

Double-Diaspora in the Literature and Film of Arab Jews

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of
Fred Schwartz, Rebie Schwartz, Hymie Toulch and Harry Toulch.
The intellectual and spiritual endeavor within was shaped, challenged,
and enriched by your practical and loving examples in life and in passing.

Abstract

Inspired by the contrapuntal and relational critiques of Edward Said and Ella Shohat, this thesis conducts a comparative analysis of the literature and film of Arab Jews in order to deconstruct discourses on Jewish identity that privilege the dichotomies of Israel-diaspora and Arab-Jew. Sami Michael's novel *Refuge*, Naim Kattan's memoir *Farewell, Babylon*, Karin Albou's film *Little Jerusalem* and b.h. Yael's video documentary *Fresh Blood: a Consideration of Belonging* reveal the complexities and interconnections of Sephardic, Mizrahi and Arab Jewish experiences across multiple geographies that are often silenced under dominant Eurocentric, Ashkenazi or Zionist interpretations of Jewish history. Drawing from these texts, Jewish identity is explored through four philosophical themes: Jewish beginnings vs. origins, boundaries between Arab and Jew, the construction of Jewish identities in place and space, and, the concept of diaspora and the importance Jewish difference. As a double-diaspora, with the two poles of their identities seen as enemies in the ongoing conflict between Israel-Palestine, Arab Jews challenge the conception of a single Jewish nation, ethnicity, identity or culture. Jewishness can better be understood as a rhizome, a system without a centre and made of heterogeneous component, that is able to create, recreate and move through multiple territories, rather than ever settling in, or being confined to a single form that seeks to dominate over others. This dissertation contributes a unique theoretical reading of Jewish cultures in the plural, and includes an examination of lesser known Arab Jewish writing and experimental documentary in Canada in relation to Iraq, France and Israel.

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Introduction: History of the Mizrahim and the Concept of Arab Jew

On the wall of a café near the camp for new immigrants
they hung a photo of Ben Gurion and his windswept hair
and next to it, in a similar frame, the pancake face
of Umm Kulthum. It was '55
or '56 and I thought that if they hung
side by side, a man and a woman, they must be bridegroom and
bride. (Someck 17)

Introducing the concept *Arab Jew* into a circle of Jews or non-Jews alike is almost certain to cause a wave of raised eyebrows. While people are generally familiar with Arabs and Jews pitted against each other as enemies on two sides of the Israel-Palestine conflict, many are surprised to learn that Jews once lived relatively comfortably in Arab Muslim societies. Ronny Someck's poem "In Response To The Question: When Did Your Peace Begin?" above conveys an opposite response, of how easily the icons of Zionist Jewish and Arab culture marry in the poet's mind prior to their signification as emblems of antagonistic national movements.¹ Side by side, bride and bridegroom, Arab and Jew are represented as equals, sharing space (the wall, the subject of the poem, the poet's gaze). As a response to the poem's provocative title, this image invokes a powerful message of what is at stake in the pursuit for peace: a sensitivity to the complex layers of trauma, identity, and desire of individuals and communities in conflict that calls attention to the means by which people are constructed as enemies.

The complex histories of Sephardim, Mizrahim and Arab Jews are often left out of discussions of the Israel-Palestine conflict, especially in debates that take place outside of Israel. The term "Arab Jew" in particular can sound like a provocation. Why do the two halves of term sound so foreign in relation to each other? Why do people assume you mean

¹ Ben Gurion was the first prime minister of Israel and one of the key figures of the Zionist movement. Umm Kulthum was an Egyptian singer and actress beloved throughout the Arab world.

Jews and Arabs rather than Arabic speaking Jews? The term challenges us to think beyond a seemingly stable enmity to a not so distant history: Someck could easily imagine the marriage of Ben Gurion and Um Kulthum because to this young Iraqi-born Jew, Arab and Jew were not binary categories. Arab culture *was* Jewish culture such that Um Kulthum was a beloved icon for Arabic speakers despite their religion. With its hybrid, confrontational form that binds together an enemy dialectic in order to deconstruct it, the study of Arab Jews is one entry point into the critique of nationalism prompted by postcolonial and postzionist studies. The study of Sephardim, Mizrahim and Arab Jews compels the Jews of Israel and the diaspora to interrogate the myth of a homogenous Jewish nation.

Postcolonial Critique

Postcolonialism emerged as an interdisciplinary set of political and academic reactions to the consequences of European colonialism and imperialism. Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism* is often considered to have pioneered the field. In this work, Said explores representations of an imagined entity dubbed "the Orient" by (primarily) British, French and American authors, painters, scholars, politicians, colonial administrators and other influential figures.² These representations are embedded in a discourse which envisions "the Occident" as a progressive, civilized entity in opposition to a backward, barbaric "Orient" and facilitates the colonial and imperial domination of *other* cultures. Said writes:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style

² This imagined entity is linked to a corresponding reality; people actually live in and actively produce this space (Said 5).

for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.
(3)

Orientalism is therefore a hegemonic³ cultural phenomenon that allows ideas about European and also American superiority over Oriental exoticism and difference to dominate over others, these in turn translate into oppressive geo-political relationships between “Western” and “Eastern” nations. Said aims to disrupt the idea of pure, impartial, apolitical knowledge arguing that Orientalism is shaped by relationships of power and must be interrogated as a constructed form of representation rather than reality. *Orientalism* thus opened the door for examining the nexus of knowledge, culture and power that continues today along the colonial paradigm. The body of criticism that tackles these issues has been dubbed postcolonial studies.

In the second edition of *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) demonstrate that postcolonialism/post-colonialism today encapsulates active and ongoing debates on a heterogeneous range of issues including the very definition of the term itself. For example, the division between those who see the postcolonial as the historical period following the end of European colonialism and the rise of independent nation states and those who, like the authors, argue: “that it is best used to designate the totality of practices, in all their rich diversity, which characterize the societies of the post-colonial world from the moment of colonization to the present day, since colonialism does not cease with the mere fact of political independence and continues in a neo-colonial mode to be active in many societies” (xix). Postcolonial critique emerged within, and continues to colour literary studies. One of Said’s major contributions in *Orientalism* is the light he shines on the complicity of language and media in European imperialism. Fiction plays a significant role

³ A term he derived from Antonio Gramsci (Said 7). Hegemony is a form of domination whereby those being dominated are complicit in their governance through indirect acceptance of the ruling power.

in shaping public knowledge about peoples. Films such as *True Lies* or *Aladdin* (despite being seemingly innocuous Hollywood blockbusters) can become complicit in reinforcing beliefs that all Arabs are (or at least are supportive of) barbaric terrorists. They support Orientalist discourse by repeating the anti-Arab images that appear in daily American news reports, aligning (albeit subtly or indirectly) with the American domestic and foreign policy that targets Arabs and Muslims in the War on Terror since 9/11.

Ella Shohat was instrumental in applying Said's postcolonial critique to the position of Oriental Jews in Israel. Her 1988 article "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims" deepened the analysis of the connection between Zionism and European colonialism expressed in Said's article of a similar name "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims" (1979). Here she lays the framework for her discussion of the oppression of Mizrahim that carries through much of her later work on Israeli culture. In her 1989 book *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* Shohat applies Said's ideas to the representation of Oriental Jews and Palestinians in Israeli cinema. Shohat argues that Israeli cinema (up to the point of her publication⁴) had produced images of the West (Jews who immigrated from Eastern Europe) as "rational, developed, superior and human" while portraying the East (Jews from Arab countries and Palestinians) as "aberrant, underdeveloped and inferior." Shohat's work helped shift the Mizrahim from subject of inferiority in Israeli society to the subject of active historical, cultural and political interest in scholarship and the popular media, a project that is ongoing.

⁴ Israeli cinema since 1999 has diversified its treatment of ethnicity reflecting debates in the public sphere about what constitutes Israeli citizenship. Self-representation, self-production and deeper character histories by and about ethnic minorities in Israel have increased significantly and nuanced the perception of East versus West in Israeli cinema (Schwartz 2006).

Mizrahim in Israeli History and Historiography

Mizrahim, (Hebrew for “Easterners”) refers broadly to “Oriental” Jews and, often more specifically, to Jewish descendants from Arab and/or Muslim-majority countries of North Africa and the Middle East. In the years following the 1948 war for Israel’s independence nearly the entire Jewish population of Arab and/or Islamic⁵ countries from North Africa to Iran emigrated or were expelled.⁶ A combination of forces prompted this exodus including economic conditions, religious zeal and rising tensions between Muslims and Jews directly resulting from the defeat of the Arab forces during Israel’s war for independence (to name a few). Encouraged by Zionist emissaries who had been active throughout the region, a large proportion of these Jews migrated to Israel. Zionism purported to end Jewish exile in the diaspora by creating a national Jewish homeland in modern Palestine. The goal of Zionism was and continues to be the forging of Jewish unity with Israel as the centre of Jewish life in an attempt to preserve and protect the world’s Jews. This is embedded in “the ethos of return” and enacted in the Law of Return (1950), which declares that every Jew has the right to immigrate or “return” to Israel as a place of refuge, and in the Citizenship Law (1952), which immediately grants Jewish immigrants Israeli Citizenship (Mor 2007). The ethos of return, however, was complicated even in its early years by the practical realities of a young country trying to deal with mass immigration and the construction of a new society. When the Mizrahi Jews arrived in Israel under the rubric of these intended goals, they found themselves targeted for their difference, racialized and treated as second-class citizens to Ashkenazi Jews.

⁵ The collusions of Arabness and Islam will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Two.

⁶ Small Jewish communities do continue to exist today in countries including Morocco and Iran.

The negative reception towards the Mizrahi immigrants of the 1948-1951 aliyah⁷ spurred from a combination of economic concerns and fears about the mass influx of immigrants combined with ideological biases that favoured young, healthy and productive Jews.⁸ For example, in one widely quoted example the journalist Arie Gelblum expressed an extreme view of the Jewish immigrants from North Africa in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'Aretz* on April 22, 1949:

This is the immigration of a race we have not yet known in the country. We are dealing with people whose primitivism is at a peak, whose level of knowledge is one of virtually absolute ignorance, worse, who have little talent for understanding intellectuals. Generally, they are only slightly better than the general level of Arabs, Negroes, and Berbers in the same regions. In any case, they are even at a lower level than the Arabs of Israel. These Jews also lack roots in Judaism, as they are totally subordinated to savage and primitive instincts. (Raz-Krakotzkin 173)

Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion mirrored this attitude saying, "We do not want the Israelis to be Arabs. It is our duty to fight against the spirit of the Levant that ruins individuals and societies" (ibid.). The Mizrahi immigrants and especially the North African with their large families, religiosity and traditional customs failed to meet the image of the exalted Israeli subject⁹, the sabra. The Hebrew term for the prickly pear cactus "tzabar" is a metaphor for the new Jew, the first generation of native born Israelis growing up in the

⁷ Aliyah is the Hebrew term for Jewish immigration to Israel. It also means "going up" symbolically referring to the spiritual elevation of returning to the Jewish homeland.

⁸ Mor's article discusses how disability and orientalism combined to discriminate against in this early wave of immigration.

⁹ Sunera Thobani theorizes the exalted national subject in the Canadian context: "The figure of the national subject is a much venerated one, exalted above all others as the embodiment of the quintessential characteristics of the nation and the personification of its values, ethics, and civilizational mores. In the trope of the citizen, this subject is universally deemed the legitimate heir to the rights and entitlements proffered by the state. Even when disparaged as a gendered, sexed or classed subject, and even when recognized to be a subject in the Foucauldian (double) meaning of the word – that is, as subject to sovereign power and as an individualized and self-constituting entity – in its nationality, this subject positively commands respect as the locus of power" (Thobani 3-4).

Zionist institutions (kibbutzim and the army etc.). Like the prickly pear, the sabra is hard on the outside and sensitive on the inside emphasizing the hardness of the new Jews of Palestine/Israel who till the land and fight in the army in opposition to the diaspora Jews who held their noses in books and remained passive while being persecuted across Europe (Almog 2000). These attitudes were tinged further with an Orientalist vision of Arab culture as primitive and backward. These attitudes were not limited to articles and speeches, but translated into state policies. Upon immigration, Mizrahi families were separated and dispersed across the country often to *ma'abarot*¹⁰ and later to Development Towns (*Ayarot Pituha*)¹¹. Mizrahi immigrants were “disinfected” and “deloused” upon arrival in Israel (sprayed with DDT) and Yemenite children were kidnapped from their parents in transit camps and given to Ashkenazi parents for adoption (Segev 173; Massad 56). Orientalism informed the way Zionist history was constructed both in official histories and in public discourse. Arabness was excluded from the conception of the new Jewish identity being created for the new Jewish state. Under Zionism, Arab Jewish history has been excluded from school curricula, and Mizrahi culture was rendered invisible by the media (Shohat 2003: 226).

¹⁰ Settlement camp with often inhospitable conditions especially for Mizrahim.

¹¹ Mizrahi Jews who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s were sent to peripheral towns (ayarat pitu'ah) on the borders in the north and south of the new Jewish state as part of the young country's project to colonize the region as Jewish space. Yiftachel and Tzfadia (2004; Yiftachel 2006; Tzfadia 2007) argue that the settlement of Mizrahim in development towns led to their entrapment in an ambiguous third space – one included within but on the periphery of— Zionism's “ethnocratic project”; a different position from Palestinians who were trapped outside of this project altogether (212). The authors argue that while one of major goals of these settlement projects was to integrate Mizrahi Jews into the Ashkenazi population, the conditions of this third space actually resulted in socio-economic, and cultural difficulties for the new immigrants creating a Mizrahi identity that backfired against this aim. The creation of Mizrahi identity was fueled by discriminatory state policies, the Judaization of Israel/Palestine, socioeconomic stratification, persisting Arab-Jewish tensions and the growth of neoliberalism (ibid).

Critical Mizrahi scholarship has sought to recover and interpret the historical, sociological, and cultural experiences of Mizrahim in Israel. Sociologist Sami Smooha (2008) addressed the particularities of Mizrahi immigration to Israel in the 1950s, a phenomenon that he deems a failure. Despite being larger in quantity than the Ashkenazi immigrants of the same time period, Smooha argues that the Mizrahi immigrants were structurally disadvantaged in several ways. First, the Mizrahim arrived in Israel as refugees: the declaration of the Jewish state suddenly affiliated Jews in the Arab world with the enemy and forced the populations to escape growing discrimination in their host-societies (Smooha 6). Wealthy Jews could choose to immigrate to France or North America, but for the majority of lower class Jews Israel was the only option open to them. Second, cultural differences segregated the Mizrahi immigrants. Arabic speaking Mizrahi Jews had to adapt to a secular European Ashkenazi culture: “Phenomena such as nationalism, the Protestant ethic, bureaucratic procedures, the industrial economy, technical and non-intimate interpersonal contacts, gender equality, the centrality of the child in the family, and so forth, were remote for most of them” (Smooha 6-7). Third, most Mizrahim who arrived in Israel were impoverished, forced to leave what property they had behind, and low human capital¹², lacking a social network to help them integrate (Smooha 7). Smooha’s analysis of these structural disadvantages to the integration of Mizrahim into Israeli society helps to refute the Orientalist presumptions in Israeli social discourse and the popular media that blame Mizrahim for their position at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

This discourse was perpetuated for example in Bourekas¹³ films, the dominant genre in the Israeli cinema of the late 60s and 70s. Shohat (1989) argues that the films were

¹² Human capital refers to the acquired and useable skills of inhabitants or members in a society (Smith 1937).

¹³ Bourekas is a pastry that was popular in the Ottoman Empire and transferred into Israeli cuisine.

Ashkenazi interpretations of the rich/poor divide in Israeli society and depicted the Mizrahim as naturally incapable of the skills needed to succeed financially and socially while the State of Israel is presented as the saviour of these “backwards” and “primitive” communities¹⁴. One classic example is Ephraim Kishon’s comic film *Sallah Shabbati* (1964) whose main character, a Mizrahi new immigrant is portrayed as a violent, drunk, imbecile who cannot financially support his large family. These satirical cinematic portrayals however belied a more complicated material socio-economic reality. While the government sought to provide employment for the entire Jewish population, Mizrahi immigrants were generally given the unskilled and low-income jobs, which contributed to an ethnic stratification.

The Mizrahi immigrants with their low level of education, inadequate knowledge of Hebrew, lack of connections, ethnic discrimination, and poor opportunities and services in their localities entered the low-ranking positions in the private labor market, civil service, schools, military, and politics, while the Ashkenazi veterans were displaced upwards in all areas of life. This ethnic hierarchy was reinforced by a periphery-center division. The Mizrahi immigrants were placed in the periphery of the country and in the inner cities and were doubly discriminated against as new immigrants and as residents of the periphery. (Smoocha 8)

Unlike the Palestinians, who were outright denied access to certain state institutions, the Mizrahim were encouraged to seek support from the Jewish organizations (Shohat 1988: 29). The economic hierarchy continues today with Ashkenazi men earning the highest income, followed by Mizrahi men, Ashkenazi women, Arab (Palestinian) men and finally Mizrahi women (Arab/Palestinian women did not make the chart) (Haberfield and Cohen 2007).

¹⁴ Dorit Naaman (2001) critiques this analysis arguing that after the upward mobility offered to Mizrahim after the successful 1967 Six Days War (due to the creation of a new economic underclass from the conquered Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza) the Bourekas film encouraged more positive portrayals of the Mizrahim through their ability to now “pass” cinematically for Ashkenazi Jews.

It is important to acknowledge the multiple histories of Sephardic, Mizrahi and Arab Jews rather than assume them as a single unit. For example, in Derek J. Penslar's work on the representation of Mizrahi Jewry in Israeli Radio 1948-1967, stark distinctions are made between Moroccan, Iraqi, Yemeni, Persian and Turkish Jews. Not all ethnic groups received the particular stigma that the Arabic-speaking group did. Only Arabic programming was severely limited on national Israeli airwaves in the formative years of the state. Persian or Turkish language broadcasts on Kol Yisrael's (the voice of Israel) overseas services, and Turkish language immigrant programming aired without controversy (Penslar 188). Given the majority Mizrahi Jewish population, and the particularly large Arabic-speaking demographic of Israel, the paucity of Arabic language broadcasting, and the contentiousness of airing Arab programming is striking. Penslar attempts to address this observation with a further example. He describes two participants on the radio program *Ha-Narkoman* ("The Addict", broadcast 1961), Mizrahi and Ashkenazi drug addicts who both attribute their addiction to Arabs; Dan, the Mizrahi, having been introduced to hashish, morphine, opium and heroin through association with Arab hooligans. Chaim, the Ashkenazi, a former firefighter, injured in the 1948 War of Independence—fighting Arabs—became addicted to morphine during his hospitalization (Penslar 196-197). The stigma or taboo of Arabness (Shohat 2006) within Orientalist Zionist discourse and discriminatory policies emerges as focal point of resistance for Mizrahi scholars.

Mizrahi Resistance

Mizrahim did not passively accept Ashkenazi prejudices and their ethnic discrimination. Two early political protests mark the awakening of political consciousness in the history of the Mizrahim. First, is the uprising that broke out in Wadi Salib, the slum

neighbourhood in Haifa (formerly populated by non-Jewish Palestinians until their displacement during the 1948 war and resettled by primarily North African Jewish immigrants thereafter). On July 9, 1950 police shot Yaakov Elkarif, a resident of the neighbourhood, in the leg, attempting to quell a fight that he had initiated after getting drunk (Shabi 194). Angry demonstrations broke out after rumour spread that Elkarif had been killed, and turned into full-scale riots targeting the wealthier Ashkenazi suburbs of Haifa and the Labor party office. These protests against Ashkenazi domination spread to other Mizrahi communities across Israel but were eventually subdued. The events at Wadi Salib brought into social awareness the ethnic divisions between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, laying foundation for a second wave of rebellion by the Black Panthers (ibid.) The Black Panther movement, a group of second-generation Mizrahi immigrants organized mass protests against the state's discriminatory racial policies beginning in early 1971. According to Sami Chetrit (2000), the uprising in Wadi Salib and by the Black Panthers "broke the dam of silence, triggering an irreversible process of radicalizing Mizrahi political consciousness that would, by the early 1990s, mature into a movement of critique and proposed alternatives" (53). Accompanying this movement of critique were growing changes in the political involvement of Mizrahim in Israel. For example, the rise of the Likud party in 1977 over the Labour party (which had been dominant since the State's inception) owes its success to the support of second-generation Mizrahim who placed their faith in Likud to correct the socio-economic wrongs done to them by the Labour government. Likud failed to fulfill the hopes of many Mizrahim and the 1980s saw a series of attempts at political resistance including the Tent Movement (1976-1981), and the formation of the first Mizrahi political parties TAMI (1981-1984), and Shas in 1983.

For Chetrit, these early forms of Mizrahi discourse were largely ones of identification and integration/cooperation with the Ashkenazi-Zionist dominant social order; Mizrahim were fighting for their basic survival in Israel and their rights to be treated as equal citizens without questioning the basic political structure. These earlier awakenings in Mizrahi political consciousness paved the way for the two dominant forms of Mizrahi political critique today: the Shas party and the “New Mizrahim”. From its humble beginning in 1983, Shas rose to become the most powerful political voice for Mizrahim, challenging the modernization ideology of Ashkenazi Zionism from a Sephardic standpoint and gaining a significant presence in the Israeli Knesset. The “New Mizrahim” is the term Chetrit uses to describe an unorganized and growing wave of criticism from diverse individuals who refuse to view Israeli society through the Zionist dichotomy of Arabs and Jews. Chetrit writes:

In contrast with earlier Mizrahi radical movement such as the Black Panthers and the Tent Movement, which presented a penetrating critique of the state but did not question Zionism’s basic assumptions, the New Mizrahim reject the process of Zionization that they and their parents underwent...want none of the Ashkenazi Zionist collective memory and seek to form a Mizrahi collective memory from which a Mizrahi consciousness and alternative visions for the State of Israel will emerge. (60)

The New Mizrahim organized movements such as HILA (Public Committee for Education in the Inner City and Development Towns), Kedma (“Eastward”), schools working to equalize education for Mizrahi children in Israel to their Ashkenazi peers, and the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition, a political party. Despite the initiatives of the New Mizrahim, Shas remains a more powerful source of political critique for Mizrahim in Israel today.

Another area of Mizrahi resistance occurs in the realm of literature, cinema and the arts where Mizrahim began to speak about their experiences in their home countries and their

immigration to Israel. Ben Gurion's Ashkenazi-centric *Mamlahiyut* (statism), and its mission to form a unified national collective out of the diverse and discrepant experiences of Jews immigrating from across the world, dominated Israeli discourse, including literary arts, in the state's first decade. Only after the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolph Eichman in 1961 and the acceptance of reparations from Germany did holocaust survivors begin to speak out about their experiences in Europe (Berg 1). Mizrahim soon followed suit with writers such as Eli Amir and Sami Michael breaking the silence on ethnicity as a realm of Jewish difference. Mizrahi writers pose a challenge to "the Zionist master narrative that dominated Israeli literary history until recently: a story of Ashkenazi fathers and Sabra sons breaking from their European past and *galut* (diasporic) culture to build the land and be built by it" (Berg 2). For some scholars, this resistance requires a further step, a collective binding with Palestinians to impound the imposing colonial boundary of Arab versus Jew (Lavie 1996). Mizrahi self-representations through literature (and also in cinema, which together are the focus of this dissertation) are therefore potent sites of analysis for questions of Zionism and Jewish difference.

Sephardim, Mizrahim and the Concept of Arab Jews

Over the course of her oeuvre, Shohat develops the terms Sephardim, Mizrahim and Arab Jews as critical categories. In a 1992 article published in the aftermath of the First Gulf War, Ella Shohat declares herself: "an Arab Jew. Or more specifically, an Iraqi Israeli woman living, writing and teaching in the U.S.". The essay challenges American notions of Middle Easterners (who fell under the category of "white" on the U.S. census) and of Jewishness (assumed to be European), by exposing the realities and complexities of Oriental Jewish cultures and histories that (among many other examples) defy closed national or

ethnic boundaries. Arab Jew as a critical concept can be understood as the product of the paradoxical effects of two “rival essentialist nationalisms” – Arab and Jewish – which forced a break in these formerly intertwined aspects of identity for Jews from countries like Morocco and Iraq. Zionist ideology, on the one hand, has created a taboo around Arabness as being associated with the Arab (Palestinian) enemy and as a diasporic taint, while Arab nationalism(s), on the other hand, have come to see Jews and Zionists as synonymous, making it impossible for Jews to be part of Arab national identities. These two nationalisms make no room for messy or hybrid identities and leave Arab Jews “trapped” between the new binary of Arabness and Jewishness. Shohat argues that the term Arab Jew has several connotations: “it celebrates the Jewish past in the Eastern world; it affirms the pan-Oriental communities developed in Israel itself; and it invokes a future of revived cohabitation with the Arab Muslim East” (1999:14).

Before Shohat’s work, Sephardim was the dominant term for non-Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jews. In the early 1990s leftist non-Ashkenazi activists began to use Mizrahim to evoke the specific experiences of non-Ashkenazi Jews in Israel (1999:14). The term challenges the condescending *bnei edot hamizrah* (“descendants of the oriental ethnicities”) as well as Sephardim. While Sephardim had also been used as a critical category of identity (See Shohat 1988), the term was later felt to be inaccurate (for Oriental Jews who did not descend from Spanish exiles) and Eurocentric. The designation “Mizrahi” specifies the ethnic differences that have marked Arab Jews as the Oriental other to Israel’s founding Zionist leaders who were Ashkenazi (Eastern-European). State practices, such as the spraying of early Mizrahi immigrants with pesticides, or the possible consideration of Iraqi

Jews to test for gene-based biological weapons¹⁵ reveals the ways in which Zionism has sought to construct a nation founded on Jewish sameness while essentializing Jewish ethnic, racial or sexual difference as inherent and outside the privileged space of the nation.

Shohat proposes a new field of inquiry called Mizrahi studies that would exist in relation to Palestinian studies as a strategy to challenge the hegemonic ideals that usurped Mizrahi history from Arab Jewish immigrants to Israel. On one level, this field would critique the folklorization of Mizrahim in Zionist discourse, which places Zionists as the saviours of the poor, primitive Mizrahim. On another level it:

... would intervene at the point of convergence of multiple communities and disciplines. Rather than demarcate neatly fenced off areas of expertise, it would cross the geographical, historical, and disciplinary borders erected by the nationalist conceptualization of identities and Eurocentric disciplinary formations. (Shohat 1999:17)

In other words, Mizrahi studies has the potential to interrupt, complicate and pluralize notions of a totalizing Jewish History. This theoretical framework deconstructs the Zionist narrative that replaces diverse Jewish histories within a teleological story of Ashkenazi Jewish experiences under European antisemitism and culminates in the establishment of Israel. Shohat discusses how the term Mizrahim was used first by the Israeli government to distinguish Arab Jews from Ashkenazim, and then re-appropriated by Arab Jews as a tool of resistance against the discriminatory policies of the State. The same identity Zionism tried to negate as exilic now appears in mainstream media and politics as evidence that while these identities were suppressed, they certainly were not erased.

¹⁵ Shohat (1999: 1) cites an unconfirmed news report in the London *Sunday Times* that claimed the Institute for Biological Research in Israel was involving Iraqi Jews in research for an ethnic, gene based biological weapon that might be to be used against Saddam Hussain's regime: Uzi Mahnaimi and Marie Colvin, "Israel Planning Ethnic Bomb as Saddam Caves In," *Sunday Times*, 15 November 1998.

Shohat's article "Rupture and Return" (2003) offers a comprehensive discussion of the Mizrahi/Arab Jewish question by historicizing and unsettling the discourses of both Arab and Jewish nationalisms. Zionism forced a rupture from a Jewish diasporic existence that was physical, cultural and conceptual. Shohat argues for Mizrahi studies as a relational critical inquiry that analyzes these ruptures across several themes. First is *dislocation*, by which she raises the problematic of names (Sephardi, Mizrahi, Iraqi etc.) and spatiality deriving from the re/dislocation of Arab Jews from the Arab world to a multiplicity of new homes and nations. Second is *displacement*, which stresses the lack of attention to the moment of border crossing from the Arab nations to Israel. Third is *dismemberment* or the erasure of the hyphen between Arab and Jew and the opposition from both Arabs and Jews to Arab-Jews, people who exist within both cultural environments simultaneously. Fourth is *dischronicity*, the paradoxes of modernization theory that rendered Arab Jews as "out of time", primitive cultures, a civilization lacking the progress of western cultures. Fifth is *dissonance*, the discursive rupture that refused to see an ethnic problem in Arab Jews despite postzionist critiques of Israel. Sixth is *disciplining* the need for Mizrahi studies as a relational inquiry that seeks to include multiple historiographies, perspectives and that pays attention to the silences of inter- and intra-relational Mizrahi experiences within Israeli, Jewish and multicultural scholarship in general.

Following Said, Shohat emphasizes the relational approach to identity, "that does not segregate historical periods and geographical regions in neatly fenced-off areas of expertise, and that speaks of communities not in isolation but, rather, 'in relation'" (Shohat 2003: 207).

Shohat examines Mizrahi and Palestinian experiences under Zionism in relation:

The same historical process that dispossessed Palestinians of their property, lands, and national-political rights was intimately linked to the process that dispossessed Arab Jews of their property, lands, and

rootedness in Arab countries while uprooting them from that history and culture within Israel itself” (Shohat 1999: 7).

This relational approach confronts Zionist ideology, and reveals the racism harboured in state ideology, which hurt the very people (Jews) it claimed to protect. Furthermore, Shohat challenges scholars to push Mizrahi studies beyond the contexts of Israel-diaspora to multiple Jewish experiences in general. It is this challenge that I endeavor to respond to in my dissertation.

Because of its relational approach, Mizrahi studies is both an important part of and counterpoint to Postzionist inquiry. Postzionism, as a discourse emerged in the mid-1980s in Israeli scholarship.¹⁶ This includes the works of new historians such as Gershon Shafir (1989) and Benny Morris (1987) who began to criticize the history of Israel that ignored the broader context of Israeli-Palestinian relations and shirked responsibility for their expulsion. Critical sociologist Shlomo Swirski examined how Zionism produced a social gap between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim (1989) while Baruch Kimmerling (1983) was the first to employ a colonial model to the postzionist debate (Silberstein 1999: 101). The field encompasses any kind of questioning of the core foundation of the Jewish state, which premises the necessity of a Jewish territorial homeland for the sustenance of a unique Jewish nation. Ilan Pappé argues:

Post-Zionism is a term I used to describe a cultural view from within Israel which strongly criticized Zionist policy and conduct up to 1948, accepted many of the claims made by the Palestinians with regards to 1948 itself, and envisaged a non-Jewish state in Israel as the best solution for the country’s internal and external predicaments. (Pappé 44)

¹⁶ Ephraim Nimni’s *The Challenges of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Fundamentalist Politics* (2003) and Silberstein’s *Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture* (1999) and *The Postzionism Reader* (2008) are exemplary collections on postzionism written in English.

The Second Intifada challenged these critical writers to clarify their positions on Zionism leading some like Morris to assert their Zionism and others like Pappé to break from it (Shohat 2006: 268). Shohat envisions Mizrahi Studies as a project that “refuses to accept the hegemonic Zionist and post-Zionist naturalizing of the place of Arab-Jews within Jewish nationalism” (2006: 332). Mizrahi Studies thus contributes to this field by posing a challenge to postzionist thinkers who neglected to analyze “the ethnic problem” in Israel. Recognising these tensions, I understand postzionism not be “going beyond” Zionism, but rather critical engagements, from inside or outside Israel, on the foundational myths of Zionism that include the assumption of a homogenous Jewish nation with a birthright to the territory now designated as Israel. A critical reflection on Israel’s physical and spiritual violence against Palestinians (both inside and outside its borders) and the racist treatment of non-European Jews is crucial to this rubric.

The postzionist debates have barely penetrated mainstream Jewish North American circles. “In American Jewish communal institutions and public forums, to question Zionism is tantamount to questioning the foundations of Jewish identity” (Silberstein 9). Yet critiques of Israel emerge in organizations such as Independent Jewish Voices, and in the works of outspoken American and Canadian Jewish intellectuals such as Naomi Klein and Judith Butler.¹⁷ There is also a growing concern for Jewish diversity as expressed in new Jewish initiatives (some recent examples in my current city, Montreal, include the Mile End Chavurah, an inclusive Jewish spiritual and cultural group, LE MOOD a festival of alternative Jewish culture and *Shtetl*, a magazine of Jewish culture that hopes to be a forum for open discussion of diverse Jewish issues). The area of Mizrahi studies has a crucial role to play in broadening multicultural and postzionist debates to educate Jews in Israel and the

¹⁷ Kushner and Solomon (2003) collected a tome of essays by critical Jewish scholars.

diaspora about the complexities of and discrimination within Jewish history, politics and culture.

From Shohat, I take ‘Mizrahi’ to refer to the constructed group of non-Ashkenazi Jews in Israel from Arab and Muslim countries who, through Zionist discourse, came to form an “imagined community”. Imagined community does not refer to a nation here (as in Anderson’s sense (1983)) but is derived rather from an “altered semantics of belonging” stemming from the geographical dislocation of Jews from the Muslim world to Israel, and their placement in a situation where they were compelled to redefine themselves within a Zionist framework that both included and rejected them (Shohat 1999:13). Mizrahim as a group are imagined in the sense that they are not composed of homogenous individuals who know each other in real space and time; rather, they are collectively formed through the othering they experienced in Israeli society. In my study I use Arab Jews (rather than Mizrahim) to emphasize the particular conundrum of Jews around the world (not necessarily coming from an Israeli context) caught between Jewish and Arab cultural-linguistic national cultures. This includes first or second generation Jews who emigrated from the Arabic speaking countries of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East. I exclude Jews of Iran and Turkey from my study because Arabic is not the dominant language of their culture. I narrow my focus further to the historical and cultural contexts of Iraq and North Africa, crucial sites for narratives of the Arab Jewish authors and filmmakers that will unravel below.

Arab Jew as a Conceptual Tool

The term Arab Jew is contentious because it forces together two identity categories assumed to be racially, ethnically, culturally and politically opposite to one another. It is a

term that denotes faith, ethnicity or location, but also reaches toward the broader cultural context that both created a binary opposition of the terms Arab and Jew and forced their hyphenation. This opposition is often assumed to be the result of an “ancient, insurmountable conflict between Arabs (who are not Jews) and Jews (who are not Arabs)” (Shenhav 2). A more comprehensive, less dialectical reading of Middle Eastern history and culture offers evidence to the contrary. The spread of Islam, and the culture of the Arab Peninsula is a process that began with the conquests of the early ummah (Islamic community) in the 7th century but has metamorphosized and transformed with the meetings of cultures over the course of Islamic history, through the rise of the Ottoman Empire, through European colonialism and decolonization.¹⁸ Arab only emerges as a significant label in opposition to Jew in the climate of modern nationalism of the 20th century and within Euro-Christian modernization discourse that favours naming and labeling as scientific categorization.¹⁹

Yehuda Shenhav’s introduction to *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* draws attention to this modern emergence of Arab and Jew as epistemological and identity categories and raises questions about the implications of using Arab Jew as a conceptual category. Following Shohat, the term Arab Jew articulated in Shehav’s work is not considered to be a necessarily natural, consistent or coherent category but rather as a conceptual tool for deconstruction the consequences of Zionism for Jews from

¹⁸ Studies of the history of Jews in North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Middle East include: Chouraqui (1998); *Cultures Juives méditerranéennes et orientales* (1982), and Tolédano (1989).

¹⁹ For more on the use of naming and categorization in modern discourse especially in religious studies see Chapter Four of this thesis and the work on the invention of world religions by Tomoko Masuzawa (2005) and Jonathan Z. Smith (1996)

the Arab World.²⁰ Shenhav notes that Albert Memmi (1975) used the term Arab Jew to self-identify (though he does so for lack of a better term):

The term Jewish Arabs or Arab Jews is not a very good one, of course. But I have found it convenient to use. I simply wanted to remind my readers that because we were born in these so-called Arab countries and had been living in those regions long before the arrival of the Arabs, we share their language, customs, and their cultures to an extent that is not negligible (29; quoted in Shenhav 9).²¹

At different historical moments, the term was either applied or obscured in Israeli discourse; –applied by Zionist emissaries, or Israeli politicians to describe Arab Jews in Israel’s early years, or obscured by school textbooks in Israel to hide ethnic diversity while consolidating a homogeneous nationalism (ibid).

Shenhav uses the term Arab Jew as a “counterfactual category” in order to challenge what he deems “methodological Zionism” (a mode by which all social processes are reduced to categories determined by a Zionist epistemology). Shenhav positions himself with other contemporary intellectuals, Shimon Ballas, Samir Naqash and Ella Shohat, who use the term Arab Jew as a political strategy:

I argue that insisting on the category of Arab Jews reveals the contradictory practices of Zionist ideology, among them, seeking to absorb the Arab Jews into its ranks while remaining European, and to retain its Jewish primordial character while remaining modern and secular. These are a series of steps that were taken during the building of a coherent national identity and then erased in order to case that national identity as self-evident and uncontested. (Shenhav 10)

²⁰ In her article (2004) “The ‘Postcolonial’ in Translation: Reading Said in Hebrew” Shohat raises important criticisms of Shenhav’s (and other Israeli postzionist thinkers’) preference for using Bhabha’s ambivalent Third Space while denouncing Said (falsely) for being a binarist. She argues that “posts” like postzionsim are irrelevant without moving through a critique of the term that follows – colonialism, Zionism, structuralism etc.

²¹ Memmi’s contradictory use of the term Arab Jews has been analyzed by Hochberg (2007) and Bourget (2010).

The goal of Shenhav's book is to reveal the social history of this series of steps that created an incontestable Jewish national identity in Israel. These four social and historical encounters include: a) the colonial encounter (the Solel Boneh construction company in the Iranian city of Abadan where Arab Jews first encountered the Orientalist, colonialist and nationalistic mind-sets of the Zionist emissaries); b) the 'religionization' (the making more "religious" from an Ashkenazi perspective) of Arab Jews within that colonial encounter to make them into better Zionists and more acceptable for immigration; c) political economy that pits the historical situation of Arab Jews against that of the Palestinians; and d) the attempt of some Arab Jews to integrate into Zionist memory. In this layered approach to Mizrahi history, Shenhav moves beyond the dialectics of Mizrahiness as either an essential "true" identity or one invented entirely within the Israeli framework.

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin (2005) concurs with Shohat and Shenhav's use of Arab Jew as a critical category, rather than an essential identity (180). Of Israel's early Mizrahi immigrants he writes:

Most of them identified as Jews, but certainly not in opposition to Arab culture, to which they belonged quite organically, 'Arabness' was not an identity; it was a cultural-linguistic reality, expressed first and foremost through language, but also through a deep sense of belonging that persisted long after their immigration to Israel (although sometimes secretly, given the disapproval on the part of the dominant society). (Raz-Krakotzkin 175)

The distinction Raz-Krakotzkin points out here is interesting in light of the rejection by many Jews of Arab Jew as a signifying identity. For example, on 29 May 2008 the *Canadian Jewish News* published an article by Rabbi Yehiel Ben Ayon proclaiming in its bold print title: "Don't call them Arab Jews." The article lauds the accomplishments of Iraqi Jews in Israel who distinguished themselves from other Sephardim by entrenching themselves into the upper middle class of Israeli society despite experiencing the same discrimination and

racial prejudice as their ‘brethren’ from North African or Yemen. This brief history of Iraqi Jewish immigrants in Israel sets up the main point of the article which is that at a conference in Tel Aviv Iraqi Jews debated a name to use to self identify:

It was evident that the Iraqis are vehemently opposed to being referred to as Arab Jews... It seems that one of their naming preferences is *Mizrahim* (eastern Jews) as opposed to other Sephardim, who are sometimes called *Ma’aravim* (western Jews). Another preference is *Bavlim* (Babylonians) as, in fact, their residence in Babylon predated that of the Arabs. (Ben Ayon 2008)

Whatever title is claimed, Ben Ayon insists: “don’t call me an Arab Jew.” Ben Ayon’s abhorrence of the *Arab* element of this term is precisely why Arab Jew can be an important conceptual tool for confronting steadfast identity oppositions. Arab Jew is discursively constructive because it interrupts the common assumptions that Arab and Jew are binary terms. The goal is not to impose Arab Jew as a new and dominant label, but to use the third space between the binary to challenge either identity label that tries to cancel the other out; to examine the possibilities that might emerge from examining these term, and the meanings that they inevitably evoke, in relation. In light of this argument, I consider several theoretical critiques that speak to the controversy surrounding this term from historical and political perspectives.

Critiques of the Concept of Arab Jew

Arab Jew, like other identity labels, is a tool with which to critique the language we use to create individual and group identities. Arab Jew, Mizrahi, Sephardi, or any other title used to group people together is necessarily problematic because there will always be those who refuse to identify with a label, or who are excluded from it by others. Arab Jew is most appropriate for this study because of the intervention it makes in the English language by

challenging the words Arab and Jew that in popular discourse are assumed to be opposites. The labels Mizrahi or Sephardic, which require more background knowledge in the specificities of Israeli and Jewish history, do not have the same discursive effect. As a critical category, Arab Jew maintains a political edge that engages with the Zionist rejection of the Orient (Mizrahi Jewish and Palestinian cultures and histories) and insists on reading these perceived opposites in relation.

Emily Benichou Gottreich (2008) and Lital Levy (2008) historicize the issue of Arab Jews respectively in the Mashriq (the Middle East and Arab Peninsula) and Maghrib (North Africa) and attempt to broaden the theorization of the concept and its practical applications. Gottreich observes that the discourse of Arab Jews has been articulated a) largely as an identity of exile; b) within or related to a particular politics regarding Zionism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and c) within the almost exclusive terrain of literary and cultural studies and to a lesser degree sociology. The convergence of these points has limited the discourse on Arab Jews to the “semantic-epistemological level, resulting in a flattened identity that is both historically and geographically ambiguous” (Gottreich 433). Gottreich responds to this by imagining how Arabness and Jewishness might have intersected in contexts beyond that of Israel/Palestine but especially in Moroccan history. She contributes a discussion of the emergence of Arabicité in North Africa unique from the early pan-Arabism of Beirut, Cairo and later Iraq historicized by Levy because it was a top-down policy imposed on a largely non-Arab population (ibid. 442).²² Levy points out that scholarship on the history of Jews in North Africa and the Middle East has been carried out in isolation from

²² These different histories of Arabness and Jewishness in the Mashriq and the Maghrib will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

the work on the Mizrahi issues (455). She believes that: “endowing Arab Jews with historic depth can only enhance its symbolic domain”:

Indeed, I believe it is particularly important for scholars from literature and cultural studies to understand that in using the term ‘Arab Jew’, they cannot assume the historic existence of a pristine Arab Jewish subject whose holistic identity was shattered by colonialism, Zionism and Arab nationalism” (457).

While Levy is astute in her pursuit to expand the significance of the term Arab Jew with her attempts at historicizing, I do not agree with her accusations against Shohat and Chetrit. On the contrary, it is this philosophical, discursive and epistemological work that created a space for Levy’s own. The radical use of the terms Mizrahim and Arab Jews enabled the voices of these populations to break their silence finally be heard. To even attempt a history of Arab Jews, one first needs a space in which to imagine the very existence of this cultural hybrid; a space which was in part created from Shohat’s and Chetrit’s radical politics which combines both activism AND academics. The specific politics of Israel-Palestine is impossible to divorce from this discursive domain, because its oppressive conditions for Palestinian and Mizrahim are the reality from which this critical consciousness emerged. Gottreich and Levy thus neglect to historicize the intellectual history of the term Arab before attempting to move beyond its complicated politics. Furthermore, postcolonial scholars using the term Arab Jew never claim to be forging a new essentialist Arab Jewish identity but are rather careful in emphasizing the problems of naming. Indeed the goal of my work is to see where the disruption of the binary of Arab and Jew can move Jewish studies as a whole, emphasizing rhizomatic movement of concepts rather than limiting identities to a unique and closed forms; to do so would negate the realities of Jewish difference and diversity which is the very terrain on which this project aims to expand.

