli, on the other hand, refuses to pay such a high price; for him, emigration is worth the price of keeping his sexual desires more public. Considering the American’s lower stakes—he is self-employed, well-to-do professional, who could return to his old-life if he wishes—he may not necessarily renounce his sexual orientation; but, this is not an option for the Israeli since he cannot afford being outed in conservative mid-sixties Israel: “this is not only a very small country,” he rebukes the American, “but also a very anti-homosexual one”.<sup>5</sup> The Israeli, then, decides to immigrate to Germany, where his boyfriend is from, because, he says, “there, I know, I am wanted”.<sup>6</sup> From the American’s viewpoint, his own “homecoming” is a sort of a fantasy, where he can imagine—not that he really needs to do so considering his social status—that he is part of the hegemony. However, for the Israeli, who found and lost a few “homes” during the war, home is where one knows that he is wanted and where he feels safe.

The American, who internalized Israeli *hasbara* (meaning the country’s strategic advocacy campaign) is also convinced that he is “safe” and “wanted.” However, so it seems, he has a different understanding of what it means to be at “home,” to have a space of his own. As in Sartre’s “The Anti-Semite and the Jew,” the American lets others define his identity for him: first, by buying into the idea that he is part of a Jewish Exodus, that is, that he is part of a bigger “we,” and then, as he says to the Israeli, that “we” are in this together, that is, facing a similar future; he emphasizes: “if they heat up the ovens again, in I go”.<sup>7</sup> The American, who relies on the Jewish state and its army to save him from future genocides, is attracted to the soldier since he is a manifestation of Jewish power, thus, a representative of the hegemony. In this case, the American sees Israel as an insurance policy; his affiliation with the country is made on the basis of fear from future-Nazis: “united we stand, divided we fall.” The Israeli, on the other hand, knows that, although he is Jewish and a honored soldier in the Jewish army, he would be ostracized once he is outed; therefore, he prefers to find a place, even if it is Germany, which he could consider home and feel safe there as a homosexual.

The American does not understand how a Holocaust survivor has a German lover and how he even considers relocating to Germany, where ovens could be heated up again. As the American perceives it, and the play’s title alludes, the Israeli lost his memory when he partnered with a German, that is, he “sells out” the Jewish past for romance. The Israeli replies to this

accusation: “how do you dare? I think it is you who forgets! My parents, my brother were murdered by the Nazis – yes, Germans! My house was burned down, my country was bombed out!”<sup>8</sup> Then he adds: “I am going to live in Germany because I want to be with my own kind”.<sup>9</sup> The Israeli does not see himself as a “traitor,” but as a person who is loyal to his “kind,” to his “we”. As other writers and artists who write about Intendance Park, the Israeli sees himself, I argue, first as a homosexual and only second as Jewish; he is committed to his people—his imagined queer community—who accept him in both levels: the private, that is, what he does in bed, as well as the public, that is, what he tells that he does in bed. As in other cases discussed in the dissertation, the Israeli chooses to imagine queer space and not a (solely) Jewish one.

Although the American is put off by the Israeli’s choices, meaning his willing to be a minority, he, nevertheless, goes to bed with him and shamefully regrets it later. To his friends back in America, he says that he did not have sex with the Israeli, and presents himself as a man of higher morals.<sup>10</sup> In the last moments of the play, the American admits to himself: “nothing comparable to the pleasure I would have now from the memory of having done what I really wanted to do”.<sup>11</sup> As we already know, especially when compared to the Israeli, the American dreams of having power: he prefers to enjoy a false memory in which he is in a position of strength than to give an account of the choices he made. He forgets in order to remember what did not happen, that he, like the Israeli, “sold out” his beliefs for a romance.

The American, who blames the Israeli for forgetting the past, ends up “forgetting” his own inconvenient past. In this sense, the American and the Israeli reflect each other. Ironically, this “forgetfulness” happens not only to the fictional characters in the play, but also to Laurents himself in his memoir. In *Original Story By*, he compares his first cruising experience in Israel—“my first night in the promised land!”—to what happens in his play.<sup>12</sup> A close examination of both narratives, however, shows that they are not completely identical: Laurents adds and omits certain elements. First of all, while the Israeli in the play is a Holocaust survivor, the soldier that Laurents met in the park is a Sabra. Furthermore, and not less important, unlike the characters in the play, Laurents and his Israeli lover did *not* have sex. When Laurents learns that the soldier has a German lover, he, unlike his fictional twin, loses interest: “I couldn’t have managed an erection no matter what he or we did [...] I was a moral Jew and the moral Jew took over”.<sup>13</sup> As in the play, Laurents gives precedence to Jewish nationalism over queer alliance; he desires that national “we.”



In the play, when the Israeli says that he is relocating to Germany to be with his “own kind,” the American dismissively replies that sex—that is, sexual orientation—is only a “basic common denominator,” as if homosexuals have nothing in common besides their desire to have sex with other men. In the memoir, when he describes the same scene, Laurens argues that at that moment he “learned” that sex is less important to “who he is.” In this sense, as if it was a *Bildungsroman*, his cruising experience matured him: he did not lose his memory, as in the title of the play, but his innocence; he comes to understand that there are more important things for a gay man than sex. Like the American in the play, Laurens goes against the idea of queer essentialism and claims word for word that sex is only the “common denominator” for homosexuals; by “losing” sex, he “finds” national identity which he then essentializes as something with higher moral qualities.