Moshe Behar has raised an interesting critique of Shenhav's work in particular. He is concerned with the academization of Mizrahi political resistance, blaming the individualist logic of academia for displacing the collectivist logic of attempts by Mizrahi activists to transform Israeli society. He celebrates the activist work of Shohat and Chetrit while condemning the Van Leer Institute, with Shenhav as its senior advisor. He accuses Shenhav of: "the trivialization of Edward Said's scholarly work and sociopolitical involvement, and the Homi Bhabha-ization of the Mizrahi perspective as manifested in what Shenhav terms 'the new Mizrahi discourse'" (92). For Behar, Mizrahi scholarship should collaborate with the Mizrahi activist struggle, remembering its foundational antecedents in pre-1999 scholarship and not dissipate into mere language-play and discourse. The history of Jews in the Arab world, and attention to the activist and collective struggles to transform Israeli society are crucial to understanding the context of the emergence of Mizrahi discourse and its validity for further research but they should not negate the conceptual, philosophical, discursive endeavors to create a new Mizrahi discourse; in fact these endeavours go hand-in-hand. Social change needs to capture the hearts *and* minds of people. The academy has an important role to play in encouraging discussion and debate. The imperative for critical intellectuals then, is to encourage a terrain on which multiple layers of languages can meet to help to bridge dialogue and action.

Methodology

The works of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Edward Said inspire my method of textual analysis in this thesis. Deleuze and Guattari (1986; 1987) treat texts as castles with multiple entry points. It is not necessary to enter through the front door in order to gain access to the castle, entering through the servant's side door entrance will illuminate the

castle from an entirely different perspective. Textual analysis, following this metaphor, is not about seeking an absolute truth or an author's definitive intent, but rather a way of imagining alternative worlds or imagining our world alternatively. This can be achieved through a rhizomatic approach. Instead of the hierarchical structure of a tree which grows up from roots and will die if it is cut off from this source, a rhizome is a plant that grows out in multiple directions from a centre and is not dependent on a single source for its life – it can be severed at any of its outgrowths and continue to grow. A rhizomatic approach, akin to Said's contrapuntal analysis, acknowledges different narratives for the unstable multiplicities that they are, and purposefully reads them together in order to enable the flux of possibilities inherent in these unstable entities. The intended result is a conversation between different narratives, without one superseding another, and a conversation that always holds open the possibility of new dialogue.

Edward Said developed over the course of his oeuvre a contrapuntal methodology that reads together the interplay of diverse ideas and discrepant experiences (Telmissany and Schwartz 2010). Inspired by his love of literature and music, Said adapted the musical concept of counterpoint to understand, compare and appreciate the relationship between culture and imperialism, and cultural relations in general:

As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts. (52)

The method involves a process of reading texts together with other texts on a horizontal plane regardless of their diverse context. A Jane Austen novel can be read together with Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* to elaborate colonial connections between what is spoken and unspoken within works that otherwise might be perceived as having nothing to do with

each other. Just as the melody of a violin and the rhythm of a percussion section are listened to in concert, the different, sometimes harmonious, sometimes competing complexity of voices are listened to together without one being allowed to dominate over the other. The goal of this type of methodology is to reveal voices that have otherwise been silenced, especially those of oppressed minorities in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

At the heart of this methodology is an ethical commitment to *listen* to oppositional voices, confront our own prejudices. As Said writes in the introduction to *Representation of the Intellectual*: “One of the tasks of the intellectual is the effort to break down the stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought and communication” (1994: xi). Said therefore pays attention to the hybrid, exiled, marginal and multiple experiences in order to challenge the clichés and misconceptions inherent to all fixed interpretations of the human experience at large. This approach allows recognition of the polyphony of voices and an integrative understanding of the self and the other to emerge.

I employ a similar contrapuntal method to explore the themes of beginnings, race, ethnicity, home and diaspora. My project reads philosophy, religious studies, diaspora theory, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, cinema and literary fiction on the same level playing field in order to analyze the contours of modern Jewish identities and culture. Each chapter asks a question about the relationship between Israel and the Jewish diaspora in regard to the themes mentioned above. In order to answer these questions, I compare sections of material from my four research sites with philosophical/theoretical material and with each other. I dedicate a chapter to each of these themes for a total of five chapters (including the introduction).

Challenges and Limitations

Over the course of my research I have come across a range of interesting challenges. One challenge that stands out is the political nature of the work involved. Zionism, Judaism and Jewishness can be deeply personal and emotional subjects for individuals rendering it difficult to engage in scholarly criticism. Academic language and critical work on identity can often alienate people who do not share the same framework of knowledge, experience or political stance. Even people on the same “side” can disagree on the best strategy for encouraging change. On a personal level, this has resulted in arguments with family and friends that have sometimes been painful, but more often (with time and much contemplation) have resulted in newfound knowledge and building stronger relationships.

My methodological approach is an evolving experiment, which has also presented me with a series of obstacles. Due to a focus on philosophical and theoretical considerations of Jewishness and Arabness, and on a deep reading of the texts, I initially paid less attention to biographical and historical considerations and intertextuality within each author's oeuvre. As my investigation deepened I found rhizomatic connections stemming from each author or director's work that extended in multiple directions, the entirety of which I could not possibly following in order to finish this work in a timely manner. For example, I discovered a rich literature on Kattan's importance in Quebecois scholarship that I could only begin to address, but not fully develop. Another possible criticism of this dissertation is that I have exclusively used English translations of Kattan's French and Michael's Hebrew original texts. I do not attempt to explore the complications of translation, preferring instead to see the English translation as a text worthy of analysis in its own right. Nevertheless, I think the English translations serve as an important starting point for connecting these diverse works,

and that my method enables the possibility of further study in directions I could not address in these pages.

The Four Research Sites

In the following section I give brief plot descriptions, contextual information about each author, and outline the major scholarship conducted on each work. There is no innate connection between the texts I have elected to examine. Each has made a deep impression on me both aesthetically and intellectually and has enabled me to think critically about Arabness and Jewishness together. The contrapuntal juxtaposition of these works, geographically and stylistically diverse, is one unique contribution of this project.

1. Sami Michael's *Refuge*

Sami Michael's novel *Refuge* tells a fictional story about a group of communist comrades in Israel on the eve of the 1973 war between Israel and a coalition of Arab forces led by Egypt and Syria. Shula, (the sabra daughter of veteran Communist party members) is called upon by her comrades to offer refuge to Fatkhi²³ (an Arab Muslim revolutionary poet who faces Israeli administrative detention), in the apartment she shares with her husband Marduch. Marduch, an army reservist, has been called to the front; his narrative unravels in his absence, as Shula recalls a series of monologues by, and conversations with her husband. Through Shula, the reader learns that Marduch was shunned by his family, tortured by Iraqi authorities for being a communist and deported to Israel against his will. In Israel he is

²³ This transliteration with the addition of the "k" indicates the pronunciation of an Arabic name with a Hebrew accent. In Arabic the transliteration would be Fathi. I decided to leave in this idiosyncrasy by the English translator.

accepted because he is Jewish yet looked down upon (by Shula's own mother included) for being from "back there in Iraq".

Shula embarks on her own emotional adventure. Berg describes Shula's journey through the novel as one of redefinition from "a sheltered, indecisive, lukewarm Communist" to an 'independent, decisive, competent Zionist' (91). At the beginning of the narrative she is dominated by the demands of her mother, frustrated with her disabled son, pining for her ex-lover Rami, tired and complacent. By the end of the novel she is more assertive, able to make decisions (first to give the poet refuge, then to refuse Fatkhi's sexual advances), able to move beyond memories of the now deceased Rami and aware of her new pregnancy. Fatkhi too embarks on a journey, though Berg notes that it is more a physical journey rather than one of character development. He begins the narrative traveling with his brother-in-law-to-be Wasfy to visit comrades (Fatkhi) and relatives (Wasfy) in the West Bank. Through their travels the reader is exposed to the conflictual and multi-layered experiences of home and exile for Palestinians inside Israel and inside the West Bank. The poet's awkward encounters help reveal his own troubled past: a humiliated and impoverished youth (after being forced to leave his home during Israel's war for independence) an Israeli girlfriend who will never marry him because he is not Jewish, and his marginal position in both Israeli and Palestinian societies as an Arab Israeli.

Over the course of the novel Shula's home fills with friends, neighbours and foes who converse about politics, burden her with the decision of whether or not to give refuge to Fatkhi and expand the narrative in a myriad of ways. Shoshana, a sabra communist who is employed by her friend Shula to help take care of Ido is married to Fuad an Arab Christian who volunteers for the communist newspaper. Their three sons Amir, Naim and Amar each choose differently between Arab and Jewish sides during the war. The secondary stories

about this family caught between Arab and Jewish social codes, impoverished but also idealistic, compliments the primary narrative that focuses on their friends Shula, Fatkhi and Marduch.

Refuge is Sami Michael's second novel. Michael was born in Baghdad in 1926. As a youth he joined a communist underground movement working to fight the oppressive Iraqi regime. In 1948, when a warrant was issued for his arrest for these activities, Michael fled to Iran, settling in Israel the following year. On his arrival, Michael worked as an editor for two Arabic language papers of the Communist party in Israel, and later as a hydrologist. Michael published his first novel in Hebrew *All Men are Equal – But Some are More* in 1974. As of 2007 Michael has published eleven novels (among them *Victoria*; *A Trumpet in the Wadi*; *Love among the Palms*); three non-fiction books examining Israeli culture, society and politics and three plays. Michael is an outspoken advocate calling for peace and an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and a two state solution. Since 2001, he has served as the President of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI).²⁴

Nancy E. Berg has written extensively on Sami Michael within the context of Iraqi-Jewish writers in Israel (*Exile from Exile: Israeli Writers from Iraq*, 1996) and a monograph that deals exclusively with his works (*More and More Equal: the Literary Works of Sami Michael*, 2005). *More and More Equal* especially offers a compelling discussion how Michael moved from being deemed an “ethnic writer” to his canonization within Israeli literature. Michael was featured in Samir's documentary reflecting on the stereotypes of Jews and Arabs in contrast with the history of Jews in Iraq with Shimon Ballas, Samir Naqqash and Ella Shohat *Forget Baghdad* (2003). Marduch's ambiguity in *Refuge* shares similarities

²⁴ Sami Michael's biography is taken from “Sami Michael and Jewish Iraqi Literature.” *Stanford University*. Department of Jewish Studies. 5-7 September, 2007. Web. 15 August 2011.

with the author's own. For example, in his 1984 article "On Being an Iraqi-Jewish Writer in Israel" Michael writes that after arriving in Israel in 1949, in an Eastern-European society unprepared for his Iraqi difference, he found refuge in Jaffa among new immigrants from Bulgaria and with local Arabs (23). Though Marduch's experiences are fictional, many of the character's personal and political conflicts mirror the author's in his involvement with the Communist party in Iraq and social activism in Israel, love of Arabic literature, and the difficult process of integrating into Israeli society as an Iraqi-Jew in Israel.

2. Naim Kattan's *Farewell, Babylon*

Farewell, Babylon is Naim Kattan's semi-autobiographical memoir of growing up in Baghdad between the years of 1940 and 1947. It is the first of a trilogy that follows protagonist Meir (who is not named in the first book) as he moves from Iraq, to France and finally to Canada, a personal and professional trajectory that mirrors the author's own. The work narrates a series of scenes, not necessarily in chronological order, of the protagonist's adolescence. Central themes include the development of the protagonist's love of literature, beginning with exposure to French at the Alliance Israélite School and Arabic literature in his Muslim high school, his sexual awakening in Baghdad's red light district, and his existence in and between the ethnic, religious, political, class and gender boundaries of his native city during a crucial historical moment. The work is also a memoir of the Jewish community in Baghdad, which today no longer exists. Kattan recalls complicated experiences of growing up in a community torn between Jewish and Arab nationalisms, the

horrors of the 1941 farhoud (when Jewish neighbourhoods were attacked and pillaged²⁵), and antisemitism, but also Jewish successes in the cosmopolitan Arab city. The memoir concludes with the protagonist's decision to study in France and become a writer rather than choose to migrate to Israel, a choice made by many of his peers at the time.

Naim Kattan's *Farewell Babylon* (English translation 2005 by Sheila Fischman) was first published in French under the title *Adieu, Babylone* (1975). Kattan was born in Iraq in 1928. He travelled first to France on a scholarship to study literature and then to Montreal in 1954 where he continues to live today. Currently he is Associate Professor in the Department of Literary Studies at Université Quebec à Montréal (UQAM). Kattan actively contributes to Quebec's literary community as a writer, critic, professor, publisher and editor. Kattan began his literary publication with a collection of short stories *Dans le désert* (1974) followed by *Adieu, Babylone* (1975). He has since published numerous collections of short stories and follow-up work to *Adieu: Les Fruits arrachés* (1977) and *La Fiancée promise* (1983). His latest novel *Le Gardien de mon frère* was published in 2003. Kattan has also published numerous non-fiction works among them *La Mémoire et la promesse* (1983); *Le Désir et le pouvoir* (1983); *Le Repos et l'oubli* (1987); a three volume work on Canadian, American and Latin American writers *Écrivains des Amériques* (1972, 1976 and 1980) and *L'écrivain migrant: essais sur des cités et des hommes* (2001). From 1967 to 1991 Kattan was employed with the Canada Council promoting the development of Canadian literature and dubbed "the grant fairy of Ottawa" (Dahab 68). He has won numerous awards and acclaim. In 1971 he was awarded the Prix France-Canada for his collection of essays *Le Réel et le*

²⁵ The farhoud is often described as a pogrom akin to the raids of Jewish villages in eastern Europe but this comparison has been the subject of debate among scholars. See Samir's film *Forget Baghdad* for some of this discussion.

théâtral (1970). He is a recipient of the Order of Canada (1983) and the French Legion of Honor (2002). In 2007 he became the first person to win the *Grand Prix* Hervé Deluen Grand Prize by the French Academy for his contributions to promoting French as an international language (Dahab 68).

Despite this impressive resume, Naim Kattan remains relatively unknown to Anglophone Jews in Canada. Without the encouragement of my Francophone professors involved in the Quebec literary community, I too would never have discovered Kattan's important work. At the outset of my study, I hypothesized that the absence of Naim Kattan in (Anglophone) Canadian Jewish Studies might be a combination of ignorance of the French language and a Jewish Eurocentrism that looks down upon Jews who were not Ashkenazim. Elements of these both might be the case, but the story is further complicated by Kattan's diasporic consciousness within the context of Quebec and Canadian politics and multiculturalism (and now interculturalism!) and by his location as an intellectual and academic. Nasrin Rahimieh (1990) argues that Kattan's willingness to exist on the border of many languages and cultures, his double existence as a bureaucrat on the Canada Council and a creative writer actually poses a constant threat to his literary voice: "[b]y refusing total integration, Kattan risks becoming 'marginal'. Yet, he has manipulated this same marginality into an art" (33). Rahimieh's claim demonstrates the unique contribution that an analysis of Kattan's work can bring to studies of Arab and Jewish (and Arab Jewish) diasporas.

F. Elizabeth Dahab (2009) takes up this challenge most recently by examining themes, narrative style, and sociohistorical conditions within *Farewell Babylon*, and the two following works of Kattan's trilogy, and in his recent novels and collections of short stories. She then links the themes of exile and expatriations in Kattan's fiction to the author's

perception of his own multiplicity as reflected in his essays and interviews.²⁶ Dahab marks the motif of absence that penetrates his work (87) and the sense of exile that emanates from being between cultures, nations, affiliations: Iraq-France-Quebec, artistic-academic, Jewish-Arab. Kattan is celebrated for refusing to linger in absences or liminal zones between cultures and world views and for instead choosing to form connections and communities (informed by a notion of totality of being that comes from his Judaism) (Dahab 90). Dahab makes a further interesting observation that Kattan like “Shems”²⁷, the protagonist immigrant-exile, just like Kattan himself, adopts his new country, French-Canada, so intimately and so well that he invents his own history, and by extension, that of his Jewish community, upon the history of Québec” (91). Kattan offers a unique voice to Canadian Jewish society that is dominated by Anglophone Jews of eastern European descent.

Kattan’s (2006) article “Juif d’origine et de culture arabes”/ “Jewish of Arab Origin and Culture” is particularly relevant to this regard. In it, he explores the transformation of Arabness as a cultural identity and explains how it is often easier to answer the question “who is a Jew” than “who is an Arab”. He offers a brief history of the rise of Arabism as a secular, socialist leaning, political identity that posited Zionism as its enemy, and how it is increasingly coming to be replaced with Islamism. Kattan expresses his connection to Arabness in the following paragraph:

I personally started writing in Baghdad, publishing short stories and articles in Arabic, and participating to the creation of two literary reviews, *Al-Fikr al-Hadith (Modern Thought)* and *Al-Waqt al-Dha'i (The Time Lost)*. Gone to Paris in 1947 to study at the Sorbonne, I continued to write in Arabic during seven years as a correspondent of the Iraqi daily *Al-Shaab*, among other things. When I arrived in

²⁶ Dahab’s work draws on other studies of Kattan’s work in French including the work of Jacques Allard who has published interviews with Kattan and written essays on Kattan’s novel in Quebec (1985, 2000, 2002), Michael Greenstein (2004) and Simon Harel (2005).

²⁷ A character in his novel *L’Anniversaire*.

Montreal in 1954, it seemed absurd to continue writing in Arabic, without a connection to an evanescent and invisible public. I had to go through five years of silence to become a francophone writer. What do I have left of the 'Arab'? I still read books in Arabic and devote some of my literary chronicles to the Montreal journal *Le devoir* (*The Duty*) to Arab writers, whose writings were translated into French or who chose to express themselves directly in that language. Among my writings, I can point to novels and short stories, in which the action takes place in Baghdad, and to essays, in which I try to analyze the link I have with my mother tongue and origin. I can clearly assert that the Arab culture is also and still mine, even if I became francophone, Canadian, *montréalais* through the language I express myself in, my interests, and the substance of my writings. The same applies to other Iraqi Jews like Elie Kedourie, who adopted English, or those aforementioned, who adopted Hebrew. Moreover, Arabic remains a cultural link between writers of different countries who, over the last few years, have been rediscovering themselves first Lebanese, Egyptian, Iraqi, etc.,. (Kattan 2006)

This is an expression of *l'écriture migrante*²⁸ par excellence. Kattan's work demonstrates how an immigrant can accept and integrate into the culture of his or her new hostland without losing the cultural link with the places they have traveled from. He furthermore is exemplary as a person who can offer criticism of his various social circumstances while simultaneously asserting his commitment to those very identifications.

3. b.h. Yael's *Fresh Blood*

b. h. Yael's (1996) video *Fresh Blood: A Consideration of Belonging* is documentary that follows the director's trip from her home in Toronto to Israel, the place of her birth. The daughter of an Iraqi Jewish mother and Polish Jewish father, born in Israel to Jewish parents but raised as a Canadian Christian, Yael's tangle of identities proves this trip no simple journey home. Arab, Jewish, female, queer, Israeli, Canadian, artist, activist; seemingly stable pillars of identity are interrogated in dialogue with each other and explored through

²⁸ This French term meaning "migrant literature" has become a popular term for referring to Quebec writings that focus on the poetics of immigration, exile, and cultural identity. The term shares connections with the key terms of postcolonialism and postmodernism such as nomadism and hybridity (Ireland and Proulx 2009).

the process of looking back. *Fresh Blood* is constructed as a video essay with chapters dedicated to key themes including: Arab/Jewish racialized dichotomies, a queer feminist revision of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, family narratives of the Iraqi farhoud and the European holocaust, and the sneaky ability of belly dancing to interfere with popular conceptions of race, nation and gender. Interviews with academics and activists are cross-cut with historical reconstructions of family memories and first person narrative. Yael experiments with documentary and narrative styles in order to destabilize the form of dominant stories including: the Zionist discourse which insists Israel is the homeland for all Jews and that Arabs and Jews are irreconcilable opposites, the Western Christian discourse that marks Sodom as the original example of God's condemnation of homosexuality, and other stories that essentialize identity and belonging. Yael also contemplates her position between Israel and Palestine, Iraq and Canada, art and activism, multiple expressions of sexuality and personal reflection and academic criticism. (bhyael.com)

Fresh Blood was produced along with an essay as part of Yael's Masters of Arts thesis requirements in the Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (1997). A follow up piece *In the Middle of the Street* (2002) explores peace actions in Israel/Palestine. Yael's recent work in video includes the *Palestine Trilogy* (2006) an exploration of various approaches to Israel/Palestine activism and *Trading the Future* (2008) that engages the tropes of apocalypse and environmental activism. *Trading the Future* won the Audience Award in 2009 at Ecofilms, an International Festival for Film and Visual Arts based in

Rhodes, Greece and the “Best Humanitarian Observation - Media Matters” award at the Rivers Edge International Film Festival in Kentucky, USA.²⁹

Yael has produced work in a variety of media and worked within different artist collectives. *Triskaidekaphobia*, for example, was commissioned by Inside/Out (Toronto LGBT Film and Video Festival) focusing on conversations with her son about phobias, theories of sexuality, and mothers. Her installations *Home Rule* and *Bomb Shelters, Offering* and (its expansion into) the *Fear Series* have exhibited respectively with the Spontaneous Combustion Collective at the Koffler Gallery and at Harbourfront’s York Quay Gallery. She has collaborated on several works with Johanna Householder including the latest piece *VERBATIM*, which recreated shot-by shot, the opening scenes of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* in order to challenge Gibson’s claims to verisimilitude. Through these avant-garde and experimental works Yael continues to use her critical lens to interrogate questions of identity, faith, sexuality and humanity.

Yael currently is a professor of Integrated Media at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto. She continues to be active in the sphere of independent film and video having served as Coordinator of Programming at the Images Festival of Independent Film and Video, contributing to the development of the festival. She has participated in numerous boards of artist run centres, arts council and festival juries. In 2009, Yael was one of eight Jewish Israeli and Canadian women who sat-in and occupied the Israeli Consulate in Toronto to protest the continued Israeli occupation of Gaza, calling on the Canadian government to impose sanctions on the Israeli government to end its abuses of human rights (demonstrating the diversity of Jewish voices on questions of Israel/Palestine).³⁰

²⁹ See “Film by b.h Yael wins Audience Award at Greek film festival.” 2009.

³⁰ See “Jewish Women Occupy Israeli Consulate in Toronto full story.” 2009.

Marilyn Burgess (1998) has written on *Fresh Blood* as an “imperfect homecoming”. Her article is more descriptive than analytical, though she does emphasize the gendered perspective of Yael’s work centering on relationships between sisters, mother and grandmother. Hladki (2006) examines the collaborative work of Yael and Johanna Householder *The Mission* (2000) and *December 31, 2000* (2001) as alternative media arts but is outside the scope of my project. There is little further scholarship on Yael’s work. This dissertation therefore offers an important critical contribution on this artist’s important and controversial work.

4. Karin Albou’s *Little Jerusalem*³¹

The fourth and final text is Karin Albou’s film *Little Jerusalem*. Albou’s film is set in the Paris suburb Sarcelles, also known as “Little Jerusalem”, a low-income, concrete housing neighbourhood with a large Jewish population. Laura (played by Fanny Valette), a French born woman of religious Tunisian-Jewish background woman, studies philosophy at the university by day and works at a Hebrew school in the evening, falls in love with Djamel, (Hedi Tillet de Clermont-Tonnerre) her coworker, a Muslim-Algerian man. The film follows Laura as she tries to negotiate the laws of the Jewish community with her burgeoning love and sexual desire for Djamel, an outsider and therefore a threat to her community. While Laura is struggling with her desire for Djamel, her sister Mathilde (Elsa Zylberstein) is struggling to save her marriage to Ariel who is having an affair (Bruno Todeschini). The film is an aesthetically rich and thoughtful portrayal of Laura’s conflict between her Jewish faith, burgeoning sexual desire and philosophical commitments. Comparison and contrast between

³¹ I have chosen to use the English translation of the film to maintain consistency with the other primary works of my investigation.

religion and secular philosophy is enhanced by the unique position of Laura's family as immigrants from Tunisia integrating into the Ashkenazi Jewish community, the Western secular French Republic, and its diasporic neighborhoods.

Little Jerusalem is Karin Albou's first feature film. Albou was born in 1968 to an Algerian-born Jewish Father and a secular Catholic mother, who was fifteen at the time of her birth. Her father's family pressured him to marry her mother and she was raised in their impoverished, secular North African household until her parents divorced when she was seven (Pfefferman 2006). Albou lived with her mother, sleeping on the couch in her mother's chaotic, two-room flat after her mother remarried and had another child, until she was seventeen (ibid.). Later, she lived with her paternal grandmother, who like Laura's in the film, pressured her to marry despite her ideals about philosophy and celibacy (Pfefferman). Albou's second feature *Le chant des mariées / The Wedding Song* appeared on screen in 2007. Albou has also directed three short film *Corps de dame* (2009); *Aïd el Kébir* (1999) and *Chut!* (1993) (uniFrancefilms). *Little Jerusalem* won Best Screenplay at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival and received two nominations and the 2006 César Awards in France: Best First Work and Most Promising Actress for Fanny Valette.³²

In interviews Albou has revealed aspects of her identity that have influenced her filmmaking choices. For example, in an interview with John Esther she identifies as "French or Arab-Jew or whatever (I don't know exactly what I am!)" ; she does not see herself as an exclusively *Jewish* filmmaker, but rather a filmmaker who deals with universal themes (Albou 2009). Describing her evolving relationship with Judaism she writes: "I am not religious now. I am Jewish. My father is Jewish. Later I converted and I was married in a

³² See John Esther's interview (Albou 2009).

synagogue. I became more religious when some of my friends became religious. I have always been interested in Judaism and religion (Albou 2006c).”

Carrie Tarr (2009) analyzes *Little Jerusalem* as a portrayal of postcolonial immigrant communities in the context of French Republican universalism. She compares Albou’s work with Yasmina Yahiaoui’s work for television *Rue des Figuiers* (2006). Tarr offers an interesting reading of the negotiation of the female protagonists’ gendered identities within their diasporic contexts and the extent to which representations in the film promote or assuage French majority fears about otherness in the Maghrebi and Jewish communities. Her reading, however, misses many of the subtleties related to the Maghrebiness of the women in Albou’s film and of Jewish identity politics in general. Carine Bourget (2010) briefly treats *Little Jerusalem* as a pessimistic glimpse of Arab-Jewish relations and of Orthodox Jews in France. She compares Albou’s film to the writing of Albert Memmi arguing that both minimize the shared cultural heritage of Jews and Muslims in the Arab world. My analysis offers a different understanding of Albou’s work regarding it as a more ambiguous space with multiple connections between North African Jewish and Muslim diasporas in contemporary France.

I chose these four texts for the way in which their narratives confront the essentialized binary of Jew and Arab, revealing a space for negotiation between the seemingly conflicting identities. Reading these texts in counterpoint with the concept of Arab Jew raises four important questions about the definition of modern Jewish identity in relation to the State of Israel. First, is a question of origins: Is an original community in ancient Israel the source of today’s modern Jewish community? What does it mean to structure a Jewish community based on this claim? Second, is a question of racial/ethnic belonging: Is

Jewishness only an affiliation of blood? What are the implications of equating Jews with race? Third, is the theme of home: Is Israel the ‘home’ of all Jews as implied by Zionist belief? What about Jews who chose not to migrate to Israel? Fourth, is the question of diaspora: How does the case of Arab Jews (exiled or living outside their places of birth in Arabic speaking countries) and the ancient Jewish homeland complicate the seemingly binary concept of diaspora versus homeland? I will explore answers to these questions by comparing examples from the four creative works listed above. In my investigation of these works I hope the analysis of Arab Jews as a double-diaspora might open us a space for alternative stories of Jewish belonging that reconceptualize the relationship between diaspora Jews and the state of Israel.

Chapter One: Jewish Beginnings

Where does Jewishness begin? Is it a religion inscribed in the laws given to the Israelites by God through Moses, interpreted by rabbinic scholars and passed on through the ages? Is it an ethnicity written in the “other” category of the census when Caucasian or Asiatic etc. does not quite suit the person being surveyed? Is it a nation descended from Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel and Leah? Or maybe it is a culture or feeling nurtured by interactions with a Yiddish, Ladino, or Judeo-Arabic speaking family or community? As Jews and Jewish studies scholars continue to debate, there is no definitive answer to these questions; Jewishness is simultaneously conceived of as, and criticized as not at all being a religion, a culture, an ethnicity, a nation.

Perhaps more interesting than the solution to this impossible paradox, is the question of why philosophically, we are obsessed with the idea of beginnings as a means of validating beliefs in the present. Edward Said’s *Beginnings: Intentions and Methods* serves as a useful starting point in examining this dilemma. In the preface to the 1985 edition of *Beginnings* Said outlines what he feels are four significant achievements of the book. First, is a distinction between beginnings (something secular, humanly produced and ceaselessly re-examined) and the notion of origins (something divine, mythical and privileged) (xi-xiii). Second is the development of a theory of authority that links the production of narrative texts to the will to power (xiii). Third, Said applies these first two arguments to modernism as an intellectual and social project. He writes that:

modernism was an aesthetic and ideological phenomenon that was a response to a crisis of what could be called *filiation* – linear, biologically grounded process, that which ties children to their parents – which produced the counter-crisis within modernism of affiliation, that is, the creeds, philosophies or visions re-assembling the world in a new non-familial ways (xiii).

Fourth, is an urgent claim made for the importance of criticism, “that constant re-experiencing of beginning and beginning-again whose force is neither to give rise to orthodoxy but to stimulate self-conscious and situated activity, activity with aims non coercive and communal” (xiv). In sum, Said’s contribution is a style of literary criticism that aims to disrupt hierarchies of power produced by the privileging of certain authors, texts or narratives over others by instead reading texts on a plane of immanence whereby all texts are created by human authors with worldly beginning intentions and desires.

Said’s distinction between human beginnings and divine origins enables us also to interrogate the mythological status attributed to social truths by reinserting secular intentions into the creation of meaning. Attention to the agency of novelists in the creation of fictional worlds, informed by the modernist literary tradition, sheds light on the production of social narratives. The idea of origins tends to place the authenticity of a subject in the transcendent, something beyond and before human creation. Following the contributions of Michel Foucault, however, the history of ideas can no longer be conceived as “a vertical line of transmission and progress chronicling the grand story of civilization as it beautifully transforms everything in its path, hurtling unproblematically towards its chosen telos” (Hussein 68). Said more constructively sees the history of ideas as “a dispersed, variously arranged series of cultural archives sedimented on top of each other, somewhere in the manner of a gigantic palimpsest” (ibid.). This attitude to textual institutions is what spurs Said’s key intervention: the role of criticism is to resist languishing in the safety of a canon that preserves a text based on its precedence, will to power, authority or orthodoxy and instead read texts as self-conscious deliberations that demand an open and continuing analysis.

Metanarratives – grand, monolithic stories about other, little stories – are created and sustained by the interrelation of canonical texts, institutional routines, and the hegemonic agreement of individuals. Zionism (in its dominant manifestation that sees the State of Israel as the only salvation for perpetually oppressed world Jewry) is one such form of metanarrative. Take for example the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, delivered on 14 May 1948:

ERETZ-ISRAEL [(Hebrew) - the Land of Israel, Palestine] was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.

Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland. In recent decades they returned in their masses. Pioneers, ma'pilim [(Hebrew) - immigrants coming to Eretz-Israel in defiance of restrictive legislation] and defenders, they made deserts bloom, revived the Hebrew language, built villages and towns, and created a thriving community controlling its own economy and culture, loving peace but knowing how to defend itself, bringing the blessings of progress to all the country's inhabitants, and aspiring towards independent nationhood.

In the year 5657 (1897), at the summons of the spiritual father of the Jewish State, Theodore Herzl, the First Zionist Congress convened and proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national rebirth in its own country...

(Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

The little stories in the excerpt – statehood, Dispersion, making the desert bloom, the First Zionist Congress – are told as part of a grand teleological narrative that originates in the ancient stories of the Torah and leads inevitably and continuously to modern Jewish statehood. The language of origins sets up Eretz-Israel as the birthplace of the Jewish people.

Jones and Murphy (2002) describe this narrative of modern Israel's history as rooted in three "implicit but questionable assumptions: The moral claims of the Jews to Israel as God's chosen people which supersede material claims by other peoples, the establishment of a modern Jewish state as part of a greater process of redemption from the usurpers of the land, and modern history as the most recent chapter of a greater story of Jewish suffering and struggle" (2). The declaration incorporates these claims by asserting filial links with this original place in turn insisting that everything about Jewishness today – the holy texts, the nation and the religion – were *first* forged there. These first people are then described in the rest of the document as a single community with a common purpose: to revive their political nation in the place that was Eretz-Israel. This story becomes a metanarrative when it is internalized and repeatedly recited without critical reflection by Jews around the world. This story becomes authoritative, when alternative versions of Jewish history are ignored or denounced by the general Jewish community.

What is obscured in this declaration is the discursive context from which stories of origins emerge and depart. The Jewish people are painted as "pioneers, ma'pilim, and defenders" who love peace but *know how to defend themselves*. Furthermore, as God's chosen people they are imbued with mission of bringing "the blessings of progress to all the country's inhabitants". The language of this document is markedly colonial, describing the mission of the Jewish people to civilize the presumably backward inhabitants (Palestinians). Furthermore, the spiritual and political collude in this document; a religious, messianic yearning for return to a homeland is painted as a secular mission to revive the Hebrew language and build a sovereign nation³³. This messianic yearning relies on the idea of a

³³ See Almog (2000) for more discussion.

magical place in time where life for Jews was better, a time before the ritualization of suffering came to construct Jewish history and identity.³⁴

Does this metanarrative have a historical beginning? Can one pinpoint the religious origins of this story? According to Said, beginnings are the main entrance into a work as an intentional production of meaning. Beginnings designate a moment in time, a place, a principle or an action, which connects to a process (a method) that unfolds from this intention. It is a point in which an author asserts their place vis-à-vis other existing texts in a canon, either continuing or complicating a tradition, or perhaps doing both. Beginnings are generally associated with the idea of precedence and/or priority. The intentional, secular, human act of beginning is to be distinguished from the divine, transcendent idea of an origin, something believed to exist outside of or before human action. Said urges us to see that between the concepts beginning and origin is a constantly changing system of meaning that at different times gives credence to one term over the other.

The tension between beginnings and origins is present in the declaration of Israeli independence. A political document with the intent to declare a truth about Israel links human activities with divine, poetic language: Jews “never ceased to pray and hope for their return,” thus “impelled by this historical and traditional attachment” they returned en masse to redeem Eretz-Israel; they “made the deserts bloom, revived the Hebrew language...bringing the blessings of progress to all the country’s inhabitants, and aspiring towards independent nationhood”. Theodore Herzl, the organizer of the First Zionist Congress in 1897 is deemed “the spiritual father of the Jewish state”. The year of the Jewish calendar (5657) takes precedence in the document over the Christian calendar year (1897) to document the First

³⁴ See Benbassa (2010) for a discussion on the role of suffering in the formation of Jewish identity.

Zionist Congress. The intended meaning of all these elisions of secular and divine, beginnings and origins is to assert the right of the Jewish people, and the Jewish people alone (however this ambiguous entity might be defined) as the rightful owners of this land (whatever its borders might be).

Said's project in investigating the idea of beginnings is to emphasize that "[b]eginnings inaugurate a deliberately *other* production of meaning – a gentile (as opposed to sacred one)" (1985: 13). The novel, he argues, is Western literary culture's major attempt to give beginnings an "authorizing, institutional, and specialized role in art, experience and knowledge" (Said 1985:17-18). This authority or intention, however, is nomadic; it authorizes what follows, but it is never a permanent, ontological truth of origin (Said 1985: 23, 34). The declaration of Israeli statehood, published in 1948, in the context of the termination of the British mandate and the end of the Second World War, asserts the intentional beginning of a Jewish nation. The State of Israel is a modern secular beginning; the authority of this nation does not extend divinely to an original source outside of men and women's intentional beginnings efforts. The critic must therefore enter into the narrative of Israel's origins and examine it as one would other secular texts.

What is the nature of the 'eternal Book of Books,' cited in the Declaration that the Jewish people gave to the world? The rabbinic tradition instructs that eternity depends upon a relationship between text and authority that is complex, dynamic and ongoing. The books of the Torah are incomplete without the Talmud, the exchange of rabbinic commentary on the text than in turn guides the laws of Jewish practice.³⁵ Jaffee (2001) demonstrates the

³⁵ The written Torah consists of the five books of Moses, twelve books of Prophets and thirteen Writings. There are two standard collections of the Talmud (Jerusalem and Babylonian) themselves composed of Mishnah (collection of oral commentaries) and the Gemara (commentaries on the Mishnah). For further discussion of the Talmud see: Strack and Stemberger (1996).

interconnection of the written Torah and the Torah “in the mouth” revealed together to the people of Israel from the revelation at Mount Sinai. Rabbinical ideological self-consciousness, according to the author, emphasizes orality as coterminous with the original revealed scripture (Fraade 2004). Jewish knowledge is transmitted through oral repetition from parents to children, from sages to students. Transmission of this knowledge involves the process of midrash, interpreting the written Torah. Contrary to understanding midrash as an attempt to uncover the implicit meaning of a divine author, Judith Hauptman suggests that “the act of exegesis is an attempt on the part of the rabbis to maintain the authority and sacredness of Scripture but, at the same time, to read their own, often more progressive social thinking into the ancient text” (472). Hauptman’s insight highlights the human role in both attributing sacredness to a site (text, divine author) and interpreting that site’s meaning according to particular intentions.

A significant example of the implications of this tradition can be found in the Passover Haggadah. The annual commemoration of the exodus of Jews from Egypt is ritually enacted through the seder, an ordered set of events that enables the older generation to pass on the story to the younger. The Haggadah (a Hebrew term translated as “telling”) is a written guide to the order of the evening and how to tell the story. There are a great variety of types of Passover Haggadahs inspired by different authorial intentions – feminist, Zionist, socialist etc. – which each tell the story of the Jewish Exodus from Egypt differently, yet, the priority of an ordered structure remains constant. Rabbi Nathan Goldberg’s (1984) *Passover Haggadah* is the standard book for many Canadian Jewish households. This version inscribes the order of events beginning with instructions for ridding the home of unleavened bread the

day before the festival begins (2), and continues with asking “Why is this night different from all other nights” (8-9). The answer is briefly summarized:

‘We were slaves in Egypt’ and the Lord our God brought us forth from there ‘with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.’ If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not brought forth our ancestors from Egypt, then we and our children, and our children’s children, would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Therefore, even if we are all learned and wise, all elders and fully versed in the Torah, it is our duty nonetheless to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. And the more one dwells on the Exodus from Egypt, the more is one to be praised (9).

The obligation to ‘retell’ and ‘dwell’ on the story are demonstrated by the commentary recited following this brief explanation. “It is told that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Elazar the son of Azariah, Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Tarfon sat all night in Bnai Brak telling the story of the Exodus ...” (9-10); the discussion of these and other important thinkers in the rabbinic tradition is read alongside the story of Moses and Pharaoh, and alongside the ritual eating of matzah and the drinking of the fourth cup of wine to freedom. The debate over the meaning of “with a strong arm” or the number of plagues in the biblical text is an example to Jews of the importance of commentary, discussion, interpretation and beginnings in Jewish practice.

No Passover ritual will repeat the text in the same way. Some families might add extra questions, or alter the rituals to make room for the voices of women or homosexuals who have been written out of the story. Each family has a different melody for the words, some might not sing at all. While the rabbinical exchange in the text might seem dry to the seder-goer who is anxious to get back to the hockey game or move on to dessert, the enactment of the ritual of midrash actually sets up a repetition of the tradition of Jewish learning with room for argument, debate and controversy. The Passover seder sets up both

the problematic of authority and text (what is the right way to celebrate the tradition, to tell the story) and a secular solution (the repetition of human ritual and dialogue).

The tradition of Midrash instructs us, similar to Said argument, that it is not enough to trace something to a single point of origin. A focus on beginnings instead of origins allows us to see the production of knowledge as a process – a continuing conversation. Following the example set by the rabbinic tradition and Said's theory, the object of this chapter is to examine the beginnings of Naim Kattan's *Farewell Babylon*, Karin Albou's *Little Jerusalem*, Sami Michael's *Refuge* and b.h. Yael's *Fresh Blood*, and to explore the contributions these authors make to the continuing discussion about the relation of Jews to Judaism and to Zionism. If the Zionist metanarrative tries to stabilize Jewish beginnings as a single point of origin in mythical Eretz-Israel, these four Arab Jewish narratives offer multiple entry points that expose different paths shooting off from, intersecting, or bypassing this single story. Kattan's *Farewell, Babylon* looks to Jewish rootedness in Babylon and modern day Iraq after the 'Dispersion'. His story emphasizes the work young Jews put into building the nation of Iraq, not the nation of Israel. Albou depicts Jewishness as embodiment, the active and regular practice of the Halakha. Yet despite its regularity, Jewish ritual is never completely rigid, there is always something new to learn through practice, practices with transformative power. Michael actually begins with a sarcastic criticism of the Zionist metanarrative, at the outbreak of yet another of Israel's war with neighbouring nations. His characters are conflicted citizens of Israel, and Palestinian refugees in the midst of conflict; the stories of their lives reject the idealization of the modern Jewish homeland and interrupt the totalizing story of Jewish redemption of the land. Yael's beginning is the assertion of self as other. She

enters into the Zionist narrative by laying claims to aspects of her identity, which the grand story of Jewishness attempts to reject.

'Beginnings' in these Arab Jewish narratives refer not only the starting words of texts or opening moments of films but are events that occur throughout the text; moments of agreement or disruption, assertions of the author's will to power in relation to existing texts. Each author's beginnings can be multiple and occur at any point in the text and as such might be read as minor literature (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). The literary criticism that follows reads these beginnings (and expects to re-read these beginnings) as deliberate entries into open ended and unorthodox experiences of Jewishness (religious, social, historical, cultural, political). The choice of these texts is not to create a new canon or authoritative Jewish knowledge, but rather to push the boundaries of what might commonly be thought of as Jewish texts, cultures and knowledge. These works illuminate the multiple subjectivities of each author and demonstrate their willingness to engage with and critique the diverse communities and circumstances that influence the development of their Arab Jewish identities.

Beginning in Babylon

Naim Kattan begins his memoir *Farewell, Babylon* three times. Each beginning marks the writer's entry into the world of ideas, the exchange of stories that come to structure what we understand as History or Truth. The story of Kattan's experiences as a young Jewish Iraqi nationalist trying to become a writer is first prefaced with an epigraph:

And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and his sons. II Chronicles 36:20 (qtd. in Kattan 5)

Near the conclusion in the final book of the Tanakh, this passage appears after a summary of Jewish transgressions in the Holy Land against God and rebellion against the Babylonian leaders. The line from *Chronicles* documents the first exile of Jews from ancient Israel to Babylon, the ‘Dispersion’ in the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel. Kattan mirrors Jaffee’s opening recommendation in *Torah in the Mouth*: “It is best to begin, as always, with a text.” (3). In his choice to preface his fictionalized memoir with a biblical citation, Kattan suggests two significant positions regarding Jewish history: the authority of the Tanakh as text and the precedence of Babylon for the memoir that will unfold. This latter position is Kattan’s authorial beginning. The Zionist metanarrative (captured famously in Leon Uris’ novel *Exodus* and Preminger’s 1960 film, for example) generally omits or silences Jewish experiences in the diaspora, or interprets them in a teleology that inevitably locates those experiences in a world of antisemitism that requires Israel as a refuge for Jewish salvation. Kattan’s focus on Babylon, the site where the ancient Israelites actually formed what would become the Jewish religion, represents a break in this History/Truth and instead creates a space for stories from the Arab and Mizrahi margins.

Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue are vocal about the silencing of Arab Jewish and Sephardi voices from Jewish history in general. In the introduction to their book *Sephardi Jewry* Benbassa and Rodrigue argue that Jewish historiography outside of Israel has been generally sealed off from teleologies inspired by groups who fall outside the European-Jewish experiences of emancipation, nationalism and the Holocaust (2000: xvii). Scholarship within Israel, largely written by Ashkenazi historians, reflected a Eurocentrism which placed Ashkenazi history at the centre of Jewish history and omitted the voice of Oriental Jews for ideological reasons (Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000: xxi). The authors argue that the Eurocentric bias that posits the history of Ashkenazim as the dominant Jewish history has

thus rendered Jewish history incomplete. In light of this lacuna Kattan's insistence on pairing the Tanakh with the history of Jews in Babylon in the opening line of his memoir is an assertion that the story of Babylonian Jews be reinserted into modern Jewish history.

Kattan confirms this assertion by returning again to Babylon and the ancient text in the foreword to *Farewell*, his second beginning. The foreword states:

When I wrote this book, the Jewish community of Baghdad, though very small, still existed to some degree. Today, there are practically no Jews left in Iraq. The prisoners of Nebuchadnezzar have left a country where they had lived for twenty-five centuries... They were there before the Christians or the Muslims. To preserve the Book, they studied it, composing the Babylonian Talmud. And while they became integrated into a series of empires, caliphates and colonial powers, they remained Jews. After years of harassment, the Iraqi government allowed Jews to leave the country in 1951, on the condition that they relinquish their nationality and their property. The State of Israel, born three years earlier, took in the majority. Others took refuge in London, New York, and elsewhere in Europe and America. (Kattan 7)

Here Kattan reveals the impetus for the writing of his memoir. The world of *Farewell, Babylon* is, as the title indicates, a world that no longer exists. Official Iraqi statistics, based on the 1947 census, measured the country's Jewish population at 118,000 or 2.6 percent of the total population of 4.5 million (Shiblak 34) before the exodus.³⁶ Between the years 1950-1951 this entire population, like the majority of Jewish populations in the Arab World over the course of the following decades were exiled or dispersed. The Zionist narrative attributes this "exodus" to a long history of antisemitism (similar to that experienced in Europe), religious devotion to the Holy Land, or ideological commitment to Zionism (Shohat 1988: 10). Scholars who contest this claim see a greater complexity of factors that caused this mass exodus. Shiblak (2005), examining the Iraqi Jewish exodus, looks at 'push and pull' factors

³⁶ Shiblak writes that the 1947 census may not have been completely accurate (35). Shenhav, for example, estimated the total at around 130,000 before the exile (Shenhav 2006: 113).

including economic and social advantages and disadvantages resulting from the Jewish communities' minority position in Arab societies under shifting colonial and national regimes following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and insecurities arising from the attitudes and actions of the Iraqi authorities, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Whether blamed on a history of oppression or on more nuance push and pull factors, it is clear that conflicts rising between Jewish and Arab nationalisms contributed feelings of anxiety and insecurity for Jews in their Arab homelands. Kattan's foreword is a bittersweet ode to a dispersed community. The biblical Jews who arrived as prisoners of Nebuchadnezzar made Babylon their new home. Kattan poetically writes that Jews remained in Baghdad through centuries of changing empires, caliphs and colonial powers.³⁷ This is contrasted with the Iraqi government's *years* of harassment between the 1930s and 1950s that lead to the swift and cruel departure of the Jewish population.

The reference to a lost Iraq might lead readers to interpret Kattan's subjectivity as one of an Iraqi exile. As a condition, exile is a "discontinuous state of being," a "dual existence of living here and there" and a "crisis in identity" (Berg 1996). If identity is posited as a narrativization of the self (as Hall (1996) suggests), part of fantasy and fiction, then exile might trigger a disruption when it interrupts the story about one's self, like a blip in the plot. This condition causes a state of disorder or chaos; rules and truisms are turned on their heads, flipped upside down. Instability and lack are accentuated by the state of exile. "At the heart of the condition of exile is the state of homelessness, which implies both the loss of a home and the need for one. The writer in exile may attempt to mediate this lack through the creative process – that is, by recreating home through art" (Berg 8). Berg asserts that writing can become a strategy to resolve this crisis in identity through poetic license.

³⁷ One of the first compilations of this Jewish history is Sassoon (1949).

Exilic writers are involved in the construction of meanings that transform locations into homelands. Exile involves both the pain of loss and separation, and the pleasure of critical distance that enables exilic intellectuals to question social norms.³⁸ An interesting parallel can be made between the discussion of textual beginnings and the experience of exile. Julia Kristeva writes:

The language of exile muffles a cry, it doesn't shout... Our present age is one of exile. How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger to one's own country, language, sex and identity? Writing is impossible without some kind of exile. Exile is already in itself a form of dissidence, since it involves uprooting oneself from a family, a country or a language. More importantly, it is an irreligious act that cuts all ties, for religion is nothing more than membership of a real or symbolic community which may or may not be transcendental, but which always constitutes a link, a homology, an understanding. The exile cuts all links... For if meaning exists in the state of exile, it nevertheless finds no incarnation, and is ceaselessly produced and destroyed in geographical or discursive transformations. Exile is a way of surviving in the face of the dead father, of gambling with death, which is the meaning of life, of stubbornly refusing to give in to the law of death. (Kristeva 298)

While Kristeva argues for the 'irreligious' characteristics of exile, Kattan shows, by his correlation of the exile from Jerusalem and the exile of Iraq, that migrations (even if they are exilic) can actually encourage the construction of links and create social ties. Meaning in the state of exile interpreted as "ceaselessly produced and destroyed in geographical or discursive transformation" agrees with Said's notion of beginnings as "something secular, humanly produced and ceaselessly re-examined." For Kattan, leaving his homeland does not sever all ties, but extends the possibility for the continuing movement of identity. Kattan, in fact, *refuses* the position of an exile; he chose to leave Iraq for France and to live in the

³⁸ See Said's discussion of the exilic intellectual (1994b).

“real” country of Canada rather than the imaginative subject position of exile (Kattan 1985:40-41).

In the opening epigraph and foreword, Kattan hails an authoritative source on Jewish origins in Iraq to repopulate a city bereft of its Jews. He distinguishes the inhabitants of this region by religion and argues, following the biblical story, that the Jews preceded these other religions. By doing this, Kattan asserts a belonging to a Jewish homeland in Iraq (not Israel). Like the declaration of Israeli independence, Kattan also refers to the “Book”. The author writes of the book’s preservation in Babylon, and how its study led to the composition of the Talmud. The declaration frames the Torah (book of book) as eternal, unchanging, and a gift to the world. For Kattan the book is intimately connected to Jewish life in ancient Babylon and modern Iraq, while for the Declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel the book is what connects Jews and to the world. One approach is particular, one universal; both, however, insist on a relationship with the Tanakh as an authoritative group of texts. In the conclusion to his memoir Kattan again returns to the Tanakh, writing the following:

Farewell, Babylon is not a work of nostalgia, nor is it a work of resentment. I remind myself that peoples outlive their lands, even lands that are hostile. Sometimes ungrateful people damage the legacy and the wealth of their land. I never forget that Abraham was born at Ur in Chaldea, not far from Baghdad. He is still the father of all monotheistic religions, even if his message is handled roughly. His word endures, even when we do not hear it. That is his victory; it is also our hope. (Kattan 8-9)

Abraham, a biblical figure born in what is now Iraq, who never saw the ancient Jewish Kingdom, inspires Kattan’s messianic vision. He hails Abraham’s message of monotheism as a source of hope, particularly in the context of destructive nationalisms. From a point of critical distance, Kattan can negotiate his relationship to Iraq, his homeland, and above all examine his own unique Jewish beginnings in light of a general Jewish history that has

sought to silence it. The process of beginning with these two instances of exile becomes a tool for examining Iraqi Jewish existence, a beginning that challenges the authoritative sources of Jewish or Iraqi nationalism that undermine this part of Iraqi-Jewish history.³⁹ Iraq is the setting of Kattan's young life. It is in this country's schools, cafés, rooftops and brothels that the young man awakens into moral consciousness, national sentiment, and a career path as a writer.

And yet this second beginning, like the first, is only the threshold⁴⁰ of the text of the memoir. The third beginning of *Farewell Babylon*, the first words of the memoir proper, starts with a coffee pot, gone around for the second time and the entrance of a character, Nessim. Kattan and Nessim, Jews aspiring to careers as writers, meet friends in their literary circle at the Yassine Café. The reader is thrust into the middle of a lively discussion about novels and great novelists. The characters debate one of the very arguments posed by Said in *Beginnings* about the uniquely European beginnings of the novel versus Arab traditional storytelling such as in *Arabian Nights*. Said argues that the novel is a means to create an alternative word beyond God's creation or at least to modify or augment the 'real world' through the act of writing (Said 1985: 81). Kattan's fictionalized memoir plays with the idea of beginnings by methodologically beginning thrice. Connection the Tanakh, the history of the Jews in Babylon and modern Iraq and the story of his own experiences growing up in Iraq, Kattan asserts his intention as an author to contribute a new beginning that disrupts the canon of texts on Jewish narrative histories. The insistence on reading together the sacred text – as a sibling standing adjacent, rather than as a child descending from – and modern

³⁹ Counteracting, for example, the popular discourse that Jews needed to escape Arab and Muslim lands. See theforgottenrefugees.com for this perspective.

⁴⁰ The threshold, or paratext, contains the elements of text both internal (titles, prefaces etc.) and external (interviews, reviews etc.) that directs readers as to how to read the main text (Allen 2000; Genette 1997).

Jewish history in the Arabic speaking world challenges the Ashkenazi-centric versions of Jewish history by rejecting interpretations that privilege both origins over beginnings and some Jewish beginnings (Ashkenazi) over others (Arab-Jewish, Babylonian, Mizrahi).

The world that Kattan depicts plays between the theatre and the real.⁴¹ It augments perceptions of the real world by exploring the complexity of its imaginative and performative possibilities. At the meeting in Chapter One, Nessim begins to speak Arabic in the Jewish dialect to the Chaldean, the Armenian, and the Muslim majority of his group, posing a challenge to the Iraqi Muslim social order. It was common in their environment, as Kattan describes, for semi-literate or rich Jews to reveal themselves by including Muslim terms or English and French words in their Jewish dialect. For example, “A child who called his father ‘papa’ or ‘daddy’ was already guaranteed a future aristocracy” (Kattan 13). Muslims, on the other hand, might slip into Jewish or Christian dialects “only to amuse visitors”; to ridicule. In Kattan’s circle of emancipated intellectuals the Jewish dialect was not spoken at all. Nessim’s insistence on speaking in the Jewish dialect perplexes his friend. Kattan’s initial response is the “path of cowardice,” silence, followed by “a middle course” of speaking literary Arabic, a language above the specific religious dialects of Jews or Muslims. But Nessim compels his friend to participate in his subversion of the Muslim mainstream:

Nessim was forcing me to take a stand against the solidarity of the group. I could not reject our common language without humiliating myself. It was no longer the language of friendship, but of the clan. I listened to myself and the Jewish words stood out in all their strangeness, coldly and naked.... (14)

Suddenly Nessim’s game was no longer a joke. Whereas before the Muslims looked at the Jews without seeing them now they recognized the Jewish distinctiveness:

⁴¹ Kattan writes extensively about this in *Reality and Theatre* (1972).

The masks had fallen. We stood there in our luminous and fragile difference. And it was neither a sign of humiliation nor a symbol of ridicule. In a pure Jewish dialect we made our plans for the future of Iraqi culture. (15)

Roles suddenly reverse. The Muslims of the group begin to attempt the Jewish dialect.

“They stammered over words they had heard so often but never allowed to cross their lips. They apologized for the awkwardness ... By the end of evening Said and Janil and all the others too were being introduced to the Jewish dialect, with as much awkwardness in the serious matter that it was.” (16)

This beautiful beginning paints Arab Muslims as friends to their Jewish co-nationals, an image vastly different from the Zionist world that only sees Muslim/Arabs and Jews as perpetual enemies. Like the transformation enabled by the adoption of the Hebrew language by Abraham,⁴² language here too is a passage for the young Iraqis of all religions and ethnicities as they try on new roles and explore the threshold of their identities.

The striking feature of this third beginning is that in contrast to Kattan’s first two attempts to authorize Jewish beginnings in Iraq, he starts the actual text of the memoir in a multi-religious setting. The first image Kattan provides of Iraq is one receptive to Jewish linguistic, and cultural difference. It is a narrative of Jewish participation and belonging in a diverse and vibrant society. This perspective is fundamentally different from the Zionist narrative which proclaims a homogenously antisemitic Muslim world or a backward society. It is not a naïve narrative that ignores the prejudice of Muslim friends and teachers towards Jewish others in their social milieus nor does it shy away from the real violence of the farhoud which played a key role in the departure of Iraqi Jews, but rather it gives equal voice to multiple experiences of both the otherness and inclusion of Jewishness in a changing Iraqi

⁴² “Il y a dans le rapport de l’exilé avec le pays choisi un refus du passage. Et quand on dit Abraham *ha ivri*, la langue elle-même est un passage... Ce passage de la personne dans l’espace est donc aussi un passage dans le temps. Un passage continu. Ce n’est pas un passage fixe, c’est un mouvement...” (Kattan qtd. in Allard 41).

national context. The Iraq depicted in this beginning is a society of friends who can engage in discourse, challenging the social norms of their times, while sharing the same pot of coffee. It is rife with the tension of pushing social boundaries, or testing the waters of the tolerance of religious differences but it documents the success of the Jewish characters speaking Arabic in Jewish voices, and being accepted. Most importantly this scene indicates Kattan's beginning insertion Zionist Jewish narrative, a disruption of the metanarrative that firmly grounds Jewish characters in their Arabic society and culture but does not restrict them to this single context.

Beginnings, in *Farewell, Babylon*, do not conclude with these three instances at the chronological start of the text. These beginnings themselves could be dislocated by starting to read at any-point-whatsoever in the text. No matter where the reader begins in the physical text, the location of Kattan's work at the threshold of canonical Jewish narratives on identity, history and homeland, remains evident. This quality is not limited to literary forms, but can also be observed in the cinematic.

Beginning in Halakha

Karin Albou's *Little Jerusalem* offers a cinematic text for considering the distinction between Jewish origins and beginnings. The very first image is an extreme close-up of a woman's hair hanging over her face. The woman is getting dressed. We see shots of her skin exposed in fragments as she pulls on her stockings. The camera lingers intimately on her skin against the fabric of her underwear and bra strap. A quick cut focuses on an open siddur, the Hebrew prayer book held firmly in one hand as she dresses with the other. The camera dwells on her lips reciting the morning prayers.

Cut to a long shot of a group of people standing at the edge of a river. Dressed in long skirts, black hats and kippot, Orthodox Jews are praying and tossing breadcrumbs into the river. The ritual of tashlich, where last year's sins are cast away in running water, indicates that this is around the time of Rosh Hashanah, the start of the Jewish New Year.⁴³ Whereas Kattan begins his memoir by referring to the Jewish texts, Albou sets her story of a love affair between an Orthodox Jewish woman and a secular Muslim man in Sarcelles, a suburb of Paris, by beginning with the theme of Jewish practice. Each work articulates Jewishness from a different key approach to the study of religion. Kattan appeals to an ancient textual history, which lends authority to the Jewish presence in Babylon by their history of presence in the land. Albou's choice to depict, first the individual in prayer, and second the community ritual practice, places Jewishness in the realm of action. Orthodox Jewish practice,⁴⁴ based on the authority of the written and the oral Torah, is entangled with the living experience of everyday secular activities such as dressing for the morning. Like *Farewell, Babylon*, Albou's film begins with a bold assertion of diasporic Jewishness, an *unorthodox* move according to Zionist discourse.

The camera zooms in to show the woman from the opening scene now praying and shaking crumbs off her clothing, a part of her community, yet standing apart. The trees around them are verdant. A close-up of the water emphasizes a connection between the people and the natural environment. In opposition, the shot then pans up to a bird's eye view of Paris below. Concrete towers, buildings and courtyards across the vast view of the city

⁴³ It is interesting that the film starts here. Beginnings and beginnings-again are built into the Jewish calendar year, a circular renewal of community and spirituality.

⁴⁴ Orthodox Jewish practice is actually quite diverse. In North America it is contrasted with other streams of practice such as Reform or Conservative (See Neusner (1975) and especially Charles Liebman's article therein.) In Israel, however, the preferred term is 'religious' rather than 'orthodox'. Whereas in North America Orthodox is one of several equally valued forms of observance, in Israel 'religious' is considered the only form of Jewish religion (See Yehiya (2005)).

contrast with the lush images of water and trees of the earlier scene. The music over the opening credits is sad and melodic. A shot of the horizon depicts the sun in the sky over the haze of the city. Albou's beginning sequence moves from the intimacy of an individual's private bedroom, to the individual in their particular community and the familiarity of their natural environment, and then to the alienating expanse of the city in which they live.

This arrangement of moving images presents a series of truths but also provokes questions. A viewer familiar with such cultural codes knows immediately from the Hebrew texts, the style of dress and the movement of bodies in prayer that these characters are Jewish. But how does the viewer know this? Is this what Jewishness authentically looks like? Why were these codes used and not others? The film narrative is an expression of Jewish culture quite different from the Kattan's literary narrative. Jewishness shifts from something defined by writing and "Torah in the mouth" to phenomena that are written on bodies and expressed through performance. If Jewishness is no longer rooted in a divine text, then how does one come to know and identify it? Simon Bronner (2008) joins a recent trend of scholarship in posing Jewish cultural studies as an interdisciplinary framework for approach the study of Jewishness.⁴⁵ Works in the field of Cultural studies apply critical analysis to understand and interpret the expressions of everyday life: arts, rituals, living experiences and beliefs of individuals and groups. According to Bronner: "Jewish cultural studies untangles the ways in which meaning is created and received by different groups in various situations" (4). Jewishness as a cultural phenomenon can be accessed through culture, rather than in a divinely ordained source, or rooted in a nation state. Cultural texts become locations in which to access the conflicts and conversations that occur within and between cultures,

⁴⁵ David Biale (2002); Sander Gilman (1991; 2003); Jeffrey Shandler (2006; 2009); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006), Jon Stratton (2008; 2009) are other important contributors.

offering an inlet into everyday activities and private lives. These can include the performances of bodies, as well as literature, film and even the arrangement of neighbourhoods and space.

Bronner emphasizes the chutzpah of Jewish cultural studies. As a keyword (Williams 1976) chutzpah refers to the edgy quality of Jewish cultural studies, the challenging disruption of both the cultural studies canon, which tends to exclude studies of Jewishness, and the Jewish studies canon, which tends to exclude studies of culture. Chutzpah has the double signification of guts and insolence. Following Aviv and Shneer (2005), Bronner argues that part of the chutzpah or challenge of Jewish cultural studies is to examine Jewish consciousness and experience from the angle of a post-diaspora and the postmodern. What this means is “[i]nstead of recovering cultural practices that *came from* somewhere – with origins in central and eastern Europe, Spain and North Africa, ancient Israel, or the Bible – it considers the locations and situations they *go to*. This cultural enquiry is not just into the city or country in which Jews form intergenerational bonds, but the ritual space they create in the home and hall” (Bronner 21). This “*go to*” aspect of Jewish cultural studies is relevant to analyzing the characters in *Little Jerusalem* who, despite emigrating from North Africa, are creating Jewishness in contemporary France.

Albou’s film exposes the bedroom as a site where Jewishness is actively being constructed and reconstructed. The bedrooms in Laura and Mathilde’s home are spaces with multiple functions. The first dialogue in the film, an argument between Laura and her sister that occurs in Laura’s bedroom, can be read according to Said’s juxtaposition of beginnings and origins. Mathilde, Laura’s elder sister, adheres to the authority of an original, divine author. “Hashem [God] is a concrete concept,” she tells us; in her opinion, Laura is wasting

her time studying the philosophy of Kant when she has been raised on the “truth of the Torah.” Mathilde admonishes her little sister: “Philosophers are like archers. They take aim and hit the bull’s-eye. But they pick the wrong target. The right one is just next to it. It’s Hashem. And we’re trying to reach him.” Mathilde’s position is firmly entrenched in the filiation of authorship and sacred authority.

Despite Mathilde’s insistence on seeing beauty in the world through her relationship with Hashem and the Torah, the ugliness slips in when she discovers that her husband Ariel has been cheating on her. Laura is shocked when Mathilde tells her about the affair, exclaiming: “he’s so devout. Are you sure?” The family’s conflict between transcendent religious law and ordinary human desires is revealed. Human culture interferes with the Laws of the divine, compelling us as critics to look beyond what the sacred texts tell us about Judaism to the messy expression of lived religion.⁴⁶ Ariel’s unfaithfulness to his wife does not negate his Jewishness nor, as Mathilde learns, does sexual desire conflict with Jewishness. At the mikvah, the Jewish ritual bath, Mathilde disrobes, submerges herself in the purifying water, attempts to recite a blessing and breaks into tears. The attentive (unnamed) woman at the mikvah comforts Mathilde. She offers to give Mathilde advice on what Jewish women can do to keep their husbands from straying.

At a later meeting in her office, the mikvah woman asks Mathilde to talk about her intimate moments. Mathilde, embarrassed, replies that her sexual practices are normal, that she does not do what she thinks the Torah bans. Mathilde is surprised to learn that despite popular discourse, “pleasure is authorized by Jewish law and doesn’t repel the divine. On the contrary it’s revered. A devout woman must keep her modesty, but modesty doesn’t exclude

⁴⁶ Chapter Three will discuss the concept of lived religion as a method of study in more depth.

pleasure. If your husband takes the initiative, you retain your modesty.” Laura asks the women at the mikvah questions her sister is too scared to ask: “Can love come from evil,” “May a woman touch her husband’s private parts?” The woman replies that true love can only ever come from Hashem and despite Mathilde’s shock, a woman may indeed touch her husband. It is possible to interpret both the mikvah woman and Albou the director as authoritative authors of Jewishness here. Both women make reference to an authoritative Jewish tradition – God, the halakha – but it is their unique interpretations and departures from the divine source, which place the formation of knowledge in secular, human intention.

For the observant sisters, these discoveries mark a new beginning within the orthodoxies of Jewish traditions that reassemble, without destroying, the parameters of the halakha. The laws that guide their world give way to movement, shaping a world of different possibilities that include the right to take pleasure in their own sexual desires. The knowledge of the mikvah woman intersects with the perceived authority of the rabbinic tradition – one often restricted to male study and the canonical thinking of the community. Albou’s beginning critiques Jewish orthodoxy by privileging the knowledge of a religious woman above the patriarchal realm of tradition.⁴⁷ Without access to the tradition of midrash (likely due to issues of gender and social context) Mathilde and Laura are left ignorant of the process that creates the rules of the Jewish religious practices they enact by rote. Their newfound knowledge of Jewish family laws empowers them both to re-experience their practice of Jewish rituals as adaptable, part of a Jewishness viewed as a continued conversation between laws and interpretations. They do so in dramatically different ways. For Mathilde, this results in her ability to meet her husband for the first time as an equal in

⁴⁷ Albou’s film is a fictional representation of a broader phenomenon in Jewish Feminism. Some sources include: jofa.org, Blu Greenberg (1981) and *Half the Kingdom* (1989).

the bedroom. It does not trigger a break from the mainstream Judaism of her peers or prevent her from participating in the Zionist ideal of immigrating to Israel in search of a safe haven. For Laura, this increases her self-conscious and critical engagement with Law and authority (that of her family, philosophy, Jewishness and that of her own creation). She embarks on a new beginning in France to be re-experienced without her family. It is uncertain if this future will include her Muslim lover Djamel.

Mathilde and Laura through their discussions with the woman in the mikvah discover that Jewish law offers more flexibility in sexuality than the popular discourse in their circle allows. Each woman depicted through Albou's directorial choices begins with Jewish laws and practice, then begins-again with the newfound knowledge of the rabbinic (rather than the word-of mouth) interpretations of these laws, revealed through the words of a woman in their community. As Said argues, however, these beginnings are human intentions, human choices and human methods despite a respect for the transcendence and veneration of Hashem and the Torah. Returning to Bronner's discussion above, *Little Jerusalem* demonstrates the potency of Jewish cultural studies, with its focus on expression, identity and representation, and its chutzpah of pushing boundaries for revealing the conflicts that can occur within and between cultures and discourses. From the film's chronological beginning and repeatedly throughout its duration, Albou focuses on Jewish culture in practice. The characters in the film offer a polyphonic dialogue on what it means to be Jewish. Even what Mathilde believes to be the original Jewish law, she finds out later from the woman in the mikvah, is muddled by human assumptions and interpretation. In this way, Albou's method interrupts any attempt to establish a single authoritative, original or stagnant Judaism and demonstrates Said's thesis about the role of creative intention in authoring secular beginnings.

“Obstinate, Helpless Ido”: Beginning in Israel

Sami Michael's novel *Refuge*, like *Little Jerusalem*, begins with a voyeuristic glimpse into the intimate lives of the narrative's characters amid their quotidian activities. *Refuge* begins by abruptly interrupting a family in its regular business of getting ready for the day. The reader is brought into the middle of a potent conversation between husband and wife:

Marduch was in the bathroom, and his voice was muffled behind a towel as he asked, "If Israel is wiped out, what will future generations remember about it?"

Shula, who was dressing obstinate, helpless Ido, mumbled something.

"Only two things." Her husband answered his own questions.

"Fantastic desert agriculture, and the royal screwing the Arabs got. And I've got nothing to do with either."

In these three opening lines a great deal is revealed about this family. First, their communication is "muffled" and "mumbled". Second, Marduch has an ambivalent sense of humour, an ambivalent outlook on his national situation and shirks any responsibility in the actions of the government. Third, their son Ido is "obstinate" and "helpless." It is an unusual beginning, full of Bronner's chutzpah. Only later in the narrative do the details of this awkward family reveal themselves. Dictated through the unravelling thoughts and experiences of Shula, we come to know the story of how Marduch, an Iraqi Jewish man, came to marry Shula, an Israeli Ashkenazi woman. Before the story unfolds, however, Michael presents us with a political conundrum. From the opening words of the book Marduch asserts his tenuous location in the nation. If he has nothing to do with the achievements or abuses of the government, why does he exclude himself so insistently? Why is the fate of Israel on his mind?

Marduch's ambivalence prompts us to question the relation of Israeli Jews, and particularly of Mizrahim in Israel, to Jewish identity. Zionist discourse sets up both a distinction and a blurring of the distinction between Judaism the religion and Jewish as a secular, national identity.⁴⁸ The archetype of the sabra, for example, was idealized as a secular alternative to the religious Jew of the diaspora. Almog (2000) names a list of characteristics that nationalist ideologies and traditional religions share:

1. Striving toward future utopia.
2. Mystification and glorification of leaders, e.g. political leaders as prophets.
3. Perception of the nation as an exemplary, chosen society fulfilling an ancient prophecy under divine supervision.
4. Formulation of social ideas in metaphysical and religious terms such as 'redemption,' 'sacrifice' etc.
5. Viewing of reality in terms of absolute values: total identification with ideology, willing to make huge sacrifices for this ideology, and criticism against those who diverge.
6. The institutionalization of nationalist ideas by insinuating them into every area of individual and communal life through taboos, cyclical ritual, symbols, etc. (18-19)

It is clear that nationalist discourse relies on the language of origins and mythology to lend it authenticity. Mythology, according to Roland Bathes is depoliticized speech, a symbol emptied of its history and rendered innocent (143). Jewishness understood in this mythic sense as a religion with divine authorship, or as a national identity extending to an original biblical land, or modern nation state risks becoming an empty symbol. Furthermore, it creates a false detachment of religion from politics.

Marduch's story fills in the emptiness of Zionism as a religious mythology with an Arab Jewish beginning. Marduch, the reader learns, is from "back there in Iraq". He was an

⁴⁸ Jewish was literally the word that identified Jews on Israeli citizenship cards (Kimmerling 2002: 188). This is also evident in the belief that Israeli is a democratic state despite its ethnocratic rule. On ethocracy see: Yiftachel (2006); Ghanem, Rouhana and Yiftachel (1998).

active communist in his home country, alienated from his family for his political associations. The Iraqi authorities captured Marduch, tortured him and deported him to Israel against his will. Marduch's difficult life is exposed through dialogue with his wife. The reader learns about his troubled past at the same as Shula:

“Tell me. I'm your wife...And all (t)his time you never said a word...Is it so hard for you?...

He nodded.

“And then they took him away.”

“Took who?”

“My brother. Next day, at dawn, they displayed his body in the square. He was shy as a girl. Ours was a rough man's world. And he was so gentle. They had to pick him, his body, to show off to the women and children, hanging from a rope.” (Michael 13-14)

The Iraqi authorities murdered Marduch's brother in retaliation for orchestrating a strike at the prison in which they were being held for their communist activities. The traumatic events of Marduch's life continue to be told non-linearly and revealed in fragments, always mediated by his wife's memory of the narrative. Explaining her husband's sensitivity to heat, Shula relates the details of his torture to her neighbour Tuvia:

“It's hard to believe that he comes from back there, from Iraq,” the pensioner said. “I've heard it gets to be one hundred and thirty degrees there. And in spite of that he's sensitive to the heat.”

“Maybe it's because he was put in chains. For eleven years he was kept in irons.” She blushed in the dark, as if she had revealed her innermost secret thoughts to a stranger...” He was seventeen years old. They chained him in irons and sent him to a fortress in the desert...(Michael 133)

Marduch's life might be interpreted as an example of a Jew persecuted in the diaspora, yet it is important to consider his agency in participating in the communist movement in Iraq and his resistance to Zionism; his experiences are context specific. The utopian goal that the

young man fought for was realized in neither Iraq nor Israel, and prophets and prophecies were nowhere to be found.

Michael's beginning is the contrapuntal weaving of diverse voices into the story of Zionism. Contrapuntal refers to the method of including multiple voices, even if they are dissonant, into a narrative without allowing one to supersede another. Said applies this method in particular to reading colonial texts that have silenced the voices of the colonized:

In practical terms, 'contrapuntal reading' as I have called it means reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England. Moreover, like all literary texts these are not bounded by their formal historic beginnings and endings... The point is that contrapuntal reading must take into account both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was forcibly excluded... (1994a: 66-67).

Through the story of Marduch and his friends and family, Michael disrupts the innocence of the Zionist narrative by the contrapuntal inclusion of multiple voices: Arab Jews, Communists, Palestinians, and women. The author begins by literally fore-fronting engagement with "[the] royal screwing that the Arabs got." Michael's work continues by weaving together the narratives of Israel's marginalized minority voices and direct engagement with the voices of characters that are Palestinian refugees. The stories of Fatkhi's ambiguous experiences with Arabness in the West Bank, Fuad's and Shoshana's struggles to find a place in Israel that would accept themselves and their children and Shoshana and Shula's family rejection for marrying Arabs (Jew or Christian) paint Israel as a rich, complex and complicated society. Michael's method refuses to let one narrative speak louder than another; rather each story relies on the interconnectedness of the other.

The innocence of Israel is further complicated by the outspoken voice of Marduch and Shula's disabled child Ido. Ido comes to symbolize the frailty but also the strength of secular Jewish beginnings. After Shula has revealed to Tuvia the story of Marduch's torture, and her neighbour has returned to his apartment, Ido cries out for his Daddy. Shula rushes to hold him and calm him down, but he bombards her with questions: "Where's Daddy? Why was there a siren? Why do we have to go down there [to the shelter]?" (Michael 135). Shula reminds her son that we set sirens to warn us about the airplanes. "The Arab airplanes?... Fuck the Arabs!" The ten-year-old connects the Arabs, airplanes, and sirens to the darkness of the shelter, which he is afraid to go into. The boy's simple, shifting understanding first connects Arabs to airplanes then is unable (or unwilling) to comprehend that Daddy has gone to the army. This, combined with his cruel detachment from his mother whom he only calls by her first name Shula, renders Ido a powerful voice in the chapter despite his simplicity.

When Ido falls back to sleep, Shula remembers a conversation in which she asks her husband if his family had a history of "anything like this before," meaning the birth of their disabled child. Marduch finally reveals his fear that Ido's disability is his own fault: "When they stripped me and tied me to that metal chair, I didn't know what they were planning to do..." (Michael 140). As the details of the abuse come out Shula no longer wants to hear the story. She pretends she never asked the question to begin with, but Marduch insists on telling it because he thinks that "maybe they turned me into a creature capable only of begetting children like Ido...They put a burning primus stove under that metal chair that they had tied me to" (Michael 141-142). Marduch's fears about his masculinity echo a much larger discourse on the emasculations of Jewish men and Mizrahi men in particular.⁴⁹ Ido, the

⁴⁹ See Gilman (1985), Biale, (1992) and Boyarin (1997) on Jewish masculinities and especially Yosef (2004) on Mizrahi masculinity. Yosef writes: "Zionism was not only a political and ideological project, but also a sexual

Israeli-born child, despite his “feeble” voice sounds almost like a muse as he provokes his mother and the reader to contemplate the confusion of the Israeli-Arab war going on around him and the domestic tensions within Israeli society and his own household.

Whereas Kattan and Albou’s works begin with vital aspects of Jewish religious culture – text and ritual – Michael begins with Jewishness as a secular identity in a Jewish nation state. The reader finds out that Shula and Marduch, because of their belonging to the Communist party, stand disgraced in Israeli Jewish society. In Iraq, Marduch’s uncle scolds him for being an atheist and then simultaneously insists that he is a Jew (Michael 193). Jewishness is a label attached to Marduch by others. As a communist, he insists that he can find comrades in any country in the world. The circumstance of his arrival in the Jewish state and the refuge he is given by that nation, result in his commitment to the Jewish nation to fight in their war.

Refuge is an interesting point of departure from the Declaration of Establishment of (the) State of Israel discussed earlier in this chapter. Gone are the transcendent references to the religious redemptions of the Jewish people. Gone is the poetic divine language to describe mundane human actions. Both the concept of refuge and the novel itself are fraught with conflict. Economic difficulties, discrimination and conflicts of identity plague Marduch and Shula’s friends. Most importantly, Michael never allows Arab and Jew to comfortably settle into essential categories. This will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

one, obsessed with Jewish masculinity and especially the Jewish male body” (2)...The colonizer seeks to constitute compliant subjects who mimic his assumptions and values. For example, Israeli cinema in the seventies expressed an anxiety about the emergence of a new Mizrahi macho masculinity and made an effort to domesticate Mizrahi men by disavowing ethnic difference, using practices of mimicry which were enforced through the military and interethnic marriage, compelling Mizrachim to reflect an image of Ashkenazi heteronormativity.” (7)

Beginning as the Other

The works of Kattan, Albou and Michael can all be interpreted as beginning with different approaches to the representation of Jewishness. b.h.Yael's video, however, begins outside of Jewishness, in the realm of the other. The first image of *Fresh Blood* is a close-up shot of a hand playing finger symbols. As the hand continues to chime the beat, a woman's ululating voice sounds and begins to sing. Seconds after the hand starts to turn, the camera quickly flashes to a close-up image of a torso garbed in colourful fabric and gold, before another quick cut to a slow zoom-in on a nondescript woman in a black t-shirt, hair tied back and unadorned. For the first minute of the video the camera frantically cuts between this slow zoom-in on the woman, Yael, and flashes of the body, skirts and scarves of a belly dancer. The singing and cymbal beats drone loudly as the belly dancer's bejeweled navel sways between cuts zooming-in on Yael's frowning face. This frantic movement between self and other sets the tone for the directorial style to come.

Yael begins with the exotic other. The belly dancer becomes the authority with whom Yael will consult for the duration of the film; her purview is the realm of the oriental, of femininity, sexuality, Arabness and difference. Rather than begin inside Jewishness, the belly dancer is used to engage with other aspects of Yael's identity, particularly as the daughter of an Iraqi mother and as a woman with multiple affiliations, not necessarily Jewish. Yael's relationship to Jewishness as a religious, cultural or national identity at the intersection of other realms of difference is explored in a fragmentary fashion throughout the chapters of her work.

In their study of Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari (1986) ponder how to approach the author's work, which they describe as a rhizome, a burrow or a castle with multiple entrances (3). Rather than begin at the beginning, the authors write: "we will enter, then, by any point

whatsoever; none matters more than another, and no entrance is more privileged even if it seems an impasse, a tight passage, a siphon” (ibid.). The rhizomatic approach is akin to Said’s contrapuntal method, though, articulated through different metaphors, Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome and Said’s contrapuntal method are inspired by similar attitudes toward narrative: an emphasis on reading diverse narratives together, and permitting the reader to constantly begin and re-begin in order to destabilize the authority of a single master narrative. This philosophical attitude and textual approach enables us to listen to the silences that are hidden below absolutist assertions of identity or Truth. Arab Jew as a beginning concept embodies this attitude. It assumes that human categories are created (not divine) and can be reformulated in the pursuit of compassion for the other.

Like Kattan’s work discussed above, b.h. Yael’s video *Fresh Blood: A Consideration of Belonging* chronologically and conceptually begins multiple times. Rather than following a single linear narrative, *Farewell*, *Babylon* and *Fresh Blood* jump between memories, musings and tangents. Beginnings in these works are complex affairs that must be contextualized from various locations. In this way study of these works can be accessed, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, at any point whatsoever. *Fresh Blood* might easily have started at a later point in the opening sequences: The camera cuts to the suitcase in hand, Yael walking through the Toronto airport. A place of high security, the voiceover informs us, a place of childhood fears of “Arabs, dogs, snakes”. Views of clouds from the airplane fade into the prior image of Yael’s face, now an extreme close-up. In voiceover she tells the story of two women she sat next to on the plane, who express their relief: “Oh good, we were hoping for a...” Yael mouths the word “woman”. The narrative might also have started with the various scenes depicting her childhood memories – either of her first memories as an immigrant to Canada, or of hearing stories of her family’s ancestry from her parents and

grandparents. All of these points are entryways into *Fresh Blood* — no matter where the viewer digs in, Yael's beginning is the same: a constant challenge to normative perceptions of singular or essentialized identities.

Fresh Blood's montage of images, sounds and texts create a palimpsest of context for Yael's artistic and intellectual work. The video depicts Yael's struggle to define herself in the contested terrain of identity. It is a narrative about Yael's trip to Israel, the place of her birth, where she confronts the layered social categories that have shaped and continue to mold her identity. Here she interrogates what it means to be Jewish, Arab, queer and female, among other identities, by entering into a process of discovery. A title "'Discovery' is always late. — Anne McClintock" appears on the screen. In what follows, Yael documents a gathering of Iraqi Jews meeting to share food, conversation and entertainment. Here the viewer is introduced to interviews with author Eli Amir, Professor Ella Shohat, and Taschi, a male belly dancer.

Yael's significant contribution in this segment on 'Discovery' is a meditation on what it means to be a minority within Jewishness. Discovery, in the Saidian sense, can never be the finding or the founding of something entirely new, but rather always derives from what is already in existence, seen perhaps this time with different eyes. Discovery involves making an effort to learn anew. *Fresh Blood* strives to find the absent stories (rendered so through colonization) that have compelled Yael to feel ill-at-ease with her place between nations, affiliations, religions and politics. Yael deliberately re-experiences her identity by beginning with the concept of Mizrahi. Here Yael comes to see her Arab Jewish identity not as one aligned with dogs and snake, but as one part of a vibrant, dynamic and beautiful culture. Belly dancing serves as a link between Arab Jews in Iraq and non-Jewish Arab Palestinians, stressing a point of shared Arab culture. But Yael does not present Arab as a unifying and

totalizing category. At this meeting of Iraqi Jews, this celebration of other Jewish experiences in Israel, there are further disruptions of the mainstream. The images of a male belly dancer and Arab Jews resist the ethnic and sexual stereotypes of who Jews are and what Jews do. Yael continues to prod at authoritative Jewishness in later scenes by conducting interviews with Israeli lesbians who, with their short hair and men's clothing, are mistaken for kibbutznikkim⁵⁰. Yael brings the diasporic concept of Jewishness as a culture to her re-discovery of home in Israel. Her approach, then, is the emphasis of the *minor* in the face of metanarrative.

Deleuze and Guattari describe the author of “minor literature” as: “Writing like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow” (Kafka 18). Minor literature describes the contributions that writers from minority groups in society can give to language; a polylingualism that aims not to speak for a majority – a single nation or state – but through revolutionary impulse resists the temptation to *signify*, to stabilize in one official meaning. Yael's work might be considered minor literature for several reasons. For one, she digs through the mess of Zionist metanarrative, academic criticism, family narrative and personal engagement to invent her own language. For two, her cinematic language is non-linear, rhythmic, and jumpy, “accented”, working in contrast with narrative-based films with an introduction, body, climax, and denouement. Language is a constant struggle in *Fresh Blood*. Yael often needs her mother to interpret her grandmother's Hebrew. The main language of the film is English. A child asks her if she speaks Hebrew and she struggles to answer that no, she does not: “Strangers on the street take my forgetting as a personal affront. Even more they see this loss as a cultural rejection. I wonder at the speed which I forgot. Almost as if I had willed myself to.” Language also links into the political. She writes the countries she

⁵⁰ Jewish pioneers, crucial figures in the Zionist metanarrative.

‘belongs’ to in Hebrew and then in Arabic, languages of her heritage but languages she no longer understands. And yet she invokes them throughout the work in order to interrogate them and their relation to her concept of self. Arabic too weaves its way through the video in background conversations and the soundtrack, interrupting English and Hebrew as master languages.

Furthermore, Yael’s work vibrates with a revolutionary spirit. Major literature, reflecting the language, symbols and imagination of majority groups, such as orthodox religious groups or nations, has taken up all the available spaces signifying every available image, making its single interpretation authoritative. Deleuze and Guattari argue that authors of minor literature must find new entries into the metanarrative: “The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it” (17). This concurs with Said’s understanding of beginnings. The choice to remain exterior to a given tradition, or ‘in- between’, represents “a transformation that has taken place in the working of the self-conscious writer. He can no longer easily accept – for many reasons, spiritual or sociological – a place in a continuity that formerly stretched forward and backward in time” (Said 1985: 8-9). Yael’s self-reflexive work deliberately sets out to defy the normative rules of a series of established canons. Yael takes popular images: the belly dancer, the Wailing Wall, Sodom, the kaffiyeh⁵¹ and unsettles the popular stories about these images.

Finally, Yael’s work embodies the spirit of minor literature in her appeals to the voices of minority collectives. The Iraqi Jewish celebrations and the feminist conference, are privileged spaces in Yael’s work that demonstrates the agency of minority voices in Israeli

⁵¹ The Arab headscarf that has become symbolic of the Palestinian struggle (and more recently in North America a controversial fashion trend).

national culture in particular, and master cultures in general. Yael renders these minority voices as multiple sites of power and resistance in her video. Marginalized voices interrupt the authoritative voice of the master language, yet no single voice is given the final dominating word.