The issue of forgetfulness is significant when reading the play and the memoir side by side, especially because Laurens has a Freudian slip which raises a few interesting questions. While the play is titled *Loss of Memory*, Laurens refers to it in his memoir as *Loss of Innocence*.<sup>14</sup> Why did he make such a mistake? Are “memory” and “innocence” interchangeable? Are they synonyms or antonyms? Can this mistake, this moment of carelessness, teach us something about the thin line, as Laurens draws it, between memory and innocence? Is innocence a product of homosexuality and memory a product of nationality? Is there queer memory? What about queer nationality? While the word “memory” appears in *Loss of Memory* a few times, and plays an important role there, the word “innocent” appears only once, but not, I argue, incidentally. The Israeli, who is not willing to be criticized by the American, insinuates that he has a mindset of an imperialist, that is, that the American is not looking for a “home” but for another home, for a bigger elbow room. He says to the American that the tourists come to Israel because it is “so cheap” and that “Israelis are so innocent”: they come to take pity and advantage of the noble savages.<sup>15</sup> Witnessing this exploitation, the Israeli loses his innocence: he knows not only that he is being used, but also knows how to protect himself from such dangers. The American, who is the one who has the ability to misuse his power, is exposed here as the truly naïve person: he is surprised that the Israeli seeks sex although he is partnered, that his partner is a non-Jewish German, and that they will relocate to Germany soon. From this point of view, the American seems not only painfully bourgeois, but also closed-minded and naive. If *Loss of Memory* was a *Bildungsroman*, it was a failed one: the

American actually does not grow up in the end of the play since, like a child, he insists not facing reality but inventing one that suits him better. In this case, I suggest, the play could be read against the grain of the memoir.

The American's "amnesia" allows him to sustain his naiveté: "memory," which produces experience, is the opposite of innocence, that is, when one has an experience, one is no longer, and cannot be, innocent. The American's cruising experience made him lose is innocence, but his "memory loss" reproduces it; without memory, he is again in the position of the innocent. Experience in the play, then, is the link between memory and innocence. This also happens in Laurents' first play *Home of the Brave*, in which a Jewish soldier in the American army is suffering from loss of memory as a way to cope with his guilt for failing to save an anti-Semitic fellow soldier. In this case, the soldier, like Laurents, cannot give an account for his deeds if he does not remember what happened. Both of Laurents' plays are centered on a trauma and offers similar solution: rewriting memories as a way to face guilt; in *Loss of Memory*. guilt for surrendering to the "common denominator." Does Laurents, like his fictional character who is ashamed of having sex with a "traitor," tell his Jewish-American friends that he did not have sex with the Israeli while actually having sex with him? Does he deceive and lie to us, his memoir's readers, about having sex with the Sabra?

Like other artists and writers who deal with Independence Park, Laurent's protagonists use the constructed past as building blocks for their present and future needs; they rewrite the past in order to make a better future for themselves. Those memories, which often engage with the trauma of Holocaust, force the protagonists to choose a side in the debate about Diasporism versus nationalism, which is also, or maybe mainly, a question of space. As many works about Independence Park, Laurent's protagonists argue for a community based on shared conditions of marginalization. The park in the works I discussed in this dissertation becomes an alternative space of sociality and belonging where non-normative sexual identities are publicly recognized. In a sense, the literary and visual works that portray Independence Park construct an alternative discourse than the national one. By making room of one's own, cruisers, writers, artists, and activists not only imagine a queer veritable space in which they feel safe(r); they do more than "just" building a community: they also "make room" for an alternative discourse in Israel. The works discussed in *Imagining Independence Park* are offering a new ways (artistically, politically, and so forth) to think about Israeli society and place of the "others" in it.

### **Looking Forward**

While writing *Imagining Independence Park* I realized that there are so many texts which portray the park—much more than I initially thought I would find—that it will be impossible to analyze all of them. In the painful process of elimination, I had to take out not only many engaging texts, but also many interesting issues and questions that those texts had evoked. Looking back at my work, I realize now that I could have also written a different book about Independence Park (maybe even more than just one) which would have asked different questions and would centered on a different theme. Although I did write about HIV/AIDS in *Imagining Independence Park*, there is room for much-needed projects that will cover and give a full attention to this important subject. I hope that my dissertation will open the door for future project that will focus on HIV/AIDS in Israeli culture.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Laurents, Arthur, 1983. "Loss of Memory," *The Best Short Plays 1983*, ed. Ramon Delgado, Chilton Books, Radnor, p. 206-217.
- <sup>2</sup> Arthur Laurents, *Original Story By: A Memoir of Broadway and Hollywood* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> 208.
- <sup>4</sup> 214.
- <sup>5</sup> 212.
- <sup>6</sup> 214.
- <sup>7</sup> 208. See: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, tr. George .J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1948).
- <sup>8</sup> 213.
- <sup>9</sup> 214.
- <sup>10</sup> I would like to point out we were Laurents' friends. In his book *The Gay Metropolis*, Charles Kaiser writes about a group of friends that included "four gay Jewish men, all working at the very top of their craft": Laurents, Leonard Bernstein, Jerome Robbins, and Stephen Sondheim. Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 89.
- <sup>11</sup> 217.
- <sup>12</sup> 185 and 186.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> 212.

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- . "Gan Shamor" (protected park), *Magaim* September 1991.
- . "Ha'agoda Mitorert" (The Association is Awaking), *Magaim* October 1987.
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