Take for your beginning the most chaotic place on earth, believe something strongly enough, apply it to that place, and you are able to author a new beginning whose intention is to make order out of chaos, because underneath everything there is a benign continuity. (Said 1985: 113)

Beginning, Said informs us, is a human intention to make meaning out of chaos. It can simultaneously be an entry into a benign continuity of human knowledge and a disruption of everything that came before and will come after it. This chapter explored several literary approaches to beginnings: as the starting words of a narrative, and as an author's intentional assertion of their place (either agreeing with or departing from an authoritative body of texts). Naim Kattan's memoir physically begins thrice at the threshold of the text and disrupts the Zionist narrative by insisting on the connection between modern Iraq and biblical Babylon for Jewish identity. Karin Albou begins with the halakha and embodied Jewish practice and culture, demonstrating that Jewishness is formed through human action and open to change over time and place, and should be studied as such. Sami Michael begins his novel with a question about Israel, a provocation that opens up a space for the diverse voices of marginalized populations to reveal their diverse experiences inside the nation. b.h. Yael starts with the other as an inherent part of the formation of the Jewish self, and stands as a strong example of minor literature. These multiple textual beginnings should themselves be open to disruption, dislocation and the possibility of beginning-again to reorder, reorganize and give way to new understandings of what it means to be Jewish.

Postcolonial narratives on cultural identity, helped in part by the legacy of the Modernist literary movement, challenge the parents of their genres. Zionism has come to stand as a metanarrative on the meaning of Jewishness and Jewish identity, positing Israel as a central feature of both. The works of Kattan, Albou, Michael, and Yael all interrupt this story that ties Jewish identity exclusively to Israel the modern nation state, meeting this secular story on an equal footing with other Jewish beginnings. Each of these authors and directors refuse to approach Jewishness from a single, original source, and in fact begin their own works several times, laying plain their authorial engagement with the world of texts. Read in counterpoint, all four texts reveal the complexity of Jewishness – the tension between a singular, original and authoritative consistency and the multiplicity of its manifestations in practice. There is no single way of being Jewish, nor one single aspect of Jewishness as a culture, religion or nation that can encompass this identity for all who claim or engage with it.

Chapter 2: The Construction of Arab and Jewish Difference

He was an Arab. She was a Jew. Shula and Fatkhi arrive at this final boundary in Sami Michael's novel *Refuge* after a narrative that weaves between the complicated lives of an Arab Jew tortured in Iraq and deported to Israel (Marduch), a Jewish woman who marries an Arab Christian man in Israel (Shoshana, Fuad), and a Palestinian poet who straddles the line between privilege, poverty and incarceration as a Communist of Muslim background living in Israel (Fatkhi). These are only four of the book's numerous characters that participate in the novel's playful construction and deconstruction of ethnic, religious, national, gender and political identities. Despite the complicated expressions of group boundaries and sensations of belonging, Michael sadly concludes the narrative with the seemingly impenetrable wall between Arab and Jew, a binary central to Zionist discourse.

Michael's terminology is not surprising given Israel's socio-political and national context. As Gil Anidjar claims in a 2003 interview:

In the media, in Israeli political discourse, in discussions about institutions, on Israeli ID cards, everywhere practically, "Jew" and "Arab" are the terms that persist. When people theorize that the "conflict" is theological - it is a clash of religions - they will still use the terms "Jew" and "Arab" (rather than Jew and Muslim). If they see it is a political problem - as a matter of competing nationalisms - they will still employ the same terminology (even if some try to be more "accurate" and speak then of Israelis and Palestinians). Some people then are trying to be rigorous. But the issue exceeds rigor, of course, as well as the speaker's intentions, and for the most part, the terms that persist are "Jew" and "Arab".

Anidjar points here to the vast and mutable qualities contained under the headings of the identity categories of Arab and Jew. How did we arrive at these terms; how are they employed? Why do they persist and what are the consequences? This chapter will explore the boundaries of the categories Arab and Jew, and how they came to be constructed in

relation to the evolving concepts of religion, race, nation and ethnicity. At the same time, other layers of difference – gender, class, dis/ability, sexuality and those that have yet to be labelled – necessarily factor into the politics of identity and will be considered (where possible) in relation to the race/religion focus of this chapter.

The creation of categories is central to the practice of scholarship. Tweed (2006) instructs us that scholars have a role-specific obligation to define the constitutive terms of their discipline (30). Constitutive terms, he argues, are those that mark the boundaries of a specific field of study. Whereas practitioners already know how to enact customs and rituals, scholars have a professional duty to be critical of the categories they impose on the people they observe. Categorization as a methodology can be especially edifying in comparative analysis when seemingly disparate categories are read together to surprising similarities (Smith 1996). The epistemological benefit of creating categories is tempered by the tendency of categories to solidify into immutable concepts with impenetrable boundaries. Imposing ideological categories on actual people and populations has material consequences. Scholars therefore have a moral obligation to interrogate the categories they use, and be sensitive to the contours of changing group dynamics and identities that resist academic labels.

An academic investigation of Arab and Jewish difference might begin with six key sociological terms. The definitions of the following terms are simplifications of socially constructed and highly contentious sets of discourses, and will be more fully fleshed out over the course of the chapter. **Race** is the term used to denote a category of people defined by biological similarities and the behavioural characteristics that supposedly accompany a set of physical or genetic features. **Religion** refers to the spiritual and ritual element of a culture,

and its worldview related to the realm of the sacred or divine.⁵² **Nation** indicates a community with a shared sense of political boundaries, often defined by a common geographic origin or territory of residence. **Ethnicity** is a term similar to race connoting the shared culture of a genealogical group but removed (in theory) of its biological taint. Etienne Balibar (1991) demonstrates the interconnectedness of these terms by positing ethnicity as a fiction:

No nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized – that is, represented in the past or in the future as if they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individual social conditions. (96)

Fictive ethnicity draws on language and the idea of race to forge a sense of pre-existing and natural unity for the nation. Language alone cannot solidify this connection. Rather,

The symbolic kernel of the idea of race (and of its demographic and cultural equivalents) is the schema of genealogy, that is, quite simply the idea that the filiation of individuals transmits from generation to generation a substance both biological and spiritual and thereby inscribes them in a temporal community known as ‘kinship’. That is why, *as soon as* national ideology enunciates the proposition that the individuals belonging to the same people are interrelated (or, in the prescriptive mode, that they should constitute a circle or extended kinship), we are in the presence of this second mode of ethnicization.” (Balibar 100)

Balibar furthermore argues that nationalism has a secret affinity with sexism as each masks the construction of its foundational hierarchy of unequal social relations (102). Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) has corroborated this claim by arguing that despite being hidden from theories of nations and nationalism, women play a fundamental role in reproducing nations biologically, culturally and symbolically. **Gender** (delimiting the characteristics that

⁵² This is a simplistic definition that I will elaborate on further in my discussion of lived religion in Chapter Three and the nomadism of the concept in Chapter Four.

supposedly accompany a biologically differentiated sex) and **class** a (person's socio-economic position), are also crucial and interconnected terms for considering the discourse on Arab and Jewish difference.

As Anidjar observes above, Arab and Jew have become normative categories that describe two bounded and opposing groups of people; this categorization has a rich and complex history. In nineteenth-century European discourse the binary of Arab/Jew did not exist; the boundaries of both categories were instead contained within the racial label "Semite". Anidjar (2008) persuasively argues that religion and race emerged in the same historical moment as contemporary, co-constitutive and co-concealing terms within the framework of European colonial epistemology.⁵³ The discursive shift from 'Semites' to Arab and Jew emerges from a politically motivated and racist history of white European (and the constructed category of Aryan) production of difference that came to see itself as secular against an inherently religious, Semitic other. Anidjar finds evidence for this in the work of Ernest Renan who he writes "emphatically considered Hebrews, Jews, Arabs, and other Semites as a race locked out of any political organization, one frozen in the past of a religious desert, a race that produced nothing but the strictest and driest of monotheisms" (30). Solomon and Muhammad are seen respectively as representatives of Hebraic/Mosaic and Arabic/Islamic "pure forms" of the "Semitic spirit." Renan viewed these figures as political failures in contrast to Aryans who invented politics and all things beautiful and rational about the world (Anidjar 32). Anidjar highlights the overlapping discourse of religion and race from which the terms Arab and Jew emerged and within which they

⁵³It is worth inquiring about how European concepts of race relate to the understanding of social groups in the Ottoman Empire at the time. Jews, as a religious minority, were *dhimmi*s under Muslim regimes and faced restrictions based on their lower status. Is there an equivalence or connection here to Europe's development of scientific racism?

remain. He calls for the need to interrogate the “becoming-enemy” of Arab and Jew by looking to the history of Orientalism, which imagines and re-imagines different categories of Others as enemies. An examination of the trajectories of the discourse on Arabs and Jews is thus crucial to consider.

Who are the Arabs?⁵⁴ Maxime Rodinson begins with the “simple answer”: the Arabs are a people (an *ethnos* or a nation in anthropological terms), who originated in Arabia and are now spread geographically from Morocco to Mesopotamia, who both self-identify and are identified by others as Arabs who speak Arabic, a Semitic language.⁵⁵ If the Arabs are to be understood as a nation, however, he writes, they are not a nation in the European sense of having a single nation-state but might better be understood as a “nationality” with the belief in a common national origin. The author examines the Arabs through a range of sociological criteria, namely language, culture and history and Arab consciousness (or self-definition).⁵⁶ He then addresses several “false criteria” for defining Arabness: as exclusively linked to Islam, as a linear and unchanging Arab or Muslim civilization, as a Race, or as descent from Ishmael. Rodinson concludes with the following:

We can, within these limits, consider membership in the Arab ethnicity, people or nationality those who:

1. speak a variant of the Arab language *and*, at the same time, consider it to be their “natural” language, the one that they must speak, *or as well*, without speaking it, consider it as such;
2. regard as their historical heritage and cultural traits as deriving from the people who self-identified and were called Arabs, these cultural traits include since the 7th century the massive support for the Muslim religion (which is far from being theirs exclusively);
3. (which comes back to) those who claim an Arab identity or have an Arab consciousness. (50-51, my translation)

⁵⁴ This question begins Rodinson’s (1979) work.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 13 (my summary and translation from the French text). The Arab diaspora is actually spread far beyond these geographical borders, across the globe.

⁵⁶ It is useful to read this sociological study alongside Hourani’s (1991) excellent history of Arab Civilization.

Arab identity is derived from a mix of historical and psychological factors, but for Rodinson it is above all a form of consciousness. It is also, as Rodinson eloquently points out, a point of contestation. As an ethnicity, no one has the authority to determine absolutely who is included under this category, especially given the limits of sociological classification and the element of fiction that Balibar claims is necessarily involved.

Who are the Jews? The answer to this question is context-specific and continues to develop over time and location. Jewish communities around the world have at different historical moments employed or been labelled by the terms race, religion, nation, ethnicity and culture. The creation of Jewish as a national category is of central importance to this dissertation as it is this construction, fuelled by Orientalism that solidified the becoming-enemy of the Arab. On one hand, “there is no definition of Judaism, regardless of how secular or purely nationalistic, that denies the historical association of Judaism and religion” (Liebman and Eliezer 1981: 105-106). On the other hand, these historical connections with Judaism are muddled with an Orientalist, settler-colonial mentality that established racialized boundaries between Ashkenazi Jews and both Arab Jews and the non-Jewish Palestinian minority (Sa’di 2004). In seeking to Judaize/colonize an indigenous Palestinian population perceived to be backward and uncivilized, Zionist pioneers provoked the Arab-verses-Jewish enemy dynamic that persists in popular perceptions today. Reference to Arab and Jewish “nations” in political discourse, wars and state policy have perpetuated the division.

The analysis of Arab Jews is a significant step forward in interrogating this arbitrarily constructed and harmful binary categorization. Such a comparative analysis of Arab Jewish culture across national borders can help highlight the complexities of religion, race, ethnicity and politics. The complex experiences of Arab Jews are not limited to the experiences of

Mizrahim in Israel. Zionist policies have had repercussions for Jewish and Arab identity politics in diasporas across the world. Shohat argues that a critical Mizrahi scholarship should involve “a new understanding of the continuities and discontinuities entailed by the movement across national borders into Israel” and should also “dismantle the zoning of knowledge and rearticulate the relationship between diverse interdisciplinary practices constituting multicultural Mizrahi inquiry” (2006: 332). This transnational move should aim to examine how discourses around Jews, Muslims and Arabs are influenced by different social contexts according to different nationalist trends. This chapter examines the frontier between Arab and Jew as it is theorized, asserted, deconstructed and reaffirmed in the works of b.h. Yael, Karin Albou, Naim Kattan and Sami Michael.

Becoming-Enemy/ Dancing on the Frontier

b.h. Yael’s video *Fresh Blood: A Consideration of Belonging* is aptly titled for a contemplation of borders maintained and transgressed through identity politics. Blood implies the discourse of race/nations/peoples that relates to those ideas of origins that see identity as rooted in the body, the family and genealogy (as discussed in the previous chapter). *Fresh Blood* disturbs this idea of origins by suggesting either a new birth or a newly cut-open wound, serving as a reminder that new beginnings can be a source of pain. Belonging is the subject of consideration, a central problematic in all identity politics. The desire to belong is a powerful emotion that structures human choices and behaviours. To belong or not belong involves a complex play between self-perceptions and relations between self and other. Those with whom one wants to belong do not always agree to one’s inclusion. Others may designate a person who does not identify with a certain group as

belonging so. Human life involves a continuous tension between individuals' private lives and their places in society, on an external interactive, and also on an internal emotional level. The negotiations between self and other are always messy and often painful.

The negotiation of Arab and Jewish selves and others, shaped by the Israel-Palestine conflict, have often formed “enemy camps” based on group solidarities. Ben Addelman and Sami Mallal's 2004 National Film Board of Canada (NFB) documentary *Discordia* for example, portrays how Jewish and Arab camps came to be created and reinforced by the events surrounding a student protest at a talk to be given by then former and now current Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu at Concordia University in 2002. Hillel, an organization that promotes Jewish student life on university and college campuses,⁵⁷ invited Netanyahu to speak on September 9th.⁵⁸ A protest organized by Solidarity for Palestinian Rights (SPHR) initially prevented attendees from entering Concordia's Hall building and resulted in a riot that saw minor injuries sustained and physical damage done to the university building (Aiken-Klarr 2009).⁵⁹

What stands out in *Discordia*, for our purposes, is the struggle faced by Aaron Maté, the Jewish Vice President of the Concordia Student's Union, who stood in solidarity with Palestinians against the oppressions of the Israeli government. For members of Hillel, solidarity with Israel and its Prime Minister is a fundamental part of their Jewish identity,

⁵⁷ Hillel is “The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life” and is based in over 500 colleges and universities throughout North America and around the world (hillel.org). In my experience across numerous university campuses, Hillel usually promotes an orthodox or conservative style of Judaism and an Israel-centric approach to Jewish identity that can be alienating to some Jewish students.

⁵⁸ In collaboration with Israel Bonds, The Asper Foundation and Hebrew University (Aiken-Klar 2009).

⁵⁹ Protesters accused Netanyahu of being a war criminal for authorizing the torture of Palestinians while in Israeli jails, for increasing settlement in the Palestinian occupied territories and for using deadly and excessive force to mollify demonstrators against his order to blast a tunnel under the Temple Mount to the Western Wall in 1996 (Singh 2002).

whereas for members of the activists in SPHR Netanyahu is a war criminal and should not speak on campus. Maté finds himself alienated from both groups at various times for his views that refuse to fit neatly into either group's criterion for belonging. Hillel, as depicted in this film, is particularly troubling because of the form of Jewishness it espouses, i.e. Zionism equals Judaism/Jewishness. Hillel is the dominant Jewish organization on Canadian university campuses. A Jew such as Maté, who condemns Israel's treatment of Palestinians, stands outside the realm of belonging of this group, for whom Israel is a blood connection, a family, a nation, and Palestinians are the enemies threatening the family and the nation.

Aiken-Klar (2009) examines the integral role that Jewish anxieties about assimilation and antisemitism play in making a connection to Israel into a central feature of Jewish diasporic ethnic identification through her ethnographic research on the campus of University of Toronto. She attributes a growing fear of assimilation to the influence of a 1990 Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) commissioned national survey of the American Jewish community that suggested a 4.6 percent decline in the American Jewish population (Aiken-Klar 108). Jewish continuity became a central fear of both the American and Canadian Jewish communities, prompting reactions from Jewish organizations. Aiken-Klar looks specifically at Hillel's marketing of Israel as a means of attracting students to both Hillel and Judaism in general (110).⁶⁰

The organized Jewish community interpreted the events at Concordia to be “intensely antisemitic” and prompted the creation of the Israel Emergency Cabinet (IEC), and later the

⁶⁰ An interesting side note here is that in June 2011 The Canadian Jewish Federation helped sponsor an event called *Le Mood: A Festival of Unexpected Jewish Learning, Arts & Culture* in Montreal. This is one of the first large-scale events sponsored by a mainstream Canadian Jewish organization that explicitly put forward an ambivalent attitude towards Israel. One session in particular, organized by Dr. Eric Arbitol, focused on campus strife surrounding Israeli-Palestinian politics. The attendees of this session were actively engaged in chronicling their diverse experiences on campus (mostly as Jewish liberal or left-wing organizers and academics) and in discussing their desire for real dialogue with Palestinians and Jewish Zionists.

Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy (CIJA), to address what was perceived to be a growing problem of antisemitism on Canadian campuses. The ethnographic anecdote with which Aiken-Klar introduces her article offers a more complex understanding of what is lacking in the organized Jewish community's interpretation of campus events. In the anecdote, she sits inside a simulated refugee tent with fellow students on the University of Toronto Campus during Israeli Apartheid Week. Opportunities for Jewish students to learn about the experiences of Palestinians, to learn about the complexities of what is happening in the Jewish State, are actually being thwarted by the militant climate of us-versus-them perpetuated by Jewish and Palestinian university activists. Aiken-Klar describes her ability to sit inside Mohamed's tent with both Palestinians and Israelis for a few peaceful moments, to enter into the space of the other and learn about the refugee conditions he experienced living in occupied Palestine. Yet as soon as she leaves this space she experiences the hostility of both Palestinians to Zionists and Jews to Arabs, destroying that space of negotiation where both "sides" can find dialogue and conversation.

This problem has recently come to a boil with the outrage in the Canadian Jewish community over the MA thesis of Jenny Peto resulting in its being deemed antisemitic in the Canadian Parliament.⁶¹ The title alone, "The Victimhood of the Powerful: White Jews, Zionism and the Racism of Hegemonic Holocaust Education", (there is no indication that any of her critics actually read the work itself) prompted the National Post to pick up a blog post denouncing Peto's work, her MA supervisor and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) the University of Toronto department, which granted her degree. Perhaps it was the obscure academic language of Peto's work which alienated her from the Jewish and journalistic communities; Peto's linking of Jews with "white privilege", for example,

⁶¹ See Moore (2010) for a summary.

was deemed racist by her critics. What is really at stake here is the ability of the Jewish community to critique itself, and the place of Jews within the Canadian community at large. Such outrage, without any opportunity for dialogue, renders it impossible for those within or without the Jewish community to separate Jewishness and Judaism from Zionism. The effect of this is an obfuscation of both conflicts within the Jewish community and interrelations between Jewish any other Canadian identity groups within the framework of multiculturalism.

Yael's work, produced in part as a requirement for her own Master's dissertation at OISE, derives from this context of Jewish identities on campuses and within Canadian society at large despite being produced over a decade earlier. Jewish ethnic identity in Canada is often defined by asserting its difference from Canada's English and French "founding national regimes" (Brown 2007). The problem with this mode of definition is that Canadian Jewish identity becomes forged into a single entity, undermining intra-communal differences. Yael's *Fresh Blood* self-consciously enters this political framework and engages with the frontiers of Arab/Jewish identities. The unique contribution of this work is its insistence on seeing the categories of Arab and Jew in relation to each other and in relation to other aspects of identity such as gender and sexuality.

The two dominant figures in the video are Yael herself and a nameless belly dancer, played by Toronto-based media/performance artist and cultural producer Camille Turner. Yael narrates the video, shaping the plot from behind the camera as well as on-screen. She introduces viewers to her family, cites theoreticians who inform her contemplative search for belonging and meditates on the complications of her journey. While Yael is depicted in safe medium shots, plainly clad and standing still, the belly dancer her muse (and a figment of her

imagination), receives a different cinematic treatment. The dancer is revealed through close-ups of her body parts, her movements caught in the border of the frame, trapped in the viewer's gaze, relegated to the realm of fantasy. The fragmentation of the belly dancer's body emphasizes her sexuality and plays into the classic discourse on oriental women, by which the veiled woman is a metaphor for the mystery and exoticism of the Orient.⁶² The long zoom-in on Yael, in contrast, establishes her as a stable character, the narrator of the video and the authoritative voice. Before any text or voiceover is used to further develop the images on-screen the immediate impression is of two contrasting images. This opening sequence establishes a dichotomy between self and other that remains a structuring principle over the course of the video. The frontier between these two figures, between self and other, is where the categories of Arab and Jew will construct, confront, collide and finally fall apart in Yael's narrative.

The narrator situates herself as both of and between nations. Early in the video Yael informs us that she is the daughter of an Iraqi mother and a Polish father. She moved to Canada from Israel at age seven, when her mother remarried, settling in the Laurentians north of Montreal. The film extensively depicts her journey back to Israel and her family's memories of Iraq. In contrast, there is no discussion of her father's history in Poland. The Nazis murdered Yael's paternal grandfather during the Holocaust. Her paternal grandmother fled to Russia, was shipped to Siberia and forced to work in hard labour camps. When she was released she continued east and deposited her son Jacov (Yael's father) in an orphanage before her death shortly thereafter. Jacov was then transferred to an orphanage in Iran and eventually Palestine. Family narratives and national mythologies informed by these journeys

⁶² See Shohat (2006) for further analysis.

across space, time and memory help to produce the values attributed to Arab and Jew. The director's consideration of belonging is also inextricable from the politics of Israel-Palestine and of her own Jewish history, blending her explorations of the past and understanding of the present. In contrast to her explorations of the Israel and Iraq of the past, Yael does not meditate in detail on the unique cultural context of the town to which she moves in Canada.

Canada asserts its influence on Yael's subjectivity in subtle ways that reveal themselves over the course of the plot but they are generally ambiguous references to which the viewer must provide their own interpretation. Early experiences in Canada, her new hostland, were crucial in teaching Yael the trauma of difference. Towards the beginning of the video Yael gazes into a mirror and contorts her face. Her voiceover narrates:

I have scrutinized this face all my life. When I was twelve, I looked into the mirror and cried. It may have been a short while after my teacher told me I could never have been trusted because I had such close-set eyes.

What is the context of this early experience of being marked as different? What is it about close-set eyes that inspire mistrust on the part of the teacher? Informed with a little knowledge of the language politics of Quebec⁶³, one might further inquire: Is Yael attending a Catholic (French), Protestant (English) or Jewish parochial school? Does the 12-year-old Yael have a Hebrew accent? In other words, in what ways is Yael's teacher negotiating a subjectivity that excludes the 12-year-old and her "close-set eyes"? The narration of this memory asserts a Canadian subjectivity in which Yael cannot participate because she does not seem to meet the physical requirements.

⁶³ An interesting and controversial read on the situation of Jews in Quebec as a result of language politics in Quebec is Mordecai Richler's *Oh Canada, Oh Quebec: Requiem for a Divided Country* (1992).

Yael's words capture the trauma of otherness, trauma constructed both externally by the teacher who identified otherness, and internally as the child who accepted it. Her confession recalls Frantz Fanon's writing in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) of his unsettling experience with the "corporeal schema of blackness". A child on the train points to him and exclaims: "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" In response to the child's reaction, Fanon writes:

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho' good eatin. (112)

What links Yael's and Fanon's experiences here is the racial schema that attaches itself to bodies. Close-set eyes (is this a marker of Arabness? Jewishness?) or black skin trigger a set of stories that attach themselves to bodily features. Naming difference as Yael's teacher did, constructs certain bodies as problematic – deceptive, terrifying, etc.. The process of racialization,⁶⁴ which fixes the corporeal schema of blackness, occurs on the frontier between self and other. For Yael this occurs on the border between Canadian and other as well as between Arab and Jewish.

Difference as a theme is enhanced through the videographer's montage techniques. The tight framing of Yael's face dissolves into an image of clouds before dissolving again into a close-up of the belly dancer's face as she rotates in a dance move. The scene dissolves again to return to Yael's contorting face in the mirror. The voiceover continues:

⁶⁴ Racialization is a term defined by Miles (1989): "to refer to those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities. The concept therefore refers to a process of categorisation, a representational process of defining an Other (usually, but not exclusively) somatically" (75).

I consoled myself that I would look distinctive. When I am old I will have two indelible lines, like quotation marks in the middle of my face. This trip is the fine thread back to my first seven years, a time I can barely conjure up. Not me, another little girl.

While Yael's narrative creates a thread between her adult self and her childhood as another little girl, the difference depicted visually is between her self and the belly dancer. Cloaked in the exotic costume of an Arab belly dancer, and embodying the role with her rotating hips the belly dancer's skin is black and her accent, which we finally hear in the conclusion of the video, is indistinguishable as anything but Canadian English. In contrast to Yael's plain clothes and playfully contorting face, the belly dancer is a model of an idealized femininity with her beautiful costumes, graceful movements and painted lips. A black woman, dressed in Arab costume, dancing passively in Yael's imagination, inserted here between narrations on her earliest memories of being different, points both to the construction of racialized difference and to an empowered black female figure to whom Yael looks for hope in her search for identity.⁶⁵

The brief appearance of this enigmatic and complicated figure in Yael's work between monologues on the narrator's own physical appearance can be analyzed on two different levels. First, the belly dancer presents layers of observable physical difference – blackness by her skin colour, Arabness by the stereotypical role she performs. Second, the belly dancer disrupts stereotypes by being simultaneous dark-skinned (rather than olive-skinned) and Canadian English-speaking (rather than Arabic-speaking). Yael's teacher can be interpreted to speak to the immigrant child as a representative of Canadian or Quebecois national normativity. The belly dancer's racialized and performative difference compels us to pay attention to complexities and nuances of identity boundaries. While her dominant role in

⁶⁵ It is also possible to do a queer reading of Yael's desire vis-à-vis the belly dancer. How does sexual identity factor into this racialized and gender dynamic?

the video is as a muse for Yael's contemplation on identity, in the conclusion of the film she becomes an active character giving instruction to an audience on how to belly dance. She transforms from a figure that passively receives Yael's commentary to a source of hope and inspiration, a teacher. The belly dancer exercises her performative agency by interrupting both the viewer's and the narrator's gaze.

The performative agency of the belly dancer lies in her ability to actively distort the spectator's gaze. Contrary to traditional film studies interpretations of Jacques Lacan, McGowan (2003) argues that while Lacan conceived of the gaze as one of mastery in his essay on the mirror stage, he later sees the gaze as the point at which mastery fails. Drawing from Lacan's *Seminar XI* McGowan writes: "The gaze is not the look of the subject at the object, but the point at which the object looks back. The gaze thus involved the spectator in the image, disrupting her/his ability to remain all-perceiving and unperceived in the cinema" (28-29). Spectators, according to this interpretation of the gaze, are always implicated in their own viewing; the gaze is never a unidirectional form of mastery. Furthermore, the viewer's encounter with the object's return gaze can create trauma when it fails to match the viewer's desire (for *jouissance*). The belly dancer in *Fresh Blood* plays with her spectators, including Yael. Her image is distorted and rearranged over time in the film. First, the dancer is merely performing her stereotypical role, gyrating and tempting the viewer with her sensual moves. She is an image to be looked at, with no voiceover commentary – with the quirk, however, that she is black. In her second role, the belly dancer serves as a muse for the narrator's engagement with fantasy. Yael converses with her through the veil of her imagination. In her third role, the belly dancer disrupts both her earlier characterizations by speaking back. She changes from an object of fantasy into an active agent teaching the crew how to belly dance.

Unlike Baudry and Mulvey, the traditional Lacanian film theorists he argues against, McGowan claims that the spectator's gaze in cinema does not agree with a singular ideology merely through the act of viewing. The gaze rather is *sui generis* a space of ambiguity. "Understanding filmic fantasy as a retreat from the gaze makes a different approach possible. Rather than simply viewing fantasy as blinding us to ideology, we might instead grasp what fantasy enables spectators to see" (McGowan 30). If the fantasy resolves in a satisfying ending – the hero wins the fight against evil, the lovers finally embrace against all odds – then the viewer's desire for a happy conclusion is fulfilled. Anxiety is eased. However,

Like fantasy, film is a knife that cuts in both directions: it can provide crucial support for ideology, filling in the blank spot within the structure of ideology, but it can also – and this is what traditional Lacanian film theory missed – take us to an encounter with the gaze that would otherwise be obscured in our experience of social reality. (McGowan 43)

Fantasy scenes that acknowledge the object looking back, the impossibility that viewer and object will perfectly agree, offer a more nuanced version of social reality. In *Fresh Blood* fantasy functions as a space for Yael to confront both the trauma of her own difference and that of the other looking back. This place of chaos gives a space of negotiation where truths and boundaries can be re-examined.

The belly dancer invites the spectator to reassess their fantasies about race, ethnicity, sexuality and identity. This is apparent in Yael's attempt to contemplate her own racialized identity. In the written section of her master's thesis, Yael describes an experience attending, as one of the programmers, the Invisible Colours film and video festival in Vancouver in 1989. She writes:

I noticed that a number of 'anglo' or 'white' women asked me if I had work in the festival. I also observed that none of the Aboriginal, Black, Latino or Asian women attending the festival asked me. Clearly, within the demarcated discourses of colour, I did not belong

to either side and was perceived by each unconstituted group to belong to the other. (Barbour 6)

Yael's Jewishness fails to fall neatly into the categories of white or coloured. Indeed Jews have a long history of falling somewhere between these lines. Karin Brodtkin (1998) sees Jewishness as the interplay between ethnoracial assignment and ethnoracial identity. Her study examines the ways in which Jews, alongside other immigrants to the United States from Eastern and South Europe "were granted many institutional privileges of white racial assignment" (3). Jews could attain the status of whiteness in America partly through economic mobility, but it was never a homogenous process and depended in large part on the relations of gender, class and ideas of race/ethnicity. Contrary to Brodtkin, Eric L. Goldstein (2006) does not claim to study how the Jews became white, but rather how Jews negotiated their place vis-à-vis the complex and changing significance of whiteness and blackness as social categories (5). The author's central argument is that Jews have never settled neatly into the categories of white or black and have been torn between a Jewish racial identity and the desire to be seen as white (86). The changing nature of the concept of race meant that when the term "race" was in vogue, Jews called upon it to differentiate themselves from other "races", while at the same time, it was being used by antisemites to marginalize and oppress Jews. It is no wonder that Yael tells us she is "neither white nor black," that her belonging is always negotiated. The categories of racial/ethnic identity are heavy with truths, fictions and contradictions.

The question of Arab Jews is tied up in the Israel-Palestine question that has dominated the discussions of Jewish identity for the last several decades. As a person who traverses national and cultural borders, Yael is able to bring the problem of Arab Jews to the Canadian context. Walter Laqueur writes in *A History of Zionism*: "Zionism is the belief in

the existence of a common past and a common future for the Jewish people” (589). Yael’s film opens a space for Iraqi Jews to add their voice to the metanarrative of Jewishness and Jewish belonging. Her search for Jewish origins⁶⁶ comes from her mother’s Iraqi Jewish culture. Belly dancing and the Arabic language become indicators of diversity within Jewish culture. Yael learns that you can be both Arab and Jewish at the same time, that these identities are not in fact opposites, and that this can be instructive for her experiences as a Canadian at the boundaries of multiple identities. For Yael, differences have been named and categorized in Western social scientific terms and are engaged according to those discursive parameters.

Messy Boundaries and Orthodoxies: North Africans in Contemporary France

While Yael’s internal narrative relies on language and discourse to engage with Jewish boundaries, the characters in *Little Jerusalem* rely on practice and performance. Karin Albou’s *Little Jerusalem* is a fictional account of relations between North African Jewish and Muslim families in contemporary, postcolonial France. The boundaries of North African identities in modern France are sketched and redrawn along the dynamic waves of religious, ethnic, gender and class conflicts ongoing within the French republican model of national identity. Four important themes surrounding Arab/Jewish boundaries arise from *Little Jerusalem*. First is the question of Arab identity for North Africans, second is the postcolonial situation of North Africans and Jews in France and their relationship with French republicanism, third is the relation of North African Jews to Ashkenazi Orthodoxy and their distance from identification with an Arab identity and fourth is how this mélange of contexts informs the boundaries drawn between Arabs and Jews in contemporary France.

⁶⁶ See Chapter One of this dissertation for discussion of origins in a Saidian sense.

The story of Laura and Djamel's love affair pulls the spectator into the tense, emotionally charged climate of racialized identity politics for second generation North Africans in France today.

1. Arabness and French North African Identity

Unlike in the Mashriq (the Arab Peninsula and the Middle East) Arab ethnicity/nationality is not indigenous to the peoples of the Maghrib (North Africa). Muslim forces under rule of the Umayyad dynasty first expanded into the Maghrib in the 7th century, with bases established first at Qayrawan in the former Roman province of Africa (Ifriqiya, present day Tunisia), reaching the Atlantic coast of Morocco by the end of the century and Spain soon afterwards (Hourani 26). The Islamic conquerors carried out an intense arabization campaign that led to the eventual decline of the indigenous Amazight (Berber) rulers by the 13th century (Storm 466). Despite the rule of the Ottoman Empire from the 16th - 19th centuries and the shift to Turkish administrative language, Arabic language and culture remained dominant in the regions of North Africa. After the French conquest of Algeria in 1830, and the establishment of the French protectorates of Tunisia (1881) and Morocco (1921), French language and culture would come to have a significant presence. Following the independence of Tunisia and Morocco in 1956 and of Algeria in 1962, each country continued to maintain different relationships to French national culture.

During World War I and World War II, North Africans were among the many foreign workers who immigrated to France to fill positions made vacant by war casualties (Killian 16). The economic boom of the 1960s saw a rapid expansion of immigration from the newly independent Tunisia and Morocco. In 1968, the government moved to regulate and monitor the immigration of paperless Algerians (ibid 17). Despite the mix of nationalities, ethnicities

and cultures the French Republican method of integration required the loss of ethnic identity and the conformity to French culture and norms (ibid. 18). Religious difference in particular is to be kept out of the public domain and tolerated as long as it does not conflict with French normativity.

Beur is a term in popular use for the second generation of (Muslim) Maghrebi immigrants in France. Tarr (2005) describes the beurs as the most visible, most stigmatized and most dynamic ethnic minority in postcolonial France (3). The children of Muslim North Africans in France, like the Jews, initially believed in the assimilationist model and the equality it promised under French citizenship. Yet a series of policies in the socialist government of François Mitterrand in the early 1980s seeking to promote multiculturalism and “racialize” immigration had the effect of ethnicization and urban marginalization of the beurs (Echchaibi 302). The repercussions of increased marginalization, alienation and lack of socio-economic integration would eventually lead to social unrest, including the 2005 riots in the Banlieues (discussed further in Chapter Three of this dissertation). In the 1990s the Maghrebi diaspora in France might still identify with a regional identity - *d’origine marocaine etc*, or *d’origine Maghrebi* - rather than an exclusive Muslim, Arab, or French identity (Tarr 4). Amazight culture also plays an important role in the identity of many North Africans and the Maghrebi diaspora and has been promoted through “Berberist” ethnonational movements. The boundaries of Muslim North African identities are therefore already complex affairs before they even come in contact with “enemy” Jewish identities.

2. French Republicanism and Minority Groups

France’s Jews, like Muslim North and West Africans and beurs, are implicated in and targets of the ethnicized/racialized tensions of postcolonial France. For over a century Jews

were an archetype of the integration of minorities. The acceptance of Jews under the rubric of French nationalism is epitomized by Count Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre's oft-cited formula from his December 23, 1789 speech to the National Assembly: "We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation, and accord everything to the Jews as individuals" (Birnbaum 158). The understanding was that emancipated Jews give up their Jewish particularism and take on French culture (and its Enlightenment values), becoming citizens of the Republic. The increasing orthodoxy of North African Jews in France, and the alienation of French Jews from both French society on one hand and beurs and French Muslims on the other has threatened the integration of Jews into the nation. This tension is an important subtext that underlies the narrative of *Little Jerusalem*.

The heroine of *Little Jerusalem* explores the position of Jews in secular French society in her attempts to negotiate between the two sets of laws that govern her life: those of Jewish religious orthodoxy and those of Enlightenment rationalism. Laura's philosophy teacher poses a challenge to students in his lecture hall: "...in our postmodern world, some philosophers observe the decline of this idea of the law as a condition of freedom. What do you, the young philosophers of the 21st century, have to say about this equation? Is freedom won by obeying the law or by breaking it?" The professor points to a student who answers: "To be free, we must break the established law." A second student answers: "Being free means living without laws." When Laura is called upon she disagrees with this position: "One must obey the law." The professor observes: "We seem to have a young Kantian girl this year," to which the whole class laughs. He then explains to the class how "Immanuel Kant applied this philosophy of the Enlightenment by observing, each day, a law that he, himself, had established" by creating the ritual of the philosopher's walk – a walk taken daily, at the same time along the same path.

There is a striking connection here between Enlightenment law, which permits individual freedom through adherence to a higher universal law of citizenship, and the laws of rabbinic Judaism, which provide a communal solidarity that permits Jews to exist as a distinct community in broader French society. Law in each case sets the terms of group affiliation and individual belonging. The communal observation of laws is what allows the creation of social groups – French national, Jewish religious. At the same time, the observance of laws is inspired by personal commitment – in Laura’s case, the management of her sexual desires. Yet, the construction of laws creates at the very same moment the possibility of their transgression. This can be observed in Laura’s adoption of the Kantian walk.

Laura announces to her mother: “I’m going for a walk. I’ll take a walk every evening at 7:00 from now on.” These words are spoken as Laura is on her way out of the apartment door. The camera pans around the room to settle on Laura’s mother, holding a stack of plates, shaking her head. The camera follows Laura as she walks down the stark graffitied hallway and passes her brother-in-law Ariel on the way up. He asks about her sister and removes his cap to reveal a kippah. She walks out the building, with its old creaky buzzer, past more graffiti, and crosses her arms for warmth against the wind. Laura walks in the dim light across a concrete courtyard, surrounded by the concrete apartment buildings towering overhead. Her heels click across the pavement. As she walks, the camera follows her from behind.

The scene cuts to Laura walking down dirty steps among a couple of religious Jewish men, marked so by their hats and tzitzit (fringes). Against the slow, pretty musical soundtrack there is a background chattering in Arabic. Women in hijabs follow Laura as she walks past closed stores and more graffiti. She glances at a man. He sits smoking a cigarette

with his back to a group of Muslim men costumed in taqiyahs. The man continues to smoke and appears to be looking at her. The scene cuts again to an image of Laura in the distance walking away. Over the man's shoulder we see a shot of Laura re-entering her building. The camera captures the man's gaze as he looks after her. The audience then observes Laura up in her apartment looking briefly out her window before quickly closing the curtain. The music becomes mysterious and foreboding. Laura covers her face and lets a long breath out, rocking gently.

Laura's walk is compelling for the way it both adopts and transgresses a law of boundaries. Each time Laura repeats her walk the possibilities around her shift. The walk through her neighbourhood brings Laura into contact with non-Jewish others in her community. The boundaries that have secluded her within her family and her Jewish community stretch and expand to include Djamel, a Muslim neighbour who also exists in the enclosure of their banlieue neighbourhood. The repetition of Laura's walk, like the repeated intervention of the belly dancer in *Fresh Blood* increases the proximity and familiarity of the other. Deleuze muses on the process of repetition:

If repetition is possible, it is due to miracle rather than to law. It is against the law: against similar form and the equivalent content of law. If repetition can be found, even in nature, it is in the name of a power which affirms itself against the law, which works underneath laws, perhaps superior to laws. If repetition exists, it expresses at once a singularity opposed to the general, a universality opposed to the particular, a distinctive opposed to the ordinary, an instantaneity opposed to variation and an eternity opposed to permanence. In every respect, repetition is a transgression. It puts laws into question, it denounces its nominal or general character in favour of a more profound and more artistic reality. (Deleuze 3)

This paradox of setting laws through repetition only for repetition to question laws unfolds through Laura's Kantian walk. In the scene described above, the concrete boundaries of her neighbourhood become the same space where her Jewish boundaries are asserted, threatened

and transgressed. The tall, rectangular, concrete towers that define the architecture of Sarcelles loom, close in, barrier the people who live within their limits against the world beyond them. They also create an open space in the form of a concrete courtyard where differences are forced together and merge as a greater “immigrant” or “ethnic” other to the white, “non-ethnic” Parisian portrayed in the space of the university.

3. The Position of North African Jews vis-à-vis Ashkenazi Jews in France

Changing dynamics within the community itself inevitably shape the boundaries of identity for Jews in France. For example, *Little Jerusalem* begins with an interesting contradiction: Laura’s family, North African immigrants, practice customs of Ashkenazi Orthodox Judaism. An early hint of this occurs when Laura tattles on her noisy nieces for playing with her mother’s wigs. A sheitel is a wig used to cover a married woman’s head in accordance with Jewish rabbinic laws. The Lubavitcher Rabbi encourages Jewish women to wear a sheitel so that she might mark her religious identity discernibly (Schneerson). On the other hand the wearing of a sheitel emulates the fashionable appearance of wealthy non-Jewish Western women, as Willa Schneberg’s poem “My Hair” suggests:

I could get a wig,
and look like Orthodox Jewish women
who think they are so glamorous
wearing someone else's hair.
If God really wanted women to cover their heads,
so men wouldn't lose control
he'd command them
to tuck their wayward strands
under a simple kerchief,
not beneath an expensive *sheitel*
to make you look like Farrah Fawcett.
(Schneberg 2006: 77)

In this interpretation the wig is actually worn to blend into an idealized kind of Western society. The sheitel is thus much more than a signifier of Jewishness. Despite “rationalizations” of Jewish women who wear wigs that it demonstrates their modesty or is merely accordance to the law, it is also rooted in the laws of a husband’s ownership of his wife (Weiss 2009). Because of its Eastern-European tradition it is not a garment one would necessarily have expected to find in North African traditions and their Arab/Muslim cultural or emancipated French Jewish contexts.⁶⁷

The Hasidic influence on France’s North African Jews is one factor in the revival of French Judaism and the changing contemporary French-Jewish community. Emancipation offered French Jews the right to participate in the universalist republic at the price of disavowing political, cultural and religious separateness. North African Jews, among the mostly Muslim formerly colonized peoples who immigrated to France in the past several decades, have fought against the republican model since the late 1980s, insisting instead on the right to express their unique cultural differences in the public sphere (Shurkin 2000, Birnbaum 2000). Rabbi Joseph Haim Sitruk, Grand Rabbi of France from 1987-2008 has been at the forefront of the controversy regarding this “Jewish revival.” According to Shurkin, the Tunisian-born Rabbi: “embodies a new Jewish militancy in France, a desire to disregard the consideration for non-Jewish sensibilities that always reigned among French Jews and, more significantly, a willingness to live outside French society and within a specifically Jewish community” (157). Shurkin links Sitruk’s popularity with North African

⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that this discussion of the wig is also relevant to the politics of the veil worn by Muslim women. The obsession with headscarves or wigs as symbolizing women’s oppression ignores the internal class/power dynamics of how and with what religious women choose to cover their hair within conformity to the laws of their communities.

Jewish “masses” to decolonization and “ethnic politics” – the community’s rejection of the Eurocentric civilizing project of France’s Ashkenazi Jews. Shurkin continues:

Ethnic politics combine with another trend, the adoption by North African Jews of Ashkenazic Orthodox movements. They turn away from traditional Sephardic religious observance and embrace either Chabad or the misnaged (anti-Hasidic) pietism of the great Israeli and American yeshivas...This process demonstrates how the turn to militant orthodoxy is in part a response to the collapse of North African Judaism, which was ill-prepared for the dual shocks of emigration and Western modernity. On its own, the North African religion could certainly survive – as Ashkenazic Judaism did – by adapting and evolving into a formal orthodoxy. But the ready availability of Ashkenazic orthodoxies make their adoption an attractive option for North African Jews. At the very least they serve as models. (159)

The overlapping of these trends has changed the possibilities for a French Jewish identity vis-à-vis French Republicanism but also vis-à-vis North African Arabs and Muslims living in France.⁶⁸ The boundaries that Laura’s family draws between Arabs and Jews is thus not a simplified enemy dynamic, but rather informed by both inter- and intra-communal tensions in their neighbourhood and nation.

4. Arab/Muslim and Jewish Boundaries in Postcolonial France

Arab and Jew as terms are too limited to summarize the conflict of boundaries in *Little Jerusalem*. Arab is difficult to extricate from the religious and ethnonational tensions within the first and second generation North African communities in France. Jewish is also an internally diverse subject position that takes into account religion, secularism and Ashkenazi and Sephardic/Mizrahi relations. Nevertheless, there is a firm boundary erected between Jews and Muslims in the film. As Laura and Djamel become more intimate, their

⁶⁸ The perceived militant orthodoxy of North African Jews was also an issue in Israel with the rise of the Shas party and has a great deal to do with Mizrahi politics.

families express their rejection of the religious other. Mathilde refers to Djamel as the “boy from the mosque”. While Mathilde dismisses Djamel as non-threatening, her mother claims: “I know these people.” This foreboding sense of intimacy stems from her mother’s experiences as a Jewish minority living in majority-Muslim Tunisia. She tells the family a story of how she smuggled her wedding ring out of Tunisia in her bra strap, how Tunisian men are modest and would never have touched a woman’s bra to check. Laura, perhaps with her passionate embraces with Djamel in mind, jokes with her mother: “So, now Arab men are modest?” Her mother replies “Tunisians are like that. They couldn’t.” Laura’s mother is defending her fellow nationals, despite their religious difference as modest and respectful of women. On a national level, the Muslim Arabs are familiar to the North African Jews. On a religious level however, they are equal to French Christians, at least in the mother’s eyes, as being outside the limits of Jewishness and strictly off-limits to her daughter.⁶⁹

Djamel’s family also erects boundaries between Jew and Muslim when Laura is invited to his family home. Djamel’s uncle and aunt speak in Arabic, while Laura, when she comprehends, responds in French.

Uncle: Do you speak Arabic?

Laura: Very little. But my family is from Tunisia.

Aunt: Which family are you from?

Uncle: What’s your name?

Djamel: Laura.

Aunt: That’s isn’t an Arab name.

Uncle: When were you born in Tunisia?

Djamel: She was born in Djerba.

Laura: Near the synagogue.

⁶⁹ Albou does not refer to it here, but there is also the question of the impact of Nazism on Tunisian Jews. What effect, if any, did the Holocaust have on Laura’s mother’s experiences in North Africa and in her family’s decision to leave?

Uncle and Aunt look shocked. There is a close up of the North African sweets and teapots.

The aunt pours the tea.

Uncle: I don't understand you. Why this girl? There are plenty of girls here.

Djamel: She's the one I like.

Uncle: The others are pretty too, Why this one?

Djamel: Because she's unique. (in Arabic)

Uncle: You want to live here with her?

Djamel: Yes.

Uncle: She'll have to convert.

Djamel: You know what I think of religion.

Uncle: In Algeria, you wrote enough rubbish in the papers. You're in France now, in my home. You'll do as I say.

Laura: What happened?

Djamel: I'll take you home.

Djamel's uncle will later threaten to end his financial support to his nephew if he continues his relationship with Laura. It is curious that Djamel's uncle insists on Laura's conversion given the mixed commentaries on the permissibility of intermarriage between Muslim men and women from the other Abrahamic religions.⁷⁰ On the other hand, what does the undercurrent of the Islamist movement in Algeria and the diaspora contribute to Arab and Jewish boundaries?⁷¹ Neither a unique ethnic, nor a national or religious identity is enough to explain why these boundaries are solidified for Laura and Djamel's families. The film is thus not a conflict in the modern sense between the binaries of religion and philosophical enlightenment or even between Zionism and assimilation, but rather a postmodern conflict between the multilayered truths and realities of postcolonial peoples (Astro 77-78). These boundaries will eventually triumph, leading Djamel to break off the relationship.

Laura and Djamel fall in love in a heated political environment in which Arab Muslims fear both private violence from other individuals and racist state violence from the

⁷⁰ See Joseph and Najmabado (2006: 251).

⁷¹ For more discussion on Algerians in France see Silverstein (2004).

police and Jews fear acts of antisemitism (increasingly by Arab Muslims). Both Laura and Djamel's families assert boundaries that exclude the other (Jewish? Muslim? Arab? French?), perceived to be a threat to their community. Albou's film demonstrates that Arab and Jew are not terms that easily resonate in the French context, but rather draw attention to the inadequacies of these labels to capture the conflict. The Israel-Palestine conflict, Western fears about Islam and intra-Jewish tensions each influence the boundaries erected by these minority groups in postcolonial France. Unfortunately, Laura and Djamel share a similar fate to Shula and Fatkhi, and are unable to cross enemy lines.⁷²

Lessons in Arab/Jewish/Muslim Boundaries from Baghdad

The construction of Arab and Jewish boundaries in Naim Kattan's memoir occurs under far different cultural and historical circumstances than in Albou's postmodern France. In the early part of the 20th century, Baghdad saw a flourishing of Arab Jewish culture which, as Reuvin Snir (2008) argues, is hardly surprising given the deep integration of Jews into Arab society and culture up to that time. Jews, having inhabited the Arabian Peninsula before the arrival of Christianity and Islam, were integral to the development of Arab society and culture, even if they were only conditionally accepted. Judeo-Arabic⁷³ literature flourished after the 9th century, while from the mid-10th to the mid-13th centuries in al-Andulus (Muslim Spain), Jews shared an intimate connection with Arab-Islamic culture and perfected writing

⁷² A related issue here is the distinction between religion and secularity set up in the French (and also in the Quebecois) national context. Religion, as Anidjar argues above, is interconnected with the definition of race such that both become a stigma of otherness when they vary from a narrow French republican or Quebecois Quiet Revolution-informed perspectives that reject the domination of the Catholic Church. This is evident in the disdain for the hijab, or Hasidic visible difference which is alienating to hard-core secularists in France and Quebec. The definition of religion, while not the subject of this thesis, continues to be shaped and challenged by the postcolonial situation in France and other imperial metropolises.

⁷³ This is a Jewish dialect of vernacular Arabic, a combination of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic written mostly in Hebrew script.

in the Arabic language for poetry, philosophy and theology.⁷⁴ Snir argues that this background of symbiosis with medieval Arab-Muslim culture is important to consider, as well as the participation of Jews in the modernization of the Middle East and North Africa from the second half of the 19th century onwards. Unlike the enemy dynamic that Anidjar argues would come to dominate the categories of Arab and Jew, the two identities were mutually compatible for the young Kattan living in Iraq in this historical period.

Modernization and secularization for Iraqi Jews paralleled in many ways that of Jews in Europe. The Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) schools with their emphasis on Western, secular culture, accelerated modernization and secularization of Jews across the Middle East and North Africa.⁷⁵ The Ottoman Tanzimat social and economic reforms of the 19th century and the Western orientation of the emerging Jewish middle class also contributed to this process (Snir 2008; Stillman 1996). In contrast to the emancipation of European Jews, however, Middle Eastern Jewish secularity did not normally result in a radical break from religion (Stillman 1996), and Iraqi Jewry “continued to preserve its social and religious frameworks even after modernization” (Yehuda 1996; Snir 65). This rings true for Kattan’s experiences growing up in Iraq in the wake of transformation of Jewish society.

As a child, Kattan is keenly aware that Muslims are different from Jews. Bedouins in particular, who came into town from the dessert, held an exotic allure for Kattan. In one exchange he dares transgress the boundary to speak to a Bedouin:

⁷⁴ This cultural intimacy depended on which class of Jews under which regime and in which location. Historically, Middle Eastern Jews considered themselves, and were considered by others, to be a separate group (Al-Shawaf 2006). Modern nationalism changed the terms under which Jew and Arab could be defined.

⁷⁵ Dr. Francis Malino (Wellesley University) recently delivered a lecture at Concordia University (2011) about her work on the archives of the AIU. Her studies revealed the fascinating transformations and agency of North African women who came to France and then taught across the Middle East. Both Malino and former AIU students in the audience revealed that the organization was internally disparate: each school was different, and how the movement approached teaching and the treatment of the teacher changed over time.

I would beg my mother to lift me above the enclosure. Speaking to the closest Bedouin, I would shout with the secret satisfaction of crossing boundaries that adults would not have the audacity to transgress: “*Ammi, Ammi*. Uncle, Uncle.”

The respect I owed to every older man required me to use this familial term. In these circumstances, it tasted of the forbidden. In the Muslim dialect, I would address the stranger. The tall Bedouin would spin around his *akal* and turn his head. Trembling with fear and courage, I would toss off, in my best Muslim dialect, “May God help you.” And the man, still talking to his camel, would answer, “May God keep you, my son.” And so he became my uncle and I his son. In the world of childhood, I was neither Jew nor Muslim, and without running any risk I could speak directly to a Bedouin. (41-42)

The Bedouin, like Yael’s belly dancer, represents the symbolic other for the author, an exotic, mysterious muse. While Yael’s bellydancer is the epitome of femininity, Kattan’s Bedouins, “vigorous men with chiseled faces who conversed with their camels with the familiarity reserved for humans” present a striking model of masculinity. Julie Peteet writes that:

Arab masculinity (*rujulah*) is acquired, verified and played out in the brave deed, in risk taking, and in expressions of fearlessness and assertiveness. It is attained by constant vigilance and willingness to defend honour (*sharaf*), face (*wajh*), kin and community from external aggression and to uphold and protect cultural definitions of generic propriety (321).⁷⁶

Kattan fantasizes in that brief moment about a filiation (uncle-son) with the nomad and entry into this adulthood ideal. Rather than being a detested enemy, the Bedouin is a figure of desire, a male role model to be emulated. The drawing of boundaries between Arab Muslims and Jews is therefore dependent on much more than a simplistic enemy dynamic.

Kattan makes explicit the parallel process of othering that Muslims and Jews in the city participate in to create and maintain group boundaries. For example: “When a Jewish

⁷⁶ Peteet’s article is on masculinity in the Palestinian Intifada. This generalization of Arab masculinity deserves further elaboration for contexts beyond Peteet’s chosen site.

mother reprimanded her son, she would call him a Muslim. The Muslim mother returned the insult by calling her offending son a Jew” (42). There are also material differences in the customs of the religious communities that reinforce their conceptual differences. On one occasion Kattan’s grandmother takes him and his brother to a Muslim district so that they might participate in the celebration of the circumcision of a wealthy man’s sons. To reach this destination they actually have to cross the Tigris River by boat, emphasizing the (especially imaginative) distance between religious communities (44). Once at the celebration the Jewish family integrates into the Muslim community. The whole neighbourhood is invited to celebrate and feast as the man’s sons aged seven and nine, emerge from a ceremonial tent “holding their wounded, painful manhood.” Kattan, taking this all in with his young eyes and processing it later as an adult, observes that: “[t]hese customs were quite unlike our own. Circumcised eight days after our birth, we had no memory of our bleeding manhood” (45). The adult narrator then links this memory to that of a second Muslim tradition witnessed as a child: “I remember another spectacle, the *Sbaya*, with terror. There is a reason for Jews to describe the *Sbaya* as a scene of horror and savagery” (Ibid.). He recounts that distant cousins of his lived in the Shia district of Baghdad (rare for Jews) and invited friends and family to witness the event from their windows. Though Kattan’s mother was hesitant and preferred that her sons not witness the events, his grandmother assures her that the children would be asleep before the procession began. Yet, the child does indeed witness the ritual commemoration of the martyrdom of Hassan and Hussein. He sees the bare-chested men flagellating themselves, men armed with swords and daggers: “The unfurling of the apparatus of war and of a panoply of green-and-black banners attested to the passage of death – so that the faith might triumph and live...The dramatic

game, the ritual of total release – was it not the precursor of the *Farhoud*⁷⁷” (Kattan 46). Circumcision and the *Sbaya* each mark instances of Muslim rituals that involve painful altering or engagement with the believer’s (male) body. These religious coming-of-age ceremonies also ritualize performances of masculinity.

It is interesting that Kattan connects the shock and horror of the latter religious ritual with the violence of the farhoud. The events of the farhoud cut a severe line of Muslim versus Jew through the mess of rising nationalisms in 1940s Iraq. The trauma of violence would solidify the lines between “us” and “them” for many of Kattan’s peers. On one level, the appeal of Iraqi nationalism for Jewish minorities was the possibility of being included as equals in the nation. The target of their combined work was a single enemy: British imperialism, “In this holy war being fought against a reviled invader, there was no question of Jews or Muslims. We were all in the same brigade in this fight to the death against a colonial power that was sucking our blood and our oil... Jews or Muslims, we had but one enemy: the English” (Kattan 20). This perhaps naïve belief of the Iraqi Jewish youths was not shared by their elders who were afraid of the Iraqi alliance with Nazi Germany; they knew how Hitler treated the Jews and expected Iraqis affiliated with the Nazis to do the same (21). The farhoud would symbolize the impossibility of easy inclusion into the Iraqi nation which increasingly came to draw its lines along an Arab/Muslim exclusionary boundary. From Kattan’s description, in the hours between the departure of the British colonial rulers and the return of the exiled Iraqi leader, the Bedouins ransacked the Jewish quarters of Baghdad, stealing or destroying property, and raping women. Muslims in Baghdad joined the Bedouins in their rampage. Kattan framed this attack as that of one tribe against another,

⁷⁷ For historical accounts of the farhoud, the eruption of violence against Baghdad’s Jews in 1941, see Shiblak (2005) and Gat (1997). See also “The Farhud” 2011.

calling Jews a tribe that could not defend itself, “ignorant of the tradition of such combats” (25). While the Chief Rabbi’s notice of mourning acknowledged only 300 dead, the Jewish community suspected the number was much larger, to say nothing of the hundreds of victims of rape and theft.

Once order was restored Kattan meets Nessim to recollect experiences of the farhoud. Nessim himself was unharmed but his uncle’s throat was slit while trying to protect his possessions. This had a dramatic effect on Nessim: “For months he thought he could recognize in every Muslim in the street the face of his uncle’s murderer” (31). Despite the complex layers of nationalism, class and social distinction that fuelled the farhoud it nevertheless settles in Kattan’s telling as a traumatic assertion of the division between Muslim and Jew. Iraqi Jews have interpreted the farhoud in different ways: by many as a decisive factor in the decision to leave Iraq, by some as an event sensationalized to encourage immigration to Israel. Iraqi nationalism contained both universalist ideals for all Iraqis, despite religion or ethnicity, and particularist aspirations by Iraqis who idealized an Arab Muslim national subject. The concept of Arab Jew forces a reexamination of the farhoud, with attention to the complexities and socio-historical context of its violence. At the same time, the racialized violence of the farhoud highlights the impossibility of a concrete and unproblematic Arab Jewish identity.

Nazism and anti-Zionism threatened the integration of Jews into the modern Iraqi/Arab nation. Kattan’s literary group in *Farewell, Babylon* consists of “emancipated liberals and revolutionaries who were working to demolish the walls put up by prejudice and misunderstanding”, but assertions of Jewishness from members were often met by ambivalence or outright rejection by the Muslims in the circle (18). Editor-in-chief Said edits Kattan’s article, removing paragraphs on Charlie Chaplin’s position against antisemitism in

the film *The Great Dictator*, because of a “layout problem”. However, Said’s prejudice later becomes blatant in his announcement that he would censor Kattan’s writing, “which often concealed a strong odour of Zionism” (19). As Kattan explains, the accusation of Zionism was targeted against Jews in general during the Iraqi nationalist fervour whether or not evidence of this was apparent; Zionism and Jewishness became inextricably linked as threats to the Arab/Muslim nation. Nessim also experiences the subtle boundaries between Muslim and Jew when a newspaper wants to Islamize Nessim’s family name from Abraham to Ibrahim. While the editor assumes this edit would make more sense phonetically, Nessim disagrees. He wants to be introduced as a Jewish writer and insists on the Judaic form of his name.

Kattan’s account of rising Iraqi and Jewish nationalisms in Iraq in the early 20th century both lays the foundation for and threatens the ideal of an Arab Jew. Indeed it is many of the Iraqi Jewish intellectuals like Kattan (including Shohat and Michael) who most strongly assert the realities of an Arab Jewish identity today. The migration of Jews from Iraq to Israel would be foundational for the continuity and reemergence of this subject position for many authors, directors, poets and intellectuals. Israel in the 1950s-70s, like Iraq in the earlier part of the century struggled to define itself and its citizenship within a world still shifting from the outposts of empires into independent nation states. Arab Jews in Israel found themselves caught inside a new discourse that framed Arabs as the enemy of the Jewish nation-state.

He was an Arab, She was a Jew.

In Iraq, a national ideology (Zionism) was used to target and defame members of a religious group (Jews). In Israel, religious ideology is used to delimit and exclude Arabs as

an ethnic category from the boundaries of the Jewish nation. Jewishness in Israel, according to Uri Ram (2008), has undergone a three-stage historical transformation from a ‘religion of a nation’ to a national or civic religion (69).⁷⁸ Stage 1: Zionism from the 19th century until the 1940s was a secular movement informed by emancipated Jews of Western Europe who shunned the rabbinic tradition. Stage 2: From the 1950s -1970s Israel employed religious symbols to integrate massive waves of new immigrants from Eastern Europe and Arab and Muslim countries who unlike the early Zionists had no wish to abandon the Jewish religion and laid the foundation for Jewishness as a national religion. Stage 3: After the 1967 Arab-Israel War Israel acquired the territories of the West Bank and Gaza, and Jewishness acquired a new meaning. Jewishness was now defined against the Arab threat (of armies and of demographics), and this threat was justified further by linking Arab violence to Nazism. Religionism⁷⁹ is thus used as ideological support for the exclusion of Arabs from the Jewish nation and the solidification of Arab and Jewish boundaries.

Refuge takes place during the transition from Stage 2 (“the turn to tradition”) to Stage 3 (strong nationalism/strong religionism) on the eve the 1973 war. While the major plotline follows the stories of Shula, Marduch and Fatkhi, the lives of their friends Shoshana and Fuad offer interesting examples of the consequences of the relations of national and religious ideology in Israeli culture. The experiences of Shoshana, a Jewish woman of the Sabra generation who married Fuad, an Arab Christian, reflect the difficulties of transgressing the Arab Jewish boundaries set by the national/religious ideology of the state:

⁷⁸ Ram’s article draws on Michael Mann’s view of religion as an “ideological network of power”. The concept of a national and civic religion draws on the work of Bellah (2005); and Liebman and Eliezer (1983). Also see Almog (2000).

⁷⁹ Ram uses this neologism to emphasize religion as an ideology on the same level as nationalism and secularism.

Many years before, swept up in a romantic tempest, Shoshana had been caught in the dilemma that every Jewish girl who marries an Arab must face – should she continue living as a Jew, or change everything and live as an Arab? Or should she seek a path between the two extremes? Shoshana had tried all three choices, retreating from each one of them, borne down by failure. (Michael 148)

In the first stage, “The Age of Delusion”, Fuad was introduced as an Indian Jew and their eldest son Amir was raised Jewish (Michael 149). Upon learning that her husband was in fact an *Arab* (Christian, not Jewish), Shula was dismissed from her teaching post at a Jewish school, her neighbours stopped talking to her, and Amir was bullied at school. The second choice, “The period of bitter reality”, was to try to live with the Arabs. Shoshana learned Arabic and tried to assimilate into Palestinian culture but with limited success. Amir continued to be bullied at school; Shoshana could not find work to supplement her husband’s income in the village. Finally, as a third choice, Shoshana and Fuad settled in Wadi Ein Nesanas, an Arab neighbourhood in mixed Arab/Jewish population of Haifa.

Living in this predominantly Arab Christian neighbourhood did not settle the conflict raised by a couple that defied the taboo of uniting Arab and Jew. Chapter Two follows Shoshana in her job as housekeeper for Shula and Marduch’s home and caregiver to their child. The job includes the benefit of taking home to her three hungry sons the leftovers that Shula’s family never eats. Shoshana muses on one downside:

There was one thing she hated about her easy job at Shula’s. Here she recalled the Jewish holidays. In her father’s house, and later, when she got her teacher’s certificate, the holidays had stood out from her daily life like glittering islands. In Wadi Ein Nesanas, on the other hand, every day was like the one before, as identical as beads strung on a cheap string. But back in the village, in Yesud Hama’alah, everyone quickened the pace of the day’s work, hurrying home from the fields on the eve of holidays. She yearned to be there, if only for a tiny instant. (Michael 24)

The feel of the Jewish holidays is unique in that according to Halakha one must abstain from doing work. Jewish men and women traditionally hasten to finish all cooking and holiday preparations that involve using electricity, money, driving or other types of “work” before sundown when the Jewish day begins. The lack of Jewish time in Wadi Ein Nesanas separates the Arab Christian neighbourhood from the Yesud Hama’alah. The image of the holiday as a “glittering island” invokes Sabbath as a taste of paradise, a gift of time.⁸⁰ Zalman, Shula’s father, emphasizes this Jewish difference felt by sacred time when he suggests Shoshana leave work early to prepare for the holiest day of the Jewish year, Yom Kippur:

The old man put on his reading glasses and opened the newspaper. After a while his nose appeared over the top of the page. “You can go home, actually,” he said to her. “I’ll keep an eye on Ido. Tomorrow’s a holiday; you must have a lot to do at home.” Then he remembered that she was married to an Arab, and he was embarrassed. He hid behind the paper and said, “If you want to.” (30)

Zalman’s embarrassment is in presuming that Shoshana would act like “normal” Jewish women and also prepare for this sacred time. It is not merely because she is married to an Arab that she might not be preparing for Yom Kippur. Shoshana, like Zalman’s wife and daughter, is a communist and thus might be anti-religious. This nuance, however, seems irrelevant against the broader “transition to tradition” happening in Israeli politics and society during this time period.

Religion in Israel is not the terrain of individual choice or the private sphere as it often is in North America but is rather a public duty.⁸¹ In not preparing for the Jewish holidays, Shoshana fails to fulfil her gender role in religious/national culture. Like race,

⁸⁰ A. J. Heschel, in his book *The Sabbath* argues that Judaism is a religion of time, and the Sabbath is a major symbol of the sanctification of time (Heschel 1951).

⁸¹ See Kopelwitz and Israel-Shamsian (2005) discussion of religion as public domain in Israel.

sexuality is employed as means of defining and naturalizing nationality (Mosse 1985). Nira Yuval Davis identifies four major ways in which nation and nationalism have constructed gender and femininity: women as biological reproducers, as cultural reproducers, as defined by differential conception of citizenship and as linked to military enterprises (Bernstein 218; Yuval-Davis 1997). The increasing religionist aspect of Zionism emphasizes the contradictory role that Jewish women are called upon to play in the state: reproduce the nation biologically, but culturally reproduce the “secular” nationalist ideology that in theory advocates women’s equality, but in practice reinforces women’s lesser status in the state (see Chapter Four of this dissertation for more discussion on Jewish feminism in Israel). Women are called upon to participate in the public sphere, but their domestic obligations remain crucial. In early Palestine:

Women, contained within close circles such as family and home, were seen as markers of collective boundaries by being contained within them. Thus women could be seen both as reinforcing boundaries when remaining within them, and threatening boundaries when crossing them or when seen as approaching too close. (Bernstein 219).

Shoshana’s body in Israel of the 1970s continues to be orchestrated in this way. The reminder of the Jewish holidays prompts Shoshana to call her brother Avi, with whom she has been out of contact for many years. The brief phone call inspires Shoshana to meditate on her sense of exclusion from her family and community, both of whom have condemned her for marrying Fuad. Shoshana thinks about her brother’s voice on the other side of the phone. She pictures Avi telling the family about her pretending to be a lawyer during the phone call, reminiscing about her proclivity for pranks. A nephew would interrupt: *that* aunt the “whore who ran off with an Arab”. Her family would defend her reputation. Her mother would tell the nephew, “Your aunt Shoshana isn’t a whore”, and her brother would agree,

“She didn’t run off. Shoshana married him.” In the end, Shoshana imagined that this nephew would echo her village’s condemnation: she ran away with a “dirty Arab” (31). Shoshana’s thoughts reflect the hegemony of the enemy dynamic between Arab and Jew imposed by nationalist ideology. In this particular narrative, Arab is emphasized as a national difference – a *dirty* Arab, an enemy – and therefore an absolute other on the other side of a boundary that cannot be transgressed without compromising belonging to the Jewish nation. Shoshana has relinquished her “Jewish” status in Israel by marrying an Arab. She has transgressed the boundary and therefore is excluded from the Jewish community.

The taboo of crossing the Arab/Jewish national/gender boundaries also encumbers non-Jewish citizens of Israel. Fatkhi, an Arab communist of Muslim background is engaged to an Arab woman from his village – Wasfy’s sister Hiam. Despite this engagement, his sexual relations have been and continue to be exclusively with Jewish women. He is in love with Daphna, a Jewish student from Tel Aviv who refuses to cross the line and marry him. Daphna “...had seen these couples caught between two peoples, like a man with a broken leg who can’t find a position to alleviate his pain. ‘Their children,’ she said once, referring to Shoshana’s and Fuad’s children, ‘are orphans, without a guardian or any institution that would take them in’” (Michael 125). Daphna is willing to travel from Haifa to have sex with Fatkhi at Shula’s apartment during a war, but she is not willing to defy the religious and national ideology of the state in order to seal their union. This fear is legitimate because even secular Israelis must rely on religious institutions for the legislation of marriage, divorce and burials (Kopelwitz and Israel-Shamsian 2005; Ram 2008).

The significance of gender and sexual relations in policing the boundaries of ethnicity and the nation, and of Arab and Jew, culminate in the final chapters of *Refuge*. A central

conflict in the novel is that not only is Shula giving an *Arab* refuge in her home, but that she is giving refuge to an Arab *man*. The burgeoning desire between Shula and Fatkhi triggers anxieties that they might transgress the boundaries between Arab and Jew. Shula's mother and neighbour Tuvia conspire to protect the Jewish female body from the Arab threat:

"I'll keep an eye on things here," the pensioner offered.
Shula's mother turned to him and said nothing. The look that passed between her and the old man depressed Shula. Suddenly there was a queer, obscure understanding between these sworn enemies, and it related to what Shoshana had said lighting in the kitchen. "Shula, sweetheart, that crazy poet of ours is setting his sights on you." Her mother and the pensioner were mobilizing to protect her chastity against the Arab in her home. (Michael 320)

Fidelity to the Jewish nation seems to transcend fidelity to her husband and family (her love for the sabra Rami does not seem to bother her family and friends as much the presence of Fatkhi). Fatkhi's friend Wasfy, however, encourages the sexual relation, seeing Shula as merely a beautiful woman for the poet to take to bed.

The sexual politics of the growing Palestinian nationalist movement⁸² (another important subtext to Michael's novel) play an important role in Fatkhi's relations with Shula and Daphna. In Palestinian nationalism, Zionism was represented as the rape of the motherland: "while the land as mother was responsible for the reproduction of Palestinians until 1947, the rape disqualified her from this role. It is now fathers who reproduce the nation. *Territory was replaced by paternity*" (Massad 472). Liberation became a matter of a line of sons protecting the motherland's honour. Furthermore, a central tenet of both Jewish and Palestinian nationalisms was the redemption of manhood through nationalism:

⁸² The Arab League recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), headed by Yasser Arafat, as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974 (Massad 470). Massad (1995) discusses the significance of this event as the coming together of grassroots Palestinians groups from the refugee camps and the bourgeoisie of the Palestinian diaspora.

“salvaging of a manhood wounded by violence and degradation” (Katz 74). Fatkhi’s fragile manhood is evident as he remembers his dying father’s unfulfilled last wish to return to his home village. His mother, a devout Muslim, scolds her husband and son for no longer fearing God (Michael 341). Fatkhi’s father, cognizant of his coming death and unmoved by her criticism, insists on braving the unpaved streets in the rain to visit his home by the sea. The weather prevents them from leaving the village, and Fatkhi’s father dies that night in a Nazareth hospital. Fatkhi wishes that his father could have lived just a bit longer to see the Arab forces reclaim Palestine.

Following this memory Shula becomes more beautiful, and he forgives her for her coldness towards him. Shula becomes a territory whose conquest could return to Fatkhi his manhood. His desire for her turns into a love symbolic of the love of his childhood village to which he can never return. For Shula, Fatkhi represent a male presence to comfort her in the absence of her husband and ex-lover. Fatkhi’s Arabness is what forces Shula to draw the boundary between them, rather than faithfulness to her husband. Anticipating the defeat of the Israelis by the Arab forces, Fatkhi demands that Shula and Ido come with him to the safety of the West Bank. Shula refuses, asking if he knows why Marduch ran off to the desert. When Fatkhi answers no, she responds:

The Israel Defense Forces are not the French armies, or the Red Army either. We were taught that the Red Army is the army of the people. The I.D.F. is the people itself. Even my mother knows it. Don’t believe her if she tells you she wants the I.D.F. defeated. ...Even if everything you say is true, I would not abandon Marduch’s house at this time. (Michael 381-382)

At this explanation and refusal, Fatkhi is caught between love and hate for the Jewish woman.

She said nothing. He rose, and his dry lips searched for hers in the darkness. She recoiled, he felt a chill, as if a wall, cold as death, had arisen between them. At that moment they ceased being a man and a woman. He was an Arab. She was a Jew.

This chapter opened with the absolute line between Arab and Jew drawn between Shula and Fatkhi. The question that prompted the entire discussion above is: After a narrative that delves into the complex experiences of Marduch as an Arab Jew, and of Shoshana and Fuad as a Jew and Palestinian Christian who have married and formed a life together despite prejudices on both ends, and the complicated affiliation of Fatkhi the poet, how can Michael depressingly return to the Zionist mythological binary of Arab versus Jew and the impossibility of their mixing?

The answer to this question lies in the disappearance/absence of Marduch. Marduch over the course of the novel has gone to the front to fight in the Israeli war. His absence is what spurs Shula's contemplation of her husband and her relationship against the background of conflict between Israel and the Arab nations that threatens in the background. Michael's brilliant storytelling takes the reader into Jewish towns, into an Iraqi prison, into the refugee camps in Palestine, insisting on a complex narrative that pays attention to a multitude of voices. When these characters representing minority voices are removed, in a situation where they fear threats to themselves, to their homes or to their families, the enemy binary of Arab and Jew is reinforced. Marduch represents the frontier, the hybrid, Arab Jewish identity. His disappearance triggers a process of selective forgetting and increasing insecurity. Shula, who has been mooning over a past love now discovered dead, is faced with the real possibility of physical intimacy with a man who isn't her husband, feminized by his Arab appearance and his fear of fertility. Fatkhi is condemned to another rejection at the hands of an Israeli Jewish woman: a Muslim, Palestinian other, never to be welcomed into

their hearts. Asserting the boundary of Arab and Jew ends the transgression between men and women, between Jews and Muslim, between human beings.

Barth (1969) observed the importance of paying attention to boundaries of social identities. Despite the fact that categories are socially constructed and that borders are always porous, social groups continue to use boundaries, even if those boundaries are dynamic, to define belonging. Gilman (2003), commenting on the boundaries of Jewish identity, sees the frontier as the space where Jews are both defined and define themselves: “One must think of the very concept of frontier as a structure of communal fantasy, as a model of imagining oneself in the world” (19). The tension here is between an absolute boundary that is fantasized, and a frontier that takes into account an integrative history of the line informed by both sides of it. It is that same tension Smith describes in his discussion of the consequences of categorization, which requires us to always criticize the categories we create. Despite postmodern criticism, binaries and bounded lines of identity continue to structure individuals in their social roles.

This chapter explored the construction of Arab and Jewish boundaries across four works of literature and film and four socio-political, historical and national contexts. *Fresh Blood* prompts a contemplation of Jewish and Arab selves and others that extends beyond the enemy dynamic being produced on Canadian university campuses. The figure of the belly dancer – black, female, Canadian— helps to interrupt the hegemonic gaze and correct the trauma of difference that Yael experienced as woman who straddles the racialized boundary between coloured and white. *Little Jerusalem* exposes the heightened boundaries between classes, races and religions in postcolonial France. The film explores how the boundaries of

group identities are both erected and made to be broken. *Farewell, Babylon* demonstrates the role of violence in solidifying an enemy dynamic between Muslims and Jews. The memoir also explores the flourishing of Arab Jewish culture in Iraq during the early part of the 20th century, a legacy that is carried on in the Iraqi Jewish diaspora. In *Refuge* race, ethnicity, nation, religion, gender and class compound to force a wall between Fatkhi and Shula; He was an Arab. She was a Jew. Each narrative reveals the fiction behind the construction of these ethnonational boundaries and their enemy dynamic. In doing so these Arab Jewish stories actively construct new fictions to dissolve those categories, disassemble walls and produce new spaces for dialogue.

Chapter Three: Constructing Jewish Identities in Place and Space

Two important characteristics of maps should be noticed. A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness. If the map could be ideally correct, it would include, in a reduced scale, the map of the map; the map of the map of the map; and so on, endlessly... (Korzybski 38).

Oh, You're from Toronto? Do you know Ari Cohen? He works at Mount Sinai Hospital; he's Sarah Hershenfeld's cousin? Went to camp with the Schwartzs? This game of locating Jewish connections in different cities is often the limit of what is understood as "Jewish Geography". "Geography" here is not rooted in actual places, but relies on a filial connection between Jews that transcends location and maintains through time. Yet, identity boundaries are not just discursive or theoretical; they are enacted in specific locations and have material consequences. What role do these boundaries play in negotiating Jewish places and spaces in Israel and the diaspora? How does the shift from the "placelessness" of diaspora to the "territoriality" of the nation-state affect the construction of Jewish identity? How are Jewish spaces designed to exclude others? What might be involved in the production of Arab Jewish space?

The spatial turn that occurred in the humanities and social sciences beginning in the 1980s rendered geography an increasingly important site in Jewish studies. Though time and history have been the central analytical concepts of understanding Jewish experiences, space and place continue to emerge as important critical tools. Brauch, Lipphardt and Nocke introduce their edited volume *Jewish Topographies* (2008) by distinguishing these concepts:

Jewish places are, in our understanding, sites that are geographically located, bound to a specific location, such as the Jewish quarter in Fez, Morocco, or the gravesite of Baba Sali in Netivot, Israel. *Jewish*

spaces are understood as spatial environments in which Jewish things happen, where Jewish activities are performed and which in turn are shaped and defined by those activities, such as a sukkah or a Bundist summer camp for children. Therefore our understanding of *Jewish place* is defined by location, *Jewish space* by performance. Both can be congruent or overlap, and the difference between them is not so much defined by *where* one can find them, but lies in their function, or as Steve Harrison and Paul Dourish have put it, in the different roles they play: “space is the opportunity; place is the (understood) reality.” (4)

The title of their book *Jewish Topographies* refers to dynamic interconnections between space and place, and of the need to integrate the theoretical and the material. This has become tantamount to the discussion of Jewish identity, which Zionist discourses attempt to ground in the Jewish nation state (a place obsessed with territorial power). A theoretical approach is needed to critique Jewish spatial practices that enclose and exclude people marked as “others” on the macro-level of nation-State (Canada, Israel, France) and in the micro-spaces of home and neighbourhood. A material grounding in actual locations is needed as well, to link theory to its “real” consequences.

The following chapter examines configurations of place, space and power on three levels: home, neighbourhood and homeland. Home is Laura’s constricted apartment in *Little Jerusalem* and Yael’s Safta’s (grandmother’s) house in *Fresh Blood*. Neighbourhood is the concrete apartment blocks of Albou’s banlieues and the sections of Kattan’s Baghdad partitioned with invisible borders. Homeland is the symbolic subject of Michael’s novel, simultaneously a synonym and antonym for the work’s title: *Refuge*. At each level, Jewish space is defined, contested, and negotiated both theoretically and materially. An analysis of these spatial poetics and practices demonstrates the creative relationships between Jewish identity and territory⁸³ and their importance for rethinking the boundaries of Arab and Jew.

⁸³ I define territory here as a space or place that is protected or governed by a law.

Home

“Apartments are cages, I still don’t know what is permanent, permanent.” – Emily Haines & The Soft Skeleton, Nothing and Nowhere

“My body is a cage, that keeps me from dancing with the one I love, but my mind holds the key.” –Arcade Fire, My Body is a Cage

Cage is a metaphor that well describes the home that Laura experiences in Albou’s *Little Jerusalem*. On one hand, her apartment is literally a tightly enclosed space. The apartment consists of a kitchen, bathroom, dining room and several small bedrooms stemming off from a central, narrow hallway. Laura lives here with her mother, sister Mathilde, brother-in-law Ariel, and their four young children; eight people in a tiny, high-rise apartment. To get here from the city, Laura must ride the train, walk through garbage filled streets and graffiti laden passages, traverse a long concrete courtyard below menacing concrete towers with hundreds of windows, buzz through the front door of her unit and climb a stark, echo-y stairwell (also laden with graffiti) before arriving at her family home. Cinematography that privileges close and medium range shots and saturated frames enhances the restrictive feel of Laura’s home. Bodies constantly invade in personal spaces: the children interrupt Laura’s studying, her mother or sister clean her room as she works, she walks by Ariel as he performs his morning prayers. It is no wonder that Laura is so desperate to escape.

On the other hand, Laura actively creates a cage within her own skin. In an attempt to contain and suppress her sexual desire, Laura emulates Immanuel Kant by imposing upon herself a law of her own creation. Laura polices her passions by restricting her body to repetition, ritual and thought. She refuses the romantic attention of Eric, the Jewish man her

mother introduced her to; she disciplines her body with a ritualized walk through her neighbourhood. The connection between these laws imposed on body and space is made apparent in the words of her philosophy professor:

We could compare these Kantian rituals to ramparts, like those of a besieged city.

Who was besieged? Kant himself, by the voracity of his urges. By his demons. That's why he built up that wall, those ramparts – to protect himself from his own personality. Perhaps also from his madness. These rituals were a sort of straightjacket that he would heroically put on to devote himself entirely to thought. True, Kant had a taste for celibacy equal to his love of thought. That is why it was no accident that he stayed single all his life.

Like for Kant, the “besiegement” of body and home is a projection of Laura's own desire. The boundaries of body and home are delimited according to human-constructed maps. Maps permit a person to organize the limits of their world, an imperial practice that permits the cartographer the sensation of control (Smith 1978). Escape from these cages would thus require much more than a change of location.

Imaginative geography is the name that Edward Said gives to this process of partitioning expanses of space and filling them with meaning. Said (1978) used this term in *Orientalism* to describe the way in which vast landscapes could be named “East” and “West” and signified as places with opposing qualities (the West as civilized, rational and modern, the East as barbaric, exotic and primitive). This happens even at the micro-level of house and home. From Bachelard, Said muses on the “poetics of space”:

The inside of a house, he said, acquires a sense of intimacy, secrecy, security, real or imagined, because of the experiences that come to seem appropriate for it. The objective space of a house – its corners, corridors, cellar, rooms – is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel: thus a house may be haunted, or homelike, or prisonlike, or magical. So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the

vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here. (Said 54-55)

Poetry translates a place (a shack of corrugated metal, a concrete apartment, a brick house) into a space: “home”. A house only becomes a home when an individual invests it with this meaning and the unique meaning of home will be subjective to each individual. In general, “home” tends to conjure up notions that include comfort, safety, family, or permanence.

Laura’s apartment is a Jewish home, rendered so by the Jewish activities ritually performed within. The family’s Shabbat meals are a vibrant example of Jewish performance. The Shabbat meal traditionally begins with a series of songs and blessings. A single shot follows the goblet of wine as Ariel passes it to his wife Mathilde, she passes it to her Mother and around the table over the pair of Shabbat candles. The two candles, the goblet of wine and the challah signify that this is a Shabbat celebration before the words “Shabbat Shalom” (Good Sabbath) are even uttered. Albou is explicit about her choice to depict the meal as naturally as possible. She favours an independent American cinema aesthetic in the style of Cassavates (*A Woman Under the Influence*): “Long scenes of meals that are splendid, you feel that it’s very alive, people improvise – I tried to make the meals seem like that” (Albou 2006b). The effect is an emphasis on the lived experiences of a Jewish home. It is consequently at these repeat performance meals that family tensions can arise and transform the mood of the event from open to restrictive: Her mother scolds Mathilde in Arabic for questioning Ariel, Ariel demands to know what has been said; Laura tells the family that she wishes to rent an apartment on her own, her mother refuses to let her leave a religious house.

Unlike the concrete walls of place, both the borders and the room inside a space are open to negotiation. The sets of beliefs and practice that we call “religion” are actually lived and produced within these dynamic parameters of everyday experience. David Hall (1997) suggests the study of religion should move beyond an attention to texts and institutional forms to dynamically include the “densely textured level of everyday practice and lived experience” (xi). In the same volume, Robert Orsi in particular emphasizes that it is “through dynamic processes of engagement that religion takes life” (8). This approach to the study of religion is useful for exploring the multiple ways that power manifests itself in the space/place configuration of the Jewish home. The subjective mapping of a given territory is bound to conflict with another’s map of the same territory. While Judaism is considered by many to be a religion of separation, the methods of including or excluding others (and defining who counts as other) shift between families, institutions and individuals.⁸⁴

One scene in *Little Jerusalem* is poignant for demonstrating the configuration of place/space/and power that police the boundaries of the Jewish family’s inclusion and exclusion. Laura returns home to find a letter for her at the doorstep. Below the Mezuzah, on the doorpost, Ariel opens the door from inside and snatches the letter before Laura, still fumbling with her keys, can reach down and take it. “It’s for me!” she cries. Ariel turns from her, tears open the letter and reads it out loud: “I am your slave. May I savour your beauty one day?” After a brief pause, he demands, “Who wrote this?” Mathilde enters from a room to share the close-up frame with her husband in the hallway. She attempts to mediate: “It’s the boy from the mosque. It’s okay, he’s nice.” Ariel treats the

⁸⁴ See Setel’s (1986) feminist critique of traditional Judaism’s understanding of separation as leading to holiness as an important counterpart.

letter like dirt, something he is disgusted to touch. Anthropologist Mary Douglas encourages us to think of dirt as “matter out of place:” “Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (36).⁸⁵ Ariel’s disgusted attitude toward the letter, which he tosses down the garbage chute and out of the space of the home, is emblematic of his will to control the home’s interior; keep the dirt out. But the architecture of the apartment building permits Laura to exit the apartment, run down stairs, open a door to the garbage chute’s landing place, and reclaim the gift from Djamel, the boy from the mosque. Though Ariel insists on excluding his presence, Djamel, the Arab Muslim other is able to penetrate the space of the home, and the space of Laura’s heart.

Another example of this negotiation of place, space and power occurs between Laura, Mathilde and their mother played by Sonia Tahar. Unable to find an actress right for the role, Albou sought a North African Jewish *maman* by placing advertisements in kosher butchers, synagogues and other Jewish establishments. Every woman who answered the ad told Albou that her daughter had encouraged her to apply; no woman admitted she was calling out of personal desire. Albou explains her choice of Tahar for the role of “The Mother”: “What I liked about her is that she has a physical (sic) of a *maman*, a North African *maman*, she has a gravity, she has something very... in her face, very painful, very sad, very and I like this contradiction between something very open and that she has something very melancholic”. The Mother’s physical difference is evident in her darker skin, more traditional garments and her frizzy hair that is not perfectly covered in public. While Ariel acts as the patriarch of the family, The Mother is

⁸⁵ Douglas’ thesis refers to ritual pollution but can also apply here (1966).

the real impenetrable force. The power she exerts over her daughters is symbolized in the smoke she uses to cast spells for the protection of her family. Orly Lubin's (2001) article "Distancing the Frame" discusses *shchur* (the name given to this folk North African magic generally practiced by women) and the home as means of control in the 1994 Israeli film *Shchur*.⁸⁶ Lubin argues that *Shchur* gives validation to traditions other than those of Ashkenazim and Mizrahi men through its privileging of these two aspects of Mizrahi female identity. The *Jewishness* of the home is thus mapped in overlapping levels of Jewish tradition: North African, French, modern and observant.

Like the Mother in *Little Jerusalem*, Yael's Safta in *Fresh Blood* emanates a power over her family inflected by her *different* (non-Ashkenazi) Jewish background. Her house in Nahalat Yehuda, a neighbourhood in Rishon LeZion, Israel, is a space of nostalgia for granddaughter Yael. Over a close up of Safta preparing food in the kitchen the voiceover announces: "I come here to search for my grandmother. To unlock the past, to confirm memory." Yael looks to her grandmother to provide a semblance of authenticity to her past:

Yael: Supta, you know I remember this house.
Supta: What?
Yael: I remember

The camera cuts away to "pan of house over rough footage".

Supta: What I...
Yael: This house. Ze ba-it. I remember. I can. Uh... Ya, I remember eating here. Wh...
Supta: Yes.
Yael: Eggs and eggplant and salad.
Supta: What?

⁸⁶ *Shchur* is written by a Mizrahi woman Hannah Azulay-Hasfari and directed by her husband Shmuel Hasfari. The Mizrahi female protagonist Cheli, has chosen to alienate herself from both *shchur* and her home, and therefore from her family and her unique cultural history. Cheli, however, is punished for her choice to abandon her traditions by being alienated from her family, and by lacking the ability to control her own image.

Yael: I remember eating with Saba⁸⁷....I remember the house to be bigger... because I was so small.”

While looking to her Safta for confirmation, it is Yael who is creating the space of the home, describing it with the foods, bodies and feelings that constitute her cartography of the territory. Safta’s stuttering English and difficulty understanding Yael’s words are emblematic of the negotiation involved in constructing the space of home for different individuals.

Yael’s cartography of home explicitly looks for Arabness and Iraqiess and finds it in the lived experiences of her grandparents. Chapter Ten entitled: “Mizrahi, Refining Arabness” begins with a close-up image of a man’s hand caressing worry beads, a dramatization of Yael’s grandfather in pajamas pacing with the beads behind his back. A citation from bell hooks appears over the image: “What does it mean to inhabit a space without a culture of domination defining how you live your life?” This montage sets up a relation between the physical (pajamas, beads) and the theoretical (Arabness, culture of domination). In doing so, Yael questions the connection between Ashkenazi power and the lived experiences of Arab Jews. This image dissolves to reveal Safta snapping her finger in the “Iraqi way⁸⁸” in front of the television in her home, dancing. A voiceover explains:

Arab men on the streets remind me of my grandfather. I never understood the memory of him fingering beads as something connected to his Arabness. I come back to her, as if she can offer me some grounding. As if she can make the act of belonging simple.

⁸⁷ Hebrew for grandfather.

⁸⁸ This note is written in Yael’s Master’s thesis (1996:110).

For Yael, Safta's house and body are spaces where Arabness is repeatedly performed. The director's search for "grounding" further transforms Safta's Arabness into a home (of safety, origins, comfort).

The Arabness of these spaces does not exclude Jewishness. Indeed they exist within the broader framework of the Jewish state, and the performances that occur within. Safta's house is also explicitly a Jewish home. A place where Safta's lights memorial candles explaining: "This is for my mother, this is for my father... for Saba Sasson, for Moshe Rabbanu ... for ner neshama⁸⁹." An Arab Jewish space is thus actively created through the lived experiences of Yael's family and through the lens of her video camera. This Arab and Jewish space is a place of inclusion, a third space between Arab and Jew rendered an enemy dynamic.

Laura's apartment in *Little Jerusalem* and Safta's house in *Fresh Blood* are places that invite a consideration the relationship between place, space and belonging. Each location is turned into space by the subjective cartographies employed by the individuals who inhabit these spaces. Both spaces make possible the contemplation of Arab Jewish space on a microcosmic level that can flood into neighbourhoods and homelands beyond.

Neighbourhood

Neighbourhoods are conceptual spaces that organize bodies and homes. They are mapped across the material locations of buildings and streets within towns and cities. Like houses and apartments, neighborhoods involve close interactions and encounters between people and families. In these local encounters individuals recognize other faces and

⁸⁹ Ner Neshama is the Hebrew term literally "soul candle". These are customarily lit by mourners (immediate family members –parent, child or sibling) of the deceased on the anniversary of a loved one's death.

subsequently organize them into neighbours (safe, ok, kind of like me, belong here) and strangers (scary, not-like-me, do not belong here). In this way, individuals actively participate in the construction of their neighbourhoods, rendering a particular location into a symbolic order, a type of community with a certain set of characteristics. Imaginative geography is also employed in this process to fantasize an easy and absolute separation of “good” neighbourhoods from “bad.”

Sara Ahmed (2000) argues that the fear of strangers or “stranger danger” is actually the impulse behind the construction of neighbourhoods:

It is the very potential of the community to fail which is required for the constitution of the community. It is the enforcement of the boundaries between those who are already recognised as out of place (even other fellow residents) that allows those boundaries to be established. The 'ideal' community has to be worked towards and that labour requires failure as its moment of constitution.' (26, emphasis in original)

Neighbourhoods, according to Ahmed, are fantasies of pure spaces. Their constitution is actually based on fears and insecurities rather than a basis of a likeness of (wholesome, unadulterated) bodies or materials. This fear (of contamination by qualities that are not like mine) pushes individuals to organize the people and places in their neighbourhood (who they must first recognize). Like the designations of ritual purity and pollution (see Douglas above) the designation of neighbour and stranger is a way of organizing and controlling a chaotic space.

Surveillance is part of the work exercised to maintain the “purity” of the neighbourhood. The cinematography of *Little Jerusalem* makes this process apparent through the use of scales. In film, “[s]cales must be understood in the ways they are used to create and recreate certain kinds of ‘reality’, understood as particular ways of knowing

the world, and how those realities can then be resisted and transformed” (Aitken and Dixon 333). The modernist architecture of *Little Jerusalem* is dominated by the long, low stretch of a central, concrete courtyard contrasted with the tall, rectangular monoliths of the high-rise apartments. The imposing presence of these towers is constant, over taking the view from the windows of Laura’s apartment and her body as she walks alone beneath them. The scale renders the concrete towers and the surveillance by the bodies within them as the power, metaphoric for the boundaries of her Jewish home and community, which Laura will try to resist.

As the title indicates “Little Jerusalem” is a *Jewish* neighbourhood. This is not to say that non-Jews do not physically inhabit and participate in this place, but rather this is how Laura the character and Albou the director imagine this particular space. Little Jerusalem is the nickname of the suburban Paris neighbourhood Sarcelles, a name given for the area’s high concentration of Jews (kino.com). The title plays on the symbolic link between Jews and Jerusalem that is crucial to both Judaism and to Zionist ideology.⁹⁰ An important textual threshold to consider is that Jerusalem is politically significant as a site of contestation between Israelis and Palestinians. Jerusalem is the capital of Israel (though Tel Aviv is the capital that the international community recognizes) and also the city (al-Quds, in Arabic) that Palestinians hope to make their capital (though the administrative headquarters of the Palestinian Authority is currently in Ramallah). Geographically, socially and spiritually the city of Jerusalem is actually divided across several intersecting

⁹⁰ Jerusalem housed the First and Second Holy Temples where the ancient Israelites performed sacrifices to God until the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE. Through generations of exile and diaspora Jerusalem remains the spiritual centre of Judaism, the direction to which Jews face when they pray to God.

lines of religious or ethnic affiliation.⁹¹ Whether used fondly by the neighbourhood's inhabitants, or by outsiders marking it as a space of otherness, Little Jerusalem is a potent name for both this neighbourhood and the film. Using this name to represent this particular location is a claim of ownership over the space; it allows the person using the title a degree of recognition, knowledge and mastery.

Little Jerusalem becomes a Jewish space by the institutions it contains and the practices that occur within them. Here is the site of Jewish elementary schools, the synagogue and the mikvah. Here is the location of Jewish bodies that walk through and transform its passages. The Jewishness of this space can be interpreted as both imposing and resisting power. When Orthodox Jews walk down suburban streets they resist the national secular culture of the space by performing a Jewish ritual within it.⁹² Yet, Laura's Kantian walk through the city is also an act of resistance against her imposing Jewish culture. Both actions disrupt attempts by neighbours to keep watch, police and control. Michel de Certeau (1984) argues that walking through the city is a practice that resists the surveillance of space achieved from the perspective of a bird's eye view that condenses and totalizes distances and obscures the everyday practices that occur inside. If, as Said writes "there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (55), walking through the city, with its insistence on physically entering space and proximity, is the indeed a practice of resistance.

⁹¹ East Jerusalem, which contains Jerusalem's holiest sites (The Temple Mount and the Western Wall), was captured in 1967 from Jordan. Rather than agreeing to international rule of the city according to a 1947 UN plan, Jordan and Israel preferred to divide the city in half. Since claiming East Jerusalem, Israel had unsuccessfully attempted to Judaize and unite the city through policies and illegal settlement. It remains a "frontier city" (Klein 2008).

⁹² See Etan Diamond's discussion on Thornhill, Ontario for a discussion of how Jewish microscapes are created in suburban landscapes (2008).

When Laura crosses through the courtyard she interrupts the designation of Little Jerusalem as an exclusive Jewish space. On her walks she encounters the *other* others in her neighbourhood – first and second generation Muslims and Christians from North and West Africa and the Middle East. Djamel, one of these stranger/neighbours, first appears to the audience through Laura's gaze. He is the focus of her attention as she crosses through the courtyard under the cover of night, sitting with his back to a group of Muslim men. The repetition of Laura's walk increases the frequency of their encounters, each time more bold, so that Djamel appears disappointed (with a gift of slippers in hand) when Laura passes one day with her sister and does not exchange greetings. Within the intimate space of the Hebrew school, where both he and Laura work, Djamel ultimately makes the shift from stranger to neighbour. Whereas in the courtyard Djamel and Laura are separated by distance across the concrete expanse (enhanced by long pans or zoom-outs that catch the horizon), in the change room they stand nearly touching back-to-back. Djamel unbuttons his gray work smock as Laura pulls hers on. The camera shots here are medium and close-ups, emphasizing the proximity and magnetism of their bodies. The angle – peering at Djamel over Laura's shoulder, only their necks and faces framed intimately by the camera – presents the space of the change room as a space of encounter and possibilities. Djamel crosses an invisible line by touching Laura's shoulder, helping her pull on her smock, despite Laura's attempt to keep him outside her personal boundaries by refusing to turn around and look at him. Her smile after he departs reveals her failure to keep him out.

The connection between Laura and Djamel across Jewish space⁹³ is significant against the backdrop of material violence that occurs in the *place* of the banlieues. Sarcelles, as discussed in the previous chapter, is a terrain fraught not only with the problematic relationships of Jews and their neighbours, but also with the intersection of French nationalist and postcolonial politics. Albou's film first appeared at Cannes in May 2005 (imdb.com) contributing to a growing wave of films by French filmmakers of the Arab diaspora and films about the banlieues. Several months after the film's release, the neighbourhood and homeland politics touched upon in the film would explode, bringing the questions of citizenship, diversity and security in France to a boil. On October 27 2005, two Arab Muslim teenagers Zyed Benna and Bouna Traore, were electrocuted in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. News reports claim that the boys climbed into an electrical sub-station in an attempt to flee police.⁹⁴ The death of these youths triggered riots in areas of primarily African and Arab diaspora communities.

In addition, the case of Ilan Halimi's torture and death is a grim example of Ahmed's neighbour/stranger problematic. Youssef Fofana and his self-proclaimed Gang des Barbares (gang of barbarians) kidnapped Halimi, a French Jewish youth of Moroccan heritage on January 21 2006.⁹⁵ Over the course of three weeks he was tortured by the gang and eventually found dead. Halimi, a cell phone sales man from a working class family, was reportedly targeted because the kidnapper assumed that since Jews were rich, the family and community would be willing to pay a high ransom for the young man's return. The

⁹³ Though the focus of this section has been on Jewish space, Djamel must also pass through the Arab Muslim space imposed by this family. The audience receives hints of this when Djamel introduces Laura to his family. Refer to Chapter Two for more discussion.

⁹⁴ See *BBC News* (2005).

⁹⁵ For articles on the Halimi case see: Uni (2006a, 2006b), Moore (2006).

kidnappers' ability to ignore the similarities between Halimi's experiences as the son of immigrants from the Arab diaspora and their own enabled their violent actions. Antisemitism is part of this process; in order to denounce someone for their Jewishness, the Jewish other/stranger must first be familiar enough to recognize. *Little Jerusalem* is sadly haunting for this, and the stream of banlieue violence that it predates. It anticipates the increasingly difficult conditions for French Jews and indeed all the banlieue communities regardless of their religion, colour or ethnicity. It is also notable that Halimi's family decided to rebury their son in Israel rather than France, adding to the association of Jews with the religious homeland rather than with multiple national homes (HaLevi 2007).

Under the chapter heading, "Victimized", there is one scene of physical violence between neighbours and strangers in *Little Jerusalem*. Against a background of apartment complexes Ariel and his son Mickael play soccer with other Jewish boys and men on a worn field. Out of nowhere a gang of hooded and masked hooligans kick and pound on the players. Ariel tells Mickael to run and he returns with his sister and Djamel still clad in work uniforms. When Djamel takes Ariel's arm to help him up, Ariel glares at him (Shock? Horror? Recognition of him as the writer of the letter?) In this moment, Djamel is looked upon as one of the enemies, affiliated with the hooligans by his not being Jewish, despite his intention to help. With Ariel safely on his feet and supported by Laura and Mikael, Djamel jets off away from the scene (the audience later learns that this is because he is a non-status immigrant and is fearful of the police). In this scene, the threat posed by strangers (read as non-Jews) has both a material and imaginative element. There is a real threat of violence (though given the socio-historical context this is not exclusive to the Jews in France) and there is an imaginative process that interprets which figures embody this threat. The

combinations of imagined and material violence actively produce both the idea of the neighbourhood and its symbolic meaning as a Jewish (or other) kind of space.

Baghdad: The Arab Jewish City

Remembering Baghdad as a Jewish city is a prominent feature of the work of Naim Kattan, Sami Michael and many other Jewish writers who left Iraq circa 1950 (Levy 2006). Jewish Baghdad is a spatial concept with a particular meaning ascribed to places in the city. Levy finds two interesting threads in the poetry and prose of this group of Iraqi Jewish writers: the posing of a dialectical relationship between identity and space, and portrayal of Baghdad as a city that is paradoxically both home and other (2006: 165). De Certeau's concept of space is useful here: "*space is a practiced place*. Walkers transform thus the street, geometrically defined by urban planning, into a space. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e. a place constituted by a system of signs" (quoted in *ibid.*; de Certeau 1984, 117, emphasis in original). On one level, *walking* organizes the streets of Baghdad into a Jewish space. On a second level, *reading* the novels and memoir of Iraqi Jewish exiles creates an Arab Jewish space out of their written words. Levy notes that Jewish Baghdad is a cosmopolitan and intercultural space rather than an essentialized and exclusively Jewish one (166). It therefore has much in common with the diasporic space of Little Jerusalem created through Albou's cinematic text. In both cases, the creation of Arab Jewish space is dependent on the crisis of its termination (See Ahmed earlier in this chapter).

Iraqi Jewish writers scribe a memory of a reality that no longer exists in the everyday practices of its inhabitants. It is the act of writing that sustains and continues to re-create this

space. Kattan's act of reading contributes to the creation of the space of *Jewish Baghdad*. It is not evident from Kattan's prose that an estimated quarter of the population of the city was Jewish at the time of his writing. Rather, it is the sense of interculturalism that is prominent in Kattan's depiction of the city. He achieves this by describing the minutiae of everyday interaction between Jews themselves and between Jews and the Muslim and Christian neighbours.

For example, in chapter seven, Kattan is first confronted with the conceptual boundaries of his Jewish neighbourhood. After injuring his arm playing leapfrog the child is taken to the local Rabbi who is also a bonesetter. The injury worsens after a second visit and Kattan's father decides instead to see a Muslim miracle man in Bab el Sheikh. Before allowing him to enter the unfamiliar (dangerous!) neighbourhood, Kattan's mother covers his fair hair to hide it from Muslim eyes and attempts to disguise her son's Jewishness. To Kattan's surprise, Bab el Sheikh is not so unfamiliar:

Holding my father's hand, I felt as though I were leaving on a trip, and secretly prepared myself to cross the boundaries of my own country. How surprised I was when I entered these foreign alleys to see doors that look like ours, windows that were identical to those on own houses...I had expected that we would be taken for curious creatures, that people would stop and look at us, that they would hurl insults or even throw stones at us. So we were not so different from the others after all. (Kattan 49-50)

The limits of the familiar Jewish neighbourhood ("the boundaries of my own country") have such a powerful hold on the young Kattan that crossing into Bab el Sheik requires this careful preparation by both mother and son. But it soon strikes Kattan that the architecture of his alleys and houses do not suddenly change beyond the limits of "Jewish" Baghdad. Bab el Sheik is only constructed as a separate city neighbourhood because of the signification

Kattan places upon it as an othered, Muslim space. Once Kattan actually crosses the border and encounters the other, his fears become unfounded. There is no danger of violence, no hurled insults or stones, little significant difference: the stranger becomes familiar.

The essentialization of Jewish neighbourhoods as exclusive and pure spaces is also interrogated in Kattan's memoir. Prior to 1930s the Jews of Baghdad lived primarily in the Jewish quarter of the city, located on the eastern bank of the Tigris to the northeast of al-Rusafa (Levy 2006: 172). As the population increased, many of the wealthier Jews moved into new developments in the south, which were "European-style house-and-garden neighbourhoods" with mixed populations (ibid). Kattan moved with his family to the Battaweyeen suburb from the "old neighbourhood." Wealth became a source of division between the Jewish populations, distancing the rich from their former neighbours in the old Jewish quarter. The young Kattan observes that:

Invisible boundaries separated the poor neighbourhoods in the Jewish community from the others. Crossing the barrier made one realize one's own wealth in comparison with the inhabitants of Hennuni and Abou Sifain, who were crowded five and six into one room. About the children of these sections I knew only the legendary image of rudeness and bad language I was warned against. (Kattan 48)

Kattan's observation reveals that the meta-categories of Jewish, Muslim or Arab are themselves variegated. The poor Jews are distinguished and separated by their wealthier Jewish neighbourhoods in Hennuni and Abou Sifain, Jews are further distinguished from the Muslims of Bab el Shaik, both are arbitrary constructions based on weighing and negotiating the boundaries between the familiar and the strange. Whereas, the Muslim others in Bab el Sheik cease to be recognized as a threat when they become friendly and familiar (able to help the Jewish boy heal), the lower class Jews remain at a distance. (Likely the lower class

conditions of the old neighbourhood are threatening to the newfound status of the wealthy Jews).

The Kurdish Jews in particular, stood at the bottom of the Baghdadi Jewish hierarchical heap. Kattan describes them as “huddled together in their sordid neighbourhood” and “living on the margins of the community” (48-49). The metaphor of dirt figures into this categorization of Jews based on class and ethnicity through Kattan’s use of the term ‘sordid’. Poor, Kurdish Jews become symbolic of the material conditions of their neighbourhood. Through reading, Kattan communicates his identification and sense of belonging to upper-class Arab segment of Jewish society in Baghdad. Furthermore, it is Kattan’s male gender that allows him to pass, above and beyond his religion, class, and ethnicity, in the spaces of both Jewish and non-Jewish Baghdad. Gender distinctions become apparent when Kattan begins to tutor female pupils. The tutelage he provides seems to count only to prepare the women for upper-class marriages (85; 89). Women in the narrative remain predominantly in the private sphere, inside the home, where Kattan and his friend Nessim integrate with other men in public schools and workplaces. The Arab Jewish space that Kattan constructs through his reading and writing is therefore dependent on his relatively privileged position in Iraqi and Jewish society at the time.

There is one space in Kattan’s narrative in which all identities nullify: the illicit space of the Maydane (in Arabic, literally square, zone or field). The carnivalesque nature of the red light district confounds all attempts to preserve unique and protected personal, identity or communal boundaries. Kattan describes his experience during one of his visits to this neighbourhood:

I barely had time to look at them when I felt a hand pulling on my manhood. It was the one-eyed woman. I was dumbfounded to see a woman go so directly to an unknown man. I had to shed my old beliefs and accept this complete reversal of roles. Here the women were totally nude. According to the laws of the desert, this physical nudity was naturally accompanied by moral nudity. The boundaries between what was real and what was dreamed became evanescent. Obscenity had no meaning since everything was obscene. (192)

The Maydane of Kattan's description transcends religious-, ethnic-, class-, and gender-defined spaces; all is accepted here, all roles are reversed. The search for sexual stimulation, embodied experiences trump the constant psychological play that divides the world into self and other.

It is the dream of a shared sense of Arabness that allows Kattan to enter into Baghdad's diverse neighbourhoods. During this time of social and political transformation, the neighbourhoods of Baghdad could become open spaces for affinities to overlap, making it difficult to police concrete lines between people on any permanent basis. The idea of pan-Arabness for all citizens regardless of religion or ethnicity was a utopian idea for Kattan and his friends. This optimism made it possible for the young Kattan to transgress the boundaries physically and conceptually that his parents and grandparents were afraid to cross. (Though this optimism would eventually be dashed by the violence of the farhoud and the inimical conditions under which Jewish citizens left Iraq).

Baghdad's neighbourhoods like Paris' banlieues are spaces that fail to completely police the boundaries between Jew/Arab/Muslim. The young Kattan's imaginative geography dissects the neighbourhoods in *Farewell, Babylon* into islands of identity delimited by religion, ethnicity, class and gender. But because these borders are imagined, they always hold the possibility of being re-imagined: the boundaries of neighbourhoods are

in constant negotiations between the familiar and the strange. Kattan's work exemplifies the dual tension observed by Ahmed that neighbours rely on the crisis of their possible destruction in their very creation. The boundaries—visible or invisible—are experienced and experienced again differently. Each time Kattan describes a neighbourhood in his memoir, the narrative contains the seeds of vocabulary capable of deconstructing the foundations of pure and bounded communities; it contains tools to deconstruct the vocabulary of home/land.

Homeland

What are the connections between home, neighbourhood, and *homeland*? Homeland, like home and neighbourhood is a space that is constructed through imaginative geography and subjective cartography. It shifts notions of security, sedentariness, ownership and control to the level of the nation. Erin Manning (2003) describes this connection as home/land vocabulary:

[E]ven as many of us provisionally assume a political stance that refutes nationalism, we often design our homes to mirror the exclusionary aspects of the nation's mandate on belonging, forgetting, perhaps, that the notion of home (or homeland) remains one of the nation's more powerful ontopological⁹⁶ enunciations. If we refrain from questioning the validity of the political structures that guarantee our 'safety' within the discourse of the home, we are blinded to the ways in which the home mirrors the politics of state-sovereignty, offering protection from the outside by condoning an ethics of exclusionary violence on the inside. We must therefore develop an awareness that, as we mortgage our lives and construct fences and walls, install security systems and guard dogs, we are offering unwavering support to a vocabulary that is at the heart of the imaginary of the nation. (Manning xvi-xvii)

⁹⁶ Ontopological is Derrida's concept that links ontology (being) to topos (soil/territory).

Home/land vocabulary is the language that establishes which bodies are qualified or disqualified as being part of the nation. For Jews, homeland, once a space of religious-messianic yearning, is now a material reality: the State of Israel. What has this form of territoriality meant for modern Jewish identity? What kind of home/land vocabulary is involved in policing its borders? Who is included and who is excluded?

The space of the nation, like the home and neighbourhood spaces of the Arab Jewish diaspora, involves a process of signification that attempts to mark physical and conceptual boundaries to protect a “pure” essence within. Israel’s vocabulary of home/land has the unique problem of a “territorial indeterminacy” stemming from the discrepancy between its conception of its self as a territorial nation and a conception of its self as a homeland for a tribal community that extends beyond its territorial borders. As Rosen-Zvi (2004) argues: “The indeterminacy of the Zionist utopian space is the product of an oscillation between two contradictory, yet complementary, discourses within the Zionist metadiscourse: the functional-positivist discourse and the organic-cultural discourse” (128). This is the tension between the idea that Jews require a territorial refuge (not necessarily in Israel) for the solution to the Jewish problem⁹⁷ and the idea that the Jews need a specifically Jewish solution, one derived from an essential Jewish culture. Rosen-Zvi continues:

The functionalist discourse clears the way for the organic one by ‘naturalizing’ the space and emptying the territory of all troublesome presence...Emptied of all otherness, the Zionist space is necessarily seen as Self... The tragedy of Zionism is that it is able to deploy itself only in a discursive space where all otherness is absent or neutralized (129).

⁹⁷ See introduction for definition of the Jewish problem in modern Europe.

The result of this is the delusion of a completely pure space, in which any state action is justified on the grounds that it has the right to protect its unproblematic Self. The Israeli space and Self are imagined as necessarily and uncomplicatedly Jewish and Arab (regardless of religion) are the troublesome presence that must be excluded.

Zionism captures Jewish insecurities – collective memories of antisemitism, of the Shoah, of anti-Jewish (or anti-Zionist riots), of exclusion – and presents Israel as a Jewish refuge. McGill History Professor Gil Troy offers one perspective from the diaspora in his book *Why I am a Zionist* (2002): “After two-thousand years of wandering, the Jewish people’s return home created a welcome refuge from oppression” (104) and that “A renewed appreciation of Zionism as a critique of modernity, as a call for community, as an appreciation of the essential glue that binds people together, can help cure what ails us” (136). For Troy, and many Jews across the world, Israel is the homeland where Jews are not only welcomed into safety but where they are also empowered (and generally encouraged) to fight back for their security. The socio-spatial politics of Israel is thus rife with the poetry and violence of home/land vocabulary; the Arab Jewish binary is upheld as one core of this dynamic.

An example of self and other in spatial terms is the security fence constructed along the border of Israel/Palestine. Israel’s national borders (though officially undefined (Stratton 2007)), attempt to mark a Jewish space distant and different from the Arab, Muslim or Palestinian space assumed to be outside. The barrier announced by Ariel Sharon in June 2002, and now (in most places) an 8 metre high concrete or steel wall

roughly constructed along the Green Line⁹⁸ but often jutting east to include illegal Israeli settlements and fertile Palestinian farmland (Gregory 122, Stratton 2007), presumably attempts to keep the ‘barbarian’ suicide bombers out, and ‘civilized’ Israelis in. This imaginative geography marks the spaces outside of Israel as the places of Arabs (Palestinian), belligerent, terrifying ‘them’/other who must be physically separated from “us” (Jews) and “our” secure home. As Stratton argues, however:

While the wall was originally conceived as a defensive project, its reconfiguration to encircle the West Bank Arabs while appropriating much of their land rewords it as an offensive measure as, indeed a concrete expression of Jabotinsky’s iron wall...both function as the site of the binary divide between colonizer and colonized. (225).

The wall, erected to create a secure space for Jews where they are protected from Arab terrorists, paradoxically creates a space of insecurity and oppression for the Palestinians trapped on the other side. Monaghan and Careccia (2009) report the following impacts of the wall:

- Fragmentation of the OPT⁹⁹ and reduction of the territory available to Palestinians for the meaningful exercise of their right to self-determination.
- Annexation of East Jerusalem.
- Loss of land and property through confiscation and annexation.
- Forced demographic redistribution.
- Erasing of the Green Line.
- Prevention of access to employment, resulting in a diminished economic capacity for the Palestinians.
- Restricted access to education
- Restricted access to healthcare.
- Isolation, as a result of the erosion of the social roots of families and the social fabric. (19)

⁹⁸ The Green Line here refers to the demarcation between Israel and the territories it captured during the Six-Day war. These include: the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula (returned to Egypt in 1979).

⁹⁹ Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The trope of “security” here, or the idea that the wall will prevent terrorism is revealed as an extension of the imagination of the pure Israeli space and self. It is the same home/land vocabulary that separates neighbours from strangers and attempts to wall in and protect “pure” spaces/communities from others. To justify the wall as a security measure, one must completely erase the realities of the repression of Palestinian rights, and also ignore the 2004 International Court of Justice’s Advisory Opinion that the Wall built in the West Bank is illegal under international law (Monaghan and Careccia 3). It is evident that Israel’s spatialization of self and other has dramatic material consequences for the people who fall on either side of the conceptual and physical borders it constructs.

The wall, in its annexation of the Palestinian territory, might be understood as a colonial dividing line. The colonial dividing line between “us” (nationals, settlers, originals) and “them” (others, nomads) is a performance; space is both a domain and a doing (Gregory 2004). Marking a line, even if it is imaginary, impacts behaviour. Those on the other side of the line are treated differently; jobs, rights, citizenship and belonging become harder or impossible to attain. Violence (verbal, physical, or epistemic) is orchestrated to create and maintain these divisions. This performative aspect, however, also leaves spaces open to creative possibilities:

This space of potential is always conditional, always precarious, but every repertory performance of the colonial present carries within it the twin possibilities of either reaffirming and even radicalizing the hold of the colonial part on the present *or* undoing its enclosures and approaching closer to the horizon of the *postcolonial* (Gregory 19).

Concrete security walls can become the tablet upon which the poetry of resistance might be written, a symbol that can help to form new types of belonging in communities drawn

according to very different lines. Action can produce conceptual change; conceptual change can produce material change: this is the creative interrelation of space and place.

In-between “us” and “them,” between Arab and Jew, between any two identities essentialized as bounded and binary is a *third space*. Third space is the ambiguous and ambivalent location between the expression of language and the interpretation of its meaning. It is the “alien territory” or the “cutting edge” where ourselves and others meet.

Homi Bhabha observes:

The act of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot ‘in itself’ be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation. (Bhabha 156)

The ambivalence of the third space ensures that communication is never a straightforward act. There is always the possibility that an object might be assigned to one category or another, that language can fail to function as it was intended to perform (Bauman 1991: 1) What a person intends when speaking, is not always translated into understanding for the person who hears. That moment, in which no assumption is certain, in which any meaning is possible, creates a space that can enable the transformation of thought. As Soja categorizes it, third space (or Thirdspace, in his writing) retains a “radical challenge to think differently, to expand your geographical imagination beyond its current limits” or “not recast to pour old wine into new barrels, no matter how tasty the vintage has been in the past” (1996: 2). Third space is therefore a *space* of potential and a *place* in between two concretes that can completely transform the blocks that try to contain it. It is a

freezone where anything goes, but also a place carrying the burden of what it left behind, and what it anticipates.

Literature and film can open a third space for dialogue between groups who cannot meet in real places. In the films of Palestinian director Elia Suleiman for example, balloons, sunglasses, and walking sticks become humorous devices for crossing checkpoints between Israel and Palestine.¹⁰⁰ In *Divine Intervention* a beautiful (Arab) woman wearing sunglasses transfixes gun-toting Israeli soldiers by momentarily raising the glasses and staring them in the eyes. As they turn to watch her walk by, the checkpoint towers topple beside them. Fiction offers a realm of fantasy that is sometimes the only way groups can see a serious situation for its humanity (and its hilarity). Texts can also travel in ways that bodies cannot: electronically, covertly or openly, through speech, writing and image. Deconstructing the vocabulary of home/land calls for creative strategies to create a space for discourse and interaction between two exclusive territories. Sami Michael's novel *Refuge* offers one such strategy.

Michael's *Refuge* as a Third Space

Refuge, n. Etymology: < Anglo-Norman and Middle French, French *refuge* protector (often used of God) (first half of the 12th cent. in Anglo-Norman), means of obtaining shelter (c1175 in Old French), shelter, protection, place of shelter or protection (all a1278), excuse, evasion (a1440), sanctuary, retreat (15th cent.), place of shelter for disadvantaged people (1663), hostel (1718, now obsolete in this sense), mountain refuge (1870) < classical Latin *refugium* place or means of shelter, concealed chamber, protector, in post-classical Latin also action of avoiding punishment (4th cent.), way out (5th cent. in Augustine), sanctuary, right of sanctuary (12th cent.) < *refugere* to turn back and flee, run away (< *re-re-* prefix + *fugere* to flee: see *fuge* v.) + *-ium* (see *-y suffix*4). (Oxford English Dictionary)

¹⁰⁰ Naaman (2006) discusses the use of borders in Israeli cinema and discusses Suleiman's films in more detail.

A contradiction exists within the etymology of the word refuge. One sense of its meaning is a place of shelter or protection. A second sense is the action of avoiding punishment or a way out. The contradiction is the simultaneous desire for permanence of safety and escape from danger. Security, peace and protection are to be achieved by both fleeing and standing still. Sami Michael invokes this contradiction in titling his 1977 (English edition 1988) novel *Hasut* (refuge in Hebrew). Its ambivalent ending “He was an Arab. She was a Jew”, discussed in the previous chapter, has led some scholars to interpret the narrative as pessimistic about Arab–Jewish relations in Israel. Gila Ramras-Rauch (1989) takes this stance:

Michael suggests that humanism and understanding are weak forces indeed in this mythic war of collective memories. Neither side is capable of stepping over the line that divides them and embracing the other. Nor can political ideology be looked to as a possible source of brotherhood. And still further, there is an implicit message in the story’s own lack of resolution (181).

I propose a different reading of Michael’s work. Through his complex characterizations and plot development, Michael actually demonstrates that humanism and understanding are powerful forces in collective life, though they do not always predominate in everyday human interaction. I believe he does this by reading Arab and Jewish together, a strategy that undermines the political ideologies that seek to alienate relations between neighbours. This strategy also works toward the humanization of the enemy, both Arab and Jewish. Michael achieves this through the metaphor of refuge, something both Jews and Palestinians seek in his novel, but can never truly find.

Ramras-Rauch’s assessment of Michael’s work as a work of pessimism fails to contemplate the potential of ambivalence and third space. *Refuge* is compelling precisely

because it tries to read together the discrepant experiences of its Israeli and Palestinian characters, even if the experiences are sometimes irreconcilable. Edward Said (in interview, Bayoumi and Rubin 2000) argues that this irreconcilability is essential to characterizing the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians:

There are certain contradictions, what I call antinomies, that cannot be resolved, and it's important to explore and to deepen investigation of them. I want to say, well, they're there, we can't wish them away, we can't reconcile them under duress, as Theodor Adorno says. As intellectuals, we have to be able to make them more apparent, to make their influence more profound and more felt, which requires more work and more of an understanding of different kinds of political organizations and intellectual efforts (423-424)

For me, this irreconcilability has always been essential as a way of characterizing the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians. No matter what you say or what you do, you're dealing with two totally irreconcilable experiences: one premised on the nonexistence of the other, in the case of the Israelis; and in the case of the Palestinians, they are unable to forget, or to let go of what was destroyed. That's one of the reasons why I've taken such a dim view of the whole question of peace as it is being negotiated, which for me seems to negate a quintessential and irreconcilable opposition at the very core of it. (427).

Irreconcilability actually becomes a space of optimism for Said. Rather than repressing either Israeli or Palestinian experiences, Michael's work makes space for multiple voices without attempting to permanently resolve them. The story actually features several co-constructive subplots that deepen the simple plot description: "Fathi, an Arab poet and Communist, finds Refuge in the home of Jewish friends, Marduk and Shula, at the time of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973."¹⁰¹ Michael's skilled writer's craft weaves tales of each character's emotional and personal life with the collective experiences of communities at the call of national or political duties.

¹⁰¹ This is Ramras-Rauch's plot description 180.

Nancy E. Berg (2001) highlights Michael's creative use of multiple subplots, a dual narrative form that works between past and present:

It makes sense, of course, that he gravitated toward a biographical genre [bildungsroman] in order to insert his story and that of other Jews from Arab lands into the collective Israeli narrative. As his writing matures, the dual structure becomes more complicated and the realism more magical. The actual journey in physical space intersects with the journey of discovery in emotional space (14).

The first level of this dual structure Berg describes as that of a “disembodied third person of limited omniscience”. This voice roams between descriptions of characters and events sometimes critical, but mostly sympathetic (Berg 20). The second narrative level moves deeply into characters' memories exposing their emotional and contextual circumstances. The dual narrative form has the effect of creating a story that never settles. Rather, the multiple subplots mutually inform and unwind each other so that anything becomes possible. In this way, Michael's narrative style moves toward polyglossia¹⁰², a way of interacting with the “reality” of Zionist mythology that locks language about Arabs and Jews in an absolute discourse. As Berg indicates the effect of the dual narrative structure is to link physical space with conceptual space (she specifies emotional space). Given this dialogic framework, it is interesting to follow some of these multiple character voices in regards to the theme of refuge.

Fatkhı and the Spatial Function of the Alien

Fatkhı's narrative unsettles the Zionist discourse of a pure Israeli place/space/Self by bringing the experiences of an Arab/Palestinian into the centre of the novel. Fatkhı's first introduction to readers occurs in the third chapter. His brother-in-law-to-be, Wasfy, arrives to

¹⁰² Bakhtin beautifully theorizes: “Only polyglossia fully frees consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myth of languages” (61).

pick him up in a big Buick and the pair set out (discretely, they try) towards Jenin the Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank. This event inspires a journey into Fatkhi's memories to explain the men's connection. Wasfy had humiliated and dishonoured Fatkhi when they played together as children in their village square. The disembodied narrator's voice emphasizes the difference in class and status between the men as boys: "Wasfy would walk down to the square from his stone house, and Fatkhi would climb up from this his family's rusty tin shack" (37). Fatkhi's own stone house had been taken from his family during Israel's War for Independence in 1948. In 1949 they lived in a shack constructed from tin and felt the winter of 1949 through the holes in the roof. Fatkhi's family was never permitted to return to their home and fields, instead they were relegated to being "refugees in their own land." Wasfy and his friends never let the young Fatkhi forget that his family had been reduced to poverty and low status in the village. Fatkhi carries the double scars of his family's loss at the hand of the Israeli forces, and the rejection of their Palestinian neighbours.

The tension between Fatkhi and Wasfy grows as they approach the border with the West Bank (in 1973 still symbolically significant as newly acquired Israeli annexed territory in 1967). Fatkhi pulls a brown necktie and pale jacket out of his suitcase. The narrative structure shifts to the subjective form as Wasfy accuses Fatkhi of "planning something" defying Wasfy's impression that they were going on a pleasure trip. Wasfy asks him why he is putting on a disguise.

"I'm not getting disguised," the poet said, taking a moderate tone.
"What I'm doing, my friend, is removing my disguise"... "No. Now I'm dressed as I should be."
"What! All strangled in a tie and jacket in this heat? Is that what you call being dressed right? Where's your common sense, man."

“I’m dressed like people my age are here,” the poet said....”I don’t want to show up in Jenin looking like a foreigner.”

“You mean in these pants and this open shirt I’ll be coming into my brother’s home like a foreigner? Allah! The Communists have scrambled your brains, Fatkhi.”

(39-40)

The poet would liked to have told Wasfy that in his American car he did indeed look like a foreigner, a detestable stranger in the refugee camp – but he didn’t dare (ibid). Fatkhi and Wasfy differ in the ways they perform their roles vis-à-vis the Palestinians in the West Bank and the refugee camp. Fatkhi’s disguise reveals his layers of alienation as a political, artistic and intellectual outsider and his desperation to belong. He is unsuccessful in this attempt, however; his exaggerated performance only serves to further demarcate him as different (as Wasfy so bluntly points out). To Fatkhi’s dismay Wasfy, despite his American car and open shirt is consistently welcomed in the places they visit in the West Bank. Fatkhi, so desperate to belong and to be seen as authentically Arab, is constantly shunned regardless of his attempt to blend in. Fatkhi, despite identifying as an Arab Muslim, does not feel at home in Arab places. His sense of alienation derives from being out of place, running away while trying to stand still.

Fatkhi idealizes the Arabs of the West Banks, but he does so from his privileged position as a citizen of Israel. Wasfy recounts a story of a previous visit to the West Bank where he observed a refugee woman attempt to buy peaches from a grocer. The grocer refused to sell to her for fear that it would turn off his wealthier customers. Wasfy expresses his outrage: “Great Allah! I felt like turning his stall upside down. The refugees are Arabs, you hear? They’re genuine Palestinians, too.” (45) To Fatkhi he turns and accuses:

You and your kind speak in their name, you use big words, but you despise them, The minute we arrived in Jenin, you make sure to get disguised like a waiter in a hotel, so you can look good for the

effendis. And you tell me to take them out to the restaurant. The owner wouldn't dare say anything while I was there, but his eyes would tell all. The food would turn to poison in their mouths (ibid).

The political refuge Fatkhi seeks from the Israeli government is thus materially different from the search for basic shelter, food, and the essential needs of the refugees in the West Bank. This contrast problematizes the idea of “genuine Palestinians” that Wasfy suggests. What can a “genuine” identity possibly mean when any category of affiliation is also so variegated by class and other layers of difference? It is important to pay attention to the power dynamics that enable one's subjectivity the air of authenticity while denouncing other subjectivities as not genuine.

The socio-spatial contrast between the refugee camp, and the concept of refuge is further elaborated in the narrative. In the refugee camp, Wasfy and his relatives perform a farcical scene, which embarrasses the poet. Wasfy shows off the foods and presents he brought for his family. His sister-in-law and her children each play out roles in relation to Wasfy's own act as the loving and generous benefactor. The scene concludes with Wasfy introducing the poet to his family as Hiam's fiancé, a big shot who “travels to Berlin and Moscow like you all go to the market,” a writer so important that Jews applaud when he insults them (53-54). But, “[w]ith every word that Wasfy uttered, the yawning chasm between Fatkhi and the refugees grew wider and deeper. The bystanders hawked up phlegm, and the children regarded him with obvious suspicion, as though he was a dangerous, violent man whose very touch was to be avoided.” (54). To add to the embarrassment, Wasfy's sister-in-law reacts by being insulted that the family wasn't invited to Fatkhi and Hiam's engagement “That's what happens when you marry into the upper crust – you forget your poor relations.” Fatkhi explains that in fact he was under the impression that they *had* been

invited. Wasfy and his sister-in-law then play a charade to pretend that she had merely forgotten so as to not embarrass Wasfy's family. In this scene the difference between Fathki and the Palestinians in the refugee camp is striking. His grasps at a home/land vocabulary and his desperate attempts to construct belonging to "his people" are completely thwarted. The physical space of the refugee camp requires a different vernacular in the game of survival.

Fathki is consistently an alien in Jewish and Arab territory. In Israel he is a "refugee in his own country." In Tel Aviv, where he lives, Fathki is welcomed into the beds of Jewish women but always remains an outsider; they will never marry him and allow him full entry into the Jewish nation. In Jenin Fathki tries desperately to disguise the Israeliness by changing his costume, but his physical appearance cannot disguise the layers of his experience and his reputation. The poet attempts to use the vocabulary of home/land to negotiate his belonging in different spaces, but he constantly fails to find the right vernacular. Ahmed reminds us of the spatial function of the alien:

To be an alien in a particular nation, is to hesitate at a different border: the alien here is the one who does not belong in a nation space, and who is already defined as such by the Law. The alien is hence only a category within a given community of citizens or subjects: as the outsider inside, the alien takes on a spatial function, establishing relations of proximity and distance within the home(land). Aliens allow the demarcation of space of belonging: by coming too close to home, they establish the very necessity of policing the borders of knowable and inhabitable terrains. The techniques for differentiating between citizens and aliens, as well as between humans and aliens, allows the familiar to be established as the familial. (Ahmed 3)

Policing, setting and guarding limits, occurs not just by the community receiving a stranger, but also by the strangers themselves. Fathki's subjective sense of exile plays a significant role in stranger status. The refuge he seeks is more than just security from the Israeli police,

but a shelter from his own oppressive thoughts (about the lack of his own authenticity or status). Israel's severe division of Arab and Jewish space and place therefore has material and psychological consequences for all of its citizens (and "aliens").

The Production of Arab Jewish Space

Marduch, like Fatkhi, is an alien inside the Jewish homeland because of his Arabness. As an Arab *Jew*, however, his spatial function is different. While Fatkhi is present for his subjective narratives, Marduch's story is mediated through Shula's memories. The Arab Jew's story is appropriated through her *sabra* perspective.

Shula is faced with the difficult decision of whether to open her home to Fatkhi during and Arab-Israeli war. Imaginative geography, the colonial dividing line, home/land vocabulary, and the tropes of neighbours and strangers spin a crisis of loyalty in the woman's mind:

As a revolutionary, she had to help the Arabs confound Israel's aggressive military moves, but the leadership had not given her a clear diagram. As a Jew, however, as a mother and the wife of a soldier, it was her duty to do all she could so that Israel's armies would not be broken, its border would not be crossed – so that the flood would not wash away her *home*...They were demanding and taking for granted that she would give refuge to the poet, and this at a time when they were hoping and praying for the destruction of the armies of Israel. (Michael 196, my emphasis)

Shula is torn between her political obligations to her comrades, and her national duties to Israel her homeland. Her apartment becomes the stage for playing out the macro-politics of the homeland. When the security of her home is threatened, Marduch's first person narrative mingles with Shula's memories.

Marduch tells of one night when he sought the comfort of his parent's home back in Iraq. His father, angry with his two sons for their radical politics, refused to open the door to his children. On this particular night, after escaping a police chase earlier in the day, and suffering from a toothache, hunger and fatigue Marduch lies to his father through the front door of his family home, telling him that the police are chasing him in the hope that this would convince his father to let him in. Instead, however, Marduch's father goes to the rooftop and calls the police: "Come and get him. He's here... I hope you don't see the light of dawn, you atheist. Finished, everything's finished between us. From now on I don't want to see your face." (187). But the Zionist neighbours who were normally hostile to Marduch across the street hear the commotion, scold Marduch's father, and invite the communist inside. Marduch's father and the Zionist neighbours across the street treat the alien Marduch under two different rubrics of home/land vocabulary. Marduch's father shuns him as stranger (atheist, communist) when he arrives upon his doorstep. But the Zionist neighbours still see Marduch, despite his ideological difference as one of their own (Jewish), and thus they welcome him in.

Marduch then breaks from the monologue to ask Shula if she is tired, or if he can speak more. The story he wants to tell is that of his last night of freedom. Marhoun, a comrade, is caught by the Iraqi authorities and betrays Marduch's name to the police, he is now on the run. Marduch intends to give himself in, but his relatives insist that he try to escape and save his mother and father the sadness of another son killed in prison. His uncle takes him to the house of Simha, distant relative whose sons were Zionist activists:

I thought of them as votaries of a cult, members of a mystical sect that smelled of religiosity. We had never even had a real debate. In those days the Zionists weren't hunted down with the same ferocity as the revolutionaries. I despised them, and they considered me a

tightrope walker who performed acrobatic stunts at the behest of foreigners. 'No,' I said vehemently to my uncle, 'they won't dare endanger themselves for my sake!'" (193)

But Marduch's uncle answers angrily: "What do you mean they won't? ...Have you forgotten so completely who you are? You're a Jew, Marduch, a Jew. What have the Communists done to you...? They won't dare, you say!" (ibid). Simha does indeed take Marduch in. After this sequence Michael brings his readers back to the third person narration and Shula's decision. Fuad has just asked Shula "that she give refuge to an Arab" but on her mind, is her husband who was "shooting and being shot at somewhere out in the desert." On one hand, she had been indoctrinated to see Israel's wars as wars of aggression, on the other, she and Marduch didn't want the Arabs to win the wars, "they didn't delude themselves, an Arab military victory meant a holocaust." Michael's narrative thus privileges the Zionist metanarrative of security and Israel as refuge through Shula's interpretation of Marduch's experience.

The narratives of Marduch, the Iraqi Jewish refugee deported to Israel against his will by Iraqi authorities for being a communist and Fatkhi the Palestinian poet, a refugee forced out of his seaside stone home in Palestine as a child after the 1948 war for Israeli independence unravel complicated experiences with borders and belonging. The novel depicts Marduch and Fatkhi as outsiders in their own homes – Marduch for being from "back there" in Iraq and Fatkhi for being a hybrid Arab-Israeli-Palestinian. When Shula offers Fatkhi refuge in their home (a safe space where he will not be persecuted by Israeli authorities for his communism during the war), political, ethnic and national affiliation conflict. Shula allows Fatkhi, who is both a friend and now, due to war, an Arab enemy, to penetrate the boundaries of her home as she negotiates her duties to Israel her nation, and

Marduch her husband who is both Arab and Jewish. In *Refuge* space is entwined with a story of both Jewish and Palestinian suffering while place is the perimeter of Israel which now extends beyond the Green Line. The story of Marduch's torture and salvation in Israel, despite the prejudice he faces there as an Arab Jew, territorializes Israel as the Jewish refuge and homeland. Marduch and Shula are too wounded, too frightened, (represented in the metaphor of their disabled child who discourages Marduch from having more children for fear that his torture renders him unable to have a healthy child) to completely cross borders to acknowledge affiliation with Palestinian suffering as experienced by their friend Fatkhi. While Fatkhi's experiences destabilize the safety of home or nation, Marduch's decision to fight for the Israeli army settles into the same vocabulary linking home origins and nation that Fatkhi's experiences deconstruct.

Homeland vocabulary collapses, however, in the third space of refuge, a concept created within the space of Michael's novel. At the level of face-to-face interaction, Shula puts the value of giving refuge to another human being over and above her insecurities: "Marduch, who had been persecuted for so many years, had sanctified the concept of 'refuge' for Shula. He had told her of [the night of his capture and torture by Iraqi authorities before his deportation] to show that to give refuge to a fugitive was the most virtuous of acts" (Michael 197). The act of giving refuge in the end trumps Shula's fears and hesitation at allowing Fatkhi, the man, the stranger, the enemy, inside the border of her and Marduch's home. As long as Fatkhi remains in her home, in the tenuous space of refuge, the separation between their identities as Arab and Jew collapses. Furthermore, the very insertion of Fatkhi and Marduch's discrepant experiences as Arab Muslim Palestinian and Iraqi Arab Jew into

an Israeli novel at a time when Arab voices were mostly absent is the active creation of an Arab Jewish space.

In claiming ownership of the State of Israel as an exclusively Jewish space Jews materially and discursively exclude the Arab. The consequence of imaginative geography regardless of whose cartography is employed –Arab, Jew or anyone seeking homogenous and “pure” places—is the violence caused by the obsession to secure borders. The third space of the novel offers another possibility. Fiction requires the active participation of readers to make its space relevant. In *Refuge*, Michael offers us the discrepant experiences of Fatkhi and Marduch. Their performances of their Arab identities, and their meditations on refuge interrupt the Zionist narrative, prompting an examination of the consequences of disqualifying Arab bodies from home spaces in the novel. In our interpretations we can read these stories together and actively conceive of an Arab Jewish space that confounds home/land vocabulary that is bent on theoretically and materially dividing Arab and Jew, human beings. Recognizing the process by which we create conceptual and material difference is fundamental in order to permit the redrawing our maps and the opening of our borders.

Chapter Four: Diaspora and the Importance of Jewish Difference

In July 2010, two controversies flared up concerning Israel's relations with the Jewish diaspora. First was the arrest of Anat Hoffman, the leader of a Jewish women's prayer group, who was detained at the Western Wall for violating a 2002 High Court ruling that prohibits women from reading from the Torah at the holy site (Haaretz Service 12 July 2010). Second was the Israeli Knesset's approval of MK David Rotem's proposed "conversion bill," a bill that attempts to centralize the Jewish conversion process under the dictates of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate. Both events elicited strong reactions from organizations in the Jewish diaspora. Questions of Jewish difference lay at the heart of the diaspora's reactions, namely: what are the rights of women within both Judaism and the State of Israel, what constitutes authentic religious Jewish leadership, and what role does the Jewish Diaspora play (or what role *should* it play, if any) in Israeli politics?

Carrying the Torah is one of the basic rituals of the Jewish tradition; men have performed this ritual publicly several times a week since Ezra's initiation of the ceremony following the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon (c. 537 BCE). Because of the ongoing work of feminism, Jewish women now increasingly perform this sacred ritual in Reconstructionist, Reform and Conservative Egalitarian synagogues, primarily in North America. To bar women from this act discriminates against them, denies them a basic human right, and insists that their religious freedoms and legal rights are unequal and inferior to those of men. Although Israel proclaims itself a democratic Jewish state, it does not clearly distinguish between civil and religious rights. The feminist movement is one of many collectives in Israel that struggle with this conundrum. For example, civil marriages cannot be performed in Israel. Family law, including regulations for

marriage and divorce, currently falls under the restrictions of individual religious communities. Under Jewish law, a husband must give his wife a divorce if she asks, but if he does not the couple is still legally married and neither can marry again. Women's groups have been fighting to end this sexist law, which enables men to have power over their wives' right to end a marriage.¹⁰³ Hoffman's arrest shines a light on Israel's domestic issues, internal struggles that are rarely acknowledged in media representation of Israel outside of the country.

Indeed, Hoffman's arrest captured the attention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), who on July 12, 2010 released "CCAR Statement on the Arrest of Anat Hoffman".¹⁰⁴ The CCAR express their "shock and revulsion" at Hoffman's arrest and dubs those responsible for the arrest (and "the Judaism they purport to defend") as "hillul hashem," a desecration of God's name. Israel's haredi leadership, the Chief Rabbinate is the target of the Conference's opprobrium. The CCAR values a feminist version of American Judaism, with "free and equal access to Torah" and "free and equal expression of Judaism for men and women alike"; religious freedom is their central concern. Opposed to this idea of religious freedom is the Chief Rabbinate's "choking air of an anachronistic and state-empowered rabbinic fundamentalism", "an increasingly ubiquitous medieval theocracy." Israel therefore stands at a "moral crossroad", between being a tolerant, and egalitarian society and an intolerant, sexist one. Interestingly, questions of sexual difference are cloaked in the discourse of democracy and equal rights rather than addressed directly in the statement. What does it mean to be tolerant in a Jewish democratic society? Which minority groups in Israel are to be tolerated? In refusing to interrogate the contradiction of being a

¹⁰³ A list of some of these women's rights organization in Israel (and elsewhere), and articles about the agunah cause can be found at jofa.org. See also the documentary *Sentenced to Marriage* (2004).

¹⁰⁴ See appendix for full statement (ccarnet.org).

Jewish and a *democratic* state, the CCAR seems to side-step the discourse which allows Israel the power to regulate Judaism to begin with; the same discourse which allows the state to refuse the civil and religious rights of women but not those of men.

One day later, on July 13, the CCAR wrote a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in response to the Knesset's passing of the "conversion bill".¹⁰⁵ The focus of this document is markedly different from that of the letter regarding Hoffman's arrest. Rather than targeting the Chief Rabbinate specifically, the CCAR addresses all of Israel, of which the Chief Rabbinate is only a part. At stake in this conversion bill is the right of the state to determine absolutely who is Jewish, informed by a single religious institution. With the conversion law Israel could once and for all settle the answer of who is a Jew in political, legal terms. In doing so the country threatens to homogenize and ultimately hijack Judaism from its reality as a diasporic phenomenon, delegitimizing the multiple ways of being Jewish in North America and around the world. This would remove the power of Jewish rabbinic council to determine who is or is not Jewish. For this reason the CCAR opposed the bill, stressing the severity of the strain this would cause to the relationship between diaspora Jews and the Jewish State. They call on the (secular) Israeli leadership to intervene: "Your active intervention at this time may be the only thing that prevents a painful rupture in Israel's relationship with over 85% of the world's Jews".¹⁰⁶ The statement is laden with the threat that American Jews will abandon Israel (spiritually, financially) if it delegitimizes the diversity of American Judaism, placing all conversion under the aegis of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate and altering the Law of Return that permits any Jews to "return" to Israel.

¹⁰⁵ This letter is no longer available on the CCAR website. See appendix for longer sections of this letter.

¹⁰⁶ It is not clear from where this percentage is derived.

This is therefore a “pivotal moment in the history of Israel–Diaspora relations”, according to the CCAR. Whereas the question of women’s rights prompted a cause for concern in this diaspora organization, the possibility of installing an Orthodox religious authority that might threaten the power of Conservative and Reform rabbis in the United States (still mostly men, but increasingly including women) prompted a swift reaction, a reaction that threatens to end the diaspora’s relationship with Israel. American Jewish reaction was strong enough to affect Israel’s political decisions. Conflict was temporarily averted when Nentanyahu issued a statement that the head of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Natan Sharansky, would lead a committee of Reform, Conservative and Orthodox rabbis to discuss the conversion law, and that the law would not be submitted before January 2011 (E. Bronner 2010). In January a moratorium on filing or continuing any court proceeding on the conversion question in the Knesset was extended for another six months (Jewish Federations of North America).

These controversies are powerful examples of the continued importance of diaspora to Judaism and Jewish identity. They also raise questions about the meaning of Jewish unity and difference. In this chapter I explore diaspora as a theoretical concept in Jewish Studies, argue that Jewish diaspora might be conceived as a rhizome rather than a dialectic, and use examples from Arab Jewish literature and film to demonstrate how conceiving Jewish diaspora as a rhizome is beneficial to enabling a more rich, meaningful, and ethical Jewish existence. I do this by linking Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin’s discussion of the Jewish diaspora as a model of cultural difference that does not seek territorial power to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s philosophy of nomadology. The literature and film of Arab

Jews serves as a case study for understanding the implications of this philosophy and its progressive potential.

I. Theorizing Jewish Diaspora

The Boyarins: Embodied Difference and the Power Over Others

Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin's article "Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," published in the journal *Critical Inquiry* in 1993, compares two discourses on group identity: one based on common genealogical origin, and one based on common geographical origin. In contemporary discourse, identity grounded in genealogy and the body is tarnished with the pejorative association of the term "race" and therefore with racism. Identity based on geography such as nationalism is generally seen in a more favourable light. The authors trace this pejorative idea of genealogy in Western discourse to the way the language of race continues to promote an essentialized and oppressive hierarchy of human genotypes, but also to the "cultural disdain for genealogy" in the foundational texts of Christianity, the Pauline Epistles.

Paul's religious vision sought to universalize the laws of the Torah, which marked Jewish particularism in the body (through circumcision) and in rituals that separated Jews from their neighbours (such as the laws of Kashrut¹⁰⁷). The Boyarins cite Galatians 3:26-29 as the moral center of Paul's work: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ [saying]: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is no male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.' If, however, you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (694-695). Paul

¹⁰⁷ Kashrut is the Hebrew term for the dietary laws of Judaism.

interprets the Galatians' proclamation at their baptism as symbolizing a new birth into a community defined by their common spirit rather than on their common physical descent from Abraham or embodied corporeal or ritual differences. "True Jewishness lay, according to Paul, precisely in renunciation of difference and entry into the one body of Christ. Anyone at all can be Jewish, and those who 'call themselves Jews' are not necessarily Jewish at all" (697). Jewishness according to genealogy was stigmatized and replaced as an allegory for a universal spirit, unhinged from the burden of the body.

The Boyarins see Paul's allegory of "the Jew" as a universal entity in Western discourses on generation, space and identity. Jean-Luc Nancy and Jean-François Lyotard both employ this allegory of the Jew in their critiques of the connection between philosophy and violence. If it is philosophy that constructs group differences and justifies violence against these groups, then philosophy should look instead to a universal humanism for a peaceful solution. In Lyotard, for example "the jews" becomes a generic for all minorities (700), with the challenge that we must all "learn how to imagine ourselves as blacks, as Arabs, as homeless, as Indians (701).¹⁰⁸ Despite the ethical intentions of these progressive French thinkers, the Boyarins argue that allegorizing the Jew as a universal contributes to the discourse that denies Jews the right to be different in Euro-Christian societies; the same discourse that in extreme cases has resulted in their persecution over the course of European Jewish history.

The authors also observe the influence of Paul's writing in Walter Benn Michael's critique of the modern concept of culture as a form of racism. This critique, however is based on "a radically individualist, voluntaristic, and attenuated notion of something that can only

¹⁰⁸ This is similar to the "we all have AIDS" campaign that universalized a stigmatized difference in order to raise awareness for a social issue. We do not all have AIDS and it is important to acknowledge the unique experiences and suffering embodied by people marked as different.

with difficulty be called ‘identity’” (702). Indeed if groups of individuals consciously elected to bond together and oppress others outside their group, then all culture might indeed be considered innately racist. Yet the Boyarins’ example of male Jewish circumcision demonstrates that culture can transcend the conscious individual’s practices and experiences. Circumcision, performed upon male infants, marks the individual’s entry into culture, an entry into Jewishness that transcends their individual agency. The biological status of Jewishness also transcends the concept of race as any man can adopt Jewish identity through circumcision and by performing embodied Jewish practices.¹⁰⁹ Paul’s mind-body dualism and sense of universalism in the spirit as a reversal of Jewish particularism thus continues to colour Western discourse on the notion of identity and difference.

Conceiving Jews from a particularist perspective is also fraught with difficulties. To demonstrate this the Boyarins raise a surprising analogy between the philosophy of Hitlerism and rabbinic Judaism as reactions to, respectively, German idealism¹¹⁰ and Pauline discourse, both of which stress the dualism and hierarchy of mind over body. Hitlerism stresses the particularity of the German people, while rabbinic Judaism stresses the particularity of the Jewish people, and both instances mark difference on the body rather than in the mind alone (for example the blond haired, blue-eyed Aryan as the ideal German, the circumcised Jew as the authentic Jew). The difference between Hitlerism and rabbinic Judaism, however, is the addition of power over others to the equation. The combination of German particularism and power resulted in the genocide of bodies that were different. The addition of power is the instrumental element: “If particularism plus power tends toward fascism, then universalism

¹⁰⁹ Women, however, offer a more complex example, as they are not legislated to enter into the covenant through circumcision and will be discussed further later in the chapter.

¹¹⁰ German Idealism was a complex philosophical and cultural movement often associated with, but not limited to, the works of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. For a full discussion see Ameriks (2000).

plus power produces imperialism and cultural annihilation as well as, all too often, actual genocide of those who refuse to conform” (Boyarin and Boyarin 707).

Contrary to the Western criticism of identity based on genealogy, Rabbinic Judaism is theorized as an alternative to both universalist notions of identity that erase the Jew through allegorization, and to particularist identities that combine with power to reject different bodies. The authors see Rabbinic Judaism as a model of group identity that is not based on the coercion or the erasure of others:

Our thesis is that Judaism and Christianity, as two different hermeneutic systems for reading the Bible, generate two diametrically opposed and mirror-image forms of racism – and also two dialectical possibilities of antiracism. The genius of Christianity is its concern for all the peoples of the world; the genius of Judaism is its ability to leave other people alone... Christian universalism, even at its most liberal and benevolent, has been a powerful force for coercive discourses of sameness, denying, as we have seen the rights of Jews, women, and others to retain their difference. (Boyarin and Boyarin 707)

The inability to accommodate difference is recognized as a fatal flaw. In this context,

[t]he Rabbi’s insistence on the centrality of peoplehood can thus be read as a necessary critique of Paul, for if the Pauline move had within it the possibility of breaking out of the tribal allegiances and commitments to one’s own family, as it were, it also contains the seeds of imperialist and colonizing missionary practice (708).

The idealized model of collective identity here is a particularist assertion of difference in bodies that renounce claims to coercive power over other bodies. The Boyarins compel us to rethink the relationship between genealogy and race, and between group identities and power. Theorizing diaspora here becomes an important tool for evaluating the relationship between the Jewish diaspora and the Jewish State.

Diaspora is proposed as a privileged theoretical and historical model for this conception of collective identity. It is offered as an alternative to models of national self-

determination, to colonialism and to imperialism. Zionism, on the other hand, conceived as Jewish state hegemony, is the antithesis of the rabbinic Jewish model. Whereas the diaspora model is based on (at best) sharing power with others, Zionism seeks to dominate others through “the fascism of state ethnicity”. Particularist practices such as Jewish self-help charities enable Jews to preserve their communities in the Diaspora, but the meaning of these social practices are transformed when a Jewish state provides welfare to only some segments of society, while it denies and oppresses others, as it has in the cases of Palestinians, women, Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jews, homosexuals and others in Israel who do not fit into the Zionist idealized national subject. In Israel, models of identity based on essentialist collusions of genealogy and geography have created oppressive discursive and material consequences for its citizens. The Boyarins want to challenge the claims to autochthony and indigenesness that the Jewish state model exalts through its attempts to validate the Judaization (and de-arabization) of Palestine. Rabbinic Jewish ethnocentricity, they argue, was only appropriate when Jews were an oppressed minority trying to survive as a distinct culture, not when the Jews are the dominant oppressors.

The Boyarins theorize diaspora as a synthesis between ethnic/religious specificity and human solidarity.

We want to propose a privileging of Diaspora, a dissociation of ethnicities and political hegemonies as the only social structure that even begins to make possible a maintenance of cultural identity in a world grown thoroughly and inextricable interdependent. Indeed, we would suggest that Diaspora, and not monotheism, may be the most important contribution that Judaism had to make to the world... Assimilating the lesson of Diaspora, namely that peoples and lands are not naturally and organically connected, could help prevent bloodshed... (723).

It might be argued that this is a utopian model, that it is impossible for a world to exist without some having power over others. Yet in the context of a world that ethnically cleanses and dispossesses peoples from their homes, that persecutes others for being different and denies others what should be considered basic human rights, a radical vision such as the Boyarins offer is not only welcome but necessary. Furthermore, the article offers a convincing analysis of the complexity of Jewish culture – both its gifts to the world, and its flaws. It is an urgent plea for a Jewishness outside the dominant realm of Zionist discourse; a challenge to the Israel-diaspora dynamic while asserting a commitment to Jewish communities and Judaism regardless of where they are geographically located.

The Israel-diaspora dialectic remains a fundamental and often deeply emotional and spiritual core for many Jewish identities. A thorough critique of the connection between Zionism and Judaism should acknowledge the phenomenological experience of collective identity. For this reason, the concept of diaspora is crucial to sustain, though it must be theorized and critiqued. The concept of diaspora invokes the religious core of Jewish particularism, not just as a historical people, but as a sacred connection between people and their corporeal practices. Diaspora, as the Boyarins convincingly argue, is what enables the Jewish community to cohere around a (shifting) ideal. Without the push for community, for peoplehood, or for other forms of group belonging, no group can even begin to exist. But diaspora also has the potential to keep the notions of collective Jewish identity in check, a constant reminder of what happens when people have the power to oppress others. This helps develop the ethical position, or the Golden Rule: “do not do unto others that which you would not wish upon yourself.”

The Canadian context further demonstrates that to do away with the notion of diaspora is to obscure the experiential knowledge of Canadian Jews. Unlike the work of Aviv

and Shneer, Jasmin Habib's book *Israel, Diaspora, and the Routes of National Belonging* (2004)¹¹¹ acknowledges that diasporic subjectivity continues to be an important cultural position for many Jews and deserves continued scholarly attention despite its ontopological links. For Habib, diaspora is less important theoretically than it is as an emotional relationship or process that people foster based in their idea of homeland. Yet this relational aspect is precisely why diaspora can contribute so much to the theoretical discussion of Jewish identity. Diaspora is more than actual relationships between Jews and the state of Israel. Wrapped into the concept of diaspora is the yearning for utopia derived from the conditions of exile. It is a human subjectivity that combines suffering with the capacity for empathy. In its theoretical form, diaspora offers the promise of a better framework for global human relations.

Problems in Applying Theory: Coercion of Female Jewish Bodies and The Creation of New Jewish Homes

Two problems arise in applying the Boyarins' model of diaspora to the corpus of Arab Jewish literature and film that is the focus of this dissertation. First is the paradox of the Boyarins' argument that maintenance of Jewish particularism involves coercion over others within the Jewish community, including women. Second is the challenge the creation of new Jewish homes and homelands pose to the privileging of diaspora as a theory.

Women's bodies have historically been interpreted as markers of the successful or unsuccessful integration of ethnic or religious groups into Western secular nationalist spheres. Obsession over the appearances and behaviours of women continue to be a preoccupation of

¹¹¹ Habib's book is an ethnography detailing research derived from participant observation on Israel Experience Tours and Israel-related events in Canadian cities. See Sasson (2006) for a review.

both men and women, despite the dramatic shifts that have occurred in what constitutes normative or appropriate Jewish femininity for different denominations of Jews. The “Corporeal Turn” (influenced by Daniel Boyarin, David Biale, Sander Gilman and others) introduced the theorization of the male Jewish body to Jewish studies but as feminist scholars argue, the female body remains relatively less theorized (Gillerman 2005). How do the embodied experiences of women in the Jewish community impact the theorization of diaspora and Jewish particularism which has been traditionally defined through the experiences of men (Hyman 2002)? The regulation of female bodies is a form of internal coercion that complicates the idealistic idea of diaspora as a model of group identity that does not seek power over others.

The internal power dynamic between Jews is observed in the cinematic treatment of female Jewish bodies in *Little Jerusalem*. The camera emphasizes their policing and entrapment but also gives space to the multiple ways in which Jewish women resist. Mathilde is depicted covering her hair and immersing herself in the mikvah, Jewish bodily practices carried through genealogy and across geography. She experiences herself as a faithful spouse who must use her own body to regulate her husband’s sexuality. Laura, like her sister Mathilde, governs her body according to the dictates of Jewish law by dressing modestly and embodying Jewish rituals practices, from reciting morning prayers to stamping her feet when Hamman’s name is called during the recitation of Megilat Esther. Unlike her sister, however, Laura resists the regulation of her body constructed in relation to the laws of her Jewish community. She even attempts to leave her bodily restrictions via suicide.

Laura’s desire for the non-Jewish Djamel becomes a threat to her family and therefore to her genealogy. In contrast, the question of with *whom* Ariel has his affair is

never asked in the film narrative. The betrayal of marital vows is the central issue of that conflict, not the nature of the body of Ariel's partner. To ask this question raises the issue of bodies and difference – did Ariel transgress with another Jewish body (what would the consequences of an affair be for a Jewish woman in this community?), or did he transgress with a non-Jewish body? No matter with whom Ariel might transgress, circumcision remains a guarantee of his Jewish identity. Sexual desire *for the non-Jewish other* is what Laura's family compels her to repress. Laura interprets this, however, into a repression of all desire. Kant's Enlightenment idealism carries with it the mind-body dualism based in Pauline Christianity. Why is Laura so attracted to this philosophy? Her repression of sexual desire can be read as a resistance to her grandmother's overbearing attempts to coerce her into an exclusive Jewish difference. Laura rejects the overlapping models of diasporic particularism embodied in her grandmother, sister and brother-in-law, and embedded in French-North African Jewish difference. In the end, Laura accepts her body and desires at the expense of her Jewish particularity. The result is that she is detached from her family, who moves to Israel, and from her lover Djamel. Without the collective identity informed by both her Jewish and Arab sense of diaspora, Laura remains an individual among others in an isolating French society.

What can diaspora contribute to Laura's identity? How can Jews retain a particularist identity based on the body without coercing other Jewish bodies to conform? Are the experiences of Jewish women collective enough to be considered a distinct diaspora from men? A deeper analysis of the gendered experiences of bodies within the particularist model of group identity is therefore important to consider.

Laura's decision to remain in France points to the second problem with privileging diaspora as a theory. Laura, Marduch in *Refuge*, Kattan in *Farewell, Babylon* and Yael in *Fresh Blood* each reterritorialize identity upon their own bodies and actively construct their own versions of home. The continued creation of new Jewish homes outside the Jewish State, and alternative homes within the Jewish State (such as Arab Jewish households), question whether diaspora is still a relevant concept for understanding modern Jewish identity at all.

Caryn Aviv and David Shneer take up this question in *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora* (2005). Aviv and Shneer argue that Jews have always had multiple homes and multiple diasporas. Israel, as the hierarchical site of Jewish belonging over other homes in the diaspora, only gained political significance at the end of World War II. Their book includes discussions of the current Moscow Jewish community, Diaspora tourism to Eastern Europe and Israel, Jewish Museums in Los Angeles, Jewish Queer ideas of Zion and of New York as the new Zion. Each discussion focuses on how Jews are rooting themselves in homes outside of Israel, and seeking new sources for the base of their Jewish identities, such as the Yiddish culture of Eastern Europe, the recovery of Sephardic and Mizrahi histories, or in the celebration of diasporic identities.

Aviv and Shneer note the influence of the Boyarins' work in deconstructing static notions of Jewish identity through postzionist political critique. They question, however, "whether the rise of diaspora as the concept that best articulates this kind of group and individual identity in the modern world has discounted or overshadowed the extent to which people – as individuals and as groups – are creating new forms of home in a more mobile world" (359). The authors find the shifting notions of 'home' more compelling than the idea

of movement of people between locations. While they agree that the valorization of diaspora has been useful in many ways, the celebration of diaspora has overshadowed the reterritorialization of diverse Jewish identities in a multiplicity of new forms of home (361). By not addressing the multiplicity of reterritorializations by Jews outside of Israel, the Boyarins indirectly reinforce the dominance of the nation state (if only as the opposing option to the diaspora model). Aviv and Shneer conclude their book with the epilogue entitled “The End of the Jews”. In it they write: “If the concept of ‘the Jewish people’ means that Jews are all one, that we speak with one voice, that we inherently share a common understanding and vision of the world, then our empathetic answer is ... yes, this is the end of ‘the Jewish people,’ and this development is good for the Jews” (175). Aviv and Shneer’s criticism of the diaspora model offers an important reminder of the agency involved in the construction of multiple models of Jewish identity, one that will be explored below in the discussion of the literature and film of Arab Jews.

While the consideration of coercion within the Jewish diaspora and the construction of new concepts of Jewish homes and homelands are important checks to the model, diaspora theory remains an effective vehicle for cultural critique. I argue that diaspora has not worn out its possibilities as a theoretical concept. On the contrary, diaspora can be utilized as a tool for self-critique of transnational communities. The Boyarins offer diaspora as a model for Jewish identity, based on the rabbinic model that preserves embodied Jewish particularity in the face of an oppressive majority culture. Yet this utopian model is complicated by the complications of power both within the Jewish community (the policing of women’s bodies), and toward others when translated into an identity based on geography (the oppression of Palestinians). It is further complicated by the fact that Jews can have multiple homelands beyond the Israel-diaspora dialectic. For these reasons the Jewish diaspora might be better

understood as a rhizome rather than as one pole of a dialectic. In order to arrive at a model of diaspora that is effective for thinking critically about Jewish identities beyond the paradigm of the modern nation I will begin with a discussion of the concept of diaspora and “doubleness”.

The Concept of Diaspora and Doubleness

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* (1994) define ‘concept’ as “the inseparability of a finite number of heterogeneous components traversed by a point of absolute survey at infinite speed” (21).¹¹² This definition of the concept brings to mind the image of dust particles illuminated in a ray of light. On a microscopic level, dust particles are heterogeneous, but caught together in the survey of the speed of light they cohere around an idea of “dust”. Taken to an absolute survey at infinite speed this instance of coherence can mutate – different particles caught at a different angles. In this moment of coherence and illumination, however, the concept of dust is a solution to an ontological problem: what does space consist of? The concept is the philosopher’s creation; an act of thought which articulates a new event (entity, idea) that then can be applied to a section of chaos (the infinity of possible realities) in order to give it consistency (some sense of understanding) without losing the infinity of potential thoughts (ibid. 43). Rather than seeing its components as related to each other through a filter of comprehension or extension, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the components of a concept are an inseparable neighbourhood of adjacent points in a field with fluid boundaries that allows thought to continue its infinite movement.

¹¹² Deleuze and Guattari argue in this work that philosophy is distinguished from other types of creation (science and arts) because it creates concepts, as opposed to scientific laws created by science, or affects and percepts created by art. The concept, according to the authors, is unique because of its chaotic nature, the infinite speed of its components.

A philosophical concept is not an absolute, but an event that facilitates the thinking-through of a problem, with allowance for the chaotic nature of thoughts that are constantly moving and adjusting their speeds. Territory, building from this definition of the concept, is an attempted stabilization of chaos, a theoretical stopping point in time and space that draws boundaries around an entity, defending it from being thought differently.

Nations are conceptual territories in this sense. In 1983 Benedict Anderson defined the nation as an imagined political community, one that imagines itself to be both inherently limited and sovereign (2006: 5-6). The boundaries of the nation are fixed, and citizens inside these borders imagined to be naturally related to the territory in which they were born. Anderson argues that modern nations could only arise historically when three cultural concepts lost their grips on the minds of people: the ontological verity of sacred texts, the dynastic order of power hierarchy with a divinely linked ruler, and a comprehension of time in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable. Conceived in this way, diaspora exists in a dialectic with the concept of the nation because it assumes the excess of its borders – a dispersion or movement between multiple territories. Deleuze and Guattari insist that “[w]e need to see how every one, at every age, in the smallest things as in the greatest challenges, seeks a territory, tolerates or carries out deterritorializations, and is reterritorialized on almost anything – memory, fetish, or dream” (67-68). This process of territorialization-deterritorialization-reterritorialization¹¹³ (T-D-R) occurs in territories of thought as they do in social fields. A twig is a deterritorialized branch, as a Canadian-born child who relocates with their family to France becomes a French citizen, as an understanding of a problem can be replaced by a new understanding. Territory in each case is

¹¹³ Deleuze and Guattari also call this process “asignifying rupture” - a characteristic of the rhizome which refuses signification.

never permanent, but rather becomes a continuous process of positioning in new neighbourhoods. Applied to the study of nationalism, Deleuze and Guattari's vision of philosophy contributes to the conception of the constructedness of nations; that the flow of people from one territory to another is infinite. Diasporic individuals move along their own path of creating territory, leaving territory and reestablishing territory, supporting the idea that people never really have a definitive, permanent place to which they can claim an unproblematic belonging.

The concept of diaspora can help elaborate a similar understanding of T-D-R. Rather than territorializing a concrete definition of diaspora, James Clifford attempts to specify the borders of its discursive field by examining what it defines itself against, emphasizing that diaspora is a dynamic concept, involving overlapping circles of society, territory, politics, culture and power. In this way, Clifford distinguishes himself from socio-historical theorists of diaspora such as William Safran and Kim D. Butler,¹¹⁴ who attempt to fix a definition of diaspora based on observable characteristics. The problem with solidifying diaspora as a social process with specific characteristics is that it pins down diaspora as a closed definition rather than an open concept (in Deleuzian terms). A definition sets limits on an entity that is constantly changing. A concept of diaspora, left flexible to include chaotic tangents that may redefine the term at the instant it is defined, has potential to refuse any single signification, increasing its imaginative and theoretical potential.

Clifford's article reads the conceptual and discursive borders of diaspora by comparing the work of the Boyarins with that of Paul Gilroy, writing respectively on the Jewish and the black diasporas. Clifford writes:

¹¹⁴ Safran (2003) and Butler (2001) use typologies to define diaspora.

The history of Jewish diaspora communities shows selective accommodation with the political, cultural, commercial, and everyday life forms of 'host' societies. And the black diaspora culture currently being articulated in postcolonial Britain is concerned to struggle for different ways to be 'British' – ways to stay and be different, to be British *and something else* complexly related to Africa and the Americas, to shared histories of enslavement, racism, subordination, cultural survival, hybridization, resistance, and political rebellion. Thus the term *diaspora* is a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement. (308, author's emphasis)

Diasporic consciousness is concerned with negotiating one's belonging in a local space, but a negotiation with a perpetual reminder of the transnational attachment. To be British and something else is part of the postcolonial and postmodern experiences of doubleness and is widely discussed in literary criticism. As Linda Hutcheon (1989) argues:

[D]oubleness is what characterizes not just the complicitious critique of the post-modern, but, by definition, the twofold vision of the post-colonial – not just because of the obvious dual history (Slemon, "Magic" 15) but because a sense of duality was the mark of the colonial as well. Doubleness and difference are established by colonialism by its paradoxical move to enforce cultural sameness (JanMohaemed 62) while, at the same time, producing differentiations and discriminations (Bhabha "Signs" 153)... (Hutcheon 162).

Doubleness is also a theme in the poststructuralism of Jacques Derrida (1973). Derrida popularized the concept of "différance," a concept which emphasizes that words both *differ* from other words to produce meaning, and *defer* temporally to elude meaning. As a philosophical project of critical theory, doubleness helps destabilize any territory of identity, any designation of singular meaning. This is a crucial aspect of criticism. It is also an inevitable part of a diasporic existence.

Paul Gilroy (1993), following the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, has been instrumental in articulating the idea of double consciousness that derives from striving to be both European

and black (Gilroy 1). Doubleness/Double consciousness problematizes notions of belonging by always including the racializing gaze in one's awareness of oneself. Gilroy writes:

Double consciousness was initially used to convey the special difficulties arising from black internalisation of an American identity: "One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." However, I want to suggest that Du Bois produced this concept at the junction point of his philosophical and psychological interests not just to express the distinctive standpoint of black Americans but also to illuminate the experiences of post-slave populations in general. (126).

Reading this contribution from black diaspora theorists to diasporic consciousness, doubleness can be interpreted as the recognition of one's own racialized, stigmatized self with the simultaneous sense of belonging in the very national culture that has done the stigmatizing. It is a critique of both Euro-centrism and black identity essentialism. To be double, both European and black, to integrate into a European environment today, *feeling* the history of black oppression creates a dialectical tension in the diasporic person. One can choose to pursue a stable synthesis but the reminder of doubleness ensures that a diasporic person can never fully integrate into the hostland and can never completely return to the homeland.

Doubleness has significant implications for cultural critique. Black diaspora theorists here offer an important counterpoint to studies of the Jewish diaspora. While the Jewish diaspora is often perceived as the paradigm for the model (Safran 2006), discussions of the black diaspora, as evident in Clifford's comparative article, decentre this supremacy of the Jewish conceptual model. The comparison of the African slave trade to the Jewish exile demonstrates that oppression is not exclusive to a single group of people. This comparison should not negate the unique frame of suffering experienced by marginalized groups in

different historical and geopolitical circumstances, but it should demonstrate that no single group holds supremacy on suffering. Briemberg and Campbell (2002) ask:

So why, then, is anti-Jewish bigotry (anti-Semitism) the only concern of Irwin Cotler, Jason Kenney and other members of parliament who in 2009 formed the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism (CPCCA)? No coalition of parliamentarians is pursuing remedies for any other group that is a target of bigotry in Canada today.

The authors question why the Canadian government is privileging antisemitism to the exclusion of all other forms of oppression; especially considering the high degree of socio-economic integration of Canadian Jews in Canadian society and Jewish “whiteness”¹¹⁵. How can Jewish and black diasporic experiences mutually inform each other to create better conditions for minority groups in Canada today?¹¹⁶ What lessons do they hold for diasporic and marginalized communities in both homelands and hostlands across the world?

Doubleness deconstructs the very notion of diaspora as a stable concept. On one hand, it can occur within a diaspora as Gilroy demonstrates in his discussion of the black diaspora. On the other hand, the concept of diaspora can itself be doubled, creating the effect of a *mise-en-abyme*, an infinite reproduction. Double-Diaspora captures the sense of being caught between sets of discrepancies between homeland and hostland that contradict each other; a double-diasporic person is caught between two contradictory relationships of belonging. Double-diasporic peoples have been deterritorialized twice, literally or imaginatively, yet can never really reterritorialize completely because of the tension of having been displaced from two homelands and living in a third. An Iraqi Jew living in Canada might harbour attachments to their place of birth (Iraq) through nostalgia, their

¹¹⁵ See Chapter Two of this dissertation for a discussion of Jewish “whiteness”.

¹¹⁶ For indigenous communities in Canada as well, for whom the term “Holocaust” and “genocide” have also been used with controversy.

imagined religious homeland (Israel) through cultural or religious education, while feeling affiliation with their chosen nation of Canada in their everyday life as a citizen. These three affiliations unsettle the possibility of belonging to any one homeland to the exclusion of others. It is this tension that Clifford attempts to preserve in his refusal to narrow down a precise definition of diaspora. Doubling the experience of diaspora can trap a person in the abyss that only repeats their isolation from either pole; yet, it can also make apparent the artificiality of their entrapment. Diaspora is revealed to encompass a neighbourhood of possibilities, which preserves the chaotic character of the concept, emphasizing the political struggle at the core of the existence of beings that transgress national and territorial boundaries.

The creation of the state of Israel contributed to the development of Mizrahi and Arab Jews as double-diasporas. While the establishment of the state was founded on the idea of “ending a diaspora” and on a desire to triumph over the conception of Jewish identity offered by Rabbinic Judaism, it actually succeeded in creating new diasporas of Arab (and other ethnic) Jews and Palestinians by detaching them from their other homelands in the Arab world (Shohat 1999). Despite physically “returning” to the imagined homeland of the Jewish people, Arab Jews found themselves outsiders in the modern Jewish nation-state, forcing, as Shohat argues, a split between essentialized Arab and Jewish identities:

On the one hand, the Israeli establishment regards Arab Jews as irremediably Arab – indeed, that Iraqi Jews were allegedly used to determine a certain toxin’s effect on Arabs suggests that for genetic/biological purposes, at least, Iraqi Jews *are* Arabs. On the other hand, official Israeli/Zionist policy urges Arab Jews (or, more generally, Oriental Jews, also known as Sephardim or Mizrahim) to see their only *real* identity as Jewish. (1999: 5)

This rift in identity – *really* you are Jewish, but still you *are* Arab – creates a sense of doubleness that problematizes belonging to the Israeli nation founded upon the negation of the Orient in particular, and diaspora in general. Mizrahim and Arab Jews in Israel, though no longer physically displaced from the imagined homeland, have been displaced as marginal citizens of the modern Jewish state and are forced to live double lives as members of the Jewish nation while simultaneously marginal citizens of the same population. Many first-generation Arab Jews (though certainly not all) harbour a relationship with their place of birth, through language, culture, tourism or nostalgia, creating a second layer of being diasporic.

The concept of a double-diaspora draws attention to the difficult position of Arab Jews vis-à-vis their belonging to any one singular nation. As a critical concept, double-diaspora can illuminate the impossible resolution of settling in a third home at the intersection of displacement from two homelands that negate each other. Like the term Arab Jew, discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, double-diaspora pinpoints a contradiction in normative conceptions of identity and disrupts them, in order to clear space for new conceptions and perceptions of identity that acknowledge the racism and discrimination experienced by Palestinians and Jewish ethnic groups as a result of the imagining of the homogenous Jewish nation.

II. Double-Diaspora in the Literature and Film of Arab Jews

Naim Kattan, Sami Michael, Karin Albou and b.h. Yael each articulate elements of a double-diasporic consciousness. The identities of their Jewish protagonists are never only characterized by an Israel-diaspora relationship but all are also crossed with a second

diasporic relationship of Arab homeland-new hostland. Jewishness in each work can be a haunting and restrictive presence tying each character to an idea of the Jewish people that transcends their present locations in different hostlands. Yet Arabness interrupts this first diasporic relationship, cutting a second dialectic into the first. What makes the Arab Jewish sense of double-diaspora unique is the context of the enemy dynamic between Arabs and Jews discussed in Chapter Two whereby Arab Jews are both “us” and “them” in the Zionist framework. But, like the relationship between Jewish and black diasporas, the Arab and Jewish diasporas should inform and unsettle each other rather than either excluding the other.

Double-diaspora in the literature and film of Arab Jews is analyzed below in relation to two humanistic themes. The first theme is the interconnection of loneliness and desire. The second theme is the movement through territories. Double-diaspora produces for the Arab Jewish characters in Michael, Albou, Kattan and Yael’s work not only sensations of loneliness but also the desire for something other, or the desire to become something other. These sensations enable the characters to move between territories both material and conceptual. The ability and willingness to move between territories contains the seeds of the self-critique necessarily to interrogate understandings of Israel and the diaspora, and how these understandings construct Jewish identity.

Loneliness and Desire

Loneliness as a sensation emerges strongly in Michael’s *Refuge*. When war breaks out between Jews and Arabs, every character is compelled to choose their own loyalties. But loyalty to abstract ideas of community such as nation or ethnicity confound the actual relationships that individuals have with their neighbours, and even within their own families. This conflict arises when the police appear outside Shula’s house while her Communist

friends are gathered inside to discuss what to do with Fatkhi. The group of Communists assumes that Tuvia, the elderly Jewish neighbour, called the police to tattle on Shula for housing an Arab Communist, but they discover instead that Tuvia forgot to tape his window and the light drew the attention of the police during a blackout. Shula laments that they have become so suspicious of each other, and the loneliness of their world. Shula tells Fuad:

I know I didn't suffer like your refugees or like Marduch, but that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the essence of loneliness, Fuad. We believe in the masses, but we're scared to death of the individual. The masses, class, nation – those are all abstractions, words. Words are all we believe in. We don't believe in people, we don't trust them. (Michael 320-321)

Shula points to an existential loneliness that persists beyond the alienation of the modern individual, and even beyond the attempts of collectives or imagined communities to ease this sensation by appealing to a broader human spirit of nationhood or revolution. Her narrative is inflected by the loneliness and anxiety she suffers with her husband gone off to war. Shula's expression of loneliness here is different than the one she finds in her memories of Marduch.

The young Marduch is committed to the communist cause and adamant about distancing himself from Zionism in Iraq. Marduch is deterritorialized by force to Israel, yet as a double-diasporic person, and particularly because of his Arabness, it is impossible for Marduch to completely reterritorialize. Despite "returning" to the imagined Jewish homeland Marduch is not home, but continues to exist in a Jewish diaspora and through his attachment to Arabic language and culture as an exile, in an Arab diaspora. Marduch tells his wife Shula:

I was dumped, by surprise, against my will, into this country. I don't know if you can understand this, Shula. The good and bad in your life, the sum total of your existence so far, all took place here. More than anything I feel a person is a social creature. He may roam in search of pasture, livelihood, better conditions, but he does whatever he can to move within a human

framework – his clan, group, family, friends. I believe in peoples more than in nations.

Iraq and Israel as nations have both let Marduch down as an individual. The title of the book *Refuge* captures this problem. Marduch can never feel at home because he has been uprooted from his country of birth, and even his wife in his hostland looks upon him as an immigrant, of inferior status to her former lover, a sabra and an “authentic” member of the nation. The term ‘refuge’, however, connotes instability, for refuge is a temporary offering in contrast to a permanent home. Israel becomes a refuge for Marduch, but the discrepancy between the individual and the impossibility of being in Israel as a stable home leads Marduch to mistrust nations, and carves out a new territory among individuals, and alternative forms of communities.

Fatkhi also finds refuge a temporary state. For the duration of the war, he is safe from the Israeli authorities in the home of Shula. While he is physically safe he is not protected from his feelings of loneliness and alienation, as a person in between the territories of identities. His stay at Shula’s is temporary, subject to the end of the war and the return of her husband. But his position in between the desire to be both Israeli and Palestinian, and the rejection he feels by both communities, fuels his desire to write; no doubt poetry is an outlet for his suffering. In the absence of Marduch, and with Shula’s ability to settle back into the choice of Jewish nationalism, Fatkhi’s struggle remains the most pressing at the conclusion of the novel. His sense of doubleness cannot be resolved while living in Israel. Despite his decision to go to the front, neither can Marduch’s.

In *Little Jerusalem*, Laura also emanates a strong sense of loneliness despite being surrounded by close family and a Jewish community. Laura clings philosophically to Frenchness, but carries a Jewish diasporic consciousness in the discipline of her body

following the laws of the Torah. The stigma of her Arabness haunts her, and she tries to quell it. This manifests in her relationships with her mother and with Djamel. In public, Laura's Arabness is absent. It is sustained in the relationships between North African Jewish women sharing secrets of spells and talismans. It is also evident in family conversations, where Ariel cannot understand the arguments in Arabic between his wife and her mother. Language marks the women as triply different – sexually, religiously, and ethnically. The Arab diasporic consciousness is something that Laura shares with Djamel. Both characters feel burdened by the culture of their parents that threatens their desire to integrate into French whiteness.

Loneliness is depicted visually. The opening scene, discussed in more detail in Chapter One, employs an imaginative geography through camera work that signifies Laura's emotional distance and difference from her deceptively close-knit family and community. Her embodied isolation is emphasized further by the comment her professor notes on her assignment: "You don't think, you shiver." Laura's mom is confused, why would he write that? The professor astutely observes that Laura thinks with her whole body. Her idealism is enclosed in a frigid, detached body. She increasingly isolates herself by refusing to give in to her emotion. She is always an outsider, in her family and in her classroom. She appears to have no friends but her sister. To work through her philosophical thinking Laura does appear to shiver, to quake with a desire, to crave movement. Her loneliness carries a desire to merge with and become the other, which finally overcomes her and floods out in her intimate scenes with Djamel.

Over the course of the film, Laura increasingly accepts her shivering desire. In one scene, Laura lies in bed and caresses herself. She fingers a necklace given to her by Djamel,

the same necklace her brother-in-law threw down the garbage chute. In a fit of passion she rips the necklace and the beads fall to the floor. Feeling under the bed for the fallen beads she finds a hamza. In the following scene she clasps the hamza as a hand reaches to touch her head. “You were waiting for me?” Djamel asks. His dark hands cover hers and find the hamza, rip it away. Laura looks at him in horror: he has discarded the talisman. Djamel kisses her. Laura says: “I feel like I’m vanishing. Am I moving towards good or towards evil?” The camera takes in fragments of his exposed skin against hers. Laura continues: “Have you crossed to the other side of death?” “Yes,” Djamel replies. Laura wonders: “What’s it like on the other side?” Desire both enhances Laura’s loneliness and her curiosity for the other.

While the film does not employ experimental forms it can be understood as Laura Marks’ (2000) notion of intercultural cinema: “Intercultural cinema by definition operates at the intersections of two or more cultural regimes of knowledge. These films and videos must deal with the issue of where meaningful knowledge is located, in the awareness that it is between cultures and so can never be fully verified in the terms of one regime or the other” (24). It is on the point of desire where this knowledge is shared between cultures. Laura’s naked limbs entangle with Djamel’s; geography becomes transcontinental, expanding across the forbidden encounter of the two lovers’ bodies. Loneliness gives ways to a desire to become the other and to learn about other ways of being in order to transform one’s self. The regime of Laura’s Jewish identity, dictated by her family and herself, eventually intersects with the regime of Djamel’s Arab Muslim family and also that of the French nation which has not granted him citizenship. After these intercultural encounters Laura’s Jewishness is no

longer protected in its exclusive regime, she must renegotiate her circumstances with her newfound knowledge, by creating for herself a new territory and home.

Movement through Territories

Kattan, in his desire to carve a territory as a writer, is stunted by personal, social, and national constraints. Iraqi nationalism eventually excluded Jews from the image of the nation, and limited their full participation as citizens. To reconcile the distance between these territories – as a writer seeking inclusion and as a citizen being excluded – Kattan must relocate his identity from “Jew” or “Iraqi”, to a place between the boundaries of fixed territories. To fulfil his dream of becoming a writer, Kattan physically deterritorializes from Iraq and reterritorializes to France, and then carries out this process again and reterritorializes in Canada. As a writer and as a character, Kattan is constantly moving between sections of thought and sections of land, territories on physical and metaphysical terrains. This process of movement between stable territories draws attention to the boundaries of “stable” fields; it is the spaces between territories that preserve the infinite play of chaotic identities. Between the borders of Iraq, Israel, France and Canada, Kattan as a double-diasporic person and a writer, exists within and can reproduce/represent in his creative text a model of identity as a concept that is not fixed to one territory that alienates others from outside.

Like Laura, Kattan also desires to become the other. His burgeoning adolescent desire leads him to the Maydane in search of a sexual experience. In order to blend into this liminal space Kattan writes:

We were all Jewish. But as soon as we crossed the threshold of the house, we changed our identities. In this exotic land, the Jewish accent would seem out of place. Speaking an adopted language, we

would carry on only simple business negotiations and any embarrassment would be superfluous. With our new faces, we would become unknown. (Kattan 153-154)

In the Maydane, Kattan and his Jewish friends disguised themselves by speaking in a Muslim accent. In close quarters Kattan can no longer hide under his adopted Muslim mask. Unable to perform with the sex worker Samirah he asks:

“Are you from Baghdad?” I asked with the Jewish accent. “I come from Karbala. My father is a mullah,” she said in the purest Muslim accent. We both burst out laughing. The joke was the first real contact between us. We were accomplices, but too late. (Kattan 158)

When Kattan is actually confronted with the other he finds he can no longer perform the imagined Muslim identity. Unlike Laura, he is unable to merge with the other.

His inability to merge with the fantasy of the other occurs again when he realizes the limits of his imagined European ideal. The protagonist’s dream of emigrating to France involves relocating to a new home inspired by reading the literature of other national communities – American, French, Lebanese. But the young man’s obsession with France is conflicted by his actual encounters with Europeans. Kattan meets a “real Frenchman,” in the form of a delegate of the French Ministry of Education who administers Kattan’s elementary-certificate examination. When asked to translate a poem by Baudelaire: “I could not do it. Patiently my examiner explained the meaning of the word ‘ostensoir’ (monstrance). I discovered through his words, that France concealed a thousand concrete details, that she had an everyday life and a religious tradition that escaped me completely, that no book had revealed to me yet” (Kattan 125). Though Kattan was educated at the French Alliance Israélite school his understanding of Frenchness is limited and idealistic. He is surprised to learn that his French teacher, “quite unembarrassed,” had never heard of Khalil Gibran:

Was it possible for a cultivated European not to know the name of such a great writer?

For us, Romain Rolland and Gibran, so far apart, so different, expressed the same revolt, muffled by a diffuse spirituality, a vague mysticism. Their cries and their appeals were transformed into a subtle evasion that allowed us to escape from a world that struck us as unreal and abstract, because it was so narrow. We did not take refuge in dreams but transplanted ourselves outside our stifling existence into the enchanted mountains and villages of Lebanon, the forests of Europe and the women of the West. They walked before us, far more real than the veiled shadows who populated the streets of our city (Kattan 83).

The protagonist is suddenly confronted with an opposing cultural narrowness, a limit to his ideal of crossing over into Europeaness before he even leaves the soil of his homeland. The French teacher's ignorance of Khalil Gibran is significant on another level. The Lebanese-American writer is a model diasporic figure that Kattan himself and the protagonist of his memoirs will emulate. Kattan, like Gibran, will pose a challenge to both home and host societies, adopting a minority position in French Canada, while remaining connected to the Arab diasporic part of his identity. Gibran as a diasporic figure provokes the narrowness of both the French instructor's and the young protagonist's narrow worldviews, offering a model of a critique of national identity to both.

As a young writer, Kattan works to carve out territory, for himself as an individual, as a citizen of a nation and as a member of a religious community. He fetishizes the mountains and villages of Lebanon, the forests of Europe, and the women of the West. In those imaginary spaces he sees a shared struggle for a way out of the turmoil of adolescence, and the narrowness of his culture and identity. The author poetically communicates his sexual frustration in the language of transnational liberation. "Veiled shadows" represent the women he is forbidden to embrace, but also represents full adulthood and full Iraqiness. Kattan willfully carves the boundaries of his identity, creating a territory for himself. He must disrupt the 'natural' link between Iraqi and Muslim cultures, and bridge the unnatural

border between Iraqi and French nationalism, to ensure his participation. In this way, he is similar to Laura and Marduch who each find “natural” relations, not necessarily with other Jews, but with others who speak the same Arabic language, or who derive from a similar North African context.

Marduch’s movement through territories offers an interesting comparison with the characters of Kattan and Laura. He resides in Israel (no longer diasporic, according to Zionist logic), but is conflicted and unsettled within the Jewish homeland. Marduch is conscious of the racializing gaze of the Ashkenazi Israelis, while simultaneously trying to construct a life in Israel. Fatkhi, the Arab (Muslim)-Israeli shares with Marduch the sense of doubleness within an Israeli society that only conditionally accepts them. The stories of both these characters are mediated through the eyes of Shula, the sabra reinforcing the presence of the Israeli colonial gaze that objectifies and subjugates Arabness and triggers double consciousness.

Not a single character in *Refuge* has a fixed identity or ownership of an exclusive territory; each is torn between multiple affiliations and feelings of alienation from groups with which they claim to identify. Loneliness leads to the desire to produce new territories and the characters do this through their participation in the Communist party. Fatkhi, Fuad and Marduch, Palestinians and Arab Jews who have been deterritorialized from their homes, are drawn together in their hostland by their love of Arabic literature. When they meet to discuss in Arabic they create a new territory that transgresses the hegemony of a Nation-State that seeks to exclude Arabness. Love of literature is also something Marduch shares with his father-in-law Zalman, despite their linguistic differences:

The old man wanted very much to see his son-in-law. At the age of seventy-one, Zalman had remembered that he was a Jew, and Judaism meant Yiddish and the poets and writers who had used

Yiddish for their works. By now all of them were gone, murdered or forgotten. In Zalman's mind, the intervening years had become blurred and confused. The poets and writers were still young, it seemed to him, brimming with creativity; but no one bothered to listen. Only Marduch, who came from Iraq, Marduch whose eyes were like a gypsy's and whose skin was like an Arab's, showed an interest in Yiddish literature.

Zalman's words emphasize that Jewishness is created in the movement between territories. Yiddish, like Marduch's native Arabic, is a diasporic language that the Israeli state sought to negate in its new citizens upon the creation of the new Jewish state. Despite their ethnic, religious or national differences, poetry and literature serve as the common ground for the affiliation between these men.

Refuge demonstrates that people and language are both involved in the creation of territory. Identities are in constant threat of being destabilized because people and language are subject to change. But identities are likewise always on the verge of constructing and restructuring territory on a chaotic terrain. Conceptualizing the movement of identity in this way, particularly in literary forms, enables a liberating means of imagining relationships between individuals, territories and nations that has been much lauded by postcolonial and poststructuralist theorists. A double-diasporic person conceptually demonstrates the construction of territories and the necessity of deterritorialization and reterritorialization as continuous processes in the movement of people, construction of identities and the infinite speed of thought. If diaspora attempts to stabilize momentarily, drawing boundaries around itself as a single relationship between two entities, distinguishing them from other relations, double-diaspora triggers a disruption, a disruption that reminds us of the infinite speed of thought, or the infinite reproduction created by two mirrors reflecting back at each other.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that it is the interaction between psychosocial types¹¹⁷, viewed from an absolute survey, which are crucial to the creation of philosophical concepts:

What matters is not, as in bad novels, the opinions held by characters in accordance with their social type and characteristics but rather the relations of counterpoint into which they enter and the compounds of sensations that these characters either themselves experience or make felt in their becomings and visions. Counterpoint serves not to report real or fictional conversations but to bring out the madness of all conversation and of all dialogue, even interior dialogue. (188)

Deleuze and Guattari want to eliminate the stability of borders through elaboration of the concept as a neighbourhood. Counterpoint in novels, the exchange of dialogue, is taken to be a representation of the infinity of thought, the interaction of neighbourhoods that permit the constant comings and goings of the neighbourhood's inhabitants/components. It is the madness of conversation, the chaos of contact between possibilities, that Deleuze and Guattari insist the concept must preserve.

Dialogue, as the conversation between characters as representatives of psychosocial types on one level, and as dialogue between texts and authors on a second level, and between texts and audiences on a third level, is chaotic and never terminal.¹¹⁸ As representatives of abstract communities, the psychosocial types Fuad and Tuvia play out the stereotypical dialogue between "Arabs" and "Jews", blaming each other for the conflict, depicting

¹¹⁷ Psychosocial types, such as the exile or the stranger, describe categories of identity attached to groups of individuals in society. While Deleuze and Guattari (68) argue that only 'conceptual personae' as real types can disentangle the knots of these three movements through territory, I suggest that a look into the psychosocial types utilized in literature offers a useful analogy that can facilitate an analysis of these concepts on a philosophical level. Kattan and Michael both employ the writer as a psychosocial type in their works as a territory of identity. To become a writer, a citizen of this particular territory, characters must deterritorialize from the boundaries of other territories of identity and reterritorialize on new terrain. (Schwartz 96).

¹¹⁸ This is where Deleuze and Guattari depart from Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic imagination, which seems to posit characters as stable rather than chaotic discourse.

precisely Shula's point. The fight is resolved when the shackles of bounded identities are shrugged off:

'How did we come to this, Fuad? This isn't what we hoped and dreamed for. I weep for Shula's officer, and the poet doesn't even try for her sake to conceal his joy. How did we come to this?'

'Ask your people, not me,' Fuad mumbled.

'I'm asking you. We're guilty, both of us. Young men are slaughtering each other in the desert – and we're to blame, we parents are guilty. Me and you, both. There's a terrible abyss dividing us.'

'We'll cross it,' Fuad vowed to him. (Michael 323)

This argument depicts the rising madness of counterpoint. It is not the opinions of the characters, or the author but the dynamic of an infinite speed of dialogue that never stabilizes. From this madness emerges the optimism of surpassing boundaries that have stunted previous dialogue. Rising tempers, continuous arguments and constant interactions are able to destabilize the stalemate of Arab and Jew and create a sensation of positive possibilities.

Problems with the Concept Double-Diaspora

Given the chaos of the concept, is double-diaspora indeed the best term to capture the critical potential of the term Arab Jew? Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of the concept as a means of finding consistencies in chaos without inhibiting the infinite speed of thought enables a novel means of thinking through the relationship between nations and territories. The authors posit a continuous process of T-D-R through which thought, like the placement of people, is never permanent. Building from this theory, double-diaspora as a concept calls attention to the contradictions in maintaining relationships with two territories as homelands while living in a third location. It problematizes the idea of nations as stable territories and nationalism as a bounded identification with one state. It furthermore challenges the

definition of religion by reminding us that what today is contained within this categorical label, is and will continue to be a temporary stabilization of a frenetic buzz of social and philosophical phenomena.

Double-diaspora provokes a reinterpretation of Jews as a single homogenous group. *Farewell, Babylon, Little Jerusalem* and *Refuge* each illuminate this through the experiences of Arab Jewish characters. The lives of Kattan, Laura and Marduch demonstrate the tension of being dispersed from two homelands, and the impossibility of ever resolving the conflict between the two relationships without breaking down the “stable” boundaries of territory in land, identity and thought. In Kattan’s and Michael’s works the writer is proffered as a character that navigates across chaos without permanently settling in any territory. In Albou’s work it is the philosopher that does this. Only in loneliness does the character realize the constructedness of the territories of identity that prohibit the possibility of a permanent refuge in an imagined homeland. The acknowledgement of this loneliness, of one’s unsettledness in the chaos of all possibilities and of ideas in the madness of conversation is necessary to enable thinking beyond of the confinement of exclusionary territories such as ‘Arab’ versus ‘Jew’.

Over the course of this research, however, I realized that doubleness was only one of multiple beginnings in the search for a concept that might inspire critical thinking about the relationship between Zionism and Jewish identity. *Double-diaspora* destabilizes the concept of a single Jewish diaspora, reterritorializes the idea, but needs to be carried further into the infinite speed of thought. Deleuze and Guattari allow for an expanded idea of the concept in the idea of multiplicities. While doubleness centres on two concrete entities interacting, multiplicities take doubleness into infinity. Nomadism, with its non-specific points of movement, might serve to be a more powerful term than double-diaspora.

I will attempt to further problematize the notion of double-diaspora by returning to the work of Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, read together with the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari expand nomadism as a historical phenomenon by theorizing it on a philosophical plane. Diaspora on this level can be perceived not as doubleness or dialectic between homeland and hostland but rather as a multiplicity. The infinite process of T-D-R allows diaspora, as it allows all philosophical concepts, to be infinitely rethought, their capacity for infinite speed unhindered. Doubleness provides entry into an epistemology of nomadism.

Interestingly, for Deleuze and Guattari nomadism is about pure geography outside the semiotic coding of signification,¹¹⁹ while for the Boyarins nomadism is about maintaining a code regardless of the physical territory. For Deleuze and Guattari territory organizes different milieus into an assemblage of rites and rituals (religion) constituted by the forces of the earth (1987: 321). The interior forces of the earth here intertwine with the exterior forces of chaos, combining energies and forming an “intense centre”. This is the analogy of the homeland – a territory where earth and chaos combine. “So we must once again acknowledge that religion, which is common to human beings and animals, occupies territory only because it depends on the raw aesthetic and territorializing factor as its necessary condition” (ibid). Religion occupies geographical space, requires it in order to even begin to exist. As much as it might (for humans) sometimes seek the sacred or transcendent, it is still a worldly and material phenomenon.¹²⁰ Yet, “[t]erritorializing marks *simultaneously develop motifs and counterpoints, and reorganize functions and regroup*

¹¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari challenge the structuralist idea of semiotics: that meaning is produced only within a preestablished chain of signifiers and signified.

¹²⁰ Kim Knott (2005) explores the relationship between relation and space in more depth. Space is a medium in which religion is situated, a strategy for examining the relationship between religion and its “secular” contexts, and an outcome, something that religious groups or individuals can produce (3).

forces” (322, author’s emphasis). The chaos and disorder of exile, combined with the “raw aesthetic and territorializing factor” of relocation to Babylon, consolidated a group of Israelite rites and rituals into what became the Jewish religion. In the very moment of territorialization, internal points and counterpoints anticipate deterritorializing factors, for it is impossible to capture and stabilize the forces of earth and chaos permanently.

Territorialization is precisely such a factor that lodges on the margins of the code of a single species and gives the separate representatives of that species the possibility of differentiating. It is because there is a disjunction between the territory and the code that the territory can indirectly produce new species. Wherever territoriality appears, it establishes an intraspecific *critical distance* between members of the same species; it is by virtue of its own disjunction in relation to *specific differences* that it becomes an oblique, indirect means of differentiation. (322, authors’ emphasis)

Religion, conceived as territory, becomes a place of passage. The implication of this for a concept of the Jewish diaspora is that Judaism (conceived as religion and thus a place of passage) must be allowed to play out the process of T-D-R. Territorialization, understood as only one part in this continuous process rather than a controlled plot of land, allows there to be critical distance between members of the same species, between fellow Jews. The challenge for Judaism (undergoing T-D-R in a network of systems) is to embrace and learn from this critical distance so that it can plug back in to the changing definitions of Jewishness as a meaningful form of identity (itself a rhizome).

Diaspora as Rhizome: Self-Critique and Connection

Let there be spaces in your togetherness and let the winds of the heavens dance between you. Love one another but make not a bond of love: let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. (Gibran 1971)

Doubleness or double-diaspora is a temporary territorialization. As discussed in the critique of Boyarin and Boyarin's article above, a dialectic revolves around two poles of a problematic but fails to grasp the multidimensional maze that is the question of Jewish identity. Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome can extend the concept of diaspora beyond the restraints of the dialectic. A rhizome, according to the authors, has several important characteristics. First and second are *connection* and *heterogeneity*; any point of a rhizome can be connected to another and must be. It ceaselessly establishes connections and should never be considered a closed system (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7). Third is *multiplicity*: everything is internally differentiated and changes when the rhizome extends its connections; no point is ever to be considered a unity or pivot point (8). Glen Gould writes in the liner notes to his 1956 recording of the Bach Goldberg Variations:

It is, in short, music which observes neither end nor beginning, music with neither real climax nor real resolution, music which, like Baudelaire's lovers, "rests lightly on the wings of the unchecked wind." It has, then, unity through intuitive perception, unity born of craft and scrutiny, mellowed by mastery achieved, and revealed to us here, as so rarely in art, in the vision of subconscious design exulting upon a pinnacle of potency.

The unity of a rhizome is an amalgam of buzzing frequencies, a coherence of heterogeneous and moving components; it is only the appearance of unity. Fourth is *asignifying rupture*; the process of T-D-R is the rhizome's way of resisting signification, resisting being pinned down to a single authentic meaning. This is also how a rhizome proliferates. Fifth and sixth are *cartography* and *decalcomania*¹²¹ (8), which stress the construction of new connections and multiple entryways rather than the tracing or exact replication of an original.

¹²¹ Decalcomania is an artistic technique for transferring an image from one surface to another. For example, when you fold a paper in half so that paint on one side is mirrored and imprinted on the other.

Unlike the other works I have analyzed in this thesis, Yael's stands out as a self-reflexive work of both art *and* theory. Theory, like art, opens a space for critique, a space for negotiation that may not be possible in actual space. *Fresh Blood* can be considered an example of intercultural (Marks 2000) or accented cinema¹²² (Naficy 2001). The video experiments with a new cinematic language informed by the diasporic experience. This experimental language is informed by the loneliness and frustration of double consciousness, a consciousness that yearns to know and become the other. From doubleness Yael is able to articulate self-critique, both of her self and of broader social structures. In this section I will consider Yael's work as a rhizome that employs a nomadic method, with attention to her search for Sodom.

Yael is looking for a city that is not there. The scene begins with an image of tall reeds against a blue sky. A close up on the reeds dissolves into a travelling shot of the desert landscape. The caption over these images is a quotation from Salman Rushdie: "It may be that writers in my position, exiles, or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim...to look back... even at the risk of being mutated into salt" (Yael 1996). Yael, like Rushdie is haunted by her relationship with the place of her birth and childhood, a place in which she no longer lives. Looking back pivots around the dialectic of doubleness, here and there, homeland and hostland.

Looking back, however, always constitutes an element of the present and of the future. This chapter of Yael's work poignantly employs a dialogic style, contrasting a

¹²² Accented cinema, according to Naficy, is the work of independent transnational filmmakers. Accented cinema tends towards a certain style: "open-form and closed-form visual style; fragmented, multilingual, epistolary, self-reflexive, and critically juxtaposed narrative structure; amphibolic, doubled, crossed, and lost characters; subject matter and themes that involve journeying, historicity, identity, and displacement; dysphoric, euphoric, nostalgic, synaesthetic, liminal, and politicized structures of feeling; interstitial and collective modes of production; and inscription of the biographical, social, and cinematic (dis)location of the filmmakers" (4).

retelling of the story of the destruction of Sodom with an interview with her own mother about homophobia. The filmmaker does not stop at this dialectic, instead overlaying several narratives of the story of Sodom, delivered in voiceovers. First is the voice of Yael as narrator who informs us: “There is a pillar to Lot’s wife somewhere here, but I think of all this terrain as Her.” The camera cuts to reveal Yael clothed in white robes and sandals running through the reeds. Second, a child’s voiceover offers a standard Judeo-Christian telling of the destruction of Sodom. How the men of Sodom and Gomorrah wanted “to know” Lot’s visitors, how Lot offered his daughters instead to the men, how God destroyed the cities for this crime, allowing Lot and his family to escape and finally, how Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt for looking back. The costuming, the juxtaposition of Yael in white against the background of yellow reeds and the authoritative child’s voiceover all work to transform Yael into Lot’s wife.

The child’s recounting of this story is cross-edited with images of the rolling desert seen through a car windshield. Yael narrates: “On the road to the Dead Sea, to Sodom, Mother and I repeat the script we always enact.” In a third level of narrative Yael appears as subject, rather than narrator, in conversation with her mother. Her mother recalls seeing two men kissing at one of Yael’s parties. She states with disgust: “And it make me sick on my stomach... For a long time it made me sick.” Yael challenges her mother to contemplate why homosexuality makes her sick, and insists that her homophobia did not emerge naturally, but that she was socialized to think that way. Her mother disagrees, arguing that it was her own research that brought her to this conclusion – the creator made people to be fruitful in a specific way.

Piles of salt begin to appear in the background scenery. Yael tells the audience: “I think of this as the birthplace of homophobia in Judeo-Christian culture. I want to go to

Sodom, as if my standing there would negate its mythic power.” The oppressiveness of Sodom as signifier for homophobia is critically reassessed through Yael’s dialogic engagement. She narrates a new story into the landscape:

I once read a revision of the story of Lot’s wife which exalted Lot’s wife, who has no name, because her turning to give a fond glance back to the town of Sodom was probably her sense of longing for those who she left in the town, women and men, Canaanites and Perizzites, Philistines and Hebrews, travellers and dwellers. Against the petrified image, she dances through my landscape, urging me to turn and return, to shape and reshape history.

This voiceover occurs over images of Yael becoming Lot’s wife. The parallel narratives of traditional stories, queer feminist revisions and conversation between mother and daughter cover the desert landscape, deterritorialize and reterritorialize the mythical significance of the space.

If an epistemology of origins conceives of home as having an organic and original connection between person and soil, an epistemology of nomadism recognizes the permeability and instability of the concept of home. Homes can be multiple: where families come from (even if one has never lived in the family’s homeland), or where one lives. In an epistemology of nomadism home can be carried in the skin; it can territorialize, deterritorialize and reterritorialize along with the subject who carries the concept. Manning writes:

This shifting between the different states of territoriality is what assures me that we continue to be in a state of flux whereby the homes we construct remain ephemeral... Deterritorialization simply subverts the notion that territory and identity can be adequately policed so as to create an entity called ‘home’ that will indefinitely protect us from the exigencies of our existence. (8)

The ability to always deterritorialize implies that home is a fluid concept; it can move from a

place that excludes strangers to one that welcomes them. Through deterritorialization and reterritorialization an ephemeral home can be constructed and reconstructed. Rooms can be expanded to provide a safe space for different groups of people as they enter borders or move beyond them. How can deconstructing the vocabulary of home/land that sees diaspora as its opposite help to renegotiate the concept, with an emphasis on its ephemerality and fluidity, to provide sensations of safety and belonging that do not result in the oppression of strangers?

This search for Sodom demonstrates the complexity of the idea of home for the filmmaker. Israel is imbued with metanarrative, dominant stories about the holiness of the land from Biblical and Zionist mythology. For Yael it is also the location of family history, of her birth, of the loss of her childhood and of her father. It is a heterogeneous, multiple and chaotic concept that can stir up unpredictable emotions. Looking back can therefore be dangerous. Ahmed observes that:

The issue is that home is not simply about fantasies of belonging (where do I originate from?) but that it is *sentimentalized* as a space of belonging ('home is where the heart is.'). The question of home and being-at-home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being-at-home is a matter of *how one feels or how one might fail to feel*. (Ahmed 89)

Affect involves both emotion and cognition. Yael's birthplace is also the birthplace of homophobia; despite yearning for the emotions that accompany the sensation of belonging or peace, the cognition of what home signifies fails to offer the peace that Yael longs for. Instead through self-critique, Yael must re-signify Sodom, drawing on a queer feminist revision of the story of Sodom told through the perspective of Lot's wife. Yael re-signifies Israel by refusing to attribute a single meaning to it at all.

Yael's intercultural, accented and experimental film language destabilizes the form of

dominant stories (and conventional classical cinema as well): the Zionist discourse which insists Israel is the homeland for all Jews and that Arabs and Jews are irreconcilable opposites, the Western Christian discourse that marks Sodom as the original example of God's condemnation of homosexuality, and other stories that essentialize identity and belonging. Yael's journey of self-discovery navigates along family history, exploring her estranged Polish father's roots as well as her mother's and grandmother's Iraqi histories. This personal history is complicated by the dominant social categories she finds she cannot settle into. On the road to find Sodom, Yael and her mother stop to ask directions from a Bedouin family who are bathing by the Dead Sea. Yael's mother, after conversing in Arabic, discovers that she shares a same last name with the family. The discovery of this commonality of Arabness, the sharing of a name, contrasts with the conflict between mother and daughter on the politics of sexuality. As an Arab Jew, Yael defies the borders of racial, ethnic or religious identity. She states: "My location is unclear. I am between colour and white, between power and persecution; what's inside and outside keeps shifting." This is emphasized further in the scenes of *Fresh Blood* that explore Yael's Christian identity. From scenes of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and images of her father wrapped in prayer shawl and tefillin, the film shifts to a scene of baptism. Yael stands in a swimming pool with a priest who proceeds to dip her in water and convert her. She says: "Israel reminds me of where I'm from – not here". Rather than feelings of being at home in the Jewish homeland, her search for home reminds her of the various conversions she has made in her life. When she moved from Israel to Canada as a young child, she learned to sing hymns in school. She converted from an Israeli Jewish culture, to a Christian Canadian one. But the conversion was not complete. In voiceover she states: "conversion is not only assimilation; For my mother it seemed the promise of eternity. For me, each new identity excluded another."

Baptism becomes a metaphor for adopting a new and dominant culture (Yael 93). To do so, comes at the cost of leaving your old culture behind, something a nomad cannot possibly do.

Nomadology can be understood as the opposite of history, a single, uninterrupted sentence, a flow of desire that refuses to settle, that moves beyond fixation on roots.¹²³ Yael refuses to settle into one safe terrain or safe identity. She constantly meditates on her relationship with her place of birth, reminding the audience that her mother was born somewhere else and that Yael in fact *lives* somewhere else. Each chapter of *Fresh Blood* criticizes the Zionist master narrative of belonging from a new angle. For example, into this dialogic placing of narratives on homosexuality and the story of Sodom, Yael thickens the plot by challenging the metanarrative of what it means to be Jewish. Yael does not find the town she is looking for. The Bedouin family tells her “there is no Sodom. This is it,” as the camera pans over the salty terrain and the sea beyond. Sodom is marked only through collective memory as a general space without marked boundaries. The looseness of its boundaries, however, makes the space of Sodom ripe for reinterpretation. Yael, demonstrating that geography is imaginatively malleable, inserts herself into the space of Sodom as the figure looking back in lieu of Lot’s wife. Yael’s alternative storytelling unthinks the centrality of Israel for Jewishness, and Jewishness for Israel, by demonstrating how Israel is meaningful for individuals and communities beyond the master narrative of a Jewish homeland, or of the birthplace of Jewish and Christian homophobia. Sodom and Israel, as homes to Lot’s wife and Yael, are persistently adhered to even as these characters are compelled to leave the security of these homes.

As a voice from the Arab Jewish diaspora, Yael’s work, (like Kattan’s, Albou’s and Michael’s) offers an important source of critique not only of the Israel-diaspora relationship,

¹²³ See Deleuze and Guattari’s “1227: Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine” 1987:351-423).

but also of intra-Jewish relationships in *all* localities. But self-critique is not in itself enough. The loneliness produced by doubleness begs for some resolve – not in stability, however, but in connection. Connection occurs as the components of a rhizome reach for other components, both within and beyond the chaotic cluster of identity. Literary communities, philosophy, organizations, families and other human beings are all neighbourhoods of connection in these works. Religions, nations, ethnicities and cultures too are rhizomes that beg for connections. Exiles, diasporas, marginalized communities are all at risk of stabilizing either in loneliness or in models of community that sever the possibility of connection. Through dialogue and counterpoint, through a willingness to explore and push boundaries, through loneliness, desire for the other and self-critique, diaspora proves to be both a theoretical model and a practical method for forming ethical and fulfilling communities outside the framework of nationalisms or orthodoxies that exercise power over others.

I began this chapter by discussing two recent controversies in Israel and the Jewish diaspora that arose over the question of Jewish difference. The arrest of a woman for praying at the Wall with the Torah, and the possibility the conversion bill which would limit Jewish conversion in Israel to the supervision of the Chief Orthodox Rabbinate threatened to alienate many North American Jews for whom feminism and multiple branches of Judaism are basic ethical and spiritual foundations. The books and films that I discuss in this dissertation also demonstrate that there is much to be learned from narratives by Arab Jews in double-diaspora. It is time for the Jewish diaspora to connect back into the rhizome of Jewish identity, to continue the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization; the process of self-critique and the construction of new forms should never stagnate. Given the space opened by interrogating the Arab-Jewish divide in the previous analysis, Israel should no longer be exalted as the apex of Jewish identity, but rather as one heterogeneous

component of the buzzing Jewish rhizome. Diasporas need not connect through Israel as a centre, but rather all components should seek connection with all other components. Jewish diasporas can connect with the heterogeneous components of Arab diasporas or African diasporas. Nomadism, that ends not in isolation and loneliness but rather proliferates through connection and critical, multi-source feedback loops, can help bridge the gaps between communities and cultures clinging to a homogenous, single idea of essential identity.

Conclusions

This project (inspired by my own nomadic experience in multiple homelands) is inevitably a subjective attempt to read and make sense of diverse texts on “the Jewish experience”. It is a philosophical reaction to injustices experienced again and again when borders are erected to coercive ends. I hope that this work can connect back into the Jewish diaspora and contribute to dialogue between Jews themselves and between Jews and others. This can be achieved through the imperative to listen to *other* Jewish voices and to the voices of those whom Jews have othered and oppressed. Theory, like literature and film, is crucial for facilitating the possibility of this intercultural communication and is necessary for imagining (and also for actively creating) improved dialogue and relationships between adamant enemies.

Arab Jew as a conceptual category intervenes into essentialist understandings of identity that configure Jewishness and Arabness as binary opposites. Sami Michael’s novel *Refuge*, Naim Kattan’s fictionalized memoir *Farewell, Babylon*, Karin Albou’s film *Little Jerusalem* and b.h. Yael’s video documentary *Fresh Blood: A Consideration of Belonging* are exemplary in demonstrating how Arab Jewish narratives challenge Eurocentric, Ashkenazi and Zionist discourses that restrict Jewishness to a singular experience. They reveal the active creation of multiple Jewish beginnings that include (but are not limited to) the Torah, embodied practices of the halakha, emergence in secular culture and relationships with the non-Jewish other. Each secular beginning (rather than divine origin) serves as a different but equally valid entry point into the study of the representation of Jewish identities, demonstrating that no single person or institution has ultimate authority on the definition of Jewish (myself included).

Contemporary Canada, postcolonial France, Iraq in the early 20th century and Israel in the 1970s provide diverse contexts for the both the construction of boundaries between Arab and Jew and also the erasure of those boundaries. Across these multiple geographies, Jewish homes, neighbourhoods and homelands are configurations of space, place and power each defined and resisted by subjective cartographies of groups and individuals. The establishment of Israel both negated and created the possibility for Arab Jewish space. The literature and film of Arab Jews offers one critical example, enabling a third space where discrepant experiences can be read together to destabilize home/land vocabulary that insists on securing pure, bounded territories.

The concept of Arab Jews as a double-diaspora challenges the centrality of an Israel-diaspora dialectic in discourses on Jewish identity. As a double-diaspora, dispersed from multiple homelands that negate each other, Arab Jews are conscious of the loneliness of deterritorialization and the difficulties of reterritorialization. Because double identities still require two poles, Jewish identity is better conceived of as a rhizome, a system without a centre, a heterogeneous entity that is buzzing with energy and constantly seeking connection. As a nomadic entity, Jewishness should disdain the temptation to ground itself in oppressive territorial forms. Instead through self-critique and desire to connect anew, diasporic Jewishness stands out as a theoretical and practical example of an ethical model of a group identity that can enable both difference and belonging without the oppression of others. Diaspora is not a perfect model, but this imperfection and the concept's inherent multiplicity offer a crucial challenge to the continuing dominance of essentialist national discourses and the war mentalities that they support.

Appendix

1. CCAR Statement of the Arrest of Anat Hoffman July 12, 2010

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, the world's oldest and largest rabbinic association, looks with shock and revulsion at today's arrest of Anat Hoffman of "Women of the Wall" for the purported "crime" of holding a sefer Torah in the women's section of the Western Wall during a Rosh Hodesh celebration. We view her arrest, interrogation, and subsequent ban from visiting the Western Wall for a month as acts of "hillul hashem," a desecration of God's name, for they bring public shame and ridicule down upon those responsible for her arrest and upon the Judaism they purport to defend.

After 62 years of statehood, Israel stands at a moral crossroads. Will the Jewish state continue to bar women from equal access to Torah in our most sacred places, or will it foster the free and equal expression of Judaism for men and women alike? Will Jewish life in Israel breathe the free air of religious freedom, or will it continue to be stifled in the choking air of an anachronistic and state-empowered rabbinic fundamentalism? Will Israel's greatest strength, that of being a modern democracy, be undercut by an increasingly ubiquitous medieval theocracy? At a time when the eyes of the world are focused on Israel, will the face Israel presents be tolerant and egalitarian, or intolerant and sexist?

In light of these recent events and the ever-creeping hegemony of ultra-Orthodox agendas, we renew our call for the disestablishment of the Chief Rabbinate.

We commend the Women of the Wall for its holy work and pledge our support of its efforts.

We commend Anat Hoffman for her courageous and her tireless efforts on behalf of religious freedom, pluralism, and equal rights in Israel.

We call upon the majority of our Jewish Israeli sisters and brothers who believe in democracy and religious pluralism to stand up and declare "dai kfar" -- we have had enough of haredi coercion in our lives and in the religious life of our nation.

We affirm that the visions of being both a Jewish state and a modern democracy are inexorably intertwined and interdependent.

We once again pledge our finest efforts to supporting Israel as a Jewish and democratic state as it reflects the highest aspirations of Judaism and the Jewish people and, in doing so, brings sanctity and honor to God's great and holy name. (ccarnet.org)

2. Excerpt from Letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
July 13, 2010

... For years we have advocated to make the conversion process in Israel more accessible and pluralistic and access to conversion courts in Israel simpler and fairer. Yet the current Rotem bill would cede responsibility for all conversions in Israel to the aegis of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate, further tightening ultra-Orthodox control over the conversion process and alter forever the Law of Return. Even more than the bills MK Rotem previously proposed, this bill would create a rift between Jews that well may be impossible to heal and severely strain relationships between Israel and the Jews of the Diaspora.

Of particular concern is the fact that this law would require converts to live an Orthodox lifestyle -- mandating that practice as the only legitimate form of Jewish life. This would delegitimize Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist Jews in Israel and around the world - - something that is completely intolerable to us and ultimately against Israel's best interests... Your active intervention at this time may be the only thing that prevents a painful rupture in Israel's relationship with over 85% of the world's Jews. At this pivotal moment in the history of Israel-Diaspora relations, we, Israel, and the Jewish people need your courageous and visionary leadership. (Accessed from ccarnet.org on July 13, 2010)

3. Methodology

I selected the primary texts of this research by broadly reading books and viewing films by Mizrahi and Arab Jews. As outlined in my introduction, I employed the methods of textual analysis and contrapuntal reading to arrive at the conclusions of this thesis. I followed the following steps:

1. Read the texts, watch the films.
2. Re-read, re-watch and take chronological notes. Ask questions along the way.
3. Review notes, search for themes.
4. Reorganize and codify notes according to the major themes that emerged: religion, nation, and identity.
5. Through dialogue with supervisors and peers these themes evolved into the four main chapters: Jewish Beginnings, Arab and Jewish Boundaries, The Construction of Jewish Identities in Space and Place, Diaspora and the Importance of Jewish Difference. Once settled on these chapter headings I compiled key research questions for each section and looked through my codified notes to find parts of each text that helped answer the different thematic questions.
6. I continued to re-read sections of text from different angles and perspectives. I reassessed the links between ideas. This was an ongoing process that occurred over the course of the project in dialogue with numerous readers.

It is the process of constantly re-entering the text that makes this methodology successful. While I certainly did not exhaust all possible interpretations of the material, I did not stop at my initial observations and listened to every challenge posed to my work along the way. The result is a richer, contrapuntal interpretation that makes transparent the medley of voices that occur within and engage with a text.

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